

Northern Territory Adult Literacy and Numeracy Best Practice

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

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Who is doing the training?

Training providers across the Northern Territory were interviewed for the purposes of this project. Our case studies focus on successful partnerships and programs that demonstrate strong links with community.

Most of the literacy and numeracy training programs are delivered in a collaborative way by local employers, registered training organisations (RTOs), university and school staff, and members of Indigenous communities.

These case studies represent:

- local enterprise (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous owned)
- a medium security prison
- a national park
- private and public schools
- a large mining company
- a prominent health organisation with a focus on Indigenous health
- RTOs based in both urban and remote areas, and
- Indigenous community councils.

The literacy and numeracy programs described in these case studies are often supported by Northern Territory Government funded grants and national grants specifying literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes, such as Training for Remote Youth (TRY) funding and the Department of Education, Science and Technology – Workplace English Language and Literacy (DEST-WELL) grants.

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Who are the students?

Literacy and numeracy training programs are conducted throughout the Northern Territory, from major urban centres to remote island communities. Our case studies represent a diverse range of students. Something they all share in common is an identified need for improving their literacy and numeracy skills.

Most students want to gain better pathways to employment and participate in literacy and numeracy training for this reason. The students of our case study programs across the Northern Territory include:

- Disassociated youth aged between 15-19 years of age, living in remote areas
- Arnhemland-based Indigenous youth on homelands and remote communities
- Indigenous administrative employees of a national park
- Adult Indigenous members of remote communities
- Indigenous youth aged 16 years and over, not engaged in schooling for 18 months
- Indigenous male prisoners in a medium security prison
- Indigenous trainees and employees of a large mining company operating in a remote location
- Indigenous students of fifteen private religious schools located in urban and remote centres across the Northern Territory
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, mainly mature-age, who are training to be health workers
- Business administration students, with ages ranging from school-age to mature-age, participating in on-the-job apprenticeships and traineeships, and school-based apprenticeships, in the major centres of the Northern Territory
- Apprentices across a range of fields, including building construction, and
- Local Indigenous youth of remote island communities.

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What is the program?

Training providers across the Northern Territory were interviewed for the purposes of this project. Summaries of each literacy and numeracy program are outlined below:

Building pathways to employment

Case Study 1 *Partnership of training providers, remote school, a national park and an Indigenous-owned hotel*

Designed as a 'pathways program' to re-engage disassociated youth (aged between 15-19 years of age and living in remote areas), this literacy and numeracy program included three different training phases. These phases were:

- General education classes, based on improving literacy and numeracy in the context of the defensive driving course, including the theory required to obtain a Learners licence
- Structured work experience, eg traineeships at a local Indigenous-owned hotel, or employment as Junior Rangers in the region's national park, and
- First Aid certificate.

Educational facilities to support the program consisted of an Area School which caters mainly for children from Pre-School to Year 10, although in recent years more options have become available to senior secondary-aged students.

Case Study 6 *Medium security prison*

This literacy and numeracy program is part of a specific short course in Deckhand skills, which is taught as part of the Certificate II in Seafood Industry. The students are Indigenous male prisoners in a medium security prison. Units of competency are chosen according to the practical issues involved with on-site delivery in a medium security prison. There are two courses with twelve (12) students each, of which fourteen (14) have completed the course requirements.

Two lecturers conduct the program – one delivers five hours per week practical training and the other provides literacy and numeracy training and support. Individual Learning Plans (20-25 hours) form part of the program and are delivered from 3.5-4 hours per week to improve literacy and numeracy.

Students must be able to complete 110 hours of training, therefore no short-term prisoners are included. It is preferable that the students originate from communities on the coast or near large rivers, where skills developed as a result of the training may lead to future employment.

Case Study 12 *Indigenous Employment Management Board*

Local Indigenous youth benefit from literacy and numeracy training programs offered by an Indigenous Employment Management Board at this remote island location. Students are offered support, appropriate training and gain skills that link with 'real jobs'. Training and employment opportunities are based locally. Related programs such as Accelerated Literacy in schools provide local Indigenous youth with basic literacy and numeracy skills which the trainers then build on.

Meeting community needs

Case Study 2 *Workplace English Language and Literacy in Arnhemland*

In literacy and numeracy training programs based in Arnhemland and funded by DEST-WELL grants, four trainers from a university regional centre flew into remote locations on a weekly basis to conduct training. Programs focused on the delivery of

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literacy in the context of employment opportunities through a local community-based employer. At first, three Outstations were involved, but this increased to five in response to requests from the Outstations' occupants.

Outcomes were identified at the commencement of the program by staff at the community-based Association in conjunction with the local Outstation inhabitants. This ensured that local needs and employment literacy and numeracy requirements could be met. An additional program involving school-based apprentices at the local school also commenced and costs of travel were shared between the school and the university training provider. Students included Indigenous youth on homelands and communities surrounding this remote location in the Northern Territory.

Contextualised learning through on-the-job training

Case Study 3 *Administrative training for Indigenous staff at a national park*

This literacy and numeracy program began as a partnership arrangement between a university regional training centre and a national park. The training program aimed to assist the national park's Indigenous staff, as well as trainees involved in a local Youth Employment Scheme, to become proficient in the national park's Governmental internal administrative procedures and processes. Task competencies to be achieved as part of this training included:

- Forms
- Protocols
- Email
- Excel spreadsheets

All resources used in the delivery of the program were in current usage by national parks staff in their daily tasks, so the literacy and numeracy training was immediately useful and contextualised.

Case Study 7 *A partnership in the metalliferous mining program*

Literacy and numeracy training forms part of the Certificate III and IV in Open Cut and Processing conducted on-site by a large mining company in a remote location in the Northern Territory. Students are employees and Indigenous trainees at the mine.

Case Study 9 *Indigenous health workers course*

Literacy and numeracy training is offered by this prominent Indigenous health organisation as part of an 18-month health worker course. Students are predominantly mature-age Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people with a literacy level of at least Year 10. They graduate from the program as Aboriginal health workers after completing 400 hours of clinical training, the highest requirement in Australia. Health worker trainers often have nursing backgrounds and assist in contextualising the literacy and numeracy training to be job-specific. Interstate applicants for health worker jobs in the Northern Territory are carefully screened and provided with additional clinical training by this organisation, if required.

Case Study 11 *Registered training organisation (industries-related)*

Literacy and numeracy skills are improved during a Building Construction training program, including skills for using heavy machinery and transport. This training provider is located at a state-of-the-art training centre with specially constructed classrooms and workshops as well as outdoor space, enabling all training to be delivered on-site. Apprentices across a range of fields participate in self-paced training in the classroom two days per week and on-the-job training three days per

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week. The training provider integrates literacy and numeracy within each program. This ensures that learning occurs on-the-job and is contextualised.

Tailored Literacy and Numeracy training

Case Study 4 *Indigenous Employment Program at Indigenous-owned hotel*

Literacy and numeracy training formed part of this Indigenous Employment Program based in an Indigenous-owned hotel at a remote location. This program initially ran full-time for 13 weeks and students graduated with a Certificate II qualification in their chosen field. Traineeships were offered in Tour Guiding, Hospitality, Business Studies, Horticulture and House-keeping. Students included local and non-local Indigenous people.

The program had three intakes according to different expected levels of literacy and numeracy. Students had to meet literacy and numeracy pre-requisites for Group 1 (Tour Guiding) and Group 2 (Hospitality, Business Studies and Horticulture). There were no literacy and numeracy pre-requisites for Group 3 (Hospitality and Horticulture). Assessment tasks were practical instead of theoretical and the program included developing skills in banking, personal finances, getting to work, time management, washing clothes and uniforms, attendance issues and nutrition.

Literacy and numeracy levels of the thirty (30) trainees were assessed by the university (as training partner with the hotel) when they entered the program. Results for the current program indicate that trainees ranged across literacy levels 1, 2 and 3. Students attended one day per week of literacy and numeracy training at the local university regional centre.

Case Study 5 *Indigenous traineeships in a National Park*

This training program involves traineeships aimed at Indigenous young people, aged 16 years and over, who have not had any schooling for 18 months. Trainees spend four days per week in employment with various local employers, including an Indigenous-owned hotel and a national park. On the remaining day, trainees attend the local university regional centre for training towards the Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management. Half of this day involves intensive literacy and numeracy training, which is tailored to each individual student's skill levels. IT training is integrated within the program delivery.

Case Study 10 *Registered training organisation (business-related)*

Literacy and numeracy training is offered by this registered training organisation (RTO) to a diverse range of students enrolled in the Certificate III in Business Administration. The RTO offers this qualification on behalf of the NT Government as part of a 'jobs plan' arrangement. Over one hundred (100) students, ranging from school-age to mature-age, participate in on-the-job apprenticeships and traineeships, and school-based apprenticeships, in major urban centres across the Northern Territory. The qualification is delivered in a mixed mode basis over a 12-month period with three weeks on-the-job followed by one week off-the-job.

The RTO is directly engaged in the recruitment selection process, in conjunction with DCIS. As a result, the training provider has a reasonable upfront knowledge of each student's literacy and numeracy levels and can therefore plan to provide additional support for individual apprentices and trainees as required. Feedback from supervisors and third party reports is also taken into account.

Literacy and numeracy assistance involves trainers working with students on a one-to-one basis or in small group sessions. As the course is delivered in mixed modes, it is flexible enough to allow for this extra assistance to be incorporated within the 'week off' blocks where necessary. Supervisors of the NT Government program are

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generally very flexible and if apprentices need to do additional intensive work, it is also possible to withdraw them from the job for short periods.

Reasonable levels of literacy and numeracy are required to complete the Certificate III in Business Administration in the NT Public Service. In this case study, the RTO has achieved a student completion rate of 92-96% over the last three years, almost double the normal completion rate for apprenticeships. The RTO considers that this success is due to the following factors:

- Training is delivered in mixed modes with scheduled off-the-job time which students can use for intensive study in particular areas.
- The RTO has a contract to manage the apprentices so they are visited by field staff on a monthly basis and individually tracked, with a view to assessing students' ongoing performance and providing assistance or additional training where required.
- This intensive level of mentoring allows training staff to stay in touch with the issues and needs of individual students during their apprenticeship. Early identification of literacy and numeracy issues is one area in which this personalised approach works very effectively.
- There is also a high level of peer support built into the program. Apprentices work together on projects or individual work to assist and support each other.

Training partnerships to improve outcomes

Case Study 8 *Private religious schools*

Literacy and numeracy training at a group of private religious schools follows a mainstream path that complies with the NT Curriculum Framework to Year 10 and beyond. Post-compulsory education past Year 10 involves provision of Vocational Education and Training (VET). The governing religious organisation supporting fifteen private schools across the Northern Territory (ten urban schools and five remote schools) believes its quality business is to assist students to achieve success. This can involve supporting students along a number of pathways to employment, including formal academic studies, new apprenticeship programs, VET and other applied learning pathways. The organisation also supports tri-sectoral arrangements involving the Department of Employment, Education and Training (NT DEET) and other key players in the Northern Territory's education system. These arrangements include professional development initiatives for teaching staff. One private school in a remote community has introduced Health PE and VET courses in partnership with a university to assist Indigenous students to achieve job-ready skills.

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How did they establish the program?

Literacy and numeracy training programs have been established to support a range of industries and professions in the Northern Territory. As circumstances are sometimes vastly different, it is interesting to note how these programs have been established and to understand key factors involved in their success (or failure).

Contracts, wages and work clothes

Case Study 1 *Partnership of training providers, remote school, a national park and an Indigenous-owned hotel*

A Steering Committee was established to oversee the program. The Committee consisted of twelve (12) community members representing diverse local interests and organisations, including local government, national park management, NT Health Department staff and the NT Chief Minister's Office. Funding for the program was obtained through Training for Remote Youth (TRY) grants. Class times were intermingled with structured work experience over a period of six weeks. Work experience was mainly with the national park as Junior Rangers. Trainees received wages and meals during the day while participating in the program, and were outfitted with regulatory work clothes and boots. A contract outlining mutual responsibilities was clearly explained at the commencement of the program. This contract could always be referred to if there were any problems or disagreements.

Availability of trainers

Case Study 2 *Workplace English Language and Literacy in Arnhemland*

Establishment of this program was a lengthy process as regular access to air transport to the Outstations and ongoing availability of trainers had to be assured. Also, a variety of programs were offered and this required a number of different trainers to be available on a weekly basis. For example, one trainer supported the local community Association's Ranger program while another provided training in Business Administration skills. At the same time, the program required apprenticeship delivery in a variety of crafts such as plumbing and mechanics.

Partnerships to make things happen

Case Study 4 *Indigenous Employment Program at Indigenous-owned hotel*

A national Indigenous Business association, a local tourism organisation and an Indigenous corporation (which owned the participating hotel) worked collaboratively to initiate this program, which was further developed in partnership with a university regional centre.

Training was initially planned as a 13-week program with completion of a Certificate II in their chosen field as the outcome. Successful graduates were offered full-time employment at the hotel. However, in 2005, a 6-week pre-employment program was added to prepare students for the work program in their chosen traineeship. This new 19-week program meant students worked five hours per day, four days per week, for a total of twenty (20) hours per week.

The 6-week pre-employment program was accredited as a VET Ready to Work program and funded by the Indigenous-owned hotel. The program included a focus on the basic details associated with gaining work-readiness, with special emphasis on Group 3 (Hospitality and Horticulture) trainees. Literacy and numeracy content was designed to link closely with the low literacy level of these trainees and the focus on preparing them to go to work tended to ensure a greater level of success.

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The program involved life skills such as setting up a bank account, getting a Tax File Number, learning how to set an alarm and be punctual to work, reading the time and using a washing machine. This program had a very high level of employer support for the trainees, without which “the program would not have been nearly as successful” (hotel employee). Particular emphasis was made on understanding Occupational Health and Safety issues during an extended induction program for all trainees, in particular the Group 3 trainees.

Case Study 5 *Indigenous traineeships in a National Park*

A partnership was formed, consisting of representatives from the Chief Minister’s Office, DEWR (Job Find), a national park and a university, to develop and oversee the program. It is coordinated by an employee of a local Indigenous-owned hotel.

Case Study 7 *A partnership in the metalliferous mining program*

A Memorandum of Understanding between a large mining company and a university was developed and signed for the co-delivery and assessment of accredited training in Open Cut Mining, to be delivered in-house to Indigenous trainees. Although the mining company is an RTO and delivers most of their required training in-house, they wanted a university’s involvement in order to have the program externally validated. This partnership ensured that employees gained nationally-recognised qualifications.

This is an exciting partnership arrangement and further enquiries have been received by the university from other remote mining operations.

Thinking beyond school

Case Study 8 *Private religious schools*

In response to community requests, a key aim of this private religious school program is to encourage more Indigenous secondary students into Year 11 and 12. The training program is conducted post-Year 10 and its dual role is to seek opportunities to return secondary students to their communities, where they can access further skills development and/or employment. The program is funded by NT DEET with involvement by communities and integration with cluster programs.

In one participating urban private school, there are a large number of Indigenous students in all grades. Students in Years 10, 11 and 12 are involved in a variety of VET programs, cluster programs and school-based apprenticeships. Due to the large proportion of Indigenous students, and the fact that most speak English as a Second Language (ESL), this school receives extra funding to assist ESL students with their literacy and numeracy, particularly those students in Years 11 and 12. As an active participant in “whatever programs are available” (interviewee), this school receives ISET funding, enabling the employment of more staff to support Indigenous students. Tutoring is available for Year 11 and 12 students, and a recently implemented program provides additional support to students participating for the first time in a mainstream education school outside of their community. This is an important part of engaging Indigenous youths in a secondary school environment.

Program outcomes, including education in the middle years, senior secondary and in VET courses, are measured against the NT Curriculum Framework. Key factors for success include good practitioners and extra funding/support for literacy and numeracy. This enables a less ‘mainstream’ approach, particularly for senior secondary students, which includes smaller group-style teaching and programs specifically designed to meet the needs of particular Indigenous students. These special programs are approved by the Northern Territory and South Australian Boards of Education as required. Success is defined by improved literacy and numeracy, and potentially a greater number of Indigenous students completing Years 11 and 12.

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The main aim of these programs is to provide opportunities for Indigenous students to return to their communities and actually contribute into a workforce pathway. In order to improve students' range of skills, school programs are chosen based on possible employment outcomes, for example, construction programs which may lead to a certificate in construction completed on-site in the community.

Case Study 12 *Indigenous Employment Management Board*

This literacy and numeracy training program is located in a remote island community. According to one trainer, "For twenty years, the schools have been pumping out illiterate kids," (interviewee). In order to establish a program that would be successful in such a remote location, students receive support and gain skills appropriate to existing employment opportunities. Training and 'real jobs' are locally based. An Accelerated Literacy program is part of the community's school education, and trainers are able to build on these skills within this literacy and numeracy program.

'Bridging the gap' in Indigenous health care

Case Study 9 *Indigenous health workers course*

There are complex issues involved in providing high quality, effective medical care to Aboriginal people of diverse language groups and cultural backgrounds within the health system in the Northern Territory. This has led to recognition of the need for health workers of Aboriginal heritage to help 'bridge the gap'. Health workers act as mediators between the Aboriginal clients and the NT Health Service, for example, in public hospitals. They assist in determining which services an individual client requires and help provide a holistic approach to the client's wellbeing, focusing on environmental health issues as well as personal health.

This training program is a federally-designed program and is offered by a prominent health organisation with a focus on Indigenous health. This training school is registered with NT DEET in order to secure course curricula. As part of the program, Aboriginal health workers undergo 400 hours of clinical training before graduating from the health organisation's training school. Interstate applicants are carefully screened and provided with additional clinical training where required.

Health workers are taught to assist doctors by acting as interpreters and mediators, using the client's body language as well as their spoken language to help them advise the doctor as to the patient's problem. Training programs such as these assist in meeting community needs, ensuring that Aboriginal clients are provided with quality care that is considerate of their cultural and social background.

Being realistic

Case Study 10 *Registered training organisation (business-related)*

In this training program, students vary in ages from school-leavers through to mature age apprentices at 40-45 years of age. Apprentices involved in literacy programs are predominantly Indigenous. This NT Public Service program delivers to major urban centres, while a rural training college and university regional training centre delivers the program to business apprentices in other rural areas. An urban-based RTO also delivers a customised program for apprentices working in regional centres.

From the training centre and training delivery perspective, there are many issues to consider when working with Indigenous apprentices. Some of these issues include literacy and numeracy levels, hearing problems, cross-cultural considerations, family and other community issues.

Therefore, an overall approach is required when establishing a training program to address all of these issues and ensure training staff are working in a realistic and

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positive way with Indigenous apprentices. Towards this end, this RTO is involved in a number of projects to develop and enhance training strategies.

For more issues, please see *What are the issues in Literacy and Numeracy training?*

For innovative strategies and approaches, go to *What innovative strategies and approaches did they use?*

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What are the issues in Literacy and Numeracy training?

There are many issues involved in planning, delivering and reviewing literacy and numeracy training programs in the Northern Territory. For the purposes of this project, a number of training providers were interviewed to determine the main issues affecting successful delivery of training programs. As you may notice, there is a certain synchronicity in the responses, with some issues arising repeatedly despite differences in delivery mode, industry/professions and student profiles.

Case Study 1 *Partnership of training providers, remote school, a national park and an Indigenous-owned hotel*

Program Outcomes The issue of students 'dropping out' of lifelong learning mid-teens has become a major issue in this remote town and concern took the form of a local group getting together to support and re-engage local youths with the view to attaining basic work-readiness skills and the ability to job search.

Seven out of the eighteen (18) students who attempted to obtain their driver's licence were successful on completion of this program. This was considered to be within the parameters of a successful program, in light of the connectedness of the youth in past education/training programs at this remote location.

Student Support

Fifteen (15) students undertook structured work experience either in the national park or the local hotel. This proved a challenging but successful program. The real-life context of the program, complete with financial and nutritional support, meant this was an enjoyable part of the program for the trainees.

Transport

Transporting the trainees to and from their workplace on an almost daily basis proved an onerous task for the employers but was a necessary part of the program.

Student Ages

The major impediment to the program appeared to be the age group of the trainees and their literacy levels. It was noted by one employer group involved that the age group (15-19 years) was too young to expect students to organise themselves and work independently to attain their goals. Instead, students of this age group required considerable support from training staff and host employers, which was very time-consuming. This had not been factored into the program in its initial planning.

Literacy Levels

The low literacy level of the participants was also a difficulty when the timeframe for the program was so short. Six weeks is the expected length of time a person with adequate literacy and numeracy would take to complete a defensive driving program.

As this program targeted local Indigenous people, training pre-requisites incorporated certain levels of literacy and numeracy skills. In 2005, the program became available to all interested Indigenous applicants. This decision was made on the grounds that many locals were missing out on the opportunity to participate and places in the program were increasingly being filled by non-local Indigenous people. From the commencement of the 2005 program, the variety of traineeship programs was increased to suit a more diverse range of literacy and numeracy skill levels.

Case Study 2 *Workplace English Language and Literacy in Arnhemland*

Continuity of Learning During this program, on-site delivery was conducted by trainers who flew into remote locations from a university regional centre. Issues

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included different levels of literacy in the same class and fluctuating numbers of students, which increased during the Wet season sometimes by 200-300%, as rising flood waters restricted travel. Combined with the sometimes hazardous flying conditions for trainers with forced flight delays or cancellations, these issues resulted in classes finding continuity to be the most difficult aspect of this delivery mode.

Contextualised Literacy Literacy was contextually based and produced some excellent results where some level of continuity could be managed.

Facilities The lack of teaching facilities was felt by the trainer to be an inhibitor to the overall success of the program.

Case Study 3 *Administrative training for Indigenous staff at a national park*

Literacy Levels Low levels of literacy was an important issue to consider, as students of this program were national park employees in administrative roles.

Case Study 4 *Indigenous Employment Program at Indigenous-owned hotel*

Student Support Successful applicants often needed assistance with commencement and induction paperwork, as most new trainees were assessed at levels 2 or 3 in literacy upon commencement. Satisfying OH&S and other obligations upon induction were onerous and very time-consuming for trainees with low literacy levels.

Student Retention Retention rates were low during this program, which provided Indigenous participants with employment at the local Indigenous-owned hotel, in addition to daily transport to and from the hotel and meals. For various reasons, some trainees withdrew from the program. Beginning with a total of five participants in the initial program, two had withdrawn by Week 3 and one withdrew by Week 5, resulting in only two students completing their traineeships. These students attained their chosen Certificate II qualifications and are still employed by the hotel.

Literacy Levels This program initially demanded particular skill levels of literacy and numeracy, but this was found to be rather limiting for Indigenous applicants.

Literacy Assessment It was determined that the literacy and numeracy assessment conducted on the first day of this program was too arduous and judgemental, with the result that potential participants (local and non-local Indigenous people) were left feeling discouraged. This deterred them from continuing the program.

Literacy Support In an effort to broaden the appeal to potential students, and to improve retention rates of trainees, the program was altered in 2005 to encompass literacy and numeracy training. Related prerequisites were abandoned for some of the traineeships. Students undertook a 6-week pre-employment program and then attended the local university regional centre for one day per week literacy and numeracy training for the duration of their traineeship. Tutors were employed to provide additional support to trainees.

IT Skills Integrated computer training forms a large part of the university-based delivery.

Case Study 5 *Indigenous traineeships in a National Park*

Tailored Training Each trainee has an individually tailored training program planned in conjunction with his/her interests. In many cases, this has meant being involved in the day-to-day management of the national park, where on-site training takes place.

Case Study 6 *Medium security prison*

Literacy Levels The literacy level of the students falls into two main groups and program planning must incorporate this in order to achieve successful outcomes.

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Case Study 7 *A partnership in the metalliferous mining program*

Literacy Levels Trainees employed at this large mining company were initially assessed for their literacy and numeracy levels, and an individual competency achievement plan was developed for each trainee.

Contextualised Literacy and Numeracy Training was conducted in the context of their working conditions and proved highly relevant and achievable, particularly in the application of literacy and numeracy skills.

Case Study 8 *Private religious schools*

Funding and Support A key factor enabling these programs to work in a private religious schools environment, is extra funding and support for literacy and numeracy.

Good Practitioners Another key factor for success involves the selection and retention of good practitioners with subject expertise.

Tailored Training Funding, support and good practitioners enables a less 'mainstream' approach to occur in a school context, particularly for senior secondary students. Training solutions include smaller group-style teaching and programs specifically designed to meet the needs of particular Indigenous students. Approval is gained from the Northern Territory and South Australian Boards of Education for tailored programs as required.

Program Outcomes Success of these programs is defined by improved literacy and numeracy, and potentially a greater number of Indigenous students completing Years 11 and 12. The governing religious organisation notes that the success of these programs relies heavily upon the teaching practitioners, who need enthusiasm, good delivery styles, commitment, engagement, knowledge and expertise. Practitioners need to be well supported yet also flexible and engaged when working with students from a range of backgrounds, including small Indigenous communities in the remote areas of the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland.

Opportunities for Indigenous students to return to their communities and contribute to a workforce pathway are an important consideration. Although employment outcomes cannot be guaranteed, training is selected according to possible job opportunities, such as building construction.

Case Study 9 *Indigenous health workers course*

Literacy and Numeracy Levels The course offered by a prominent health organisation, with a focus on Indigenous health, is unable to cater for students with low literacy levels because funding (discussed below) does not allow for long-term remedial work. Accepted applicants generally have literacy and numeracy levels equivalent to Year 10. For mature-age students this may include a reasonable length of experience in occupations where literacy skills have been taught or are needed, rather than formal schooling.

Contextualised Literacy Technical language, although it can be complex in the medical field, is taught within context during health worker training. This program, conducted by a prominent health organisation, focuses on key terms most likely to be relevant in an Indigenous health context.

Literacy and numeracy skills development for an environmental health context is an important focus in the training and the work of Aboriginal health workers. Health workers are trained to deal not only with the patient's disorder, but also with broader issues relating to environmental health, such as personal hygiene, and the patient's home or community background. This enables a holistic approach to the care of Indigenous clients.

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Training is innovative and highly practical, and language is used in support of the actions. This empowers the students, even when they may have lower literacy or numeracy levels, to be confident when dealing with medical professionals.

This approach contextualises the training and ensures success for all students. For example, students with a very basic level of reading are able to learn medical terms and spell them correctly as long as they have visual contact with the issues they are dealing with. Also, all medicines are colour coded so trainee health workers learn the names in association with the colours.

Funding and Support The health organisation prides itself on being able to run its health worker courses on a very low budget, though this is through necessity rather than desirability.

A major funding issue for the organisation is the fact that the health worker training course runs for 18-months, whereas government funding rounds operate on a financial and/or calendar year basis. The health organisation receives funding based on student intake at the beginning of each course year, despite the fact that there are additional students still completing from the previous year's intake. As a result, funding is stretched.

Limited funding also impacts on this health organisation's ability to advertise for more students. The organisation utilises a local Indigenous community radio service to advertise its course and encourages current students and training staff to 'spread the word' about Indigenous health issues and health worker training at local community events, such as football matches and social events.

Funding provided is inadequate to allow for long-term assistance for students with low literacy and numeracy levels, so this impacts upon the type of applicants that the organisation is able to accept into the course.

Tailored Training This health organisation is rigorous in making certain that its students are people-oriented, a major factor for ensuring the students become successful health workers who enjoy their job.

Very occasionally, an applicant presents who has all of the necessary skills in relating to people and shows real promise in being able to work effectively in a team situation but needs assistance with, for example, literacy and/or numeracy. In such cases, the organisation endeavours to make special efforts to provide for them. For example, the student may attend training at the university or regional Indigenous training college, or may even receive private tuition. However, in general, the organisation is frustrated by lack of funding in this regard and in the majority of cases cannot offer support to applicants with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Cultural Knowledge and Awareness Another issue in literacy and numeracy training involves the key skill this organisation seeks in successful applicants – the ability to effectively communicate with Aboriginal people.

This involves the understanding of 'Aboriginal English', which varies semantically and syntactically in its production and its delivery from 'Australian English'. The health client's English may also be interspersed with words from different Aboriginal languages, so knowledge of cultural issues and regional dialects and languages is extremely useful for the Indigenous health worker.

Trained health workers not only listen to a person's voice but use vital cues in a client's appearance (eg. if their skin is flushed, sweating, or pale) and body language (eg. the way they are standing, talking, the expression in their eyes) to help inform them of the client's specific situation and medical problem. The health worker then conveys this to the non-Indigenous doctor in terms he/she can understand, hence the vital role of health worker as 'interpreter' and mediator.

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In order to successfully complete the health worker course, students must demonstrate cultural knowledge and awareness appropriate for communicating with Indigenous people in a sensitive and professional way.

Case Study 10 *Registered training organisation (business-related)*

Literacy and Numeracy Levels The strategies needed to address literacy and numeracy issues are different in urban environments compared to remote bush settings. In remote communities, people are often learning English as their second, third or fourth language, and may have literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to just mid-primary or upper-primary levels.

Their level of functional literacy and numeracy is very different to people working in a power station, on a construction site or in an office environment. Yet, if they undertake, for example, Certificate III in General Construction, students need to be able to make accurate calculations, such as how many metres of concrete are required to pour into a slab. While difficult from an everyday language perspective, there is also a range of underpinning skills which must be learned. This presents a training challenge.

Student Support Indigenous mentoring is one strategy used by this RTO to assist students with literacy and numeracy issues.

Other strategies are developed on a project by project basis. For example, the RTO is undertaking a project on behalf of an Indigenous Community Council in a remote community, and has developed a 3-5 year employment training strategy for the community. There is also a formal Memorandum of Understanding in place to assist the Council in progressing with the strategy. As part of that exercise, this RTO is assisting in the 'roll out' of an apprenticeship program in General Construction.

In order to achieve this, and to support the apprentices, a full-time literacy and numeracy lecturer has been employed in the community. This position and that of the builder/trainer is funded from a mix of recurrent funding sources including a remote Indigenous training college and NT DEET's VET in Schools program.

This approach is reaping rewards, with more apprentices not only completing the qualifications, but obtaining ongoing employment and often deciding to study for higher-level qualifications.

Tailored Training A key element in the RTO's success with Indigenous apprentices and trainees is its focus on taking a holistic approach to each individual. Literacy and numeracy issues are viewed within the context of other crucial factors such as cross-cultural issues, hearing issues, the need for mentor support, etc. In short, an entire package of holistic approaches enables the student to progress through the apprenticeship pathway with a range of mentor support, mixed modes approaches, appropriate delivery and training etc, which provides the apprentices with excellent discipline in life-long learning and knowledge that can be applied directly to their work environment. Once they have these skills they can continue on to further study or successful careers.

Contextualised Literacy and Numeracy The RTO provides apprentices with a range of contextualised learning opportunities, resulting in excellent discipline in life-long learning and knowledge that can be applied directly to their future work environment. With contextualised literacy and numeracy skills, successful apprentices can engage in further study or develop a career.

Case Study 11 *Registered training organisation (industries-related)*

Contextualised Literacy and Numeracy Literacy and numeracy is learnt on-the-job in this program and is therefore contextualised within a realistic workplace

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environment. Training occurs self-paced in the classroom for two days per week and on-the-job for three days per week.

Case Study 12 *Indigenous Employment Management Board*

Literacy and Numeracy Levels According to trainers delivering literacy and numeracy programs on a remote island community, “We’re into our third generation lost to reading and writing English. Non-Tiwi people having to be flown into the Islands to do basic business skills and measurement of housing for repairs etc.” (interviewee)

Program Outcomes The government-funded Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), which supports work opportunities on remote communities and related workplace training, needs an “end point” in the opinion of one trainer delivering programs at this remote location. It is “not suitable as an ongoing venture” (interviewee) and should have specified long-term employment outcomes for training participants.

Contextualised Literacy and Numeracy “We treat trainees and apprentices as if they are going to fulfil a position once they are trained.” (interviewee) Program delivery occurs within the remote community, incorporating appropriate cultural knowledge and language skills.

Student Health Concerns Short life span is a serious issue for the Indigenous population in the Northern Territory. Health workers are “not coming through the training” (interviewee) and loss of students to early deaths is an unfortunate and adverse consequence of social and environmental factors in this remote community.

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What innovative strategies and approaches did they use?

Training providers have provided an insight into the strategies and approaches required to conduct successful literacy and numeracy programs across the Northern Territory. Some of these strategies have been developed as a result of trial and error, emerging as a genuine 'need' within a cross-cultural learning environment.

Other approaches are an indication of the creativity, enthusiasm and commitment of those involved, including trainers, students and partners in learning, such as community, government and private enterprise.

Overall, success is measured not only by graduate statistics but also through the establishment of a positive learning environment. This is achieved in part by maintaining realistic expectations, providing holistic support for students, displaying cultural sensitivity and contextualising literacy and numeracy skills.

As a result, you may find a range of useful and practical ideas and insightful strategies in the case studies below.

Case Study 1 *Partnership of training providers, remote school, a national park and an Indigenous-owned hotel*

- **Be flexible**
- **Provide student support, both on and off the job**
- **Allow a 'second go'**

As a result of the outcome after six weeks, a revamping of the program took place to ensure that the group of unsuccessful students could be more supported both off and on the job. They were offered a place in a subsequent program involving another local employer.

Case Study 2 *Workplace English Language and Literacy in Arnhemland*

- **Commute weekly by plane to remote areas**
- **Arrange training/classes according to cultural considerations**
- **Integrate ICT**
- **Conduct regular on-site visits**
- **Embed literacy within a practical program**

Travel by air on a weekly basis: Due to safety and family reasons, staff travelled by air when visiting the remote outstations. They also travelled in pairs. Air travel presented some logistical challenges as the light aircraft allowed for 40 kg of equipment only, meaning that the 16 available laptop computers could not all go!

Cultural considerations: Staff travelled in male/female pairs in order to accommodate the preference of participants for same sex classes, thus preventing cultural reasons (taboo or poison cousins) for participants to not be in the same training session.

Integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into the delivery of the training. Laptop computers were flown into the Outstation each week and used in the delivery of programs. This fits well with the "Indigenous preferred learning environment" (interviewee).

Regular weekly on-site visits occurred, as compared to 'block' training, so that minimal training is missed if a participant is unable to attend in a certain week.

An impediment to smooth delivery of training was the large numbers of students in the Wet season. The seasonal changes between the Wet and the Dry seasons in

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Arnhemland caused student numbers to fluctuate dramatically, with very large numbers of students wishing to undertake training in the Wet season, compared to the Dry season when participants were more likely to be 'on the move'. In the Dry season the trainers could expect to instruct a manageable class size of 36 in a session, whereas in the Wet season, the numbers could double and sometimes triple. This had a detrimental effect on the ability of the trainers to make a difference in literacy competencies during the Wet season.

Instead they focussed on the practical competencies related to the program and embedded literacy into the program when they could. It was not always possible to give the one-on-one support that had been available throughout the Dry season to the participants.

Case Study 3 *Administrative training for Indigenous staff at a national park*

- **Choose practical units to build confidence**
- **Use Multimedia tools to minimise preparation, enhance literacy**
- **Provide relationship-based support**

Training initially focused on practical units so that trainees were assessed on these units first, enabling them to build confidence prior to undertaking theoretical units.

Ready for work programs take a lot of staff time. Videos and visual learning tools were used in place of paper-based instruction, minimising preparation time and enhancing learning for students with low literacy levels.

In 2005, the program was highly successful overall (28 out of 32 completed) but was not as successful as hoped for low literacy trainees, as the intended literacy and numeracy support was not well organised. However, two low literacy trainees did complete the program and have now been employed by the Indigenous-owned hotel for six months. Their success was relationship-based. It involved a great deal of one-on-one support throughout the life of the program and following successful employment.

Case Study 6 *Medium security prison*

- **Involve minimal writing**
- **Use visual teaching aids and oral delivery to maximise learning**
- **Re-write resources to be culturally appropriate, more visual**
- **Ask the students, focus on their interests**

Due to the low literacy levels of most of the students, training involves minimal writing;

Visual teaching aids and oral delivery is utilised to maximise learning and communication;

Lecturers have rewritten worksheets to make them culturally appropriate and more visual.

Lecturers seek to discover what the students really want to learn, then focus on that to engage students.

Case Study 7 *A partnership in the metalliferous mining program*

- **Consider cultural aspects of learning**
- **Contextualise the learning**
- **Conduct training in students' preferred learning environment**

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This training program ensured that cultural aspects of learning were considered as an integral part of the delivery and assessment requirements. Trainers and the large mining company (employer) worked with the students, successfully contextualising their learning. As the preferred learning environment was small group work, training sessions were conducted on-site in small groups. This maximised the learning of students (employees) and improved relationship-building opportunities.

Case Study 8 *Private religious schools*

- **Establish Indigenous leadership group, teacher assistance support**
- **Provide professional development opportunities**
- **Maintain good communication through meetings**
- **Highlight examples of good practice**
- **State outcomes to achieve, strategies to use**

It is refreshing to find “switched-on practitioners” (interviewee) who are regularly confronting the challenges of training in a cross-cultural and school environment with a positive yet realistic attitude. Some strategies to meet these challenges were identified during interviews and these strategies are implemented within a whole school/organisational approach.

Schools interviewed during this project actively find and select staff who want to be involved with Indigenous students and who are committed to improving Indigenous students’ experience of a school environment and their future employment opportunities, particularly with the aim of returning to communities.

These schools have established an Indigenous leadership group to provide Indigenous leaders for teacher assistance support, sharing cultural knowledge and advice as part of teachers’ professional development (PD).

The provision of regular PD opportunities for staff is important to these schools. PD is offered across a range of subjects, with a particular focus on the provision of PD to classroom teachers. Recent PD has included an Indigenous leadership group, teacher assistance groups, and two days of PD supporting teacher assistants in classrooms.

An area of special focus is literacy and numeracy, especially the knowledge and access of related support and services available to schools. Within schools, there is “a high expectation” (interviewee) of literacy and numeracy PD.

The schools convene moderation meetings to maintain levels of student engagement and set program outcomes. Moderation meetings involve schools delivering programs to secondary Indigenous students, with some schools setting very high standards for delivery and student outcomes. These meetings are aimed at maintaining levels within each school, and improving outcomes through learning from the achievements of other schools and gaining from the strategies used.

Good teaching practises are highlighted, particularly where good teaching strategies are implemented across school curriculum delivery and/or other training programs. Examples of good practice are used to inform current teaching strategies within these schools.

Case Study 9 *Indigenous health workers course*

- **Set Literacy and Numeracy levels for applicants**
- **Recognise prior work experience, current occupation**
- **Provide practical training**

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- **Maximise student experiences**
- **Provide trainers with list of important issues for students**
- **Provide opportunities for students to learn by observation**
- **Recognise and value the trainers**

English language and numeracy programs are not built into the health worker training programs, so successful applicants generally have literacy levels equivalent to Year 10 or beyond.

Applicants with low levels of literacy cannot be accepted as the training school does not have the capacity to work intensively with them, and so they are referred to other training institutions. However, mature-age applicants without an adequate level of formal schooling can also have their occupation and work experience taken into account, so a large number of mature-age students are accepted into the school.

The health worker training is very practical, and trainee health workers are moved as much as possible between clinics – noting, however, that there are men and women’s health clinics, and the women’s clinics are divided between disorders and child health clinics.

Health worker trainers are given a list of issues they need to direct the student to, and the students learn by watching the trained health worker interacting with doctors and patients in the clinics.

The health organisation conducting this training program notes that its health worker trainers with nursing backgrounds, primarily female, are particularly effective and skilled teachers, and contribute a great deal to the success of the program.

Case Study 10 *Registered training organisation (business-related)*

- **Look at the ‘big picture’ – holistic approach**
- **Think outside the square – hearing loss strategies**
- **Develop tools for ‘action-learning’**
- **Use related government funding to build training partnerships**
- **Employ an Indigenous mentor**
- **Establish on-site visits to remote communities by field-workers**

In terms of working with Indigenous apprentices, from the training centre/training delivery perspective, there are many issues that combine to contribute towards low levels of literacy and numeracy in Indigenous students. These include limited literacy and numeracy knowledge and training, hearing problems, cross-cultural considerations and family responsibilities.

An overall approach, addressing all of these issues, is required to ensure training staff employed at this RTO are working in a realistic and positive way with Indigenous apprentices. Towards this end, the RTO is involved in a number of projects to develop and enhance strategies.

The RTO is currently engaged in a pilot project supported by DEST funding, to look at the effects of conductive hearing loss for Indigenous apprentices and to develop possible strategies to mitigate hearing loss issues. The pilot project involves Damien Howard, a well known psychologist in Darwin who has considerable expertise in this field.

The RTO is also developing tools, templates and approaches for ‘action-learning’, with assistance from VET Leaders at the nearby university.

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The RTO's training centres have obtained funding under the DEST-WELL program to work in conjunction with an Indigenous regional training college, to conduct intensive work with thirty (30) Indigenous apprentices on an annual basis. The apprentices will be a combination of students involved in the RTO's internal programs. This partnership will enhance the RTO's capacity to provide additional literacy and numeracy support for other Indigenous apprentices.

To provide personalised support for Indigenous students, this RTO employs an Indigenous mentor who takes all the Indigenous apprentices off the job to spend time in monthly workshops. During these workshops, the Indigenous mentor discusses barriers and issues from the workplace, and explores training perspectives for Indigenous apprentices. The mentor also provides good quality group support and follow-up. This approach ensures a 'total package', aimed at further supporting Indigenous apprentices.

As there are 65-70 Indigenous apprentices participating in training in remote communities (undertaking Essential Services Certificate II level qualifications), two full-time field-workers are employed in two major urban centres to visit apprentices on their communities and provide structured support to all trainees. Training involves a structured workshop combining on-the-job and withdrawal off-the-job during field-worker visits to "get the apprentices through." (interviewee)

As described above, the following strategies and approaches have proved successful in training apprentices with literacy and numeracy issues through research into strategies to mitigate the effects of hearing loss in Indigenous students; Indigenous mentoring; development of 'action-learning' tools and templates in conjunction with a university; and a DEST-WELL funded literacy strategy partnership.

Case Study 11 *Registered training organisation (industries-related)*

- **Establish learning agreements**
- **Write appropriate resources**
- **Take on apprentices and provide support**
- **Mentor apprentices**
- **'Follow through' on student progress from start to finish**
- **Raise awareness of the 'big picture'**

Literacy and numeracy training has been developed to incorporate Understanding Basic English 1996, which includes grammar and focuses on important parts of speech, including sentence construction. Trainees and apprentices sign an agreement to complete this unit during their course.

This unit is based on the premise that they move from the known to the new in small steps. The manager and staff of this RTO wrote the resource after recognising certain issues recurring during training delivery.

This RTO committed to 'taking on' its own group of apprentices, who then successfully built several houses from start to finish. This achievement was a direct result of strategies and approaches implemented by the RTO to support its apprentices. Apprentices were mentored in the job, and individual progress was 'followed through' from start to finish.

The fact that these apprentices built several houses successfully was considered to be "an achievement in itself" as often these apprentices "only concentrate on their particular apprenticeship area and many had never completed a house. They built it together." (interviewee) Raising student awareness of the 'big picture' (ie the

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knowledge and combined effort required to build an entire house) was an important factor in this training program.

Case Study 12 *Indigenous Employment Management Board*

- **Use appropriate resources**
- **Wear ‘team colours’ to show commitment**
- **Emphasise trainees’ responsibilities**
- **Employ an Indigenous graduate as trainee/apprenticeship coordinator**
- **Develop local partnerships**
- **Establish good tracking procedures for student progress**

During this training program, trainers used ‘Using Accelerated Literacy and Sound Ways’ resource, along with a program called ‘Money Business’ to support the business skills program.

All trainees wear a t-shirt indicating their commitment to the program. This gained kudos for the trainees within their community.

Trainees have “real responsibilities” (interviewee) as far as the local Indigenous Employment Management Board is concerned, which oversees the program.

A local Indigenous graduate of the program is trainee/apprenticeship coordinator and working with a network of locals to develop partnerships.

The Board established and registered a company in order to register all trainees and apprentices, to “keep track of them” (interviewee). As training is delivered by a number of RTOs, this strategy was implemented to track student progress effectively and to safeguard against errors.

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What are the future directions for these programs?

Literacy and numeracy training programs can be adversely affected by a host of factors, including funding decisions, employment and industry changes, availability of trainers and other challenges. As a direct consequence, the future of the programs outlined in our case studies may not be predictable. However, a few training providers chose to outline some possible changes, improvements and/or important considerations necessary to the success of any future programs.

Case Study 1 *Partnership of training providers, remote school, a national park and an Indigenous-owned hotel*

- Integrating the attainment of improvement in literacy within a sought-after skill, like obtaining a driving licence, in conjunction with,
- Paid work experience
- Supplying a ‘taster’ of possible future employment opportunities for the trainee.

“This strategy appears to work in almost 50% of the cases.” (interviewee)

Case Study 4 *Indigenous Employment Program at Indigenous-owned hotel*

- Relationship-based support is very effective
- Tutor and practically-based instruction assists the low literacy students to achieve success and grow confident in moving onto a more literacy-based program
- Contextualised literacy and numeracy training improves learning outcomes
- Strong partnership arrangements between the employer and registered training organisation provide a sound framework within which training is delivered
- Separating groups according to literacy levels enables trainees to receive adequate support and instruction from tutors and small group work.

Case Study 5 *Indigenous traineeships in a National Park*

- Impediments to success were identified early in the program in a risk analysis and these included:
- Communication: In some situations with the trainees the program deliverers need to utilise Indigenous elders into the role of mentors and translators as confusion and mistrust can occur very quickly with the young people.
- Cultural barriers: Ceremonies interfere with the smooth-running timetable of a training program and staff may not have been told that a trainee is not turning up to a driving lesson. This can produce a negative reaction and so communication lines are to be encouraged through mentors and networking regularly between partners.
- Structure of training: A ‘hands-on’ employment-contextualised approach, based on practical activities until the literacy and confidence levels have gained momentum, is essential for success with low literacy trainees. Indigenous learning styles of small group work, using computers and an awareness of cultural mores and practices through staff undergoing Cultural Awareness training is also considered essential.

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- Demands of funding bodies: In some instances, the outcomes for the program to be successful, in the view of the funding body, is out of line with the reality on the ground. Success may be determined by the trainee as an increase in confidence in public speaking and meeting strangers in a positive manner within the hospitality sector but the program itself may not yet be completed as more time is required for achievement of competencies.

Case Study 8 *Private religious schools*

- Individual schools have options for Indigenous students in terms of the post-compulsory years and VET courses
- Schools may establish new apprenticeship programs
- Schools can highlight all the different types of employment pathways that are offered to students in each school's care, and to those who are charged with responsibility of delivering those programs

Case Study 9 *Indigenous health workers course*

- Use Literacy, Numeracy and Language as an integral part of the course
- Non-Aboriginal doctors may be actively involved
- Training to be practical – ensuring health worker students learn by osmosis
- Students move around clinics, and men and women are separated. This approach works well and ensures cultural considerations are met.
- Success to continue, despite low budget
- Skilled nurses are produced through a range of strategies

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What do other people think?

In a school-based training environment

Interviewee: “You would probably need to talk to the school to get the actual facts and figures [of students completing Years 11 and 12, because] I can’t tell you that. Opportunities for the kids to go back to communities and actually contribute into a workforce pathway [is important]. We try to run programs – as an example, construction programs in schools – from which, kids go back with a certificate in construction hopefully. We can never guarantee these things but, hopefully, there’s going to be an opportunity for housing in a community or some other area where they can actually go on and do further study.”

Interviewer: “Is there any evidence of it actually working?”

Interviewee: “I couldn’t comment on that.”

Interviewer: “What support do you give your teachers and how does that work in terms of professional development?”

Interviewee: “For example (and I couldn’t list all the PD that’s been given over the years here), but in the NT, we’ve currently got on – as we speak at the moment – [an] Indigenous leadership group and next week, teacher assistance groups – two days of PD supporting teacher assistants in our classrooms. We very much align ourselves in terms of provision of PD for classroom teachers, especially in the area of literacy & numeracy...they have a number of supports and services that are available to us as with any other sector but...there would be a high expectation there of literacy and numeracy too, and good teaching practise using good teaching strategy that delivers PD. Not so much ‘train the trainer’ stuff but examples of good practice.”

In an Indigenous health workers context

Interviewer: “What makes [your health organisation] different? Is there a legacy where someone will look back and say, this is what [your organisation] has done?”

Interviewee: “One of the reasons [we] started a training school was that Aboriginal people found it difficult going to other institutions...where the training was basically concerned with people from remote areas and certainly not urban areas – and that’s where they will come from, to our courses.”

From the perspective of a practitioner and/or researcher

Adult Literacy and Numeracy:

Literacy and numeracy skills are shaped by social, cultural and technological developments. Therefore the definition of literacy will change with the times, as will approaches to fostering literacy and numeracy skills.

People with limited literacy can lead very successful lives. They can achieve stable employment, economic self-management and academic success. In doing so, they often have to be particularly determined and able to make clever use of networks and technologies.

Learning about language, literacy and numeracy is not restricted to conventional educational environments. It can also be integrated into work and community settings. This requires effective collaboration and coordinated approaches.

- Foster & Beddie 2005

Integrated approaches to teaching adult literacy in Australia:

The extent to which language, literacy and numeracy is delivered successfully in an integrated approach is dependent on the ability of facilitators and assessors to interpret vocational training packages and to develop appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

Practitioners experienced...challenges with understanding training packages and used different language, literacy and numeracy frameworks and support materials. However, they were able to demonstrate great flexibility in response to contextualising

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training...and applied a remarkable consistency of instructional strategies to enhance the language, literacy and numeracy skills of students.

Restrictive funding models leave registered training organisations to make commercial decisions about levels of support required by learners, affecting the time and resources available for practitioners to explicitly address the language, literacy and numeracy needs of students.

- McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2005

The national Indigenous education policy has contributed to:

- Substantial progress towards achieving parity in access to and participation in education and training between Indigenous people and other Australians, although more still needs to be done.
- The better accommodation of Indigenous people's aspirations and cultural needs within many of Australia's schools, TAFE institutions and universities, again noting that much more still needs to be done.

- Robinson & Bamblett 1998

Key findings from data analysis of VET programs 1997-2001:

- Participation of Indigenous people in vocational education and training is very strong and the rate is twice that of other students.
- Young Indigenous people are especially participating in strong numbers, and at rates above those for non-Indigenous young people.
- The very strong participation rates in vocational education and training provides encouraging opportunities for the future for Indigenous people, especially given their relatively low participation rates in the other education sectors of schools and higher education. However, against all indicators apart from participation, Indigenous people are faring less well than non-Indigenous people.
- There is a trend towards more Indigenous students studying Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)-related courses that therefore have industry and lifelong learning relevance.
- An outstanding challenge is to develop performance indicators that will demonstrate the social and community economic and welfare benefits of participant in VET that can be used in addition to the existing employment-related indicators.

- Saunders et al 2003

From an Indigenous perspective

Issues and strategies for engaging Indigenous people:

The most striking single issue about the experiences of Indigenous peoples in VET in Australia has been the relatively recent elimination of inequities in VET participation rates between Indigenous peoples and other Australians.

VET providers...have taken steps to encourage Indigenous access to their programs, and Indigenous peoples have responded by enrolling in record numbers across Australia...Indigenous participation in the VET sector has grown at a much stronger rate than Indigenous participation in other forms of post-compulsory education and training.

The issues of what were 'successful outcomes'...was frequently raised during the study...Staff in Indigenous education units often gave examples of learning and personal development which could not be discerned from outcome data.

The assumption that Indigenous students inevitably experience VET as culturally alien or threatening ignores the enormous diversity of Indigenous situations and individual responses by the large number of Indigenous peoples from a very diverse range of backgrounds.

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If...strategies are developed properly with the involvement of the Indigenous community, Indigenous education units and the students themselves, then they need not compromise any cultural or social beliefs of the students.

- *Robinson & Hughes 1999*

Relevance of literacy to Indigenous communities:

Literacy...is only relevant if it is linked in a useful way to the prescribed roles and responsibilities in the community. The mainstream education and training system invests in the individuals progressing along a pathway towards labour market and employment, whereas in this remote Indigenous context the most important investment is in the social capital – norms (values), networks and trust (Putnam 1993) – of the communal whole.

- *Kral & Falk 2004*

Traditional culture vs Western education:

So, while Indigenous communities consider Western education important they do not believe it should come at the expense of traditional culture. This poses a challenge to an industry-driven vocational education and training (VET) system based on national competency standards. Kral and Falk (2004) suggest that mainstream VET has a poor fit with the needs, values, interests and opportunities in the rural Indigenous community they studied. They found that while skills could be taught, the process was futile as it was irrelevant to the local community, where formal education and training was not seen to be aligned with cultural expectations.

Fostering literacy in this context goes beyond developing skills for economic participation. It is about developing community capacity to influence and direct the running of the community. 'The community is seeking a "both ways" model where mainstream education, and education into the Indigenous law happen side by side'.

- *Foster & Beddie 2005*

Effective ways of supporting Indigenous students:

Literacy and numeracy skills are highly valued by Indigenous students and community members and are the key to further training, education and employment.

Literacy and numeracy support actually given to Indigenous students remains inadequate across much of the VET sector, although effective support systems are available.

The study identifies one-on-one support in the form of in-class tutorial support and peer tutoring as the most effective method of delivering literacy and numeracy to Indigenous VET students.

As the relationship between teacher/tutor and the student is of primary importance to Indigenous students, there is a need for more Indigenous staff throughout the VET sector, including teachers/trainers, administrators and support staff. Cross-cultural training should be made available for non-Indigenous teachers delivering courses in which Indigenous students are enrolled.

- *McGlusky & Thaker 2006*

From a government perspective

The six principles of Indigenous learning:

1. Intercultural competence – recognise cultural differences; build relationships that enhance learning; show commitment, humility, sense of humour
2. Respect – show respect for Indigenous culture by designing and structuring appropriate learning environments; reflect on relevant learning materials and resources; engage with local Indigenous communities; help Indigenous learners to negotiate the transition from training to employment
3. Negotiation – complex process bound by cultural protocols, language barriers; involves both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; understanding of the needs of

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various parties; a 'give and take' attitude; building relationships at personal and organisational level

4. Meaningful outcomes – programs must lead somewhere and have a purpose
5. Relationships – developing trust, mutual understanding; commitment
6. Indigenisation – Indigenous people teaching Indigenous people

- DEST 2004

A snapshot of training in the Northern Territory:

The Northern Territory has a higher concentration of Indigenous people with 30.1% of the NT population reporting as having an Indigenous background, compared to Australia at 2.5% of the total population.

The Indigenous population in the NT is characterised by a low school educational profile, with a large number not achieving Year 12 education. Many Indigenous Territorians live in remote areas where access to education...may be limited...As many as 64% of Indigenous Territorians are neither employed nor looking for work and only approximately 15% are working in mainstream (non CDEP) employment. There is work to be done with the Indigenous population to provide them with the capacity to engage in the labour force.

Limitations associated with delivery of VET training in remote communities present major challenges to the Northern Territory. The cost of remote training delivery is high...Approximately 22.1% of the Territory's population live outside the six regional centres, and a major proportion of this population is Indigenous

The three main languages spoken at home (other than English) are Australian Indigenous languages.

The Northern Territory also has seasonal factors such as road blockages and airstrip closures during the wet season, which affect delivery by limiting access to communities. Often there is a shortage of suitable physical infrastructure to support required training in Indigenous communities.

Challenges exist in the building of a critical mass of VET practitioners that are able to realise the potential of flexible learning. VET practitioners must have the training, resources and experience to deliver VET in remote contexts and utilising innovative training delivery models such as Interactive Distance Learning and other e-learning techniques. DEET is addressing these issues by providing professional development programs for training practitioners in the Northern Territory.

- DEET 2006

From a global perspective

United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012:

Literacy is about more than reading and writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. Literacy – the use of written communication – finds its place in our lives alongside other ways of communicating. Indeed, literacy itself takes many forms...It comprises other skills needed for an individual's full autonomy and capacity to function effectively in a given society. It can range from reading instructions for fertilisers, or medical prescriptions, knowing which bus to catch, keeping accounts for a small business or operating a computer...Those who use literacy take it for granted – but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today's world.

- UNESCO 2003

Factors for enhancing Literacy, Numeracy and Language (LNL) learning:

- Appropriately skilled teachers who can identify the strengths and weakness learners have in speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. [Findings suggest] full-time teachers are more likely to enhance learner gain, and that learners benefit when there is assistance from teacher aides or volunteer tutors.

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- A curriculum that is linked to the authentic literacy events that learners experience in their lives. An authentic curriculum appears to lead to gain for learners in family literacy, for ESOL learners and for mainstream LNL learners...

- *Auckland Uniservices*