

Reframing adult literacy and numeracy
course outcomes: A social capital perspective

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The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or NCVER

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Key messages

This study examined the social capital outcomes experienced by 57 students as a result of their participation in accredited adult literacy and numeracy courses undertaken through the vocational education and training (VET) sector. Social capital outcomes are concerned with changes in students' connections with people. The study also examined how these outcomes contributed to the socioeconomic wellbeing of students, and considered the implications for educational practice and reporting of outcomes from language, literacy and numeracy courses.

- ✧ Participation in accredited adult literacy and numeracy courses produced social capital outcomes for 80% of the students interviewed, even though improved literacy and numeracy skills were not necessarily present.
 - ◆ Students reported changes in the number and nature of attachments they had to existing and new social networks and spoke of changes in the way they interacted with people in their networks.
 - ◆ Students valued social capital outcomes highly because they contributed to their socioeconomic wellbeing.
 - ◆ There was evidence that social capital outcomes had a positive impact on students' social environments, education and learning, employment and quality of working life.
- ✧ Literacy and numeracy improvement often required the social capital outcomes noted above as a prerequisite or co-requisite. For example, students' literacy skills improved when their membership of networks provided them with opportunities to learn, or to implement what they had learnt.
- ✧ Social capital outcomes were realised as a result of specific teaching strategies, such as promoting interaction with peers, and through the new networks and relationships experienced in the course. Reframing adult literacy and numeracy teaching/learning to include the idea of the student as a member of networks would make the social capital-building function of the courses more explicit.
- ✧ Current reporting frameworks, including the National Reporting System for language, literacy and numeracy, do not specifically account for social capital outcomes. Recognising the importance of those outcomes, and perhaps reporting them, is likely to result in a more accurate picture of the contribution that adult literacy and numeracy courses make to individuals and communities.

Executive summary

Social capital outcomes have recently been added to the more traditional human capital outcomes of knowledge and skills as possible benefits of education and training. By social capital we mean ‘networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or amongst groups’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2004, p.5). Social capital outcomes from course participation are concerned with changes in the nature of the connections that students have in existing or in new social networks and which lead to more involvement in society.

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate for the first time the social capital outcomes experienced by students as a result of participation in accredited adult literacy and numeracy courses conducted through the vocational and education (VET) sector. The study showed that the social capital outcomes produced were highly valued by students and teachers alike and played an important role in improving the student’s quality of life. Yet, currently social capital outcomes are not being formally assessed and reported.

In addition to identifying social capital outcomes, the study considered their value, which was judged in terms of the contribution they made to the socioeconomic wellbeing of the student and/or other members of the community. The study also identified the teaching/learning practices that seemed to be most conducive to the generation of social capital and concluded with implications for both educational practice and framing of outcomes reporting.

Interviews seeking information about participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses were conducted with 57 students and 18 teachers in four courses, one each in the Northern Territory and Queensland, and two in New South Wales. Included in the participant group were students from non-English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous students, youth and mature-aged (45 and over) students. The data were coded using two frameworks and cross-referenced. Data were coded for the presence of 12 indicators for social capital adapted from the ABS (2004) framework for measuring social capital. Indicators sought changes that students believed were attributable to course participation in four aspects of the networks in which they interacted: network qualities, network structure, transactions within networks and network types.

Data were also coded for evidence of course participation exerting socioeconomic impacts on the students themselves or on other members in the community. Impacts were assessed using the eight areas for socioeconomic concern as identified by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 1982). These are: health; education and learning; employment and quality of working life; time and leisure; command over goods and services; physical environment; social environment; and personal safety.

To determine how course participation produced social capital outcomes, students and teachers were asked about their classroom and other course-related activities. Practices that led to social capital outcomes were identified and subsequently grouped into several broad categories.

The study found that almost 80% of the students interviewed had gained social capital outcomes as a result of participation. These outcomes were largely realised as a result of changes in network structures and/or changes in network transactions. Changes in network structures were attributable to the changed attachments students had in their networks, while changes in network transactions

resulted from changes in the way students sought, received or gave support, and in the ways they negotiated and shared information and skills.

Interestingly, student characteristics, such as English speaking background, Indigeneity and age, seemed to influence the kinds of social capital outcomes experienced. For example, Indigenous students in this study derived social capital outcomes principally from changes in their transactions in networks. This was in contrast to students of non-English speaking backgrounds whose social capital outcomes came primarily from changes in network structures.

The study suggests that social capital outcomes are indeed a valuable result of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses, contributing to the student's quality of life. The OECD categories of socioeconomic wellbeing indicated evidence of social capital outcomes impacting on areas such as the student's social environment; education and learning; employment and the quality of working life; their use of time and leisure; and their command over the goods and services available in society. In fact, in more than 50% of student examples in which at least one socioeconomic impact was evident, there were also identifiable social capital outcomes.

Some of the examples students gave of how the course had impacted on their lives made it clear that it was social capital outcomes and not improved literacy or numeracy skills that had made the difference. For example, one young man had experienced no improvement in literacy skills but, as a result of the course, he had established new networks, which had positively changed the way he interacted with adults. This, in turn, had led him to approach prospective employers and secure a job.

However, changes in student quality of life were more usually a result of a combination of different kinds of course outcomes. Socioeconomic impacts tended to result from a combination of both social and human capital outcomes, such as increased literacy and numeracy skills; interpersonal skills and intrapersonal skills; and attributes such as self-confidence.

Social capital outcomes in adult literacy and numeracy courses do not appear by accident. Key to the learning experience and contributing significantly to the social capital outcomes experienced by students were the three new networks to which students gained membership as a result of participation in the course. These were: the network of fellow students; the network the individual created with the teacher(s) and other staff; and the network that operated as a 'class', comprising teachers and the student group as a whole. The interaction that occurred in these networks produced the resources, that is, knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that led to social capital outcomes and/or human capital outcomes, such as literacy and numeracy skills, and the more elusive intrapersonal skills and attributes, for example, confidence and esteem. In teaching/learning terms, social capital outcomes were generally a prerequisite or a co-requisite for human capital gains, such as improved literacy and numeracy skills.

Although the study was limited to a small sample of courses and students, the findings have potential significance for teaching, learning and the reporting of outcomes in adult literacy and numeracy courses. Social capital outcomes are frequent enough and important enough to be acknowledged.

Placing the student at the *centre of practice* is the dominant principle informing teaching/learning in adult literacy and numeracy courses. Placing students at the *centre of networks* also has the potential to influence the way in which social capital outcomes, and arguably other outcomes, including literacy and numeracy skills and intrapersonal skills and attributes such as self-confidence, are produced.

Current reporting frameworks, such as the National Reporting System, do not specifically take account of social capital outcomes. Reporting social capital outcomes would assist in aligning the teaching/learning strategy, the outcomes experienced, and the outcomes reported. Recognising the importance of social capital outcomes, and perhaps reporting them, is likely to result in a more accurate picture of the contribution that adult literacy and numeracy courses make to individuals and communities at large.

Research purpose

The broad purpose of this research study is to explore the relevance of social capital to the field of adult literacy and numeracy, and then more specifically, to course outcomes. In a sense this study is exploratory because the concept of social capital remains contested, and to date, there have been very few studies undertaken on the role of social capital in adult literacy and numeracy courses.

By social capital we mean ‘networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or amongst groups’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2004, p.5). This definition is drawn from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which views social capital as a resource, along with natural capital, produced economic capital and human capital, that contributes to the socioeconomic wellbeing of the individual and community. This study explores the social capital outcomes for participants in several adult literacy and numeracy courses. That is, it explores a change in aspects of student networks resulting from student participation. Further, this study investigates the value of these social capital outcomes by relating them to established OECD indicators of socioeconomic wellbeing. And finally, this study analyses the implications of these social capital outcomes for adult literacy and numeracy pedagogy and, importantly, for ‘reframing’ the outcomes of adult literacy and numeracy courses.

It should be pointed out that in this study we are referring to formal accredited adult literacy and numeracy courses conducted by a range of vocational education and training (VET) providers. Most of the courses from which we interviewed students were ‘stand alone’ adult literacy and numeracy; that is, they were not being run as part of another course or integrated within a vocational course. The exception was one course run in conjunction with a Year 10 general certificate course for young people.

Background

Three fields of enquiry within the current educational climate led to our research questions. These fields of enquiry relate to: social capital and adult learning; human capital and adult literacy and numeracy courses; and the ‘social turn’ in adult literacy and numeracy research.

Social capital and adult learning

For more than a decade the popularity of the concept of social capital has been rising and it now occupies a significant role in major global organisations such as the OECD (2001) and the World Bank (1999). Social capital has become the concern of leading political figures in Australia (for example, Costello 2003), and national organisations such as the ABS (2004) and the Productivity Commission (2003) have demonstrated the importance of developing the concept.

The more social capital there is in society, measured by such indicators as network memberships and the extent of civic participation, the more cohesive and healthier a society is considered to be (Putnam 2000). Moreover, social capital has been related to the production of human capital (for example, Coleman 1988), with education and learning both producing and being produced by social capital. Not surprisingly therefore, the OECD (2001, p.70) has called for more research ‘clarifying

the links between human and social capital to explore how social networks can promote the education of individuals and how education can promote social capital'. The current project is a response to this call.

In recent years there have been many studies which have sought to unravel these links and relationships, especially in terms of the wider benefits of adult learning, both formal and informal (for example, Field 2003; Kilpatrick, Field & Falk 2003; Schuller et al. 2004). Australian studies feature prominently, indicating in particular the role of adult learning in community development (Kearns 2004), and especially rural communities (for example, Falk & Kilpatrick 2000; Kilpatrick 2003). But these relationships are complex. Balatti and Falk (2002), for example, explain how the learning process, seen in terms of change in knowledge and identity resources, both draws on and builds social capital in making socioeconomic contributions to communities. Their findings are based on a study of ten adult and community education (ACE) programs in Victoria (Falk, Golding & Balatti 2000) which demonstrates the significance of ACE programs in producing socioeconomic benefits at individual and community levels (see also Clemens, Hartley & Macrae 2003) and how social capital is produced at each of these levels. One of the conclusions of the study is that social capital production is the *modus operandi* of ACE and not a by-product. This encourages the question: if social capital within ACE programs (which included one English language course for African women and a rural adult literacy course) can result in important socioeconomic benefits, what role might adult literacy and numeracy courses have?

To date, relatively few studies have focused on the role of social capital in VET generally (Kearns 2004), or in adult literacy and numeracy courses in particular. In relation to the latter, an exception is the work of Falk (2001a, 2001b, 2001c). He argues, for example, that jobseeker courses with their focus on the acquisition of human capital, in this case work-related job skills, may be insufficient for gaining employment, unless participants also have the requisite social capital, including social networks involving bridging ties. This argument can be seen to be reflected at the broader VET level where there is now strong interest in the interface between social and economic policy (ANTA 2004; Kearns 2004). Clearly, in light of Falk's early findings and current VET policy directions, there are research gaps and thus the need to extend further the social capital research perspective to VET and, in particular, adult literacy and numeracy issues.

Human capital and adult literacy and numeracy courses

For more than a decade in Australia the primary focus for adult literacy and numeracy policy and programs has been the promotion of human capital (Castleton & McDonald 2002). Specifically, from the time of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (Department of Employment, Education & Training 1991), the overriding aim from the Australian Government's perspective has been to develop literacy and numeracy skills for jobs and to improve the economic competitiveness of the nation in a globalised economy. As a result, jobseeker and workplace language, literacy and numeracy programs have received priority government funding. From the mid-1990s the adult literacy and numeracy field shifted deliberately to embrace the mainstream VET agenda (Wickert 1997). This thinking has been largely in tune with international trends led by the OECD, in which adult literacy and numeracy skills are considered essential to economic development (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004). From 1996, the National Reporting System (NRS) was instituted (Coates et al. 1996) and its use is mandatory for reporting outcomes for the main federally funded jobseeker programs (Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme [LLNPI]) and workplace language, literacy and numeracy programs (Workplace English Language and Literacy [WELL] Programme). The NRS is a reporting framework incorporating five levels covering six aspects of communication and the macro skills of reading, writing, oral communications, numeracy and learning strategies. According to McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2004, p.23), it is informed by an eclectic set of linguistic, education and assessment theories and practices, including work which underpins the International Adult Literacy Survey. A scoping study of the NRS (Perkins 2005) recommends that the NRS be reviewed, revised and potentially extended to provide the framework for other applications.

The NRS remains one important manifestation of an industry-led VET system changing the adult literacy and numeracy field. Other significant changes include: the accreditation and development of competency-based adult literacy and numeracy curriculum (Hazell 1998; Sanguinetti 2001); the increasing 'integration' of literacy and numeracy in VET (Courtenay & Mawer 1995; McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2005) and, more recently, the view that literacy and numeracy should be 'built in' to the training packages developed in each industry sector (Falk, Smith & Guenther 2002; Wignall 2003). While it needs to be acknowledged that a considerable number of 'stand alone' literacy and numeracy courses remain in formal VET institutions (McGuirk 2001, pp.83–113), all such accredited courses have been influenced by these changes.

It is this human capital model that currently 'frames' adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes in VET institutions, and it may take several forms. For example, an evaluation of the main federally funded jobseeker literacy/numeracy program (Rahmani & Crozier 2002) presents outcomes for 'clients' in terms of either obtaining a job or gains made in one or more of the NRS macro skills. And for the many students enrolled in VET, accredited literacy and numeracy course outcomes are usually presented as a unit of competency, module or course completion (for example, TAFE NSW Access Division 2004) and subject to extensive validation and moderation processes (for example, TAFE NSW Access Division 2003). While much of this current reporting of outcomes reflects the global trend towards greater 'performance accountability' (Merrifield 1998), the overall focus is on human capital, on demonstrating basic or technical skill outcomes in an industry-led education sector with the overriding aim of improving economic performance.

The 'social turn'

The third field of enquiry falls within what Gee (2000) refers to as the 'social turn'. For the past 20 years a new and alternative conceptualisation of literacy has developed, usually known as the New Literacy Studies (for example, Barton 1994; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Baynham 1995; Gee 1996; Street 1984). In contrast to the traditional view which sees literacy as a single set of decontextualised skills (that is, 'basic' skills) which people possess to varying degrees, the main focus here is on how literacy and numeracy are put to effective use in people's everyday lives. Literacy, or more accurately literacies, are seen as social practices (for numeracy as social practice, see Baker 1998; Johnston et al. 1997) that are necessarily always 'situated' (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000). People read and write or calculate for a specific social purpose which is primarily to communicate with others in a whole range of life situations or contexts. Social practices may take the form of writing birthday cards or leaving brief written messages in the home domain (that is, local or vernacular literacies, according to Barton & Hamilton 1998), or they may involve the so-called dominant literacies of the schooling system and other formal institutions. Within this perspective, social networks are recognised and valued as part of social practices. For example, people in some social networks may be given assistance with literacy-related tasks by 'mediators' (Baynham & Lobanga Masing 2000) or there may be a reciprocal exchange of assistance in different ways between people (Fingeret 1983).

It is not difficult to see some overlap between the New Literacy Studies and aspects of the social capital perspective. While the social capital perspective has yet to involve literacy studies to any great extent, both value social networks and the everyday aspects of people's lives. Within the context of this current research project, both would seek recognition in adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes of how people's everyday lives have changed. However, in the case of the New Literacy Studies, the focus would be on the role of literacy practices in people's lives; in the social capital perspective, it would be on how people's social networks have changed.

Towards reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes

Recent literature in the field of adult literacy and numeracy indicates that, while there is an array of different conceptualisations of literacy, 'social' understandings now predominate among literacy researchers (Lonsdale & McCurry 2004, p.36). A central issue for this study is whether the social capital perspective should be added to the human capital perspective, especially in terms of course

outcomes, as recent research literature has foreshadowed. For example, Castleton, Sanguinetti and Falk (2001) call for a new national policy on adult literacy which takes account of not simply a single economic bottom line, but a 'triple bottom line' involving economics, social capital and community development. Recent reports put great emphasis on new, broader directions for the field, involving lifelong learning (Shore et al. 2002) and the integration of literacy and numeracy in cross-sectoral community capacity-building projects (Australian Council for Adult Literacy 2004; Figgis 2004; Wickert & McGuirk 2005). These developments are in line with broader future directions for lifelong learning generally in Australia (Kearns 2005). Strengthening social capital is central to addressing issues of social exclusion that are the focus of many of these community capacity-building projects. It is also central to the strengthening of communities and regions, an important objective within Australia's national strategy for VET (ANTA 2004).

Thus social capital is on the agenda but it has not yet become an official part of the practice of adult literacy and numeracy courses. At this stage, as we have indicated, adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes are viewed primarily in terms of technical literacy skills. However, larger-scale outcomes surveys in Australia and overseas have shown that outcomes can also include increased self-confidence (for example, Beder 1999 in the United States; Bensenman & Tobias 2003 in New Zealand; Brennan, Clark & Dymock 1990 in Australia; Charnley & Jones 1980 in the United Kingdom). In the United States recently, a number of researchers have grappled with federally mandated adult basic education course outcomes based on their own national reporting system (Bingham, Ebert & Bell 2000). They indicate that this national reporting system does not adequately capture the complexity of course outcomes when taking into account student perspectives which see course outcomes largely in terms of changes in sense of self.

Our current study of adult literacy and numeracy courses and social capital outcomes similarly questions the adequacy of existing reporting measures to capture course complexity. A social capital perspective may have the potential to move the debates and pedagogical practices forward and provide a more comprehensive picture of literacy and numeracy course outcomes. It is important to stress that, by so doing, we do not envisage a dilution of human capital skills as outcomes of adult literacy and numeracy courses, but rather, we make explicit (and therefore enhance) an important social capital element. As seen earlier, the available evidence suggests that technical skills such as literacy and numeracy (human capital) are necessary, but usually insufficient to ensure that course participation impacts on the socioeconomic wellbeing of the students.

In the adult literacy and numeracy literature several theoretical approaches or 'families of thought' can be identified, with implications for what it means to be literate and numerate in contemporary Western society. These approaches have been termed: *skills*, including emphasising the technical procedures of decoding and encoding; *growth and heritage* with an emphasis on personal and individual growth through reading and writing; and *critical cultural* with an emphasis on the variability of everyday literacy practices in different cultural contexts and the importance of critically analysing literate communications for their underlying beliefs and power relations (Lo Bianco & Freebody 1997, pp.35–9). While these approaches are not mutually exclusive, an additional approach has recently been added, that of *social capital* (Falk & Millar 2001; Falk & Guenther 2002). The current research study may provide additional evidence to support and extend this latest approach.

Research questions

Five research questions guided this study. They are:

- 1 What are the social capital outcomes of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses?
- 2 What are the socioeconomic impacts (as gauged against OECD bands) for self and/or community of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses?
- 3 What is the role of social capital outcomes in producing socioeconomic impacts?

- 4 What are the implications of social capital outcomes for adult literacy and numeracy pedagogy?
- 5 What are the implications of social capital outcomes for reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes?

As we have explained in this chapter, at this stage there are no adult literacy and numeracy studies which specifically focus on social capital outcomes. At the most fundamental level we need to establish if adult literacy and numeracy courses do produce social capital outcomes (research question one) and if so, the significance of such outcomes. In this study, significance or value is determined by the extent to which course outcomes lead to socioeconomic impacts (research questions two and three). Finally, the implications of the findings need to be considered for pedagogy (research question four) and the current 'framing' of outcomes in adult literacy and numeracy courses (research question five).

Methodology

Design

This research represents a starting point for filling the research gap explained in chapter one, with the provisos noted in the 'Limitations' section at the end of this chapter. The primary purpose of the research is to explore social capital outcomes resulting from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses. The research design that suits the expressed purpose of exploring, then building new knowledge and theory (as opposed to testing existing knowledge and theories) is qualitative (for example, Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Marshall and Rossman (1999, p.15) identify a number of strengths of research design we see as relevant to the design adopted for this study. The design as selected is ideal for:

- ✧ identifying and uncovering the complexities of multiple inputs and outcomes
- ✧ identifying unexplained outcomes
- ✧ understanding *how* outcomes and inter-relationships occur.

Following the identification and selection of the 75 respondents, data were collected by semi-structured interviews (Patton 1990) following Stake's (1995, p.65) structure and procedures. The semi-structured interview schedules for both students and teachers are found in appendix 1 in the support document. The interviews were conducted with students and staff involved in accredited adult literacy and numeracy courses in three Australian jurisdictions: New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory (see next section for details). In some instances, especially those involving Indigenous students in the Northern Territory, two to four students were interviewed at once as they felt more comfortable this way.

Interviews primarily sought information about course outcomes and aspects of the course experience that produced those outcomes. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed in full. In total, the student transcripts provided 196 items of data that referred to outcomes. The outcomes reported in the student transcripts were then coded for social capital indicators and socioeconomic impacts. Aspects of the teaching/learning experience in both student and teacher interviews were also analysed for commonalities deemed to relate to the reported outcomes, especially social capital outcomes.

Sample

Of the 75 total interviews, 57 interviews were with students and 18 were with staff in the courses. These overall numbers are summarised in the table below by site.

Table 1: Total interviewees—breakdown by site

| Site | Totals |
|---------------|-----------|
| Darwin | 15 |
| Townsville | 16 |
| Sydney 1 | 26 |
| Sydney 2 | 18 |
| Totals | 75 |

Student interviewee details

The sample of 57 students was almost all selected from the four student demographic groups of interest nominated as the focus by the researchers in collaboration with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER):

- ✧ young people (under 25 years of age)
- ✧ Indigenous people (self-identified)
- ✧ non-English speaking background (NESB) migrants
- ✧ mature aged (45 years or older).

All students attended adult literacy and numeracy courses¹ with the exception of one student who had recently completed his course. Students targeted for the research sample were to have participated in an adult literacy/numeracy course for a period of at least one year, and while this was mostly the case, it was not always so. The adult literacy course experience of students interviewed for the study varied from as little as several weeks to as long as several years. Some students had participated intermittently in adult literacy and numeracy courses over a period of years.

Table 2 shows the number of students in each demographic category. It is important to note that the four groups are not necessarily mutually exclusive and that, for example, some ‘youth’ were also Indigenous and some students of non-English speaking background were mature-aged.

Table 2: Student interviewees—breakdown by student groups

| Group | Totals |
|-------------------|--------|
| Indigenous | 12 |
| Mature-aged | 25 |
| NESB ¹ | 21 |
| Youth | 20 |
| Other | 6 |

Notes: 1 This table does not include those Indigenous students for whom English is not their first language, following the original ABS categorisation of the meaning of NESB.

2 ‘Other’ refers to students who do not fall into any of the four nominated categories.
NESB = non-English speaking background

Appendix 2 in the support document contains four additional tables (a, b, c, d) presenting various ways of viewing the sample of students, that is, by site, gender, English speaking background and Indigeneity. Three-quarters of the students were either unemployed or not looking for work at the time of the interviews.

¹ In this report, the word ‘group’ refers to the four demographic classifications of student interviewees, namely Indigenous, mature-aged, non-English speaking background and youth. The word ‘course’ refers to the unit of work in which the students were enrolled, for example, the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA). The latter courses are outlined under the later sub-heading ‘Courses’.

Staff interviewee details

A total of 18 staff involved in the adult literacy and numeracy courses were interviewed. The sample of teachers was selected on the basis that they were the staff involved in teaching the students selected for interview. These staff included full-time and part-time teachers, while in Townsville there was also a paid tutor and a volunteer tutor.

Of the staff interviewed, 60% had 15 or more years experience in teaching adult literacy and numeracy. A further 22% had between 10 and 15 years experience, while the remaining 18% had more than three but fewer than ten years experience.

The table below summarises the break-up of staff interviewed by site and gender.

Table 3: Staff interviewees—site and gender

| Site | Males | Females | Totals |
|---------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Darwin | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Townsville | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Sydney 1 | 0 | 7 | 7 |
| Sydney 2 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Totals | 2 | 16 | 18 |

Courses

The 75 interviews with students and staff were conducted across a purposefully selected wide sample of courses in sites in Sydney, Townsville (Queensland) and Darwin. The sites were selected on the basis of their diversity of learning practice and the proportion of the nominated demographic groups in each. The list of courses from which students and staff were selected for interview follows:

- ✧ Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA)
- ✧ Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN)(Statement of Completion)
- ✧ Certificate in Foundation Adult Vocational Education (FAVE)
- ✧ Certificate I in Vocational Access (supplemented in one site by students enrolling in Independent Learning Plans (ILP201)).

Additional information about these courses and the institutional sites from which they are taught are located in the support document, appendix 3.

Analysis procedures and techniques

Student data

In line with standard qualitative research techniques, the study, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.4) put it, utilised ‘... more than one interpretive practice’. The adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes found in the interview data were analysed against two major frameworks: social capital (ABS 2004) and socioeconomic wellbeing (OECD 1982). The frameworks have been derived directly from the ABS and OECD sources described in the next two sections of this report. The three members of the research team engaged in the following research quality assurance checks and processes to ensure maximum consistency of interpretation and the subsequent coding of data onto the two frameworks.

- 1 Team members individually carried out trial data analyses for data falling into both social capital and OECD indicator areas, using techniques given in the sections describing these indicators (following).

- 2 Team members sent 20 samples of their most difficult, marginal and clearest data placement samples to one another and these samples were independently coded and located on frameworks (see coding techniques in the two sections that follow related to social capital and OECD frameworks) by the other team members.
- 3 Meetings were then held to compare and moderate the outcomes of the independent analyses.
- 4 On the basis of point 3, data were re-coded and analyses were completed for all sites and interviews.
- 5 A face-to-face three-day workshop was conducted. At this workshop, every item of data was collectively discussed, moderated and confirmed or re-located on all categories of both social capital and OECD frameworks using Excel spreadsheets.
- 6 Tentative results and findings were derived following point 5 and circulated for discussion and amendment as appropriate.
- 7 A further half-day tele-workshop was conducted to validate the outcomes of the results and findings across the three team members.
- 8 In the final analysis, a distinction was made between student-provided data and teacher-provided data. In total, from the student interviews, there were 196 examples of data that referred to outcomes, with many of these related to the ABS social capital indicators or the OECD areas of social wellbeing. Teacher data included more examples supporting the outcomes derived from the 196 student examples.
- 9 Moderated agreement was reached over the most valid and useful ways to report data in relation to the research questions and expected audiences.

It should be noted that the steps described above were selected in order to ensure that the researchers were able to answer the research questions in full. In the chapter on the findings of this research project, the various headings and subheadings are worded to ensure that the reader can find a direct relationship between the outcomes of the techniques listed above, the way they address the research questions, and the adequacy of their answers to those question.

The two frameworks, social capital and socioeconomic wellbeing, are now set out in detail, along with the techniques used to classify the data into each of the two frameworks.

Social capital indicator bands and coding techniques

A social capital outcome is, in this study, a piece of transcript data describing a social activity that clearly includes one or more of the social capital indicators (table 4) based on the ABS social capital framework. The ABS (2004) framework was selected because (a) it is current and is being periodically updated; (b) it has been developed through a synthesis of the major existing research in the measurement of social capital (including Bourdieu 1983; Coleman 1988; Onyx & Bullen 1997; Productivity Commission 2003; Stone 2001; Woolcock, 1998); (c) its use was strongly recommended in initial NCVER reference group meetings at the outset of the project. As can be seen in table 4, the four main groupings of social capital outcome areas are shown in the left-hand column; the elements of each grouping are identified in the next column; and in the final column, the 12 indicators applying to adult literacy and numeracy outcomes for this study are articulated. The detail in these columns is drawn directly from the ABS (2004, p.14).

Table 4: Application of ABS Social Capital Framework

| Groupings | Elements | Indicators for the study |
|---|---|---|
| | | Does participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses result in |
| 1 Network qualities (including norms and common purpose) | Trust and trustworthiness Sense of efficacy Acceptance of diversity and inclusiveness | 1a changes in trust levels? 1b changes in beliefs about personal influence on the student's own life and that of others? 1c action to solve problems in the student's own life or that of others? 1d changed beliefs and interaction with people who are different from the student? |
| 2 Network structure (including norms and common purpose) | Size Communication mode Power relationships | 2a change in the number and nature of attachments to existing and new networks? 2b change in the number or nature of the ways that the student keeps in touch with others in their networks? 2c change in the nature of memberships? |
| 3 Network transactions (including norms and common purpose) | Sharing support Sharing knowledge, information and introductions | 3a change in the support sought, received or given in the networks to which the student is attached? 3b change in the ways the student shares information and skills and can negotiate? |
| 4 Network types (including norms and common purpose) | Bonding Bridging Linking | 4a changes in the activities undertaken with the main groups with which they interact? 4b changes in the activities with groups that are different from the student? 4c changes in the links that the student has to institutions? |

Source: ABS (2004)

Techniques for coding the social capital data

The questions found in the right-hand column of table 4 are worded to enable data to be coded according to a noticed or observable *change* in a social practice. That is, they are all prefaced by the word 'change' or 'action' to facilitate the identification of examples of changes brought about by participation in the courses. In this way, the researchers provide an assurance that the data coded against these categories were deemed to reflect behavioural or attitudinal alteration *as a result of participation*. The remainder of the words in each question in the right-hand column relate directly to the ABS categories of social capital outcomes and their related sub-categories, as found in the ABS publication (2004, p.14).

The OECD framework is now described.

OECD indicator bands and coding techniques

The eight bands of socioeconomic wellbeing (table 5) developed by the OECD (1982) are utilised in this study as a means of locating and categorising the impacts that participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses had on the students. The OECD framework was selected for use because it is the most enduring and validated of these kinds of frameworks. It was first put forward in the early 1970s, and the 1982 version has provided a framework that has stood the test of time and multiple uses. In Australia, it has also been put to use in similar projects in recent times (for example, Balatti & Falk 2002; Falk & Guenther 2002; Falk, Golding & Balatti 2000; Guenther 2003) and aligns closely with the ABS wellbeing measures (ABS 2001). Each of the 196 student examples referring to outcomes was analysed for socioeconomic impact and then coded in the relevant band as shown in table 5.

Table 5: OECD indicator bands and their meanings as used in this project

| OECD indicator band | Meaning |
|--|---|
| 1 Health | Changes in physical, emotional and spiritual self or that of others as a result of participation in these courses |
| 2 Education and learning | Change in human capital (for example, specific literacy skills, enrolling in another course) of self or that of others |
| 3 Employment and quality of working life | Change in employment of self or that of others (for example, getting a job or a better job, doing current job better, being happier in current job) |
| 4 Time and leisure | Change in use of time for leisure of self or that of others (for example, picking up a hobby, joining clubs, changing the nature of what they do in their existing clubs, change in what they do with their spare time, such as going to the library) |
| 5 Command over goods and services | Change in the way students (or others) can access the common (for example, health services, the law, public knowledge) goods and also commercial goods (buying food) available in society |
| 6 Physical environment | Change in students' own practice (or that of others) in working/living with the physical environment (built and natural) |
| 7 Social environment | Change in the way that students (or others) interact with individuals or groups (family, friends, clubs, organisations, institutions) |
| 8 Personal safety | Change in students' own practice (not knowledge) or that of others when it comes to personal safety (for example, not getting caught up in physical fights anymore) |

Techniques for coding the OECD data

Similar to the social capital framework, the statements found in the right-hand column of table 5 are worded to enable data to be coded according to a noticed or observable *change* in a social practice. In this case, they are all prefaced by the word 'change', to facilitate the identification of examples of changes brought about by participation in the courses. In this way, the researchers provide an assurance that the data coded against these categories were deemed to reflect behavioural or attitudinal alteration *as a result of participation*. The remainder of the words in each statement in the right-hand column relate directly to the OECD category indicators of social wellbeing outcomes as found in the OECD publication (1982).

Staff data procedures and analytic techniques

Because the research concerned student outcomes, the procedures paid careful attention to every piece of student data, as has been seen in the previous section. Data from staff interviews were not analysed in the same way, but were analysed using scanning and manual coding for explanatory and supplementary information on student outcomes. Their nature and information related to the way courses and pedagogy may or may not have played a role in achieving these outcomes; that is, staff data were used as a means of supporting the information and themes resulting from the student data analyses which, in turn, were based on answering the research questions. In some cases, the staff data analyses revealed a number of useful examples and confirmations, which were used to assist interpretations of student data.

As with any research, there are certain limitations inherent in both some elements of the design and analyses, as well as the nature and scope of claims that can be made. These are now outlined.

Limitations and their significance

As noted in the first section of this chapter (see 'Design'), qualitative research has many purposes and strengths. This study has used a highly empirical approach within the qualitative paradigm to establish the possibility and nature of social capital outcomes and socioeconomic wellbeing impacts resulting from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses. Three jurisdictions are included, each quite diverse in its own right. Across these jurisdictions, a range of purposefully diverse courses were targeted from which to draw the total of 75 interviewees for the study. This number is

considered sufficient to support the claims we make in findings and conclusions. The limitations of this study are as follows:

- 1 The sample size is typical of theory-building (as opposed to theory-testing) research, not large enough to make wide-scale and generalisable claims, so the researchers have ensured that the claims made in the findings and conclusions are sufficiently warranted from the nature and size of the data set to provide readers and research users with confidence about their scope and implications.
- 2 As readers will have noted (see ‘Analysis techniques’ above), considerable effort has been made in the identification, interpretation and location of every data item. However, there is always room for error in these processes.
- 3 Another limitation, given that we were interviewing students, was that we were unable to determine social capital outcomes experienced by students after termination of the course.
- 4 The final limitation was the use of frameworks (ABS and OECD) primarily designed for large-scale quantitative and survey-style research work, with very little detail provided to describe the kinds of social activities at the micro social level that might count for each category or indicator. For this study we had to make sense of the kinds of practical, micro and applied social activity that might realistically and validly be argued to warrant inclusion in these bands of indicator activity.

From this overview of the methodology and its possible limitations, the report now moves to summarise the findings of the study.

Findings

This chapter reports the findings that relate (a) to student outcomes, (b) to the aspects of course participation that seem to affect outcomes, especially social capital outcomes, and (c) to the formal reporting of outcomes.

The five topics around which the findings are organised are:

- ✧ the social capital outcomes of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses
- ✧ the socioeconomic impacts (as gauged against OECD bands) for self and/or community of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses
- ✧ the role of social capital outcomes in producing socioeconomic impacts
- ✧ the aspects of course participation that appear to contribute to students experiencing social capital outcomes
- ✧ the mismatch between student-reported course outcomes and the formal reporting of outcomes.

Social capital from adult literacy and numeracy courses

The findings for the research question *What are the social capital outcomes of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses?* are that:

- 1 Participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses does produce social capital outcomes for most students.
- 2 It seems that course participation produces certain kinds of social capital outcomes more than it does others.
- 3 The social capital outcomes experienced are not the same for all students in qualitative or quantitative terms.
- 4 Different student groups, when differentiated by student attributes such as Indigeneity, age and English speaking background, experience different combinations of social capital outcomes.
- 5 In addition to social capital outcomes, participation can also produce human capital outcomes, including intrapersonal outcomes.

The findings in this section draw on the data from student interviews concerning outcomes; that is, what students said they were getting out of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses. In total, there were 196 discrete pieces of text in the student interview transcripts that referred to outcomes. These pieces of text, from now on called ‘examples’, can be as short as one word, for example, ‘confidence’, or as long as a two- or three-paragraph recount of an event. Table 6 shows the number of examples produced by each student group.

Table 6: Breakdown of examples by student group

| Student group | No. of examples |
|---------------|-----------------|
| NESB | 35 |
| Indigenous | 60 |
| Mature age | 72 |
| Youth | 61 |
| Other | 31 |

Notes: Examples do not total 196 because of overlap between student groups.
 'Other' refers to students who do not fall into any of the four nominated categories.

The ABS (2004) indicators were used to seek evidence of social capital outcomes. The experience of 45 of the 57 students (79%) suggested the presence of social capital outcomes. Before we present the frequency with which the social capital indicators appeared in the example set, we provide one illustration from the data of how each social capital indicator was interpreted (table 7). While more than one indicator may be evident in the example given, for the purposes of illustration, only one is identified. Networks refer to formal or informal groups, for example, family members, groups of friends, work associates, fellow club members, organisations and institutions.

Table 7: Examples of social capital indicators

| Indicators | Examples |
|---|---|
| 1 Network qualities | |
| 1a change in trust levels | A 17-year-old boy now has his mother's trust because she knows he spends his days at TAFE unlike previously when he was truanting from school. |
| 1b change in beliefs about personal influence on his/own life and that of others | A 45-year-old man originally from Iran now feels confident to participate in formal discussions and informal conversations in any context he finds himself including answering the phone at work. |
| 1c change in action to solve problems in one's life or that of others | A 50-year-old woman originally from China can now make phone calls to institutions such as banks and the local council to lodge complaints or make enquiries. |
| 1d change in beliefs and interaction with people who are different from the student | A 39-year-old man now allows other people to express their points of view even when they are different from his own. |
| 2 Network structures | |
| 2a change in the number or nature of attachments to existing and new networks | A 47-year-old Indigenous man has made new friends with people in the course and with whom he socialises out of class time. |
| 2b change in the number or nature of the ways that the student keeps in touch with others in his/her networks | A 58-year-old woman originally from Hong Kong now has computer skills and enough English to use email to communicate with friends. |
| 2c change in the nature of memberships in networks for example, power differential | A 15-year-old boy is now prepared to help out at home in a reciprocal relationship with his parents, whereas in the past, he resisted being told what to do and was hardly at home. |
| 3 Network transactions | |
| 3a change in the support sought, received or given in the networks to which the student is attached | A 50-year-old Indigenous man no longer relies on others to read his mail for him. |
| 3b change in the ways the student negotiates and shares information and skills | After six months in the course, the English of a 24-year-old Indigenous man who recently moved from an Indigenous community to the city has improved sufficiently for him to better deal with Centrelink. |
| 4 Network types | |
| 4a change in the activities undertaken with the main groups with which student interacts (bonding ties) | A 54-year-old woman originally from Columbia is now able to be more effective at work because she can communicate and work in teams better. |
| 4b change in the activities undertaken with groups that are different from the student's (bridging ties) | A 50-year-old woman originally from China and who has been attending classes for two-and-a-half years recently went on a cruise fully aware that fellow passengers would not be Chinese. She would have refused previously. |
| 4c change in the links that the student has to institutions (linking ties) | An 18-year-old Indigenous man can now complete the forms necessary to deal with institutions. |

Table 8 summarises the frequency with which the indicators used to identify social capital outcomes appear in the set of examples. Of the 196 student examples, 116 (59%) included social capital indicators and were therefore defined as social capital outcomes.

Table 8: Frequency of social capital indicators in the examples

| Indicators to do with | Indicators described as changes in | Frequency | |
|------------------------|---|------------|------------|
| | | No. | % of total |
| 1 Network qualities | 1a trust levels | 4 | 2 |
| | 1b in beliefs about personal influence on his/own life and that of others | 5 | 3 |
| | 1c action to solve problems in one's life or that of others | 3 | 2 |
| | 1d beliefs and interaction with people who are different from the student | 13 | 7 |
| 2 Network structures | 2a the number or nature of attachments to existing and new networks | 41 | 22 |
| | 2b the number or nature of the ways that the student keeps in touch with others in his/her networks | 10 | 6 |
| | 2c the nature of memberships in networks for example, power differential | 8 | 4 |
| 3 Network transactions | 3a the support sought, received or given in the networks to which the student is attached | 30 | 17 |
| | 3b the ways the student negotiates and shares information and skills | 28 | 15 |
| 4 Network types | 4a the activities undertaken with the main groups with which student interacts | 30 | 16 |
| | 4b the activities with groups that are different from the student's | 2 | 1 |
| | 4c the links that the student has to institutions | 8 | 5 |
| Total | | 182 | 100 |

Notes: Total social capital indicator number is different from total example number because the number of social capital indicators evident in each example varies.

As table 8 shows, the groups or categories of social capital indicators that appeared most frequently were the 'network structures' and 'network transactions'. The indicator that was most prevalent was in the 'network structures' category. This indicator identified change in the number or nature of attachments that students made to existing and new networks.

Participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses also produced changes in the 'network types' category. While students experienced changes in the bonding, bridging and linking ties they have with networks, more social capital outcomes were realised from changes in the bonding ties that students had within networks than in the bridging and linking ties with external networks. However, teacher accounts of student outcomes would suggest a higher proportion of social capital outcomes resulting from bridging ties than the table indicates.

The least represented category of indicators was that related to network qualities. The reason for this is unclear.

Table 9 shows the percentage of social capital indicators recorded within each of the four network categories for each student group. The table suggests that different student groups may experience different types of social capital outcomes from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses. Changes in network qualities, for example, are more significant for the youth category than for any other student group, while changes in network types are less significant for this group than for any other. In contrast to other student groups, Indigenous students derive social capital outcomes principally from changes in network transactions, while changes in network structures are relatively less important. Implications for pedagogy are discussed in the next chapter.

Table 9: Social capital indicators by student group

| Categories of social capital indicators | Student groups | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | All (%) | Indigenous (%) | NESB (%) | Youth (%) | Mature (%) | Other (%) |
| 1 Network qualities | 14 | 6 | 6 | 23 | 7 | 12 |
| 2 Network structures | 32 | 11 | 43 | 37 | 37 | 27 |
| 3 Network transactions | 32 | 51 | 27 | 25 | 34 | 27 |
| 4 Network types | 22 | 32 | 24 | 15 | 22 | 34 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Adult literacy and numeracy courses produce human and social capital outcomes

Social capital outcomes were only one type of outcome that students reported. Students also experienced human capital outcomes encompassing technical skills, such as literacy and numeracy, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and attitudes.

Many students reported improved reading, writing and/or speaking skills. This is the kind of outcome that is most commonly recognised and measured, and constitutes part of what is normally called human capital. Also evident were outcomes related to interpersonal skills and attributes such as better listening skills and improved ability to get on with other people. The ABS (2004) complies with the OECD definition and also defines these as human capital. In this example set (see table 7 for instances), social capital outcomes reported by students were only sometimes accompanied by improvements in technical or interpersonal skills.

Yet another type of outcome identified as present and which the ABS (and OECD) also defines as human capital were intrapersonal outcomes. These included changes in confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy and general wellbeing. Also reported were feelings of happiness, of enjoyment and of purpose in participating in the course. A 17-year-old student's reflection on how she feels about participating in the course refers to pride:

I'm actually a lot more proud of myself because I know I'm doing this all on my own ... I'm a lot more self-confident in myself to know that I can actually come and do something without being made to go and do it. It's a choice that I make and that makes me feel better.

A 22-year-old Indigenous woman comments on her physical sense of wellness after attending the course:

More energy. Like after the course you go back home and you wanna do something ... wanna do anything like housework even.

Self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy almost always accompanied changes in social capital or changes in improved technical literacy skills.

The students interviewed in this study who experienced outcomes from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses reported different combinations of social and human capital outcomes. This study did not investigate the possible relationships among social capital outcomes and the different kinds of human capital outcomes reported. The study did identify, however, that socioeconomic impacts of course participation resulted more often than not from a combination of social and human capital outcomes.

Socioeconomic impacts of adult literacy and numeracy courses

The findings for the research question *What are the socioeconomic impacts (as gauged against OECD bands) for self and/or community of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses?* are that:

- 1 There were socioeconomic impacts from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses. Participation can impact on all facets of socioeconomic wellbeing but it was more likely to influence the three areas of ‘education and learning’, the ‘social environment’ and ‘command over goods and services’ than the other five comprising the OECD framework.
- 2 Impacts in the ‘social environment’ category were marginally higher than in the ‘education and learning’ area.
- 3 The socioeconomic impacts from participation varied from student to student and from student group to student group. In the education and learning category, Indigenous students had the highest proportion of impacts (48%) and youth had the lowest (29%). The opposite was true for the social environment category in which youth reported the highest proportion of impacts (52%) and the Indigenous students the lowest (32%). The course experience for both the non-English speaking background group and the youth group appeared to have more influence on their social environment than on their education and learning. The opposite was true for the mature-aged and Indigenous groups and for the group of students who did not belong to any of the nominated categories.

The outcomes (human and social capital outcomes) experienced by students from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses can affect their socioeconomic wellbeing or that of others. The OECD areas of social concern were used to identify impacts of course participation on socioeconomic wellbeing. To illustrate how the eight areas of social wellbeing have been interpreted, table 10 provides an example for each category. In the interest of simplicity only one OECD category is identified in each example, even though some may be illustrative of more than one.

For 52 of the 57 students (91%), the course experience produced some socioeconomic impact as identified by the OECD categories. In the set of examples, all but one impact were reported as positive. The exception concerns a 44-year-old woman who lost her only group of friends when she told them that she had enrolled in the course. They had not previously realised that their friend could not read or write.

Table 10: Examples illustrating OECD impacts

| Area of socioeconomic wellbeing | Student reported examples |
|--|--|
| 1 Health | A 49-year-old woman from Hong Kong who is socially isolated now attends the gym regularly with a friend she made in the adult literacy and numeracy course. |
| 2 Education and learning | A 33-year-old man is now able to read more of the newspaper and he can use the computer to write. |
| 3 Employment and quality of working life | An 18-year-old waitress is now able to apportion costs when two customers want to split the bill. Previously she had to ask the customers to do the calculation. |
| 4 Time and leisure | A 15-year-old girl now mixes with a new group of people and does not engage in trouble-causing behaviour in her spare time. Previously she and her then friends would ‘just get up to trouble’. |
| 5 Command over goods and services | A 41-year-old Cantonese woman successfully installed the internet on her computer by following the telephone directions from the provider. Her poor English a year earlier had made that attempt unsuccessful. |
| 6 Physical environment | A 60-year-old Indigenous woman commenced literacy classes three years ago and since then, she has also completed a horticulture course in which she learnt to graft and pot plants. |
| 7 Social environment | A 17-year-old boy’s relationship with his parents has improved significantly as a direct result of participating in the course. He no longer fights with them and they think he has matured. |
| 8 Personal safety | An 18-year-old Indigenous man tells of how the younger students accept him as a mediator when there are anger-fuelled issues to resolve. |

Table 11 shows the distribution of socioeconomic impacts over the 196 examples. A total of 182 examples (93%) indicated some impact in at least one area. Many of the results are perhaps not

surprising, given the nature of the course and of the interviewee group. The adult literacy and numeracy courses from which the student interviewees were drawn were primarily ‘stand alone’ literacy courses (the exception was one course which was run in conjunction with a general education course). Participants in this project ranged in age from 15 to 72 and enrolled for a variety of reasons, many having nothing to do with employment. Almost all, with the exception of one student, were current students and therefore any impacts after completion of the course could not be identified.

Given that the interviewees were participants in an education course, it is expected that the ‘education and learning’ impacts would be high. Included in this category were student reports of participation in other courses, improvement in technical literacy skills, changes in communication skills and an increase in knowledge in a specific area for example, culture.

Perhaps the surprising finding here is that impacts in the ‘social environment’ category were marginally higher than in the ‘education and learning’ category. Course participation seemed to change the nature of interaction of many students in their groups and with organisations. Almost all examples coded for this impact were also coded as social capital outcomes.

The third most reported impact of course participation was in the ‘command over goods and services’ category. This included being able to access products and services previously inaccessible. It also included accessing services differently from how they were previously accessed.

Table 11: Impact on OECD areas of socioeconomic wellbeing

| Areas of socioeconomic wellbeing | Impacts identified in student examples | |
|--|--|------------|
| | Number | % |
| 1 Health | 10 | 3 |
| 2 Education and learning | 116 | 39 |
| 3 Employment and quality of working life | 9 | 3 |
| 4 Time and leisure | 14 | 5 |
| 5 Command over goods and services | 25 | 8 |
| 6 Physical environment | 1 | 0 |
| 7 Social environment | 122 | 41 |
| 8 Personal safety | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 300 | 100 |

Note: Total impact number is greater than total example number because number of impacts evident in each example varies.

Table 12 shows the proportion of each of the eight types of impact within the examples provided by the various student categories. For all student groups, the ‘education and learning’ and the ‘social environment’ categories seem to be the areas most influenced by course participation. The third most common area for all groups, with the exception of youth, was the ‘command over goods and services’ category.

While there are patterns of distribution shared by all student groups, there are also some marked differences. In the ‘education and learning’ category, Indigenous students had the highest proportion of impacts (48%) and the youth had the least (29%). The opposite is true for the social environment category in which the youth reported the highest proportion of impacts (52%) and the Indigenous students the lowest (32%). The course experience for both the non-English speaking background group and the youth group (which in this project are mutually exclusive groups) appears to have more influence on their social environment than on their education and learning. The opposite is true for the other three groups.

Table 12: OECD impacts by student group

| OECD areas of socioeconomic wellbeing | Student group | | | | |
|--|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Indigenous (%) | NESB (%) | Youth (%) | Mature (%) | Other (%) |
| 1 Health | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| 2 Education and learning | 48 | 32 | 29 | 40 | 45 |
| 3 Employment and quality of working life | 0 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| 4 Time and leisure | 5 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 0 |
| 5 Command over goods and services | 11 | 13 | 2 | 10 | 5 |
| 6 Physical environment | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 7 Social environment | 32 | 41 | 52 | 36 | 41 |
| 8 Personal safety | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Role of social capital outcomes in socioeconomic impacts

The findings for the research question *What is the role of social capital outcomes in producing socioeconomic impacts?* are that:

- 1 The data warrant the claim that, vis-à-vis course participation, social capital outcomes do play a role in realising socioeconomic impacts.
- 2 In over 50% of examples in which at least one socioeconomic impact was evident, social capital outcomes were also evident.
- 3 Social capital outcomes from course participation can impact on socioeconomic wellbeing with no evidence of improved literacy or numeracy skills.
- 4 In many cases, it is the combination of social capital outcomes and human capital outcomes from course participation that impacts on socioeconomic wellbeing.
- 5 The role of social capital outcomes in producing socioeconomic impacts varies and depends on context, including the student's needs, motivations and existing resources.

The ways in which social capital outcomes are implicated in producing socioeconomic impacts from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses are first explored by looking for numerical patterns across the student interview data and then by analysing some teacher and student examples. Both approaches indicate that social capital outcomes do have a role, but causal relationships are complex and difficult to ascertain.

Table 13 shows the number of examples that demonstrated socioeconomic impact using the OECD areas of social concern and which also had evidence of social capital indicators. Taking the area of 'employment and quality of work' by way of illustration, eight of the nine examples (89%) that were coded as producing an impact in this area were also coded as social capital outcomes. The table suggests that, in over 70% of examples where a socioeconomic impact was registered, social capital outcomes were somehow implicated. Even ignoring the 'social environment' area in which all the examples that had been coded as social capital outcomes were also coded for impact on the social environment, five of the remaining six areas had 50% or more of the examples having social capital outcomes present.

Table 13: Examples coded for OECD impact that were also coded as social capital outcomes

| | No. of examples coded as social capital outcomes | Total no. of examples in each category | % that were social capital outcomes |
|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Health | 5 | 10 | 50 |
| 2 Education and learning | 60 | 116 | 52 |
| 3 Employment and quality of working life | 8 | 9 | 89 |
| 4 Time and leisure | 10 | 14 | 71 |
| 5 Command over goods and services | 15 | 25 | 60 |
| 6 Physical environment | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 7 Social environment | 116 | 122 | 95 |
| 8 Personal safety | 3 | 3 | 100 |
| Total | 217 | 300 | 72 |

Note: Number of examples in this table is more than total number of examples because some examples demonstrated more than one impact.

Interestingly, almost half of the examples (56) coded as having exerted an impact in the ‘education and learning’ area did not have social capital outcomes. These same examples were further analysed to determine whether, in addition to an impact on ‘education and learning’, they had produced other socioeconomic impacts. The results are in table 14.

Table 14: Other socioeconomic impacts of non-social capital ‘education and learning’ examples

| Areas of social concern | Number |
|--|-----------|
| 1 Health | 2 |
| 2 Education and learning only | 43 |
| 3 Employment and quality of working life | 1 |
| 4 Time and leisure | 1 |
| 5 Command over goods and services | 8 |
| 6 Physical environment | 1 |
| 7 Social environment | 1 |
| 8 Personal safety | 0 |
| Total number of impacts | 57 |

Note: Total number of impacts is one more than total number of examples because one example demonstrated impact in three areas.

Three-quarters of the ‘education and learning’ examples with no evident social capital outcomes produced no other socioeconomic impact. Most of the examples that registered only an ‘education and learning’ impact generally referred to changes in technical skill level. Students stated they had seen improvements in spelling, grammar, writing, reading or in the use of the calculator or the computer, but they did not identify how these had changed any aspect of everyday life. It is possible that, for technical literacy and numeracy skills acquired through participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses to have an impact on other aspects of socioeconomic wellbeing, social capital outcomes may also need to be present.

The analysis of the examples showing evidence of socioeconomic impact in the tables above suggests that, more often than not, social capital outcomes are implicated. The actual role of social capital outcomes in producing socioeconomic impacts remains difficult to specify because it varies. The complexity of the role is illustrated by the detailed examples presented below which draw on teacher interviews as well as student interviews. The examples are selected because they illustrate just three of the different roles that social capital outcomes can play in producing the socioeconomic impact.

Example 1: Socioeconomic impact results mainly from course-generated social capital outcomes

Bill, a 17-year-old student who left school before completing Year 10 has been attending adult literacy and numeracy courses part-time for 18 months. His teacher comments on the acute lack of progress in terms of module completion. When encouraged to put pen to paper he replies, 'I just can't do it'. Yet the same student reports significant outcomes from course attendance that relate to how he sees himself and how he interacts with adults. Bill describes what he is getting out of the course:

Teachers at school treat you like you're six years old. When I was at school I figured that older people, adults who had power over me, would all be like that, but now once I come here I seen that they can treat you as though ... treat me the way they should ... So I treat them with a lot more respect, because I realise they are not all like that ... Although they have authority over us they speak with us as equals, sort of makes it easier to speak to authority figures.

When asked what he is doing now that he did not do before participating in the course, Bill explains that he now works in casual jobs such as landscaping and bricklaying. He explains:

I never had the confidence to do that when I was at school ... to go out and get a job ... with the authority figures sort of thing.

Finally, when asked whether he is the same sort of person now as he was a year ago, he replies:

Um, not really, just comes back to the authority figures let me down ... I just have so much more respect for everyone ... for all adults, even students here. I didn't get on with students at school.

This example illustrates participation producing an impact on three aspects of the young person's life: employment, education and learning (defined beyond the technical) and the social environment in which he now operates. The strongest influence exercised by the course appears to come from the new networks Bill is experiencing, especially networks with the teachers at the technical and further education (TAFE) college. This interaction has changed the way Bill perceives adults in general, and his relationship with them. In this case, there were no improvements reported in technical literacy skills. It was social capital outcomes and intrapersonal outcomes from the course that led to a change in the quality of Bill's everyday life. The social capital outcomes for Bill originate in the first instance from these course-based networks but also from the new networks he is now able to access in the wider community through the world of work. This is an example of socioeconomic impacts resulting from social capital outcomes being produced in the immediate context of the course, which then led to social capital outcomes outside the course.

Example 2: Socioeconomic impact results from application of new literacy skills in existing networks

Amy is from a non-English speaking background and mother of a teenager. She reported improved language skills from participation in the course. For Amy, this has meant that her interaction with her son's school has improved. After three years of adult literacy and numeracy courses she is now able to write letters to her son's teachers. In the past she had to depend on her husband. She is also attending parent teacher evenings. Recently, she negotiated with teachers for her son to receive English as a Second Language assistance.

In terms of socioeconomic impact, this example produced change in three areas: education and learning, social environment and command over goods and services. It illustrates how technical literacy skills acquired in the course led to the production of social capital outcomes outside the course in the school social context, that is, better interaction with her son's teachers. There have been changes in the network transactions, as the support sought from the teachers for her son has changed, and there have been changes in the linking ties that Amy has with the school. This case then is an example of socioeconomic impacts resulting from human capital outcomes being produced in the immediate context of the course which then led to social capital outcomes outside the course.

Example 3: Socioeconomic impact results indirectly from course-generated human capital outcomes and existing social capital

This case differs from the previous two because the socioeconomic impact is strongly dependent on the existing social capital of the student. Many of the Indigenous students in the adult literacy and numeracy classes in Darwin are newcomers to the city and are often from remote Indigenous communities. A teacher comments on the impact that George, a successful student, had on other members of his community:

We had one student who went on to complete a resource management course. He went back to their community in WA and then three more people from the community came back over to do the course.

In this case, the impacts are several steps removed from the adult literacy and numeracy course, but show the importance of longitudinal data on outcomes being collected. The strong socioeconomic impact on ‘education and learning’ resulted from the student, who had been successful in the adult literacy and numeracy course and a subsequent course, telling his friends and contacts in his community about the training. Here the existing social capital of the student and his success in the courses produced a multi-dimensional impact on the education and learning experienced by several members of his community.

Summary

These three examples of socioeconomic impact resulting from participation in the adult literacy and numeracy courses all involved social capital outcomes. However, they illustrate that the role that social capital outcomes plays in producing socioeconomic impacts varies. These examples suggest that there are at least three factors that influence this role.

Firstly, there are different combinations of human capital (technical, interpersonal, intrapersonal) outcomes and social capital outcomes that produce socioeconomic impacts. In Bill’s case, changes in technical literacy skills were not implicated in the socioeconomic impact of the course, but in Amy’s case they were.

Secondly, the role of social capital outcomes also seems to be mediated by the conditions of the context in which both student and teacher are located, described by the ABS as the ‘culture and political and legal and institution conditions’ (ABS 2004, p.14). The very different contexts of TAFE and workplaces in the first example, a school in the second example and a remote Indigenous community in the third example influence how social capital outcomes are implicated in producing socioeconomic impacts.

A third factor that seems to influence the role that social capital outcomes play in producing socioeconomic impacts comprises individual influences, such as the desires, needs and motivations of the student and the existing resources that they bring to the course. For Bill, the 17-year-old ‘at risk’ young man, the student–teacher relationships appeared far more important than for Amy and George. For Bill, being a member of the class produced social capital outcomes and a socioeconomic impact directly related to that membership. This was not the case in the other two examples. Amy’s new language skills and her need to communicate more effectively with her son’s teachers provided the catalyst to improve her links with school-related networks. The increased enrolments from Indigenous students were a result of George drawing on existing stores of social capital in his home community and his own success.

The purpose of the preceding discussion has been to illustrate the scope and complexity of the role of social capital in producing socioeconomic impacts. The list of identified factors which influence the role is by no means intended to be comprehensive. It is provided to explain at least in part why the role varies.

The findings, so far reported, show that adult literacy and numeracy courses produce social capital outcomes. Furthermore, the study has shown that these social capital outcomes, alone or in concert

with human capital outcomes, impact on the socioeconomic wellbeing of the participant and/or the community. Social capital outcomes, therefore, are significant outcomes from adult literacy and numeracy courses.

In the next section those aspects of the course experience that appear to produce social capital outcomes are discussed. While these same aspects may also be producing the other kinds of outcomes described earlier, the focus is on social capital outcomes.

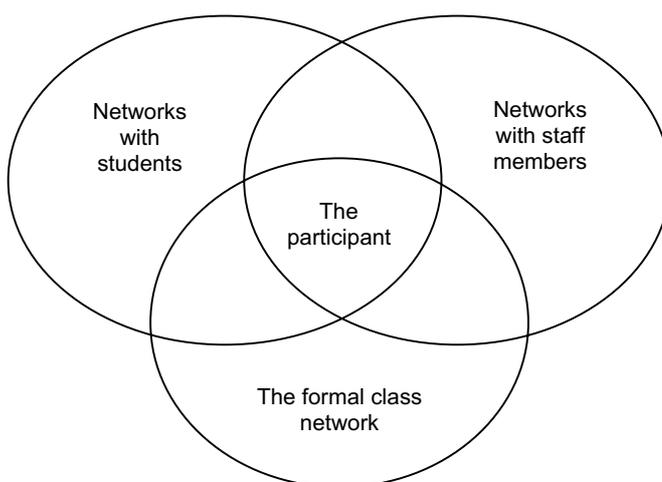
Course contribution to social capital outcomes

As a result of an analysis of both student and teacher perceptions of what occurs in an adult literacy and numeracy course, the findings are that:

- 1 There are contextual and pedagogical aspects of the course experience that seem to produce, intentionally or otherwise, social capital outcomes.
- 2 Social capital outcomes generated in the course context occur in the three networks of which students become members: the network of other students; the network of staff; and the class network comprising students and teaching staff.
- 3 The norms and pedagogical practices operating in the course ensure a safe and potentially productive practice ground in which students can redefine themselves and their relationships with others. At the same time, the course design encourages bridges between the course experience and students' lives in the 'real world' by welcoming knowledge exchange and network-building.

Different aspects of the course experience seem to contribute to social capital outcomes for different students. These are discussed here in terms of the three new networks to which the individual student gains membership by participating in the course. They are the network of fellow students; the network the individual creates with the teacher(s) and other staff members; and the network that operates as the formal 'class', comprising the teaching staff and student group as a whole (figure 1). Within these networks, resources are produced that generate social capital outcomes evident in the interaction in the course-related networks and/or in networks outside the course context altogether.

Figure 1: Participant membership of course-related networks



Networks with students

Adults enter the group knowing that there is the common bond of literacy, language or numeracy difficulties amongst the participants, and the further common bond of wanting to improve their skills. As interaction and trust build in the group, in great measure due to teacher strategies, student

networks independent of the teacher develop. The strength of the bond between the individual and other class members varies.

In this study, at one extreme, there was the student for whom the class members were her only friends. Also at this end of the continuum were the students whose longevity in the courses had produced strong social ties among group members. One teacher noted about a group of non-English speaking background students that ‘that’s why we find out students don’t want to leave, because they get to know each other and the teacher really well’.

At the other extreme, there were participants, albeit very few, for whom connectedness with others in the class was of minimal importance. For example, three male employed participants who worked and attended evening classes reported little interaction with others. The comment, ‘I say g’day and that’s it—I’m the sorta type of bloke that keeps to meself really’, characterises at least some of these students.

Different classes produced different kinds of networks. There were some non-English speaking background classes, for example, that seemed to produce rich student networks in which information on a variety of topics relating to their everyday lives, such as health, food, customs, education and holiday destinations, was exchanged and group outings were planned. In contrast, other groups seemed to have less cohesion, but nevertheless still provided an information network for jobs, further training, services or general knowledge.

Notwithstanding these differences, many students from all classes identified the interaction with fellow participants as a significant part of their course experience. At its least specific, students referred to feeling safe amongst other students which allowed them to be open about who they were, including being open about their language and literacy skills. Three young people expressed the sentiment as follows:

Everyone’s nice in the class. They’re not like back-stabbing you, saying ‘Oh look at her!’ or something like that because in our class, we’re all different but we’re in the same kind of like situation you know.

Everyone is just more, like you know in school they’re a bit bitchy and it’s like if you’re not in the cool group it’s not ... here they’re just nice.

I made friends very quickly ... everyone here are nothing like students at school, they’re accepting of people, really nice.

Students spoke about being in a group where people helped one another. Many commented on the course participation having provided them with the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. For some, this led to socialising in their free time, including visiting one another’s homes and joining clubs together.

Some students developed leadership capacity in the student networks, both formally and informally. In one group of Indigenous students, an 18-year-old participant who had been attending courses for two years saw himself as a mediator in the group when required, but also as the go-between for people who were new to the city, when they wished to communicate with people in authority at the TAFE. He explained:

Some of the students are from ... very remote communities, they’re really shy, so if they get knocked back [when they have approached somebody], well they just don’t ask ... There are lots of people to talk to, but you have to take them, like, to the coordinator. After a while, they lose their shyness ... but it takes a while, coming to big city like this ...

If they are wanting to borrow money, they could get into problems there so I tell them about student equity and how they can get a loan from them and pay it back. It comes out each fortnight. They would get to the door and turn away otherwise.

In another group, a 33-year-old man developed, with the assistance of the teacher, a common project for the group. He organised the group to produce displays and activities for Literacy Day.

His teacher explained that he had wanted to develop himself as a leader for a long time and had found the opportunity to do so in the class.

The teachers interviewed were cognisant of the importance of the student networks formed among the students. One teacher of an adult literacy and numeracy class of mainly young people who were disenchanted with the school system observed that 'if they don't form a friendship almost straight away then they are not going to last'.

Learner networks break down the insularity experienced by many adults caused by any number of factors concerned with health, education, employment, family circumstances and other socio-cultural issues. A teacher who works with classes of mainly Indigenous students described the benefits of the networks:

It's about mixing with other people, people they would not normally meet, so the benefits are usually social, personal development. Unless they are in this situation this would not be happening.

For some students of non-English speaking background who live and circulate almost entirely with people of similar backgrounds, the class actually forms the only social group in which they can practise their English. An observation made of one student typifies these kinds of participants:

There's an older woman in my group who is Korean, and she said that if she didn't come here she would feel very cut off because she doesn't speak very much English outside of here.

Changes over time in student networks are evidence of social capital outcomes being realised. A teacher of mainly Indigenous students noted the network-building occurring between her two classes:

After a while, groups form. For example, the two different groups I have are starting to meet up at smoko and to walk around the campus. They grow and link and form friends in other classes.

Within a class comprising many different ethnic backgrounds, a teacher observed that six months after joining the course, a student originally from Hong Kong welcomed people of different cultures into his network:

And it was a real turn around. He invited the guys from the Middle East to come and sit with him because they all sort of sit in groups and he sort of said, 'Come and sit here and we can discuss this together'. Big smile, very positive, open arm movements and very open body language. That was really, really encouraging to see ... It's only just recently starting to occur. So he's feeling more confident within himself and more able to be more welcoming.

Membership in student networks formed through course participation is an important source of social capital outcomes. The membership provides opportunities for new attachments and new ways of interaction.

Networks with teachers

The significance of the student-teacher relationship in many of the interviews warrants the need to identify the network that students have with staff as very important in producing social capital outcomes. Over the duration of their study, students interviewed usually interacted with only one teacher, but in some courses they worked with two or more teachers and support staff. In one course in this study, students also worked with paid tutors and volunteer tutors, either in or out of the classroom. Relationships between students and staff were built in the public forum through formal and informal interaction in the classroom and on outings to locations as varied as museums, wildlife parks, legal courts, restaurants and even dance venues, but also more privately in personal conversations and, in the case of one student, through letter-writing.

The ensuing close relations between teachers and students characterise the adult literacy and numeracy pedagogy; teachers from other sections in VET are often unable to behave similarly with their students, or wish to retain a degree of social distance from students. An adult literacy and

numeracy teacher in the youth course described one such visiting teacher as someone who ‘sits at the table here and does the marking. Just does not want to go into the room’.

For a number of students, the relationships they have with their teachers were perhaps the most significant factor affecting outcomes, including social capital outcomes. It was through these relationships that many students redefined their connection with education institutions, redefined their relationships with other adults in authority positions, and even more significantly, redefined themselves as learners, and sometimes even as members of society.

Two of the more important aspects of the teacher–student network discussed here are the nature of the student membership in the network and the role that the teacher takes in linking students to networks outside the course context.

Student membership in the network

When referring to how students felt teachers treated them, the most frequently expressed sentiment was ‘with respect’. The contrast with remembered school experience was commented on often, especially by disaffected young people, as evidenced in the following comments:

They’re just friendlier ... They don’t hassle you. I don’t like teachers at school. Yes, I used to hate teachers. But they’re fun here, teachers are fun. (Female, age 23)

They just treat me like a normal person. They don’t treat me, you know, like in school they just treat you like, ‘Oh yeah, you’re younger so you listen to me’. So your relationship’s better with them too. Like you feel ... closer and you can ask them anything. Teachers are happy for you to ask them anything. (Female, age 16)

I expected it to be more like the teachers standing there and telling you what to do ... I was really surprised. They’re not really judgemental. It’s really changed everything for me coming to this course because the teachers are really good role models for you because they tell you, ‘You can do it!’ and it gives you confidence. (Female, age 18)

At school, they bossed you around. Here they give you respect and you can give it back to them. (Male, age 15)

It’s like chalk and cheese. No comparison. You get treated with respect, and your opinion is valued and everyone can make comments. (Male, age 50)

A second feature of the student membership evident in the adult literacy and numeracy course and remarked upon by students and teachers alike was agency. Students had some control over what transpired in their time together as a group and had complete control over the pace at which they wished to learn. Many students, especially the young, readily welcomed the new-found control over their own learning journey. Others, who were generally older, were sometimes wary and even initially resisted a teacher–student relationship in which the teacher refused to dictate content, process and speed.

A third aspect of the student membership was that, in some critical respects, it shared commonalities with that of the teacher’s membership. For example, both viewed themselves as learners and therefore potentially teachers of the other. For this reason we have chosen to refer to course participants in this study as students rather than learners. Teachers spoke of their own learning, and students observed that their teachers learnt from them. The exchange of cultural views with the student of non-English speaking background or the Indigenous student had the potential to impart new learnings to both the Australian Anglo teacher and student. Both student and teacher were givers and therefore takers. In this sense, memberships were alike.

One story, in which appear many of the key elements typical of the teacher–student relationship in adult literacy and numeracy, is reproduced below. This story is from a teacher who uses letter-writing with her students of non-English speaking background as a way of embedding language in social practice.

One student in her letter last year said to me she was wanting to bring back her mother's ashes from Hong Kong and didn't know how to go about it. But that was just in her letter; she would never have said that in class. Then I wrote back to her and I said to give me a few days and that I'd find out what to do. So I got on to the government departments and gave her the telephone numbers. Eventually, months later, in one of the letters she wrote back she said that finally her mother's ashes were on the way out, and she could have them rest in the Buddhist temple where she went. That was a really big thing for her, but without the communication in the letters that wouldn't have happened.

A brief analysis identifies important features of the teacher–student relationship. The story reveals the authentic engagement of both teacher and student in the interaction. It also illustrates that it is the student who controls the interaction rather than the teacher. In writing about her personal problem in the letter, the student shows trust in her relationship with the teacher; informing the teacher of the outcome indicates respect. The teacher follows suit and also responds in writing, accepting the appeal, explicitly or implicitly made, to assist in any way possible. To do this, the teacher needs information in an area about which she knows nothing. She then gives the student the contacts necessary and waits for the student to tell her the final outcome of the exercise, if and when she chooses. The story also illustrates the connections that teachers can help students make with other groups and networks outside their own personal sphere of interactions.

Teacher as connector/link to other networks

Teachers interviewed drew on their own human and social capital to connect students with other groups, organisations and institutions in society. The individual student needs, aspirations and capabilities informed the advice teachers gave, and the degree of intervention applied to facilitating the links.

In some instances, teachers physically took the student to the appropriate destination. In one case, a teacher took a student to the city library and helped with the membership application process. In another, a tutor drove the student to the transport department to enable him to undertake an oral driver's licence test she had specially arranged for him. More commonly, the link took the form of teachers explaining how to access the necessary information, for example, phone numbers, addresses or websites of support services, volunteer organisations and government agencies. Most common of all was teacher encouragement to pursue a particular goal or to contemplate possibilities hitherto unconsidered, which led students to form new links or connections.

Linking students to other education and training opportunities was a common practice. For example, a teacher recalled a student from a recent class:

There was one person who loved fishing so we arranged for them to do an aquaculture unit and yes, their confidence just grew.

Teachers drew on their own networks for specialist skills to help students to achieve their goals. For example, an Indigenous man who wished to give his elderly father a photographic record of his trip to his place of birth called upon assistance from a person skilled in scrap-booking who was a friend of his teacher.

Teachers helped students connect with community support and other services they were not currently accessing. A teacher explained how a combination of encouragement and increased self-confidence from the course experience can lead an adult in need of such services to make the contact:

I think they now have the confidence to open up and communicate some of those things. And I encourage them to get some support and counselling about this, so supporting them in that decision ... So I'm encouraging them to take on new ideas and to think about new possibilities and not to feel embarrassed or ashamed.

The links that teachers provide can be less tangible than those described so far, but nonetheless significant. Sometimes the link between the student and institutions can be indirectly and tentatively

forged through adult literacy and numeracy teacher intervention. One example concerned a parent of a school age child whose fear of being found out as illiterate prevented her from attending any school functions or meetings. In this case, the student felt sufficiently confident to bring to literacy class the communication she had received from school for the teacher to read to her. In this way, she was connected with the school, albeit from a distance.

That some students remain in contact with their teachers well after their participation ends suggests that the relationship can be particularly significant. One 17-year-old young man who drops in now and again to visit his teachers viewed the relationship as a friendship. His teachers' encouragement to maintain his membership of a drama group and their attendance at his performances seemed to have been an important legacy of the course. Another teacher spoke of an ex-student in her thirties and now employed, who visits her teachers just to 'keep in touch'.

Other past participants draw on the teacher student network when the need arises. For example, an ex-student recontacted her teacher when she wanted assistance in writing a letter of complaint to the city council. A numeracy teacher told of students who have moved on to other courses, including university, who still contact her for advice.

This study has shown that the teacher can be a very rich resource for students in a number of ways, apart from their expertise in teaching literacy courses. For many students, the teacher may be the only person they get to know well, who is educated, relatively knowledgeable in areas that are important to the student, and who is a member of networks that could be useful to them. For many more, the teacher is a person of authority or of some standing who treats them with respect.

Network with teachers and students

The third, and possibly the most visible, and certainly most formal, new network that the participant enters comprises the teacher(s) and the students collectively in the classroom. The principles of adult basic education teaching are well documented (Lee & Wickert 1995; Scheeres et al. 1993), as are adult basic education practices (Herrington & Kendall 2005; McGuirk 2001). While all these principles could be discussed in terms of their impact on social capital outcomes, this report will not do so. Rather, attention is drawn to two aspects of the classroom network (important in adult education pedagogy) that appear significant in understanding how social capital outcomes are generated, namely, the norms that operate in the group and the nature of student membership in this 'whole of class' network.

Network norms

Being an active and productive member of the class is integral to adult literacy and numeracy courses, regardless of whether the focus is writing, reading or speaking. Discussions led by teachers or students, buddying, peer tutoring, mentoring, pair work or small group work are just some of the ways that group work forms part of the *modus operandi*. Consequently, teachers and students alike conform to a set of norms that produce a social-emotional environment in which tolerance and good manners prevail; in which new students are welcomed; where students feel safe to take risks and share; where people listen patiently when others talk; and where being non-judgemental is paramount. Non-compliance, if persistent, is ultimately challenged.

One teacher spoke at length of a student who took two terms, and several critical incidents, to learn to comply with the required norms. The story is significant because it illustrates how norms are established and maintained by both teachers and students. After one term in which the student had adversely altered the dynamics of the class, the teacher had a lengthy private discussion with him, drawing his attention to the rights and responsibilities of the class that were displayed on a poster on the wall and to the importance of group interaction in any efforts to improve literacy skills. In a subsequent lesson and in the student's absence, the teacher explained to the rest of the class the action she had taken in recognition of the 'insults, rudeness and bluntness they had suffered'. The student did return to class after an absence of several weeks, this time completely withdrawing from any interaction with the group. In response, the group 'were very, very good to him, they all rallied

round and deliberately included him in things and deliberately spoke to him'. After several more setbacks, the student made a 'dramatic turnaround ... listening to others and talking to them and not telling them where they are wrong ...'

Participant membership in the network

Student membership in the adult literacy and numeracy group is defined within the constraints of the norms described above. Providing that students do not infringe on the rights of others, they are welcomed as full members of the group. The stereotypical, but for many, personally experienced role of the student being placed in the inferior position relative to the teacher or to other students appears to be absent from adult literacy and numeracy courses.

Students are invited to nominate topics of interest, to bring into the classroom setting their histories, their interests and their aspirations and to even take the class out into their world of everyday interaction. In other words, in this network, students have full membership by simply being themselves.

The story of the student turned dancer illustrates the way in which this kind of membership can produce a chain of events replete with social capital outcomes for the student and for fellow students. A newspaper article discussed in class on the health benefits of dance caught the interest of a student originally from Hong Kong. After that discussion and unbeknown to his class, he started attending classes in modern dance with four different groups in the city four nights a week. Several months later, in a class discussion on hobbies, he let his class know of his interest and provided a demonstration. This led to a group excursion by train to one of the dance venues for a lesson. Two other students took up dancing classes as a consequence.

Particular attention is paid to new members in adult literacy and numeracy courses. Where possible, every effort is made to allocate students to groups where the teacher believes the student will feel comfortable. Student readiness to move from one-to-one to group learning is also carefully monitored and, if necessary, supported. One teacher with more than 20 years experience explained how she manages the transition of Indigenous students from a one-to-one relationship to being a group member:

Individual approach to start with and then group work which are two different things but you need to lead one into the other. So when they first come in, you give them individual things to do and then group things. You find them a buddy, someone to do things with, even to walk around with so they know where they are even.

The data from students and teachers in this study suggest that the course-related networks students experience serve two functions. They are a practice field and they are bridges. As far as possible, the learning environment is controlled through specific group norms and pedagogical practices to allow for students to generate new resources, that is, to learn. Resources may be new skills, new attitudes and beliefs about self and others, new ways of interaction and new links and connections. For many, the networks are a new and safe environment in which to play out new aspects of identity and practise new skills. Within these networks, social capital outcomes are experienced.

The networks are also bridges, because there is a two-way flow of resources between the safe, controlled environment of the group and the external networks. The two-way flow occurs when contacts made in class lead to other contacts; it also occurs when resources generated within the safe environment are applied, deployed or transferred to new or existing networks outside the practice ground of the adult literacy and numeracy course. Just as importantly, the two-way flow also occurs when students draw on their out-of-class lives in their interaction with teachers and peers in the classroom.

Mismatch between observed outcomes and measurement

In this final section, teacher views of the current reporting regime are summarised. The main findings are that:

- 1 There is a mismatch between the observed outcomes and the outcomes currently requiring formal measurement and reporting.
- 2 Outcomes that could be described as social capital outcomes are rarely identified by teachers as needing to be reported.
- 3 Outcomes identified as important and possibly requiring reporting are of the intrapersonal kind, such as self-confidence and self-efficacy. The lack of longitudinal data also precludes other outcomes from being identified.
- 4 Many teachers believe that formal reporting of outcomes has little relevance to students and to teachers. Some teachers have a dual system of recording outcomes: the first for compliance purposes, the second for meaningful feedback to the students, or for their own records.
- 5 There is a concern that changes to reporting systems to incorporate other outcomes will lead to even more onerous record-keeping.

The definitions of student success that many teachers hold are at odds with the formal definition of success, that is, successful completion of modules or increases in NRS levels. Teachers agreed that the outcomes measured do not constitute all the outcomes achieved, and for some students, they are not even the most important outcomes. From the teacher's perspective, amongst the most important are those related to self-confidence and self-esteem. Almost all teachers (83%) identified increased self-confidence and self-esteem as being outcomes of adult literacy and numeracy courses, with some teachers noting that those are the most important outcomes.

Becoming an independent learner also rates highly amongst important yet unreported outcomes. A teacher describes indicators of increasing independence as follows:

So they start to assess their own learning and they have the confidence to speak out and ask, you know, for greater assistance ... They are also getting the ability to look for information for themselves and look in a variety of places.

To this list of unreported outcomes can be added the following:

We don't report on their openness to education. We don't report on their willingness to change, when they come and say, 'Yes I want to do more education'. We don't report on that.

The NRS is very limited and rigid ... as for attitude or turning their lives around we can't comment on those outcomes.

There are two important observations to make about the kinds of outcomes that teachers noted as important but not reported. Firstly, most are what the ABS (2004, p.13, p.148) describes as intrapersonal outcomes. These outcomes are not necessarily a consequence of improved literacy and/or numeracy skills—the skills measured in the formal reporting—but they may lead to improved literacy and numeracy skills. Secondly, teachers generally did not identify social capital outcomes as being outcomes that should be reported. In the interviews teachers provided many examples of individual students and groups of students achieving social capital outcomes as the result of participating in adult literacy and numeracy courses. As examples, one said friendship was an important outcome for many, and another identified the relationship with the teacher as being important for those students who 'may not have other adults in their lives [who take an interest in them]'. However, in relation to formal reporting of outcomes, social capital was rarely mentioned.

Teachers also observed that many outcomes from adult literacy and numeracy courses are never recorded because no longitudinal data are collected. Employment that may not be immediate, for

example, is not identified. Neither are less tangible outcomes such as young people becoming law-abiding citizens. One teacher who taught a group of young people explains:

Keeping people out of jail—that should be something that should be reported on. A literacy outcome is all the youth that we work with and keep going, keeping their noses clean and keeping them out of detention centres and jails. So that is a potential outcome of literacy that's not captured.

Teachers comply with current assessment regimes for auditing purposes, but many do not see any educational value in the process. Teachers avoid any practice that suggests to students they have been unsuccessful. One teacher of Indigenous classes, for example, grades students as a CE (continuing enrolment) or IP (insufficient participation) if they have not met the desired standard. A teacher of non-English speaking background classes has students resubmit work until it is of the required standard. Continuing participation is prioritised over formal measurement of performance.

Some teachers have supplementary and informal forms of reporting to students. For example, a teacher who teaches students of non-English speaking background explains that the advice given to students at the course end has more significance than formal results:

At the end of the year, you recommend what class they go into or if they should leave, look for a trade or whatever. I think that's as far as you need to go with these students. I find the National Reporting System is irrelevant ... it doesn't work, it doesn't mean anything.

Others keep samples of work and anecdotal histories independently of formal requirements. When discussing progress with their students, they use this material as evidence of change.

Notwithstanding the recognition that many important outcomes are not being reported, there is a concern that reporting would become an even more onerous task should additional outcomes be included. There is also the belief that many of these outcomes are too difficult to record.

The findings reported in this chapter demonstrated that students do experience social capital outcomes from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses, and furthermore, they are important outcomes because of their impact on socioeconomic wellbeing. The next chapter discusses the implications for pedagogy and for reporting.

Implications

This report concludes with a discussion of the implications the study has for pedagogy (research question four) and for reframing outcomes in adult literacy and numeracy courses (research question five). Also proposed are directions for further research.

In summary, the implications are:

- 1 It is important to identify the teaching strategies and conditions that produce social capital outcomes for different student groups.
- 2 Given the importance of the student–teacher relationship in producing social capital outcomes, courses that do not include face-to-face pedagogies may lack social capital outcomes.
- 3 Pedagogical theory should be reframed to include viewing the student as a member of the various networks that are part of the adult literacy and numeracy learning experience.
- 4 Pedagogy, learning outcomes experienced and outcomes reported are not aligned in adult literacy and numeracy courses.

Implications for pedagogy

In response to the research question, *What are the implications of social capital outcomes for adult literacy and numeracy pedagogy?*, we have identified implications for both pedagogical practice and theory.

For pedagogical practice

This study suggests that social capital outcomes result from adult literacy and numeracy course participation and that they affect the socioeconomic wellbeing of the students and/or community. Hence social capital outcomes are useful and not merely a benign by-product of participation.

The findings suggest that groups of students experience *different* social capital outcomes from adult literacy and numeracy courses. Network qualities, for example, are more significant for the youth student category than for other student groups, while changes in network types are less significant. For Indigenous students, changes in network transactions are particularly significant.

This study has also found that, for the technical skills of literacy and numeracy acquired through course participation to exert an impact on a range of aspects of socioeconomic wellbeing, social capital outcomes may also need to be present. The classroom pedagogy in adult literacy and numeracy courses facilitates social capital outcomes and thus enhances the students' capacity to apply these technical skills in various social contexts and situations.

The significance of social capital outcomes suggests that identification of the relevant elements of pedagogy that help build them, namely teaching strategies, curriculum and assessment is important. Professional training therefore needs to make explicit the contextual conditions (for example, class size and mix of students) and the pedagogical practices that provide fertile ground for the realisation of social capital outcomes. Furthermore, the differences between student groups need to be critiqued from the perspective of pedagogical practices used. More needs to be known and documented about how trust and respect develops between students and teachers; how student and

teacher networks develop from the curriculum focus on topics relating to the everyday life experiences of students; and how network norms develop through individual and group discussions in various forms and rules of social engagement.

It has also been found in this study that, for many students, the relationship they have with the adult literacy and numeracy teacher is probably the most significant factor affecting outcomes, including social capital outcomes. The relationship facilitates students to redefine their connection with education institutions, to redefine their relationships with others in authority positions and, even more significantly, to redefine themselves (their identities) as learners and sometimes as members of society. There are implications here for face-to-face pedagogy, not only in adult literacy and numeracy courses, but in VET generally in light of the current trend towards online learning and other forms of 'flexible delivery'.

For pedagogical theory

For the past decade in Australia there has been little new focus on adult literacy and numeracy pedagogical practice and theory at a national level. In the early 1990s following the development of the 1991 Australian Language and Literacy Policy, there was a strong national focus on identifying and developing specific adult literacy and numeracy teaching competence (for example, Scheeres et al. 1993; TAFE National Staff Development Committee 1993, 1995). In recent years there has been relatively little focus on adult literacy and numeracy pedagogy as it has become part of the mainstream VET agenda, and thus it has a less clearly defined identity. Teachers in stand-alone adult literacy and numeracy courses today may need to look back at least a decade to find a clearly defined set of principles and practices on which to base their teaching. This is a particularly pertinent issue in the context of the ageing, and subsequent retirement of many experienced adult literacy and numeracy teachers in the next few years (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004, p.8) and the recruitment of teachers new to the field. A review of pedagogical practice and theory is overdue.

If the findings of this exploratory study are found to be true across a larger range of adult literacy and numeracy courses and a larger number of participants, then it would suggest the need for a reframing of adult literacy and numeracy pedagogy. This reframing would make the role of social capital building in teacher practice more explicit and would be valuable for student learning. While keeping the core pedagogical practice of having the student at the centre, the reframing might consider having the student also at the centre of networks, such as the three networks suggested in the study. In constructing the student as a member of these networks, a different light is thrown on how social capital outcomes, and arguably other outcomes, including literacy and numeracy skills and intrapersonal skills and attributes such as self-confidence, may be produced.

Implications for reframing outcomes

In response to the research question, *What are the implications of social capital outcomes for reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes?*, the key issue is whether the social capital outcomes of adult literacy and numeracy courses should be accounted for and thus measured, and if so, how.

In view of the links between social capital and socioeconomic wellbeing and the potential for enhanced transfer of learning, it could be argued that the findings of this study indicate that social capital outcomes should be taken into account and reported in some way. Significantly, it was found that participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses for these students could impact on all facets of socioeconomic wellbeing, although it was more likely to influence the three areas of 'education and learning', the 'social environment' and 'command over goods and services'.

The findings in this report indicating that social capital is implicated with human capital in producing socioeconomic impacts provide some evidence to substantiate the suggestion made in the first chapter that the technical skills of literacy and numeracy (human capital) are necessary, but usually insufficient, to produce socioeconomic impacts. The relationship between human and social

capital is complex, but nevertheless it is difficult to ignore the significant role that social capital outcomes in this context can play. At its most obvious, take the case of 17-year-old Bill featured in the findings in this report. Bill was, according to his teacher's account, failing in his course of study because he was unable to complete his modules of study. And yet, according to Bill, as a result of participating in the course, he was able to engage effectively with authority figures and thus gain employment. He could also relate more appropriately with adults generally and with other students. Thus course-generated social capital resulted in significant socioeconomic impacts for Bill but, within any of the current 'framings' of adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes, these social capital outcomes (and in turn socioeconomic impacts) are unlikely to be taken into account.

Adult literacy and numeracy courses have always been concerned with more than the acquisition of a set of technical skills. At an individual level, for example, teachers and researchers have long documented the personal growth of students who participate in these courses (for example, Grant 1987). At the broader level of impact, since the early 1990s these courses have been seen to have a role in the formation of what Marginson (1997, p.147) calls the 'economic' citizen. This study also shows there are literacy and numeracy course outcomes beyond technical skills, but for the first time, it has drawn attention to the positive effects for individuals of social networks and how these are implicated with technical skills in bringing about socioeconomic wellbeing.

Although a case can be proposed for the need to account for social capital outcomes based on the worth of the many examples documented in this study, how this should be accomplished is problematic. In most education contexts, course outcomes are related strongly to pedagogical practice including assessment; that is, there are strong links between what students learn (and what teachers do) and what is measured. But currently in 'stand alone' adult literacy and numeracy courses, as the teacher interviews revealed in this study, there are some apparent anomalies.

- ✧ There is no (or limited) connection between certain types of outcomes achieved by students and what is measured. And in this project it is social capital outcomes we are interested in.
- ✧ There is only limited recognition from teachers that social capital outcomes from participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses should be reported. By contrast, they are extremely aware that intrapersonal outcomes such as self-confidence are not reported and should be.

Currently we find stand-alone adult literacy and numeracy courses demonstrate an apparent lack of alignment among: (a) pedagogy, with its heavy focus on social practices and everyday life contexts; (b) what is measured to indicate outcomes; for example, macro skill levels determined by the NRS or competency-based module outcomes; (c) what teachers cite as important outcomes; for example, intrapersonal skills such as self-confidence; (d) and actual learning outcomes, including social capital outcomes deemed worthwhile in this study through their links to socioeconomic wellbeing.

How to align these elements is for practitioners in the adult literacy and numeracy field to determine. Some of these anomalies have long histories (for example, personal growth discourse versus human capital discourse; see Lee & Wickert 1995) but, within the scope of this current study, we suggest that social capital outcomes at the very least should be recognised as worthwhile, and therefore be taken into account in some way in the reporting of outcomes. How this happens remains for other studies to determine. As the result of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses, students in this study have demonstrated changes in their lives, often major changes involving social networks. These changes are recognised by the students themselves as significant, and often tacitly by teachers, but they are not officially recognised by institutions. Current official reporting measures, such as module completions or the NRS, may accommodate some aspects of social capital outcomes, but not specifically.

Directions for further research

At the outset we explained that this study was exploratory, and inevitably it raises many more research questions. We see value in pursuing further studies in the following areas.

Social capital research in adult education and training

More work is needed to develop a social capital indicator framework suitable for identifying the social capital capacity of education and training courses. Interestingly, the ABS continues to develop its framework and plans to include social capital topics in its next General Social Survey to be conducted from April 2006. The ABS (2004) framework has been adapted for this current study, but there is a need to develop a consolidated version, perhaps based on the work of this study, that can be applied in qualitative research settings, and specifically to education and training interventions.

There is the need to understand the relationship between social capital outcomes and human capital outcomes, and especially those the OECD defines as ‘intrapersonal’ outcomes such as self-confidence. It would also be useful to have a better understanding of how social capital outcomes are implicated in producing socioeconomic impacts.

Studies of the social capital outcomes of education courses are in their infancy. Some recent work has been conducted in ACE (for example, Clemens, Hartley & Macrae 2003; Falk, Golding & Balatti 2000). More studies are required which compare the ‘social capital outcome’ profile of adult training courses, including adult literacy and numeracy courses.

A highly significant area for further research is a relative comparative examination of the extent to which face-to-face pedagogy and various forms of online or flexible delivery produce social capital outcomes and socioeconomic benefits for students.

Social capital research in adult literacy and numeracy courses

More investigation is required into social capital outcomes involving larger samples of courses and including students who have completed adult literacy and numeracy courses. In the past 20 years of Australian research in adult literacy and numeracy, there has only been one major longitudinal study tracking students to determine longer-term course outcomes (Griffin & Pollock 1997). In other fields, such as health, this absence of an evidence base would be untenable. It is especially important in adult literacy and numeracy in light of the multiple benefits that might accrue from explicit pedagogical attention to social capital and socioeconomic outcomes.

As suggested earlier in this chapter, more detailed analysis is required of the pedagogical practices in adult literacy and numeracy courses that appear to result in social capital outcomes. These include analyses of how trust and respect develop between students and teachers; how student and teacher networks develop from particular curriculum models; and how network norms develop within classrooms.

There are both commonalities and distinct differences across student groups in terms of social capital outcomes gained as a result of participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses. A number of students in this study experienced many social capital outcomes, while others experienced none, and certain social capital indicators were more prevalent than others. We need to investigate why these differences occur.

While this study has indicated the range and the potential value of social capital outcomes from adult literacy and numeracy courses, it remains to investigate the merits and practicalities of formally reporting these outcomes.

Concluding comments

This study has sought, for the first time, to explore the relevance of social capital to the field of adult literacy and numeracy, with particular reference to course outcomes. It found that students do experience social capital outcomes. If we agree that the value of adult literacy and numeracy courses can be measured in terms of their socioeconomic impacts, then this study further suggests that

social capital outcomes cannot be ignored. Social capital outcomes are as significant as human capital outcomes in the production of socioeconomic impacts.

The social capital perspective is part of the ‘social turn’ referred to in the first chapter. It presents a challenge to the dominant human capital discourse, but it is also complementary to it. While the main focus in this study has been on ‘reframing’ adult literacy and course outcomes, the study has implications beyond this. A social capital perspective potentially involves a ‘reframing’ of the whole field of adult literacy and numeracy, including pedagogy, and more fundamentally, even how adult literacy and numeracy could be defined.

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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes: A social capital perspective—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>. The document contains:

- ✧ Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview schedules for teachers and for students
- ✧ Appendix 2: Tables related to student sample
- ✧ Appendix 3: Information about courses
- ✧ Appendix 4: Extended literature review.



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