Distance Learning Service

Web based literacy and numeracy learning

EBSN General Assembly and Conference, 2013 24/05/13

Tom O' Mara
NALA

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Overview

- Tom O' Mara, Distance Learning Co-ordinator, NALA

  – Why we use Distance Learning in Ireland

  – Web-based learning – how this fits within Distance Learning

  – Blended Learning – the best of both worlds

Why we use Distance Learning in Ireland...

What does 'literacy' mean to NALA?

- Literacy involves:
- listening,
- speaking,
- reading,
- writing,
- numeracy, and
- **using everyday technology to communicate and handle information.**

- But it includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change.

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Gap

- IALS, 1997 – **25%** of Irish adults have problems at L1.

- **18.5%** (383,800 people) of labour force has less than a level 4 qualification

- **1 in 10** leaving primary school system with a literacy difficulty. This rises to 3 in 10 in disadvantaged areas.

- School completion rate for 20-24 year olds **85.4% in** 2006

- **0.3%** of the total education budget is allocated to discrete adult literacy development

- '**Spiky profiles**' rather than 'illiteracy' the main issue

- Since 1997, provision of adult literacy learning opportunities has grown from **5,000** places to **56,797** in 2011.

- Annual funding increased from approximately **€1m** in 1997 to over **€30m** in 2011.

- In spite of these successes, support is still only being provided to approximately **11.35%** of those adults identified by IALS.

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What do we want to achieve?

- Increase Participation
  - Numbers
  - Locations
  - Learner profiles

Distance Learning – One Possible Solution

- Addresses many of the barrier issues:
  - **Stigma** reduced as service is private and confidential
  - **Not like traditional schools** – no building, no desks, tutor rather than teacher, curriculum personalised
  - Lack of **childcare not an issue** – study at own time, most tuition happens in evenings after children are in bed
  - **No transport** required
  - Study at **own time** and **at own pace**
  - **Free**
  - **Expands capacity** for those in existing services

Distance Learning – How?

13 Prime Time TV Series

Viewership (numbers)

250 000	
200 000	
150 000	
100 000	
50 000	
0	

RWN1 (2001), RWN2 (2002), RWN3 (2003), RWN4 (2004), RWN5 (2005), RUG1&2 (2007), Written Off? 1 (2008), Written Off? 2 (2009), Stuck for Words (2010), A Story With Me In It..., A Story With Me In It 2...
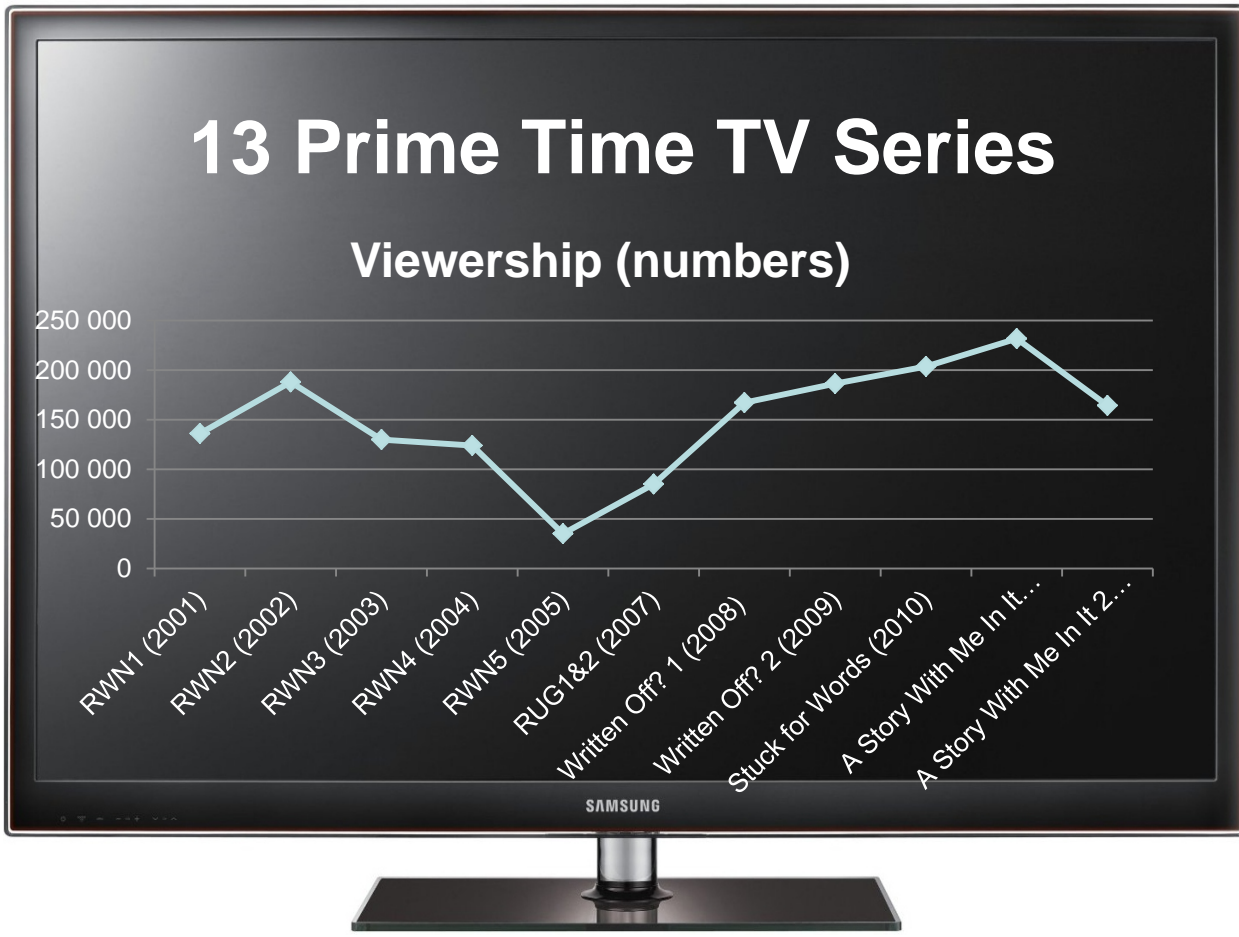
Get People's Attention!

Distance Learning – How?

Get them to call NALA or go directly to local service.
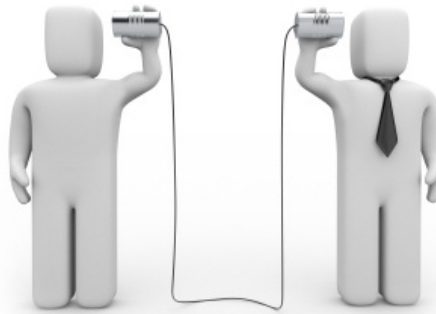
Freephone 1800 20 20 65

Freetext 'learn' to 50050

Distance Learning – How?

Deliver individualised learning.
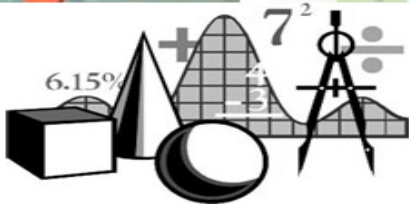
Web-based learning – a natural fit....

4 Things We Learned in the DLS

- Learners wanted more support, outside of the one-to-one weekly phonecall/email.

- There was a demand for accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

- Many learners had skills but no qualifications. So we needed an Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) system.

- Administration of accreditation for large numbers of learners was burdensome.

- We wanted to better integrate various literacies.

NALA and the Web

Learning on the Web

- www.literacytools.ie developed in 2004

- www.rug.ie developed in 2007

- www.writeon.ie went live in September 2008

- Designed to provide Level 2 learning content, to integrate technology with other literacy learning and to simplify accreditation

- Used initially with second Written Off? TV series and independent learners

- Then taken up by one VEC to accredit learners – Round 3 and 4

- Formal Blended Learning Project with 12 centres in 2010

- Currently tutors in 180 different centres have used the

site for accreditation, including 31 VECs

12 Level 2 Minor Awards

Award Code	Award Title	Value
M2C01	Reading	5
M2C02	Writing	5
M2C03	Listening and Speaking	5
M2L12	Personal Decision Making	5
M2L13	Setting Learning Goals	5
M2N05	Quantity and Number	10
M2N06	Pattern and Relationship	5
M2N07	Shape and Space	5
M2N08	Data Handling	5
M2N09	Quantitative Problem Solving	5
M2T10	Using Technology	5
M2T11	Computer Skills	5

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14 Level 3 Minor Awards

Award Code	Award Title	Value
3N0880	Communications	10
3N0929	Mathematics	10
3N0928	Application of Number	5
3N0930	Functional Mathematics	5
3N0881	Computer Literacy	10
3N0931	Internet Skills	10
3N0552	Digital Media	10
3N0896	Career Preparation	10
3N0532	Health and Safety Awareness	10
3N0565	Personal Effectiveness	10
3N0564	Personal and Interpersonal Skills	10
3N0921	Managing Personal Finances	10
3N0553	Self Advocacy	10
3N0585	Event Participation	5

3 Level 4 Minor Awards
NON-ACCREDITED

Award Code	Award Title	Value
4N0689	Communications	15
4N1987	Mathematics	10
4N1858	Digital Media Technology	10

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Success to Date

Since September 2008,

30,447 learning accounts set up

1,000+ learners have received.....
   9,800 + Level 2 minor awards, and
   500 + Level 2 Certificates in General Learning

300+ learners have received.....
      ... 1,700 + Level 3 minor awards,
         ... 90 + Level 3 Major Awards

Independently and in 180 different learning centres from across Ireland

Monthly Usage

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2012
Writeon.ie													
Visits	5,088	6,663	6,715	4,898	6,831	3,335	2,164	1,741	3,465	6,237	5,558	3,509	**56,204**
Unique Visitors	1,942	2,408	2,356	1,810	2,247	1,306	837	676	1,334	2,183	1,950	1,145	**14,229**
Avg Time on Site	23:39	23:56	22:58	23:25	23:09	20:58	18:39	19:36	19:31	22:05	21:49	23:38	**22:26**
Bounce Rate	10.08%	10.57%	9.96%	9.80%	9.65%	10.94%	15.30%	16.31%	13.02%	12.71%	11.51%	10.52%	**11.13%**
% New Visits	27.20%	24.96%	22.56%	22.74%	21.37%	23.48%	25.32%	25.04%	24.96%	24.16%	22.71%	16.61%	**23.34%**
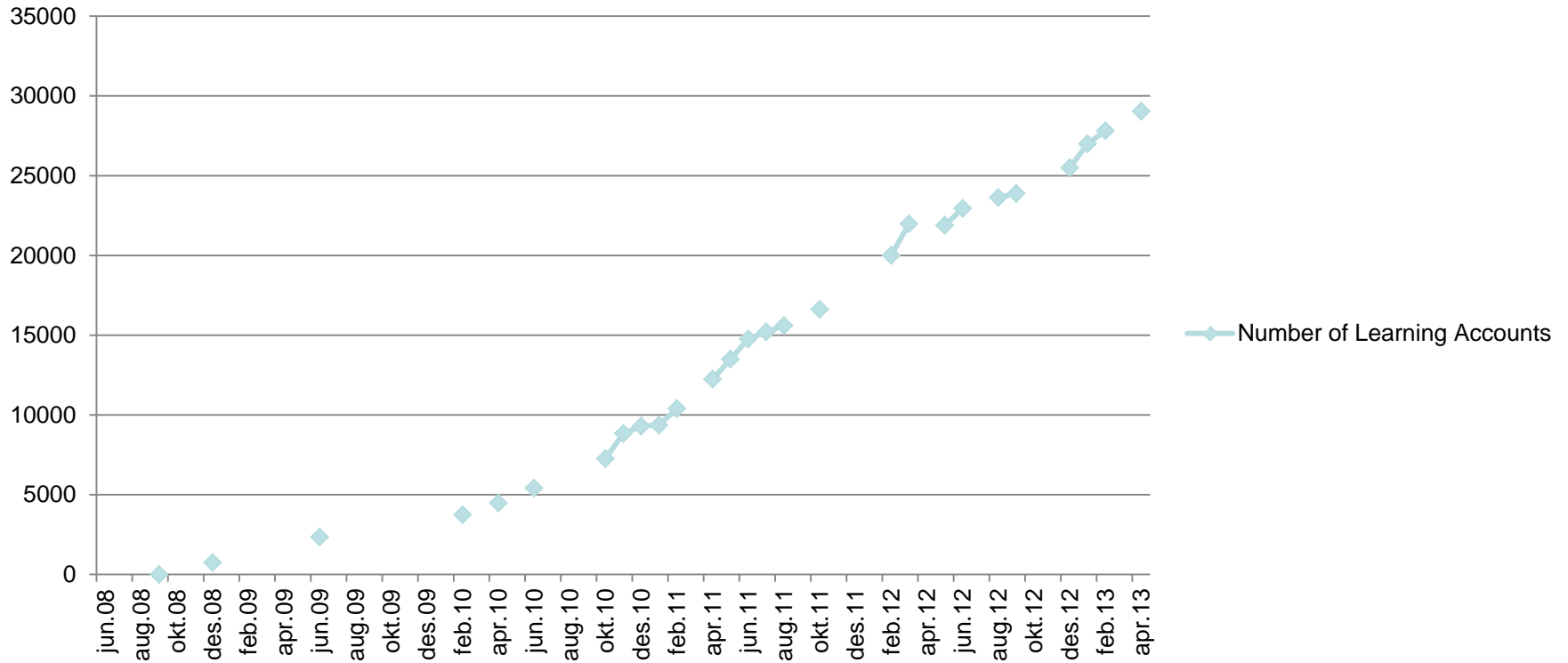
Awards Given Out by Round

Round	FETAC Submission Date	Learners	L 2 Minor Awards	L2 Major Awards	L3 Minor Awards	L3 Major Awards
1	2008	11	11	75	0	0
2	2009	33	98	10	0	0
3	Feb-10	138	614	57	0	0
4	May-10	45	188	17	0	0
5	Jul-10	132	594	63	0	0
6	Jan-11	94	442	47	18	2
7	May-11	368	1,376	107	192	14
8	Jul-11	211	391	36	196	4
9	Sep-11	100	415	34	71	11
10	Dec-11	113	456	29	64	11
11	April– 12	243	686	53	194	8
12	June– 12	234	685	53	197	8
13	Oct-12	601	2,027		571	
14	Apr-13	628	2,312		234	
Totals			9,839		1,737	

Award Popularity

Award	User count
Reading	8370
Writing	6569
Listening and Speaking	5827
Quantity and Number	4638
Using Technology	4559
Computer Skills	3751
Quantitive Problem Solving	3279
Pattern and Relationship	2721
Personal Decision Making	2639
Shape and Space	2435
Setting Learning Goals	2340
Computer Literacy	2330
Communications	2207
Mathematics	2122
Personal and Interpersonal Skills	1697
Internet Skills	1583
Personal Effectiveness	1540
Career Preparation	1274
Digital Media	1233
Health and Safety Awareness	1124
Application of Number	1005
Functional Mathematics	625
Managing Personal Finances	354
Self Advocacy	197
Event Participation	176

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Resources

- http://resources.writeon.ie/

- 16 workbooks

- 10 TV series

- Organised and searchable by award, level, SLOs and keywords

- Will be updated as new resources are developed

Ted.com Inspiration

School is obsolete for today's learners!

- Sugata Mitra: Build a School in the Cloud
- http://www.ted.com/talks/sugata_mitra_build_a_school_in_the_cloud.html

Free teachers up to teach people individually!

- Salman Khan: Using video to reinvent education
- http://www.ted.com/talks/salman_khan_let_s_use_video_to_reinvent_education.html

Current education doesn't feed people's spirits!

- Ken Robinson: Bring on the learning revolution!
- http://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_bring_on_the_revolution.html

- Adult Education is uniquely poised to take advantage of these ideas because we're unencumbered by unwieldy school and curricula!

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Progression to more and more blended learning...

Blended Learning – what is it?

...blended learning aims to join the best of classroom teaching and learning with the best of online teaching and learning...

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Blended Learning – to NALA

- Blended learning is about **facilitating learning** using a variety of approaches, best determined by the needs of the learner and the capability of the provider. It may or may not involve computers. It is simply a way of creatively matching using different approaches to learners, content and contexts.

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Blended Learning – how?
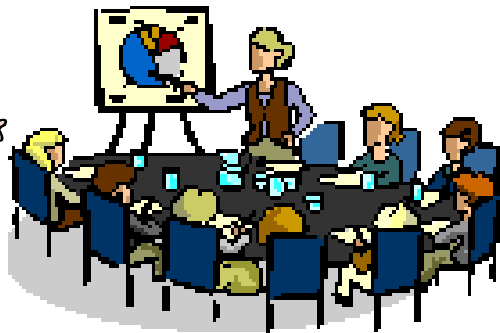
Blended Learning – Why?

- For learners:
  - People learn in different ways so it makes sense to facilitate learning in different ways.
  - Learners may require more support than you can traditionally provide.
  - You can integrate literacy into other learning needs rather then deal with it separately.

- For providers:
  - Get more out of existing tutoring resources.
  - May not have all the resources required for the needs of a particular learner.
  - Makes sense to share content rather than reinvent the wheel every time.
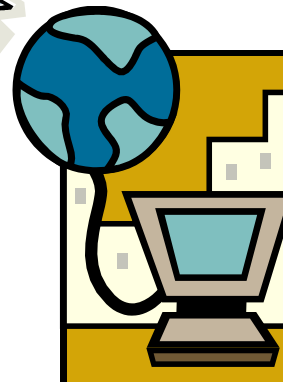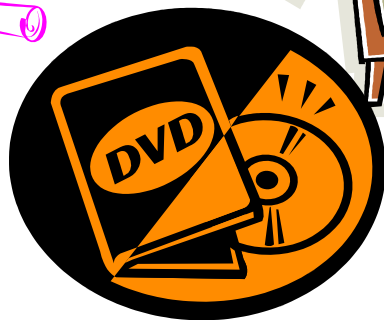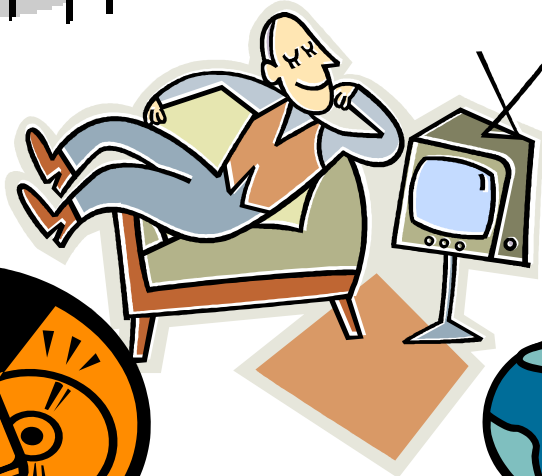 - May not have an appropriate validated programme if accreditation is requested.

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NALA's Blended Learning Project 2010

- 12 centres

- Using 'traditional' approach
  - One-to-one, Group
  - Books, DVDs, CD-Roms, TV, tasks, etc

- Combining it with www.writeon.ie
  - To expand capacity – one tutor, many one-to-ones for example
  - To offer independent study options
  - To introduce computers
  - To offer accreditation at level 2

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Evaluations

- NALA DLS 2010 Evaluation - Connected - Improving Literacy and Computer Skills Through Online Learning – available from www.nala.ie/publications

- Blended Learning Report published in April 2011

- 2 Key findings:
  - Providers can support more learners.
  - You can provide more targeted and individualized learning by adopting blended learning approaches.
  - In a group, you can begin to effectively eliminate 'spiky profiles'.

Learners want to learn about technology.

- It is a new literacy, a new chance. **I'm not getting left behind** like the last time. *Blended learner*

- **The things we read, the things we do involve technology**. So surely we should be improving people's reading and writing skills in the context of ICT. The website was the perfect vehicle for that. You are not overtly teaching people how to click on something or use a browser in order to complete a reading exercise. *DLS co-ordinator*

- I have only been here a few weeks now. The shame was dreadful for me. I felt about six and was afraid of looking stupid. **I was hesitant at first but after only four weeks I can use the computer.** *Blended learner*

Writeon.ie is used for different reasons

- It's like a fresh start. A new beginning. **I want to learn more and computers hold a lot of knowledge**. *Blended learner*

- I could do it myself and get a **qualification**. *Independent learner* If you want to get a job now you have to know how to use a computer. *Blended learner*

- I went back for my **job** and for my **kids**. They are in primary school and they use them [computers] and I want to be able to give them a hand. *Blended learner*

- I got all the **certs** I needed on my own. All I'm doing is refreshing. I never got any qualifications from school. *Independent learner*

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It can expand capacity.

- It seemed to present an opportunity to **expand the learning opportunities of students**. It was also an innovative project. Exciting and interesting with lots of possibilities. *Blended learning centre co-ordinator*

- From my experience, students at Level 2 gain a lot from www.writeon.ie as **a reinforcement of skills they will have been tutored on**. In other words, I think the basics of spelling and writing etc. need to be taught or refreshed with people at this level and then they can use or refine them on the website. *Distance learning tutor*

- I had three learners and **I would just let them work away on it**. If they had a question I would tell them to get back to me. They would just do it at home. I would contact them once a week and the website would be part of the discussion. I'd ask them how they were getting on with it. Alongside that I'd do the other distance learning work. *Distance learning tutor*

It can expand capacity.

- It has been wonderful for learners. It has given them **personal ownership** of their own learning. They are working on their own individual thing but still they are working as a part of a group too. That has been very nice to see and it has really driven the idea of independent learning which is what it is all about. *Blended learning centre co-ordinator*

- The big thing is that **it gives the learner something they can go on and work on between sessions**. They have a tutor in the background that they can have access to when they need to. They can work whenever they want at their own pace. It gives them great freedom. *DL tutor co-ordinator*

- **They are not relying on you in class**. You are going around keeping an eye and helping them when they need it. But it is not all centred on you. Your role has changed. It is a helping role. It is more of a facilitative role really. It's not like here is the class today and I am giving you all the stuff. *Blended learning tutor*

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It's a new effective approach.

- I could see that it would be useful to my learners. It allows them to work on a range of skills, at their own pace and gain accreditation. **A new methodology is always welcome**. *Blended learning centre questionnaire*

- For some reason **it gives more control to the learner**. They are making choices with the mouse. *Blended learning tutor*

- I am a **visual and auditory learner** so the fact that www.writeon.ie has speech really suits me. *Blended learner*

- I think **you learn quicker and it sinks in better than paper**. *Blended learner*

- My reading and writing has come on in leaps and bounds **in a very short space of time**. *Blended learner*

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It's a new effective approach.

- Using the keys and that – **the spellings seem to sink in quicker**. You have to physically do them. *Blended learners*

- **It has definitely given them better group skills**. They will ask one another for help now. There is no fear in asking as they are all learning. They are more open to asking one another. Nobody feels that anybody knows more than they do. *Blended learning tutor*

- **We help one another if we get stuck**. Some of us would be stronger in different areas. I'm OK at the maths end of it but then someone else is brilliant at reading. *Blended learner*

- **I suppose you have to relinquish control**. Before you were the person, I suppose, making up the recipe for what they would do. I'm not really choosing anymore. *Blended learning tutor*

It's a new effective approach.

- **It's an exciting way to learn compared to sitting with pen and paper**. When you sit in front of the screen you just tap in the words and it tells you you've got the right answer – yes, no. It builds your confidence. You have more control over it. It gives you a lift and an incentive to keep going. *Blended learner*

- **There is definitely a buzz around the centre about it**. They are not looked upon anymore as 'just' the basic English class. I think they are holding their heads higher. It's not a big worry to them anymore. They are not sneaking in and out of class. We're now doing computers and it's great. A whole new language and whole new learning and it doesn't put you down anymore. You're the same as anyone else around here. There's lots of people here who are in 'higher' classes who need to learn computers. It brings the level up for those who felt 'I can't do this' to feel now 'I can do this. I can use a computer. I know what they are talking about when people are talking about the internet, the websites and google this and google that'. *Blended learning tutor*

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It's a new effective approach.

- Even tutors who are not great at IT are keen to use it. They are learning alongside the learners and the dynamic changes a little bit then. One learner is very keen and he goes off and tries it himself and he says he is helping his tutor. There is more of a blurring of who is the tutor. You wouldn't get that if someone was looking at a book. **It creates a common bond really**. *Blended learning centre co-ordinator*

- My spelling has improved an awful lot. I was just thinking about it yesterday and realised that a few years ago I could barely write my name. Working on www.writeon.ie has made a massive difference to me. I can talk to people better than I ever could before. It has really changed my life. I used to spend my time worrying about medication and my sickness and all that and now I haven't time to think about those things. My life is full. It is a great confidence builder. *Distance learner*

It's a new effective approach.

- **The pen and paper remind you of something you can't do**. It reminds you of the red pen and the scribbles on your copy book. The computer is all new. *Final focus group*

- I would have thrown the pen and paper out the window years ago. **This way is really of benefit to me**. *Blended learner*

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Learners are comfortable with technology.

- I was afraid of the computer at first and then I couldn't believe the things on it. **I couldn't believe that I could do it**. *Blended learner*

- When I got something wrong I felt frustrated but **if there had been another person involved I would have been embarrassed**. I was only competing with myself. *Independent learner*

- **You can take breaks** from it if you are losing concentration or things. You can switch off when you want if you are getting fed up with it. *Independent learner*

- I have been **dipping in and out of it for a year or more**. I have done it myself and I feel great. *Independent learner*

Learners are comfortable with technology.

- It's more like a **game** for me. I do brain games on the computer. *Independent learner*

- I asked learners: 'How is it for you interacting with a computer rather than a person?' They said, 'It's great. **A computer can tell us we are wrong 20 times. It's patient**. It doesn't get angry with us and we don't feel we are imposing on it'. *DLS co-ordinator*

- I've heard another student say **they feel absolutely wonderful when they are at the computer with their earphones on**. The whole image of 'I'm in business now'. That was confidence boosting in itself. They love getting on it. I might say we will take a break now and they'd say 'No!' I do think it is a bit much to be sitting in front of a computer for two hours but they seem to enjoy it. *Blended learning tutor*

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# Learners are comfortable with technology.

- For me the main thing is that **I'm not afraid of it.** I realise that there are lots of other things I can do. Last night I was able to download pictures… to follow the instructions. Normally it would just look like a lot of symbols and boxes but now I am able to read it and follow it. And I know that I can fix it if I need to. The panic is gone. I wouldn't have been able to do that before. I realise there's loads of things there for me. I know it's just a matter of practice now. *Blended learner*

- **Mistakes can be undone now**. Before the anxiety would stop me writing. I'd get stuck and think 'it's gone'. You can't get the word and you feel like you can't go on or you have to think of something different to say to put in. Now I say it doesn't matter. I can go back and fix it later. I am freer to learn. *Blended learner*

The first centre using www.writeon.ie......

..surpassed all of our expectations....

.. The enthusiasm amongst the learners is palpable to all.

We have found it increases their self esteem and has had a profound affect on their self confidence.
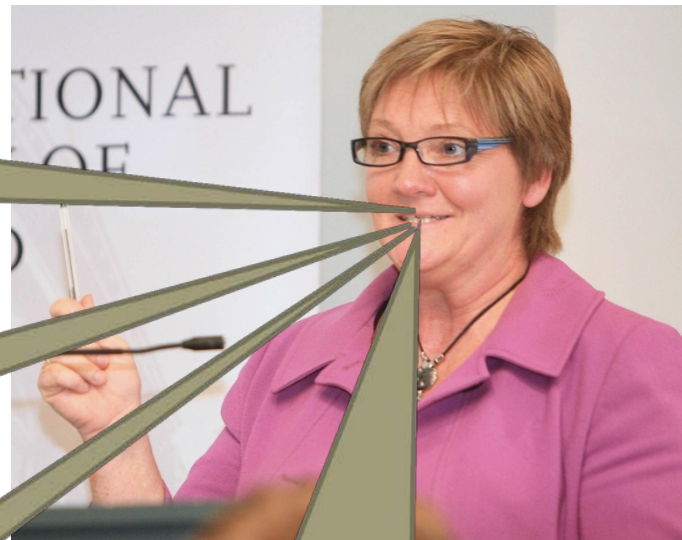
Using technology certainly creates a wonderfully exciting learning environment for all.

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Blended Learning Report

Available from http://www.nala.ie/publications/blended-learning-report-2011

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Thank you