



## Creating spaces for Whānau wellbeing, literacy and numeracy in the context of neoliberalism in Aotearoa, New Zealand

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### Abstract

*This article reviews current research about three short focused literacy, language and numeracy programmes designed to assist New Zealand Māori (indigenous) adult students and their whānau. Whānau is a complex Māori concept that includes physical and metaphysical dimensions based on the Māori worldview of whakapapa (genealogy) and is at the heart of whānau adult literacy programmes. The programme's success was measured by the way students grew self confidence in their own literacy and numeracy abilities that translated into positive impacts for their whānau wellbeing. For example, students who did not have books in the home prior to participating in a programme now created spaces with books in the home for quiet reading as a result of attending an introduction to the public library. Through embedding appropriate literacy and numeracy techniques, Literacy Aotearoa tutors developed a reliable baseline to capture students' progress in their formative and summative stages of the programmes against a backdrop of neoliberal ideologies. Dominant neoliberal policies impact and outweigh educational policies through the demands for more transparency, efficiency and accountability as part of a quality improvement shift to market adult education in New Zealand. Despite this shift in policy, this article focused on ways to co-opt strategies that at a basic level may counter the disconnect between factors that drive the achievement gaps for vulnerable students learning to learn and the tensions that arise in order to comply with neoliberal policies that underpin New Zealand's changing adult education sector.*

### Keywords

Adult literacy, language and numeracy; Māori; Neoliberalism; programme content; teaching style; wellbeing and whānau

### Introduction

In 2006, New Zealand took part in an Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) that measured the prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills of participants aged 16 to 65 years from a number of countries (Satherley, Lawes, & Sok, 2008). The survey built on the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (Ministry of Education, 2009). The results from the survey showed that 1.3 million New Zealanders literacy levels that were too low to meet or fully engage in work demands. Over 40 percent presented as Māori and Pasifika. The survey also demonstrated that



many New Zealanders had no school qualifications and had very low literacy as they struggled to cope with basic literacy demands such as reading a bus timetable, labels on food, newspapers or books.

With so many New Zealanders identified as having low literacy levels, it is inevitable that a sharper focus is required to assist raising people's self-confidence and literacy abilities. To meet these challenges cultural, financial, environmental, and supportive (pedagogical, pastoral) conditions need to be present. These conditions can be a challenging prospect for charitable not-for-profit organisations, like Literacy Aotearoa, that are known to operate on limited funding along side the rise of neoliberal agendas.

Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of neoliberal policy, this article proposes to focus on the strengths of three whānau adult literacy and numeracy programmes (whānau literacy programmes) as a way to co-opt strategies that may counter the tensions that emerge to meet centralised accountability demands.

## Research Design and Method

In 2013 and 2015 Literacy Aotearoa conducted three whānau literacy and numeracy programmes that were evaluated as part of a series of literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) research studies. These programmes were:

- *Literacy, Language and Numeracy for Māori adults and their whānau for Literacy Aotearoa and Te Puni Kokiri 2012–2013* (Literacy Aotearoa, 2013a);
- *The Adult Literacy Provision and Early Childhood Achievement Pilot for the Ministry of Education 2013–2014* (Literacy Aotearoa, 2013b) and
- *Strengthening Early Literacy and/or Mathematics at Home programme 2014–2015* (Literacy Aotearoa, 2015b).

The whānau literacy programmes were selected as good practice examples of lifelong learning and commitment to whānau engagement. Data was collected from a range of sources including: formative and summative assessments such as initial assessment information, self-reports, evaluations and final reports. Where appropriate literacy assessment progress results were reviewed. The programmes are useful for exploring the contradictions between integrated approaches to individual and whānau achievement and neoliberal economic imperatives that promote market driven competition. An inductive approach was applied to analyse the data that resulted in the findings based on the following research questions:

## Research Questions

1. What are the strengths of whānau literacy programmes?
2. How can whānau literacy programmes counter neoliberal policies that affect adult education in New Zealand?

## Background

Literacy Aotearoa is a not-for-profit charitable organisation. At its core, it is Te Tiriti o Waitangi based and has a network of 37 Ngā Poupou (member providers) nationwide that operate under a collective system of organisation and governance. For over 32 years the organisation has designed and delivered quality LLN services to foundation students. The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) defines foundation students as people who do not have essential foundation skills (Tertiary Education Commission, 2016). Over the past five years Literacy Aotearoa has developed and refined knowledge and expertise in the field of adult literacy education and has recently delivered effective whānau literacy programmes nationwide. Students have been recruited from diverse backgrounds including: workplace, community, vocational, school and whānau based. Of these students, the majority said they had negative and complex experiences with learning at school. They also said they had no or limited passive understandings of their own language and identity as Māori. Against this backdrop, the

organisation's core business is based on the principle that literacy is a fundamental basic human right. It is also provided at no direct cost to the student, which directly contradicts neoliberal policies that presently underpin educational policy.

### *Adult literacy defined*

Literacy Aotearoa defines literacy as “listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and critical thinking, interwoven with the knowledge of social and cultural practices” (Literacy Aotearoa, 2015a, p. 18). This definition aligns with the *Te kāwai ora: Reading the word, reading the world, being the world* that suggests literacy is the ability to read and interpret the world through symbols, nonverbal communication, artefacts and other media. It also said that literacy can be bi-literacy where Māori and non-Māori have the ability to function in both Māori and Pākehā worlds and is the “lifelong journey of building the capacity to ‘read’ and shape Māori and other worlds” (Māori Adult Literacy Working Party, 2001, p. 4). This position includes living by Māoritanga values and ways of knowing and being while also enjoying the full rights of citizenship under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The TEC's *Literacy, Language and Numeracy Action Plan 2008-2012* defines adult literacy as:

the written and oral language people use in their everyday life and work; it includes reading, writing, speaking and listening. Skills in this area are essential for good communication, critical thinking and problem-solving in the workforce. It includes building the skills to communicate (at work) for speakers of other languages. (Tertiary Education Commission, 2009, p. 6)

The common thread that links the definitions outlined is that literacy is the ability to develop functional literacy skills such as reading, writing and speaking in everyday life. The difference is highlighted by the way the TEC focuses on developing skills through education as a commodity in that adult learners are potential workers for the benefit of the economy. This is in contrast to the former definitions that place emphasis on developing skills to enhance social, cultural and lifelong citizenship which can also include work. Literacy is not only the ability to read well enough to sustain employment, but it is the ability to participate with family members and the community effectively. This viewpoint creates tensions for how Māori and other indigenous people engage in literacy programmes because the definition of literacy is reinforced by a monoculture perspective (Yates, 1996).

### *Business as usual—neoliberal approach to education in New Zealand*

Neoliberalism has developed from a moderate form of liberalism to a capitalist set of new ideals that underpins the fabric of current business, social, cultural and educational enterprises (Mill, 1999). In New Zealand, neoliberal reforms have evolved since the late 1980s and early 1990s with involvement by successive governments and corporate groups increasing economic activity that extends to political, social and environmental issues. Unbridled neoliberal reforms are based on the principles that: economic growth is paramount in that corporations and governments are free to pursue an economic advantage through deregulation and the expansion of the global market place; free trade benefits all people, rich and poor; and individual responsibility replaces the concept of public good and community through trade liberalisation and increased privatisation (Harvey, 2005; Humpage, 2011).

### *The impact of neoliberal educational policy*

In New Zealand, the impact of the neoliberalism system on adult education policy and practice has been well documented (Abendroth, 2014; Bargh, 2007; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Patrick, 2013; Small, 2009). Tertiary courses now incorporate a neoliberal agenda that focuses on meeting the changing labour market needs. For example, the *Tertiary Education Strategy 2014–2019* sets out the Government's long-term strategic direction for tertiary education (Tertiary Education Commission, 2014). The strategy outlines a focus on building international relationships that will contribute to improved competitiveness and support business and innovation through the development of relevant skills and research, and improve outcomes for all. This approach suggests that the priority for

individual success is based on the promotion of ideas, skills and knowledge that serve as the new tools for obtaining national and global success and wealth (Flemming, 2010).

Under a neoliberal framework a learner is successful because they are fully engaged in the learning process and are accepting of the norms of school and society. The transmission of knowledge is provided as prescribed curriculum that gives emphasis to growing cognitive skills and skills for work. Learner progress is measured by standardised assessments and exams. The learner understands and accepts the teachers' role as one of instruction to transmit knowledge, and the learning is hierarchical and direct. Teachers are linked to achievement result payments and standardised testing in order to promote a competitive market economy (Hicks, 2016).

Given the generalised statements above about what a universal learner may experience, the neoliberal framework presents challenges for the way Literacy Aotearoa operates and delivers free quality whānau literacy programmes to students who identify as vulnerable learners. Vulnerable learners require intensive supports and learning that is flexible and adaptable and therefore requires a unique approach in design, delivery, implementation and support.

### *Literacy Aotearoa—business as unusual approach*

Based on an ethos to support vulnerable learners, Literacy Aotearoa has coined the phrase *business as unusual* as a way of countering the above mentioned universal tensions at play (Literacy Aotearoa, 2013a, p. 57). In essence, the way Literacy Aotearoa operates is business as unusual because it seeks to maintain quality educational practice through quality training and delivery while at the same time responding to the complex needs of the learner. This approach is significantly different from universal ways of engaging with learners because the focus is on providing flexibility to ensure learners can participate in learning. It also includes providing quality literacy and numeracy provision and the ability to co-construct with the learner their learning goals and learning process. Moreover, literacy and numeracy is applied and embedded in the learning.

In addition to teaching support, tutors are not only transmitters of knowledge but also provide or facilitate pastoral care by recruiting supports such as social workers to provide counselling or advice. This reinforces a student-centred learning approach where tutors put themselves in the shoes of the learners.

Literacy Aotearoa's success is based on accepting a range of funding supports from business enterprises and Government. As a consequence of accepting funding opportunities, Literacy Aotearoa recognises and accepts that as a not-for-profit organisation with an ethos of manaaki (care) there is also a responsibility to comply with neoliberal policies that may manifest in the form of restructuring, audit reviews, preference for qualified tutors (as opposed to volunteer tutors) and standardised testing in order to promote a competitive market economy. These neoliberal reforms have influenced the tertiary education sector at a rapid pace over the past two decades. A significant shift has been seen from a focus on students' pursuit of knowledge for empowerment to the achievement of individual gains.

Literacy Aotearoa understands the value of using standardised testing to assess where a learner's literacy levels are before they begin a programme in order to know how they are progressing during the programme. In addition to these tests, the organisation encourages the use of the Hei Ara Ako ki te Oranga wellbeing model as another way of assessing a student's progress (Hutchings, Yates, Isaacs, Whatman, & Bright, 2013). This measure is based on learning that occurred outside of the literacy assessment process and shows where confidence to learn was transferred to the learner's whānau.

### *What we mean by Whānau*

Whānau is a complex Māori concept based on whakapapa (genealogy). Whakapapa is the genealogical link between people and the physical and metaphysical dimensions. These two concepts of whānau and whakapapa share parallel themes in that they are socially and culturally constructed. In essence, whānau is based on the Māori worldview which means to be born or to give birth. It relates to extended family and family members who are the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society.

In today's modern world whānau is translated to mean family. Jane Furness's (2012) work on family literacy provision in New Zealand provides a comprehensive understanding of family literacy as a social practice that has relational meanings. For example, like whānau literacy, family literacy has been considered as literacy activities that support individuals within the family context. While there are similarities between the two concepts there is one primary difference that sets the concepts apart. That is the understanding that whānau is embedded in Te Ao Māori (Māori worldview of cultural knowledge, values and experiences). This article does not review family literacy but rather provides examples of whānau literacy models that have been identified in the literature and in recent research undertaken by Literacy Aotearoa.

### Whānau literacy programme models

Published research reports suggest successful whānau literacy programmes involve engagement with adult learners in LLN learning activities (Benseman & Sutton, 2005; Furness, Yates, & Isaacs, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2009; Potter, Taupo, Hutchings, McDowall, & Isaacs, 2011). The learning activities are designed to meet the learners' personal goals that may also contribute to the improved personal and social wellbeing of their whānau. These types of programmes produce benefits for the learner and their whānau directly and indirectly. Research conducted by Te Wahanga, the Māori unit at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, and Literacy Aotearoa highlighted the whānau literacy programmes success as parents now:

were (more) able to help their children with learning, including school based learning and were creating opportunities at home to do so. They had more books at home and participated in more literacy activities like reading and going to the library. Parents and grandparents said they had come to perceive their tamariki and mokopuna as competent learners, they talked more about school and learning with their children, and they participated more in school activities and were more comfortable talking with teachers. (Potter et al., 2011, p. 43)

These research projects provide examples for how future whānau literacy programmes could emerge and flourish.

### Three whānau literacy, language and numeracy programmes

#### Programme design and roll out

In 2013, Literacy Aotearoa delivered two distinct whānau literacy programmes nationwide (Literacy Aotearoa, 2013a; 2013b). One programme was supported by Te Puni Kokiri (TPK) and the second was supported by the Ministry of Education (MoE). A third programme was offered in 2015 as a result of the MoE programme delivered in 2013 (Literacy Aotearoa, 2015b). All programmes were managed by Literacy Aotearoa National Office in partnership with supports from TPK and MoE. LLN tuition was carried out by Literacy Aotearoa tutors.

#### Promotion and recruitment

The promotion and recruitment of participants were led by Literacy Aotearoa adult literacy services called Ngā Poupou. Ngā Poupou managers and tutors carried out face to face recruitment and word of mouth strategies to existing networks with local schools, community leaders and champions, health and social service providers, marae and local businesses. Some Poupou drew on their networks to promote posters, pamphlets and messages disseminated in local businesses with their permission. All three programmes employed similar recruitment, retention and support strategies that included an initial interview, diagnostic assessment and a learning plan. Topics of interest for participants that helped to define their learning goals were to: develop strategies for life; develop tools to deal with difficult circumstances; gain a sense of identity through te reo Māori; renew and improve relationships with family, friends and peers; gain employment; improve relationships between parents and children;

and improve confidence through communication which impacts on intergenerational issues such as inactivity, lack of confidence.

### Initial assessment

Ngā Poupou conducted an initial assessment interview as a fact-finding exercise that allowed the tutor to gather the students' existing knowledge and experience. The student-centred learning approach enabled students to talk about their interests, hobbies, goals and existing knowledge and abilities. This information was then used to inform the development of the individual student plan and programme content. As part of the formative assessment process, ongoing assessment involved a continuous process of enquiry and review throughout the programme including midway reviews, anecdotal notes and informal observations to gauge learner success of their goals and programme outcomes. Throughout the programme the tutor built up a profile of each student and maintained and reviewed their progress against their learning goals that informed the changes in the planned teaching strategies in order to better match the student's identified needs.

### Literacy and Numeracy Assessments

Literacy and Numeracy assessments were carried out with students where appropriate to complete a pre and post reading and/or numeracy assessment based on the TEC's Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool. Some students did not meet Step 1 on the TEC assessment tool and were encouraged to carry out a Starting Points pre-assessment test instead (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010). In addition to these assessments, tutors also drew on a wellbeing model for measuring wellbeing outcomes for literacy programmes called 'Hei Ara Ako ki te Oranga' (Hutchings, et al: 2013). The model captured student outcomes identified by the following wellbeing indicators:

- motivation;
- fulfilment;
- interest;
- confidence;
- positivity; and
- inclusion.

These indicators were part of an interactive narrative story telling method delivered in Te Reo and English to demonstrate the link between literacy learning and wellbeing for Māori students.

### Student profile

A total of 455 adults enrolled and took part across all three programmes. One hundred and seventy-four preschool aged children were impacted by the two MoE programmes. During the initial interview held with tutors and Poupou managers, many of the learners expressed their reluctance to engage in learning for a range of complex reasons including health, trauma, and social, financial and transport issues. Some learners also expressed anxiety about learning due to negative experiences they had at school. After building trust and rapport with students, tutors and students co-constructed learning plans based on the students' identified goals as shown in Table 1.



**Table 1. Example of Student Identified Goals**

Literacy and Numeracy Skills	Everyday Life Skills
To help children and their whānau	Healthy living
Build confidence and personal skills	Build te reo Māori, tikanga and whaikōrero skills with confidence
Gain full time employment	Develop reading, writing, spelling and maths skills
Gain a qualification	Improve computer and financial literacy by developing focused budgeting skills
Gain drivers licence	Model positive behaviour
Know how to talk to school leaders and teachers	Manage money better
Learn how to prepare their child for school	Communicate with children and family better

### Programme Design and Process

Fifty-nine Ngā Poupou carried out a total of 53 quality whānau programmes across Aotearoa from Kaitiāia to Invercargill in a mix of urban, semi-rural and rural communities. Some Poupou participated in more than one programme. Programmes were rolled out in a mix of communities with high social and economic needs. The programmes ranged from 10 to 20 weeks for a total of 50 to 100 hours. Programmes were delivered in one to one or group sessions for 2.5 hours per week or twice per week or over a series of consecutive weekends. The venue arrangements were formalised between Poupou and external stakeholders; for example, primary schools, Te Kohanga Reo, Early Childhood Education centres and community centres were used. Literacy and numeracy was embedded into programmes as it was being applied through day to day life experiences such as:

**Building life skills**—Students were encouraged to decode words and their meanings using everyday activities such as grocery shopping. Tutors assisted students to create healthy living options such as learning about nutrition by reading food labels, planning menus that included the 5 + a day rule and what it means. Students also learnt to identify the health properties and benefits of minerals and vitamins in food for the first time. They also learnt how to plan a healthy lunch box and incorporate basic food items.

These activities and others enabled students to identify and understand different reading texts, words, and phrases. This encouraged a shift in learners' behaviours, attitudes and confidence levels. As one learner said, "I really liked the low-cost cooking classes we did. It made us look at how much money we were spending and it made us discuss and compare healthy food options for school lunches" (Adult Student).

**Role modelling positive parenting**—Students wanted to improve their relationships and interactions with their preschool and school aged children. Tutors assisted them with communication strategies such as speaking clearly, knowing the audience, reflective listening and recall exercises. They also learnt about nonverbal communication. Where relationships were strained for some students, developing effective listening and speaking strategies were effective as for the first time students had confidence to engage in ways they never had before. As one whānau member said:

As a result of my Mum coming on the course, it's sparked a yearning for me to learn with my parents and it's really made us look at the way we treat one another. So it feels good that we all want to change and make our lives better by learning to listen to each other so that we can all be happy and live in harmony (whānau member of Adult Student).

Students were encouraged to read to their children in creative and animated ways. Activities were provided in English and te reo Māori. A student said: “The course has brought me and my mother closer. It has helped us to learn how to communicate rather than do what we always do which is argue with each other” (Adult Learner). Another student expressed: “I enrolled my daughter into an ECE centre. Before I was very reluctant, because I didn’t think she needed it” (Adult Learner).

**Gaining a sense of identity through te reo Māori**—Students engaged in cultural practices such as karakia (incantations), waiata (songs) and whaikōrero (formal speech). They began to memorise kupu hou (new words) that linked to information from their pepeha (tribal aphorism) which took into account Māori formulaic expressions of connecting landmarks and waterways that they spiritually identified with, such as Ko Wai to Maunga (Who is your mountain?) Ko wai to awa (Who is your River?). Through this process students extended their vocabulary and learnt correct pronunciation and understandings of some basic sentence structures in te reo Māori.

**Reading in the home**—Some students said they did not know they had a responsibility to teach their children reading and communication skills at home. They thought this was something schools or ECE centres did. As a result of visiting the library during the LLN programme, students observed quiet spaces for focused reading. They recreated quiet reading spaces at home which in turn encouraged interactive discussions because parents were now asking their children questions about what they had read, who was their favourite character and why? This interaction assisted adults to create routines and structure that reinforced positive communication among all whānau members. It also enabled students to learn narrative storytelling activities as a way of sharing what they learnt during the course of the programme. As a result of the literacy strategies employed by tutors the following outcomes for the students were achieved as they could do things they couldn’t do before such as:

- take their children to the public library and access books;
- create quiet spaces in their homes for reading;
- allocate time with their children and discuss the day’s activities;
- understand school and/or ECE centre newsletters; and
- assist children with their homework.

**Experiencing culturally safe learning spaces**—Students were also motivated to learn because they felt comfortable with the learning environment. As some students highlighted negative experiences with learning at school, Poupou conducted one to one learning in the student’s home, public library, community buildings, schools or ECE centres. Students felt they could now participate in learning and also found more enjoyment in participating in interactive activities; learners made a greater contribution to whānau activities; and whānau relationships were strengthened as a result of the learners’ improved communication skills.

**Gaining employment and work ready skills**—Despite the complex life issues some learners faced, they identified personal goals that would help them prepare better for work ready skills. They sought to increase employment opportunities by improving their reading, writing and spelling skills. Poupou also assisted students with activities that enabled them to gain full time employment or qualify for a learner driver’s licence to improve their job prospects.

The success of the programmes was based on the range of strategies and concepts used to assist students to obtain their goals. At the conclusion of the programmes, tutors carried out a summative assessment to assess whether the student’s goals had been achieved and to plan for the next goals or pathway. A summative assessment also enabled tutors an opportunity to measure learning gains against the TEC assessment tool, their goals and external criteria.

**Co-constructing individual learning plans**—A key component learners valued was the ability to co-construct their individual learning plan with their tutor. This meant that they had full ownership over how their goals were going to be achieved. In most cases the learners preferred to learn in a small group and one on one rather than an individualised competitive environment.

**Attaining quality improvement**—To ensure programme success, mechanisms were put in place to ensure transparency, efficiency and accountability as part of a quality improvement shift to demonstrate good return on investment. The standard of quality provision was attained even in the



context of an organisational restructuring and audit review. At the same time, preference for qualified tutors opposed to volunteer tutors was made as part of the funding requirements, and standardised testing through the TEC assessment tool was a requirement to promote a competitive market economy. These neoliberal reforms have influenced the tertiary education sector at a rapid pace over the past two decades. There has been a significant shift from a focus on students' pursuit of knowledge for empowerment to the achievement of individual gains.

## Overall key findings from the three LLN Programmes

The findings from the whānau literacy programmes have demonstrated positive changes in participants' literacy abilities that have improved their lives and the lives of their whānau.

### The strengths of whānau adult literacy programmes

The strengths of the whānau literacy programmes were based on Literacy Aotearoa's local autonomy and ability to provide flexibility in order to tailor local programmes to meet the needs of individual students within their local communities. As Poupou provided a diverse approach, inequalities were reduced not only at an outcomes level but also in an approach that enabled the organisation to operate in a business as unusual way.

The programmes also demonstrated the change adults made to be more involved in their children's literacy development at home as they began to read, draw, write, sit, speak and encourage their children's learning. This change has created positive nurturing styles at home as parents and whānau are learning together. They also encourage their children to ask questions and are assisting their children to create stories based on their own life experiences.

Another critical feature was the ability for students to transfer what they learnt on the programme to their home environments i.e., they prepare healthy meals for their whānau, they read and understand food labels, they have done away with junk food and they have built their own mara kai (healthy garden) at home where they provide food for their own whānau and wider whānau. In addition, they

- use more positive language and are happier about seeing their children's own happiness;
- have better relationships as they work together with their whānau (i.e. participating in sports activities together, singing together);
- seek employment opportunities;
- have changed negative attitudes and behaviours for positive affirmative attitudes and behaviours; and
- have learnt how to draw on their own life experiences, which now enables them to reflect and apply critical thinking skills to a range of situations.

### How whānau literacy programmes counter neoliberal agendas

The strengths of the whānau literacy programmes were prominent despite the tensions that emerged between advocating for vulnerable learners while countering reporting and accountability requirements. The key to whānau literacy programme success was the ability to embed literacy and numeracy in authentic contextual learning and everyday life experiences. This was achieved by co-constructing learning plans and agreeing to safe learning environments. Co-constructing learning plans and providing options for learning instruction is not a common feature of typical learning environments. Neoliberal environments encourage activities such as repeated restructuring, audit reviews, payments based on performance results, standardised testing through assessment results, and individual learning.

Despite neoliberalism, Literacy Aotearoa aspired to co-opt assessment standards such as the TEC assessment tool to not only provide a picture of the students' reading or numeracy results at the beginning and end of the programme but to account for the investment that is made. The challenge with co-opting any standardised measure for accountability purposes lies in the fact that some learners

who present to Literacy Aotearoa are not able to be assessed because their learning abilities are not at a high enough standard. Even though there is a pre-assessment tool such as the Starting Points framework, this may also be an inappropriate way of aggregating performance for learners who present with complex issues.

While most learners reported to have improved their self-confidence in communicating, writing, reading and applying mathematical principles and concepts to everyday tasks they also conveyed achieving an increase in wellbeing and general confidence outcomes. Wellbeing is considered as the ability for learners to gain knowledge holistically as individuals as well as to have positive impact on whānau.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that successful whānau literacy programmes are raising people's self-confidence and literacy abilities that will have a positive impact on their whānau. It has also focused on the tensions that emerge to meet centralised accountability in order to prove that these kinds of programmes are worthy of investment and relevant in the field of adult education.

Overall, this article has contended that a business as unusual approach could be integrated into compliance and reporting through narrative storytelling as a reliable baseline that demonstrates where a learner is in their learning and life journey. Wellbeing focussed measurement tools such as the Hei Ara Ako ki te Oranga model could be used as a legitimate way of capturing baseline data to track learner progress through learner stories. The programme outcomes reported in this article illustrate that learners were able to help themselves and in turn support their whānau in spite of emergent challenges such as transport, economic means and housing that have impacted and hindered their learning. In the face of these challenges, learners have gained more than functional literacy and numeracy skills toward independence. They have also achieved wellbeing and confidence outcomes for themselves and their whānau.

From the analysis of the findings in the LLN programmes we have demonstrated that short, focused LLN courses can assist learners to lead personally fulfilled lives when they have developed LLN skills. At the same time, the learners have gained increased abilities to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in the whānau, which has enabled them to maintain a sense of wellbeing for themselves and their whānau. Success was also achieved as Literacy Aotearoa tutors enabled learners to experience a sense of value and meaning in relation to their learning in safe learning environments.

While it is inevitable that neoliberal policies will continue to influence the tertiary education sector, it is imperative that Literacy Aotearoa continues to challenge the status quo by applying a business as unusual approach to future adult and whānau LLN programmes. Where neoliberal education policies expect adult learners to be prepared to fit into the existing neoliberal view of society; compete in an international competitive workforce and take part in a performance-driven and results-based education system, Literacy Aotearoa affirms its commitment to meet the obligations of the neoliberal agenda but at the same time to meet its commitment to addressing the complex needs of the learners based on a business as unusual approach.

In this regard, Literacy Aotearoa will continue to provide whānau literacy and similarly based programmes because the evidence suggests they work. The evidence suggests they work well for whānau because the learners have grown their capability to succeed and assist their partners, children and wider whānau members by modelling behaviours, attitudes and abilities to succeed.

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Manager Peter Isaacs that spans over 32 years working in the adult literacy sector in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

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