Beyond deficit approaches to teaching and learning: Literacy and numeracy in VET courses

Stephen Black, Keiko Yasukawa
University of Technology, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Abstract

Literacy and numeracy skills (L&N), now framed nationally as 'foundation skills', are high on government and industry agendas, and a new National Foundation Skills Strategy is currently in the making. L&N support provided to students in vocational education and training (VET) courses is anticipated to feature strongly in this new strategy, especially in light of the national focus on increasing post school qualifications. Predominantly, current models of L&N support in VET courses can be seen largely as a 'deficit' approach in which individual students are identified, usually through a test or screen at the beginning of their course, as being in deficit of the L&N skills needed to complete their course. Students are often given the opportunity of obtaining assistance through attending additional 'stand-alone' L&N classes, a study centre, or a L&N teacher providing assistance in the vocational classroom. This paper considers other models of support, both in the research literature and in Australian case studies, which 'integrate' L&N with VET courses. This involves a variety of team teaching arrangements between vocational and L&N teachers in which the aim is to assist the whole student group and not just those identified with L&N 'problems'. This approach may improve vocational learning by more directly linking L&N practices with vocational practices. It also avoids the negative labeling of students associated with the deficit approach, and may be seen as a more active pedagogy, encouraging change in VET practices. The paper is based largely on semi-structured, taped interviews with a total of fifty-three L&N teachers, vocational teachers and VET managers across most Australian states and territories. These interviews were undertaken by the authors as part of a Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) funded research project on integrated L&N support in VET which is due for completion in mid 2011.

Introduction

Debates on adult L&N, framed nationally within the broader concept of foundation skills, are currently high on the national agenda (Black & Yasukawa 2010), and the federal government has flagged a National Foundation Skills Strategy (Australian Government 2010), which will be the first national policy statement influencing the field of adult L&N since the Australian Language and Literacy Policy in 1991 (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991). The push for action has come largely from industry groups (e.g. Australian Industry Group 2010, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2007) and the recently formed Skills Australia (2010), because literacy and numeracy 'problems' in the workforce are seen to be affecting productivity and other indicators of economic development. This argument draws on large scale survey data of L&N levels in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 1997, 2007) and internationally (e.g. Statistics Canada/OECD 2005), and quantitative research based on these data (e.g. Miller & Chiswick 1998, Coulombe et al 2004, Shomos 2010). Other groups (e.g. National VET Equity Advisory Council 2010) have recently drawn attention to equity issues in VET, and the perception that many students are being disadvantaged in their vocational studies due to L&N difficulties. It is anticipated L&N support in VET will feature strongly in the new strategy, especially given its perceived

significance for underpinning nationally agreed 2020 targets for increasing the qualifications of Australian adults (Council of Australian Governments 2008).

This paper focuses on L&N in VET courses, and in particular, the ways in which L&N teachers work with vocational teachers in providing support to students undertaking their vocational studies. Often this provision is framed in terms of 'integrated' L&N, though as we will see, integrated provision varies considerably in practice. The paper draws on unpublished data from a current research project undertaken with DEEWR funding (Black & Yasukawa forthcoming). It excludes the already well documented workplace L&N programs undertaken with federal government Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) funding (see Woods et al 2006).

The main argument we present in this paper is that predominantly, L&N support provided to students in VET falls within a 'deficit' approach, that is, learners are perceived to have problems which are primarily located within them, and that they need support to overcome these problems in order to succeed in their studies. This approach is so ingrained in VET practices that there is very little debate over it in Australia, either in the research literature or in practice. It is naturalised and largely uncontested – part of the dominant pedagogical discourse in Australian VET. The aim in this paper is to highlight the fact that current approaches are underpinned by deficit notions, and to provide some examples and directions for future pedagogical models which both avoid a deficit approach, and provide more effective vocational learning.

Literature review

L&N support for vocational students has long been a feature of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, the main Australian public VET providers, going back more than thirty years (Wickert et al 2007:251). While this began as 'stand-alone' L&N provision, with the developing concept of 'integrated' L&N support in VET, Australia was seen at one stage to have led the world (Australian National Training Authority 2003:3). Courtenay and Mawer (1995:2) explain that conceptually, delivering L&N in VET in an integrated way involves concurrently developing L&N and vocational competencies '… as interrelated elements of the one process'. In other words, L&N are taught not as separate or discrete skills, but contextualized or 'situated' within the process of learning vocational skills. Integrated L&N forms the conceptual base of the 'built in not bolted on' approach to industry training packages (Wignall 1998), and these packages underpin what is taught in Australian VET. Also, in workplace L&N programs funded by the federal government, integrated L&N provision is the norm, and is considered a key factor in the success of these programs (Woods et al 2006:14-16). To date, integrated L&N provision has received most attention in workplace programs (e.g. Sefton et al 1994, McKenna and Fitzpatrick 2005, Woods et al 2006), though the concept has also been promoted as the basis for community programs featuring cross sectoral partnerships (Wickert and McGuirk 2005).

While TAFE systems have adopted various forms of L&N support for many years, including individual and small group tuition, attendance at study centres and team teaching, this provision remains relatively unresearched, certainly from a national perspective, which partly accounts for the rationale for our current study. In some state jurisdictions such as New South Wales, integrated L&N support in the form of team teaching has been established and documented as 'good practice' for many years in TAFE colleges (e.g. Randazzo 1989, Glossop 1990, Black 1996, Access & General Education Curriculum Centre 2005), as too

have professional development programs encouraging the 'working together' (TAFE NSW 1990) of vocational and L&N teachers. While some other states have also promoted integrated delivery (e.g. Queensland – see Foley 2002), one model of integrated L&N delivery, the Western Australian developed Certificate in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS), has been particularly influential, being delivered in a number of states and territories in the past decade. In the CAVSS, explained in more detail later in this paper, vocational and L&N teachers work closely together, often as 'tag teachers', delivering to the whole class in both theory and practical sessions (Bates 2004).

To date there has been little documented discussion in Australia over the theoretical foundations of L&N support in VET. Primarily, the focus seems to have been on the practice of VET, guided by the apparent common-sense rationale of providing L&N support to students identified as being 'in need'. In workplace programs, this idea of providing special assistance only to those in need, was identified by McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2005:29) as a deficit model, which characterised early workplace programs to the mid 1990s, but not the 'integrated' programs that followed. In fact, implicit in the notion of 'integrated' L&N provision, especially that involving team teaching, seems to be the assumption that it avoids a deficit approach. As this paper later demonstrates, this is not always the case.

By a deficit approach, we refer to work on 'deficit thinking', which amounts essentially to the process of 'blaming the victim' (Valencia 1997:x). In other words, people are held responsible for their own failures rather than any structural inequalities in society. Rogers (2006:129) views the dominant (or orthodox) paradigm of lifelong learning to be a deficit one. He explains that the cause of inequalities conceptualised in this paradigm, 'is that some people lack resources which others possess, a matter which can be remedied by the provision of inputs'. Typically, special programs are set up for the less well educated, 'those who are in deficit', in order for them to 'catch up'. It is quite easy to see how some forms of L&N support for vocational students can be considered to fall within this deficit paradigm – including special after-hours L&N classes, 'remedial' classes, and attending a study centre for one-to-one or small group L&N assistance. One of the significant outcomes of deficit approaches, especially in the field of adult L&N, is the negative and sometimes debilitating effects they can have on people's self image, their identities. This has been documented for more than 30 years in adult L&N studies (e.g. Jones & Charnley 1978, Grant 1987, Barton 2009). It also leads to a view of literacy and numeracy as discrete skills that can be taught in isolation from their contexts of use.

In the UK as part of their *Skills for Life* initiative, there is a strong focus on 'embedded' L&N support in vocational education as distinct from 'discrete' (i.e. 'stand alone') L&N provision, with a clear preference for the former which was found to lead to improved student retention and higher success rates (Casey et al 2006). The term 'embedded' essentially equates to 'integrated' provision. While these UK studies do not refer specifically to deficit approaches, the implication is that deficit approaches relate to the 'discrete' L&N support model, in contrast to the 'embedded' provision, in which students acquire L&N skills in the process of becoming socialised ('apprenticed' – see Lave and Wenger 1991) into becoming a competent member of their new occupational community. Embedded L&N support is provided usually in a team teaching mode in all aspects of the course, including when students are carrying out the practical tasks of their course (Roberts et al 2005:8). The researchers do point out however, that there is overlap between discrete and embedded forms of L&N support, and they maintain there is a place for separate L&N provision, 'providing it is integral to the delivery of the vocational curriculum and done by teachers who have close links with the

vocational classroom' (Roberts et al 2005:10). A possible ideal would see L&N integrated in all aspects of the VET system, a 'whole organisational approach' as explored in a recent Irish study (Hegarty and Feeley 2009). This would include L&N integrated in college strategic plans and professional development, in addition to the delivery of courses.

Complementing these integration discussions is recent UK work on 'literacies across the curriculum' in further education (e.g. Ivanic 2009, Ivanic et al 2009). Adopting a social practice perspective, their work directly challenges deficit approaches in VET, because it challenges the established pedagogical practices which serve to identify students as deficient. They provide examples of how vocational teachers can change their pedagogy, including assessment practices, by drawing on the rich variety of everyday L&N practices of their students to make learning more meaningful to students. They also analyse the L&N practices of different vocational courses and attempt to link these more appropriately with the actual practices required to work in their disciplinary areas. In some cases, more formal, abstract course assessment tasks, such as formal essays, were found to have little relevance to the actual work practices in the jobs for which these students were being trained. Hence, such L&N practices, which can be seen as part of an overall 'academic drift' in VET (see Edwards & Miller, 2008), needed to be questioned. The social practice approach to L&N research is significant for indicating that potentially, L&N teachers have a role that goes beyond the deficit notion of simply helping students to pass exams, to changing VET pedagogical practices.

To help our understanding of how LLN can be integrated in the delivery of VET courses, it is useful to draw on higher education studies of 'academic literacies', especially in view of the blurring of boundaries between VET and higher education in Australia following the Bradley review (Australian Government 2008). There are also a number of dual sector institutions featuring VET and higher education. Most higher education institutions have 'study skills' provision, which provides academic L&N support to individual students within an approach which largely fits the deficit paradigm. That is, students attend study skills centres because they are perceived to lack the generalised (i.e. de-contextualised) L&N skills needed for success across all academic disciplines. An increasing number of researchers are now questioning this approach, in some cases proposing 'doing away' with study skills (Wingate 2006), or at the very least, including an additional 'social practice' approach which is seen to be more effective for student learning because it draws directly on the specific L&N practices used in the disciplines (e.g. Jacobs 2005, Boughey 2006, Haggis 2006, Lea and Street 2006, Lawrence 2009). Much in the way that a trades area in a VET context has its own conventions and ways of operating (i.e. discourses - ways of being), involving a range of different literacy and numeracy practices, so too with academic disciplines in the higher education sector. A social practice approach enables a learner to acquire the literacies and numeracies of their academic discipline in the process of learning that academic discipline, that is, in mainstream classes, through an integrated approach which in some cases involves team teaching between academic literacies teachers and discipline experts.

The social practice approach draws largely on theories of social learning, and the concepts of situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) and communities of practice (Wenger 1998). Lea and Street (2006) add further distinctions between the social practice approach - what they call the 'academic literacies' approach, and the 'academic socialisation' approach. An integrated L&N approach may equate strongly with the academic socialisation approach insofar as it involves 'acculturation into disciplinary and subject-base discourses and genres' (p.369) which are relatively stable and uncontested. The academic literacies approach (i.e.

social practices) on the other hand, recognises the dynamic and political nature of what represents a discipline, and has the potential to challenge the epistemological assumptions of that discipline, and the identities of the student in becoming a member of a new academic community.

Jacobs (2005) provides an academic literacies example from a higher education context in South Africa which resonates particularly with the VET contexts in our study. Drawing on Gee's (1990) concepts of Discourses, Jacobs explains that students and academic literacies teachers are 'outsiders' and discipline experts are the 'insiders' of the academic discipline (discourse) to be mastered. By team teaching, the presence of the academic literacies teacher may well cause the discipline expert to view their own teaching practices differently, more as an 'outsider' would, and thus make adjustments and possibly teach more explicitly in order to increase the understanding of students who are not yet a part of the discourse community of their chosen academic discipline. As a team teaching discipline expert explained:

> … just working with a language person, you suddenly realise that you're veering way into the discipline, like talking out from the discipline rather than bringing people in with you … the notion of discourses is that when you're inside one and you've been inside one for a long time, you forget what it's like to be out of it … (Jacobs 2005:487)

A social practice approach to L&N support, in both higher education and VET contexts, may thus be seen to open a dialogue on a pedagogy that challenges the deficit model. It is an active approach likely to cause existing pedagogical practices to be questioned and improved. A study skills or deficit approach by contrast can be seen to be one which aims to accommodate students to the pedagogical status quo.

Research method

Our research study had three main research phases. *Phase 1* involved an online environmental scan of known L&N providers using a national database of L&N providers. These providers were asked for information on the type of L&N support programs operating, and contacts for possible follow-up interviews. *Phase 2* involved semi-structured interviews with L&N and vocational teachers identified mainly in survey responses, and also managers with responsibilities for L&N support programs. Interviews were planned in person and by phone, and all interviews were taped and later transcribed in full. *Phase 3* involved case studies undertaken in three states to examine in more depth the pedagogical issues involved in L&N support programs.

In this paper, we focus mainly on data obtained during *phase 2*, the interviews with teachers and managers. A total of 53 people were interviewed, 28 were L&N teachers, 11 were vocational teachers, and 14 were VET managers with responsibilities for L&N support programs. The number of interviewees according to a breakdown of states/territories was as follows: Victoria 19; New South Wales 17; Western Australia 6; Queensland 5; Northern Territory 3; South Australia 2; and Australian Capital Territory 1. Interviews with personnel from Tasmania are planned for early 2011.

Most interviews took between 45 minutes and one hour, and were based on focus questions in the areas including: the effectiveness the L&N support, types of provision, the needs of students, and the main pedagogical issues involved in L&N and vocational teachers teaching

together. Interview questions varied considerably, depending on the work context of the respondents.

Findings and discussion

Diverse provision within an overall deficit approach

Literacy and numeracy support in Australian VET is diverse, with little evidence in TAFE institutes of a systematic or strategic approach. Instead, it has developed in largely ad hoc ways in response to local needs and local management priorities. Even within the same TAFE institutes, provision can vary markedly from being a priority in one college to virtually no provision in a neighbouring college. With the general absence of designated funding for L&N support, and with little or no policy providing direction, the extent and type of L&N support appears to depend on the individual motivations and priorities of the local head teachers of L&N and vocational sections, and the managers they report to.

One common feature of almost all such provision, however, is the overall deficit approach insofar as L&N support is invariably viewed through its predominant reliance on testing/assessing and stand-alone L&N provision, as a mechanism for enabling students with 'problems', often termed 'disadvantaged' students, to succeed in their vocational courses. Several providers mentioned the new funding pressures being placed on them by completion rate criteria, and L&N support is seen largely as a means of improving completion rates for disadvantaged students (see Black 2008). These students are predominantly from so-called 'equity' target groups who traditionally have experienced poor success rates in VET. These groups commonly include: Aboriginal and non-English speaking background students, various students groups categorised as 'at risk', older students returning to study, and some categories of 'disability' groups.

Identifying students with 'problems'

A clear indicator of a deficit approach in VET is the use of various testing/screening mechanisms to identify those students in need of L&N support. Nearly all TAFE systems have these testing mechanisms, though again, they vary considerably, and they can be seen to fit along a continuum ranging from formal, decontextualised testing at one extreme, to informal chats with students at the other. In one state TAFE system, for example, a formal test exists at course enrolment time, managed by the Admissions section, which effectively screens out those students deemed likely to experience difficulties in passing the course due to L&N problems. As a respondent explained, if people do not have the minimum entry requirements to get into a course:

> … they will sit a TAFE admissions basic skills test … It is totally multiple choice, requires no extended writing, and against this people then get scored, and they can or can't get into Cert III or a Cert IV.

Unsuccessful students are then referred to 'stand-alone' L&N provision, where they can improve their L&N skills to Certificate II level before being allowed entry to a vocational course, or they can attempt the admissions test again. This formal testing process can be contrasted with an informal process at another TAFE college in a different state, where L&N teachers play an almost surreptitious role during course enrolments. In every teaching section of the college, while students are queuing up to enrol in their courses, L&N teachers interact

informally with the students, asking them to write some basic details about themselves in order to obtain individual student 'profiles'. The manager of the college calls this:

> … a conversation… about what have you done before and why are you interested in this? And it's about picking up language and literacy… We don't say you're going to have your literacy assessment … They (L&N teachers) are just another person on the vocational section's team.

This process was described by the college manager as a 'good customer service thing', and an L&N teacher said the students liked it: 'They feel they get individual attention and they just feel welcomed and that's a great start'. The individual student 'profiles' containing background details and a brief example of the students' writing, are then used in negotiations between the L&N section and the vocational sections of the college in deciding which students are most likely to need L&N support, and in which classes.

Most commonly, L&N teachers devise their own L&N 'screens' which they tailor to the particular curriculum needs of the different vocational sections. A carpentry course, for example, will feature trade calculations typically required in the carpentry course. Usually in the first week of classes, or the first teaching session, L&N teachers administer the screens to all new students and, as with the abovementioned 'profiles', use the results as both evidence of the need for L&N support, and to decide where the L&N support is best provided. This process is not new, and was considered 'good practice' more than two decades ago in TAFE (see Kelly 1989). The main aim is to locate those students most in need of L&N assistance, and locally tailored screens, often taking no more than 20 minutes to administer, provide that information. Rarely did interview respondents see the need for this assessment process to be extensive or require the use of validated tasks benchmarked to particular 'levels'. Respondents were asked if they used measures based on the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), the nationally developed assessment and reporting tool, and very few did unless they were obliged to according to the course funding agreements.

Is 'integration' the answer?

It has been suggested in this paper that 'integrated' L&N, especially that involving team teaching between vocational and L&N teachers, enables provision to move beyond a deficit approach. This is on the basis that the whole class benefits from more explicit L&N teaching in the process of learning the new skills and competencies required of their vocational course. If this form of L&N support extends also to the practical or field work required in the course, then students will be able to see how literacy and numeracy are truly 'situated' as part of the social practices required of them to become members of the community of practice of their vocational field.

The interviews indicated, however, that rarely is L&N support so situated. While it is common for L&N teachers to be present in vocational classrooms across all state and territory TAFE systems, many L&N teachers see their role to be primarily about helping students to pass their theory exams and assignments, and not their practical work. And the students they help are seen to be mainly those students who have problems with the course. Very rarely were examples provided of the vocational teacher and the L&N teacher jointly delivering content to the whole class. As one L&N teacher explained, while the vocational teacher delivers the lesson content:

I move around sometimes, just maybe if I pick up a term that I think a particular student might not be aware of; I might just quietly go to that person and explain particular terminology.

Similarly, another L&N teacher explained that in the vocational classroom she mainly works with 'her' group of students who need additional help, 'so I just hover and take good notes and then I just ask questions that I think they may not understand'. This secondary, supporting role, in which L&N teachers are largely passive, listening for much of the instructional part of lesson while the vocational teacher delivers the content, and then working with individuals or groups of students having difficulties, is accepted by many vocational and L&N teachers as the norm. It clearly fits within a deficit approach.

Moving beyond a deficit approach

In this section, we briefly outline the CAVSS team teaching model as one example where integrated L&N does move beyond a deficit approach. CAVSS was first trialled in 2000 in Western Australia in response to traditional deficit models of L&N support that often did not work well. As a manager for introducing CAVSS explained, 'we had teachers who would set up support classes during lunchtime and then complain that it didn't work because the students wouldn't go to them'. CAVSS aims to improve vocational training by deliberately shifting away from an individual deficit perspective to one which sees literacy and numeracy as social practices (Bates 2004:4). It is based on two underpinning principles: the *normalising principle* in which L&N support is viewed as an 'ordinary part of the VET training, and something that every student is engaged in as a matter of course', and the *relevance principle*, which ensures L&N practices relate primarily to the vocational learning (Bates 2004:4). Apart from Western Australian TAFE Institutes, the course is now commonly delivered in other states, including Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, and in a number of private Registered Training Organisations.

There are a number of key features of the CAVSS model which differentiate it from other L&N support models, including the following:

Team teaching is mandatory, and requires a close working relationship between the L&N and vocational teachers. These teachers are required to *jointly plan lessons*, and they often present to the class as 'tag teachers', that is, they take it in turns to teach the whole group, the vocational teacher focusing on vocational content, and the L&N teacher making explicit the literacy and numeracy practices. In practice, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate the respective roles of the teachers as they work together towards the same vocational outcomes.

Teaching focuses on the whole group and withdrawing students for extra assistance is not allowed, even within the same classroom. An experienced CAVSS teacher stated that he could see no justification for focusing on individual students with problems, because there was the likelihood others in the class were experiencing similar problems, and that helping one or several students soon escalated to helping the whole class, and 'what happens is the students at that particular point in time will realise that you're not there for the dummies; you're actually there for everyone'.

The L&N teacher participates in both the theory and the practical work. One CAVSS teacher said his workload was approximately 50:50 in relation to classroom and workshop work, and

he expressed amazement that people should assume the work of L&N support teachers would be primarily in the classroom:

> It is … as if people don't speak or read or talk or do geometry in a workshop. It is like the world does not understand what a vocation is or what a vocational person does … what happens in the classroom is extremely important, but it all happens again in the workshop.

There is no assessment of L&N skills in CAVSS. This aspect makes CAVSS different to almost all other L&N support models – there is no attempt to identify individual students with 'problems'. One CAVSS teacher said that assessing students 'would just ruin everything' including the momentum, the ethos of CAVSS, and the teacher's relationship with students. This teacher said the advantage of being a CAVSS lecturer was that:

> no student ever sees you as judging them or being the person who holds the key for them to open the door … You're just a person that is … genuinely interested in helping them get through what they're doing so they can go onto the next part and finish this course and become that tradesperson that they want to become.

This same teacher found it hard to justify how, for example, first year trade apprentices could be assessed appropriately for their L&N skills anyway, because they had no trade knowledge, so an 'industry-based' assessment wasn't appropriate, and a 'school-based' test was simply a return to experiences that for many students were not positive. For this teacher, 'success' was the key factor, regardless of students' L&N 'levels'. For many students, CAVSS was the first success they had experienced in an educational environment, which they could achieve with some 'genuine support … rather than a person who wants to point out what they can't do'.

Another important feature of CAVSS include the obligatory *professional development courses* that new and existing CAVSS teachers are required to attend to ensure they have knowledge of the philosophy and practice expected of the course.

Conclusions

The CAVSS provides an example of a model that is based on a coherent set of principles that shifts away from deficit approaches to L&N support in the delivery of VET courses towards what we might term a social practice approach (for a more detailed account of how we view a social practice approach, see Black & Yasukawa forthcoming). Arguably, our data on CAVSS reflect a model that lies somewhere between what Lea and Street (2006) call the 'academic socialisation' and the 'academic literacies' models because, while L&N practices are firmly embedded in vocational practices, there is little indication in the CAVSS model that one of its aims is to challenge existing vocational practices. There are other examples identified in our research, including a 'shared-delivery' model in a Victorian Institute, in which the pedagogical practices drew more on the cultural/linguistic resources that a multicultural learning group brought to the classroom, and which did challenge existing vocational practices. We plan to document this as a case study in our DEEWR research report (Black & Yasukawa forthcoming). The idea of L&N teachers working very closely with vocational teachers in both the delivery and the planning of vocational courses is not new in Australian TAFE colleges (see Black 1996). Neither is teaching to the whole group of students, and L&N teachers spending time in the practical workshops as well as the theory classrooms, but examples of these types of programs in action are quite rare. Not assessing

students at all for their L&N skills is extremely rare, and we are far more likely to find L&N support as an 'add on' (or 'bolted on'), with L&N teachers using their screens to identify those students they should be spending their time helping with exams and assignments.

While the deficit approach largely prevails in Australian VET, most teachers and managers do not see themselves as 'deficit approach' teachers, because the term has negative connotations, and such an approach is normalised as a common sense approach, and in fact is viewed as a 'good practice' approach to helping students to get their vocational qualifications. The main point of this paper is to highlight that there are other approaches that can be adopted. A social practice approach to L&N, aspects of which are reflected in CAVSS and several other programs we researched, has the potential to reduce the negative effects on students of being labelled in yet another educational context as deficient. As a CAVSS teacher indicated, 'success' can overcome many of the deficits or problems that formal (or informal) testing might reveal. By 'situating' L&N practices fully in the context of vocational learning, including in the practical workshops where much occupational identity work occurs, it is likely students will more readily accommodate these practices because they see the relevance of them. As the same CAVSS teacher notes in relation to building trades students, '… they will start seeing why they need to be able to do quotes … so it is success breeding success'. Finally, as some of the recent literature on L&N in further education in the UK (Ivanic et al 2009), and the literature on academic literacies in higher education indicates, a social practices approach encourages change. By enabling L&N teachers or academic literacies lecturers to work closely with vocational or disciplinary experts, there is the potential for participants to take on new ways of seeing and identifying new spaces for change. A deficit approach on the other hand, largely retains the separation of the disciplines, and tries to support students by bringing them up to the established norms, but without challenging the norms.

Acknowledgements

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