

Longitudinal Study: Destinations of Adult Literacy Students.

Patrick Griffin: Assessment Research Centre, RMIT.

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This paper reports on some preliminary descriptive results of a longitudinal study of the destinations of adult literacy students. The study was commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education and Training. It is the first such study of the impact of adult literacy programs on the social, community, employment and educational aspects of the lives of the program participants.

Introduction:

Adult literacy provision, as a category of adult education was given a boost in the late eighties by the impetus of the international year of literacy, and the publicity given to the issues associated with adult literacy. Coincident with this was a perceived need for Australia to restructure its economy, industry and education system. The international year of literacy also coincided with a growing belief that Australia's industry had to become more competitive, that English in the workplace was essential, that the capacity to process information, to participate in problem solving, process numerical and textual information in printed, computer and signage media were essential skills. The rapidly changing nature of the workplace, the realisation by employers that the workforce needed to be literate and numerate, and the rising numbers of unemployed led to an almost irresistible pressure on the community to raise the literacy levels to a point where all citizens could participate in employment, in community affairs, social exchanges and responsibilities and in education and training opportunities.

While adult literacy programs have been conducted for decades, little is known about the impact of the programs, about the effect on the participants, about the impact on industry, or on productivity, on training, flexibility of the workforce, or even what has happened to students who have participated in the programs. It is relatively simple to collect anecdotes of students who have succeeded and have been introduced to reading, opening up a new dimension on their lives. On the other hand, the media is fascinated by the negative side of literacy and insist on reporting on levels of "illiteracy". Literacy workers focus on "literacy" and now refuse to recognise or even use the word "illiteracy". Every literacy teacher has an anecdote of the success story of those who have proceeded to higher education.

Very little systematic and rigorous research has been done on the field of literacy and adult basic education in Australia. There has been a great deal of theorising (as much in recognition of the lack of a theoretical basis for the work), a great deal of posturing in curriculum development, many attempts to identify an approach to assessment and a diversifying of the professional groups delivering adult literacy programs. Industry has been in a quandary as to whether to afford the basic or key competencies of literacy and numeracy the status of vocational competencies. Literacy organisations, often language and literature based, have redefined numeracy as "literacy with numbers" in what appears to be an attempt to maintain control over all aspects of adult basic education. At times the fate of the adult

learner has diminished in importance in the continuing process of change. The amount of money involved, the power and influence available to key individuals and organisations has meant that at times that the focus has been on lobbying and influencing public servants who control the funds rather than on the impact of the programs on the learners. While this "big picture" battle raged, most practitioners worked on, often oblivious to the power struggle being waged in capital cities and bureaucratic organisations and simply set about the task of helping adults learn to read and write and to develop their language skills. A tiny minority also focused on the capacity to deal with numerical information and to carry out mathematical applications of everyday exercises. Very little has been written about or by those who carry out the task of developing the literacy skills of individuals. There have been very few longitudinal studies although at least two are currently under way (Bossort, 1993; Jones, 1991). No Australian studies have been conducted into the impact of literacy programs on the lives, education, work, social or community aspects of participants' lives. In the light of this background, this project sets out to examine the changes over time in these aspects of adult learners' lives and to explore the possible attribution of these changes to participation in adult basic education classes. Even this study has not been able, due to requirements by the funding authority to measure literacy, and thus the link between literacy and changes in life circumstances cannot be drawn. This study can only link participation in classes to change in life circumstances. This may turn out to be a serious flaw in the study and a severe limitation to the power of the study to support recommendations for change.

#### Adult Literacy Participants' Goals:

There have been studies into the reasons for participation in adult basic education programs (Brennan et. al., 1986). Other studies have emphasised the benefits to the self esteem of the participants. There have been other studies of the nature of the adult basic education students, but few of the adult basic education population.

Thomas (1984) in her study of Canadian students emphasised the varied nature of the adult education student group. She identified ten factors or major reasons for adults to take part in basic education including literacy programs. They were educational advancement, self improvement, literacy development, diversion (hobby), community and church involvement, economic need, family responsibility, job advancement, launching themselves in social activities and urging of others. It is often assumed that students' motivations are stable and that they lead, through participation in adult literacy classes, to positive outcomes and the realisation of all their hopes embodied in the expression of the motives for participation. Fingeret (1983), however, illustrated that the effects of adult basic education participation were not all positive. There were risks attached to the program for participants. Learning to read and write may mean that established friendships were fractured, students may become alienated from existing support networks. In fact,...

...illiterate adults know that as they learn to read, all of their network relationships must shift. They will have less time available to respond to the needs of others, and their own needs will change. Previously secure niches in the social order are weakened as [established] readers' skills are requested less often. (Fingeret, 1983, 144).

As a result, self esteem and perception of social and interpersonal relationships may change as a result of participation in literacy

classes. The adult learner is generally assumed to have a basic need to learn to read and to develop in a personal sense. As Thomas and Fingeret illustrate, the motivations and outcomes can be diverse. The expectations outlined by Brennan and others were predictable, but lacked insight into the risks and potentially diverse set of possible losses from participation in adult basic education classes. The study focuses on the participants goals and changes in these areas over time.

#### System Goals:

Adult education practitioners, have been subjected to a large range of developments in recent years, particularly after the international year of literacy. Policy makers and practitioners have both been redefining and publishing their goals for students, (OACFEB Framework), literacy programs such as those offered by SkillShare have developed into more than developing reading, numeracy and writing skills. The courses have been devised to address needs seen as access to employment, retaining employment, changing jobs, gaining access to further education, improvement of self esteem, helping children and others with reading and access to information, participating more in the community, improving communication skills, developing general

life skills, developing better family interrelationships among other motives defined by providers. Particularly strong has been the movement, potentially based on Freire, but lately emerging from the critical literacy thrust, is the empowerment of marginalised groups in the community and the politicising of adults into more active political participants in the community.

Program evaluations in adult basic education have focused on curriculum, on methodology, on ideology and philosophy of the practitioner, on the assessment, on the process, but the opportunity to focus on outcomes, apart from the Brennan study, has rarely been given.

Studies that have done so, were essentially focussing on and reinforcing the presumed outcomes as established by providers. In general, this is an acceptable form of evaluation and provides immediate and formative information on how to improve the presentation and content for the short term outcomes of the course. However, it is possible that participants' views of the programs may change once they have been out of the program for some time. The immediate gains may be diminished by experiences. Bosset contends that client's experiences over a ten year post program period makes the validity of evaluations of current programs questionable when life goals are taken into account. Low literacy students are vulnerable and impressionable when attending programs. It may, for instance, be the first time anyone acknowledges their needs, their insecurity and their past sense of failure in education. Adult basic educators establish rapport with the students, and evaluations of programs reflect their personal impressions of the teachers as well as the impact of the program. Adult students even tend to continue to attend classes even if the program and the development of skills is causing personal upheaval in their lives as the support and encouragement is regarded as positive. It is important therefore to ask students after some time has passed, and the personal relationship with the teacher, other students and the curriculum has diminished, whether the program has had a lasting impact on their lives.

These goals have all been articulated by the providers, more particularly by the policy makers and organisations associated with adult basic education classes (OACFEB, 1993; Luke and Gilbert, 1993) but there does not seem to have been any attempt to identify whether the participants share the goals in the overt or covert agendas of the providers. Given that the present longitudinal study is not to be

evaluative, it will not be possible to address the issues of whether participants achieve these goals and if so, what was it about the program that enabled the achievement or, if not, what was lacking. To this point, no Australian study had asked whether the changes brought about in their lives as a result of participation were positive or negative. This study set out to investigate over a five year period, the effects of literacy programs on the education, employment, social

and community lives of participants. The study is constrained not to measure literacy or to link literacy levels or gains to the impact on participants lives.

#### The population and Sample:

A representative sample was required by the Funding authority (Department of Employment, Education and Training) consisting of approximately 50% from English Speaking Background and 50% from Non English speaking background. The reason given for this was that the national study of adult literacy (Wickert, 1989) indicated that about half of the lower literacy level adult group were from a NESB population. However, the figures quoted from Wickert, (1989) should neither be used as a guide for literacy program studies and for this study in particular for a number of reasons detailed below. That study used a self selecting sample comprising 14% Non English Speaking Background and the sample, the population and indeed the study itself had no relationship to the need to enrol in adult basic education classes, nor did it have any impact on actual enrolment figures. Moreover, the results of the national study could not be generalised to the Australian population given the way in which they were established. A sample of 1496 from more than 7500 targeted over the age of 18, and more than 4500 approached makes any generalised use of the results extremely doubtful. Nevertheless, so badly needed were any results of Australian adult literacy levels that the study results were never questioned. Government, industry and educators eager to secure the profile that the results could give seized upon the data and used them for a range of purposes. After several years the data have become established as the benchmark for adult literacy studies.

Adult literacy programs offered through Technical and Further Education providers are a state responsibility supported by commonwealth or national funds provided by DEET. Other providers are funded directly by the Commonwealth. In this scenario programs have been funded by a range of organisations including the Department of Employment, Education and Training, the Department of Immigration, the Department of Industrial Relations, State employment rehabilitation programs, and various community groups. Pollock (1993) indicated that the population of adult basic education students does not reflect the breakdown interpreted from the Wickert study. This is not surprising given that the studies addressed different populations. The Wickert (1989) survey was a study of the performances of a sample of the Australian adult population on a series of literacy tasks. The data has been interpreted generally as indicating that the lower quarter of the population in terms of literacy levels identifies those in need of literacy training. However, identifying the lower quarter does not necessarily define or include the adult population that elects to attend literacy classes. This study focuses on the population that elects to attend classes funded by the government Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Adult basic education students are drawn from two populations - those whose first language is English (ESB) and those whose first language is other than English (NESB). Unfortunately the literature is diverse in its definitions of language background. No generally accepted

definition of NESB has been firmly established. Most definitions fail to address how fluency in mother tongue for NESB people or whether English is the language of choice at present. The inherent assumption that a language other than English constitutes a disadvantage in educational terms is open to challenge. Classifying participants as NESB because they began life speaking a language other than English would also include those persons who now speak only English. In many cases these are adults who came to Australia as children and learned English after starting school. The mother tongue has diminished to rare usage among many of these participants. English is now the preferred and first language for many of these cases.

The difficulty in determining the NESB/ESB ratio in adult literacy points to the crude and unrealistic nature of a dichotomy which serves more as a category in allocating funding for programs than as a conceptual distinction or as a description of the major language used by participants. Accordingly, some redefinition has occurred in terms of the population and the sample used for this study. The approach has also altered since the funding agency requested the change in sample composition.

The programs represented in the study are drawn from labour market and concurrent literacy programs in metropolitan and rural settings. The selection of sites also represents a breakdown of NESB and ESB clients in approximately even proportions. Samples were drawn from providers funded by DEET literacy programs. These included programs provided by Skillshare and by Technical and Further Education providers. Because of the insistence by the funding body that the project not be evaluative at the program level, agreements were made that no provider, program or individual would be identified. Instead, adult participants are classified according to employment status, gender and language background. No population figures are available to determine the adequacy or accuracy of the sample for generalisation purposes.

### The Design of the Study

Moreover, the effects on environmental aspects such as employment, education, social and community activities have never been examined in the same study of adult basic education. The relationship between the environment and educational achievement have been examined by Keeves (1972) in a study of school achievement. Keeves related the attitudinal, process and structural dimensions of the learners'

environment to achievement in a school setting. The potential of the Keeves' study design for the present investigation is considerable. Process and structural dimensions defined and explored the activities and physical attributes of the learning environment. The attitude dimension defined and explored the personal attributes and feelings of learners. These dimensions of the environment were examined in three contexts; the home, the school and the peer group. The parallels for the present study offer a systematic paradigm for exploring the relationship between personal, process and structural ( or contextual) attributes of the learners' environment and outcomes in the employment, education, social and community environments.

A matrix depicting the personal, process and contextual factors that can influence the educational, employment, social and community destinations of adult literacy students is shown in Figure 1. The literature on adult literacy studies was examined for variables and these were assigned an appropriate cell of the matrix. Details of this literature review are presented elsewhere. While no longitudinal studies had been conducted, there was a rich resource in snapshot

examinations of adult literacy that examined most of the combinations of personal, process and context dimensions in employment, education, social and community environments, but these classifications were not identified. In the first stage, the literature on adult literacy studies was examined for variables and these were assigned an appropriate cell of the matrix. Details of the scales their origins and statistical properties in presented elsewhere (Corneille and Griffin, 1994). An adaptation of the Keeves approach has been developed as a framework for this study. It is shown in the figure below. The matrix has become the guide for the development of interview schedules, for sampling and for the selection of observation and discussion topics for case study components of the present study.

Figure 1  
The Framework for the Longitudinal Study

Employment  
Education  
Social  
Community

Personal  
confidence, self esteem, satisfaction, aspirations, morale, motivation



and perceptions

peer and self, family attitudes, significance of others' and aspirations, motivation - extrinsic, intrinsic, morale, persistence, perceptions (ability to describe), needs, morale family roles, expectations, aspirations, age, gender, marital status, priorities, confidence - in self in future, security, sense of control, social and interpersonal confidence knowledge of facilities, aspirations, motivation, approach/avoidance, identity, perceptions and descriptions, welcome tone

Activity/  
Process

mobility (promotion), involvement/interaction, absenteeism, productivity, flexibility, re-skilling, status - changes to, skill base acquired, language(s) used, literacy activity, numeracy activity time involved, mode of education, knowledge of offerings, uptake of opportunities - starting points, participation, mobility, awareness, success/failure, resources needed, learning/teaching style, financial, promotion outcomes, formal and informal, language(s) used, literacy activity, numeracy activity roles, social interaction, leisure activities, family rituals, language(s) used, literacy and numeracy activity, pressure felt to enrol interaction, use of facilities, involvement and participation, cultural pursuits, language(s) used - home, community, work, school, literacy activity, numeracy activity, year 12 participation, neighbourhood watch involvement, CES, reliance on - other people, symbols and survival strategies

Context

participation - status, type of opportunity, locality, mobility,

duration, skill base required (Awards), Occupation Health and Safety,



and income

accessibility - including learning resources, time available, cost, articulation arrangements, appropriateness, support services, eg. child care, delivery mode, agency/provider, location, certification required and education background

family size, ethnicity, status, family structure, peer group nature, financial status, life circumstances - family responsibilities and careers

culture(s), location, services available and communication of socio-economic profile of the community, employment figures, education services, community facilities/clubs, support services, ethnic composition, stability, religious facilities, values and climate and activity level/vigour

### Case Studies.

Several case studies have been initiated. Short reports on these are given elsewhere in this conference (Fitzpatrick, 1994). A paper on the methodology of case studies in adult education has also been prepared. This was carried out after an exhaustive analysis of previous case study reports and a realisation that methodology in this field was in need of guidance. The paper also enables the large number of people engaged in case study work to work to a common framework. This paper is also appended and is intended to be published in adult basic education literature as a guide to similar work in the field. A brief outline of example cases being investigated is included. No full report is warranted at this stage given that interpretation can only be completed at the end of the study. The case studies represent the three main groups in the project, Employment status, Gender and Language Background. These categories are represented in the following diagram.

EMBED MSDraw \\* mergeformat

Case studies are being drawn from categories outlined in the table below:

Employed

Unemployed

Male

Female

Male

Female

#### ESB

- o Mr O /JP
- o Food  
Processing  
Group
- o QLD /JS
- o Mrs C. /JP
- o Food  
Processing  
Group

- o QLD /JS
- Mr H /PG
- Ms X / JS

#### NESB

- o Well Group  
/MF
- o Well Group  
/MF
- o Mr D /SC
- o Ms S
- o Ms A

### Case Study Procedures

#### Field Notes:

These form a continuous research diary in which the observer records every encounter with his or her informant. They will include notes on what was said as a supplement to any tape recorded interview. In addition they include any impressions or anecdotal observations made at the time. Personal impressions are also be included even when the evidence for their validity seems absent or doubtful. This will be important later when you search your notes for patterns. .

#### Tape recorded and transcribed interviews

With the informant's permission the session is tape recorded and then transcribed. The intention of the case study part of the investigation is to let the informants tell of their own experience in their own voices, but we are also interested in searching for patterns of commonality and difference in this experience.

#### Observation / Interview Schedule

These items, shown only for the Employment dimension, are derived from Figure 1 above, the matrix being used as a framework for the study in the paper; Griffin, Pollock & Fitzpatrick, Case Studies in Adult Education. It must be stressed that these are tentative suggestions only and they should not be considered binding.

Artefacts. This is a tentative set of letters, notes, completed forms, lists of items read, old school reports, family albums, references from employers etc.

#### What Is Wanted From Informants

The study is concerned with the employment, educational, social and community destinations of adults who were in various adult literacy programs. In the case studies we want to know what the informants think about these aspects of contemporary life and how their facility with literacy might impinge on their lives under these broad headings.

As the study is a longitudinal one focus is whether, and how, the views might change over the period we are following our informants. It is important to recognise that the informants might have very different notions from ourselves as to what each, or any of the headings might mean. It seems that these ideas will be most effectively reached by open ended questions that let the informant reflect on the issues rather than simply repeat their own life histories.

#### Audit trails & Triangulation

In quantitative researchers we write about validity or the confidence that the data actually reflect the phenomenon of interest. The parallel concept in ethnographic research is trustworthiness where the focus is to establish that the findings are properly grounded in the experience of the informants. An audit trail is a means of verifying any conclusions by showing the process by which they were generated. Typically it is achieved by reporting the results of a debriefing of the researcher by a sceptical reviewer so that the reviewer is convinced that the conclusion is supported by the evidence. A discussion seminar will do this, but if the case studies is part of a research component of a higher degree a fairly rigorous audit trail will need to be established. Some short pen pictures of the case studies is included below.

#### Phase 3.

The design of the interview schedule was based on previous analyses, monitoring the sample and recent studies in the field of impact of adult literacy studies. It is intended that a second telephone interview study will be conducted focussing on the following areas:

The nature and reasons for current studies, progress made in education, perceptions and beliefs about education, employment status and impact of education on employment, activity, knowledge and involvement in community, literacy activity, literacy strategies, satisfaction with life and impact of education on personal life, social activity and perceptions. Planning for data collection in the study has been influenced by several factors.

(i) The initial design of the study. The matrix of employment, education, social and community domains reflected in the personal, activity and contextual factors affecting changes in destinations is the basis of planning for all aspects of the study. This includes each of the surveys and the case studies.

(ii) Successive results and analyses. As data is analysed for each phase, the results indicate where further analysis and data would assist in illustrating changes. Much of the data from the first phase, for example, need never be collected again. This includes gender, language, educational history, employment history and so on. Subsequent data collections are able to focus on likely changes.

(iii) Research in the field from other settings. Since the start of the research, correspondence with other researchers, in the UK and Canada in particular, has identified issues and areas that require inclusion in data gathering.

(iv) Interviewee overload. The initial interview lasted, for some subjects, for more than an hour and involved a team of 41 field workers working on a one to one basis. This was possible with the assistance of providers and employers who made classes available to interviewers. This process cannot be repeated because of the mobility of the sample. Intact groups of subjects no longer exist at any providers premises. While some adult learners have continued in courses, others have ceased to study and must be contacted via a variety of means. These have included, mail to private addresses, use of electoral roles, searches using the genealogical society, tracking through providers, and continued contact through public forums, mailouts, provision of gifts and so on. The method of data collection therefore in intermediate phase data collections necessitates shorter periods of

time.

This approach means that long intensive interviews are not only impractical, but counterproductive. Interviews also need to be conducted predominantly at night when maximum likelihood of contact exists. In addition to the project staff, additional interviewers have been employed in city and rural centres in four states. Data collection for phase 3 began in October 1994 and will end by March 1995.

#### Phase 4:

Using the results from the first three phases, the fourth data collection period will focus on explanation rather than confirmation of trends. In phase 1 and 2, trends are still being identified and further in depth exploratory work being followed up in the case studies. In Phase four, the project will change its focus. Trends identified over the first three data collection periods will become the focus of a series of smaller studies aimed at collecting explanatory data for trends identified in phases 1 to 3 and supported by the case studies.

#### The Sample:

The study has now established a baseline of phases 1 and phase 2 data. The sample composition reflects groups from four states, urban and rural workplace settings and groups that are represent both non English and English speaking background. It has been necessary to arrange to employ persons in two states to coordinate the collection of data and to take charge of monitoring the sample on behalf of the project team. This has not obviated the need for project staff to travel to the centres, but has resulted in a need for a continuing presence of the project in specific centres interstate, and it is expected that a specific centre will need to be established in a third state. Table 1 below illustrates the sample structure for Phase 1 and Phase 2 data collection. The sample size is small but the intensity of the data collection and the case study emphasis makes it imperative that a small sample be used. The problems and logistics of maintaining a mobile sample over five years also makes it necessary to monitor a small sample. According to Ross (1986) sample attrition in longitudinal studies can be supported provided that the replacement of sample subjects is not less than one third. In this study an additional change in sample is built in. It is planned to add a cohort each year so that the five year study will have cohorts in the sample from one to four years, each representing a different time period and perhaps a different program context, reflecting the rapid changes in adult basic education provision.

Group  
1992  
1993  
1992  
1993

1

6.5

3.2

16

11

2

3.3

2.1

10

8

3

4.2

12

12

4

1.6

5.3

50

30

5

4.9

4.2

19

16

6

13.1

6.3

20

16

7

14

11

8

9.8

5.3

21

18

9

11.5

7.4

24

18

10

3.2

29

26

11

5

2

12

5

4

13

5.3

20

17

14

4.9

4.2

24

17

15

4.2

14

11

16

20

10

17



1.6

5.3

17

13

18

6.6

8.4

44

38

19

9.8

9.5

14

12

20

5.3

15

13

21

3.3

2.1

2

2

22

13.1

7.4

8

8

23

9.8

7.4

13

9

24

13

9

25

20

22

26

22

4

27

8

8

28

10

10

Total

#### Data Collection:

The data for the first phase was collected by 41 field workers who were given a one week training program in interviewing, recording and establishing rapport with the target group. The interviewers were assigned to participating providers' programs and spent two to three days visiting classes, getting to know the participants, explaining the project and ensuring that the adult participants understood the nature of the project. Each interviewer conducted an average of 10 interviews over a two week period, in agencies such as adult migrant, TAFE, industry, SkillShare and other community programs. The initial data

collection continued from November 1992 to April, 1993. A second data collection (presently under way), is being conducted by telephone interview and will cover the same time period from October 1993 to April, 1994. Case studies of 12 adult representatives of the major categories of gender, employment, language background are also being undertaken.

Data has been collected from four states, to ensure that the sample composition is in accord with the requirements of the funding body. The data has been collected in large metropolitan regions, rural cities, country locations and remote locations. Four states are represented in the study. Every effort has been made to ensure that confidentiality is assured. No intention exists of any evaluative study of any agency involved in adult literacy programs.

#### Monitoring the Sample.

Data on 413 phase 1 subjects was collected in the first round of the study. Since then a major task of the project team and in particular the project officer, has been maintenance of the sample. Maintaining contact with the sample is a difficult task in a longitudinal study of such a mobile population. Letters with reply paid envelopes have been sent out to subjects with instructions regarding change of address. This, in many cases, begs the question with literacy students and alternative methods had to be found to maintain contact. Social events were organised, in which all subjects in geographic regions were invited to community locations, lottery tickets were sent out, as well as vouchers and other means of keeping the subjects in touch. They will also be invited to contact the research team as changes occur in their living conditions. Many have done so. Follow up phone calls were made to almost 340 subjects as part of the second round of data collections. A small number of the initial sample did not have a telephone connected. The major reason for loss of contact was mobility and failure to notify of change of address. In many cases the provider had no record of address, or of alternative contact. In subsequent rounds of data collection, interviewees were asked to provide an alternative contact in case we were unable to find them later on.

Follow up work in the form of public forums in shopping malls have also been conducted encouraging participants to come and make themselves known to the research team. The second round of interviews began late in October 1993 and was completed by March 1994. The third round started in October 1994 and is in progress. Every participant is contacted in a three step process. First a letter is sent to each interviewee, informing them that a phone call would be made in the coming week. At that time a lottery ticket or other incentive such as a magazine is included. After the phone interview and a reassurance (usually from the project team) that the subject would continue in the

project a second lottery ticket or incentive is posted. The magazine is provided complements of Time incorporated. Almost exclusively, participants are delighted to be contacted and want reassurance that they would be asked to continue in the study. Each participant also has been provided with a small pocket diary in which dates relevant to the study have been marked. Response rates have been particularly high. These have been provided complements of Hallmark. Birthday cards are also sent to all participants, as well as greeting cards at appropriate times in the year. Cards are provided complements of Specialty Cards inc.

An analysis of the data using preferred language as the "first language" definition the percentages for 1992 were 54% English an 46% Non English speaking backgrounds. There may be a need to examine the definitions of NESB and the relevance of country of birth for literacy instruction purposes. Where the purpose of the class is literacy rather than "English", the Bureau of Statistics classification based on country of birth may be unsuitable for basic education classes.

In phase 2, the participants in the study were interviewed by telephone. Considerable time was spent locating the sample. After the first phase, many had changed their status with respect to attendance in courses. More than 60% were still involved in education or were planning to undertake more and 37% were no longer involved and had no plans for any further participation. Only 17% of TAFE students were in the same course, 24% of the SkillShare students were still involved in the same course and 35% of the other students in community, workplace or, labour market were enrolled in the same programs as for phase 1. This underlines the effort required to track the sample in phase 2. Given the lack of records and follow up procedures used by providers, there was little that providers could do to assist in tracking students from the previous year. Table 3 below presents the participation rates for the sample after the second phase. The table illustrates the proportions that are enrolled in the same programs, those who are taking new programs and those who plan to take additional programs. In some cases the same participant has indicated that they have plans for new courses even though they are still enrolled or have already taken a new course.

Table 3

Percentage Participation in Education by Type of Provider

Provider

New

Same

Plans

%

%  
%

TAFE  
47  
17  
36

SkillShare  
45  
24  
37

Other  
33  
35  
32

"Other courses" include work, community and further education. A short interview schedule was prepared focussing on the current status and plans in education, beliefs about the benefits of education, current status and attitudes about employment, community and social or life satisfaction. Participants were traced using addresses supplied in phase 1, information supplied by providers where it was available,

inspection of electoral roles, the national compact disk version of phone directories, contact with family members, in at least one case enquires made through real estate agents and so on. At each contact, participants were asked about future involvement in the project. All except two have agreed to continue participate. This stage has established a procedure for tracing the participants in future phases of the study and it is expected that tracking participants will take smaller amounts of time. The specific tracking procedure used was as follows:

A letter was mailed to the survey participant informing them that a member of the project team would be in touch with them within the coming few days. A telephone call was then made to the participant. If contact is unsuccessful from information held on the project data base, the following procedure was followed;

- Step 1 Check telephone directory , ring 013/0175 or 1100
- Step 2 Send letter to original address
- Step 3 Contact provider
- Step 4 If no response from 1st letter, second letter sent- & visit address (if applicable)
- Step 5 Check state & federal electoral roles
- Step 6 Australian directory search (CD Rom) historical society

## Step 7 Assistance from Estate Agents

Response from the participants has been most positive -100% of sample contacted wish to continue with the study. The majority of contacts have had to be made 'after hours' and on weekends as this proved to be the most suitable time for participants. After completing the telephone interview, the participant is sent four items;

- (i) a "thank you" letter,
- (ii) a scratch (Tattersall) ticket or a magazine
- (iii) a certificate of participation and
- (iv) a Diary (Donated by Hallmark Cards).

In addition, each participant will receive a birthday card, a new year greeting card and requests for changes of address. A specific card has been developed for the latter purpose.

The attrition rate has been reduced to 15%. By the end of Phase 2, only 8 persons had been conceded as having been lost to the study. Three categories of attrition have been established;

- 1.No longer wishes to participate in the study for personal reasons.
- 2.Had left the country.
- 3.Gone overseas and was unable to be contacted until later in 1994.

In phase 3 of the project, arrangements are made for personal visits if communication problems occur such as in completion of a notification sheet informing them of the pending interview. A small number of interviewers have been trained. Each participant will receive the latest issue of 'Who Weekly' (Donated by Time Inc.) with notification sheet and on completion of the interview, an 'instant tats' ticket is sent. In addition it is intended that a newsletter will now be sent to all participants and perhaps providers who initially participated in the study, giving an outline of progress and results.

### Interim Descriptive Results:

NOTE: The data in this report do not represent final analyses or final figures. They represent the analyses of data to hand at the time of

this report being prepared. Due to the continuous data collection phases of the project, the proportions for Phase 2 will not be final for some time yet. The figures should be treated as indicative only and this report should not be cited in any way without checking the data with the research team. People wishing to cite the results may find considerable variation as further data and analyses come to hand.

- 1.0 Sample Composition: Phase 1 and 2.

So far data from 329 of the original 415 people has been entered for the second year of the study, representing a 79.3% retention rate. Stacked bar charts demonstrate that the impact of attrition on the age, level of education and occupation variables were randomly affected and that there seems to be little or no systematic loss of subjects from the study. Further data is still to be collected from difficult to track subjects.

Figure 1.1 Phase 2: Age and Interviewed Phase 2.

Figure 1.2 Phase 2 Interviews and Level of Education.

The age distribution is uni-modal for both Phase 1 & Phase 2 with the 20-29 age groups being the two largest. The pro rata attrition was lowest in the 40-49 group and greatest for those less than 29 years of age. Most (88%) of the participants had greater than 6 yrs of school. Attrition was lowest in the group with less than 6 years of education and highest among those who had more than 10 but less than 12 years of education.

For those people not born in Australia, the length in time in Australia has a mode of 1 year and median of 5 years. At least 81 of the 270 (SYMBOL 179 \f "Symbol"30%) NESB people have been in the country less than 2 years. This indicates a strong emphasis on language classes rather than literacy, although all were identified as being part of literacy instructional groups.

Figure 1.3 Phase 2

Figure 1.10 First Language and Time in Australia for Migrant Group

The three largest categories in both phases of the study were labourer/cleaner, plant operator and trades persons. Attrition was smallest in the home duties group and largest in the office worker group.

Figure 1.4 Phase 1



Figure 1.5 Phase 2

The distribution of age according to language background remained much the same over the two years, with a greater proportion of ESB people in the less than 29 years of age group. Over the age of 30 years most were NESB subjects.

Figure 1.6 Phase 1 Gender, Age and Phase 1 Interview.

Figure 1.7 Phase 2: Gender and Age and Phase 2 Interview.

Overall, the breakdown by gender remained constant (57% males; 43% females) from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

The Phase 1 distribution of age according to gender revealed that the proportion of females was greater than that of males in all groups up to the 50 plus years of age groups. For Phase 2, the male/female proportions remained much the same. No systematic differences are evident in the two samples

Figure 1.8 Phase 1: Employment Status and Phase 1 Interview.

Figure 1.9 Phase 2: Employment Status, Age and Phase 2 Interview.

The percentage of employed participants increased from 15% in Phase 1 to 31% in Phase 2. Phase 2 Interview data is still being adjusted and the percentage is expected to rise to approximately 46% by the end of the data processing period. The change is attributed to two factors: first, subjects are gaining employment; second, new subjects in workplace programs have been recruited for the Project. A marked difference from Phase 1 to Phase 2 by age breakdown is evident with the proportion of employed being greater than unemployed for all age groups up to 40+ and vice versa for the 40+ groups. Pronounced changes occurred in the younger than 29 year old group where there was an increase in the proportion of employed. Conversely, there was a large decrease in the proportion of employed in the 40-49 year old group.

## 2.0 Changes in employment status

Of the sample data entered to the end of October 1994, 15% were employed in Phase 1. This increased to 31% in Phase 2. 63% of the employed group in Phase 1 remained employed in Phase 2. 16% unemployed in Phase 1 gained employment in Phase 2. Of the 50, over half were male NESB viz: 38 were NESB (27 male; 11 female) and 12 were ESB (8 male; 4 female). Whilst the overall proportion of males/females remained the same (57 % male; 43% female) from Phase 1 to Phase 2, the proportion of employed males increased from 59.6% to 67.8%. Conversely, the proportion of employed females decreased from 40.4% to 32.2%. 47% of the employed people in Phase 1 were NESB/ESB. In Phase 2 it was 62% NESB to 38% ESB. In both years the proportion of NESB employed was lower than the proportion of NESB people overall (72.6% to 71.1% from Phase 1 to Phase 2). In Phase 1 the proportion of

male/female NESB employed was much the same (22.8 % males to 24.6% females), however in Phase 2 the proportion of males was much greater (40.2% male to 21.8% female). In Phase 1 male ESB were the largest group amongst the employed, representing 36.8%. This dropped to 27.6% in Phase 2 where male NESB had the largest share of 40.2%. The pie charts below show the % distribution of employed people in Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2

58% of employed persons in Phase 1 were enrolled in a course in March 1993. In Phase 2 almost the same percentage - 57% of employed people were enrolled in a course. 14% of employed persons in Phase 1 were promoted between Phase 1 & Phase 2. 22 people were promoted between Phase 1 & Phase 2, but interestingly only 8 of these people were employed in Phase 1. Of these 22, 9 were enrolled in courses in Phase 2 (3 TAFE, 1 Skillshare, 2 community, 2 work, 3 other. One person was enrolled in 3 courses). 15.8% of people employed in Phase 1 gained new jobs between Phase 1 & Phase 2. 46 people gained new jobs between Phase 1 & Phase 2, of these, 9 were employed in Phase 1. 25 of the remaining 37 were enrolled in a course in Phase 2. 34 of the 50 employed people enrolled in a course in Phase 2 had either been promoted (9) or gained new jobs (25) between Phase 1 & Phase 2. For the small groups gaining employment or promotion enrolment in a basic skills course appears to have been important.

### 3.0 Course Activity

70% of participants were enrolled in a course in Phase 2. 84 people had commenced a TAFE course and 33 were continuing their previous studies at a TAFE. A total of 21 people were enrolled in a new Skillshare course. The "Other" course category has 42 people enrolled (23 new; 19 continuing). Examples of the types of courses in this category are: AMES English classes, private tuition, basic literacy (in prison). Enrolments in courses at community houses numbered 7 (3 new: 4 continuing), and at a school totalled 5 (3 new : 2 continuing). Course participation by gender remained much the same Phase 1-Phase 2 from 57% to 55% for males and 43% to 45% for females. Over half, (58%) enrolled in a course were married. This is similar to the overall % of married people in the study (56%). Hence marriage status does not appear to be a determining factor in enrolment. The language background and gender of those people enrolled in a course is as follows:

Figure 3.1

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.3 Age by Course Enrolment

Figure 3.4 Occupation by Enrolment

The two largest groups enrolled in a course are the 20-29 year and 30-39 year groups; representing at least 62% of the total pool of people enrolled in a course. There was little difference between proportions enrolled/not enrolled across all age groups. The two largest groups enrolled in a course are the <10 years and >10<12 year categories; representing at least 60% of the total pool of people enrolled in a course. These two categories also have a higher proportion of enrolled than the non-enrolled groups. At least 40% of those enrolled had less than 10 years of school, this figure is similar to the overall sample ie. 41% had less than 10 years at school. Note that the nature and allocation of occupations may change from year to year

The two largest groups enrolled in a course are plant operators and

labourers/cleaners; however the proportion of non-enrolled is higher for both groups. Those occupations where the proportion of enrolled is higher than non-enrolled are home duties, office workers, trades persons, sales, professional, and self employed. The employment categories most likely to be enrolled are plant operator, labourer, cleaner and trades person. The professional group are predominantly NESB seeking language support.

#### 4.0 Rural sub-group

Rural people in the first year of the study was constituted 21%, this stayed much the same in the second year (22.5%). 70.3% of rural people were enrolled in a course in Phase 2; this is a similar rate to that of the rest of the study (69.5%). hence rural/city location was not a determining variable for enrolment. 34.2 % of rural people were working in Phase 1 compared with 8.5% for the rest of sample. Location therefore may have been a determining effect for employment among the adult basic education group. However the sample size is so small that clear conclusions cannot be drawn from this. 42.2% of rural people were working in Phase 2 cf. 27.3% rest of sample.

#### Education:

Reasons for enrolling in literacy classes were also investigated. Improving basic English skills in reading and writing was offered as a reason by 56% of the sample. Eight percent wanted to improve their chances for educational reasons, including the capacity to assist others in education and 26% were enrolled to help with employment prospects.

A scale of the importance of education was developed from reasons given for gaining an education eg. ability to earn more money, be a better informed person etc. Each key variable (gender, language background and employment status) illustrated a similar lack of variability with respect to explanation of the variability in participants impression of the importance of education. There were no statistically significant differences within or between groups. Every group considered the importance of education to be high but the range of perceived importance was also large for all groups.

Participants were also asked to rate the effect that their basic education courses had on their lives in terms of education, social and employment aspects. Results of this analysis illustrate that there are effects of both remaining in education and of the employment status in

1993.

The effect of current enrolment is an interesting outcome. Those not

enrolled in the course have greater expectations of education than those who have continued basic education courses. Alternative explanations could be that the adults continued education because of a lowering of expectation or, that after completing, they have not experienced the gains anticipated. Those still enrolled may be expressing their optimism or rationalising of continued participation. This may also be related to employment status. This relationship is included in the figure below where employment is included. The effects of education are related to both employment status and enrolment in courses. In 1992 there was a very different level of expectation between the employed and unemployed.

Those enrolled clearly had higher expectations in 1992. In 1993 the difference in levels of expectation between those enrolled and those not still enrolled was negligible. Employed persons in 1993, still enrolled in a course had much lower expectations than those who were unemployed. Employed persons no longer enrolled in a course have higher expectations than unemployed persons no longer enrolled. This may be an expression of frustration on the part of the unemployed non enrolled group. Unemployed persons still enrolled in the course have much higher expectations than unemployed persons no longer enrolled. This analysis suggests that gaining or maintaining employment and remaining in education lowers expectations of an education. Losing or failing to maintain employment and remaining in education increases expectation but leaving education is strongly associated with a lowering of expectations.

Pressure to gain an education was assessed from the importance of education by self, family and friends and their expectations for interest in aspects of literacy eg. how important does your family regard education for you? etc. Females experienced the most pressure to gain an education and the amount of pressure was significantly higher than that experienced by males. Also, NESB people appeared to feel significantly more pressure than ESB people. The range of pressure felt by males, unemployed and ESB participants is interesting. Why male unemployed ESB participants should have a large range of perceived pressure to participate in literacy programs is being pursued in the case studies with appropriate individuals.

#### Work:

A scale of the level of workplace confidence was developed from the responses given to items which relate to aspects such as confidence to take part in meetings, perceptions of the effect of participant's literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace etc. Again the greatest variation is shown by the male ESB participants. Given that all groups have high levels, it is of interest to explore the lower values on the scales through case study and follow up interviews later in the project. The variation between groups in levels of workplace

confidence are illustrated in the Figure below. As the study is a longitudinal one, the behaviour of the lower tails of the distributions are of interest over time as an indication of rising levels of confidence after literacy classes - and a host of other potential explanations.

#### Social Aspects of Life and Satisfaction:

The study also employed a general life satisfaction scale. The measure was obtained in both 1992 and 1993. Hence it is possible to examine changes over time and in relation to employment status. This scale examined ratings on opinions, friendships, religious, social activities, estimates of knowledge of social life and self image. Details of the scale are included in a technical report of the study. Satisfaction is also related to enrolment in a course. Interestingly, in 1993, those enrolled in the course had higher levels of satisfaction than those not still enrolled. This is illustrated in the Figure below. Whether this is an artefact of an unsuccessful completion of the course is unresolved. Those still enrolled in the course and having higher life satisfaction levels also deserve further investigation. Should this result be identified in the current phase, then the final data collection will include efforts to investigate reasons for these persistent results and to link them to participation in literacy classes. A small number of more intensive interviews may be undertaken with a representative sample of subjects who exhibit these characteristics.

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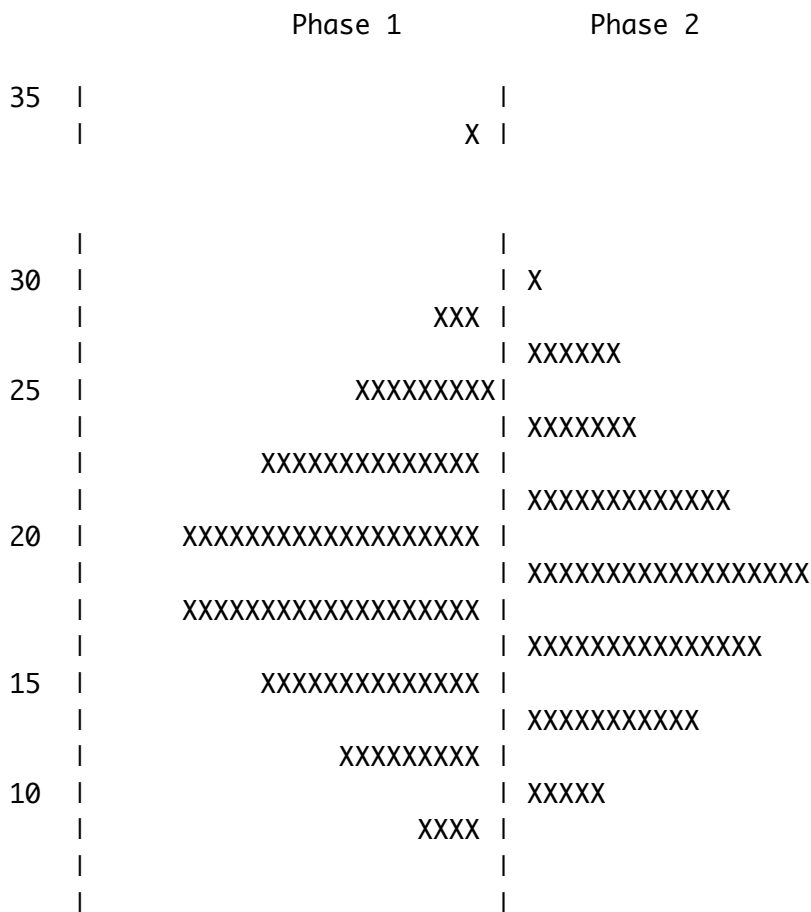
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When Satisfaction was examined in combination with Employment Status in phase 2, The combined effects of enrolment and employment appear to have a clear effect on general satisfaction. The satisfaction levels of continuing education students is consistently higher than those who have discontinued. Moreover, the satisfaction of the employed group is higher than the unemployed group. Clearly education and employment lead to higher levels of self image or life satisfaction. This is not an unexpected result. Of the two, enrolment in a literacy course seems to produce higher levels of life satisfaction than employment alone and the combination of enrolment and employment seems to be offering the subjects the best of both. The interaction effect is evident in the Figure below and is statistically significant. The effect of

employment on satisfaction is also evident over time despite an general apparent lowering of satisfaction from phase 1 to phase 2.

Life Satisfaction - 1992 , 1993

While the figure illustrates a small difference using linked and equated (Wright and Stone, 1979) scores, the difference is significant and beyond chance or random levels. ( $t=2.7$ ,  $SYMBOL\ 97\ \backslash f$  "Symbol"=0.05). The figure below illustrates the shift in relation to employment more clearly. Overall the life satisfaction of the subjects is lower in 1993, but those employed maintain a higher level. The message of this is clear and predictable. Employment is necessary for a better view of life. From an adult education point of view the important message is that enrolment in basic education classes enhances that feeling, but does not sustain it for lengthy periods without employment.

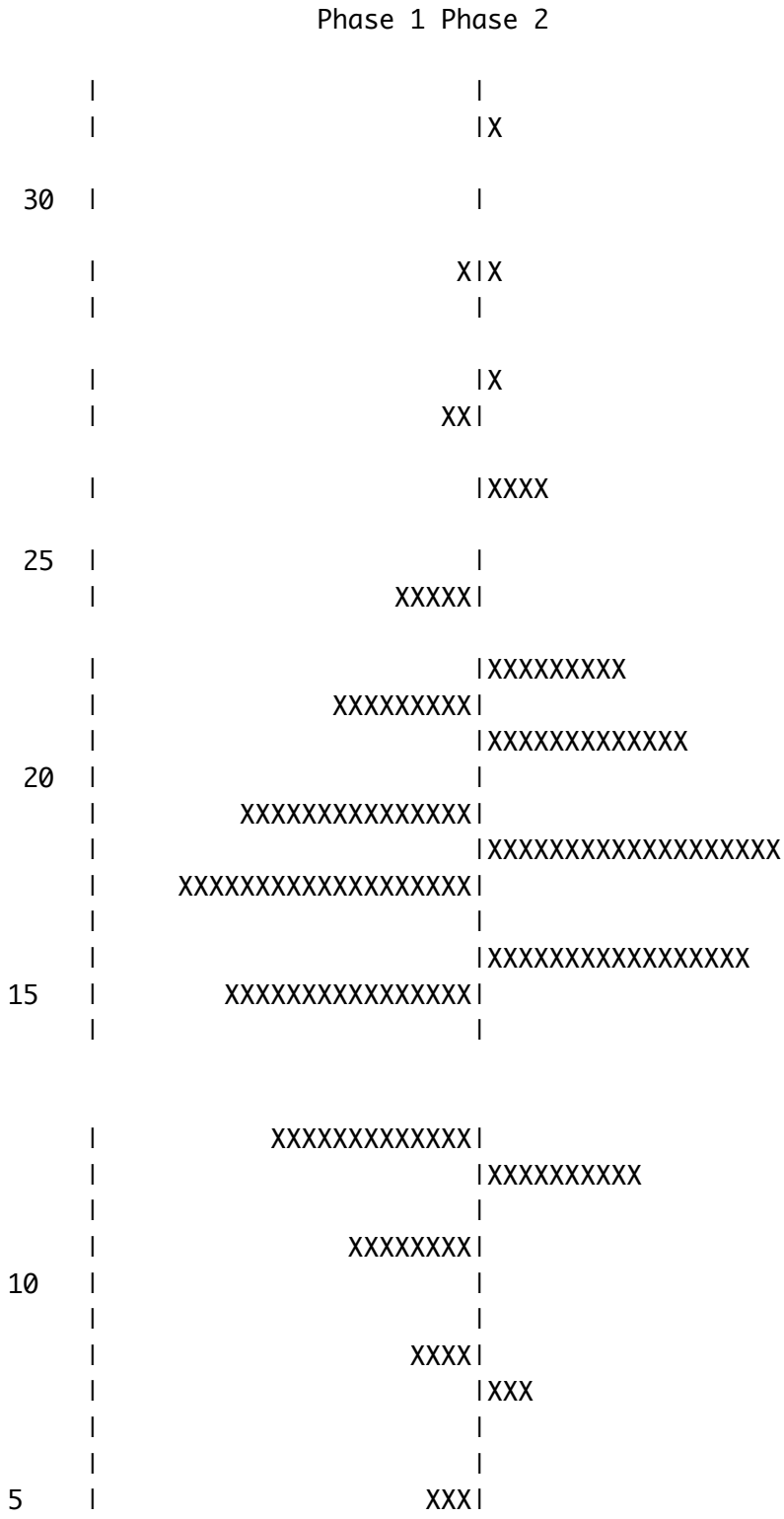


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At this stage it is not possible to offer an explanation of this effect. It should also be pointed out, that the scale on the graph accentuates the size of the difference and it is evident that the employed group have consistently higher levels of satisfaction over the two years.

Community Activity: Phase 1 to Phase 2



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### Community Aspects of Life:

The level of community activity was assessed from responses to items which related to such activities as participation in sport, attending church, visiting the library, participation in social, community groups and use of community facilities. This variable was also analysed with respect to the key variables, gender, language background and employment status. While there are no significant differences within the language and employment status groups, the level of community activity by males is significantly higher than that of females.

This appears to be an uninteresting result. No significant differences were evident between any of the groups indicating that gender, employment status and language background were not predictors of community attitudes among adult literacy students.

Further investigation of the data revealed that activity in the community was varied within groups but not between groups. Attempts to investigate the links to literacy class and other variables with low levels of community activity will be undertaken in the future. A scale of community attitudes was developed from the responses given to items which relate to various community and social issues eg. importance of a high school education, whether a person lives in a friendly community etc.

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Once again there appears to be very little except the difference in range of attitudes among the employed and unemployed groups. Changes in community activity were also assessed over the two assessment periods, in phase 1 and phase 2. The plot below presents the frequency distributions for the two phases reflected in the vertical axis. There is an obvious shift in the period from phase 1 to phase 2 illustrating an increase in overall community activity. ( $t=1.98$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). For reasons yet to be investigated the participants became significantly more active in the community over the period of one year from phase 1 to phase 2. If this trend continues the last phase of data collection will focus on explanation. If the trend changes, an investigation of why such a shift occurred at this stage is worth pursuing

## Case Studies:

### Female / ESB / Employed

Mrs C is a 38 years old resident of a growing dormitory suburb on the western edge of Melbourne. She is from an English Speaking Background and is employed as a kitchen hand in a large corporate staff canteen.

She began adult basic education in a community based access education program and is now enrolled in a basic numeracy program. In speaking of herself she says she was never very interested in school. Of her present involvement in a program she says she is very surprised at how much easier she now finds "sums." She adds that others at work "seek her out because they know she is good at that stuff".

### Male / ESB / Employed

Mr O is a 50 year old employed single male living in the western suburbs of Melbourne. His early years were spent in a number of rural communities where he reports he was not interested in school. Mr O's acknowledged interest in adult basic education began when he decided to get a "crane chaser's certificate." He is not now in a course but he has gained a promotion and has improved his income since completing the program. He believes he is more confident at work than previously. Mr O has indicated that he is actively involved in several athletic clubs.

He says he has an active social life yet he admits to often being lonely.

### Male / NESB / Unemployed

Mr. D is 48 by years old and came to Australia with his mother 30 years ago, from what was then Yugoslavia. He did not attend school in Australia and was unemployed for two to three years. He eventually found work in a factory and went from job to job largely because there was an abundance of jobs then. Two years ago he was made redundant from the textile factory where he had worked for six years. His redundancy package included literacy classes through the DEET Office of Labour Market Adjustment (OLMA). Mr D's oral skills in English are near native proficiency, he taught himself without ever attending a class, but he did not learn to read or write in English. He states, "Before (the classes) when I see a I was just...my legs would shake you know... I can speak the language, I can Understand the language but then when I sit down and want to put it down on paper I just can't do it.... I want to be able to sit down and write a letter like I can in my own language." Mr D has been in three different literacy classes over the past two years and is very willing to talk about the differences he feels these classes have made to his life. He says, "I felt like my life wasn't complete. Well now it's getting there you know." Mr D maintains that he uses English much more than his first language, Serbian. He says he does not mix with people from his language group and only speaks Serbian to his mother. Further

investigation is required to illuminate the best way to describe this learner in terms of being from a non English vs an English speaking background.

Female / NESB / Unemployed

Mrs A is a 43 year old unemployed NESB resident in North Queensland. Having first arrived in the country at 8 years of age she worked on her parents' farm and missed a good deal of schooling. She claims to be proficient in her first language. She travels by bus and taxi to get to class and is highly motivated by a desire to be less dependent on other people. Her aim is to continue until she is satisfied with her own reading and writing skills. She is comfortable with her own

children's' literacy development as she now feels that she has a greater understanding of education in general. She would like to continue her literacy studies and has plans to do a computer course when she is more confident with her reading and writing. She is very pleased at being included in the study.

Another unemployed female NESB case study is with Ms S a resident in Melbourne. Ms S. is a TAFE student and is planning tertiary study at university. Her studies this far have been in accountancy but she would like to study at university to train as an interpreter. The impact of her literacy studies has been to make her aware of the importance a wide range of communication skills.

Male and Female / NESB / Employed

A group or cohort case study is being undertaken by Maree Fitzpatrick at a workplace literacy program in a manufacturing industry in the inner west of Melbourne. This program began as part of the multi-skilling, award restructuring process and on the basis of a successful pilot received WELL funding. The individual informants are all process workers. Further case studies will include ESB males and females employed in food processing in rural Victoria and ESB males employed and unemployed in rural Queensland. Our experience suggests that many of the cohort are more than willing to participate in case studies. Considerable interest has been generated by providers/tutors and ongoing case studies could be identified very easily for future exploration.

Male, ESB Unemployed.

Harry is a 42 year old Australian born unemployed male who has been attending basic education classes at a SkillShare centre. He does not remember a great deal about his school education, except to the point where those who seemed to be slower were always grouped together, for English, maths and social studies. He remembers a sense of

frustration in some classes and some teachers may have been as frustrated as he was. When he left school he started work in a small supermarket keeping stock- on the shelves. He quickly learned to recognise products by the label design. After he left the supermarket he went through a series of jobs including drainage labourer, roof tiler, factory hand in various industries and other types of work where reading and writing were not a requirement. During February 1993 he inquired about an English course he had seen advertised in a book sent to all houses in the district. He was diagnosed as having scotopia sensitivity syndrome but really did not believe that the suggested solution, a piece of coloured plastic, could make any difference to the way he saw a page of writing. However, yellow tinted glasses made it easier for him to understand what he was reading, The letters and words stayed in focus and he could see the punctuation marks. For many years he had simply not read, unless he have absolutely had to. When he started reading news-papers he would only read the headlines and sometimes a few lines, or two or three paragraphs. Then he would make up his own story, to go with the little bit he had read.

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