

Facing the Challenge:
Foundation Learning for Adults
in Aotearoa New Zealand

Edited by John Benseman and Alison Sutton

CHAPTER ONE

Foundation learning in New Zealand: An overview

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CHAPTER ONE

Foundation learning in New Zealand: An overview

John Benseman

This book comes at a timely point in the development of the foundation skills sector in New Zealand. From a peripheral status on the margins of education and public debate, foundation skills for adults has now taken up a central position not only in education, but also in relation to work and the national economy. Such prominence would have been unimaginable when the literacy, language and numeracy needs of adults began to be recognised over 30 years ago. For those of us who became involved in the issue at that time, this move has not come too soon. The sector is not yet of a scale or secure enough in its funding for there to be a realistic chance of ensuring that all New Zealanders have foundation skills of a level sufficient to be fully functioning citizens in the 21st century.

Increasing recognition has brought with it the challenges of providing effective responses in the form of policy, practice and research. While from the 1970s through to the 1990s we were largely concerned with ‘proving’ to politicians and government officials that adults in New Zealand did have literacy, language and numeracy needs on a scale that warranted serious attention, the issue has now turned much more to how we best address the issue – especially what constitutes effective practice. In a field that is still under-developed, under-researched and lacking an infrastructure comparable to other educational sectors, addressing the issue will still take time, resources and creative thinking. And yet, we are part of an insistent agenda, driven by the need to show strong results in a political environment determined by the urgency and fluctuations of a three-year parliamentary life cycle. As a newly emerging sector (about which not everyone who wields power is convinced), foundation skills’ fortunes are still likely to rise and fall with the fortunes of our political advocates – and increasingly, the degree to which we can show sufficient impact on the issue.

The purpose of this first chapter is to provide an overall context, by reviewing what is meant by the term ‘foundation skills’ and its various synonyms before moving on to a brief history of the sector in New Zealand and in particular, the significance of the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey that proved to be a turning-point in its development.

Following a discussion of the broader significance of research and evaluation, the chapter then reviews where we stand at present in terms of policy, the range of provision available and the learners that it serves. Finally, an outline is provided of the book's chapters and what they cover.

Definitions

Defining the term 'foundation skills' or its kindred term 'literacy, language and numeracy' (LLN) has prompted many prolonged debates and even more protracted writings. The lack of agreement over definitions (and hence terminology) is due to a number of factors. First there is the debate over what the terms cover. Most agree about reading, writing, numeracy and oracy or oral communication. But other broader skills are now often included - computer skills, the 'new literacies' that are often associated with developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (Leu et al., 2004), financial literacy, problem-solving, team-work, citizenship education, media literacy, health literacy, emotional literacy (as the list become broader there is a subsequent falling-off of agreement).

Second, political purposes bring out another layer of difference. For some, foundation skills and LLN are a set of technical skills that need to be learnt in the same way as riding a bike or using a piece of technology, while for others these skills are deeply imbued with cultural and political meanings that warrant close analysis and consideration. There is also debate about literacy in first versus other languages; the IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey) and ALL (Adult Literacy and Life Skills) Survey, for example, are both carried out in the dominant languages of countries (English in New Zealand) and reflect the cultural hegemony of dominant groups, usually associated with histories of colonisation.

Third, there is the debate about the relative importance of and interrelationships between the different foundation skills themselves. Even when foundation skills are restricted to literacy, language and numeracy there is considerable debate, for example, about the 'poor cousin' status of numeracy. Its advocates argue that this distinctive set of skills is usually neglected for reading and writing, and when numeracy is taught it is often taught badly because of difficulties in accessing skilled numeracy teachers (Tout & Schmitt, 2002). The teaching of language (which usually refers to the teaching of the host country's language to new migrants and refugees) also operates in its own distinctive way, but usually includes the teaching of reading, writing and numeracy in the dominant language. In other words, each of these foundation skills has a distinct set of aims and pedagogy, but they also have many things in common.

Defining LLN, or foundation skills, can be done in a number of ways. Quigley (1997), for example, classifies four broad approaches or philosophies: vocational, liberal, humanist and liberatory. While this type of classification has merit, the philosophies also overlap in many ways. Below is a simpler three-way typology of approaches to defining and understanding foundation skills.

The first approach sees foundation skills as a distinct, definable set of technical functional skills that adults need in order to participate fully in society. This functional view of literacy was explicitly identified in the US after World War II and became the mainstay of definitions for bodies such as UNESCO. In 1958 UNESCO stated (Newman & Beverstock, 1990, p. 34): 'A person is illiterate who cannot with understanding both read and write a short, simple statement on his everyday life.' Later UNESCO definitions still referred to functional literacy, but also included references to basic human rights 'to learn, know and communicate'.

Probably the best example of this approach occurred in the mid-1970s in the US when the Adult Performance Level project (APL) set out to identify a taxonomy of adult needs deemed to be necessary to ‘function successfully’ in American society (Beder, 2007). An initial list of consumer economics, occupational knowledge, community resources, health and government and law was reduced to four primary skills: communication skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), computational skills, problem-solving skills and interpersonal-relations skills. Achieving these skills was assumed to lead to ‘success’ for the successful adult learner, especially those from low socioeconomic groups. As Beder (2007, p. 97) says, ‘APL also claimed that there was a direct “mathematical” relationship between learning these skills and success in later life’. APL was widely criticised as being reductionistic, manipulative and an example of the middle class arrogantly defining what is good for those on the lower rungs of the social ladder.

A functional perspective can be broad or narrow in its scope, but the skill components can be taught in isolation, with the aim of eventually integrating them into a coherent set of skills so that the learner can cope with any type of literacy demand. There is much emphasis on the teaching of discrete skills such as phonics, vocabulary, basic maths operations and even formal grammar. Teaching content is arranged from the simple to increasingly complex; while it can include ‘adult-appropriate’ content based on the learners’ interests and everyday needs, the technical component of the teaching is usually seen as more important. This approach is characterised by a hierarchical relationship between the teacher and learners, where the teacher is seen as a subject expert and exerts strong direction over the learners’ activities.

Proponents of this approach usually see themselves as apolitical, while their critics see them as either open advocates of the status quo or at the very least, doing nothing to challenge existing power structures and relationships. Not surprisingly, this approach is common in government policy and programmes as it offers clear indications of what is to be taught, and subsequently, what can be monitored. It also represents little challenge to existing political structures.

A second broad approach to foundation skills, or LLN, is what can be termed ‘social action’, Freirean, critical or emancipatory.

The name most commonly associated with this approach is the Brazilian Paulo Freire (1971). He is generally credited with linking the act of reading with politics – for him, ‘reading the word’ must also involve ‘reading the world’. Within this approach the technical aspects of learning are always inextricably linked to the learners’ lives, including their social, cultural and economic positions and most importantly, the means to transform these positions from subservience to ones of equality and power. In Freirean pedagogy the generative themes that underpin the teaching are based on an analysis of the forms of oppression experienced by the learners. LLN skills are important, but always as a means to achieving broader political goals. As Freire argued, this process can never be neutral; it either supports the status quo or challenges it. Although initially developed in the slums of Recife in Brazil, Freire’s philosophy (and teaching models based on it) has spread throughout the world and has formed the springboard for much debate and inspiration for practitioners.

The highly political nature of this approach has meant that it has been taken up on a large scale mainly in revolutionary societies such as Guinea-Bissau and Nicaragua. In the West there have also been one-off programmes based on this philosophy (see, for example, Barndt, Cristall & Marino, 1982), but probably the greatest uptake has been at the level of individual

practitioners. This statement is true of New Zealand, where the dominance of government funding, with its assumption of political neutrality constraints for foundation skills, makes it difficult to run overtly political programmes (Benseman, 1985), but practitioners often have some degree of autonomy within their classroom walls (Benseman, 1998).

Teaching using a critical, Freirean approach strives for a much more egalitarian relationship between teachers and learners, although some critics believe that this ideal is rarely achieved because of the inherently hierarchical nature of teaching. Certainly, the content is generated from the learners' lives and is expected to address issues of real substance. Less is usually said about the actual details of the teaching process, especially as Freire's original model was based on Portuguese, which is a highly phonetic language that lends itself more readily to constructing multiple words from a single generative word or phrase than other languages like English that are less consistent phonetically (e.g. *ough* in *though*, *tough*, *bough*, *ought*).

Critics of Freire have focused not only his political motivations, but also point to studies of adults in foundation skills programmes who lack key reading skills such as phonemic awareness (Kruidenier, 2002). In other words, whole-language teaching may work for the majority of schoolchildren, but it doesn't work for most of those who end up in foundation skills programmes and repeating this approach with them as adults is likely to have the same outcome.

A third approach to understanding foundations skills is what is commonly referred to as 'new literacies' or 'literacy as social practices'. Here, LLN is seen as:

... part of social practices which are observable in 'events' or 'moments' and are patterned by social institutions and power relationships. This view encourages us to look beyond texts themselves to what people do with literacy and numeracy literacy, with whom, where and how.... Literacy and numeracy then are shaped by the social and cultural context within which practice is embedded, the meanings that it has for users and the purposes it serves. (Hamilton and Hillier 2006, p. 18)

New literacies are deeply embedded in their social and cultural contexts, rather than narrowly-defined technical skills involving coding and decoding texts. They therefore reflect values, attitudes and social relationships that vary according to where they are situated – the workplace, the family, the community or educational institutions. In order to understand these various literacies, the power relationships behind these different contexts need to be understood, particularly who has access to the texts and who can produce them.

While social practices remind us that skills such as reading and writing do not occur in a social or cultural vacuum, the practical implications of this approach are less obvious for practitioners in their day-to-day dealings with learners. Social practice analyses are often linked to critical reflection or social action approaches in programmes and teaching, but not exclusively.

While these perspectives have been outlined here as three distinct approaches, the reality is that most programmes and teachers operate using a varying amalgam of them (Degener, 2001). For example, tutors may operate from a Freirean philosophy in terms of their relationships with their learners, have a social practices understanding of texts being used, but still teach discrete reading skills consistent with a functional approach. Tutors are also not always aware of the lack of consistency between their espoused philosophies and their actual practice. They often find it difficult to teach in a non-hierarchical way for example, even when they personally identify with a more egalitarian approach (Beder, 2001).

Terminology

Throughout its short history in New Zealand, a number of terms have been used to identify what we are referring to as foundation skills, or LLN. These terms have included *the 3 Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic)*, *adult literacy*, *second-chance education*, *basic skills*, *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)* and *adult basic education*. There are also numerous associated terms relating to types of provision and learners: family/whānau literacy, bridging education, study or learning support, dyslexia and dyscalculia, and foundation studies. As the joke goes: ‘I may not have improved my foundation skills much, but I’ve acquired a hell of a vocab in the process’.

The labels we use matter. The most obvious example is the term ‘illiteracy’. There is often a public perception that literacy is a simple dichotomy – one is either literate or illiterate – rather than recognition that these skills are on a continuum. This may be one of the reasons why there has been a reluctance to recognise adult LLN – ‘we don’t have illiterate people in New Zealand’. Also, ‘illiteracy’ is so loaded with negative connotations (dumb, stupid) that people are understandably reluctant to associate themselves with anything that may be linked to this label – even when expressed in the more positive corollary ‘literacy’. As many practitioners know, often one of the first concerns raised when negotiating a programme with an organisation, company or learners is that the word *literacy* not be used. The term is seen as off-putting to potential learners, who either don’t see themselves as having LLN issues¹ or are embarrassed to be seen in such a programme.

On a more positive note, ensuring LLN practitioners use terms in common is a way of promoting a sense of identity. As this book illustrates, there are wide variations in what we all do, how we do it and whom we teach, but we still share enough commonality to identify as a distinctive sector with our own professional identity and practices. Developing a common language helps in this.

We have used the terms ‘foundation skills’ or ‘foundation learning’ in this book as these are the dominant terms in usage at present, including in government documents. We also refer to literacy, language and numeracy (LLN), especially when referring to these more specific skills.

An historical perspective

Like other Western countries, New Zealand assumed that the achievement of universal primary and secondary education meant we had become a literate nation. A question in the national census about being able to read (sic), for example, was dropped in the 1930s because it was assumed everyone could. ‘Illiteracy’ was seen as a Third World issue and no longer of concern, especially with the apparent quality of our emerging schooling system that was gaining an international reputation for academic excellence and expertise in teaching reading through the work of educators such as Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) and Marie Clay (1993).

Adult foundation skills issues were largely invisible in New Zealand society for most of the 20th century. Although there were always adults who struggled with their LLN skills, this could be more readily concealed from the public gaze than in the more print and number-demanding world we now inhabit. Where individuals with poor skills were exposed, they would undoubtedly have risked public scorn and embarrassment as a lack of these skills was probably seen to be more associated with intellectual deficiency or a lack of schooling than anything to do with a shortfall in the schooling system.

In many countries adult foundation skills first gained public prominence in the early 1970s, especially in countries such as Britain, Canada and Australia. The US had always had some degree of public awareness of these issues due largely to its long history of large-scale immigration and, interestingly, the role of the military in training large numbers of recruits with low levels of schooling (Kett, 1994; Sticht, 2002). New Zealand's awareness was prompted in large part by events such as the involvement of the BBC in Britain in a public awareness campaign (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006) and also some early New Zealand LLN advocates visiting emerging learning centres in the UK such as Cambridge House, Centrepoint and Tower Hamlets (Hill, 1990).

Under the leadership of Rosalie Somerville in Hawke's Bay and the Auckland Workers Educational Association (WEA), community groups offered tuition to a growing number of adult learners in the 1970s and early 1980s, culminating in the formation of the Adult Reading and Learning Assistance Federation (ARLA) in 1982 (Hill, 1990). As Gail Harrison recounts in her chapter in this book, there followed a steady growth of LLN provision around the country, but it was a saga of constant frustration as the movement's advocates met with polite, but firm resistance from government ministers and their officials for more realistic levels of funding to match the burgeoning demand. Exchanges between Ministers of Education and ARLA officials, for example, often foundered on the inability to convince the Minister of the extent of need in a country that prided itself on the quality of its school system, reflected its consistently high placings in international child literacy studies.² This period was one of growing awareness among practitioners and advocates of the extent of the need for adults to improve their foundation skills, a slowly emerging identity as an educational sector in its own right and a professional set of practices matched to the demands of teaching learners who had been failed by the schooling system. There was also a strong reluctance by government, its officials and other educational sectors to recognise the issue as one warranting a full and sustained response.

The pivotal role of IALS

Prior to 1996, there was very little systematic knowledge about the incidence of LLN skills in the New Zealand adult population. Anecdotes abounded, but the research on this issue had been very small in scale and limited in quality and coverage. Most studies had relied on self-report and used small samples of specific populations such as the unemployed (Irwin, 1988), prisoners (Mudford, 1993), and industry groups (Moore & Benseman, 1993). This lack of authoritative proof about LLN levels in the national adult population undoubtedly hindered the recognition of the issue by government and its various agencies at this point.

The country's participation in the second round of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) sponsored by the OECD (1997) proved to be a significant turning point for literacy advocates and practitioners. A random national sample of 4,223 adults aged 16 to 65 took part in the survey. The results showed that approximately one fifth of New Zealand adults scored at the lowest levels across all three domains – amounting to approximately 536,000 in the total population (Culligan, Arnold, Sligo & Noble, 2005). A further third of the sample scored at Level 2, equating to 800,000 of the total adult population. Sub-groups shown to have disproportionately higher representation in Levels 1 and 2 included: non-native English speakers (the test was done in English), Pasifika, Māori, unemployed and low-skilled workers, older adults and low-income people. New Zealand's results broadly matched those of comparable countries such as Australia and the United States.

While there was some challenging of the survey's results in the media (Elley, 1999)³, these were insubstantial and short-lived. In government circles, there was considerable interest shown, which eventually resulted in a number of policy documents and other responses, which are discussed below.

In addition to the effect on policy, I believe that the IALS results were significant for a number of reasons:

- The findings challenged the assumption that because New Zealand had achieved very well in child-based studies such as PISA,⁴ it would also have a low incidence of adult literacy problems in the adult population
- The survey helped break down the traditional dichotomy of literate/illiterate by assessing LLN skills along a continuum
- It also showed LLN skills across three domains (prose, document and quantitative literacy) underlining the variable nature of LLN demands
- While it showed some groups to be disproportionately represented among those with low LLN skills, it also showed representation of adults from all groupings in the lowest levels – in other words, LLN skills are an issue for all sectors of society, albeit to varying degrees
- The findings helped make sense of some public controversies such as university academics periodically criticising the academic literacy skills of their students.

New Zealand has participated in the next generation of OECD sponsored surveys, the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) Survey (Comparative Education Research Unit, 2007). Initial results from the ALL survey are expected to be made progressively available from late 2007. In addition to information on the three domains measured in IALS, the ALL survey will measure problem-solving skills. It is unclear whether findings from the ALL survey will have the same impact as IALS, but a larger sample size and a much more sophisticated understanding of these surveys will produce much more interesting results. Many practitioners speculate that the findings will not appear very different from those of ten years ago, arguing that the serious policy focus on LLN is too recent. On the other hand, results may be similar to those in the first round of ALL in other countries that show a reduction of numbers in the lower skill levels (due in part to the reduction of participants who received minimal schooling in the 1930s).

The emphasis over the last ten years has been mainly on building a sector infrastructure, which had to precede substantial increases in funding for improving the quality and quantity of provision. Only when these have been achieved, would it be realistic to expect substantial changes in skill levels as measured in ALL. The ALL findings will undoubtedly reflect the increased numbers of residents who do not have English as a first language. Sub analysis of the results from the youngest age group may indicate whether any long-term benefits have been gained from the major literacy and numeracy initiatives in schools over the last ten years.

The role of research

Following the release of IALS and a national adult literacy strategy, *More than words*, in 2001, the Ministry of Education commissioned a review of existing New Zealand research on foundation skills. This review (Benseman, 2003) identified a total of 54 studies that had

been carried out over a 20 year period. Most were programme evaluations, involved very small sample sizes, and had limited research methodologies; many were masterate students' theses or studies carried out by individual researchers rather than as part of co-ordinated research programmes. Few were of a scale or quality to usefully inform policy decisions or provide findings that could be generalised beyond their immediate contexts. Following this review there has been a noticeable increase in both the quantity and quality of foundation skills studies. A second research review (Benseman & Sutton, 2007) identified 79 studies carried out since the previous review four years before.

Research up until 2003 was dominated by the need to prove that low literacy, language and numeracy were issues for individuals, their communities and the country. This later period of research has focused more on how provision operates, who participates and how it can be improved. The second review also identified seven literature reviews, which signals greater recognition of research findings and probably a more 'evidence-based' approach to development in the sector. Some findings such as the need for 'deliberate acts of teaching' and the need for programmes of 100+ hours duration that emerged from these studies and literature reviews have since become commonplace points of reference in policy documents and debate. Reliable research on learner outcomes, the broader impact of programmes and more detailed analyses of provision are still limited, but the process of building a solid research foundation to inform future developments is now underway and differs substantially from the earlier situation, where research was a much less visible part of decision-making processes.

A growing interest in research here has also coincided with extensive research programmes on foundation skills in the US and the UK. The robust, high-quality research programmes carried out by research consortia based at the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) co-ordinated through Harvard University and the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) co-ordinated by the Institute of Education in London have provided invaluable research and evaluation findings that have helped inform many local studies and developments. Some studies such as the NRDC longitudinal studies are larger than anything likely to be done in New Zealand and so are able to provide invaluable insights for us. There have also been considerable interchanges between researchers in these agencies and their New Zealand counterparts (as well as with other key national bodies such as the National Adult Literacy Agency in Ireland and the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education in England).

State of the play

Current policy

Foundation learning has moved more to the fore in educational policy. During 2006 the government developed its second *Tertiary Education Strategy 2007–2012* and an accompanying *Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities (STEP)* (Ministry of Education, 2007) that highlighted areas of urgent action for the next three years. The new strategy has included 'increasing literacy and numeracy skills of the workforce' and 'achieving educational success for young New Zealanders – more achieving qualifications at level 4 and above by age 25' (p. 30) as two of four national priorities. As the major educational providers in most regions, Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) are now required to play a major role. Through the TEC's Investment Guidance, ITPs are now directed to increase the numbers of learners who make progress on their LLN skills while undertaking qualifications

at NQF levels 1-3 and to improve their capability for delivering foundation learning (Tertiary Education Commission, 2007, p. 39). The government has drawn on the 1996 IALS data to justify the strong focus on foundation learning – 333,000 adults with low literacy and numeracy and a further 610,000 with insufficient skills for a knowledge society.

Moves in this direction were flagged in the first STEP 2003-2007 (Ministry of Education, 2003b) which included ‘raise foundation skills so that all people can participate in our knowledge society’ as one of six strategies. It clearly signalled that foundation skills are now to be the concern of all tertiary providers, not just traditional foundation skills providers.

Achieving a policy focus on foundation learning has taken years. Community adult literacy programmes had begun in the early 1980s and there have been lobbying for adult literacy and lifelong learning since that time. IALS was completed under a National coalition in 1996, but the election of the Labour Government in 1999 brought concrete advances, such as the appointment of the first Chief Advisor in Adult Literacy in 2001 and the launch of strategy documents for adult literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and community education. A review of industry training also included LLN as one of its six priorities (Ministry of Education, 2001b).

The adult literacy strategy, *More than words* (Ministry of Education, 2001a), has the broad goal that all New Zealanders should enjoy a literacy level that ‘enables them to participate fully in all aspects of life, including work, family and the community and to achieve literacy in English and Te Reo Māori’. The strategy (p. 5) stipulates three main aims:

- To raise levels of the current adult population who are ‘below the bar’ of literacy adequacy
- To invest in the current working-age population who have adequate literacy to ensure that over time they remain literate as new technologies and work practices increase the literacy demands in their workplaces
- To ensure that school-leavers have adequate literacy so that those entering the workforce and adulthood are not in need of remedial literacy education.

The report describes three key ways to achieve these aims which have been the focus of the Ministry of Education’s foundation learning work: *increasing opportunities* for literacy learning; *developing capability* of providers; *improving quality* of literacy services. The Adult ESOL strategy (Ministry of Education, 2003a, p. 3) has a similar vision for non-English speakers ‘to have opportunities to gain English language skills to participate in all aspects of life’ and four strategies similar to those in the Literacy Strategy to meet it: better co-ordination and collaboration; enhanced access and affordability; expanding provision and increasing quality; and ensuring the diversity of learner needs are matched with appropriate provision.

Current forms of provision

Provision varies from one-to-one or small-group programmes that are informal, free, non-credentialed and take place in community settings, to programmes in individual workplaces through to courses in tertiary institutions that require fees and result in formal tertiary qualifications. Mapping the sector is problematic because literacy and numeracy provision and learning support are often embedded within other tertiary programmes. For example, a large number of foundation learning students are enrolled in polytechnics or PTEs for certificate-level bridging education programmes (e.g. pre-degree nursing; introductory

certificate in business studies, travel and tourism, computing or hospitality). These programmes are funded through Student Component funding that is the government's partial payment toward tertiary education; approximately six per cent of Student Component funding goes on literacy, numeracy, life skills and employment skills. The intention with the new TEC Investing in a Plan system is that LLN should be integrated into all low-level National Qualifications Framework (NQF) qualifications.

Focused Training Opportunities (TO) programmes provide employment readiness and foundation learning for unemployed people (aged over 18 years), while Youth Training (YT) programmes cater for early school leavers (aged 16–18 years). TO programmes are funded by the Ministry of Social Development (as a labour market strategy), while YT is Ministry of Education funded because of the government's thrust to keep young people in education or training until 19 years of age.

TO and YT programmes are typically full-time (a minimum of 30 hours attendance per week) for 26 or 48 weeks. Each programme is expected to have a specific industry focus (e.g. welding, automotive trades, or hairdressing) in order to prepare students for either further education or employment. Programmes are free to the learner, with some assistance for transport costs and for TO students, continued eligibility for the unemployment benefit. The current low unemployment rate has meant a substantial reduction in the numbers of TO and YT programmes.

Industry training provides for vocational-related training for people in the workforce, primarily at Level 3 and below although some Level 4 study has been approved. The content of training is driven by competency standards-based assessment of skills obtained through work experience and training both on and off the job. Industry bodies are responsible for setting these standards; the lead industry bodies determine the extent to which LLN or other generic skills are incorporated.

Free community literacy provision is primarily offered by Literacy Aotearoa, a federation of community adult literacy providers. Community literacy is usually available one-to-one for one–two hours per week although some centres are able to offer some short courses or some group teaching in local community learning centres. Tutors are usually volunteers who have been through a national basic training programme. Community literacy programmes have fewer constraints on them than the other programmes in terms of pre-determined curricula and assessment.

Free English language and settlement support in the home is provided to non-English speaking migrants and refugees by volunteers from the ESOL Home Tutor Service. Migrants can also access a range of English language programmes from other tertiary providers.

Workplace literacy is a growing area of interest, although only small-scale provision currently exists. Workplace literacy programmes establish a curriculum for each site, based on the specific business requirements of companies. The government supports Workbase: the New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development to conduct research and development in workforce-based LLN and to provide some sector-wide training and resource development for tutors and provider organisations. At present Workbase is the main provider of programmes in industry and their website has online resources for providers on how to establish programmes. Workbase is also funded to run a free national specialist adult LLN library available to providers and practitioners and to provide a web-based portal providing easily accessible information on national and international initiatives in LLN.

As an indication of the increased importance of workplace literacy there are two major initiatives underway. The first involves Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) carrying out pilots to identify effective strategies for embedding LLN skills in their industry qualifications. The second, the *Upskilling Partnership Programme* led by the Department of Labour, seeks to develop a range of workplace literacy programmes with up to 15 employers in order to evaluate their impact and effectiveness to inform future policy and funding developments.

Foundation learners

It is estimated that approximately 21% of the population aged over 15 participated in some form of formal tertiary study in 2004 (Ministry of Education, 2005), but is difficult to identify which of those were enrolled in programmes that were (either specifically or indirectly) focused on LLN. There were 385,000 enrolled in formal study at NQF Levels 1–3, a large number of whom were in short courses to meet short-term work-related skills needs. Many of these students probably have some LLN issues, but there is no information available on them. Approximately 76,000 were enrolled in LLN-specific programmes – 35% of the total. There were estimated to be approximately 12,000 part-time adult literacy or ESOL language learners in community provision. Approximately 30,000 trainees took part in labour market programmes and 800 learners were enrolled in workplace literacy programmes.

Participation patterns vary from context to context and by location. Workplace learners are predominantly male and community-based learners tend to be female. Pacific Island learners are significantly underrepresented in overall provision, although they are proportionately overrepresented in workplace programmes. Some small towns and rural areas have low participation, even though they have the highest incidence of need, according to IALS. There is often a lack of skilled practitioners available to teach literacy, numeracy and language in rural areas.

Outline of book

The first section of this book looks at different perspectives of foundation learning. Private training establishments (PTEs) have been a significant site for foundation learning in New Zealand since they first emerged in the 1990s. Frank and Judy Solomon's chapter provides an insight into how Māori kaupapa is infused into the structures and teaching programmes of a PTE in ways that support both Māori and non-Māori learners.

IALS showed that Pasifika people are disproportionately represented among those with low foundation skills and yet they are underrepresented in foundation learning programmes at present. In Chapter 3, Tony Gibbs provides an overview of how Pasifika peoples see literacy, language and learning, both historically in their Pacific homelands, and how these perspectives are shaped by the demands of urbanised life in Aotearoa. He goes on to describe some of the challenges in working with Pasifika learners and the key qualities needed for successful programmes.

Chapter 4 provides the views of two learners on their foundation learning experiences. These quite different learners recount their experiences as adults coping with poor skills in an increasingly print-rich environment, how they went about accessing help, and the impact of foundation learning activities on their lives. Their accounts show that while grappling with these demands is an ongoing challenge, there is tremendous satisfaction in the changes learners achieve in their lives.

As discussed above, the teaching of foundation skills occurs in a diverse range of settings, each of which has its own philosophy, constraints and strengths. The second section of this book looks some of the most important settings.

As in other Western countries, foundation skills were pioneered in New Zealand by community-based organisations – in particular Literacy Aotearoa (formerly the Adult Reading and Literacy Association, ARLA). Gail Harrison reviews provision within her own organisation in Wanganui, which is a poupou (member scheme) of Literacy Aotearoa. Community programmes still remain an important part of the web of provision, especially as a ‘first port of call’ for many learners, and yet funding and recognition seems little better than when the organisation first started. Gail’s chapter provides a useful insight into the realities of foundation skills provision in this context.

With the large increase in tertiary participation over the past two decades has come an influx of many non-traditional students, who often struggle with the literacy demands of academia. In Chapter 6, Marg Cartner outlines how student learning centres have developed in New Zealand, with particular reference to her own institution, Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec). Her account provides a useful illustration of how different forms of provision ebb and flow according to the political environment, the valuable role that research can play and the advocates who champion the provision.

Victoria Yee’s chapter looks at the provision available for the steadily increasing number of adult immigrants and refugee communities in this country. While historically English for Speaker of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes have operated independently of LLN programmes, the two are becoming increasingly intertwined, reflecting the realities of many foundation skills learners who may have both language and literacy issues. Victoria outlines the myriad of different providers who offer programmes for these learners and then goes on to provide an analysis of some of the issues that these providers face.

In the next chapter Susan Reid looks at foundation skills in New Zealand workplaces. A small government grant that was given to ARLA as part of International Adult Literacy Year in 1990 to explore workplace programmes eventually led to the establishment of Workbase as a national centre focused on workplace programmes. Workplace programmes are now at the centre of current government policy. This chapter describes some of the challenges in establishing workplace programmes, offers an explanation as to why the progress has been hesitant, outlines what needs to happen for this provision to progress in a more sustained way and concludes by outlining key elements needed when planning and implementing workplace programmes.

John Benseman, in Chapter 9 then explores a recently developed form of foundation skills provision, family literacy. Here children and their parents are involved in the same programme (usually on-site in a school with an early childhood centre nearby), unlike some programmes where the parents are involved only as teachers of their children, the model of family literacy described here recognises them as learners in their own right. John’s chapter outlines the main arguments underpinning family literacy and illustrates the impact achieved with reference to the Manukau Family Literacy Programme (MFLP).

The third section of the book then turns to the teaching and learning of foundation skills. The first three chapters of this section discuss core skills. Trisha Hanifin looks at the changing nature of literacy and the expansion of the definition beyond reading and writing before discussing issues related to teaching reading and writing. Gill Thomas discusses the place of numeracy in society and recent experiences in introducing numeracy professional

development into the sector. Mary Roberts discusses the teaching of English to speakers of other languages who have low literacy skills in their mother tongue. Each of these writers reviews the nature of the skills themselves, particular challenges related to them and some indications of effective teaching.

In Chapter 13, John Benseman, Josie Lander and Alison Sutton look at what lies at the heart of foundation learning – how teachers teach. They describe and analyse how 15 foundation skills teachers actually teach in the classroom. Their discussion covers the specifics of teaching reading, writing, numeracy, spelling, English language and oracy, but also the ‘nuts and bolts’ of generic teaching skills that underpin much teacher–learner interaction.

Integrating foundation skills into existing tertiary courses is a central part of current strategies to improve adults’ foundation skills. Kathleen Krsinich and Wendy Roberts have extensive experience in helping vocational teachers integrate foundation learning into their courses at the Manukau Institute of Technology. Their chapter, Chapter 14, looks at the different approaches to integrating foundation skills teaching and reflects on their experiences and lessons learnt in this work.

Assessing the impact of teaching is central to foundation learning. In Chapter 15, Alison Sutton and Ginnie Denny present some key concepts and assessment methods, describe what has been learned about current assessment practices from two recent studies and briefly discuss new developments in assessment that may enhance the quality of our teaching and learning in the future.

Professional development (PD) is a key strategy for improving the quality of provision. Ginnie Denny looks at the nature of the foundation skills teacher workforce and current forms of professional development in operation, before going on to discuss the new professional qualifications now available in Chapter 16. She then reviews the research on effective professional development and how this relates to what is currently underway in New Zealand.

Finally in this section, Ruth Schick, in Chapter 17, relates this to the increasingly important role of e-learning and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). While there is much hype about the potential of e-learning and the use of ICT, the reality of programmes usually falls well short of the rhetoric. And yet, if foundation skills provision is to match the scale of need identified in IALS, there will inevitably be a prominent role for technology. Ruth reviews some core concepts and discusses the implications (both for practitioners and for their organisations) of the changes in ICT usage, and then provides some examples of ICT use in programmes.

The final section of the book reviews the experiences of two other countries in facing the challenges of foundation learning, providing useful points of reference to what New Zealand has achieved and is currently planning. Jan Eldred provides a comprehensive overview of the main components of the *Skills for Life* strategy in England and Wales, its achievements and the issues that have arisen. The scale of investment in *Skills for Life* is unprecedented, and yet the implementation has not always been straightforward or achieved the anticipated results. Nearby Ireland is more like New Zealand in terms of its population base and the approaches taken to this issue. In Chapter 19 Inez Bailey provides a parallel account of what has been undertaken in Ireland, what has been achieved and where the challenges still lie.

Conclusion

The chapters in this book tell something of the story of foundation learning in New Zealand to date – how we have got to where we are now and the major themes and issues we face as we head into a new stage of development. There will be more to tell over the next few years as the infrastructure matures and we start to see the positive effects of a quality regime for providers and formal qualifications for tutors. There are significant changes and challenges ahead. The responsibility for foundation learning is moving to be mainly with one agency – the Tertiary Education Commission. ITPs are now expected to show more leadership in the foundation learning sector and we will learn more about effective provision in the workplace. The ALL survey results will be published to tell us more of the scale of the need and perhaps there will be an infusion of much more substantial funding to better meet it over the next decade. We hope the book will provoke reflection and discussion and will lead to more research, analysis and writing in the sector in the future.

Notes

1. Only one in four of New Zealand respondents assessed at Level 1 in the IALS study rated their literacy skills as ‘poor’ or ‘moderate’ and only one in five felt ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ dissatisfied with their skills (OECD, 1997).
2. I attended these meetings as a researcher contracted to ARLA.
3. Ironically, Elley chaired the advisory group for IALS.
4. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) a three-yearly survey of 15-year-olds in over 40 countries, concentrates on three key areas of knowledge and skills, reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy.

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