



# **Beyond deficit approaches to teaching and learning: literacy and numeracy in VET courses**

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- Research project on Literacy and Numeracy in VET courses
- DEEWR funded
- Data based on semi-structured interviews of 25??? teachers (mainly L&N, some vocational) and some students across all states and territories, except Tasmania
- Some in-depth case studies undertaken in 2 sites

‘Built in, not bolted on’ (1998)

- Integration of literacy and numeracy in industry training packages

Building in literacy and numeracy into VET pedagogy?

- How are literacy and numeracy being integrated into teaching and learning in VET courses?

## **Literacy and numeracy in VET**

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We first need to explain what we are focussing on when we talk about literacy and numeracy in VET. When national industry training packages came into being, there was a concern to ensure that language, literacy and numeracy were integrated into the training packages – this led to an approach that came to be known as the 'built in, not bolted on', that is, that LLN is not an 'add on' but an integrated part of training in all vocational areas.

What we were interested in was how the delivery of vocational courses integrated LLN in the pedagogy in VET classrooms – our focus was in college based, rather than workplace based VET.

- **Integrated delivery** as concurrent development of literacy and numeracy and vocational competencies, seeing these ‘as interrelated elements of the one process’ (Courtenay & Mawer 1995: 2)
- **Embedded delivery** combines the development of literacy, language and numeracy with vocational and other skills. The skills acquired provide learners with the confidence, competence and motivation necessary for them to succeed in qualifications, in life, and at work (Roberts et al 2005: 5)

## **Integration/ embedding literacy and numeracy in VET delivery**

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There are different definitions of integrated delivery, but with the common theme that LLN 'competencies' or skills and knowledge are developed *concurrently* as part of the vocational learning process.

It is therefore not a model that sees LLN as a 'pre-requisite' that students can get fixed up with prior to commencing a vocational course.

In the UK definition, the rationale of this integrated or what they call embedded approach is also made explicit – that is, that LLN is integral to gaining qualifications, work and life in the community.

- Withdrawing students
  - Learning/ study centre support
  - Tutorial support
- Individual support in VET classroom
- Team teaching
- Shared delivery

**Nomenclature and practices of  
'integrating' literacy and numeracy in VET  
delivery**

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At the start of the project we had envisaged that while there was a range of approaches being taken in addressing LLN in VET courses, there would be a prevalence, at least in some states such as NSW of an integrated approach involving team teaching by a vocational teacher and an LLN teacher.

This was based partly on our knowledge that in NSW, there had been a lot of professional development work undertaken in TAFE on LLN and vocational teachers 'Working together'.

We were also aware of a more formalised arrangement in WA to team teaching.

We came across a wide range of both nomenclature (as can be seen on this slide) and practices, only a few of which we believe fits the intent and definition of integrated delivery – namely some examples of team teaching and shared delivery, which we will talk more about.

We observed -

- A strong focus on assessing and screening learners
- LLN being addressed as the skills that students were deficit in
- LLN learning as the skills that only some students (usually those who fall into identified 'equity' groups) needed
- The pedagogy and content of the VET curriculum as uncontested
- LLN teaching as the LLN teachers' responsibility

## **An overall 'deficit' approach**

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What was noticeable in many of the approaches - including what people called a team teaching approach, was a focus on LLN as something that students 'lacked' or were in 'deficit of', rather than as resources that all students needed in order to make sense of the process of learning to become a member of a new community of occupational practice. LLN was something that students who could not succeed through the established vocational curriculum and pedagogy must be lacking. It was something that was the responsibility of the LLN teacher to attend to, not a joint effort or responsibility involving the vocational teacher. There was an overall 'deficit' approach.

**The study skills model**  
– student writing as technical & instrumental process

**The academic socialisation model** – student writing as a process of acculturation into the discipline

**The academic literacies model** – student writing as a process of meaning making and contesting the established knowledge

**The study skills model**  
– student writing as technical & instrumental process

**The vocational socialisation model** – student writing as a process of acculturation into the established vocational practices

**The vocational literacies model** – student writing as a process of meaning making and contesting established practices

## **Making sense of integrated LLN using Street & Lea's *academic literacies model***

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In order to make sense of what we saw, and to consider what could be alternative models, we drew on the higher education literature on academic literacy

Street and Lea have a taxonomy of the models of academic literacy support in higher education as shown on this slide

The 'study skills model' is where students are identified as being lacking in what the lecturer or teacher assumes as 'basic' literacy skills and sends the students off to a literacy teacher or unit to get fixed up

The academic socialisation model is where academic literacy in a discipline cannot be separated from the knowledge and culture of the discipline, and therefore must be taught and learnt within the discipline - it is part of 'becoming' a historian, economist, biologist, etc

The academic literacies model is one where the academic literacy conventions and the established knowledge of the discipline are themselves challengable, including by the knowledge and literacies that 'outsiders' or novices to the discipline such as students bring

We could see a parallel of all three of these models in the vocational contexts

CAVSS – Certificate in Applied Vocational Study Skills

- Vocational and LLN teachers work as a team, as 'tag teachers'
- LLN skills and knowledge of the vocational course are delivered to the whole class
- LLN teacher is involved in both the 'theory' and 'practical' work of the course
- No assessment of students' LLN

## **CAVSS as an example of moving beyond the deficit model**

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In our research we saw a few models of integrated LLN delivery that moved beyond the deficit or 'study skills' model.

One was CAVSS – the WA Certificate in Applied Vocational Study Skills

An important feature of this model is that the LLN and vocational teachers teach as a tag team to the whole class

This means that all students gain the benefit of explicit teaching of the LLN demands of their course, and no students are targetted as students with problems

In the ideal situations, the LLN teachers work with the vocational teacher in both the theoretical and practical components of the class

Another key feature is that students are not pre-assessed on their LLN skills



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 the tradersperson that they want to become.

(a CAVSS teacher in WA)

CAVSS approach

- Integrates LLN in both the theoretical component and the practice components of the course
- Does not allow for the vocational teachers' pedagogies to be challenged by the LLN teacher
- Does not explicitly encourage the students' existing LLN practices to be used as the basis of learning new vocational literacies

## **CAVSS as a hybrid of the vocational socialisation & vocational literacies models**

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CAVSS is not a deficit model because it does not start from the position that all students benefit from LLN teaching, and does not focus on identifying deficits in a group of students

It sees the need to teach LLN explicitly in the context and in the moment of teaching those vocational skills and concepts in which the LLN skills and knowledge are needed

It is based on the vocational and LLN teachers planning together so that the LLN teacher can come in to explicitly teach the relevant LLN at the right moment

Students see the relevance of the LLN as part of being acculturated into the vocational practice

However, there is a very strong principle in CAVSS that the LLN teacher is not there to influence or change the vocational teacher's pedagogy – in that sense it is not a model for changing pedagogy as what the vocational literacies model is



Implications in the light of –

- Current literacy (and numeracy) ‘crisis’ in workplaces
- The development of a National Foundation Skills Strategy
- The social inclusion agenda
- COAG targets to increasing workers with qualifications of Cert III and above:

A model of LLN delivery in VET should aim to -

- ✓ Remove the stigma around LLN
- ✓ Work with LLN as a meaning making resource for all VET learners
- ✓ Be a part of improving VET pedagogy
- ✓ Deal with the multiple literacies (and numeracies) involved in VET

## **What’s wrong with a deficit approach?**