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Summarising: Kral & Schwab (2003), *The realities of Indigenous adult literacy acquisition and practice: Implications for capacity development in remote communities*
Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
The realities of Indigenous adult literacy acquisition and practice: Implications for capacity development in remote communities

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
I. Kral and J.G. Schwab

Time period:
2003

Geographic location:
A small remote Indigenous outstation community in north central Arnhem Land and a remote community spread across 17 outstations in the Sandover region of Central Australia, some 250 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs (NT).

Methodology:
This is a case study of two communities using an ethnographic approach involving interviews and conversations with community members, observation of everyday literacy practices and analysis of literacy artifacts and documents. Interviews were held with 56 community members and 10 non-Indigenous key people from the education department, the health service, training providers as well as linguists.

Aims:
This research aims to identify the realities of everyday literacy in two remote communities. In particular the study focuses upon:
• the level of literacy skills and abilities of community members; and
• perceptions surrounding the use of literacy.

Selected findings and insights:
The research found that there was a large discrepancy between people's perception of their literacy competence and their actual competence, possibly due to either to a reluctance to self-identify as non-English literate or a general lack of experience with a world based upon English literacy.

• Some 65% of males and 44% of females were not yet competent at the National Reporting System Level 1 of literacy and overall about 20% of adults were competent at Level 2.¹

The study concluded that adult literacy levels were generally low and, in several cases, much lower than was assumed by some non-Indigenous people who live and work with members of these communities.

¹. At NRS Level 1 individuals are able to identify specific information such as personal details in a text with familiar content, or are able to write personal details such as name and address or a one or two phrase sentence conveying a simple idea or message.
In terms of the extent to which literacy was used, the study found that:

- females did more reading and writing than males, perhaps as a consequence of having had more education, or their role as primary caregivers or because more females had had employment experience in domains requiring literacy competence, most commonly education or health. Females had typically read English and about one-third had written in English on the previous day; and

- males were more likely to have read or written English in the last week than the previous day (although only about half had done so), perhaps because the need to read or write was sporadic rather than constant.

In terms of how literacy was used, the study found that females tended to use literacy for a more diverse set of purposes than do males. Interestingly, the study found that in many instances of ‘functional literacy’ adults described some form of literacy mediation whereby the literacy broker - storekeeper or relative - gave an oral interpretation of the text.

Literacy itself was mainly acquired through primary schooling although some literacy learning also took place in adult education-literacy courses, Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) courses and incidental workplace literacy activities, as well as through Christian literacy teaching. The family or household itself did not appear to play a significant role in literacy development, due to the extant low levels of literacy in the adult community; where adults were literate, then younger individuals in the family were more likely to be literate.

The study found that both communities placed a high value on schooling: school attendance and community participation in schooling was high compared to other remote Indigenous communities. Yet the community did not consider education in terms of 'investment in human capital' but rather as a means of operating in the Western world whilst maintaining their own cultural focus.

Educational implications:

The study identifies some practical suggestions to encourage everyday literacy practices, including

- the need to support the creation and storage of culturally relevant literacy materials and finding a means to ensure that such materials are made more accessible in remote communities; and

- support for the literacy brokerage role of those with higher level literacy skills in the community. In addition, consideration needs to be given to how best to raise awareness of and then support the role of family and community in the acquisition of literacy.

Adult education courses for Indigenous adults can provide effective training in English language, literacy and numeracy, as well as a foundation for capacity development for community life. In addition they can promote lifelong learning and provide vocational training for local community work – both paid and unpaid. The study suggests:

- customising Training Packages so that they reflect the real contexts of English language, literacy and numeracy use in remote communities;

- customising Training Packages to allow for training and assessment tailored to specific local Indigenous needs and contexts, and/or assessment by local Indigenous assessors working in tandem with registered training organisations;
• providing for community-based adult educators who are not tied to accredited competency based training courses, and who can provide targeted English language literacy and numeracy support. [adult learning] [training]

Relevance:

Domain 1: Early Childhood Education
  Teaching of pre-literacy and numeracy
  Parental capacity to support literacy acquisition and participation in child’s education

Domain 2: School and Community Educational Partnerships
  Cross-cultural understanding of purposes and value of education
  Cross-cultural relationship between school and community
  Use and negotiation of educational partnership agreements between schools and communities.

Domain 4: Quality Teaching
  Explicit teaching of English literacy and Standard Australian English

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education
  Adult return to education and/or training
  Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers:
I. Kral and I. Falk *What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health*, 2004 Report to NCVER.