

adult literacy
English Indigenous
literacy practices training
what is all learning
community capacity
health adult English
Indigenous learning for
English literacy



What is all that learning for?

Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training,
community capacity and health

Inge Kral

Ian Falk

Publisher's note

On 15 April 2004 the Australian Government announced its intention to close down the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the associated agency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS). Responsibility for ATSIC–ATSIS programs and services to mainstream agencies will be transferred from 1 July 2004.



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Funded under the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Adult Literacy National Project by the Commonwealth through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of ANTA, DEST or NCVER.

ISBN 1 920895 63 9 print edition

1 920895 64 7 web edition

TD/TNC 77.10

Published by NCVER

ABN 87 007 967 311

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Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the generous support of the Urapuntja Health Service. We wish to acknowledge at the outset that the Urapuntja Health Service Council supported this research project, and that permission has been given to name the community.

In particular, we would like to thank the research assistants, Joyce Jones and Elizabeth Beasley. This project would not have been possible without their support, judgement and commitment.

We would also like to thank Ken and Shirley Kunoth, Ricky Tilmouth, Dan Jones and the Urapuntja Health Service Council, especially Lenny Jones, Johnny Skinner and Harold Nelson. Thanks also go to the medical staff at the health service.

At the Central Australian Remote Health Development Services we wish to thank Dorothy Lucardie whose support for the project was unfailing. Thanks also go to Stephanie Mouthaan, Tanya Wooley, Brian Day, Maria Castles, Sue Stent and Dianne Schultz.

Finally, we are grateful to Ruth Wallace at Northern Territory University, Jenny Green, Gail Woods, Nick Richardson, David and Susan Moore, Jeannie Devitt and Barbara Pamphilon for their important comments.

Thanks also to IAD Press for permission to use the map.

Executive summary

In remote Indigenous communities in Australia there are minimal labour market opportunities, with the majority of jobs under the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), and limited education and training services. Yet Indigenous communities are under increasing pressure from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the government to build sustainable communities with a social, cultural and economic capital base, and share responsibility for community well-being and capacity building. Simultaneously, the delivery of primary and secondary Indigenous education is under great scrutiny as outcomes fall behind commensurate levels in the wider Australian society. There is also increasing emphasis on ensuring that ‘culturally appropriate’ vocational education and training (VET) opportunities in remote Indigenous communities are made more accessible, so that Indigenous people can gain the employment skills to ultimately take control of their communities. Conversely, adult literacy is increasingly seen as a major factor affecting the participation of Indigenous people in training and the subsequent delivery and management of services in remote communities.

This study investigates and describes how both the English and the local Indigenous language are used in reading and writing by adults, through a case study of a community-controlled health service in a remote Indigenous community in the Northern Territory. In addition, it analyses the social context of literacy use (Barton 1994; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Reder 1994; Street 1993, 1995); that is, how (for what purposes and functions) people use reading and writing in everyday life in the community. Although Western education has a short history in the region—schooling was first introduced in the area in 1969—access to schooling for all children was only made available as late as 2003.

The case study explores this community’s quest to implement a culturally appropriate form of health delivery that encompasses not just physical well-being but also the interrelationship between the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the community as a whole. The health service leadership in this community is seeking to develop a model that integrates the training and employment of local Indigenous people into a process of strengthening community capacity. Intrinsic to this process is a growing awareness that an emerging training and employment model must reflect existing tribal authority structures and processes, and be integrated into the social and cultural schema of the community, rather than be imposed from the outside. That is, the leadership is aspiring to develop a ‘both ways’ model of community capacity that ensures cultural control in the short-term and, in the long-term, leads to the development of skilled, literate adults, who have also maintained Indigenous law and culture, and are able to manage change and sustain community development.

In this case study, it was found that there is a demonstrated trust that the institution of Western education will deliver worthwhile outcomes. Learning English is seen as a necessity and this is interrelated with meeting everyday functional needs and social obligations. However, adult literacy levels are generally low and it would appear that most adults do not have sufficient proficiency in English language, literacy and numeracy to meet the VET sector’s training requirements. The provision of vocational education and training in this region has been *ad hoc*, short-term and compartmentalised into disconnected sectors of health and education and from a range of registered training organisations. Community employment opportunities are minimal and vocational

education and training is primarily linked with the limited employment opportunities available in the education and health sectors.

A theme that emerges in the study is that most training does not fit into the meaning and purpose of community life. The connection between education, vocational education and training and employment pathways is not linked to any future planning process that takes account of community aims and aspirations. Consequently, a relevant and appropriate 'training culture' has yet to evolve and become integrated into community life.

The community believes that for education to be successful and to lead to sustainable outcomes, it must be integrated into the social and cultural framework of the community, and must include community goals and aspirations. In this community, relationships through the kinship system are a crucial, cohesive element in an unchanging authority structure determined by Aboriginal law. Literacy, therefore, is only relevant if it is linked in a useful way to the prescribed roles and responsibilities in the community. The mainstream education and training system invests in the individuals progressing along a pathway towards labour market employment, whereas in this remote Indigenous context the most important investment is in the social capital—norms (values), networks and trust (Putnam 1993)—of the communal whole.

The case study in this report highlights the challenge faced by remote Indigenous communities. For these communities, the challenge is to achieve social and economic sustainability without losing the core values of Indigenous law, culture and language. Remote communities can no longer afford to be excluded from the broader national context and this report is not suggesting an isolationist approach. It does, however, suggest that the key to sustainability is to find a way to maintain local coherence, and the core values within remote localities, while simultaneously developing models of appropriate community development. Training and employment are essential elements in this future scenario, but emerging models for remote Indigenous communities must integrate training and employment pathways that reflect community realities and tolerate alternative definitions of employment that are characteristic of diverse localities.

New policy changes are needed that recognise the inherent differences between localities in Indigenous Australia and accept that education and training needs are not necessarily the same for all remote communities. Achieving sustainable social and economic outcomes in remote contexts will be difficult and will involve implementing long-term community development planning processes that harness the training potential of the Community Development Employment Project and capitalise on existing culturally appropriate labour market opportunities. Furthermore, interagency linking between service delivery sectors will be a crucial element in any community planning process. The 'what for?' question in relation to education and training will need to be linked with community goals and aspirations so that literacy learning and use can be targeted to relevant roles and responsibilities in the community.

Introduction

This report is a study of a remote Indigenous community and its social practices, including alphabetic literacy practices. It is a study of a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger 1998). We examine the ways in which alphabetic literacy practices relate to the capacity of community members to engage in further education and training. We use the health sector as a case study to explore these concepts. The community describes its goals and aspirations in terms of striving for the capacity to maintain its Indigenous cultural heritage. A component of this capacity to achieve cultural maintenance is the notion that health and well-being are inextricably linked to Aboriginal ‘law and culture’ and relationship with ‘country’. The concept of health, therefore, encompasses not just the physical well-being of the individual but also the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole community (Commonwealth Department of Health 1989).

The components of such a community form its capacity, and these components merge to achieve a state of well-being in the community. They include the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge, the skills and knowledge of alphabetic literacy practices and social capital. Community capacity, in this context, also requires the integration of both Western and Indigenous cultural influences, to enable a genuine ‘two ways’ or ‘both ways’ approach to a community’s development of its capacity to pursue its goals and aspirations.

The case study is of a remote Indigenous community in Central Australia where the Health Service (hereafter the ‘health service’) is an *independent* community-controlled health service that, for nearly 25 years, has been aspiring to build an appropriate health care system. Unlike Department of Health and Community Services clinics, this health service has the autonomy to explore other models for the delivery of health care. The model they are developing is more than just a Western model of primary health care provision; it is a ‘two way health service—white fellah clinic and Aboriginal law and culture’ (Bartlett & Duncan 2001, p.50). The health service has adapted its delivery model to meet community needs (Bartlett & Duncan 2001, p.7) while simultaneously providing leadership within an emerging framework of community development or ‘capacity building’ in the region. The community goals and aspirations in this respect are described by the health service director as follows:

Europeans that have been involved in running the community over the years since we bought this station ... come and go and everything they start doesn’t really eventuate, it falls down, everything still the same ... And that’s a recurring thing so [the chairman] tried to do more of a cultural input into the health service. So instead of employing white people to run it—directors and that—they’ve started to employ local traditional Aboriginal people like myself ... I’ve been at it for three maybe four years now and we’re gradually sorting out the cultural input into Aboriginal people being involved in the health service and not going away ... and before you know it they’ll be running it. But the important thing is the cultural side. If you get Aboriginal people in here doing things, you got to have cultural input from all the elders ... I think the main focus we’re on about now is getting all the cultural side. The government [has] to recognise the cultural side of the community and the impact it has on health. We believe that if we haven’t got culture we’d be a pretty sick community. So we want government to recognise our cultural input and how it controls our health, makes us strong and we don’t get sick because we know all our family they’re gonna support us culturally and look after us.

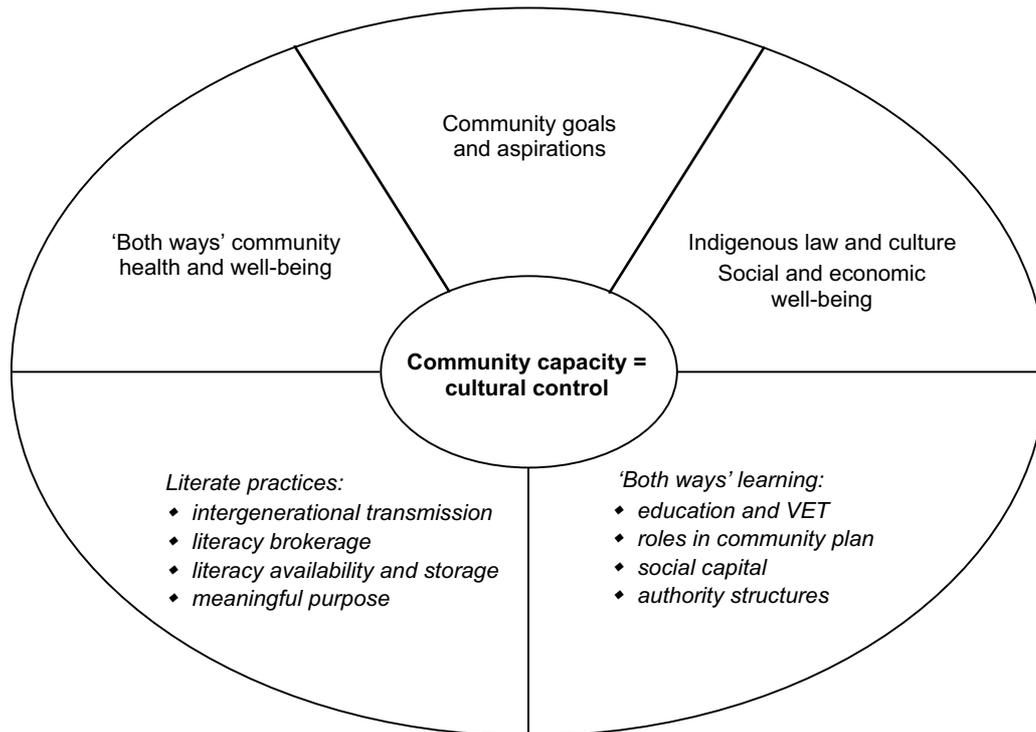
(UM8)

It is, therefore, a ‘community of practice’ that is striving to develop a health care service that can provide:

- ✧ a Western model of health care delivery integrated with Indigenous law and culture
- ✧ a capacity building process leading to greater community control.

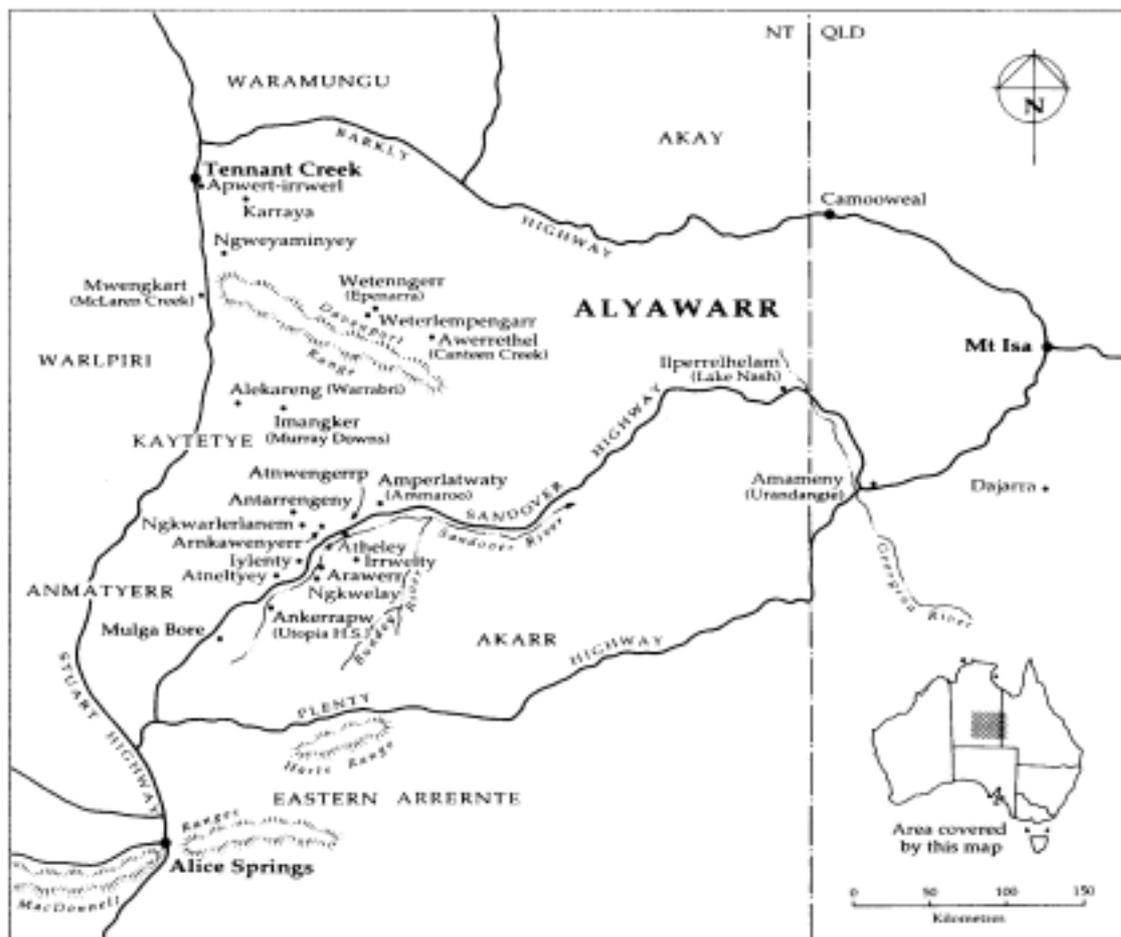
A healthy ‘community of practice’, we therefore propose, comprises all the various components outlined above, working together. This model of a ‘community of practice’, can be illustrated as follows (figure 1).

Figure 1: Community of practice



The hypothesis posed in this study is that in this community there is a discordance between the goals and aspirations for the development of community capacity *and* the concomitant literacy requirements for participation in education and training in the health sector. The data is analysed and discussed in relation to the social context of literacy learning and use in this community and the English literacy requirements for participation in the national vocational education and training (VET) sector, and employment in the health sector. This study also focuses on the community’s quest for improved well-being in relation to a ‘both ways’ approach to community capacity development.

Figure 2: Map showing main language communities



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The case study community

Introduction

The Sandover Highway, some 250 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs, traverses country traditionally inhabited by the Alyawarr- and Anmatyerr-speaking people of the Northern Territory. Occupation of land in this region by non-Indigenous station owners commenced in the 1920s. During this period, local Indigenous people maintained strong traditional links with the land, while intermittently doing station work. In the early 1980s the European-owned station was returned to the traditional owners.

During the 1970s, after protracted negotiations with the local Aboriginal community, the ... station lease-holders ... sold the property to the now defunct Aboriginal Land Fund Commission. It was purchased on behalf of the Aboriginal community resident there in 1976 (Toohey 1980, p.6). Two years later, in what was to be a precedent-setting case, the Aboriginal Central Land Council successfully claimed [the] station under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. Five 'patriclans' (one Anmatyerr and four Alyawarre), numbering about 400 people, became the legal owners of [the] station ... Services to resident Aborigines began during this time when Alice Springs-based Central Australian Aboriginal Congress set up an independent health service at [the station]. The community formed a council to direct the clinic's activities and this has continued to be the community's central administrative body. After [the station] was 'repatriated' there was a dramatic increase in population as Aborigines from neighbouring areas took up residence.

(Devitt 1988, pp.40-1)

The station then became an Indigenous community. This study recognises that the term 'community' in the Indigenous context is problematic, as what appears to be a 'geographic community' actually requires further investigation as a concept. The 'community' (as it is hereafter named) comprises some 17 decentralised outstations, and as a model of remote Indigenous community living it is unique. Most remote Indigenous communities in Central Australia are based on an artificially created Western 'township' model, often with an overarching community council governance system and a centralised administrative network, including local government services, the office, the clinic, the school and the store. Indigenous people living in these communities have adapted to living communally, to a greater or lesser extent, within these contrived administrative parameters. In comparison, Indigenous people in the case study community operate essentially as autonomous family groups with a singular sense of allegiance to country binding them to their own outstation rather than to an overarching network of administrative services. Local government is represented in this community by a community council and has an essential services role. The health service council acts as a collective governance body by delivering more than a 'health service', as it also assumes responsibility for well-being and community capacity of community members in the entire dispersed region.

Not only are we a health service here, but we're a resource for the community too ... we're the ones with the Toyotas, we're the ones with the things that actually work. They turn up and we're here. So we get a lot of things that are probably not within the strict parameters of a 'clinic' workplace. Like the handyman for the clinic helps fix bores on the outstations ... If we were a government clinic we sure wouldn't be doing that. If you believe that self-determination

and ownership should be with local people's hands and we should be supporting them to do that, then it's a good place and those things can happen. (UP9)

The health service employs an Aboriginal director, Aboriginal administration officer, eight Aboriginal health workers, a doctor and up to four nurses. Effective education and training of Indigenous people in this region is of paramount importance for the community to pursue its aspirations for a community-controlled approach to capacity building. The short history of schooling, adult education and training is a feature of the region and has implications for current capacity development processes.

History of education and literacy learning

Formal Western education came to the Sandover River region later than in other areas in Central Australia. A few schools for Indigenous students had opened on some nearby pastoral stations in the early 1960s (Richardson 2001, p.106) and a government Native Welfare Branch school started at the station in 1969. Some adult education including literacy, numeracy and arts based activities also started soon after. Other pastoralists on adjoining stations resisted opening schools for the Indigenous children resident on their stations (Richardson 2001, p.115) and over the next decade no further government schools were established in the Sandover River area. Thus the 'majority of adults and school-aged children living in this region did not have access to any form of state education whatsoever' (Richardson 2001, p.176) until families started drifting back to the community in the early 1980s and Indigenous people began moving out to live on their homelands. The school, however, remained centralised on one outstation until the mid 1980s when extra staff were allocated to service some of the new homelands, and more permanent structures, each one known as a Homeland Learning Centre, were erected in a few outstations from 1985 onwards (Richardson 2001). Consequently many children did not have access to any form of formal schooling until the mid to late 1980s or later, with the final outstation school building erected as late as 2003. No secondary schooling facility has existed in the region, although over the years a number of secondary-aged students have been sent away to board at Yirara College in Alice Springs (Richardson 2001, p.221).

Richardson argues that 'students involved in public schooling in the Sandover River region had little chance of achieving functional literacy and numeracy skills in this formative decentralised phase of education' (2001, p.217):

... the Commonwealth's commitment to its Indigenous constituents in the Sandover River region was negligible from the outset ... the assimilationist vision of successive post-war conservative governments, which provided the impetus for the establishment of remote area schools for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, was predicated on misguided and racist beliefs that militated against equitable educational outcomes ... the Commonwealth abrogated its responsibility to the Indigenous people by establishing a service that was fundamentally inferior in both structure and outcomes when compared to programs offered to its non-Indigenous constituents. (Richardson 2001, p.92)

From the literature a picture is painted of a community of Indigenous people with a short history of formal schooling in English and limited understanding of the purpose of education in terms of seeing the connection with pathways towards formal Western training and employment outcomes.

School teachers were seen by the Indigenous residents to be useful because they: had knowledge and access to resources; gave Indigenous people rides to town; regularly showed movies; handed out mail; gave advice on Social Security; didn't act like bosses; [and] were the first government people to show interest in Aboriginal culture ... Whilst teachers were regarded as being useful, the Indigenous population generally didn't have much idea regarding the purposes of education and what they wanted from it. Only a handful of people

in the region had attended any form of Western educational institution elsewhere prior to [the] school being established in 1969. (Richardson 2001, p.150)

The system of education currently being implemented by the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training is attempting to provide a more appropriate education model to better meet the needs of the outstation communities (Freeman 2002). This approach is aiming to work in tandem with community aspirations for a recognition of 'both ways' education. The department provides primary education for school-aged students and there are now five outstation Homeland Learning Centres. Although the schools are not community controlled, the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training has supported changes to the structure and management of the school since the early 1990s.

We have Indigenous and non-Indigenous teaching assistants, all of them are involved in a professional development exercise, either ... a *Certificate III in Indigenous Education Work* course or a *Certificate IV Education Work* course. [The school] is a both-ways school in many respects. [One outstation] has a qualified Indigenous teacher and staffing is entirely Indigenous. She graduated ... with an *Advanced Diploma of Education*, which is equivalent to a three-year qualification. She was working with a non-Indigenous assistant teacher, and we have the reverse in other community schools. (UP3)

Over recent years the Homeland Learning Centres have developed a collaborative education planning program that is 'wrapped up in a layer of ongoing onsite professional development' (Freeman 2002, p.1). This programming model was developed:

... in response to a lot of the issues that confront education in that region. A high turnover of staff, limited face-to-face instruction with students ... We call it collaborative planning, and the whole point of the exercise is to privilege the Indigenous staff—they're the ones that provide continuity of education ... and so they are an integral part of the programming for the year for each of the schools. (UP3)

Increased community participation and ownership of schooling have been identified as key factors in improving Indigenous education. The Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training has been attempting to incorporate some of these ideas into the way it delivers education in the region.

There was a move many years ago for the communities to have a sense of ownership of the schools ... [and] control of what went on in the school ... We sort of tried to change that around and the way that we did it first up was to give keys to the assistant teachers ... If we're looking at both-ways education, it's not just a whitefella, European imposition, it implies that there is trust and that both the Indigenous students, Indigenous community members, assistant teachers and non-Indigenous teachers are going down the same learning path. There's trust in that relationship and if that relationship is to develop, then having access to a school at all times is, you would think, a good way to go ... parents have free reign to walk into the school at any time ... we welcome them to be involved in decision-making processes, and they take that seriously I think. (UP3)

... so all them old boss mob go working in the schools now, the kids sit down and listen more now. It wasn't happening before, because we got white man, no [Aboriginal] law business—they just laughed at school, played up and didn't do as they were told half the time. But that's only been happening in the last two years, so you won't get any proper outcomes, I suppose, until this generation grows up into teenagers. (UM8)

Now there's a lot more kids coming to school ... on an everyday basis ... Before they used to swap over, different kids ... now it's always the same ones that come, because they know that their own family's working in the school and that they're teaching them. And they know that if the visiting teacher goes ... assistant teachers know how to do it themselves now. Before, if they didn't have a visiting teacher or the visiting teacher was sick, they'd shut the school for

the day or it could get shut for the whole term ... but now they keep it open because the assistant teachers can do it themselves. (UP7)

Literacy

Adult English literacy levels are perceived to be low across the outstation communities. Between around 1987 and 1995 it was noted that not many adults were seen to be functionally literate or numerate (Richardson 2001, p.5). A 1994 review of the health service noted:

The short history of education in the region has resulted in a widespread lack of literacy and numeracy among adults who have spent the majority of their time in the area. This is a distinctive feature of the area with particular implications for health worker training ... Exceptions to this are people ... who have in recent years migrated from larger communities such as Alekareng, which have a longer history of education. Although education is now more widely available in the UHS [Urapuntja Health Service] area, it is an outstation primary school regime of 5 half days per week in those outstations (4 out of 15) which have schools. Few children are currently involved in post-primary education. It is difficult to see any rapid rise in literacy and numeracy levels in the near future. (McDermott et al. 1994, p.27)

Adult vernacular (or first language) literacy competence is also low. In recent years limited work has commenced on writing the *Alyawarr* and *Anmatyerr* languages, an *Alyawarr to English Dictionary* (Green 1992) has been published and an *Anmatyerr* dictionary is currently being researched. As the orthographies, or spelling systems, for these languages have only recently been developed, the spelling of words has been inconsistent, as is evident in the different spellings of the language names quoted in this report. Very few vernacular texts are in existence, even the dictionary is not an easily accessible document for most language speakers. An *Alyawarr Bible* was published in 2003 and this is the first extensive vernacular text to become available. Consequently, few people can read in their own language, let alone write in it.

Training and employment

Few employment opportunities for Indigenous people exist in the Sandover region, and there are relatively few non-Indigenous people providing an administrative infrastructure for this dispersed community of some 1000 people.

At present there are few skilled or qualified Anmatyerr, Arrernte or Alyawarr people who are able to take on the positions and the responsibilities that are necessary for this [self-management] to occur without the assistance of non-Indigenous people. Not one Indigenous person who was born in this region occupies a professional position at present, and throughout the homelands there are few people with either a formal trade qualification or accreditation to work in a para-professional capacity. (Richardson 2001, p.233)

Adult education and training has been provided in the region (see appendix A), but it has been short-term and *ad hoc*. Moreover, the adult education and training that has been provided by various agencies over the years has been compartmentalised according to the sector (in particular health and education). It has also not been systematically provided in a manner that takes account of overarching community development or strategic planning processes interlinked to community aspirations, cultural priorities or real employment outcomes. This will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

A further important feature of the region is its distinctive national and international art profile (Green 1981; Boulter 1992; Brody 1990):

... it can be argued that the adult education batik program was the only really successful Northern Territory Education Department sponsored educational program in the region since the introduction of public education at [the] station in 1969. (Richardson 2001, p.171)

Although the batik 'industry' is no longer prolific, it was the genesis for the current major acrylic painting 'business' which generates a significant income for artists across the communities and is said to be the cash flow that keeps the community afloat.

Indigenous knowledge and culture

The Alyawarr and Anmatyerr people of the Sandover region, unlike Indigenous people in neighbouring areas who went into missions or government settlements, have maintained a strong link with Indigenous law and culture, through their unbroken connection to 'country', the strength of the kinship system and the ensuing ceremonial and cultural obligations.

Where people avoided long periods of institutionalisation as in the Sandover area, the integrity of local groups and families was preserved ... Perhaps in the Sandover River area, Aborigines resisted that pressure [to move into larger Aboriginal settlements] and maintained direct links with their land because intrusions, although widespread, remained at a low level.

(Devitt 1988, p.67–8)

The implications, Devitt argues, of this distinctive history are that the 'stability and coherence of social life was more sustainable within a pastoral lifestyle than that of large centres' and this enabled people 'to retain an active relationship with country that they have never abandoned' (1988, pp.67–8). Furthermore, they have continued to transmit this knowledge to subsequent generations. Richardson has noted that 'relationships between people and land are of primary importance in the Indigenous scheme of things in this region' (2001, p.36). He states that:

Whilst people of this region often identify themselves to non-locals according to language affiliation, amongst themselves identity can be a contested issue that is usually expressed in terms of affiliation to country.

(Richardson 2001, p.49)

This is most evident in terms of family affiliation to outstations and the careful location of outstations for family groups in relation to country. Devitt posits that:

... it matters a great deal who are *artweyelkerde* (owners) and who are *kwertengerle* (managers) for tracts of land such as Irrwelty, Arlperr, Ankerrapw, Atwel, Arlekwar, Ananger, and Ilkewartn. The locals have complex and specific responsibilities to their own areas of country.

(Devitt 1994, p.6)

These Indigenous law and culture responsibilities include looking after land, protecting sites of importance, carrying out ceremonies associated with the land and maintaining social relationships (Devitt 1994, p.6). The ceremonial cycle that underpins Aboriginal law and culture is a regular annual event that is seen as the special time when one ceremonial cohort passes the knowledge down to those who are at the next stage. This process of mentoring or teaching the law is fundamental to the authority structure of the elders and is the consistent cohesive element that binds the society together and determines who is responsible for what. The significance of these responsibilities and how they underpin the social cohesion and well-being of this 'community of practice' are referred to in this study.

Literature review

In this section we will explore the relevant literature for these key terms:

- ✧ literacy and literacy practices
- ✧ education and health
- ✧ vocational education and training and literacy
- ✧ community capacity and social capital.

Literacy and literacy practices

The most widely accepted Australian definition of literacy appropriate for a broad adult community was established by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy:

Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking; it incorporates numeracy. It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different situations. For an advanced technological society such as Australia, the goal is an active literacy which allows people to use language to enhance their capacity to think, create and question, in order to participate effectively in society. (Australian Council of Adult Literacy Policy Statement, 1989, cited in Wickert & Kevin 1995, p.48)

Because literacy is seen to be embedded, or integrated, into whatever we do in our work, community, learning or leisure, contemporary research in the area describes literacy as a set of socially organised practices (Barton 1994; Gee 1996) in which basic skills for decoding, encoding and fluency connect to all aspects of an individual's and a community's sense of social identity and capacity to command social resources (Freire 1985; Fairclough 1992; Gee 1996), sometimes referred to as 'empowerment'.

... literacy is an integrated complex of language and thinking processes and skills, incorporating a range of habits, attitudes, interests and knowledge, serving a range of purposes in different contexts.

(Victorian Department of School Education and Catholic Education Office of Victoria, quoted in Lo Bianco & Freebody 1997, p.28)

The multiplicity of literacies for different purposes in different contexts has come to be known as 'multiliteracies' (see The New London Group 1996) and perceptions of numeracy parallel those of literacy. Varying numeracy skills are required to deal 'systematically [with] problems of concern in everyday life and [to] better understand the physical, economic and social environment in which we live' (Crowther 1959, quoted in Cummings 1996, p.11). Literacy and numeracy, therefore, both have social, political and educational implications. They are often seen to be involved with power and control of social resources (Searle 1999) of one group or individual in society over another. It is the importance of literacy and numeracy in this control over social resources that leads to this study's focus on literacy's socio-economic impact on training and employment outcomes.

Literacy practices as outlined above are perceived as integrated, or embedded, in a social context, and society embraces this diversity of literacies (Hamilton, Barton & Ivanic 1994). When, however, a society has only recently been introduced to mainstream alphabetic literacy learning, the 'social literacies' (Street 1995) differ. Reference must therefore be made to the literature (Scollon & Scollon 1981; Spolsky, Engelbrecht & Ortiz 1983; Schieffelin & Gilmore 1986; Huebner 1987; Kulick & Stroud 1993; Reder & Wiklund 1993; Kral 2000) that takes an ethnographic approach to the study of literacy development amongst other previously non-literate Indigenous cultures. These studies analyse the conditions conducive to literacy learning and acquisition in contexts similar to this case study. They situate the development of literacy within a paradigm that is cognisant of the cultural practices extant in the community and the interrelationship between literacy and cultural identity (Ferdman 1990). Other studies suggest that there is a strong acquisitional component to literacy learning through a process of social transmission and meaningful participation in social and cultural practices (Heath 1982a, 1983, 1986; Auerbach 1989; Resnick 1990; Reder 1994). In addition, an historical perspective allows us to see similarities with early literacy development in pre-industrial times when society was neither 'wholly literate' nor 'wholly illiterate' (Schofield 1968) and reading was more 'an oral, often collective activity' (Graff 1994), with a reader interpreting religious texts for a group of believers (Olson 1994), rather than a private silent activity.

The strength of Indigenous cultural identity in the Sandover region, interconnected with the short history of formal schooling, minimal intergenerational transmission of literacy practices and the implications for training and employment, must be borne in mind in this discussion.

Education and health

In remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, literacy levels and school retention rates are low (Collins 1999). There is also increasing pressure to improve literacy competence in order for adults to access further training and employment opportunities and to ultimately take control of their communities. Adult literacy is seen as a major factor affecting the participation of Indigenous people in primary health care delivery and management. Literacy has been noted as a 'critical health issue' for the whole community (Durnan 2002).

Research indicates that there are complex and interlinking factors which influence Indigenous education retention rates, including family and community attitudes to education and schooling (Schwab 1998, 1999; Schwab & Sutherland 2001). Indigenous education policy has come under scrutiny. Schwab concludes that the critical issues are not the 'what', 'who' and 'how' questions, but the 'why' questions of Indigenous education policy and that we need to consider an alternative to 'a human capital model wherein education is seen to be an investment from which both the individual and ultimately the nation benefit' (1995, p.24). Research suggests that there is a relationship between education levels (as measured by qualifications, literacy and numeracy levels, and years of formal education) and the other social determinants that influence the health of the individual and the community (Caldwell & Caldwell 1991; Boughton 2000; Ewald & Boughton 2001; Gray & Boughton 2001). However, in Australia at least, economic and health outcomes are part of a trend towards higher inequality in education outcomes (ABS 1997; Morris 2002; OECD 2000).

Vocational education and training and literacy

Accredited VET sector training (incorporating training packages) is based on a system of national competency standards and assessment 'essentially based upon the identified needs of a mainstream, industry-driven training framework' (Campbell 2000, p.8). The assumption is that 'the individual's main goal is employment within a specific industry' (Campbell 2000, p.8). On the contrary, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council states that Indigenous

people have raised the ‘maintenance of Indigenous culture’, and the ‘perceived role that education has in improving community life’ as key desired outcomes (quoted in Campbell 2000, p.9). VET sector reforms over the past ten years have, to a large extent, been equity driven and have aimed to ‘build a national system whereby the entire sector has commensurable standards, qualifications, and quality assurance’ with a presumed national ‘level playing field of shared educational experiences, and the enjoyment of similar social circumstances and economic opportunities’ (Campbell 2000, p.vi). The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) has responded to Indigenous needs through the implementation of national Indigenous VET policies and strategies (ANTA 1998a, 2000a, 2000b). Strategies outlined in *Partners in a learning culture* (ANTA 2000a, 2000b) have tended to homogenise Indigenous vocational education and training needs irrespective of the differing urban, rural and remote contexts. These strategies do, however, include ‘achieving increased, culturally appropriate, and flexibly delivered training’ as an objective for the VET sector, as well as being ‘responsive to cultural attributes and the demands of the community it serves’ (ANTA 2000a, p.39).

VET sector research (ANTA 1998a, 1998b) has started to explore issues related to the delivery of vocational education and training in remote Indigenous communities:

The delivery of [vocational education and training] to rural and remote Aboriginal communities has presented VET system providers and Aboriginal clients with often questionable outcomes in terms of vocational competencies linked to the development of the communities concerned. [Vocational education and training] delivery to Aboriginal communities has struggled with the complexities of community life for providers and clients alike. In particular VET authorities and providers have found it difficult to adjust the institutional framing of formal training requirements to the realities of community life and cultures, and, as a result, have often failed to achieve resonance with the self-determination priorities of Aboriginal people. (ANTA vol.1, 1998b, p.2)

Effective training in Aboriginal communities may well be related to the close relationship of particular training programs to the ‘Aboriginal domain’ of the community involved. When training provision intersects with the real business of a community, as defined by the community’s own development agenda for example, training outcomes are most likely to be enhanced. (ANTA vol.1, 1998b, p.37)

It has been suggested (Campbell 2000, p.32) that lifelong learning be a stated goal in delivering training to remote communities but this involves investing in an Indigenous training culture, the requirements of which are:

- ✧ a paradigm shift, giving Indigenous people control over the development of an ‘Indigenous training culture’
- ✧ the establishment of a national Indigenous education organisation which could, with input from local or regional bodies, develop VET opportunities
- ✧ more formal recognition of vocational education and training as part of the ‘business’ of Community Development Employment Projects.

Rowse (2002, pp.75–6) discusses the notion that education and training are perceived to be an ‘investment in “human capital”’, and that in fact:

... many Indigenous Australians are training themselves for service within the Indigenous sector. If reform of the institutions of vocational education and training is to be consistent with Indigenous ‘self-determination’, the Indigenous sector should be considered to be an ‘industry’ with its own training needs. Of course in many respects, such as basic literacy and numeracy, the needs of the Indigenous sector are no different from those of any other industry. However, to the extent that there is an Indigenous sector dedicated to realising the many facets of Indigenous self-determination, the political and administrative experience of

that sector's employers should now be informing the design of training for Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) personnel.

Significant work is now being undertaken to increase the capacity of Indigenous communities to govern their own services, particularly in the primary health sector, and this is being addressed by the VET sector. Funding bodies such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health have recommended the implementation of Certificate IV in Business (Governance) from the Business Services Training Package (ANTA 2001) to meet the training needs of Boards of Management of Indigenous community organisations. In addition, in the health sector Aboriginal Health Workers are being trained and assessed in Certificate III in Aboriginal Health Work – Clinical (NT customised version) (ANTA 2000c).

However, training and assessment procedures at Australian Qualifications Framework level 3 (AQF 3) against the national competency standards as required for Aboriginal Health Workers' registration in the Northern Territory (Every 2001; Commonwealth of Australia 2000) have raised many questions regarding the English language, literacy and numeracy proficiency of trainees.

It would seem that the English language, literacy and numeracy requirements within the competency standards and how these have been and are being translated into curriculum and training packages has the potential to both transform and jeopardise the nature of Aboriginal health work in the Territory. (Every 2001, p.7)

There are health workers in communities in Central Australia and in the Northern Territory who have limited English literacy and numeracy who may never reach registration in the Northern Territory. There is a registration board that looks at Health Worker practice and these health workers are not likely to reach registration for safe practice. But they play a vital role. (Commonwealth of Australia 2000, p.99)

In this study we explore the relationship between adult literacy and vocational education and training and the participation of Indigenous people in primary health care delivery and management within the health service as a case study.

Community capacity and social capital

The capacity of a mainstream community to create development and be sustainable is interlinked with its connection to private and public sector employment. In a remote Indigenous community context, this connection with the labour market is nebulous and complex, as unemployment is high, little sustainable industry is apparent and public sector 'employment' is often supported by programs such as the Community Development Employment Program. Nationally, the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy has provided a policy framework for Indigenous employment strategies. Rowse (2002, pp.34–5) draws the following conclusions on the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy based on research by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research:

- ✧ All government efforts to increase Indigenous employment have faced an uphill battle in that the working-age Indigenous population has been growing very rapidly. It has been a case of 'running fast to stay in the same spot'.
- ✧ Where the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy appears to have made an improvement to Indigenous employment, the Community Development Employment Program can take most of the credit. This raises the question of whether the Community Development Employment Program is to be counted as 'employment'.
- ✧ Even if we count the Community Development Employment Program as 'employment', it is clear that it is a form of employment with an income ceiling. Improvement in employment 'equity' via the Community Development Employment Program does not translate into improvement in income 'equity'.

- ✧ There are two kinds of markets for Indigenous labour: those in which the Community Development Employment Program is significant and those in which it is not. It is reasonable to adopt different expectations, strategies and criteria for success in these two different contexts. The evaluation of Indigenous well-being, if it is to be realistic about persistent structures of culture and political economy, must be regionally differentiated.

Social capital is commonly defined as the norms (values), networks and trust (Putnam 1993) that oil the economic and social wheels of society. Another strand of social capital research identifies the resource base that makes up social capital as being knowledge and identity resources crucial for the development of social capital (Balatti & Falk 2002; Falk & Harrison 1998; Falk & Kilpatrick 2000; Falk 2001). Hunter (2000) introduces 'social capital' in relation to measuring the social cost of unemployment in Indigenous communities and he advises analysing the cross-cultural usefulness of the concept. He suggests, for example, that:

... not having any employment in the Australian labour market may actually empower many traditional Indigenous peoples to hunt, fish, paint, and live on [the] country. Indeed the extra hours of 'spare' time may facilitate more extensive participation in ceremonial activities, thus increasing what may be loosely defined, in the Indigenous context, as 'social capital'.

(Hunter 2000, p.2)

Social *capacity* is further understood to be the capacity of a community for development and sustainability in terms of social, economic and environmental outcomes. The term 'social' capacity suggests a (measurable) level of ability to manage change. 'Community' capacity can be defined as the 'combined influence of a community's commitment, resources and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems' (Garmer & Firestone 1996, p.1). Cavaye sees community capacity as consisting of 'the networks, organization, attitudes, leadership and skills that allow communities to manage change and sustain community-led development' (1999, p.iii). The role of vocational education and training in terms of community capacity is important to explore when community capacity is understood to be the capacity of a community for development and sustainability in terms of social, economic and environmental outcomes.

This study understands that literacy (and numeracy) skills are intrinsically connected to education, employment and health outcomes. However, an aim of this study has been to begin to explore this relationship by utilising the concept of 'social capital' in relation to the complex dynamic of recent Indigenous history, relationships, cultural obligations, networks, norms, trusts and aspirations. This is not unproblematic as the concept of social capital in non-Western settings needs further investigation. It is acknowledged that these theoretical positions are complex and cannot be fully explored within the scope of this research paper. They will, however, be touched on in light of the goals and aspirations of the case study health service to develop culturally appropriate community capacity, governance and health care for the people of the region that maintains a local coherence and does not further isolate this community from the broader community.

Methodology

The research is a case study using ethnographic techniques. In recent years there has been an increasing interest in using 'education ethnography' (Goetz & LeCompte 1984) to explore how literacy is acquired, retained and transmitted intergenerationally in mainstream and non-mainstream communities (Heath 1983; Schieffelin & Gilmore 1986; Cairney & Ruge 1997; Barton & Hamilton 1998). Elements of this body of work resonate in this study as, in Australia, little is known about everyday literacy practices in remote Indigenous communities and how literacy is acquired, retained and transmitted outside of formal schooling.

... there is relatively little research that gives us detailed insights on ways in which speakers in different communities talk about their language and how their views relate to their acquisition and retention of literacy skills. In particular we need studies of what happens to basic literacy skills once a formerly nonliterate group attains such skills: How are they extended and interrelated with social needs and functions so that they can be retained? (Heath 1986, p.216)

The research is constructed as a case study (Spradley 1979, 1980; Stake 1995; Yin 1984) of the literacy practices of the community using the ethnographic techniques of observation, document collection and recording of conversations and interviews (Clifford 1983; Geertz 1973; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; Lincoln & Guba 1985). Data include the outcomes of unstructured open-ended interviews and semi-structured interviews (Burns 1997, p.329), observation notes and the collection of literacy artefacts, including written notices, messages and graffiti. Specific elements from social literacies theory (Barton 1994; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Heath 1982a, 1983, 1984, 1991; Street 1993, 1995), social capital (Bourdieu 1983; Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993) and community capacity (Garmer & Firestone 1996; Cavaye 1999) are brought to bear and used to analyse and interpret the data by thematic means (Aronson 1994; Leininger 1985).

The interview schedule was prepared in accordance with the following principles:

- ✧ Consideration is given to the bodies of literature relevant to the study, namely literacy practices, social capital and community capacity.
- ✧ The data are used for a specific purpose, rather than for open-ended outcomes. In this case, the specific purpose is the investigation of literacy practices as part of a community's overall capacity framework. The schedule therefore contains topics and questions about community capacity and social capital elements as well as literacy practices.
- ✧ The schedule is structured in an open-ended fashion to facilitate the capture of information about a broad range of topics. This is achieved using both 'grand tour' and 'prompt' or 'probe' questions (see Lincoln & Guba 1985).

Procedures

There were three main procedures for data collection:

- ✧ Data collection occurred over a two-month intensive period. Indigenous community members were sought for interviewing. The sampling was opportunistic, according to the availability of interviewees and the nature of local community activities, although the researchers endeavoured to interview a cross-section of ages and genders. Key informants were also sought for interviewing.

- ✧ Observations were made of community members engaging in everyday literacy practices and events. These observations were documented using proformas developed for the purpose based on Cairney & Ruge (1997).
- ✧ The identification, collection and analysis of literacy artefacts were carried out in their context of use (Clifford 1983). These were documented through site and artefact descriptions and discussions with Indigenous research assistants.

Data gathering

Data were gathered using the instruments in appendix A and other methods outlined below.

Table 1: Research questionnaires

| Guides | Grand tour questions | Content areas covered |
|--|---|---|
| A1 Semi-structured interview guide | Individual and family literacy practices Tell us about language and literacy in your history and your family. Literacy inventory (individual and community) Tell us about the literacy practices in your life. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ literacy history and intergenerational practices ◆ literacy acquisition and learning ◆ literacy use in everyday life ◆ adult education/VET needs ◆ employment needs |
| A2 Unstructured interview | Literacy environment Tell us about the literacy activities that go on in your camp? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ literacy use in everyday life |
| B1 Semi-structured interview guide | Survey of attitudes (social capital/ capacity building) Tell us about what it means to be able to speak, read and write in English in this community? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ social capital ◆ adult education/VET needs ◆ employment needs ◆ capacity building needs ◆ health |
| B2 Semi-structured interview guide | Interview guide for key informants Tell us about the capacities of Indigenous adults in this community. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ adult education/VET needs ◆ employment needs ◆ capacity building needs ◆ social capital ◆ health |
| C1 Document collection | Literacy artefacts identification and collection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ literacy use in everyday life |
| C2 Site description | Thick* description of activities and interactions at site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ literacy use at this site ◆ social capital |

Note: * 'Thick' description refers to a way of doing an ethnographic description (Geertz 1973).

Sixty interviews

- ✧ *Indigenous community interviews:* Comprising an opportunistic sample, 49 interviews were conducted with Indigenous community members using unstructured open-ended interviews and semi-structured interviews (appendix B, guides A1, A2 and B1). Twenty-eight females and 21 males were interviewed. The ages of interviewees ranged from 16 to over 50 years of age. A National Reporting System (NRS) (Coates et al. 1995) assessment of reading and writing was done with interviewees and this involved a brief assessment of reading and writing using assessment procedures from the Central Australian Remote Health Development Services *English Language and Literacy Assessment Kit* (2002).
- ✧ One semi-structured interview (appendix B, guide B2) was conducted with the Indigenous director of the health service.
- ✧ *Key informant interviews:* Ten semi-structured interviews (appendix B, guide B2) were conducted with primarily non-Indigenous key informants from the education department, the health service, the store, training providers and linguists.
- ✧ Participant observation and literacy artefact collection (appendix B, guides C1 and C2).

A one-day workshop with the research team and the steering committee

All quotes are referenced as follows:

UM – male Indigenous community interviewee

UF – female Indigenous community interviewee

UP – key informant interviewee (primarily non-Indigenous)

All quotes are referenced according to these codes and emphases added are those of the writer.

Ethics

The purpose of the interview was explained to the Indigenous interviewees by the research assistants, and permission was sought to have the interview recorded. All interviewees were given a consent form to sign. All interviews with Indigenous-language-speaking community members were conducted by the non-Indigenous researcher and local Indigenous research assistants working together.

A steering committee made up of members of the health service council, health service director and the Indigenous research assistants was established to approve the procedures and act as a reference group throughout the data-gathering period. In addition, the steering committee met with the research team for a one-day workshop to discuss the findings. The final draft of the report was also taken back to the steering committee for approval.

Reliability and validity

Research in a non-English speaking Indigenous context is fraught with difficulties. This factor notwithstanding, every effort was made to ensure that the process was transparent and done in concert with community wishes. The two female Indigenous research assistants were trained and understood the purpose of the research and the process. Their primary role was to act as ‘cultural brokers’, they determined where we would go each day and whom we would talk to. They explained the project in the appropriate language and acted as interpreters for the duration of the interview. This involved not just literal translation but also interpreting the cultural background knowledge required to understand many of the questions. Interviews with English speaking key informants were recorded and transcribed.

In interviews with community members it was found that the questions (guide B1) designed to explore the relationship between training, employment and capacity building in general did not work despite many redrafts with the Indigenous-language-speaking research assistants. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the questions, although able to be translated literally, were too decontextualised, hypothetical and conceptually unfamiliar.

Although the research aimed to gather a broad sample, in many cases the community selected who would be interviewed on each outstation, and often these were the most literate people who had been to school. The National Reporting System assessments were conducted under inconsistent conditions and are used primarily as an *indication* of the adult literacy competence of those interviewed.

Findings and discussion

In this study the main question we asked was:

What is the relationship between English literacy practices and the literacy requirements of further education, training and employment—in order to achieve the aims of community capacity building in relation to improved health outcomes—in a remote Indigenous community?

Embedded in this main question are the following secondary questions:

- ✧ Is there a relationship between individual/community history of literacy learning and current literacy practices?
- ✧ How do adults use literacy in everyday life?
- ✧ How is literacy acquired/learned within the social and cultural framework of the community?
- ✧ What approaches engage and motivate adult literacy learning?
- ✧ What relationship do adults see between literacy learning and ongoing training and employment pathways?
- ✧ How does literacy learning link with Indigenous community capacity building?
- ✧ Do the findings from these questions have validity in other Indigenous contexts in Australia?

These questions will be answered and discussed in relation to the findings.

A fundamental question is: How is literacy acquired/learned within the social and cultural framework of the community? This question underpins the whole study and will be interwoven through the entire discussion.

Literacy learning, proficiency and practices

In this section two aspects of the main question will be answered:

- ✧ Is there a relationship between individual/community history of literacy learning and current literacy practices?
- ✧ How do adults use literacy in everyday life?

We discuss the social context in which English literacy has been learned and/or acquired in this community of practice and look at the individual and community history of schooling in relation to current literacy practices and adult literacy proficiency.

Literacy learning

As stated in the literature review, the history of formal schooling in the region is short.

The school started in 1969 ... so just over one generation of the Indigenous people living in that region have been exposed to Western primary education. Even up until 2002 there were still kids of school-going age that had never attended a school before ... so we started up the fifth Homelands School this year in order to cover all bases, so that kids living on the

homelands would have access to education. I guess the history of Western schooling in the region is such that a lot of people you know in their thirties and forties never attended school at all ... there are a lot of illiterate Indigenous people, I would say most of the adults are illiterate, functionally illiterate. (UP3)

Although the Northern Territory Department of Employment and Education has implemented changes in education, some community members see that the school still has further to go in developing an appropriate both-ways model.

Education is good if they hang on to the [Aboriginal] law and culture, it's gotta be a two-way thing. The government has got to start to recognise that communities like [this] need funding to educate our people culturally as well as the white man's way, so they gotta give us money and allow us to put our own ideas culturally, promote our culture in our own community and they gotta give us dollars to do that and not condemn the culture and just concentrate on being academics in the white man's world.

So that's what we're up against and that's what we're frightened of—just being assimilated, our people just getting educated under the white man's law, teach the rest of our kids white man's business and forget about our culture ... we're gonna lose all that if we follow one law without the other and the bureaucracy has to understand that—that's what we're on about. We buck the system a bit by not letting our kids get educated properly sometimes—I don't know what it is, but they're frightened of it. I notice that our kids go one way ... but you get Europeans in the education department and they just come in and try to teach 'em without any Aboriginal input, then I think you only get half the benefits. (UM8)

Here we give an overview of schooling provision in the region and memories of participation in formal schooling over the generations. Attitudes to Western schooling are also discussed.

Participation in schooling

We investigated the history of schooling provision in the region, and individual memories of participation in schooling. Interviewees were asked about their own participation in formal schooling and the history of family or intergenerational schooling (figure 3).

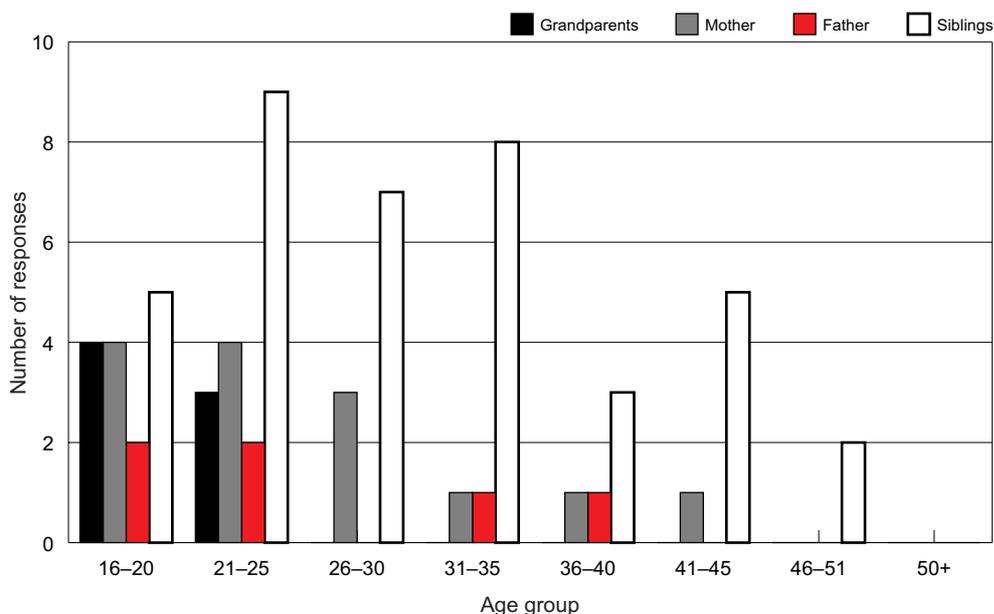
High numbers of people noted that they had experienced Western schooling; however, this must be understood to mean that people do remember having been at school *at some time*. The findings are not indicative of regular attendance at primary school from ages 5 to 12 nor do they provide information on the quality and duration of that schooling experience. Many people interviewed were not sure of their date of birth, nor current age, so the figures given regarding number of years in attendance at school or age at which schooling was completed are estimates rather than indicative of actual retention rates. People talked about going to school 'halfway' or 'half and half' or 'only sometimes' or 'a little bit'. The findings do show that some adults experienced post-primary schooling, particularly at Yirara College in Alice Springs. However, many told stories of leaving after a short time because they were homesick or lonely, including one young man who said that he left Yirara after one day. The health service director explained that because there is no Indigenous 'law' at Yirara College the 'kids leave and get away with it':

We've sent ten of them in to Yirara College one year and they lasted a week there, and every one of them come back—they didn't like being away from home. They miss family and that, so we're trying to get a secondary school out here. (UP7)

Older people who did attend school when younger either came from other regions (e.g. older women who have married in) or were living in other communities and returned to the community after the land was reclaimed. The most interesting finding is that of an Anmatyerr man (UM4), aged over 50 years of age, who had the unique experience of being sent away to the Bungalow school in Alice Springs, then continuing on at the Santa Teresa mission school, hence having an unusually consistent experience of formal education for someone of his age and language group.

Figure 3 shows that there has been a general pattern of increased participation in schooling with each subsequent generation, although in the youngest category fewer siblings appear to have been to school. The data show that it is mothers, rather than fathers, who are known to have had schooling. Only those people aged 25 or younger talked of grandparents who went to school, and they most likely had mothers and possibly grandparents who originated from, or lived in, another language region (in particular Arrernte or Luritja, and therefore went to school at either Santa Teresa mission school or Hermannsburg mission school).

Figure 3: Intergenerational schooling



It can be concluded that the process of intergenerational transmission of literacy practices in the home is minimal. Cultural transmission of the purpose of Western schooling across the generations is limited. People have accepted the notion that formal schooling is important but, one can surmise, are not yet acting as agents of control, or discerning consumers. That is, they have difficulty determining whether the schooling system meets their individual needs, or the aims and aspirations of the community as a whole.

Attitudes to schooling

There is demonstrated trust that the institution of Western education will deliver worthwhile outcomes. People believe that the purpose of school is ‘learning’ and learning is intrinsically important. Learning English is seen as a necessity and this is interrelated with an individual’s cultural obligation to assist old people and family at the English language interface. In particular this means negotiating the way through interactions by mail or in person with ‘government’ in its myriad forms, for example Centrelink, pensions and tax. Additional understandings of the purpose of schooling revolve around meeting the basic needs of everyday community life, such as talking to the police and going to court (see figure 4).

Interviews with key informants shed further light on the community’s attitude to formal schooling and its role in the community.

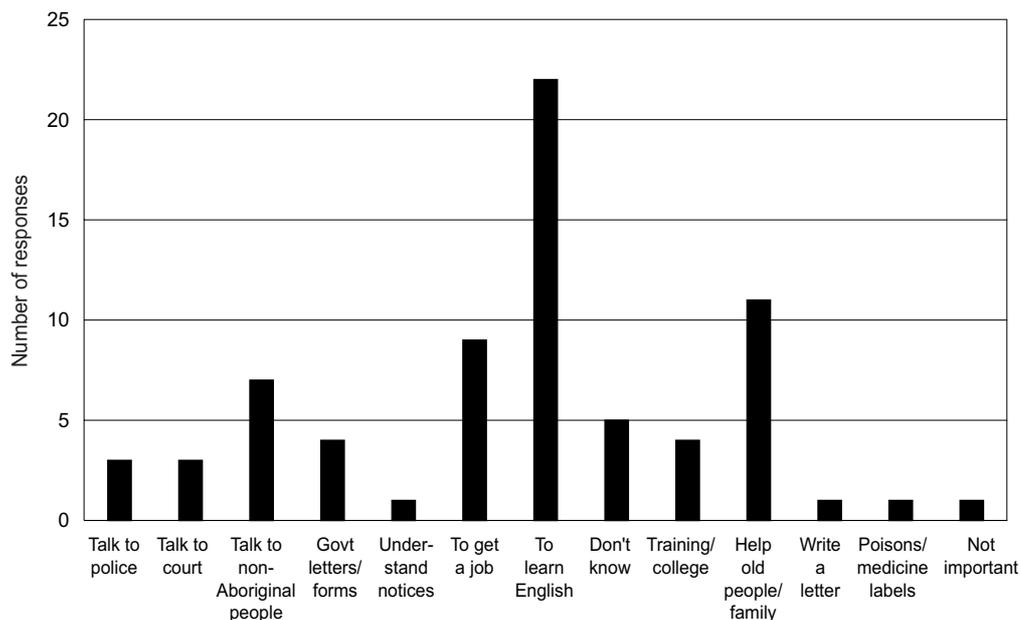
... this whole idea of Western education is difficult for people who have never been involved in it themselves as a student. The old people who are interested in education have a notion of education which may or may not resemble the truth; in effect *people are not discerning consumers of education because they haven’t been exposed to education themselves, so it’s difficult*. People are working on trust. I think the *old people who have been supporting education for*

10–15 years, they're working on trust. They never had the opportunity to go to a school themselves and yet they have been passionate supporters of school, their kids would always be everyday kids all year, they'd never miss a day of school. I think [it comes from] the days working on the station ... they can see the key that education can open doors with. They were involved in the land claim process ... and they could see the possibilities that education can provide in terms of their own empowerment, working on stations. The work ethic, the European work ethic would have been pretty much entrenched. (UP3)

I recently did a paper for the education department about the core business of education, I just went and sat with the ladies mainly because they're the ones who ... related to the school I guess too, but generally [to] whitefella reading, writing, literacy and I just said 'well, what do you think, why do people have to learn all this?' and really they said, it was very obvious. Even asking men if they wanted to talk about it, they said 'ask the women because they're the ones who have to ... relate to the kids in schools and that type of thing. For us it's not really, *the core business of our world is like our Aboriginal business, our ceremonies, funerals all that type of thing*'. (UP10)

I think *a lot of the parents are hoping their kids learn so that they can explain it to them then*, and then the kids can fill out their forms and that 'cause a lot of the old people can't even fill out forms, 'cause they never had schooling and the kids can show them how to do it then. *To help their old people*. Not many of them would actually want to go away to work, they'd want to work in their own community. (UP7)

Figure 4: Why is education important?



In conclusion, it is apparent that the institution of Western schooling is now very much integrated into the community terrain. School attendance and community participation is comparatively high for a remote Indigenous school and there is palpable community ownership of the Homeland Learning Centres. The buildings have been brightly painted by community members and, although unfenced, are protected by outstation residents from vandalism by 'humbug' children. Nevertheless, education is not perceived as an 'investment' in an individual pathway towards further education and employment nor as a means of accumulating 'human capital' for a future purpose. To some people education is not seen as part of the core business of the Indigenous world, nor is Western schooling seen as a means for acculturation into mainstream norms.

Literacy proficiency

National Reporting System (NRS) (see appendix C) assessments were conducted and are an indication of the adult literacy competence of those interviewed (see appendix D for National Reporting System assessment samples).

Table 2: Adult English literacy

| Profile of community interviewees who had some schooling | Adult English literacy proficiency | | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Identifies as literate | | NRS assessment* | | |
| | No (%) | Yes (%) | 1 NYC (%) | 1 C (%) | 2 C (%) |
| Males | 25 | 75 | 50 | 25 | 25 |
| Females | 16 | 84 | 40 | 36 | 24 |
| Age groups: | | | | | |
| 16–20 | - | 100 | 20 | 60 | 20 |
| 21–25 | 22 | 78 | 56 | 11 | 33 |
| 26–30 | 14 | 86 | 29 | 43 | 28 |
| 31–35 | 33 | 67 | 67 | 33 | - |
| 36–40 | - | 100 | 34 | 33 | 33 |
| 41–45 | 33 | 67 | 34 | 33 | 33 |
| 46–50 | | 100 | 100 | - | - |
| 50+ | | 100 | - | - | 100 |
| Total | 20 | 80 | 44 | 32 | 24 |

Notes: * The NRS assessment criteria were used.
 1 C = Competent at NRS Level 1 Reading and Writing.
 1 NYC = Not yet competent at NRS Level 1 Reading and Writing.
 2 C = Competent at NRS Level 2 Reading and Writing.

In some circumstances a few interviewees were assessed as competent at National Reporting System Level 2, even though they may operate at Level 3 in some areas. Likewise, individuals who have been assessed as competent at Level 1 may operate at Level 2 in certain areas. Insufficient samples were gathered, so it is not possible to confidently rate them at a higher National Reporting System level in reading and writing. Numeracy assessments were not done owing to limited time. Forty-one of 49 interviewees stated that they had been to school; however, the findings (table 2) indicate an overall discrepancy between people's perception of their literacy competence and their actual competence. In addition, 80% stated that they could read and write in English yet when assessed it was found that 50% of males and 40% of females were not yet competent at National Reporting System Level 1. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this.

Firstly, people are not likely to self-identify as non-literate, as there appears to be an awareness of the social stigma of 'illiteracy'.

A lot of those women learnt to sign their names. That may not sound like much but I suppose there was quite a status attached to being able to write your own name rather than sign with a cross. (UP4)

Secondly, people's experience of the literate world and what it really means to be able to read and write in English is very limited. In everyday life people in this region have had minimal exposure to the infinite range of what can be read, what can be written and the myriad ways in which texts can be interpreted, comprehended, composed, drafted, redrafted, and refined in unlimited contexts. Thus, in comparison to those who cannot read and write at all, those with very limited English reading and writing competence are likely to describe themselves as literate. The samples in appendix D are rated competent at National Reporting System 2. The school principal surmised that 'most of the literate people living in the homelands are working in the schools, I know that because we recruited them' (UP3). He claimed that the younger community teachers probably have

the equivalent of 'primary school Year 6', whereas the older ones who may have gone to Yirara have around 'secondary Year 2 or 3 level'.

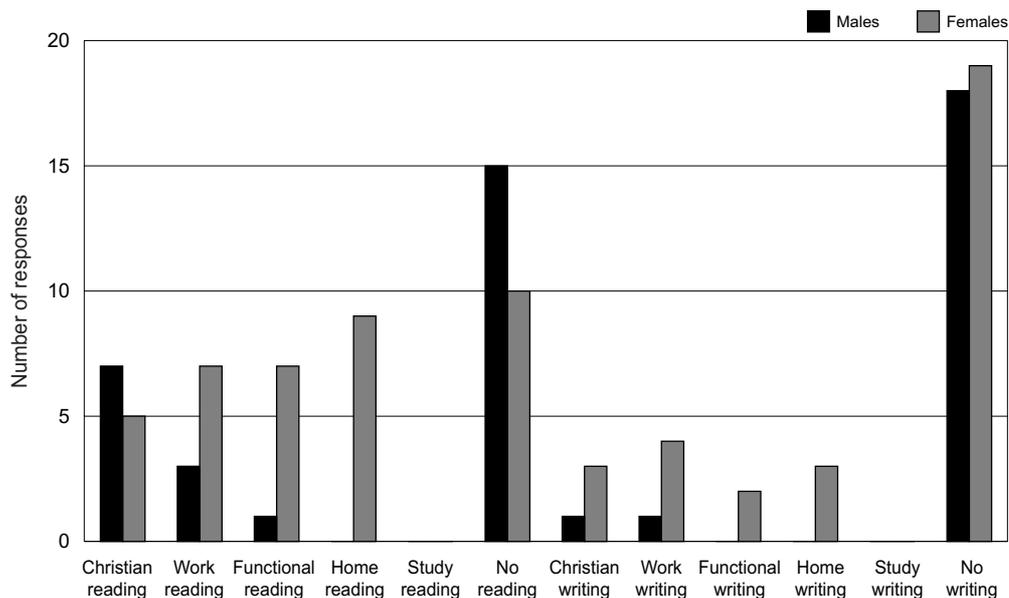
The adult literacy proficiency data gathered above is minimal; however, it does provide an insight into the context. Unfortunately, it is not possible to make comparisons with similar situations as no thorough surveys of Indigenous adult literacy have been completed. A 1992 survey (Christie et al. 1993) of adult literacy in the general Northern Territory community did not include non-urban areas, Indigenous communities or town camps, as the construction of a tool to test competence in these contexts was found to be too difficult. A national survey of Australian adult literacy (Wickert 1989) also neglected this area. The need for a survey of Indigenous adult literacy, in English and Indigenous first languages, warrants further investigation.

Literacy practices

The everyday literacy practices that were mentioned in the course of the interviews or observed by the researcher have been categorised into five types:

- ✧ Functional literacy
- ✧ Home literacy
- ✧ Work literacy
- ✧ Study literacy
- ✧ Christian literacy

Figure 5: Daily literacy practices

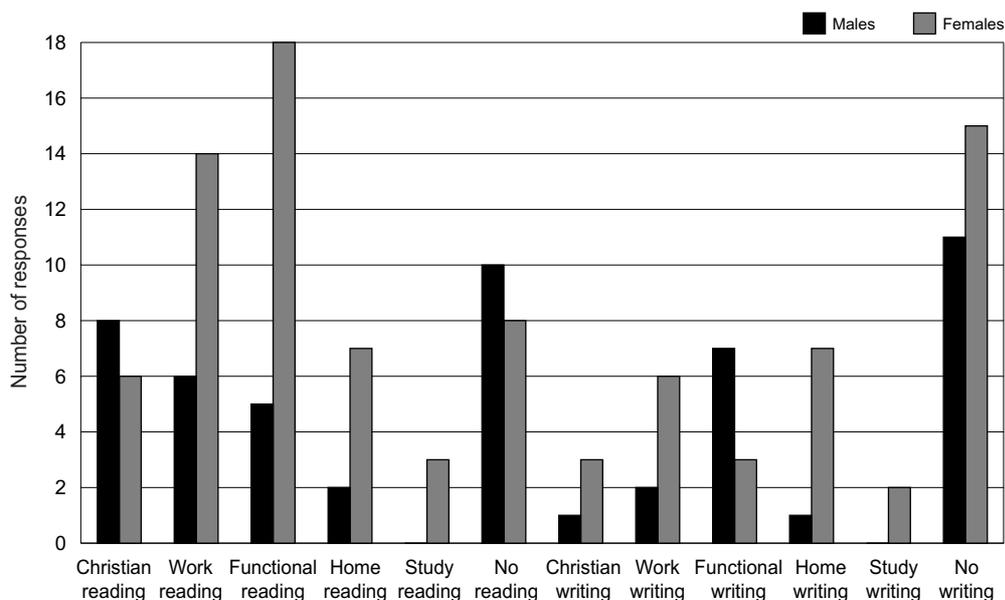


In order to gain a snapshot of everyday literacy practices, individuals were asked to describe 'literacy events' (Heath 1982b) in which they participated (in English and/or their vernacular) on a typical day (figure 5) and in a typical week (figure 6). Community interviewees were also asked what activities they did at home with the children in their camp and what papers or texts they kept at home and what they did with them. Each mention of an interaction with text was listed for each interviewee.

A large number of those interviewed indicated that they did not use any literacy practices or literacy artefacts in everyday life at all. This includes those who were not literate and those who had some literacy competence but did no reading and writing and kept nothing at home. Older people who

mentioned signing their paintings as their only literacy event were not included. Some literacy events are broader than others. For example, a community teacher in one of the outstation schools listed school reading or writing activities with children in the classroom as *one* literacy event in the *work literacy* category, even though this literacy event contains a broad range of classroom-based activities, including writing words or phrases on the board, reading a variety of texts out loud, counting and alphabet activities, and assisting with individual reading and writing activities. In comparison, the single action of putting a signature on a Centrelink form is also noted as a literacy event in the *functional literacy* category.

Figure 6: Weekly literacy practices



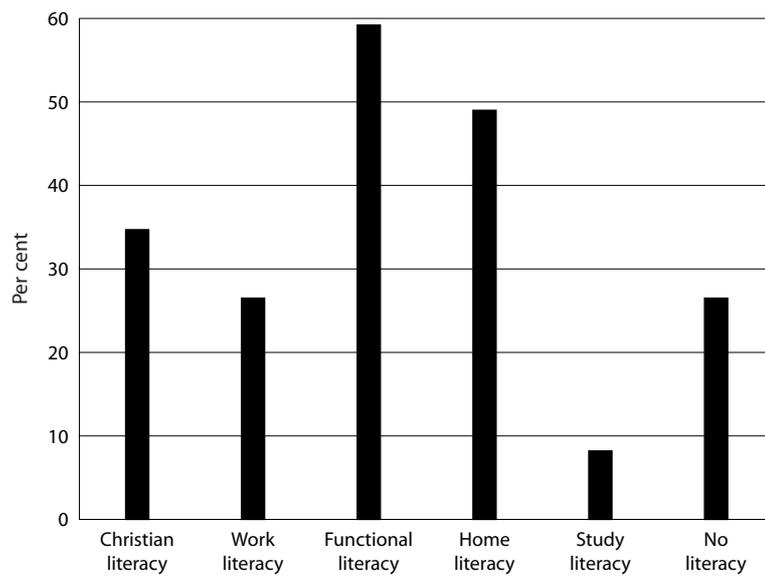
At first sight, figure 7 shows that functional literacy is the most commonly used literacy, with 59.2% of the mentions falling into this domain. However, this figure must be qualified, as *all* mentions of *any* kind of interaction with text were registered, including the 32.7% who mentioned putting their signature on their Centrelink lodgement form, and 26.5% who mentioned interacting with Centrelink letters or forms. *Functional literacy* skills are therefore required for dealing with the reality of high unemployment in this community. On analysis the breakdown of the events indicates the low level of literacy competence required for most contexts and the low numbers of people using functional literacy practices. Examples of *functional literacy* events also included mentions of reading food or medicine labels, signs, and keeping Keycards or business cards.

As well, 49% of literacy practices mentioned are *home literacy* practices. Again these figures are deceptive, with the majority of interviewees indicating that the most common interaction with text in the home is 'reading' video or DVD covers. This category is divided into individual and family events. The figures indicate that only 10% of interviewees mentioned literacy practices that require sustained reading or writing such as magazine reading, writing letters or using vernacular dictionaries. Less than 5% of events mentioned were book reading. However, interestingly, 12.2% of the mentions of family literacy events were reading activities with children.

Only 26.5% of the mentions of literacy events were *work literacy*, with the majority linked to employment in either the Homeland Learning Centres or the clinic. The least number of mentions were associated with adult education or training.

The most interesting finding was in the area broadly defined as *Christian literacy*. Although this domain indicates only 34.7% of the mentions of literacy events, upon closer inspection it can be seen that it is in *this* domain that perhaps the most concentrated literacy practices are evident.

Figure 7: Types of literacy practices



This is because all mentions of interaction with Christian text require some level of literacy proficiency, including individual Bible reading events, in English or the vernacular, at home. This finding will be discussed further in a later chapter. The above information, along with observations of literacy practices over the interview period, was compiled to form an inventory (table 3) of everyday literacy practices evident in this community.

Summary

In summary, there is an assumption that formal schooling and ‘learning’ *per se* is inherently important, especially learning English for fulfilling cultural obligations such as looking after kin. Yet education is not seen as part of the ‘core business’ of the Indigenous world. The Western-oriented attitude to education as an individual ‘investment’ in further education and employment runs counter to other cultural priorities. This demonstrates concurrence with research in a similar remote context which found, paradoxically, that ‘while most Aboriginal people recognise the value of speaking English and acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills they do not perceive that education is needed to live a fulfilling life ... they do, however, recognise the importance of cultural competence—not competence in Aboriginal culture where they are already competent, but competence in *non*-Aboriginal culture’—that is understanding the ‘cultural and bureaucratic logic’ of the non-Aboriginal world (including negotiating with government and the modern welfare state) (Schwab 1998, p.15). This also resonates in these findings where it can be seen that functional literacy skills are regularly needed, although meaningful, purposeful literacy practices are most evident in the Christian domain.

Table 3: Everyday literacy practices

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Work literacy | <p>General: Reading payslips; filling in forms; filling in timesheets; reading jobs list for the day; writing phone messages; sorting mail; reading names.</p> <p>Specific: Community teachers/tutors/childcare – reading stories to children; writing simple words/phrases on the board for children to copy; helping individual children with reading and writing; reading correspondence.</p> <p>Aboriginal Health Workers – reading/writing lists of names; using tick box proforma for noting patient details; reading medicine labels; reading <i>CARPA Manual</i> and health information; writing health promotion posters.</p> |
| Functional literacy | Filling in Centrelink forms and signing Centrelink forms; reading letters from Centrelink, bank, etc.; listening to letters read or interpreted out loud; reading signs, notices and posters; money transactions; using Keycard pin numbers; reading speedometers, clocks, calendars, diaries, medicine labels, food labels; supermarket leaflets; maintaining folders of plastic cards—business cards, membership cards, or important papers e.g. bank, tax, superannuation etc.; signing names on paintings. |
| Home literacy | <p>Individual: Reading magazines (<i>Women’s Weekly</i>, etc.) and newspapers (<i>Land Rights News</i>, <i>Centralian Advocate</i>); reading books borrowed from school or trainers; copying words; writing stories in notebooks; reading and writing letters or cards to family/friends; using calculator to add numbers.</p> <p>Family: Reading and writing letters or cards to family/friends; story or song writing for children; reading stories to children; watching TV, video or DVD and reading covers; drawing, singing songs, reading, writing, and copying words with children.</p> |
| Christian literacy | <p>Home: Singing in vernacular or English using songbooks/hymnal; song writing; reading Bible in English or vernacular independently; prayer writing; reading simplified adapted Bible stories, writing Bible stories; doing Christian reading and writing Bible study activities.</p> <p>Church: Singing in vernacular or English using songbook/hymnal; reading Bible in English or vernacular as church leader/Pastor; listening to Bible/religious posters being read or interpreted out loud.</p> |
| Study literacy | Reading study papers or books; writing stories. |

Training and employment

To explore the relationship between literacy, training and employment the following aspect of the main question is answered in this section:

- ✧ What relationship do adults see between adult literacy learning and ongoing training and employment pathways?

Adult education and training

For people from other regions who had been introduced to vocational education courses on missions or government settlements, particularly during the assimilationist period from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, the notion of formal adult education and training leading to employment was not an entirely unknown concept. However, for people who had only lived in the Sandover region, formal adult education and training was relatively unknown until the late 1970s when some training, including literacy, was introduced to adults living in the region.

In 1977 the women who were living at ... the central community at that time, they expressed an interest in doing some adult education classes in learning some literacy and numeracy and potentially doing some arts and crafts and so on ... The first thing we did was tie-dye ... Later on we all learnt to do batik ... and we used to run driving lessons on the airstrip ... Most of the women had had no whitefella education, one or two who were a bit younger may have been to school at Santa Teresa ... But that group of women were in their late 40s or 50s ... a lot of them had kids in the school ... and most of those women had not had any whitefella education. A lot of those women worked in stock camps, as nanny goat shepherds,

worked building fences on stations ... So they'd had a life living in their country but moving from station to station to get rations and to get some occasional employment. (UP4)

Although this training was not formalised, it met immediate training needs and it has ultimately been fruitful in establishing long-term private sector, income-generating employment outcomes:

Essentially I had no idea what it would take to teach adult literacy, so what we did achieve was writing our own names. But the art stuff was what really took off ... in the beginning it was recreational, it was enjoyable, it was good fun and something new and exciting and we made things out of the cloth we produced. It was fairly basic. When the batik started there were small ventures into town. The first exhibition was held in about 1981 ... It sold out. That was one of the first occasions that the women got money for their work. Of course, that was a very humble kind of beginning for what it is now. The art business out there now is worth a lot of money to particular artists and is really one of the main employment avenues open to people living in those communities. (UP4)

A range of other adult literacy and training has been introduced into the region since that time. In the early 1990s training support was provided for building appropriate housing in an outstation community. Aboriginal Health Worker training was provided at one outstation, and later Aboriginal Health Workers accessed training in *Certificate III in Aboriginal Health Work (Clinical)* in Alice Springs. An adult learning centre in one of the outstation camps provides courses in English language and literacy through the *Certificate I and II in Spoken and Written English* and vernacular literacy through *Certificate I and II in Own Language Work*. The Indigenous community teachers employed in the Homeland Learning Centres by the Northern Territory Department of Employment Education and Training are enrolled in *Certificate III in Indigenous Education Work*. Training and assessment against the National Competency Standards (Northern Territory customised version) in *Aboriginal Health Work (Clinical)* has also been provided by a training provider. Governance and management training for the administrative staff and council at the health service is currently delivered on-site. A Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program has also operated at the health service initially through one training provider and plans are currently underway for a different provider to deliver Workplace English Language and Literacy support to Aboriginal Health Workers in the clinic. There has also been an ongoing research project exploring alternative training methods for the Indigenous management in the health service.

In general terms, it can be seen that some training has been provided in the region. However, the key aspects of this training scenario are that it has been *ad hoc*, non-continuous, short-term, multi-agency and often aimed at a non-specific target group. Most significantly, however, it has not fitted into any consistent, long-term community plan.

Out of a sample of 49 interviews, 24 people (49%) identified that they had participated in an adult literacy or training course of some description (some identified that they had participated in both vocational education and training and literacy type courses). These figures do not equate to the attainment of qualifications, as no data has been gathered to correlate individuals with enrolments and course completions. However, it is understood (UP9) that within the community only one Aboriginal Health Worker (who was not interviewed and originally came from another region) has attained the AQF level 3 Aboriginal Health Worker competency standards required for registration, and only one Indigenous teacher (who also came from another region and was not interviewed) has completed an *Advanced Diploma of Education* and is employed as a qualified teacher. At present there are nine Indigenous community teachers enrolled in *Certificate III in Indigenous Education Work* (UP3).

It was found that more females than males have participated in some form of adult education or training, particularly in health, education and general English literacy. Of those who participated in VET courses, eight women identified as having participated in Aboriginal Health Worker or Indigenous Education Work training compared with only two men. The duration and quality of

training is difficult to quantify, as in virtually all instances interviewees were not able to recall the name of the course nor the training provider for the course they had participated in. The prime identifying factor relating to course participation was usually the name of the lecturer or trainer and the relationship with that person. This was particularly the case for the cohort of older women whose motivations for accessing literacy courses appear to be for reasons other than ultimate employment outcomes.

They continue to do [literacy] courses because it's social, it's fun and you get stuff. You get things and you get to hang out with those white fellas. *If you're doing a course you sort of get privileges.* (UP2)

Figure 8: Training aspirations

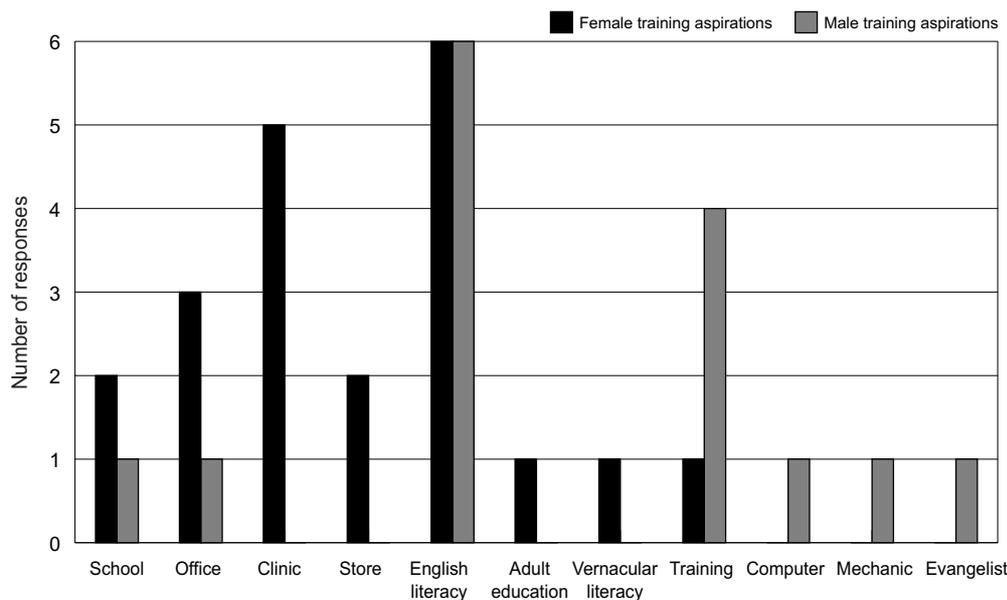


Figure 8 shows the small number of people who indicated an interest in doing formal training. Females tended towards the familiar areas of health and education and males towards 'training' as a generalist category. Interestingly equal numbers of males and females expressed an interest in English literacy courses, although this may have been influenced by the focus on English literacy in the interviews.

A theme to emerge from the research is that the community's perception of the purpose and function of VET training and/or English or vernacular literacy course differs from that subscribed to by training providers, and by implication, the Australian National Training Authority. Community members in general do not understand their place as trainees in the broad schema of the VET sector, nor how training fits into the meaning and purpose of community life, nor the implicit assumption that there is a relationship between VET courses and employment pathways. Most training does not fit the meaning and purpose of community life, and the connection between adult education, vocational education and training and employment pathways is not linked into any future planning processes that take account of community aims and aspirations. Consequently, a relevant and appropriate 'training culture' (Campbell 2000) has not yet become integrated into community life.

Yirara hasn't been successful. Kids [are] leaving school at 14. Nothing for them to do in the community, some of them have worked on the [community] council, and the clinic hires a few of them to help the handyman, but you know they're learning ... gardening and fixing cars and things like that, but it's always the boys that are doing that, not the girls—the girls are doing nothing, they're just sitting around ... No training options, unless they wanted to be health workers. (UP7)

On an Aboriginal community you have to get the cultural side right first, that's the foundation ... if you haven't got the Aboriginal culture or structure in there, no-one's gonna listen to you. (UM8)

The customisation of vocational education and training courses and training packages has allowed some flexibility in the VET system to tailor training for Indigenous needs and has given providers 'greater insight' into issues such as literacy and numeracy, and the impact of cultural commitments on training time-frames (Campbell 2000). Nevertheless, the Northern Territory customisation of the Aboriginal Health Workers Competency Standards, for example, has worked against the training and employment of Aboriginal Health Workers in some remote communities in the Northern Territory because of the increased need for English language, literacy and numeracy competence (Every 2001; Commonwealth of Australia 2001). It has been recommended (Commonwealth of Australia 2001) that Aboriginal Health Workers be assessed at National Reporting System 2 before commencing assessment against the competency standards and in this context, as noted above, National Reporting System 2 is a relatively high level of English language, literacy and numeracy competence. The correspondence between Australian Qualifications Framework levels and high school qualifications, in terms of the underpinning English as a second language literacy and numeracy requirements in remote community contexts, is also an area that needs further research.

Overview of community employment

The most striking feature of this community is how few employment options there are outside public sector employment in the school and the health service and possible Community Development Employment Project positions in essential services and the store.

The local government office manages a skeletal essential services area with only three professional positions, including council clerk. There is an allocation of *only* 17 Community Development Employment Project positions for all 17 outstations, with 12 to 15 people working on roads and general maintenance. This allocation includes Community Development Employment Project positions at the clinic cleaning, doing odd jobs, picking up rubbish and driving ambulances. In addition, the local government office employs one local woman in a funded after-school program. The indigenisation of professional positions is evident in this community, with one qualified local Indigenous teacher in charge of one outstation school and an entirely Indigenous management and administration at the health service. In addition to the non-Indigenous professional teaching staff, the school employs 19 community teachers in the five Homeland Learning Centres. 'Community teacher' is a term coined by the community to increase the status of the Indigenous staff and is unique to this region. The term has been adopted to include both the 11 full-time and part-time assistant teachers who work for the Department of Employment, Education and Training, as well as the eight casual Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme tutors employed through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). The health service employs a non-Indigenous medical staff and uses Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health funding to employ Aboriginal Health Workers. The Community Development Employment Project is used for additional positions such as ambulance driving, rubbish collection and odd jobs. The store is the other main employment site and is operated by non-Indigenous managers who have intermittently employed local Indigenous staff.

We've got the store and I really don't how many Indigenous people are employed there but every time I walk into the store it's non-Indigenous people who are running behind the cash registers, and packing the shelves and doing the bookwork and filling up the vehicles with diesel ... They haven't had much success recruiting health workers up there at [the] health clinic—there are health workers that are community based, but mostly the health professionals are non-Indigenous. I guess we're the major employer in the region. (UP3)

Apart from art, primarily acrylic painting, there is no income-generating industry in the region. However, painting, as a private-sector industry, is highly uncoordinated and relies on a direct relationship between artists and dealers, although there has, periodically, been an arts centre in operation.

Here there's a naivety, they've got a bubble and they're going to keep it intact ... It's not a poor community, because there's an underground industry of painting that keeps it afloat and people have money and ... new cars and ... clothes and food. And people fly off to Paris and New York, exhibiting and they paint and it's famous ... Maybe if they were a poor community in terms of money, they wouldn't have resources like cars and maybe they'd feel more desperate to make it work. It works enough to get by. It's *ad hoc*. I wonder what it would be like if that arts money wasn't there ... Maybe arts is more of an opportunity, or tourism if they ever want to go down those roads ... maybe they could have some control over it ... Maybe it's all pipe dreams. What's community development here? It's a foreign concept. (UP9)

Overall there is no cohesive planning or interagency linking to coordinate service provision in the community, including the Community Development Employment Project. All the employment sectors operate essentially autonomously and are not linked to any articulated, shared vision of community aspirations for the future. Health and education offer the main sites for employment, but do not yet co-exist within a commonly shared vision of the potential interrelationship. The Community Development Employment Project exists, but, as has been discussed elsewhere (Campbell 2000; Rowse 2002), it is questionable whether it is 'real' employment. Until the vocational training-related employment potential that the Community Development Employment Project offers is harnessed and integrated into an overarching vision of community capacity and community development planning processes, it will merely remain a source of short-term, unskilled labour. In many remote Indigenous communities the Community Development Employment Project has been used to pursue important land and cultural maintenance activities integral to the creation of a sense of community well-being, but this often depends on the foresight and experience of key individuals. Traditional activities are a key feature of this community but are not valued as 'work' in any institutionalised sense, for example through the project. These activities need to be abridged into a broader system so that they are valued as 'work'. This is an important point in this community because, as in many other remote Indigenous communities, it is not possible to generate sufficient 'employment'—in the labour-market sense—for every adult. This community 'stands at the periphery of the world of paid employment', which enables community members to more easily retain their 'own ideas about what it is to be a competent person—in their world' (Rowse 2002, p.60). Identifying alternative employment roles, including looking after country and supporting cultural well-being activities, will provide meaningful, purposeful activities for all and, as Hunter (2000, p.2) suggests, would increase the social capital in the community.

Employment experience, past and present

Community interviewees were asked about their employment experience, past and present. Although in a Western cultural context this is a straightforward question, as the range of employment options open to an individual seem unlimited, in this context the answers are narrowly constrained by the understanding of 'employment' as a recently introduced Western cultural concept. Yet, as noted above, there is a well-entrenched European 'work ethic' particularly amongst older people whose first exposure to 'work' in the Western sense was on the stations and who now despair at the younger generation who don't work. Older men in particular, articulated the view that they did 'real work' in the past but now the Community Development Employment Project has taken that away.

Figure 9: Employment experience

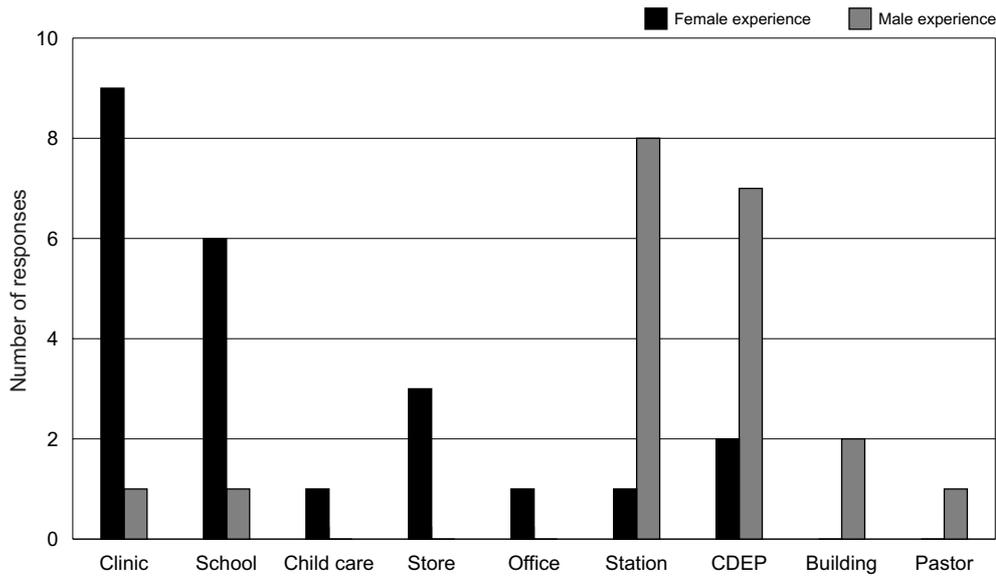


Figure 10: Current employment

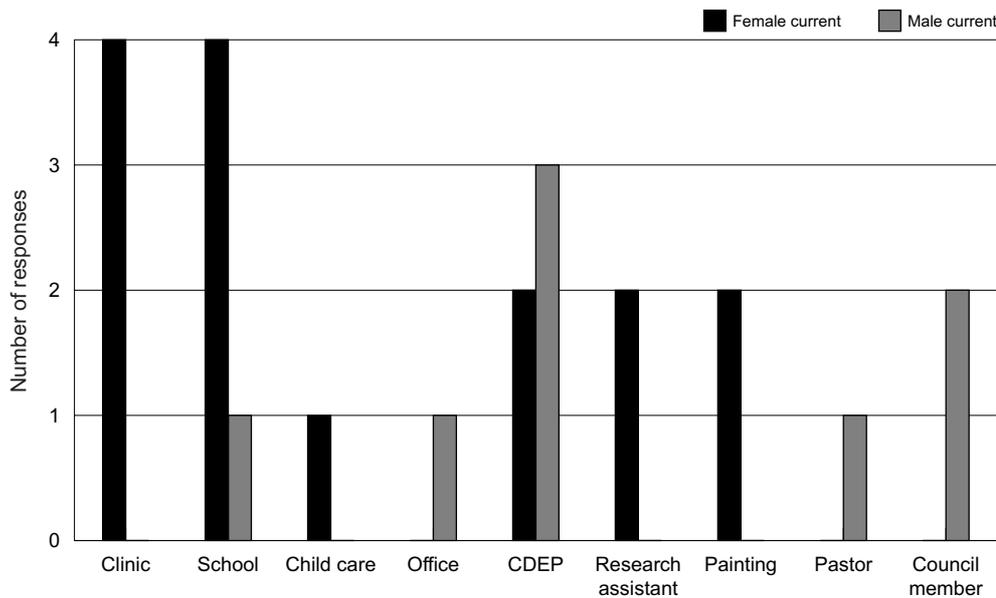


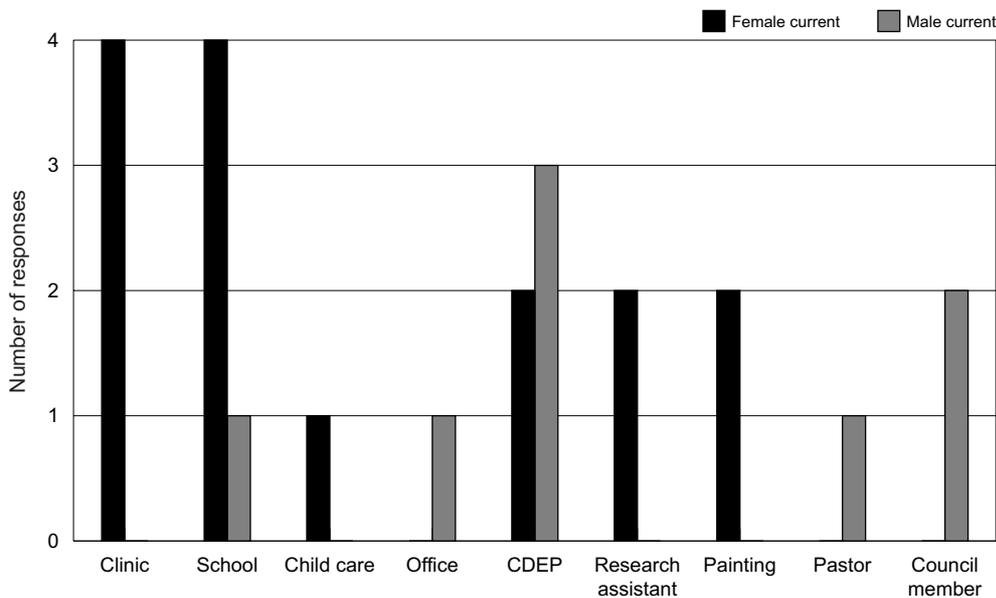
Figure 9 affirms that the predominant area of employment experience for males has been station work or the Community Development Employment Project—older men talk mainly of station work experience and younger men talk of the project. Employment experience for females has primarily been in health and education. Figure 10 shows little variance between past employment experience and current employment in terms of the range of employment areas and gender distinctions within these areas. Both figures 9 and 10 highlight the limited range of employment options that Indigenous adults have experienced in the region.

Seventeen-year-olds, just walking around in town, they never learn. We try to tell them to find work but they don't. Some children just don't go to school. Some went to school. They ran away ... One learnt, she's going everywhere, she's at Tennant Creek. None working ... their parents should tell them what to do but they don't ... Yes, they should [speak English] but they don't. They don't even work, they don't even speak up for someone who comes and asks them questions. (UM4)

My son [is] getting sit-down money, they never done work yet. They should go back to big school and learning them working things, they can go back training, Batchelor or anywhere, nothing here, only town. Only when they start building that big school [high school], they walking away from Yirara College, they might make that big school round here, close to mother and father, I heard of it, think it's a good idea. When they go Yirara College they don't learn properly, too many idea, like think back mother and father come back home, or make a boyfriend something like that. (UM14)

As seen in figures 9 and 10, experience of employment is restricted to a few narrow domains; hence people's answers regarding employment aspirations, as shown in figure 11, fall within these domain categories. The findings show that more females than males aspire to 'work' in the conventional sense and a number of men nominated fencing as a specific area of employment interest.

Figure 11: Employment aspirations



Furthermore, the employment aspirations articulated match the range of employment options currently available in the region. This reinforces the notion that people have difficulty conceptualising a world of training and employment beyond their personal experience.

Health case study

As identified, health and education are the two sectors in the community that stimulate employment-driven training. In this section we will focus on the health service, where training and employment are starting to be linked into a healthcare framework that is also part of a community-controlled initiative to develop community capacity.

I think there's an anxiety amongst some of the older people that they may lose their cultural context, maybe language as well, so that's why I can understand that they want to maintain their communities here and the current model of homeland outstation based [on an] Aboriginal controlled community, including health service, I think is something that they want to sustain. (UP6)

Training

Everything's chucked at us, training and that, but not working because not the right way. (UM8)

The health service management has identified training as a fundamental component in its long-term goals and is endeavouring to find a training method that suits the context.

[Trainees] are getting into that age group where they can read and write ... they're keen to learn and they come into the office and they do a couple of days a week sitting in there on computer, learning off [us] ... They got a lot of questions they ask as we're working along, so they see us and we mix together like, we talk about what's going on in the community. They're in the know, they know exactly what's going on through [us], we tell them everything that's happening on the community, government, monies and that. We sit down and really talk about it with these old fellas here, he goes and spread the word around they go and see the next person like [council members] and they all know what's happening here. That interaction happens all the time, we talk and we let each other know what's going on and they see things that I don't do properly too and they sit down and tell me about that ... I suppose the clinic is a sort of leader in respect of that, getting the kids. (UM8)

The health service is aiming to implement a training model that will lead to increased self-determination and appropriate governance systems. The health sector is the domain that is at the interface of mainstream VET sector training requirements at AQF level 3. Aboriginal Health Worker training is a critical element in the capacity-building process. The research findings show that there is general consensus from the health service staff that Aboriginal Health Workers are integral to the health care team.

You couldn't possibly do without those health workers. You couldn't run the service without them ... you'd be struggling, they're absolutely crucial and I think that what they do ... advocacy and everything—like interpreting and generally knowing where everybody is and that sort of stuff is really, really important. (UP2)

That's what happens when you haven't got Aboriginal Health Workers here to find what's affecting them kids, making them do wrong things, they give us the community input that we need to look after them. These health workers, they tell us, 'that young fella done that because

of that' and we need their family. They get their families to come in here to the clinic, grab that young fella and they all sit down and do right way, right skin ... So health workers, all these mob here, they're very important people ... their input on our health is far greater than just medicine ... they just know exactly what skin group there and who to look after them and what whole community hears about it when there's somebody sick and we look after them culturally. (UM8)

As stated in the literature review (see page 17) the introduction of the national competency standards in Aboriginal Health Work has redefined their workers' training and brought to the fore a complex web of issues associated with the English language, literacy and numeracy requirements.

We have two health workers who, when they have people to work with that they get on with, they are always at work. The competencies have scared them as they do not have the literacy. Loss of health workers disrupted the community—only had white staff after that. So to fit the government law the community got young ones in who could read and write and that broke their own community law. (UM8)

... [they] are very capable as health workers but in order to get anywhere, or go anywhere with it, they really needed to be literate as well in English ... they themselves said to me that they were frustrated about the level that they had to remain at. They could physically do everything: they could be told, they could be taught, you know you can teach people to do all those things, give injections, all that sort of stuff, but something like reading blood pressure you've got to be able to read the numbers, and you've got to be able to count. (UP2)

As a health work educator, it's very difficult to implement the training and assessment because of their lack of English and numeracy skills ... They work effectively ... use the phone and pass on communication via verbal means, but they are unable to write, so unfortunately because it's a requirement of Certificate III training and assessment they can't attain that, so even though they have all these other skills and are an integral part of delivering the health care in the community they can't be classified as an Aboriginal Health Worker. There has to be another job description put in place so that they can continue on there. (UP1)

The problem I see is that we may not be able to get people who are motivated enough to become health workers if they see the literacy skills as some impediment they can't get past ... The high level of literacy required may be daunting enough for them to decide they can't do it and so we may lose people who are skilled in every other way except that particular area. (UP6)

A range of training methods have been employed at the health service over the years:

- ✧ Aboriginal Health Workers have been enrolled in *Certificate III in Aboriginal Health Work (Clinical)* with a registered training provider.
- ✧ A health educator has been employed at various times to train Aboriginal Health Workers on-site—this position no longer exists.
- ✧ Workplace English Language and Literacy support has supplemented Aboriginal Health Worker training.
- ✧ Trainers have delivered on-site training and assessment against the AQF level 3 Aboriginal Health Workers National Competency Standards (Northern Territory customised version).

Ultimately:

... the [health service] council put their foot down and said 'we're sick of people going off to [a training provider], well [them] taking them away', that was the impression they had. 'We want to bring people out here, to train people on-site so we know what's going on and we can do a bit more gatekeeping'. That was one of the main objectives for a length of time, to make sure that happened, and probably still is. (UP9)

Medical staff at the clinic have identified the following aspects as issues affecting Aboriginal Health Worker training:

- ✧ high turnover of staff, no corporate memory and a perpetual reinvention of systems
- ✧ community wanting on-site training only
- ✧ most Aboriginal Health Workers do not have sufficient English language, literacy and numeracy to meet the requirements of the national competency standards
- ✧ no commitment to a consistent training system that fits into a coordinated community plan.

Determining appropriate training methods for the Aboriginal Health Workers in the health service remains an unresolved issue. As identified above, literacy is a requirement for successful participation in AQF level 3 certificate courses in health worker training. However, unless adults already have the requisite level of English literacy competence at National Reporting System Level 2 or above, there are few avenues available for improving English literacy proficiency other than *Certificate in Spoken and Written English* courses and employment-sponsored Workplace English Language and Literacy support programs.

They go to [a training provider] and ... they find it hard, because ... the tutor ... just stands in front of them and they've got that book in front of them, and it's just done like that, but out here they're actually shown how to do it ... I think that assistant teachers get more training than what the health workers do ... With the assistant teachers, [the trainer] lives out here permanently, so they can get help whenever they want ... she goes around to the schools every day and helps the visiting teacher, so they get [training] all the time, and the health workers only get it ... when somebody can come out here. (UP7)

A literacy tutor who has worked on a Workplace English Language and Literacy program with Aboriginal Health Workers identified that the program had the potential to be successful because it was 'so specific, so you could really work stuff to fit and suit and that would be utterly interesting to those people and inspire them to do more'. However, for trainees, getting Workplace English Language and Literacy support only one week in a month was not sufficient. She suggested that the efficacy of the program could be improved by integrating targeted support with an accredited literacy course and have the 'Workplace English Language and Literacy person directing the literacy tasks and things that they'd learnt in general into that actual workplace literacy and making it fit'. She acknowledged, however, that delivering Workplace English Language and Literacy in combination with an accredited literacy course may not be achievable as the cost would be an impediment. It was identified that a year was too short a time to make headway with trainees who had minimal literacy competence and it was therefore necessary to ensure the literacy outcomes are realistic and match where the learner is at, and that they provide useful outcomes which match the requirements of the context.

Health service management

There has been no consistent, coordinated community planning by the health service between the implementation of the first strategic plan in 1982 and 2000. The subsequent employment of a local Indigenous management team, with an Indigenous director operating under an Indigenous health service council has, however, ushered in a new management style.

I think it's better now, an improvement with a local person as the director, it's like you kind of get this sense that you're doing things with the community instead of to them and for me that's really what any kind of community work should be about. It's invaluable, like all that stuff about family politics, power plays or land and culture, we haven't got a clue about what really goes on. (UP9)

I see that they are implementing appropriate governance skills, they're computer literate and the head, the health director who is very strategic, not only in the community but in health as a whole, he attends all the various meetings ... he also has a Western education too, so as head of the community he is also very strong culturally, so he's able to work very well with the various committees that they have there and as an interpreter and cultural broker. (UP1)

The local Indigenous director has a long-term commitment to the job and works alongside the health service council. He acts as the interface between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous worlds and assists in resolving issues.

The health service has also implemented a governance and management training program to develop community capacity and two methods have been trialled:

- ❖ Co-operative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health (CRCATH) has had an ongoing research project which has included a mentoring, coaching and support aspect aimed at exploring alternative training methods for the Indigenous management. A trainer has lived and worked in on-site support.
- ❖ Central Australian Remote Health Development Services provides on-site training for the Indigenous director, director and administrative staff at the health service, with a trainer visiting for two to three days every few weeks. The trainer is not using an accredited VET course, although he makes reference to the competency standards in *Certificate IV in Business (Governance)* from the Business Services Training Package to provide a framework for 'opportunistic' informal training for the Indigenous administration.

I don't think it really works having someone coming out for a day a week, it doesn't flow ... Aboriginal people relate to people, the relationship is important and it takes a long time to get to know someone ... I don't think it works as well as having someone on-site for a month or longer at a time. And I think it also works with encouragement; 'come on you can do it, let's sit down and do it together'. (UP9)

There are courses that they do, but it is my impression so far that they've not had any formal business training to do the work that they do. From the director down, they have skills that they bring, such as some literacy skills, some organisational skills and maybe a small amount of IT skills, but most of their day-to-day work is really learnt through ... mentoring from the community members and ... from the health staff, doctor, nurses who would guide them on the best way to do something from an administration point of view ... such as assistance in writing a letter that has to be worded appropriately or the dismissal of a staff member, they have to be assisted to do it the right way ... there are courses ... but how do you take a director out of his role as a director and still have the structure functioning? (UP6)

The general consensus is that longer periods of intense training are better than short, regular periods; the training style needs to be encouraging and relationship-based; and the training program needs to build up 'real world' skills for dealing with funding bodies and government agencies.

Although there is no formal training program for the health service council members, the health service has been exploring governance models.

I don't think that [health service council members] do need governance training ... they are learning or gaining an understanding at this stage from the people who are actually receiving governance training, [and] not only governance, but input from other organisations, from Aboriginal organisations. And they come together for meetings, when the need arises ... I really think that if you jumped too far ahead and pushed for English literacy and numeracy and governance skills ... you're likely to frighten them off ... More direction has to come from the community and that we facilitate what they see as a need—not necessarily to push the ideas, our ideas, Western ideas on to the community. (UP1)

Well, you get all these old fellas [council members] they're all the atywerreng bosses, they're the top rank and everybody listens to them on their communities, and they all got together

and they backed me up with all their cultural stuff. In other words the majority of the community, the elders, they support what [the chairman] is trying to do and anything happens they back me up, like [Aboriginal] law—all the dangerous things—anybody mucks with me, they sort say: ‘well you got to tangle with us mob too’. That’s virtually all set up, so the cultural input’s there, through them to me, from them to me to the bureaucracy, how to run the health service, so you got more Aboriginal control over the health service now than you did before. Before, the implementation of what goes on at the health service was done by the white director, and the nurses and doctors used to run the show and they dictated to us.

(UM8)

A ‘both ways’ model – towards ‘cultural control’

Managing a ‘both ways’ health service means developing community capacity and becoming self-determining in a manner that suits where the community is at. In this context the relationship between community capacity and Indigenous law and culture is inextricably linked. The elders, through the health service council, provide the authority structure required for ‘cultural control’. Integral to the self-determining ‘both ways’ model is this notion of ‘cultural control’. This is interpreted as meaning having the right people in the right roles as opposed to a model of community control wherein Indigenous people have to be trained to ‘take over’ all aspects of running the community.

This health service is more culturally controlled. You haven’t got the centralised set-up other communities have got, where you’re all together and mixed up and everybody’s got their own ideas, their own [Indigenous] law and culture ... it’s a lot easier to control culturally, you’ve got all your [Aboriginal] law intact out here, it’s not broken down in any way ... started three years ago. The government is starting to recognise the organisation and how it runs the health service. It’s different to other communities and I think they’re starting to listen to us now ... they’re sitting back watching how we go ... I’ve got [Aboriginal] law ... it’s all proper, all the young people they all listen, whereas *you didn’t have that* input before, people didn’t listen to Europeans. They just said ‘yeah, you go and fix everything up, we’ll just sit back here and go hunting and do whatever we want to do’.

(UM8)

Looking after ourselves, our own [Aboriginal] law and the government side, keeps us healthy and strong.

(UM8)

You go in to Alice Springs hospital and hardly anybody from [this community] would be there. [The community] is always like the elders here ... and the old people, they’ve always been into the health thing, like they don’t have petrol sniffers here, they won’t allow’ em on [this community].

(UP7)

There’s less ill health from stress, because you’re not dealing with all this other stuff from everybody else and all sorts of things going on when you’re all piled in on top of each other. That’s not to say fights don’t happen, ’cause they certainly do, but ... everybody living on their own country keeps them stronger and healthier. People are closer to their core and that would make you stronger and healthier.

(UP2)

Aspects of ‘cultural control’ are enacted through ‘looking after country’. The health service business and the well-being of people are, in this respect, intrinsically connected to the well-being of country.

Looking after country and sacred business, [being] caretakers for the land, that makes the community run smoothly, everyone’s happy ... we clean [the country] up all the time ... that’s Aboriginal business, that’s what keeps us healthy and strong.

(UM8)

Yeah, yeah, that’s why me have to look after my sacred site area, [place-name] side along that creek, clinic side. We look after two sides, your way and our way. Yeah some are they don’t know anything Aboriginal way, they lose ’em everything—not here, we’re here around the community and we look after everything. Yeah, still there, cause we know everything, always

lived round [this] area. We want to learn from your side too, we might learn paper, write 'em down, send 'em somewhere, that's why we want 'em your side. Together strong way. (UM6)

Cultural control is also demonstrated through council members advising non-Indigenous people to listen to what the community wants and to understand why the community emphasises the importance of choosing the right person for particular roles.

A horticulture environment project selected the wrong people, not the right people who through the [Indigenous] law are the right people for that plant or land. But the community knows the wrong one was selected (that is the young one with reading and writing). So *the community can't support someone who's culturally not allowed to do it*. The experts through the [Indigenous] law are the right people but the community must be asked who.

(Urapuntja Health Service director)

Even the ones who go away to Yirara they fall back on their [Aboriginal] law ... they don't really see their role as going to school unless the community wants 'em to. So the big change, I suppose [is] the clinic is a sort of leader in that respect of getting the kids ... that have been to Yirara College and got an education to read and write. To further that, we bring him in here and we're teaching him the administration side of it [the council] tell him to come here so he comes in a bit three or four times a week, not on any wages or anything, just that the old people tell him he's gotta learn, so he comes in there and we teach him and he goes off does a bit. (UM8)

People acknowledge that people with the skills to interact between the multiple cultures can be quite useful in positions of authority, that's one thing, but the other thing is that *people who have the traditional authority to be in a secular position in particular places is a very important principle that can in some cases override all others* ... relationship to country and kinship stuff is incredibly important and if people have all of those credentials that's very good. (UP4)

Understanding who are the right people for certain roles also means being cognisant of the authority structures and relationships in the community and working within that reality.

I've found there is a great interest in authority and the meaning of reality, especially amongst the old men, the elders that I have been working with. At one of the education meetings there were mainly women there ... and some of the other men (they were sort of off on the side, the women were in the centre) took me aside and they said 'we know, we're hearing all this stuff about all the courses and all the people who come out from Northern Territory government and talk about various, different lot of funding and courses but what's the authority? Where's the authority?' And I thought, that's a real motivation to these fellas, they're really interested in the core reality of everything ... they've got to know who are the owners for that knowledge and who has that authority. (UP10)

Key elements in the training method the health service is developing include:

- ✧ having the community identify the right person for the role
- ✧ identifying a cohort of younger trainees who become integrated into the workplace culture before they are expected to take on higher level responsibilities
- ✧ identifying training for long-term accumulation of a wide-ranging set of skills for future leaders
- ✧ ensuring that more senior Indigenous staff and council members mentor the younger trainees coming up through the ranks
- ✧ ensuring that training is transparent, informal and opportunistic
- ✧ seeking outside training support for short periods of targeted intensive on-site training

- ✧ ensuring that the traditional authority structures through the Indigenous law are maintained and respected
- ✧ ensuring that these authority structures are reflected in the workplace.

Summary

The health service has started to develop a 'culturally appropriate' model of community capacity that sees the relationship between community capacity and Indigenous law and culture as inextricably linked. Indigenous managers have been employed who are English first-language speakers and have sufficient literacy and numeracy to cope with a range of informal training methods. But most importantly, this management has authority through the Indigenous law; the Indigenous management is putting in place infrastructure that respects and works within the framework of the authority structure of the health service council elders. Training of health service management and administrative staff is starting to be linked into this framework. Aboriginal Health Workers training and assessment against the national competency standards remains, nonetheless, an unresolved conundrum because of the underpinning English language literacy and numeracy requirements.

The concept 'community control' is embedded with notions of participation, empowerment and development, as well as equity, as training seeks to attain skills commensurate with the mainstream. However, in this case study, the key first step along the pathway towards community control is cultural control. The components of cultural control include acknowledging that the process of community capacity development is communal and must be done in a way that adheres to the authority structures and kinship relationships extant in the community through the Indigenous law. In this model the community looks to having the 'right people', chosen by the community and placed in the 'right roles'. This may be a slow, intergenerational process that will lead ultimately to the next generation taking responsibility; as opposed to a more deficit-oriented model that seeks to rapidly 'fill' Indigenous people with Western knowledge and skills, including English language, literacy and numeracy, required to 'take over' roles currently held by non-Indigenous people. The community is identifying that if training for employment is to be successful in the long-term, it must work within an evolving model of community control and be relevant to community priorities.

Community capacity

In this section we explore community aspirations and discuss the health service case study in relation to literacy and capacity building by answering the question:

- ✧ How does literacy learning link with Indigenous community capacity building?

The nexus between education (that is, English literacy learning), training, and employment is explored in relation to the link with Indigenous community capacity building. These processes must be linked to an overarching structural framework of community development planning for them to be meaningful within the social and cultural schema of the community, as they are inextricably linked to the goals and aspirations of the community. The findings from this research show that, on the one hand, the community is able to define aspirations *vis-a-vis* cultural maintenance and a 'both ways' vision for the future. But, on the other hand, their aspirations in relation to education, training and employment are curtailed by the limited experience that people have of the interrelationship between these recently imposed Western institutions. The health service provides the site for an exploration of these aspirations, as it aims to provide community infrastructure that is both culturally appropriate, and to deliver a 'both ways' health service with a clear training component. The health service is seeking new models and is cognisant of the socialising impact of education and the need to find an appropriate model of training that suits the context, as well as the aims and aspirations for community well-being in the future.

Community aspirations

Although people articulated a sense that Western education is important, it is not to be gained at the expense of losing traditional culture. Looking after country, looking after family in the proper way, participating in traditional or ceremonial activities and maintaining language are core values that must be integrated into any community development planning model.

Good learning—got to have a children learning, but like my kids lose all the language, while they only talk English, that's not what I want [for] him, they want to learn two way. If they learning one way, white people take all the kids teaching, they not in country like they lose their mother and father language. They lose 'em business, like Aboriginal Law and rule.

(UM14)

They're keen, they want to read and write but everybody on the community wants them to read and write, they want them to do it at an early age and they really tell their kids to go to school and they do it from a young age to primary school, after primary school the [Aboriginal] law and culture steps in and they follow that, they end up getting married and going on the dole, and there is no other secondary education out here. Once they get to a certain age the kids they just go straight into our culture, they just follow that because there's nothing else on the European side ... even the ones who go away to Yirara they fall back on their [Aboriginal] law, they follow that more a lot of 'em, they don't really see their role as going to school unless the community wants 'em to.

(UM8)

So what are these kids going to do if they go to school now, finish school, they've got improved literacy and numeracy but what are they going to do? ... There's no plan, no strategy, education for what? Blind faith?

(UP9)

The state of literacy in the region is working against people actually self-managing their own affairs. I think people in the region are happy with their lot, they're living on their own land and they can live an approximation of a traditional lifestyle supplemented with food purchased from the store, but in terms managing their own affairs in 2003, they're still reliant on advocates, non-Indigenous advocates for them.

(UP3)

What is clearly demonstrated is that greater community control of services in the community is an aspiration for the future. This must, however, be achieved 'together' within a 'both ways' model, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches working side by side in a mutually respectful system that takes account of Indigenous cultural priorities and finding a way to train the *right people* in the *right way* for a sustainable future.

I can only think that anything done in this community can only ever be sustainable if Aboriginal people are involved right from the concept and the application of that particular activity or project. That is, that they have to believe that it's important to do, be involved in the doing and they're going to be here for the long haul whereas the rest of us will come and go, so that's the first thing. But in the interim they need mentoring, which has to be often I think, a casual informal mentoring where people come and sit with, do with, give assistance with in a casual non-shaming way, and it has to be appropriate to what they want to do, not what we think they should be doing. In terms of overall aspiration I think the issues are basically the same as any other population in the country, they are the future of their families, which is the most important thing combined with maintenance of culture, including language and that has to be taken into account in every situation, culture and language, the basic survival skills that are needed to survive with your family out here ... I think there is an understanding certainly in the elders in the community of the need for that also in terms of their aspirations to have good health, both psychological health, cultural health, physical health and it has to be in the context of this land and understood in the connection with their land and for us to understand that that is right up there with family.

(UP6)

Strong culture, strong language, people are happy, they're living on their own land, they're still involved in subsistence practices, the gathering and hunting, in short they supplement

when they get welfare payments with processed food but they've got everything, they can save up every couple of months they can buy a Ford second-hand motor car in Alice Springs, They've got just about everything. But they don't self manage their own affairs, so education plays a pivotal role in that move towards self-management. (UP3)

Summary

The community's capacity in this context is represented by an amalgamation of the inherent strength of indigenous law and culture, kinship relationships, governance structures, and education and training working effectively together. When all these elements are working effectively you have capacity. The health service is an emerging model that illustrates how capacity can be developed. The goals and aspirations of the community are identifiable within a framework being developed by the health service. However, until people have genuine input and 'cultural control' over what is going on, other aspects of community capacity will not emerge.

Within the emerging framework there is scope for individuals to have control over specialised domains that require cultural competence in the Indigenous domain and may or may not require competence in Western skills and knowledge. From the community's perspective, an individual's capacity to do a job is not dependent on the autonomous accrual of mainstream skills and competencies. It appears that the concept of an individual's ability to do the job successfully is more closely aligned with being the right person for the role according to one's relationships and status in the community, irrespective of English language literacy and numeracy requirements and mainstream qualifications. This is a communal decision and the individual's role is to fulfil the responsibilities and obligations that come with the position. If this is the case, then it cannot be assumed that individuals come armed with the requisite Western skills and knowledge (including English literacy) for all employment areas. Thus, developing an appropriate training system to meet these needs is fundamental. In addition, the successful realisation of community capacity requires the development of an overarching community development strategy where roles and responsibilities (including pathways for Indigenous trainees and employees, and meaningful functions for other community members under the Community Development Employment Project) are identified.

Key themes

This study has been an exploration of the relationship between actual literacy practices in the community and the requirements for training, employment and capacity building in this community. In the following section the discussion will focus on other key themes that emerged during the research. Firstly we focus on the developing literate environment in this community and how adults in this community do engage with literacy when it is meaningful; and secondly we focus on other methods and approaches which engage adult learners. We then discuss the social capital indicators present in the community.

The research shows that when reading and writing activities are personally meaningful, as in the Christian domain, people are motivated to read and write and to improve their literacy skills. It also indicates that literacy practices relate directly to purpose, and if the purpose differs then the practices appear to differ too. When community practices occur in a particular place, learnings and literacies derive their meanings from those practices. Accredited literacy courses are available; however, the people accessing these courses may be motivated to study for a range of reasons that may only be marginally associated with learning literacy to access further training and employment. What is apparent is that adults are unlikely to make the shift from a basic level of functional literacy into a higher level of purposeful autonomous engagement with written text unless they are in a *role* and have *responsibilities* in a context that demands high-level literacy competence.

The developing literate environment

‘Textual’ communities must be developed to allow opportunities for talk about knowledge gained through reading and transmitted in writing. The process of learning from written materials includes reflecting on the meaning of such knowledge for changed values and behaviours. For literacy as a habit to be sustained, interaction must take place around the ultimate goal of determining an agreed-upon meaning from the text. Thus the maintenance and extension of functions and types of literacy within a society depends upon opportunities for participation in multiple and reinforcing occasions for oral construction of the shared background needed to interpret written material. (Heath 1986, p.228)

A theme to emerge is the evident developmental continuum in the way people interact with written text depending on their individual experience and family histories. This is neither a wholly literate, nor a wholly illiterate, community, although some individuals participate as readers and writers in literacy events more than others. It is apparent, however, that all adults do not have to be competent readers and writers themselves to interact with text to a greater or lesser extent. There is clearly evidence of a developing literate orientation or ‘literate behaviours’ (Olson 1984; Heath 1991) in the way that individuals are beginning to interact with text—that is, in the way they use, create, manage, control, protect and store texts without being fully literate themselves. Some adults are more able than others to function, negotiate and navigate their way through interactions with text using alphabetic literate conventions; that is, they know how to access information found in texts and what to do with it. For those closer to the more non-literate end of the continuum, the systems, meanings and purposes of literate conventions are less apparent. In this developmental phase a literacy brokerage role has emerged and this will be discussed below.

Intergenerational transmission

The research shows that individuals who are from families where a parent or grandparent originates from a community outside the Sandover region (and have therefore had longer intergenerational exposure to literacy practices) are more likely to exhibit a greater range of literate behaviours than those who are, at most, the first or second generation to have passed through formal schooling. Furthermore, if an individual has continued to engage in meaningful, purposeful lifelong learning through adult experiences in training, employment or Christian activities, then he or she is also more likely to exhibit literate behaviours. These adults show control in literate contexts and can make decisions and initiate actions based on a greater understanding of the purpose behind the text.

Experiential knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next. Adults who come from other communities are more likely to have experienced the link between education, training and employment. They are also more likely to understand the socio-cultural context of literacy use and the relevance to later training and employment activities and be able to discuss the embedded concepts. This generational shift cannot be speeded up.

This development of literate behaviours includes understanding the where, what and how of buying books and other pre-literacy materials for children and using them at home, as well as being prepared to spend money on literacy materials for children. Literate behaviours also involve exhibiting a more systematic approach to how literacy artefacts are incorporated into everyday life, including keeping books at home and storing important personal documents in folders. This represents the subtle accumulation and control of the kind of social capital required to move into the literate domain with greater ease.

Some personal profiles of adults whose families originate from communities outside the region illustrate this.

UF2 grew up at a camp outside Tennant Creek. She remembers her father, who went to school at Lake Nash, reading the newspaper and discussing it with the family, helping with homework, reading the Bible and reading letters out loud, and ‘writing his name so we know how to write his name, that’s how it’s spelled out’.

Now I see people do that and it reminds me like when I was little ... My father would write on piece of paper when out bush on outstation and we would take paper to show shopkeeper to give us things ... I see that now, people take that paper to the store and the manager puts the food in the box. And at the clinic people want anything like tucker they fax papers through to the store, someone writes the paper. (UF2)

UF20 had a parent and grandparent who participated in schooling and adult Christian literacy activities at Hermannsburg mission. Her grandmother was a teacher in an Indigenous language program and her aunt is a qualified teacher. She describes her home literacy practices as reading Bible stories in Luritja, using a notebook to write Bible stories, keeping a Luritja Bible songbook, using her own money to buy *Women’s Weekly* magazines and simple books from the supermarket in Alice Springs for her three-year-old daughter, as well as keeping her letters from Centrelink in a bag.

UF4 grew up at Santa Teresa mission and went to school there. She learnt to read and write at school and has retained her literacy skills through lifelong learning as a teaching assistant. She describes her home literacy practices as including reading the Bible every day, reading letters from family in English every month, reading newspapers and magazines from the teacher, as well as writing songs in Arrernte and using the Arrernte dictionary which she keeps at home.

UM19 is the son of UF4; he comes from a reading, writing home environment. Although he learnt to read and write in English, he has developed transfer literacy skills in the vernacular by himself, without the aid of an Alyawarr dictionary. He talks of how he learnt vernacular writing through praying and ‘getting those words into my mind by myself. I worked it out by myself, write it by myself, worked it out from the songbook’ (that is, the Alyawarr gospel songbook).

In the study, adults were asked to draw a picture of their camp showing literacy artefacts that they kept at home. Appendix F shows the pictures drawn by UF4 and UF12 demonstrating how these two adults conceptualised this task. Of those interviewed UF4 is at the more literate end of the continuum, whereas UF12 is at the more non-literate end. UF4 labelled the diagram independently and UF4 copied a sentence.

Availability

Retaining literacy skills is a lifelong activity and literate adults access reading and writing materials in many facets of their lives. In this case study community, one sees immediately that reading and writing materials are not readily available. There is only one store for all the outstations. The non-Indigenous store workers talked of how they have bought children's books but they 'don't sell', although simple taped stories and children's activity colouring books do. As the store worker surmised, only those adults 'that can read will ask for magazines and newspapers'. The purchase of children's reading material is, they found, 'dependent to a large extent on the reading ability of mothers' (UP5).

A number of adults talked about how they borrow magazines from teachers, nurses and the trainers. Although a few people talked about learning to read in the vernacular, vernacular dictionaries are only available through a learning centre at one outstation.

I don't see really any evidence of people doing any of those things on a regular basis unless the material is available, and when the material is available I see them at least attempting to, for instance if there's health material in the clinic I see them trying to read it, look at it, look at the pictures. But most of the time in the community I don't see any evidence of any literacy because the materials aren't available. (UP6)

This paucity of easily accessible everyday reading material stands in stark contrast to the availability of Christian text evident in the outstations and the overt strategies used to disseminate simple English Christian reading and writing materials to community members.

Creation and storage

The cultural space required for an individual to have control over the creation and storage of written text in everyday community life is virtually absent. Individuals who have access to Western institutional structures, in particular the Homeland Learning Centres, are more able to take advantage of the institutional rules, to store and control materials and documents for safekeeping. Two community teachers showed how they were able to store important personal documents in the drawers of their desks inside the building—a space that children cannot easily access—and one community teacher had organised her personal papers (superannuation, tax, official correspondence and so on) into a plastic folder.

Keep letters from bank, Education Department, read just little bit, teacher helps me read them. Sometimes we look for car through newspapers (*Centralian Advocate*). Tax one, letter from bank, and letter from school, keep them in a drawer in a desk at school. Keep some old letters at home, and payslips. *Safer to keep them at school*. Diary at school, take it back home most days. (UM3)

Get CDEP payslips on Friday. Keep payslips inside of window. Keep them 'just for know' and remember how much pay. (UM2)

Pick up letters from store and *keep in a handbag*, and put it where kids don't touch it, up top. *Keep because someone might ask us and we can show them we got the letters here*. I ask store manager for help to write to Centrelink, write answers to Centrelink or school, or get someone to help. Have papers from school with picture or story and kids tell me 'Mum can you read this with me sometimes'. Sing school songs and help them when they ask me to spell out words to put in their paper. (UF2)

Inside my humpy I do my own work, I keep my own books, study books from [a training provider] and new ones too, old ones I left at school, plain paper to write stories about going to carnival or something, to show all the children, take them to school. For all the children to teach them to count the numbers in the camp and learning centre, counting all the numbers and counting all the money and I got a little calculator to add 'em up, ruler, pencil, pen.

(UF15)

The storage of papers is not a meaningful activity in the course of everyday life for most interviewees. However, for those who did make mention of keeping papers at home, they often referred to the need to protect papers from 'humbag' children by storing them in bags, cupboards and on high shelves. UM4, an elder and man of high status, keeps his treasured collection of English and vernacular Bibles and other Christian texts in a canvas briefcase and he stated that he didn't 'keep anything for writing as kids come and grab it and take it away'. Children have not yet been oriented into 'respecting' the literacy artefacts in the home domain, unlike in the school domain.

Literacy brokerage

As exemplified in the literature review, a society that is neither 'wholly literate' nor 'wholly illiterate' identifies a role for a 'literacy broker'; that is, a reader who can play a mediating role as 'textual interpreter' for a less literate group. This is demonstrated in the findings. In this community not everybody has to be literate, as key people are acting as brokers in identified sites. The observed sites where a literacy brokerage role is enacted include the store, the clinic and outstation churches.

Textual interpretation

The store is the main agency for a number of crucial services, including receiving mail for community members and operating as a Centrelink agent. The non-Indigenous store workers are at the functional literacy interface and the store is a primary site for 'textual interpretation'. Although there are community members who can deal with the correspondence they collect at the store, many cannot. The store worker describes the literacy brokerage role as follows:

We do their forms, they come and pick up their cheques ... Well, what we do is when they come to do EFTPOS and when they come to collect their cheque, we go through their mail and if there is anything for Centrelink we say 'well look, this is your mail', they'll actually ask us to open their mail so that, because they can't read, they won't understand, only a handful of them do read but most of them don't and they'll ask us 'you open the mail for us', and we'll open up their mail and we'll find that there is their 12 weekly lodgement form, which we'll get them to sign, we ask them the questions, they do answer them quite well. We just tick the boxes, they sign them and we put them in a pile and we process them and we fax them through to Centrelink ... they might have warrants that they owe to the courts, you know fines, and a good thing that has come out now that Centrelink have started ... say they've got a \$500 fine, Centrelink can actually then deduct it out of their Centrelink payments to pay the courts ... and therefore they don't have the police chasing them and sending them to jail for say 15 days till they pay their fine. So all those sort of mails, anything legal that they need to go and face court or they need to get themselves a Legal Aid Officer ... so that they can appear in court and have a Legal Aid Officer with them, all those sort of mails they make us open it—they don't make us, but they ask us 'can you please open and you read it to me what it is' and yet when we read them a letter they do understand ... But to read it, no.

(UP5)

We've tried sending homework home but it doesn't come back and the kids don't seem to sit down and do it either. The parents can't read and write quite a few of them. You've got to model for the parents as well as explain properly to the parents as well.

(UP7)

Information dissemination through text appears to be an integral aspect of community life as the store is full of signs, community notices, faxes for individual and groups and so on. Indigenous and non-Indigenous bystanders are called on to interpret this information.

What we've noticed is the ones that can read English, the other ladies will ask the one that can read and she will then translate in her language to them. They won't ask us all the time but they will ask, say the likes of the few names I have mentioned, they'll ask them and then they'll speak in their language and tell what it is. Some of them do ask us 'what is this?' and we say, well look you have got to go to [training] on the days, for a week, concerts the same, [a council worker] he's excellent, he'll come in with a poster and then he will tell them what it is, if he's not here they'll ask us, you know concert tonight you've got Warren Williams coming ... I think it's because subconsciously we know they can't read, we try to point to the words ... and we'll read to them and we'll point and say 'look this man's saying this' ... So they'll look up at the picture and you know whether they remember that word next time.

(UP5)

Textual interpretation was observed in other contexts also. In the regular weekly church services on certain outstations, designated individuals gave the service. Their role was to study the chosen text from the Bible, understand it, read it out loud to the congregation and then interpret it, not by literal translation but by interpreting the main ideas from English to the vernacular.

Read the Bible, finding a verse to share it out tonight, mark it in the Bible with a pen. (UM7)

At the clinic the health service council members are mostly non-literate elders. At council meetings it is not necessary for them to read and write independently; however, the content of important documents must be interpreted in order for a process of discussion and decision-making to take place.

The thing that they need most of all is literacy ... spoken literacy skills. So they need to be able to understand some spoken English, so that a document can be explained, a letter can be read or interpreted as to what it means.

(UP6)

Motivation

In this section we answer the question:

✧ What approaches engage and motivate adult learners?

We do this by focusing on the themes that have emerged from the data on adult education strategies used by the Christian adult educators.

Christian literacy learning and teaching

Other non-formal training models extant in the community warrant attention. These include the apparently successful intensive adult literacy teaching method used by some linguists.

The methodology used by the Finke River Mission evangelist trainers is one that has developed as a result of 125 years' experience teaching reading to Indigenous adults originating at the Hermannsburg mission in Central Australia (see Kral 2000). Since the 1980s, Finke River Mission has been working in the Sandover region training Indigenous Lutheran evangelists and pastors.

We've got to work with *long-term plans* that go for years and years ... And we're trying to get a corporate memory and trying to learn from history ... one of the things we've learnt is that the authority structure is so important ... *relationships and trust* ... having a long-term relationship with the people you are teaching. We have found that ... it was only after we'd been there a few years that we started having a strong relationship with people ... [a previous teacher] had *assimilated to the Aboriginal reality* and knowing how Aboriginal people like to

work and how to joke and *it's all done in language too*. If you do it in English it's really hard, but once you can talk [their] language it makes it a lot easier. (UP10)

A linguist working in this domain accounted for the success of this approach as follows:

Christianity is another dreaming track, it's important business done by the men, and the women do the signing, it's like another ceremony so it's important. Thing is, I began to see that school is not so important, health is like, it's important when you're sick, but otherwise it's not really important ... that's because people probably think OK if I need this now, I need it. But it's not like the really important spiritual type world in Aboriginal society that I think is probably very important. The *Christian business is dangerous business and sacred business and so it has all that element as well that makes it successful* and they've got to keep the story exact. (UP10)

A key component of their methodology has been to teach adults to read Christian texts written in local Indigenous languages. The scarcity of available texts has led to the production of a number of cheap, vernacular Christian texts and songbooks (Alyawarr Translation Project 2002a & 2002b), which widen the circle of adults who are able to read in their first language, the language they understand.

We don't really encourage English that much as not many people use it. A lot of people don't really understand what they're singing and they can start singing a lot of nonsense without realising it. But if people want to learn, that's fine. Intelligibility is part of it, but also we believe in maintaining language and culture and we're quite ideological about that in Finke River Mission. That it's their language and we should accommodate to them in their area ... But the other thing is that people don't get very far with it 'cause they just find the English too hard to understand and they just give up whereas when it's in their own language they can not only understand it, they have that intelligibility, they also have ownership and the ability to change it, which is revolutionary. (UP10)

The main site for vernacular literacy events is in church, especially the use of two Christian songbooks (Alyawarr Translation Project 2002a & 2002b) in local languages and the Western Arrarnta hymnal (Finke River Mission 1988).

UF24 reads Alyawarr in the songbooks: 'A little bit, church songs. Only go to church to see it, we sing and we learn from Alyawarr song. Learn for Alyawarr, read little bit, spell little bit, good in songbook, I can sing and learn'. However, she says that she couldn't, for example, write a letter in Alyawarr and has only seen an Alyawarr dictionary when at school at Yirara College. When asked about other adults who had learnt vernacular literacy by themselves she commented that 'only [UM19] can write in his mind and write it down'. This notion of 'writing in one's mind' indicates that the individual is mentally composing text prior to writing.

Not all adults who profess to 'reading' Alyawarr in the songbook are literate, it is a domain where 'reading-like behaviour' is common.

UF12 finished school at around nine or ten years of age. She is not literate although often copies simple Alyawarr from a songbook to make the words bigger to 'read'; but she was unable to read a simple two- or three-word sentence that she had copied.

It was observed by the researcher that there is also a high level of motivation for reading Christian texts in English. In fact, the most purposeful English reading practices observed were Christian literacy activities, where people were attempting to comprehend longer and more complex texts than in any other domain. This is often a self-initiated, independent activity. English Bible reading is often done by men and is closely linked to a fundamentalist Christian movement from further north, which injects a large quota of Christian reading material into the community.

... sometimes when I'm at camp and I got nothing to do I always read Bible because I'm a Christian bloke, I like reading Bible about how to get along in my life, you know. When I

came [here] I became a Christian because in other place I was just getting drunk all the time. Started in 1999, Lake Nash mob came, Outreach sharing the Gospel, that's when I became a Christian. (UM7)

Learning from friends when I stay at Lake Nash long time, good so people can know God, reading for that. I found through Bible easy words, God's words, I learn a little bit like that, little bit for telling kids, classroom, like reading and counting maths. Sometimes I help other people. (UM3)

Surprisingly, young men aged between 16 and 20 also spoke of reading the Bible as their only regular literacy event, and one talked about how he *only* read the English Bible because it 'helped him think about things' (UM13). Another read the English Bible by himself at home 'because he died on the cross, because good stories and words' (UM20). People relate to the timeless quality of the stories and seek moral guidance from them.

One adult who has some sense of the vastness of the literate world and how to operate in that world is an Anmatyerr man, over 50 years of age, who has experienced lifelong learning through written text. This man, uncharacteristic for his age and linguistic and cultural background, went to school and has been identified as literate all his adult life. Anecdotal evidence (Jeannie Devitt personal communication) is that, in the 1980s, he was the only local adult with sufficient literacy competence to hand out the social security cheques. Most importantly, he has been a Lutheran pastor since 1994. He describes his reading and writing as follows:

I tried hard to learn and finally I learnt to read. I never stopped reading in school and after school ... somebody show me a newspaper, cartoons, read bread or tea packet—people were testing me all the time, always kept reading from young man, newspapers, letters, magazines. I tried to learn so I can be like others who can learn to read and write, and I'm still learning with these Bibles today ... *I learnt reading hard, I tried reading hard after I left school I kept on going so I can read any language; English, Western Arrarnta, Alyawarr, Anmatyerr, Eastern Arrernte, all that.* Yes, sometimes it's boring, you gotta think how you're gonna write, what you're gonna write, what you're gonna write in the office or out in the shade. (UM4)

An interview with a linguist in the region affirmed his proficiency:

He reads for meaning, he reads fluently and is not put off by the occasional word he may not get and he's able to cope with any orthography, including Strehlow (1956) [that is, the orthography containing diacritics]. He has a confidence. Finke River Mission doesn't put much emphasis on writing so it's mainly reading, so that's why his reading is superior to his writing. (UP10)

UM4 is unique; nevertheless his story exemplifies that in a context where literacy is meaningful, adult learners can develop sophisticated higher level literacy skills.

These educators emphasise the importance of working within the male authority structures that are integral to the social and cultural framework of the community.

If we're really fair dinkum about language we should teach the old people first and then work downwards ... the mission has taken a particular emphasis towards men, which I think is important because I think they've been marginalised, especially by the welfare system ... even schools, they tended towards women. Among Aboriginal people it would be mainly women who are employed in the community, education and health. [We have] tended to redress that balance and gone towards men but the thing is that aligning with children, the school has really cut itself off, now they've only got people until the age of initiation, as soon as they're initiated that's it, break away, and all that reading and writing that's kid stuff. [We have] actually gone the opposite way and said that we won't work with people unless they're initiated ... we've got to get to the intellectual centre of Aboriginal concerns. And then people are interested to talk and they're interested in why are we reading, what purposes are there, why are we learning this, and that sort of thing has to be consulted on a daily basis ... Now

out of the group, out of the seven, probably four of them will never learn to read and three might have a chance, gradually over years and years, it could take 15 years something like (but one is a really old man, in his 80s, 90s, but *he's a patriarch so it's important for him to be there*). [Elders] turn up and it's really important they turn up ... even though they don't read, they're part of the community, the process, they have the right to kick me out or to say if they don't like it and it's all there publicly. (UP10)

Not all aspects of this method are transferable to other contexts, but some aspects that do pertain to other adult education contexts have been synthesised as follows.

These adult education teaching principles are:

- ✧ based on building long-term relationships and trust
- ✧ participatory
- ✧ egalitarian and sharing
- ✧ respectful of the Indigenous law, authority structures and language and culture
- ✧ reliant on teachers living within the community in a way that most non-Indigenous educators do not.

Adult literacy is taught by educators who:

- ✧ are committed to language and culture maintenance
- ✧ learn to speak and read the vernacular
- ✧ teach reading using vernacular text
- ✧ build text-based relationships
- ✧ reflect on language and develop learners' metalinguistic awareness
- ✧ seek exegetical meaning from the text with learners
- ✧ talk to people about language in a complex conceptual manner
- ✧ allow people to think about how language is used.

The social capital indicators in this teaching/learning style are visible and account for the apparently high level of success. Christianity is evidently a key motivating factor for people acquiring and maintaining reading skills in both English and the vernacular. Christian literacy is *meaningful* as it is embedded with social capital.

Social capital

Education must be part of the social and cultural framework of the community and that framework must include the goals and aspirations of community. The relevance or role of literacy is more apparent if it is linked to roles and responsibilities in the community that are meaningful and have social capital. The mainstream education and training system invests in the human capital of the individual on the pathway towards labour market employment, whereas in this context the most important investment is in the social capital of the communal whole. The social capital is the communal 'glue' that binds people together and makes them strong. In this community, relationships through the kinship system are the crucial cohesive element in an unchanging authority structure determined by the Law. The social capital is, therefore, not in the development of the *individual* literate but in the development of the whole community and the literate's *role* within that whole socio-cultural dynamic. This community is rich in social capital and the indicators that resonate include:

- ✧ Norms (values), networks and trusts

- ✧ Family obligations and reciprocity
 - ◆ binding kinship relationships
 - ◆ sharing of resources
 - ◆ ownership of country
- ✧ Culture maintenance activities and obligations
 - ◆ ceremonial activities
 - ◆ authority structures
 - ◆ looking after country
 - ◆ hunting and collecting bush food/medicine
 - ◆ promotion of community well-being
 - ◆ cultural competence
 - ◆ lifelong learning
- ✧ Health service community
 - ◆ cultural control
 - ◆ community of support beyond family
 - ◆ long-term relationships
 - ◆ trust
 - ◆ roles and responsibilities
 - ◆ authority structures
 - ◆ community capacity
 - ◆ resources
- ✧ School community
 - ◆ trust
 - ◆ respect for literacy practices and literacy artefacts
 - ◆ resources
- ✧ Christian community
 - ◆ long-term relationships
 - ◆ trust
 - ◆ roles and responsibilities
 - ◆ respect for literacy practices and literacy artefacts
 - ◆ lifelong learning.

It is not possible to expand upon the social capital indicators within the scope of this paper. This is, however, an area that warrants further research, particularly in relation to the cross-cultural implications of social capital theory in an Indigenous context.

Summary

Literacy learning has only relatively recently been introduced into this community and so the intergenerational processes of literacy transmission, although apparent, are in their infancy. This community is in the process of developing as a literate community. This interim period includes processes such as literacy brokerage and textual interpretation. The process of achieving universal literacy will be slow and must be bound to the development of meaningful, purposeful literacy use. This can be enhanced by increasing the opportunities for the availability, storage and use of literacy artefacts within the social context of everyday community life. Moreover, the relevance or role of literacy works if it is linked to roles and responsibilities in the community that are meaningful, have social capital and are part of a dynamic of meaningful roles. Education, including literacy learning, must be linked to community capacity and 'cultural control'; that is, genuine input into the process by the appropriate authority structures.

Conclusion

Introduction

In this study the main question we asked was:

What is the relationship between English literacy practices and the literacy requirements of further education, training and employment—in order to achieve the aims of community capacity building in relation to improved health outcomes—in a remote Indigenous community?

In the introduction we described this community as a ‘community of practice’ (figure 1). This study has *not* aimed to understand fully nor describe the following aspects of this community:

- ✧ ‘both ways’—community health and well-being
- ✧ community goals and aspirations
- ✧ Indigenous law and culture
- ✧ social and economic well-being.

These components have been alluded to in this study; although we have not aimed to understand these domains, we respect that they are the community’s business. We have, however, explored the relationship between English literacy practices and the literacy requirements of further education, training and employment—in order to achieve the aims of community capacity building in relation to improved health outcomes—in a remote Indigenous community by using the health service as a case study. In this exploration, ‘cultural control’ is a key component in the community capacity developmental process.

The title of the report emerged from observing that schooling and training are happening but are disconnected from an overall, purposeful framework. The fundamental question being asked is: *‘What is all that learning for?’; where does schooling and literacy learning lead if not to realise the goals and aspirations of the community?* We return to the hypothesis set out in the introduction and suggest that in this community there is a discordance between the goals and aspirations for the development of community capacity *and* the concomitant literacy requirements for participation in education and training in the health sector. The community is aiming to deal with this discordance by desiring to have education and training reflect the ‘both ways’ socio-cultural values and aspirations of the community. The community says that education must be integrated into the cultural values that make this community strong and is starting to explore models for building ‘cultural control’ into community infrastructure. The community has maintained cultural competence in the Indigenous domain where education within the Indigenous law is intact and provides a safe, consistent framework. It is also seeking competence in the non-Indigenous domain and is starting to shape a future plan by designating roles to young people. It recognises that in order to fulfil these roles, young people need to learn skills from the mainstream schooling system. However, to be competent in these roles in the community’s eyes, they must simultaneously hold onto Indigenous law and culture. The community is seeking a ‘both ways’ model where mainstream education, and education into the Indigenous law, happen side by side.

Paradoxically, the community perceives that an appropriate education system for young people is in place through the Indigenous law, *whereas* a culturally appropriate European education and training system has yet to evolve. The basis of mainstream education, training and employment rests on an assumption that all participants subscribe to the same set of socio-cultural goals, including investing in the development of *individual* competence. In comparison, the socio-cultural framework of the community through the kinship system and relationships within the Indigenous law is *communal*. The framework of Aboriginal law embodies an education system that invests communally in 'ceremonial cohorts' every ceremonial season. These cohorts learn and progress through the stages in Aboriginal law, while simultaneously mentoring the cohort below. In this way the community 'trains' young people from birth to progress along the cultural path that strengthens and maintains the social structure. This small communal group relies on the framework of the Indigenous law to regularly restore harmony to the family groups through actions such as 'payback'. In this way, cultural strength is maintained and, as the community states, only when this cultural core is in place can health and education issues start to be addressed.

The effectiveness of the interrelationship between education (literacy learning), training and employment has yet to be realised. Currently the 'employment sectors', predominantly education and health, are compartmentalised. Both these sectors are attempting to implement culturally appropriate strategies to facilitate change.

The school is aspiring to play a more integral role in the socio-cultural framework of the community. The school community is building the foundation for a future 'Indigenous learning community' (Schwab & Sutherland 2001) by actively seeking to develop a model of 'cultural control' and aiming to incorporate the school into the socio-cultural schema:

- ✧ The community teachers in the Homeland Learning Centres have a role commensurate with their status in the community.
- ✧ The planning and teaching cycle is consistent and prioritises the authority of the Indigenous teachers.
- ✧ The increased role, responsibilities and trust given to the Indigenous teachers has, in turn, led to improved community participation and attendance rates.
- ✧ Many of these initiatives support strategies outlined in the *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2000–2004* (Commonwealth Government 2000).

The health service takes on wide-ranging responsibilities and has moved towards 'cultural control' by:

- ✧ employing an Indigenous management that has authority within the Indigenous law and works in tandem with the Indigenous Health Council, comprising community elders
- ✧ employing Aboriginal Health Workers who are culturally designated to the role, but also simultaneously employing younger people with English language, literacy and numeracy competence
- ✧ designating young people to future leadership roles in the health service structure and slowly mentoring them into positions.

This community perceives that the cultural structure is being put in place and it is now time to move forward and to start addressing the English language, literacy and numeracy needs, and vocational education and training. To achieve this, a long-term community planning process needs to be set in place that takes account of cultural priorities and works with the community to determine roles for the future that meet community needs as a whole. This means not just putting in place a training plan that collocates with what is already available in the VET sector but also seeking to have more community input to tailor the sector to meet community needs more effectively. The community is seeking to define the roles that keep the entire social fabric strong. Some of these roles currently exist within the Western employment paradigm, for example 'health

worker' and 'administrator'. However, some roles, integral to the maintenance of community well-being, are not currently definable within the VET sector.

The community is, therefore, seeking a model of vocational education and training that takes account of some notion of 'community accreditation' linked to an overall community plan. Rather than individual attainment of modules or certificates, a cohort of workers could, for example, attain components or modules from accredited training packages and gain collective accreditation. Vocational education and training, it is suggested, could also take more account of cultural competence and recognise and validate cultural outcomes. Vocational education and training could also be the site for lifelong learning, and second-chance education, particularly in English language, literacy and numeracy and adult and community education, in the broadest sense.

The community also recognises that an economic structure is needed to keep the culture strong and hence maintain well-being. The training and employment potential of the Community Development Employment Project is an avenue for this and must be linked into an overarching community development plan.

These proposals are not new: they do, in fact, align with policy suggestions outlined by previous vocational education and training researchers (Campbell 2000; ANTA 1998a), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council and ANTA (2000a & 2000b) as noted in the literature review, including:

- ✧ maintenance of Indigenous culture
- ✧ improvement of community life through education
- ✧ culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training
- ✧ lifelong learning
- ✧ development of a 'training culture'
- ✧ formal recognition of vocational education and training as part of the 'business' of vocational education and training.

This research provides a case study that echoes the collective Indigenous voice in remote communities *vis-à-vis* the delivery of a culturally appropriate model of VET sector training. The question is, how will the VET sector activate policy change, including dealing with the reality of the English language, literacy and numeracy context in the delivery of training to remote Indigenous communities?

Do the findings from these questions have validity in other Indigenous contexts in Australia?

Indigenous Australia is complex and diverse. Locality and context strongly determine the transferability of the findings. The transferability of these findings to an urban or rural Indigenous context or locale may be marginal. It can, however, be speculated that aspects can be transferred to other *remote* Indigenous community contexts in Australia. As Schwab (1995, p.20) argues, 'it cannot be assumed that choices, needs, and outcomes are constant either within or among Indigenous communities'. A key aspect of vocational education and training is, for example, the transferability of qualifications. However, Indigenous people in remote communities do not tend to repatriate, nor act as individuals seeking employment prospects across the nation. On the contrary, people tend to act communally and stay within the safe and secure structure of their own family, own language group, and own community for their entire life. Thus, the attainment of individual transferable VET qualifications is relevant in rural and urban Indigenous contexts, but less so in remote contexts.

Most importantly, however, this study has found that it cannot be assumed that Indigenous adults from remote communities who undertake VET sector training have the underpinning English language, literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge, particularly for training at AQF level 3. In this context, VET sector training must incorporate an awareness that most adults:

- ✧ speak English as a second, third or fourth language
- ✧ do not come from literate home backgrounds
- ✧ may have learnt some literacy, *not* in their mother tongue, but in a language they do not speak well.

Therefore, these adults cannot be expected to make the conceptual, cognitive leap into the VET sector domain and seek equity with their Indigenous contemporaries from rural and urban contexts without appropriate English language, literacy and numeracy support.

Where to from here?

Literacy

- ✧ increased attention should be paid to supporting community literacy activities:
 - ◆ support home–school transition programs, including professional development for parents/caregivers in ‘family literacy’ activities (pre-literacy activities, reading at home, helping with homework and talking with children to prepare them for school)
 - ◆ encourage intergenerational learning activities in the schools
 - ◆ encourage professional development for literacy brokerage role; for example, store workers, office workers, community advisors, as well as literate community members
 - ◆ establish homework centres and encourage parents/caregivers to participate
 - ◆ develop strategies for building Indigenous learning communities
- ✧ encourage everyday literacy practices:
 - ◆ increase the availability of literacy materials for community consumers; for example, stores sell pens, notebooks, paper, envelopes, coloured pencils, children’s pre-literacy activity books, simple little story books and educational books for children, magazines, newspapers, find-a-word or crossword activity books and diaries for adults
 - ◆ establish a community library
 - ◆ increase the availability of durable, lockable chests or cupboards suitable for storing literacy materials available to community members
 - ◆ construct community houses with built-in lockable cupboards for storing literacy materials
- ✧ conduct a thorough survey of adult literacy in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

Training

Vocational education and training is not just about training for employment, it can also provide a ‘second chance education’ for adults. Adult education courses for Indigenous adults can provide an effective training in English language, literacy and numeracy, and ‘civics skills’ as a foundation for community life and lifelong learning, as well as the world of work—both paid and unpaid.

- ✧ Train Indigenous community members for meaningful activity that maintains the well-being of family and community.
- ✧ Provide relevant on-site training that fits into a long-term community development plan.
- ✧ Negotiate purposeful training pathways for required roles negotiated with the community not imposed upon the community from the outside.
- ✧ Customise training packages in line with the reality of English language, literacy and numeracy context in remote communities.

- ✧ Customise training packages to allow for training and assessment tailored to specific local Indigenous needs and contexts and/or assessment by local Indigenous assessors working in tandem with registered training organisations.
- ✧ Research non-formal training and mentoring strategies to support the provision of non-accredited training.
- ✧ Provide for community-based adult educators, not tied to accredited competency based training courses, who can provide targeted English language literacy and numeracy support.

Community development outcomes

- ✧ Incorporate training and employment goals into long-term community planning processes.
- ✧ Expand the community development potential of the Community Development Employment Project by linking it to community planning processes.
- ✧ Identify community activities that fit into the socio-cultural framework; for example, arts-based activities and tourism. These activities fit into the core values that matter, as well as being a vehicle to generate income and provide further employment.

Cultural competence

- ✧ Incorporate cultural outcomes into relevant training; for example, looking after country, maintaining language and participating in cultural activities.
- ✧ Have cultural outcomes customised by the local community, according to local needs and contexts.
- ✧ Encourage government and training bodies to acknowledge the existing Indigenous authority structure in communities.
- ✧ Incorporate Indigenous law and culture outcomes into education policy for remote schools.

Further research

- ✧ Research the cross-cultural implications of social capital theory in an Indigenous context.
- ✧ Research comparative remote Indigenous contexts to assess the transferability of findings.

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Appendix A: Interviewee profiles

Indigenous community interviews

| Interviewees female | Outstation | Language group | Age group |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| UF1 | Arawerr | Alyawarr | 26–30 |
| UF2 | Amengerternenh | Alyawarr | 31–35 |
| UF3 | Amengerternenh | Alyawarr | 36–40 |
| UF4 | Arawerr | Arrernte | 41–45 |
| UF5 | Arawerr | Arrernte | 21–25 |
| UF6 | Atneltyey | Alyawarr | 31–35 |
| UF7 | Artekerr | Warlpiri | 41–45 |
| UF8 | Arlparra | Anmatyerr | 41–45 |
| UF9 | Amengerternenh | Alyawarr | 31–35 |
| UF10 | Arlparra | Anmatyerr | 31–35 |
| UF11 | Apengarlayntem | Kaytetye | 16–20 |
| UF12 | Arnkawenyerr | Alyawarr | 41–45 |
| UF13 | Antarrengeny | Alyawarr | 46–50 |
| UF14 | Arawerr | Alyawarr | 21–25 |
| UF15 | Atnarar | Anmatyerr | 36–40 |
| UF16 | Atnarar | Anmatyerr | 31–35 |
| UF17 | Ankerrapw | Arrernte | 26–30 |
| UF18 | Ankerrapw | Arrernte | 21–25 |
| UF19 | Ankerrapw | Arrernte | 26–30 |
| UF20 | Arlparra | Luritja | 21–25 |
| UF21 | Arlparra | Anmatyerr | 36–40 |
| UF22 | Akaya | Anmatyerr | 16–20 |
| UF23 | Akaya | Anmatyerr | 21–25 |
| UF24 | Atheley | Alyawarr | 21–25 |
| UF25 | Arnkawenyerr | Alyawarr | 50+ |
| UF26 | Arnkawenyerr | Anmatyerr | 50+ |
| UF27 | Arnkawenyerr | Alyawarr | 41–45 |
| UF28 | Arlparra | Anmatyerr | 31–35 |
| UM1 | Amengerternenh | Alyawarr | 26–30 |
| UM2 | Amengerternenh | Alyawarr | 16–20 |
| UM3 | Arawerr | Alyawarr | 41–45 |
| UM4 | Lylenty | Anmatyerr | 50+ |
| UM5 | Amengerternenh | Warlpiri | 31–35 |
| UM6 | Amengerternenh | Alyawarr | 50+ |
| UM7 | Arawerr | Alyawarr | 26–30 |
| UM8 – UHS director | Amengerternenh | Alyawarr | 50+ |
| UM9 | Arawerr | Alyawarr | 41–45 |

| Interviewees female | Outstation | Language group | Age group |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| UM10 | Arawerr | Anmatyerr | 46–50 |
| UM11 | Ankerrapw | Arrente | 50+ |
| UM12 | Lylenty | Anmatyerr | 26–30 |
| UM13 | Lylenty | Alyawarr | 16–20 |
| UM14 | Ariparra | Alyawarr | 50+ |
| UM15 | Akaya | Anmatyerr | 21–25 |
| UM16 | Akaya | Anmatyerr | 21–25 |
| UM17 | Atheley | Anmatyerr | 21–25 |
| UM18 | Arawerr | Alyawarr | 31–35 |
| UM19 | Arawerr | Alyawarr | 26–30 |
| UM20 | Arawerr | Alyawarr | 16–20 |
| UM21 | Kurrajong | Alyawarr | 50+ |
| UM22 | Kurrajong | Anmatyerr | 31–35 |

Key informants

- UP1 Aboriginal Health Worker educator
- UP2 Adult education trainer
- UP3 Principal
- UP4 Linguist
- UP5 Store worker
- UP6 Clinical health professional
- UP7 Non-Indigenous teaching assistant
- UP8 Teacher
- UP9 Clinical health professional
- UP10 Linguist

Training providers

The training providers referred to in this report include:

- ✧ Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
- ✧ Central Australian Remote Health Development Services
- ✧ Centre for Appropriate Technology
- ✧ Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health
- ✧ Institute for Aboriginal Development.

Appendix B: Research questionnaires

Guide A1

Semi-structured interview guide

Interviewee: _____ Location: _____ Date: _____

DOB: _____

| | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 1a | Where were you born? | |
| 1b | Where do you live now? | |
| 1c | What languages do you speak? | |
| 1d | What other languages do you know? | |
| 1e | What is your mother's language? | |
| 1f | What is your father's language? | |
| | | |
| 2a | Did you go to school when you were a child? | yes/no |
| 2b | Where did you go to school? | |
| 2c | About how old were you when you finished school? | |
| 2d | Do you remember reading or writing at school? | yes/no |
| 2e | Did your grandmother/grandfather/mother/father or siblings go to school? Where? | |
| 2f | Who do you know who can read or write in your family? | |
| 2g | Can you remember any reading or writing in your camp when you were a child? | |
| 2h | Can you remember any reading or writing in any other place when you were a child? | |
| | | |

| | | |
|----|---|--|
| 3a | What language did you learn to read and write in at school? | |
| 3b | Can you still read in English? What? | |
| 3c | Can you still write English? What? | |
| 3d | Can you read or write in English? 1 = nothing 2 = a little bit 3 = a lot Reading 1 2 3 Writing 1 2 3 | |
| | | |
| 4a | Can you read in your language? What? | |
| 4b | Can you write in your language? What? | |
| 4c | Can you read or write in your language? 1 = nothing 2 = a little bit 3 = a lot Reading 1 2 3 Writing 1 2 3 | |
| | | |
| 5a | Did you do any reading or writing yesterday? What? | |
| 5b | What do you read and write most weeks? What did you do last week? | |
| 5c | Do you keep any papers at home? What and where? | |
| 5d | Do you do any reading or writing with any kids in your camp? What? | |
| | | |
| 6a | After you finished school did you do any training? What? | |
| 6b | Was it easy?/Was it hard? | |
| 6c | Why? | |
| 6d | Do you want to do any other training? Is there anything else/more you want to learn about/to do? | |
| | | |

| | | |
|----|---|--|
| 7a | What work have you done since you finished school? | |
| 7b | Did you need to read/write in English? | |
| 7c | What work are you doing now? | |
| 7d | Do you have enough reading and writing in English for the work? | |
| 7e | Do you need to learn anything more to do the work? | |
| 7f | What work do you want to do? Do you want to work? What? | |
| | | |
| 8a | Do you have children/grandchildren? | |
| 8b | Do they go to school? | |
| 8c | Where do they go to school? | |
| 8d | Is it important for them to learn to speak, read and write in English? Why? Is school important? | |

Guide A2

Unstructured interview – literacy environment

Interviewee: _____ Location: _____ Date: _____

Draw a map of your camp as it looks today. Draw the rooms, the veranda and the outside. On the map draw any beds, tables, chairs and draw the people who live in your camp. Also draw any books, paper, pencils, pens, magazines, newspapers, posters, games, homework, study papers, personal papers, videos, CDs, cassettes that are in the house. If there is a clock, oven, TV, video, CD/cassette player, radio, or computer, draw these too.

Guide B1

Semi-structured survey of attitudes (social capital/capacity building)

Interviewee: _____ Location: _____ Date: _____

| | | |
|---|---|----------------|
| 1 | Do adults need to speak English in your community? | Yes/no Why? |
| 2 | Do adults need to read and write in English in your community? | Yes/no Why? |
| 3 | <i>If you do training:</i> Do you need to be able to speak English? What kind of English? | Yes/no |
| 4 | <i>If you do training:</i> Do you need to be able to read and write in English? | Yes/no |
| 5 | Do people in your community get good training for jobs? | Yes/no |
| 6 | What do Council members need to know to have meetings? | |
| 7 | What is most important for a good, happy life in the future? | |

Guide B2

Semi-structured interview guide for *key informants*

Interviewee: _____ Location: _____ Date: _____

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | What is your job? | |
| 2 | Do you work with Aboriginal adults in this community? | Are they trainees? Are they co-workers? Are you a supervisor? |
| 3 | Could you describe the job done by one local Aboriginal worker you are familiar with. | |
| 4 | Has this worker been trained to do the job? | Formal training – what? Informal training – what? |
| 5 | Does this worker have the skills to do the job? yes/no | Why?/why not? |
| 6 | Was the training appropriate for the context? yes/no | Why?/why not? |
| 7 | Does this worker speak and understand English sufficiently well to do the job? | |
| 8 | How did this worker learn to speak English? | |
| 9 | How could they improve their English listening and speaking skills? | |
| 10 | Does this worker read and write English sufficiently well to do the job? | |
| 11 | How did this worker learn to read and write English? | |
| 12 | How could they develop their English literacy skills? | |
| 13 | Have you noticed ways in which adults learn English reading and writing well? | |
| 14 | Have you noticed ways in which adults learn other job skills well? | |
| 15 | How long has schooling been available to young people in this community? | |
| 16 | Could you describe the preschool, primary and secondary schooling options that are available to young people in this community? | |

| | | |
|----|--|---|
| 17 | Could you describe the adult English reading and writing practices in this community? | How, where and what do people read and write? |
| 18 | If this worker wanted to do further study can: she/he access training/English language, literacy and numeracy courses in the community? | |
| 19 | Does she/he have access to independent study facilities in the community? | |
| 20 | Do Aboriginal people in this community have appropriate governance skills? | |
| 21 | What skills do they need for community governance to be realised? | |
| 22 | Do people have the English language, literacy and numeracy skills required for community governance? | What are these English LL&N skills? |
| 23 | Are people in this community receiving appropriate education and training to develop governance skills? | |
| 24 | Is health an issue in this community? | |
| 25 | If Aboriginal adults could read and write more in English would health be improved? | Why? How? |

Guide C1

Literacy artefact identification and collection

Date: _____

Item name: _____

Location: _____

Activity or contact associated with item:

Importance of item:

Description of item/content:

Other comments:

Guide C2

Site description

Date: _____

Location: _____

Description of site in community

Appendix C: National Reporting System

<<http://www.nrs.dest.gov.au>>

Indicators of competence in reading and writing

NRS Level 1

Reading

Reads and identifies letters of the alphabet in the context of whole words, numbers, signs and symbols relating to personal details and immediate environment.

Identifies specific information in a personally relevant text with familiar content which may include personal details, location or calendar information in simple graphic, diagrammatic, formatted or visual form.

Writing

Copies letters of the alphabet, numbers, and dates in order to convey personal details such as name, address, telephone number.

Writes basic personal details about self or others such as name, address and signature.

Writes one or two phrases/simple sentences conveying an idea, message or opinion drawing from a modelled text.

NRS Level 2

Reading

Reads and interprets short simple texts on a personally relevant topic.

Locates specific information relating to familiar contexts in a text which may contain data in simple graphic, diagrammatic, formatted or visual form.

Writing

Writes about a familiar topic using simple sentence structure and joining ideas through conjunctive links where appropriate.

Completes forms or writes notes using factual or personal information relating to familiar contexts.

Appendix D: NRS writing assessment samples

UF5

When I came to Soapy bore there were lots of people living everywhere There were no fighting, no petrol sniffing and no grog. Today people are living everywhere in other outstations, and there are few people living at Soapy bore and having a peaceful and happy life when you come to utopia you'll find how happy people are living and keeping their culture strong because at our country there are lots of fighting and drinking they don't know their culture, and they don't know what to say to elders and councils when there is troubles.

UF20

In utopia people need to stay healthy by cleaning, picking up rubbish eating good Food Washing hands using good Blankets Clothes and Cleaning laundries disher's. Family likes to look after thair Country taking old people to country to visit telling stories about olden days is a healthy ways to learn and utopia needs lots of houses same for outstation they need houses training center to work for jobs is a healthy way.

UF24

On Tuesday when we came from Lake Nash we saw four kangaroos at the bush on the side of Road. Andrew shoot the kangaroo but we wouldn't get kangaroo and after that we can back here and I watch the DVD video on Tuesday night it was good fun, and after that I say Hey kids let's go to get Sugar bag at the bush and we see five tree with Sugar bag and we eat Sugar bag from 3 tree it was to sweet and good. After that we walk and we saw kangaroo tracks and I like to be Christian and to be good life, no drining, drugs and go to work at clinic it's more understand, words And I been seen my all sisters and brothers all like to be follow Lord, and I like working at clinic everyday, on Monday to Friday.

UM9

My name is ... Born in 1958 now came back to Sandover to my fathers familys to live in our community So they might teach us more Law and I am realey happy to live with my Brothers fathers Brothers from Soapy bore and they taught us few things they learned us for hunting cooking kangroo and dancing.

UM19

I like do work for CDEP just to do how place looks good so the other to see and how people can look how we live here at Soapy bore and so we can live in good house too. So we can have shower and toilet as well.

Ayeng-an ilkelheley aneyew apmerr mwer-angker, school-anthen anantherr aneyek

Appendix E: Types of literacy practices

Christian literacy

Figure 12: Examples of Christian literacy

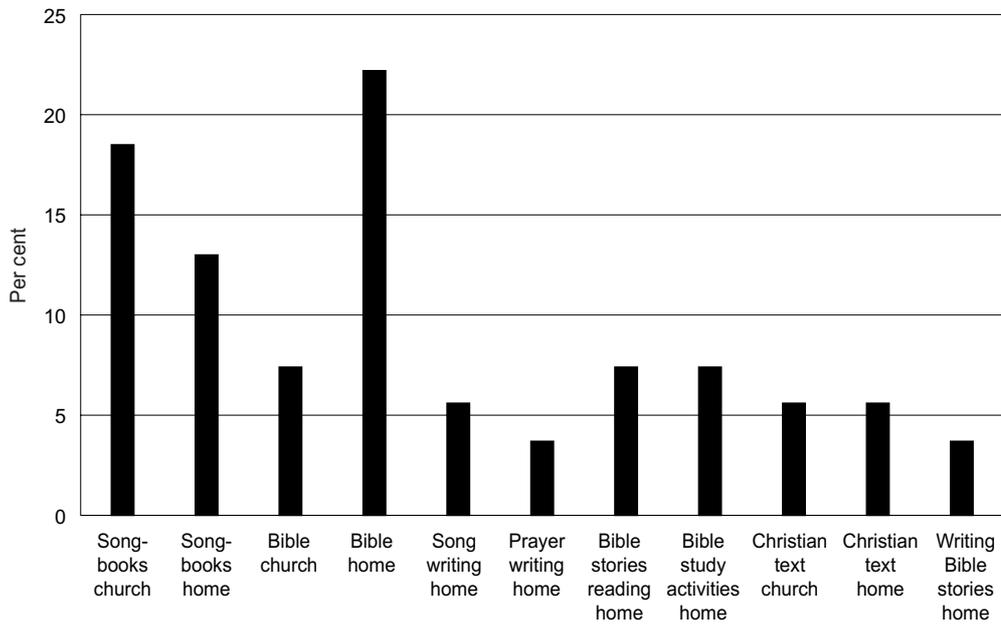
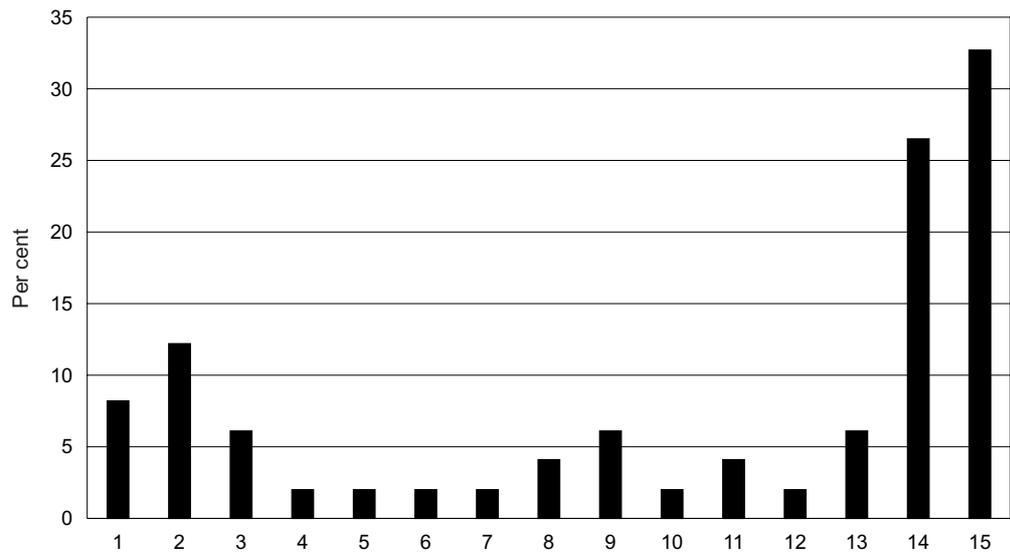


Figure 13: Examples of functional literacy



Notes: 1 = reading posters; 2 = reading signs; 3 = reading notices; 4 = reading speedometer; 5 = reading calendar; 6 = reading clock; 7 = money transaction; 8 = food labels; 9 = medicine labels; 10 = supermarket leaflet; 11 = forms; 12 = personal papers; 13 = business/bank cards; 14 = Centrelink mail; 15 = Centrelink signature.

Figure 14: Examples of study literacy

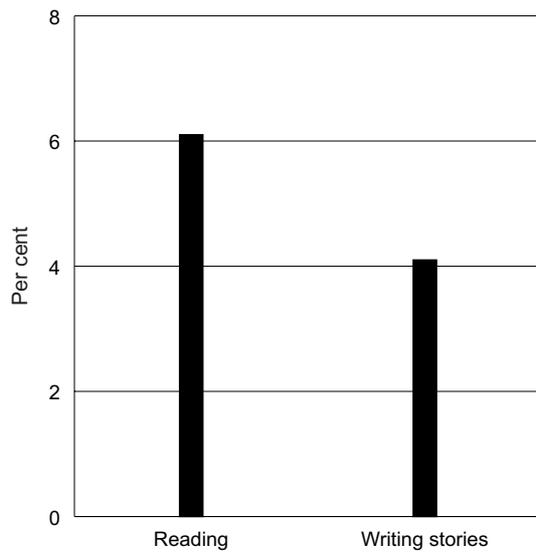


Figure 15: Examples of home literacy

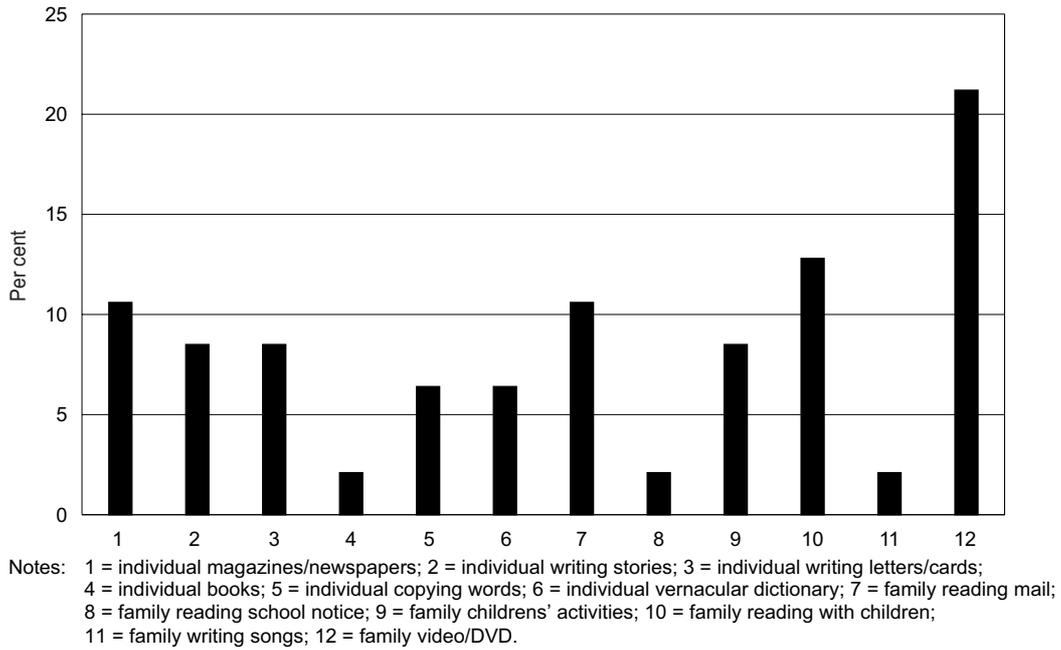
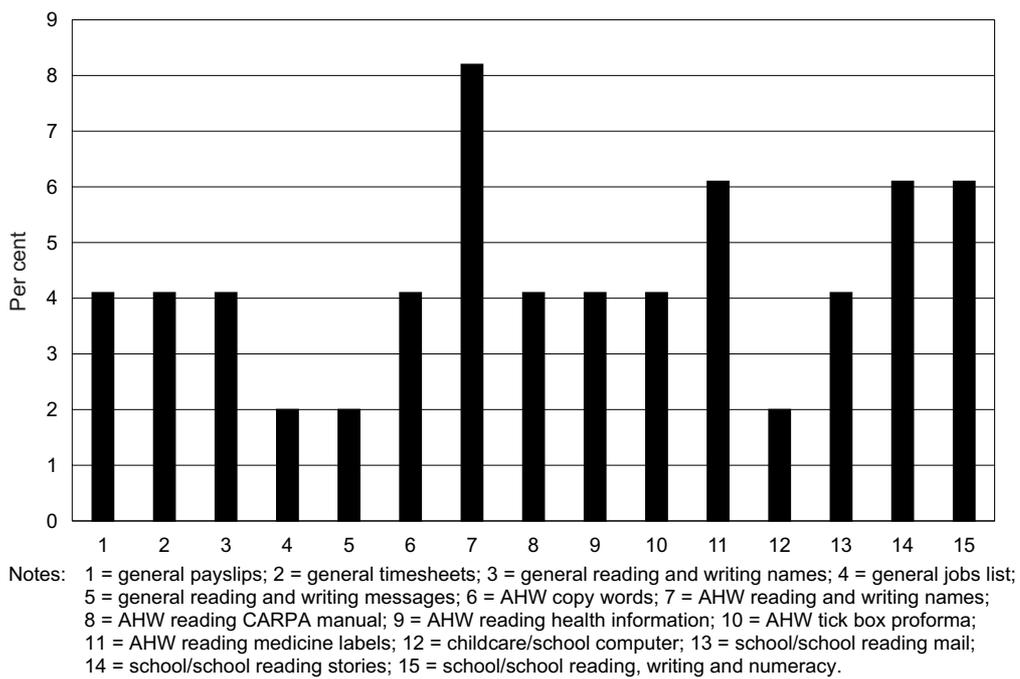
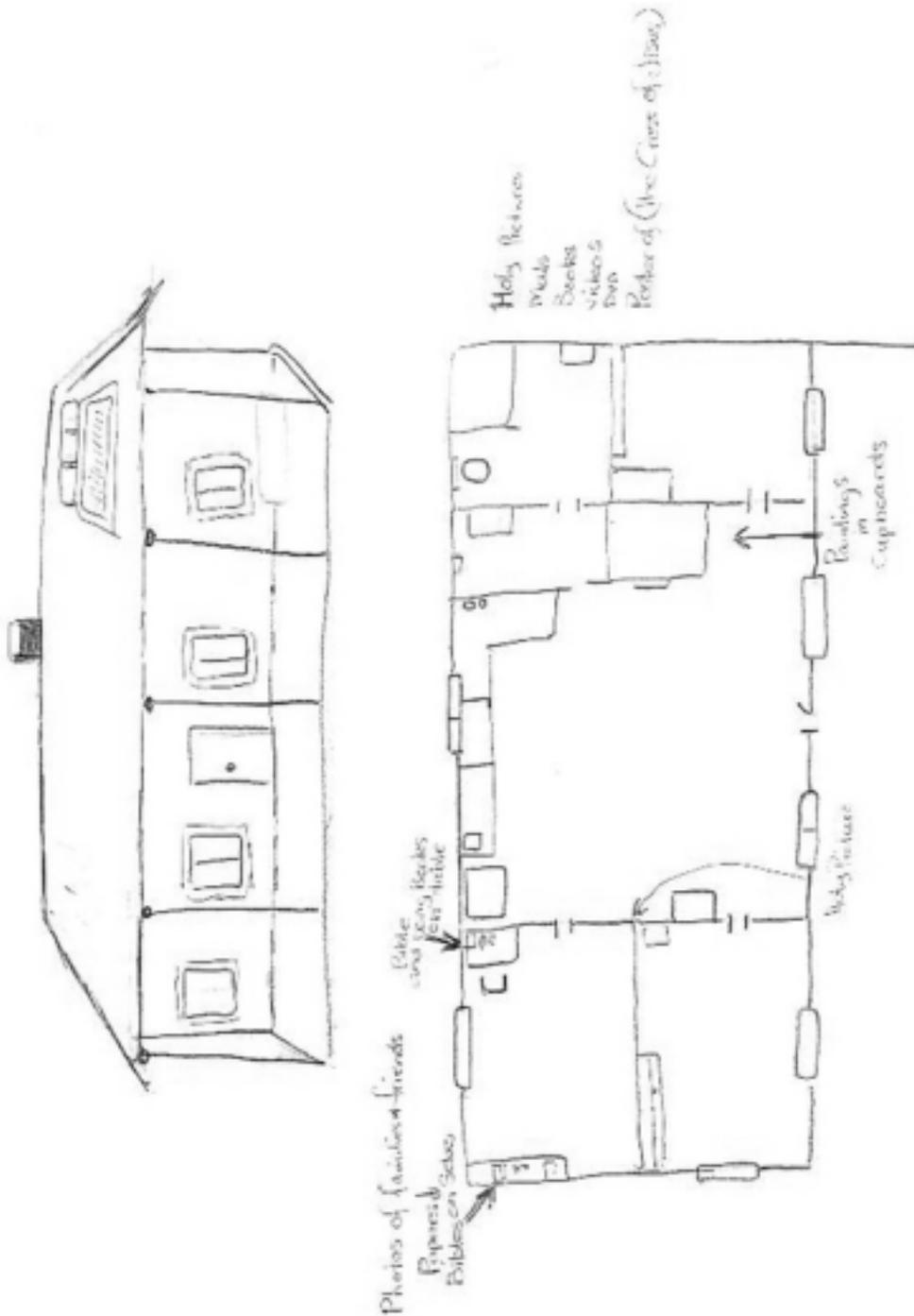


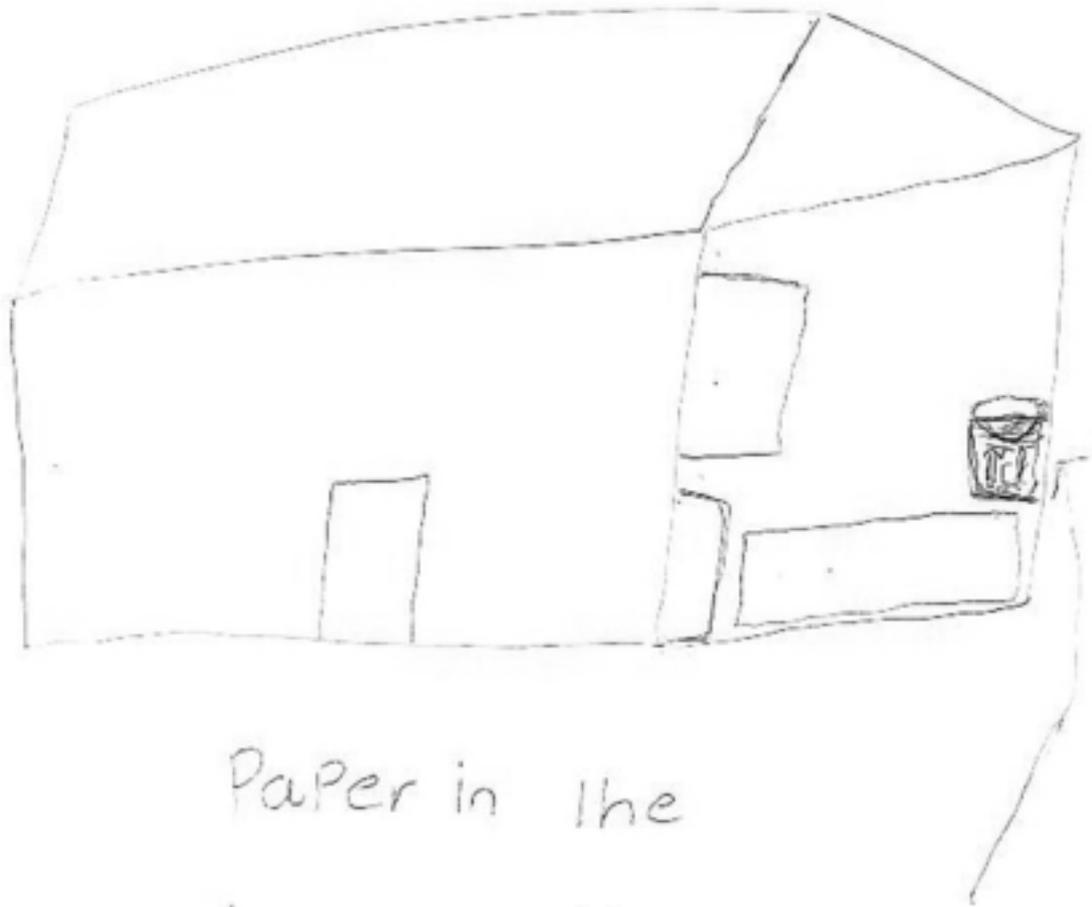
Figure 16: Examples of work literacy



Appendix F: Literacy environment diagrams

UF4 and UF12





Paper in the
bag on the
table



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ISBN I 920895 63 9 print edition
ISBN I 920895 64 7 web edition