
FEEDBACK on the TEC Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2012

Paper 056/12

Prepared on behalf of COMET Auckland, 6 July 2012

Whakatauki

E kore e taea e te whenu kotahi
ki te raranga i te whāriki
kia mōhio tātou ki ā tātou.
Mā te mahi tahi o ngā whenu,
mā te mahi tahi o ngā kairaranga,
ka oti tēnei whāriki.
I te otinga
me titiro tātou ki ngā mea pai ka puta mai.
Ā tana wā,
me titiro hoki
ki ngā raranga i makere
nā te mea, he kōrero ano kei reira.

The tapestry of understanding
cannot be woven by one strand alone.
Only by the working together of strands
and the working together of weavers
will such a tapestry be completed.
With its completion
let us look at the good that comes from it
and, in time
we should also look
at those stitches which have been dropped,
because they also have a message.

- Kūkupa Tirikatene

About COMET Auckland

COMET Auckland, Te Hononga Akoranga is a charitable trust and CCO (Council Controlled Organisation) of Auckland Council. The Trust has an agreement with the Council to deliver analysis and advocacy for education; and the co-ordination and facilitation of projects that make a difference to education and skills outcomes in the city. COMET Auckland was formed on July 1st 2012 from the former City of Manukau Education Trust, in order to enable the organisation to work across Auckland.

Over-arching comments

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2012.

COMET Auckland has an interest in TEC's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy as part of our role as an education trust linked to Auckland Council. Under our former trust, we published *Unlocking Auckland's potential: adult literacy and numeracy skills in the new Auckland* (Sutton, A. and Vester, B., 2010) to inform Auckland decision makers about this key issue. Improved adult literacy is now identified as a target in the Auckland Plan. COMET Auckland is one of the organisations in the city focused on achieving improvement in literacy across our city.

Our responses to the strategy include:

New workstreams

We support the two new work streams, Addressing Maori and Pasifika needs and Cross-Government collaboration. Both of them are issues at the core of COMET Auckland's work. Both will require TEC to fund different work and to work differently with others to achieve it. The opportunities presented by these work streams are discussed in more detail later.

Infrastructure

We applaud the education infrastructure that has developed around literacy: the Progressions, Starting Points and their related resources; the Assessment Tool; Pathways Awarua. The infrastructure has provided important underpinnings for professional development and the learning resources have been much needed.

There is great potential in independent learning through Pathways Awarua and we look forward to future developments of it.

The Assessment Tool

We have grave concerns about the notion of the Assessment Tool being sold in any form. This will be highly likely to lead to it being used to screen potential employees and to become a high-stakes instrument for learners and potential learners. It does seem appropriate for industry or other bodies to pay for the development of specific items to improve the applicability of the tool for use in specific contexts.

We also have concerns about the degree to which the Assessment Tool is being used in contexts for which it was not designed, including ESOL literacy, low ESOL learners, very low level literacy learners and within very short courses. We do not believe the Tool is appropriate in all situations. Its use with ESOL literacy learners does not fit with high quality assessment practice. We suggest that TEC consult with the Ministry of Education's ESOL specialists, English Language Partners and other stakeholders with a deep understanding of pedagogy and assessment for low literacy ESOL adults to develop more appropriate alternatives.

The extent to which the Assessment Tool is able to identify learner gains in very short courses remains a concern, if funding decisions are to be made primarily on those results.

Given the scale of investment in the infrastructure, we would expect evaluation to be a major part of work in the next couple of years, to understand the impact and consequence (planned and unforeseen) that may arise from the use of the Tool in specific contexts and situations.

New Zealand is developing a unique approach to embedding. As data becomes available from the Assessment Tool, a major evaluation of the extent to which embedded literacy programmes are able to achieve learner gain needs to be undertaken, particularly for learners with very low skills.

The National Centre

The Strategy refers to the Centre as a focal point of the sector. This statement is aspirational rather than a reality. The Centre will only become a major focal point if it is resourced and enabled to move beyond its role as a source of professional development and is allowed to become a centre of research excellence and specialist literacy, numeracy and language policy advice.

Addressing Maori and Pasifika needs and cross-agency collaboration

We agree that different thinking, new approaches and targeted funding is required if Maori and Pasifika achievement is to be raised and this requires agencies to collaborate in different ways. The current system focuses on learners as individuals. If we are to make real achievement with Maori and Pasifika, whanau/fanau focused approaches are necessary.

“Thinking Family” is more than just looking for young Maori and Pasifika who are the first to go to university. It means looking for opportunities for intergenerational literacy learning – and supporting the cross-agency collaboration required to make this possible. Thinking family in any intervention can help bring more sustained change because adult and family learning empowers families to work more effectively with their community, and builds their skills and capacity to look beyond the immediate and to become more self-sufficient as a family in the longer term.¹ Parents are motivated to make changes that improve the lives of their children, and children benefit from both short-term changes in the family’s situation and from longer-term role modelling from their parents and extended family.

The adult literacy strategy could link with the Pasifika Education Plan and Ka Hikitia, enabling the funding of adult learning that supports parents to build the literacy learning of themselves and their children.

We strongly advocate for collaboration between government departments to create opportunities for family literacy that stops the intergenerational cycle of low literacy. For eight years, COMET has been coordinating a family learning and literacy programme that delivers a foundation level qualification to Maori and Pasifika parents in a primary school. The programme achieves social wellbeing outcomes. Collaboration between the TEC, Family and Community Services (MSD) and the whanau engagement section of the Ministry of Education would reduce the policy and funding silos that have made it so difficult to achieve sustainability for the programme.

Thinking family would also enable foundation learning programmes to be more flexible and have more creative mixed mode delivery, recognising that more than a quarter of young Maori and Pasifika who are studying are also parents.

The Strategy needs to place more emphasis on language acquisition because English language and literacy skills are a major issue for the workforce in Auckland and for the future workforce. In many situations, specialist ESOL classes would enable ESOL learners to make faster progress and prepare them better for the workforce than the current system where many providers recruit ESOL learners because they are easier to reach. Ongoing professional development is needed to ensure literacy providers are appropriately skilled to work with ESOL learners.

¹ Lochrie, M. (2004). *Family learning: building all our futures*. Leicester: NIACE.
Thomas, M. (2009). *Think Community. An exploration of the links between intergenerational practice and informal adult learning*. Leicester: NIACE.

Greater collaboration between literacy providers, community agencies and Work and Income to develop literacy-related innovations at local levels is important. The Strategy gives very little recognition of the importance of community development initiatives for connecting with very low level literacy learners. They often need a number of ACE learning opportunities before they are work ready.

This submission has been assembled by COMET based on our own knowledge and experience, and on extensive discussions with education stakeholders.

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