Perceptions of literacy: hearing the learner

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Session outline:

• Experiences of language learning prior to immigration
• Perceptions of English literacy skills
• Use of English literacy in the community
• Fit with the AMEP
• Discussion: Considerations for literacy curriculum, teaching and program planning
Data set

- Learner interviews
- Classroom observations
- Learning portfolios
- Assessment portfolios

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS)

The ALLS was part of an international study designed to identify and measure literacy which can be linked to the social and economic characteristics of people both across and within countries.

The ALLS measured the literacy of a sample of people aged 15 to 74 years.
ALLS: Measures of literacy

- **Prose literacy**: the ability to understand and use information from various kinds of narrative texts, including texts from newspapers, magazines and brochures.

- **Document literacy**: the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts.

- **Numeracy**: the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage and respond to the mathematical demands of diverse situations.

“Level 3 is regarded by the survey developers as the "minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy" (ABS, 2008:5)
ALLS Survey results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Level 3 and above</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First language not English</td>
<td>General population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prose literacy</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document literacy</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ABS, 2008: 13)

“Compared to 1996, of the people who migrated to Australia in the five years prior to the survey whose first language was not English, there was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of people attaining literacy scores of Level 3 or above on both the prose and document scales.”

(ABS, 2008: 13)
**NCVER Research report: Adult literacy and numeracy: Research and Future Strategy**

“It is hard to ignore the correlation between low levels of literacy and numeracy and social isolation, unemployment, lack of qualifications, low wages and poor health.”

“It is also hard to ignore the evidence that low literacy and numeracy skills have measurable impact on local communities, organisations, industry sectors and at a national level, or that effective interventions can have diverse positive outcomes.”

(Perkins, 2009)

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**Adult literacy and numeracy cont’d**

“As Australia seeks to better define its desired future, a perfect opportunity exists for literacy and numeracy to be seen as an integral part of the drive towards social inclusion, increased workplace skills and improved productivity.”

(Perkins, 2009:39)
LTS participants: Learned English prior to immigration

- Yes: 28 (18%)
- No: 11 (7%)
- NS: 1 (0.7%)

Total: 113

Experiences of English language learning

- School: 67.26%
- University: 15.04%
- English medium ed.: 5.31%
- Informal: 3.54%
- Adult: 3.85%
Learner perceptions of pre-migration English language learning – all groups

Formal learning
- Hours of instruction: limited (except English medium)
- Curriculum: Academic, rather than communicative; demotivating; test-driven
- Literacy: focus on alpha-numerics; orthography, spelling, written grammar exercises, limited reading comprehension (senior levels).

Informal learning
- Self-directed, opportunistic, limited range of contexts

Summary of learner perceptions: English literacy learning

- Learned English literacy foundation skills: orthography, alphabet, number, introductory vocabulary (colours, animals) 99
- Used English literacy skills for language learning only (written exercises & tasks) 97
- Used written English for professional/academic purposes
- Used written English for social purposes 2
- Used written English for professional/academic purposes 0
I still remember clearly during that time that the teacher was so strict they asked all the student to memorise fifty vocabulary every day.

Fifty? Whoa.

In English? English?

In English yes.

English every morning <?><?>

So got to get up early in the morning and to- learn to memorise the spelling.

And did you remember them every day?

Yeah I did but the effect is not that good.

Yeah.

So we learn so hard was because to to uhm ah because we have tests every day the spelling test every day.

Yeah but it’s because we don’t use it after the test we forget.

Discussion: Perceptions of literacy

How has previous language learning equipped learners to deal with the literacies associated with early settlement

What are the implications for AMEP curriculum?
## Participants’ use of English literacy in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Prose</th>
<th>Websites</th>
<th>Digital communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forms (variety of contexts)</td>
<td>literary texts,</td>
<td>Babycare information</td>
<td>email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial contracts &amp; applications</td>
<td>Novels, children’s books</td>
<td>Professional interest</td>
<td>chat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance/business/legal documents</td>
<td>non-fiction</td>
<td>Jobseeking adverts &amp; applications</td>
<td>social networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility invoices &amp; accounts</td>
<td>autobiographies</td>
<td>health information</td>
<td>blogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bank statements</td>
<td>religious texts</td>
<td>trading</td>
<td>workplace data entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical/ethical clearance</td>
<td>Professional books</td>
<td>banking, financial</td>
<td>Financial transactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation, superannuation etc (SB)</td>
<td>Transactional letters</td>
<td>Newspaper sites (global)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Reading & writing in the classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing formal letters</td>
<td>Job applications, adverts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/writing reports</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formatted texts</td>
<td>Sport &amp; recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading narratives</td>
<td>Biographies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading newspaper articles</td>
<td>Health, public transport, housing,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing informal letters</td>
<td>Life experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write recounts</td>
<td>Australian people, places, music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading procedural texts</td>
<td>Driver training,</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some want to learn more about reading & writing

*c02p010*: But my- my- my English not grammar… no… I cannot read very good I cannot write very good that’s why I’m came here… to want to learn more about writing…. and reading… and more maybe grammar..

... and job- related literacy

*c02p012*: Yeah the problem with the- was disappoint like ah when go out to find a job you know then the person ask then you need a- ah reading writing ah all communication skills then uhm <,> knowing- not knowing English that was hard so I didn’t have those skills<>

*c02AR*: Yeah<.>

*c02p012*: So wasn’t getting ah any job so I was getting rejected<!>
c02p012: So I just kept working.<>
<co2AR>: Hm<.>
<co2p012>: And ah no- but now uhm I realise that I can’t just do labour work or<.>
<co2AR>: Hm<.>
<co2p012>: I can’t just keep doing <,> what I’m doing<.> I need to do ah la- improve my English more<.> Grammar and everything<.> Written<.>
<co2AR>: Hm<.> Yeah<.> Writing because I make mistakes in grammar in reading writing in spellings and that...
<co2p012: So I want to improve more so I can then go for better jobs...
<co2p012: So I don’t have to do ah labour work all my life

... about Workplace literacy

<co2p016> ...order I I doing myself coffees cakes and everything yeah. But ahh like paperwork is like uhm hhhmm this my .. my boyfriend like insurances
<Co2AR> Oh
<co2p016> and
<Co2AR> he does all those yeah.
<co2p016> This this what I need improve now I I I ask him be help me with this management ...managing this shop ... why is important to contact the... these companies electricity Telstra ... everything he is ... he is doing. Everything he organise but I I need to be.... shown me
...about differences between spoken & written language

<C05P010>: Oh my God! I was really really really stressful time you know and I asked to colour cutting teacher. I said you know when I’m reading the textbook they are very big...

<C05AR>: Yeah you talked about them.

<C05P010>: and I said when I’m talking with you with my classmate with the people it’s different language. When I’m talking reading the books,<,> the book in the book they use very, very difficult words that is not necessary for a conversation. You know I’m,<,> I’m scary about that. I think that I can’t pass my exam.

about the ‘contract’ of the written word

<co5p007>: Yeah. <,> When- when I ah write long letters trying to explain very specific things.

Hm.

<co5p007>: Yeah I am trying to write everything.

But yeah but maybe if you’re- if you don’t use the correct word in some letter is- the- the meaning is completely different and- and i- and it’s something that is- the people is keeping for a long time.

<co5p007>: But that you are putting on a paper is something that you say and I send the paper and it’s something that you have to- to keep all the time and that’s the importance to write- I think is better,<,> to write well to-
Discussion:

How does the AMEP equip learners for lifelong literacy learning?

Are AMEP learner groups at risk for future “social isolation, unemployment, lack of qualifications, low wages and poor health”

• What more do we need to teach about reading and writing for the workplace, study, etc.
References
