



# BREAKING SECRET CODES: Multi-literacies: literacy and community learning

A RESOURCE FOR COMMUNITY LEARNING PROVIDERS



The purpose of this booklet is to provide information about incorporating multi-literacies skills development into community learning courses and projects.

It is a resource created within the framework of the South Australian Adult Literacy Action Plan, “Secret Codes: making literacy everybody’s business”, and is designed primarily as a starting point for project coordinators who wish to help adults build literacy skills within their community learning activities.

This publication also serves to highlight the point that engaging adults in activities that they enjoy does not mean that their literacy skills development is ignored. In fact, learning the literacy and numeracy skills relevant to an activity which gives them other skills and knowledge can prove to be the most successful approach for many learners.

Making sure that learning activities are tailored to the knowledge, skills and goals of each learner, is the most effective way to address learning needs and confidence adults need to be able to pursue pathways to further education training and employment. This resource provides some hints for planning and implementing community learning multi-literacy activities in communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

In September 2008, the Adult Literacy Action Plan, 'Secret Codes: Making literacy everybody's business' was launched by the South Australian Training and Skills Commission. Its purpose was to make an impact on the literacy skills of South Australians through outlining ways to re-connect adults to learning and increase opportunities for them to develop their multi-literacy skills.

Adult Community Education through the *South Australia Works: ACE Program* has a focus on adult literacy for skills development required by adults in their families, communities and workplaces. Looking at this activity through a "multi-literacies" lens, the literacy focus in the ACE Program becomes clearer.

Specific language, literacy and numeracy learning programs provide a key element of the overall provision of adult literacy skills development, however we know that not everyone who needs to improve their skills wishes to attend these programs.

Other activities which attract and engage adults in learning can also be designed to help address their functional as well as other literacy skills development needs. This brochure has been created to provide ideas for community-based organisations wishing to incorporate multi-literacies approaches into other community learning activities they offer.

## WHAT ARE MULTI-LITERACIES

Multi-literacy skills can also be referred to as "basic", "core", "essential" or generic skills. They can include the following:

**Functional literacy** – including reading, writing, spelling, grammar and basic mathematics operations that underpin other learning

**Cultural literacy** – understanding how language and texts are used in different cultural contexts: what to say, how to say it, when to say it.

**Critical literacy** – understanding how words have the power to influence actions.

**Computer literacy** – knowing how to use computers, automatic teller machines and other modern technologies in our everyday lives.

**Financial literacy** – knowing how money works, including banking and finance, superannuation and other financial information that we need throughout life.

**Health literacy** – understanding information about how to live healthy lives, how to communicate with medical professionals, and understand their written and verbal instructions.

**Environmental literacy** – knowledge of how everyday decisions we make can make a difference to the health of the world around us.

**Community literacy** – local literacy practices, including local words, expressions and terminology that may be different to 'official' literacy.

**Media literacy** – understanding how television, radio, newspapers and advertising influences the way we live and how we make decisions.

**Employment literacy** – understanding the world of work, and how to find, keep and make the most of employment opportunities.

This list is not exhaustive. Other literacies can be identified and no doubt further literacies will be added to our language over time.

## INCORPORATING MULTI-LITERACIES INTO COMMUNITY LEARNING

Multi-literacy learning experiences for adults take place in many settings, and incorporate a range of approaches to accommodate a range of skills.

The following descriptions provide ideas and starting points for thinking about multi-literacy activities as a part of other adult community education activity.

### A Cooking class

A cooking class is not just about cooking. It involves speaking and listening, understanding and giving directions, using texts and creating new ones. It also involves mathematical concepts through measurement, fractions, adding, subtracting and multiplication:

Kitchen vocabulary	<p>What vocabulary is used in kitchens?</p> <p>How might it be different in different cultures?</p> <p>Look at examples of cooking vocabulary from different languages and discuss how some of this language has become part of English language.</p> <p>The group creates a vocabulary list for the kitchen using images and text to help those who are learning English as a Second Language.</p>
Recipes	<p>What does a recipe look like eg. A list of ingredients and step by step instructions.</p> <p>Examine and compare different cookbooks and how they are put together? What works best for you?</p> <p>How were recipes in different families passed on?</p> <p>Participants write down favourite or family recipes, with support or with the help of a scribe. Editing can take place to put them into the format that the group decided worked best.</p> <p>A new cookbook is made up of favourite recipes, and copies provided to all group members, or perhaps published by the group.</p>
Visual texts	<p>Photographs are visual texts which tell a story or are used to support written text. Group members look at photographs that support recipes to discuss how well they help create meaning.</p>

	Group members create photographs to demonstrate the steps of recipes, and/or to show the finished product. These can be incorporated into a cookbook, or to create recipe sheets.
Cultural knowledge	Do kitchens look the same? Does a commercial kitchen look the same as a home kitchen? What is different? What are the essential items in a kitchen, and how might they be different in different cultures? Create a list of essential kitchen items.
Health and Safety in the kitchen	What rules apply to health and safety in kitchens? How do you safely use appliances and tools in the kitchen? What should you do if something goes wrong? Create a safety procedure chart for the kitchen.

### A Life skills class

Lifeskills classes help participants to make meaning of the world around them, and it may involve interaction with a range of texts, or involve explaining and demonstrating to help build skills and knowledge.

Health literacy	Discuss the elements of a healthy diet, its short- and long-term benefits. Compare good and poor diets. Benefits of exercise – personal, social, community health. Try out appropriate exercise strategies to maintain health. Create personal exercise plan.
Reading and understanding health and safety	Health and hygiene rules Treating scratches, scrapes and minor burns. Important contact details Reading and understanding medicine labels and instructions. Body vocabulary
Local knowledge and literacy tools	Local transport options and how they work. Reading and understanding signs and directions Ticketing, timetables and routes. Using directories and the internet to find your way around. Understanding the services and activities available in local areas, and how they are accessed.
Managing personal finance	Understanding money and what it is for Giving and receiving change,

	Planning a personal budget, Thrifty shopping.
Using technology	basic computing basic word processing using email and the internet

### **Sewing and craft classes**

Sewing and craft involve many mathematical skills as well as the ability to read diagrams, instructions and understanding the vocabulary that relates to the topic. Many of the examples of literacy activities provided for cooking classes in the example above will also apply to sewing and craft.

The key to success is understanding that the skill levels of participants will not be the same, and you need to plan your activities to accommodate those who need to also learn the language, literacy and numeracy involved.

### **Computing classes**

Computing involves functional skills such as reading, and writing, however it is also considered a literacy in its own right. In today's society the ability to use technological tools such as computers to obtain information and communicate with others has become a new 'core skill'.

In delivering your computing classes, you need to be able to accommodate a diverse range of literacy skills and plan timing and support for those who will need assistance with some activities.

### **Employment skills course**

Employment skills training will involve a range of literacy skills which may include resumes and job application writing, understanding workplace cultures, working in teams, time management, communication in the workplace, using log books, written instructions, and technology.

Understanding the words that relate to employment and workplace settings, such as "time sheet", "annual leave", "TOIL" – to name a few – will form part of the cultural knowledge that adults who have been out of the workplace for some time will need to learn or re-learn.

### **Construction and woodwork**

Construction and woodwork involve many of the same mathematical and reading skills as those required in sewing and craft classes (see above), and will also include important health and safety knowledge when using tools and machinery. It will also include vocabulary, as it is important to identify tools by the right name.

**Community gardening**

A community gardening project may involve similar skills and knowledge as those of a cooking class. This will include vocabulary, visual texts, instructions and measurement. As with cooking, there may be differences in cultural approaches, as well as health and safety issues that must be considered.

**Your notes**

Use this space to help you identify opportunities in other community learning activities to incorporate multi-literacies.

What are you doing now?	What is the connection with multi-literacies?

For further advice about identifying and planning for multi-literacies skills development, contact the ACE & Community Partnerships Unit, DFEEST by telephone 8226 1158.