Perspectives of Adult Literacy Learners 2006-2007:

A REPORT FROM THE WANGANUI ADULT LITERACY AND EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

Niki Murray • John Franklin • Margie Comrie • Bronwyn Watson • Fiona Shearer • Elspeth Tilley • Frank Sligo • Franco Vaccarino

Massey University
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2006–2007

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Department of Communication and Journalism,
Wellington and Palmerston North, New Zealand.
This report is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr Su Olsson (1942–2005), friend, colleague, and objective leader in the Literacy and Employment Programme.
Executive summary

In-depth interviews with adult literacy participants were conducted in 2004/2005, 2006, and 2007. The 2004/2005 interviews primarily explored the adult literacy learners’ perceptions of their literacy needs, barriers to literacy learning, and barriers to employment. From these discussions, further key themes emerged regarding conduits to literacy, and benefits and positive aspects of the training programme. These results are outlined in an earlier report in the Literacy and Employment series ‘Perspectives of adult literacy learners 2004-2006: A report from the adult literacy and employment programme’.

The present report outlines the findings from the 2006 in-depth interviews. In 2006, we re-interviewed a sample of the initial 2004/2005 interviewees, and some new adult literacy participants also took part in research discussions. Following on from the earlier interviews, we sought participants’ further insights into literacy needs; barriers to literacy; and barriers to employment. We also explored participants’ thoughts on: conduits to literacy; conduits to employment; benefits and positive aspects of their learning; what they found negative about their learning; their publicity suggestions; learning styles; any reasons for leaving training, and finally; participants’ thoughts on the meaning of ‘literacy’ and ‘foundation skills’.

Discussion of the 2006 findings is followed by an initial analysis of the 2007 interviews. In these 2007 interviews we met again with some literacy participants two years on from their original interview (part of the 2004/2005 sample), and also once again interviewed participants one year on from their original interview (part of the 2006 sample). For both interviewee groups outcomes in terms of employment and further training (or continued training) are outlined.

Finally, this report ends with an overview of what we believe are the key turning points, derived from the interviewees’ accounts of their literacy and life journeys over the last two-to-three years.
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This research programme could not have proceeded without the fullest possible involvement of the Wanganui community. In particular, the success of the research is due to the foresight of the Wanganui District Library, later joined by the Whanganui Community Foundation, Literacy Aotearoa (Whanganui), and Te Puna Mātauranga o Whanganui. Under the Library’s leadership, this research programme has benefited enormously from the support of many other local and national organisations, including the adult literacy providers and practitioners of Wanganui, the Wanganui District Council, WINC, Work and Income (Wanganui), the Corrections Department, Police, TEC, the Ministry of Education, and GoodHealth Wanganui.

We are especially indebted to the adult literacy participants who gave their time and stories to the research team.

Many Massey colleagues also offered invaluable support, including Sharon Benson, Christine Morrison, Nicky McInnes, and Nigel Lowe.

We are indebted to many other friends and colleagues not named here for their insights and support to date in this research. However, all remaining errors and omissions in this discussion paper are of course the responsibility of the authors alone. Further, the points of view expressed in this paper are those of the authors, and are not necessarily endorsed by the community groups which, as is normal in a diverse society, will have their own perspectives on the issues covered here.
Introduction

In early 2004, the Foundation for Research, Science, and Technology (FRST) approved funding for a community-based study of adult literacy and employment in Wanganui. This research project grew from a community-identified need for better understanding about the impact of low literacy levels on community development aspirations. The research aims to develop deeper insights into the issues surrounding adult literacy and employment and, eventually, to develop solutions for participants, practitioners, and policy-makers. One important goal is to increase the likelihood that the growing investment in adult literacy in New Zealand is used effectively to benefit both individuals and the country as a whole.

At the heart of the research we investigate how participants in adult literacy programmes perceive their literacy and learning needs, barriers to their literacy learning, and the contribution of their learning to any subsequent employment opportunities. We wished to explore the experiences of participants on their courses, as well as their life experiences which had impacted on or influenced their prior and current literacy learning.

These perceptions of adult literacy participants have been gathered through longitudinal in-depth interviews, conducted once a year since late 2004/ early 2005. Seventy-nine participants in adult literacy training courses in Wanganui shared their experiences with us in late 2004 and early 2005. A sample of 22 participants from this original group was re-interviewed in 2006 alongside a new cohort of 34 participants. In 2007, 32 participants from the original and 2006 samples were interviewed again.

We believe the perspectives of adult literacy training participants, combined with the perspectives of training providers, the wider community, and employers (on literacy issues of importance to them), will lead to a deeper understanding of adult literacy initiatives and their impacts on workplaces and communities. The study sets out to benefit New Zealand by providing rigorous attention to an inadequately researched issue of growing significance for a country that seeks to participate fully in the “knowledge society” world of the 21st century.

This report on the perspectives of adult literacy learners is relevant to the first three objectives of the wider adult literacy project. It is in three main sections. The first enlarges and updates the findings of the second round of participant interviews conducted in 2006. These were initially covered in an earlier report from the adult literacy and employment team. This earlier report also contains a full analysis of the findings from the 2004/2005 interviews. The second section presents initial findings of follow-up interviews with 32 participants, initially interviewed in either 2004/05 or 2006. This section of the report concentrates particularly on employment outcomes or further (or continuing) training activities that may have resulted from the adult literacy training undertaken. The third section details key turning points in participants’ life journeys that have become apparent in our reading of their stories over time.

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1 Initial findings of the 2006 participants’ perceptions of literacy and learning needs can be found in Tilley, Comrie, Watson, Culligan, Sligo, Franklin, & Vaccarino (2006).
Part one: 2006 interviews with follow-up and new participants

Method

In late 2005 and early 2006 the project team initiated a series of feedback meetings with organisations providing adult literacy training in Wanganui. We reported on the findings from the participant interviews as a whole and gave comparative feedback on each organisation’s own students (in a manner that preserved the students’ confidentiality). The meetings also provided a chance to hear more from the providers and find out what they wished to gain from the second round of interviews.

Feedback was also given to the original participants via a summary of key findings that was sent out with an Information Sheet for the second round of interviews.

All twelve provider organisations agreed to take part in the second series of interviews. Where possible, they helped locate the original interviewees, many of whom appeared to have relocated, and some provider organisations also helped find a new cohort of interviewees.

In line with Objective 3 as agreed with FRST – “to evaluate how effectively adult literacy programmes secure employment outcomes” - the interviews concentrated on exploring what employment and further training outcomes the longitudinal participants may or may not have achieved since undertaking the course. Further, we wished to explore other potential outcomes such as increases in confidence, positive attitudes, and goal-setting behaviours to name a few. Both the follow-up interviews and those with the new cohort also sought to further investigate some of the barriers to learning that were identified through the first round of interviews.

As with the original interview schedule, questions were developed with feedback from key community groups, especially adult literacy providers themselves. Because in the 2006 sample, we had two groups (a follow-up sample from the previous year, and a new cohort) some of the questions in the schedule differed for each group. Questions for the new interviewees focused on participants’ socioeconomic background; experiences of school; health; learning needs (including meeting cultural needs); marketing and advertising needs of the course; benefits and positive aspects of the course; and conduits to learning and employment. The longitudinal participants’ interviews included all of the above but also explored potential outcomes from the course in terms of employment, further training, or other types of outcomes, and, if applicable, reasons for non-completion of their course.

Pilot interviews were conducted with two follow-up interviewees and one new interviewee during the first two weeks of April, 2006. Over the next 10 weeks, 22 of the original 88 participants were interviewed. A further 27 were not interviewed, but information on their present whereabouts and employment or training outcomes was sourced through their prior or present adult literacy provider agency. A new cohort of 34 participants was also interviewed.

Analysis
The coding analysis was completed with a total of 56 interviews that were able to be transcribed. The transcripts were examined line by line using grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992), to allow categories and constructs, collapsed into codes, to surface from the participants’ own words. By this means we aimed to establish codes well based in participants’ statements. The intention was to ensure that each code could be supported by comments within the transcripts comprising “extensive amounts of rich data with thick description” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 514). Examination of emergent codes was supported via use of the HyperResearch data analysis package (ResearchWare: Simply powerful, n.d.).

We stress that the data are qualitative and categories are often inter-related. Further, the variety of students and the differing emphases of their training makes generalisation fraught. This kind of analysis is best at offering a rich picture of the diversity and range of issues in responses. However, we have used some quantitative descriptors where appropriate, for example, the number of respondents who mentioned a particular ‘theme’ and the number of comments made about the theme. The number of comments may be taken as some indication of “intensity”. Coding was conducted without reference to any respondent’s demographics in order to allow the words to speak for themselves. However, in order to orient the data overall, a brief aggregate summary of demographic details provided by the participants follows.

Profile of participants

The overall 2006 sample was made up of 56 participants: 22 were follow-up or longitudinal interviewees, and 34 who were first-time participants. In this overall sample, men outnumbered women with 33 men and 23 women participating. Nearly two thirds of participants were aged between 16 and 30. Of these, 21 were in the 16 to 20 years age bracket, and 15 in the 21 to 30 years bracket. The remaining 21 participants were fairly evenly spread across the age cohorts. Seven were in the 31 to 40 years group, seven in the 41 to 50 band, and five were aged between 51 and 60. There was just one participant aged between 61 and 64. Table 1 outlines the age groups of participants by gender.

While the 29 New Zealand European participants represented the largest ethnic group (51.8%), the 18 participants who identified as Māori comprised nearly a third of participants (32.1%). Of the remaining nine participants, four identified as Māori and New Zealand European, three were New Zealanders, one was Māori and Pacific Islands Peoples, and one identified as New Zealand European and Pacific Islands Peoples. Table 2 outlines the ethnic identity of participants by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-64</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The sum percentage of gender groups does not add exactly to 100% due to rounding of decimal places.
For most participants (93%) English was their first language. However, four participants (three men and one woman), indicated they were bi-lingual in Māori and English.

The demographic of ‘employment status’ is complex and it is therefore difficult to present a straightforward analysis, however collapsing the employment status categories enables discussion to be simplified. It is then possible to say that, at the time of the interviews, 46 of the 56 participants were students/trainees (82%). Of those, 34 were not in paid employment, two were in full time employment (one in the armed forces and one on course related work experience), seven were in part-time employment, and three were in casual employment. Of the 10 who were no longer studying at the time of the interviews, two were in full-time employment, four were in part-time employment and one was doing voluntary work. Three were unemployed, and one of those was defined as a ‘house person or retired’.

Looking at educational level, it is again difficult to provide clear-cut analysis. This is because some participants have included their current or recently completed training courses, while others appear not to have included these. However, using the data given by the participants, most participants (80%) had attended secondary school for either three or four-plus years, slightly more than in the previous participant groups. Twenty-eight participants (50%) had attended up to three years of secondary education and 17 (30%) had spent four or more years at secondary school. Two participants had attended primary school only, while seven participants had attended up to three years of tertiary education, and one had attended three or more years of tertiary education.2

**Comparing follow-up and new participant demographics**

The 2006 interviews comprised 22 follow-up participants (39%), and 34 new participants (61%). The follow-up participants comprised 12 women and 10 men, which reflected the gender proportions in the first round of interviews. Among the new participants, though, there were almost twice as many men as women, with 23 men (68%) and 11 women (32%). This difference may have been due to the types of courses that had participants available and willing to be interviewed; courses that tended to cater for young men. Table 3 shows the percent of follow-up and new participants by gender and age group membership.

---

2 One new male participant’s years of education were not provided.
Table 3. Percent of follow-up and new participants by gender and age group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Follow-up participants</th>
<th>New participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-64</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The sum percentage of gender groups for each category does not add exactly to 100% due to rounding of decimal places.

Ten of the 22 follow-up participants, almost half (45%), had between one and three years of secondary education. A further seven (32%) had four years or more of secondary education, and four (18%) had completed up to three years of tertiary education. One follow-up participant had attended only primary school education. Among the new participants, one also had attended only primary school. The largest group of new participants (18 participants, 53%), had up to three years’ secondary education. A further 10 (29%) had completed four years or more of secondary education. Three new participants had completed up to three years of tertiary education; and one had more than three years’ tertiary education. By comparison, then, while 77% of follow-up participants had spent either three or up to four-plus years at secondary school, that percentage was higher among the new participants (82%) although there was a slightly higher number at the four-plus years level among the follow-up participants.

The current employment and training situation of the participants was complex. Tables 4 and 5 describe the differing employment and training situations that participants outlined.

Table 4. Follow-up participants’ current employment and training situation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment and training status</th>
<th>Percent of follow-up participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currently in training:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student or trainee</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student – unemployed</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student – full-time employed</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student – casual employed</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No longer in training:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employed</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time employed</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in paid employment</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in paid employment – voluntary</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in paid employment – house person or retired</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The sum percentage of gender groups for each category does not add exactly to 100% due to rounding of decimal places.

Just over half the follow-up participants were in some form of training, with three of these students stating that they were also currently working, two full-time and one casual. Of the 10 participant’s no longer in training, two were in full-time employment and four were in part-time employment. The remainder were not in paid employment.
Table 5. New participants’ current employment and training situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment and training status</th>
<th>Percent of new participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently in training:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student not in paid employment</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student – part time employed</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student – casual employed</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer in training:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time employed</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual employment</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed – house person or retired</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost three-quarters of the new participants were in a training course at the time of the interview, and the majority of those (20 students, or 77%) were not in paid employment. Five students were also in part-time employment and one was also in casual employment. Of those who had left training, two were in part-time employment and one was in casual employment. Five of those who had left training were unemployed.

Among follow-up participants 14 (64%) identified as New Zealand European; six (27%) identified as Māori; and two (9%) identified as New Zealanders. Among the new participants, while they were still the largest group, there was a smaller percentage of New Zealand Europeans, with just 44% (15 participants) identifying as New Zealand European. The 12 new participants identifying as Māori comprised a slightly higher percentage (34%) than among the follow-up participants, and in the new participant group there were also four participants (11%) who identified as Māori and New Zealand European. One each identified as being New Zealander, of Māori and Pacific Island descent, and of New Zealand European and Pacific Island descent.

Findings

Literacy needs

Follow-up participants’ perceptions of literacy needs and literacy training needs

Although the tables below show the frequency of codes mentioned by respondents, they are a guide only. The codes relating to perceived literacy needs should not be read as discrete from each other as many respondents mentioned multiple or interrelated literacy needs. As an example of this, five respondents mentioned the merits of both group work and one-to-one tutoring as a literacy training need.

Discussion of follow-up participants’ literacy needs and literacy training needs has been separated. Table 6 outlines the follow-up participants’ perceptions of their literacy needs, while Table 7 outlines this group’s perceptions of their literacy training needs. Participants responded to specific questions such as, “What do you need to learn?” and “How do you like to learn best?” Participants also, on occasion, mentioned their learning and literacy needs during discussion of other issues, such as when asked what skills were needed for gaining or keeping employment. Their responses to this question matched the literacy and learning needs outlined elsewhere in the interviews, prioritising things such as communication skills and attitudinal
factors like confidence. Because respondents themselves did not make clear distinctions between their literacy needs generally and their training needs for gaining employment, and because they often mentioned identical needs in each context, coding of the interview transcripts has collated these needs to ensure all mentioned needs are captured together. This enables us to map overall priorities in terms of participants’ articulated needs, whether for adult literacy specifically, learning generally, or employment. Following each table is a short explanation.

**Table 6. Follow-up participants’ perceptions of literacy needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy needs</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications or credits</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude incl. confidence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and or writing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific knowledge set or skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The total N of respondents includes respondents who have mentioned more than one literacy or learning need.

Half the follow-up participants mentioned academic qualifications or credits as an end in themselves, a primary reason for their study, or a necessity for employment. This matches closely with the perception that lack of qualifications creates barriers to employment, and to the most frequently mentioned benefit of the course being obtaining work. (See below for further discussion of ‘barriers to employment’ and ‘benefits of the course’.)

Attitudinal needs such as confidence and a ‘work ethic’ were mentioned by slightly fewer follow-up respondents than the need for qualifications, but received the greatest number of comments overall.

Reading and writing were mentioned with the next greatest frequency. A majority of these follow-up participants are in their second year of study or in a follow-up training course. Therefore they may well now have a longer history of being exposed to viewpoints which suggest that literacy is needed in a more specific or ‘traditional’ sense. Socialisation into this viewpoint via contact with tutors, learning materials, and other students on the course may have led to the more frequent expression of reading and writing as a need than in earlier interviews. Computer skills also received a number of comments. However, it was less dominant as a perceived literacy need than in the first-year (larger) sample of participants.

**Table 7. Follow-up participants’ perceptions of literacy training needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy training needs</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 shows that very few respondents in this follow-up group expressed explicit training needs. Some of their ongoing needs for training conditions such as group work or individually paced learning can be inferred, from looking at the positive benefits they discussed elsewhere in
relation to their course (see below), but because these were uniformly expressed as needs being successfully met, not as outstanding requirements, they have not been listed here in this section, which covers priority needs to be addressed.

Two of the ‘other’ comments were general indications that a respondent wanted more training; “I need knowledge” and “I need more”, while the other expressed a need for ongoing and formative assessment rather than year-end summative assessment: “probably the system in the schools now would have suited me a bit better, where it’s assessed over the year; a lot of the marks are assessed over the year rather than that final exam”. The applied learning comment links with a number of follow-up participants (see section entitled ‘benefits of the course’) who mentioned specific skills as a positive outcome of their course.

**New participants’ perceptions of literacy needs and literacy training needs**

New participants stated eight literacy needs that they sought, along with three categories of literacy training. These are ranked in order of the number of respondents mentioning them in Tables 8 and 9 below. As above, participants responded to specific questions such as, “What do you need to learn?” and “How do you like to learn best?” Participants also, on occasion, mentioned their learning and literacy needs through discussion of other issues. Where this occurred, coding of the interview transcripts has drawn these needs out to ensure all mentioned adult literacy and learning needs are captured. We separate discussion of literacy needs and literacy training needs into different sections due to their differing emphases.

**Table 8. New participants’ perceptions of literacy needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy needs</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude inc. confidence</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific knowledge set or skills</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualifications or credits</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and/or writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other needs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attitude including confidence**

The greatest number of respondents who talked about needs commented on attitudinal needs such as confidence, motivation, enthusiasm, and a “positive” outlook, whether for engaging in learning, gaining and keeping employment, or just in one respondent’s words “moving forward” with life generally. Some respondents said people needed “good work ethics” or “reliability”; others said a crucial need was “confidence in a way that they don’t feel shy to go out there and speak to employers and say, I’d like to, I’m interested in doing this job”.

For one participant a work ethic incorporated being “willing to learn, showing up every day, listening skills, carry out instructions, and clean up properly ... if you’re willing to learn, you know, I’m pretty sure they’re willing to employ you”. Another likewise stated a “willingness to learn” was needed to maintain employment: “even if you have got the job ... don’t get lazy once
you have been employed”. Also “having an open mind on people as individuals” was needed to obtain and maintain employment. A further interviewee identified being interested in work (training or employment) as a requirement to do work.

The importance of self-motivation was emphasised by several participants with one stating that: “Some people rely on others to motivate them. Problem is, in today’s society, you need to motivate yourself”. Another defined a work ethic as being self-motivated enough to continue to work even when the employer was not around. Other needs were qualities such as responsibility, honesty, to “treat people the way you want to be treated”, and working on “how you come across”.

Several respondents thought confidence was an important specific need. In two cases, confidence was linked with enhancing communication abilities, as outlined above. Others mentioned confidence in more general terms of having self-confidence, which was seen as necessary for employment as well as for life satisfaction in general:

... just be comfortable about who you are, and what you see yourself doing in life ...

To know, you can’t second guess yourself. Like I did a PhD in life. I rarely second guess myself and just go for it.

**Specific knowledge set or skills**

Fifteen participants said the most important need—for themselves or others—was to gain specific competencies in defined workplace disciplines such as automotive mechanics or carpentry, either so they could eventually work in that field or for personal interest reasons. Many respondents observed that there were no generic needs as such; rather “It depends what job ... [as there are] specific skills for specific jobs”. Two mentioned coming to the course to obtain skills in a different area from their current occupation as a guiding need, so as to eventually change careers. Two interviewees wanted to obtain their drivers’ licences.

**Communication skills**

Twelve participants made fourteen comments about the need for communication skills, either to get or keep a job, or as a general life or learning need. For example, “you’ve got to have good people skills” and “you’ve got to have the communication skills, be able to work in a team, and work under orders and stuff”.

One respondent thought that “literacy” and “communication skills” were interchangeable: “You have to have literacy as well and just like knowing what you’re doing really ... like if you don’t know what to do, go ask ... yeah, so just like communication skills”. This participant identified communication competencies not only as an employment need but also as a way to get around an inability to read or write: “If you don’t know how to read or write, at least tell someone, then they will be able to help you with it”.

Two participants linked the ability to communicate with potential employers to confidence, so that having improved communication abilities showed them “how to talk to them [employers] and how to really, how to go out there and say, ‘Hey, just wanting to get a job’” and gave them the confidence to look for work. Another described the need for oral communication skills as well as confidence: “They’ll need to be able to talk to people ... And to be able to get through the
interview you have to be able to talk to people, won't you? So yeah, confidence in what you’re doing”.

Several others also mentioned “people skills” as needed for employment. Some respondents defined this in a general sense of communication or talking skills, while others were more specific:

Communicating with other people, just getting it out there and making yourself known.

Being able to talk to people that you are serving … told to do something then do it the way you’re told to do it not, you know, your own personal touch on it unless you need to.

Even if you don’t particularly like someone, you still have to talk to them with respect and be caring and be understanding and things like that … you do come across people [at work] that are quite rude and you just act all nice and “Okay man”.

**Academic qualifications or credits**

Ten interviewees identified the importance of obtaining qualifications from training. Some needed a qualification to move to a desired level of further training, while several said qualifications would assist them to move into desired employment: “Probably just a Level 1 certificate. I want to at least get that. That’s the way I can get into an apprenticeship”; or “I want to sit the Level 3 paper and the 4 paper and then I can go straight onto university with those because of university entrance and stuff like that”.

Certificates from the current course were seen as an important pre-employment need: “I suppose you’ve got to do this course first before you can get in there because these qualifications will make them say ‘Yes’, not, ‘oh, you need to have this certificate and this certificate’”. Another spoke about the importance of school qualifications. Comments were also made about education in general as a need (i.e. not necessarily in conjunction with qualification attainment):

... they really need to have at least some sort of education behind them. Don’t expect them to go out there and work without any education … A truckie has to take notes, in the money side, in the writing side, practically in every way of education I would imagine …

**Reading/ writing skills**

Two participants specifically mentioned reading and writing competency as a literacy need from their training course. This may be because of the integrated nature of most adult literacy courses, where literacy is built into a vocational curriculum. Thus, participants could have been developing literacy without being aware of it. Further, as shown through an earlier community phone survey (Comrie et al., 2005), people often take functional literacy such as reading, writing, and numeracy for granted when they are asked to think of preparation needed for employment. Many participants acknowledged their desired outcome from the course was movement into employment, or improved work opportunities. Therefore, when people think about the attributes they need, their focus may be on job competencies rather than underlying foundation abilities.
As already outlined in the discussion of the follow-up participants, it is possible that the greater importance placed on reading and writing abilities by follow-up participants, compared with the new participants, could be due to the follow-up participants’ continuing training. As mentioned above, the length of time the follow-up participants have been in integrated literacy training may have influenced the importance they place on developing more traditional forms of literacy.

Maths, English, and computer skills
Several respondents nominated numeracy, English, and computer skills as needs. For example, one participant mentioned three times how she needed English and maths abilities to “move forward in my life … I want to learn and go forward”. This same participant noted her need for computer skills to “move forward”. Another respondent identified her need for School C (or Level 1) Maths and English to obtain a full-time job to cover child-care costs as well as living costs (so she could come off a Work and Income benefit). Multiple respondents mentioned maths as a necessary precursor to employment.

Other needs
One participant discussed his need to generally gain more employment and job-related background knowledge. He was interested in the theory behind practice, for example, he wanted to answer the question “What am I doing this job for?” Another mentioned practical and physical needs: “Well, they need transport. They need to be alert and healthy, because no one is going to … employ a person that is going to be going down to the doctors all the time”.

Literacy training needs
New participants described both group work and one-to-one assistance as important in their literacy training. However, often when they commented on the benefits of working within groups (particularly small groups), they acknowledged that one-to-one assistance was also beneficial. Table 9 outlines the literacy training needs nominated by the new participant group, ranked by number of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy training needs</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The new participants were slightly more likely to nominate particular attributes of training as an ongoing need than the follow-up participants, for whom language had largely shifted from expressing necessity around training issues to expressing satisfaction.

Group work
This code captures those people who said they needed a group, usually small, in order to learn effectively, with one participant stating they learnt best with “about two or three other people”. Comments about preference for group work centred around the ability to meet different people, the ability to share ideas and obtain others’ viewpoints, the opportunity to bounce ideas off one another, and the opportunity to obtain others’ help if an individual was stuck on a particular task. One participant enjoyed working within a group as he thought that this prepared him for the workplace.
Several people commented that they enjoyed a combination of group work with one-to-one but as this was uniformly expressed as a satisfaction with existing training rather than a need, it has been coded under course benefits (combination group and one-to-one).

**One-to-one**
One participant expressed a need for more one-to-one time with the tutor as they felt disrupted during group learning:

> Like if it was one-on-one I’d get through everything and I would be learning. But if you’ve got the whole class … I get distracted by people … they’re only joking and things, but I get distracted by that and it takes me away from my focus of wanting to learn, because that’s why I’ve come here. I’ve come to push myself forward … I want to learn.

**Applied learning**
Two participants nominated applied learning as a training need, seeing it as crucial preparation for gaining employment. For example, one said they needed training to be “Hands-on work. Things to do, because most of the time when you do work experience out in the workplace, they don’t do paperwork or anything. They just do hands-on”.

**Other**
One participant expressed their need to understand the bigger context to their employment: “I want to actually, specifically know… I’ve done jobs before … But what am I doing that job for? You know? And where does it start and where does it finish? I’m more into getting to know the nitty gritty of it instead of just doing the job and you don’t know why you did it”.

**Follow-up and new participants’ needs for cultural and ancestral or whakapapa knowledge**

Nineteen interviewees (both follow-up and new) said one literacy need was cultural knowledge or knowledge about whakapapa.

Several interviewees expressed an interest in their Māori whakapapa, although this was often expressed as something they would like to know about in future. One interviewee who was not fluent in Te Reo but could understand the language, said he would simply like to hear a little more Māori spoken on the course and that other students needed to take up this challenge. One participant, by contrast, felt that it was important to embrace Pākehā culture.

Other participants said their training had opened their eyes to Māori culture, along with other cultural perspectives. Several talked about shared values and respect; one participant said her course had helped her affirm her own value system and recognise that while students came from all backgrounds, “we’ve all got the same wavelength as each other that we wanted to go out there, and we wanted to get in the class and, you know, do our best”.

**Summary of literacy needs and literacy training needs**

While the types of literacy need mentioned were similar across the follow-up and new participant groups, the order of importance (as indicated by the number of respondents) differed. New participants were most focussed on attitude first, and then specific knowledge and applied
skill sets relevant to their desired employment or personal goals, whereas follow-up participants sought specific knowledge less often and were more focussed on academic qualifications, followed by attitudinal needs. Providers of adult literacy and vocational courses typically describe how they must be relevant to students’ needs - literacy must be integrated with vocational competencies to enhance students’ engagement in learning, and must have built-in methods for building confidence, boosting motivation, and providing communication skills. Fortunately, these are some of the key benefits that participants state they are already gaining from literacy training. The high stated need for specific and more “traditional” literacy skills by new students and the lesser need for these among follow-up participants may mean that people involved in adult training for longer periods may better understand the crucial nature of foundation literacy in addition to more general life skills, or may have moved to a stage where confidence is in place to an extent, rather than their most pressing need.

We noted a similar disparity in the need for reading and/or writing. Follow-up participants said this was their third most important literacy need. For new participants, the category of reading and/or writing was ranked sixth in importance, with very few comments. As mentioned above, we may explain this difference because follow-up participants have been in their courses longer, and so over time may have apprehended a need for these competencies such as in the work needed on the course, or through discussions with tutors. In other words, these students may have been socialised into a mindset in which traditional literacy is important through their exposure to the course.

Both respondent groups ranked gaining academic qualifications or credits highly, although follow-up participants more so. This reflected the view that employers want to see a “piece of paper” before they think a potential employee can do the job. However, it was interesting that computer skills were variably ranked: eighth (for new participants), or fourth (for follow-up participants) in literacy importance. This differed from the original sample of participants (2005) who ranked computer skills as their most important literacy learning need. It may be that this is due to the type of vocation sought by participants. A proportion of the 2005 sample wanted jobs involving computer use, and some thought that every job needed computer competency. Those follow-up participants who were a portion of the original sample still thought computer skills important, but the new participants, some of whom were undertaking courses in car mechanics, were less likely to view computer competencies as a necessity.

Interestingly, communication abilities (highly important for the 2005 group) were less important to the follow-up participants. The follow-up participants as a sub-sample of this 2005 group may have felt that their communication needs had been addressed, so that less need existed for such training. The new participants described communication as a key need (ranked third), and especially as a need in preparing to seek or keep employment.

The differential in expression of training related issues as a need between new and follow-up participants would seem to indicate that those who have been in training longer increasingly feel that their training needs are being met. This may also reflect the socialisation effect mentioned above, where those in training longer have been more substantially exposed to arguments which convince them that, while they may have a natural inclination towards a particular style of training such as one-to-one, other forms of training such as group work are also important. The same differential can be observed between the groups when benefits of training are discussed (below).
Barriers to literacy

Follow-up participants’ perceptions of barriers to literacy

The themes and categories in this section arose from participants’ description of their life experiences and what had impacted on their learning. Follow-up participants were occasionally asked to further explain or add to comments about barriers they had earlier made in their first interview – for instance, about school experiences or their family situation. Further, because health emerged as an important barrier in the first round of interviews, respondents were now specifically asked whether they thought that health was a barrier to literacy.

We derived barriers to literacy learning from participants’ discussions of their life experiences, coding them under themes. We developed these themes from the actual transcripts, yet also took into account the previous year’s themes. For example, the barrier ‘goal orientation’ was used in both analyses to account for comments that fell under the same definition for that theme. Consistency of coding was achieved by employing shared definitions over the two analyses, along with the researcher responsible for the initial coding supervising the second analysis.

Note that the different barrier themes outlined here do not form discrete categories, as most are interrelated. We reiterate that the data analysed here are qualitative in nature, so that, for example, respondents may talk about their learning style not being catered for as a barrier to their learning at school. Because of this, they may have engaged in bad behaviour to hide their lack of understanding. This we would code into two categories of ‘learning style not catered for at school’ and ‘behaviour at school’, to reflect the fact that both ideas were raised, yet they are interdependent in the story of this participant.

Table 10. Follow-up participants’ perceptions of barriers to literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy barrier</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health or physical</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning style not catered for at school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family environment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure/bullying at school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal orientation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time – employment commitments</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour at school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School curriculum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude or motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School not meeting needs (other than factors above)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School truancy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical isolation or lack of transport</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Follow-up participants described a smaller range of barriers than those covered by the larger cohort in the first round of interviews in 2004/2005. Below, we discuss the first seven barriers to literacy and mention the others briefly.

**Health and physical barriers**

As mentioned above, the predominance of health issues as a barrier to literacy reflected this being a topic of our research inquiry. Health as a barrier was mentioned by 42 of the original cohort of 79 (53%) in the 2004/2005 interviews. In our follow-up interviews, 12 out of 22 (55%) described health as a barrier. Five of these thought of health as a barrier for other people, either in their current class or in those they were teaching as part of a teacher aide course. For the other seven, health issues were personal and generally chronic (ranging from mental illness such as depression, to asthma and a severe visual impairment). They affected both past and current literacy attainment.

**Learning style not catered for at school**

This is one of the major clusters of schooling-related barriers. Interestingly this barrier is higher in the “top ten” than it appeared in the first round of interviews (where school not meeting needs was the top school-related barrier). A reason for this may be that participants’ literacy training gives them insight into what their learning styles actually comprise. This would allow them to understand in more depth what they might earlier have perceived more vaguely as school somehow not meeting their needs.

**Other barriers**

The comments listed here did not fit neatly with other code descriptors. However, we note that five comments by three of the four participants in this category include the feeling that ineffective systems, procedures, or communication within or between institutions may create barriers to literacy. For example: “Now, if they had have given me physio and gone through the procedures of, ‘Right, this man can’t work. Let’s get him into a learning programme at ___,’ ... I could have done this 20 years ago”; and, “I was supposed to be like help, help with my reading and writing and that, but it never happened ... I never found out until afterwards I was supposed to go to ... some learning place, to go because they help you reading and writing and that”.

One participant twice commented that people feel “scared” to come forward: “So there’s a lot of people that are less than me that are out there that are too scared to come forward, too scared to be known, to be seen”.

**Barriers in the family environment**

Of the four participants mentioning this barrier, one referred to his experiences of watching students in the classroom in teacher aide training, who were struggling with their learning as a result of barriers in the family environment. One other participant commented on his parents who came from big families, who had to give up school, and had few reading abilities “so their education didn’t get passed to us”. The other two participants referred to having to care for disabled or ill family members, and so had difficulty keeping up with their literacy learning.

**School teaching**

Comments in this area included “acting up” because the participant felt blocked from getting his point across; “being called a dummy, and being slapped across the ears” at primary school,
elements of racism connected with being labelled “hopeless”, and a participant who felt that his teachers had not been able to cope with the introductory year of NCEA.

**Peer pressure or bullying at school**

Four participants described peer pressure at school as a barrier to their literacy learning. One commented on the large number of “naughty” classmates who put him off achieving. Two others were bullied over a long period for being “different”, while another described the impact of bullying more generally.

**Goal orientation**

A far lower percentage of respondents mentioned a lack of goal orientation in this round than in the original set of interviews where it was mentioned by half of the respondents as a barrier. Among the follow-up participants, three mentioned a lack of goal orientation as a problem now overcome. As one put it: “I just never did anything before. I just didn’t do anything about it. Before I found this place I just actually thought well, I can’t read and write, and that’s going to be my problem for the rest of my life”.

**Time – employment commitments**

Three participants remarked on their own or others’ reasons for leaving the course, all comments related to employment. One participant was anticipating a shift job at the freezing works and realised that “I will have to leave ... I’ll be too tired to come in, in the morning”. Another said “I was only here for the first term, then I got offered some work so I took it. I never completed the course, but while I was here, it was choice”. A third participant remarked on two other participants who got work and did not complete the course.

**Further barriers**

Two participants talked about the school curriculum not meeting their needs, two described behavioural problems at school, and one said there was low encouragement at school. Another participant commented on how literacy learning was undermined after being “knocked back”, and one participant said that bullying had led to their truancy (this participant’s comments in this area were also coded under the ‘peer pressure/bullying’ category above). Finally, one comment illustrated how geographical isolation is a barrier. The participant said that coming from the country they did not know that adult literacy trainers existed and did not know where to start.

In Table 11 on the following page, the follow-up participants’ literacy barriers are clustered in related categories (as in the earlier analysis with the first cohort of 79 participants). Some comparison of categories’ intensity is obtained by cumulating the number of comments. Here, the barriers related to ‘self’ – health or physical, goal orientation, and attitude or motivation – come out as the most important domain of obstacles.
Table 11. Follow-up participants’ perceived barriers by cluster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Health or physical</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitude or motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Frequent Cluster</td>
<td>Goal orientation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Largest Number of Comments)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| School                   | School teaching                     | 4           | 4        |
| Second Most Frequent     | Behaviour at school                 | 2           | 2        |
| Cluster                  | Peer pressure/bullying at school    | 4           | 4        |
|                          | Learning style not catered for at school | 5     | 5        |
|                          | School truancy                      | 1           | 1        |
|                          | School curriculum                   | 2           | 2        |
|                          | School not meeting needs - other    | 1           | 1        |
| Total                    |                                     | 19          | 19       |

| Family/ Community/       | Family environment                  | 4           | 5        |
| Lifeworld                | Time – employment commitments       | 3           | 3        |
| Third Most Frequent      | Geographical isolation or lack of transport | 1     | 1        |
| Cluster                  |                                     | 8           | 9        |
| Total                    |                                     |             |          |

This order above differs from responses in the first round of interviews. There, cumulative responses for the school related barrier were highest, and the ‘self’ cluster received considerably fewer comments (only a few more than the ‘family/lifeworld’ cluster). Follow-up participants appear to be shifting their perceptions of barriers in their lives from concentrating on external factors to concentrating on internal factors; again, possibly a result of their time in training which may have both focussed them internally and given them confidence to believe they can have some impact on their lives by developing their skills.

New participants’ perceptions of barriers to literacy

Our interviews explored the new group of participants’ life experiences, exploring their family background and recollections of school. As mentioned previously, we inserted a question about health as a potential barrier.

Table 12 below shows the new participants’ perceptions of barriers to literacy. We rank the codes by the frequency of respondents stating a particular theme, and show alongside the number of comments. The frequency of respondents indicates how much concern seems to be associated with any one particular barrier. The number of comments may suggest the breadth and depth of feeling about each area of concern.
Table 12. New participants’ perceptions of barriers to literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier to literacy</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health or physical</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School teaching</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family environment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour at school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure/bullying at school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning style not catered for at school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School truancy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School overcrowded</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching on the training course</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School curriculum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School not meeting needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time – family or community commitment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude or motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Health or physical barriers
As already noted, many respondents stated health or physical issues were barriers to their literacy learning. This might stem from two factors. First, the interviewer raised health or physical barriers to learning to explore an earlier finding that health issues were prevalent in this subgroup. Second, people within the new group of adult literacy participants appear similar to the follow-up group in terms of poor health experiences serving as barriers to their literacy learning.

With these possible contributing factors in mind, a health or physical reason appeared as the single most influential barrier to literacy learning. Participants described incidences and chronic conditions of diabetes, Attention Deficit Disorder, epilepsy, asthma, measles, binge drinking, brain injury, cancer, and extended periods of time in hospital that had impacted on their ability to concentrate or attend in either school or a literacy training course. Comments included:

Because there was my epilepsy. I couldn’t … retain the information. So that is part of the reason why I left half way through the year in the 5th form. Because I had studied for hours and hours and hours, all this information; when it came to the exam …

Just my slow learning, because I'm quite slow … because I got beaten up when I was a baby by my natural mother … So, it's kind of damaged my head a bit and left me with slow learning abilities, disabilities, which is slowly coming right.

School teaching
Many participants’ comments about school teaching as a barrier to their learning revolved around their perception of the teacher’s attitude and lack of supportive behaviour. Some comments made were:
It really depended on the attitude of the teacher as well as the other students in the class ... The teachers, some of them they just had like different moods, like you’ll see one day a teacher would be like, “No talking,” stuff like that.

And I just kept being put back a class until I got to my brother’s class, and the teacher used to compare me against him because I was older, and he used to get me by the ear, and pull me out the front and say, “You’re a dumb-dumb. Sit over there in the seat.”

One thing I would hate was when I got a bad mark on my English test, and the tutor really rubbed it in my face ... Why should I try, you know, if he’s going to do that? So a whole year, my School C year, I decided nah, I’m not even going to try, I’m not even going to study.

Teachers, the way that they taught, they didn’t care if you couldn’t learn that way. If you were a hands-on person, they didn’t care really.

Two comments described how teachers did not have enough time to help all the students in the class, with one participant noting she would be pushed aside for attention if she was doing well in favour of the “naughty kids”. Another respondent recounted how teachers were too busy, even when they were asked for help. A third interviewee saw a lack of feedback from his teachers as a barrier to his learning at school:

They’d tell you how you should do it, and then you do it, and then ... by the time they’ve done their lesson, there’s no time to actually ask them, “Well, what do you think of this? How did it go? What do you think of what I’ve done?”

**Family environment**

Barriers to literacy learning from within the family were mentioned by nine participants. A vast array of comments ranged from stories of abuse, the need to put care of siblings ahead of study, or a lack of positive reinforcement, through to the death or divorce of parents. One participant recalled how he thought school was “awesome” and “so easy”, but then his mother pulled him out of school which he stated was “frustrating, with nothing to do.” Issues of confidence and self-esteem interrelated with this barrier as participants recalled parents saying “You’ll never make a nurse. Look at you. You’re dumb” or “My whole life I’ve been told that I’m going to be nothing but a bum”.

**Other barriers**

Comments in the ‘other’ category cover barriers that did not fit neatly into any of the other categories. Two participants reflected on discrimination at school that acted as a barrier to their learning:

I was a bit confused in some things and being Māori ... it was hard, being part Māori ...

I thought the Pākehās had it easy ... And me Māori, Māori boy in a Pākehā society, you know, it’s real hard.

Another interviewee described gender discrimination:

What really crunched it for me was the fact that I enrolled in the metal work class, and they let me go to it, and then after the first class I had to be removed and the only rea-
son ... they turned around and said that “You need to leave this class” and I said, “Why?” And they said, “Because you’re a distraction to the class”. And I said “Why? I’m doing my work. I’m sitting down there, I’m doing all the stuff that I am meant to do”. “Because you’re the only female in the class. It’s a male-orientated class, so how about you go to woodwork”.

Two participants found learning generally difficult with one reporting that school was “quite difficult, as in learning stuff”. Others stated that “school wasn’t all that great ... never really learned anything actually” but attributed this to issues such as drugs being readily available at school, hanging out with “troublemakers” or “the wrong people”, and focusing more on rugby than on other aspects of schoolwork. Two further interviewees noted that a barrier to their literacy learning was their non-attendance or non-completion of school with one stating that he “just got sick of school ... waking up in the morning ... homework...I know I shouldn’t have left school”, and another recalling being asked to leave school before he was expelled.

**Behaviour at school**
Six participants suggested their own behaviour at school had undermined their literacy learning. Four of the participants recalled getting into trouble with teachers because of “mucking around” and fighting. One recalled spending time drawing rather than listening to the teacher, while another recalled a history of being stood down from various schools for verbal abuse, defiance, threatening teachers, fighting, and using drugs and alcohol. These behaviour issues eventually led to this interviewee being asked to leave before she was expelled.

One respondent stated that she “ended up getting into trouble so I could leave school because I didn’t want to stay there”. Another tried to avoid getting into trouble by not attending at all: “It’s not wanting to go to class and smell like cigarette smoke. Didn’t want to get in trouble ... It was attendance, for me ... Regret it bad though. If I could go back to school now, I would”.

**Peer pressure/ bullying at school**
Four participants recalled being bullied by others at school. Pressure to not be seen as “geeky” resulted in one interviewee moving away from achieving learning goals towards the “bad crowd”:

I used to do the science awards at school in my fourth form year, and I got called up in front of the assembly to receive a Principal’s Award and that was the end of my learning. I got bullied big time after that because I got called up in front of all the school and yeah, got beat up and “You bloody nerd,” and yeah ... So that was sort of the end because I was trying to play myself off as dumb, “No, I’m not a nerd” you know, to fit in with everyone.

Anxiety about bullies also undermined ability to learn: “I was too worried about the bullies than actually learning, so I suppose in a way my mind drifted”.

**Learning style not catered for at school**
Interviewees described how teachers at school either “didn’t care if you couldn’t learn that way”, or tried to “rush” tasks they were teaching. Both participants who made comments about their learning styles not being catered for at school expressed a need to work on tasks at their own rate, which was not allowed for in the formal schooling environment:
I only liked doing stuff at my pace and they were trying to rush me and that.

It just wasn’t my style of learning, sitting in a class being told what to do. It’s not too bad here [current training course] because you don’t have to sit down and do it straight away. I do it if I can do it at my own pace, without having to just do it within the period that you’re there for.

School truancy
Two participants described not attending school, instead smoking drugs and getting drunk. One participant told how this had held him back particularly with regard to his maths:

That’s why I’m having a bit of trouble on the maths … I’ve just been out of school that long and … it’s just catching up you know … I’ve got a fair idea but I just don’t have enough.

School overcrowded
Participants recounted how over-large class sizes undermined their learning: because there were “so many children in the class, you couldn’t get the learning”. In this person’s view, both she and her daughter had had their learning affected by insufficient attention from teachers: “They wouldn’t understand that my daughter needed more, sort of closer, one-on-one. Not to go in the classes which is for people that are really silly, but just – she needed … an extra coach with her, because there’s too many people in a class”. Her statement also highlights interdependency among barriers - differing learning styles are probably implied in that this interviewee’s daughter requires more support in her learning than someone who learns best in an autonomous way, to which traditional schooling caters.

The interviewee also went on to claim that “there’s no way a teacher can get to help the needs” and that “if you’re on a medium level, they’re not interested. If you’re right below, they’ll help you. If you’re on a medium, and you want to build your way up …” In her view, teachers’ time in large classes is occupied by students on the lowest levels so that people of medium-high ability do not receive equivalent attention. Other adult literacy participants claimed similarly that either those who are more academically able or those who are more troublesome in class monopolise the teachers’ attention, with those in the middle overlooked.

Teaching on the training course
Two participants identified barriers to their learning within their current training courses. One outlined his wish to be pushed a bit further as he had been working on one unit for 30 hours since starting the course a month previously. This respondent stated he did not understand it, and he didn’t know why he didn’t understand it, but felt that it was time to move on to something else.

Another participant considered that the tutor in his training course did not teach the class how to do anything: “He just did his own thing and we just did our own thing … showed at the end of the course, because no one passed at all”.

School curriculum
Some participants thought that the school curriculum should outline the relevance to life situations of what students were learning. For example, subjects and topics taught should be explained in terms of “When am I going to use this?”, “Why learn it?” A second participant
found moving from topic to topic within a subject difficult. This again shows a possible interrelationship with the barrier of ‘learning style not catered for at school’. This participant stated that she found this constant change difficult, and ended up getting into trouble so she could leave school; an outcome she now regrets.

Moving schools
The experience of moving schools sometimes resulted in the feeling that a person had “lost quite a lot”. Disruptions to family life and moving schools between countries made it difficult for this individual to fit in to a new school and a new culture: “I didn’t know anything about New Zealand”. She fell behind her peers in school, found it hard to fit in, so left school for correspondence learning. This was also difficult however, as no one in her household could help with the correspondence work, and consequently she did not attain School Certificate. She states that at an earlier stage (around Form 2): “I was like a straight ‘A’ student before I left and I actually went back, I was ‘B’ and ‘C’ ... just by upsetting I suppose. Now I understand it wasn’t the wisest decision anyone could have given me. As far as my education goes, I think I lost quite a lot”.

School not meeting needs
The one response that was coded under this category referred to attendance at a Christian school by an interviewee who did not share the Christian faith. This caused learning difficulties for him as his beliefs did not align with those of his school.

Time – family or community commitment
Difficulties around time management with a partner also doing a course and a son young enough to need crèche care were issues for one participant.

Attitude or motivation
One participant perceived that she had trouble getting along with the teachers at her school “because of my attitude, because I had a very staunch kind of attitude. I never really respected them personally”.

Confidence
Only one participant specifically mentioned lack of self-confidence as impacting their school learning: “Because I’m never that good at school. I’ve never been that brainy enough to do some of the things at school ...” This sub-theme is related to some of the comments made under the ‘family environment’ barrier where some participants described being told they were “dumb” by family members, which in turn affected their learning goals, and in some cases, their subsequent employment goals.

Table 13 on the following page shows the individual barriers to literacy learning aggregated into clusters of ‘School’, ‘Family/ Community/ Lifeworld’ and ‘Training’ and, ‘Self’. Barriers associated with school were seen as the most influential on subsequent literacy learning, followed by family/ community/ lifeworld barriers. Personal or ‘self’ barriers were next, followed by issues with current training that participants perceived were not conducive to their literacy learning.
Table 13. New participants’ perceived literacy barriers by cluster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>School teaching</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Frequent Cluster (Largest Number of Comments)</td>
<td>Behaviour at school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer pressure/bullying at school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning style not catered for at school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School truancy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School overcrowded</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School curriculum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moving schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School not meeting needs – other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/ Community/ Lifeworld</td>
<td>Family environment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Most Frequent Cluster</td>
<td>Time – Family/Community Commitments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Health or physical</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Most Frequent Cluster</td>
<td>Attitude or motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Training in teaching course</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Frequent Cluster</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of barriers to literacy

Neither the new participant group nor the follow-up participant group reflected the 2004/2005 participants in the order of frequency of barrier clusters. The 2004/2005 participant group described school barriers more frequently than other factors overall, as did the new participant group in this report. However, the follow-up participants mention ‘self’ factors marginally more often than school factors. This may reflect the design of the interview schedule where follow-up participants (with whom barriers to literacy learning had already been discussed in the 2004/2005 interviews) were asked specific questions around health and physical barriers that were not focused on in the earlier interviews.

It is interesting that the new participants placed ‘self’ factors at the bottom of their list of most frequent barriers to literacy learning. However, these participants were asked more generally about barriers to literacy, before being specifically asked about the impact (if any) of health bar-
riers, so this may have affected their discussion of important barriers (although note that health issues were mentioned by many respondents in both groups). Further, most of the new participants were under 30, with nearly half those under 30 aged 20 or less, which may explain the focus on school experiences among this group. The age of follow-up participants was distributed more widely. Therefore, while school was recalled as an obstacle to literacy learning, the impact of these factors may not have been as fresh in the minds of this latter group.

Family, community, and lifeworld factors were not so important for the follow-up group (six comments) but were mentioned often by the new participants (17 comments). Again, this may be because of the new participants’ closeness in time to these factors, whereas when the follow-up participants discussed the impact of family environment, some reflected not on their own experiences, but instead on the barriers facing others they came across in their lives.

Barriers to employment

**Follow-up participants’ perceptions of barriers to employment**

Half the interviewees commented on barriers to employment: Table 14 outlines the frequency of comments made. The most frequently talked-about barrier to employment was qualifications. Of the six respondents who mentioned qualifications, two commented that they had competencies and/or experience, but no qualification, causing an employment barrier. Others who had been unemployed and job-seeking for some time, were always told that they did not have the necessary qualifications. One respondent, whose comments have been coded under barrier ‘other’, said that being “too qualified” could also be a barrier to employment.

Within the ‘other’ category, some barriers to employment included discrimination in the form of “having a bad record”. One respondent thought the lack of good unions was a barrier to employment while another saw the overall lack of jobs in Wanganui as a barrier.

Three participants identified health as a barrier to employment. Two mentioned specific literacy as a barrier. One said that while she had experience, it was her reading and spelling that had prevented her from gaining the qualification she needed. Only one participant commented on attitudinal aspects as a barrier to employment, but this should be read alongside the discussion on needs where many respondents said a “good attitude” was necessary to achieve employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier to employment</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health or physical</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy required</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological skills required</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**New participants’ perceptions of barriers to employment**

New participants mentioned seven barriers to finding employment that they or others they knew of had faced.
Discrimination
The most prevalent of these employment barriers, with three respondents mentioning it five times, was discrimination. Discrimination took various forms with one participant claiming personal discrimination on unknown grounds: “The lady didn’t like me. She’d picked on me too ... So that [an undisclosed health issue] was a good excuse for her to get rid of me”; and, “They had to make somebody redundant after a certain amount of time. I was the last one there. He didn’t like me anyway, so he was happy ... He picked on me all the time so he could get rid of me, so that was fine”.

Another participant claimed discrimination against him due to previous criminal convictions: “Decided to try and make a go of trying to find work. But it was pretty hard, because not many people take people with criminal convictions ...” A third participant claimed racial discrimination when looking for employment which he recounted as an experience of some of his friends: “I’ve only heard from some of the boys, you know, that ... they go out to some contractors and, you know, ‘don’t send any Māoris’... yeah, that kind of stuff”.

Health or physical
Two participants made five comments about health or physical barriers to employment. A story of continual rejection for employment opportunities and employment training was told by one respondent who lives with epilepsy and bipolar disorder. This interviewee was turned down for a nursing course and a sewing job due to her epilepsy. Further, her ability to take part in employment (especially full-time employment) is limited due to health barriers.

Work and Income benefits
Two participants described benefits being cut as a barrier to full-time employment:

Most people like myself are on the invalids’ benefit, are on it because we’ve had a disability practically all our life, and it’s never going to go away. That’s why we’ve been put on it. So, if we are choosing to go out into the workforce to just try and help ourselves, give ourselves a little bit of extra money, because the money you get is not that good ... they shouldn’t be punishing you and saying “Okay, well if you do over 15 hours, we’re going to take it off your benefit”. Now does that encourage people to go out to work?

I was working for [name of organisation] and I could only work until one o’clock because ... child subsidies don’t allow me to do full time work, which I found really hard ... It put me in this position where I thought ‘well, I am working, that’s good, we’re getting this extra money, but I am not getting anywhere in life doing what I am doing’.

Further barriers to employment
Not having a driver’s licence, not being allowed to undertake tasks at your own pace, and a lack of qualifications and technological abilities were mentioned by one participant each as impacting on either their employment opportunities, or their ability to undertake and maintain employment.

Summary of employment barriers
Interestingly, while both groups of participants mentioned the need for qualifications when discussing literacy needs, only one new participant described lack of qualifications as a barrier to
employment, whereas six follow-up participants did. This may be explained again by the age range of the two groups and the different training and life stages they are at. That is, the follow-up group may be more likely to be seeking employment at the time of the interview, and thus have come across these barriers, whereas the new participant group may not have actually experienced this barrier much yet, although they usually express a general need for qualifications and training.

Both groups mentioned health and physical barriers to employment. It is plausible that medical conditions, especially chronic ones, will affect all aspects of life, not just literacy development, as outlined under ‘barriers to literacy’. A lack of literacy and/ or technology skills was also described by participants as a barrier to enhancing or gaining employment. However, these two areas were not mentioned by many participants in either group (two and one respectively for the follow-up and new groups) which reflects the perceptions of the participants in the ranking of literacy or learning needs. Both groups also stated discrimination by employers as a barrier to employment.

While the findings here are similar to the employment barriers reported by the 2004/2005 sample, it was noteworthy that ‘confidence’ was not mentioned by any of the participants as a barrier to their employment. In the 2004/2005 sample, seven participants made fourteen comments about their lack of confidence as a barrier to employment. Confidence was also mentioned as a literacy or learning need by this group. One possible reason for the difference is that the current group of interviewees is actually more confident than the previous group. More likely, however, this group was simply linguistically less explicit than the previous interviewees when talking about confidence issues. For example, during their discussions of barriers to literacy, this group of participants described derogatory comments being made about them or their learning. It can be implied from their discussion that these comments impacted negatively on their confidence and, subsequently, their further learning and employment opportunities. However, the link to confidence as a term or concept was not explicitly made by the participants. Therefore, the analysis does not discuss confidence per se, even though an impact on confidence is implied through participants’ reported experiences.

Conduits to literacy

During their interviews, participants spoke both about struggles and barriers to literacy but also about ways in which they had been encouraged or enabled to pursue learning. This section is often contiguous with the barriers section, showing how certain areas of life can offer both support and obstacles, and underlining the fact that participants’ life experiences are complex and multifaceted.

The Literacy and Employment research project works under a multiple literacies philosophy. Therefore, when looking at conduits to literacy, we define “literacy” broadly to include conduits that contribute to participants’ engagement in learning throughout their life. Again, when reviewing the categories derived below, these should not be viewed as discrete. Instead, each participant may have mentioned only one conduit, or several interacting conduits, all of which will be reported here.

As in an earlier analysis of the 2004/2005 interviews (Tilley, et. al., 2006) we first categorised comments from the participants under the title ‘conduits to literacy’. We found that these col-
lapsed into the same four codes - goal orientation, family environment, positive reinforcement, and an ‘other’ category - which had emerged in the earlier analysis.

**Follow-up participants’ perceptions of conduits to literacy**

Table 15 shows the number of follow-up participants commenting in each of these areas, along with the number of comments made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conduit to literacy</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal orientation</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family environment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reinforcement from teacher or other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Goal orientation**

Over three quarters of the follow-up participants mentioned an internal motivation or goal orientation as providing a conduit to their literacy learning. These comments included goals towards future employment, for example: “So that’s one of the reasons why I took, wanted to learn how to use the computer so I could go on the internet and work ... have a home base business”. Others were hoping to enter the military or study for a trade.

Such goal orientations could also be related to hobbies such as the participant taking training to allow them to undertake a Certificate in Art and Design – an aim that arose from an interest in body piercing and doing art as a hobby. For another, who was easily able to get a job, the goal was to get a more satisfying job where he could make a difference and “add value”.

A number wanted to improve themselves in various ways. One just wanted to keep learning, while another wished to “be able to have someone say to me, ‘Oh, how do you spell such and such?’ And I can just rattle off. No problems at all”.

Interpersonal and personal development goals were also mentioned such as the participant who studied childcare (and accessed the associated literacy support) because, although she wasn’t planning to have kids of her own, she wanted to be competent if she might be baby-sitting for other people. “If I was working with them, I wouldn’t know how to change a f... ing nappy. I wouldn’t know how to feed them properly. I thought, ‘Yeah well, that’s something that I would need’”. More generally, other interviewees wanted just to participate: “I just wanted to get out and meet people, and give it a go. Okay, if I didn’t pass, I didn’t pass”.

**Family environment**

Just under half the participants mentioned family environment as a conduit to literacy learning. Some participants said their children were significant in their pathway to learning:

> My daughter funnily enough. It came from her. When she was little ... she had a book shelf above her bed, and I used to walk past in the morning and she would be sitting there with all her teddies around her. She couldn’t read, but she had the book and she was making up stories. And one day she asked me to read to her. And I said to her, “Mummy can’t read”. And she said, “Well just read the picture then”. And I sort of
thought, “Okay”. So I just started reading the pictures to her - what I saw in the pictures, and that just made her so happy. (This woman’s daughter was currently teaching her to master the computer at home.)

Other participants described general encouragement and support from parents, partners, siblings, or extended whanau/ family. This ranged from practical help such as learning how to use a computer or helping with financial backup, to more general support in the form of encouraging comments such as pride in participants’ progress.

Positive reinforcement from a teacher or other outside mentor
Nine of the 22 follow-up participants mentioned mentors, some being family members. One identified a high school teacher, but most comments in this section concerned current tutors on their literacy and training course as the people who had helped them achieve.

The other responses were disparate. One participant had to retrain from a manual job following back problems; another found that playing sport helped them mature enough to stay with the course, while for another it was developing trust in others on the course that encouraged and reinforced their continuance.

New participants’ perceptions of conduits to literacy

Table 16 below outlines the number of new respondents mentioning a conduit to literacy, alongside the number of comments made about each category.

Table 16. New participants’ perceptions of conduits to literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conduit to literacy</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal orientation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family environment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reinforcement from teacher or other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goal orientation
Those responses coded under ‘goal orientation’ tended to describe ongoing goals in the participants’ lives generally that had motivated them to want to learn and achieve, rather than specific goals that served as the deciding factor as to why they came to a particular course. The specific reasons why participants chose a course are coded under a separate theme area entitled ‘How new participants found their courses’.

Sixty percent of respondents talked about a form of goal orientation being a conduit to literacy learning. Interviewees spoke about employment-related goals. These varied from aiming for a specific job, to a stated need for a career as opposed to “just a job”. Three participants said their long-term goal was to own their own business, while a further three sought to gain qualifications so they could achieve employment in their chosen field:

Get somewhere in the motor trade probably, on this course. Try and get something out of it, and, yeah, get a full time job. That would be my main goal really …
When I do finally get a career, because I want a career as in long-term goals, not just a job, you know. So, the difference [between] a career and a job for me is - a job is just earning money and you might not like that job as such. And a career is your long-term future …

This course … is actually my second step into becoming what I want to be. I want to be a qualified carpenter and own my own business …

Probably just a Level 1 certificate. I want to at least get that. That’s the way I can get into an apprenticeship.

Five participants identified a personal interest as a learning goal: “All I wanted to do was learn a bit about cars. I don’t necessarily have to get a job after … it’s just sort of fix my own car and stuff like that”. For another interviewee, an interest in learning stemmed more from the reasoning and theory behind practice in a particular field, rather than just doing the job without knowing why.

Four interviewees said their goal orientation was centred on gaining qualifications generally. One said her goal orientation was towards a general move “forward” in life, emphasising on four separate occasions her need to “move forward”, to “progress”, and to “learn and go forward”. Others focused on specific achievements such as a driver’s licence, a particular trade, a change in career, and improving computer abilities for current employment.

Other goal orientation conduits to literacy learning were attending the course for a “change of scenery”, maintaining a relationship with a partner, and responsibility to family with regard to “figure[ing] out where we need to go next in life, for like jobs and career opportunities and stuff like that … trying to get on track …”

*Family environment*

Family environment as a conduit to literacy and learning in their past was mentioned by three interviewees:

Dad always used to let me on the computer to do my homework and stuff. I had to do my homework after school and everything before I could watch TV

My Dad, he always wanted me to do well. And Mum, she tried hard, but she wasn’t very bright anyway with paperwork and stuff … So I didn’t get a lot of help from her, but I got the support.

Most interviewees who thought family environment was a conduit to learning were describing their current course. One participant recalled incentives for passing offered by his mother:

They help me with money … they try to be real enthusiastic

Probably just … encourage me to do what I want to do, like here, go for my goals and stuff like that.

the support from my grandparents, my son supports me really well. He’s like “Yeah, you do it mum! You prove people wrong!”
if I am stuck on my work or something, and I need some help, just go to my family and get them to help me … they’re really good people.

As in the first round, a respondent described how a lack of support for learning from her family environment became a conduit to literacy learning:

I hated school and everything, and the only reason I’m going to do something with my life … because my whole life I’ve been told that I’m going to be nothing but a bum. I’m not going to do anything. I’m going to get no education. So I’m proving my whole entire family wrong, just to shove it in their faces, and walk out and leave and have more money than they could dream about.

**Positive reinforcement from teacher or others**

Four school teachers were remembered as a positive force in participants’ learning. One participant described the kinds of teaching and school environments that had been helpful to her:

He was the only teacher [whose] … class I went to because he always made sure you knew what he was talking about and always helped you and always pushed you to keep going and … made you work to the best of your ability … for people that didn’t want to learn they’d try and get them, try and teach them, and, if they didn’t, they just put them into another class where they would learn, or they would change their timetable to something that they liked, so they would want to go to class.

The tutor on the course was considered by one respondent as a positive aspect of the course as “you could always talk to him about anything”. A careers advisor was also deemed helpful in assisting one participant to plan their future.

**Other**

Other conduits to literacy included assistance from friends both outside and inside the class with coursework.

**How follow-up participants found their courses**

Three of the 22 respondents stated how they found the course. One heard about the adult literacy course through other courses they did, and two people mentioned that they found the course through Work and Income.

Ten follow-up respondents described their reasons for coming on their course. (The factors mentioned here are closely related and often appear in the literacy needs section). Of these, only one respondent explicitly talked about building reading and writing abilities as the reason for joining the course. Others did not mention this even though some were in courses explicitly aimed at literacy attainment. For example, one participant said lack of help and negative feedback at ACC about getting a job had pushed him to come to the course: “The motivation I got, I think, was the build-up of everything negative that they said, that I could do it, and I wanted to prove that I could do it”. For others, the reason for entering the course was to learn specific skill sets such as farming or computing. Others were referred by Work and Income, or had enjoyed other courses offered by the provider.
**How new participants found their courses**

Three of the 34 new participants mentioned coming to the course through Work and Income. Two of these were told about it by their Work and Income case manager. The third initially heard about his course through school, then asked his case manager whether he could attend.

A further participant discovered the course through a STAR course at his school. Two were referred through a friend and a parent respectively, while a further respondent found the course when they just happened to be passing by:

> where the vehicles are parked I would walk past there every day, because part of my job was to get the vehicle and drive the other students out to [name of place]... And I would pass ... And I thought ‘Ooh, ooh that looks all right. I could do that’.

Another interviewee found out about the course through a newspaper advertisement for a learner driver’s licence:

> First of all, I found out through the newspaper for the learner’s licence, came in here to book in for that, then I saw the English and maths and said I was interested in that

Fourteen new participants talked about the reasons why they came to the course. Five interviewees talked about a personal interest in the specific area the course covered, for example, “It just helps to know a bit more”. Two of these five interviewees also outlined a personal use for the skills they hoped to learn through their course: “I’ve a few mates down home who are carpenters and every time I go back down they’ve always got something new added to the house, and I’d just like the, just want to be able to do that stuff”; “And then I’d be able to do things like finishing, finish the work [on her own house being built]. You can actually get a building up so far and do all the finishing yourself. So yeah, there’s lots and lots of choices”.

Three respondents outlined that they came on the course as a means of improving their skills for future employment purposes. Two of these three were not sure exactly what that future employment might entail, but one discussed his wish to work in the automotive field. Another spoke of his initial wish to learn computer skills for a job, however, he was now “drif[ing] away from what I actually wanted, to actually what I think I can do, like another, well nothing to do with computers at all”.

Three participants stated they came to the course for “something to do”: “It was better than sitting at home doing nothing ... Just wanted to get in and do something”. Another two discussed their wish to gain an education, which they felt they could not gain through a formal school environment:

> I wanted an education, and I can’t get one from a school because no school will accept me, and I wouldn’t be able to handle school because I just can’t stand the crowds and crowds of people in my classes, being all noisy. It just gets me really angry.

A final respondent outlined how he wanted to come to the course to “prove them [his family] wrong, because they were sort of like talking me down ... for a while, thinking I was going to turn out to be a nobody ... but nah”.

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Summary of conduits to literacy

The follow-up and new participant groups were similar in the conduits to literacy learning they reported. Essentially, with a goal or aspiration, and support from tutors, family, and/or friends, participants found that they could learn and achieve, and perhaps even enjoy learning. For many, whose previous experiences of learning had been mostly negative, this was the first time learning had given them any sense of satisfaction or achievement.

Views on publicising courses

We had earlier discovered that most adult literacy participants find their training programme via word of mouth (Tilley et. al., 2006). Therefore we thought it important to explore participants’ perceptions around types of marketing that their courses could use to promote their services to relevant target audiences.

Follow-up participants’ views on publicising courses

Interviewees were asked to give feedback on types of publicity that would work for their course and also about what they would tell others about the course in order to recommend it.

Four of the 22 follow-up participants contributed comments on existing marketing. Two thought that their particular providers had the advertising focus correct, with one believing that material was available in the right places: “in schools, and at Work and Income … the truancy service … in places like that, where people are finding things hard, and don’t know where to look”. The other respondent was training with a large tertiary institution and liked its television advertising for courses in general. This respondent also said “We had a stand at Disability Expo in Wanganui here and … I think it’s getting out there, but I think people are a little bit shy of doing courses”.

Two respondents mentioned shortage of funding for promotion, though one was of the view that literacy providers ought to advertise everywhere if they could afford it, while the other believed that money-restricted providers might promote courses through schools – albeit with the comment that students might not be ready for such an approach.

Ten follow-up participants spoke about how they would tell others about the course. Several mentioned that they would just encourage people to “give it a go”, saying “There’s nothing you can’t do, even if you’re shy”; “If I can do it, you know, just give it your best”. Several mentioned that they would say it was “good” while others commented on the helpfulness of the course or the tutors: “They spend heaps of time”; “You will never get put down”.

New participants’ views on publicising courses

Five of the new participants thought that print, television, radio, or newspaper advertising would be useful: “Oh, just set up posters around at schools and stuff, and places where youth hang out you know. Maybe even set up a TV ad”; “Putting something in the paper … because there are a lot of people out there … I’ve had people come up to me and say, ‘Gee, you’ve changed’. And I’ve said, ‘Yeah, I’ve been going to the Learning Centre’. ‘Where’s that?’”
Another participant believed that more signs were needed: “because I didn’t even know that this [place] existed”, while another felt more support from employers would convince employees to attend: “Maybe like the companies, the people that we’re working for, could show a bit more interest in it and … tell people how good it is and people might start coming here as well”. One respondent thought tutor business cards might disseminate information effectively.

When asked to describe what they would tell others about the course if wanting to recommend it, responses included: “because the tutors really listen and … they’re really helpful”; “easy to learn stuff that they probably want to learn, and easy to ask questions”; “I’ll say, hey look, I’ve been on this course and it helped me”; “Come to our course, man. You get certificates out of it. You get things out of this course which you do at school. You get a lot more freedom and you’re a lot happier”.

**Summary of ways to improve course publicity**

Participants identified ways for providers to advertise their courses, some of which are already used, such as newspaper or TV advertisements. However, while advertisements of this nature may inform potential students (though low functional literacy is a barrier), they do not necessarily result in enrolments. Low student confidence is a serious impediment, as is a general perception that learning is “not for me” (Tilley et al., 2006). Therefore, getting learners to engage in these courses goes beyond merely handing out information.

As noted in our earlier reports, we believe that the most effective means to get students to engage in learning is the trusted recommendation from family or friends who have participated in the course before. The responses from participants above, demonstrate the enthusiasm they have for their courses. As Sligo, Watson, Murray, Comrie, Vaccarino, & Tilley (2007) suggest, a more structured means of tapping into this word-of-mouth resource may be the most effective way of marketing and converting enhanced awareness into actual increased recruiting.

**Conduits to employment**

In the 2004/2005 interviews, respondents commented on barriers to employment. In the follow-up interviews of 2006 we inquired again about barriers but also asked about things that led to employment. In response, a number of people described needs that they saw as likely precursors to employment, but very few people described specific instances of employment gained and were therefore able to pinpoint concrete factors leading to actual employment. Answers that described what respondents thought were the priority needs in terms of preparing people for employment matched with the expressed literacy and learning needs generally, and were coded under the appropriate sub-sections within the ‘needs’ category. In this ‘conduits to employment’ section we record only actual instances of employment gained and the pathways that led to the job (in the same way that, in the conduits to literacy section, respondents are reporting actual factors and influences that have assisted them with learning in their life).

**Follow-up participants’ perceptions of conduits to employment**

Only one of the 22 follow-up participants talked about a specific experience of gaining employment. The conduit they described related to attitude, that is, having the confidence to ask for a job:
My partner had never been in a hospital in her life. Now she is a phlebotomist; she takes blood. She’d never touched a needle in her life. She just went in and said, “I can do this” … She’d never ever thought of doing that in her life, but she, like me, is positive. She says, “I can do that”. So she went and applied for it and she got it. She hasn’t looked back. Been there two years.

Other people talked about various similar attitudinal attributes in relation to preparing for or keeping employment, but in a speculative sense, i.e. they described it as a likely need before employment could be gained or kept, so their comments have been included in the relevant sections under needs.

New participants’ perceptions of conduits to employment

None of the 34 new participants described explicit conduits that had led to employment for themselves or others. Some were confident that their training would lead to a job (coded under course benefit employment) and some expressed an opinion that communication skills, life skills, attitudinal attributes, job-related skills, or qualifications were needed for employment (coded under needs), but none expressly related specific factors that had obtained employment for themselves or others. In short, all the new participants answered questions relating to factors leading to employment with statements couched as needs, using the term ‘need’ itself frequently.

Benefits of literacy training

Follow-up participants’ perceptions of the benefits of their training

Follow-up participants spoke enthusiastically and at length about the benefits of their training and the difference it had made to their lives.

The most frequently mentioned course benefit was employment (17 participants). Some were aiming for particular jobs, or wanted to set up their own business; others spoke more generally of the course as a perceived pathway to employment. Several, in this follow-up group, were now working directly as a result of their earlier course.

Employment was closely followed by confidence, achievement, and motivation (15 respondents with a total of 40 comments). Some used the word confidence, while others talked about how they felt: “I’m feeling quite intelligent, actually!” or “I’ve had the chance to reaffirm what I’ve already suspected in myself but never really gave myself the credit or the chance to do”; “I hadn’t ever really any aspirations, and then when I started the course, I started to realise that I was quite capable”. Others spoke about growth, development, and opportunity: “It made me feel good about myself because … I knew I had the qualities inside of me, I just needed somebody to unlock it, show me how to use it”. This benefit of confidence received the highest number of comments (which we have taken as an indication of intensity). Similarly, in the 2004/2005 interview round with 79 respondents, confidence received the most comments, although it was mentioned by a far lower percentage of the participants.

In Table 17, under ‘other’ benefits, several comments similar to those about confidence were coded which seemed linked to better well-being in a less explicit way. For example: “It’s helped
me settle in life”. Comments in this section also include a stronger sense of self arising from the course, or of getting the chance to address emotional issues, such as:

I learnt a lot about myself … my actual past experience, was brought to the front when we were going through a few of the scenarios and talking about different things here … then I started to analyse me, and then start to really look at who I was. I must say it’s been an exciting journey.

Further benefits listed under ‘other’ included being “off the benefit” and “having fun”.

Table 17. Follow-up participants’ perceptions of course benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course benefit</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence, achievement, motivation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills – reading, writing, numeracy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific work skills</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better interpersonal or family communication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course specific skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-discovered skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than half the follow-up participants also talked about participation in society as a benefit of the course. Most mentioned making new friends or meeting different people. One commented: “coming here gets me out of the house twice a week, and that’s what I like about it, because I’m meeting people”. Another said: “even doing a course is better than doing nothing”. One follow-up participant stated that previously he had not felt part of the community and the course is “a huge, huge piece of my life”.

Seven of the 22 respondents specifically identified reading, writing, spelling, and numeracy as benefits of the course, far fewer than made comments on personal development. Specific work abilities (reflecting the courses that participants were enrolled in) were mentioned by seven participants and computer competencies received specific mention by six. Broader life skills such as budgeting and cooking and “learning to arrive on time” were mentioned by five participants.

Four participants commented on their improved interpersonal or family communication. One said “Now I’m learning to be able to socialise properly” while another described the family interaction she was now able to join, for example, by doing a crossword with her partner and daughter. Others talked about now being able to recognise difficult interpersonal situations, and learning to respond appropriately. Four participants saw qualifications as a benefit from the course, or talked about learning how to learn.
New participants’ perceptions of the benefits of their training

Benefits from the course were often multiple for each respondent. Therefore, items in the following table of benefits should not be read as discrete. Table 18 outlines the new participants’ perceptions of benefits of the literacy training course ranked by the number of respondents who mentioned a particular benefit.

Table 18. New participants’ perceptions of course benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course benefit</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific skills</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence, achievement, motivation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group learning social benefit</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading, writing, or numeracy skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal or family relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific skills
Fourteen participants spoke of attaining specific competencies from their courses. These varied, dependent on participant interest and course type, but included learning more about cars and motors, letter writing, computer skills, learning how to do assignments, note writing, diagram drawing, and social interaction. Three participants pointed to gaining practical abilities through work experience course placements.

Employment
The second largest number of respondents described the benefit of employment from taking part in literacy training. This benefit was defined in a variety of ways. The benefit of employment included either actually starting employment or getting an offer of employment attributed to the course. In this category we included responses that spoke about the perception that barriers to subsequent employment had been lessened or removed, particularly through gaining work experience. Here we also located comments indicating that training would lead the respondent to more desirable employment (better pay or better conditions).

One participant described how work experience organised through the course led to his employment as an apprentice at his work placement: “Work experience is real cool, going out and working on the site with companies and stuff. It’s real good, learn heaps from that. And you get a bit of pay as well so that’s probably better, yeah, it’s awesome”. Another participant talked of the “good possibility of having a job after the course finishes” due to his work experience placement supervisor being happy with his work.
Other participants spoke of the assistance they were receiving from tutors. For example, one respondent spoke of the need for a CV, which his tutor was helping him with, while another spoke of the tutor helping them to find a job.

Often the enhanced likelihood of future employment opportunities was attributed to the competencies, qualifications, and values participants felt they were learning:

You’ve got to do this course first before you can get in there because these qualifications will make them say, “Yes”, not “Oh, you need to have this certificate and this certificate”. Whereas if you come here you get those certificates. So, when you go in they really can’t … You’ve got everything. They just need a position for you.

It’s good because once we’ve done this course it’s like a step into an apprenticeship. It’s easy to get an apprenticeship out of it.

Well, it’s teaching me what I need to know to be able to go into the workplace to show them I know what I am doing … I hope that at the end of the year I’ll be pretty organised and be able to show my future employer that I will be able to do what’s expected of me.

They teach you the values that you have to have to go into a job.

One participant when talking about the employment-relevant abilities she was learning in the course could already see benefits in her current employment:

Communicating with others … even if you don’t particularly like someone, you still have to talk to them with respect and be caring and be understanding and things like that. Just, you learn things, and they do help because I work at McDonalds and you do come across people that are quite rude and you just act all nice …

Participation

All 12 interviewees who mentioned participation in the course itself as a benefit referred to the social nature of the course. Three respondents likened the atmosphere to one of “family”. Typical comments made about the social aspects of the course included:

They’ve been friendly and wanting to become my friends and everything and that’s great.

You’ve got a different range of people coming in on a course … I went to Wellington Zoo not long ago, they have camps … they take us to the movies and stuff. They take us to different places … just places that I wouldn’t personally go myself on my own, I have enjoyed with the group.

The people. They’re really nice, lot funnier. It’s just a really good family here. Everyone supports each other. It’s really nice. It’s just something I needed. I enjoy it here. It’s really great.

Confidence, achievement, and motivation
Those giving responses in this area generally all mentioned confidence either as a benefit in itself, or related to achievement or motivation. One participant linked confidence-building to feeling safe:

I’m not afraid to laugh because they don’t put me down. So, it’s given a lot of confidence and I’m not afraid to speak out because I was always scared to speak out in case I said the wrong thing and I was shot down, or made fun of. But I can come here and I know I can speak out and its really great stuff. I know I can open my mouth and not be afraid … It’s security I think, and feeling safe.

Another participant talked about a feeling of confidence that came from achievement:

Q. What helps you to feel good about yourself? A. Achieving stuff … like I just … handed two books in just yesterday. Hopefully, I’ve achieved them.

One participant said the course had fostered both motivation and self-confidence:

It’s just … motivated me to go further … people are open-hearted, you know, open to things and share each others’ thoughts on things. It’s been good. It’s helped me develop and helped me go out wider, into the wider community and that.

*Group learning social benefit*

Seven participants described a positive social benefit from training in groups on the course, and greatly enjoyed the friendships they had made:

I love it. I get to meet different people I’ve never met before, and they’ve been amazing.

Oh yeah we’re, it’s an all boy class so, we all like to have good laughs and stuff … it’s pretty fun.

You learn … because I mean a lot of people, a lot of them are older, so they’ve done a bit as well, but labouring, on the site, so they show you a bit as well.

And the guys on the course are good to get on with and that. Everyone just gets along. Everyone just, everyone helps everyone when it’s needed - stuff like that.

Everybody shares their ideas in a way. Like, say someone brings in one idea; everybody else brings in their ideas on how to do it.

*Other benefits*

Six participants commented on other course benefits that could not be aggregated further. These included comments on guest speakers at their courses whom participants felt were beneficial to their personal interests. One participant believed the course would be excellent for those who wished to learn English. Another interviewee recounted how the course allowed him to get his car fixed for free.

*Qualifications*

Four of the six participants who talked about the benefits of qualifications related this to the likelihood of improved employment prospects. One respondent thought qualifications gained
would be evidence of up-skilling, and another interviewee saw qualifications as a benefit in and of themselves: “I’m like ‘Come to our course man. You get certificates out of it. You get things out of this course which you do at school’”.

**Reading, writing, or numeracy skills**

Only five of the 34 participants mentioned reading, writing, maths, or spelling as course benefits. Reading was only stated by one participant as having improved, while three interviewees said that their writing had been enhanced. Writing letters, stories, and hand-writing were examples of ways in which the interviewees were receiving help. Maths was mentioned three times as improving through the course.

**Computer, learning, and life skills**

Three participants described improved computer skills as an outcome of the course they were taking. One participant remarked on the learning they had gained: “Just the ability to boost the stamina of learning up rather than pushing it down”. One participant remarked on learning life skills: “You go home and cook meals like there, and when I move out”.

**Interpersonal and family relationships**

This category recorded comments about spin-off benefits from the course that may have occurred in other areas of the respondents’ lives. One participant said the course had changed his outlook on his life, stating that it had “just changed really how I see things in life. Like everything is not kind of like … nothing now is revolved around violence. I try and keep out of it as much as I can”.

**Summary of benefits of the training course**

Again, while the follow-up and new participant groups discussed similar types of benefits, the way in which these benefits were ranked in the frequency tables suggests that they were valued differently. Consistent with their most frequently stated literacy need, new participants claimed that specific competency achievement was an important benefit of the course. However, it is important to note that these specific abilities were not necessarily purely practical work activities. They also included aspects like study ability, note taking, and learning how to undertake assignments. Therefore, enhanced learning competency was also perceived as a course benefit.

Employment outcomes (either actual or perceived for the future) were the most frequently mentioned benefit by follow-up participants, and came second only to specific skills for the new participants. Participation in the course and feelings of confidence, motivation, and achievement were also considered important by both groups, just in slightly different frequency orders.

It is expected that employment outcomes would feature highly in the perceived beneficial outcomes from a course, as the majority of participants begin adult literacy training with the goal of achieving or improving their employment status or opportunities. It is also the goal of the majority of training programmes (and often an outcome on which programme funding is based) to ensure that participants obtain employment within two or three months of finishing the course.

It is also expected that participants will perceive benefit in terms of enhancing their particular vocational and literacy competencies. However, it is interesting, and in line with our previous
findings (Tilley, et al., 2006), that enhancements in confidence, achievement, motivation, social participation, and interpersonal communication are spin-off benefits from the official focus of the programme. These will enhance employability and personal development further.

Positive and negative aspects of the course

Benefits and positive perceptions of the course were closely interconnected. However discussion of these two theme areas has been separated. Benefits were deemed to be those things that participants spoke of as having gained from the course, for example, employment or enhanced social participation. Positive perceptions referred to those aspects of the course itself that participants viewed positively as helpful to their learning, for example, good teaching practices or the one-to-one learning opportunities that were available. Sometimes, the same categories are reported in both theme areas, for example, social participation is reported under both as it was viewed by participants as both a positive aspect of the course, and a benefit to the individual as well.

Follow-up participants’ positive perceptions of their course

The themes discussed in this section were clearly interconnected, but over 90% of the respondents (20 out of 22) specifically talked about good teaching as positive. Some participants talked at length about their tutors. Valued attributes such as tutors’ patience, support, sympathy, their ability “not to stand over you”, setting high but achievable expectations, and responding to students’ learning styles were all favourably commented on.

Around a third of respondents described the social elements of the course such as group learning as positive; another third thought one-to-one learning was a further beneficial aspect. Interestingly, a number of those who enjoyed one-to-one learning also enjoyed the small group learning activities. Five respondents specifically commented on the combination approach as meeting their needs. Participants’ comments demonstrated that from their training they were finding the balance of learning approaches they needed and enjoyed.

Two participants mentioned the relaxed atmosphere of the course (in comments that echoed praise of tutors): “It’s a good learning environment. Compared to the schools it’s like all stress and all that kind of thing. Back here, it’s just do it in your own time. If you don’t know anything, just ask”. One student appreciated the flexibility of tutors who understood the commitment of having children.

A large number of comments (46) are listed under ‘other’ positive aspects. As a rough guide, a large percentage of these comments related to general descriptors such as “really good” and “wonderful”, without precisely nominating what was particularly good about the training. Respondents also talked about the things they made or did in class, such as poetry, as being positive. In addition there were also positive comments about the “atmosphere”, without describing what sort of atmosphere they were referring to. Several comments referred to the practicality of the training while three praised the small class size. Table 19 shows the beneficial aspects of the course that respondents mentioned by theme.
Table 19. Follow-up participants’ positive perceptions of their literacy training course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive aspect</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good teaching</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group learning (social)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one learning</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of learning styles (group and individual)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually paced learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed atmosphere</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reinforcement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating commitments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Follow-up participants’ negative perceptions of their course

Three of the 22 follow-up participants commented on negative elements in their training in a total of six comments. One found the computers a little dated, adding “but I mean that’s financial restraints”. Another felt he had undertaken the wrong course first, while another was unhappy with a shift from individual work to group work saying “you’ve got too many people who want to talk to a tutor”.

New participants’ positive perceptions of their course

New participants’ perceptions of the beneficial aspects of their literacy training courses ranged from “good teaching” to the ability of the course to be flexible in accommodating other commitments participants may have. Table 20 outlines the positive aspects of the course ranked by the number of respondents who mentioned them.

Table 20. New participants’ positive perceptions of their literacy training course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive aspect</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good teaching</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group learning – social</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined one-to-one and group training</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individually paced learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reinforcement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating commitments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Good teaching

Twenty-one respondents made 33 supportive comments about tutors’ teaching practice, such as saying the tutors were “like another friend for when you come to class”, or like family: “Actually this place has been a family place for me … they’ve been through thick and thin with me and they’ve treated me like their family”.

43
Tutors’ positive qualities included being caring, giving much encouragement, listening, being welcoming, and being vibrant. Six participants thought being enabled to work at their own pace was a valued component of their tutors’ teaching: “You’re doing it at your level too which is good. I find that’s very good. In a classroom situation, you’re pushed, and you can’t learn”. Tutors’ positive attitudes were regarded as a precursor to confidence in learning new things, and motivation “in what you can learn and what you can do”.

The time that tutors gave to their students, assisting when it was required, was appreciated:

I like that they take their time if you want to put your hand up and they will come by and explain it properly, and, if you don’t get it then they’ll come back and try to revise that. If you didn’t get it they will show you again until you get it right.

The new participants liked a more relaxed approach to learning than they had experienced at school:

The main tutors are cool as. They’re not teachers. They just, they don’t care if you don’t do the work, but you’re there to do the work. So, if you don’t want to do the work, then basically, why are you here? But they don’t sit there like teachers doing their nut at you for not doing the work right there and then.

He’s like, he’s cruisey, but at the same time he’s also, we’re learning and probably making progress.

The participants also described tutors’ learning approaches as positive:

They’re good because they put it to you in a different way, and you pick it up easier and you start understanding properly. And then once they give it to you in a different way, instead of what it said on the paper, you pick it up, and you write what it is.

He explains it like on the practical side of things, he explains to you first, then I say “Oh yeah” and he will go out and demonstrate, which is good because I don’t know, just like watching and that’s the only way I can learn really.

With the repetitive learning, you know when they put it up and we then write it down and they go over it, and they talk about it, they explain, and they get us doing it in a role play sort of way in respect of saying, starting with a sentence and you have to make up the sentence, and the reason for it etc. They just teach very well … They’re excellent teachers.

**Other positive aspects of the course**

We have listed a variety of comments under the ‘other’ category. Four participants mentioned that the course fitted with their learning style, ranging from a preference for hands-on or theory work, to the course being structured in time allotments that worked best for the participant: “It’s just how I like to do things. It’s all broken down and not big. Oh we do short periods, not long periods of thinking and working”. Two participants mentioned the freedom they felt in the course:
You can smoke here. Sweet. Because all I ever wanted to do at school was just walk outside and have a cigarette whenever I was stressed out and I couldn’t, and here I can.

School was not good for me at all. Here you get a lot more freedom and they give you the opportunity of doing what you want at that time so you fly through things. So yeah, that’s been good. But school? Nah. I didn’t do very well at school. I’ve done a heck of a lot better here than what I did at school.

Also mentioned were: the equipment the participants could use in the course; the hours which fitted with normal employment hours, thereby allowing the participant to become used to “work ethic hours”; and obtaining practical, paid work experience.

**Group learning – social**

Again, several comments were made by participants about the group setting allowing for classmates to work together and help one another with learning. People valued the ability to share visions and ideas with others in the group: “Just that everyone’s like doing the same thing. Like say I don’t feel like left out if we’re working in groups”. Many of these respondents also enjoyed one-to-one sessions.

**Combined one-to-one and group training**

Four participants specifically commented that a standout aspect of their training was the fact that the course met their learning needs by offering a combination of both one-to-one and group learning situations. For example, one respondent said:

I like the group, but I do enjoy my one-to-one, because I’m learning quarters and eighths and circles and that, you know how they normally teach? ... It’s good for someone who hasn’t had that. I’m learning my eighths and my thirds [in the one-to-one], and it’s really good. I like the one-to-one ... but I also like the group because you get in there and we have a great, you know, we’re learning, but it’s not boring. Do you know what I mean? I mean for people like us, I think we need to be able to learn, but make it an exciting learning situation ... And that’s basically what they do here. And if we have a laugh, we have a laugh. You know what I mean?

Another confirmed that: “You’re doing this at your level, and this is why the one-to-one for an hour, once a week, is really good. It’s a really excellent, but the rest of the week it’s in the group. And I think it’s really, really excellent”.

**One-to-one learning**

Four participants commented on one-to-one training as positive, as it allowed for work to be pitched at their level. However, these participants were also involved in small group work. Three of the four participants who remarked on one-to-one learning as beneficial also liked the positive aspects of small group work, meaning only one exclusively favoured one-to-one training.

**Individually paced learning**

Individually paced learning was favourably compared with school: “in a classroom situation, you’re pushed, and you can’t learn”. Participants felt that at last they were allowed to learn: “These tutors that they’ve got are absolutely brilliant. Yes, because they’ve taught me how I
want to be taught, and they’re wanting me to have the best out of life through their teaching and it’s been good – much easier”.

Positive reinforcement
One participant valued the positive reinforcement she received:

I love it. You know, I don’t feel threatened. I feel safe. It’s a safe place to come and not feel threatened, yeah. And I’m not downed. I mean I’m treated equal as everybody else. And I’m not called a dumb-dumb, and it’s a real safe place. I mean, people would be lost without this place.

I think it’s excellent; a lot of encouragement.

Accommodating commitments
The flexibility of the course was also highly beneficial in that the participants could take time off to honour other commitments:

I took my son with me to Wellington. I mean he’s only four so thought he would enjoy it a little bit more than me. And that was really cool because they didn’t say no, that they were quite fine that I took him, and I thought that’s really good. There’s not many places that would let you do that, I suppose that is really good.

Summary of positive course aspects
The follow-up and new participants ranked the same types of beneficial aspects in the same order (with the exception of ‘a relaxed atmosphere’ which was an addition to the follow-up participants’ theme areas).

This ordering of positive course attributes was also very similar to those reported from the 2004/2005 interviews. Again, variations of ‘good teaching’ were most often reported, followed by comments on group learning, individually paced learning, one-to-one learning, the combination of these, and the other elements noted above.

Learning styles
Participants were asked about ways they preferred to learn. Where their comments have allowed we have loosely grouped them according to the VARK learning styles (Fleming & Mills, 1992). VARK stands for Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic. Many respondents clearly have multiple learning styles. However, where the participant suggested an inclination to a particular learning style they were coded as such. Further, it should be noted that it was not uncommon for follow-up participants to become aware of their learning styles as part of their training. The discussion below combines both the follow-up and new participant groups.

Overall, our respondents indicated a tendency towards a kinesthetic learning style, with about half of the follow-up participants and nearly all the new participants expressing a preference for demonstrations and a “hands-on” approach. We may partially account for the dominance of the kinesthetic style in the new participant group by the number of automotive trainees in this group (31%). A smaller number said they learned best through listening and talking. A number of these aural learners also possessed kinesthetic learning styles. Only about a fifth of those
who indicated their learning styles identified a read/write approach, and this was generally in combination with aural and other approaches. Unsurprisingly, most participants (both follow-up and new) expressed discomfort with reading even as they recognised its place. Unfortunately, there is no typical VARK profile for the general population to compare these findings against (VARK: A guide to learning styles, 2006). Further, those who undertake the online VARK assessment tend to be either students or teachers, and the profile results usually show a range of learning style preferences as opposed to one sole preference (VARK: A guide to learning styles, 2006). However, with these limitations in mind, proportions of VARK preferences for a sample of 6033 responses have been recorded with 16.3% of responses endorsing a Visual preference, 23.7% Aural, 30.8% a Read/Write approach, and 29.2% a Kinesthetic approach (VARK: A guide to learning styles, 2006).

**Meaning of ‘literacy’ and ‘foundation skills’**

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) conducted in New Zealand in 1996 found that many of those scoring at the lowest levels of literacy ability perceived that they did not need to improve their literacy (OECD, 2000). One interpretation of why this is so could be the definitions usually applied to the term “literacy”. In general, people tend not to believe that they have a literacy “problem”, if they can read and write to a certain level. These people, therefore, may tend to think literacy training is irrelevant to them, and that such courses will be of no benefit.

Further, the stigma surrounding the term “literacy” in concert with the issues that Tilley et al. (2006) uncovered around marketing adult literacy courses, led us to explore further what participants understood literacy to mean. We also wished to assess whether the more recent term “foundation skills” was more meaningful or neutral than literacy. Therefore, we asked follow-up and new participants what they thought literacy and foundation skills meant.

**Follow-up participants’ perceptions on the meaning of ‘literacy’ and ‘foundation skills’**

In the 2004/2005 participant interviews more than a quarter of the 79 interviewees saw literacy as strictly functional in nature (reading, writing, and occasionally numeracy). Then 16 participants expanded this definition to include comprehension or communication, 12 respondents said the term was meaningless to them, while six spoke about literacy in terms of a deficit model and often applied this to themselves.

In the 2006 round of follow-up interviews, the 22 participants were asked for their definition of literacy and foundation skills (a term in widespread official use). The question asked was usually framed around learning to get the participant to relate literacy or foundation skills to what they were learning on the course. For example, the interviewer would ask, “Thinking about your learning here, what does the word literacy mean to you?” This approach should be taken into account when considering responses to this question and in comparing responses to the first round.

Many respondents gave a mixture of definitions in one answer. For example, some respondents started by saying that they were not sure what literacy meant, but the respondent would then go on to give some ideas of what it might mean to them. For example: “Um, bunch of big
words. I don’t know … all I can say is reading and writing. They say ‘numeracy and literacy’ and I’m just like, ‘Eh?’ Why don’t they just use the basics?”

Of the 22 follow-up participants, 19 respondents talked about what literacy meant to them with a total of 23 comments. Twenty respondents discussed foundation skills with a total of 29 comments.

**What does ‘literacy’ mean?**
All but two of the 19 who responded to this question mentioned reading, often combined with writing and maths. However, some of these respondents also signified that they were confused about the term: “I’m not sure how to put it … Is that putting stuff on paper … like for me literacy is hard, because I … sometimes do struggle reading and understanding stuff”. Respondents’ comments were also often accompanied by a laugh and the interviewer noted that the term made respondents feel uncomfortable, as signified by their body language and delayed responses.

As well as mentioning reading, writing, and numeracy, some respondents went beyond this to include broader issues such as communication and computer skills. Three of the students associated the term with something large: “a huge spectrum of things”, “everything is based on words and … how do I explain it? Just being able to function in society: to be literate”. Another follow-up participant (a teacher-aide trainee) spoke about the difference that making a breakthrough in teaching literacy made to “difficult” children in school: “That whole behaviour, the whole attitude changes, and they come to school, and the hair is freshly done, they’re clean”.

**What does ‘foundation skills’ mean?**
There was significant confusion over this term with four of the 20 who responded stating they did not know what it meant. Another group related to the term in respect of “building” something. For one person, foundation skills were connected to family values, Christian values, and life skills. For another it was “skills needed in order to do something … like a child kicking a ball needs good hand/eye coordination”. Another talked about “something we learn way, way, back, when we, you know, formative years”. Others mentioned “the basics” and did link this to reading, writing, and numeracy. Others mentioned life abilities such as confidence with one person taking the view that an essential foundation skill was to learn to “treat your enemies with love and you’ll learn”.

**New participants’ perceptions on the meaning of ‘literacy’ and ‘foundation skills’**
New participants gave a variety of responses when asked what the terms literacy and foundation skills meant to them.

**What does literacy mean?**
Several comments suggested a relationship between literacy and reading, writing, and numeracy:

- Literacy is just like getting your basics on your writing and stuff like that.
- English really. Like, doing exams, paper work, all that kind of stuff. Like using the dictionary, if you have to.
Lots of paper; lots of reading. That's what I think when you say the word literacy. Or being able to read and write.

Other comments equated literacy with communication: “Like literacy is talking and stuff”; “Just knowing words ... and like talking the slang that people talk ... like doctors etc.”; “communicating with others, interpersonal skills, just things like that”. One participant described literacy as a learning process: “Well, literacy means a whole lot of learning, that's positive learning, not negative”.

However, even when participants gave their definition of the term, they often did so only after some initial confusion:

I don’t know. I don’t really get those two words. Like literacy is talking and stuff like, and foundation is, what's that? What do you mean by that? ... Is it like being honest to yourself or something; being like not lying to your boss and stuff like that – I suppose like that.

Four participants explicitly stated they did not know what literacy meant.

**What does ‘foundation skills’ mean?**

Some respondents viewed the term foundation skills as easier to relate to than literacy, for example:

Oh that foundation skills looks a bit better package than say literacy. Literacy could mean any old thing.

Foundation skills I think would be better ... people straight away think, ‘Well, all we’re basing on is written’, and ... it’s about maths as well, and computers as well. So the foundation skills would most probably be better, because it's doing a whole round of circle of all the things that you learn.

As in their responses to the word “literacy”, some participants related foundation skills to functional literacy competencies such as reading, writing, and numeracy. Some connected foundation skills to interpersonal communication. For others, foundation skills were the building blocks or stepping stones upon which further learning could be based, either for general learning throughout life, or in terms of specific basic competencies for specific vocations upon which advanced learning and training could be based. Nine participants did not know what foundation skills referred to.

**Summary of the meaning of literacy and foundation skills**

The 2006 follow-up and new participants followed the same pattern of the 2004/2005 interviewees with responses that ranged from defining literacy and foundation skills as reading, writing, and/or numeracy, to having no idea what the terms might mean. Often, especially when asked to define literacy, participants would struggle and show confusion, while foundation skills did seem to not make people as uncomfortable. However, the latter term elicited a broader and vaguer definition from some participants, with some commonality around the idea of all the building blocks upon which further advanced abilities could be based.
These definitions, or in some cases, a complete inability to provide definitions or meaning of these key terms, contains implications for the marketing of adult literacy courses. These responses are also relevant when considering the potential engagement of current non-participants who may need and wish to up-skill but believe that adult literacy or foundation skill courses possess no benefits or relevance for them.
Part two: One year later - the 2007 follow-up interviews with adult literacy participants

It is important to note that the findings discussed below are initial only, as the full analysis has not as yet been finished. An in-depth analysis of the 2007 round of interviews is nearing completion and will be available for review in a further report due for dissemination in November 2007.

The initial analyses as presented below have focused on employment and training outcomes experienced by adult literacy participants. Beneficial outcomes of adult literacy training courses are, of course, far wider ranging than just employment and further training results. These other outcomes will be discussed in a later report. Further, while there is a focus below on age and health barriers to employment, it is important to note that there are other important factors that influence the ability to move into employment. These will also be outlined in detail in the upcoming final report.

Method

One of the objectives of the current FRST Literacy and Employment research project and the overarching aim of the longitudinal interviews was to “evaluate how effectively adult literacy programmes secure employment outcomes”. While we had obtained some insights into this through the 2006 follow-up interviews, a third data collection point allowed for investigation of longer-term employment outcomes.

In early 2007 the project team initiated discussions with Wanganui adult literacy providers about a third round of interviews with those adult literacy participants who had been interviewed in 2006. In some instances adult literacy provider agencies expressed their preference to contact the potential interviewee on the project’s behalf. In other instances, the researchers made direct contact with interviewees. We attempted to contact all participants from the 2006 sample of 56 via their last known phone number or through face-to-face conversations in the case of some providers. Those whom we could contact were invited to take part in a third and final interview. Thirty-one participants chose to take part. Demographics of the sample are given below.

In consultation between the community and university researchers an interview schedule was developed. While focusing on employment and training outcomes the participant might be engaged with at the time of the interview, the interview schedule also included discussion around changes in personal life or community participation that the participant might attribute to their past adult literacy course. We also sought to obtain participants’ thoughts on potential further learning needs for employment or other reasons. As many of the participants had expressed a kinesthetic or “hands-on” approach to learning, the option was also included for the participant to draw the change (if any) they saw in themselves or their environment, rather than directly telling the interviewer about it (although they would be asked to explain their drawing to the interviewer). Only one participant, however, chose to make use of this option.
The findings detailed in this section represent the employment and further training outcomes that the 2007 longitudinal participants perceived as attributable to the adult literacy course they had taken part in.

Demographics of those in the longitudinal study

In the 2007 round of interviews, 15 participants were interviewed for a second time (first interviewed in 2006) and 16 were interviewed for a third time (first interviewed in 2004/05). Twice as many men (10) as women (five) were interviewed for a second time, while among those interviewed for a third time, 10 women and six men participated.

In the group interviewed for the second time, 13 (86%) of participants were aged 16 to 40. Five participants were 16 to 20, five were 21 to 30, and three were 31 to 40, leaving just one aged 51 to 60 and one between 61 and 64. Those interviewed for the third time were more evenly spread across the age groups from 16 to 60, except in the case of the 41 to 50 cohort. Two participants were aged 16 to 20, three were 21 to 30, three were 31 to 40, six (38%) were 41 to 50, and two were 51 to 60.

Table 21 outlines the proportions of the participant groups who took part in either a second or third interview, by age group, gender, and ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Second interview</th>
<th>Third interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic identity</th>
<th>Second interview</th>
<th>Third interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand European</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori and Pacific Peoples</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand European and Pacific Peoples</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori and New Zealand European</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealander</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The sum percentage of gender groups for each category may not add exactly to 100% due to rounding of decimal places.

Overall, in the group interviewed for the second time, several ethnic groups were represented. New Zealand Europeans formed the largest group at 7 respondents (47%), while 27% of the group identified as Māori (4 participants). One participant identified as Māori and New Zealand European, one identified as Māori and Pacific Islands Peoples, one preferred New Zealander, and one identified as New Zealand European and Pacific Islands Peoples. Those who were on their third interview comprised only three ethnic groups with 11 New Zealand Euro-
pean participants forming a large majority (69%), three Māori (19%), and two self-described as New Zealanders (13%).

**Findings: Employment and training outcomes**

Comments about employment, current training, and other outcomes from the adult literacy courses were derived from two sources; information directly elicited from a questionnaire on current employment and educational activities, and information embedded in the interview transcripts. This two-pronged approach was chosen as the questionnaire provided only limited employment and training outcome information, whereas the interviews themselves elaborated and extended on this information. However, as some information was not given by respondents there may be some skewing of the figures. For example, among the second-interview participants, considering the high numbers of participants still in training compared with the numbers in paid employment, there is a possibility that the numbers actually receiving benefits may be higher than the four who specified they were receiving a benefit.

Overall, most participants in both groups were strongly committed to engaging in both employment and training, though they were frequently under constraints such as from poor health or heavy demands on their time from family responsibilities. In the two interview groups, for those still in training, much of the employment, paid and unpaid, tended to be course-related work experience. Participants spoke of their employment with pride, both in having employment and in what they had achieved, while also describing their excitement at how much they had learnt through their “hands-on” experiences.

**Second-interview (2006-2007) participants**

**Employment**

At the time of their second interviews, nearly three-quarters of second-interview participants were in either paid or unpaid employment. Equal numbers were in paid or unpaid employment; one who was in employment did not specify whether the work was paid or unpaid.

Five second-interview participants reported receiving welfare benefits. One of those was in paid employment and still training, two were in unpaid employment while still in training, one was in unpaid work but no longer training, and one was in training only. Two participants cited parenting or family commitments that reduced their employment options. Nevertheless, one of those two was in paid and the other in unpaid employment while also in training. Two participants also mentioned ill-health, one with physical and the other with mental health conditions, each curtailing participation in employment.

**Training**

Thirteen of the 15 second-interview participants (87%) were still in training at the time of their second interviews. Because 11 of the 15 were in some form of employment, a complex interrelationship exists between the training and employment categories. Four participants were solely in training, although one of those was seeking work. Four participants were in paid employment while training; and four had unpaid employment while in training, two of those also seeking paid work. One who was in training and also in employment did not specify whether the work was paid.
Third-interview (2004/05-2007) participants

Employment
Fifteen of the 16 participants (94%) in this group had worked since the previous interview, whether in a paid or unpaid capacity. At the time of the third interviews, more than half of the participants (9) stated that they were in paid employment, two were in unpaid employment, and a third did not specify whether the employment was paid. Of those in unpaid employment, one was looking for paid work, and the other was not seeking work. Three participants specified being unemployed and receiving benefits.

Two major factors emerged that appear to have had an impact on the ability of the third interview group to undertake employment. Those factors, which will be discussed in more detail below, were ill-health and parenting or family commitments. While the same factors were present among second interview participants, they appeared to a much lesser extent.

We suggest the reason that ill-health and family commitments appear more prominently as factors restricting employment opportunities among this third interview group than in the second interviews is because of the higher numbers of women and older participants in the third interview group. Young men dominated the second interview group.

Training
In contrast to the 87% of second interview participants still in training at their interviews, just under a third, that is five, of the 16 third-interview participants were still in training at their third interviews and a sixth (unemployed) was seeking further training. Four participants still in training were in paid employment, while one was in unpaid employment, and one was unemployed. As mentioned above, the employment undertaken by those still in training, both paid and unpaid, tended to be course-related work experience.

Employment

Paid employment, no longer in training

Third-interview participants
At the third interviews, five participants no longer in training were in paid employment directly related to their recent training courses. One participant responded to the question “What have you been doing?” with “Ah, just working hard” before listing the activities the job entailed. Although participants tended not to specify whether their work was full- or part-time, one participant stated she was in casual and/or part-time work. This participant had sought out and taken on a second job to cover a long, unpaid summer break in her main job at a secondary school, and at the time of the interview, although back at her main job, was pleased to have also just been requested to begin “filling in” at another school.

Other participants also expressed pleasure and enthusiasm for their new work, with one saying, “And even the teachers tell me when I’m at school, ‘Slow down!’ I’m paid to do a job”. Another went so far as to claim to be:

Overworked. Overpaid ... Paid the most I’ve ever been in my life. It’s only because I’ve learnt ... and still more to learn. Still, it’s, amazing ... And some people actually ask me how to do something. So that’s, a big plus ... And I’m just screaming ahead of
them going, ‘Crikey. I’m still young’. So yeah. So hopefully I’ll be a very important cog in this company. Which I am now. But I’d be a better one if I had some backing of certificates.

However, the participant did not mention intending to continue training.

**Paid employment while still training**

**Second-interview participants**

Paid employment undertaken by second-interview participants covered employment conditions such as work experience, apprenticeship, and either part-time or full-time work. Each type of work provided learning experiences; for example, one participant described work experience employment which had involved comprehensive “hands-on” practice in house building, which he preferred to the course “theory work” because theory is “sort of hard to get your mind around, … you know? Because you’re not actually doing it. So, you get a better idea, yeah when you’re on the site”. He described work experience as providing the triple benefits of “learning, working, getting paid”, adding that the learning covered:

> Just all, everything, about building pretty much … we’d go there and I’d do a weather-board and next time I go there doing stuff outside and stuff like that. And, yeah, we’ve actually started from the ground up. Um, just this year, now. And yeah, it’s going to be pretty good. Learn all about concrete and framing and what not to do and what to do.

Two participants in an apprenticeship programme demonstrated the commitment to learning involved for the participants who were combining employment with training:

> [I’m] building project cars and stuff … at a mate’s place, and sometimes at home … I’m going for Level 3 … [doing] apprentice work, like work at a workshop while you’re doing books … I do books late at night, which are more advanced than Level 1 and 2, but I still get help from [a tutor] while I’m there. … [I] work half the day and then go to course in the afternoon.

The second participant hoped that the paid work experience would last at least as long as the apprenticeship, adding that the study would take “about four years if you do it properly … if you’re onto it and do 40 hours a week, and don’t have sick leave all the time”.

While five participants said that they received welfare benefits, just one participant mentioned receiving assistance from a welfare benefit to top up income from employment during training. The participant, who had been working part-time in paid employment for a year during training, was able to cope financially when the hours were reduced because “[I] still get my benefit”.

Another spoke of problems trying to dovetail the part-time, casual work of a preferred “real job” with training for a new occupation, along with the realisation that the only available work in the new occupation would involve full-time commitment. This would be during hours that would preclude working in the “real job”. The participant’s outlook, however, was positive:

> If I can get night work that’ll be cool. But there’s not many mechanics that do nights. That’s the bummer bit about it. I can do afternoon work from twelve to whatever. But
ah, they don’t usually take on those kind of people eh. Because they want fulltime workers you know. Eight till five sort of thing. And basically when I get the call to go to work for my [real job] I’d rather be there than at that. But it’s all good you know. I’ll try to fit it in, you know.

**Third-interview participants**

Four of the third-interview group were in paid employment while still training. Two were working in course-related work. One of these participants was “really excited” about assisting a student with a health impairment in their course-related work experience. The participant was enjoying the learning experience of joining classroom exercises alongside the student. The other participant was the only one in this group who described the commitment needed to complete training while undertaking employment, or how the two impacted on or were related to each other. The interviewee enthusiastically described working in three part-time jobs in work directly related to the training course recently completed, as well as starting a new specialist training course. The participant concluded with a laugh, “So yeah, I’m very busy”.

The third participant, whose employment was not related to course work, spoke of needing to find another job because the current employment was “on-call so, hardly ever work, only if they really, really need someone to come in … It’s a good job, but … never get any work”. The fourth, in the armed forces, mentioned “doing search and rescue … and teaching up at the local cadet forces unit”, but did not discuss whether the hours of employment impinged on his own training, or any interrelationship between the two.

**Unpaid employment while still training**

**Second-interview participants**

Several second-interview participants were doing unpaid work experience during their training. One participant said employers’ problems accessing funding created difficulties for trainees trying to gain work experience:

> I’ve just been doing working experience … First off I did a bit of work experience with a lady … Did a bit of horticultural stuff and that with her, but … she didn’t end up getting the funding for that … So that didn’t work out, but … it’s good now for him [‘him’ meaning the participant’s current employer] because he’s got the funding now. He’s got $50 going into his bank account so he’d be happy. He just found that out, which is good … So at least he’s got the funding for me … being there. Yeah.

A second participant talked about the possibility of work experience leading to paid work at the end of the training course. The participant was not optimistic about continuing in the same position, but did hope the experience would lead to work elsewhere:

> Interviewer: And do you think this present sort of work experience job you’ve got, do you think that will lead to anything? Participant: Oh, it might. I’m not quite sure because … I’ve only been getting the odd sort of jobs and stuff at the moment and … sometimes … some days … didn’t actually get anything, but yeah. But no, it was um … has it’s on and off days where you get something, but no … I think it might actually lead me to something new …
Another participant with health problems had found through work experience that long-term employment in the course-related field would not be appropriate. However, the participant, determined to find suitable employment, had been experimenting with personal work experience in another field:

Since then I’ve also been looking into other fields ... For the last three years I have been helping on a farm and helping people that have got farms around the country, through a friend. And I’ve found out that that’s very therapeutic for my [health problem]. So, I have found out that what I want to do is really be on a farm.

One participant, still seeking work after completing a training course, was working unpaid at the training centre to fill in time until gaining employment:

I just help with them [students at the course] and try and make them understand about it ... just gives me something to do, more skills with it ... I’m just trying to keep looking round for a job and then, when ... if I do get a job I will leave. But I just come here to keep my mind off things that are happening. Yeah [sighs], so hopefully by ... maybe the middle of this year, hopefully I’ll get a job. Six months is my goal just to try and see if I can get a job. Just for now. But I haven’t thought further than that. Yeah.

Two participants spoke of engaging in part-time, unpaid employment that was not course-related work experience. For one it was “a job on a Friday now at Senior Citizens, just working in the kitchen, but that’s fine”. However, the other was repairing damage. As the participant explained, a little sheepishly:

I’ve done a little bit of work. Interviewer: What kind of work? Participant: Um ... painting. Um ... not, [chuckles] but I’m not getting paid for it so I ... um ... not quite a month ago I was around at my boss’s place and I went through his ranch slider, yeah. And I ... yeah, no, he wasn’t happy and I’ve got to work that one off. Yeah [chuckles]. But, nah, it’s all right.

One participant was involved in unpaid community work:

I’ve got myself involved on the ... school roll. They coaxed me [into] going into the committee so I’ve been dragged onto that. They reckon it will do me good.

Third-interview participants
A third-interview participant who spoke of doing unpaid course-related work experience claimed not to have enjoyed the experience. Although laughing, he complained:

Oh, did work experience ... But he [the boss] drove me nuts. Because he tells you to do something so you go to do it. And then he ends up doing it anyway. Because I’ll go grab a tool. And yeah, he comes back and moans at you because you didn’t do it. But you have to go get a tool.

Another was working unpaid at the training centre, “just helping out” while “doing the odd unit standard every now and then”.

Seeking employment
**Second-interview participants**

Four second-interview participants described attempts to seek employment. One faced barriers caused by previous criminal convictions, which the participant explained needed to be disclosed at employment interviews. Another was unsuccessfully seeking supermarket work:

I’m actually trying to get into the supermarkets so ... It’s quite hard there. I dunno, they’re just too picky eh, you know? And yeah, I got into the Warehouse ... just like that. But the only thing with the Warehouse is there’s only holiday work. Nothing permanent.

One participant, after finding employers wanted experienced workers, had decided to apply for work experience:

Just trying to find a job now ... Well, because I’ve never worked before, I suppose that’s why they didn’t want me ... so I think I need to get out and do a bit of work experience, like maybe in retail or something so they know that there’s something there ... Might have to look around and ask places if I can do [unpaid] work experience ... so they can teach me.

One participant felt he should be seeking work and had applied for “a couple” of jobs but “never heard back from them”. However, he laughingly stated, “That’s all right. I enjoy it here”.

**Ongoing training**

**Continuing training**

**Second-interview participants**

Twelve (80%) of the second-interview participants were still in training at the time of their interviews. Their training covered a range of fields including basic literacy such as reading, writing, and maths; computer skills; automotive work; and teacher aide work. While some participants focused on how their study had gained or would help them gain employment (as noted above), others were excited by extending their learning or by how their new abilities would enable them to help their children’s learning, as seen in the comments below:

I’ve done quite a fair bit here actually. It’s been really, really good. I’ve learnt a lot more about maths. It’s been really interesting. Now I can understand where the kids today are coming from [laughs] ... They show you all different ways of doing it.

Just learning to be confident and ... the basic maths and computers ... and writing skills. Make sure [they are] up to scratch. And ... writing short stories, letter writing, editing. A lot of stuff. You know, full stops and question marks and where all those ... commas and stuff are supposed to go. Just learning all that basic stuff.

National Certificate in Employment Skills and NCEA. They’re both Level One and I completed them in 2004. And then I went on [a] course doing NCBAC and only completed the NCC which is National Certificate in Computers ‘cause I wanted to know more about computers ‘cause my brother’s got a computer and ... he doesn’t really know how to use it so I thought I’d come and learn more about computers so that I can teach him how to do it.
Still doing my computer, learning more on it … I don’t know if I had passed the two computer NZCAs when I last saw you. Plus I started trying to do another one … this year.

Just trying to expand my knowledge of what I’ve got of automotive stuff and … get in there and actually get my hands-on … because I’m very what you call kinesthetic … and I get my hands dirty and … pulling things apart and fixing them and putting them back together.

Well, who would think that I’d be on a mechanics course eh?

I’m doing NZQA on automotive now five days a week … Slowly getting through my books, more quicker than I started off with. Just more in the way of trying to get a job out of this.

Third-interview participants
Third-interview participants still in training described achievements in basic literacy including reading, writing, and maths as well as computer skills. For example, one participant claimed, “My maths is picking up”. One was enthused by her new reading and writing facility saying:

Oh, that’s going off like a bomb, eh. That is. That’s fantastic, my reading. I did some reading the other day … and I only got four words wrong in the whole book, and I’m now up to reading to a level 2 book instead of a level 1. So that’s cool … And I wrote a story the other day and most of the words I got right. There was only two words I couldn’t spell, because I used all the words that I know how to spell. But there was only two that I couldn’t spell. So things are going on really well there.

Another was gaining confidence in working with computers and explained:

I learn by experience … If I don’t know something, like put in, say, someone might want a RAM chip into their computer, and if I’m not sure I just type it on to the computer and it will come with a page, and I’ll print it out and there it is there.

Moved on to further training
Second-interview participants
Several second-interview participants had moved on to further training since their first interview. For example, one had moved from a literacy course to training in the armed forces, saying:

I went on the LSV course … a military course … doing like basic military training … It’s been good. I’ve learned heaps … like the way motors work and how you maintain a car.

A second participant had moved from Level 1 and 2 courses with a literacy provider to an apprenticeship with an automotive engineering firm and was studying Level 3 courses:

[I passed] Level 1 and 2, and I’m going for Level 3 … [doing] apprentice work, like work at a workshop while you’re doing books … I do books late at night, which are more advanced than Level 1 and 2 … Do work half the day and then go to course in the afternoon.
A third had moved on to “the Up Skill Course, which is the National Certificate in Adult Education and Learning Level 5”.

A fourth participant who started with a driving course with a Wanganui literacy provider, had also recently begun ‘Life Works’, a twelve-month correspondence course which the participant had seen advertised on television. In the participant’s words:

You do a twelve month course and you do it at home. And they come to you every, two months. They send you kits. You get six kits and you learn about things ... like Maths and ... English and ... employment. Learning about yourself. Teaching new ways to better yourself and everything and find out more about yourself. I passed the first one. She said that I did more than you’re meant to do. Most people only do the two bits you’re allowed to do. I did the whole lot. I finished it in quarter the time that most people do. She said I was the first student that she’d ever had that just ... She said she was so amazed. She said, “You’re just wonderful”. She said, “We don’t need to make an appointment for me to come in this amount of time. Just wait for the next kit to come and then, when you’ve done that, just ring me up. We’ll do it that way”.

Third-interview participants
Many third-interview participants had also moved on to further training since their previous interview. For example, one participant was “just doing the odd unit standard every now and then ... just English or maths, stuff that I haven’t done yet”. One teacher aide trainee had begun a course in sign language, having discovered a shortage of teachers in the subject. Another was studying search and rescue through the armed forces, while another was starting an adult teaching certificate:

I’m going to do an adult teaching certificate through the Wananga, through Up Skills ... That started on the 26th of last month, so yeah, I’m very busy ... It’s sort of one step at a time, because this adult teaching certificate ... finishes in 12 months but I think we’re sort of studying right up till about November. That’s our last assignment, so yeah.

Impacting factors on employment and training outcomes

Work and Income benefit

Second-interview participants
Three second-interview participants spoke of receiving welfare benefits. One participant reported that reliance on a benefit limited their future options. Another with considerable family commitments needed a benefit until they were able to find a job with appropriate hours, while a third spoke of needing a benefit to top up dwindling paid employment hours.

Health

Second-interview participants
Only two second-interview participants referred to ill-health as a constraint to their learning. One with immune system problems also had an eye disease that meant activities such as sewing and writing were difficult, but they could “just do it in easy stages”. The second participant was in their “20th year in the mental health [system] as a ... client”.

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Third-interview participants
A few third-interview round participants who were no longer in training and who mentioned being unemployed and/or on a welfare benefit described working for a period since the last interview, but having to stop because of ill-health. For example, a participant who was in unpaid employment left (and was not seeking) paid work because of ill-health. They now preferred voluntary to paid employment in order to be able to work when health allowed and also because:

Well, to get paid for it I’d have to get a fulltime work with like, at least 30 hours a week. In order to make it worthwhile, because what I was doing with just 15 hours a week that I was getting paid for, benefit got stuffed around with. And my rent – being in a Housing Corp house – just about doubled. And I just wasn’t earning enough at the time to make it worthwhile. So I was quite happy to tell them, “Stop the payments. I’ll go back to do it for voluntary”. And that was just so much more convenient for me. I don’t really care if I get paid for doing it or not. It’s something I enjoy doing. That’s all that matters to me.

Two participants also spoke of ill-health curtailing their training, with one saying, “I haven’t really done anything sort of out there [at the literacy course] … just getting my health right, you know?”; and the other mentioning not completing a course because of illness: “I didn’t finish it [the course], because my health suffered a little bit … so I never finished two subjects”.

Family commitments
Second-interview participants
For at least one second-interview participant, unpaid employment was fitted around family responsibilities as well as around training, while another managed paid employment and training along with family responsibilities. When asked what she had been doing since her last interview, before describing her paid employment in detail, the latter participant mentioned, almost in passing, that she had been “Um, working, of course, [looking after my] Nana, still being [a] mum. Um, moved. Um, yeah it’s been pretty full-on actually”.

One participant spoke of being uncertain whether to train for her dream job. To engage in training would take a commitment of time and expense, both of which the participant was reluctant to make because of the impact on both her child and her living standards:

If I went on the hairdressing course, I can’t work which means I can’t live. So, and then if I do the hairdressing course and then get a part time job after the course, it means I’m gonna be away at the course all day, away at work at nights, so there goes that time with my son as well. So, kind of hard … I keep thinking and thinking and thinking about it. And it’s just been on my mind so much lately. But, theoretically, if I want to live and have my house and my nice new fridge and my car, then I need a job. And I still love to spend a lot of time with my son. And in the future I wouldn’t mind having another one.

Childcare issues faced by working parents were raised by two participants. Issues included difficulty finding employment during school hours, the problem of finding an appropriate carer and the costs of child care:
If I could find a job that really suited the hours, where I could either drop my son at school, or pick him up, either one, I would be very, very happy with that. But it’s finding that ... Like, it would be neat to pick my son up from school, and say if I started work at six in the morning, but it’s that finding someone that I trusted enough to stay in my house, take my son to school in the morning. Because like when you put them in the OSCAR programme and day-care and stuff it’s so expensive that when you’re working you’re actually spending a lot more of your money on the caring of your child ... And it’s like well why should I bust my butt when it’s going all on my son when I’m quite capable of looking after my son and taking him to school myself.

As the parent of an older child, one participant spoke of her family commitments and also of how she learnt by listening to her daughter’s father help her with homework. The participant went on to say that she found it more difficult to parent her own child than to cope with students at school in her role as a teacher aide:

And I help my daughter; my daughter does homework from Intermediate, and she comes home ... and I give her a little bit of help with some of the things I know, but the things I don’t know, her father helps, but I sit there and listen so I pick up the way of doing it ...

Third-interview participants
Parenting or family commitments were the second major impediment to employment that emerged from the third-interview participants’ discussions. It was mentioned by more than half (nine) of the participants when talking about their activities since their last interview. Comments from both men and women participants ranged from: discussion of the “24-7” care required for small children; the care of older children with social problems; children with disabilities; caring for high needs foster children; to the care of older family members. Examples included:

I was looking after my Mum. She’s got Alzheimer’s so she’s in a rest home at the moment, so I’ve been spending a lot of time with her. Doing a whole lot around home because, just you know sort of helping my father out. He doesn’t have the best of health any more.

It’s been hectic at the moment, with kids, and the cops. Interviewer: And the cops? Participant: Yes. I’ve got an 18-year old child who’s causing a lot of trouble around town and he’s in and out of trouble with the police ... [And] my second child is special needs. So, have to look around for special needs class and, everything else for him.

I love watching kids programmes with my kids and going out and playing ball and, and mucking around. Just great. Great. And listen to what they say and how they learn. I’m teaching them. I realise that I’m a teacher to my kids. Which I never thought I was. I just thought I was their Dad. But I’m not. I’m a teacher. And what I learn I try and pass on.
Reporting employment and training outcomes: Some limitations

The overall intention of the Adult Literacy and Employment research project was to explore and record the journeys of adult literacy participants as they moved through and out of their chosen courses. Specifically, objective three of the project aimed to answer the following research question: “How effectively do adult literacy programmes secure employment outcomes?” Talking with the participants over the space of three years showed that quality employment outcomes were dependent on so much more than the presence of a job. Other factors such as enhancement of literacy skills, attainment of vocational skill sets, increased confidence, improved interpersonal communication skills, and the ability to learn how to learn (among others) were also essential in attaining, maintaining, and progressing in employment.

Many participants in adult literacy programmes take part in such courses with future employment outcomes in mind (Neilson & Culligan, 2005). At the time of the interviews with this project’s follow-up participants, 24 (49%) in our 2006 sample, and 22 (71%) in our 2007 sample, had achieved some form of employment.3 Forms of employment included full-time, part-time, paid, and unpaid, and could be occurring concurrently with a course, or after participants had moved on from training.

In focusing on employment outcome percentages such as the above as the primary outcome of adult literacy programmes, an important message often becomes lost. The achievement of employment after or during a course does not necessarily mean that the employment is attributable to the training programme in question. (However, in saying this we do not disregard that there are cases where specific trades or vocational training courses have led to jobs in those particular fields). An employment outcome percentage also does not give any indication of the quality of that employment (whether it is paid or unpaid, full- or part-time, or of permanent or limited duration). Finally, movement into employment does not necessarily mean that literacy learning should cease, or that the individual learner would not benefit from further training. However, the practicalities of holding down a job, as well as other life commitments, often mean that literacy learning does cease upon entering employment.

Aligned with the findings on employment are the training outcomes. Eighteen (36%) follow-up participants in the 2006 sample, and 18 (58%) in the 2007 sample, were in training at the time of their follow-up interview. The 58% of people still in training in 2007 was derived by combining the follow-up groups of second-interview and third-interview respondents. It should be noted that these two groups were quite different in their scores for those remaining in training: 87% of the second-interview group, and 31% of the third-interview group. It is plausible that the second-interview group would have a much higher percentage still in training as they had only been interviewed for the first time one year before.

A further constraint on interpretation of these results, as mentioned previously in this report, is that it is important to note that ‘training’ and ‘employment’ are not mutually exclusive categories. Participants may belong to either or both of these groups. It must also be noted that some-

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3 It is important to note that the overall 2007 sample includes participants from a 2006 new cohort, as well as participants from the original interviews in 2004/05.
times unpaid or paid employment reported by participants still in training referred to course-related work experience.

A final limitation of these reported results is the rate of attrition of interviewees over the three year interview period. In 2005 we began with 79 interviewees all taking part in an adult literacy training course. By 2006, 49 of those initial participants were able to be tracked in terms of employment and training outcomes, with 22 (28%) of the original participants available to be re-interviewed. By 2007, 14 (18%) of the original participants were able to be contacted for a final interview. Of the new cohort of 34 interviewees we talked to for the first time in 2006, 17 (50%) were available for a second interview in 2007. The employment and training outcome figures for each year are likely to be skewed as those people who were able to be contacted and re-interviewed were those who were likely to either still be on the course, or not in employment.
Part three: Turning points in participants’ stories 2005-2007

As the Literacy and Employment research project has progressed, terminology of concepts has progressed also. The research team have come to view ‘conduits to literacy’ as ‘turning points’ in participants’ lives. It is important to note that ‘conduits to literacy’ as mentioned in this report and in previous reports, are essentially ‘turning points’ under a different name. The analysis presented here summarises key ‘turning points’ or ‘conduits’ in participants’ lives over the three years of the project to date.

Analysis of transcripts of participants’ interviews revealed a range of events, opportunities, and actions by others or themselves that created ‘turning points’ in participants’ literacy learning paths. These turning points were moments when, for example, the participants might suddenly become aware of the possibilities open to them through increasing their literacy, when they realised that they were more able than they had been led to believe, or allowed themselves to believe.

Although just one trigger may have led to a turning point for some participants, for most, turning points occurred as a result of a conjunction of several interrelating triggers. However, for ease of discussion, turning points noted have been divided into three broad categories: those connected to the providers; those connected to the participants’ developing sense of self-esteem; and those connected to participants’ interpersonal relationships.

Literacy providers

One of the turning points most frequently mentioned by participants was encountering professionally competent, patient, and compassionate adult literacy providers. These were providers who listened, understood, resourced, and encouraged the participants to believe in themselves, their abilities, and their potential:

I didn’t really believe in myself, because no-one gave me that encouragement to believe in myself, and when I came to [the provider], and people gave me that extra help, I started believing in myself.

Personal support offered by providers was enabling for another participant:

They were there for me. And if my personal life was going through a lot of crap, I could sit down there and talk to them, and it was good. They’re more friends than teachers … and that’s what helped me get through it. They’re good people. Their approach is so different to what I remember at school.

A sense of security offered by providers helped a third participant:

It gives [students] a doorway to walk through and feel they’re okay … Rather than being out in the cold all the time and having all the sort of thoughts about, ‘I’m no good’
... you open up the door, you come in, and it’s a world where you’re allowed to explore things you had never thought before or wanted to or were scared of.

With the help of providers, some participants found that discovering a “second chance” to learn was a turning point. As one participant noted, “I never thought, after I left school, that I’d be able to get the sort of education that I’ve got here, but I did it”. Through this second chance participants learned work readiness, maths, English, and communication, while also learning about themselves, all of which proved to be turning points for some participants. For example, a participant who had previously been afraid of computers spoke with pride of having started a computer course:

And I am doing more [computer] courses next year to actually up skill myself so I can actually go out to the workforce and work in office administration and travel.

Being shown in their courses options that they had not known existed was a further pivotal moment. A typical statement was that, “the course … opened my eyes to another world I wouldn’t have even contemplated going down”.

### Self-esteem

Turning points for some participants came as they gained motivation, self-belief, self-appreciation, self-discipline and perseverance. Speaking of a newly found determination to complete a training course, one participant demonstrated this turning point:

I know what I want at the end of it and I’m not going to let anything stop me from getting there. I want that qualification. I want that bit of paper. I can see my name on it already.

Some participants spoke of turning points in terms of gaining confidence to speak up, take action, and make a commitment. For example: “My confidence wasn’t that high ... But it’s improving in my confidence in talking, speaking out. I used to just sit back, and do nothing. Now I’m speaking out”. For some, it was the realisation that they had the ability to take ownership of their ambitions and plan for their futures because they were now equipped to do something about it. In the words of one participant, “I didn’t realise that I was so capable”. An important turning point for other participants was finally having tutors, friends, or family confirm the ability they knew they had:

I can see by the expression on her face that she [the tutor] is just so proud of me because I’ve actually done something. I thought to myself, ‘I have done something right. I’ve done it the right way for a change’. It does make me feel so good.

### Personal relationships

Making friends and finding community and support networks with classmates and tutors were important turning points for participants. Through these personal relationships they gained
new messages to override any negative, demeaning messages received from family members and/or school, implicit in such comments as “I was donked at home and I’d go to school and get donked at school”, and “My father ... said, ‘No point you going to school because you’re thick and stupid’”. The emotional intensity of reaching such a turning point was expressed by another participant:

I just didn’t believe that I would ever be able to do something like that and yet I’ve done it, and I think, ‘Wow. It’s so cool ... I could prove to my mother that I can do this’. She’s told me that I am too stupid. I’ll never be able to learn anything.

Alternatively, for some participants, experiencing the positive influence and encouragement of family members, spouses, partners, and children as they engaged in literacy courses also proved to be a turning point:

Family has given me a lot of support, my brothers have given me encouragement, my Dad has given me encouragement. He thought it was brilliant when I passed the computer course ... It was the first time ... he said he was proud ... I’ll tell you what, that felt great. That felt so wonderful, just knowing that he was ... he saw the certificate and said, “I’m proud of you”, shouted me a frame and put it up on the wall. So it made me feel really good for the first time for a long time.

Some participants found a turning point came with the motivation to move away from group cultures that were negative. One participant, for example, was motivated to stay out of jail. He spoke of moving away from friends and actions that had led to prison sentences. After describing the laziness of his friends, he said that he had “snapped out of a few things”, deciding he wanted to spend time with his daughter as well as make something of his life.

Others found a turning point came with the realisation that literacy courses gave them something positive to do to avoid the negative feelings that led to sitting on the couch at home, a realisation summed up by one participant:

Well I had nineteen years on ACC ... so that’s half my life sitting around; moping around feeling sorry for myself, not doing anything. And then having the chance. By jeez, if it wasn’t for [the provider] I’d still be sitting around, doing nothing. ‘What can I do? I can’t do anything’. But I can do something now. They opened the door ... And with a passion for learning, and if anyone thinks you can’t learn, you can. It’s turned into a passion now. It really is. It’s a, I can do. No, I can’t do it. I can do it.
Conclusions

Objective three of the Wanganui Adult Literacy and Employment research programme aimed to answer the following research question: “How effectively do adult literacy programmes secure employment outcomes?”

At first glance this research question appears to involve two main factors or variables, as though adult literacy programmes can be understood as an independent variable possessing an impact on a dependent variable (employment). Yet such a reduction would obscure the complexities of the relationships between these and other factors in people’s lives. Most importantly, such a focus obscures what is perhaps the most critical element in this research objective, the question of “what kind of employment outcomes and for whom?” To begin to answer this question, at least four major elements must be considered: adult literacy programmes, employment outcomes, and, above all, the individual of low functional literacy for whom these programmes are designed, and the lifeworld within which they move.

The findings presented previously under ‘Reporting employment and training outcomes: Some limitations’ show that participants were achieving employment and further training outcomes. We have commented elsewhere that some of these employment outcomes are short term or even “blind alleys”. Moreover, these outcomes are not just attributable to an increase in literacy and vocational skills. Our research has shown that it is essential for adult literacy providers to address participants’ learning and life needs within a holistic perspective, in order for participants to achieve their learning goals. However, the ability of providers to meet their students’ needs in this way is currently limited and the sector requires further resources combined with recognition of the process of learning as multi-faceted and lifelong.

Only when both programmes and employment outcomes are addressed in the context of the whole person with low functional literacy will we obtain good insights into the needs and capabilities of such persons, and be able to understand ways in which training programmes may be combined with other systems or other kinds of change or support not just to the individual but also to their context, in order to actually result in quality employment outcomes. The initial research objective, in other words, was individualistically focussed, but from the data we have learned, resoundingly and repeatedly, that the issue is systemic and requires a systemic focus and systemic solutions.

Issues pertaining to training programmes. Historically, adult literacy training has been the preserve of small community adult education enterprises, supported by a combination of full-time and part-time employed and volunteer teaching labour. Many of these individuals have given wonderful and dedicated service. However, such training has been fragmented and of variable quality. It has lacked a guiding mission, operationally specified outcomes, sufficient financial and professional resources, and a sufficiently systematic approach. It has been tasked, resourced, and equipped only to tackle one variable among the hundreds that impact on the outcomes it is expected to produce. The scale and complexity of New Zealand’s adult literacy problem is simply beyond the existing adult literacy training infrastructure. Much remains to be done in professionalising adult literacy training programmes, though progress has recently been made such as with the development of adult literacy educational qualifications. Much more needs to be done to create collaborative approaches between literacy providers and pro-
providers of other social and community services, and to recognise and encompass the multidirectional links between literacy and issues not only of employment, but also of crime, family violence, mental and physical health, parenting, poverty, inter-generational self-esteem, and the welfare of communities more broadly. Literacy levels are not an “educational issue” in isolation but both a symptom and a trigger of all the other social issues facing our society today.

Despite progress at the margins, the intractable systemic problem with the adult literacy industry is that, given the enormity and complexity of the challenge, it is too small, fragile, and lacking in capacity and resources to be able to respond to this country’s national aspirations to have a citizenry with good quality literacy. Nor is the nature of this industry’s mission yet clear. An increasing amount of policy rhetoric talks about “life-long learning”, but it is far from clear as to how this concept should be defined or operationalised in any meaningful way.

Adult literacy enterprises are generally micro businesses with little capability to provide resources or ongoing development for their own personnel. At present, while adult literacy training courses are available (mostly through integration with vocational courses), the competitive model of funding within which they manage their businesses hampers collaboration, stair-casing, and pooling of resources. The “survival mode” that many adult literacy providers operate within means the ability to plan strategically with a long-term focus to meet the holistic literacy needs of the local population is virtually non-existent.

The ability to bring literacy training to the local population who have literacy needs, and for those in the population to access literacy providers, is also an area of concern. Possibly only 2% of New Zealanders at work can presently access literacy training (The key steps forward, 2007, p.9). Nor does there appear to be much prospect for substantial improvement in the short to medium term: for Wanganui employers we spoke with tended to possess little understanding of the impact of low literacy on workplace productivity. Hence, the majority of employers we interviewed placed little priority on taking steps to upgrade their workers’ capabilities in literacy.

**Issues pertaining to the individual.** People in need of literacy training in a vast majority of cases have had negative experiences at school and often at home that have combined in ways to undermine their ability to build functional literacy. Those who have brought themselves to the point of undertaking literacy studies have had to come to terms with their unhappy history of schooling and/ or home life that have given them little training in an ability to learn. That they attend literacy training as an adult at all is a tribute to their persistence and openness to change. Such attendance normally suggests very positive motivational attributes, but skills as well as motivation are needed, for participants still typically have to learn how to learn. This is not necessarily straightforward. The conditions of poverty and social exclusion are debilitating and punishing. Interwoven social and economic factors are often implied in a person’s inability to perform well in functional literacy and low literacy interconnects closely with many other indicators of deprivation. These often include poverty, poor health, low earning capability, transient status as a child or adult, or social exclusion in various manifestations. The current research programme has revealed the ways in which every person has somewhat different needs. Often learning needs cannot be met until problems of health or poverty are also addressed. If such persons are to be drawn into literacy learning, strong interpersonal supports and mentoring are needed.
The “Matthew effect” applies here as elsewhere: to those that hath, it is given. As a generalisation, people in adult literacy training, while certainly in need of support and development, are the minority who have been able to overcome barriers and find their way into training. They represent only a small percentage of people in the community with low literacy. Many others much in need of literacy development never make it into training and so are unlikely to upgrade their literacy learning. No systematic means to identify and approach people in need of literacy services exists, and there is a large subculture of people who have little understanding of their own low literacy, or of the occupational and economic benefits that could accrue if their literacy was higher.

We found that very frequently people found their way into literacy learning not from any formal published or printed source, or by advertising, but via recommendations from trusted friends within their closest social circles. Often these friends were themselves persons of low functional literacy who had been delighted and relieved to discover that bad former experiences of learning at school were no longer repeated in their adult literacy classes.

Attempts to increase the uptake of literacy classes should not focus on the individual alone. People in need of literacy training and development must be understood within their context or web of family and community relationships. The literacy training on offer must make sense within that web of connections, and have a self-evident purpose which will assist the person, within their community, to achieve aspirations not currently being met.

**Issues pertaining to employment.** Within living memory there was a time when extensive low literacy was a relatively insignificant problem for New Zealand or other developed nations. A person who left school early, or who had a learning disability, could be given a job such as a cleaner at the railways where literacy and numeracy were not a priority. There was no shortage of low-level jobs demanding relatively little facility with the written language or numbers into which persons of low literacy could be inserted.

Until the mid-1990s a general, but unexamined, assumption, even in educational circles, was that the country possessed “full literacy”. On closer scrutiny, this probably never meant that anyone assumed the entire population was highly literate. Instead, the assumption was probably that people were “as literate as they needed to be”. The release of IALS results in 1996 revealed of course that we did not possess a working-age population that was literate to a high level. Nearly 50% of people of working age were considered to lack the skills to operate adequately in the emerging, sophisticated, knowledge society.

Yet old traditions and taken-for-granted notions still prevail. New Zealand has even now failed to free itself from the narrow, functionalist mindset that had served it up to a point since the first days of European settlement. This was that a proportion of people could get by with low functional literacy for perhaps their entire working lifetime, and, therefore, working people’s inability with the written word or with numbers could safely be ignored.

Since the shock of the IALS results in 1996, the country has floundered with various approaches to redress the problem that a large proportion of the workforce is ill-equipped to cope with a modern knowledge economy. Our national literacy statistics are probably little better in 2007 than ten years ago.
In future, computers may become sufficiently sophisticated that visual literacy and a facility with spoken English in instructing computer functions will be more important than an ability to use the keyboard and keypad. Yet, at least in the short to medium term, New Zealand, along with every other country that wishes to compete in a globalising economic system, must find ways to ensure that as many as possible of its citizens become highly literate in traditional written forms.

More fundamentally, many educationalists are inclined to believe that if you can’t express it linguistically - write it or speak it - you can’t think it (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis). That is, there is a synergy between the act of formulating then verbalising an idea in a systematic way such as on paper or on screen. Precision in articulating the right words, then shaping nuanced sentences, serve to sharpen and better manifest a person’s thinking. Literacy, from this perspective, is only a means to an end. The desired outcome is a smarter, more flexible workforce, comprising people who are better able to assess evidence, who have the confidence to advance a point of view in the workplace, who are not limited by a lack of skills or available professional development opportunities to progress in their career and life, and who enjoy the better communication and interactional capabilities associated with literacy improvements.

The case for much-improved literacy can readily be made in workplace terms, of course. Equally fundamental is the social justice argument that all citizens deserve access to literacy learning as a basic human right. Disparities in educational attainment associated with social structural factors cause dangerous divisions and inequities in the social fabric, themselves destructive of national aspirations for security and progress.

As a community-university research team, we were privileged to be invited inside the lives of so many adult literacy participants. These participants have given us not only their time but also a better understanding of their learning and literacy needs, the barriers they face in their development, and their life situations. Their stories have frequently revealed courage and persistence, along with the life-changing influence of their training and a continuing tribute to the hard work and understanding of their tutors. Our interviewees have also offered ideas for improving provision to ensure quality employment and lifelong learning outcomes for those that wish to take up the opportunity. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those adult literacy participants who have shared their experiences with us and to wish you all the best for the future.
References


This report explores the perceptions of participants in Wanganui and District adult literacy training programmes. In-depth interview findings from learners new to the research project in 2006 are outlined, alongside follow-up interviews with those who were first interviewed in 2004/5. Similar issues are discussed with both groups and a comparison is offered of their perspectives on several key issues including adult literacy learning needs, and barriers to literacy and employment. The report ends with a discussion of the employment and further training outcomes of the adult literacy training participants.

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