

Good practice guide

Literacy support for Indigenous VET students

Approximately 44% of Indigenous Australians have low literacy levels in Standard Australian English, compared with 19% of non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 1996). Literacy difficulties are compounded for Indigenous students because English is often their second, third or fourth language.

Proficiency in literacy and numeracy increases the ability to successfully access and complete vocational education and training (VET) courses. There is currently little information and support for teachers dealing with this issue. This guide aims to assist teachers by providing a set of 'good practice' strategies for designing effective literacy and numeracy programs for Indigenous VET students, and for building effective literacy and numeracy support into existing VET courses.

Adult learning good practice

- ✓ Develop positive relationships with each student—view them as an adult learner with prior knowledge, skills and life experiences, and respect their individual cultural and educational backgrounds.
- ✓ Seek student input to determine what the student wants to gain from the learning experience.
- ✓ Encourage collaboration between literacy and numeracy specialists and vocational teachers.
- ✓ Conduct relevant pre-course assessment to identify literacy and numeracy levels in an informal environment and provide support in spoken form.

Indigenous-specific good practice

- ✓ Understand cultural protocols and attitudes to family, time and community.
- ✓ Be aware that Indigenous students may not always ask for help or clarification—offer explanations in plain English and frequently ask whether the students understand.
- ✓ Be aware that, for many Indigenous students, English is their second, third or fourth language—employ English-as-a-second-language (ESL) strategies.
- ✓ Undertake cultural awareness and cross-cultural competency training—start with a cultural awareness course and continue the process by seeking out Indigenous advisors and mentors.

Appropriate resources

- ✓ Use relevant, real-life texts that are culturally inclusive and customise them to individual students' needs—newspapers, magazines, advertisements, telephone directories and menus are some good examples.
- ✓ Ensure resources are culturally appropriate by including relevant examples, graphics, scenarios and language.
- ✓ Ensure resources are age-appropriate—designed for adults, not children.
- ✓ Ensure resources are written using appropriate literacy and numeracy levels.
- ✓ Incorporate appropriate literacy and numeracy instructional design principles—for example, font type and size, white space, wide margins and plain English.
- ✓ Build relationships with learning support centres and, without forcing attendance, offer to accompany students there—introduce them to support staff and encourage them to attend further sessions under flexible arrangements.
- ✓ Invite support centre staff to visit the classroom to talk to students and display their resources—where possible, allow them to work with students in the classroom.
- ✓ Recognise that the ideal class size is ten.



This good practice guide is based on the report, *Literacy support for Indigenous people: Current systems and practices in Queensland*, by Narelle McGlusky and Lenora Thaker, which is available from the NCVER website at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1659.html>.

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Successful VET programs

Successful training programs produce some or all of the following outcomes for Indigenous learners:

- ☑ **personal outcomes:** enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem; improved sense of connection to, and engagement with, the community; improved communication skills and knowledge; and improved understanding of Australian systems and culture
- ☑ **employment and education outcomes:** improved subject and course completions; and increased movement to further study at higher levels that is likely to result in employment.

Seven key factors lead to positive and improved outcomes for Indigenous VET students. These are inter-related—success depends on all of the following being present all of the time:

- ☑ community involvement and ownership
- ☑ the incorporation of Indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values
- ☑ the establishment of ‘true’ partnerships
- ☑ flexibility in course design, content and delivery
- ☑ quality staff and committed advocacy
- ☑ extensive student support services
- ☑ appropriate funding that allows for sustainability.

(Miller 2005)

Useful websites

Australian Council for Adult Literacy

<http://www.acal.edu.au>

Literacy Net

<http://www.dest.gov.au/literacynet/resources.htm>

Literacy and numeracy for VET

<http://www.decs.act.gov.au/publicat/litnumVET/vet0005.htm>

National Adult Literacy Database (Canada)

<http://www.nald.ca>

Australian Flexible Learning Framework (no. 425 under Equity toolboxes)

<http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/toolbox>

Online Writing Lab: ESL resources

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslstudent.html>

Skillswise

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise>

ESL lesson plans and resources

<http://www.csun.edu/~hcedu013/eslplans.html>

(Accessed August 2006)

Indigenous input & consultation

- ☑ Encourage Indigenous input (both formal and informal) regarding design, development and delivery at all stages.
- ☑ Collaborate with Indigenous staff.
- ☑ Collaborate with the local Indigenous community.
- ☑ Seek out successful models of collaboration, including community advisory boards.

Useful references

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1996, *Aspects of literacy: Assessed skill levels, Australia*, cat. no. 4228.0, ABS, Canberra.

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Level 11, 33 King William Street,
Adelaide SA 5000

PO Box 8288, Station Arcade,
Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

Phone: (08) 8230 8400

Fax: (08) 8212 3436

Web: <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>

Email: ncver@ncver.edu.au