



TUTOR TIPS

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Assessing wider learning outcomes in ALLN

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As practitioners know, what learners achieve in adult language, literacy and numeracy courses and programs is much more than the acquisition of skills. This issue of Tutor Tips looks at those wider learning outcomes, and how they might be assessed.

Introduction

In the past fifteen years or so, the focus on accreditation and on measuring outcomes in Australian vocational education and training has also meant a focus on securing uniformity - national standards of competence within and across industries, nationally consistent training packages, and reliability of outcomes through uniform assessment.

In adult language, literacy and numeracy (ALLN) courses and programs in Australia, however, diversity rather than uniformity is the reality: diversity in learners' purposes, diversity in teaching and learning approaches, and diversity in learning outcomes. This is particularly true at introductory levels, whether in non-accredited or accredited learning.

Last year Stephen Billett (Griffith University) and I investigated the assessment of wider learning outcomes in non-accredited ALLN, in collaboration with practitioners in four states (Dymock & Billett, NCVER, forthcoming). Here we share some of our findings and provide examples of the sorts of assessment instruments we road-tested with learners, teachers, tutors and coordinators.

What are wider learning outcomes?

Adult learning research constantly identifies 'Wider learning outcomes', particularly in language, literacy and numeracy learning. For example, a Tasmanian adult literacy survey (Department of Education, 2005:12) identified eleven 'other outcomes', including pathways to further study and employment, better skills in researching and finding

information, and a significant increase in self esteem and in opportunities to participate in the community. A UK study of adult learners' lives (Barton, Ivanic, Appleby, Hodge, & Tusting, 2004:101) identified the 'wider benefits of learning' as empowerment in the classroom and in life, new skills acquisition, and a change in attitudes to learning which added quality to life. Ward and Edwards (2002:4) concluded from their research with literacy and numeracy learners in north-west England, which used the 'learning journey' as a metaphor, that:

Perhaps the most profound change for most learners interviewed was a massive enhancement of their confidence and self-esteem. This increased confidence had a significant impact on their learning achievements, attitudes to learning, aims and aspirations, ability to do real life activities and their social activities with other people.

From a review of such studies worldwide, we identified seven learning outcomes in addition to the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills:

- Self-confidence and personal competence – extent to which learner has a sense of self and a belief in being able to put their capabilities into action
- Engagement with others – extent of learners' interaction with other individuals in the family, at work and at sites such as schools, government offices, and shops.
- Attitudes to learning – extent of learner's attitude towards current and future learning, and ability to learn how to learn
- Agency/pro-activity – extent to which learners actively access and negotiate with and learn from experience, and are able to shape construction of that experience
- Life trajectories – extent of learners' goals and ambitions, and expectations of where life will lead
- Personal growth/personal change – extent to which a learner perceives they have grown and/or changed as a person
- Social capital – extent of community participation, involvement in networks, clubs and other social situations.

For learners engaging or re-engaging with vocational education and training, such outcomes are key to the extent to which they will succeed as learners. However, the dominance of competency-based training and associated regulatory frameworks in Australian education and training in the past decade and a half appears to have diminished the significance of these personally-oriented outcomes, particularly in adult language, literacy and numeracy, because of the difficulties in measuring them. But as Eldred, Ward, Dutton & Snowdon (2004, p.4) observed: *If gains in confidence are as significant as many learners and tutors appear to suggest, ways of evidencing them seem to be important.*

How can wider learning outcomes be measured?

There have been numerous attempts in the past 25 years or so to capture the wider benefits of ALLN learning. For example, Good and Holmes (1978, p.3) in their book, *How's it going?* advocated a three-level assessment of

reading, writing and spelling: 'Beginning', 'Not bad' and 'With ease'. Charnley and Jones (1979) proposed five overall criteria for measuring success in language, literacy and numeracy which extended the conception of skills development into how those skills were applied: affective personal achievements (e.g. 'an increase in confidence associated with literacy skills'), cognitive achievements (e.g. improved reading and writing skills), enactive achievements (e.g. reading newspapers, using writing skills at work), socio-economic achievements (e.g. participation in civic duties), and affective social achievements (e.g. better relationships within and outside the tuition group).

More recently, Eldred et al (2004: 21-24) attacked the issue through the development of a 'confidence grid'. The 'Catching Confidence Grid' comprises a matrix with twelve statements down the left-hand column, intended to capture different aspects of confidence. Example A shows an assessment instrument adapted for ALLN from the Confidence Grid.

Example A: Changes in confidence

Write a number between 1 and 4 in each box below to indicate how confident you feel since starting your adult literacy program. Leave blank any boxes that do not apply.

Key: 1 = Not confident 2 = A little confident 3 = Quite confident 4 = Very confident

Statements	At home	Socially -with friends	In shops and government offices	At work
1. I am confident when meeting new people				
2. I am confident that I can use what I learn from the tutor in daily life				
3. I am confident to speak to a person I do not know				
4. I am confident to speak in a group				
5. I am confident in situations which may be difficult				
6. I feel I am generally a confident person				
7. I am confident I am learning from this literacy program				Yes/No/Not sure
8. I am confident that I have valuable skills to offer				Yes/No/Not sure
9. I feel I am generally a confident person				Yes/No/Not sure
10. I am confident with my reading				Yes/No/Not sure
11. I am confident when writing things down				Yes/No/Not sure
12. I am confident with my spoken English				Yes/No/Not sure
13. I am confident working with numbers and figures				Yes/No/Not sure

Another way of mapping the wider benefits of learning has been in identifying 'soft outcomes': 'outcomes from training, support or guidance interventions, which unlike hard outcomes, such as qualifications and jobs, cannot be measured directly or tangibly' (Dewson, Eccles and Tackey, 2000:2). The authors used the term *soft indicators* to refer to those achievements that indicate progress towards an outcome, but they observed that this may be a subjective judgement. Example B shows an ALLN assessment instrument that uses the concept of soft outcomes and soft indicators.



Example B: Learner outcomes - personal, social, economic

Indicate changes since last report. Leave blank any boxes that do not apply.

Personal outcomes	Examples/Indicators
Confidence e.g. now able to catch a bus on their own; stands up for own rights; can deal with authorities;	
Personal goals, ambitions e.g. now wants to do TAFE course; wants to travel; now has clear goals beyond this program	
Social outcomes	
Engagement with other individuals e.g. now able to have two-way conversation; mixes better with others; reading to children	
Involvement in the community e.g. has joined a club; has joined library; now talks to child's school teachers	
Economic outcomes	
Employment e.g. got a job; started checking job adverts; attended job interview; working as volunteer	
Life management e.g. ability to shop independently; taking charge of own affairs; taking responsibility for improving health	
Learning e.g. took another course; is now aware of own strengths; has obtained learner's or driver's licence	
Other outcomes	

One of the limitations of such an instrument is that it is not possible to assess *progress* against each indicator, except through subjective judgements of whether subsequent examples indicate movement ahead (or back).

Another assessment instrument (Example C) is designed as an indicator of progress, asking students to identify their particular goals and then to indicate where they think they lie on a three point scale in relation to each of those goals. Other goals can be added as the students' aspirations change.

Example C: Achievements (an adaptation by Read Write Now! WA)

FIRST CHOOSE AND TICK YOUR GOALS	GOALS	For the goals you have ticked, rate your improvement for this period		
		About the same	Progressing	Achieved
	Literacy			
	To improve my reading and/or writing at home			
	To improve my reading and/or writing at work			
	To improve my spelling			
	To improve my maths			
	To improve my spoken English			
	To increase my vocabulary			
	To use a computer for writing and searching for information			
	(If studying) To improve my understanding of course materials			
	(If studying) To improve my marks for assignments			
	Other areas:			
	Everyday Life			
		About the same	Progressing	Achieved

	Regularly attend tutoring session			
	Complete my homework			
	Answer the phone			
	Ring organisations, tradespeople, doctor etc.			
	Read signs (for example: street signs, safety signs)			
	To become more independent eg shop by myself, use public transport, use ATM banking etc.			
	To be more confident to speak with others			
	To ask for help when I need it			
	To become more confident in myself			
	To join a club or library			
	Other areas:			
	Work wise (if applicable)	About the same	Progressing	Achieved
	To explore job opportunities			
	To get a job or a better job			
	To be promoted at work			
	To gain a driver's licence or other certificate			
	To enrol in another course			
	To work as a volunteer			
	Other areas:			

Selecting the most appropriate instrument

Our research showed it is possible to develop instruments that can be used to assess the wider benefits of learning, and these instruments can provide options to cater not only for the learners' individual needs, but also tutors' and coordinators' abilities and preferences. The choice of instruments will be determined in part by whether they are to be used formatively to provide a means of reporting outcomes over time (i.e. monitoring progress), or whether they will be used as a summative assessment instrument, or in some combination. In ALLN, such instruments tend to be designed to incorporate the perceptions of tutors and students, so the language must be appropriate for the learners, particularly those for whom English is a second language. Such instruments could be used alongside existing assessments of accredited learning in order to recognise and value the full range of outcomes. In our trial of the instruments with ALLN providers, an unexpected outcome was the positive responses of tutors

and learners to the assessment process itself. There were reports from the participating tutors of learners developing confidence from taking part in completing the assessment tasks, regardless of the actual results. And tutors also reported benefits for their own teaching, not just from seeing examples of learners achieving outcomes, but also from engaging in the process with their learners.

The concept of wider learning outcomes is not of course limited to the adult language, literacy and numeracy field, but can be applied in such areas as health, welfare, and employment, and some of the examples in our trials were drawn from such fields. So there are opportunities for tutors to develop their own instruments, drawing on a range of sources, in order to meet the needs of individual students or particular programs, especially where the learning is non-accredited, or to supplement assessment in accredited learning. Our forthcoming NCVER report is a good starting point, and you can also contact me at d.dymock@griffith.edu.au.



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