Who, what, how, and why?: Profiles, practices, pedagogies, and self-perceptions of adult literacy practitioners

Robyn Chandler, Robert Tobias, Vivienne Boyd, Julie Cates, Kellie Shanahan, and Cathy Solomon

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Dedication

We dedicate this research to Helen Robinson (d. 23 June 2004), acknowledging her commitment to the idea and practice of an inclusive research network and her work as an adult literacy practitioner, and in recognition of her contribution to and support of this particular project.

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1. Introduction

This study began in the Spring of 2003, when we—the Canterbury Adult Basic Education Research Network (CABERN), an informal cross-sector network of local adult literacy researchers and practitioners—sent out a questionnaire. The questionnaire addressed potential respondents by asking: "Are you a tutor engaged in any aspect of adult literacy?" and the accompanying information sheet explained the main driver behind the research:

> We began this particular project because we felt that, while there is a lot of talk currently on what adult literacy tutors should do, there is actually very little material available on what they do do and why they do it; our project is an opportunity for tutors to tell their own stories. We want to continue the project on beyond this initial survey, and hope that anyone interested in further involvement in the research will let us know. (CABERN, 2003, Appendix 1)

Practitioners were interested, and the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) funding allowed us to extend the initial survey into a larger, exploratory project. We were interested in representing who adult literacy practitioners thought they were, not as they were defined by others.

2. Research aims and objectives

The research took place during a period of great change in the field. As part of the mainstreaming of adult literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand through the advent of the tertiary reforms, the "fragmented literacy sector" identified in 2000 (Johnson, 2000, p. 8) was (and still is) being actively reconstructed into a unified field of knowledge and practice, an endeavour occurring largely within government and its agencies or in response to its requirements.

The "talk" CABERN referred to in the initial information sheet quoted above was largely government discourse such as that signalled in the key policy statement of 2001, *More Than Words: The New Zealand adult literacy strategy. Kei Tua Atu I te Kupu: Te mahere rautaki whiringa ako o Aotearoa* (New Zealand Office of the Minister of Education, & Walker, 2001). The adult literacy strategy prioritised capability building among the adult literacy practitioner workforce, noting a necessary connection between increasing the professionalism, training, and support of tutors across the sector and improved learner outcomes.

But what was the baseline? "Real" practitioners were largely absent from *More Than Words*, and while a welcome flurry of adult literacy research and publication has occured since 2001 (e.g., Benseman, 2002; Benseman & Tobias, 2003; Doyle, Chandler, & Young, unpublished), until recently, little of this has revealed the adult literacy workforce. Much of the information we do have on practitioners has been focused on classroom practice or professional development and its impacts. In 2003, John Benseman was able to write that "Tutors are the cornerstones of the educational process and yet we still know very little about the people who teach in adult literacy programmes" (p. 9).

This project, then, was designed to fill a gap in knowledge. We anticipated that the project's greatest strategic value in TLRI terms would be in its contribution to understanding the processes of teaching and learning in an underresearched field. We also felt it would be useful for discourse about practitioners—whether educational or political—to be grounded in evidence as researched by the nascent profession itself. Briefly we were interested in such things as the following: Who are adult literacy practitioners? What do they do? How and why do they do it? Would they like to do things differently, and if so what differences would they like to see?

Our research aims, in short, were to:

1. understand more about the backgrounds, characteristics, motivations, and training of adult literacy practitioners
2. understand more about the nature of their literacy practices in the various contexts
3. understand more about their aspirations, their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their practices and of the contexts within which they work

4. explore the impact of such factors as class, gender and cultural background on the work of literacy practitioners
5. contribute to the building of relevant research capacities in the field.

3. Research design

The CABERN project is a "basic interpretive and descriptive qualitative study" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6), its central concern to identify—and delineate the experiences of—self-defined adult literacy practitioners. The theoretical positioning of the researcher has been identified as a key area to cover when "aiming for credibility as generic qualitative research" (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). In CABERN's case, the deliberately generic approach of the study has a pragmatic connection with the widely varying positions of the team members, allowing a diverse group to work together on the same project.

Although the majority of team members were practitioners and the research process encouraged self-reflection, the study was not primarily practice-oriented as is often expected of practitioner research. We would argue that there are other important approaches to research undertaken by practitioners, particularly in the context of professional change such as we found ourselves. Ivor Goodson (1999) has written that:

> ...we need to look at the full context in which teacher's [sic] practice is negotiated, not just at interaction and implementation within the classroom. If we stay with the focus on practice then our collaborative research is inevitably going to largely involve the implementation of initiatives which are generated elsewhere. That in itself is a form of political quietism.

By 2003 in Aotearoa New Zealand, a national qualification (ALEQ) was in development, a quality assurance standard (ALQM) in draft, and a professional body (ALPA) had just been established, all markers of the government engagement in "professionalisation":

> a direct attempt to (a) use education or training to improve the quality of practice, (b) standardize professional responses, (c) better define a collection of persons as representing a field of endeavor, and (d) enhance communication within that field. (Shanahan, Meehan, & Mogge, 1994)

The timing of the CABERN survey, at this early stage in the professionalisation process, meant that practitioners might participate who would not necessarily "fit" within fully developed formulations of literacy practitioners and their practice, but who nonetheless understood themselves as belonging to this "collection of persons". Rather than "better define" practitioners in an exclusive sense, the study was designed to present the range of their nonstandardised views on their "profession" and associated professionalism:

> Practitioner A: I am not a tutor. I am a trained teacher with advanced specialised training.

> Practitioner B: I like the fact that it's a kind of line of work you can go into without necessarily being highly qualified and an expert at everything.

Participants

The survey was intended to reach as many practitioners as possible in as many different contexts as possible, including those currently located outside of existing networks.

The questionnaire was sent out to CABERN's membership which included individuals (organisations could not join) from the local tertiary education institutions, or TEIs (Christchurch College of Education, University of Canterbury, Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology), schools involved in adult literacy provision (Linwood College, Hagley Community College), local private training establishments, the Christchurch City Council, He Oranga Pounamu (mandated by Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu to develop health and social services for Māori in the Ngai Tahu rohe), the Adult Reading Assistance Scheme (local member scheme—poupou—of Literacy Aotearoa), postgraduate students, a number of independent practitioners and researchers, and that also had links through its members with Literacy Aotearoa and the Adult Literacy Practitioners' Association (ALPA).

Only one questionnaire respondent was from outside Christchurch, so we decided to focus on the local population. Using the questionnaire results, the CABERN directory of adult literacy providers (Boyd et al., 2002) and the Christchurch Library's community database, as well as approaching Teachers of Promise (TOP) providers and other organisations, we initially estimated that, as at February 2004, there were 237 tutors involved in adult literacy in Christchurch, 197 of whom were currently practising. On this basis, our total 57 participants comprised almost a quarter of all tutors and 29 percent of those currently practising. In terms of workplaces, however, we had quickly discovered new locations for self-identified practitioners (such as the University of Canterbury) and we had not originally counted English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutors (five of whom chose to become involved at later stages in the project). We did not determine the extent of informal involvement such as that often occurring in Māori organisations or on marae. Similarly, our survey did not include Te Reo Māori tutors. These factors and others, the most important of which being that our population was indeterminate by design, and our sample self-determined, mean that we are unable to be precise in establishing just how representative our sample was. Where other studies are available, however, similar trends can be discerned in a number of aspects (see following sections[1]), leading us to believe that with a few important provisos, our study produced a "snapshot" of those who identified as adult literacy practitioners in Christchurch in 2003–2004. What can be said from our rough attempt to determine the local population of practitioners is that the community sector was clearly underrepresented in our survey (24.56 percent of study participants practised in the community

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[1]   The most relevant study here is Benseman, Sutton, and Lander (2006). The authors drew on data collected by three national organisations—Literacy Aotearoa, ESOL Home Tutor Scheme, and MClass—and supplemented this with material collected in the course of the Adult Literacy Achievement Framework (ALAF) trials, from a 2002 survey of bridging programmes, and by ALPA (p. 28).

versus 82 percent of the population as estimated, and this latter percentage would be even greater if we had added in the Community ESOL tutors).

Research partnerships and collaborative process

CABERN entered the TLRI process as a pre-existing research partnership, formed in March 2000 as an informal local network of tutors, researchers, and other practitioners interested in adult literacy and coming from a wide variety of backgrounds and workplaces. The network functioned via a mailing list and a series of regular meetings.

Previous CABERN projects were undertaken by those who were able to participate, in effect a core subgroup within the larger network (Boyd & Canterbury Adult Basic Education Research Network, 2002; Boyd et al., 2002). The TLRI funding, however, required a legal entity with which to contract. Several of us were working within TEIs and it was suggested we could umbrella the project under an institution. This was in some ways an attractive option, allowing access to resources (the TLRI explicitly excluded equipment from its funding criteria), expertise, support, credibility, and time allocation as part of a job. To ally ourselves with an institution, however, would compromise CABERN's status as an independent network and threatened to reinstitute the imbalance between practitioners and researchers that CABERN was founded in part to reject. The independence was precious and the product of constant tensions and negotiations; we all had affiliations to various institutions, philosophies, theories, and practices—within a fragmented field, it was paramount to maintain the group. We all constantly negotiated conflicts of interest. Our diversity was our strength, our raison d'être in many ways, but also our weakness.

The decision was made to formalise the network, and at the end of 2003 CABERN became an incorporated society. The move from an informal to formal group, a noninstitutionally affiliated group dealing with a formal structure, brought about its own challenges. The original intention was to have a research subgroup reporting back to the wider network. Perhaps inevitably, we found the wider group got smaller. Most aspects of the project were undertaken within the core project team: project management, project support, design, and data collection, analysis, and writing up. Where work needed to be completed outside the team, our principle and process was to keep the work within the sector as much as possible; for example, transcription of interviews was carried out by a business which provided literacy and numeracy tuition as part of their training arm (and whose literacy and numeracy tutor happened to be a participant in the research); one of the focus group facilitators was a committee member for a community literacy organisation; one interviewer had recently finished her Master's thesis, her topic in the adult literacy area. The research subgroup undertook different tasks according to interest, experience, and availability. For one researcher, for example, the focus on practice of the journal was especially attractive, in that it offered both the opportunity for self-reflection, and demonstrating to others the realities of working in adult literacy.

Research subgroup meetings and email communications formed an important part of the collaborative process, being the spaces where methods were discussed, tools designed and refined, and findings and research strategies considered. Findings from the initial questionnaire were fed back to all participants and an update and feedback session on preliminary findings was also held (Appendix 2).

Ethical considerations

Not being allied with an institution meant we had to develop our own ethics procedures and the associated documentation. Information sheets were provided to all participants prior to their involvement and consent forms were collected. No names have been used in the report but we were very mindful throughout the research process that we knew the identity of the participants and needed to be scrupulous with setting and maintaining boundaries. One of the project team, for example, was working for Skill NZ at the time and therefore restricted her involvement to activities not involving participants or their information. Although our policy was to allocate research roles that would not put people into inappropriate positions, for example an employer interviewing their employees, in a local survey anonymity cannot be guaranteed and some team members had to personally negotiate issues regarding confidentiality on an ongoing basis.

Data collection tools

Questionnaire

The project began with a brief questionnaire (Appendix 3) designed by the core team and finalised after feedback from members of the wider group. The questionnaire was designed to gather data on demographic details, nature of employment, length of involvement in the field, and training. Respondents were also asked to rank order a series of factors relating to motivation for their entry into the field. An empty item was included here to allow respondents to identify their own priority factors. An open question designed to collect information on respondents' definition of "literacy" used the government definition from *More Than Words* as a prompt.

The final version was distributed through the CABERN networks by email, post, and person, and was also available as a Web survey.

Focus groups

Four focus groups were scheduled at various locations and times intended to be accessible to practitioners.

The key questions for discussion were:

1. What keeps you going as an adult literacy tutor?
2. The positives and negatives of adult literacy work.
3. What/how do you teach and where does the mandate for what/how you teach come from?
4. What are the age, gender, background, culture factors for people with whom you work and how do you go about your work with people of a different age, gender, background, and culture to your own?

Invitations to attend a focus group were emailed or posted to questionnaire respondents who had indicated their interest in continuing involvement in the research and individuals and organisations identified in the baseline scoping exercise.

Potential participants were then sent information about the focus group purpose and process (Appendix 4). Participants who had not filled in the questionnaire were asked to provide background information. Each focus group was taped and notes taken by a note-taker. The facilitators were also asked to briefly document their reflections following the focus group session (Appendix 5).

Interviews

1. In-depth semistructured interviews (see Appendix 6) were designed to collect detailed information relevant to our research aims that could be compared to other data already collected and yet to be collected (see next section). There were three main areas:

1. "You (the interviewee) and your story as an adult literacy practitioner", where interviewers were asked to encourage interviewees to construct their own narrative while also ensuring certain factors (such as entry into the field, training and experience, relationship to career and life goals, and gender, culture, and socioeconomic factors) were investigated.
2. "Your conception of adult literacy". For the purposes of comparison, this section again used the government definition as a prompt.
3. "You and your practice". This section used an adaptation of the Critical Incident technique (Brookfield, c. 1995) to structure reflection on recent practice.

Potential interviewees were identified from those who had already participated in earlier stages of the research and indicated their interest for continuing involvement and those identified in the baseline survey who had expressed interest but not yet been involved.

Potential interviewees were then sent information about the interview purpose and process. New participants were asked to provide background information. The interviews were recorded (Appendix 7) and interviewers took notes.

Practice journals

The practice journal (see Appendix 9) was a combination logbook—using a template to document the activities engaged in by the participants—and reflective journal, that used the Critical Incident

technique already introduced in the interview. The journal-keepers were interviewees who had expressed interest in documenting their practice, and they did so for a fortnight. As we were interested in what tutors actually did, they were asked to include all activities, not just those in the classroom—including staff meetings and planning, for example.

Evaluation

In order to evaluate the extent to which our study contributed to building capacity and capability, members of the project team, and a small group of other participants, were surveyed by phone and email (Appendix 8).

4. Findings

As already indicated, the project had five aims. In the first place, we wanted to understand more about the backgrounds, characteristics, motivations, and training of adult literacy practitioners. Secondly, we wanted to understand more about the nature of adult literacy practices and how practitioners perceived these practices in the various contexts in which they worked. Thirdly, we wanted to understand more about practitioners' aspirations, their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their practice, and of the contexts within which they work. Fourthly, in the course of our investigations we hoped to explore the impact of such factors as class, gender, and cultural background on the work of literacy practitioners. Finally, since it was anticipated that practitioners would be involved at all stages of the study, we hoped that the project would contribute to building relevant research capacities in the field. The findings in relation to this aim are discussed in a later chapter (see "Contribution of project to building capabilities and capacities in the field of adult literacy").

Overall, we had little success with our fourth aim of exploring the impact of such factors as class, gender, and cultural background on the work of literacy practitioners. Our other aims, however, were achieved and this section of the report discusses the findings of the study in relation to each of these other aims. It draws mainly on data from the questionnaire survey undertaken in 2003 and from the focus groups, interviews, and practice journals completed in 2004 (Sections 1–3 below).

1.   Background, characteristics, motivation, and training of adult literacy practitioners

In the first place, as stated above, we wanted to understand more about the gender, ethnicity, age, length of involvement, motivation, and training of adult literacy practitioners in the region. As participants entered the study, we collected demographic and career data. For greater detail, we drew on data from the original survey and the interviews with practitioners.

Gender, ethnicity, and age of practitioners

Gender

The overwhelming majority of practitioners (91 percent) were women. This finding is in keeping with Benseman, Sutton, and Lander's national study (Benseman et al., 2006, p. 30).

Ethnicity

Ethnically or culturally the vast majority of practitioners identified themselves as Pākehā/European or "New Zealander". The 2003 national study also found the (adult) literacy, numeracy, and language (LNL) workforce to be predominantly Pākehā or European (Benseman et al., 2006, p. 30). In Christchurch, 76 percent identified themselves as Pākehā/European, 7 percent as "New Zealander", 2 percent as Māori and, 2 percent as Māori/Pākehā. Two percent did not state their ethnicity, while the remaining 11 percent identified themselves as Dutch, English, Filipino, and Irish.

As compared with the Māori population of Christchurch at the 2001 Census, Māori seem to have been significantly underrepresented among adult literacy practitioners. Moreover, there were no practitioners who identified themselves as Pasifika.

Figure 1 **Ethnicity data**

Rough comparison Christchurch City 2001 and survey data 2003-4
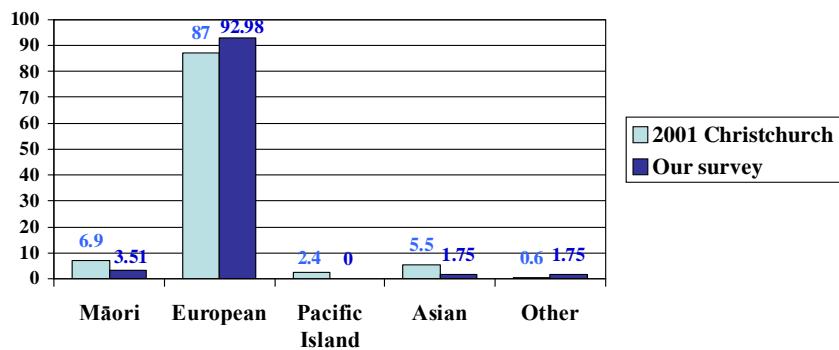
Age

The largest age group was 50 to 59 years of age (44 percent). Seventy-nine percent of practitioners were over 40 (in the ALAF trials this proportion was 65 percent (Benseman et al., 2006, p. 31)). Twelve percent were in the 30–39-year age group, 21 percent were 40–49, 12 percent were 60–69, and 2 percent were 70 and older (one participant). None was younger than 30.

The five men in the survey were aged between 40 and 59. Nine percent of practitioners did not state their age.

Length of involvement in adult literacy

Fourteen percent had been involved for less than one year and 9 percent had been involved for 15 years or more. The median period of involvement was between two and five years (23 percent of the total), while 16 percent had been involved for between one and two years and 35 percent for

between six and 14 years. The proportions compare with the ALAF trials sample as follows: approximately 30 percent had less than two years' experience compared to approximately a quarter of the ALAF sample, 44 percent had been working for over six years compared to about a third, and 2 percent did not respond compared to 20 percent (Sutton, 2004, p. 35).

Motivation

Questionnaire: reasons for entry into the field

Questionnaire respondents were asked to rank order a series of options according to their importance as reasons for the practitioner's entry into adult literacy work (1 = most important). An option for "other" was included so respondents could describe and rank their own reasons.

The four most commonly ranked reasons were: "I enjoy working with adults" (28 respondents, average ranking of 2.25); "It was/is something worthwhile which I can do" (26 respondents, average ranking of 2.65); "I enjoy working with young adults" (24 respondents, average ranking of 2.75); and "Adult literacy fascinates me" (20 respondents, average ranking of 2.85).

Fourteen respondents chose "I needed a job and a position in this field was offered to me", with an average ranking of 3.64. Twelve respondents chose "I wanted to move from teaching children to teaching adults", with an average ranking of 3.25. Ten respondents chose "By chance", with an average ranking of 4.4, and nine chose "The part-time nature of the job", with an average ranking of 3.66. Ten repondents also listed other reasons; these included two practitioners who entered the field due to family members with literacy needs and two with an interest in specific learning disabilities. Most comments glossed other rankings, for example: a practitioner who had chosen "chance" wrote that:

> Over a year ago I went to a public meeting. I had no idea that that one meeting would change my life and I would be where I am today. But the manager of Christchurch Supergrans saw in me what I did not. She knew that the position that I hold now, would be perfect for me. I must say that this lady is right.

Another explained that: "I am an adult who needed extensive tutoring to help me gain confidence and ability in academics."

The following sections draw on the interview data to outline some of the key themes. The interviews opened with a question focused on practitioners' reasons for their involvement in adult literacy. Interviewees responded in a variety of ways and at a number of different levels and none of the interviewees attributed their involvement to a single factor.

Love of reading

Several people saw their own personal love of reading as leading them into adult literacy work. One interviewee said that she had become involved almost by chance. However, she goes on to say that she has always loved reading. In this respect she sees herself as:

> …one of the lucky ones, English has always been my thing … that's how I scraped through Bursary, on my English marks… I love teaching … reading and language … and things like that.

Other interviewees also expressed a love of reading. One expressed it in the following terms:

> I just love to read all the time…. I love books and I just love the thrill of reading and what words do, and beautiful phrases and similes and metaphors and that, and the magic that they produce I just love, and I can't imagine not having that in my life.

And others said:

> …. I love reading. As a child I could read before I went to school … and then I used to be such an obsessional reader… So I really liked reading, and … it sort of really upset me that other people I knew at school, or had been to school with, they couldn't read.

> I enjoy reading myself. I'd hate to not be a reader … so I thought it's not a bad way to help people.

Love of languages

Some people saw their involvement in adult literacy work as arising out of their love of languages. One interviewee said that he had always had a love of languages—at least from his intermediate school years when his interest in words and their origins led him to develop his own personal dictionary or notebook—a practice he maintains to this day:

> When I taught at secondary schools they ... laughed at me because I always had the reference dictionary from the library under my arm. At university I studied Latin and Greek… I'm interested in the origin of language … and [now] I'm also studying Hebrew.

Love of learning

Some people saw their involvement in adult literacy work as arising out of their love of learning:

... just like a ... thirst for learning ... for knowledge and finding out things ... and always reading and sort of thinking about things. Yeah, it's that whole literacy for the family.

One of the practitioners said that what he enjoys about adult literacy is the fact that it is rich in the unexpected and the breadth of learning:

> That's what literacy is about. It's about ... participating in life I think. That's what I enjoy about it because you can prepare, but you can't prepare, you know. So from one day to the next you don't know what's coming up. And that's what I like about it, really.

Love of working with and/or helping other people

Some interviewees saw their involvement in adult literacy work as arising out of their love of working with or helping other people:

> It's the love of working with people I think ... and helping them along with whatever they want to learn really. So that was my main motivation and still is. It's something that I really wanted to do.

> ...it's the love of working with people I think ... and helping them along with whatever they want to learn really. So that was my main motivation and still is.

> …there's kind of that desire to work with people on their learning… But to not actually be a (traditional) teacher…

Wish to do something about a social problem

Some practitioners said they became involved in adult literacy work in order to do something about a social problem which they saw as important or serious:

> For many years I've been concerned at the number of Māori men in prison and I thought if I could help them to read and write, maybe they wouldn't end up in prison…

> …I'm really quite passionate about empowering people and I think that these skills are so important to them being empowered.

Interest in other cultures and a wish to get to know people from other cultures

Some people said that they became involved in adult literacy work partly as a consequence of their interest in other cultures:

I really came into it through ESOL… At that time a lot of Somali people ... first came into Christchurch, and I saw these people you know with a little piece of Africa here, and I thought, how can I get to know these people?

Influences of family and particularly parents

Some practitioners attributed their involvement in adult literacy work to the influence of family and particularly their parents and caregivers. In some cases this was seen as influencing them to become involved in education or as **teachers in general**:

> My family has a long tradition of involvement in education. In particular my father influenced me to become a teacher.

> ...my mother was a teacher. My father had big ambitions for all his daughters to be teachers but none of us became teachers—except one. He succeeded with one… No ... I wouldn't say I have any particular background.

In other cases the influence was more **specifically** focused on their involvement in **adult literacy**:

> I think just my family background and discussions with my mum sort of helped me ... my mum is very involved in the field of adult learning so it was kind of [natural]. I've just had so many discussions with her in the past and ... all the time about the issues, especially literacy… It all just ... really inspiring.

Finally, there were other cases where the influence was **both general and specific**:

> I come from a family who have a background of teaching. My father was the Director of the Reefton School of Mines, and part of his duty was to teach miners for the certificates they needed, and that really also involved literacy because many of them had very little schooling. It involved teaching from a very basic level, right up to university level… I also have an older sister who's a teacher. I vowed and declared I'd never become a teacher, but that's what happened. I trained as a secondary teacher, and I enjoyed my first year's teaching.

Personal experience of reading difficulties or unhappiness at school as a young person

Some people saw their involvement in adult literacy work as arising out of their own personal experiences of failure and their negative experiences at school:

> I was never a very good reader myself…

> The other thing ... is the fact that I never particularly enjoyed school myself. I think that's probably why I have that sort of **abhorrence** of really controlling teachers.

Reading difficulties in one's own family

Some practitioners attributed their involvement in adult literacy work to their direct experience of living with someone in their family who had reading difficulties. In some cases this was a **parent**:

> My mother left school at Standard Five and went straight into a workroom, and I feel she always regretted that she didn't have more schooling because she struggled… She always had a spelling book beside her. She wanted to be very correct, but she didn't trust her own judgement ... it was a struggle.

For others it was a sibling or husband or wife or a member of their partner's family who had difficulties:

> I had a sister who struggled with her reading… I thought it's not a bad way to help people.

> ...my older sister who is, I would say, a slower learner … I think that there was a feeling of she was going to be my first student.

> I had always been interested in how people learn and hence perhaps my background in psychology… [However] I married into a family that has a lot of learning disabilities in it, specific learning difficulties in it, and so of course I got more and more interested.

> ...my first husband couldn't really read and write when I knew him. He used to get me to read a book and then tell him what was in it...

And for others it was a **child or children of their own** who had difficulties:

> ...after my children were born I helped them with their English and I sort of realised that this is what I enjoyed doing ... then my third son had severe disability problems, dyslexia, learning difficulties. So I got … very interested then, in how to help him and I started to look into people who need help with literacy, and then I went to ARAS and I started to meet people who were really intelligent but who weren't reading, and it really interested me because this was also similar to my son, you know. I thought, 'Hell, you know, I could see he's bright, very highly intelligent but he's just not reading and the school was saying something different.' That was the beginning of it, yeah.

> ...when my own children started to go through the educational system, I became aware that the three of them were very different. I became, I guess, aware that one size doesn't fit all.

Experience as a migrant

Several interviewees said that it was their own experience as immigrants that had led them to become involved in adult literacy and particularly in ESOL work. They felt that they could identify with other people because they could understand what they were going through:

> ...because I'm a migrant I can relate and ... feel how migrants have tried to survive and have tried to struggle to keep their identity. I wanted [them to keep] their identity but [also to be able] to stand up and say, 'Hey, I can speak English and I can understand you.' So that was how I felt when I got involved and [that is how I feel today].

> I think I can understand them very well because I know where they come from, and if they struggle with the language or with the culture, I've experienced it first hand too. So sometimes you can use it as an excuse of course, but at least I can ... explain language to them ... and I can say to them, 'Well this is the rule ... this is how it works...'

Experience of teaching or working with young people struggling with literacy-related difficulties

Some practitioners said they became involved after becoming aware of the reading difficulties faced by many young people. As we have already seen, this happened for one person when she became involved with her own children. For another it happened when she became chairperson at her daughter's school:

> I became interested in adult literacy ... when I was Chairman of the Board of Trustees … at my daughter's primary school. We did a bit of research on the kids that were having trouble reading. And what we found was that most of their parents had trouble reading too. After that I was talking to a friend who was a trained teacher and she did voluntary work with ARAS and she said to me, 'Why don't you go? If you feel like helping out and making a difference then why don't you try that and go along to ARAS?'

Another respondent who was a secondary school teacher whose main teaching subject was French said that she became aware of literacy issues when she was called on to teach fifth form kids who were struggling to achieve anything academically:

> I was teaching French ... I had some of the top classes. [However] I [also] had [some of] the lower … Fifth Form English classes... They all wanted to sit School Certificate [but] weren't able to do so. They would ask me why they weren't doing the same work as the higher classes, and in the end I had boys of 15 weeping on my shoulder because they couldn't do anything. So I got out of teaching … and I thought I'd better find out more about that. I was already ... doing a social work course, so I got a job and I qualified in social work. And after I married I picked up again my skill at music teaching, and then I saw this SPELD course advertised. So I did that, but it was mainly directed towards small children sevens, eights, nine to eleven and I wasn't working with these children. I found that I really preferred the older children who were at secondary school, and the adults who came along because these people were more motivated.

Changes in career and/or personal circumstances

Some respondents were employed as adult literacy practitioners, while others were involved as volunteers and were not paid for their work. Changes in personal circumstances seem to have had an influence on practitioners in both situations.

For some people, voluntary work in adult literacy had led to paid employment and increasing levels of involvement:

> Voluntary work led to an offer of a part-time (10 hours a week) paid job as a tutorial assistant at another agency and that led on to a full-time job.

Others became involved in voluntary adult literacy when they retired:

> I've been teaching adults for the last 35–40 years as a Nurse Educator Administrator, but when I retired I thought, 'Well I could do something with adults.' I saw an advertisement for training ... so I rang up and enquired and started... It's something I can do in my spare time... I've got quite involved. …as I say, I have always been teaching adults, and I enjoy working with adults [but literacy work was something new when I retired].

In the case of those in employment as adult literacy practitioners, one interviewee became involved in ESOL following a long career in primary school teaching leading eventually to burnout and a change of direction:

> …I was a primary school teacher, and after 25 years of teaching and doing a lot with literacy because I taught mainly young children, I decided that the time was right for me to take a break, having suffered from burnout. So I then did some voluntary work, and helped in ESOL classes at the polytech. Then from there became a home tutor, where I was helping new migrants who didn't have much literacy in English. Then I was asked to come and work for the home tutors, and so I started working as a trainer, teaching adults how to teach English to new migrants. From there, I did a diploma in TESOL (Teaching English to

Speakers of Other Languages) and now I'm the principal co-ordinator of the scheme here in Christchurch.

Others became involved following **family illness**:

> I really came into it through ESOL first, and how I got into that was, I used to work in the library, but anyway my oldest daughter got very sick and I had to leave work. So I was … thinking about a new career move...

> …At the time [I first heard about literacy problems] I wasn't working because ... [my daughter] actually had leukaemia at the time, and my husband had just passed away… [Following a friend's suggestion] I went along to ARAS, did their course and did some voluntary tutoring which I loved, and then saw a job for [an adult literacy tutor] advertised and I thought, 'Oh well I could get paid for this maybe', and I went along and did a bit of tutoring for them.

> When I left school I trained as a primary teacher … and I've always worked in some way with children and reading and writing and speaking … got into the way of helping children who had reading problems. [Eventually because of family illness I took a job as a tutor in an employment programme.] ...then after five years I applied for a job as a [literacy] tutor at a newly opening public programme, got a job as a tutor, and then after a year ... became a co-ordinator. I'm now moving out of administration back into tutoring literacy with adults.

One interviewee emphasised the continuity between her previous work as a primary school teacher and her work in adult literacy:

> I went back to teaching when my youngest son went to Intermediate; I did quite a lot of part-time work for a start, and as is the nature of part-time work, you get landed with a lot of classes who are not easy. And then I had another period of chopping and changing schools. And then I saw an advertisement for training leading to a diploma and a position working with students with learning difficulties in a private sector centre. I work largely with teenagers and adults, I work quite a lot with university students, polytech students and some business people who want to do further training.

Another person said they became involved in adult literacy **after being made redundant**:

> …about eight years ago, after being made redundant … I was looking around for alternative work and spotted [an advertisement for an adult literacy job]. The idea of that type of work and the short hours ... really suited me.

Stimulated by personal studies as an adult

Some people saw their involvement in adult literacy work as arising in part out of their **own experiences as adult students**. One person explains this as arising because she found the experience—a long hard struggle over many years—so rewarding in the end that she became involved in helping other adults educationally:

> [I did my 7th Form English and then] it took me 11½ years but I did a BA in English and graduated two years ago. So that was, once again, a continuation of the love of literature, the love of words. I didn't know if I could do it. I lived from paper to paper, but your

confidence builds as you do it, and I was doing a full-time job at the same time. So it was burning the midnight oil, doing assignments at 5 am in the morning and reading morning, noon and night and lunchtime and carrying your books to work and all of that, but paper by paper, I got it and it was such a rewarding experience.

Another interviewee said that her involvement arose out of a **research project** she did at varsity.

[I had no previous relevant work experience but] … I knew about ARAS because for one of my adult education papers I had to do a research project … [which involved finding out all the places in Christchurch that had all kinds of programmes and ringing them up and finding out their fees and how many people were teaching and what they taught and all that sort of thing … And I interviewed … and really enjoyed hearing about what she was doing and thought to myself, 'Well when I'm free I will go back and do that.' So I rang up and waited for the next course and got accepted ... and then did the three months tutor training and started being a tutor over a year ago.

For another person:

...It kind of all started when I decided to go back to university to finish my degree, I [did a] paper on Adult Learning ... and that got me **really interested in ... adult learning**… So that's what inspired me about working with adults.

Personal contacts with an adult literacy tutor or co-ordinator

Some practitioners became involved in adult literacy partly as a consequence of **informal personal contacts** with others who were involved:

[As a migrant] I first heard about the ESOL Home Tutor Scheme from a friend—in fact from the mother of my daughter's best friend. I then became involved with the scheme as a tutor.

I heard about it [the adult literacy tutor position] through my mum, and just sort of started there.

The woman who used to run a programme was a friend of mine and she asked me if I would be interested in being a tutorial assistant. [This led to a part-time job.]

After [being involved with some research on reading difficulties at my daughter's school] … I was talking to a friend who was a trained teacher and she did voluntary work with ARAS and she said to me, 'Why don't you go? If you feel like helping out and making a difference then why don't you try that and go along to ARAS?'

Flexibility and part-time nature of much adult literacy work suited some people

Some practitioners were attracted into adult literacy work at least partly because of the flexibility and part-time nature of much of the work. One participant said:

…the idea of that type of work and the short hours etc., etc., really suited me.

> I ... was still working on my degree ... a four-hour-a-week part-time position [as a tutor in an adult literacy programme] came up and this was great… [Because I wanted to look after my small children] I wasn't looking for a full-time job.

> I started doing 10 hours, just helping people in vocational settings and I'm still doing that today ... and I like the part-time nature of the work. It allows me time to spend with my family and do my other teaching.

Chance

Finally, chance played a part for some people. Some saw their involvement in adult literacy work as partly fortuitous. They had stumbled into their adult literacy involvement. Comments included the following:

> I suppose I kind of drifted into it but…

> I fell into it accidentally, relieving for [a colleague] in tutoring this course. …Before that I was a primary teacher.

> I saw an ad ... it just looked interesting.

Training for adult literacy practice

All participants entering the study were asked: "What training have you had that is relevant to your current tutoring position?" Responses for all practitioners can be accessed in Appendix 10. The most common responses are summarised here alongside the 2003 ALPA survey results for comparison (Benseman et al., 2006). Fifty-three percent held a compulsory sector teaching qualification (this compares to 45 percent in the 2003 ALPA survey) and 30 percent percent had a qualification in adult teaching or had completed some study in this area (37 percent in the ALPA survey held a qualification in adult teaching). A quarter of participants had training in or held an ESOL qualification (under 6 percent qualified in the ALPA survey); 21 percent had an adult literacy teaching qualification or had studied in the area (just over half the ALPA respondents); and 21 percent were trained or qualified in the areas of Specific Learning Disabilities (6 percent of ALPA respondents had completed SPELD training). A further 21 percent cited their teaching experience (compulsory or adult sector). Twenty-six percent held an undergraduate qualification and 16 percent either held a postgraduate qualification or had done some study toward one (approximately half of ALPA respondents held university degrees).

A more detailed picture was available through the interview data. Interviewees were asked how they had learnt their adult literacy practice. The value placed on formal initial teacher training, other forms of training for adult literacy practitioners, and on-the job experience varied widely. Many interviewees said that much of their learning had been on the job. However, this on-the-job learning was frequently complemented by nonformal learning, formal training, and a wide range of experiences in their families and in other work and voluntary situations. A number of

interviewees said that they had trained as primary teachers and a number had trained as adult literacy tutors through ARAS.

The following summaries provide a picture of the variety of learning and training received by interviewees:

- No formal training, attended 3-month course for volunteers—also did an adult education paper as part of her BA.
- Trained as primary school teacher, worked as a volunteer, completed diploma of TESOL.
- Volunteered as a home tutor, completed postgraduate diploma in TESOL. Feels disadvantaged because she doesn't come from a teaching background. Because of this she states: "I'd had to make it up or learn it as I went along."
- Has background in psychology—worked in psychiatric hospitals. Internal training programme in place where interviewee works.
- Did internal training with ARAS where interviewee initially trained. Has TESOL certificate.
- Has "been involved for many years … was trained as an adult literacy tutor in the 1970s [and] has lots of experience".
- Her "initial teacher training in the Philippines was important" to her. There she learnt to work with all age groups. Her experiences as an immigrant taught her a lot about working with other migrants.
- She "learned about the job as I went along". Her "family, and specially my mum have been very influential, with frequent conversations and discussions". From family had "gained a passion and thirst for learning [and] also empathy for others". —"I think having empathy with people and not wanting to impose. I think that that's a really important skill to have with adult learners, to find out where they're at, where they want to go." She feels that failure or unhappiness in initial schooling may help some practitioners to empathise with people struggling.
- Other than initial training as a volunteer tutor, "I've had no training, it's all been on the job." Previously employed for about six years as a receptionist at a polytechnic, where she had "lots of experience in working with [a variety of] different people"—"I had a lot of experience with people [including] people with all sorts of disabilities, as well as working with second language people—I'd had a lot of experience working with people and that's what has pulled me through my inexperience in the lack of curriculum knowledge. And so sort of seeing where somebody might be needing assistance, not actually knowing what to do, but having an instinct about what would…"
- "On the job, thrown in the deep end"—had previously worked as a primary school teacher and received primary teacher training, currently studying for Graduate Diploma in Literacy Education through Massey.
- Did internal training programme for volunteer tutors run by ARAS, "then, yes. That was the start."

- Started national literacy training programme provided by Literacy Aotearoa but did not complete. Did the internal training programme with ARAS—has also worked as a nursing educator for 35–40 years. While completing PhD, helped foreign students with their English.
- On the job—"I have to say that I've learnt the most at the coalface." "Formally, I've done a Certificate in Adult Teaching at the College of Education." Has also had training in other related fields, e.g. counselling—"I did quite a lot of counselling courses over the years that I was first here because I believe it should be dealt with holistically... In my experience once you start dealing with reading and writing and maths problems, then other things start to surface."
- Has had formal training at the centre where she works. It has a programme to train their tutors—"They work with children, young people and adults with specific learning difficulties. They're in the process of redefining their qualifications at the moment, going through NZQA." Important informal learning going back many years from prior contact with young people including her own young children, each of whom was very different. She says that formal training has reinforced her belief in "the importance of trying to understand the specific difficulties experienced by people and the ways in which these impact on their lives, and then designing programmes to address these difficulties".
- Trained as a teacher in the Netherlands. However, most important learning had been on the job. Previously worked at an alternative high school where he dealt with kids from very different backgrounds—"We worked in groups all the time ... we didn't have individual programmes ... [our] programmes were for groups of five students within a 25-group setting. So you really had to be on the ball as to how all the groups were working. They were working on the same topic but were doing different things. So that's where you learn a lot about how to work with different backgrounds, different levels and different needs all the time… It was good, you know, I've learnt all the tricks I know now I think. Most of the tricks I learned there. Because you had to deal with kids on the spot… Yeah, a bit of a challenge, but hard work. Yeah, but I mean you learn a lot about yourself as well … you were thrown in the deep end, but we worked in a team as well… And that's the same here. So I've [done] literacy [work] from one to one, to small groups and to bigger groups. That's basically one of the things I have done over the years because the organisation I was working for worked one on one, you know, when I started off."

2. Adult literacy practice

As noted above, we wanted to understand more about the nature of adult literacy practices as they were perceived by practitioners in the various contexts in which they worked.

Following a brief description of the contexts within which the practitioners in our study worked, this section describes in some detail adult literacy practitioners' perceptions of their learners and the nature of the tasks which they perform. It also provides a detailed description and analysis of

adult literacy practice together with descriptions and reflections by practitioners on selected teaching sessions and some reflections on adult literacy as paid and unpaid work.

For this purpose we have drawn on data from the survey as well as from the practice journals, focus groups, and interviews.

Contexts of adult literacy practice

As participants entered the research, data were collected on the kinds of workplaces, types of involvement, and the types of employment of the adult literacy practitioners. (Percentages have been rounded.)

Workplaces

Almost a third of the practitioners worked in private training establishments (PTEs). Twenty-eight percent of PTEs were school-based, 9 percent of the total. Seventeen percent of PTEs were marae-based, 5 percent of the total. Nearly a quarter of the practitioners worked in the community (nearly 29 percent of whom worked in ESOL). Fourteen percent of the practitioners worked in TEIs, and another 14 percent for specialist adult and child literacy providers. One respondent worked in a corrections facility. Nine percent combined more than one workplace type. Nineteen percent did not state their workplace.

Types of engagement

Eighty-one percent engaged in one-to-one tutoring, 56 percent in group work, 34 percent in literacy within the context of another subject, 12 percent in workplace literacy, 10 percent as an administrator/manager, and 5 percent as "other". Just over half of the participants (54 percent) had multiple engagements. The two most common forms were combining group and one-to-one tutoring (16 percent) and group, one-to-one, and teaching literacy within the context of another subject (12 percent).

Employment type

Twenty-eight percent of our respondents were full-time tutors, 60 percent were part-time paid tutors, 9 percent were self-employed (60 percent of whom were part-time), 21 percent were voluntary and unpaid tutors, however half of these also had full-time (1) or part-time paid work as tutors, and one more adding "other". Seven percent in total gave their employment type as "other"; this included those who were administrators or managers. Ninety-one percent of our participants received some form of remuneration for at least some of their work.

Who were the learners?

Here we draw on data from the practice journals. Practitioners were asked to describe the learners with whom they were working. These varied from centre to centre.

At one centre the practitioner reported that there were 15 learners whose skills ranged from middle primary to NCEA Level 2. She then provided information on four learners with whom she had worked over the period. The first of these was H who was female, 35 years old and European. She wrote: "I believe H is quite capable of reaching higher levels of competence than she has been led to believe in the past. H's written work had indicated she was ready to move on—her spelling was good, her ideas were coming more developed and she was interested in writing." The second person, M, was male, 17, and European. The practitioner writes: "M has been 6 months on this programme, having moved from mainstream because of non-attendance due to bullying. He has difficulty concentrating for any length of time. Has been diagnosed with ADHD and Dystrophic and has been on Ritalin in the past." The third person on which background information is given was S, also male, 22, and European. S is described as "studying NCEA Level 2 maths and Level 1 English through The Correspondence School. The maths is fine—it is internally assessed and he is focused and returns his assignments regularly. English is a different matter—S has been assessed by SPELD and diagnosed as having a Learning Disability. His verbal communication and appearance indicate no such thing. He is articulate and well presented and can become a part of a conversation on almost any subject."

At a second centre, the learners were described as generally young adults in their twenties. However, some were in their late teens, a few were under 18, and a few were in their thirties. There were more men than women and they included both Māori and Pākehā as well as a few Samoans and Cook Island Māori, and one Egyptian. It was noted that several students had intellectual disabilities. At a third and fourth centre, the practitioners reported that the learners were adults and young adults 15 to 60 years of age, both male and female, New Zealanders, and various other nationalities (including Chinese, Afghan, Samoan, Filipino, and Russian).

At a fifth centre, the learners were described in the following terms: In one group, two Kurdish women aged in their forties (not literate in own languages, early development of literacy in English); two Afghan women aged in their twenties (not literate in own languages, early development of literacy in English); one Ethiopian woman aged about 40 (not literate, has little concept of literacy yet, very new to the country and in culture shock, malnourished but this is improving)—can copy words and letters with help; two Ethiopian men—one new to country and in late forties; has L1 (first language) literacy. The other, in his sixties, has been in New Zealand for 4+ years (has no literacy—is struggling but has good skills in oral communication) (very broken English but gets it across); one Somali woman in twenties (not literate in own languages, but very bright and learning fast). In a second group, four Afghan women (all in their twenties with preschoolers who have not yet separated so must have lessons in crèche and all very new to the country) (seem to have a concept of what reading and writing is all about and seem to be learning fast); and one Kurdish woman (probably in her early thirties, has been in New Zealand maybe 2 or 3 years, recently shifted house which has unsettled her preschooler).

Finally, the ARAS learner was reported as being female, between 50 and 60 years old, married, with children and grandchildren, of Dutch origin but has been living in New Zealand for almost 50 years.

Reflecting on the tasks of adult literacy practitioners

In this section we look at the ways in which focus group participants described their own adult literacy practice and the kinds of things required of them and their colleagues as literacy practitioners.

Adult literacy work is not so much a technical task as a social one

Adult literacy work requires practitioners to be aware of the tensions that arise between teaching the basics of language and literacy and providing support for the whole person. The effective teacher requires both. There is a "technical" aspect of literacy teaching, but it is much more than that. One participant pointed out that:

> ...even though the people [you're working with] can seem very different from you ... there's always quite a lot of things you have in common.

It is important to find and build on these common elements. Another person pointed out that practitioners need "patience ... you've ... got to be interested in their point of view", and you have to have a sense of humour. One participant said:

> ...if all else fails just burst out laughing and say, 'But *we* can't understand what you're saying.' And that sort of breaks the tension, yeah.

It was also pointed out that it is necessary to provide time and space for people to talk among themselves about personal issues without themselves becoming "social workers":

> I think my job is more or less just trying to help people kind of open up and function effectively… It's different from only teaching ESOL for sure.

> I think it's quite important that [people] do have somewhere [to talk about personal issues] and it's good that they talk amongst themselves, to air those personal issues, because quite often they're a barrier to learning … they come in with real [problems, and] they can't learn anything unless they—you know, until they get rid of this.

> I absolutely agree but I also don't see my role as a social worker. I know there's a fine line.

> What I say to our tutors here is ... if you sense the situation [warrants it] give them five or ten minutes and then talk about your role and what they're here for … it's amazing how many people have ... baggage which stops them learning.

Empathy and sensitivity were, therefore, seen by participants as critical aspects of effective practice.

Adult literacy work involves working with diverse people with a variety of skill levels and experiences

As we have already noted above, practitioners highlighted the fact that literacy learners varied widely in terms of their interests, expectations, and reasons for attending the programmes as well as in terms of their skills and abilities and background knowledge. This required tutors to address the needs and interests of each learner in a unique way. A wide range of resources to suit the interests of individuals was needed, and each individual had to be taught at their own level:

> One of the main points in our philosophy is to tutor according to the need of the students … You have to sit down with a student, get a good rapport, and find out what that person needs, and then find out if some of the things you know about, work for that student. So, the mandate [really] comes from the student I suppose.

> [We try to teach] every student on their own level ... some of them can't even speak a word of, [some have] never held a pen, [others] have finished school and have quite a bit of English. So we're trying to teach everybody on their own level ... within a group … it's topic-based [teaching] but it's called a literacy programme ... and most people say they want to learn to read and write, quite a few of them speak English quite well … but some of them have waited 60 years to get in the situation where they can learn to read and write … it's their mandate, 'I want to learn to read and write'.

Adult literacy work requires practitioners to draw on learners' experiences and their stories. But not always!

Adult literacy practitioners cannot merely draw on their own experience or on predetermined sets of exercises and tasks. They may well be able to use some of these, but they will have to be used flexibly and in such a way that they make sense to the learners. Participants pointed out again and again how important it was that practitioners draw fully on learners' own experiences and their stories. However, they also pointed out that it was vital they go beyond these stories and that learners are challenged to go beyond the limits of their previous experience. They also pointed out that there were variations in the extent to which one can usefully and appropriately use learners' experiences in teaching. One person said:

> Well it depends how much language they have, because quite often they can't talk much (in English) anyway. And quite often they don't even … want to talk about ... the past. They don't want to be reminded over and over and over again about the horrors that—you know. You've just got to work from where they want to take it, if they don't want to talk about it then you don't talk about it. If they do want to talk about it then you talk about it, or write about it. And you know, you've got to respect their customs up to a point but then you've got to respect your customs too…

To achieve an appropriate balance, group work and a wide range of resources are essential:

> Yeah, well and the topics come from either what the learners say they want to focus on or we can—because there are some people that have been there before and some new, sometimes we have to be a little bit autocratic, but we choose topics that are going to be relevant and useful and most urgently needed by the learners.

> We teach individually and in a group… The basics, like vowels and that, we teach as a group cause we kind of think it's good for everybody, even the more advanced people, to go back to the basics... Some of them were away [on the day a particular topic was taught] or whatever, and they missed out on it. Then each morning we have an individual session with each of our students, and the lower readers ... get to read every day or, like, we've got someone doing an academic essay so there's a wide spectrum that we [cater for].

There is therefore not any single right way or right approach to teaching and learning:

> I think we ... use as wide a range of approaches as possible. We try to be fairly kinaesthetic too. We use anything that works. We also [think] a lot about how to help people relax and de-stress things so they're, you know, not worried about whether they perform well or not, just to get them doing.

> …we're not into [any single approach to teaching reading and writing]; whatever is right is right.

Adult literacy and numeracy work is closely linked

Focus group participants referred at various points to the breadth of the adult literacy curriculum. In particular, several people highlighted the close and interdependent relationship between literacy and numeracy:

> I probably came into literacy because I'm also very interested in numeracy and that's been my field ... but the more I learn the more I realise that they are very interrelated and we need the skills, we need the literacy rules I need for numeracy and the other way around and I guess this is another area that I'm interested in and the same kind of things happen. With the literacy, the confidence and working with people and learning more.

> I've taught quite a bit of numeracy over the years with students and I've actually found that if they're able to achieve something in maths, their self-esteem and self-confidence [increase enormously]... It's incredible, suddenly they find themselves better at spelling, better able to write. I think maths is a very powerful tool.

Adult literacy work requires practitioners to have the capacity to move beyond the tasks of teaching literacy and numeracy

We have already referred to the fact that literacy teaching must go beyond the narrow "technical" tasks of teaching reading and writing, that it may well include aspects of maths, and that it involves working with the whole person. Practitioners also called attention to the fact that the curriculum must go beyond reading, writing, numeracy, and so on, and that it must also include a wide range of social issues:

> I find that we're not just teaching literacy and numeracy; there are things outside of those boundaries that you always end up being involved with. Like, I know one of my students was having problems with WINZ...Though it had nothing to do with literacy... I knew a WINZ worker so we went at it together. So yeah, ... it's just a great big benefit for my students.

What do adult literacy practitioners do?

The descriptions of adult literacy practice provided in the focus groups and discussed in the previous section were elaborated on by those writing the practice journals.

The work of practitioners described in these journals consisted of two broad categories of activity: (a) teaching activities; and (b) other kinds of work. In both cases this includes some activities which took place regularly (i.e., on a daily or weekly basis) and some which took place occasionally or spasmodically.

Teaching activities

One-to-one teaching
Many activities took place on a one-to-one basis as tutors worked with students on their individual learning programmes.

One voluntary tutor worked exclusively in a one-to-one relationship with her student. This was for two hours a week. A second tutor said that she worked regularly on a one-to-one basis for periods of 15–20 minutes with individual students to provide help with each student's personal needs. This could relate to spelling, reading, maths, writing, and so on. For about 50 percent of these periods the tutor said that she directed activity choice while students themselves made the key decisions in the remaining 50 percent of instances. While she was spending time with individuals the other students in the group undertook their own independent learning as individuals or in groups. A third stated that she worked regularly for about seven hours a week with students on their individual learning programmes.

A fourth tutor provided a number of examples of work on a one-to-one basis. These included conversational English (grammar and pronunciation) with student doing clerical/computer course, maths re foreign currency calculations, metric system (area calculations) with student doing basic course in welding, learning styles, brain research findings, psychology, and career planning—addressing immediate needs/interests of a student and tying these in with learning and the outside world, form filling and drivers' licence test, learning strategies for computer theory with one student doing clerical course—addressing individual need/interest in wanting to gain certification as a computer technician. "We analysed part of a chapter, listed main points and analysed the summary", study skills, learning strategies, and looking at IQ test samples as used by army and police—demystifying the use and analysis of IQ tests as well as critically analysing the structure and content of the tests.

Small groups
Small groups were also used extensively for a multitude of purposes. One tutor described how she spent time regularly tutoring small groups (two to six) in such aspects as maths (Units 8489, 8490, 8401, and 8491) "for example, working on +-*÷ problems with words, reading tables and graphs, goal-setting, preparing and writing CVs and job application letters". Small groups were also used by another tutor to work together with students on such things as spelling and phonics. A third

tutor described various forms of work with small groups. These included: doing regular work in basic English grammar with three students in Life Skills course; driver's licence theory with five students doing a computing course in response to individual requests; various maths unit standards and driver's licence work with five students doing electronics as a response to individual needs/requests; etc.

Whole-group teaching

Whole-group teaching was also used in various ways and for a variety of purposes. On some occasions, the literacy tutor was in a classroom assisting another tutor with those students who were having some difficulties. One tutor described how he assisted students at theory sessions in an accountancy course taught by another tutor. He sat in on the sessions helping students with terminology, asking the tutor to explain certain things again, and helping some students with note-taking and explaining the meaning of some things himself. In other cases, tutors were on their own with the whole class. Finally, in other cases, tutors were part of a team or group who jointly taught particular sessions. Examples of these activities included a daily "getting started" activity at one centre, lectures, presentations and demonstrations on such topics as using a thesaurus on a computer and in a book, brainstorming sessions, exercises, quizzes and games (e.g., spelling and number games), meetings and social activities (e.g., ten pin bowling).

Note: Of course there was inevitably overlap between the various kinds of activities described above. More importantly perhaps, in many instances there was a high degree of integration between different kinds of activities. Not every activity could be identified exclusively within any single category and many activities formed an essential element within a wider framework. At one level tutors often designed activities of various kinds with the intention that learners would be able to move from one to another as seamlessly as possible. At another level it is of course the learners themselves who engage with their environments and the available resources including other learners and the tutor/s in the various one-to-one, small-group, and whole-group learning contexts.

Nonteaching activities

The nonteaching activities referred to were also wide-ranging. They included such things as the following.

Planning and resource development

This included planning, preparation, and resource development for teaching programmes on their own and/or with colleagues/students (e.g., meetings with other tutors, discussing plans with individual students, photocopying resources, writing quiz, updating workbooks, and so on).

Assessment and providing feedback on learners' work

This included marking, proofreading of student work (including real letters applying for jobs and students' CVs), assessment moderation, sorting/gathering/publishing student writing for end-of-year booklet.

Counselling and support of learners

This included contacting absent students (mainly by phone), planning with student/s, regular interviews with learners to ask them how it's going regarding learning, other people, and so on, and what they're thinking of doing next term/year.

Administration and liaison

This included general administration, record keeping and work on budget, dealing with emails and correspondence, writing reports and references for students, staff meetings, contact with, and receiving reports from, other relevant agencies, help with planning and organising the Open Day, planning use of tutor hours, interviewing applicants for part-time tutor position, checking unit standards and student evaluations, support, and supervise colleagues, fortnightly meetings with manager.

Descriptions and reflections on selected sessions

This section draws on the practice journals. It presents practitioners' descriptions and reflections on one or two specific sessions that had taken place during the period. Participants were asked to select a couple of sessions on which to provide detailed and in-depth reflections.

What were the aims of sessions?

Many of the aims of the sessions were highly instrumental. They varied from the general to the highly specific. One practitioner wrote that the aim included "preparing students to gain various unit standards (mainly in maths but also in writing, e.g., sentence structure and spelling), helping students to complete CVs and letters of application for jobs, helping students to understand such things as pie charts, graphs, etc..."

Another practitioner identified the aims of four sessions, each with a different student, as follows:

> The aims of [one] session were to introduce [the student] to the concept of paragraphing. I believe H is quite capable of reaching higher levels of competence than she has been led to believe in the past.

> The aim of [a second] session [with a different student] was to assist the learner to become more focused and to complete something.

> The aim of [a third] session [with two students] was to complete the assessment for US 8292— Use standard units of measurement. This is a very interactive and kinaesthetic assessment and I enjoy doing it. Although the assessments were carried out separately they were given on the same day and there were some interesting comparisons.

A third practitioner referred to two or three sessions, the aims of which were to review previous learning and to increase knowledge of the New Zealand health system and learn a number of relevant and useful words. In particular she wrote that:

> My teaching was focused on the kind of words we would read on medicine labels (i.e., take, apply, dose). The aim is ... to recognise (read) these words. Today was familiarisation with the words and what they mean. We also looked at words for medical treatments done in

doctors' surgeries and hospitals such as scan, blood pressure test, etc. They need to know these words and what they mean.

And a fourth practitioner identified the following highly specific cognitive aims for her learners for two sessions:

To recognise when to use an apostrophe to show ownership (singular and plural).

To learn a technique (practised by most of class at least once before) for deciding where to place the apostrophe.

To insert apostrophes for ownership into given sentences.

To write a paragraph for an essay, defining assertiveness.

Finally, one practitioner emphasised that the aims of all her sessions were framed in terms of the student's primary aim which was "to be able to write concise, accurate and error free Incident Reports in the Day Book at her place of work".

How were decisions made on content/curriculum?

All of the practitioners stressed the key role in decision making played by the learners. They were in general at pains to make the point that they did not attempt to impose their own ideas on the learners. Thus one practitioner wrote: "Our role as literacy tutors is to support individual and group learning for students and tutors alike." And another wrote:

Decisions on what to do in each session are the choice of the student and always aimed at their primary goal. In the case of J this can include her own homework prose, reading aloud to improve pronunciation and expand vocabulary, spelling, dictionary use, work sheets, word games, etc.

On the other hand, most acknowledged the external constraints, expectations, and requirements that had to be met, as well as their own contributions to the decision-making process. These in turn were affected by their own experiences (often covering a number of years), strengths, and limitations as tutors. Thus one practitioner wrote that the content of sessions could arise in part out of her observations of the learners' writing. For example, she had noticed that a few new students were not using apostrophes at all in their writing, and no members of the group were using them consistently. Accordingly, a session was planned which would be an introductory one for three of the students, a review for the other members of the group.

Finally, one of the other practitioners described a complex, interactive, and ongoing process of decision making for several sessions with various learners:

The aims of the session with H were to introduce her to the concept of paragraphing. I believe she is quite capable of reaching higher levels of competence than she has been led to believe in the past. Her written work had indicated she was ready to move on—her spelling was good, her ideas were becoming more developed and she was interested in writing. She and I worked on taking apart paragraphs she had written and finding the main idea, eliminating non-related sentences, and coming up with other sentences to support the main idea.

The aim of the session with M was to assist him to become more focused and to complete something. M has been on this programme for 6 months, having moved from mainstream because of non-attendance due to bullying. He has difficulty concentrating for any length of time, has been diagnosed with ADHD and Dystrophic, and has been on Ritalin in the past. In this session we were working with Number (NCEA Level 1—integers). First I checked with M that he knew the process (he did) and went over the first part of the exercise—first I read the question and he read it silently.

The aim of the session with R & M was to complete the assessment for US 8292— Use standard units of measurement. This is a very interactive and kinaesthetic assessment and I enjoy doing it. Although the assessments were carried out separately they were given on the same day and there were some interesting comparisons. R and M had been working towards this assessment for several weeks and the final date for 2004 assessment was looming so they decided they would give it a try. It is divided into three parts—a practical section, several word problems and some estimation.

S is studying NCEA Level 2 maths and Level 1 English through The Correspondence School. The maths is fine—it is internally assessed and he is focused and returns his assignments regularly. English is a different matter—S has been assessed by SPELD and diagnosed with a Learning Disability. His verbal communication and appearance indicate no such thing. He is articulate and well presented and can become a part of a conversation on almost any subject. I need to encourage him to get some notes down to help him with his formal writing.

What methods were used?

A wide range of methods was used by practitioners in the selected sessions. Varied use was made of whole group, small groups, pairs, and individual programmes. References were made by one practitioner to the use of "individual learning programmes, conversations, group meetings and discussions and games", while another referred to the use of "games (e.g., each person writes one sentence and then passes the paper with the sentence on to the next person who also writes a sentence until a story is complete), quizzes, and meeting real-life requirements (e.g., compilation of CVs, letters, etc., preparing for an interview, practising for a test of the road code)".

One practitioner provided a clear and succinct summary of the methods she used in two two-hour weekly sessions:

> Session 1—Greetings/catch up (5 mins), Corrected spelling/punctuation in final copy of story written for ARAS Newsletter (15 mins), Discussed "work scenario" report [student] had written for homework (aided by a colleague) and spoke about the difficulties of Incident Reporting under pressure (30 mins), Read aloud from [student's] current library book, checked for gist, looked up new words in dictionary and entered into spelling notebook (10 mins).

> Session 2—Greeting/catch up (5 mins), Discussed five well constructed 'work scenarios' produced by student during the week, Detected spelling errors and sought ways of remembering corrections (30 mins), Wrote out word families and talked about meanings (15 mins), Completed monthly ARAS Student/Tutor Progress Form (10 mins).

Another described the methods she had used at some sessions in the following way:

> H and I worked on taking apart paragraphs she had written and finding the main idea, eliminating nonrelated sentences and coming up with other sentences to support the main idea. The object was part of an ongoing project to improve her formal writing. I introduced the idea of questioning—what, where, when, why, who, how.

> In this session we were working with Number (NCEA Level 1—Integers).

> First I checked with M that he knew the process (he did) and went over the first part of the exercise—first I read the question and he read it silently.

Other methods used by practitioners included greetings, conversations, short talks and presentations (by tutors and by learners); demonstrations, the use of examples provided by the tutor, as well as searching for and using examples drawn from the learners themselves; tutor-led and highly structured discussion, tutor-led and unstructured, open-ended and free discussion, and learner-led discussions of various kinds; brainstorming; various forms of problem solving in groups and as individuals; free as well as highly structured writing of words, phrases, sentences, and longer pieces of work of various kinds by individuals; the use of pictures, slides, and so on to stimulate discussion or to illustrate ideas or practices; various kinds of reading (e.g., silent reading, reading aloud), telling and listening to stories, practising number work in groups and individually, doing worksheets, and so on.

What forms of assessment were used?

All learners, tutors, and those involved in facilitating learning are necessarily engaged in an ongoing process of assessing learning. Most of this takes place informally and subconsciously. Here we are concerned mainly with formal means of assessment. However, practitioners also referred to various other forms of assessment and some emphasised the importance of informal assessment. One practitioner wrote: "I'm constantly assessing by observing the learners and their work" and another highlighted not only the informal assessment of learning but also the tutor's own assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the session. A third described the forms of assessment used in two of her sessions in the following terms:

> Session 1—Informal assessment during discussion. I was involved in informal assessment as I worked with smaller group. Their chosen examples from books also a good indicator of understanding and opportunity for them to explain reason for that apostrophe. Marked 1:1 with independent folk.

> Session 2—Informal assessment by observation of [the student's] understanding of the topic, and how to reference. By talking with him I realised he had not 'got' the notion of quoting from a previous teaching session and model essay, and so spent more time on this with his working example.

Another practitioner provided the following case studies, which illustrate the importance of informal assessment:

There was no formal assessment as part of the learning although we did talk about her letter writing and using paragraphs in that. The session was good but there were interruptions which I couldn't do anything about because I was alone in the room. I felt the session went well because [the student] wanted to put her finished paragraphs on the computer.

And then at another session with a different student:

At the end of the session I carried out a formative assessment to establish if he knew the complete process. I asked him to complete two problems and explain how he reached the answers. The session was very successful because the student was focused for thirty minutes.

And a fifth practitioner described a form of assessment which is formalised within the agency but which is not part of the Qualifications Framework:

The 4-weekly ARAS Student/Tutor Progress Form required completion. The tutor completes bulk of the Form from notes about each session (eg dates of sessions, were learning goals achieved, resources used, Learning Plan goals for next month, Progress toward main goal (on scale). Tutor and student read and agree on above, then each completes their own 'comments' section about progress, milestones, achievements, or how they feel they are going. The completed Form goes via ARAS office to Literacy Aotearoa NZ, Wellington to support funding.

Much of the assessment referred to does not form part of the Qualifications Framework. Nevertheless some practitioners did report that their learners were preparing for unit standards, and it seems that for some, though by no means all learners, completing unit standards is a high priority. One of the practitioners provided case studies that highlighted the significance of formal assessment for some learners in some situations:

R and M had been working towards this assessment for several weeks and the final date for 2004 assessment was looming so they decided they would give it a try. It is divided into three parts—a practical section, several word problems and some estimation. The practical section and word problems were completed with relative ease but the estimation was difficult. M found the question relating to the dimensions of the room trickiest while R found the question relating to mass the trickiest. We wondered if that was because he was less familiar with shopping and cooking than M. Both passed the Unit Standard at first try and this meant they had completed all four maths Unit Standards offered on our programme.

And then again at another session with a different student:

I needed to encourage him to get some notes down to help him with his formal writing. Here is a good example from the Correspondence School and we discussed this. He identifies a subject and comes up with three or four main points. We start to get some notes down but then he begins to question me and himself about points we have made—it is an avoidance tactic and I decide to leave him and help someone else. The other tutor (who works with the Correspondence students) takes over from me—not much more is achieved. We both hope he will cope in the exam on Monday.

Reflections on practice by interviewees

Both interviewees and those keeping practice journals were asked to reflect on their practice. In this section we present data gathered in the interviews in response to a series of questions designed to elicit interviewees' reflections on their own practice and in the next section we present data from the practice journals. In both cases a critical incident approach was adopted. To do this in the interviews, use was made of the technique described by Stephen Brookfield. Interviewees were asked to think back over their recent work in adult literacy and to respond to the following five questions:

1. At what moment did you feel most engaged with what was happening?
2. At what moment did you feel most distanced from what was happening?
3. What action that anyone (colleague/student) took recently did you find most affirming and helpful?
4. What action that anyone (colleague/student) took recently did you find most puzzling or confusing?
5. What about a recent session/class surprised you the most? (This could be something about your own reactions to what went on, or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you.)

Responses to these questions are discussed in the five sections below.

At what moment did you feel most engaged with what was happening?

The moments most frequently described by interviewees in response to this question were those when they were aware that their participants were achieving successes in learning. However, there were variations in the kinds of moments and the kinds of satisfaction. In some cases the successes they described were big ones, but they could also consist of small steps.

On the larger scale, one interviewee stated that she felt most engaged when her students were achieving learning goals/outcomes. She described two recent students, one of whom "had gained a painting and decorating apprenticeship" while the other "had been scoring 80–90% in her exams". She stated:

> That's when I really feel engaged in my work and I'm actually doing something really positive because I've made a difference. Well she's done it herself but, you know, I've helped her along the way and that's great.

On a smaller but nevertheless significant scale, one interviewee described an episode, which had occurred on the afternoon of the interview:

> Then I got her [the learner] to sound out some of the words, and she was getting right to the end of them, and I got out the flash cards and she was going through all those, and I said, 'Oh this is great, aren't you improving!' And she was like [full of emotion] and ... says, 'Yeah I am!' And you know when she's reading she's suddenly able to sound out the words. She could never do that before… Yeah, she's suddenly started to click in ... it's taking time, but it's working. It's taking time yeah, but that's okay.

And another described the satisfaction gained when one of her students not only began to really write but also to edit and correct their own writing:

> One of the big struggles I have with most students ... is [actually getting them to] write something. So we've got into the habit, I write a sentence to begin. And I write one to finish, and she has to fill in the middle. Well [this one student recently] got really carried away... And she wrote: It was about a seagull sitting on a ledge and he was all alone, and it ended when he had flown for the first time. He had made his first flight. That was the last sentence. And she had filled in the whole thing. She wrote about 12 lines, and I couldn't believe it, from [someone] who would actually write very, very little. And then she read it back to me. And she picked up most of the errors, she did most of the editing herself, I was a bit fussy with her, I made her read every word that she'd written. And where there were sort of a few problems I'd say 'Now have a good look at that, is that right?' But she picked it up, and I felt that was a major achievement for the end of term. That she was prepared to fill those two things in... I felt that I had actually got somewhere ... it's having enough confidence to start writing… It was a good end to the term to be honest.

Similarly, other interviewees described their sense of excitement and satisfaction with learning breakthroughs that occur in the following way:

It was a peaceful moment, yeah. It's great when you can see it, you know, and when she's reading she's suddenly sounding out words and she could never ever do that.

…I guess when my student started to really grasp things and had those 'ah ha' moments…

One interviewee emphasised the importance of knowing that the learners had a sense that they were making progress:

> I think you're most engaged when you feel that it's actually getting somewhere, you can see that people have learnt something, and that they're happy, or that they're progressing in some way.

And another highlighted the importance that can be attached to students having positive feelings about learning. She said that one thing that engaged her was "...when a student walks through the door with a smile on their face".

Knowing that you "were on the right track" was important for one interviewee. One person had recently attended a hui and she felt that this had been very affirming. One of the speakers had given a workshop on "ways to learn a word" and she said that:

> a lot of what she said was very affirming for the staff, other literacy tutors, and the staff and tutors, for just ways of teaching, so that was really helpful for us to know that we're on the right track and this was being affirmed.

One interviewee stated that the most recent highlight for her had come through her work with an enthusiastic student—man who has lost his leg in a railway accident and is having to learn to use a computer. She said that he was in a wheelchair so that she had to go around to his house to teach him to use a computer:

I get really engaged with him. You know, it's pretty good, yeah. Well the point is he's like a baby muted and he gets such a kick out of every little bit that he learns. It's really good.

Another interviewee stated that he felt most engaged when students' negativity stops and learning begins:

...what I've found with adults [is] that they come along and they complain. I had one who complained, every session about the English language and the spelling of it, and I think we put up with that ... for three months. Then suddenly the complaining stopped and the learning started… If you don't allow those complaints to surface, you never get to the learning. ...they have to ... sound off about their previous failures or bad experiences… And then suddenly that disappears and they get cracking…

The experience of "really listening" and sharing this experience with the learners was identified by one interviewee as a recent highpoint:

I was taking a small group of literacy students on a unit on ... awareness of listening skills, and people were starting to sort of reflect on their own learning and where they'd come from. I was actually getting them to break into pairs where one person would talk for two minutes and then the other talked, and then they reported back. They reported back about the person they had talked with, to share with the group where that person was at. I felt that that's the kind of small group thing that really builds people's confidence to share their ideas and experiences, and to talk with others and in front of others. I felt really inspired by the group experience and I think several of the learners also were inspired. Perhaps for the very first time in their lives someone was available to actually listen to what they had to say.

I found that just ... being a good listener was a really good step ... and I shared that with them as well. And I could see their learning was actually happening with me.

One interviewee said that she had felt most engaged recently when one of the students she was working with "began to hear and act on the feedback which she had been giving" over an extended period:

I was working with one of the students and reading through the sentences that had been written. They were making sense, whereas previously they have been quite jumbled. I was giving feedback and the person was actually hearing ... what you said. …And it just felt so good and it was all about the work that the person had been producing but it felt like it had suddenly clicked.

Another interviewee said that she felt most engaged when she had been able to get to know her students, their learning needs, skills and abilities:

That's when I feel really engaged and sort of engaged with the students, that I can actually do something, or start from there rather than go over everything that they've already got, but still looking for the little gaps because there might just be a few gaps that they need, rather than go through the whole rigmarole one more time with another person.

One interviewee said that she had been most engaged in her work when she had simply had some fun with a group of students:

Last Thursday, there was a ... group were doing a cultural unit, you know, on how to deal with different cultures. And I thought it was ... great fun. It was good … you get language, you get culture, you get… But the students did it themselves because they are all adults, you know... So you were just facilitating it.

And is that why you felt you were engaged with that?

Yeah. I like that sort of teaching.

Finally, one interviewee said that:

It's nice to be successful yourself, but if you see other people ...[succeeding]… I've got a job. And if we can help them a little bit, you know, by writing a letter or … then that's when I feel most engaged in my work.

At what moment did you feel most distanced from what was happening?

A considerable variety of factors were identified which resulted in interviewees feeling distanced from their work. They included a range of organisational factors, factors having to do with students and their learning, and factors associated with the interviewees' own situations and circumstances.

Most interviewees interpreted a sense of distance in negative terms. However, one interviewee saw distance in positive terms. She pointed to the need for tutors to maintain a degree of distance from their students and said:

...it's important that we as tutors are distanced some times, or quite often from what is happening, because I think the process is a very personal thing for the student and it must be a personal thing because the aim is that they are going to be able to learn independently. They don't want me as someone who is always at their shoulder saying 'do this, do that.'

Several people associated feelings of distance or alienation with a sense of failure or frustration at the apparent lack of student interest or motivation. One interviewee commented on the frustrations that can arise when students are allowed to go at their own pace:

There are these constant highs and lows of what you want for them, and then what they want for themselves, … just sitting back and letting them [go] is hard when you want to help them so much, but you know ... you can't push them into something that you want them to do when they haven't got around to it yet.

Several interviewees expressed frustration at the unwillingness or reluctance to receive feedback:

One of my students at the moment who, I would say, is really damaged educationally and ... psychologically as well ... just doesn't want any feedback. I find this incredibly frustrating. You know, when you're used to sitting next to someone and going, 'Oh that's great, look you've spelt this word right' and 'Let's proof read your work', and he just puts up a big wall and says, 'No' or 'Don't tell me.' 'Don't show me that, I'd rather figure it out myself.' ...when I'm dealing with a person who's really quite dyslexic and I know can't figure it out, and I've tried everything and there's nothing I can do.

...yesterday was a classic example: [I was] working with a person who has indicated they don't want feedback, so I'm not allowed to point out their errors. So we were doing some editing and all I could do was write in the margin. If there was a capital letter that wasn't required I would just put a 'c' with a line through it and the person would spend five minutes looking for the incorrect capital letter. It was the most frustrating 15 minutes I have ever had, because I could see the person wasn't going to move on quickly and didn't know what to look for... But they wouldn't allow me to point out what to look for... I feel that if I had been able to point [things] out ... and explain why ... the person would remember it for the next time. But instead there's this process of trying to decide what capital letter they're not allowed to have in the sentence and not know why, incredibly...

Other comments highlighted frustrations arising out of student absences or irregularities of attendance:

But sometimes it can be frustrating as well, you know, you build people up, or you work with them and then you think you're going to see them again next Monday and they don't turn up or, that can be, you know, but I mean you need to be not so emotionally involved I think. That's something you have to learn. Yeah. I couldn't do that in the beginning, you know, because you would, you know, have bad weekends and think about it. But I'm a bit, you know, further removed from it now I think, you know, you have to be a bit more professional about it otherwise you... But it's something you have to learn.

I find it really difficult when a student ... fails to turn up for a session, especially when they are hard to contact, and I don't know whether I'll see them back again. And when my contact with the student has been mixed.

It's so difficult when you can't make contact with a student. I'm trying to make contact, but yes. And probably with this same student, the time before, I've had some good sessions and some not so good sessions. And at a very basic level, an extremely anxious student, a very intelligent student overall. But with big difficulties in organisation and literacy.

Other comments reflected interviewees' frustration at their failure to persuade or help their students to adopt good study habits or make any progress:

Some students may not learn very well... They're their own worst enemies, and ... they're not good at organising [themselves].

[One] student is working all over the place, is looking to do a full-time course in the next semester, university semester, and I don't think he's really grasped the fact that you need to have enough sleep, enough food. And if you're going to do a full-time course it's the same time commitment as a full-time job. And I felt that I hadn't really got past that point to address the literacy issues that are there ... it's about planning, establishing routines and boundaries and things.

My previous student ... was very frustrating... He just never seemed to remember anything from one [moment to the next] ... and in the end I thought, 'Oh, how am I going to escape from it?'

For some, a sense of distance also arose out of language and communication problems:

> …you've got some people who can talk in English but can't read and write, and some … who can read and write and can't talk, you know that sort of thing. So the ones that can talk to you in English are easier to communicate with, and you feel less distance from them…

Others said that they had felt most frustrated or distant from their work when students made unreasonable demands on them. One interviewee said that one student had tried to manipulate her:

> I think it was when a student tried to get me to do the work that they needed to do, they tried to get me to do that work…

Another described how a student had tried to waste her time:

> When a student was working on an essay type question… This is, this is for university, and so she told me what it was about and we were checking comprehension … and brainstorming what she would do. Then the next time she came she had changed the topic… There was a series of choices, she changed the choice… And she didn't do well…

One interviewee suggested that the source of her occasional sense of distance lay in her own staleness. She had been doing the work for too long:

> Sometimes I think the challenge has gone [out of the work] a little ... after ... 30 years… Maybe it's time to do something else…

She recognises, however, that:

> Everybody gets that feeling sometimes, you know ... and there are a lot of things I do enjoy. So you balance it out. If you have a day which is not so good here, you know, but it is not the students really … sometimes it can be something with your colleagues or something like that, you know, that can put you off a little bit. It happens in every working situation… And you think, oh, you know, but I'm not going home and say, you know, what a terrible day or something. So I don't really have that… So most of the sessions we do, yeah, there is always something happening, you know, that is good.

A number of interviewees said that they felt distanced occasionally not by their interactions with students but by factors in their organisations.

The rigidity of an imposed curriculum that got in the way of deep learning was seen by one interviewee as giving rise to her sense of distance and another highlighted issues of authority that made to feel like a "naughty girl". One commented:

> I think I felt really distanced once recently when one of the students asked me if she could write about the meal she [had] cooked the previous night and I said 'Oh yeah', and I wrote her up a word bank... But [then I realised] she was meant to be doing something else. ...I guess I felt like a naughty girl, in a way, because I wasn't listening to my boss who … became quite annoyed with me because I was encouraging the learner to be distracted from her table of relevant work. And a wee while she had gone off ... writing her story and I don't know whether she ever finished it or not. And she was being tested on her times tables. I don't actually think she is ever going to remember her 10 times tables…

A second comment focused on what were seen as the unrealistic expectations of the organisation that the interviewee works for:

> They'd given me 22 credits which is supposed to be 220 hours of learning to deliver in 44 hours, and by the time I'd done all the assessments, goal setting and everything else that comes in as well, I tried to explain that this is not going to work and basically my boss … said well that's it. And I just, I got home and I cried, I was so angry that; (1) they hadn't listened, and (2) I'll be assessed on what I deliver, and there's nothing I can do about it.

Racism and ethnocentrism in the workplace were also identified as factors leading to a sense of distance and alienation:

> ...because of my race, because of my colour... I am different. When we had ...[gatherings] of literacy tutors I would always be the only Asian tutor and so it ... my feeling that people might say, 'Oh who is she? I mean, she's also learning English; how come she is teaching English?'

In another organisation, one interviewee pointed to the lack of adequate resources to support the work of tutors. She said that having to pay for photocopying gave rise to irritation:

> One thing that annoys me [in my organisation] is that they're so strapped for cash that we are expected to pay for things that we photocopy to give to our students and that. I'm sure it's a hardy annual but it really goes against the grain, and that, you know, makes me think why bother? You know, we're giving our time, our effort and we have to pay for the photocopying, as well as the bus fare or the petrol in and out. That goes against the grain.

Finally, one interviewee who was in charge of a centre said that "being kept at a distance by fellow tutors can be hard ... very hard".

What action that anyone (colleague/student) took recently did you find most affirming and helpful?

In response to this question, interviewees identified a wide range of helpful and affirming actions taken by students and colleagues.

One of the most commonly mentioned affirming actions was focused on student accomplishments and achievements:

> The affirmation I get is when they pass their course—especially if they've failed in the past… Quite often they've completely failed [in the past], or they're aware they need to prepare so they can go ahead to do whatever they've chosen to do. If they come to me first and then pass some ... or all of their courses then I feel that I've succeeded to some extent.

> ...last year I had ... a student who really struggled with maths ... a six-foot 18-year-old came to me once a week and sat down and slaved over addition and subtraction, and multiplication and division for an hour every week, with a smile as he came through that door... I couldn't believe it. It still wasn't easy for him when he left. But he passed his course and ... that's the affirmation I get. Once they come and get a routine of coming,

they're usually fine. You have to establish the relationship. Or when students come to me with little or no confidence and leave with the expectation that they are able to do well.

Or when students learn to ask questions (which often comes with greater confidence). Like a lady that came to me with no confidence whatsoever, doing an adult carers course. And when she came she was scared to ask questions, she was convinced she was the slowest of the group, that she'd never be able to manage. And she worked out ways that she could study herself, she had to travel in her job at that time, she was travelling round various firms, and she made little cue cards that she took in the car that she could look at while she was waiting for an appointment, she made little tapes that she could play in the car while she was going from one place to another. And she learnt to ask questions in the course, we talked about that and she said 'Oh everybody else will think I'm dumb'. I said 'I bet they're dying to ask the same question', so we made a pact that she'd ask one question. The first time, and she did that and everybody else was very affirming. So it sort of opened up the group and everybody started asking questions and...

Or when students take the initial first step and go on to achieve things they would never have thought possible.

One student ended up doing more study, and ended up one of the top students of the course. Some of it was sort of I guess due to that start. Because she went on and did the rest herself, and I sort of felt, when I saw her picture in the paper, I thought 'wow that really worked'. You know I was just so pleased to see that she had achieved. Seeing students begin to achieve something they thought they'd never be able to do ... such as in maths… I suspect it's a personal thing because I had difficulty with maths at school... If they begin to understand maths it seems to do wonders for their confidence and self-esteem. Suddenly they can spell better and things like that. It sounds weird but ... I think it's because it's something that they thought they'd never be able to do.

When [the students] start doing things for themselves, e.g. taking exercises home, it's wonderful.

...the fact that this lad has achieved his initial goal. He wanted to get a particular certificate for his work, and after about a year he got all the material related to it, and then was able to present himself to the NZQA Assessor such that he didn't have to do a lot of the written work.

Yes, well it's very affirming when they come along and say, 'Look I've passed the exam, and I'm in…'

Yes, sometimes they make giant leaps forward, and you can see that, and they can see that they have remembered five or six things in a sequence and that is very affirming… And it's good for them as well… That they've managed, say, to remember a set of instructions… Or they come along and they say 'Look I've written this!' And you say 'Yes, read it to me'…

Interviewer: So it's when the motivation comes from them is when you find it affirming in a session? Interviewee: Yes, because basically you're trying to get them to do it on their own… Because you can't be with them all the time, they've got to go it alone sooner or later.

Interviewer: So one of your goals is independent learning? Interviewee: Mm it is, and showing them how to learn, how to look up a dictionary quickly. And many of them don't really know the alphabet, for example, so speed is important. Especially in today's world.

Seeing students develop confidence in themselves is very affirming for many interviewees:

The ones that really give me a buzz, if that's a word ... are the ones that go from no confidence whatsoever, to completing their courses and doing well.

A student's openness and willingness to say sorry was something that inspired one of the interviewees:

It was during one of my group discussions and there was a bit of tension amongst some of the students and [one of them] actually ended up storming out [of class] and slamming the door. The next morning she came in and she just said, 'You know, I lost it. I'm really sorry.' You know, I was just so inspired by her honesty and frankness.

Another focus was on receiving positive feedback. In one case this came from a friend of a student. A second referred to the course evaluation:

I found that really helpful because, you know. They always say great things… It's just wonderful. Yeah. And I got rung up this morning and asked if I'd help them with their holiday programme. So that was also nice. It's nice feedback for me and I find that's... I like feedback.

A third referred to an unexpected public compliment from a student who had previously been difficult:

I suppose it was, actually not so much to do with actual teaching because there had been an incident in the class. And the next day somebody [in the class] said, 'Oh you're doing a good job.' You know, it was just that, just that comment that reminded me that we do do a good job. And I'm part of that, yeah.

And a fourth referred to positive feedback from students and colleagues:

Oh, they tell me 'You're the best teacher.' I said I know… Yes. I like that. Yeah. But I mean, I don't need it because I say that's my job. I am here to do that work with you and if you get something out of it that's good, you know. It makes me feel good of course, but I don't want to feel good, you know, because of someone else's weakness, because you have got to be careful with that too…

One interviewee refers to the intrinsically satisfying nature of the work, especially seeing "someone discover something that they've never been able to do before":

You know, it's oh you're doing such a good job, but it is very satisfying, of course, this work, you know, that you, that someone discovers something that they've never been able to do before, whether it is percentages or, I said, well, I did not know how to do that either, you know.

She describes the satisfaction gained from helping and encouraging others and especially helping people to develop confidence in their own abilities:

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If you help people to explore things, I can't get enough of that really, whether it's my own children or the students here, you know. I just had a conversation with a Chinese student ...who was telling me all about what happened to her on the weekend and all this stuff and it was great, you know. You just keep on encouraging, just listening and being patient…

One of the best examples may be when people [who have no confidence] get their licences. At first they may say 'No, I'm never going to pass.' So they sit here and do their licence. I say you start doing your licence here, you will pass. They say pardon? I say you will pass, okay? And they come back with their licence and they show me and I say see, not hard. Yeah you did it. I say no, I didn't do it, I just said you could do it, was all. That's all I do, I say yeah, you can do it. Because we get so many people here who've been knocked maybe, or that the confidence, again it is coming down to the confidence, you know.

The satisfaction I get, yeah, there's always something happening every day, you know. That somebody understands something or, you know, has a bit of success in whatever they do.

Aspects of collegiality were referred as affirming by a number of interviewees. Reference was made to the ongoing support and learning from colleagues and students that has been enjoyable and stimulating:

Because at this job I have learnt so much on how to explain things. I have learnt a lot from my former boss as well, you know, on how to, because she was primary school trained whereas I wasn't. So I got in the situation as like how do you explain division? So that's what I still like about this work, and about learning in general. I always like to learn new things for myself too.

…we sort of all work together, you know, really support each other, because there's nobody else to support us. In a way you're on your own, and really we're in this environment where everything depends on all of us, the crèche, the other teachers, the volunteers and stuff, and if we start having conflicts inside that, we'll be stuffed.

Finally, a colleague's approach to teaching was an important source of inspiration and affirmation for another interviewee:

One of my colleagues ... initiated a task ... with three students. He got them to write about an experience they'd had, illustrating it with their own photos or photos from books, and then actually publishing the work. One of the men [involved] was learning to read and he was actually reading his own work—his own book. And he was writing it from the perspective of someone who is learning to read and write, to help somebody else. ...It was about fixing a car, and it was perfect because there might be someone else just like him who could come on that course at a later date who could pull … the book off the shelf and actually enjoy it and learn from it. I was just so impressed. I thought that's such a creative way to work with people… It's meaningful for them because they can go back and read it and it inspires them to read their own stuff and someone else can. It's meaningful. It's not just writing about… I found that really exciting. I was really inspired by that, to try and get other people to do that kind of thing.

What action that anyone (colleague/student) took recently did you find most puzzling or confusing?

In response to this question, issues identified related to students, colleagues, and the organisations interviewees work for.

As far as students are concerned, interviewees identified a number of factors. One interviewee highlighted what she saw as a cultural factor affecting literacy practices:

> I've been pushing the importance of reading, reading, reading … and my student likes to read. But finding time to read is very hard for her because of the hours that she works, but also ... I think her culture [makes her] work so hard. If there's anything to be done at all, whether it's at home, at work, that has to be done first, and reading comes second... It's a mindset: she cannot sit down and read because she feels guilty if there's still some work to do. And getting around that's very difficult, because it's an ingrained cultural habit. So every week I say, you know, 'Have you done any reading this week?' 'Oh no, I was too busy.' So I say, 'Have you got a book with you?' I'm sure that's cultural, because she says, 'I just can't read when there's things to do.' Whereas I would say, 'To hell with the housework! I've got a good book. I'm going to finish it.'

Lack of any response from students can be puzzling or confusing:

> When I don't get any response. When I'm just looking at a blank face and I feel, 'Help', you know, sort of, Where's the cavalry? You know that feeling when you wonder if you're enough. And that really confuses me and it would be nice to have a group of people to ring up and discuss, say 'Look this happened to me today.'

Students' forgetfulness can be disconcerting:

> I think it's quite disconcerting when they [students] come along and you've taught something, and you look at it again, and it's a complete blank.

> Well say if, you know, they've known it week after week after week… And then suddenly … don't know.

Student behaviour or learning difficulties which are difficult to explain, understand, or respond to can be confusing:

> I guess I was very puzzled and confused by a student who never went on any outings. And I didn't really know what was underneath it all and I wanted to work it out... So I took a lot of time to sit down with her and try to reassure her… But she still doesn't go on the outings.

> I find it puzzling and confusing when I don't know what the problem really is, what makes a student tick, as it were. It's sort of like sorting a jigsaw puzzle in a way. Or you're a detective trying to find what it is that's holding up the learning process. If you can find that piece that's fouling up the works as it were. And do something about that. Sometimes it may even be just getting the student to acknowledge that there's a difficulty in a certain area. And admit it even. Or realise that it's there. Then they can do something about it.

> I can go through certain things that I know to look for, but occasionally I get somebody who's quite different. The usual symptoms and outcomes that I see. If there's a perceptual problem you can usually pick it up. You can pick it up from the report. Sometimes there

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can be very poor comprehension and you don't really know why. The person sees perfectly well, they hear perfectly well, their reading and writing's fine, but for some reason it doesn't stick on the way through. And you can try a variety of techniques and it just doesn't work, and you're trying to find what it is that you need.

Interviewer: You're looking for that piece of the puzzle? Interviewee: Yes but everybody's different, and that's what makes it interesting ... it's never boring, never ever boring,

When people (students or other tutors) detach themselves, switch off or mentally withdraw from things without telling me why. Not knowing why people withdraw can leave me puzzled and at times disturbed.

Lack of respect was sometimes shown by colleagues and students for one another:

It's the way people deal with one another … the personal relationships … that disappoint me the most, I think ... if people treat each other badly. When they make grunting noises to imitate an Asian student or something like that, or when one colleague says something stupid about somebody else and you think, come on, don't waste your time. That gets me down really, you know, those sorts of things… That would be the main thing. It hasn't got anything to do with the [literacy work itself] … to me it's about commonsense—the way you live. Certain things you just don't do… But, who am I to tell somebody, who is a lot older than I am, off or something like that, you know? That is something that comes from home as well, you know. You respect the older generation, you know, in talking about colleagues for example, but also students amongst each other, you know, that they do things and you think, come on you've got a long way to go still in this world, you know… Well, just to accept each other the way people are. You know, it's just, yeah. So it hasn't got anything to do with the teaching…

Coping with some people's low level of motivation and commitment was difficult:

Sometimes I find it hard to understand that people don't have it, but that is something you have to learn…

Although you get [some of] the younger people saying, 'Oh why do we have to do this stuff?' … I've heard it so many times. You think, my job is just to say, 'Yeah it's okay, you don't have to do it.' Then later on they come to you and ask, 'How does this work?' And you say, 'Okay, so you want to know it?' 'Yep…'

Interviewer: You just let them sort of come to you when they are actually ready to learn it? Interviewee: Yes! So in general that would be the main thing, I think.

Organisational and funding issues were also identified as giving rise to puzzlement or confusion.

Dealing with funding agencies was a source of frustration and puzzlement for some:

…we put in a major funding application to get money to taxi or transport the learners to classes. The most frustrating thing was we got a negative response, which said that our learners weren't a priority! And we couldn't believe that women who were pre-literate with young children, who couldn't access anything else, were not a priority in New Zealand. We tried to do something about it but were told, 'No'. So we wrote to the head people in the Ministry and they said, 'No, there's nothing to be done about.' It's very frustrating when

you're always fundraising to be told that it's not valuable (and most of our workers were volunteers).

The large amount of organisational work to be done can be frustrating:

It's all the other stuff that has to be ordered for that day to happen. I always start off the first half hour dealing with the crisis, or just get to finding more workers. I get them going. Those children that can't separate from their mothers, the children have to stay, the mothers have to stay in the crèche, so I have to get separate work for them, find someone who will go down there and work with them. Then there's the people that didn't come, the people complaining cause their driver didn't come. Then there's this and that, and all of those things to get sorted. I think that sort of stuff is a big part of it and it is. I don't know about confusing, but it's annoying a lot of the time.

Dealing with narrow institutional thinking on the part of management can be frustrating:

The failure on the part of management to recognise that it was essential to teach a course in a room which had all the appropriate resources.

What about a recent session/class surprised you the most?

Interviewees identified a wide range of things that had surprised them.

One of the most common things mentioned was the pleasant surprise evoked at students' unexpected achievements and successes.

One interviewee described a student's change in attitude and spelling improvements:

On the day of the interview ... a student who had been very negative had asked her 'Wouldn't you like to test me on that spelling?', and that was good because … he spelt every word perfectly and he doesn't choose easy words to learn either.

Well, sometimes you think a person will never make it, that they'll never get started, and it will never go in! And then suddenly it seems to be there… And that's jolly good… And if it takes that long I suppose it takes that long…

I do notice that they, they come along many of them and they mumble… And of course we encourage them to speak clearly… And so they mumble, mumble they might mumble sort of for about nine sessions. And then suddenly the next session's totally different, and they are speaking up, and they are even argumentative, and more assertive, I've had this sort of thing…

It's a bit disconcerting for a start, but it's really good 'cause you know they're on their way… And they're on their way towards independence as well…

When it's unexpected, you know you just think this mumbling is going to go on forever and then suddenly click, something's happened. Well they come along you see, and after you think they can't do anything and they've brought this piece of work that they've done… Written a poem, or written something, and there it is, it's the unexpected nature of it… And one has to be ready to go along with it.

One interviewee described the success of a student in writing stories:

> On two occasions recently my student has done very good stories, which surprised me, and … both have been published in [our organisation's] newsletter… In addition, the place where she works has a newsletter for their staff, and she recently has had a story about something that happens at the home which she turned into a lovely story that's gone into that newsletter… So last week she came very thrilled to the lesson to say that the newsletter had come out and that there was a note on the noticeboard. Three of her colleagues had written a comment about how great her story was, which was wonderful.

One interviewee said they had been amazed at the extraordinary speed with which a recent migrant had progressed in understanding written English:

> Today, a new person joined the class—a Cambodian refugee. [Back home] he'd been to school for eight years, he'd only been in the country two weeks. However, he can understand many things that other people have been struggling with for years. He can't really understand that much of what I'm saying to him, but you know the reading he just whips through that. You know you get this and you think, this is amazing, isn't it?

One interviewee described the way in which a number of the students on a recent course picked up and ran successfully with the challenge of public speaking:

> I was pleasantly surprised when at the end of the unit that I did on listening I got students to do speeches—small speeches about something of their choice. I was pleasantly surprised at how well the students who chose to do it really tackled it and confronted their fears, and just really got up there and said often some stuff that was really personal to them.

> One of the students made a speech about making a speech and how hard it was. And it was beautifully structured, and humorous, and well delivered. She was so nervous, but she overcame it all and she shone amazingly through with that. And another young man who really doesn't like writing at all, has never really learnt to write, relying entirely on lists, delivered a completely eloquent and well structured, humorous, factual, informative speech. It was brilliant and it was off the top of his head. He didn't have anything written down!

One interviewee described a recent writing achievement by one of her students:

> Today I got as real surprise. This week we'd set the students a research assignment. We said they were only going to have one week [to do the assignments]. There were lots of moans and groans and carrying on, but they really got stuck into it. And one of the ... slower people in the class, who easily gets agitated about … written work because of his learning difficulty, finished his today. …He had researched a music group and so he'd written down all the names of their albums, etc. and that was great… You know, even though we did the typing for him, the words were his own.

Unexpected spelling and reading achievements were also identified:

> We have a spelling test every Friday. It's completely non-competitive, but one of my students has to [write his words] all over the whiteboard, and make a big performance … he finds it really stressful to do the test, and has to talk out loud. So he drives everyone else up the wall. Anyway last Friday he only got two spelling words wrong and he announced, 'I've

bought my first book and I've read heaps of it. I've read nearly half of it …' And I thought, 'It's fantastic'. The book's on skateboarding, and it's the most awful book to read—the fonts are really small and the lines are… really hard for him. But because it's about skateboarding he's really persevering.

One interviewee was amazed at the new-found confidence and ability in public speaking in a recent group of students:

When all those students stood up and spoke at my farewell last week I was just gob-smacked. I couldn't believe it ...all those very nervous people and they were just prepared to stand up in front of a group of 50 people and speak. Yeah I was amazed. I was just so amazed.

One interviewee highlighted the surprises which can occur in the relationship between tutors and students. In particular she described her surprise when one of her students had responded in an unexpectedly positive way to a blunt critique of his work:

A couple of weeks ago I didn't have a very good session with one student. In general I felt that I got on all right with him. But I just sort of felt that I wasn't getting through. One of the first sessions I had with this student I thought I'd blown it completely, because I felt that I'd got a bit bossy. …He was a young man and I thought hmm. I'd been fairly, I suppose, blunt in telling him what I thought he needed to do… And I actually thought that week I wouldn't see him the next week. But he was there early the next week with his folder and he'd actually done everything I'd suggested. You can't always tell, so obviously something had got through.

One interviewee said that she had been surprised at the maturity shown by one of her younger students:

Maybe the maturity of some of the younger students. We had a discussion, it was not my lesson, it was Sally and Michelle that you just saw here. They had a class going with one of the tutors, one of the youth classes, and they had a debate on lowering the drinking age or something like that. And there was one girl in there and she, one of the younger students, and she gave argument after argument in a very positive, constructive way, and the way she was moulding the facts, you know, very good. I thought very good for a young person, the way she was participating instead of standing there like a lot of them—bah, you know, they're like bah, who cares, you know—but she was really good at wording the argument and very convincing too, you know. Because the tutors tried to defend one point of view with a group of students and the other group of students tried to say no, no, it's not low enough or something like that, you know, because we can handle it and blah, blah, blah, blah, all that stuff. But that one girl in there, I thought yes, excellent example of how to put views across, you know. And not by using swear words and stuff like that, you know, just with a very mature sort of a way.

One interviewee described her delight and surprise in experiencing a different cultural perspective was also identified:

> Well, we decided, instead of having a class for the last session we'd go and visit this lady who'd had a baby [recently]. So we all bowled around there, and it was just wonderful. The whole place was, it was a tiny little state house overrun with loads of children and then there's one room in this house which … on the wall were these wonderful hangings of …silk hangings and curtains, which completely went right around the room and there was this floor seating, which I had never seen in my life before. If we could be anywhere in the world, and then in comes … and the tea on the floor and… It was really nice, and I felt really privileged to be working in the field doing things like this for people.

Finally, some interviewees described as unexpected or surprising some of the emotions which they themselves had experienced in the course of their literacy work. These ranged from exhilaration and joy to anger and disappointment. One tutor was surprised to find that she had "become angry with the students, and was surprised at this reaction". Another was surprised at the anger she had felt when hearing of the way in which one of her students had been treated at work, while several described their exhilaration when their students had unexpectedly succeeded.

Reflections on practice contained in practice journals

As mentioned previously, for the purpose of the practice journals a critical incident approach was also used. Practitioners were asked to respond to the following questions: At what point (or points) over this period did you feel most connected, engaged, or affirmed as an Adult Literacy Tutor—the point when you said to yourself, "This is what being an Adult Literacy Tutor is all about?" At what point (or points) over this period did you feel most disconnected, disengaged, or bored as a tutor—the point when you felt you were just going through the motions? What was the situation that caused you the greatest anxiety or distress—the kind you don't want to have to go through again in a hurry? What was the thing that took you by surprise? shocked or challenged or thrilled you? Of everything you have done in your practice over this journaling period, what would you do differently if you had the chance? What would help you to do so? When you look back over this journaling period, what do you feel proudest and/or most pleased about? Why?

Responses to these questions are discussed in the subsequent five sections.

Point/s at which practitioners felt most engaged, connected, or affirmed as adult literacy tutors

It seems that all these practitioners found their greatest satisfaction and affirmation in the accomplishments or achievements of their students. These accomplishments were of various kinds. One person wrote that the most satisfaction they had gained had been gained through "helping a … woman write a job application letter and prepare for an interview. She got the job! The student gained in confidence." Another practitioner wrote that:

> One of our second language students is to become a New Zealand citizen tomorrow. She expressed her joy to me about the 'special occasion'. She is very shy and rarely interacts with the group. I was very excited that the group responded so positively when I asked them to write on a card for her. The best response was—'Cool—now you are a Kiwi 2'.

A third practitioner wrote in general that she felt most affirmed when she saw "people succeed (obtaining a driver's licence, passing tests/assessments, taking the initiative [and responsibility] for their learning, making people think outside the square) and encouraging/coaching them". By way of contrast, two practitioners wrote on similar themes but in very specific terms. One wrote:

> My student wrote five short, accurate work scenarios with minimal spelling errors for the first time. This breakthrough made me feel we were at long last in sight of [her] primary goal.

Another said she was affirmed as an adult literacy tutor:

> When a student with serious literacy difficulties took over my apostrophe lesson (he's heard it so many times before) and did a great job of explaining my examples.

> When students spontaneously notice things about words/spelling/patterns, and tell me about that process.

> When I hand out work and 12 students all become lost in proof-reading, when (apart from my typos) it's not meant to be a proof-reading exercise—must do something on writing instructions.

> When we celebrate a 21st birthday and nobody writes *Happy Brithday* in the key!

Finally, one practitioner provided the following full account of some of the language experiences of one of her refugee learners and of her reactions to teaching and learning:

> One Kurdish lady was very detailed about what she had learned this year: how to write her name, address, phone number, and the name of her country 'Kurdistan'.

> Her family [had been] ... thrown out of Iran and made to live in a camp in Iraq a long way from the Kurdish area. Now they have to live on a south sea island and maybe never go home because of their belief in a Kurdish homeland. Now she can say 'Kurdistan' whenever she likes and she has learned how to write it as well. There is kind of an incredible power in this for her. It's fantastically exciting for her and us to see her break through into literacy.

> This kind of breakthrough moment, which we see a couple of times each year, is like a change of gear in the brain. The moment when we stop going through the motions, and the learner actually begins to see the point of it all. Then they begin to take some responsibility for their learning. They might begin practising (or [sic]) the alphabet at home, or start trying to read words they see in the environment, or with speaking and listening they begin to use the language to communicate. This is tremendously exciting and it makes all the hell of trying to manage this class worthwhile. I think this process happens in some way whenever we learn, but because these are non-literate people who have never attended school before, the process is incredibly slow. Sometimes it's many steps backward and a long period of just doing the work but not really learning, before it all clicks or something spurs them to take responsibility for learning or they see why we ask them to write their name and address over and over again or why we do question and answer over and over. When I see someone begin to make this progress and to see it in themselves I know it is all worth it.

Point/s at which practitioners felt most disengaged, disconnected, or bored as a literacy tutor

A variety of issues were raised by practitioners in response to this item. Some referred to times of low energy among learners and tutors: "Nobody, including me, could get excited about writing yet another formal letter, so we abandoned it and went for a fun topic." The absence of some learners from a group can have a negative impact. One co-ordinator noted: "In the past I have felt disconnected or bored when only a few students attended, and especially when these are the 'quiet', 'head down and get on with it' students."

Some of the practitioners commented on the boredom induced by the slowness with which some of their students learnt. One wrote: "When I'm working with intellectually challenged students … whatever they learn one day, they usually forget the next." The same tutor was one of those who also referred to behavioural difficulties that could erupt in the classroom: "Sometimes they are verbally abusive." And another tutor wrote:

> I felt particularly disconnected when a student who had been making amazing progress displayed some very negative behaviour when given something different from the 'comfort zone' activities such as 'Practice your English', which she had helped herself to from the bookshelf. I also had to speak with her about being negative in the group sessions that another tutor had been taking. She reacted very badly and rode off on her bicycle. Fortunately she only went as far as the gate but it took a whole morning to reach a resolution.

Practitioners also commented on their disappointment when learners fail to fulfil their agreed-on responsibilities. One practitioner noted: "The production of only one short work scenario for homework over a two-week period was very disappointing, especially as it was mainly the work of a colleague. The student is committed to writing in their homework book every day, so I felt as if I was pushing a boulder up hill!"

Practitioners noted that external circumstances and events in the lives of learners and tutors can have a profound effect on the learning/teaching transaction. For one practitioner, "I think it was when my daughter was in hospital and I came to class with a cobbled together lesson and was somewhat distracted, that I wasn't really connected. This shows that with this facilitation approach it is the planning that is vital. If you have a clear idea of what you want to achieve and the right materials then things happen even under the difficult circumstances we teach under."

The difficulty of ensuring mutual understanding and pitching the teaching material at the right level within an ESOL class was noted by one person. She said that this was something she was still learning to do:

> ...at times I feel as if I'm talking to people across a deep chasm of mutual [lack of] understanding. In this class, where we are reliant on bilinguals and where everyone is on their own level, my work is really facilitation more than teaching. This means relinquishing control of many things and just letting it happen. Often it is like working in the dark. This can be disconnecting, e.g. what is actually happening with the learners working in the crèche? I might get downstairs once in a lesson to see them; the rest of the time it's up to the

volunteer down there to follow my instructions or not. So I might have my plan and my methods but the bilinguals and others might not understand or implement it as I would like.

It is easy to get too ambitious. Often it depends how the material is used and I may end up not having control of that. For example, I distributed a worksheet from which I wanted the learners to pick out certain words commonly found in instructions on medicine labels—I didn't expect them to read all the material which I thought was beyond them. However the volunteers and learners thought that I had asked them to read the whole thing. Consequently they complained that it was too hard. Clearly this was a case of misunderstanding.

Situations which caused the greatest anxiety or distress

Responses here echoed some of those in the previous section. Some practitioners described situations in which a student or group of students were out of control. One practitioner stated that she "had to talk with a student whose attendance has been poor and has hardly been participating or speaking this term". She also had "a student 'winding up', answering back, generally building up and pushing me to react. I dread this situation for the disturbance it causes to me and rest of class."

Several references were made to situations associated with student absences. Voluntary tutors in particular can feel a sense of being used when students fail to turn up for sessions. One practitioner wrote as follows:

Two weeks ago I changed my own routine to meet my student on a different day, time and place to suit her change of work roster. She failed to turn up for our appointment. She had been asked to work extra shift hours and forgot our arrangement. Although she apologised when I followed up that evening, I felt used and wondered whether the monetary reward had taken precedence over her commitment to me, her volunteer tutor.

Another practitioner wrote as follows about a difficult situation that had arisen, not in relation to a student, but in dealing with a student's partner:

Today I dialled 111 for the first time! The person who answered the call told me it was probably not a sufficiently serious situation to do this and I agreed with this. However it felt threatening at the time. We had all been manipulated and controlled by this young man's actions for an extended period, and I had to let him know I was serious. He removed himself to the road gate and sat there for more than two hours.

Most of the situations associated with anxiety, however, were not associated directly with students at all. Some were associated with other work pressures. Two practitioners referred to situations in which colleagues' actions generated distress. One refers to "negativity among staff members during breaks", another to a "run-in with another tutor who is racist and homophobic", while a third referred to a different kind of stress concerning staff. She wrote:

My day was not over—I had to tell a colleague that there would probably not be enough hours for her next year. I had not looked forward to this but I was humbled by her graciousness, in spite of her disappointment. I felt sorry that she had been employed as a tutor rather than as an assistant which would have allowed us to keep her on.

Finally, there were references to work pressures arising from the amount of work undertaken:

> Things have been good in the class this year and I haven't had any teaching or management problems. I get anxious more over the other work I have to do to keep it running. My responsibility of organising the volunteers—about 60 people, mostly driving, and recruiting them—is quite hard and done from home. When I finish the day with a list of people I have to ring at home at night (as happened today because many people aren't coming next week so I have to call all their drivers) this can be stressful. I only teach the programme 8 hours a week as does the person I job-share with, and this is because we have a lot of administrative responsibilities and we can only take so much of people demanding things etc. The administrative work pays me only a small amount of money but it often seems to overshadow the actual teaching and takes many hours. This is the nature of the group we are working with: they are extremely labour intensive.

Things that surprised, shocked, challenged, or thrilled practitioners

It would seem from the responses to this question that most, though not all, of the surprises were positive ones. One practitioner responded in the following way:

> Thrilled—One of my students landing an excellent job; Shocked—Two of my students involved in a murder; Surprised—One of my highest needs/problem students getting a job at an equipment hire company.

Another referred to:

> The hidden interests students reveal at times (history, politics, culture, psychology, languages, maths). It's great to use these in students' learning and my own learning too, because teaching is two-way traffic!!

Things that thrilled a third practitioner included the following:

> Two of my students with dyslexia said in their half-term interviews how well the phonics/small group spelling teaching had worked for them and asked for more as we haven't met for a few weeks.

> When my colleague said of two students following a session devoted to finding patterns in words, 'They've really got it, you've taught them that!'

> When I suggested to a student, who lives in a muddle, that she should tidy her desk and prioritise her pile of work for the morning, before she leaves in the afternoon, she actually did it, without a reminder.

And a fourth wrote as follows:

> My student wrote a short piece in the third person about the bird and insect life residing in the hedge that surrounds her garden. It was brilliant and good enough to submit to the Organisation's Newsletter. By contrast, after a year she still struggles with the language required for work reports.

Finally, one of the practitioner's responses served to highlight the importance of not trying to do too much for one's students. It suggests the importance of simply being there for them:

Our most recent student coloured in and drew all day—he is having accommodation problems. He has had numerous foster homes and now his social worker has decided to move him to an independent living situation and has found him board in a one-woman household. When he left today he gave me the briefest detail about this—foolishly I pushed it by asking questions. He responded by thanking me for all I had done for him, which basically has been leaving him alone!

Things practitioners would have done differently if they had had the opportunity

Practitioners' responses suggest for the most part that in the circumstances and with the current pressures on them they could have done little differently. However, they do qualify this in various ways. One wrote: "If I had more time and my days were more predictable, I would spend more time planning in detail. I need more time and consistent student attendance." Another wrote as follows:

Have sussed the non-participating student and, once given the attention, he's back on track. While I'd like him to operate independently and thought that he would have come back from the September holidays operating at the same level of independence and motivation that he had in Term 3, he has obviously had a setback and needs all the reassurance and 'hand-holding' that he did earlier on the year. I feel bad that I have let him slide for so long this term.

A third practitioner wrote:

I would do nothing differently. However, I struggle with J's inability to memorise and retain old and new spelling words. Past demons such as 'where' for 'were' and vice versa recur repeatedly. Age and first language interference (Dutch) are probably factors, but it is still frustrating.

Finally, one reflected quite extensively:

I think that there is little I could do differently. I think the way we manage the class is the only possible way of managing something as complex as this and our methods have been developed over a 13-year period which is how long the programme has existed. If everybody came every day and understood why they were here and spoke English and weren't stressed or traumatised or old or resentful and angry about their lives or having a mental breakdown or on a one-month fast or distracted with babies—yes we could achieve much better results, and efficiently as well. (I know this because I work in other classes that are 'normal'.) The very reason for the existence of the class is to support and teach people who cannot learn in a more mainstream environment so all the problems we face each day are part and parcel of what we do.

I would love to have more time and knowledge to plan more efficiently so that I can be sure that what I want to happen will happen, that the worksheet I want to use or have made will actually review exactly what I want it to. This sometimes (quite often) doesn't happen, but in this kind of environment and under the kind of pressure we work and the programme being so resource starved as it is that would be a luxury. Having to design the curriculum as you go and re-design it each year can mean that you are constantly reinventing the wheel

and that everything is in draft form and not perfected as it would be if you just repeated the programme year by year. If however you compare the materials we produced say 3 years ago with those we produce today there is a definite progression and improvement. As for the learners having a programme literally constructed around them and their needs, as opposed to fitting them into an already existing structure (as in a school or polytechnic), this has real advantages. When we design a worksheet or a weekly programme we know exactly who will be doing it and what they need.

Things that practitioners felt proudest or most pleased about

The responses here echo strongly those referred to in 1 above, and in particular the pride and pleasure which tutors have in the accomplishments of their learners and the part which they may have played in their successes. Most practitioners express this in one way or another. One wrote, "I feel proud and pleased that with my encouragement [her student] has developed a reading habit and is enjoying books. She is now using the local library and is proud she can read and return a book within the four week loan period." Another wrote that he is proudest when he "sees people succeed! Never write off those Youth and Training Opportunities trainees," he writes, "because they're unpredictable (in the positive sense)." Yet another wrote that the thing that pleased her most was when "I realise I have given (or helped to give) students the skills and confidence to go the next step and get a job or go on to Polytechnic or another course".

Somewhat more extensively, one practitioner wrote:

> It's wonderful when someone achieves a goal that we have supported them to achieve. One person failed the citizenship English test at the beginning of this year. Now he has just passed it because we were able to teach him to answer the questions he needed to and he was able to trust us and use us to achieve his goal … it's been pretty exciting for him and us.

> I feel inspired when I work with a man who has waited 60 years to be in school and who has struggled ... to learn to write his name and address and to ... see where words begin and end. I know he will keep on coming and keep on struggling to learn—something like that is incredibly humbling and inspiring.

Finally, another of the practitioners, moving from the general to the particular, wrote in these terms:

> I have enjoyed teaching essay writing [this year]. The students have been great, enjoying the challenge and appreciating my walking them through the different tasks. They are excited about their next year's study which is great… This period has been probably the least structured programme of the year so far, as I have managed to run quite an individualised programme for many students who have been here all year and are pretty independent—it's working well.

> [I'm] pleased with the way I handled the student who was on the way to 'blowing up'—I pre-empted it by saying I thought he was having a rough day, could he tell me about it…

Concluding reflections—journal

At the conclusion of the journal, practitioners were invited to make any other comments. Most took advantage of this to make a final point or two, frequently on issues that had been highlighted for them by the task of doing the journal. One person expressed surprise at the number of unpaid hours she worked and "how many students are intellectually disabled or have mental illness". A second person reflected on the uncertainties of literacy learning and teaching. She wrote:

> After 7 years [teaching] this class, I still feel that I'm an amateur... I'm still coming to grips with what to teach and how to teach, how to strip everything back to something simple enough to be understood and yet be useful and interesting. I don't have an answer to the question that someone asked me the other day—'How do you teach someone to read?' I have some ideas, but there really isn't a definitive step by step process that works for everyone.

Another emphasised the importance of fun and flexibility in her reflections on "a day from hell" in the following terms:

> To-night I have a multitude of issues to reflect upon. I am sitting in front of a bag of lollipops, which are to be a part of a 'pass the parcel activity' for tomorrow. A colleague told me that the game was played at a board meeting she attended recently—'It got some energy released,' she said.

> When we brainstormed recreational activities recently some students suggested pass the parcel. Two reasons to give the activity a go. The only other times I have been a part of such an activity have been with my children and grandchildren. I have a pack of pens for the last wrapper and I will put a lollipop and a quotation to be read at each unwrapping.

> Postscript

> The 'pass the parcel' activity did not eventuate—a student was very disturbed about it and very vocally announced that she didn't want to be a part of it. It will eventually happen but in the meantime I have a large newspaper parcel tied up with an orange ribbon sitting on my desk.

A fourth practitioner emphasised the enjoyment of the work of voluntary teaching as well as the need for more funding to enable voluntary workers to gain paid employment in this field. She wrote:

> I enjoy being a literacy tutor, albeit only in a voluntary capacity at present. More funding from Government to enable voluntary tutors like myself to get into paid employment in this field, would undoubtedly help alleviate the pressing literacy needs of many more New Zealanders (not to mention growing number of refugees and migrants) to more quickly take their rightful place in our multi-cultural society.

Finally, another practitioner also ended by expressing satisfaction in his work in adult literacy. He wrote that, after 12/13 years of practice he still finds the work "hugely satisfying.... I'm a facilitator who is good at making learning happen … mostly … depending on degree of student's participation. Relating to people is the key, not subject knowledge! All sessions were good. Most students really want to learn something and this is easy to guide. I like what I'm doing!"

3. Practitioners' aspirations and their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their practice and work contexts

Thirdly, we wanted to understand more about practitioners' aspirations, their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their practice, and of the contexts within which they work, including issues to do with adult literacy practice as paid and unpaid work. For this purpose we have drawn on data from the focus groups and the practice journals.

How did adult literacy work fit in with practitioners' lives and career goals?

This question was addressed in the interviews as well as in the practice journals. Accordingly, this section draws on both sources.

The time devoted to adult literacy work varied considerably between the six practitioners keeping practice journals. For some of them it was a full-time paid job; for some it was a part-time paid job; while for others their involvement was unpaid and voluntary. Whether or not they were in paid employment in adult literacy, a key aspect of their practice as reported was that they all did a number of hours of unpaid work on a voluntary basis. For some of these practitioners adult literacy constituted their vocation and career.

With regard to payment it would seem that in some instances at least, insufficient attention was given by funding agencies to the important place of out-of-classroom or noncontact work in engaging in effective adult literacy practice. In at least one instance the agency was not funded for these activities and, as a consequence, the practitioner was called upon to undertake most of this work on an unpaid voluntary basis. One practitioner wrote as follows:

> The teaching is relatively easy and I have built up a good rapport with most of the learners and the ethnic communities over the years, but the co-ordinating side is painful and underpaid and cuts into time that could be spent earning money. Yet without this work the classes couldn't function so it's a bit of a cleft stick for us. For example, the new teacher who just teaches and has no administrative responsibilities and doesn't need to make materials is thus able to teach more hours and be paid more than those of us who have more responsibility. This I find unfair, but it is the way the funding is organised that allows this to happen.

Only one or two interviewees referred to adult literacy as a "career" or related it to "career goals". For some it constituted a "vocation" rather than "career" and for others it was a vocational interest or commitment. Perhaps this is a realistic response to a situation in which there are very few opportunities for practitioners to pursue a career in this field.

One interviewee said that adult literacy work is "a job but it's also a career", while another sees it as a career but goes on to raise two difficulties: (1) the need for more training courses, and (2) the

difficulty of getting paid work. A third person responded to the question by emphasising the same point that there is a need for more training courses and more jobs:

> I see it as a career and I would like to have more courses running though, because there's a huge need out there. Because we have a lot of enquiries from people who are working so I would like to, I guess I would like to be teaching and then I'd like to be kind of coordinating another course. So if we could run the same course alongside, because when you start talking to staff and that suddenly a lot of people are really interested in the field, and they're like well how do you get into it, and how do you get paid work in it, which is another issue.

And another, who clearly feels passionately about adult literacy and sees it as an important element in her life, stated:

> Well it [adult literacy work] is my career. (Laughing). …And it is my life. I'm very interested in the research that's going on. I love making resources for the students, and I just love talking to other people about it and so it is, probably, a huge part of my life. [It should be recognised as a profession.] 'I think that it's sort of highly under-rated…

One person said that she had been working in the field for six to seven years. Although she did not mention career goals, she clearly had a "highly professional attitude" to her involvement in adult literacy. She stated that she feels she has a lot more to learn:

> I'm just scratching the surface of knowledge, and as long as it's like this, you want to keep doing it.

In a somewhat similar fashion a number of people referred to their work in adult literacy not as a career but as a vocation. These people included volunteers as well as part-time tutors who had no aspirations to move into full-time practice.

A number of interviewees were involved in adult literacy work on a voluntary or part-time basis for a number of reasons. They enjoyed the work and they saw it as making a worthwhile contribution to the community. In addition, it allowed them to pursue other interests or fulfil other commitments especially as parents and caregivers in their families.

One interviewee said that he really enjoys the work—most of the time. He works part-time since this allows him to be a parent as well as do other teaching:

> I've been there for a while. Sometimes I think it's time for another challenge, you know. Yeah, but I do a lot of other things, so I only do this part-time now. I've done it full-time for a while, but most of the years I've been working here, since 1991, I've been part-time and it has been excellent because I'm teaching languages as well, so I've done some work in primary schools. And I work at Canterbury University too.

Another person saw teaching, including teaching adults, as her vocation. She sees herself as a "born teacher" who believes in all forms of education for people of all ages. She said that she will "continue to be involved as long as she is able to be". It is very much part of her life. Another person said she sees adult literacy work as a vocation and would like to do further postgraduate study.

Another interviewee said that she saw adult literacy work as a hobby. She made it clear that she does not see adult literacy as a career and does not want NZQA qualifications:

> It's really just one of my hobbies ... it's really [just] one of the things I do. It's quite nice to see how they [the students] grow when you help them a bit... I keep in touch with quite a few of my students.

Similarly, another interviewee said that she worked in adult literacy mainly because she found it "fulfilling" and "interesting". She also liked the flexibility:

> I find it fulfilling and ... it allows me a certain amount of flexibility… I hope to be able to continue what I'm doing for some years, firstly because I'm interested in it, and secondly because it brings a small amount of income... At the moment I don't actually need to work. But I do so because of my interest and because, in the future, I think that it's something I can continue with.

Then there were those who enjoyed their work in adult literacy but who had become discouraged or disillusioned by all the tensions and frustrations. Comments here included the following:

> The tensions that I've encountered have ... made me question whether I want to carry on with this line of work in the future. [The whole emphasis at some places on] 'bums on seats', and on just filling the places [without] worrying about how the learners all ... gel together, or that kind of thing … leads me to high degrees of frustration with my work.

> Full-time ... work would be attractive if the frustrations ... could be addressed.

> [Currently working 9 hours a week] ... in some ways I'd like to stay with it and move more into full-time or more hours as the children get older and I feel like I've got more space. [However] I'm just not too sure. I've felt frustrations. I guess the issue that people always have to face is trying to fit their philosophy and their beliefs about something or about learning with the reality of the situation, and trying to keep courses full of participants. I sometimes find it quite a struggle getting the right kind of balance in trying in one class to meet the needs of very different groups of people. I don't think it's the case across the board, but we've had quite a number of ESOL students on the course whose needs are very, very different from those of the literacy students who are coming through.

Several interviewees were retired, partly retired, or looking to retirement and saw adult literacy work as a useful way of keeping involved on a part-time basis. One interviewee, who is in her late 50s, said that she loves her work, which is part-time and involves working one-to-one with young people and adults. She finds it very interesting and enjoyable and feels that it's worthwhile, but sees no need for "career goals" or further training.

Another interviewee said that she was retired but wanted to use skills acquired while studying for a BA. She said that cost was a barrier to obtaining further formal qualifications. Another refers to the importance of maintaining work/life balance and the contribution her adult literacy involvement makes to this. She states that, "I feel I'm too young to give up full-time work." And another said that she is:

> hoping to semi-retire and just do literacy because that's what I really love. At the moment I'm teaching ESOL at PEETO as a reliever during the day, but at nights I'm doing part-time literacy for Somali ladies, and I just adore it. It's wonderful.

And one interviewee who is retired made it clear that she had no career goals. However, she enjoyed the challenges and the social contacts involved:

> Well, being retired, I guess I don't have any career goals left, but it fits in with the fact that I enjoy the stimulation of being challenged I guess, and working with people, and otherwise I think you could sort of sit at home and get quite insular. So it sort of fits in, makes me get out and about. I enjoy the people and the stimulation of it.

A different though related theme to emerge in response to this question focused on some of the qualities needed by people working in adult literacy. These included a belief in the importance of literacy and communication, a capacity to show respect for all people and deal with them as equals in every respect, and the capacity to retain a passion for the task of empowering people through literacy:

> I think you've really got to believe in people. You've got to be prepared to go to their place. You can't expect them to come to you. You've got to gain their respect, and you've got to realise that it's a long sort of process, and they need to know about the process as well. They're not big children. They're quite different to working with children.

> I've always loved to read and communicate, and I love speech and drama and things like that, and if I hadn't been able to read or write I wouldn't have been able to do all those things and I just think it's a huge gap in people's lives that their reading and writing isn't at a level where society expects it to be. So I guess that, I suppose I kind of drifted into it, but I'm really quite passionate about empowering people and I think that these skills are so important to them being empowered.

One person relates her involvement closely to issues of social justice/advocacy, which she sees as being central to her life:

> …when I look back on my life the things that have challenged me most … have been when I can stand up and speak for people who are not able to do that for themselves… In my earlier years it was, of course, in psychiatric hospitals, … but we've got to the stage where we now don't have to do that. So this fitted in very neatly with that.

Positive aspects of adult literacy practice

In this and the following section we draw on data from the focus groups. The positive features of adult literacy practice which of course may also be interpreted as motivational factors, may be grouped into the following sets: those focusing on the social purpose of adult literacy programmes; the satisfaction in helping someone else make a difference in their lives; the satisfaction gained from the social encounter between learners and tutors; the satisfaction gained from the opportunity and scope to continue one's own learning and professional development; the flexibility and diversity of the work; the recognition by an employer and the salary (for one

person); and force of habit (for one person who had been tutoring for many years). No claim is made here that any practitioner is driven by only one set of factors. On the contrary, it may well be the case that we are all driven by more than one set of factors.

Social purpose—"There's a job that needs doing"

One key factor, which some participants identified as influencing them in undertaking adult literacy work, was a sense of vocation, a social commitment. Tutoring adults with reading and writing difficulties was seen as a socially worthwhile thing to do. There was a sense of social purpose. One participant expressed it in this way: "…somebody's gotta do it… It's something that needs doing." A second person said that "...it's obviously a need and it has to be done by someone". And a third person emphasised her view that through voluntary adult literacy work people can make a social contribution:

> …as a volunteer I did it because I had come to a stage in my life where I wanted to give back to the community…

Enjoyment and love of the work—It's intrinsically satisfying and rewarding

A second set of factors identified by a number of participants had to do with the enjoyment and love of the work itself. Within this set of factors three distinctly different though overlapping orientations can be seen: (a) the first focuses externally and finds satisfaction in helping someone else make a difference in their lives; (b) the second also focuses externally and highlights the satisfaction gained from the social encounter between learners and tutors; and (c) the third focuses internally on the satisfaction gained from the opportunity and scope to continue one's own learning and professional development.

"...it's feeling that you can make a difference"

As indicated above, the first set of factors here focuses externally and highlights the satisfaction in helping someone else make a difference in their lives. The comments here were many and varied. One person highlighted "...the excitement of something significant happening to your students". Another said "...it's those small things that you ... observe in a person which can make a difference—not only to them but to you too—all this is rewarding and satisfying".

"I'm really enjoying ... getting to know these people."

The second set of factors here also focuses externally, but by way of contrast with the previous set, it highlights the satisfaction gained from the social encounter between learners and tutors. Examples of comments here include the following:

> I'm really enjoying the other [refugee and migrant] communities and getting to know and understand where they've come from and their cultures, and getting to know these people, characters, personalities…

> …it's great fun when you start to build up that rapport with them and it's not just the teaching ... it's the actual relationship.

Some participants in fact suggested that some forms of adult literacy work require primarily people who are interested in and good at working with people:

> It's good if you're a ... social sort of person … you meet lots of different people.

> …you make a greater connection in a one-to-one situation than in a class … it's easy to sort of get to know people … when you're sort of working ... one on one for a couple of hours with somebody. You do get to know them pretty well.

> *"It's a constant challenge ... I'm always learning something new."*

The third set of factors here focuses internally rather than externally on the satisfaction gained from the opportunity and scope to continue one's own intellectual curiosity and professional learning and development and for pursuing research interests. Examples of comments here include the following:

> I really enjoy it because I'm always learning something from the students…

> I find that ... you yourself get a lot of insight into people ... and I guess one is always doing professional development so that one is always learning. And there's always new things to try with people...

High levels of motivation that most adults bring to the tasks of literacy learning.

Working with adults who are volunteers for learning and most of whom therefore have a very high level of motivation was seen by some as a very positive feature of adult literacy work:

> One of the big positives of [working with] adults if you're lucky ... is the motivation—they have such tremendous will to work. If they've made that step to come themselves, not so much in the teenage area but adults who come, and that motivation can get them amazing places.

> Having a group of students ... who are just so wanting to learn, that's a positive.

Some people need the time and space to find themselves before they can learn. Spending time with people and seeing this happen can be very positive

Spending time with people with literacy difficulties was seen as a positive aspect of adult literacy work by some participants. The following sample of a conversation provides an illustration of this:

> I think for me, one of the positives of not being funded through the front door, is that we don't have a timeframe, so people can stay with us and it's really important not to have a timeframe. For instance, there's one woman who came here in, I don't know, the late nineties and she says now that for the first four years she hated everything about New Zealand—the smell, the sight, the language, the food, didn't want to know a bit of it, because she was suffering from the culture shock and a lot of stuff going on for her, and

then she started turning around and now she's started learning, but in those first four years ... she did learn to speak a bit, but it took her all that time to be ready to take the next step.

Inteviewer: And was she coming to you for those four years?

Interviewee: Yes. So in that four years she was just, she just needed the space to feel a bit better ... she was so distracted… I think it's a terrible thing to have these rigid timeframes because until people have balanced themselves in whatever way they need to, they're not going to learn and really progress.

Flexibility, diversity, and creativity of the work

The flexibility and diversity of adult literacy work was identified as a key factor by some participants as well as the opportunity to be creative. Examples of comments included the following: "I think I just like the flexibility of ... there's always something different to do", and "The work is really satisfying … you can use your creativity cause we have to make [our own resource materials]. There's not the kind of resources available for people in our level of learning, so you can expand your creativity as far as you like and if you're able to."

Some practitioners keep going to some extent out of habit and this can be positive for some

By way of contrast, some participants pointed to the regularity with which they had been involved in the work over many years as being a positive factor and an incentive to continue. The following is a sample of a conversation:

> …you said you've been involved for quite a long time?
>
> About fifteen years.
>
> Fifteen years, so what's kept you going year after year?
>
> Some of it's habit—but ... mostly because you get something out of it, you don't really look for big results, more little small results.

Recognition and pay can be important for some practitioners

For some practitioners the pay and the recognition by employers as well as by students of the value of work done is a positive factor contributing to them keeping going. One person stated: "I'm certainly a lot better paid in this position than I've been previously, but I also feel valued both by the employer and the students; so you know, I think I'm getting paid in that way."

Mixed orientations and factors

As indicated above, we do not wish to claim that any practitioner is driven by only one set of factors. On the contrary, it may well be the case that we are all driven by more than one set of factors, and implicit in some of the evidence presented above is the notion that people's

motivations cannot readily be categorised. In at least one case the enjoyment inherent in making connections with people is combined with positive feelings associated with doing something worthwhile: "You make ... personal connections with people and [you have] a sense of doing something worthwhile." In a second case a variety of factors and orientations are evident: "The sense of doing something worthwhile and of helping someone make a difference in their life and the value of the experience of a highly emotional encounter with another human being from a very different cultural background." This illustrates the dangers of categorisations and the value of holistic thinking. A third case highlights the integration of at least two factors—the curiosity and interest of the tutor in trying to understand her student's background and her positive feelings in being able to contribute something to the student's ability to make a difference:

> I find it interesting ... [trying to understand] the huge impact that their [the students'] life experience has—whether it's been bad or good or a mixture. It can have a profound effect on their learning, as to whether they have the confidence, they may have the ability but they don't have the confidence. Once they have the confidence it can make it really very simple and ... it's lovely to think that they do take a wee part of you with them because you've got to work very closely, and so you do—almost intimately with some people.

And in a fourth case we see the joy in teaching people who really want to learn in a way which is determined by the tutor herself as well as the positive feelings generated by the supportive environment in which she works and the opportunity to see her students succeed:

> Positives? Having a great group of students. Having the course full… Being able to teach what I want to teach, what they want, you know, everybody says I want to learn to spell so I can teach students and to think that they're having those successes really, little successes really quickly so they stay motivated. Working at ... it's a lovely environment ... and people that I work with who are really enthusiastic about teaching and learning so that's a positive.

Negative aspects of adult literacy practice

In the previous section we have focused on the positive features of adult literacy work—the things that have kept practitioners going in their paid and unpaid work. In this section, which also draws on our focus group data, our attention moves to the negative features of their work. A variety of difficulties, problems, and negative features were identified in response to questions here.

The complexity of the task. One cannot focus on one area of content or one curriculum area

Some participants highlighted the difficulty and complexity of adult literacy work. In particular, some of the teaching in this field was seen as very demanding. A newcomer to the field pointed to the difficulty she was having in teaching an adult literacy class. She stated that one of the contrasts between her previous teaching and the adult literacy teaching she was doing was that it involved very much more than teaching a "subject". There were so many apparently conflicting demands and expectations:

> What I find hard about it is that there are so many different strands already, like every person is that individual so it's not like holding one subject and following that but having to go with that person who's on that line and that person who's on that line, I find that—because it's so new for me, I've only been doing it a few weeks, it's like it's mind boggling. And that's one of the hard things for me.

This view was endorsed by others with more experience who also pointed to the demands on their time and the pressures of course expectations:

> ...for me sometimes it's really negative to find that I don't have enough time to do the things I'd really like to do or to provide people or offer the opportunities that I'd really like to … the course just ... doesn't have those parameters in it, I mean it's a great course ... but the parameters just aren't wide enough.

> Yes there's always more. There's always that feeling that you could do more.

In addition, several participants drew attention to the complexities that arise out of the fact that many literacy students are at the same time struggling with a range of other difficulties in their lives:

> I find that with our students their literacy needs [are] only part of a wider set of things. By the time they've dealt with all of those, there's very little time left for literacy learning.

Frustrations felt by some adult students can lead to difficulties in teaching

The difficulties alluded to in the previous section are elaborated on here. The frustrations experienced by some adult students give rise to major difficulties for tutors. One participant referred to the frustrations she had felt in teaching on a Training Opportunity course when the students on the course failed to act responsibly. She said:

> They don't think to turn off lights or shut windows… You work with these adults, you take them out for a picnic, and then they've got no idea how to get themselves ... to the car, and ... they don't think to pick up coats and bags…

Other participants echoed this frustration. However, some went on to describe long-established habits and the expectation that the "*teacher* would do it all". One went on to say how important it was that tutors have the patience to "go with them while they're complaining", since it is only by allowing people to give vent to their frustrations that they can be freed to go beyond them to begin the hard process of learning:

> And I think another frustration is that even with adults, for all their motivation—and I agree ... that they are more motivated than the children who've been sent by their parents—they still have these … ingrained habits. [They] don't want to do anything between lessons ... they're expecting the teacher to do it all… It really is a partnership and adults do have to do the work and I find usually they come and they complain like fury about the English language. 'I don't want to do this', they complain and complain and complain, and if you can go with them while they're complaining, then sooner or later they drop their complaints and get down to work. I guess the complaining is a sort of defence mechanism and an excuse for their failure perhaps.

And another participant counselled tutors not to judge their students too harshly for their "negative behaviours". Instead, it was important to recognise and acknowledge the "huge changes" some of them had made "just to be in this group":

> When I first started, there were some ... behaviours too that were negative, dealing with some behaviours you don't expect from adults, and you think, 'Oh why?' Can't work it out, you know. And then you talk to them about it and you see that they've made some huge changes just to be in this group and you can see more changes there. It's fine but it's a hassle.

Literacy learning can be very hard work. We put a lot of pressure on many children and adults

Participants identified the fact that literacy learning is, as one person put it, "very, very hard work". It is, as she suggested, very important that this be recognised by all concerned. It can give rise to some of the difficulties and many of the frustrations referred to earlier. Moreover, unless we recognise this we are likely to have expectations which are unrealistic and which put our students under undue pressures to succeed in short periods of time:

> I think it's very, very hard work. I admire my students who put in this tremendously hard work 'cause I would imagine that if you can't read it's just such a huge thing to try to decipher, I think I'd be complaining a lot of the time and I can understand why people would do that. Because it is, it is very, very hard work so that it's I think—also if you don't come from a background where study and learning, whatever (inaudible) is not encouraged, you don't have the skills or the strategies or ways of thinking about, 'If I apply myself to this particular problem for a certain period of time I will be successful', if you haven't ever had that instilled in you, it's very hard to find it.

> I looked into the face of one of my students last week and she's just a young woman, just in her early thirties but I looked at the tiredness in her face and she could have been like a woman in her sixties. And she's ... trying so hard to correct all sorts of horrific things in her life, but she manages to do it, she's doing very, very well.

> And then there's the time pressure we put on people including children. I've devised a programme [for parents, teachers etc.] that helps them realise how hard it is for the children to learn and in the middle of it I'm usually saying, 'Now hurry up, you know that word, you know that word', and everyone can identify with the pressure we put on people while they're trying to learn.

Difficulties can arise from the natural tendency of people to avoid those things they don't like or enjoy or which they find difficult

Difficulties and frustrations were identified also as arising from a "natural tendency" of people to avoid those things they do not enjoy or which they find difficult. Many adults with literacy difficulties are those who either rejected formal schooling when they were young or had their particular learning difficulties exposed as deficiencies in the process of formal schooling. They learnt at an early age that they were no good at reading and writing and/or that they disliked

reading and writing. It was argued that to return to try something in the face of overwhelmingly negative past experiences presents large difficulties for some people:

> Given the choice, there's also the natural tendency of students to avoid things they don't like. We all do that. I mean out of choice … I don't run in the mornings. I never have. Given the choice I would go swimming, I would swim happily rather than run. It's almost the same with literacy—if it's difficult and takes a lot of effort, you avoid it when you get the choice.

Participants also suggested that the tendency of some people to avoid reading and writing leads to a growing gap between readers and nonreaders. Participants said:

> I heard of an expression ... [called] the Matthew effect. It refers [to the biblical idea that] to those who have much, more will be given and to those who have little, even that which they have, will be taken away… There's a lot of truth in it because the gap does get bigger, and it impacts on all sorts of areas of life if the basics of literacy aren't there.

> Yes, they lose out on a lot of vocabulary so you can be talking to them using some fairly ordinary words and they really don't know what you're talking about.

And of course it was noted that people who cannot read and write very well are frequently embarrassed about this, and develop a range of strategies to hide their difficulties.

Feeling under pressure to take on the role of a social worker as well as teacher

There are clearly different views on this.

A number of participants talked about the pressures on them to perform two roles, and the tensions that this caused. There were different views on how best to respond to this tension. On the one hand, there were those who rejected the notion that they should have a "social work" role. One argument advanced was that special skills were needed to deal with social work issues—skills which literacy tutors did not necessarily have. A second argument was that dealing with social work issues would detract from time and energies for literacy teaching:

> I guess one of the negatives for me when I first came into our programme was listening to people's personal stuff … it seemed to take up so much time and I wasn't skilled as a social worker, and I started feeling really uncomfortable because I didn't think I could … help them in the appropriate way and that I was only there to help them with their literacy and so I struggled with that for a long time but have now come to—I don't help them with personal stuff.

On the other hand, there were those who argued that the teaching and social work roles could not and should not be separated out and that they must be integrated. It was argued here the involvement in addressing social issues could deepen and extend the literacy learning and heighten its relevance to students.

Lack of adequate funding, facilities, and resources for voluntary groups

Several participants identified a lack of facilities, resources, and recognition for funding as giving rise to difficulties. A lack of adequate funding for voluntary groups was a source of major frustration for some people. A second related issue was the lack of recognition and facilities for volunteers. The following comments reflect these concerns:

> I think the major frustration [for us] is that we've been going for twelve years and we cannot get recognition. We never had any education money until we joined with the Community Tutor Service Scheme as they can get TEC money. [We haven't] even been able to get money to transport the students.

> My top negative is [a lack of] funding for voluntary groups ... a second one is [the lack of] parking for volunteers [at our centre].

The lack of adequate facilities for teaching was also an issue for some. One participant working in a marae-based programme described some of the difficulties involved in a lack of special-purpose classrooms:

> I think our biggest problem is not having our own classrooms… To have your own wall to put your own things on would be wonderful.

On the other hand, this same participant did recognise the many positive advantages of holding classes in such a setting:

For one participant who works with refugees, large groups, a lack of adequate transport and consequent irregularity of attendance all gave rise to major frustrations:

> They have 50 or 60 people who meet 3 &1/2 days a week but they don't all come at once… A lot of them don't get there unless I arrange a ... driver to bring them… And there aren't enough drivers. And so not everyone can be there all the time. It's impossible to get enough drivers and we would like our own van as well as our classrooms.

Problems arising out of the requirement that many courses are focused on short-term outcomes

The continuing funding of many adult literacy programmes was seen by many to depend on participants' short-term measured outcomes. Often the key measures of outcomes were based on information obtained by telephone interviews two months after the completion of a course on participants' employment and education or training undertaken. The following comments address these issues, and highlight the tensions that arise for practitioners in being required to achieve the kinds of outcomes stipulated:

> I find the fact that we're run by an outcome system really difficult because I believe that every person who comes to the centre improves in some way, but the only measure we have of whether they're successful or not is if they get a job or go to another course. There are people who come to us who make enormous changes in their lives but that's not mentioned or counted...

Our course is outcome focused, so we have to get our students into further training or work. However, some of the women love coming on the course. They want to stay there for years and years and they don't want to work. And yeah, this can lead to frustration; the Government doesn't measure self-esteem as an outcome. Everyone agrees on that.

Yes, very short time frames for measuring outcomes are also a problem. Only those jobs that they get directly after the course count. If they get a job the next month or six months down the track using the kinds of things that they benefited from on their course it doesn't count, and funding stops.

So there's always that quest there, in the back of your mind, always... While you're wanting to look at the person and ... [their] situation holistically cause you want to see what you can do sort of travelling along with them on their journey to make it better, always in the back of your mind are [the short-term] outcomes required. If I fail to get my outcomes then the whole course gets closed down, so everybody misses out and that's probably my strongest complaint or worry.

The two-month outcome measure after teaching a Training Opportunities course is awful. Two months after you've finished the course you have to ring people up, and of course half of them you can't track down. So there's an outcome gone. Not knowing … and the thought that your course running or not could be dependent on this outcome, I've never had that message but when you start ringing five people and you can't get hold of any of them, you know, of course I start to panic.

It's also a bit of an invasion of privacy, isn't it? It's awful.

Problems arising out of false promises and misguided rhetoric linked with limited funding which can lead to unrealistic expectations

Participants referred to false promises and misguided rhetoric which suggests that learners would be able to get a job or a better job once they have developed their literacy skills and that this can be achieved in a few short weeks by attending a class. A number described problems that arise out of the unrealistic expectations that are common in relation to adult literacy. We have already referred to the very hard work required of adults who become literacy learners after years of negative experiences in reading and writing. Unrealistic expectations are nevertheless common among learners, employers, funding agencies, and others with an interest in literacy learning. A good deal of time and patience is needed to develop literacy skills:

Becoming literate takes a lot longer than anybody thinks—or I mean, not people who work within the field—but people outside, government agencies and things. They don't understand what a long process it is.

The following participants draw attention to the danger of students expecting that a course will provide them with "a quick fix" as well as the constraints of costs in those cases where students are paying fees:

…it can depend on students' expectations; they may want a quick fix and become impatient.

The other constraint of course is time. If you work as an individual tutor people cannot usually fund more than one hour a week. And you don't get much done in an hour a week.

Another participant highlights a danger that learners may come to expect that raising their levels of literacy will inevitably make a difference to their lives. It is pointed out that this is not necessarily the case:

I think there's also a problem with raising the expectations of adult students ... you can raise their expectations that their life is going to be very different if they learn to read and write; but it may not be. Just because you learn to read and write, it doesn't mean it's going to actually make a difference—in some people it can make quite a marked improvement, but in some people it's like it won't. So you might be in a position where you're ... trying to keep people realistic. And I hate that because it feels like you're dampening down their enthusiasm when you're only trying to be realistic, because you know what the employment market is and that can often be difficult.

It is not only students who have unrealistic expectations. Participants pointed out that those who pay the piper also frequently have unrealistic expectations. In the first case referred to below it is the ACC, which only provided the funding for 10 lessons:

Yes, I had a person come from ACC, and they allowed for the payment of only ten lessons and you can't do much in ten lessons.

Administrators in tertiary education institutions also frequently look to cost cutting and underestimate the time required for students to achieve the necessary literacy standards:

This is the thing that I work under too—I do quite a lot of work for educational institutions, and a lot of it's funded in the same way. You get ten hours—which is very little—to work with a person, even though it's on an individual basis. Sometimes it's adequate to help a person on their way but many times it's just simply not enough.

Other teaching difficulties

Participants identified a number of other teaching difficulties that they had encountered. A number of difficulties were associated with the perceived inadequacies of unit standards and the requirement to teach to these standards:

It has been a big worry knowing how many unit standards I was expected to deliver.

Is there really any point in this person having this unit standard? There's students who have hundreds of unit standards who have no idea that they have them. To me it's just assessment for the sake of assessment and monitoring really.

Several of these related to difficulties arising out of the diversity of students in some of their groups, and in particular the range in levels of literacy competence:

...you can gather together a group of ten people who have literacy difficulties but they might all be at entirely different levels and need entirely different teaching or learning—and you've, and they put them into one class and say, 'make them literate in six months'.

> ...the nature of the students is that you've got this range from just learning to read and write letters to you know, really competent kind of readers, writers, spellers, so some people could whiz through it and others probably it's just at too high a level, even the basic. And even if you've got a person to read and write for you, sometimes they still don't understand group processes and things that are going on, so I think well, is there really any point in this person having this unit standard?

It was pointed out that it could be very difficult and frustrating for tutors of such diverse groups to be sure that they were reaching everyone in the group.

Finally, participants identified as a source of frustration the cost of maintaining teacher registration ($300 for three years) for practitioners who are volunteers or in low-paid positions.

Findings: conclusion

Findings in relation to the first three of our five research aims are summarised here. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, our fourth aim, that of exploring the impact of such factors as class, gender, and cultural background on the work of literacy practitioners, was not realised. Our fifth aim, that of contributing to building relevant research capacities in the field, is discussed elsewhere.

The project produced extensive data and interpretive work is continuing.

Background, characteristics, motivation, and training of adult literacy practitioners

The demographic profile of the group of practitioners was similar to that outlined in other relevant studies. Most practitioners were female, Pākehā/European or "New Zealander", and 79 percent were over the age of 40. The median period of involvement in adult literacy was between two and five years, with just over 45 percent having been involved for over two and under 10 years.

Practitioners' reasons for entry into the field of adult literacy were varied. Questionnaire respondents prioritised pedagogical and philosophical reasons, with enjoying working with adults and/or young adults, a fascination with adult literacy, and the chance to do something worthwhile those most often chosen and ranked most highly. Interviews revealed the range of motivations. For some, their personal disposition toward aspects of literacy and education was motivating: participants spoke of a love of reading, love of languages, or love of learning. For others, motivation was social, sometimes altruistic or political—a love of working with and/or helping other people or wanting to do something about a social problem—sometimes an interest in other cultures and a wish to get to know people from other cultures. Personal experience and empathy could be a driver: experience as a migrant, a personal experience of reading difficulties or unhappiness at school as a young person, or reading difficulties in one's own family. Influence, whether familial or from the field—personal contacts with an adult literacy tutor or

co-ordinator—were reasons some became involved in adult literacy. Pedagogical and intellectual drivers were behind some practitioners' entry into the field, for example, the experience of teaching or working with young people struggling with literacy-related difficulties, or the stimulus of personal studies as an adult. For some, life events were important: changes in career and/or personal circumstances. Pragmatic employment-related reasons such as flexibility and the part-time nature of much adult literacy work suited some people. Chance also played a role for some practitioners.

Over half of the practitioners held a compulsory sector teaching qualification with under a third having training in adult teaching. A quarter had training in English language teaching, with just over a fifth having training in adult literacy. The value placed on formal initial teacher training, other forms of training for adult literacy practitioners, and on-the-job experience varied widely. Many interviewees said that much of their learning had been on-the-job. However, this on-the-job learning was frequently complemented by nonformal learning, formal training, and a wide range of experiences in their families and in other work and voluntary situations.

The nature of literacy practice

Practitioners were located in a range of contexts and situations and they worked with a variety of learners. Nearly a third of the practitioners worked in PTEs, some of which were located in schools, or on marae, and nearly a quarter worked in the community. They described a range of different activities associated with adult literacy practice. These they categorised as teaching and nonteaching activities. Many teaching activities took place on a one-to-one basis as tutors worked with students on their individual learning programmes (81 percent of practitioners worked this way). However, small and large groups were also used extensively for a multitude of purposes (56 percent of practitioners worked this way, with 16 percent engaging in both individual and group work). A wide range of nonteaching activities was also identified. They included such things as planning and developing resources, assessing and providing feedback on learners' work, counselling and supporting learners, and a range of administrative and liaison responsibilities.

We found that practitioners highlighted a number of aspects of their work. They saw adult literacy work as involving not so much technical as social tasks. It was seen as requiring practitioners to have the capacity to move beyond the tasks of teaching literacy and numeracy, and to work with diverse people with a variety of skill levels and experiences. For much of the time it requires practitioners to draw on learners' experiences and their stories. Adult literacy and numeracy work is closely linked.

We asked the practitioners who kept journals to describe and reflect on selected sessions. The aims of sessions varied widely. However, they were generally highly instrumental. On the question of how decisions were made on the content of sessions, all practitioners stressed the key role in decision making played by learners. They were in general at pains to make the point that they did not attempt to impose their own ideas on the learners. At the same time, most acknowledged the external constraints, expectations, and requirements that had to be met, as well

as their own contributions to the decision-making process. These in turn were affected by their own experiences (often covering a number of years), and their own strengths and limitations as tutors. Practitioners reported on the use of a wide variety of teaching and learning methods and forms of assessment in the selected sessions. Varied uses of whole groups, small groups, pairs, and individual programmes and both informal and formal methods of assessment were also reported.

Practitioners' aspirations and their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their practice and work contexts

While over 90 percent of practitioners received remuneration for at least some of their adult literacy work, few saw it in terms of a career, perhaps unsurprising in the light of the lack of opportunities in the field. One practitioner explained:

> I see it as the most exciting and interesting, and fascinating work I've ever done, and I've been doing it for six or seven years or something, and I still don't know anything, really, I still feel like I'm just scratching the surface of knowledge, and as long as it's like this, you want to keep doing it. But on the other hand, I'm working my heart out, and I'm still on a benefit.

Some saw their work as a vocation, and others as a key interest or commitment.

Positive features of adult literacy practice as identified by the practitioners may be grouped into the following sets, although often evidenced in combination: those focusing on the social purpose of adult literacy programmes; the satisfaction in helping someone else make a difference in their lives; the satisfaction gained from the social encounter between learners and tutors; the satisfaction gained from the opportunity and scope to continue one's own learning and professional development; the flexibility and diversity of the work; the recognition by an employer and the salary (for one person); and force of habit (for one person who had been tutoring for many years).

When practitioners reflected on the specifics of their recent practice (in interviews and/or journals) all found their greatest satisfaction and affirmation in the accomplishments or achievements of their students. Many talked at length about these achievements and the resulting satisfactions. In some cases the successes they described were big ones, but they could also consist of small steps. On the larger scale, one person referred to an instance when she had felt that she had really "made a difference" while others pointed to smaller but nevertheless significant student learning. These included learning "breakthroughs", with one person referring to "ah ha moments", another to the time "when a student walked through the door with a smile on their face", and a third to the moment "when student negativity stops and learning begins". Receiving positive feedback or an unexpected compliment from a friend, colleague, or student also meant a great deal to some people. Reference was also made to other satisfactions associated with adult literacy practice. The work was seen by some as intrinsically rewarding and satisfying. This included the satisfaction gained from helping and encouraging others, the recognition that

somebody understands something new, or that someone has gained greater confidence. Aspects of collegiality, recognition, and support from colleagues were also mentioned as affirming. Positive "surprises" for practitioners in their recent practice included students gaining employment, discovering the "hidden interests" of students and being able to work with these, feedback from students or colleagues on positive aspects of learning and teaching, and good pieces of work by students.

Negative aspects of adult literacy practice included the complex nature of the teaching, the fact that it is not limited to one content or curriculum area. Learner needs extend beyond literacy, producing pressure on tutors to take on the role of a social worker as well as a teacher. The demanding nature of literacy learning in itself was productive of negative aspects including learner frustration and avoidance. Diverse groups of students with a range of literacy levels made teaching challenging.

Practitioners reflecting on the specifics of their recent practice identified a range of organisational factors, factors having to do with students and their learning, and factors associated with the interviewees' own situations and circumstances as negative factors. Several people associated feelings of distance or alienation with a sense of failure or frustration at the apparent lack of student interest or motivation. Others highlighted frustrations arising out of student absences or irregularities of attendance and language and communication problems. Reference was also made to times of low energy among learners and tutors, boredom induced by the slowness of some learners, behavioural difficulties which could erupt in the classroom, the failure of some learners to fulfil their agreed-on responsibilities, and the difficulty of ensuring mutual understanding and pitching the teaching material at the right level. With regard to situations which caused the greatest anxiety or distress, some practitioners described situations in which a student or group of students were out of control.

Most of the situations associated with disengagement or anxiety, however, were not associated directly with students at all. External and organisational factors included the rigidity of an imposed curriculum, issues of authority, unrealistic organisational expectations, lack of adequate resources, and issues of racism and ethnocentrism in the workplace. Some were related to the impact of external circumstances and events in the lives of learners and tutors as well as the lives of students' partners or family members and several were associated with other work pressures. This included the amount of work undertaken or expected and the actions of colleagues.

Other negative aspects related to resourcing issues, and in particular those related to funding. These included the lack of adequate funding, facilities, and resources for voluntary groups, problems arising out of the requirement that many courses are focused on short-term outcomes, and the unrealistic expectations raised by false promises and misguided rhetoric linked with limited funding.

Practitioners keeping journals were asked to identify things they would have done differently if they had the opportunity. Generally, responses here suggest that in the circumstances and in the light of current pressures, they could not have done much differently. However, they do qualify

this in various ways and in particular the claim is made that if there were less pressure on the lives of everyone involved, if they themselves had more knowledge, time, and resources, they might have been able to deal more effectively with a range of situations. It is noted that there has been some progress and improvement in the materials available in recent years but that there is a long way to go.

5. Limitations of the project

This study is essentially a local one. It was undertaken by a local Christchurch group of adult literacy practitioners and researchers who were members of the Canterbury Adult Education Research Network (CABERN). Because this is a local project, the practitioners who participated in and contributed, including those who completed the questionnaires, who participated in focus groups and interviews, and who kept practice journals, reflected the idiosyncrasies (in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) of adult literacy practitioners in the region. From a wider national perspective therefore it is important to recognise that Māori and Pacific people in particular were underrepresented in our sample (see). On the other hand, our sample did include a wide cross-section of people involved in adult literacy in many different situations and contexts.

Many of the study's limitations and weaknesses have arisen out of its very strengths. CABERN was and is a voluntary and noninstitutional organisation. It is not driven by any institutional agendas. As we see it this is one of its strengths. Its members are people who are committed to adult literacy. They include people who are employed practitioners in adult literacy as well as people whose involvement in adult literacy is purely voluntary and unpaid (see). Whether or not members of CABERN are paid or unpaid practitioners, their involvement in CABERN was and is purely voluntary and unpaid. In this respect the study reflects some of the strengths and weaknesses of many adult literacy practitioners and their organisations.

Precisely because CABERN has tried to avoid institutional capture or capture by institutional agendas, priorities, and constraints, we have found that our work has at many times been marginalised. Members of the team have found that the work they have done for CABERN and for this project have not been counted as part of their institutional workload and their contributions have not been recognised by their institutions. The impact of this on this study has been profound. Members of the research team have found it enormously difficult at times to find the time and energy to maintain the high and consistent level of involvement required to complete the project. Events in the lives of key members have had an impact on the study. One team member died and others either lost their jobs or moved to other fields of work and could not be replaced. One member moved to another part of the country and others retired and resigned. Some members experienced some resistance from their employing organisations, which could not be persuaded of the value of the project to their organisation. All these difficulties have had an impact on the way in which the study has been carried out. Communication within a disparate group has at times been difficult and there have been misunderstandings. Moreover, work on the study has at times been sporadic and its completion has taken much longer than would have been expected for an institutionally driven study.

It is important to note that this study is a practitioner-driven one. Its strength lies in the fact that it seeks to address questions about adult literacy practitioners and their practice which were posed by practitioners themselves and that it was designed by practitioners and researchers working together. However, some of the limitations also arise out of this. The study is not theory-driven. As a consequence of this we are better able to describe aspects of adult literacy practice than we are to explain or interpret our findings in the light of any wider theories. As a "snapshot", our findings are related to a specific time and place—an important limitation at a time of rapid change in the field of adult literacy.

6. Contribution of project to building capabilities and capacities in the field of adult literacy

The project was planned to involve practitioners at all stages of the study, and we hoped that the project would contribute to building relevant research capacities in the field. CABERN itself as a voluntary community organisation of adult literacy practitioner/researchers had been built on the principle of partnership between researchers and practitioners. The core CABERN group which took responsibility for the project included practitioners and researchers from such organisations as Literacy Aotearoa and ARAS, Hagley Community College, Linwood College, Christchurch College of Education, University of Canterbury, CPIT, and several other community organisations and private providers of adult literacy. Probably as many as 40 practitioners and researchers attended at least one of the meetings held in connection with the project.

Nature and extent of involvement by researchers/practitioners

Every effort was made by the project team to extend an open invitation to practitioners throughout the Canterbury region to become involved in the project. Inevitably, the extent and nature of people's involvement and participation varied widely. Some were more involved in planning and designing the project, while others were more involved at the stage of data collection. Still others were more involved at the stage of data analysis, writing up, and presenting various reports. Most of the work undertaken on the project was done on an unpaid, voluntary basis. However, payments were made to focus group facilitators, those doing the transcribing, and for some of the project management, analysis, and report writing. As is the case with many voluntary organisations, the extent of people's involvement ebbed and flowed somewhat during the project, at least partly because of other pressures and expectations (including the pressures of paid work) in our lives.

Most aspects of the project were undertaken within the core project team: project management, project support, design and data collection, analysis, and writing up. The kinds of activities various people were involved in included the following:

- Planning the project and developing the research proposal, acting as secretary, treasurer, facilitator, etc. for CABERN and for the research team, attendance at numerous meetings over the period of the project, managing the resources, developing and maintaining contacts and networks, and undertaking relevant literature searches, etc. over the period.

- Work on the initial questionnaire. This included developing a mailing list of practitioners and organisations throughout Canterbury, developing, testing, and administering the questionnaire, completing and returning it, and analysing the data and writing up the report arising out of the questionnaire.

- Work on the focus groups. This included developing and testing the focus group questions and format, organising a team of facilitators and recorders and ensuring that they were all fully briefed, organising the focus group sessions (this included inviting people to participate at various times and venues to suit participants in various paid and unpaid situations, organising the venues, tape-recorders, and transcriptions of tapes), conducting, facilitating, attending, and recording the focus group sessions, analysing the data, and writing up the report arising from the focus groups.

- Work on the interviews. This included developing and testing the schedule, organising a team of interviewers and ensuring that they were all fully briefed, organising for the voice-recording and transcription of recordings, conducting and recording the interviews, being interviewed, transcribing the recordings, analysing the data, and writing up the report arising from the interviews.

- Work on the practice journals. This included developing the guidelines and format for the journals, identifying and inviting practitioners from various contexts to participate by keeping the journals, briefing and being briefed on expectations, keeping the journals, analysing the data, and writing up the report arising out of the journals.

Contributions of project to building capacity and capability

To address the question whether the project contributed to the task of building the capacity and capability of researchers and practitioners to engage in research together with a view to improving teaching practice, in January 2005 members of the project team were invited to contribute thoughts on their experiences with the project in response to an open-ended email. In addition, 10 people responded to questions put to them in brief telephone interviews carried out in June 2006 (see Appendix 8).

Experiences of project team (January 2005)

Comments made in response to the open-ended question to the project team were as follows:

> My involvement in this project developed from the point (October 2003) when CABERN learnt that the application that others within our network had developed had been approved subject to the resulting contract being with a legal entity. I was excited to have the opportunity to work with others to expedite the process of Incorporation of CABERN that this condition necessitated. I became directly involved with the project from November '03 and from that time until January 2005 (when this was written) I enjoyed contributing to meetings and assisting with project administration. Throughout 2004 I appreciated the opportunities to continue to contribute to the design of focus groups, interview

questionnaires, and practice journal formats. Although I have felt frustrated on occasion that we could not always keep to the over optimistic timelines I suggested I acknowledge and respect that this was due to other commitments and pressures. I have admired the skills and insights colleagues have generously shared during the project, and everyone's tenacity in seeing each phase through under Robyn's effective guidance! I have valued the scope for involvement appropriate to my situation. (Response A)

I wasn't there at the start of the project so took a while to get to grips with the whys and wherefores of the research topic and aims. I liked the collaborative planning for focus groups and practice journal questions. My experience of research in the past has always been a really lonely/isolated/not enough time to really get what you want done, so to work as a group with a Budget!! made it easier (for me anyway). The best aspect was meeting with others in the adult literacy field and hearing them speak at the focus groups. Enjoyed the experience of facilitating a group too. Getting tutors talking to each other highlighted the huge range of 'philosophies' and experiences that influence how and what we teach. The interview was an effective way to be heard. Probably the best part of the project for me was the journal reflections. These really got me thinking about the personal/personality dynamics in tutor–student relations, and also the notion of power, especially for learners whose past experiences of formal education have been so damaging. Overall it definitely fed into my practice, just having to take the time and think what is it that I do, and why! (Response B)

As far as my response to your question, it seems to me that I would like to focus on my experience of doing this research at a time of substantial personal change in my life and the greater freedom as well as pressure that I have experienced. [For various reasons] I have been reluctant to take on some forms of work associated with this project. This has included attending meetings and taking on some responsibility for data gathering. This has left me feeling somewhat guilty at times with the question arising: 'Am I pulling my weight?' I'm not sure of the answer to this at this stage. However I do feel under some obligation to continue to make a significant contribution—and will do so! One of the other differences involved in this project arises from the fact that in the case of most such projects for which I have had primary responsibility I have been able to employ research assistants. On this occasion this has been very different as we have had to negotiate with one another our responsibilities for various aspects of the work and employment of research assistants has been minimal. (Response C)

Results of telephone interviews (June 2006)

Ten people have responded to a telephone interview. Most of the respondents were involved in several facets of the project. These included project team membership (4), focus group facilitators and recorders (2), focus group participants (2), interviewers (3), interviewees (6), journal writers (4), and data analysis and report writing (3).

Previous research experience

Three of the interviewees had had considerable relevant research experience, one had recently completed a postgraduate thesis on adult literacy, one had done a postgraduate thesis in another

field of research, one had been involved in a previous CABERN research project, two had done some undergraduate research, one had been involved in market research interviewing, one had been involved with the administration of medical research, and one had no previous research experience.

Contributions of project to the practice of those involved

Interviewees were asked if they could recall whether their involvement in the project had contributed to their understanding, confidence, or ability as an adult literacy practitioner and, if so, in what ways it might have influenced their practice.

Eight of the 10 interviewees said that their participation in the project had made a positive contribution to their practice. Two said that it had no impact on them. The nature of the contributions is indicated in the following comments:

> Keeping the journal was very valuable. It made me think more deeply about what I was doing, how I was doing it, and why. The interview also led her to reflect on her practice and the focus group was interesting in meeting people from other situations and talking about different issues.

> Increased considerably my knowledge and understanding of the work of adult literacy practitioners in a variety of contexts.

> Increased my familiarity and understanding of the contexts and situations faced by practitioners in situations with which I had not previously been very familiar. She believes that it might have made a contribution to her practice. Coming together with other practitioners through the project could have been really helpful. However she hasn't been involved in literacy practice in recent times.

> Yes it certainly did make an important contribution to my understanding of my practice.

The focus group broadened her understanding by extending her network of practitioners from various backgrounds and contexts. However, the most important contribution came from keeping a practice journal. It provided her with an important mechanism of professional development "enabling her to reflect on her practice". She wishes she could find the time to write down and reflect on her practice today.

It provided an opportunity and stimulus to think about aspects of her work as a voluntary tutor and to understand a little better, for example, when "things turn to custard". It provided food for thought. She has a longstanding commitment to adult literacy work and would very much like to get a paid job in this field. She was stimulated to think further about what it means to be a volunteer:

> Involvement in interviewing and the focus group exhilarating. After many years of work and involvement in adult literacy she was encouraged and excited to see how enthusiastic practitioners were. Also found it valuable to identify so many common interests.

Involvement in the project was "stimulating". It kept up her interest in adult literacy work.

Contributions of project to research abilities of those involved

Interviewees were asked whether they could recall whether their involvement in the project had contributed to their understanding, confidence, or ability as a researcher and, if so, in what ways it might have influenced their skills and understandings.

Only three interviewees were clearly of the view that the project had contributed to their research skills and knowledge. One of these stated, "Yes. In particular I increased my knowledge and understandings of collaborative practitioner-based approaches and also focus group methods since I had not previously been involved in their use." A second interviewee said, "Yes. In particular working with a group of people as opposed to working on my own", and a third person valued the opportunity to practise interviewing and focus group facilitation skills.

A fourth interviewee said that although the project might not have contributed much to her research skills it had been "really useful and positive being able to use and apply some of the research skills she had learned" as a graduate student.

Of the other interviewees, three said that their involvement had been too limited to have any influence on their research skills, and three indicated that they had had little time and opportunity to follow up on the research focus. One stated that, "There's very little occasion to do research. My practice in ESOL is very hands-on and all-consuming", while another said that she did not think the project had contributed to her research skills "partly because of the huge and increasing pressures I've been under" which has limited her capacity to further develop her research skills.

Other comments

Finally, interviewees were asked whether they had any other comments relating to the project and the following comments were made in response to this question.

Three interviewees had little or nothing to add to their previous comments. The others all emphasised in one way or another the view that the project had been a worthwhile and important one and that it was important that further research is done in a field that generally receives too little recognition. They also highlighted some of the factors that inhibit developments in the field.

One person commented along the following lines: Yes, she feels that the project has been "really good" for the field and has provided an opportunity for practitioners such as herself to achieve "increased levels of competence". On the other hand, the project has also had some limitations. It has reflected the "transient nature" of the field of adult literacy tutoring. Many of those who were involved two years ago have since moved on to other things. This reflects the "marginality of the field and general lack of professionalisation".

A second wanted to emphasise her belief that adult literacy work can make a difference to people's lives. Her participation in the project had strengthened her commitment and understanding that a lot of people were involved in this work. It had also reinforced her perception that the work and especially the work of volunteers remained marginalised and undervalued with work frequently being done in draughty rooms with insufficient resources and facilities. There

was little scope for those who felt passionate about work in adult literacy to get paid work in this field.

A third person had nothing but praise for the project, which she felt had made important contributions, in particular in making connections. In particular, she had been struck by the number of adult literacy practitioners who are so incredibly dedicated to their work and who do everything possible to meet the particular and varied needs of individuals. Many of these practitioners are unpaid volunteers and others are paid very little and yet they go on doing everything they can year after year. She felt she had a real connection with many and would like to see them as friends.

A fourth said that it had been an interesting project that she hoped would provide a springboard for further research.

Other comments were as follows. "It's very important that such research in adult literacy and ESOL continue to be done", "Very worthwhile from my point of view", and "I gained greater insights into the situations and perspectives of participants from different backgrounds and a range of different situations. This is important."

Conclusion

By way of conclusion to this section, responses have highlighted the value and importance of the project. It seems to have contributed to the development of reflective forms of practice by some practitioners, while also providing some with a larger perspective on their work together with a wider sense of collegiality, as they have become more familiar with the work of others in the field of adult literacy. In addition, it was seen by some as providing some form of recognition or endorsement by the Ministry of Education of the importance of adult literacy. These are some ways in which the project was seen to have contributed to the development of capability and capacity of practitioners in this field.

At the same time, the project was also seen as reflecting some problematic features of the field of adult literacy. These included the marginality experienced by many practitioners, the fact that practitioners were either unpaid volunteers or low-paid workers often working selflessly with inadequate or insufficient resources and with few possibilities for professional advancement or recognition while remaining in adult literacy. As was pointed out earlier, there was even little scope for those who felt passionate about work in adult literacy to get paid work in this field. Hence the transient nature of work in the field—a transience that was to some extent reflected in the way in which the project has functioned with changes in the levels of involvement by those associated with the project. As was pointed out earlier, such ebbs and flows are virtually inevitable in projects based on philosophies of voluntarism and partnership such as was the case for this project. This has resulted in some delays in bringing it to a conclusion in 30 months instead of in 18 months as originally planned. On the other hand, there is some evidence that the project has achieved several very worthwhile goals, and that these goals have been achieved through very many hours of voluntary and unpaid work by a considerable body of people.

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Presentations generated by this project

Conference presentations

Chandler, R. (2005, December). *"Who, what, how and why?: Profiles, practices, pedagogies, and self-perceptions of adult literacy practitioners"*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (NZARE), Dunedin.

Contribution to TLRI symposium.

Chandler, R., Cates, J., & Shanahan, K. (2005, May). *"Who, what, how and why?: Profiles, practices, pedagogies, and self-perceptions of adult literacy practitioners". Research outside the institution.* Paper presented at the annual conference of Adult and Community Education Aotearoa (ACE Aotearoa), Wellington.

Feedback to participants

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Appendices

Appendix A: Who are CABERN

Who are CABERN and who is the research for?

Tēnā koutou katoa.

CABERN is an informal local group of tutors, researchers, and other practitioners who are passionate about adult literacy. We come from a variety of backgrounds and workplaces – including community literacy, university and polytech, college of education, community college, high schools, PTEs, the city council, Māori health/social services... – and we are always keen to welcome more members.

CABERN does not represent any one approach or organisation, what we all share is a commitment to improving adult literacy in Canterbury, something we believe is assisted by us all working together and sharing our different knowledge, i.e. doing local research. Our approach to research is that it is best done by those involved in the area, and so our projects are designed and undertaken by those of us who have the time and energy to do so, no matter our usual designation. The research is by us, for us, and for the field of adult literacy in general.

We began this particular project because we felt that, while there is a lot of talk currently on what adult literacy tutors should do, there is actually very little material available on what they do do and why they do it; our project is an opportunity for tutors to tell their own stories. We want to continue the project on beyond this initial survey, and hope that anyone interested in further involvement in the research will let us know.

Thanks for your time and we look forward to hearing from you!

Appendix B: Invitation

Nau mai - Haere mai

Please join us...

As a participant in the CABERN Adult Literacy Practitioner Research Project you are warmly invited to come, share some mid-winter refreshments with us, and find out how the research has progressed.

21 June 6pm

Christchurch College of Education/ Te Whare Whai Mātauraka ki Ōtautahi

We hope you can come!

Please RSVP to Robyn Chandler
robyn.chandler@cce.ac.nz or 3437780 ex8394 by **3rd June**

We will send you directions on receipt of your RSVP

Looking forward to seeing you...
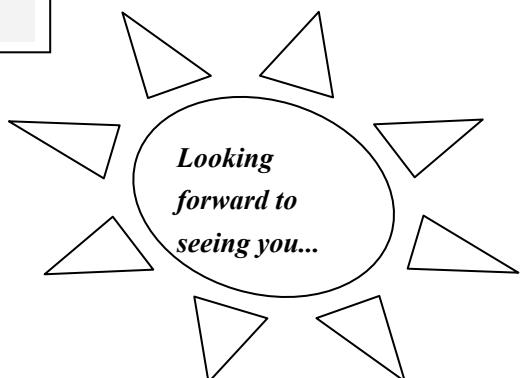
Appendix C: Questionnaire

Are you a tutor engaged in any aspect of adult literacy?

We are interested in finding out about the work of adult literacy tutors in Canterbury.

WHAT DO THEY DO? HOW DO THEY DO IT? AND WHY?

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is the first step in an exploratory study being undertaken by a group of adult literacy practitioners and researchers in Canterbury who are members of an informal network called CABERN (Canterbury Adult Basic Education Research Network).

The aim of the study is to begin to explore the ways in which adult literacy tutors see their practice and their reasons for being involved in adult literacy. Your completion of this questionnaire will help build a foundation for further research and we appreciate your contribution.

1. *In what capacities have you been involved? (Please place a tick in one or more of the boxes below)*
   A group literacy tutor? ❒
   A one-to-one literacy tutor? ❒
   A tutor of literacy within the context of another subject? ❒
   A workplace literacy tutor? ❒
   Any other (please specify): ❒

2. *For how long have you been involved in tutoring in any aspect of adult literacy? (Please place a tick in one box)*
   Less than one year? ❒
   One to two years? ❒
   Between 2 and 5 years? ❒
   More than 5 years?   How many years? ❒

3. *Literacy tutors include people who are unpaid volunteers as well as people who are in paid jobs in the field. What is your position? (Please place a tick in one or more boxes) Are you …*
   A voluntary and unpaid tutor? ❒
   A full-time paid tutor? ❒
   A part-time paid tutor? ❒
   Other (please specify): ❒

4. *Literacy is defined in* **More than Words** *(2001); the Government's adult literacy strategy, as "a complex web of reading, writing, speaking, listening, problem solving, creative thinking and numeracy skills." If this definition does not fit with what you do, please place a tick in one box and add any comments.*

It's too general or broad ⊓

Comments: _____

_____

It's too narrow or specific ⊓

Comments: _____

_____

If you wish, add your own personal definition. Continue on a separate page if needed.

5. *Adult literacy tutors are likely to include people who have come into literacy work for a variety of different reasons. Please indicate below in order of importance your reasons for becoming involved in adult literacy work. (1 = most important reason).*

I needed a job and a position in this field was offered to me ⊓

It was/is something worthwhile which I can do ⊓

Adult literacy fascinates me ⊓

I enjoy working with adults ⊓

I enjoy working with young adults ⊓

I wanted to move from teaching children to teaching adults ⊓

By chance ⊓

The part time nature of the job ⊓

Other reasons (please specify): ⊓

6. *What training have you had that is relevant to your current tutoring position?*

_____

_____

7. *Please indicate your:*   *Gender* _____

                      Age _____

                      Ethnicity _____

No person or organisation will be identified in the report on this research. We do not need your name if you would prefer to remain anonymous, however, if you would like to receive a copy of the research report, please send a self addressed and stamped envelope, A4 size, or include your email address. If you wish to have further involvement in this research please complete the following.

Name: _____

Postal address: _____

Telephone Number/s: _____

Email address: _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS RESEARCH

You may choose to mail the hardcopy to the address below, or alternatively, this form may also be accessed on www.literacy.gen.nz.

Return to: *Robyn Chandler*
            c/- Centre for Adult Education and Training
            PO Box 31-065
            CHRISTCHURCH

Return by: *22 September 2003*

Appendix D: Focus group invitation

Adult Literacy Practitioner Research – phase 2

Kia ora,

CABERN are now moving on to the next phase of the Adult Literacy Practitioner research project involving focus groups, interviews and practice journals and we would value your involvement in one or more of these activities.
Our overall research aims for this next phase of the project are to find out more about:

1. the backgrounds, characteristics, motivations and training of adult literacy practitioners

2. How they work and where

3. What they hope and aim for in their practice and what they see as positive and negative about literacy work

4. How gender, socio-economic and cultural factors impact on their work

We also hope

5. To contribute to the building of relevant research capacities in the field.

Right now we would like to invite you to participate in one of four focus groups we are running in the first few weeks of March.
A focus group involves participants discussing certain topics with the assistance of a facilitator. The point is to get everyone interacting together; what we're interested in (and hopefully you will be too) is what *you* think, the facilitator is just there to keep the discussion 'focussed' on the topics. Each group will meet for an hour and a half.
We will be using the focus group data to help fulfil our research aims (above): to collect data that will answer these questions, that can be compared to other data we are collecting using different methods, to have the opportunity to find out what adult literacy tutors think about things as a professional group as well as individually, and to help us tease out themes and issues to include in the next stage of our project (individual interviews and practice diaries), as well as to identify those of you who may be interested in participating in these next activities.

The focus groups will be held at:

Tuesday, 2nd March at 10.30am –12 noon   Christchurch South Library
Thursday, 4th March at 5.30-7pm   Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology
Wednesday, 10th March at 3.30-5pm   Adult Reading Assistance Scheme (72 Gloucester St)
Thursday, 11th March at 7-9pm   Christchurch College of Education

If you are interested in some lively discussion with colleagues – come along!

Please let us know which session you would like to attend (reply to Robyn robyn.chandler@cce.ac.nz or call 3437780 ex 8394). We will then send you an outline of the topics to be discussed, and details about the venue and facilitator for your group. If you cannot make the focus group but are still interested in participating in the research in some way (either as a participant or as a researcher), please let us know.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Regards,
Robyn Chandler

Appendix E: Focus group guidelines

Kia ora,

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate a Focus Group.

Here is the question guide and some resources that can assist you to facilitate your group most effectively.

Probably the most important thing to remember is that a focus group is an opportunity for people to interact together; i.e. your job is to assist the group to discuss the topics amongst themselves, not to hold a series of sequential interviews.

Prior to facilitating the group
Please arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the agreed start time.
Check:
- The room is arranged appropriately – chairs around a table for example and you have everything you need.
- Tea/coffee etc are available
- Tape recorder is set up with tapes (we will provide)
- Note-taker has a place to work
- Sign is on the door
- Participants are checked off against a list of expected group members, and any extra people added to the list.
- Please ensure all participants fill out the information sheet before the group commences (we will get this to you)

Please let us know if there is anything else you need or that we can help with.

How do the focus groups fit into the wider research project?
We will be using the focus group data to reach our research aims (below), to collect data that will answer these questions, that can be compared to other data we are collecting using different methods, to have the opportunity to find out what adult literacy tutors think about things as a professional group (rather than as individuals), and to help us to tease out themes and issues to help us design the next stage of our project (individual interviews and practice diaries), and to identify the individuals who may be interested in participating in this next stage.

We will be asking focus group participants to complete an information sheet so we can access certain factual information about participants.
Here is a list of our research aims so you can see the relationship with our questions:

6. To understand more about the backgrounds, characteristics, motivations and training of adult literacy practitioners.
7. To understand more about the nature of their literacy practices in the various contexts.
8. To understand more about their aspirations, their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their practices and of the contexts within which they work
9. To explore impact of such factors as class, gender and cultural background on the work of literacy practitioners; and
10. To contribute to the building of relevant research capacities in the field.

The Guide

This *is* a guide, not a rigid schedule. What is important is that the questions/topic areas are answered – whether you ask them as such is immaterial!

We have tried to arrange these topics into a natural order. Under each question area is a list of possible prompts that may be useful to you but these are by no means exhaustive, please do not limit your approach accordingly.

Please also keep in mind that your group may be very diverse and you may need to consider your choice of prompts accordingly.

Question and prompts
1. **What keeps you going as a literacy tutor?**
   (Aims 1 & 3) [We see this very much as an introductory, warm-up question]
   Possible prompts:
   students
   colleagues
   importance of work
   career path
   pay (just joking!)
   outcomes for individuals and communities
   personal factors eg family member with/ self overcoming literacy difficulties
   personal philosophy/ values etc
2. **Positive and negative aspects of adult literacy work**
   (Aims 1 & 3)
   Possible prompts:
   Students
   Colleagues
   Employer
   nature of work
   curricula
   compliance requirements
   context of work
   job status
   job conditions
   support/lack of
   training, resourcing,
   policy direction

3. **What/how do you teach and where does the mandate for what/how you teach come from?**
   (Aims 1 & 2) [Somewhere in here, we need to get an idea of how people define 'adult literacy']
   teaching/learning strategies
   definitions of literacy
   curricula
   course content
   priorities
   training
   workplace requirements and quality standards
   student-driven
   nature of workplace

4. What are the age, gender, background, culture factors for people with whom you work and how do you go about your work with people of a different age, gender, background, and culture to your own?

   (Aims 2 & 4)
   Socio-economic
   Rural/ urban
   Maori
   Pasifika
   Migrants
   ESOL
   Training
   Difference
   Teaching/ learning strategies

At the conclusion of the session

Please ask participants to indicate to you if they are interested in being involved in further stages of the project (interviews and/or practice diaries and/or as a researcher).

Following the session

Please spend some time immediately after the session noting down your feelings and hunches about the session – themes, atmosphere, problems, possible subtexts etc.
 The tapes, your notes, and the notetaker's notes will need to get back to the research group. You will be contacted regarding arrangements for this.

We hope you enjoy meeting and working with a great group of people. Any questions – just get in touch.

Regards,
Robyn Chandler
CABERN research project   3437780 ex 8394
robyn.chandler@cce.ac.nz

Appendix F: Guidelines for interviewers

1. Contact your interviewees and arrange a date/time/venue suitable for them. They will have been sent an information sheet (you will also have a copy) and may have questions.
2. Email/call Robyn with the details (3437780 ex8394 or robyn.chandler@cce.ac.nz) and she will book the recording equipment and arrange with you how to get it there on the day
3. Meet with interviewee.
   a. Thank them for coming
   b. Check that they have filled in the information and consent form and remind them that they can terminate the interview at any time, or skip questions they don't want to answer
   c. Check that they agree to being recorded and explain the recorder will be left running until they leave, unless they specifically ask for it to be turned off. No material will be deleted.
   d. Go through the interview procedure
   e. Interview (see Schedule below)
   f. Following the interview, thank the interviewee and remind them they will receive a copy of the report when completed
   g. Tell them that we are looking for people who would be happy to keep a practice journal for a brief period and that we are keen to have diarists who have also been interviewed. Keeping a journal will involve documenting their tutoring life for a couple of weeks – teaching sessions, planning, meetings, training – anything they think is part of their role. We will ask people to use Brookfield's 'critical incident' technique (introduced in the interview)
   h. Jot down some brief "field notes," documenting your impressions about the interview, body language, hunches, any themes you felt came through – anything on the top of your mind.
   i. Return the information and consent form, recording, and a copy of your 'field notes' to Robyn
   j. When everyone is finished interviewing we will meet again for a 'debriefing' session
   k. Julie Cates will contact you regarding payment

How do the interviews fit into the wider research project?
We will be using the interview data to reach our research aims (below), to collect data that will answer these questions, that can be compared to other data we are collecting using different methods (particularly the practice journals), to have the opportunity to find out what adult literacy tutors think about things as individuals, and to help us identify the individuals who may be interested in participating in this next stage.

Here is a list of our research aims so you can see the relationship with our questions:

11. To understand more about the backgrounds, characteristics, motivations and training of adult literacy practitioners.
12. To understand more about the nature of their literacy practices in the various contexts.
13. To understand more about their aspirations, their perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their practices and of the contexts within which they work
14. To explore impact of such factors as class, gender and cultural background on the work of literacy practitioners; and
15. To contribute to the building of relevant research capacities in the field.

Schedule
The interview has three main areas 1/ "you (the interviewee) and your story as an Adult Literacy Practitioner"; 2/ "your conception of Adult Literacy" 3/ "you and your practice"

1/ **you and your story as an Adult Literacy Practitioner**
[aim 1 and 3 partic. aspirations, 4]
Encourage the interviewee to construct their own narrative, assisted by your prompts and probing.
Prompts (please make sure you cover these)–
      What got you into Adult Literacy?
      How have you learnt what you know about adult literacy and teaching it? (experience & training)
      Where does your work in adult literacy fit in terms of your life and career goals?
      What role has/does your gender/culture/socioeconomic status play/ed in your story? (use suitable words)

2/ **Your conception of Adult Literacy**
[Aim 2 & 3]
Prompts:
      What do you think of the Government's definition in 'More than words'?
Literacy is "a complex web of reading, writing, speaking, listening, problem solving, creative thinking and numeracy skills." [see separate sheet]
(check as to whether your interviewee answered this question in the questionnaire, if so "Do you still feel the same?" etc
      Does your organisation have a definition?
      Do you have your own definition?
      [you are welcome to change the order here, but still need to cover all. It is important not to make people feel that they should have a definition of literacy they can easily articulate and are lacking if they don't]

3/ **You and your practice**
[Aim 2 and others]
Explain that we are using Brookfield's technique for encouraging reflective practice ie a way of interviewing yourself (this will be explained briefly on info sheet) . This gives a snapshot of current/recent practice (this will be picked up on in the practice journals) that highlights important points.

When you think back over your recent work in adult literacy:

    1   **At what moment did you feel most engaged with what was happening?**

    2   **At what moment did you feel most distanced from what was happening?**

    3   **What action that anyone (colleague/student) took recently did you find most affirming and helpful?**

    4   **What action that anyone (colleague/student) took recently did you find most puzzling or confusing?**

    5.   **What about a recent session/class surprised you the most? (This could be something about your own reactions to what went on, or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you.)**

Allow the interviewee time to process their thoughts and draw any conclusions if they wish, don't analyse their experience, rather encourage self-reflection. They may want to jot down some notes (see separate sheet). They may also wish to have the transcript of this part of the interview – which they are very welcome to request. Following our discussion on Friday, if anyone shows signs of wanting to apply the technique to their overall career –thus nicely framing the interview - that's great (and for anyone who hasn't been in the field for long, this will happen anyway). But we still want recent insights as well.

Appendix G: Example of researcher support material

The Digital Recorder 'At A Glance'
for the more reflective among us...
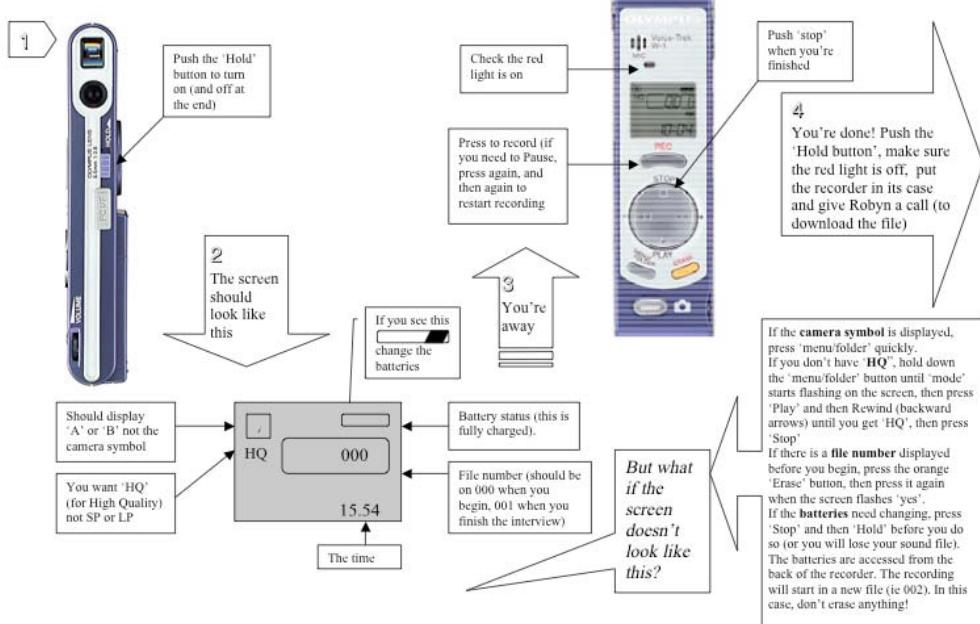
Appendix H: Evaluation questions

CABERN's Adult Literacy Practitioners' Research Project - Telephone Interviews

We are preparing the final report for the Ministry of Education on CABERN's TLRI reseach project on adult literacy practitioners. As part of this we would be grateful if you would be willing to participate in a short (5 minute or so) telephone interview. The interview will address questions about your involvement and contributions to the project.

1.   **Involvement** - In what ways were you involved with the project? (eg Member of team? focus group participant/facilitator? interviewee/interviewer? Kept a practice journal? Other?)

2.   **Previous experience** - Have you had any previous experience of participating in research?

3.   **Contribution to your practice?** Can you recall whether this involvement made any contribution to your understanding of your practice or your confidence or ablity as an adult literacy practitioner? If so can you describe any ways in which it might have influenced your practice?

4.   **Contribution to your research skills, etc?** Can you recall whether this involvement made any contribution to your understanding of research or your confidence or research skills? If so can you describe any ways in which it might have influenced your skills and understandings?

5.   **Any other comments?** Do you have any other comments relating to the project?

6.   **Anonymity?** Would you prefer your comments to remain anonymous or would you prefer your comments to be attributed to you?

Appendix I: Practice journal

Kia ora   .

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this stage of the research. The purpose of the practice journal is to get a picture of what kinds of adult literacy 'activities' you engage in as part of your practice (e.g. meetings, planning, tutoring, initial assessments etc), when and how you engage in them, and how you understand them. The journal is a combination of logbook and reflective journal. We hope it will be an enjoyable and useful process for you to reflect on your practice.

Please keep this journal over a two-week period and have it ready to return by **November 11th**.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Robyn Chandler (robyn.chandler@cce.ac.nz or 3437780 ex8394).

Please fill in the sections below:

All material will be treated confidentially, and identifying details will not be included in the final report. You may withdraw from the research at any time.

Signature: Date:

Name

This journal covers the period _____ to _____.

If your work in adult literacy has changed much since you last participated in this project (e.g. new workplace), please briefly describe what has changed:

How to keep the Practice Journal:

Should I write on this form?
Please use this template either as a guide to shape your journal keeping in a notebook or similar, or to print out and fill in, or fill the journal in onscreen – whichever suits you best. For sections 1 & 2 you may need to make extra copies of the templates. If you choose to handwrite your journal, please write legibly in black pen.

What does the journal cover?
The journal should cover a two-week period. It is up to you how many of your activities you want to cover in depth, as a guide, if you work in adult literacy full-time, please log at least two days or representative activities over the two weeks. Please indicate approximately what proportion of your adult literacy work you have chosen to journal.

How is the journal arranged?
The journal is in three parts and a template is included for each:
1. a log of your adult literacy activities over the period
2. more detailed journaling of those tutoring activities you choose to cover in more depth
3. an opportunity to reflect on the journaling period (the critical incident approach you have already met with in your interview).

How much should I write?
If you are completing the journal in hardcopy (either writing on the printed out form, for example, or in a notebook), please feel free to write as much as you like. It would help us if you attach any extra pages and number them according to the section/question. If you are filling the journal in onscreen you will find the sections expand to fit your input.

How do I return the journal when complete?
If you fill the journal in onscreen, please email it back to robyn.chandler@cce.ac.nz. Mail hardcopy to R. Chandler, c/- CAET, Christchurch College of Education, PO Box 31 065, Christchurch 8030, or give Robyn a ring on 3438870 ex8394 and we will arrange to pick it up from you.

1. Log template

date and time	location	duration	what was the activity? (e.g. planning, tutoring, meetings etc)	notes (please give some details – e.g. a couple of lines - particularly about any non-tutoring activities)
e.g. 2/11/04 4pm	*community centre*	*1h*	*first meeting with new one-to-one student. Goal-setting.*	*See journal entry*

2. Tutoring activity journal entry template

Please answer the questions below as stated, or incorporate the answers into your journal entry:

2.1   Who was/were the learner/s ? (please include as part of your description age, gender, ethnicity, whether group or one-to-one)

2.2   What were the aims for the session?

2.3   How did you decide what you were going to work on with the learner/s?

2.4   What did you and your learner/s work on?

2.5   What methods did you use to do so? Approximately how much time did you spend on each of these?

2.6   Was any form of assessment part of the session? If so, what did you do?

2.7   What do you feel didn't go so well in this session? Why?

2.8   What do you feel did go well in this session? Why?

3. Reflection template

At the conclusion of your period of journaling, please complete this reflective exercise (a version of that introduced in the Interview[*]). Please include specific examples.

3.1   *At what point (or points) over this period did I felt most connected, engaged, or affirmed as an Adult Literacy Tutor – the point when I said to myself: "This is what being an Adult Literacy Tutor is all about?"*

3.2   *At what point (or points) over this period did I felt most disconnected, disengaged, or bored as a tutor – the point when I felt I was just going through the motions.*

3.3   *What was the situation that caused me the greatest anxiety or distress – the kind I don't want to have to go through again in a hurry?*

3.4   *What was the thing that took me by surprise? shocked or challenged or thrilled me?*

3.5   *Of everything I have done in my practice over this journaling period, what would I do differently if I had the chance? What would help me to do so?*

3.6   *When I look back over this journaling period, what do I feel proudest and/or most pleased about? Why?*

3.7   Please add any other comments as you wish (attach any extra sheets):

Thank you very much.

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[*] Adapted from Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 73).

Appendix J: Relevant training

Training category	N= Instances of Training		N = participants
Adult literacy qualification/training			Total = 12 participants (21%)
	Literacy Aotearoa	3	
	Local poupou	10	
	Workbase	2	
	ALPA workshop	1	
	TEC workshop	1	
Adult teaching qualification/training			Total = 17 participants (30%)
	CAT/ NCAE	14	
	DipATL	1	
	Overseas qualification	3	
Compulsory sector qualification/training			Total = 30 participants (53%)
	Primary	12	
	Secondary	4	
	Teacher training unspecified	6	
	Diploma	8	
ESOL qualification/training			Total = 14 participants (25%)
	Diploma	3	
Specific Learning Difficulties/Disabilities qualification/training			Total = 12 participants (21%)
	SLD	4	
	SLD Diploma (level 5)	4	
	SPELD	6	
Special Needs qualification/training			Total = 2 participants (3%)
	Cert Special Needs Learning	1	
	Dip Special Needs	1	
	DipSTN	1	
Reading Recovery			Total = 3 participants (5%)
Certificate	Education		Total = 1 participant (2%)
	Reading		Total = 1 participant (2%)
	Counselling		Total = 1 participant (2%)
	Children's Literature		Total = 1 participant (2%)
Diploma	Business		Total = 2 participants (3%)
Treaty of Waitangi course			Total = 1 participant (2%)
Postgraduate papers/qualification			Total = 9 participants (16%)
	Education	4	
	Others: History, Arts x 2, Psych, Clinical Psych.	5	
Undergraduate qualification			Total = 15 participants (26%)
	Education	9	
	Others: BA English, Arts x 3, language, computing, BSc, psych	8	
Assessor			Total = 1 participant (2%)
Workplace assessor			Total = 1 participant (2%)
Teaching experience			Total = 12 participants (21%)
	adult education	5	
	primary	4	
	secondary	1	

Work experience - other	Journalism		Total = 1 participant (2%)
Life experience			Total = 4 participants (7%)
	special needs children	1	
	father	1	
	schooling	1	
	personal tutor's example	1	