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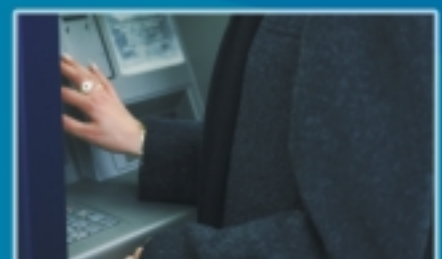
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Perspectives of Adult Literacy Learners 2004-2006:

A REPORT FROM THE ADULT LITERACY
AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

Elsbeth Tilley ♦ Margie Comrie ♦ Bronwyn
Watson ♦ Niki Culligan ♦ Frank Sligo
♦ John Franklin ♦ Franco Vaccarino



Massey University

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A report from the Adult Literacy and Employment Programme

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<http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/>

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This report is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr Su Olsson (1942–2005), friend, colleague, and objective leader in the Literacy and Employment Programme.

Executive summary

This report explores the perceptions of adult literacy participants of their literacy needs, the barriers to literacy and learning, the barriers to employment, conduits to learning, and the benefits and positive aspects of their training programmes. This information derives from a series of interviews conducted in late 2004 and early 2005 with participants in adult literacy training programmes, and is supplemented by follow-up interviews completed with 22 of the same participants 1 year later. Findings from these interviews form the core of a major, longitudinal research programme exploring issues around adult literacy and employment.

First, the interviews undertaken in 2004–2005 are discussed, followed by some comparisons between findings in these interviews, and findings from a parallel group of non-participants (those who have never attended an adult literacy training programme). The longitudinal sample is then described, and initial findings about employment and further training outcomes are outlined.

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We are indebted to many other friends and colleagues not named here for their insights and support to date in this research. However, all remaining errors and omissions in this discussion paper are of course the responsibility of the authors alone. Further, the points of view expressed in this paper are those of the authors, and are not necessarily endorsed by the community groups which, as is normal in a diverse society, will have their own perspectives on the issues covered here.

Introduction

In line with the Government's strategic priority to improve participation in employment, earnings, and quality of employment, the Foundation for Research, Science, and Technology (FRST) funded study of Adult Literacy and Employment in Wanganui aims to develop deeper insights into the issues surrounding adult literacy and employment and, eventually, to develop solutions for participants, practitioners, and policy-makers. One important goal is to increase the likelihood that the growing investment in adult literacy in New Zealand is used effectively to benefit both individuals and the country as a whole.

At the heart of the research is an investigation of how participants in adult literacy programmes perceive their learning needs, barriers to their learning, and the contribution of their learning to any subsequent employment opportunities. Eighty-eight participants in adult literacy training courses in Wanganui shared their experiences with us in late 2004 and 2005. Because assessments of adult literacy employment initiatives in this country have been largely one-off in nature, the Wanganui-based project has incorporated a longitudinal approach with plans for two follow-up interviews with the same participants across a 3-year period. We believe this, combined with the perspectives of training providers and employers (on literacy issues of importance to them), will lead to a deeper understanding of adult literacy initiatives and their impacts on workplaces and communities. The study sets out to benefit New Zealand by providing rigorous attention to an inadequately researched issue of growing significance for a country that seeks to participate fully in the "knowledge society" world of the 21st century.

Following preliminary advice of funding support from FRST, four research objectives, indicated below, were determined via negotiation with the Foundation. All four objectives were designed to help policy makers, adult literacy practitioners, adult literacy participants, and employers better understand the issue's surrounding literacy, and the extent and significance of the impact of literacy on an individual, community, and nation. The objectives were also designed to help better prepare participants and practitioners for the challenges they face in addressing literacy issues. The four objectives are to:

1. establish the adult literacy needs of both employed and unemployed in Wanganui and Districts
2. identify the social, attitudinal, and economic barriers to adult literacy, numeracy, and analytical thinking skills of employed and unemployed in Wanganui and Districts

3. evaluate how effectively adult literacy programmes secure employment outcomes
4. examine adult literacy learning processes and their relationship to employment.

This report is aimed specifically at objectives 1–3. The Adult Literacy and Employment project has been an expanding one which at the time of writing contains more than 20 different sub-projects of methodologies, briefly described on the project website <http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/methodologies.html>. Key approaches employed in this study include researching the perspectives of employers, individual adult literacy participants, persons with low literacy in English who are not participating in training (non-participants), adult literacy providers, and associated community groups. However, in-depth interviews aimed at capturing the experiences of those undertaking various kinds of literacy training programmes are the project's core. As well as discovering the experiences of participants on their courses, we wished to explore certain elements in their family background, including early schooling and learning experiences. We were also interested in how they perceived their learning style, and wanted to discuss with them their employment history, their aspirations, and their community involvement; these being some of the elements mentioned in the literature as likely to have a bearing on literacy outcomes and to be affected by literacy training.

As mentioned previously, the project contains a longitudinal element, and follow-up interviews were conducted in April to May 2006 along with interviews with a new set of participants building on the knowledge gained from the first set of interviews. A third round of interviews is planned for 2007. Follow-up interviews concentrated on building a picture of where participants were in their lives 1 year on – concentrating on employment and further training, along with other 'soft' outcomes. The follow-up interviews also investigated in more depth those perceived needs that had been mentioned in the first interviews. These included participants' health needs, learning needs (in terms of the course structure, tutor attributes, and their own learning styles), and course marketing needs.

This report on the perspectives of adult literacy learners is aimed at partial fulfilment of the first three objectives of the wider adult literacy project. It is in two main sections. The first enlarges and updates the findings of the first round of participant interviews conducted in 2004/2005, which were initially covered in two earlier reports from the adult literacy and employment team¹. This fuller analysis is followed by a brief comparison with results of interviews with 40 'non-participants' who took part

¹ Initial findings of the participants' perceptions of literacy and learning needs can be found in Comrie, Olsson, Sligo, Culligan, Tilley, Vaccarino, and Franklin (2005). Initial findings of participants' perceived barriers to literacy and employment are discussed within Sligo, Comrie, Olsson, Culligan, and Tilley (2005).

in similar interviews to provide some context or 'benchmark' for the experiences of participants². The second section presents initial findings of follow-up interviews with 22 of the original participants. This section of the report concentrates particularly on employment outcomes or further training activities that may have resulted from the adult literacy training they have undertaken.

Part One: Initial Interviews with Participants

Method

An exploratory, qualitative interview process was chosen to hear the participants' stories and obtain rich data. The interview structure was developed by community partners/subcontractors and Massey University collaborating to prepare open-ended questions, designated under theme areas and by the key information required. After initial discussions with community stakeholders, a series of broad question areas were developed in line with the relevant literature. (A literature review associated with the project can be accessed at <http://literacy.massey.ac.nz/publications.html>). Questions were further refined in a series of consultations with community representatives, who included those with experience in literacy training. We were particularly concerned that participants were free to tell their story and that the interviews should not spring from a 'deficit model' of literacy.

Ethics approval for the interview process was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee to ensure no harm came to interviewees and proper procedures for informed consent were developed.

Adult literacy providers in the Wanganui and Districts region were next contacted by a community subcontractor and informed of the project and why we wished to undertake interviews. Providers were invited to assist the project team in identifying potential participants. (On some occasions participants self-identified from a direct presentation of the project and from interview invitations to a group of potential interviewees.) The adult literacy providers then approached potential participants on the project's behalf, explaining the research and providing them with the Information Sheet. If a person was willing to be interviewed, an interview time was established, and the individual was offered the opportunity to have a support person present, if they wished.

Consent to participate in the interview was undertaken at the beginning of the interview meeting. Time was taken to ensure the participant was comfortable before, dur-

² Full findings of the non-participant interviews are reported in Comrie, Tilley, Neilson, Culligan, Sligo and Vaccarino (2006).

ing, and after the interview. Interviews were audio-taped where the interviewee gave permission for this to occur, and the tapes sent back to Massey University for transcribing and analysis.

Interviewers were encouraged to be flexible in their approach, and to use the questions and key information required as guidelines to the topic areas they needed to cover in the interview. Interviews were not required to follow a strict question sequence. Flexibility to adapt wording of questions was encouraged if desirable. The nine theme areas covered in these interviews were: socioeconomic context; schooling; learning and views on the course being undertaken; employment; motivation; persistence; resistance; barriers; and power dynamics.

Participants were sought from as many training providers as possible in the Wanganui District. Twelve of the estimated 13 providers at the time took part in the study. The aim was to interview participants from each course who reflected the range of clients. Some of the providers were broader training and education institutions; our participants came from those within the organisations who were identified as undertaking specific literacy training.

Because of the collaborative nature of the project and the sensitive nature of the issues to be disclosed, working with the providers to identify interviewees and to gain their trust involved time. Two pilot interviews were conducted on 2 December 2004. Eighty-eight participants were interviewed in late 2004 and early 2005.

Analysis

The written transcripts of the interviews were examined line by line using grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992), to allow categories and constructs, collapsed into codes, to surface from the participants' own words. By this means we aimed to establish codes well based in participants' statements. The intention was to ensure that each code could be supported by comments within the transcripts comprising "extensive amounts of rich data with thick description" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514). Examination of emergent codes was supported via use of the HyperResearch data analysis package (ResearchWare: Simply powerful, n.d.).

The coding analysis was completed with a total of 79 interviews that were able to be transcribed following a number of different technical and other problems. We stress that the data are qualitative and categories are often inter-related. Further, the variety of students and the differing emphases of their training makes generalisation fraught. However, we have used some quantitative descriptors where appropriate, for example, the number of respondents who mentioned a particular 'theme' and the number of comments made about the theme. The number of comments may be taken as some indication of 'intensity'. Coding was conducted without reference to any respondent's demographics in order to allow the words to speak for themselves.

However, for reference purposes, a brief summary of demographic details provided by the participants follows.

Profile of participants

The sample comprised 88 interviewees of working age (between 16 and 65 years), all of whom were undertaking a course of study at one of the 12 identified adult literacy providers in the Wanganui and Districts region. Eighty-three of the participants completed demographic questionnaires. Two-thirds of these were less than 30 years of age, with nearly half of the sample in the age group 16 to 20. Two interviewees were over 60 years of age.

There were slightly more females (43) than males (40). In terms of ethnicity, just over half (42) identified themselves as 'New Zealand European' and 3 as 'New Zealander'. Twenty-four interviewees (28.9%) identified themselves as 'Māori', and a further 10 as 'Māori and NZ European'. Two participants identified with 'Pacific Peoples', one with 'Asian Peoples', and one as 'Dutch'.

English was given as their first language by 72 respondents (87%). Māori was given as a first language by three respondents, and another three answered 'English and Māori'. Twenty-eight percent reported an iwi affiliation. Of those affiliating with an iwi, almost half stated they were either Whanganui Iwi or Te Atihaunui-a-Paparangi.

Over half the sample had had up to 3 years of secondary schooling (43 interviewees, 52%) or primary schooling only (3 interviewees). Another 30% reported 4-plus years of secondary education, while 9% had some level of tertiary education.

Interviewees often used several categories to describe their employment status. However, about 75% of the sample indicated they were student/trainees (57) or unemployed (7). Four interviewees were full-time employed (more than 30 hours a week). Eleven described themselves as in part-time or casual work, and six described themselves as a 'house person or retired'.

Figure 1 shows the age grouping of the sample, while Figures 2 and 3 show the educational achievements and employment status of the participants respectively.

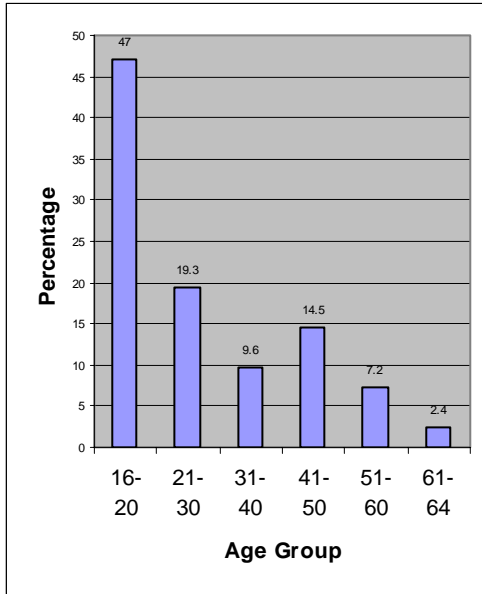


Figure 1. Participants' Age Group

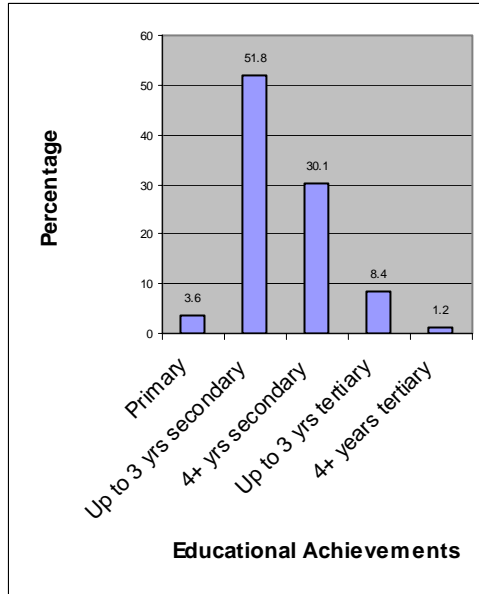


Figure 2. Participants' Educational Achievements

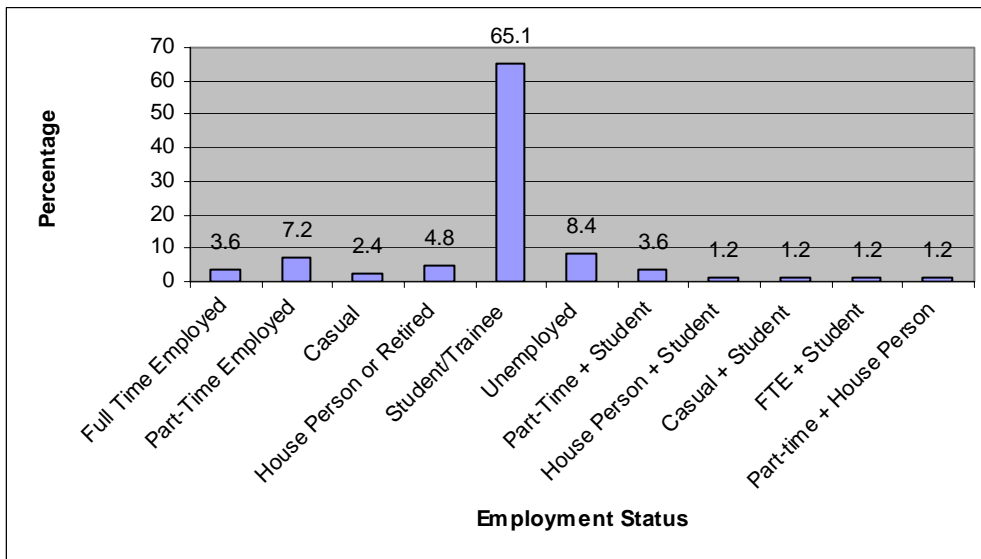


Figure 3. Participants' Employment Status

The aim was to select participants who were broadly representative of students across the variety of adult literacy training providers in Wanganui. A comparison of our sample of interviewees with the profile of literacy provider clients shows a similar range of ages, with a concentration in the 16–19 age group, and the majority under 30. Gender varied widely across different providers, but overall, as in our sample, there were slightly more female than male clients. With regard to employment status, interviewees tended to prefer the descriptor of 'student/trainee' to describing

themselves as ‘unemployed’, whereas training providers recognised that many were on their programmes because they were or had been registered as unemployed.

Participants’ perceptions of literacy needs

The theme of literacy needs of various kinds was seen in all 79 of the interviews analysed. These participants’ comments have been coded using 19 themed areas of need. The table below shows these needs in rank order of the number of participants who mentioned them. The third column in the table shows the frequency of comments. This frequency can be taken as some measure of intensity, perhaps how strongly participants felt about a certain issue. Below we give some detail about the “top seven” needs and make brief mention of some other needs. Then we group these literacy needs into four related areas and discuss the implications of this briefly.

The frame for interviewing both participants (and non-participants) was established around literacy and employment. Both this and the nature of the courses that participants were taking may be reflected in their comments.

Table 1. Participants’ Literacy Needs

Literacy Need Identified	Respondents	Comments
Computer Skills	36	51
Communication Skills	34	59
Reading and/or Writing	26	38
Training Need: One-on-One	25	30
Maths	25	29
Life Skills	24	34
Attitude, including Confidence	23	34
English	14	16
Academic Qualifications or Credits	14	15
Training Need: Group Work	11	11
Cultural Literacy or Whakapapa	10	10
Specific Knowledge Set or Skills	9	10
Training Need: Other	6	8
Thinking and Understanding	4	5
Other Literacy Needs	3	4
Training Need: Feedback	2	4
Bilingualism or Te Reo	2	3
Science	2	3
Training in Own Community	2	2

Computer skills

Nearly half the respondents indicated that computer literacy was a need and/or an increasingly prevalent need. Typically, comments mentioned that computers were everywhere: "Even looking through the papers now for employment, there's not much available where you don't need some sort of basic computer skills" or "everything in the future will be computers. It doesn't matter if you're working in a supermarket or in a school in an office, computers...that's the first thing." Another participant suggested that "even tractor drivers" now needed to be computer literate. Several respondents commented on the importance of learning typing skills because of the increasing need to use computers.

Others, however, suggested that only clerical-type employment required computer skills and a small number argued against the need for computer skills. For example: "I don't know what computers are good for. I can do everything that a computer can do, by myself. It becomes more gratifying when you're doing without a computer."

Communication skills

The respondents saw communication skills other than written communication as a crucial literacy need. Examples were, 'talking to others', 'people skills', 'social skills', 'listening skills', 'getting on with others in the workplace', 'working in groups or teams', 'negotiating', 'interpersonal skills', and 'cross-cultural communication'. Communication skills were mentioned by almost as many respondents as computer skills and there were the greatest number of comments in this category. For example, one participant commented on the need for "communicating with other people, understanding everyone, just getting on with everyone". Another suggested that communication skills are essential: "you're not going to get on with everybody, but if you can't work in a team or discuss a problem as an adult, you may as well stay at home".

Reading and/or writing

Around one third of those who mentioned literacy needs saw reading and/or writing as key. One spoke of reading and writing as "the basis of learning everything else – the building blocks – you know, like the foundations of something, you can't read about the great mystery if you don't know how to read". But a larger number mentioned reading and writing as necessary for practical, work-related needs like safety, changing job requirements, increasing paperwork, and faxes. For instance: "I work in a machinery factory. You've always got to read stuff because if you don't know what you're touching or you're playing with you could chop your hand off." Or "the reading bit is for warning signs and instructions; writing is if you fill out a first aid form." Another participant said changes in procedure had given him a bit of a shock:

I was a linesman when I first started working. We didn't do anything; we'd go off and fix pylons. Fix it or paint it or whatever. Then like half a year or a year

into it we had to write stuff down in our log books... to be sent to the main office.

Need for one-to-one training

Of the training needs, to be discussed in more detail later, this was by far the most frequent training need (followed by group work) and mentioned by about a third of the respondents.

Maths

Twenty-five respondents mentioned maths as a literacy or learning need. Some saw maths needs as widespread because of computers, or simply because, "Every time you go on a course there's maths involved or in a job there's maths." Another respondent said:

Even if you were a truck driver...you are meant to have this many pallets on a truck and you have only got 4 pallets instead of having 6 pallets... At the other end they are going 'Where's the 2 pallets gone?'

For another participant numeracy needs depended on your job: "If your job is to be an accountant then you need maths."

Life skills

Almost as many respondents saw life skills as a crucial literacy requirement (for example, financial literacy, health literacy, time management, practical day-to-day problem solving skills, 'common sense', or the ability to make good choices). The line between these and attitudinal needs and communication skills is sometimes fine (for example, problem-solving usually involves communication). Where respondents specifically used the term life skills or placed most of their emphasis on 'survival' type individual life skills such as cooking, or moral judgement skills such as knowing right from wrong, their answer was coded under life skills. Where they more heavily emphasised attitudinal factors such as emotional control or confidence, their comment has been coded under attitude, and where they placed more emphasis on fitting into a group through developing communication skills, they have been coded under communication need. One example of life skill needs for one participant included health literacy "I used to smoke and I used to drink and when I think back to why I did it, it was just because everyone else did." For another, a necessary life skill was for boys to learn cooking.

Attitude, including confidence

About a quarter of the participants nominated attitudinal aspects such as having confidence, having a goal and a sense of empowerment to reach that goal, or having a 'positive' attitude or a work ethic as important literacy needs, as well as necessary precursors to more traditional literacy studies. For example, "I think the biggest part

of all is just having the confidence...self belief. A bit of discipline with those because sometime we do have [to] discipline ourselves as adults.” Another talked of the need to “buckle down and just go hard”. A further respondent said that before you can learn traditional literacy skills you need discipline and to know about “how to respect someone, how to listen. And then once that starts bring literacy in, combine it.”

Less frequently mentioned literacy needs

Fourteen respondents specifically nominated ‘English’ as a literacy need. A similar number mentioned the importance of qualifications, credits, and certificates; some mentioned this in the context of changing employment needs while others mentioned they were studying for the qualification itself. Eleven respondents indicated that for them group learning was an important training need. Ten respondents commented on the need for cultural literacy or whakapapa for themselves or others. While their reasons were personal, there was a common sense of cultural and ancestral literacies contributing to a holistic sense of identity. Several respondents regretted not having knowledge of their ancestors. Only two specifically commented on the need for Te Reo or bilingualism.

Table 2. Participants’ Literacy Needs Grouped into Related Categories

Category	Sub-Category	Comments
Non-traditional Literacies Most Frequent Cluster	Computer Skills	51
	Communication Skills	59
	Life Skills	34
	Attitude, Including Confidence	34
	Cultural Literacy and Whakapapa	10
	Specific Knowledge Set or Skills	10
	Thinking and Understanding	5
	Other Literacy Needs	4
	Bilingualism or Te Reo	2
Total		209
Traditional (3R) Literacies & Science Second Most Frequent Cluster	Reading and Writing	38
	Maths	29
	Academic Qualifications and Credits	15
	English	14
	Science	3
Total		99
Training-related Needs Third Most Frequent	One-on-One Training	30
	Group Work	11
	Other Training Needs	8
	Feedback	4

Cluster		
	Training in Own Community	2
Total		55

Although the data are not quantitative, they can be a rough guide to levels of concern among respondents. The cluster of non-traditional literacies contained more than twice as many comments as the next most referred to cluster, traditional literacies. Relatively few of the participants referred to training needs, suggesting this is not a significant area of concern, which reinforces the positive comments made about their training. However, there were more comments on the non-traditional literacies than on all other clusters combined. Given the close relationship between communication, life skills, and attitude, this suggests the analysis of needs leading to uptake of training provision and/or marketing of training in terms of personal development – the facilitation of motivation, confidence, communication skills, and other social skills – are key areas that require greater emphasis.

Participants’ perceptions of children’s literacy needs

Forty-two participants made a total of 52 comments about children’s literacy needs. These comments were also included under participants’ perceptions of literacy needs in general and have been separated out here for general discussion.

While over a quarter of these 42 respondents mentioned reading and writing and often maths skills, these were often combined with the need to generally do well or work hard at school. Here parents often mentioned their efforts to help and encourage their children at school. Most of the answers, however, concerned non-traditional literacies, with a strong emphasis on various living skills. Some of the interviewees mentioned specific requirements like budgeting skills, personal hygiene, or health literacy, for instance, learning to avoid smoking and drinking. Others were more general: “just basic life skills”. The need for communication and various people skills received regular mention.

There was strong emphasis on developing the right attitude. While some comments were along the lines of “they just need to buckle down and go hard”, for others the striving was expressed in terms of liberation: “live your dreams ...don’t just sit there and dream about it. Actually do it.” Another participant hoped children could learn from their parents’ mistakes.

The theme of confidence was threaded through a number of answers. One interviewee thought children were “overconfident” but others thought that confidence, especially blended with people skills, was essential. There was often an implication that this had been lacking in the participants’ own experience: “You want them to be educated. You want them to have goals. You want them to have self belief, confidence ... I think that may have been a big part of my education where I – you fall away.”

There was a recurring theme that children needed to know “right and wrong” or “morals”. As one participant put it, they should “ultimately know how to treat people with respect and kindness.”

Others mentioned the prime need was love and attention at home. One participant said children need to know “that they are loved and they have good support.” Another used an analogy: “Children need nurturing. It’s like a plant. Without water it dies.”

Perceptions of barriers to literacy

The interviews explored aspects of the participants’ life, work, and school experiences and from these emerged a number of barriers to literacy learning coded according to 30 themes (from a total of 79 cases). These loose categories or themes emerged from participants’ own comments as areas of particular or repeated mention. These were later grouped into four clusters representing the dominant emphasis in a particular comment (self; community/family/lifeworld; school; and training). Again, clusters are for ease of description and should not be taken to indicate the areas of concern are discrete. For example, a respondent may talk about his or her family background as unsupportive of learning due to parents working long hours. This is likely to be at least partly an economic issue; however, if the respondent has not explicitly identified it as such (for example, by mentioning the need to earn money, or explicitly commenting on financial difficulties) it has only been coded under the more general area of family background.

The complexity and multiplicity of respondents’ comments indicate barriers are very much integrated across these areas rather than attributable exclusively to one or the other. Where multiple themes occur in one comment, efforts have been made to split the comment into components. Because some contextual material is useful about each component, this means that on rare occasions a comment may be coded twice, in different contexts, to reflect a respondent’s understanding of their situation as multi-faceted.

For example, one respondent who genuinely had a health barrier also described playing up that health issue because they had an unpleasant teacher and wanted to avoid school for that reason. The two were interrelated, with the amount of school missed attributable both to health and teaching barriers. The number of respondents mentioning a particular theme is therefore indicative of the level of concern among the respondent group, but is not a true quantitative measure. The comments themselves are the most useful illustrators of the breadth and depth of each area of concern.

We deal first with the separate themes (seen below in Table 3) discussing in detail only the top seven barriers. We then comment on the clusters (shown in Table 4).

Table 3. Participants' Perceptions of Literacy Barriers

	Respondents	Comments
Health-related Barriers	42	71
Family Environment	39	71
Goal Orientation	38	49
School not meeting Needs	33	53
School Teaching	27	67
School Peer Pressure, Bullying	25	30
Time: Employment Commitments	22	26
Time: Family/Community Commitments	18	20
Attitude or Motivation	17	25
Economic	16	20
Changing Schools	16	22
Learning Style not Catered for in School	15	26
No Positive Reinforcement	13	14
Geographical Isolation, Lack Transport	12	17
Behaviour at School	12	16
Confidence	10	12
Literacy not Needed	9	10
School Curriculum	9	12
School Truancy	9	10
Other Barriers	6	7
Stigma of Using Literacy Services	5	6
Training: Wrong Pace or Level	5	5
School Streaming	4	4
Training: Peers	4	4
Training: Unavailable	4	4
Training: Teaching	3	3
Not Taught Te Reo because of Social Pressure	2	4
School Overcrowded	2	2
Training: Lack of Awareness	2	5

Training: Structural Barriers	1	1
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The ‘top seven’ barriers to literacy – mentioned by the most participants - are summarised here followed by a few comments on the ‘clusters’.

Health barriers

The biggest single barrier to literacy was health-related. More than half the participants (42) mentioned a wide range of physical and mental health problems. These included hearing and sight loss, accidents, ADHD, asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, physical disability, kidney malfunction, and mental illnesses. A number of these health problems had seriously disrupted schooling.

The prevalence of health and physical concerns as barriers to literacy suggests examination of the ways in which children who miss school are assisted to catch up is also necessary. Several respondents felt that missing school due to illness had been a turning point in their learning and had had a lifelong impact on their subsequent educational achievement levels. For example, one respondent commented on an illness-related absence from school: “That was a huge ... and I felt that with that gap, and even my parents said that’s where they feel I might have gone wrong somewhere.” The comments also indicate that better identification and support systems for those with problems of poor eyesight, hearing, ADHD, dyslexia, and related conditions that affect participation in traditional classroom situations are important, and are not yet optimum.

Barriers in the family environment

Various aspects of the family environment (including lack of support for learning at home, family violence, a parent dying, divorce, and being removed from school by a parent) were mentioned as a barrier by 39 respondents. “Mum ... never had an education. I think she just couldn’t wait for me to finish school”; “Mum and Dad don’t get on at all – it’s like World War II”; “I grew up too fast really, but I learned how to take a certain amount of punishment shall we say”; “My real father ... he didn’t give a toss about us kids. It was easy not to go to school”; “Because of the long hours they had to work ... my younger half brother and I had to look after ourselves”; “My parents split up when I was 13 and I ended up having to help my father bring up four other children”.

There were a large number of comments (71) made about the family environment, with some participants in particular returning to the theme several times and revealing traumatic histories.

Goal orientation

Goal orientation (lack of goals, feeling disempowered, having no role models) was mentioned by 38 respondents. Comments included, “If you look up to negative peo-

ple, you end up like that yourself"; "I never really had that urge to want to learn something to become something"; "I used to actually wonder whether I would still be alive when I hit 21"; and "I don't like to plan things, they just happen."

School not meeting participants' needs

School not meeting needs (ranging from finding it boring and not fitting in, to lack of pastoral care) was mentioned by 33 respondents. One participant commented, "I left without realising that I could've gone on and done the Sixth Form". Another participant left at the school's suggestion: "the College rang my Mum and told her all they were doing was baby sitting me." One participant who talked about teachers as "the knockers" said "I was strapped because I was talking and I liked to bounce ideas". Another, who liked school and tried hard, said, "I was too ashamed to tell the teachers that I couldn't read or spell". Others found school too slow: "I'd done [my work] too fast and then I mucked around and got into trouble for the rest of the period"; "I'd always run off and do my own thing. I'd be too far ahead of the class and it wasn't funny, or I just wouldn't bother because it was just a waste of time." Another left school because "the teachers wouldn't teach me because I was too slow". Others were "on the side" or spoke of being alone or getting detention because they "got the wrong end of the stick." Several mentioned simply not liking school.

Teaching and teachers as a barrier

Twenty-seven participants mentioned the teaching they received as a barrier to literacy (including racism, refusing to answer questions, putting students down, and using physical punishment). The large number (67) of comments that related to this barrier shows something of the intensity of participants' feelings. One interviewee made 12 comments – a number of them extensive – mainly about the amount of physical punishment at school, one particular teacher who ripped up her creative efforts, and others who told her she would never be good enough or pass. Another interviewee, who made eight comments, spoke about being constantly told that she would never get anywhere and of teachers being "too busy" to help her individually even when they were on their break. Others spoke about being branded as troublesome because of other members of the family. The long-term damage of being humiliated by teachers was a consistent theme.

Peer pressure and bullying at school

Peer pressure and bullying was a barrier to literacy mentioned by 25 respondents in a total of 30 comments. For several it was being with the 'wrong crowd', beginning to wag school, or to take drugs. Others mentioned distractions in class, including violent classmates. There was a strong theme of bullying and being picked on because they were different: "I used to get bullied heaps"; "I was mainly teased at school"; "They thought just because they were bigger than me, they could give me a hiding and I always used to get into trouble for beating people up". In a large number of cases these factors contributed to participants leaving school early.

Time: Employment commitments

Twenty-two participants commented that struggling to balance work commitments with study or having to give up study to take on work was a barrier. Several reported long hours at work, overtime, and pressure from employers to come in on extra days as hindering their training. Other participants said job opportunities in the past had been the reason behind them leaving school or not completing earlier training courses.

Table 4 groups the categories outlined above in Table 3 into larger, related clusters of barriers. Within each cluster sub-categories are ordered in terms of the number of respondents who made the comment. The numbers of comments for each cluster have been cumulated and can be seen as a rough measure of the salience of the issue to the respondents.

Table 4. Participants' Perceived Literacy Barriers: By Cluster

Cluster	Sub-Category	Respondents	Comments
School Most Frequent Cluster (Largest Number of Comments)	School not Meeting Needs	33	53
	School Teaching	27	67
	School Peer Pressure/Bullying	25	30
	Changing Schools	16	22
	Learning Style not Catered for	15	26
	Behaviour at School	12	16
	School Curriculum	9	12
	School Truancy	9	10
	School Streaming	4	4
	School Overcrowded	2	2
Total			242
Self Second Most Frequent Cluster	Health-related Barriers	42	71
	Goal Orientation	38	49
	Attitude or Motivation	17	25
	Confidence	10	12
	Literacy not Needed	9	10
Total			167
Family/ community/ Lifeworld Third Most	Family Environment	39	71
	Time: Employment Commitments	22	26
	Time Family/Community Commitments	18	20

Frequent Cluster	Economic	16	20
	No Positive Reinforcement	13	14
	Other	6	7
	Not Taught Te Reo	2	4
Total			162
Training	Stigma of Using Literacy Services	5	6
Least frequent cluster	Training at Wrong Pace	5	5
	Training: Peers	4	4
	Training Unavailable	4	4
	Training: Teaching	3	3
	Training: Lack of Awareness	2	5
	Training: Structural Barriers	1	1
Total			28

When the barriers to literacy are clustered, poor experiences at school emerge as predominant. As well as the barriers described above (school not meeting participants' needs, poor teaching practices, and peer pressure and bullying), 16 participants commented that moving schools had created a problem; 15 that school had not catered for their learning style; 12 mentioned their own behaviour at school as a barrier; 9 mentioned truancy; 4 commented that school streaming had adversely affected them; and, 2 mentioned problems with overcrowding. Within this, the relatively large number of comments on how participants' learning styles were not catered for in school is worthy of note. A number found the physical constraints of sitting still or being confined in the classroom overwhelming. Others said they were 'hands on', perhaps excelling at sports but being unable to write things off the blackboard. A number looked back to see they had certain skills and interests but these were never able to be utilised in the class setting.

However, participants clearly faced a number of formidable personal and family/community/lifeworld issues. In terms of 'self', as reported above, nearly half of the respondents mentioned health barriers, demonstrating how important this barrier is. We note, though, that this was frequently also a socio-economic barrier because a lack of resources for dealing with health problems contributed to the barrier to learning. As above, 38 respondents commented on a lack of goals or on feeling unable to meet or set goals. Further, 17 participants mentioned attitude or motivation levels as a barrier. A number of these participants simply said they were 'not interested' in earlier training, others characterised themselves as 'lazy' or distracted by video games and other activities. Comments from 10 suggested a lack of confidence held

them back. For most of these their feelings of shyness at being 'dumb' or bound to fail were in the past. For a few, however, the confidence barrier still existed. Nine respondents did not see literacy as necessary. We note that this too may not be strictly a 'self' factor as these respondents may not have been exposed to the experiences that construct literacy either as a means to an end or a goal in itself.

In terms of family/community/lifeworld barriers, as reported above, nearly half the participants (39) identified a literacy barrier in their family situation and 22 had difficulty juggling work and study. Additionally, 18 participants mentioned difficulty juggling family or community commitments and their current study, or these commitments had made them give up earlier study. In particular, looking after children or elderly parents, and the need to attend funerals were all mentioned as factors causing participants to miss course work. A further 16 mentioned economic barriers (such as the cost of courses, the need to work, and economic factors in the family background that limited learning opportunities). Thirteen mentioned a lack of support or negativity from family, friends, colleagues, or others in the community held them back in their literacy learning. Lack of transport or geographic isolation was a past or present barrier for 12, and two mentioned not having been taught Te Reo as a barrier.

Training barriers were mentioned by relatively few. Five commented on the stigma of using literacy services as a barrier. For two of these the stigma was from mates, of being thought 'sissy' or 'brainy', but for the others the stigma was about having lesser skills: "They say to me 'Dumb people go there'." Five said that training was at the wrong level (mainly, it was too easy); 4 mentioned difficulties with others on their course; 4, the lack of availability of training; 2, the lack of awareness of training; and 1, a specific issue with management of an earlier course.

Participants' perceptions of barriers to employment

The employment barrier mentioned by the greatest number of different respondents was a need for formal qualifications. Several respondents felt that skills and knowledge were not recognised or valued by employers or prospective employers unless in the form of formal certificates. This barrier was only slightly greater in frequency than the two next most frequently mentioned barriers, the need for computer or technological skills, and a health or physical barrier (these were equally frequent). These three (qualifications, computer skills, and health) were the stand-out barriers in terms of the highest numbers of respondents mentioning them.

Table 5. Participants' Perceived Barriers to Employment

Barriers to Employment	Respondents	Comments
Qualifications	11	15
Health/Physical	10	13
Technological Skills	10	12
Confidence	7	14
Literacy Required	6	8
Attitudinal (No Confidence)	3	4
Lack of Experience	3	3
Family Commitments	3	3
Geographic	1	4
Time for Study to Improve Skills	1	1
Lack of Social/People Skills	1	1
Age	1	1
Other (Including Aspects of Discrimination)	13	20

A second group of two themes – lack of confidence, and the need for literacy (understood as traditional 3R literacy) – was mentioned slightly less frequently as employment barriers. Confidence and traditional literacy had around the same level of response. These were followed by a third group containing three themes with lower levels of response again: lack of experience, family (specifically maternal) commitments, and attitudinal barriers. The 'Other' category consisted of a variety of different responses within which were a number of responses relating to different aspects of discrimination. Individual themes and selected comments are presented below.

Qualifications

Eleven different respondents commented on the need for qualifications as an employment barrier to even 'hands on' jobs. One participant said:

You look for jobs in the paper now and you've got to have...at least a basic skill. Not in your head. You might know how to go and do a job, but you've got to have it down in black and white now, like...labourers now. They even have to sit like an exam now.You've got to have some sort of certificate now to say you've done a course on how to be a f***ing labourer.

Another commented

I, like, always wanted to work in the Takeaway Bar behind the counter... and plus behind the bar, in the pubs... those types of jobs I like to do, I love to do it, yeah. To do all that, you gotta, um, sit some course, like, ah, how food-wise how... you know, when you work in kitchen you gotta have, have your certificate... and when you work behind the bar, the same thing...."

Two further comments illustrate the theme: “You can do all the hands on stuff but these days you have to have the qualifications to do it”; “It’s definitely tough to get a job out there, because you’re needing those certificates. You need those qualifications. So it’s a big requirement.”

Technological skills

Ten different respondents commented on the need for technological skills, particularly computer skills, as an employment barrier. One participant said there were, “no manual jobs out there now because everything is computerised”. For another, who was now tackling the issue, the difficulty was

...there were ads coming in the paper and I knew that I had to not apply because I was not conversant with the computers. I actually had technophobia. Anything new, and it appeared in front of me, I just freaked, and couldn’t cope with it... And I was going to miss out on an office coordinator kind of job.

Other typical comments were: “If you don’t know how to operate a computer there’s no way you can get work”, and “Every job I want they need somebody with computer experience, and I didn’t have it”.

Health or physical condition

Ten different respondents indicated that health or physical conditions were a barrier to employment. A recurring theme was health conditions that prevent repetitive postures, whether sitting or standing, for example, “I cannot stand on my feet too long”. Another participant said “I can’t stand too long in any particular place or walk too far,” and also “I can’t sit for too long”. Another participant also found a sedentary job caused health problems, while a further interviewee was unable to work for long periods outside. Some of these physical barriers could potentially be overcome in workplaces where jobs were structured to involve a variety of postures or movements, and a range of tasks, rather than either continual sitting or standing. However, participants perceived that employers appeared unable to cater for these physical requirements. For example:

I lost my job because of my injury in my back. I mean, it’s just a disability because my back got so severe that sometimes I can’t even stand. Sometimes I can’t even sit on a chair for more than 2 hours – sometimes as little as half an hour.

For another, who had suffered from severe depression, the need to find a job that did not create too much stress and pressure was a major employment barrier and such needs were not well catered for in the workplace.

Confidence

Seven different respondents mentioned lack of confidence as a barrier, and these comments were predominantly self-directed. Several respondents commented on their drop in confidence after time out of the workforce. For example, one respondent found that after 20 years on ACC, “my self-esteem and everything was shot. Shot to pieces – like, talking about being at rock bottom”. Another described a similar phenomenon: “The longer it is the more you think ‘Oh well, I couldn’t get a job anyway, who’s gonna employ me’”. This participant added, “I find it hard to go out and talk to people and stuff like that so, that’s a lot of reason I haven’t got a job ‘cos I’d be too scared ... I thought I was useless”.

Unsuccessful job applications took their toll on confidence which in turn lessened the chance of getting employment: “you apply for jobs and you never hear back and that can get disheartening ... I suppose it’s a vicious thing that sort of traps you in that cycle...”

One participant reported being “frightened to succeed and frightened of failing” and connected these feelings back to negative experiences during schooling:

Deep down inside me the old fears of what I’d learned in my 12 years at school came to the forefront and said, ‘I won’t be able to do this. They’ll throw maths at me. I won’t be able to take a temperature. I won’t be able to do this. I won’t pass,’ in my head.

Requirement for literacy

Six respondents mentioned lack of literacy as an employment barrier. “All the employers out there are looking for the perfect person who knows 1 + 1 and how to type a letter and to spell right”. Another participant said, “I wanna get back in the workforce in the next year or so, but I cannot because of not being able to read and write”. One used the term “literacy ghetto” to describe what they perceived to be a problem of communities in which “A lot of them don’t know how to read and write for themselves”.

Lack of experience

Three respondents commented that lack of workplace experience was a barrier for them. “I applied for a job and I got told I’m not experienced enough,” and “You’ve had a bit of experience, that’s very important, experience means a lot to people, especially if they know you’ve dealt with certain cases before or something like that”. The third said, “They said to me ‘Oh you can go, to – I can’t remember what place it was – and they’ll write your CV up for you... [laughs] but I had nothing to put on it, and so, that was the only offer they gave me”.

Family commitments

Three respondents (all mothers who cited maternal responsibilities) commented on family commitments as a barrier to employment. One of them expected to encounter discrimination because of her parenting responsibilities:

I could go to an employer and say I'm a solo mother and I've got 2 children, one is an asthmatic and this is where I'm at with these two kids, and he'll probably think, well, ok, this woman's got a problem with this child, I haven't really got time to employ somebody with this sort of thing.

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers, mentioned by three respondents, were mainly other-directed, such as comments that others in the community lacked work-ethic, or were easily led by peer pressure. For instance, "They are not interested in getting a job. They just rely on that benefit, smoke and drink, have no money, and go steal".

Geographic

One respondent made several comments about there being little work in Wanganui and not having transport available to go elsewhere.

Time for study to improve skills

One respondent, when responding specifically to a question about their opinion of the proposed work-for-the-dole scheme, suggested the time needed to study to improve skills should be considered an important employment barrier, rather than simply getting unemployed people working for work's sake:

They've also got to remember that you only get a certain amount of time to do your studies. I mean, if it [working for the dole]'s going to stop me...if that sort of thing is going to stop me from coming here, for me to learn, and if they're sending me out there to rake up leaves or that sort of rubbish, and take me away from...well, I'm against it because I already know how to do that.

Lack of social or people skills

One respondent commented on a lack of social skills as an employment barrier: "If you can't relate to people then you're not going to get a job."

Age

One respondent mentioned age as an employment barrier: "I was just looking at my age, yeah I know, wouldn't work for me at my age". Age as a barrier to employment was also mentioned by 29 community members in a phone survey of 400 Wanganui residents.

Other barriers (including discrimination)

Thirteen respondents mentioned employment barriers not coded elsewhere. These included personal barriers, such as life being disrupted by the death of a close family member, but also more generalisable themes such as growing bored with a particular job or working conditions such as long hours.

Five interviewees spoke of encountering some form of discrimination, in one case, racism, and in another being condemned on the basis of their family connections and not judged on their own merits. A further participant had found job interviewers being “quite nasty” when they found he was on a benefit. Two others talked of the difficulty of finding another job once you had left the workforce or had been laid off.

Others had experienced other disharmony or unfair treatment in the workplace, for example, not meeting a specific job equipment requirement such as having their own vehicle; being out of the workforce due to domestic violence; being told by an employer that the respondent did not have ‘what it took’ for the job. Others were simply happy just acquiring new skills and not wanting to be in employment.

Participants’ perceptions of conduits to literacy

During the course of examining the interviews for barriers to literacy and for literacy needs of the participants, it became apparent that many of the respondents were talking not only about obstacles and struggles but also about ways they had developed their literacy or been encouraged to pursue learning during the course of their life. A new series of codes was therefore created to record ‘conduits to literacy’. This includes how they found out about the particular literacy course in which they are participating, and the factors mentioned as positively influencing their learning more broadly. Given that we are working with a multiple literacies model where learning and skills acquisition in the broadest sense are understood as synonymous with ‘literacy’ acquisition, these conduits have been coded not only where the respondents identified them specifically as conduits to ‘literacy’ or to what they understood as literacies in the traditional sense of reading, writing, and numeracy, but wherever respondents identified a factor that motivated or empowered them to learn. Three general groups of such factors emerged: family environment; teacher or other non-family mentor; and goal orientation or internal motivation.

Own goal orientation

Around two-thirds of respondents mentioned an internal motivation or goal orientation as providing a conduit to literacy learning. Goals included wanting to enter a specific career such as nursing or the army, or wanting a higher paying or more enjoyable job in general. For example, one respondent commented “I thought maybe I

should come back and get a few qualifications and start doing something that I really enjoy doing rather than just for the money". Another stated, "I just thought it was time that I got off my behind and tried to better myself, for employment". Others wanted to improve specific skills or use the course as a stepping stone to other goals including other courses. For some, the goal was intrinsic to the course rather than beyond the course: "Sorta set my goal to come to class, complete this course... and get that, that little bit of paper at the end...".

Family environment

Around half the respondents discussed family environment as a conduit. In most cases this was positive, due to encouragement, help with homework, a positive parental or other family role model such as older siblings whom they emulated, or books and learning tools provided in the home. A number of participants said they were getting support and help for their current training from children, spouses, and grandchildren. In a few cases the conduit had been a negative experience at home, where learning outside the home became attractive because it provided an escape from the home environment.

Teacher or other outside mentor

Around half the respondents mentioned a teacher or other mentor figure in a teaching-type role who had provided a conduit to literacy learning. Particular comments about inspirational teachers recurred: 'good' teachers were those who listened, who showed an interest, who helped, and who, although firm, were 'fair'. One participant's comments are typical of the responses about what made good teaching: "They were like a friend and you really felt like they cared. And that was really important. It was fitting in. Being able to fit in and having a teacher who really encouraged you and motivated you without making you feel... I mean, they never put you down". A sense of mutual respect was also important to many respondents in their assessment of good teaching, for example, one said:

It was just the way they talked and we just...you just knew how to...like you couldn't get smart to him like some other teachers you could get smart to and just run away, which happens in schools. But these teachers you just had that respect because of the way they talked to you. It just felt different.

How participants located their training provider

About three-quarters of the respondents commented on how they located the training course. Of these, the majority mentioned word of mouth, including, in particular, word of mouth from others who were on or had been on a course. Many respondents mentioned multiple ways of finding out about course options, such as a newspaper and word of mouth combined.

More than half the respondents who supplied a method of finding their course mentioned some form of word of mouth as important either as an endorsement of something they had also seen or heard elsewhere (newspaper, WINZ, etc.) or as their primary reason for joining. More than two-thirds of those word-of-mouth endorsements were from current or former training participants. One of the participants accurately acknowledged the level of word-of-mouth recruitment: "They've got to get themselves here themselves, but half the time it's by word of mouth".

Around a quarter of respondents who commented on their method of finding the course mentioned WINZ as having a role in locating the course or sending them to it, usually through a referral from their case manager.

Around a quarter mentioned seeing it in a newspaper or someone else seeing it in a newspaper and telling them. Six mentioned other kinds of non-WINZ referrals such as from a community group or school counsellor. Four respondents had information on the course found for them by family members.

Only three of the respondents who commented on how they located a course mentioned a pamphlet, and all three had also received a personal recommendation or endorsement. Two said they had found it themselves. One had found it by walking past. One found it on the internet.

Given the importance to respondents taking up training of word-of-mouth endorsement, particularly by other people studying in the course, a key initiative in marketing could be to recruit current and former participants to a direct marketing campaign. Newspaper ads appear to be partially successful in raising awareness, particularly through alerting other family members who then pass on the information, but ads appear to need confirmation in the form of personal contact. The word 'free' was repeatedly mentioned as a key attention-grabber in newspaper advertising.

A marketing analysis could look at ways of increasing and formalising the word-of-mouth marketing component. Pamphlets and internet appear to be relatively unsuccessful, except possibly as an adjunct to other methods.

Some of the respondents talked about their own efforts in word-of-mouth publicity, and indicated they felt it is important to get the message back to their communities about what the courses offer. One said,

I've told a lot of people, even strangers I talk to outside on the table. I give them all the topics and stuff like that and they're just blown away and they're, 'Oh, I might think about that course next year.' 'Give it a go, man. You've got nothing to lose. It's cool. It's a good course.'

Another relates similar personal recruitment efforts but adds, “I can only show so many people”.

Participants’ perceptions of the benefits of their training

These results were based on 79 cases where participants responded to questions probing whether they had gained anything from their course, and what aspects might have been beneficial about it. Although the data are not quantitative some general indication of frequency can help assess levels of concern or agreement among respondents.

Table 6. Course Benefits

Course Benefit	Respondents	Comments
Confidence, Achievement, Motivation	36	65
Employment	20	28
Better Interpersonal or Family Communication	19	29
Life Skills	16	18
Qualifications	10	11
Participation	9	14
Reading, Writing, Numeracy Skills	8	9
Learning Skills	6	10
Computer Skills	6	6
Health	1	1

The standout benefit mentioned by the greatest number of respondents (36) and most frequently (65 times) was improved confidence or other positive attitudinal changes resulting from a sense of ability and achievement. This included an improved sense of general wellbeing and motivation, increased focus on future goals, and a sense of empowerment and ability to reach goals. Of these, a considerable number spoke of their training as a transforming experience: “I went out and I was so confident it must have shone out like anything”; “I’ve passed and it was like this was the last big block of my life before I can go out there and give everyone my 100 percent plus that I am capable of. But it’s taken 52 years to break through that old belief”; “If I hadn’t come here I’d still be back there. I’d still be running away from it”; “It’s helped me face my fears”. For others, the course is giving their life shape and purpose: “I’ve got a routine and a direction”; “I’m finding it interesting enough that I actually want to be here”; “It gives you the chance to train again ... you’re taking more responsibility for your life, but not only that, for your future.”

About half the interviewees mentioned confidence, achievement, or motivation as benefits of their training. This was almost twice as many respondents as mentioned the next two most frequently cited benefits. Twenty participants talked about the job

skills and employment possibilities resulting from their course: "I'm gaining skills and they're actually work experience skills"; "I applied for two jobs and got both...it's just, yeah, beyond my wildest dreams"; "I'm doing this course to get my reading and writing capability up and try to get a job that I'll actually enjoy, not like sweeping streets or anything." For 19 participants a benefit of their training was that it had helped improve interpersonal or family relationships and communication: "If my daughter comes home with a problem, I can sort it."; "Before I used to jump down someone's throat going, agrrr... And the first thing I learnt was not everyone is the same. And once I learnt that, well then I've got to individually take everyone as they are. It's hard, but it can be done"; "I actually joined this course to teach my son something, instead of him teaching me"; "I'm a very private person but this, this course, learning communication, it's teaching me to open up a bit"; "Before I wouldn't talk to no-one 'cos I was too shy"; "learning how to communicate with people around me, my husband, my family, friends"; "I've learned how to not stress out so much because communications skills, they tell you about stress and stuff ... and I've come a long way since I've been on this course".

Life skills were mentioned as a benefit by 16 participants. These ranged from learning how to treat others with respect and patience, learning routines, self-discipline and time management, to more closely related employment knowledge, such as understanding employment contracts, health and safety issues, and writing CVs. A qualification, certificate, or NZQA credit was mentioned by 10 participants; and almost as many (with rather more comments) spoke about the benefits of participating in voluntary work, of helping other people or simply being with other people, and, finally, taking part in a course.

Perhaps surprisingly, only eight respondents specifically mentioned reading, writing, or maths as a benefit of the course. However, of those who did, five truly valued the new skills. As one participant put it "Now I read books – amazing... writing, reading, just huge, just a totally different life." Another said "When I get letters from people, I can read them myself", and another attested that the course contributed most to "the basic skills that everyone needs". Six spoke of the learning skills they were gaining, with comments such as, "I can read my own knowledge and get the computer and do whatever" or, "This is a year of putting my brain back into learning", and "I'm more open to learning new things". Six specifically mentioned the computer skills they had learned as benefits in their own right. One participant spoke about the improvement to their health: "Don't drink and smoke now and I'm feeling good, I'm learning." The small number of comments on the 3 Rs may also reflect the emphasis placed on non-traditional literacies by the participants, discussed above. It may further reflect the overt emphasis on job training in many of the courses, where literacy is taught in an integrated manner.

Participants' perceptions on positive aspects of their course

Participants also spoke about the positive aspects of the courses they were attending as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Positive Aspects of the Course

Positive Aspects of the Course	Respondents	Comments
Good Teaching	15	19
Social Aspects of Group Learning	12	14
Other	11	12
Individually Paced Learning	6	6
One-to-One Learning	5	5
Positive Reinforcement	4	5
Relaxed Atmosphere	4	4
Accommodating Commitments	3	4

Most comments related to aspects of good teaching on the course. Some participants were very enthusiastic about their experiences: "If you need help, all you have to do is ask"; "...really really good. They create a wonderful learning environment"; "She actually makes the course fun"; "...they probably put themselves through hoops to make me feel as comfortable as I could possibly be"; and, "The tutors really take the time to listen, to care". The social aspects of group learning were clearly also important to a number who were being taught in groups. For some of these it was the fun of social contact and of meeting new people, while two talked about learning to work with other people, and one commented about the confidence gained by being at the same level as others in the group. The 'other' category contained a wide variety of comments ranging from simple broad approval to comments about work experience, and good fit of the course, to the fact that training was free. Other areas noted as positive by the participants were the ability to work at the individual's own pace of learning, one-to-one learning, the positive reinforcement and encouragement they received, the relaxed atmosphere, and the fact that courses and tutors helped them fit in with various family commitments.

Coping strategies

The approach of the research team has been to recognise that literacies are multiple and are positioned within individual life-contexts. We also agree with Hamilton and Barton (2000) that prose, document, and quantitative literacy as defined by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) is a narrow approach to literacy. Such approaches, which find their reflection in government policy, tend to encourage a defi-

cit model. We therefore felt it useful to explore whether respondents' answers revealed strategies and creative approaches for dealing with low functional literacy in ways that drew on their strengths. Participants were not directly asked about these strategies. However, ten different respondents made unprompted comments relating to coping strategies.

The strategies mentioned include concealing literacy levels, avoiding literacy-related aspects of a job by getting someone else to do that task, working in a job that did not require literacy, asking lots of questions, 'bluffing', using computers to help with certain aspects of a job, and self-teaching. Comments included "about 90% of my friends did not know"; "When it came to costing I said I could do it, and I couldn't because it was maths. So I'd take it home to my husband to do it. That's how bad it was." One interviewee also talked about developing a self-deprecating humour style as a coping strategy, which enabled them to endure feelings of inadequacy about their literacy level: "using what I had then to make people laugh. I gained a few friends from there".

Again, the categories are often interrelated: it seems likely that the interviewee who describes 'bluffing' their way through school by learning from others has an auditory learning style not catered for in schooling, because as soon as this participant was able to hear others repeating the information, they were able to recall it: "I could only get back what I'd been told not what I learnt, but what I'd been told, not read". It may be that the coping strategy imposes the learner's preferred information processing style over what is offered by inserting an additional step in the knowledge transfer process.

Such comments reveal, perhaps unsurprisingly given the political and social environment, that these participants are also working from a deficit model. The comments also resonate with the finding that literacy issues have a low profile in the wider Wanganui community and the recognition by community members that there is a stigma attached to low literacy that would prevent people seeking help (see Comrie et al., 2005). These sorts of perceptions and responses, combined with the low profile of literacy training providers, make it harder for those resources to be obtained that will enable people to begin a path of lifelong learning.

Participants' perceptions of what 'literacy' means

Participants were asked what the word 'literacy' meant to them. The largest number, more than a quarter of the respondents, saw literacy as meaning strictly '3-R' type functional skills. Although a significant number of respondents saw literacy as extending slightly beyond '3R' skills, for example, to include comprehension, or com-

puter literacy, very few if any perceived literacy as broadly inclusive of multiple strengths or a wide range of life and employment skills.

We thought it important that a dozen respondents could put forward no answer to the question of what literacy means to them. The term was entirely meaningless for them and did not appear to relate to their lives or their needs in any way. For a number of others, perceptions of literacy were clearly based in a deficit model. They conflated 'literacy' with 'illiteracy' or described 'literacy' as meaning 'problems' of some kind.

A large number of respondents appeared to find the word itself off-putting, perhaps officious or long-winded, with a connotation of, as one respondent put it, "blah, blah, blah". Its association with school is significant in a group that, generally speaking, encountered a number of difficulties at school that had created a barrier to their learning.

As may be gathered by the discussion above, comments from participants were sorted into four categories: 3-R type responses; beyond 3-R; 'don't know' or meaningless; and deficit-related comments. Some further description is provided below.

3-R type responses

Twenty-one participants responded along the lines of "Reading and writing and all that". Only one of these respondents mentioned maths and that was in order to say "I don't think it means maths". However, a number added references to 'English', 'spelling' or 'grammar' and 'dictionaries'. There was a clear association with school and formal learning, and in some cases this was directly mentioned.

Beyond 3-R

Sixteen participants gave broader responses that added additional kinds of learning to the 3Rs, although these extras rarely incorporated notions of wider non-traditional literacies. Two, who had given "reading and writing" comments, also had comments coded in this area that included the idea of "being able to speak and converse properly", and of also being able to "actually understand it and to know what it means". Others mentioned understanding as important – having others understand you and being able to communicate. "Education, knowledge" was another response. Only one mentioned computer skills unprompted.

However, again there were negative links with the word 'literacy'. For one participant it meant "school work – English, maths, science, the compulsory ones". For another it was "Work ... It's like to a job". There was an element of compulsion: "Sometimes you need to know, your maths and English and whatever – and your computing skills – because you could have a desk job or whatever. You've got to know how to read and write and blah, blah, blah".

One of these participants pointed out that for those with a disability, literacy opens up the world:

It's an important word because it's language, um, it's paraphrasing, it's a word, an understanding word, because if you've got a hearing disability and you cannot understand a word of, or trying to speak it or spell it, there can be a blockage there and it can be a struggle. If it's caught in time, if it's really, really caught in time, then I think literacy can be such a wonderful and vital thing in a person.

Don't know or meaningless

Twelve respondents said they didn't know or weren't sure what literacy meant. Some, even when prompted for a response to a 3-R type definition, still replied that it made no sense to them, or said "I still don't know what it meant to me, though". One respondent said: "Literacy and that, like, see, this is where I don't know. I know we've been learning that, um. Yeah, I can't remember that".

Deficit-related comments

Six respondents gave responses based on a deficit model. Two immediately brought up the word "illiterate", with one saying that literacy meant: "Starting again. Literacy was that you were illiterate." Another participant answered: "People that haven't learned much in their lives, reading and all that." A further response was: "To me it's a problem of learning, comprehension, and understanding". Another spoke of someone who might have difficulty with reading and writing and another said it meant needing to study and study hard.

An illustrative answer that suggests some of the complex problems about the term 'literacy', including its association with English, was provided by one participant:

Nothing. It's just a word to me. Honestly, it doesn't mean anything. Literacy means...I'm not sure what literacy means. I think it's all to do with that English stuff, but literacy, I should imagine, means making things sound right and having your words spelt correctly.

These and other similar comments point to problems with the word literacy as a term and as a 'brand'. They suggest the impossibility of marketing 'literacy' courses to potential participants as something that will provide multi-faceted life and communication skills, because the term itself has deeply negative connotations. The term does not at any point connect in these participants' minds with what is actually on offer from training providers or with where they want to go with their lives.

Participants and non-participants – Comparison of findings

It became clear that a comparison group of “non-participants” should also be interviewed. These were deliberately chosen to cover a wide spectrum. The majority of the non-participants were sourced through a number of concerned community agencies, through a multiple literacies approach. Some were more broadly representative of the community as a whole and were selected from among the large number of community members who had taken part in a community telephone survey conducted by the project team in August 2004 and who had expressed an interest in being further involved in the research. Forty non-participants took part in the interviews.

The interview and interview structures were identical to those described for the participants above with the exception of the questions on participants’ learning and their course which was removed from the interview. The eight theme areas covered in these interviews were: socioeconomic context; schooling; employment; motivation; persistence; resistance; barriers; and power dynamics.

Demographics

The sample included forty interviewees, of whom all were at least 16 years of age or over. The non-participants were sourced from places of employment and community groups or agencies in the Wanganui and Districts region. All non-participants filled in demographic questionnaires.

The demographic data show that 42.5% of the sample was male, and 57.5% female. In turn, 90% reported English as their first language, and 32.5% of the sample stated they were affiliated to an iwi. Of those affiliated to an iwi, 38.5% reported they were either Whanganui iwi or Te Atihaunui-a-Paparangi.

A greater number of non-participants than participants were in full-time employment (32.5% versus 3.6%) and in part-time employment (15% versus 10.8%); however, 65.1% of participants were full-time student/trainees, while only 10% of non-participants identified in this way. Non-participants came from across all age groups, with a peak in the 41–50 years of age category (30%). While participants also came from all age groups, they were most strongly represented in the 16–20 years of age group (47%). Educational achievements were also higher in the non-participant group.

Perceptions of literacy and learning needs

Participants in adult literacy programmes and non-participants (those who had never been in such a programme) had very similar perceptions of their or others’ learning and literacy needs. The highest single endorsed learning need for both groups was

computer skills. There was, however, some discrepancy between responses that endorsed computer skills as a need, with some viewing it as a general skill needed for employment, and others as a need that was specific to the type of job that the person was interested in. Both participants and non-participants views of literacy needs generally concurred; the only difference being the greater emphasis placed by non-participants on the importance of cultural literacy or an understanding of whakapapa. This was ranked third on the non-participants' list of important learning needs, but appeared at 11th on the participants' list. An additional difference is that non-participants mentioned this learning need as a way in which people might be drawn into a course, i.e. some noted that if they were going to do a course, the ability to learn about their cultural background and whakapapa would be a motivator for their attendance.

It was interesting to note that while both participants and non-participants mentioned the traditional literacy skills of reading, writing, and maths as learning needs, these were not the most highly endorsed needs. For participants, computer skills and communication skills were indicated to be more important. For non-participants, these two learning needs, combined with a cultural literacy/whakapapa focus, were endorsed more often than reading and writing skills. For both groups, maths skills were ranked fifth in importance.

When the type of learning needs were grouped, the importance placed on non-traditional literacies becomes clearer. Non-traditional literacies were endorsed by both groups more often than traditional literacy needs, which were second, and training needs, which were third. This emphasis on wider literacies as important learning needs (in this case computer skills, communication skills, life skills, attitude, and confidence) reflects wider debates about the nature of literacy. Surveys such as IALS, which concentrate on functional literacy and have impelled government policy, are widely critiqued as focusing only on a narrow aspect of literacy ([Hamilton & Barton, 2000](#)). The consensus today is that literacies are multiple, contextual, and embedded in life experiences ([Hamilton & Barton, 2000](#)). Participants' and non-participants' focus on non-traditional literacies also aligns with the views of employers who generally lament the lack of life skills, attitude (work ethic), and communication skills in their available labour market.

While the researchers recognise that traditional literacy skills are the necessary basis for further learning, and the beginning of a pathway to optimum performance in the workplace, these skills are difficult to enhance without necessary bases of confidence and the addressing of wider life concerns. Therefore, the traditional literacy skills must combine with non-traditional literacies to provide an optimum pathway for learning.

Learning needs for children

Participants and non-participants both mentioned life skills, attitude (often expressed as 'morals'), confidence, and manners, when specifically thinking of the learning needs of the next generation. Non-participants also added a work ethic, communication skills, and good health. This mention of health by non-participants was of particular interest as health issues had also been identified as a major barrier to learning by the participants. It should be noted here that in discussing the learning needs of children, non-participants tended to respond within a framework of skills for employment, while participants seemed to respond within a framework of what children needed to learn from school (this may have been because interviews had caused them to reflect on their own school lives and what they believed they had missed out on). Both participants and non-participants felt that nurturing of the younger generation was very important, and there was a general feeling that children needed to 'work hard' not only at work (emphasised by non-participants) but in school (emphasised by participants).

Interestingly, when discussing the learning needs of children, over a quarter of the participants mentioned the need to learn to read and write, while relatively few of the non-participants mentioned this. Clearly, participants in adult literacy courses might be expected to have their awareness of the importance of functional literacy skills raised. However, non-participants were closer to the perspective of the broader community as seen in the findings of the community survey, which demonstrated that these literacy skills were largely taken for granted (Comrie et al., 2005).

Finally, it was interesting to note that when talking of children's learning needs, the participant group did not mention computer skills at all, while some of the non-participants did. This may again have been a reflection of the work focus of the non-participant group.

Barriers to literacies learning

When discussing barriers to literacies learning, participants and non-participants differed in their emphases. For instance, the main barrier for learning for participants was seen as health, whereas the main barrier for non-participants was economic, with a number mentioning course costs and the burden of student loans. A number of non-participants stated that they would not enter training that was going to place them in debt, perhaps reflecting that a greater percentage of non-participants were in employment, and training might have resulted in time away from work. For the participant group, health was a large barrier both to their learning in their current course, and their earlier schooling years. Different health conditions led to large amounts of time off school in the cases of some participants. Also, most reasons given for non-attendance at their current course were related to their own health, or the poor health of close family members who needed care. The non-participant

group also discussed health as an important barrier for their learning, but this was not as strongly emphasised as it was by the participant group.

Both participants and non-participants placed similar importance on the influence of family environment as a barrier to literacy development. For both groups, this could come in the form of a lack of positive reinforcement from family members, or a lack of help with homework particularly while within formal schooling years. It should be noted that the positive influence of some aspects of family environment were also mentioned by some as a conduit to learning. This is discussed further below.

Lack of a goal orientation was mentioned by participants as a significant barrier to their subsequent learning. However, non-participants did not endorse this nearly as much. This may be because of the differences between the two groups. For instance, non-participants were more likely to be in employment, perhaps suggesting that they had already reached certain goals and therefore did not see the need for training to reach employment goals. This interpretation finds some support in the conduits discussion below, where goal orientation (i.e. having dreams and goals to work toward particularly with regard to employment) was seen as a motivator to attending the adult literacy programme.

Both participants and non-participants similarly recognised that school that did not meet their learning needs was a major barrier to learning. In the case of the participants, some reflected on working either too fast or too slow on school tasks and getting into trouble after 'playing-up' because there was not enough to do, or they did not finish tasks on time. While, some non-participants spoke of "something missing" in terms of pastoral and individual care from their teachers, participants were far more likely to report negative experiences of teaching at school. Participants were also more likely to report being bullied. A number in both groups reflected on the fact that their learning style did not suit the formal teaching approaches of school. Such experiences have clearly had lasting effects on subsequent efforts to learn.

A final barrier to learning that was similar in importance for both participants and non-participants was the other commitments in their lives. For example, employment commitments for participants (if they had a job that required them to be at the workplace during course time they would not attend the course), or, in the case of non-participants, family or community commitments would stop them attending a training course.

When barriers to learning were grouped into overall categories of 'School', 'Self', 'Lifeworld' and 'Training', it was interesting to note that the order remained the same for both groups, with one exception – for non-participants the barrier of 'Family/Community/Lifeworld' came before the 'Self' barrier. It appears that for participants their health, attitude or motivation, goal orientation, confidence, academic pursuits, and a view that literacy is not needed form a greater barrier to their learning

than for non-participants. Non-participants were more likely to mention economic issues, the impact of family environment, family or community commitments, no positive reinforcement or role models, employment commitments, geographic isolation, and social pressure to not teach Te Reo as barriers to learning.

Barriers to employment

When looking at perceived barriers to employment, a clear difference appears. It is apparent that while participants place qualifications and health at the top of their ranking list, non-participants have placed these two barriers at the bottom. Non-participants have tended to emphasise 'individual circumstance' (time taken off work, interpersonal skills), confidence, and work ethic (attitude), with a lesser emphasis on qualifications and literacy skills. Participants, on the other hand, rate highly qualifications, literacy skills, health, and technological skills. 'Confidence' and 'attitude' are also considered important skills by both groups which a lack of constitutes a barrier to employment.

For non-participants, age was seen as an important barrier to employment, whereas for participants, age was not given nearly as high an emphasis. This seems to reflect the fact that the non-participant sample was taken mostly from the 41–60 age group, and had experienced ageism. Interestingly, while lack of technological skills was highly emphasised as a barrier for employment by participants, this was not mentioned by non-participants. This again shows the focus of non-participants on 'soft' skills needed for employment such as work ethic and confidence, while participants seemed to primarily focus more on 'hard' skills such as technological skills and qualifications, with the 'soft' skills following behind.

Conduits to learning

When what we termed conduits to learning emerged from the interviews: participants and non-participants mentioned the same conduits but with differing emphases. Participants were more likely to mention self-motivation or internal goal orientation as a conduit to their participation in learning. This was followed by a positive family environment that had reinforced their learning goals, and third, a positive role model, usually in the form of a teacher or some other mentor, who had helped them towards their learning goals. In contrast, non-participants primarily emphasised the influence of family environment as a conduit to learning, followed by an inspirational teacher or mentor, and third, self-motivation or an internal goal orientation.

Definition of 'literacy'

When asked to define literacy, participants and non-participants came up with similar comments. Traditional literacies of reading and writing were the primary interpretation, although maths was not often cited as a part of this definition. A broader definition of these traditional literacies including aspects of speaking and understanding were endorsed by slightly fewer respondents in both groups. Third in rank-

ing were those respondents who did not know what 'literacy' meant to them, or when told a possible functional literacy definition explained how that term or that meaning was meaningless to them. Finally, some participant and non-participant respondents discussed how they related to the term 'literacy' from a deficit perspective, constructing it as a 'problem' or turning the word literacy into 'illiteracy'.

Part Two: One Year Later – Follow-Up Interviews with Adult Literacy Participants

Method

In late 2005 and early 2006 the project team initiated a series of feedback meetings with the organisations providing adult literacy training in Wanganui. We reported on the findings from the participant interviews as a whole and gave comparison feedback on the organisations own students (in a manner that preserved the students' confidentiality). The meetings also provided a chance to hear more from the providers and to find out what they wished to gain from the second round of interviews.

Feedback was also given to the original participants via a summary of key findings that was sent out with an Information Sheet for the second round of interviews.

All twelve provider organisations agreed to take part in the second series of interviews. They helped locate the original interviewees where possible, and some also helped find a new cohort of interviewees.

In line with Objective 3 as agreed with FRST, the interviews concentrated on employment and further training outcomes from training the longitudinal participants had undertaken. We also wished to explore other 'soft' outcomes such as an increase in confidence, positive attitudes, and goal orientation. Both the follow-up interviews and those with the new cohort also sought to explore further some of the barriers to learning identified in the first round.

As with the original interview schedule the questions were developed with feedback from key community groups, especially literacy providers themselves. Pilot interviews were conducted with 3 follow-up interviewees during the first 2 weeks of April 2006. Twenty-two of the original 88 participants were interviewed. A further 27 were not interviewed, but information on their present whereabouts and employment or training was provided.

A new cohort of 35 was interviewed up to the time of writing, and further interviews are expected to continue into August as more interviewees become available. Ques-

tions for the new interviewees focus on participants' socioeconomic background; experiences of school; health; learning needs (including meeting cultural needs); marketing of courses; and conduits to the course. The longitudinal participants' interviews focused on exploring more of the previously mentioned health barrier; learning needs (including meeting cultural needs); outcomes from the course in terms of employment, further training, or other types of outcomes; reasons for non-completion if the case; conduits to learning; and marketing of courses.

In this report we provide initial feedback on the 22 follow up, or longitudinal interviews, concentrating on training and employment outcomes. Some additional information is provided about the current situation for a further 27 of the original participants one year on.

Demographics of those in the longitudinal study

Of the 22 participants taking part in second round of the longitudinal study, 12 were female and 10 male. This reflects the demographics of the first sample where females slightly outnumbered males.

In terms of age, these follow-up participants were spread more evenly across the various age groups, compared with the participants in the first round who were predominantly under 20. In this second round, five (just under a quarter) were between 16 and 20 and another four aged between 21 and 30. The largest group was the six in the 41–50 year-old age range. This is related to the relative mobility of the younger participants; a number had left Wanganui and were not able to be contacted.

In educational attainment, these interviewees closely paralleled the demographics of the original participant group, with 10 (46%) having up to 3 years secondary education, 7 (32%) with 4 or more years at secondary school, and four with up to 3 years of tertiary education. One respondent had only had primary school education.

The participants' employment status is discussed in the following section in more detail.

Initial findings – Outcomes for participants

Employment

From Figure 4 below, it can be seen that 44% (21) of the 49 literacy participants were in paid employment, including 19 who were no longer in literacy training, and two who were still continuing their literacy training. While five participants stated they were working on a part-time basis, the other 16 did not specify the hours they were employed. A further three participants (6%) were employed, unpaid, on a part-time basis. Of these, one was actively seeking paid work while also continuing to study

unit standards as they became available. The other two were neither studying nor actively seeking paid work.

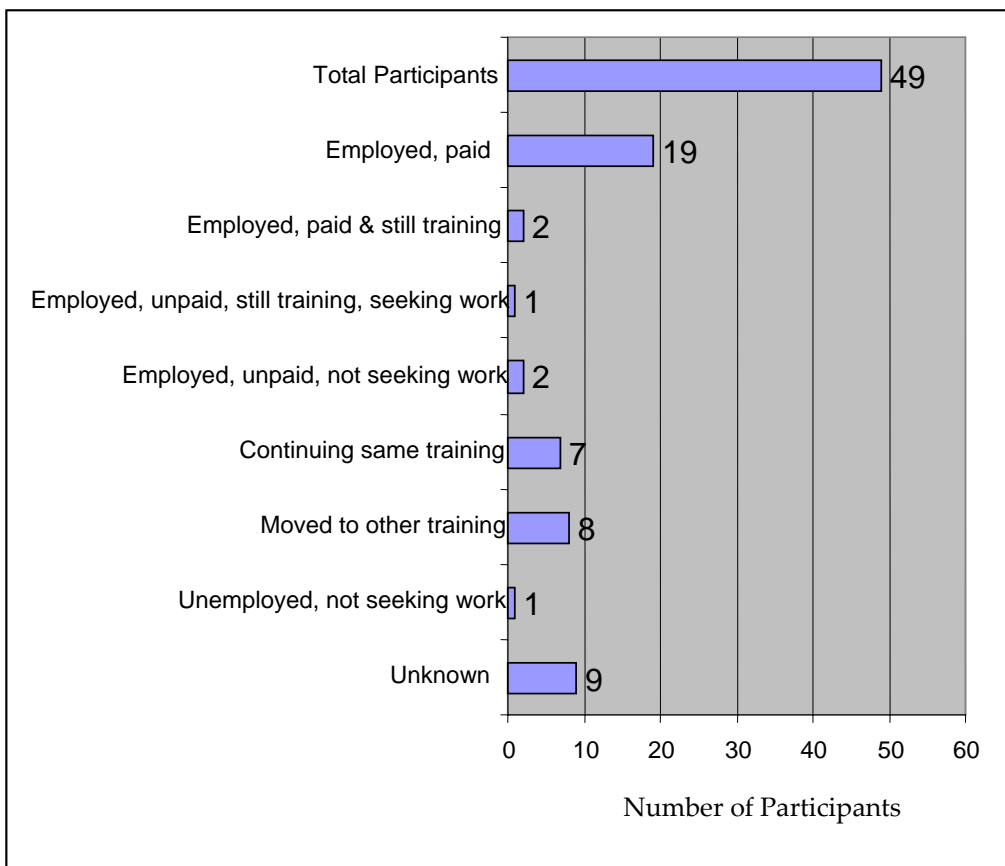


Figure 4. Participants' Employment and Training Status

Five of the eight interviewed participants in paid employment were working in the occupation for which their training course prepared them. One of these participants stated that all the members of his training course had obtained employment. Showing that there is a demand for training in this field, several of these participants mentioned that they had been offered employment while they were still training. One stated:

By the time it got to the second term and I started on my practicum, I already had a job there. But of course, I knew that I wanted to finish my certificate first and she was quite happy for me to. I could have had a job there right there and then, or I could finish my certificate and go there next year, which is what I did. And that's where I am now.

However, because of the nature of the work, often contracted for a specific purpose, this tends to be short-term, part-time, contract work, with little employment security.

One participant commented that she had a year's contract and was concerned about her future when that expired:

I have to do something. I'm getting really worried about the fact that [the time] is coming up and my contract ends.

One member of this group of graduates was working part-time for two employers, but she did not explain whether the two part-time contracts together made full-time work or the length of her contracts. One of the part-time positions was for her literacy provider.

Another member of the same group was categorised as being in paid employment. She was also working part-time for her literacy provider, but was not paid by the literacy provider. Her employment was under a government supported 2-year placement scheme on completion of her training. The Wanganui Disability Resource Centre had referred her to the course. Because of health and learning problems, she found part-time work more suitable. She did not discuss her plans for when the 2-year sponsored appointment had ended.

A further two participants from the same course were working unpaid. Both suffered health problems that hindered their range of employment options as well as the number of hours they were able to work. One had completed the training course and was voluntarily assisting the training providers while she considered what to do next. The other had left without completing the training course to take up an employment position offered to him during a course practicum. However, he found payment for the part-time work he was offered led to a rise in his housing rental. He had resigned from the job to return to an Invalid's Benefit and was instead working, unpaid, assisting in a classroom on an informal basis. He said:

I'm sort of a [the occupation] ... although I'm not getting paid for it. I just cruise in ... whenever I feel like it almost. Well, I haven't been in there much ... because I've been crook, but they obviously enjoy me being there because they ask me to keep coming back.

He was not interested in paid work, unless it was work that interested him:

I doubt if I'll ever sign a contract for paid work unless it's really full-time stuff doing what I want. Then I'll have to have sub-clauses in it that give me the sort of freedom which I know works for me.

Instead, he preferred being able to work the hours that suited him. He also enjoyed no longer being tied through an employment contract to a particular facet of the work and being freer to participate more fully throughout the work place.

One student was employed part-time at course-related work while still attending his course. He was grateful that the course tutors had organised several jobs in the district for him throughout his training and was proud that, as a result, he had learnt a wide range of useful practical skills as well as how to work unsupervised.

Continuing literacy training

As Figure 5, below, shows, around 36% of the participants (18 literacy students) were still in literacy training. Of those, 20% (10 students) were continuing with the same literacy provider they had been with at the time of their original interviews. Two of those were also in paid employment, and the third was in part-time, unpaid employment, while actively seeking paid employment. The other 16% (8 students) still in training had moved to further training with another provider. The reasons for the changes in literacy providers are not known, although providers do refer students to other courses.

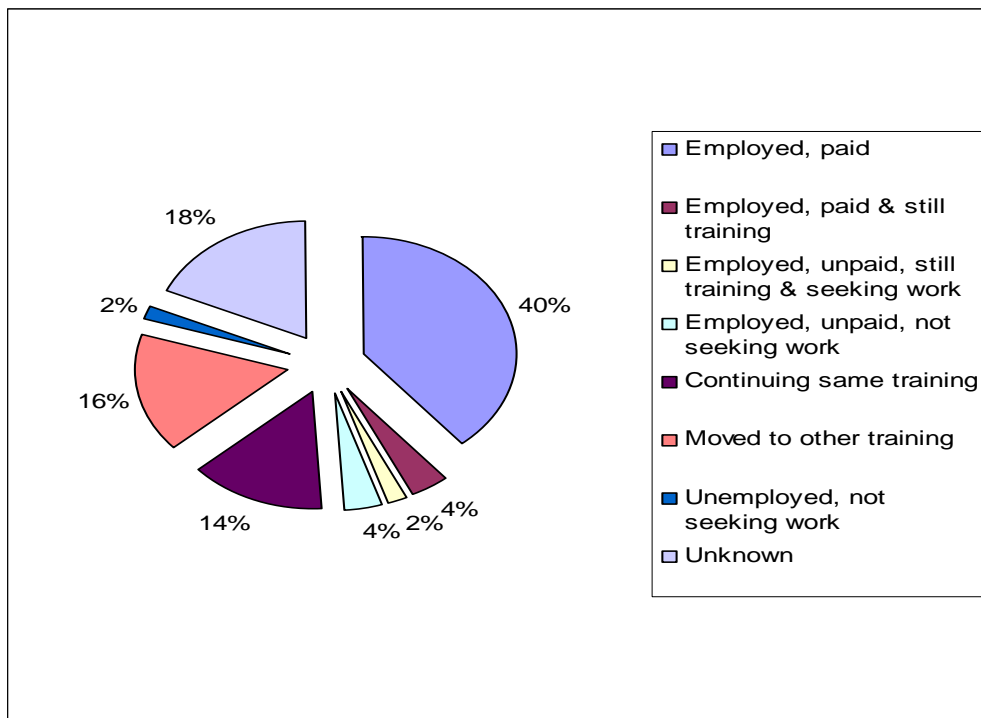


Figure 5. Percentage of Participants in Employment and Training

Of the two participants interviewed who continued training while in paid employment, one had been accepted into the Defence Force. He noted that he had been accepted into the Defence Force both because he had qualifications beyond a School Certificate level subject and because he was studying business management, as this was a skill sought by the Defence Force:

Well, I've got my pass in Management Production stage of my Agricultural National degree or diploma, and now the Air Force has said, 'You have got only your business side to do. Come to us with what you need to do on the business side and we'll help you through that side ... a) to get your diploma or whatever and b) it encourages us to have someone with business management in their units.'

Three participants had left for employment opportunities before completing their course. Only one of the three had considered returning to complete the training, even when their jobs had fallen through. He had some regrets:

If I get my opportunity, I'll be back again. I know I can come back and get it [the training certificate]. As I said, I've got that self-belief in me now.

Two of the three claimed they were learning more through on-the-job experience than on the course. A typical comment was:

Everything that I want to learn, I can learn in the field and I think that's probably what I'll end up doing. I will learn along the way as well, but I don't think it's all that important for me to get those academic qualifications. ... I was supposed to do study at Massey this year, and then I got the job and that kind of like put everything on hold.

One, however, had gained sufficient confidence through the training and work experience of his first job to phone the boss of a related work place and successfully ask for work when the first job finished.

Of our interviewees, only one training participant who had completed his course and was unemployed at the time of the follow-up interview, was actively seeking employment. He had not undertaken further study this year but was considering doing some the following year, if he was not successful in gaining work. Another young man, who was still at a training course, was waiting for the opening of the meat works' season to apply for paid employment. He was hoping to get full-time night-shift work and did not believe it would leave him time to continue with his training. He thought he would be too tired. However, when asked, he said that he might return to the course when the meat works' season had finished for the year.

Confidence

One theme that occurred throughout the interviews was the increased confidence the literacy training participants had discovered through their courses. Many talked about how the courses had boosted their self-esteem and made them aware of life possibilities they had not considered previously:

It was really, really good for me, the course. It's just opened up so many doors.

I didn't realise I was so capable. It was really great for my self-esteem, as well as educational.

But also, for me it was just a stepping-stone, too. I don't see myself doing this forever.

I knew I had the qualities inside of me, I just needed somebody to unlock it, show me how to use it, how to put it into practice.

You just learn so much about yourself, about discipline, about how to handle other people, how to speak to other people, how to learn to love yourself more, how to find out what it is that's making you tick because that's all involved in it as well.

Another key issue relating to the rise in confidence of some participants was how their training courses had helped them develop their social skills. As one said:

I've learnt a lot about getting along with people from this course and the courses that I've done because I used to be a shy, quiet person, not very outgoing, but meeting people here, I think I'm getting better at it. ... I didn't really believe in myself because no one gave me that encouragement to believe in myself.

One man, who had always done manual work, suddenly found that his health would no longer allow that, but believed that he had no skills for any other form of work. He described how his confidence was boosted when he approached the literacy training centre:

I went up there and asked if I could...if they could teach me and they were so positive. Of course they could teach me. And I'm going, "Yeah, right." And they could. I just...just like a gate opened up of learning. I was like a sponge. I couldn't get enough. I wanted to go up. I didn't want to leave.

This man was so determined to get a job once his course had finished that he persuaded ACC to fund him while he worked unpaid for a firm for 6 weeks to prove to the firm that he would be a good employee.

Several of the participants talked of how their training courses improved their confidence and self-esteem by removing them from a situation where they spent their days at home with no personal goals or ambitions. For one, this had been caused by staying at home to raise her children:

I'd been a stay-at-home mum for a long time and ... lapsed out of any thought of ever retraining ... and I hadn't ever had any aspirations. And then, when I started the course ... it was just really good for my self-esteem.

For others it may have followed years of ill-health or depression:

Well, I think being at home for so long and doing nothing, sitting around home and absolutely doing nothing and I just wanted to get out and meet people and give it a go. Okay, if I didn't pass, I didn't pass – I just wanted to do something to improve myself.

Coming here gets me out of the house twice a week and that's what I like about it 'cause I'm meeting people.

Others talked of raised self-confidence brought about by family pride in their success. For one it was her sister's approval:

It was quite nice to hear from my sister saying that they were proud of me for going and doing it. Yeah. And I guess my sons were as well, proud of their mum for getting out and doing that. I'm not just a mum any more; I'm a teacher aide as well.

While for another it was her father's encouragement:

My Dad has given me encouragement. He thought it was brilliant when I passed the computer course. ... That felt so wonderful. ... He saw the certificate and said, "I'm proud of you," shouted me a frame and put it up on the wall. So it made me feel really good for the first time for a long time.

A few commented on their increased confidence in their ability to gain paid employment. One said that he felt really good because if his current job did not work out he now knew that he could get another. However, a more common experience was self-confidence gained through learning that having trouble at school, and later, with literacy skills did not mean that they were 'dumb'. They had learnt that there were different learning styles and that in many cases theirs had simply not been catered for while they were at school. For one, the key was, "Acceptance, I suppose. Acceptance that I wasn't a dummy anymore".

Through attending the classes, the literacy training participants also learnt that there were many others with the same experiences. Several stated that even though they often struggled with understanding the course work, being able to help someone who was having even more trouble heartened them. A typical comment was:

When I first found out I couldn't read and write I thought I was the only person who couldn't do it. I didn't believe there were other people. I thought "I'm the

only person”, and then I came here and found out I am not the only person... I came to a maths class ... and had a guy sitting beside me and he had no idea what he was doing and because I knew the work I had been past that some other time, I helped him out with it and he was just so grateful about it, eh! ... And I thought that was just so fantastic I could actually pass on what I had learnt, and I felt really good.

Stemming from this new understanding, a common theme among older students, especially those who were parents, both women and men, was an appreciation of the importance for their children’s future of successful education experiences and how much they could contribute to this, both by the example of their own new education participation and by being able to better understand and help provide their children’s education needs:

I want them to stay at school and get as much as they can out of their education and not let others affect the education because ... I had peer pressure when I was at school and I didn’t really bother too much at school, whereas I think back now and I realise that I’m quite capable.

I thought to myself, “If I’d known the things that I learnt on how to learn when they [my children] were young I could have applied that to them”. If I’d known these things when they were young – I did the best I could, anyway – read to the kids and helped them with their homework and stuff like that, but I would have maybe made a bit more of an effort to try and find out their learning styles and then be more adjusting to how they are learning ... if I’d known these things back then.

Summary

Twelve months from the first round of interviews we met with 22 of the original literacy participants. Our primary aim was to learn what employment and further training outcomes they may have been engaged with. Interesting for us were their positive reflections on the continuing impact of their course learning. For the majority, their courses had given them new optimism and confidence, which was reflected in their on-the-job performances, in their newly discovered career goals, and in their interaction with their peers and their children. One literacy participant summed this up in her assessment of her literacy training:

It’s brilliant. It’s ... a doorway to walk through ... it’s a world where you’re allowed to explore things you had never thought before or wanted to or was scared to.

Conclusions

The Adult Literacy and Employment team are aware of the privilege of sharing some of the experiences of participants in literacy training courses. Our interviewees revealed many personal details of what have often been difficult life experiences. They also talked about their hopes for themselves and often for their children.

In terms of the barriers to learning and literacy faced by participants, the fuller analysis contained in this report sees some shift in the order of barriers reported initially in Sligo, Comrie, Olsson, Culligan, and Tilley (2005). For instance, when individual barriers are considered, health was the most frequently mentioned individual barrier in both the earlier and the full analyses. In the full analysis, however, problems in the family environment comes in second place, while in the earlier report it had received relatively few mentions by those whose interviews had been analysed at that stage.

However, such individual differences are inclined to disappear when the literacy and learning barriers are grouped. The school-related barriers then appear clearly as the most important in both analyses, with health and goal orientation also important, followed by a number of family, community and socio-economic issues.

For many of the participants these barriers are inter-related, creating a kind of vicious cycle. Indeed, the interviews revealed a complex of difficult problems faced by the participants, confirming suggestions in Sligo et al. (2005) about the three dimensional aspect of literacy, comprising: "A, literacy or functional skills; B, the whole person; and C, the person's lifeworld" (p. 56). Performance in literacies needs to be measured within specific contexts as part of a holistic set of personal attributes.

Similarly, conclusions reached in the first report about the need for literacy interventions built on individual need – responding, for instance, to health-related difficulties, or particular learning styles – are reinforced by the findings in this report. Discussions with adult literacy training providers show tutors are aware of the wide range of needs in their students, recognising that at times health checks, counselling and other support is essential before learning can even take place. Such students often need on-going support. As one tutor told us, "At least I can guarantee [students] a safe place while they are here during the day with us". Such situations place an enormous strain on programmes funded largely at delivering measurable skill and job outcomes, and even greater pressure on tutors who are not highly paid and need both training and support to enable them to deal with the multiple, health, and welfare needs that can present themselves.

The importance of bad experiences at school as a perceived barrier to learning and literacy will be no surprise to most people involved in the adult literacy training sector. This theme of misfit and misery at school was also relatively prominent among non-participants; a significant number of these had been identified through social agencies as potentially having difficulties with literacy. Many interviewees reported resulting behavioural and attitudinal problems that further encouraged them to leave school early, often ill-equipped for work. Merely raising the school-leaving age does little to help such students or the school system. Our discussions with employers indicate that school-to-work transition schemes – relevant and attractive to both students and employers – might make a difference. Earlier discussion about the support needed to ensure the health and welfare needs of adult students are identified and dealt with, applies equally too for the secondary school system where teachers deal with far larger numbers of often vulnerable students.

The importance of attitude and a lack of goal orientation have led us to suggest the possibility of incorporating personal action plans in supporting students' literacy, learning and life aspirations (Sligo, Comrie, Culligan, Tilley, Vaccarino, & Franklin, 2006, p. 60). This, combined with the reports of positive role models who have acted as 'conduits to literacy', leads us to reflect on how effective mentoring and role model schemes can be implemented within secondary schools.

Our participants were very conscious of the lack of qualifications and technological skills presenting a barrier to employment. They were less likely to mention functional literacy as a barrier. When they talked of literacy and learning, needs such as computer skills, communication skills, life skills, attitude, and job-specific skills came ahead of the more traditional literacies and academic qualifications and credits. These responses reflect the paradox that is at the heart of literacy and vocational training. Training providers report that the possibility of gaining a job, along with credits and certificates, are 'carrots' that attract and maintain students. Functional literacy skills are taught in an integrated manner – combined with the specific vocation and other skills needed by students. While providers agree this is an excellent way to teach literacy, it presents a number of challenges for tutors primarily employed for their vocational expertise. For students, who do not want a return to school, this approach is most relevant, but it may also account for their low recognition of the 3Rs as a need.

From their perspective, employers want employees to come out of training or even school with the 3Rs so firmly entrenched they can be applied to work situations. Employers stressed that training should be relevant and seemed to distrust the very qualifications they use as a hurdle for potential employees. Employers also make little distinction between communication skills and 3R literacy and say their prime need is for people with work ethic and life skills. There is an inherent tension between employers' demands for 'hard' vocational and applied 3R skills and their need for 'soft' skills and attributes like communication, confidence, and life skills, which

they regard as less relevant for training. Participants, however, recognised the need for these soft skills. They also recognised that they had gained confidence, motivation, better communication, and life skills as part of their training. Meanwhile, one year on, a number acknowledged the continuing gain of confidence and the advantages it has brought in its train.

Adult literacy training schemes tend to be oriented to producing work-ready employees for the economic good of the country. Such a goal frequently coincides with that of the learner, and indeed our survey of the Wanganui community showed that most would take on further training primarily for job-related reasons. The follow-up study reported here shows that 1 year on, about 46% of those who attended courses were in employment (even though this might not be full-time or secure), while approximately 36% were continuing either on the same training course or moving on to other training.

Funding for training providers frequently depends on such successful job placements. We note, however, that the nature of such jobs seems to be less of a concern. We believe that these jobs are frequently temporary, part-time, or insecure in the face of any economic downturn. This belief has received some support from the follow-up study. While leaving a course early to enter a job – as three of our interviewees had done – may be viewed as an acceptable outcome, training providers and the research team share the concern that cessation of literacy learning does not benefit the learner in the long term. We argue that greater provision needs to be made for trainees to continue their courses when they begin jobs.

As researchers we recognise the importance of employment (particularly secure, remunerative employment) as the source of a number of positive economic, social, and psychological outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. However, a predominant vocational thrust to training and learning encourages the commodification of a narrow range of literacy skills as the same time as it downplays the importance of basic 3R skills as foundation for ongoing enriching learning. This approach does not recognise the complex three-dimensional nature of literacies and the importance of embedding them in an individual's social and cultural world. Nor does it leave much room for individuals to bring to such training their own knowledge's and strengths. It therefore risks being inefficient and ineffective.

Conversely and perhaps surprisingly, the vocational approach makes it harder to address literacy issues because the need for basic literacy competencies is hidden beneath the need for 'job skills'. We note that computer skills were those that first come to mind when the wider Wanganui community was asked what the most important job skills were, and only 3% spontaneously mentioned any of the 3Rs. The difficulty lies in raising public awareness about literacy issues without increasing a sense of stigma and a feeling of deficit among those who are identified as having problems with functional literacy. The term 'literacy' itself was frequently not well recognised

by participants, was associated with 'school and all that stuff', or was turned around to illiteracy and applied to themselves. In short, when the term literacy was employed participants (and some non-participants) felt uneasy and judged. There is scope for a specialist research project on the term literacy, and the marketing of 'literacy,' including a critical analysis of current methods and development of alternative terminology and branding based on participants' own perceptions of their needs and course benefits.

The data from the conduits report that relate to how participants found their course, the data from the benefits report about what participants gained from their course, and the data on stigma as a barrier, from the barriers report, are all relevant to such a project. These data could be combined with a test-marketing experiment and marketing-related interviews with current and potential participants, community leaders, and marketing experts, to provide an overall picture of the ways in which greater and better awareness could be created of the nature of available learning opportunities.

Given 'literacy' is an English term and a power-laden concept, the postcolonial historical context forms a crucial precursor to such research. 'Literacy' would need to be historicised in New Zealand, and its attendant power discourses laid bare to the extent possible within the scope of the given research. The previously conducted literature review, *Te Reo o Te Awa Tupua Whanganui*, would also be an important resource. The critical discourse analysis would then provide a platform on which more constructive recommendations could be built for the future of communication methods with and between literacy training providers and their potential audiences.

The outcome of such a project would ideally be a series of recommendations for more effective marketing and branding of both the state of 'literacy' itself, and 'literacy' training services. These recommendations would propose strategies to help overcome the range of social, awareness, message comprehension, attitudinal, and other current barriers to literacy training uptake. A significant part of such a research project could consist of addressing the cross-cultural context in which such marketing often takes place. Ideally, an inclusive, or Kaupapa Māori, or partnership approach could be designed for the marketing of 'literacy' services involving iwi.

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This report explores the perceptions of participants in Wanganui and District's adult literacy training programmes. In the first section, the interviewees consider training and learning needs, and the barriers they face to employment and to learning. The report also explores conduits to literacy

and how the participants define literacy. In the second section, during follow-up interviews, employment and further training outcomes are discussed.

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