

WORD FOR WORD PROJECT

Project conducted by Keysborough Learning Centre
on behalf of the ACFE Regional Council of the
Southern Metropolitan Region

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Glossary

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACAL	Australian Council for Adult Literacy
ACE	Adult Community Education
ACFE	Adult, Community and Further Education
ALA	Adult Learning Australia
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
DET	Department of Education and Training
EAL	English as an additional language
ICT	Information and communications technology
KLC	Keysborough Learning Centre
LGA	Local Government Area
LL	Learn Local
L&L	Language and literacy
LLN	Language, literacy and numeracy
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NS	Native speaker (of English)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional development
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SEV ACFE Region	South Eastern Victoria ACFE Region
SMR	Southern Metropolitan Region
TAE	Training and Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHS	Workplace Health and Safety

Summary

The Word for Word Project, undertaken by Keysborough Learning Centre (KLC), was commissioned by the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Regional Council of the Southern Metropolitan Region (SMR) of Melbourne. The research project aimed to identify the range of design and delivery approaches of pre-accredited language and literacy (L&L) programs in Learn Local (LL) organisations in the ACFE SMR, including both English as an additional language (EAL) programs and literacy programs. It also aimed to identify best practice in the literature and the Region and share best practice by recommending a variety of approaches to be implemented across the Region. Within this broad framework, the research aimed to identify learner needs not met by the current models of design and delivery; the relationship between supply and demand; the range of resources teachers access to support their practice; and any specific supports needed but not currently available.

The research design incorporated three phases: a review of the relevant literature; a survey of LL organisations in the SMR; and an in-depth qualitative investigation of selected pre-accredited language and literacy programs drawn from LL organisations that took part in the survey. There was a high response rate to the survey with 72% of organisations providing answers to the survey questions. These responses were augmented and extended through the perspectives of managers and teachers gathered through interviews. The research team also captured the learners' perspectives through classroom discussions conducted by the classroom teacher and recorded by the researchers.

The research found that literacy programs were offered by well over three quarters of the survey respondents, making it the most widely offered program type. Literacy programs were accessed by both native speakers (NS) of English and migrants for whom English was an additional language. A third of the responding organisations offered mixed EAL/NS literacy classes, while EAL programs were offered by two thirds of the responding organisations. Students with a mental or physical disability were enrolled in language and literacy classes in a quarter of the responding organisations. Within the broad categories of EAL and literacy, the research revealed a diversity of programs being delivered to cater for the diversity of learner needs, goals and aspirations. These ranged from stand-alone EAL or stand-alone literacy classes to programs embedded in social activities, work-focus activities or family-based activities, to VET support classes offered either before the VET training or alongside it.

The majority of classes have enrolments of fewer than 15 learners, a class size much appreciated by both teachers and learners who consider these best able to meet learning needs. However, other programming decisions have the potential to inhibit the meeting of needs. These include the low intensity of class scheduling, which discussion revealed were not favoured by either the majority of language and literacy learners or their teachers because of their lack of efficiency and effectiveness in the development of language and literacy skills. Some programming decisions, such as mixed level classes, stem from issues of viability of classes and/or from the lack of an initial placement test. Mixed level classes present teachers with significant difficulties and constrain learner progress. However, they will inevitably continue to exist where enrolment numbers are small. Some programming decisions, such as larger classes, stem from demand exceeding the ability to supply programs on the premises. These programming issues gave rise to four recommendations to assist organisational change and provide teacher support so that learner needs can be better met:

- ❖ Raise managers' awareness of the educational benefits and increased effectiveness of more intense scheduling of classes, and awareness of possibilities for funding classes that increase in intensity over the year as learners gain confidence.
- ❖ Raise awareness of the educational value of assessing levels for initial class placement, and provide opportunities for training in language and literacy assessments and the sharing of existing resources.
- ❖ Although the use of an initial placement test may reduce the incidences of mixed level classes, they remain an unavoidable inevitability for which teachers need to be supported through PD and opportunities to share experiences and resources.
- ❖ Encourage organisations to investigate locating programs outside their existing premises to alleviate space issues restricting the ability to respond to demand. This would also alleviate the educational disadvantage of large classes that can result as a response to learner demand where space issues exist.

The research also revealed that the current program models of language and literacy support for VET are not those indicated in the literature as best catering for the needs of learners. There is an extensive body of research (e.g. Alkema and Rean n.d.; Casey et al. 2006; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010; Black and Yasakawa 2012) indicating that the best support is provided through embedding the support within the delivery, either within the training room itself or in integrated concurrent programs, i.e. concurrent not only in the sense of being delivered within the same timeframe but also in the sense of concurrently addressing the same content in the support program as is being addressed in the VET training. This involves a range of organisational and programming decisions including co-location and shared planning time resulting in what Black and Yasakawa (2012) refer to as a 'shared delivery' approach. There was no opportunity during this research to investigate the extent that Learn Local pre-accredited programs fulfil the conditions of embedded VET support programs as elaborated in the literature, but the predominant mode of Pre-VET support cannot meet these conditions and thus the immediacy and relevance of the support that leads to the best outcomes for the learners. This leads to the recommendation that LL organisations and ACFE:

- ❖ Further investigate the range and effectiveness of current VET support classes with a view to sharing experiences of good practice to enhance and, if possible, extend the provision.

In terms of the range of resources accessed by teachers, the research revealed that teacher-made resources are the most widely used classroom resource. Comments by teachers indicate that skilled teachers spend a great deal of time developing their own resources because these are what best serve their learners' needs within the particular context of their lives and local environment, i.e. that they view language and literacy as 'essentially a social practice, shaped by the demands of work and life and developed through a process of purposeful participation in social and cultural practices' (Thompson 2014, p. 8).

A social practice approach demands that learners engage in the classroom with the authentic spoken and written texts that they need to deal with in their daily lives – or with modified versions of them – and are provided with support materials and activities designed to build learner competence in using the required texts. Such an approach means that skilled teachers acknowledge the prevalence of ICT as a common communication practice in our society, and, consequently, incorporate a range of ICT devices into their teaching programs as classroom resources. Skilled teachers also draw on their own cultural knowledge and that of others as a resource to develop their EAL learners' awareness of cultural expectations underpinning written and spoken social, educational and workplace interactions in Australia (see Liddicoat 2000, 2005; Yates 2008; Devi 2008; Vlahos 2012; Achren 2013).

The voices of managers, teachers and learners in our research showed how skilled teachers use strategies to determine their learners' real-life needs, interests, purposes and goals and then plan a program around relevant topics and genres according to the needs determined. Skilled teachers then select, design and sequence learning activities using authentic texts as well as concrete hands-on experiences, as advocated in the literature (e.g. Reder 2009; ACE NSW 2010; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010; Achren, Newcombe and Roberts 2012; Davies, Lamb and Doecke 2011).

However, we know from teacher interviews and classroom discussions that the concept – the 'big picture' – of language and literacy as social practice is not necessarily understood by all teachers in the sector, particularly those without professional qualifications related to language and literacy, and consequently, without a thorough grounding in language and literacy development. For this reason, many teachers need support to develop their pedagogical understanding and to incorporate appropriate resources and teaching strategies into their professional practice. Managers and the teachers themselves identified a range of professional development needs not currently available to them. This led to a number of recommendations around the provision of paid professional development to support the practice of teachers:

- ❖ That professional development opportunities be provided to support and develop understanding of language and literacy as social practice. This includes classroom practice that addresses everyday ICT communication needs and the intercultural communication needs of learners.
- ❖ That the Learn Local Pre-accredited Teachers Community of Practice receives on-going funding to ensure its ability to strengthen its teacher networks and organise PD and opportunities for language and literacy teachers – including special interest groups – to share classroom strategies and resources.
- ❖ That teachers' time and commitment to on-going improvement, as well the impact of professional development on program quality, are recognised by the provision of funding to attend professional development in whatever location it is held.
- ❖ That professional development in the use of the A-frame as a resource for identifying and planning to meet learner needs is provided on a regular basis.

The research revealed that teachers employed to teach language and literacy but lacking a solid pedagogical understanding of the developmental nature of language and literacy took an *ad hoc* approach to planning and delivery that was an ineffective use of learners' time. Consequently, this research supports and extends a call by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL 2007):

- ❖ That in the longer term, Learn Local organisations work towards greater professionalisation through the employment of teachers with the relevant professional language and literacy qualifications.

The final support need identified through the research was one that emanates from the qualities and skills of pre-accredited language and literacy teachers to gain the trust and develop the confidence of their learners. With no other support system, learners often divulge great difficulties in their personal lives that teachers (and managers) feel ill-equipped to deal with and which leave them stressed and, in some cases, concerned about their own mental health. A broad recommendation here is:

- ❖ That support mechanisms be put in place to assist staff to deal with the stress that can result from the essential gaining of trust of vulnerable learners with such high support needs.

In relation to best practice, this summary has already alluded to several aspects in pre-accredited language and literacy provision in the SMR. We have seen that best practice involves embedding the

learning within the social practice requirements of daily life or, as described by Black, Balatti and Falk (2009, p. 7), within the 'wider spheres of activity, including the sociocultural and economic activity of the community in which the training is taking place' after having determined the particular purposes within those 'wider spheres' for which learners need to develop their skills. We have seen that best practice involves drawing on solid pedagogical knowledge to plan activities to meet those purposes. We have seen that delivery and outcomes are enhanced by grouping learners with similar language and/or literacy levels and needs in smaller sized classes which are scheduled to build in intensity as the learners gain in confidence.

Most particularly the research highlighted that that pre-accredited language and literacy teachers excel at building learners' trust levels, confidence and interaction with others, initially within the classroom, but also beyond the classroom. In other words, best practice includes the building of the social capital so crucial to individual and community wellbeing (ABS 2014). Social capital has been described as increased classroom networks ('bonding ties'), increased links to new and broader community networks ('bridging ties'), and new connections between individuals and institutions, systems and organisations ('linking ties') (Balatti, Black and Falk 2007, 2009; NCVER 2010). These new or strengthened learner networks 'offer contacts, services, knowledge, and other social, economic and cultural resources that the learner had not previously enjoyed' (Balatti, Black and Falk 2009, p. 35) and have been described as 'the wider benefits of language and literacy learning' (Dymock and Billett 2008, p. 15).

The confidence and trust building that is so integral to the work of pre-accredited language and literacy teachers and at which our research has shown them to excel, are not only closely linked to the development of language and literacy skills, but as previous research cited in Dymock (2007a) has concluded, are important foundations for a pathway towards engagement in accredited training, employment and increased community participation.

The research demonstrates that the fostering of organisational networks is crucial to the provision of pathways and essential to the continued growth of pre-accredited language and literacy learners' social capital because organisational networks facilitate not only the identification of community needs but also the design, establishment and resourcing of programs, as well as the provision of pathways. Organisational networks are themselves a form of social capital (NCVER 2010) and well networked organisations are best placed to provide programs and pathways to cater for the on-going and changing needs of communities and of individual learners.

Thus, both managerial and pedagogical best practices assist learners to move on – to build their social capital to a point where they have the confidence and skills to take the next step along a pathway. The research illustrates that pathways are embedded in language and literacy programs from the start as advocated by Davies, Lamb and Doeke (2011) through the informal and on-going strategies teachers employ to build learners' confidence and awareness of future possibilities. Moreover, this research demonstrates that best practice – practice that most effectively assists pre-accredited language and literacy learners to do this – is a whole of organisation approach in which the teacher continues to build learners' social capital and awareness of pathways possibilities within the classroom when and as appropriate, and managers draw on their networks, the teachers' perceptions of learner needs and on the learners themselves to establish appropriate supported pathways.

The increased capacity of learners in pre-accredited language and literacy programs to engage in learning, family life and the wider community is a significant outcome when one considers how literacy is bound up with an individual's sense of identity; that in a highly literate society such as

ours, low literacy skills can have a profound impact on self-esteem, motivation, attitudes to learning, health, family life and the capacity to fully participate in society (e.g. Hartley and Horn 2006; Dymock 2007a, 2007b; ACAL 2007; Davies, Lamb and Doeke 2011). Its significance, and most particularly the role of teachers in its achievement, needs to be promoted and celebrated. Teachers need the opportunity to hear that these aspects of their work – aspects that tend to go unrecognised as the Australian education and training sector focusses on accredited and more easily measurable outcomes – is, in fact, highly significant and has great value. They need opportunities to share their strategies and develop new ones. This leads us to the recommendation to:

- ❖ Celebrate and share the development of social capital and other aspects of language and literacy delivery through a fully paid annual conference or ‘showcase’ aimed specifically at pre-accredited language and literacy teachers, but also their coordinators and managers.

Finally, the research suggests there are potential funding opportunities associated with Learn Local organisations’ expertise in developing the social capital so essential to the social and economic wellbeing of individuals and of communities. It is, consequently, important to investigate ways of raising awareness in the wider community and amongst funding bodies of the value of pre-accredited language and literacy programs. The instigation of an on-going monitoring of progress – recording instances of social capital outcomes such as examples of increased confidence and increased engagement with language and literacy practices outside the classroom – would make a valuable contribution to the promotion of Learn Local expertise with marginalised groups. Consequently, the research makes two further recommendations:

- ❖ That teachers are encouraged to record instances of learner progress through the development of a flexible record sheet and through professional development.
- ❖ That Learn Local expertise in developing the social capital of language and literacy learners – particularly in increasing the learner confidence that underpins all other learning and is essential to embarking on pathways – be promoted, and opportunities for increased funding explored.

In conclusion, the research indicates that Learn Local organisations have significant expertise in the provision of pre-accredited language and literacy programs and has also indicated a range of support mechanisms to further strengthen the provision.

1 Introduction

1.1 Project Purpose

The Word for Word project was undertaken by Keysborough Learning Centre on behalf of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Regional Council of the Southern Metropolitan Region (SMR) of Melbourne.

Broadly speaking, the purpose of the project was to provide a comprehensive picture of ACFE-funded pre-accredited delivery of adult language and literacy programs in the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector by Learn Local (LL) organisations in the SMR. The project sought to identify and share best practice in adult language and literacy program provision developed and delivered by LL organisations using the Pre-accredited Quality Framework (ACFE 2013). The study included pre-accredited programs for adults in both English as an Additional Language (EAL) and general literacy classes. In 2015, language and literacy programs account for 44% of pre-accredited delivery in the SMR.

The Word for Word Project specifically sought to:

1. Identify the range of design and delivery approaches of pre-accredited language and literacy programs in the ACFE SMR
2. Identify best practice (key success factors/ critical elements) in the literature and the Region (Identify critical elements of high quality literacy/EAL programs)
3. Share best practice by recommending a variety of approaches to be implemented across the Region.

The Regional Council was particularly interested in gaining the perspective of learners themselves on the extent to which the programs meet their needs. From this standpoint the focus was on how the current programs fit into models of best practice language and literacy learning in terms of approach, duration, and 'intensity' of delivery and other key factors.

Key research questions were:

1. Are there any students' needs not being addressed by the current models of design and delivery, and if so, what changes need to be made to successfully meet these identified needs?
2. What is the current relationship between demand and supply of programs?
3. What range of resources are teachers accessing to support their practice?
4. Are there any specific supports needed that are not currently available?

1.2 Defining language and literacy learners

Australia is a highly literate society, i.e. information is predominantly recorded and communicated in written texts, and as a result, literacy is considered important for full participation in Australian society. Those marginalised by poor literacy skills in Australia can be regarded as falling into a number of categories based on previous educational experiences, cultural background and personal factors. The following categorisations of English language and literacy learners are adapted from McPherson (2007, p. 1):

Non-literate learners: Native speakers (NS) of English or EAL learners whose home or first language has a written form, and literacy is widely used in social interaction in their home community, be it Australia or overseas. However, due to social disadvantage, poverty, war, and/or oppression these students have not had opportunities for education in their native country and as a consequence are not literate in their home language.

Semi-literate learners: NS or EAL learners who speak a home or first language that has a written form, but because of limited opportunities or interrupted education the learners have developed only very elementary literacy skills in their first language. Such learners are often well aware of the power of literacy in social practice.

Preliterate learners: EAL learners whose home or first language is the predominant language in their community and doesn't have a written form. Literacy has a low profile in the communication practices of such communities and learners from these oral cultures are likely to have had little previous exposure to the written word.

Non-Roman alphabetic literate learners: EAL learners who are literate in a home or first language that doesn't use the Roman alphabet (for example Arabic, Greek, Russian) but are not literate in a language using the Roman script.

Non-alphabet literate learners: EAL learners who are fully literate in language written in a non-alphabetic script (e.g. Chinese).

Roman alphabet literate learners: EAL learners who are literate in a language written in a Roman alphabet (for example Spanish, French) but are not literate in English.

All of these learner types are likely to be found in Learn Local pre-accredited language and literacy programs. Among the native English speakers, some may have a learning disability, others may have a mental illness or other health issues, and many may be hard to reach learners with motivational issues stemming from low self-esteem and poor previous learning experiences (Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010, p. 12). The migrants and refugees could be long term residents who may have high oracy but low English literacy skills. They could be comparatively newly arrived and have completed their federally-funded EAL tuition without having gained sufficient English language and/or literacy skills for full participation in society, as is frequently the case with learners from oral cultures, learners with little or no education and survivors of trauma.

2 Project approach

The research design incorporated three phases: a review of the relevant literature; a survey of LL organisations in the SMR; and an in-depth qualitative investigation of LL organisations selected from those that took part in the survey.

2.1 Phase 1: Literature review

The review of literature considered research and other key documents focussing on best practice in language and literacy provision. It drew on Australian and international research and other relevant documents drawn primarily from the previous ten years. The relevant literature spans a range of interconnected areas, all underpinned by the notion of literacy as social practice with language and literacy provision having the ultimate goal of social inclusion. The relevant literature encompasses the interlinked key areas of:

- Language and literacy as social practice
- The relationship between language and culture
- Embedded learning
- Outcomes
- Pedagogical practice
- Organisational practice.

2.2 Phase 2: Survey

Based on the literature review and the key research questions, the survey was developed to:

1. ascertain the range of programming options available across the region
2. identify the implementation of aspects of good practice as discussed in the literature.

The project team trialled, revised and then distributed the survey to the 47 LL organisations in the SMR. Incomplete or duplicate returned surveys were discounted, resulting in a 72% survey return, i.e. a total of 34 LL organisations from all local government areas (LGAs) in the SMR. They comprised:

- 14 small LL organisations – including 3 registered training organisations (RTO) + 1 with RTO status unknown
- 16 medium LL organisations – including 6 RTOs
- 4 large LL organisations – including 2 RTOs.

The survey was conducted electronically via Survey Monkey. A document version is provided in Appendix 1.

2.3 Phase 3: Qualitative follow-up

The survey responses informed the qualitative phase of the research, which sought the perspectives of managers, teachers and learners. For this we needed organisations that:

1. represented the range of LL organisations in the SMR in terms of size, RTO status, learner types and range of provision
2. exhibited, according to the survey, quality practice as elaborated in the literature so that we could investigate a range of perspectives on:
 - how, and to what extent organisations achieve those aspects of best practice,
 - how and to what extent they meet learner needs,
 - challenges and support needs.

To participate, managers of the organisations needed to be willing to take part in an interview and find a teacher willing to be interviewed and also allow the researchers into his/her classroom. The 10 LL organisations taking part in the qualitative research comprised:

- 2 small LL organisations (both non-RTOs)
- 6 medium LL organisations (5 RTOs and 1 non-RTO)
- 2 large LL organisations (both RTOs).

According to the survey responses, these organisations each exhibited some or all of the organisational practices described in the literature as embodying good language and literacy practice. In addition, they provided a diversity of language and literacy programs so that we were able to capture the voices of teachers and learners in a range of programs:

- 2 stand-alone literacy programs, one specifically for learners with an intellectual disability
- 3 stand-alone EAL programs, one specifically for women from a particular ethnic group taught by a bilingual teacher
- 2 mixed EAL / NS language and literacy programs
- 1 literacy and numeracy program embedded in social activities (cooking) for learners with an intellectual disability
- 1 language and literacy program embedded in a family-based setting (primary school)
- 1 language and literacy support program for vocational education and training (VET).

2.3.1 Manager and teacher perspectives

The perspectives of the 10 managers and 10 teachers were sought through semi-structured interviews using the interview guide approach in which topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form, but the interviews remain fairly conversational with the actual wording and sequencing of the questions decided during the course of the interview depending on the context and direction taken by the interviewee (Patton 1990). Open-ended questions ensure that, while the required topics are covered, the answers are not limited. Two researchers were present at all interviews.

The manager interview guide and teacher interview guide can be seen in appendices 1 and 2.

2.3.2 Learner perspectives

Decisions about how to gain the perspectives of learners were more problematic. Surveys were considered and discounted because, as pointed out by Golding et al. (2012), using surveys with learners with an insecure grasp of language and literacy or with a mental disability, calls into question the validity of the responses – the researchers cannot be sure whether it is the learner or the teacher who is actually responding. Individual interviews were considered and discounted because many learners, as a result of past experiences, may have a distrust or suspicion of people with whom they are not familiar – particularly if the interviewers are perceived as being people in authority. Refugee communities, who have suffered persecution in the past may fear the consequences of giving their opinion (Farah 2007). Moreover, not being familiar with the students and their language levels or communication patterns had the potential to make discussions difficult.

Consequently, the research team considered that the most effective way of capturing the learner voice was to ask the teacher to conduct a classroom discussion. Participating teachers were briefed on the nature and purpose of the discussion and provided with the topics. However, the way in which the discussion was best conducted was left up to the teacher as the expert on his/her class. The teacher was also provided with a sample survey to be used if appropriate with higher level learners. The research team attended the discussions and recorded the interactions so as to best

capture the learner voice. It also provided us with rich data as it enabled us to observe the interaction between teacher and learners. However, because of time constraints, three teachers of higher level learners were asked to conduct the discussion and then ask their learners to complete the survey and return them to us without the researchers present.

The process for gaining learner perspectives was trialled and amended as necessary. A total of 65 learners participated in this aspect of the research, which took place at the beginning of term 4. Two researchers attended the class discussions.

The topics for discussion to elicit the learners' perspectives are provided in Appendix 4.

2.4 Phase 4: Analysis

Survey data was quantified and aspects of this quantification cross-referenced with other information (such as RTO status) collected through the survey. Analysis of the qualitative data involved triangulating the perceptions of managers, teachers and learners in order to compare and contrast their responses. This provided a cross-data validity check. The qualitative data was also used to check, interpret and illustrate the quantitative data. Thus, validity was also enhanced by cross-referencing the qualitative data with quantitative and other data from the survey (Patton 1990).

3 Literature review

Key themes in the literature relevant to language and literacy provision in the Learn Local sector – more widely known in the literature as the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector – are underpinned by the conceptualisation of language and literacy as social practice. The discussion in the EAL field of the interrelation of language and culture and the need to raise awareness of Australian cultural expectations underpinning successful spoken and written communication is allied to the concept of literacy as social practice, as is the interrelationship of growth in social capital to the development of language and literacy. These interrelated themes emphasise the importance of embedding language and literacy development in the contexts in which the learner will use those communication skills, i.e. in the work, family or social situations relevant to the learners' needs and interests. As the literature review will demonstrate, these key themes all highlight the importance of skills and qualities of the teacher as well as the importance of partnerships and networks at all levels. This section will look at each of these interrelated issues in turn beginning with the underpinning concept of language and literacy as social practice.

3.1 Language and literacy as social practice

There is no generally accepted definition of adult literacy. For many years, the field of adult language and literacy has been dominated primarily by a functionalist approach associated with the development of human capital, described by Pancini (2012) as focussing on basic skills development to prepare individuals for the requirements of education, training and employment in an increasingly technological society. However, there is a growing consensus that the functional (basic skills) approach is limiting because it does not acknowledge the cultural and social aspects of literacy or the development of a critical view necessary in a highly literate society such as ours (see for example Pancini 2012; Achren & Williams 2006; Burns and de Silva Joyce 2005). Instead, there is a body of research suggesting that adult literacy is a social act performed to achieve particular purposes. As summed up in an Adult Learning Australia (ALA) publication, 'adult literacy is essentially a social practice, shaped by the demands of work and life and developed through a process of purposeful participation in social and cultural practices' (Thompson 2014, p. 8).

The social practice model sees the acquisition of literacy as being intricately linked to the acquisition of language and is thus relevant to both NS literacy development and EAL learners, with the latter having an additional focus on the development of oracy. For example, Liddicoat has described communication (both spoken and written) as 'an act of sociality: that is, it is not simply the case that information is transferred from one participant to another, but rather language is used to create and maintain social relationships ... This means that in communication, whether in a first or other language, "getting the message across" is only one element of what is involved in language use' (2005, p. 202).

The Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) describes a social practice model of language and literacy acquisition as follows:

Speaking, listening, reading and writing are all meaning-making acts and they imply interaction. Language is *shared* (social) practice. Because it is *social* it is also *multiple*. There is no single set of language or literacy practices that will serve all the needs for interaction and performing roles that a person has. Moreover, becoming *literate* is more than a matter of learning to read and write. The skills of decoding and encoding underlie *literateness* and they must be explicitly taught and learnt [but] people also need to acquire new forms of language to produce and comprehend the range of texts utilised in a modern, developed, post-industrial society such as Australia ... They

need to develop new vocabulary, new patterns of sentence structure and new knowledge about the contexts in which these forms are applied (discourse knowledge). This implies that people need to learn and practise new habits of language behaviour as a means of becoming competent in new situations (ACAL 2007, p. 7).

At the classroom level the social practice model acknowledges that, ‘the most effective way for adults to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills is by applying them in context for particular purposes’ (Thompson 2014, p. 8). Those purposes can be as diverse as accessing banking facilities, catching public transport, paying bills, engaging with children’s schooling or participating in vocational training. Consequently, efficient and effective learning is achieved through:

- determining learners’ real-life needs, interests, purposes and goals
- planning a program around relevant topics and genres according to the needs determined
- selecting, designing and sequencing learning activities relevant to the topics and genres in order to provide adequate support for the effective development of skills and understandings
- using concrete objects, DVDs and photographs to help establish the context
- using authentic texts (spoken and written) relevant to learners’ goals and needs
- providing relevant authentic opportunities for language and literacy practice.

(Reder 2009; ACE NSW 2010; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010; Achren, Newcombe and Roberts 2012; Davies, Lamb and Doecke 2011).

3.2 The relationship of language and culture

Integrally linked to the concept of language and literacy as social practice is the connection between language and culture and how cultures shape the way language is used. This has emerged as a major focus of attention in the EAL field and led to a growing recognition of the fundamental importance of integrating the development of intercultural capabilities into language teaching and learning (see for example, Liddicoat 2000, 2005; Liddicoat and Scarino 2013; Lo Bianco and Crozet 2003; Yates 2008). Liddicoat explains:

...culture is practice that is accomplished and realised by members of a cultural group in their daily lives and interactions ... This means that culture in the context of language learning needs to ... examine the ways in which these things are accomplished discursively within a context of use. This also means that culture learning becomes an *engagement with cultural practices* rather than *exposure to information about* a culture (2005, p. 202) (italics added).

Much of the research in the field of intercultural communication relating to adult EAL learners has been about enabling learners to understand workplace cultural expectations. Yates’s (2008) influential work raised understanding of the fundamentally culture-specific nature of employability skills. She explains that the employability skills of communication and teamwork may be particularly problematic because our understanding of appropriate ways of communicating and interacting are developed when we are very young, through our socialisation. However, because ‘people react in different ways in different cultures, the ‘rules’ we have learned in our first culture may not be the same as those used in another, and so we have difficulty recognising them when we operate in a culture we did not grow up in’ (p. 14). For example, ‘although advanced users of English as a second language many be proficient at particular facets of communication such as “speaking clearly and directly” they may find that these skills are interpreted and accomplished in subtly different ways in

English. How direct is “direct”, and how is this directness achieved in a way that is clear but not offensive?’ (p. 16). In particular, Yates focuses on what she terms the ‘secret rules’ of communication, such as the real meaning behind an employer’s seeming suggestion that an employee “... might like to ...” which is actually a directive. This highlights Liddicoat’s statement that ‘communication [spoken and written] is not just a question of grammar and vocabulary, it is also a question of culture’ (2000, p. 9).

Achren (2013) points out that the use of softeners such as ‘might like to’ stems from the value we place in Australia on egalitarianism which results in a friendly and casual style of communication between employers and employees, and which can be extremely difficult to interpret for people from more hierarchical societies. Bilogrevic (2012), in an ACFE action research project carried out in her Learn Local class providing concurrent support for EAL learners in a Vocational Education and Training (VET) aged care course, concluded that recognising the expectations in the communication of what she termed the ‘hidden hierarchy’ was vital to gaining and maintaining employment. Others in the Learn Local sector and beyond have pointed out how cultural expectations affects such things as punctuality, notions of politeness, informing employers of absences, Workplace Health and Safety (WHS), asking questions, making suggestions and working in teams (Moore 2012; Vlahos 2012; Yates 2008). There are few commercial texts available in this area but a recent AMES publication (2013), with input from Moore and Achren deals explicitly with these cultural expectations and associated language skills.

At a classroom level, researchers agree that these ‘secret rules’ of communication need to be made explicit and, moreover, that learners need time to practise and internalise them in order to feel comfortable with a different cultural way of ‘being’. Yates (2008) suggests that authentic models of communication together with explicit explanations by teachers provide EAL learners with opportunities to ‘notice’ and reflect on cultural differences in communicative interactions. This can be as simple as a group discussion to explore the question ‘How is it done in your culture?’. Yates explains that discussing cultural phenomena in this way means they can be explored as ‘culturally relative aspects of behaviour rather than behaviours that are “right” or “wrong”, and discussion can then focus on what happens in a context and why; in a way that allows both learners and teachers to step outside their own cultural spaces and have some insight into another’s’ (Yates 2008, p. 31).

Australian classroom expectations can be similarly confronting for people from more overtly hierarchical cultures. Yates (2006) explains, ‘In the relatively informal learner-centred climate of many classrooms in Australia, the distance between the learner and the teacher and their respective roles may appear blurred to learners used to clearer hierarchical distinctions’. As with workplace expectations then, there is a need to ‘discuss explicitly the underlying cultural “rules” that underpin our approach to teaching and learning’. Some (e.g. Devi 2008) advocate drawing explicit parallels between what we do in the classroom and what happens in workplaces, for example that group work is akin to the employability skill of team work. Group work thus involves understanding culturally appropriate ways of asking questions, clarifying, offering opinions etc., and the opportunity to practise these in the safe environment of the classroom. Devi (2008 p. 10) considers that when learners ‘see the relevance of everything we do in the classroom and how it is related to the workplace it gives meaning to their learning’.

3.3 Embedded learning

The preceding discussions of language and literacy as social practice shaped by culture, exemplify the statement by ALA that the ‘most effective way for adults to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills is by applying them in context for particular purposes’ (Thompson 2014, p. 8). Balatti, Black and Falk, (2009, p. 7) describe this as embedding the learning ‘in wider spheres of activity, including the sociocultural and economic activity of the community in which the training is taking place’.

Much of the research around how best to embed language and literacy learning has been undertaken in the VET sector where there has been a growing awareness that such an approach is more likely to retain learners and lead to greater rates of success (Alkema and Rean n.d.; Casey et al. 2006; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010; Black and Yasakawa 2012). There has also been the growing understanding that language and literacy development cannot be left to the vocational trainer but requires specialist skills. This was vividly captured in the title of Casey et al.’s 2006 report “You wouldn’t expect a maths teacher to teach plastering”.

While there appears to be no ‘single perfect’ model of embedding language and literacy in vocational education, researchers agree that close collaboration between the language and literacy specialist and the vocational specialist is key to successful outcomes for learners (Casey et al. 2006; Black and Yasakawa 2012). Close collaboration means that specialists are able to ‘link up and create an integrated experience for their shared learners’ (Casey et al. 2006, p. 6).

In some cases this means team teaching in the training room. This has also been referred to as a ‘tag-teaching’ approach in which the specialists take turns as the main instructor each contributing their specialist knowledge as appropriate and as required. This negates the stigma attached to needing additional support and ‘centralises the need for specialist and explicit teaching of complex cognitive and communication skills as an integral component of all or any vocational training course’ (McHugh 2011, p. 13). Vlahos (2012) provides an interesting report of research conducted in the Learn Local sector in which she describes her growing understanding of the intercultural communication needs of a group of learners as she team teaches with a VET teacher.

However, Black and Yasakawa (2012) warn that often in a team teaching situation the language and literacy teacher ‘plays a secondary role to the vocational teacher, “hovering” in the back ground and helping only those students assessed as requiring it’ (p. 348). They describe this as a deficit form of team teaching.

Instead of team teaching, Black and Yasakawa suggest that integrated concurrent delivery, which they term ‘shared delivery’, is more appropriate. They describe the ‘shared delivery’ model as one which involves shared responsibility for learner outcomes and, consequently, planning:

Each teacher has primary responsibility for delivering their own course, but importantly, they also have joint ownership of the combined program; they have an equal role with shared responsibility for the same group of students. The vocational and [language and literacy] teachers thus share the overall planning for both courses, though not necessarily the actual delivery in the form of team teaching ... as joint owners of the programme they do need to meet regularly to plan their teaching programs. The idea usually is to link the content of the two courses through a shared planning process (Black and Yasakawa 2012, p. 349–351).

Researchers warn, however, that the process of embedding language and literacy in vocational education is not without challenges and can take a number of years to evolve. Success requires

whole of organisation approaches, professional development, careful selection of teaching staff, flexibility and commitment of all stakeholders to the process (Black and Yasukawa 2012).

Another factor enhancing success is co-location in which the two specialists not only deliver their courses on the same premises but also share office space. This facilitates the shared planning and enables on-going communication about such things as classroom activities and issues with students (Casey et al. 2006; Black and Yasukawa 2012).

Although much of the literature has been concerned with embedding language and literacy in vocational training, there has also been literature around embedding it in other contexts, e.g. on community housing estates, in social settings, within social activities or in family-based settings such as schools and kindergartens. All of these have the advantage of contextualising the learning within real and immediate needs. Embedding learning in such 'host community organisations' has the advantage of 'bringing learning to the learner' through outreach programs in easily accessible locations, and thus engaging 'hard to reach' or disengaged adults in learning and enhanced networks (Davies, Lamb and Doeke 2011).

3.4 Outcomes

For most funding bodies, economic (human capital) outcomes – the development of language and literacy skills in order to improve potential employment possibilities – remain ultimate goals. However, the literacy as social practice model emphasises that literacy is not only a human capital issue, but is bound up with an individual's sense of identity; that in a highly literate society such as ours, low literacy skills can have a profound impact on self-esteem, motivation, attitudes to learning, health, family life and the capacity to participate fully socially (Hartley and Horn 2006; Dymock 2007a, 2007b; ACAL 2007; Davies, Lamb and Doeke 2011).

Consequently, it has been shown that participation in language and literacy programs have 'wider benefits' than the development of basic skills, and for programs to be successful there is a need to focus specifically on the development of such things as self-confidence and community participation. In other words, gains in the social sphere influence literacy gains and vice versa; they are inextricably linked. For example, Dymock (2007a, 2007b) stressed that personal outcomes such as confidence, self-esteem and the aspiration to engage in learning are not only closely linked to the development of language and literacy skills, but are also important foundations for a pathway towards engagement in accredited training and increased community participation.

Dymock and Billet (2008, p. 15) identified the 'wider benefits' of improved language and literacy skills as including:

- *self-confidence and personal competence*: the extent to which the learner has a sense of self and a belief in being able to put their capabilities into action
- *engagement with others*: the extent of the learner's interaction with other individuals in the family, at work and at sites such as schools, government offices, and shops
- *attitudes to learning*: the extent of the learner's attitude towards current and future learning, and their ability to learn how to learn
- *agency/pro-activity*: the extent to which the learner actively accesses and negotiates with and learns from experience and is able to shape construction of that experience
- *life trajectories*: the extent of the learner's goals and ambitions and expectations of where life will lead
- *personal growth/personal change*: the extent to which a learner perceives they have grown and/or changed as a person

- *social capital*: the extent of community participation, involvement in networks, clubs and other social situations.

While Dymock's work has focussed on the 'wider benefits' and ways of assessing them, other Australian researchers have positioned their work within the discourse of social capital, which has been a subject of discussion and debate within Australia and overseas for some time. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines social capital as 'the networks together with the shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation with or amongst groups' (OECD 2007, p. 103). The Australian Bureau of Statistics has adopted the OECD definition of social capital which it describes as 'a topic of considerable interest to a wide range of people due to its links to individual and community well-being' (ABS 2014).

As described by Balatti, Black and Falk, social capital outcomes 'include learners accessing or becoming members of new networks that offer contacts, services, knowledge, and other social, economic and cultural resources that the learner had not previously enjoyed' (2009, p. 35). These researchers assert that it is networks and not necessarily language and literacy skills development *per se* that lead to employment and full participation in society. As Falk so aptly phrased it in 2001, 'getting a job can be as much about who people know and what networks they can tap into as the work-related skills they may possess' (cited in, Balatti, Black & Falk 2006a, p. 321).

Balatti, Black and Falk (2006b, p. 7) also acknowledge the importance of self-confidence and changed attitudes along with the development of basic skills: 'socioeconomic impacts tend to result from a combination of both social capital and human capital outcomes, such as increased literacy and numeracy skills; interpersonal and intrapersonal skills; and attributes such as self-confidence'. Increased confidence is demonstrated by such things as '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 (Dymock 2007a, p. 10).

A good practice guide compiled by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER 2010, p. 2) describes social capital outcomes as including:

- changes in personal characteristics, such as the learners' trust levels, sense of belonging (membership of the class group and wider groups) and self-confidence
- changes in the number and character of existing and new networks
- changes in transactions occurring in learners' networks, i.e. 'support sought, given or received in the learner's networks and the way the learner negotiates and shares information and skills'
- changes in types of networks such as new links to institutions, which could be knowing how to access a website to find out about services or accessing the services themselves.

Clearly, Dymock's 'wider benefits' of language and literacy learning overlap significantly with the outcomes of a social capital approach as articulated in the NCVER list. Such outcomes are not acknowledged on conventional assessment scales which can render invisible the progress and important gains made by learners with characteristics such as those of many of the disadvantaged learners in the ACE sector (Christie and Dunbabin 2014). ACAL (2007, p. 9) described conventional measures of progress as having 'failed to recognise how people's identity and behaviour is related to language and literacy use'. In research by Baynham et al. (2007), the learners themselves articulated their progress and achievements in terms of what they could now do that had been previously impossible, such as participating in local communities and dealing with their own official correspondence. According to Reder (2013, 2015), examples such as these provide evidence of changing or increased 'engagement with literacy practices' which over time lead to growth in literacy

proficiency and, therefore, should be used as a measure of progress. Overall, research suggests that the wider benefits/ social capital gains of language and literacy classes are frequent enough and important enough to be acknowledged, and has prompted O'Maley (2007, p.3) to argue that they should be made overt along with the 'relevant pedagogical elements which help build these social capital outcomes'.

Balatti, Black and Falk (2007, 2009) describe the pedagogical elements of a social capital approach as involving teaching strategies to create 'bonding ties', 'bridging ties' and 'linking ties':

- bonding ties refer to the nurturing of a sense of belonging among learners, i.e. of a classroom network or learning community in which the learner feels secure
- bridging ties are those that link the learners to new and broader community networks. This is facilitated by excursions to libraries, swimming pools, health clubs etc. It is also facilitated by 'classroom delivery partnerships' which includes guest speakers such as community members, successful past students and officials from relevant organisations
- linking ties are the forging of connections between individuals and institutions, systems and organisations through, for example, teaching learners which websites to access for information and how to navigate and read them.

ACAL's 2007 discussion paper on community education and national reform suggested that there is a need to explore and exploit the potential of a social capital approach to language and literacy learning because of the opportunities it offers to 'fully recognise the social and interactive nature of literacy learning, and the social and interactive nature of the outcomes of that learning' (p. 9).

3.5 Pedagogical practice

The literature reviewed so far has already revealed the complexity of the language and literacy teacher's task. However, to be truly effective the teacher must know *how* to foster a learning environment in which 'learners feel they can make errors, play out new aspects of identity and practise new skills (NCVER 2010) and *how* to identify initial and changing needs so that they can be used 'as the organising principle to shape learning' (ACE NSW 2010) and the basis for 'clear planning, both strategic and responsive' (Baynham et al. 2007, p. 28). In other words, the language and/or literacy teacher requires a sound pedagogical understanding of the developmental nature of language and/or literacy learning and how language, literacy and culture 'work' in order to select, sequence and scaffold (Hammond and Gibbons 2005) all the aspects of learning so that communication goals can be most effectively reached.

Many have referred to the quality of teachers as being the key to successful language and literacy learning (e.g. Thompson 2014; Dymock 2007a; ACE NSW 2010; ACAL 2007). A study by Baynham et al. (2007) refers to these qualities as being flexibility, reflectiveness and high learner responsiveness all underpinned by a sound pedagogical understanding or 'clear professional vision':

The effective practitioner is highly flexible and needs to be able to turn talk into learning by on-the-spot analysis and responsiveness to learner talk. This requires a thorough understanding of ... language [and literacy] learning and pedagogy (p. 9)

Effective ... practice involves high level teacher strategies and qualities. They can plan on the spot and, like a *bricoleur*, can pull together whatever is at hand to make the class work. These "*bricoleur* teachers" are eclectic in using and designing materials and activities to be highly learner responsive, and this eclecticism is underpinned by clear professional vision (p. 9).

... teachers with professional vision are reflective about their practice and work in a responsive way...They 'know' their students and can 'see' how materials can be selected and exploited because they are confident in classifying and highlighting a particular phenomenon or issue as it arises. Teachers with the clearest professional vision are able to code, categorise and critically highlight issues in a complex field (p. 20).

However, the study also found that:

Learning the practices that constitute professional vision takes time. Accordingly, professional vision is characteristic of the experienced expert practitioner' (p. 20).

The complexity of the task, and the time it takes to develop the qualities of an effective practitioner combined with the understanding that 'the quality of the teacher is the single most influential factor in successful literacy teaching' (Rowe 2005 cited in ACAL 2007, p. 8), suggest a need for on-going professional development (Baynham et al. 2007; Dymock 2007b; Leach et al. 2009 cited in Alkema, and Rean, n.d.). Moreover, it has prompted ACAL to call for the employment of 'better trained, higher skilled teachers of literacy' who are 'well enough educated about language and language structures, language acquisition, variations in language practice and the full range of methodologies and approaches to teaching reading and writing (ACAL 2007, p. 8).

3.6 Organisational practice

Time has been one of the recurring themes in the literature reviewed. As well as the time it takes for a teacher to develop 'professional vision' as seen above, we saw earlier that time is needed for teachers and trainers to plan together as a team to embed language and literacy support into VET programs. The literature reviewed has also made it clear that time is an essential component of quality program delivery if learners are to develop their understanding and skills, their self-confidence and their identity as a learner (Dymock 2007a, 2007b). Yates (2008) and Liddicoat (2000, 2005) writing from an intercultural communication perspective, both advocate that teachers devote classroom time to helping learners come to terms with differing cultural expectations. In the same vein, Balatti, Black and Falk (2007, p. 256), writing from the social capital perspective, have asserted that 'the process involved in making the transition to new ways of thinking or doing and firmly establishing them in one's repertoire takes time and practice'. Before any of this, trust and bonding ties have to be nurtured – a process that 'cannot be rushed and which takes place through many interactions among all participants, including the teacher' (Balatti, Black and Falk 2009, p. 23).

While there is general agreement that adequate time must be scheduled for learning to take place, there is little in the literature about what actually constitutes 'adequate'. This is perhaps understandable given the diversity of language and literacy learners and their needs. Likewise, there is little discussion of time in terms of hours of instruction per day or frequency per week. However, McPherson (2007) researched the relationship between course hours and the learning needs of pre-literate and low-literacy EAL learners. Her research, involving teachers, program managers and learners found that that 4 hours a day with a mid-session break was considered ideal as it allows adequate time for reviewing and extending language, while 3 hours per day was considered less tiring for both the teacher and the learner but 2 hours a day was considered insufficient (McPherson 2007, p. 3).

In terms of frequency, McPherson also reports that 3 days per week was considered adequate but 4 to 5 days a week was preferred with teachers arguing that 'more frequent teaching sessions throughout the week allow them to (a) re-introduce learned language in different literacy contexts

which help students to recognise, memorise and re-use this language in their reading and writing, and (b) build on language and literacy skills through the gradual introduction of new language and literacy concepts' (McPherson 2007, p. 3).

In relation to class sizes, McPherson (2007) reports that because of the intensive support needs of pre-literate and low-level literacy learners, class sizes should not exceed 15, and that numbers above 10 should be supported by another teacher, trained volunteer tutors or bilingual support. On the issue of bilingual or first language support, research by Murray and Wigglesworth (2005) found that it was a teaching tool most appropriate for beginning EAL learners, in particular those with little or no previous education, and for elderly learners because it can help reduce the stress of learning and facilitates the communication of difficult concepts and explanations. However, they warn that teachers and bilingual assistants are likely to need professional development opportunities to make optimal use of the first language to support additional language learning, to be aware of the learning function it plays in supporting language learning in the classroom and to be able to limit its use to appropriate contexts. As such, use of the first language needs to be seen as a scaffolding tool providing temporary assistance which is gradually dismantled as students develop confidence and trust, and learn new skills and understandings (Hammond and Gibbons 2005).

Other programming considerations that contribute best to learners' needs include grouping learners with similar needs together rather than mixing levels and abilities (McPherson 2007).

Discussion in the literature has raised other implications for organisational practice. This was perhaps most strongly seen in the literature on embedding language and literacy within other activities. Black and Yasukawa (2012) referred to the benefits of co-location of teachers and trainers involved in VET delivery and support. Co-location facilitates shared planning and enables the language and literacy teacher to fully understand the demands of workplace and gain insights into the culture of the occupational area they are supporting. Casey et al. (2006) found that understanding the demands was seen as a highly important factor in how learners viewed the language and literacy support. Moreover, understanding the culture is essential if teachers are to assist learners to develop their intercultural competence as advocated by Yates (2008) and others in the intercultural communication field.

Casey et al. (2006) emphasise the need for a whole of organisation approach to embedding language and literacy support into VET training. As well as time for joint planning, they stress the need for opportunities for training and observation, if embedding is to work effectively. They note that 'institution-wide policies makes it easier to direct resources in ways that will support embedded LLN' (2006, p. 32).

Embedded VET support is perhaps easier to establish in LL organisations that are also RTOs providing VET programs. However, VET support is not confined to RTOs but could be provided through a partnership between a non-RTO and an RTO on an outreach basis or through co-location. An important component of this is that the language and literacy teacher must go to where the training is taking place if the support is to be embedded. Other types of embedded programs may also require the establishment of outreach programs which enable teachers to go to where the learners are rather than trying to get hard to reach learners to go to the programs (Balatti, Black and Falk 2009; Davies, Lamb and Doeke 2011). For this to be successful, LL organisations need strong cross-sectoral partnerships and networks with, for example, health and welfare centres, schools, youth centres and industry groups. To be successful, such partnerships are 'highly dependent on having lead personnel based in each of the collaborating organisations who are strongly committed to the partnership effort' (Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010, p. 19).

Partnerships and networks are not only essential for outreach programs but also for the establishment of pathways. On the one hand, local community partners facilitate the engagement of hard to reach learners into pre-accredited courses. On the other hand, partnerships and networks can provide pathways for learners from pre-accredited to accredited courses or employment (Balatti, Black and Falk 2009; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010; Davies, Lamb and Doeke 2011; Achren, Newcombe and Roberts, 2012). Research by ALA (Haukka and Haukka 2010) into pathways for ACE learners concluded that 'networked providers are more likely to have well-articulated pathways than not, and the capacity of providers increasingly depends on building partnerships with employment networks and client-service providers' (p. 10). The research also found that ACE providers that were also RTOs were more likely to offer pathways into VET courses, along with large organisations and those providing pre-vocational, employment skills and adult literacy and numeracy programs. However, the research also found that a large proportion of both RTOs and non-RTOs did not know how frequently their learners moved from non-accredited (pre-accredited) courses into VET, and the keeping of such records depended on the extent providers were engaged in targeting learners and customising programs to meet pathway needs.

Davies, Lamb and Doeke (2011) consider that pathways are extremely important for a disengaged learner and should be embedded in programs from the start. They suggest that examples of embedded pathways include role modelling (e.g. guest speakers and mentors), work experience and engagement with industry. Those working in the social capital paradigm point out that creating organisational partnerships for the delivery of education and training is in itself an act of social capital building. In other words, a well networked provider has strong social capital. These organisational partnerships are essential to the development of the crucial partnerships between teachers, learners and community representatives (NCVER 2010, p. 3). However, Nechvoglod and Beddie (2010) point out that partnerships are difficult to maintain and take time, effort and money.

4 Research findings

This section is an analysis of the findings from the survey, the follow-up interviews and classroom discussions. The section begins by outlining and discussing the range of provision as determined through the survey. The perspectives of learners, teachers and managers gleaned from interviews and discussions are incorporated to elaborate and comment on the survey information. Next, by drawing on the experiences and perspectives of learners, teachers, and managers, the section examines key elements of quality programs as well as the challenges associated with their design and delivery.

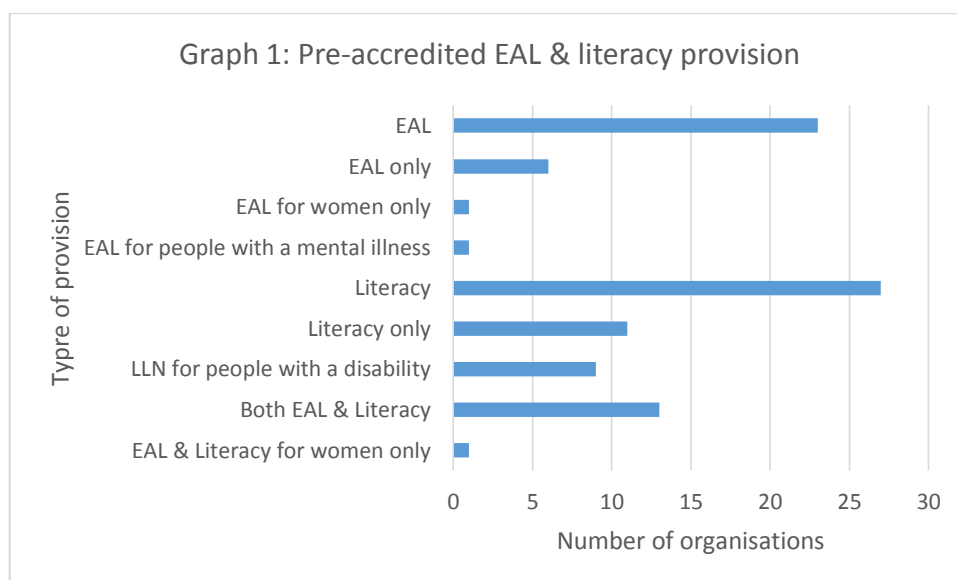
4.1 Range of provision

4.1.1 Provision types

At the time of the survey, a total of 23 LL organisations (67% of respondents) were providing EAL classes with 6 (18%) focussing on EAL exclusively. Among those, one was providing beginner level EAL classes exclusively for migrants and refugees with a mental illness, and one organisation was providing a bilingual class for women with little or no previous education from one ethnic group.

A total of 28 organisations (82%) were providing literacy classes with 11 (32%) focussing solely on literacy, including one for learners described as being all 'Vietnamese Chinese and Cambodian mature age people', at least some of whom (it is not known how many) were stated to be taught bilingually. Another organisation provides literacy classes exclusively for people with a disability. In total, 9 LL organisations (26%) were providing language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) tuition for people with disabilities.

As Graph 1 shows, 13 LL organisations (38%) provided both EAL and literacy classes. In one of these LL organisations all provision is exclusively for migrant and refugee women.



In total, 54% of organisations indicated that they delivered programs targeting specific groups of people (migrants and refugees, disabled or women) either exclusively or in conjunction with other groups. There was no delivery targeting specific age groups, i.e. youth or seniors, and no LL organisations indicated that they were offering pre-accredited programs for men only or aboriginal groups only. The majority of organisations were providing language and /or literacy programs for mixed groups of people, i.e. men, women, migrants and refugees and/or native English speakers of all ages.

The learners accessing pre-accredited language and literacy programs varied depending on the demography of the locality. However, these interview extracts suggest that EAL learners tend to be in the majority in all types of provision:

Our pre-accredited learners are predominantly EAL background. Many are long-term residents who went directly into work after their arrival in Australia. Their spoken English is often high but now they need to build their reading and writing skills because they want another job, or need to do further training in order to get a promotion. We have 10-20% native speakers. They want to build their skills for the same reasons or they want to get into work.

Our learner cohort is quite mixed – some have a disability and/or learning difficulties, they may be educationally disadvantaged or are learning English as an additional language. Often the EAL women have English-speaking partners so they speak English at home and some have children going to school so there is a strong incentive for them to learn English. Also many were tertiary educated in their own country and want to move into further education. Our basic literacy classes are for people with learning difficulties. Our higher-level literacy classes could have both EAL and native speakers in them.

We have a very high percentage of learners whose first language isn't English – about 50%. These are a mixture of new migrants to Australia and those who are long-term unemployed. Most learners are mature aged who are retraining to enable them to enter the work-force.

Our learners are mainly longer-term migrants from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Also Rohingas, and a few Sudanese and Afghanis. The majority of our learners (70%) have less than 7 years education in their own country and many have suffered trauma.

We have 55 different nationalities at our centre. They're mostly in the 45+ age group and are often the parents of people here on skilled migrant visas – this is an affluent area. We have a lot of Chinese, Russian and Indians with strong educational backgrounds.

4.1.2 Program types

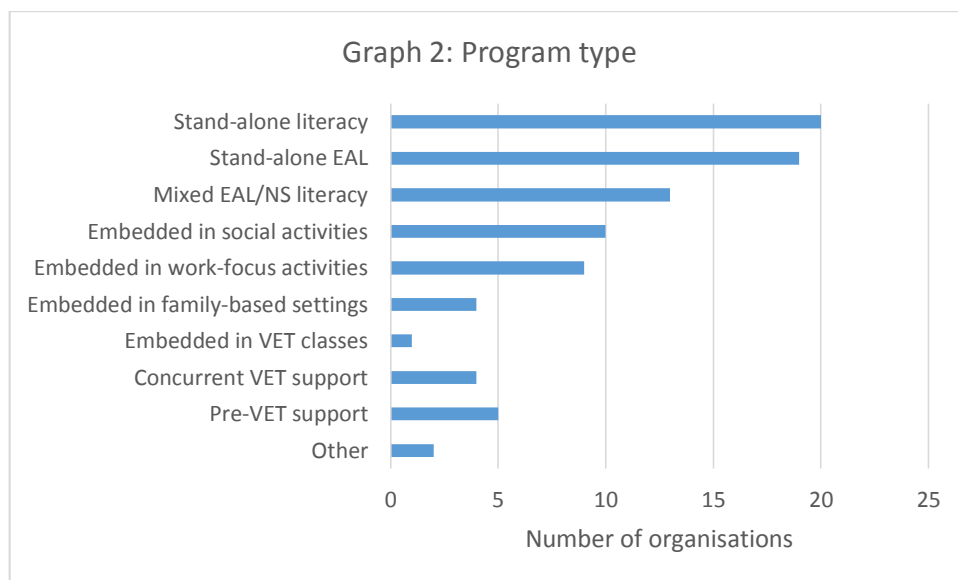
The survey showed that the type of provision offered was predominantly stand-alone literacy classes (20 LL organisations) or stand-alone EAL classes (19 LL organisations). The third largest category was mixed groups of EAL and NS literacy learners (13 LL organisations).

Language and literacy embedded in social activities was offered in 10 LL organisations. A manager described how a literacy and numeracy class embedded in the social activity of cooking was initially started as a way of creating connections between learners with an intellectual disability:

When we first started a literacy program, the students all sat apart – they were socially isolated both here and outside. We decided that building social connections was very important but we couldn't find a commonality. We decided that eating was something that we all did and we could incorporate literacy into a cooking class. Within two weeks, students were talking to each other, saying things like "Did you try making that dip at home?"

The teacher described how language and literacy (and numeracy) was embedded in the cooking class:

The class is as holistic as we can be. The learners have to decide as a group what they want to cook, but it has to be cost effective so students have to budget, it has to be able to be prepared within the time available – that’s numeracy again and time management – and it has to be healthy so there’s a lot of discussion there. We have a planning day when we make the initial decisions and so the students know what’s coming. Each week the learners do the shopping, the cooking and then we have a community lunch. All this incorporates a lot of employability skills and builds relationships with others.



As Graph 2 shows, 4 organisations provided classes in family-based settings (schools, kindergartens and a maternal child health centre). A teacher described how the learning is embedded in the activities of the school, i.e. within the real and immediate needs of the parents enrolled in the program. Again we see that initial impetus for the program was one of relationship building, of making connections between the parents and the school:

[The learners] all have children or grandchildren at the school. But the school noticed that they didn’t mix with other parents – they used to stand separately when they brought the children to school or were waiting to pick them up, and they didn’t participate in school life. I focus on the school curriculum so they can understand what their children are doing – for example writing recounts or NAPLAN. They want to know what it is so they can help them. We develop the parents’ literacy and an understanding of the school.

Programs that supported VET delivery in one way or another (pre-Vet support, concurrent support or embedded support) were offered in 10 LL organisations. All but one of these were also RTOs. The non-RTO had a partnership with an RTO and its pre-VET support program offered a pathway into VET programs conducted by the RTO. Among the LL organisations that were RTOs, only one indicated that it was offering language and literacy embedded in a VET program. Follow-up investigations suggest that the ‘embeddedness’ of this program is still evolving. Although the language and literacy

support teacher and the VET trainer share a staffroom, they have no allocated time for planning together. The literacy support teacher told us, *'I work closely with the trainers about what they're doing in the course and how the students are doing. I have to grab them when I can. We are in the same staff room so I can catch them before their class or after it'*. A further limitation on its embeddedness is that the support is offered only for a short period of time, rather than for the duration of the VET course. Both the manager and the teacher were aware of this limitation and were hopeful of extending the support in the future.

Further investigation would be needed to find out to what extent the other language and literacy programs supporting VET courses could be described as embedded – a characteristic which, according to the literature, leads to greater retention and higher success rates (Casey et al. 2006; Black and Yasukawa 2012; Alkema and Rean n.d.).

While VET-focussed delivery was more commonly offered by RTOs, non-RTOs more commonly offered L&L embedded in work-focus activities (6 organisations) than RTOs (3 organisations). Further investigation would be needed to determine the range of factors contributing to this distinction.

In the 'Other' category, one organisation said that it offered 'literacy and numeracy for intellectually challenged people' (as noted before) and another explained that it provided language and literacy support in computer classes and social/personal development classes if necessary.

Most organisations offered a range of courses, however, in 5 LL organisations programs were exclusively stand-alone literacy classes and in 6 programs were exclusively EAL classes. Of the 13 who offered mixed EAL / NS literacy classes, two offered these exclusively. Follow-up interviews suggest that these learners are often upskilling or reskilling, returning to work or looking for work, as described by the manager of a low intermediate EAL/NS literacy class:

The learners are predominantly EAL learners plus two native speakers with gaps in their schooling. They need basic grammar, spelling, reading – it affects them professionally because their literacy holds them back. They're stuck in low or semi-skilled jobs. They benefit from the EAL methodology used to teach – they're all learning the structure of the language.

A teacher pointed out that whether EAL or native speaker, students in such literacy classes *'often need language too. They may have got into the habit of a lot of slang and swearing. They need to be exposed to other, more appropriate ways of saying things'*.

Importantly, teachers consider EAL/NS literacy classes to be very valuable in terms of promoting intercultural understanding (Liddicoat and Scarino 2013; Lo Bianco and Crozet 2003; Yates 2008):

I believe that one of the reasons it's good is the sharing of cultures – that can't be underestimated. For example, in one group we had native English speaking men who had all been previously employed and EAL learners who hadn't. The native speakers became more tolerant as they got to know the EAL learners. The EAL learners got an inside view of Australian work culture – you have to turn up on time, you have to ring if you're sick, this is what you do when you go to the pub after work, it's important to go, you don't have to drink or gamble. – It showed the native speakers that they had knowledge to share. The EAL learners told about the lack of OHS in their country, for example (Teacher).

Another teacher talked about the benefits mixed classes can bring in terms of confidence building:

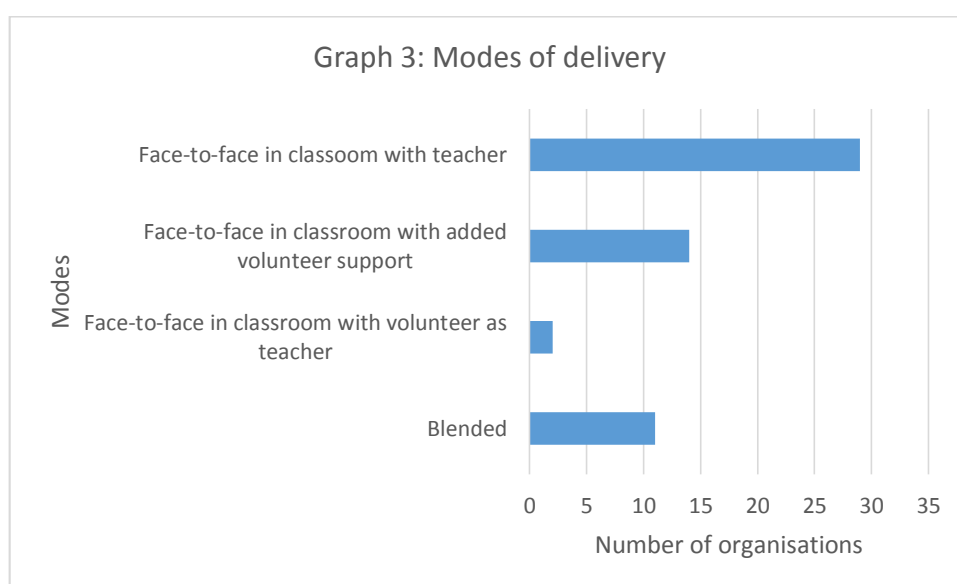
Initially we had nearly all EAL but the inclusion of native speakers has grown over time. They can fool you into thinking they're better than they are – that's their survival strategy, coping strategy. The native speakers can be mentors for the EAL students, particularly with computers. This helps give them the confidence they lack. Native speakers have felt uncomfortable in the mainstream, but here they find they're accepted. It's a good learning environment for them, they're not threatened or embarrassed. They find they have things in common with the EAL students. (Teacher).

4.1.3 Delivery locations and modes

The majority of LL organisations (65%) delivered all their programs on their premises. However, 12 LL organisations (35%) also delivered classes in other locations described through the survey and interviews as partner organisations, primary schools, libraries, a kindergarten, a day care centre, a Maternal and Child Health Care Centre, as well as Community Centres, church halls and other Learn Local organisations. One manager commented that locating suitable venues outside the organisation can be challenging.

Whether at the centre or in an outreach location, tuition was primarily delivered in face-to face teaching contexts, and in the majority of cases (85%), in the classroom with teachers. Many organisations (42%) also offered classes in which delivery was supported by a volunteer(s) in the classroom. A number of these have been provided with some form of training such as the cost-free federally-funded volunteer training delivered by AMES, or internal training provided by the individual organisation. Others were provided with little or no training and were working under the supervision or guidance from the teacher. This raises the possibility that the need to guide an untrained volunteer in the classroom could actually increase the workload of the teacher.

Two organisations offered classes in which face-to-face teaching was delivered by volunteers. It is not known if these volunteers were, in fact, trained teachers who were volunteering their time. However, both of these organisations reported that their volunteers participated in the federally-funded volunteer training (initial and on-going PD workshops) delivered by AMES.



The survey also asked if respondents offered blended delivery, with the researchers believing that this was commonly understood to mean the integration of face-to-face learning with a range of information communication technologies (ICT), as described by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Digital Learning Branch, DEECD 2012). Following up with the 11

managers who responded that they offered this delivery mode, we discovered that the term was not well understood, with some believing it referred to 'blended' (mixed) literacy levels; 'blended' (EAL and NS) learner types; or 'blended' content (integrated delivery of reading, writing and speaking or integrated delivery of reading, writing and current affairs).

Amongst those who were integrating ICT into their language and literacy classes, it was seen as being very important because, as one manager observed, *'We are in an ICT age – we have to stay current so digital literacy needs to be integrated into all classes – not a separate class for learning computers. We need to normalise ICT'*. This is further emphasised by another manager's observation that *'Even dealing with Centrelink has to be done on-line now'*. Teachers commented that they incorporated digital technology for practical and immediate needs. For example, one of the primary schools conducting a family-based EAL class was changing to be 'money-free', which meant that the parents needed to learn how to order things, such as lunch, on line. Another teacher told of an 'off the cuff' lesson that eventuated after an EAL student asked her for some information and she decided to see if anyone in the class knew how to use their mobile phone to 'google' it. The learners found it empowering and with the many other enquiries that came up, everyone got a lot of practice. The teacher finished the class with a discussion of phone plans and the cost of using the internet facility. The learners' homework was to check their phone plans. As the program manager pointed out, *'There is so much language and literacy in that'*.

4.1.4 Enrolments: Supply & demand, class sizes and levels

Demand for classes outstripped supply in 40% (14) of the organisations surveyed, i.e. they had waitlists of students wanting classes. Reasons for this included:

- availability of suitable teachers – *'Our main challenge is engaging more teachers who can work successfully with low level learners'* (Manager)
- eligibility i.e. requests from non-residents who are not eligible for funding – *'... asylum seekers ...are desperate to learn English but are not eligible for funding'* (Manager)
- funding in general – *'the demand we have for pre-accredited classes far exceeds the funded hours we receive'* (Manager)
- lack of facilities – *'We could run more classes if we had more rooms'* (Manager).

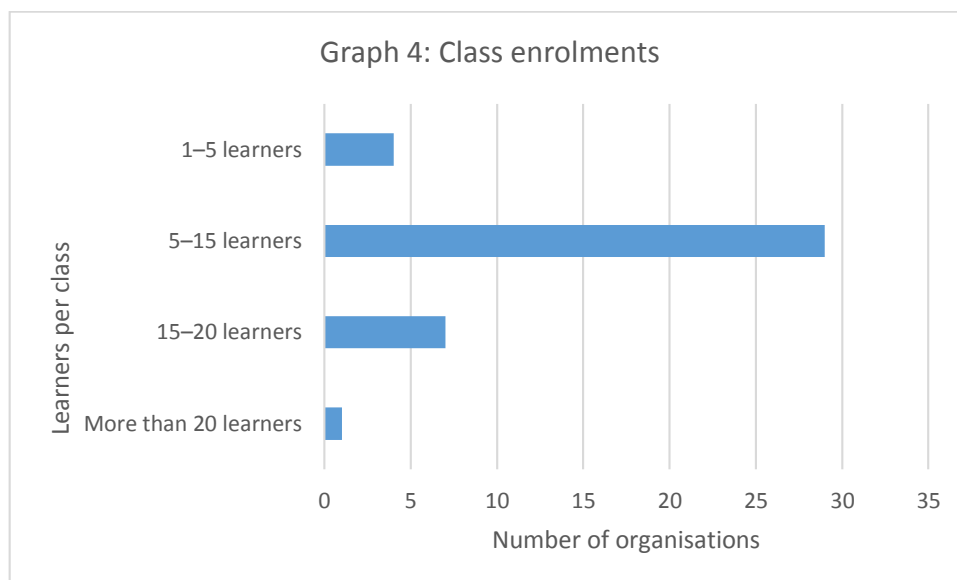
It is interesting to note that 5 of the 7 organisations with limited facilities conducted all their programs in the one venue. This raises the possibility that space issues might be alleviated if the managers of these organisations were to investigate conducting classes in other venues.

Although 6 of the 10 organisations taking part in the qualitative research did not have waiting lists, managers of all 10 organisations were definite that there were potential learner groups in their communities who were not accessing their programs. These were primarily described as hard to reach learners including particular cultural groups, those with a disability or mental illness, native English speakers with low literacy, youth, single mothers, and potential EAL learners who were either newly arrived or working. One manager commented in interview that *'The more we get out into the community the more "hidden" groups come to light'*. However, for all the managers interviewed, the major constraint was time to 'get out into the community' – to network, make connections and find out community needs.

While demand exceeding supply was an issue for some, viability because of numbers was an issue for 13 (38%) of the organisations surveyed. Reasons for this included:

- fluctuating enrolments and interest in particular courses (4 organisations) which couldn't always be predicted and made planning difficult – *'Sometimes there are issues of viability but there doesn't seem to be a particular pattern over time'* (Manager)
- costs combined with class sizes, i.e. being able to balance the conflicting demands of program costs, including teacher salaries, with quality in terms of teacher/student ratio.

Two (2) of the organisations with stated viability issues were offering classes with enrolments of only 1–5 learners, one had 15–20 learners, while the remainder had enrolments of 5–15 learners. In half of these organisations, sufficient enrolments had been achieved by conducting classes in which learners had differing levels of language and literacy.

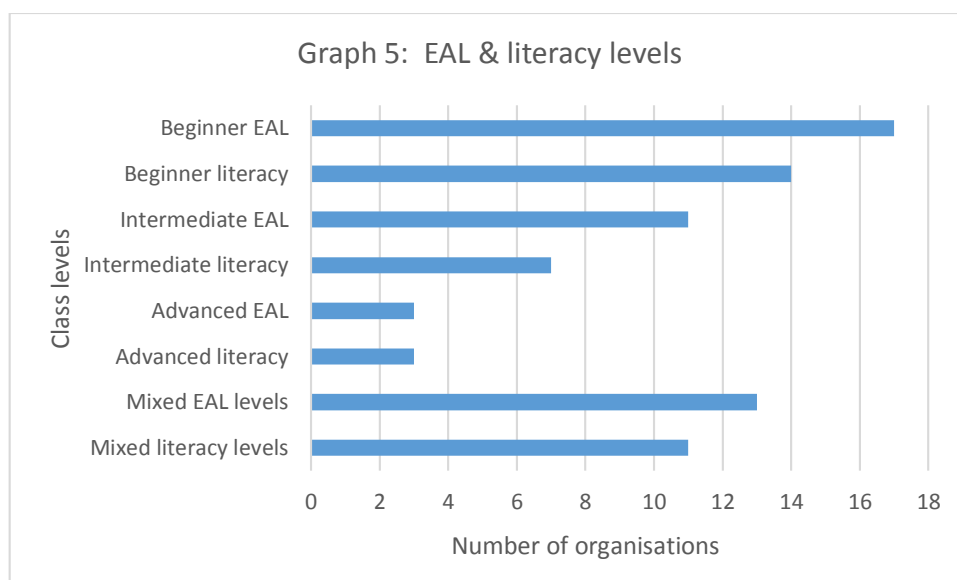


As graph 4 shows, the majority of classes (85%) had enrolments of between 5 and 15 learners and 4 organisations reported conducting classes of 1–5 learners. Seven (7) organisations reported having larger classes of between 15 and 20 learners and 1 conducted classes of more than 20 learners. Among these organisations providing larger classes of over 15 learners, 3 also reported that they had difficulties responding to demand because of space limitations, suggesting that perhaps both their class numbers and demand issues could be reduced by investigating the possibility of conducting classes in other locations.

Smaller class sizes (i.e. less than 15) were appreciated by both teachers and learners because of the greater possibilities for individualised attention. As one EAL learner in a class of eight said, *'It was hard for me to learn when I was in a big class [at another organisation] – the teacher didn't have time for me like here'*.

Most EAL classes were at beginner and intermediate level, with very few LL organisations conducting advanced EAL level classes. However, more than half the organisations were conducting mixed level EAL classes and in 7 LL organisations EAL classes were all mixed level.

The levels of literacy classes being conducted at the time of the survey was very similar to the levels for EAL classes, with most being at beginner level, few at advanced level and many conducting mixed level literacy classes.



Some managers acknowledged mixed level classes as a problem. Two considered it to be the main challenge facing their organisations but were concerned that offering separate level classes may not be financially viable. Teachers, however were concerned about the amount of planning as well as the limitations it imposed on being able to meet individual needs:

Mixed levels means more preparation and I can't teach as much. It sometimes means that it's difficult to pace the class so that it suits everyone's needs (EAL teacher).

Planning is time consuming. Sometimes I'm planning activities for five different levels. Explaining each of these activities in class also takes time (Teacher mixed EAL/NS literacy class).

I have mixed levels. It's very challenging because some of them are pre-beginners [pre-literate] learners and so they're not independent learners. They are very demanding of my time (EAL teacher).

Learners had mixed responses to mixed level classes. While many said they would prefer the same level, few provided reasons (perhaps not wanting to offend others present). However, two higher level EAL learners in a mixed level class suggested (perhaps diplomatically) that they thought classes of the same level were better because 'It's easier for the teacher' and one EAL learner said that 'When we're with lower levels, they don't talk much and we don't learn so much'. A number of learners said that the level didn't matter because they helped each other and the teacher catered for their needs. A few learners saw it as a positive experience. This is summed up by one student who said, 'I like different levels, for example I can learn from a higher level and if I peer teach, I can learn by teaching. If our teacher tells something to a lower level, it helps me remember'.

Respondents were not asked to specify the levels of the students in their mixed EAL/NS literacy classes, although analysis of the survey results indicate that the majority those offering this type of provision were delivering to advanced or intermediate level literacy students (7 organisations) while a further 6 were delivering mixed EAL/NS classes at beginner or mixed levels of literacy. This does not provide information on the EAL level of oracy. It is to be hoped that the EAL learners have intermediate or advanced oracy/ auracy skills but need to focus on improving low literacy skills. As we have seen, planning for mixed level literacy classes increases teachers' workloads and is

perceived to diminish quality. If the teacher had to deal with mixed literacy and mixed oracy in the one class group, addressing all needs would become increasingly difficult.

When placing learners in classes, 55% of organisations used a placement test and 45% did not. As can be expected, in the majority of the organisations (12 of the 15) who did not use a placement test, learners were placed in mixed level classes. The manager of one organisation that did not use a placement test stated that their learners were beginners only but it is unclear how this was determined. Another manager said that the learners were placed in a literacy class after discussion with the referring agencies and a third that placement was based on the learners' initial enrolment forms and discussion at the time of enrolment. One manager, who did not have a background in education, thought it unnecessary.

Mixed level classes also eventuated in 7 of the organisations using a placement test, but in these cases, the mixed level classes were offered as well as classes in which learners were grouped according to ability. Follow-up interviews suggest that mixed level classes include programs such as language and/or literacy classes in schools where the engagement of parents is the prime consideration and numbers may be small, thereby making it impossible to offer level-specific classes. One manager further commented that, in such cases, volunteer support for the classroom teacher was necessary.

On the other hand, some managers considered that the value of an initial placement test was that determining the appropriate class level gave learners the greatest benefit for their time. The language and literacy level thus determined was also considered important information for the teachers in their planning. One manager described how the placement test she had developed starts by talking about their needs which is then picked up in a reading task and a writing task. She considered that this helps the learner begin to focus on why they are enrolling, which was also important information for the teacher.

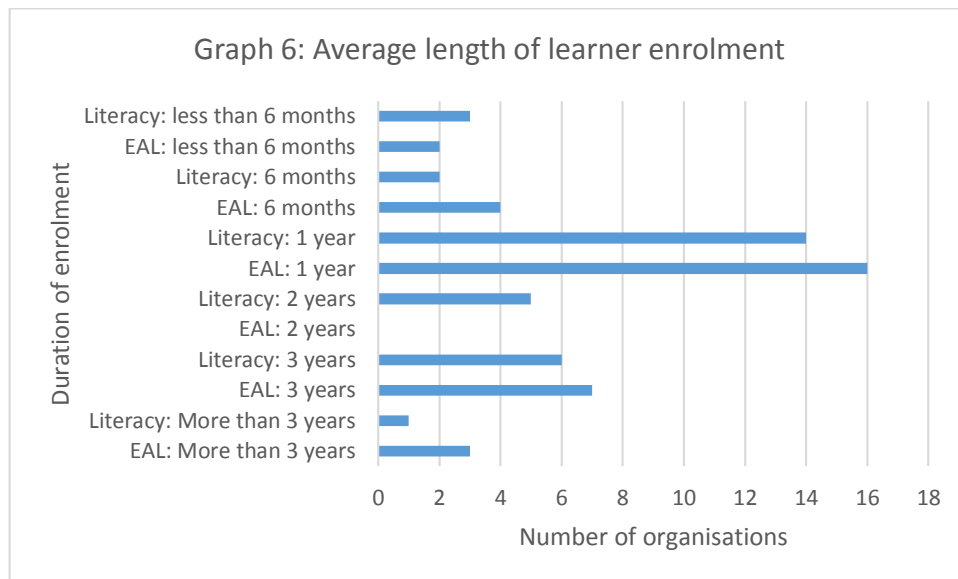
The most commonly used assessment tool for placing students in appropriate level classes was found to be one that had been developed by the organisation itself. These in-house assessment tools were used by 7 organisations. Most gave no details, but 1 organisation described theirs as *'taking into account skills level from pre-literacy to higher literacy and referenced against the ACSF'*, i.e. the Australian Core Skills Framework published by the Australian Government (2012). The English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) kit (AMES NSW 2010) was the next most commonly used (4 organisations), while one used the International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) scale and another used the Safe Work Online Language, Literacy and Numeracy Indicator Tool (<http://ln.safework.com.au>).

4.1.5 Duration & scheduling of programs

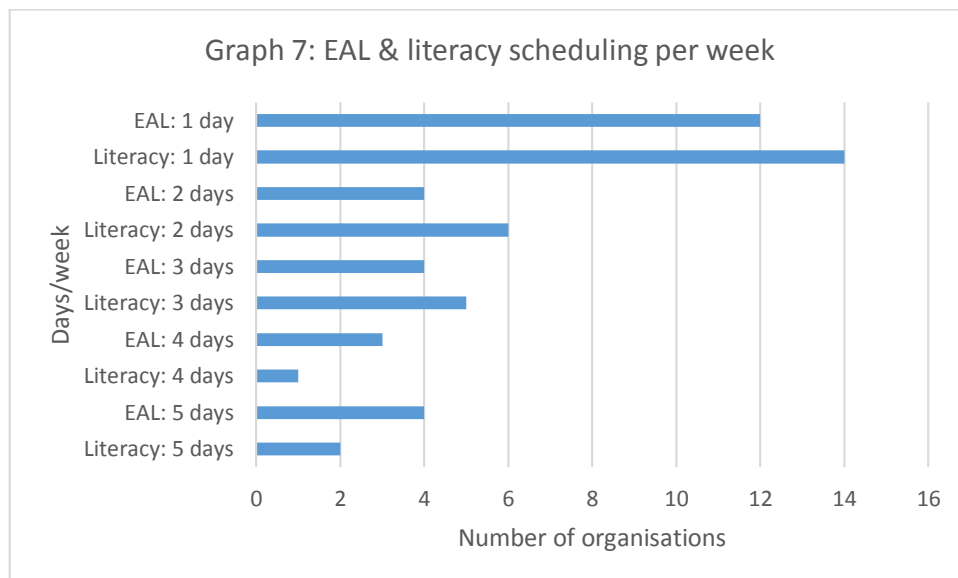
Survey responses indicate that classes are scheduled across the year, with most organisations stating that the majority of both EAL and literacy learners enrolled, on average, for a year. However, a significant number of both EAL and literacy learners had also been enrolled in organisations for 3 years or more. On the other hand, in some organisations, average learner enrolment was 6 months or less.

Many factors could be contributing to these differences in enrolment times including learner characteristics and the quality of provision (e.g. teaching skills and the intensity of courses), bearing in mind that the literature suggests that 3 or more days a week of 3 or 4 hours per day was considered necessary for the adequate introduction and recycling of learning and also for the

retention of learning. More than 4 hours was considered tiring for both teachers and learners. (McPherson 2007).



The hours allocated for both pre-accredited EAL and pre-accredited literacy classes range from 1.5 to 6 hours per day, with most being either 2, 2.5 or 3 hours per day although classes for 5 or 6 hours a day were also common in both categories. However, the majority of both EAL and literacy classes are scheduled for only 1 day a week:



This low intensity (1 day a week) was also the most common scheduling for the classes involved in the qualitative interviews and discussions (8 of the 10 classes). Interviews revealed that many managers schedule classes on 1 day per week primarily because of constraints such as availability of rooms, teachers or because of (perceived) funding constraints:

These are the hours we're funded. We can't get more funding to extend a program. We can only apply for more funding to start a new program. But we also have difficulty finding teachers (Manager).

Some managers believed that although this was a pragmatic decision, it also suited the learners:

1 day a week fits with our room schedule and it's harder for people to commit to 2 days (Manager).

That was the day the room was available and it suited the students. We're very needs-based. We always consult – although sometimes there's a compromise. (Manager).

However, some also acknowledged that it was not ideal:

One day a week for 2.5 hours: these are the hours we're allocated. The downside is that people don't always remember from one week to the next and EAL students are saying, "How can I learn if I'm only coming one day a week?" But we can only get funding for a new pre-accredited course (Manager).

This was echoed by both teachers and learners:

The continuity of more regular time together is important – the follow up and build up it allows is important for learning. With a week in between sometimes it's almost like starting again – because the students haven't retained it – rather than being able to review and move on (Teacher).

Speaking is like learning to drive – we need to practise regularly (EAL learner).

In fact, apart from learners with a disability who were happy with their scheduling (“Not too tiring”), the majority of learners would prefer to attend more days a week. In two of the class discussions we observed (one EAL, one literacy), at first the learners agreed that they'd like to come every day but then someone pointed out that they wouldn't have time for their other commitments (such as housework) so then they agreed on 3 days a week. Comments from students, other than those with a disability, included:

One day is not enough to learn spelling and writing.

Twice a week for 3 hours [would be] better because outside class it's difficult to practise.

I'd like 3 days and 3 hours a day because 1 day and 2 hours aren't enough and I have more time.

I'd like 2 or 3 days – I'd like to come to learn more. One day isn't enough.

I'd like 2 to 3 days for 2 hours. The more we come the more skills we get – only one day a week, we forget from one class to next.

More time so that ICT could be included or extended was commonly voiced:

I'd like 2 days so we can learn more. It could be one day for writing and one day for computer.

I'd like one day for English and one day for computer.

I'd like 2 days so we can learn more. It could be one day for writing and one day for computer. Two or 3 hours is fine so that after studying we have can go home to do cooking and other things.

Such comments were representative of the views of learners even amongst those attending the classes that managers considered to be scheduled around learner availability. This suggests that while learners may at first consider that they only have time to attend one day a week, later into the course they see value in more frequent scheduling. It further suggests that as most classes are conducted across the whole year, a re-evaluation of the learners' view of their availability as the year progresses would be appropriate.

4.1.6 Recording pathways

The majority of organisations actively promote pathways throughout their courses, as is expected of pre-accredited courses. However, 2 organisations stated that they did not do so. Two skipped the question.

Records of the pathways actually taken by their learners are kept by 11 organisations (i.e. approximately a third of respondents), with the majority of those keeping records on whether learners increased their community participation and half keeping records on learners going on to VET courses. According to the survey, the various records kept and the number of organisations keeping them were:

- Learners going on to study another EAL or literacy course (7 organisations)
- Learners going on to study a VET course (5 organisations)
- Learners enrolling in further education (8 organisations)
- Learners finding employment (8 organisations)
- Learners going on to volunteer (9 organisations)
- Learners increasing their community participation (10 organisations)

Among those keeping records, 5 are RTOs, with four of these RTOs keeping records of whether learners subsequently enrolled in a VET course after their EAL or literacy course. Interestingly, the fifth RTO stated that it only kept records on whether learners increased their community participation, perhaps reflecting the type of learners enrolled in their EAL course. Only one non-RTO kept a record of progression into VET, and a follow-up interview revealed that the organisation had an established pathway through its partnership with an RTO.

In total, 7 of the organisations (6 RTOs and 1 non-RTO) keeping pathways records were among the 10 whose staff and learners participated in the qualitative phase of the research. Interviews revealed that those managers who collected such information considered it important for a range of reasons including reporting to their Committee of Management or Board; using it as a recruitment and marketing tool; as a measure of course effectiveness; and to inform future planning.

One manager in an organisation that did not keep records of learner pathways acknowledged that doing so would '*give more than an anecdotal idea and more feedback for future planning*' but the issue was '*time and funding*'. Other organisations also considered that staff were too 'time poor' to formalise what both teachers and managers considered would be a time consuming process. The information was often 'in the teacher's head' and also in the Learning Review completed by learners at the end of their course, but managers were wary of formalising the process for fear of placing an extra burden on teachers and others who were often described as being 'bogged down in paperwork'. For anyone to undertake the task was an issue of time and funding.

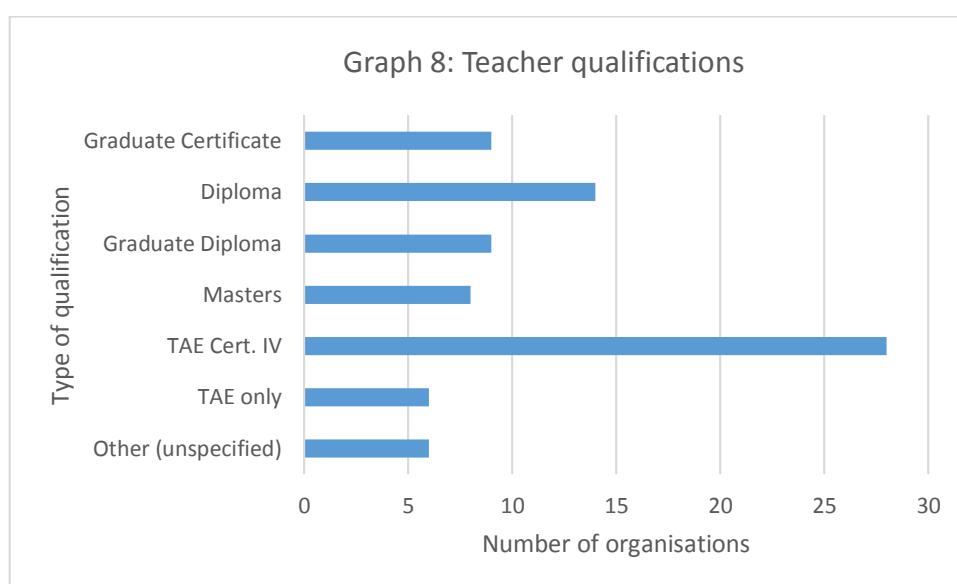
4.1.7 Teacher qualifications & delivery support

Most organisations employed teachers with some form of qualification, ranging from Masters level to Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (part of the VET Training and Education package and

commonly referred to as the TAE). In 6 organisations, the TAE was the only qualifications held by the teachers employed to teach the pre-accredited EAL and/or literacy classes.

It cannot be assumed, however, that the university qualifications held by teachers relate to the field in which they are teaching. There were, in fact, only 2 university qualified adult language and literacy teachers amongst the 10 we interviewed. Australian teaching qualifications in other fields were held by 3, and 1 held overseas teaching qualifications. The remaining 4 had a TAE Certificate IV only. This suggests that there are likely to be a number of others without Victorian recognised qualifications related to their current employment or with only a basic TAE qualification. It is a survey design fault that we were unable to ascertain more details.

Language and literacy teaching experience amongst those interviewed ranged from 1 year to 19 years with an average of 8 years. This may have been useful to know for all teachers across the Region but would have been overly demanding of managers' time if they had been asked to provide this level of detail in the survey.



In the majority of organisations, teachers had access to a range of resources to support their classroom delivery including:

- Teacher-developed resources (33 organisations)
- Commercial resources (16 organisations)
- Computer access (30 organisations)
- Library access (14 organisations)
- Student mentors (7 organisations)
- In-class volunteers (14 organisations)

However, in 3 organisations the only resources used were teacher developed materials, and in 1 organisation the teacher had access to self-developed materials plus a library. In 9 organisations the only support for delivery was teacher developed materials and access to computers.

Among the teachers we interviewed, 9 of the 10 used self-developed resources. Only 1 teacher used a course book as the basis of the course and supplemented it with worksheets selected from other commercial texts. The course book was British and the teacher acknowledged the cultural inappropriateness of some of the text to learners in an Australian context. On the whole, a social practice model was evident amongst the majority of teachers we interviewed with commercial

materials viewed as a resource from which to pick and choose as appropriate to the needs of learners. The 9 teachers we interviewed who made their own resources saw commercial texts and the internet as a source of authentic texts and ideas that then needed 'personalising' for greater learner engagement, closer attention to specific needs and maximum learning potential. This can be very time consuming. One teacher told us *'I trawl the internet – much of it is for children – I need things that are relevant to their age group and their goals. I listen to the students and then make worksheets and activities according to their needs'*. As well as the internet and commercial texts, teachers draw their inspiration from wherever they can get it and in addition to worksheets teachers make concrete learning activities. The social practice approach, i.e. the development of language and literacy relevant and meaningful to the learners real-life needs is evident in this experienced teacher's rationale for the resources she chooses:

I use anything that's not nailed down. I make a lot of resources so that the learners have hands-on experience, concrete experience. I made a voting box around election time when the state election was our theme. I also invited a candidate here and we went on an excursion to parliament house. Our students' main focus is fitting into the culture, society, community. They want to integrate and so are very interested in how the system works and the role they'll play in it.

Despite their inventiveness, or perhaps because of it, all of the 9 teachers who valued self-developed resources were keen to have access to a greater range of resources as a springboard for their ideas. Teachers would like to know what commercial resources were available but had difficulty finding the time to go out looking. When asked about what professional development (PD) they would like to have, opportunity to meet with other teachers to share resources and ideas was the most common answer, both amongst the experienced and the inexperienced. Some teachers, particularly the inexperienced, felt isolated. In particular, teachers wanted to have the opportunity to engage with others teaching specific-focus courses, e.g. classes for learners with a disability or VET-support classes:

I'm always looking for new ideas. I'd like to get together with teachers with similar groups to mine and hear their approaches.

I would like to go to something with teachers of students like mine – students working towards a VET qualification. Perhaps we could have a group who could meet together to share ideas and resources.

PD and networking specifically with other teachers of students with a disability, special needs.

I want to know what other teachers do and what resources they use. I would like to share resources with other teachers, especially experienced teachers.

As well as meeting and sharing, teachers wanted particular classroom strategies:

I want to be shown ways of doing things, for example, more efficient and effective ways of dealing with mixed levels.

I want any new ideas for the classroom, such as ice breakers.

I need other ways to engage learners, I need more hands-on activities.

I'd like to know more about how to use ICT as a learning resource with students – how to integrate it into my classes, what apps are good ...

In fact, all but 1 of these teachers accessed available PD opportunities and 8 of them were members of the Learn Local Pre-accredited Teachers Community of Practice (SEV ACFE Region) – more commonly known simply as the Community of Practice. Overall, survey responses indicated that teachers in 31 of the responding organisations access PD (externally provided as well as internally conducted); and in 17 organisations, teachers are members of the Community of Practice. This represents 50% of the responding organisations and 36% of all LL organisations in the SMR. It is not known, however, the percentage of teachers in each organisation that attend PD or are members of the Community of Practice.

The Community of Practice was referred to favourably in interviews by a number of teachers and managers, for example:

The Community of Practice is a great innovation (Manager).

It's a great opportunity to participate in PD in a nearby place (Teacher).

The more opportunities for teachers to get together the better – it helps to break down isolation and gets people talking and sharing skills (Manager).

A big factor in the Community of Practice's favour was that teachers were funded to attend the PD it offered. Unpaid PD, whether offered externally or within the organisation, creates difficulties for both managers and teachers in this predominantly casual and part-time workforce:

When the PD is run is an issue but also how we fund it is an issue. We have a PD here in the first week. It's a student-free day but we still need to pay the staff (Manager).

We're funded to run courses but we need funding for student-free PD days (Manager).

Free PD is still a cost to the organisations because we need to pay backfill. We don't have funding for backfill (Manager).

Paid PD is very important – especially if it's on a day off (Teacher).

Part time teachers have difficulty attending PD because they might be working elsewhere (Teacher).

The availability of sessional teachers is a problem. PD really needs to be toured around and held at different time and on-different days (Manager).

Another difficulty was that 'Information about PD doesn't always filter down to teachers' (Manager).

Overall, the type of support offered to teachers for the delivery of their pre-accredited language and literacy programs was summarised from the survey as:

- Professional development (31 organisations)
- Community of Practice (17 organisations)
- Teacher reference books (26 organisations)
- Mentoring (9 organisations).

One teacher mentor described how her approach supports planning, delivery and continuous improvement for language and literacy teachers who joined the sector sometime after the introduction of the Pre-accredited Quality Framework (ACFE 2013) and missed out on the training associated with the A-Frame curriculum document, which is part of that package:

We found that our new teachers needed support to write up their session plans – they didn't see the value of writing them; they thought they were too busy to write them. I look at them once a month, once a fortnight, or once a week depending on the teacher and the support needs. I read them and give feedback – what went well, or I might make suggestions. I also go and observe because I can't fix something if I don't know what it is. When I see the teacher in action, I can talk to her about slowing down or whatever ... I might invite a teacher to observe one of my classes if I think it would help. The idea is to give positive feedback to support them to plan. I strongly encourage them to attend PD to address their needs. It's gone over really well – teachers see it as a positive experience.

Our teachers now see the rationale for session planning – that it's important because it gives continuity. They see that they need to include a revision of skills of the last lesson and then build on that. The reflection part – the Review and Changes part – of the A-Frame has been huge in moulding their thinking. There's much more revision and recycling now because of it. I tell them that if they haven't covered everything in the session plan, they just need to make a note of that and the reason why – maybe they'd planned too much, a discussion took longer than expected or took off in an unexpected direction – that's fine but it needs to be in there and incorporated into the planning for the next session (Teacher mentor).

Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of many organisations to provide such intensive support for the delivery of programs. It requires a certain skills set that may not be available in all organisations. It also requires sufficient funds to pay for the time and skills of the mentor. The description of this teacher mentor's role does, however, emphasise that:

- (1) it takes time to develop understanding of the importance of lesson planning and the skills to do it for maximum learning potential
- (2) there is a need for on-going professional development associated with session planning and skills building through revision and recycling. Opportunities for (structured) observation would also be beneficial.

Apart from time to develop the skills, actually writing plans on an on-going basis requires time. Lack of paid preparation time was frequently mentioned as an issue by both managers and teachers.

4.2 Keys to success

4.2.1 Building confidence and connections

When teachers were asked what they considered were the keys to the success of their programs, they invariably talked about success in terms of relationship building and gains in confidence. Although they didn't use the terms, the responses of teachers interviewed showed that they were working, to varying degrees, within a social capital framework, which values the creation of learner networks, i.e. connections within the classroom and beyond (Balatti, Black and Falk 2007, 2009; NCVET 2010).

All of the 10 teachers interviewed referred to the development of confidence as being crucial to their learners' success and integral to their work as teachers. As the words of one indicate, the building of confidence, the creation of a comfortable learning environment and the development of connections between learners and between the teacher and individual learners are mutually dependent:

Lack of confidence is the major obstacle they need to overcome in order to make progress. They need to feel comfortable in their environment and with the teacher. It's about group cohesion.

Another experienced EAL teacher described how she builds the confidence of learners and helps them adapt to cultural expectations at variance with their own so that they are not afraid to speak up in class:

The key to success is the relationship between the teacher and the students – one of mutual respect. We have to break down the barriers so the students come to see the teacher as someone they can trust, feel comfortable with, safe with, that there are no boundaries on what they can ask. This is a different cultural experience – that it's appropriate to ask questions – it takes time to establish that the whole group is a safe and comfortable place, that no question is stupid. I say, "Please ask because there will also be someone else who wants the same things". I constantly acknowledge the validity of questions so they don't clam up and go back into their shell.

A third experienced teacher described how she uses personal narrative, weaving in stories about her own experiences and life to in order to lessen the divide between teacher and learners and between the learners themselves:

I work hard to make a friendly environment – it makes a huge difference. I tell them about my life to encourage them to talk to each other about their weekend, their life. They build relationships. Now they share everything – they give each other confidence and support. They become like a family.

That relationships had been successfully built in the classrooms was confirmed by the learners themselves in many of the class discussions observed by the researchers. Learners said such things as:

We feel very comfortable. We know each other. We can say anything – we are friends. We understand each other and know more about each other's cultures.

There's a great atmosphere in the class. No one makes you feel silly. Our teacher encourages us to try new things and not be shy.

I love this class because my teacher understands me. I feel comfortable to ask and to talk to her.

Managers also almost invariably talked about success in terms of the development of confidence and they understood the value of the classroom environment nurtured by the teacher (and reflected throughout the organisation):

Confidence is everything. A hundred percent of the time they are initially lacking in confidence – they may be ashamed by their lack of skills. Native speakers try very hard to hide their lack of skills – they have developed amazing strategies to do this.

Our learners need to be comfortable in the space. We take great care to create that and to create connections between learners.

Managers, teachers and learners also talked about measuring progress in terms of changed attitudes, which eventuate from increases in confidence:

For some of our learners, a measure of success is that now they can come in the door with a smile on their faces, their heads lifted up, making eye contact and greeting people they see. Some people don't realise how big an achievement that is. I think it should be recognised (Manager).

After coming to this class, I changed my thinking about what work I can do. Before I only thought of the factory but now I want to keep learning and get a qualification (Learner).

I evaluate how they're handling the class, the work, their peers, their attitude to learning (Teacher).

Progress was also informally assessed by feedback from learners about their interactions outside the classroom. Learners were well able to articulate their achievements when asked what they could now do that they couldn't do before they started the class:

I'm starting to do emails – I know how to sign off and I can attach documents now.

At my work, my boss sends me to get things from the store room now – I can read the box and bring back the right one.

I can text on the phone, do emails.

I can talk to my neighbours – before I used to stay inside the house but now I can talk to them. Before I could only catch one or two words but now we can talk normally.

I can read a short story – I can read to my children.

Some of these outcomes have been described in the literature as the wider benefits of language and literacy learning (Dymock 2007a, 2007b; Dymock and Billet 2008), and some reflect what Reder (2013, 2015) describes as increased engagement with literacy practices. Within the social capital framework they are referred to as 'bridging ties' to wider community networks beyond the classroom (Balatti, Black and Falk 2007, 2009). The development of bridging ties or community connections is gauged by feedback from a range of stakeholders as well as the learners themselves. For example, in the case of the program started at the school because there was a group of migrant parents who didn't participate in school life and seemed isolated from other parents, the teacher told us that *'Now the principal says she sees them having conversations before and after class'*. One of the learners told of her greater engagement in the school and her child's learning: *'The first time I went to a parent-teacher interview, I went with my husband, but the next time I felt comfortable to go by myself'*. This successful outcome was facilitated because before the interviews the class group had spent time preparing for them, i.e. developing the associated language skills and understanding of the process and expectations. It is an example of learning embedded in the learners' real life outside the classroom. The language learning and practice took place in the safe environment of the classroom and was 'tested' outside the classroom in the authentic context of the parent-teacher interview.

While the majority of managers (approximately 80%) who responded to the survey told us that they included increased confidence, changed attitudes, increased engagement with literacy practice and greater community engagement in their assessment of individual language and literacy learner's progress, this inclusion appears to be primarily informal observation and perceptions which are not necessarily recorded. The Learning Review completed by learners at the end of their course asks them to record what they can do now, but its timing means that it unlikely to capture the reality of

progress as measured by the growth in social capital. A few teachers said that they sometimes made a note of such progress, only one did so on a regular basis as a reflection on every session plan.

4.2.2 *Catering for needs: planning and flexibility*

The qualitative research highlighted that another key factor in the success of programs was the ability of teachers to respond to individual needs within the context of the whole class:

The key to success is a good teacher who understands the learner needs on an individual basis – not just their academic needs but taking into account their life skills and social skills (Manager).

The teacher – her flexibility, her ‘reading’ of the students – ability to look at the learner group and think ‘How can we achieve the best outcomes for each individual?’ (Manager).

Closer analysis of what the teacher actually does, of the pedagogy involved in responding to needs, shows that it involves planning skills, listening, the ability to be flexible, and the recognition of language and literacy as social practice.

The Learner Plan within the A-Frame curriculum document (ACFE 2013) is a valuable tool used by skilled teachers for formative assessment to determine overall class needs and set learning goals. This was articulated by a VET support teacher who described how she went about planning a course when she was first employed to teach it:

I didn’t decide beforehand what they needed. I listened to them to find out what they needed. From doing their Learner Plans with them, I knew that they found doing their assessments difficult. I needed to help them develop their reading and writing skills specific to their VET course. What is the assessment task asking for? – interpreting the task and understanding what it means if they ask you to examine or discuss – how to write in that genre. I listen to what the students say and how they say it. Being prepared to listen and not rush is essential to how the course develops, how it gets fine-tuned.

Another experienced teacher also referred to the Learner Plan and listening as her main tools for determining needs:

I find out their needs by talking to them and by filling in the Learner Plan. We review the Learner Plans all the time. Our students have no qualms saying what they want. Better classes come from what they want.

These examples suggest that the Learner Plan, in the hands of a skilled teacher, is a valuable planning tool into which other needs can then be integrated as they arise and as learners become more adept at identifying, and confident in articulating, their needs. Nurturing trust and confidence, as described before, is integral to the way teachers cater for initial and on-going needs. As one teacher said, ‘*I encourage openness and communication so they can tell me what they want*’. Once the learners have gained confidence and recognised that it is culturally acceptable to ask questions, they begin to use the teacher to explicitly help them negotiate their world outside the classroom:

Somethings I hear I don’t understand so I ask my teacher. If people don’t understand us, we can come to class and discuss that. Now I know how to stop a conversation I don’t want to have – maybe about politics. I know to say, “Sorry, I have to ...”. And

now I know how to call elderly people – in my culture we say ‘Aunty’ ‘Grandma’ ... but not here (Learner).

One day a student came to class and told me that his wife said she wasn’t going to pay the bills any more. “Oh dear”, I said, “that could be a problem”. “No”, he replied with a big grin, “because I’m going to pay them. My wife says now I know how to read the bills, I can pay them all”. Then he added, “Now I want you to show us how to use an ATM” (Teacher).

When they gain confidence, the students start saying “Now I need work” and I incorporate that into my planning (Teacher).

As the words of this learner and these teachers suggest, effective teaching and learning is embedded in the learners’ real and immediate needs. Their language and literacy skills are developed by applying them in context for particular purposes.

For most of the teachers interviewed, listening was considered to be a key element of the success in meeting on-going needs. Most, but not all also recognised the value of authentic texts relevant to those articulated needs. However, our observations showed that some teachers need assistance to ‘dig down’ beyond a generalised ‘I want reading and writing’ or ‘I want speaking and listening’ to discover what it is the learner actually needs to do with those macro skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking – writing messages at work, for example, or knowing how to begin, end or enter a casual conversation with neighbours or during lunch break at work. In contrast, in one interview, a literacy teacher, although well able to articulate her learners’ ultimate goals for their literacy use, appeared bewildered when asked if she used authentic texts and replied that she did not because ‘*Their request was more general – they just said they want to read*’. Similarly, in a literacy class for learners with an intellectual disability, although having previously told us that ‘We are trying to get them to do things in the community, to be more independent in the community’, the teacher was using generalised commercial texts with no relationship to the literacy practices the learners might be encountering, and need to engage with, in the community.

While these two examples are but a small sample of the pedagogical practice of Learn Local language and literacy teachers, it is unlikely that they are isolated examples. They suggest that there will be other teachers who need help in determining the specific social purposes for which their learners need language and literacy skills; and teachers who need help in understanding that ‘the most effective way for adults to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills is by applying them in context for particular purposes’ (Thompson 2014, p. 8). Only when the practical social purposes for which learners want the skills is known, can purposeful planning take place. Examples above also demonstrate how learners’ needs can change as the course progresses and the consequent necessity to constantly review their needs with them.

As well as planning, listening and responding with relevant real-life texts, another critical element in meeting learner needs is flexibility – the ability to throw the plan out the window when the need arises and the occasion warrants. Dealing with long term goals and immediate needs was particularly well described by one experienced teacher:

I develop my overall course plan from the Learner Plan in the A-Frame – it gives me an overall direction and then I incorporate things that come up afterwards. I always have a session plan but sometimes someone comes in with something they want – maybe they have a note from their child’s school saying that parent-teacher interviews will be 1.30pm–5pm and they don’t understand what that time means. If

it's urgent I deal with it as a whole class there and then, if possible. If it's not urgent or I'll need to plan something in order to deal with it, I say, "Can I get back to you on that next week?" And then I have time to gather all the tools I need (Teacher).

In both this and earlier examples, we again see how skilled teachers value contextual learning and authentic spoken and written texts. Moreover, while being flexibly responsive to needs as they arise, they still value planning ("Can I get back to you on that?") so that the appropriate teaching resources can be selected and sequenced ("I have time to gather all the tools I need").

In all the examples, these skilled teachers demonstrate the qualities and skills described by Baynham et al. (2007, p.9) as being held by "bricoleur teachers" who 'are eclectic in using and designing materials and activities to be highly learner responsive, and this eclecticism is underpinned by clear professional vision'. As pointed out by Baynham et al. (p.20), it takes time and practice to develop such skills and professional vision, so we were not surprised that some less experienced teachers were somewhat overwhelmed by the task. As one manager commented, 'It's difficult to be that flexible and have structure' and, as one inexperienced teacher with limited professional training told us, 'I can't do a session plan because they always bring something they want to class. They bring real examples relevant to their lives – maybe a form from school. If they don't, I bring my bags of worksheets with me so that I have everything I might need'. Rather than responsive to needs, this approach could more accurately be described as *ad hoc*.

The problem with an *ad hoc* approach is that it cannot provide the continuity and structured teaching required for truly effective learning to take place. It does not allow the teacher time to 'gather all the tools', as we heard in the approach taken by the experienced teacher. It does not allow planning time to analyse the often complex language and literacy involved in particular texts and genres or to sequence the learning into steps that bring the learner incrementally to an understanding of them and ever closer to competence in using them. Our research suggests a need for mentoring and on-going professional development in order to maximise learning opportunities and make the most of learners' time. This need was recognised by at least one teacher participating in our research who, when asked what PD she would like, responded, 'I want to know how to meet individual needs while keeping the class as a whole'.

Our qualitative investigation also uncovered another teacher support need that results directly from being so responsive to learners with such high support needs and having so successfully built the learners' trust, i.e. how to cope with the sometimes harrowing stories that learners share once rapport has been established:

The teacher is often the only person they can trust. But I need help to help me respond appropriately to their difficult stories – their personal problems ... domestic violence ...'. Teachers need to know where to refer students and to know how to debrief personally (Teacher).

What's the line between friendly and professional boundaries? Isolation and depression is huge amongst our EAL learners. Teachers are often the front line and learners come to us with all sorts of problems – anything from the simplest to the most complex. We need PD to help us know how to deal with it. And we need access to counselling for both students and teachers – it's a mental health issue (Teacher).

It's sometimes difficult to separate their emotional needs from their learning needs. We're not counsellors. We're lucky here because we have a volunteer who is a trained

psychologist so I can refer and support. But I need to be mindful of burnout. We have regular tutor support meetings where we can debrief – it's really important (Teacher).

Overseas people don't have a support network – they walk in the door and we're it. We become their support network. But how do you deal with people who have anxiety and depression? How do you support the teachers? They need a debriefing time. We need a funded counsellor for personal issues – someone with the knowledge of where to refer people, where the support is – especially support from someone who speaks their language. A strong central referral system would be good (Manager).

Our disability teacher has to be all things to all students. She can come and chat with me but as a manager there is nowhere for me to off-load. We need time for debriefing in a professional, supervised way – with a counsellor (Manager).

The voices of these teachers and managers paint a picture for us of the issues they face as a result of their skills in developing learner confidence and trust. It is ironic that one of the greatest strengths of the sector presents its teachers and managers with one of the greatest challenges. However, their voices have also suggested ways, including PD and access to counsellors, in which they can be supported in catering for the needs of individuals and the class as a whole.

4.2.3 Providing pathways

It is clear from the learners', teachers' and managers' voices we have heard so far that for language and literacy learners in pre-accredited programs the pathway to increased social and economic participation begins at classroom level with the development of trust and confidence. Following that, quality programs extend the pathway by specifically supporting the learner to put their language and literacy skills into practice outside the classroom in the social contexts for which they need them. However, the litmus test to the success of programs comes when learners have developed sufficient confidence and skills to move on – not necessarily out of the LL organisation, although this is surely the ultimate goal, but on to other programs and other teachers.

When asked during the class discussions in term 4, 80% of the learners articulated the pathway they envisage for themselves after their current class finished. Of these, almost 60% said they wanted to continue studying to a higher level, with some indicating that a blended course (i.e. including ITC) was a preference.

I don't want to finish – more communication, more computer (EAL learner).

I want to learn new iPad stuff (Literacy learner).

I want to still study to a higher level (Literacy learner).

I want to learn more and more (Literacy learner).

I want to read more than the name on the bus (low level EAL learner in bilingual class).

A third of those who wanted to continue studying in the type of course they were in now indicated that they wanted to improve their skills for a range of social purposes such as talking to their children's friends and teachers, talking to plumbers and mechanics, reading recipes and newspapers. These learners could be said to be at the second stage of their pathway having gained sufficient confidence and skills to participate in the classroom but needing more assistance (skills building and supported contextualised practice) to create (in social capital terms) the bridging ties that enable them to engage outside the classroom. Their situation is perhaps summed up by one EAL learner

who said *'The first is understand a little more'* suggesting that she hadn't ruled out taking further steps but improved skills come first.

However, approximately 40% of learners taking part in the classroom discussions had gained enough confidence and skills to at least begin to think about taking that next step along their pathway: to consider employment, volunteering or VET training. We have already heard from one learner who encapsulated this with the words:

After coming to this class, I changed my thinking about what work I can do. Before I only thought of the factory but now I want to keep learning and get a qualification (Learner).

Most, but not all, of the learners who were aiming at a VET qualification also knew the employment sector in which they wanted to work. In other words, they are further along the pathway than other learners who vaguely 'want a job' and who perhaps need more assistance in understanding the possibilities and how to achieve them.

A critical element in the provision of any pathway is *how* learners are supported to develop that understanding and take the steps they need. While the majority of survey responses indicated that LL organisations actively promoted pathways throughout language and literacy programs, there was no indication in the survey of how this was done. Follow-up interviews shed light on this.

Managers tended to talk about formal processes:

Trainers deliver a pathways session, usually in third term so that learners can begin thinking about it in fourth term. They also raise awareness of the pitfalls of funding arrangements (Manager).

Industry tasters give clients an understanding of both good parts of the job and bad parts of the job – helps them decide if this is something they can cope with (Manager).

We have a careers guidance counsellor shared between a network of local organisations (Manager).

One manager talked about a whole of organisation approach in which photographic displays in reception depict learners engaged in activities 'beyond the EAL classroom'. The displays are intended to inspire learners as well as letting them know the pathways the organisation can offer them.

Teachers tended to talk about the informal process that form part of their on-going pedagogical practice. Whether or not the teachers were aware of it, these responses reflect a social capital approach:

I talk to them about lifelong learning and how their confidence is developing (Teacher).

I encourage them to mix, to "go out there" and talk to people. This lessens their isolation. It's a move towards empowerment. In our community the men are actively out in the community – the men do the driving, shopping, banking. These women want to do it themselves. I tell them, 'It's never too late'. (Teacher of a bilingual program for women).

A few teachers talked of supporting pathways to employment by specifically focussing on the cultural expectations of more formal learning and of workplaces:

I talk to them about the culture of Australian Training rooms. I give them culturally appropriate classroom strategies such as putting up their hand and asking questions. We practise how to phrase questions, for example, "I understand X but could you explain ...". Before they go on work placement we look at how to communicate with staff, children, parents. We practise this. They don't have time to practise in the training room (Teacher of VET-support program).

I talk to them about cultural expectations such as being punctual (EAL Teacher).

These teachers' comments echo action research previously conducted within LL organisations (Bilogrevic 2012; Moore 2012; Vlahos 2012) and the work of intercultural communication theorists described in the literature review. The importance of providing this kind of support is confirmed in these comments from managers:

Bunnings told us, "We need employees who can come on time, know how to dress. Qualifications are the last thing we look for".

The chamber of commerce sends a newsletter and holds meetings about what skills are needed to fill jobs. Often it's the 'soft skills' – appropriate language, WHS, understanding workplace expectations.

Bilogrevich's (2012) work, in particular, emphasised the importance of providing opportunities to discuss and practise the required cultural expectations and related communication skills before learners go on work placement because a successful placement can often lead to employment. Consequently, the development of intercultural communication skills and understandings of workplace expectations are critical elements of a supported pathway to employment. Their development needs a culturally aware teacher who can act as a role model and is equipped with strategies to assist learners in the difficult process of developing the skills to negotiate a new culture. Courses need to be of sufficient duration and frequency to enable learners to integrate new ways of thinking and doing.

For those already undertaking VET courses, embedded language and literacy classes are another critical support element for learners with insecure cultural, language and/or literacy skills (see section 3.3). However, as discussed previously, the survey revealed that only one LL organisation described their VET support class as embedded although others provided concurrent classes that may or may not be embedded, or pre-VET classes. This is a critical pathways support area that requires further investigation.

Another critical element of pathways provision appears to be the security provided by the internal pathway. This was the case for 8 of the 10 LL organisations taking part in the qualitative research. These were able to provide internal pathways either because they were themselves an RTO (5 of the organisations) or because a non-RTO had a partnership with, or was looking to form a partnership with, an RTO (3 organisations). The manager of a small LL organisation without RTO status explained:

These learners are comfortable here now so we're looking at having accredited training delivered here; at establishing a partnership with an RTO.

A manager of an LL organisation with RTO status described the internal pathway and its rationale as follows:

Our EAL learners are looking for employment but they're not ready to step out so we create a pathway for them. As well as language and literacy, they have the

opportunity to study other classes and when they have a sufficient level of English we provide practical hands-on VET courses suitable for our learners' educational background and their aspirations. The courses include volunteering in their area of interest, resume writing, job applications, and because the course is so practical we can give a reference.

Accredited learning is not for all, and for some learner cohorts the pathway is to greater community participation and to volunteering. One organisation taking part in the qualitative research has built up an impressive network of places in which learners with an intellectual disability can volunteer. The manager also spends considerable time liaising with these organisations and supporting the learners there.

All of these managerial and pedagogical practices assist learners to move on – to take the next step along a pathway. It was not within the scope of this research to make an in-depth study of all the ways in which pathways are promoted throughout courses or the extent to which learners are supported. We have, however, been able to provide a few examples, among which the pedagogical practices are particularly interesting for what they reveal about the way LL teachers build the social capital and cultural understanding of learners that enables them to take the necessary steps. Further investigation in these areas would also be useful.

The type of pathway clearly depends on the learner cohort. Consequently, another critical element in the provision of pathways is determining what pathways to provide. It was not possible within the timeframe of this research to investigate this in any detail but managers described a variety of ways of determining community needs including formal needs analysis, looking at the information provided in the Learning Review completed at the end of a course, suggestions from teachers, requests from students and potential students (*'Anyone who comes in the door and says do you do X? – we record that'*), and being aware of what's happening in the wider community.

As may be expected, however, the provision of pathways is not without challenges. Firstly, once the needs of current learners and the wider community are known, the design and development of new courses to meet those needs requires time and effort – perhaps particularly so if other organisations are involved in program development to enhance the quality through specialist input. The design and development, therefore, require the allocation of scarce funds which are not always available.

In addition, three experienced managers felt constrained by their own perceptions of their limited knowledge of the most effective way to support learners in VET programs or, as one manager described it, 'to bridge the gap between language and literacy and VET'. While this was expressed by three managers, it is likely to be indicative of a wider need and further supports the suggestion that language and literacy support for VET is an area that warrants further investigation.

Another challenge is that awareness of the wider community needs also requires time effort and funding for networking. This will be discussed in the next section, which deals with networking as the fourth key to success.

4.2.4 Networking

Answers to questions in the survey about networking indicated that 35% of the responding LL organisations had wide networks, while 47% had limited networks (the remaining LL managers did not respond to these questions). Amongst those with apparently few connections, 4 took part in the qualitative follow-up which revealed that, in fact, each of these 4 had fairly extensive networks. This suggests that the networks of other LL organisations in the SMR may be greater than indicated by the survey. It was not possible within the time frame of the project to follow this up, or to fully

investigate the impact of limited networks on the quality of programs. However, the 10 managers interviewed perceived them to be very important – in the words of one manager, *'We wouldn't survive without them'*.

Discussions with managers showed that Learn Local networks related to language and literacy provision fall into two broad categories. The first category is the networks, partnerships and alliances formed with other Learn Local organisations, including local cluster groups, the Pre-accredited Teachers Community of Practice and ACFE meetings. For want of a better description, we will call these 'internal' networks. The second category of network is connections with other (external) forums and groups, such as other educational service providers; service providers such as libraries, health, employment, welfare and cultural groups; local councils, church groups, and local industry networks. These two broad categories of network groups – internal and external – play different but complementary roles in the identification, design and delivery of quality language and literacy programs.

When questioned in interviews about how their networks benefitted their pre-accredited language and literacy programs, managers' responses showed that the internal Learn Local networks were valued for the opportunities they offered to get together with others dealing with the same issues and similar learner cohorts. These opportunities were valued because of the potential to stimulate ideas: *'It reinvigorates your thinking'* (Manager).

In the context of professional development support, the Community of Practice was referred to positively on a number of occasions. However, the comments of 7 managers' suggest that at managerial level, well-functioning local cluster groups are particularly highly valued. A key feature of these groups is the opportunity they present for sharing ideas, resources and workloads:

We are interested in quality delivery within our group. We get together and talk. We looked at what we had in common, and how we could share resources such as teachers, and develop workbooks together.

A manager in a different cluster said:

We work as a cluster. We share teachers across the cluster, we plan together, we share resources and develop pathways. We share professional development, excursions and speakers.

Clusters also present opportunities for sharing the workload of marketing:

We decided to market ourselves as a group –we put together a promotional plan for the [sub] region and for each organisation.

Another manager in the same cluster described the promotional plan in more detail:

We share a web page, a face book page and brochures. We also do pop-up classes. This is good for marketing and promotion but also for trying things in a different space – ours are full.

These examples demonstrate how a well-functioning, supportive cluster can benefit individual organisations and the local community through the sharing of ideas, resources, workloads and the development of pathways. This potential was summed up by a manager in an area where a cluster was not yet in operation:

We're working with [another local LL organisation] to form a cluster group for marketing collectively to our community. But more than just marketing, it's working collaboratively to help our community.

Despite the benefits, the establishment and maintenance of such clusters are not without challenges. They require time, commitment and a willingness to work as a team and to share. One manager considered that the cluster, despite its obvious benefits was *'hard to sustain without funding. It relies on the good will and drive of individuals'*.

The second category of network, the external networks, were similarly valued by the well-connected LL organisations taking part in the qualitative research. Networking with external organisations is a two-way process. On the one hand, networking enables managers to know what is happening in the community and so assist in the identification of community needs. On the other hand, engagement with external networks raises the profile of individual LL organisations and the sector as a whole. It is an opportunity to promote what an individual organisation can do and what it can offer.

Establishing the organisation's reputation in the community leads to mutually beneficial partnerships such as outreach programs which, by 'bringing the learning to the learner' (Davies, Lamb and Doeke 2011), facilitate the engagement of those who would not otherwise access existing language and/or literacy programs:

At one forum recently someone said, "We have this cohort who can't get to you", so we're going to them (Manager).

The comments of the managers interviewed uphold the view expressed in the literature that a critical factor in the success of such partnerships is the commitment of lead personnel in both organisations (Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010, p. 19). In an interview, one LL manager described how an outreach partnership to deliver a VET support program fell apart when the manager of the partnering organisation left and the Board of that organisation decided that the partnership was a conflict of interest. Another manager considered that the success of a program embedded in a family-setting – a primary school – depended on the support of the principal, the school council as well as the Parents Group and the Wellbeing Officer. Moreover, the manager emphasised that it is essential to have *'the right teacher to engage with those learners and fit in with the school – engage with the personnel at the school'*.

All managers interviewed who were, or had been, conducting outreach programs commented on the need to constantly keep in touch with all stakeholders involved, not just the management but also the LL teachers because they can feel isolated. This involves time and effort – meetings, emails, phone calls and more casual things such as popping into the principal's office, and going to morning tea during class break time. This demonstrates a considerable commitment of time and energy.

However, a committed partnering organisation can contribute not only the facilities, but other resources that enhance the quality of the program:

Their commitment is very important for supporting the program functioning – they might supply a volunteer or a childcare worker, for example.

Another benefit for the LL organisation is that when the partnering organisation is committed to the program, it contributes to the task of recruiting learners:

In our school-based program, the wellbeing officer goes and personally approaches parents are not involving themselves in the school – who she thinks might not have

enough English. The Parents Group is also directly involved. The classes are also advertised in the school newsletter.

Recruitment and referrals to programs, both in outreach locations and within the organisation itself, were benefits of external networks frequently referred to by managers. External referring organisations such as a disability service or an employment service can also provide support *'if we have problems with a student, such as attendance issues. Or they can provide guidance on the particular issues of the student'* (Manager). Feedback from networks about programs was also considered invaluable: *'Direct feedback tells us how we can improve our quality and our range'*. Networking with other educational providers was *'useful for cross-fertilization of ideas'* and *'providing a different perspective'*.

As we saw in the previous section, the provision of pathways is a key to the success of pre-accredited language, and literacy programs and work placement is a critical element of a supported pathway. Managers of well-networked LL organisations reported that their connections with local councils; non-profit organisations such as the Lions Club, Rotary and charities; churches; and local businesses, such as child care organisations, aged care, retail and industry were crucial to the supported pathways they could offer because such organisations provided work experience placements and volunteering opportunities.

Local businesses and industries were also valued for the insight and input they can provide into the development of new courses to meet community needs. However, they were also considered the most difficult to establish. This was summed up by one manager who said:

I'd like greater connection with industry – what small businesses are out there? What are the skills shortages? But there's a time constraint on both sides.

In fact, time was major issue for managers in establishing and maintaining the networks to which they were nevertheless committed:

We go out there in any time we might have available. It's something I'd like to do more of. I believe in face to face networking. I think the direct approach is best to let people know what we can offer, find out what people need.

Three-quarters of my time is spent on maintaining networks – making sure communication lines are open, building rapport.

I need stronger contact with places like Rotary but finding the time is difficult.

Networks are so important – it's who you know not what you know – but time is the major issue. We really need funding to pay for an extra day, an extra person. The marketing role needs a specific person.

It's a question of time and funding. My role is multifaceted – networking, recruiting, marketing, supporting teachers. As well as that I have a heavy teaching load myself.

I value the importance of networking but time is the biggest challenge.

In summary, the internal and external networks of LL organisations serve a range of purposes with the potential to enhance the quality of language and literacy programs. Internal networks are primarily supportive and collaborative. Collaboration can lead to enhance provision through the sharing of resources, shared marketing and the establishment of pathways. Networking externally serves to raise the profile of the LL organisation and promote what it can offer. External networks

assist in the identification of community needs, and feedback from external stakeholders contributes to continuous improvement of programs. External networks can help to reach otherwise elusive learner groups through outreach programs established in partnership with an organisation with a mutual interest in the learner cohort. Partnerships can assist in recruitment, the provision of facilities and other resources. They can enhance the outcomes of programs by providing the work placement and volunteering opportunities that are often crucial to the gaining of employment and greater social participation.

The common thread linking both the internal and external networks is commitment – the commitment and ‘drive’ of individuals to the establishment and maintenance of networks. This workload is challenging for managers who have many demands on their time.

5 Discussion and recommendations

This discussion of the findings of the ACFE Word for Word Project begins with a brief summary of the range of design and delivery of pre-accredited language and literacy programs in Learn Local organisations in the southern metropolitan region. This will serve as a reminder of the overall context for the following discussions around the key research questions and best practice in pre-accredited language and literacy programs as revealed through the research. Recommendations for enhancing provision and sharing best practice are included throughout.

5.1 Summary of design and delivery approaches

Information about the range of language and literacy provision in the SMR was primarily determined from the survey sent to all LL organisations in the Region. There was a high response rate to the survey with 72% of organisations providing answers to the survey questions. The information from these 34 participating organisations was illustrated and augmented by the voices of managers, teachers and learners from 10 of those organisations.

The research showed that the EAL programs were offered by 67% of survey respondents (23 organisations), while literacy programs were offered by 82% respondents (i.e. 28 organisations). Most offered both EAL and literacy programs but 6 provided EAL exclusively and 11 provided literacy exclusively. Literacy programs for people with disabilities were offered in a third of all organisations with literacy programs, either in addition to other literacy programs or exclusively. Literacy classes were accessed by both migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds and native speakers (NS) of English.

Stand-alone classes were the most common delivery approach across the SMR, with 20 organisations providing stand-alone literacy classes and 18 organisations providing stand-alone EAL classes. Mixed EAL/NS literacy was the third largest delivery approach, being offered in 13 LL organisations usually in addition to other types of literacy programs but as the only type of literacy program in 2 organisations.

Language and/or literacy classes embedded in social activities, offered in 10 organisations, was the next most widely delivered type of program. A literacy (and numeracy) program embedded in cooking was part of the qualitative phase of this research. Designed for learners with a disability, the shared planning, shopping, cooking and eating experience provided stimulus not only for literacy learning but also for greater social interaction among the learners and the wider community.

Various types of VET support programs were also delivered by 10 LL organisations. The approach taken in 5 organisations was to provide Pre-VET support, and 4 were providing concurrent VET support. Only 1 LL organisation reported that it was offering the type of support previous research has found to be the most effective, i.e. language and literacy embedded in specific VET programs (Alkema and Rean n.d.; Casey et al. 2006; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010; Black and Yasakawa 2012).

Only a few organisations (4) were conducting language and literacy programs embedded in family-based settings. As with all types of embedded programs, these have the advantage of contextualising the learning within real and immediate needs. Overall, 35% of organisations were conducting programs in outreach locations.

Learners were predominantly enrolled for one year in classes scheduled 1 day a week. The classes were often mixed levels. The literature, supported by the learners' voices in this current research, suggest that these are programming decisions that do not provide optimal learning conditions. This will be addressed in the discussion of key research question 1, below. On the positive side, class sizes

of less than 15 learners are common across the SMR. These smaller-sized classes are appreciated by learners for the greater support they can offer and are one of the strengths of Learn Local language and literacy provision.

All programs were delivered face-to-face in classrooms as is befitting learners with high support needs. In 42% of participating organisations, in-class support by volunteers was also available. Most, but not all, volunteers had received training in how to support language and literacy development. Our qualitative research suggests that a number of teachers do not hold professional qualifications relevant to language and/or literacy development. Without a strong pedagogical underpinning, inexperienced and unqualified teachers need a great deal of support in order to cope with the demands of this complex work.

5.2 Key research questions

Key research Q 1: Are there any students' needs not being addressed by the current models of design and delivery, and if so, what changes need to be made to successfully meet these identified needs?

The research suggests that certain programming decisions – most particularly scheduling (course intensity), but also class sizes and class levels – detract from the ability of teachers to adequately address the language and literacy needs of learners. This section will first discuss these commonly-made decisions before discussing the range of programs available to address the support needs of learners in VET and, with reference to the literature, evaluating their potential effectiveness.

Programming

The survey found that most language and literacy classes are very low in intensity, being scheduled for 1 day /week for 1 year. However, the development of new language skills and new literacy skills is cognitively complex and requires frequent meaningful practice if learners are to understand, process and master new skills and concepts. Skilled teachers provide practice opportunities by planning activities in which skills and concepts are recycled in a range of relevant contexts. Macpherson, in her research conducted in 2007, argued that frequent teaching throughout the week was necessary for optimal learning to take place. Our qualitative research found that rather than being able to build on skills from one lesson to the next, with a week in between it was, as described by one teacher, *'almost like starting again'*. Learners (apart from those with a disability) almost unanimously voiced a need for more frequent classes so that they didn't *'forget from one class to next'* because *'outside class it's difficult to practise'*. The preferred frequency for the majority of these learners was 2 to 3 days a week for 2 to 3 hours a day, which would, they considered, give them enough time to learn effectively and to balance their study with their other commitments.

Managers were under the impression that the low intensity of 1 day a week was what the learners wanted. They reported that they consulted with learners about scheduling and their preference was for 1 day a week. These consultations took place on enrolment, but the students taking part in our discussions did so after having attended classes for some time. This suggests that, while they may initially have been apprehensive about a bigger time commitment, or indeed about their own ability to study at all, after they had settled into the class and had gained confidence, they could see the benefits of more frequent classes and were ready to make a greater time commitment. Consequently, the most appropriate scheduling would be one that builds in intensity as newly engaged learners grow in confidence and are better able to perceive their own learning needs.

Managers also talked of funding constraints to scheduling classes of greater intensity than 1 day a week (*'These are the hours we're funded'*). More intense scheduling of classes would require a higher level of funding. However, as voiced by the LL teachers and the learners in this study, and

supported by the literature, increased intensity of scheduling would also more effectively cater for the learning needs of course participants, thus providing a shorter pathway overall to greater community and economic participation.

Class size is also a factor impacting on the learning environment and the teachers' ability to effectively cater for learner needs. Many learners accessing pre-accredited language and literacy classes have high support needs which place great demands on teachers' time and effort both in the classroom and in preparation. Previous research recommends that, ideally, class enrolments for such learners should not exceed 15 and should be supported with a second teacher or a trained volunteer for numbers greater than 10 (MacPherson 2007, p. 4). It should be acknowledged at this point that our research found language and literacy classes of this optimal sizes were offered by 85% of participating LL organisations. Moreover, these smaller class sizes are much appreciated by learners because of the more individualised attention they receive from teachers. Smaller class sizes are thus a strength of pre-accredited language and literacy programs in the SMR.

However, 8 organisations also reported that they were conducting larger classes, with one organisation reporting more than 20 learners in a class, thus limiting teachers' abilities to meet individual needs associated with acquiring language and literacy skills. Some of these large classes resulted because the organisations had limited space, suggesting the possibility that establishing classes in other locations, such as libraries, could solve the problem.

The effectiveness of large classes is further compromised if the learners in the class also have mixed levels of skills. In fact, mixed levels, which were found to be common across the SMR, are a concern in all classes because they significantly increase teacher workload particularly in terms of planning appropriate activities for the range of levels. They also decrease the effectiveness of the learning environment because of the time it takes to explain each activity to each learner level, and makes it *'difficult to pace the class so that it suits everyone's needs'* (Teacher).

We acknowledge that, in some cases, mixed level classes may be unavoidable, for example in language and literacy embedded in family-based settings such as schools where the engagement of parents is the prime consideration and numbers may be small, thereby making it impossible to offer level-specific classes. However, our research also suggests that, in a number of organisations, mixed level classes eventuate because the organisation is not using an initial placement test to determine the most appropriate class level for learners. The survey showed that a significant proportion (45%) of LL organisations did not use an initial placement test. Our qualitative research suggests that some managers, particularly those without educational backgrounds, may be unaware of the educational benefits of grouping learners with similar needs together rather than mixing levels and abilities; unaware that learners' language and literacy needs can best be met in class groups of similar levels and abilities (McPherson 2007; Achren & Williams 2006).

Initial placement tests need to be administered by people skilled in assessing language and literacy levels (Achren, Newcombe and Roberts 2012). Difficulties may, therefore, arise for organisations in which the only person with the appropriate skills is a casual teacher who would need to be paid to do the assessing thus increasing costs for the organisation. Moreover, it may also be that there is no one sufficiently skilled and knowledgeable within the organisation to assess levels because our qualitative research has suggested that many of the teachers of language and literacy programs in the SMR do not have qualifications specifically relating to language and literacy development. If this is the case, training in assessing language and literacy levels would need to be put in place. More than half of all LL organisations in the SMR already use a placement test of one sort or another.

Sharing of experience of using these would make a valuable contribution to the uptake of initial placement tests across the region.

Recommendation 1: Raise managers' awareness of the educational benefits and increased effectiveness of more intense scheduling of classes, and awareness of possibilities for funding classes that increase in intensity over the year as learners gain confidence.

Recommendation 2: Raise awareness of the educational value of assessing levels for initial placement, and provide opportunities for training in language and literacy assessments and the sharing of existing resources.

Supporting learners in VET

There has been a great deal of research into how best to support the language and literacy needs of learners in VET courses. The consensus is that it is best done through embedding the support in the specific VET course in which the learners are enrolled (Alkema and Rean n.d.; Casey et al. 2006; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010; Black and Yasakawa 2012). Drawing on the literature, we can define embedded support courses as those in which the VET trainer and the language and literacy support teacher work closely together so that the support is timely and relevant to immediate needs. The support is preferably available to all so that, rather than singling out those in need in a deficit model scenario, it is seen as an integral part of the VET training. This means that the support teacher must be able to contextualise the language and literacy support within the content of the VET training and provide it as it is needed. This can happen in a team teaching situation or in a separate class. Black and Yasakawa (2012) advocate what they call 'shared delivery', i.e. a separate class conducted concurrently but planned with input from both trainer and support teacher to ensure its relevance and immediacy. In addition, the support classes and the VET training need to be co-located so that learners don't have to go somewhere else to get help, the trainer and support teacher have easy access to each other for on-going planning purposes, and the support teacher can more easily become familiar with the culture of the target workforce. This is vital given the relationship between culture and language and the differing communication needs of different employment sectors (see, for example, Yates 2008). Planning is vital so that areas of difficulty can be anticipated and appropriate support activities prepared. For the planning to be effective, the two specialists need to be supported by having clearly designated and paid planning time.

Only one LL organisation identified its language and literacy support for learners in VET as being embedded but we found that it embodied many, but not all of the features just described. However, the most commonly offered support is pre-VET support, which, given its 'distance' from the VET training itself, lacks the immediacy of embedded support, and thus lacks relevance to the learner. It follows that this is likely to be the least effective model of pathways support for learners in VET. Four other organisations identified the design and delivery of their VET support classes as being concurrent. Further investigation would reveal if, and to what extent, any of the concurrent VET support classes could, in fact, be described as embedded.

Recommendation 3: Further investigate the range and effectiveness of current VET support classes with a view to sharing experiences of good practice to enhance and, if possible, extend the provision.

Key research Q 2: What is the current relationship between demand and supply of programs?

Over a third (38%) of LL organisations reported that viability of programs was a concern. Few enrolments leads to small classes and this must be balanced against costs. The survey showed that while most organisations with viability issues had enrolments of 5 to 15 students, two were conducting language and literacy classes with 5 or fewer learners. In many instances, sufficient class numbers are achieved by providing mixed level classes which, as we saw in the previous discussion

of programming issues, has the potential to decrease the effectiveness of the learning environment while at the same time adding greatly to teachers' preparation and in-class workload. Difficulties are significantly increased if class numbers are large but could be alleviated by the introduction of an initial placement test, as discussed previously, and the separation of learners into two class groups with more homogenous levels.

Overall, viability and mixed levels is a vexed and complicated issue, when the alternative to a mixed level class being no class at all because of insufficient numbers to conduct separate classes. Mixed levels are, therefore, likely to be an on-going feature of pre-accredited language and literacy delivery. However mixed level classes place great demands on teachers. Consequently, PD to help teachers to cater for mixed skills levels within classes remains a perennial issue.

Recommendation 4: Although the use of an initial placement test may reduce the incidences of mixed level classes, they remain an unavoidable inevitability for which teachers need to be supported through PD and opportunities to share experiences and resources.

While viability issues were reported by 38% of participating LL organisations, 40% reported that demand outstripped supply. Some of those wanting to access courses are not eligible for funding, e.g. asylum seekers and other non-residents, and some organisations reported difficulties attracting suitable teachers with the skills and attributes to teach language and literacy learners. However, the major constraint, reported by half of those who had difficulty responding to demand, was a lack of facilities, with most conducting all their programs on the premises they had outgrown. As in the previous discussion, investigating the possibility of locating programs elsewhere would be beneficial.

Recommendation 5: Encourage organisations to investigate locating programs outside their existing premises to alleviate space issues restricting the ability to respond to demand. This would also alleviate the educational disadvantage of large classes that can result as a response to learner demand where space issues exist.

Key research Q 3: What range of resources are teachers accessing to support their practice?

The survey informed us that teachers in the majority of LL organisations have access to computers as a class resource, but less than half have class access to a library, although reference books were reported to be available to the teachers themselves in three quarters of the participating organisations. While only half of the managers reported that their teachers used commercial materials, managers from all LL organisations reported that their teachers used self-made materials in their classrooms.

One explanation for the use of self-developed resources rather than commercial ones is that the commercial resources are not available within the organisation or in the teachers' own professional libraries. This is supported by comments made by some teachers during interviews such as 'we need lots more resources'; 'ours [or 'mine'] are getting old', and that they would like to have the time to 'get out and see what's out there'.

Another explanation is that skilled teachers spend a great deal of time developing their own resources because these are what best serve their learners' needs within the particular context of their lives and local environment. As one teacher commented, 'I use my own resources that are relevant to their needs and ages'. We also heard from a teacher who uses 'everything that's not nailed down' and described making a voting box at election time to support EAL learners in developing the associated language and literacy skills. Such teachers have adopted a social practice approach to language and literacy development, i.e. they acknowledge adult language and literacy to be 'essentially a social practice, shaped by the demands of work and life and developed through a

process of purposeful participation in social and cultural practices' (Thompson 2014, p. 8). The voting box was thus a resource for enabling learners to participate in the social and cultural practice of the Australian electoral process and its underpinning values.

Resources such as a voting box are not available commercially. However, teachers want access to commercial resources because they are often used as a source of inspiration for teaching ideas or ideas that skilled teachers can adapt and from which they can, as another teacher described it, '*pick and choose*'. These skilled teachers exemplify those described by Baynham et al. (2007, p. 9) as being 'eclectic in using and designing materials and activities to be highly learner responsive' but whose 'eclecticism is underpinned by clear professional vision'.

Authentic spoken and written texts are another feature of a social practice approach to language and literacy development, the use of which also often requires teachers to develop their own supporting materials. We heard from a number of teachers who accessed authentic texts as learning resources. To continue the election example introduced above, the teacher invited guest speakers and planned an excursion to parliament house – all of which involve the use of authentic texts along with teacher-made resources to support the development of the learners' language, literacy and cultural skills to the level where the meaning of the authentic texts can be accessed by the learners. We also heard other skilled teachers talk about using rosters, recipes, VET assessment tasks, bills, school-based texts including on-line ordering, ATMs, and mobile phones as a source of information.

These last examples demonstrate the prevalence of ICT as a common social practice in our society. They tell us that teachers with an understanding of literacy as social practice are accessing a range of ICT resources to incorporate this increasingly important mode of communication into language and literacy classes; they are, in fact, delivering blending learning (see Digital Learning Branch, DEECD 2012). The importance of ICT to learners was heard in comments about being able to '*text on the phone*' or '*do emails*' after attending a literacy class, and of wanting to learn more '*ipad stuff*'. These examples support one manager's view that:

We are in an ICT age – we have to stay current so digital literacy needs to be integrated into all classes – not a separate class for learning computers. We need to normalise ICT.

As this research shows, at least some teachers are already doing this. But we also heard from teachers who would like to know more about what is available and how to integrate it into their classroom practice.

We also heard from teachers who draw on their own cultural knowledge and that of others as a resource to develop their EAL learners' awareness of cultural expectations underpinning written and spoken social, educational and workplace interactions in Australia. This research has shown that drawing on the cultural knowledge of learners in mixed EAL/NS literacy classes can be one of the strengths of these classes. In the hands of skilled teachers, such classes can maximise the opportunities for discussion leading to greater intercultural competence for all concerned (see also Yates 2008; Devi 2008; Vlahos 2012; Achren 2013).

The importance of intercultural discussions are not confined to mixed EAL/NS speaker classes (including VET support classes) but are vital to all classes with EAL learners because, as pointed out by Liddicoat (2000, p. 9–10), native speakers are often very tolerant of errors in grammar or vocabulary but significant problems can arise when there is a 'cultural mismatch' in communication styles and expectations of appropriateness (eye contact being a classic example). Liddicoat explains that this is 'largely because people are much less aware of their own cultural rules for interaction

than they are of other aspects of language'. This emphasises the value of intercultural discussion in mixed EAL/NS classes because they can raise everyone's awareness of different cultural ways of interacting, i.e. the intercultural competence we all need for living and working in multicultural Australia. Liddicoat explains further that 'cultural knowledge is not something that [EAL] learners can just pick up. In fact, cultural differences may often go unnoticed by learners until they actually create a problem'. Because of this, both Liddicoat (2000) and Yates (2008) advocate the use of teaching strategies that help learners 'notice' when their own culture differs from that of others and provide the opportunity to practise culturally different ways of interacting. Again, it is likely that there are teachers who would benefit from professional development opportunities to increase their skills and understanding in the area of intercultural communication.

Key research Q 4: Are there any specific supports needed that are not currently available?

The previous section has described some of the resources used by teachers skilled in developing language and literacy as social practice, i.e. language and literacy for the practical daily use of their learners. To develop learners' communication skills – their speaking listening, reading and writing skills – to the point where they can achieve their particular purposes, skilled teachers use strategies to determine their learners' real-life needs, interests, purposes and goals and then plan a program around relevant topics and genres according to the needs determined. Skilled teachers do this by selecting, designing and sequencing learning activities relevant to the topics, genres and learner skills levels using authentic texts as well as concrete hands-on experiences, as advocated in the literature (e.g. Reder 2009; ACE NSW 2010; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010; Achren, Newcombe and Roberts 2012; Davies, Lamb and Doecke 2011).

However, we know from the qualitative research that the concept – the 'big picture' – of language and literacy as social practice is not necessarily understood by all teachers in the sector, particularly those without a thorough grounding in language and literacy development. For this reason, many teachers need support to develop understanding of the concept and incorporate appropriate resources (e.g. authentic texts) and teaching strategies into their professional practice.

Recommendation 6: Provide professional development opportunities to support and develop understanding of language and literacy as social practice. This includes classroom practice that addresses everyday ICT communication needs and the intercultural communication needs of learners.

We have also previously recommended that teachers be supported in their classroom management in the difficult, but often unavoidable, situation of mixed level classes (Recommendation 4). In addition, during interviews, teachers – both skilled and the less experienced – articulated their need for support to develop classroom management strategies to 'meet individual needs while keeping the class as a whole', and teachers variously articulated needs for classroom strategies to better engage their learners, for hands-on learning, for ice breakers and apps. Less experienced teachers articulated the need for opportunities to network with the more experienced – to know what strategies they use, to share resources and hear their approaches. Moreover, rather than broad categories of 'literacy' or 'EAL', teachers of specific-focus programs would like to be able to get together with others teaching in the same or similar situations, e.g. teaching in VET support classes, teaching learners with an intellectual disability, teaching classes embedded in family-based or social contexts. The research found that teachers often feel isolated; they crave opportunities to know what others are doing, to share resources and ideas.

Networking for teachers to share ideas, resources and strategies would be best achieved through facilitated workshops. These could involve the 'showcasing' of a particular specific-focus pre-accredited language and literacy program or aspect of a program to stimulate ideas and discussion.

They could involve small group discussion and sharing sessions. Participants could be required to bring a resource (commercial or self-developed) to share and/or get feedback on. Sessions could involve opportunities to develop new resources based on input.

Professional development could be provided within organisations or clusters of organisations, although it may be less easy for an organisation or cluster to organise the type of networking and sharing opportunities required to support teachers of special interest groups, e.g. learning circles or action groups. Moreover, we have seen that there are cost issues associated with teaching staff attending professional development, whether in-house or externally held. The research demonstrates that payment for staff to attend PD is essential. Casual staff need to be paid for their time, which means that sometimes funds are needed for both the casual teacher attending the PD and the replacement teacher. This is a significant cost issue for organisations and one which, if not met, can impact on the quality of programs.

The ideal opportunity for addressing basic teaching strategies and ‘thornier’ issues as well as hosting specific interest groups, however, is the Pre-accredited Teachers Community of Practice, which is local, well regarded and has established networks and processes for reaching teachers. The Community of Practice is, as voiced by one research participant, ‘a great innovation’ and, particularly in the area of moderation, has achieved much in the time it has been operating. However, this research demonstrates that for some teachers the PD may be pitched too high, assuming skills and understanding that inexperienced and untrained teachers do not have. Nevertheless, the Community of Practice is the ideal forum for addressing the more basic-level skills, strategies and understanding required. However, there is concern that once ACFE seeding funding ceases, it will be difficult to sustain the momentum and quality of the work of the Community of Practice. Moreover, only half of the participating organisations reported that their teachers were members of the Community of Practice, indicating (if managers reported correctly) that there are more teachers to be reached. Importantly, we also know that attendance is facilitated by remunerating teachers for their involvement in professional development. It is an acknowledgement of their time and commitment. Therefore, this research recommends that funding for the important work of the Community of Practice is continued at both managerial level and teacher level.

Recommendation 7: That the Learn Local Pre-accredited Teachers Community of Practice receives on-going funding to ensure its ability to strengthen its teacher networks and organise PD and opportunities for language and literacy teachers – including special interest groups – to share classroom strategies and resources.

Recommendation 8: That teachers’ time and commitment to on-going improvement, as well the impact of professional development on program quality, are recognised by the provision of funding to attend professional development in whatever location it is held.

Another area in which the Community of Practice has an important professional development role to play is that of planning overall programs and individual sessions. It is evident from the research that the A-frame curriculum document is a valuable tool used by skilled teachers. We heard how they use the Learner Plan as a formative assessment of class needs around which to plan the overall direction of their programs and then actively listen to their learners to update and refine their understanding of the practical social purposes for which learners need new skills. We heard how the Session Planner is a valuable tool for purposefully, systematically and flexibly building the language and literacy skills that will enable learners’ to move along a pathway to greater social and economic participation. Such listening, planning and flexibility enable skilled teachers to effectively respond to learners’ needs. They are keys to the success of language and literacy programs. From our research,

however, it is also evident that not all teachers have the skills, experience and pedagogical training to do this. Those who joined the sector after the introduction of the Pre-accredited Quality Framework (ACFE 2013) have not had the benefit of the training in the use of the A-Frame that accompanied the introduction of the pre-accredited curriculum document. Nor do many have the good fortune to have a teacher mentor available within the organisation or cluster in which they are employed (only a quarter of participating managers reported that they provided teacher mentors). Consequently, until such a time as all teachers entering the sector have professional qualifications in language and literacy teaching, it is essential for the quality of programs that professional development in the use of the A-Frame is available on an on-going basis. Lack of planning ability has a serious impact on the quality of programs.

Recommendation 9: That professional development in the use of the A-frame as a resource for identifying and planning to meet learner needs is provided on a regular basis.

Crucially, the research has starkly illuminated the complexity of the language and literacy teacher's task. To be truly effective the teacher must know how to foster a learning environment in which 'learners feel they can make errors, play out new aspects of identity and practise new skills' (NCVER 2010). They need to know how to identify initial and changing needs so that they can be used 'as the organising principle to shape learning' (ACE NSW 2010) and as the basis for 'clear planning, both strategic and responsive' (Baynham et al. 2007, p. 28). In other words, one of the greatest supports available to a language and literacy teacher is a sound pedagogical understanding of the developmental nature of language and literacy learning. In order to select, sequence and scaffold (Hammond and Gibbons 2005) all the aspects of learning so that communication goals can be most effectively reached, teachers need to know how language, literacy and culture 'work'.

For teachers without a theoretical framework upon which to base their practice, planning can be an overwhelming task. Without a solid pedagogical basis it is a task that, as we have seen, leads to an *ad hoc* approach. While the particular qualities of teachers can be extremely effective in the initial engagement of reluctant learners and the crucial development of their confidence, a pedagogical understanding of language and literacy development is needed if programs are to make the most effective use of learners' time. Consequently, this research recommends that in the longer term, the sector work towards greater professionalisation through the employment of language and literacy teachers with the appropriate professional qualifications. ACAL has called for the employment of 'better trained, higher skilled teachers of literacy' who are 'well enough educated about language and language structures, language acquisition, variations in language practice and the full range of methodologies and approaches to teaching reading and writing (ACAL 2007, p. 8). This research both supports and extends that call to include EAL teachers and the full range of communication skills, i.e. speaking and listening as well as reading and writing.

Recommendation 10: That in the longer term, Learn Local organisations work towards greater professionalisation through the employment of teachers with the relevant professional language and literacy qualifications.

The research also found another support need that results directly from one of the keys to success of programs, i.e. the building of the trust and confidence of learners in their pre-accredited language and literacy programs. Teachers and managers work hard at making learners feel comfortable in the learning environment; they work hard at building their trust and confidence. The difficulty is that once the learners' trust has been gained, staff – most commonly the class teacher – become privy to a host of problems that the learner does not know where else to take. As one manager pointed out, learners often have no other support system.

The issue was succinctly summed up in the words of one teacher who said:

The teacher is often the only person they can trust. But I need help to help me respond appropriately to their difficult stories – their personal problems, domestic violence ... Teachers need to know where to refer students and to know how to debrief personally.

Managers also felt the strain:

Our disability teacher has to be all things to all students. She can come and chat with me but as a manager there is nowhere for me to off-load. We need time for debriefing in a professional, supervised way – with a counsellor.

Some raised this as an issue affecting their own or their staff's mental health. In interviews managers and teachers offered suggestions on how they could be supported to deal with this ranging from debriefing sessions, to access to trained counsellors for both teachers and students, to a 'strong central referral system'. Relaxation techniques or destressing strategies could also be beneficial.

Recommendation 11: That support mechanisms be put in place to assist staff to deal with the stress that can result from the essential gaining of trust of vulnerable learners with such high support needs.

So far we have focussed primarily on the support needs of teachers. We will now turn to the primary support needs raised by managers in relation to many aspects of their work, i.e. time and funding, the two, of course, being inter-related. We have already touched on these constraints in this section in relation to other support needs: funding was raised as an issues in relation to best practice in programming when managers expressed concerns about the cost factor involved in more intense scheduling of classes; both time and funding were raised in relation to the provision of a staff member skilled in conducting initial placement tests in order to decrease the incidences of mixed level classes and thus provide more effective learning environments.

Funding for additional resources was also raised by managers, and we have discussed the role commercial resources play as sources of inspiration for skilled teachers who routinely develop their own resources customised to their class needs. This leads to one of the major funding issues raised in the survey and numerous time in interviews: paid teacher preparation time. Teachers who make their own resources that best address their learners' needs are not paid to do so; they are not paid to spend hours preparing work that addresses the needs of learners in mixed level classes, they are, in short, not paid to prepare.

In fact, funding the work of teachers *per se*, and not only their preparation time was raised by almost half of the managers responding to survey questions about the major challenges for the organisation in providing pre-accredited language and literacy programs and/or the additional support they considered would help the organisation to improve is provision. As well as paid PD, managers talked about the difficulties of paying salaries appropriate to the work, with some considering that the low salary rate/hourly rate contributed to the difficulties of attracting suitably qualified teachers.

From the manager interviews we know how crucial networking is to the functioning of LL organisations and their provision of quality programs. Managers working collaboratively in a cluster with other of LL organisations have found that this provides significant support for their work through the sharing of workloads, resources and information and expertise. Networking with external agencies is, amongst other things, essential to determining community needs, and developing programs, partnerships and pathways to meet those needs. At the same time, these networks support organisations by recruiting and referring learners to programs. Fostering and

maintaining networks raises the profile of LL organisations and is an essential marketing tool. However, without specific funding, networks rely on the 'drive', commitment and specific skills set of individuals.

As well as maintaining networks, managers have many other demands on their time: there are programs to be marketed; needs analyses to be conducted, new teachers to be mentored, new courses to be developed. Managers talked about wanting time to conduct systematic needs analyses, to consult more widely, to research the design of specific programs such as VET support. They talked about demands on their time of increasing paperwork.

In total, 40% of survey respondents considered funding constraints to be a major challenge and/or that additional funding would better support them to provide quality services. It is of course, inevitable that managers committed to quality programs will always perceive that more funding will improve their provision. However, the research has demonstrated that LL program managers have a challenging workload that calls for a broad skills set – perhaps broader than most people can lay claim to. Funding to employ others with the required skills whatever they may be (a marketing person, for example) would alleviate the workload and enhance program promotion, design and delivery. Attracting more funding is not an easily achieved, and we will leave recommendations relating to this until the next section which deals with best practice in pre-accredited language and literacy delivery, the promotion of which would strengthen the sector's profile as a major contributor to successful outcomes for language and literacy learners.

5.3 Best practice

This discussion has already illustrated aspects of best practice in pre-accredited language and literacy provision in the SMR. So far, we have seen that best practice:

- involves embedding the learning within the social practice requirements of daily life or, as described by Black, Balatti and Falk (2009, p. 7), within the 'wider spheres of activity, including the sociocultural and economic activity of the community in which the training is taking place'
- determines the particular purposes within those 'wider spheres' for which learners need to develop their communication (speaking, listening, reading and/or writing) skills
- necessitates the selection, sequencing and structuring of relevant, purposeful, authentic and customised resources and activities to meet those purposes
- integrates ICT into language and literacy classroom delivery in acknowledgement of its role in everyday communication
- incorporates strategies to develop learners' understanding of the cultural norms and expectations involved in successful communication
- is enhanced by smaller sized classes of fewer than 15 learners of reasonably homogenous needs whose classes are scheduled to build in intensity as the learners gain in confidence and begin to form a picture of potential pathways.

To this we will now add discussion about other aspects of best practice in Learn Local pre-accredited language and literacy provision. These are:

- the building of learners' confidence and connections, i.e. increasing learners' social capital and the contribution this makes to the development of language and literacy skills and greater community and economic participation
- the provision of pathways and how these begin with the crucial development of confidence
- the fostering of organisational networks and, in particular, their contribution to pathways.

Our research has showed that pre-accredited language and literacy teachers excel at building learners' trust levels, confidence and interaction with others, initially within the classroom, but also beyond the classroom. In other words, they excel at building the social capital so crucial to individual and community wellbeing (ABS 2014). Social capital has been described as increased classroom networks ('bonding ties'), increased links to new and broader community networks ('bridging ties'), and new connections between individuals and institutions, systems and organisations ('linking ties') (Balatti, Black and Falk 2007, 2009). These new or strengthened learner networks 'offer contacts, services, knowledge, and other social, economic and cultural resources that the learner had not previously enjoyed' (Balatti, Black and Falk 2009, p. 35) and have been described as 'the wider benefits of language and literacy learning' (Dymock and Billett 2008, p. 15).

Our research recorded numerous examples provided by teachers, managers and, most importantly, the learners themselves, of increases in learners' confidence, trust and connections. They were perceived by all as being vital keys to the success of programs and underpinning all subsequent progress. Teachers talked about confidence being the major obstacle learners need to overcome in order to make progress; about building group cohesion; about nurturing an environment in which the learners feel comfortable; about how they '*break down the barriers so the students come to see the teacher as someone they can trust, feel comfortable with, safe with*'; and how the class group becomes '*like a family*' who '*give each other confidence and support*'.

Learners provided us with many examples of what they could now do that they couldn't do before – of the increases in their community participation and their literacy practices, i.e. of the 'linking ties' and 'bridging ties' that had increased along with their confidence. We heard of their being able to have conversations with neighbours, send emails and phone texts, read to their children, engage with their children's schooling, and better fulfil their workplace responsibilities. Teachers told us of learners who would now put up their hands to ask questions, who proudly announced that they could now pay their own bills, who understood how to provide written answers to VET assessment tasks, who had 'moved on' to volunteering.

The increased capacity of learners in pre-accredited language and literacy programs to engage in learning, family life and the wider community is a significant outcome when one considers how literacy is bound up with an individual's sense of identity; that in a highly literate society such as ours, low literacy skills can have a profound impact on self-esteem, motivation, attitudes to learning, health, family life and the capacity to fully participate in the community (e.g. Hartley and Horn 2006; Dymock 2007a, 2007b; ACAL 2007; Davies, Lamb and Doeke 2011). O'Maley (2007, p. 3) has argued that the 'relevant pedagogical elements which help build these social capital outcomes' should be made overt. Our research suggests that it needs to be made overt to teachers that that is what they do, and do very well. They need to hear it. They need to have the opportunity to come together to celebrate it and share how they do it, thus strengthening and promoting the significance of the outcomes.

Recommendation 12: Celebrate and share the development of social capital and other aspects of language and literacy delivery through a fully paid annual conference or 'showcase' aimed specifically at pre-accredited language and literacy teachers, but also their coordinators and managers.

Social capital outcomes such as we have seen are often overlooked in a world conditioned to the more easily measurable and pre-determined outcomes of competency-based courses. Learn Local staff also appear to have an ambiguous attitude to them. While everyone recognises them as significant and learner progress of this type underpins on-going teacher planning, teachers rarely record them. One teacher of a disability group told us that she 'evaluates how they're handling the

class, the work, their peers, their attitude to learning' but rarely records these 'bonding ties' that underpin all others. Teachers and managers talk of getting feedback from partner organisations, employers and the learners themselves of progress outside the classroom, for example the principal of a primary school hosting an embedded family literacy program reported seeing parents in the program increasingly interacting with other parents at their children's school ('bridging ties') and learners told of their increased participation in school activities ('linking ties' to institutions).

These outcomes are sometimes considered too nebulous to record and also too difficult because they are likely to be different for each learner unlike the pre-determined outcomes of accredited courses. But the flexibility of the A-frame, its ability to be responsive to the different needs of different learner cohorts and individuals is one of the strength of the pre-accredited quality framework. It allows for the 'diversity rather than uniformity' which Dymock and Billett (2008, p. 21) found to be the 'reality and central concern for the purposes, processes and outcomes of learners' learning' in non-accredited language and literacy programs.

The 'measuring' of confidence is perhaps viewed by many as the most nebulous. However, Dymock (2007a, p. 10) describes increased confidence as being demonstrated by such things as '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'. Speaking up in class is in itself a risk for EAL adults with limited oral language skills and for native English speakers whose life-time of poor literacy skills have impacted on self-esteem, motivation and attitudes to learning. We have already discussed a range of examples of increased spoken and written communication practices beyond the classroom as learners are assisted to connect with individuals and institutions.

With this in mind, it is possible to envisage a format that is flexible enough to record instances for each learner as they occur and that are relevant to the particular individual. This could, for example, be a class list with a column for increased confidence, in which to record an instance such as 'now asks questions in class' or 'now participates in discussions', along with a few blank columns to record feedback from learners and other stakeholders about what they have done related to increased community interactions and engagement with institutions and organisations. If we envisage comments being added to the sheets when they arise, rather than as a summative assessment at the end of a course, it would require little time. Managers are wary of adding more paperwork to teachers' workloads, but if it were part of the planning process – the reflection on the previous session in order to plan the follow-up session – it should not be an onerous task, but one which would formalise the informal observations that teachers already make. It would be, as advocated by Dymock (2007b, p. 38), 'a more careful approach to monitoring progress'. Furthermore, recording social capital outcomes would also provide managers with a means for informing stakeholders, for example Centrelink, of individual progress. Dymock and Billett (2008) developed and trialed a number of such learner records which could provide insight and input. Nevertheless, it is advisable that the introduction of any such record sheet be taken gradually so that it is not viewed merely as another 'bureaucratic requirement' but as a valuable tool. The tool would need to be well constructed, and introduced after raising teachers' awareness and pride in this significant aspect of their work.

Recommendation 13: That teachers are encouraged to record instances of learner progress through the development of a flexible record sheet and through professional development.

The examples we have provided of the work of pre-accredited language and literacy teachers' skills in building learner confidence confirm previous research that personal outcomes such as confidence, self-esteem and the aspiration to engage in learning are not only closely linked to the development

of language and literacy skills, but are important foundations for a pathway towards engagement in accredited training, employment and increased community participation (see Dymock, 2007a). Thus, our examples demonstrate that pathways are embedded in language and literacy programs from the start as advocated by Davies, Lamb and Doeke (2011).

Having built trust, confidence and a sense of belonging, we have seen that teachers continue to embed pathways informally by such things as talking to learners about lifelong learning, developing their understanding of the classroom expectations of further education and training, providing opportunities to practise the cultural expectations of Australian workplaces, and frequently reminding them of their progress – what they can do now that they couldn't do before. In fact, any course delivered on the understanding of language and literacy as social practice, i.e. any program that is built around the real-life communication needs of learners, has pathways embedded within. A pathway to increased engagement with a school community within an embedded family literacy program, or a pathway to employment within a VET support program are overt examples of embedded pathways. But pathways are also an integral part of stand-alone language and/or literacy classes, when built around the purposeful, real-life communication needs of learners. In the hands of a skilled teacher, embedded programs of any type increase the relevance and immediacy of the learning and thus enhance learning, motivation, and positive outcomes that include the learner taking steps along a pathway (see also Davies, Lamb and Doeke 2011; Alkema and Rean n.d.; Casey et al. 2006; Nechvoglod and Beddie 2010).

Clearly, taking steps along a pathway are a further manifestation of increased social capital. Managers talked of providing industry tasters, of providing access to careers guidance counsellors and of teachers holding a pathways session at some point during the program, although as we have seen, best practice also involves the more subtle on-going work that teachers do to raise confidence and awareness of pathways. Our research has also shown that internal pathways within an organisation offer supported pathways for learners not yet ready to 'step out' of the supportive environment created by the Learn Local organisation in which they have gained initial skills and confidence. The type of pathway clearly depends on the learner cohort. Consequently, a critical element in the provision of pathways is determining what pathways to provide.

The research showed that determining pathways was facilitated by organisational networks because they contribute to the identification of community needs and the establishment of courses to meet those needs. Skilled managers thus foster pathways through networks with other Learn Local organisations in a cluster and through wider external partnerships and alliances. In addition, network members provide referrals and feedback on courses for continuous improvement. Networks lead to partnerships and the establishment of the outreach programs embedded in such places as schools, kindergartens and health centres. Outreach partnerships can benefit the LL organisation by the partner organisation doing the recruitment and providing facilities and resources. Importantly, outreach programs provide best practice in engaging 'hard to reach' and disengaged learners' by 'bringing learning to the learner' as advocated by Davies, Lamb and Doeke (2011). Similarly, co-location of VET training and VET support programs takes the support to the learner, as well as facilitating planning (Black and Yasakawa 2012). Learn Local organisations who are not RTOs can thus use their expertise to embed language and literacy support for VET programs through partnerships nurtured by networking. Partnerships and alliances with external organisations also strengthen learner pathways by offering volunteering and work placement opportunities, thereby providing the Australian workplace experience often seen as essential by potential employers.

All of these managerial and pedagogical practices assist learners to move on – to build their social capital to a point where they have the confidence and skills to take the next step along a pathway.

Consequently, our research suggests that best practice – practice that most effectively assists pre-accredited language and literacy learners to do this – is a whole of organisation approach in which the teacher continues to build learners’ social capital and awareness of pathways possibilities within the classroom when and as appropriate, and managers draw on their networks, the teachers’ perceptions of learner needs and on the learners themselves to establish appropriate supported pathways. While it was not within the scope of this research to make an in-depth study of all the ways in which pathways are promoted throughout courses or the extent to which learners are supported, the pedagogical and managerial practices are particularly interesting for what they reveal about the way LL organisations build the social capital and cultural understanding of learners that enables them to take the necessary steps along a pathway to greater social participation, whatever that might be for the individual learner.

Recording the steps along a pathway, along with the social capital outcomes we discussed earlier, would provide a basis – a tool – for promoting Learn Local expertise in developing the social capital of those marginalised in our community by their limited language and/or literacy skills. Developing social capital is, as concluded by Black, Balatti and Falk (2006, p. 323), the ‘*modus operandi* of ACE and not a by-product’. Promoting this valuable role played by pre-accredited language and literacy programs – promoting Learner Local expertise in this field and with marginalised learner groups – could help to attract much needed funds to further strengthen the provision.

Recommendation 14: That Learn Local expertise in developing the social capital of language and literacy learners – particularly in increasing the learner confidence that underpins all other learning and is essential to embarking on pathways – be promoted, and opportunities for increased funding explored.

5.4 Concluding comments

This study supports the views of other Australian researchers that one of the major strengths of the ACE sector is the ability to develop the social capital of language and literacy learners, which are proving to be as significant in the production of socioeconomic impacts as the prevailing human capital discourse in education and training (Balatti, Black and Falk 2006, 2009). Through the voices of managers, teachers and the learners themselves we have shown that a major strength of Learn Local organisations is the development of social capital, particularly the learner confidence that is fundamental to all other skills development and progress towards greater social and economic participation. We have heard how this is achieved as learners form bonds with their learner group and then connect with the wider community and its institutions. We have confirmed Dymock’s (2007b) view that the quality of the student-teacher relationship is the key factor in the growth of confidence, and we have revealed some of the pedagogical elements that pre-accredited language and literacy teachers employ to develop the confidence that is the first crucial step in language and literacy skills development and along a pathway to greater social integration.

We have seen that organisational networks, including Learn Local cluster groups and external partnerships and alliances are essential to the continued growth of pre-accredited language and literacy learners’ social capital because networks facilitate not only the identification of community needs but also the design, establishment and resourcing of programs, as well as the provision of pathways. Organisational networks are themselves a form of social capital and well networked organisations are best placed to provide programs and pathways to cater for the on-going and changing needs of communities and of individual learners.

We have heard from learners and teachers that small classes – preferably with homogenous levels – are a critical element in the ability of teachers to meet learners’ needs and that best practice

involves more intense scheduling that builds in intensity once learners have developed confidence and class connections.

Teacher and learner voices have informed us that listening is key to the ability of teachers to determine learner needs and that in response to these needs, skilled teachers structure and sequence learning activities in well planned but flexible courses embedded in the socio-cultural and economic reality of learners' lives and underpinned by an understanding of the social practices for which learners need to develop their language and literacy skills. 'Embedding' thus encompasses not only those programs officially designated as such (e.g. embedded in social activities, in work-focus activities, in VET, in family settings) but also stand-alone EAL and stand-alone literacy classes which account for the major part of language and literacy delivery in the SMR.

We suggest that, as a way of sharing best practice across the Region, the strengths of LL organisations and of pre-accredited language and literacy delivery should be celebrated and promoted. However, we have also seen that less skilled teachers may need significant assistance to develop pedagogical skills ranging from determining needs, to planning programs, to classroom strategies, to 'big picture' pedagogical frameworks underpinning best practice. Consequently, we recommend that on-going paid professional development is the best strategy for developing pedagogical skills and sharing best practice across the SMR. Similarly, paid professional development opportunities, including 'showcasing', and opportunities for special interest groups to come together to share ideas, expertise, problems and experiences, would lessen the isolation expressed by a number of pre-accredited language and literacy teachers.

Last, but by no means least, there are potential funding opportunities associated with Learn Local organisations' expertise in developing the social capital so essential to the social and economic wellbeing of individuals and of communities. It is, consequently, important to investigate ways of exploiting this by raising awareness of the value of pre-accredited language and literacy programs. Thus, the on-going monitoring of progress – recording instances of social capital outcomes such as examples of increased confidence and increased engagement with language and literacy practices outside the classroom – would make a valuable contribution.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey

ACFE Word for Word Project: Survey of pre-accredited language and literacy provision

The ACFE Word for Word Project aims to identify and promote best practice across the Region.

This initial survey aims to find out more about the ACFE-funded pre-accredited language and literacy (including EAL) provision in the Region. It will help to inform further research.

Some questions ask you to differentiate between your EAL classes and your specific literacy classes. Other questions refer to language and literacy (L&L) in general. For these, you are asked to include both EAL and specific literacy in the one answer.

NB: The survey relates to pre-accredited programs only.

Contact details

Your contact details are confidential and not for publication.

Your name:

Your position:

Name of organisation:

Is it an RTO?: yes/no

Address of organisation:

Phone:

Email:

Your L&L students

1. Which of the following describes your L&L learner groups?:

- Aboriginal only
- Disabled only
- Refugees/migrants only
- Men only
- Women only
- Seniors only
- Youth only
- Mixed groups
- Other

If other, please state which:

Programming

2. What type of L&L delivery does your centre provide?:

- One-on-one
- Face-to-face
- Blended
- Other

If other, please state what:

3. What size are your L&L classes?:

- 1 – 5 students
- 5 – 15 students
- 15 – 20 students
- More than 20 students

4. Do you have issues of viability because of numbers?

Yes/no

Please give details:

5. Do you have more people wanting L&L classes than you can provide?

Yes/no

6. If yes, what are the constraints?

- Funding
- Facilities
- Eligibility
- Availability of teachers
- Other

If other, please state what is constraining provision:

7. Are all classes conducted at your centre?

Yes/no

If no, where are they conducted?

8. What level are your EAL classes?:

- Beginner level
- Intermediate level
- Advanced level
- Mixed level

9. What level are your literacy classes?:

- Beginner level
- Intermediate level
- Advanced level
- Mixed level

10. How often do your EAL classes run per week?:

- 1 day
- 2 days
- 3 days

- 4 days
- 5 days

11. How many hours per day do the EAL classes run?

12. How many weeks do the EAL classes run for?

13. What is the average length of time a learner is enrolled in pre-accredited EAL courses provided by your centre?:

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- More than 3 years

14. How often do your literacy classes run per week?:

- 1 day
- 2 days
- 3 days
- 4 days
- 5 days

15. How many hours per day do the literacy classes run for?

16. How many weeks do the literacy classes run for?

17. What is the average length of time a learner is enrolled in pre-accredited literacy courses provided by your centre?:

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- More than 3 years

Types of provision

18. What types of L&L classes does your centre provide?:

- Stand-alone literacy classes

- Stand-alone EAL classes
- Mixed native speaker and EAL literacy classes
- L&L support embedded in social activities
- L&L support embedded in work-focus activities
- L&L support in family-based settings, e.g. schools
- L&L support embedded in VET courses with specialist teachers
- L&L support courses running concurrently with a VET course
- L&L pre-VET support courses (e.g. bridging courses)
- Other

If other, give details:

19. Does your centre use volunteer L&L tutors?:

- No
- Yes, as L&L classroom teachers
- Yes, in one-to-one tuition
- Yes, with small groups
- Yes, as classroom support for a teacher

20. What training do you provide for your L&L volunteers?

Staffing & resources

21. What qualifications do your L&L teachers have?:

- TAE Certificate IV
- Graduate certificate
- Diploma
- Graduate diploma
- Masters
- Other

22. Do you provide mentors for L&L students?

Yes/no

23. What resources are used to support your L&L provision?:

- Computer access
- Library access
- Student books
- Mentors for L&L students
- Teacher developed materials
- Other

If other, what:

24. What support is used by your teachers/volunteer tutors?:

- Professional development
- Teacher reference books
- On-line networks
- Mentoring
- Community of practice
- Other

If other, what?

Assessment

25. Do you use an initial L&L placement test?

Yes/no

If yes, which?

If no, how do you decide which class to place students in?

26. How is progress assessed?:

- Formal test at the end
- On-going formal assessment
- On-going informal assessment, e.g. observation
- Ask the learner
- Assessment is not important
- Other

If other, what?

27. Do you include increased confidence in your L&L assessment?

Yes/no

28. Do you include increased engagement with literacy practices?

Yes/no

Data collection

29. Do you systematically collect information related to your L&L provision?

Yes/no

30. If yes, who do you collect it from?:

- L&L students
- L&L teaching staff
- L&L support staff
- VET teachers
- Other stakeholders

31. Do you collect data on L&L student goals and aspirations?

Yes/no

32. Do you collect information on why L&L students withdraw from a course? Yes/no
33. Do you analyse information collected? Yes/no
34. Do you feed the analysis back to students, staff and other stakeholders? Yes/no
35. Do you use the information to inform continuous improvement? Yes/no

Pathways

36. Do you collect information about where EAL students go after they finish a course? Yes/no

37. If yes, which of the following do you record?:

- Numbers/percentage of your EAL students going on to study another EAL course
- Numbers/percentage of your EAL students going on to study a VET course
- Numbers/percentage of your EAL students enrolling in further education
- Numbers/percentage of your EAL students finding employment
- Numbers/percentage of your EAL students going on to volunteer?
- Numbers/percentage of your EAL students increasing their community participation?

38. Do you collect information about where literacy students go after they finish a course? Yes/no

39. If yes, which of the following information do you record?

- Numbers/percentage of your literacy students going on to study another literacy course
- Numbers/percentage of your literacy students going on to study a VET course
- Numbers/percentage of your literacy students enrolling in further education
- Numbers/percentage of your literacy students finding employment
- Numbers/percentage of your literacy students going on to volunteer
- Numbers/percentage of your literacy students increasing their community participation

40. Does your centre actively promote pathways throughout L&L courses? Yes/no

Partnerships, networks and alliances

41. What partnerships, networks and alliances does your centre have?

42. How do these partnerships, networks and alliances benefit your L&L programs?

Overall

43. What do you consider best practice is in pre-accredited L&L courses?

44. Which L&L program(s) conducted by your centre do you consider incorporates best practice and why?

45. Is your centre currently initiating something new in its L&L provision? Yes/no

If yes, please briefly describe the initiative

46. What are the main challenges for your centre in providing L&L programs?

47. What additional support would help your centre improve its L&L provision?

48. Is your organisation:

- Large?
- Medium?
- Small?

Appendix 2: Interview Guide: Managers

Organisation:

Date:

Name:

Position:

Provision type & learner group

Brief profile of your pre-accredited L&L learners:

We're particularly interested in your (e.g. *embedded family*) classes. How did they come about?

What's the main purpose of the program?

How many in a class? How often do they classes run and for how many hours?

Why have you chosen to schedule it that way?

Success factors/ critical elements

What do you think are the keys to success of such programs?

What are the main challenges?

How could you be further supported in the delivery of these particular programs?

Networks

How do your partnerships, networks & alliances benefit your pre-accredited programs?

How do you establish and maintain your networks?

What are the challenges?

How could you (or others) be further supported to establish & maintain networks that would benefit your pre-accredited programs?

Supply and demand

How do you identify community needs?

Do you think there are potential learner groups who are not accessing your pre-accredited L&L programs?

Are there programs you would like to offer but currently don't? Why don't you/ can't you?

Your survey indicated that you do/don't offer mixed EAL/NS literacy classes. What do you see as the advantages/disadvantages of such programs?

How could you be further supported to identify community needs/ mount other pre-accredited programs?

Measuring progress

What do you think is the value of an initial placement test?

How is progress measured in your L&L classes?

Why do you think that increased self-confidence, increased social interaction, and increased community participation are important outcomes?

Your survey indicates that you do/don't collect data related to pathways. Why and how? / Why not?

Support needs in general

What paid PD would you like to see offered to support pre-accredited programs in general and your (e.g. *embedded class*) in particular?

What additional resources would benefit your provision of pre-accredited L&L programs in general?

Anything you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Interview Guide: Teachers

Organisation:

Date:

Name:

email:

Class type:

How long teaching this type of class?:

Overall teaching experience:

Qualifications:

Provision type & learner group

Could you describe the learners in your class, please?

What's the main purpose of the program?

How many in a class? How often do the classes run and for how many hours?

What do you think is the most appropriate scheduling for these learners? Why?

How do you determine individual needs?

How important are individual goals and aspirations to your planning?

Classroom practice

What do you think are the keys to success of the program?

What do you do specifically to achieve these key success factors?

Measuring progress:

How do you measure individual progress?

Can you give an example? / Do you keep a record of examples?

(If not already discussed) Do you think that increased self-confidence, increased social interaction & increased community participation are important outcomes? Why? / Why not?

Does your centre have a formal way of reporting such outcomes at your centre? How?

Do you keep a record of where you students go/what they do when they leave your class?

Support needs

What are the main challenges in teaching this program?

What resources do you use?

What kinds of support do you have?

How could you be further supported in planning, delivering & assessing progress for learners?

What paid PD would you like to have?

What PD and additional resources do you think would benefit your centre as a whole?

Appendix 4: Learner Voice: Discussion/Observation Sheet

Organisation:

Date:

Class type:

L&L Level:

Number in class:

Days/week:

Hours/day:

Why did you enrol in this class?

How many days a week would you like to come to class? Why?

How many hours a day would you like to study? Why?

What do you like about this class?

Do you like to study with people the same level as you or different levels? Why?

Do you like to go places with your class? Why?

Where have you been?

Where would you like to go? Why?

What can you do now (after being in this class) that you couldn't do before?

What would you like to be able to do?

What do you want to do when you finish this class?