



Practitioners' Perspectives on the Value of a National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Qualification

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ABSTRACT

Adult literacy and numeracy practitioners are integral to the successful development of this emerging sector and yet there is little research about them as a professional group or their practices. This study of 217 enrollees in two national adult literacy and numeracy certificates reviews their experiences undertaking these qualifications and explores the impact their participation has had on their practice. Overall, it shows that the respondents rate their involvement in the certificates very positively and that they believe it has had a beneficial effect on their work.

INTRODUCTION

The results of the first national adult literacy and numeracy survey in 1996 (OECD, 2000) and its subsequent follow-up, ALL (Satherley & Lawes, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Satherley & Lawes, 2009; Satherley & Lawes, no date; Satherley, Lawes, & Sok, 2008) helped confirm what many practitioners in the sector had known for some time: that there was a significant educational issue to be addressed and that it involved a large proportion of the New Zealand adult population. These surveys breathed credibility into the issue by reference to large-scale, high quality surveys that were under the auspices of a reputable international agency, the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD).

The survey results undoubtedly prompted an unprecedented level of awareness among both national politicians and government officials not only in the Ministry of Education but also in related ministries and departments where the implications for areas of work, employment and social services also became increasingly clear (Benseman, 2003; Benseman, 2005; Benseman, 2008). Within the national education agencies there was a newfound enthusiasm for policy development and research funding rose to an unprecedented scale.¹ A series of national strategy papers (Ministry of Education, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2010; Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), 2009, 2010) were written and implemented to varying degrees by successive governments from both sides of the political fence, using increased levels of funding to respond to the surveys' results. The three subsequent work streams included building an infrastructure

¹ Most of which has subsequently been re-distributed to other sectors over the past few years.

(the development of a national assessment tool), extension of provision (including the workplace, distance provision through Pathways Awarua and large-scale embedding of literacy and numeracy teaching into low-level tertiary qualifications), and professional development (the establishment of a national adult literacy and numeracy centre, developing two National Certificates in Adult Literacy and Numeracy Education, known as NCALNE). One NCALNE is specified as 'Educator' and the other (shorter) qualification as 'Vocational/workplace'. Both are referred to as NCALNE in this article.

NCALNE was seen as the cornerstone of professional development for a sector where the teaching workforce is highly diverse in terms of their qualifications, educational backgrounds and professional expertise. In the TEC's most recent strategy paper (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012, p. 9), professional development is seen as:

central to ensuring educators are well-equipped to raise the skills of their learners. The workforce needs educators who are suitably qualified and can gain access to professional opportunities that forge connections, access sector leaders and research and that promote refreshment of existing skills and further development of new skills.

The document goes on to conclude, 'the qualifications are in place and performing well' (p. 33), although it is not clear what this judgement is based on.

This article reports the findings of a survey of 217 adult literacy and numeracy educators² who enrolled in two NCALNE certificates introduced in 2006. The aim of the survey was to identify the makeup of the Certificates' participants, explore their experiences in undertaking the qualification and gather feedback on its value for them as practitioners. Some data relevant to the study is also included from a small concurrent on-line survey of nine Certificate providers.

RELATED RESEARCH

There is now a strong body of research findings that show teachers to be amongst the most influential factors affecting learner outcomes (see for example, Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hattie, 2009; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 1998). Although most of these meta-analyses and large-scale studies come out of the schooling sector, there is also some emerging now about adult literacy and numeracy specifically (Vorhaus, Litster, Frearson, & Johnson, 2011). The findings are very consistent: teachers (especially well-qualified) matter most. In order to improve the quality of educational provision of any type, it is essential to increase the skill base of those most involved with the learners, teachers.

Given the centrality of their role in providing high quality provision, there is a remarkable dearth of research about New Zealand tutors in the adult literacy and numeracy sector both in terms of their backgrounds and their professional practices despite an unprecedented increase in government-funded research over the past decade (Benseman, 2003; Benseman & Sutton,

² The terms 'educator', 'tutor', 'teacher' and 'practitioner' are used interchangeably in this article.

2007; Ministry of Education, 2008). One study (Chandler et al., 2008) of 57 tutors in Christchurch explored their backgrounds, the nature of their work in different contexts and how they evaluate their work in the sector. As part of the Ministry of Education's *Learning for Living* programme to develop the sector, an observation study (Benseman, Lander, & Sutton, 2005) of adult literacy tutors was commissioned. This study recorded and analysed in detail how these tutors actually taught in the classroom. Sutton (2008) carried out a stocktake of adult literacy and numeracy qualifications including the NCALNE, but the review's positive feedback was limited by the timing of the study as few people had completed the qualification at that point.

New Zealand is not unique in this respect. Several Australian writers have noted a similar lack of research about their sector's practitioners (McGuirk, 2001; Perkins, 2009). One study (Berghella, Molenaar, & Wyse, 2006) surveyed 42 workplace tutors, including their characteristics, current professional development activities and needs, expected competencies and future priorities. The study concluded that many of the practitioners felt inadequately prepared for their work, professional development opportunities were limited and that there was a need for an appropriate entry-level national qualification into the field. Another study (Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick, & Cipollone, 2006) involving over 200 respondents also reviewed practitioners' professional development needs, showing that many felt professionally isolated, were 'drowning in paperwork' and unable to access appropriate professional development provision.

Consistent with other countries' experiences, none of the 12 main areas that the large research programme of the National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning (NCSALL)³ in the US focused specifically on practitioners. One of their more substantial studies (Smith & Hofer, 2003) looked at the characteristics and concerns of Adult Basic Education teachers. They found that few practitioners have adult-specific teaching preparation, have limited access to professional development, work under less than optimal conditions and have very limited career options, with many leaving the field after only a short period.

The National Research and Development Centre's (NRDC) research programme in Britain was comparable to that of NCSALL, but has included some notable research on practitioners. An initial study (Lucas, Casey, & Giannakaki, 2004) showed the sample of 8,762 adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers to be predominantly female, over 46 years, white and reasonably well qualified. A more complex study of 1027 teachers of literacy, numeracy and ESOL ran from 2004 to 2007 (Cara, Litster, Swain, & Vorhaus, 2008). The teachers were interviewed on three occasions to 'find out who these teachers were, what they do at work and what they think about their job' (p. 6).

This study's profile of the workforce is similar to the one described by the Lucas, Casey and Giannakaki study (2004). In relation to teacher qualifications and training, the study identified a wide range of routes into the sector with a matching array of qualifications. They argue that the complicated qualification profile goes 'some way to explaining why notions of what it means to be 'a qualified SfL [Skills for Life] teacher are confusing' (p. 15). Unlike most countries, SfL teachers are required to have both an adult teaching qualification

³ Now defunct with the loss of its funding.

as well as one related to the content of what they teach (e.g., maths). Over a third (38%) had post-graduate level qualifications, with this proportion higher in Further Education colleges and among ESOL teachers. On average, about two-thirds of the respondents rated their qualifications as 'useful' (ranging from 30-75%) and a slightly lower percentage as 'effective' (the difference between the two ratings is not explained). Criticisms of their qualifications centred on the teaching of material already known, irrelevance of pedagogical content, irrelevant theory and poor quality teaching.

The limited amount of research on adult literacy and numeracy tutors is puzzling, given their importance in achieving learner outcomes. Even identifying the socio-demographic and professional profiles of the sector's workforce is yet to be done in many countries; this missing information is especially important for future planning and given the wide diversity of backgrounds and entry points for the sector's workforce. Beyond a professional profile, there is also little known about their professional practices such as practitioners' teaching philosophies and models, their career paths and in-depth understanding of their teaching practices in the classroom.

Internationally, New Zealand is unusual in having a single national adult literacy and numeracy certificate qualification available for its practitioners. It therefore provides a useful access to understanding the value of such a qualification for practitioners in a field that is still in its early stages of development.

METHODOLOGY

Accessing the sample for this survey was not straightforward as there was no centralised database of NCALNE participants publicly available. It was therefore decided to access potential participants via their qualification providers. Using the 27 NCALNE providers⁴ listed on the NZQA website, an exploratory letter was sent out to these providers outlining the purpose of the research and inviting them to become involved. A total of 19 providers initially replied, indicating an interest in the research and of these, nine attended a workshop to collaboratively develop the study methodology and aims.

A questionnaire was subsequently developed in *SurveyMonkey* and Unitec Research Ethics Committee approval gained. Emails were then sent to the group of providers who had initially responded, requesting them to complete the provider questionnaire (some of this survey's findings are reported in this article) and to forward an invitation to participate to the educators who had enrolled in their NCALNE programmes at any time since 2006. Some of these providers reported that they no longer had detailed records of their enrollees, but that they would publicise the survey through their various networks. While this 'intermediary' strategy was not ideal for gaining access to respondents, it was the only viable method possible given the confidential nature of participant records.

It is difficult to accurately calculate a final return rate for the questionnaires. There have been over 2000 educators enrolled in at least one paper of the Certificate programme since its inception (Tertiary Education

⁴ At least five of this initial group have subsequently been found to be no longer functioning and many are no longer offering NCALNE.

Commission, 2012, p. 32). The final response rate was a 10.9% return rate based on these figures. It is somewhat higher if the returns are calculated in terms of the numbers linked to the providers who passed the information on to their enrollees, although it is not known how representative it is of the overall qualifications' enrollees.

Sample characteristics

As indicated earlier, there has not been any substantial survey of adult literacy and numeracy practitioners in New Zealand, but other studies with data on practitioners (Benseman, 2003; Benseman et al., 2005; Benseman & Sutton, 2007; Chandler et al., 2008) show similar results to this survey (and internationally) with regard to socio-demographic characteristics. About two-thirds (70%) of the respondents were women, predominantly Pakeha (80.1%; 14% were Maori and 3.8% Pasifika) and aged 45-54 years (41.3%) or 55-64 years (27.7%).

A total of 195 of the 217 respondents listed their highest educational qualifications. All had some form of qualification; nearly a quarter (45: 23.1%) were at post-graduate level, the same number (43: 22.1%) were at degree level and another quarter (54: 27.7%) at undergraduate level. Of the remainder, 26 (13.3%) identified a specific trade qualification and 27 (13.8%) listed NCALNE as their highest qualification. Many respondents specifically named their qualifications; of these, about half were in education and a similar proportion named a myriad of other fields from farm management to an MBA.

The largest number of respondents work in Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (71: 40.1%) and Private Training Establishments (59: 33.3%), followed by other community organisations (13: 7.4%), Literacy Aotearoa Poupou (12: 6.8%), private companies (11: 6.2%), Industry Training Organisations (7: 3.9%) and wananga (4: 2.3%). Over half (120: 57.1%) said that their current position included 'a lot' of literacy and numeracy work, a third (76: 36.2%) said they did 'a bit' and 14 (6.7%) were not involved in any literacy or numeracy role at present.

Respondents were asked what type of work they had been involved in prior to becoming involved in literacy and numeracy work. A total of 199 respondents named a diverse range of occupations, from mainstream education to a pearl technician and a tyre wholesaler. About a third (35.6%) were involved in non-educational jobs, a similar proportion (31.2%) were involved in various forms of trade training and another third (32.7%) had been involved in educational positions. Of this last group, a similar proportion had been involved in various forms of tertiary education (15.1%) and non-tertiary education (17.6%).

Respondents were asked how long they had worked in literacy and numeracy as well as adult/tertiary education generally. The figure below shows that they had worked longer in general adult education, which probably indicates that they have come into adult literacy and numeracy via another part of the adult/tertiary education sector (probably as part of the embedding development). Well over half (58.7%) have been in literacy and numeracy for less than five years, while at the other end of the spectrum, about a quarter (24.0%) have 10 or more years experience.

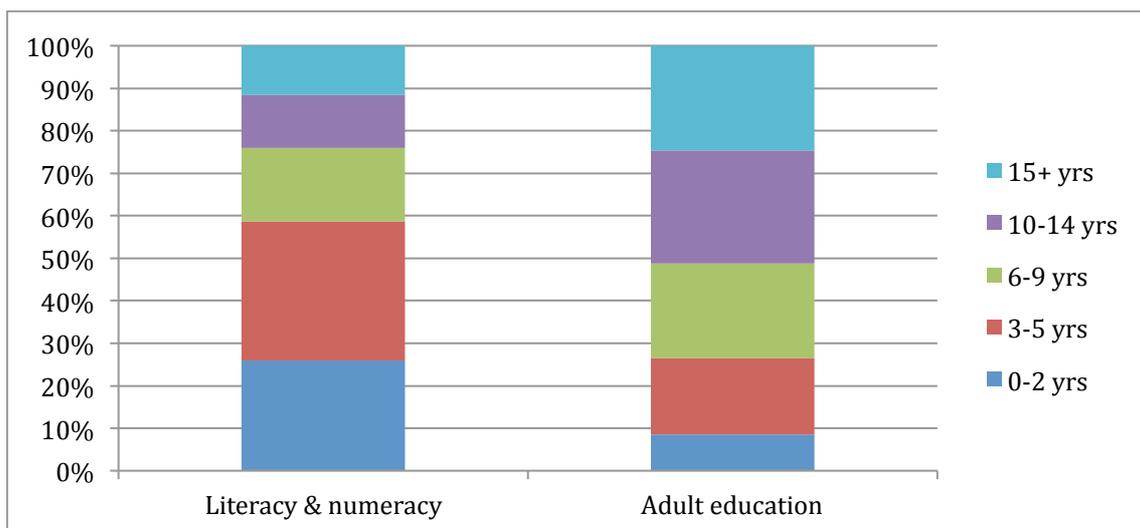


Figure 1. Respondents' years of experience in adult literacy and adult/tertiary education (n=211)

RESULTS

Certificate enrolments

Over a half of the 217 respondents (121: 56.0%) had enrolled in the Vocational/Workplace certificate, 82 (38.0%) in the Educator certificate and the other 13 (6.0%) in both. Most (182: 83.9%) had completed their qualification; of the 38 who hadn't yet completed, most (25) said they 'definitely' intended to finish, nine were 'not sure' and four said they did not intend to finish.

Figure 2 below shows the total numbers of participants by the year that they first enrolled. It shows a steady increase up to 2010 before peaking in 2012. The fall-off in 2013 reflects the fact that this survey was carried out mid-2013, but also that enrolment numbers appear to be plateauing.

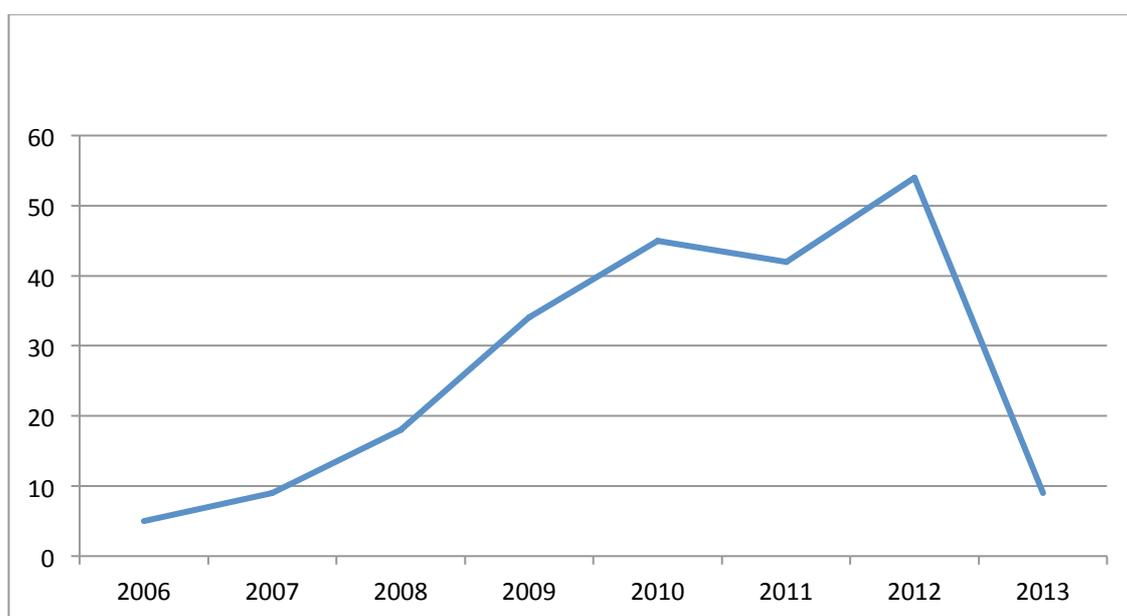


Figure 2. Respondents' first year of enrolment in NCALNE (n=216)

In order to stimulate interest in the NCALNE, the TEC offered Educator Grants for enrollees who applied. In 2010, 226 were available (185 taken up), 205 in 2011 (147 taken up), 184 in 2012 (152 taken up) and 151 have been taken up 2013 at the time of writing.⁵ Nearly a third (63: 30.6%) of the respondents in this study reported that they had taken up a grant, with 38 (59.4%) using it for one year and the remainder (26: 41.6%) for two years. Those who had used a grant were asked how important it had been for them. Over two-thirds (47: 67.1%) said that they 'would not have done the Certificate without it', 15 (21.4%) said that it was 'useful, but not essential' and the remaining eight (11.5%) were 'unsure'. Those who hadn't used a grant were asked why they hadn't. Of the 120 who answered this question, half (59: 49.2%) said that they 'didn't need it', an identical number (59: 49.2%) said they 'didn't know about it' and only two respondents said that they had applied, but had been unsuccessful.

Respondents were asked to indicate the amount of support they had received from their employer during their studies across four main factors (Figure 3 below). Overall, the figure shows a strong pattern of support from employers. The support was strongest in terms of paying fees, followed by encouragement to complete their studies, having time off to attend courses and encouragement to change their teaching. About one in five reported that they did not receive any support for fees (39: 20.8%), time off (32: 16.4%) or changing their teaching (46: 26.9%).

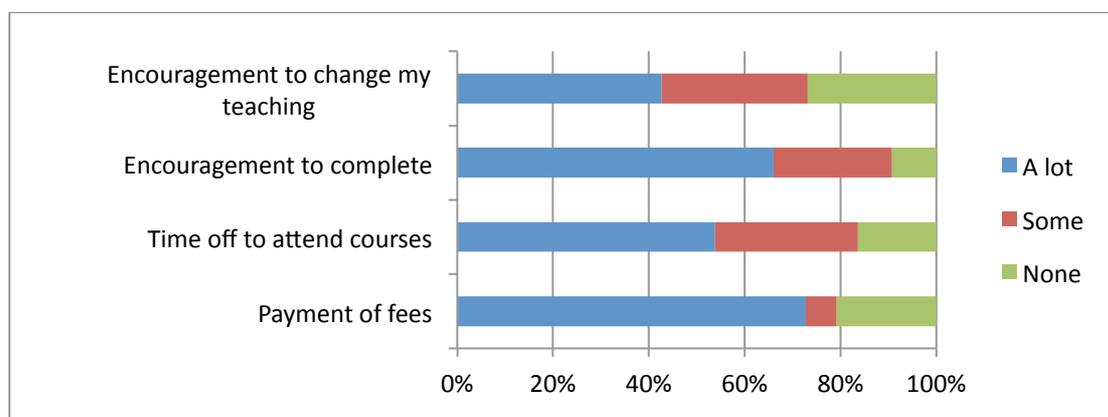


Figure 3. Degree of support received from employer during studies (n = 206)

In addition to receiving encouragement, they were also asked if they felt any pressure to enrol in the Certificate. Nearly a quarter (50: 23.2%) said they felt 'a lot of pressure', a third (82: 38.0%) felt 'a bit of pressure' and the remainder (84: 39.0%) 'no pressure'. Asked where the pressure came from, the most frequent response was their employer (94: 75.2%), funding body (20: 16%) and colleagues (11: 8.8%).

⁵ TEC customised data.

Asked if they had any particular goals to achieve when they first enrolled in the Certificate, two-thirds (139: 65.9%) said they had. Of this group, 129 named specific goals. By far the most common type of goals were to improve their teaching (37.2% of the stated goals):

I wanted to be made aware of best practice delivery of literacy and numeracy and then transfer this knowledge into my delivery. I wanted to be able to provide the best educational experience for my learners.

I wanted to develop literacy tutoring skills in working with groups. I also wanted to improve my literacy tutoring skills in general. The qual was also relevant to my field of adult education and training.

A similar number (38.8% of the stated goals) wanted to upgrade their qualifications, often as an anticipated career move:

I thought it would position me well in the company by giving me a bit of a niche field of expertise and possibly even lead onto further emerging career opportunities.

Yep, I wanted to be qualified to teach, I wanted it to marry up with my [other qualifications] and I needed it because my role [is] to empower teach and help the unemployed people get jobs. Another reason was that it would look good on my resume and hopefully mean I get paid more money.

To become qualified because TEC said that we had to.

Twenty one (16.3% of the stated goals) respondents said that they needed to understand specific aspects of literacy and numeracy (usually embedding) and TEC requirements (usually the assessment Learning Progressions):

Better understanding and techniques for embedding LLN development strategies into the training resources I develop for clients, plus an understanding of learning progressions.

A few (4.6% of goals) were motivated to understand the sector in order to understand what their colleagues were doing and to act as mentors:

Saw the relevance of the qualification and so was very determined to complete it and encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Other goals related to personal development and to help design teaching materials.

Certificate teaching format and content

Over half of the Certificate enrollees (109: 52.9%) reported that their Certificate had been mainly taught face-to-face, a third (79: 38.4%) said it had been a combination of on-line and taught sessions and the rest (18: 8.7%) were taught fully on-line. Most rated the format they had experienced as either 'totally suitable' (130: 61%) or 'reasonably suitable' (70: 32.9%). Only 13 (6.2%) respondents rated their teaching format as 'not suitable'. No particular format was rated differently than any other. Asked if there was any aspect of the course teaching they would like to have been different, 120 (55.3%) replied and 84 of these named specific aspects. The most frequent suggestions were: to improve the quality of the teaching (23); to provide more face-to-face contact and support (20 - predominantly in the blended and on-line courses); making the course more grounded/contextualised/relevant (11); various logistical aspects such as timing, location (10); better focus in the teaching content (8); providing a distance on-line learning option (6); the Māori component (5 – both to increase and to decrease); and, more theory (1).

Specific comments included:

It was taught to the assessment and was really just ticking off the boxes for the unit standard.

A bit more passion and enthusiasm.

More application to the classroom.

The books from TEC were full of great resources.

It was condensed into a three-month time frame.

There was so much information to gain.

I am a primary-trained teacher and felt awful for the others who had no experience of 'educationese'.

This course should have been done in smaller chunks over a longer period.

Evaluation of Certificate

The respondents were asked two evaluative questions about the Certificate. The first asked them to rate the various topics that were taught. The figure over the page shows that nearly half the respondents rated most of the topics as 'very positive' and a similar number as 'positive'. Around 10-15% were unsure about most of the topics and only 5% rated them as 'negative'. One person consistently rated the topics as 'very negative'. Most of the topics were rated consistently well, with the exceptions being 'knowledge of the history and development of adult literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand' and 'developing adult learners' literacy and numeracy skills using information communication technologies'.

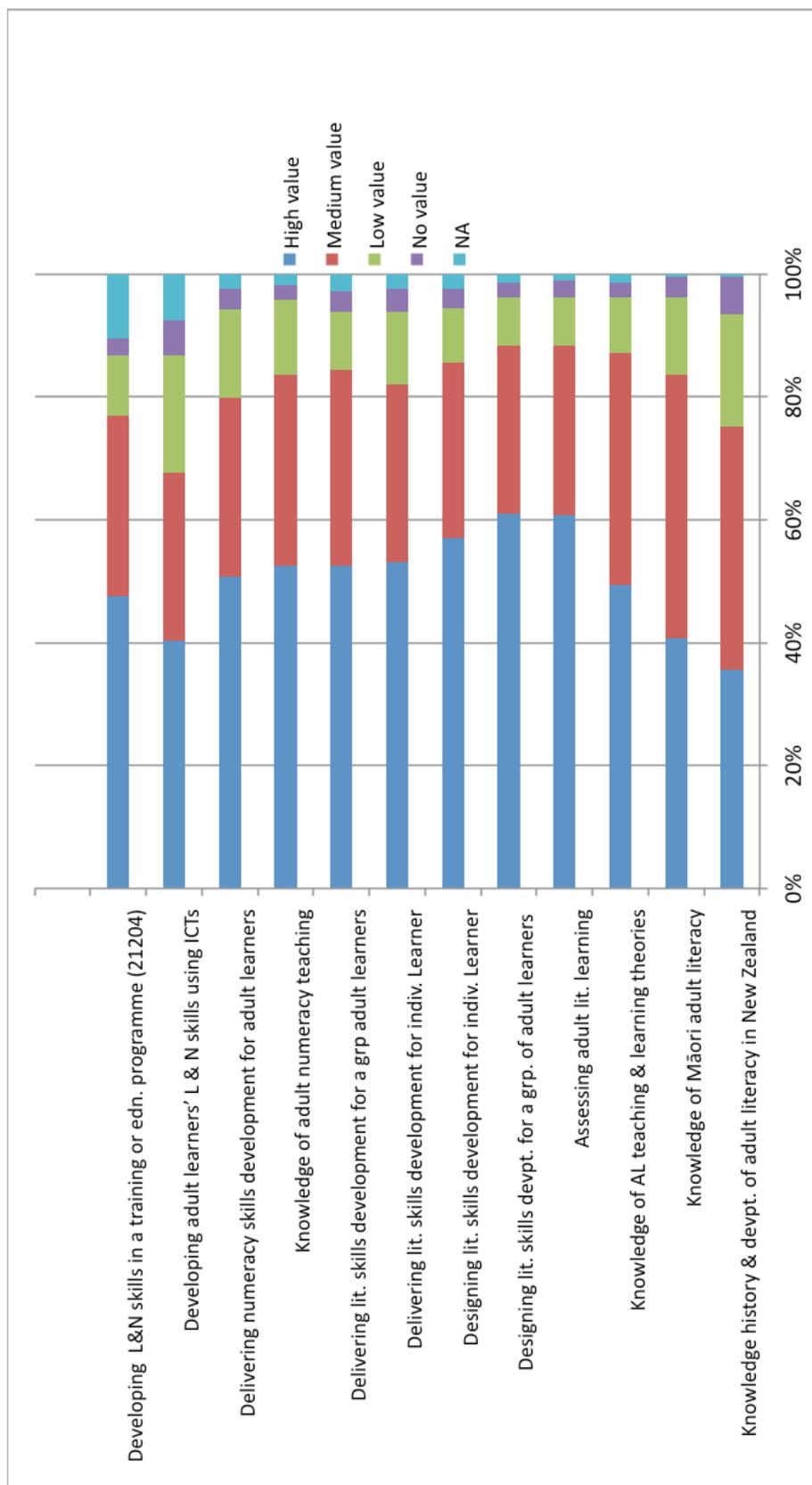


Figure 4. Respondents' ratings of Certificate teaching topics (n=214)

Figure 5 below shows their ratings of a range of aspects relating to the Certificate and its teaching. On average about 80% rated each of the aspects positively, with about half of these ratings as 'very positive' and the other half as 'positive'. There were very few 'very negative' ratings (again the same individual). The topics rated most positively were 'tutors' knowledge of teaching content' and 'relevance to my work', while the lowest ratings were for 'quality of teaching' and 'on-going support while studying'. Overall, the Certificate is rated very positively, with 43.9% rating it 'very positive', a similar number (42.9%) as 'positive', only 3.3% as 'negative' and .5% as 'very negative'. Twenty respondents (9.4%) were unsure.

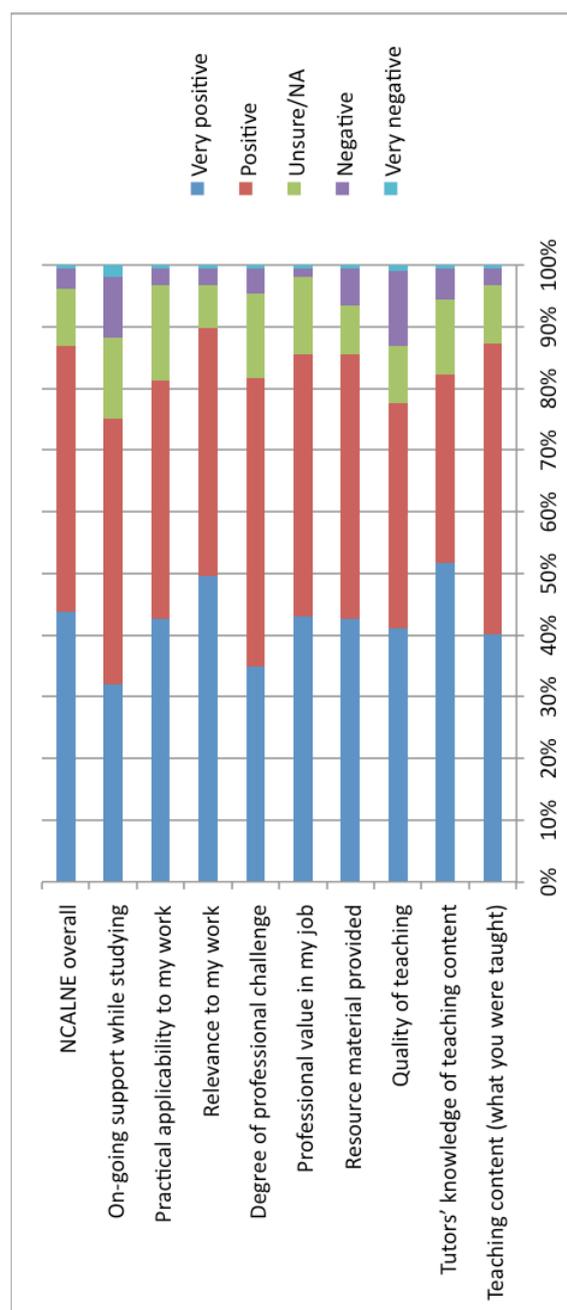


Figure 5. Respondents' ratings of Certificate (n=214)

Because the Certificate does not explicitly cover English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) issues and pedagogy, they were asked if this omission was of concern for them. Nearly a quarter (21.5%) said it was a 'major concern', a third (32.4%) said it was a 'minor concern' and the remainder (46.3%) said it was of 'no concern' or not relevant. More than half of the respondents included comments about this question – predominantly that the numbers of ESOL learners were constantly increasing and now often formed a significant proportion of their learners:

Because many students I teach are ESOL and it would have been useful to have some aspects/ teaching strategies in the course to address it.

Most workplace literacy in Auckland involves ESOL. Because I had an ESOL background I found it easy to work with these learners but people with no experience either struggled or just didn't perform as well as they could have.

ESOL student numbers are growing exponentially in our generic bridging programme. Knowledge of how to help these students is imperative. I had to do a Cert TSOL module to help me understand the specific problems for ESOL students so it would have been good to have some basic info available from NCALNE.

They were also asked how much they learned about adult literacy and numeracy research in the Certificate that is relevant to their work. Over a third (84: 39.2%) said 'a lot', 95 (44.4%) said 'some' and only 31 (14.5%) said 'very little' or none (4: 1.9%). Asked to name any particular adult literacy and numeracy theorists or researchers who have influenced their development as practitioners, only twenty-two respondents named specific individuals: eight were well-known practitioners, three were researchers from another (non-education) field and only eleven were adult literacy or numeracy researchers/theorists.

Impact on practice

In order to gain an indication of the impact that the Certificates have had on them as educators, the respondents were asked to self-assess how influential it has been on their practice. A total of 213 responded to this question: a third (73: 34.3%) rated the Certificate as 'highly influential', nearly half (100: 47.0%) as 'moderately influential', 16 (7.5%) felt it had not been influential and the rest (24: 11.3%) were 'unsure'.

Some of the 'highly influential' comments made on this self-assessment included:

I never wanted to be a teacher, or tutor, I joined this job because it was work. There are little or no jobs in this town, and any job was going to do for me. This job, I thought entailed me being a work broker, little did I know it then broadened out to being a tutor as well. I asked to do some training, because I knew nothing, I wanted this, so in the NCALNE training, the whole thing was highly influential.

At first I was sceptical about why I was even there. After about 2.5 days, a little light bulb lit up. It suddenly dawned on me why, I had struggled with the same information on different courses with different students.

And with those who had been 'moderately influenced':

I was already aware and implementing much of what I learnt so it encouraged me that I was on the right path and fine-tuned some other areas. It made me examine things that I did and the reasons behind them, made me re-evaluate.

Doing the Certificate, validated that my own current practice was on track – but now I could relate it to the NZ education environment/specific pedagogy instead of just 'knowing that my teaching was good because it worked, because of results, because of student feedback' etc. It has also enabled my focus to be specific, applying different elements of my course in different ways.

Others felt that their practice had not changed very much, often because of their circumstances.

The [name] 18-week course is an immensely challenging course which places the learners under huge pressure. To introduce further (whilst undoubtedly helpful!) training/literacy assistance into an already full learning timetable for these learners is a big ask.

And others felt that it had changed them minimally:

My practice has not been altered in any way. I was already doing everything I needed to do.

I've had a lot of experience, and taken part in a lot of professional development. NCALNE felt like a ticking-the-boxes exercise. Didn't feel it was relevant, challenging or interesting, and nothing in the content was new learning for me. Felt it was more appropriate for an inexperienced practitioner.

In their separate survey carried out concurrently, the Certificate providers were asked to assess how influential they thought the Certificates have been in influencing the quality of literacy and numeracy practices of their staff. Two rated them as 'highly influential' and seven as 'moderately influential'. None saw them as 'not influential' or were unsure. They were also asked to provide examples to illustrate their assessments.

Comments from the 'highly influential group included:

Naming what they already do. Builds confidence and professionalism. Using a wider range of literacy and numeracy strategies. Understanding the importance of research and how it contributes to good practice. More patience with learners, better targeted strategies. Knowing their learners better and the effects and challenges learners face including cultural diversity. Leads to more appropriate strategies and more flexible teaching and learning. Building their own understanding of basic maths. Building their own confidence to teach numeracy effectively. Wider ripples to helping their own children and Whānau.

Better understanding and use of the assessment tool and other literacy and numeracy assessments. Using ILP's [Individual Learning Plans]. Knowing course demands, knowing the learners and knowing how to bridge the gaps. Connecting to the wider community of adult literacy and numeracy. Many ex-students have moved on into other roles in the sector including research and development roles.

They are passing on the 'torch'. Has built up the professionalism in the sector. Knowing what to do next – using the Learning Progressions. I think it has really come of age in the last two years. I would point to [provider's] work with [agency] as a case study in how trades tutors can change their practice in a large organisation.

Comments from the 'moderately influential' group included:

Trade tutors have adopted strategies learnt in the sessions and are using these in their classrooms: tutors using more hands-on activities to engage their learners, a greater emphasis on vocabulary, promotion and use of contextual language during practical sessions and developing understanding of underpinning knowledge and skill needing to be mastered by the learner – ultimately leading to success with course demands.

Staff have developed a better understanding of how to support their learners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in order to meet the demands of the programme. Teaching practices have been enhanced as staff have been introduced to different strategies and approaches.

DISCUSSION

Practitioners are the cornerstone of quality adult literacy and numeracy provision, both in terms of their relationships with learners and achieving learning outcomes. And yet, there is scant documentation of who they are, how they perceive themselves as teachers and how their work fits in their professional aspirations. This study of the participants undertaking national adult literacy and numeracy certificates (NCALNE) provides some insight into these issues.

The 217 respondents to an on-line questionnaire (supplemented by some data from nine of the Certificate providers) are predominantly white, well-qualified, middle-aged women, a pattern that is probably not unusual in many similar professions. This profile stands in contrast to the profiles of the majority of the learners they currently (or potentially) work with: young, non-white, low-qualified males (Satherley & Lawes, 2008c). Whether this disparity is significant remains an issue for debate, but it is certainly worthy of note. Their concentration in older age groups is also noteworthy for future workforce planning in the sector.

Like many new qualifications, NCALNE's enrolments increased rapidly from its beginning in 2006 and started to plateau from 2010. Its future projection is uncertain at this point, both because it may have already catered for a majority of the sector's interested practitioners and the current lack of political interest in the sector. Although, the continuing provision of Educator Grants for the Certificates does ensure some support for maintaining Certificate participation.

For the third of this survey's respondents who took up an Educator Grant, their availability was significant as two-thirds of this group indicated that they may well have not enrolled in the Certificate without it. Most of the respondents also indicated that they had also received considerable support from their employers, particularly with the payment of fees, time to attend the courses and encouragement to complete the qualification. Although less frequent, over half also reported encouragement to change their teaching practices.

Nearly two-thirds of the group reported feeling some pressure ('a lot' for a quarter of the total) to enrol in the Certificate, mainly from their employer. This pressure to employ suitably qualified teaching staff (such as NCALNE) is probably linked to rising expectations from the TEC about low-level learner outcomes. Although there was a high degree of pressure reported, it did not appear to have any negative or lasting influence on the participants' ratings of their experiences on the Certificate. The various components of the Certificates' content and delivery were consistently rated very positively, with only a very small number of negative ratings. They also rated the three different teaching formats (blended, face-to-face and on-line) positively, although some wanted more personal contact, even in the face-to-face courses. The lack of ESOL content in the Certificate was a concern for many, especially with the increasing numbers of ESOL learners in centres with diverse populations like Auckland.

Although the great majority of the group indicated that they had learned a lot about research relevant to their work, only eleven could name specific adult literacy and numeracy theorists or researchers. It is not clear why this

discrepancy occurs, but probably indicates that research is not explicitly prominent in the Certificate's operations. This finding is consistent with other overseas studies (McGuirk, 2001; Zeuli, 1991) and probably suggests that these respondents are not being overtly educated into research-based practices (Benseman, 2013; Comings, 2003).

Fully mapping and understanding the impact on practitioner practice by transferring what is learned on a course is not straightforward and requires a more sophisticated research methodology than the current study (Merriam & Leahy, 2005). Nonetheless, there are still some useful indicators that the Certificate is having an impact on practice. A third of the respondents report that the Certificate has been highly influential and a further half of the group say it has been moderately influential. Less than 10% say that it has not been influential. These results are also corroborated by what the providers have reported in their separate survey, backed by extensive lists of changes they have observed with their teaching staff.

This study shows that the national adult literacy and numeracy certificates have been received very positively by this group of practitioners. Only a very small number of the respondents have criticised its content or delivery to any degree. Most have found it a positive experience and report that it has also influenced their practice. These findings indicate that NCALNE has made a positive contribution towards developing a more knowledgeable and skilled workforce for this emerging educational sector.

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John Benseman has worked in adult education and literacy for 35 years as a practitioner, programme administrator, researcher and evaluator. He studied adult education in Sweden, then worked in a range of adult education organisations including continuing medical education for general practitioners, the Auckland Workers Education Association, The University of Auckland as well as a self-employed researcher and evaluator. Over recent years he has worked in literacy research projects for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). From 2007-2010 he ran the *Upskilling* workplace literacy, language and numeracy research project and is now the Learning Manager for the New Zealand Planning Institute.