National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

reflect

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SPECIAL REPORT:

Teacher training

Researchers and practitioners consider the issues

Adult literacies: the Scottish approach
John Leavey reports on policies and strategies for adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland

Re: vision
Roi Kwabena's poem about the journey of learning

New light on literacy and numeracy
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Reflections on writing
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About NRDC

The NRDC was established in 2002 as part of the ***Skills for Life*** strategy. We are a consortium of 12 partner organisations, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. The Basic Skills Agency is a key partner. The NRDC is dedicated to improving literacy, numeracy, language and related skills and knowledge. One of our key goals is to refresh and help take forward the government's ***Skills for Life*** strategy. NRDC brings together research, development and action for positive change to improve the quality of learning and the achievements and progression of learners to further learning and employment.

NRDC consortium partners

NRDC is a consortium of partners led by the Institute of Education, University of London with:
Lancaster University
The University of Nottingham
The University of Sheffield
East London Pathfinder
Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership
Basic Skills Agency
Learning and Skills Development Agency
LLU+, London South Bank University
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For information on alterative formats, please contact:

Emily Brewer
Marketing and Publications Officer
Institute of Education
University of London
Tel: 020 7947 9501
Email: e.brewer@ioe.ac.uk

www.nrdc.org.uk

NRDC
Institute of Education
University of London
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7612 6476
Fax: +44 (0)20 7612 6671
email: info@nrdc.org.uk

Editorial

Cover illustration:
Jason Bennion

The most important commitment of *Skills for Life* is to professionalise the teaching workforce for literacy, numeracy and ESOL; teacher education for the whole learning and skills sector is now in the midst of a major reform. The DfES agenda for this reform was set out in *Equipping our teachers for the future* published in November 2004; you may be participating in the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) consultations as part of the development process.

In a complementary strand of the reform the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit are revising the subject specifications for teachers of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL, and have commissioned work to define the specialist pedagogies.

Helen Casey's article in this edition reflects on some of the challenges and opportunities the reform agenda brings. There is a need to move towards a system of initial teacher education (ITE) capable of producing the supply of new skilled and qualified literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers the sector needs. Helen argues that in *Skills for Life* we need more pre-service, subject-specific ITE, in contrast to the in-service generic ITE that prevails in the sector.

In the recently published Ofsted report *Skills for Life in colleges: one year on*, it was noted that 'The lack of skilled teachers is at the heart of the continuing difficulties with effective implementation of the *Skills for Life* strategy.' While the report goes on to describe the successful introduction of the new specialist teacher training courses, it is critical of the short-term and uncertain funding arrangements.

Nora Hughes, Anne Paton and Irene Schwab from the Institute of Education discuss their experience of working closely with the subject specifications and argue that the specialist nature of ESOL and adult literacy methodology makes any separation of pedagogy from subject knowledge artificial. Olivia Sagan shares the views of some of the 300 or so trainee teachers on the *Skills for Life* teacher education programmes as part of the soon-to-be-published NRDC research.

A secondary theme in this edition is a focus on Scotland, where Juliet Merrifield reports 'For the last five years, Scotland has been developing a remarkable adult literacy and numeracy strategy'. Taking a social practices approach, not just within the classroom but at a national policy level, this is a very different approach from that taken in England and there is much for us to learn and reflect upon. In the next issue of **reflect** we will explore social practices in England in more depth.

Ursula Howard
Director, NRDC

Skills for Life and teacher education: the continuing challenges

Helen Casey of the NRDC notes the work being done to professionalise the existing *Skills for Life* workforce but is concerned about maintaining the supply of trained teachers in the future.

The supply of new teachers

The face of *Skills for Life* teacher education, and of teacher education for the learning and skills sector as a whole, continues to change. Developments and reforms continue apace, but are we any nearer to having a sufficient supply of capable new teachers of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL?

Much of the recent focus has been on upskilling and professionalising the existing teaching workforce. The Success for All targets are to achieve a qualified workforce; the LSC Skills for Life Quality Initiative supports the training of existing teachers in the sector. But is enough being done to ensure a continuing supply of new *Skills for Life* teachers?

The double-bind

There is growing evidence of the difficulties facing prospective *Skills for Life* teachers. The RETRO (1) project described the double-bind in which many prospective teachers find themselves, being denied access to initial teacher education programmes unless they have already found work, but being unable to find work unless they already have initial teaching qualifications. Many potential new teachers are attracted via the high profile national marketing campaigns but a complex nightmare of referrals and re-directions is a common story for newcomers wishing to join the gremlin-banishing workforce.

The available teacher education programmes come in a confusing array of different shapes and sizes, some in universities, others in colleges. The way programmes are funded varies, as do the fees payable by trainees, and the availability of bursaries is so variable that, to an interested newcomer, it can feel like a lottery. Only the determined and the committed are likely to make it through into the *Skills for Life* teaching workforce.

Revision of the subject specifications

Work on the DfES reform of teacher education outlined in *Equipping our teachers for the future* (DfES 2004) is currently under way, including new standards for teaching and learning from LLUK (Lifelong Learning UK – the sector skills council). The good news for many *Skills for Life* professionals is that the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit has recently commissioned a revision of the subject specifications, and a definition of the specialist pedagogies of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL, to inform the revision process.

However, the reform agenda assumes the continuation of a broad in-service and generic model of teacher education, whereas the future supply of *Skills for Life* teachers may need a different model offering pre-service and subject-specific teacher education.

Ways in to teaching

New vocational teachers in the learning and skills sector will usually find a job and then train on an in-service

Today, inspections and a range of research projects are highlighting the lack of pedagogy amongst *Skills for Life* teachers.

A complex nightmare of referrals and re-directions is a common story for newcomers wishing to join the gremlin-banishing workforce.

basis. Prospective *Skills for Life* teachers, however, often find that, without some experience and qualifications, it can be difficult to get work. An untrained novice ESOL teacher can easily have no relevant experience to use when faced with a class of ESOL beginners. In contrast, a hairdresser, for example, would have experience supervising juniors in the salon, on which they can build while in the early stages of a new teaching/training role.

The need for initial training for *Skills for Life* tutors before they start work was highlighted by Ofsted/Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) as an issue for action with regard to staff training and professional development.

An initial training programme should be developed for new (ESOL, literacy and numeracy) tutors who do not have a teaching qualification, to introduce them to the essential techniques of teaching before they start work. This should be easily accessible and available throughout the year.
Ofsted/ALI 2003

In the past, many of the 'legacy' teacher education qualifications for literacy, numeracy and ESOL catered for this need for pre-service training, as did the previously common practice of joining the profession through a volunteer entry route.

There are some pre-service programmes available, but few if any offer an integrated package leading to the fully qualified status that a new adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL teacher needs. Many new entrants to *Skills* →

for Life teaching are career-changers, for whom a part-time route is preferable. An exploration of the funding options for the programmes may help to explain their short supply.

Universities complain that adding the subject specifications to a Certificate in Education programme nets no additional funds from HEFCE for the extra work incurred. For the college-based provision, the LSC view is clear: staff training is the responsibility of the individual employer. Implicit in this is again the assumption that the teaching workforce as a whole is trained on an in-service basis.

The ITE programmes described by the RETRO project had an essentially in-service structure and ethos, and expected new entrants to find their own teaching placement/employment before joining the course. Where no viable pre-service option was on offer, this was the only route available.

Subject-specific pedagogy

The reform agenda outlined in *Equipping our teachers for the future* promises more attention to subject pedagogies for all subjects in the learning and skills sector, but limits this only to the role of the mentor. The vision assumes that the large number of different subjects in the sector necessitates a generic approach to pedagogy and to the taught aspects of the teacher education programmes.

Another feature of the 'legacy' teacher qualifications was their focus on the subject-specific pedagogic skills needed by literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers. When these programmes were created, it was in response to the limitations of the generic programmes for equipping language and literacy teachers.

Today, inspections and a range of research projects are highlighting the lack of pedagogy amongst *Skills for Life* teachers involved in literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision.

The Ofsted survey *The initial training of further education teachers* (2) concluded that the 'FENTO standards themselves give insufficient attention to subject or occupational pedagogy' and also commented that 'trainees generally start with good knowledge of their subject or occupational area. However, they have limited expertise in subject pedagogy'. The survey also recommended that ITE programmes should 'give substantially more attention to developing trainees' expertise in teaching their subject'.

Prospective new teachers of literacy, numeracy or ESOL do not start with background knowledge of their subject in the same way as vocational teachers. The subject specifications were developed in response to this difference, to capture the essential subject knowledge, but did not include the subject pedagogy. The subject-specific pedagogies for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL are now in the process of being defined by the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit mentioned above.

The post-reform agenda

The role and position of the pedagogy within the post-reform structures remains to be clarified. In the post-reform environment, the quality of the supply of new *Skills for Life* teachers will depend on a balance and parity of subject knowledge, teaching skills and subject pedagogy within the teacher qualifications.

An important primary focus of the reform agenda is on broadening its scope to the full learning and skills sector. The new frameworks and funding mechanisms will need to be flexible enough to accommodate the particular needs for subject-specific and pre-service training for *Skills for Life* teachers. There is much to do to ensure an adequate and continuing supply of competent literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers, in addition to the many current initiatives which focus on professionalising the existing workforce.

There is much to do to ensure an adequate and continuing supply of competent literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers.

DfES (2004) Equipping our Teachers for the Future: reforming Initial Teacher Training for the Learning and Skills Sector can be downloaded from www.successforall.gov.uk

Ofsted/ALI (2003) Literacy, numeracy and ESOL: a survey of current practice in post-16 and adult education.

(1) DfES-funded project led by NIACE in 2003/05.
(2) Ofsted survey HMI 1762, November 2003.

Talking to the trainees

Olivia Sagan of the NRDC passes on some of the comments made by trainees on level 4 ESOL teacher education courses.

NRDC has recently completed a research project into the new teacher education courses in England (literacy, numeracy and ESOL) (1).

These are some examples of comments made by ESOL trainee teachers, who were frank in sharing their experiences, their opinions, and their frustrations. The comments give an insight into some of the knotty issues of subject knowledge, pedagogy, theory, and teaching practice, and demonstrate the complex interplay between them.

On subject knowledge
'...there's a lot, really, a lot to know about language...to be able to teach it really well, make the connections, understand the learners' problems...'

'...It's made me much more confident about my language teaching, more aware of language, even how I use it...I analyse everything.'

On pedagogy
'...The loop teaching...I think really works well...the session is delivered demonstrating how we could teach with our learners...'
'...the sessions need to make sense with one another, to complement what I know, stretch me...'

'...theories of learning – I had never known actually what was behind why we do certain things...'

On theory
'...It's a lot to take in, a lot to read...and it didn't really make that much sense until I actually started thinking about it in the practice...'

'...I came in thinking it was going to be a lot more practical, y'know, you do this and these are the problems you encounter and this is how you can teach to overcome them...'

On teaching practice
'...It's where it all makes sense...(or sometimes doesn't!)...'

'...mentors...they sometimes lacked the experience, or the time really, to do the job...'

'...I would have liked to have a placement in a hospital, say, or a prison, but I had to go into a college...I wanted to expand my experience...'

'...feedback...that's where you work things through, discuss things and really reflect on your practice...'

On integration
'...well, with phonology, for example, we get the input which shows us how to teach it, materials, activities and things, but then we can adapt that in our own teaching setting. We also have to show, in the assignments and lesson plans, that we're thinking about phonology issues and analysing, putting into practice the theory...so it's a whole picture...'

Of course, the comments were not always positive. Trainee teachers often struggled with the demands of work and study but were appreciative of the new opportunities.

'...These are new courses, there are bound to be teething problems, and in a way we're guinea pigs...but I could see even on this course how things were improving as we went along...'

(1) The report, ' Towards a professional workforce: adult literacy, ESOL and numeracy teacher education 2003-05', details the research findings from 30 institutions in England. It is due for publication by NRDC early next year.

Theory, practice and professionalism in teacher education

Nora Hughes, **Anne Paton** and **Irene Schwab** outline the principles that underpin the professionalising of the *Skills for Life* workforce.

The emerging professionalisation of the *Skills for Life* workforce has prompted two key questions:

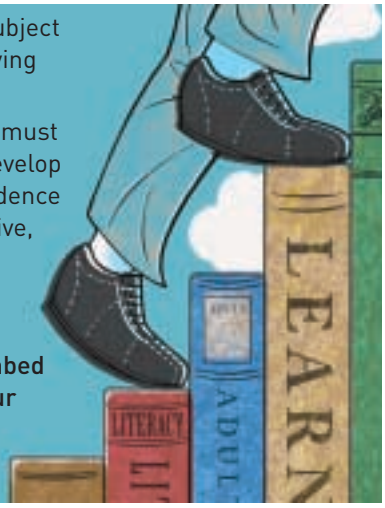
What does it mean to be a professional?

How can teaching skills and subject knowledge be integrated in teacher education programmes?

When developing the PGCE Adult Literacy/ESOL at the Institute of Education, we came up with the following principles:

- An important part of being a professional is adopting an open, questioning approach to the field in which we work, including our own contribution to it.
- Being an effective teacher – or teacher educator – depends on integrating teaching skills and subject knowledge, and applying them creatively.
- Teacher education must enable teachers to develop and sustain the confidence and skills to be creative, critical, reflective practitioners.

We have aimed to embed these principles in our PGCE programme.



Adopting a questioning approach

Hard-pressed teachers do what they feel works for them and the learners they work with, thinking, perhaps, that they do not always have time to explore the theoretical basis of a chosen approach. Yet every teacher's practice is informed by beliefs and theories, whether self-generated or learned from elsewhere. One of our aims on the PGCE is to enable teachers to uncover these underlying beliefs and reassess them in the light of theory and research.

Teachers need access to ongoing debates in their field, and the confidence to make choices based on a full understanding of available options. For example, in order to use the Core Curriculum effectively, we need to understand its theoretical basis and to know how this fits with other viewpoints.

Teacher educators also have a role to play in enabling teachers to explore their subject in its social, political and historical context. To be effective practitioners, we must extend the same critical tools to the contexts in which we work – the classroom, the institution and the wider society. While welcoming the funding, resources, status and training opportunities offered by the current government initiative, it is our professional responsibility to examine this too through a critical lens and compare it with other options.

A central goal of the *Skills for Life* strategy has been to set out, in the form of 'subject specifications', the subject knowledge that professional teachers need. In the PGCE Adult Literacy/ESOL we take a positive, critical approach to these, seeing them as working documents to which we have a responsibility to contribute. For example, we aim to redress what we see as an imbalance in the 'theoretical frameworks' section of the documents, by adding 'discourse', as a category in its own right, to the current ones of 'grammar' and 'lexis', which on their own create a distorted picture of the nature of language.

An important part of being a professional is adopting an open, questioning approach.

All this demands openness and a spirit of enquiry, which are the essence of professionalism in its broadest sense. Education is not an exact science but a complex human process, and we, the trainers, do not have all the answers. Our role is to raise questions, to elicit responses and to suggest positive ways forward.

A teacher education course provides opportunities for the productive exchange of ideas, enabling us to scrutinise received wisdom and consider our responses. The PGCE Adult Literacy/ESOL is designed to provide an additional opportunity for exchange, by allowing ESOL and Literacy teachers to learn from each other's work in their separate, but closely related, fields. Coming from a variety of backgrounds, they offer a range of experience and expertise, and look to each other as well as to their tutors for ideas and insights, particularly those relating to practical teaching. Theoretical knowledge may be sought primarily from tutors, but the group is a valuable resource for developing it.

Education is not an exact science but a complex human process, and we, the trainers, do not have all the answers.

Integrating teaching skills and subject knowledge

The specialist nature of ESOL and adult literacy methodologies makes any separation of pedagogy from subject knowledge artificial. Language and literacy, as the basic tools of communication, require a specific repertoire of teaching skills and approaches. Examples include techniques for teaching aspects of pronunciation (in ESOL) and using the 'language experience' approach with beginning readers and writers (in both literacy and ESOL). The lack of emphasis on methodology in the subject specifications makes it particularly important to approach it in a specialised way through the generic aspects of teaching and learning.

Developing understanding of an aspect of language can, in the words of one teacher, 'change the whole landscape'. As teacher educators, we need to ensure that the ways in which the subject knowledge can be put to use are consistently made explicit. Possible strategies for training sessions include the following.

- Using activities related to teachers' working lives, such as evaluating published resources, analysing learners' use of language, or devising materials or activities.
- Including learning activities which can be used, or perhaps adapted, for ESOL or literacy students, such as sorting activities or revision games.
- Modelling strategies for instruction-giving, checking understanding, using different interaction patterns and feedback techniques.
- Using the strategy referred to by Tessa Woodward (1991) as 'loop input', where course participants learn, for example, about writing through a series of writing activities, or about group learning through a sequence of group tasks.

We often ask participants to experiment with an approach or technique and to report back on their findings in an input session. This strategy has been further developed in research-based course assignments in which teachers apply theories to their own practice and report their findings.

Do you have suggestions for how these principles might be further embedded in the development of teacher education in this field? Please contact us at n.hughes @ioe.ac.uk

References

Woodward, T. (1991) Models and Metaphors in Language Teacher Training: Loop Input and Other Strategies Cambridge University Press.

Becoming confident, critical, reflective practitioners

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of ensuring that theory is embedded into practice is the observation of teaching, where trainee teachers are encouraged to experiment with new ideas and to address undeveloped aspects of their own practice, and are confident that they will receive feedback which acknowledges their areas of expertise and takes their stated concerns as a starting point. Their managers are not involved and the process of lesson observation during a teacher training course is relatively non-judgmental (as far as it can be within the framework of assessment and quality assurance). A dialogue can take place between the observed and the observer, in which both parties learn more about the contexts of teaching and learning and the links between theory and practice. For example, the observed teacher may have more expertise than the observer in working with particular groups of learners, such as the 14 to 16 age group, or they may be more skilled in using infomation and learning technology.

Such an approach to the observation process is vital in developing the self-confidence, open-mindedness and analytical skills which underpin the best professional practice and ensure development beyond the confines of the course. Through the observations, assignments and course sessions, teachers are invited to recognise themselves as contributors to our field of knowledge and expertise rather than as recipients or consumers.

Learning and teaching as dialogue

Adult literacy and ESOL learners bring with them a rich store of knowledge, understanding and skills, which teachers must recognise and celebrate. It is the learners who are the real 'experts' on the meaning and purpose of language and literacy in their lives. Effective pedagogy draws on the insights and expertise of both learner and teacher. In the PGCE Adult Literacy/ESOL we aim to put this principle into practice.

Nora Hughes, Anne Paton and Irene Schwab run teacher education programmes at the Institute of Education, University of London.

E-learning, *Skills for Life* and teacher training

Introduction

Jenny Hunt (Schemata)

It is now widely accepted that the use of e-learning as part of a blended approach to teaching *Skills for Life* is highly effective for motivating and engaging learners. If learners like using technology, if they feel it is relevant to their lives, and if they are already using it for life and leisure purposes, then it is vitally important that their teachers know how to integrate it into the teaching and learning process. But this is not always the case. Although many good examples of the use of e-learning in *Skills for Life* are emerging, many teachers are still not confident about using technology themselves and even less confident about using it in the classroom.

Some of the people and organisations involved in introducing e-learning to *Skills for Life* teachers have shared their experiences and views about e-learning with me. They say why they think that it is important to include e-learning as an integral part of initial teacher training as well as in continuing professional development (CPD) programmes.

The new government e-learning strategy *Harnessing technology* (DfES 2005) states in the section about the post-16 sector that one of its priorities is to provide a good quality ICT training and support package for practitioners. This would involve enhancing practitioner e-learning pedagogical skills with the following milestones set in place.

- Core optional and elective units of training and development based on LLUK's e-learning and e-leadership sector standards, available by 2007-8 and embedded in initial teacher training and professional development programmes.
- ICT personal competency, based on the e-Skills standards, required as part of the 'common core' of all initial teacher training in the sector by 2007-08.
- Provider level three-year development plans agreed with local LSCs by 2006.
- NIACE to train practitioners to LLUK standards, to mentor their peers in e-learning, with initial training programme complete by 2006.

Exploring e-learning:

Judith Woodlock (LSDA)

My understanding of e-learning has largely come through the *Exploring e-learning for literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers* project, carried out for the *Skills for Life* Strategy Unit. The project has much to tell us about where practitioners are in their ICT development and how they can be converted to e-learning.

It seems that most *Skills for Life* practitioners, while using ICT in a small way both at work and at home, are not extensive users. Many lack confidence with ICT. So, in both initial and continuing professional development, it is essential to show them how much they can already do. Most practitioners can:

- word process;
- use CDs and spreadsheets, mobile phones and laptops;
- get on the web;
- send an email.

Recognising that they have those skills changes their self-perception from 'non-user' to 'user' and sets the scene for development.

Many practitioners are put off because they think e-learning is monolithic and separate. So they also need to understand that the ICT skills they already have can be used in their teaching – and that adding to those skills is easy.

They need to progress in small, unthreatening steps, for example:

- inserting drop down menus to create spelling exercises;
- using the Word dictionary to liberate learners from the Oxford Concise;
- using PowerPoint with sound to reinforce sentence patterns for aural learners;
- adding hyperlinks to learning resources to create small units of independent learning;
- dragging textboxes as a kinaesthetic way to do matching exercises;

and many more.

Practitioners are prepared to be enthusiastic about e-learning. However there is still a lack of belief in the entitlement of teachers to use ICT and little sense of urgency to change this situation.

Investment in e-learning does change practice. Because it stimulates teachers to think harder about how they teach and how their learners learn, it has impact on teaching quality across the board. But those who start on an e-learning journey will need to be able to count on a supportive climate for trying out new ideas. It is easy to make it hard for teachers to change – and an unsupported teacher will abandon new ways unless their new enthusiasm is reinforced.

Personal reflections on training teachers to use ICT

Alan Clarke (NIACE)

There have been numerous efforts to encourage and train tutors in the use of technology to support and deliver learning in all parts and sectors of education. My own involvement began in the early 1980s when I attempted to change my own practice using a process of trial and error. Progress was slow until I located other enthusiasts and began to share experience. This is an important lesson even today. It is vital that tutors are able to discuss their impressions with colleagues to gain feedback and compare ideas.

Later, I contributed to national training programmes, for example *Project Author* which aimed to develop tutors into authors of computer-based learning materials. It was very successful and, for a time, many of the key staff in commercial companies were graduates of the programme. It showed me that the creation of effective learning materials required authors who understood learning and could transfer their classroom knowledge to the new environment of the screen.

It also showed me that tutors should be encouraged to develop e-learning materials for their own use. Education has always employed a mixture of commercially produced materials alongside locally developed resources; technology should assist this process, but tutors are often deterred. We should encourage them.

It is very easy to find yourself out of date in either e-learning or ICT. Initial training is rarely going to be sufficient without an ongoing effort to extend skills and knowledge. This is a very ambitious objective for adult and community tutors who are often working part-time with little development time. We need to find ways to make the most of the small amount of time available. Short modules combined with mentors or coaches are important in this area.

Many tutors are keen to learn about new developments in relation to teaching their speciality so e-learning needs to be presented in a way that they can quickly use in their courses. General ideas and concepts are less likely to be received with much interest, while examples based on their subjects will be. This is probably an argument for training within each curriculum area but this can mean that some of the benefits of sharing ideas across the curriculum may be lost. →

E-learning and adult numeracy professional development

Noyona Chanda, Graham Griffiths and David Kaye (LLU+, London South Bank University)

Training
Online discussion between tutor and trainees, arranged for a set time and date, was a feature of the e-learning training course taken by members of the numeracy professional team at LLU+. This should be built into any e-learning professional development programme at the planning stage, and it should be adhered to. The decisions made in planning will determine whether the e-learning is an add-on to conventional face-to-face delivery models, or helps to create alternative, more flexible models of professional development.

Communication
Communication between tutors and trainees can be more efficient and more frequent through the use of email and email contact groups or SMART groups. However, even if the structures and systems for such communication are in place for the trainers, there is no guarantee that there will be similar ease of access at the trainees' end. Our experience is that those who are technically-minded use SMART groups, while others do not.

Furthermore, although trainees welcome the prospect of being connected with each other, they often do not or cannot find the time to contribute to e-learning through facilities such as discussion boards. Some people do not welcome discussions through this medium.

Online access
The available technology potentially brings knowledge to one's fingertips, making research for learning considerably easier. However, the procedures for getting trainees on a particular course registered as student users of university library and support services are often complicated and time-consuming (especially when it is a part-time or short course) .

A further disincentive is the lack of trainees' computer skills. Part-time students are further disadvantaged in that there are time delays between initial induction, usage, and any resulting trouble-shooting response.

Planning
In the teacher/support staff professional development context, efficient incorporation of e-learning strategies and resources is predicated on its inclusion in the planning stages of a programme of blended learning. In addition, there needs to be formal planning of the tutor resources and timetable required to co-ordinate and manage this aspect of programme communication, delivery and assessment. Engaging the interest of trainees will be facilitated through increased use of DVD/video clips/ interactive learning materials on websites, etc.

Overall, we feel that the future for e- learning is hopeful, but not assured.

Conclusion

Jenny Hunt (Schemata)

It would seem that there is still a long way to go before e-learning is fully accepted by teachers and becomes an integral part of teacher training and professional development programmes. Some immediate actions for the future could be that:

- e-learning should be more accepted as the norm in classroom practice;
- e-learning modules should be created as an integral part of existing *Skills for Life* teacher training qualifications;
- there should be effective continuing professional development opportunities in the use of e-learning in *Skills for Life* teaching and learning.

DfES (2005) Harnessing technology: transforming learning and children's services London DfES.
This document can be downloaded from www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy

Insights from research and practice

Margaret Herrington introduces a new collection of seminal papers from RaPAL. Future editions of **reflect** will include short 'tasters' chosen from this collection.

Insights from research and practice, published by RaPAL, is intended for educators in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. It draws together key insights from researchers, practitioners and students, both in Britain and overseas, who have published their ideas in the journal of the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) network between 1986 and 2004.

It is a timely publication because many new practitioners are entering this field following the government's *Skills for Life* initiative in England and Wales. New challenges have been set in terms of a core curriculum, standards, national tests, targets, graduate teacher training standards and qualifications, materials development, and research and development programmes. We want to distil for practitioners the central philosophical, political and pedagogical insights that can be seen in the work of RaPAL over a 20-year period. Insights from research and practice link past experience to the present policy context.

Why is this so important?
There are three main reasons.

- First, literacy, numeracy and ESOL are highly charged in political, economic and cultural terms, and very different models of literacy and numeracy are constructed and employed in research, policy and practice contexts. Practitioners, as professional educators, must be able to put into context – theoretically and politically – any new policies they are asked to implement, both for their own sake and that of their students. They must be able to draw on past experience if they are to be aware of their own position in the new policy context.
- The second reason for this compilation concerns the pedagogical legacy from the recent past. Many new practitioners say 'We know what you want us to teach, but how do we actually teach this curriculum?'. It is important for practitioners to be able to draw on the wealth of ideas and reflections of colleagues in the history of practice.
- Third, researchers and practitioners in this field have effectively developed a new body of knowledge about adult literacy. Some of this huge outpouring of investigative energy is reflected in the RaPAL network. Members – researchers, students, tutors, managers – have asked important questions about the nature of research itself and about how practitioners and students could be involved in this. It is important for new staff to draw on this experience, reviewing the processes and outcomes, if they are to see the value of, and feel confident about, building research into their practice.

We want to distil for practitioners the central philosophical, political and pedagogical insights that can be seen in the work of RaPAL over a 20-year period.

In forthcoming issues of **reflect** we will be publishing a series of short 'taster' papers about the themes explored in the book; these will be designed specifically for use within teacher training courses. They are expected to include topics such as building confidence, students and tutors, the literacy/ESOL interface, adult learning contexts, asking the useful questions and dyslexia.

It has never been more important for tutors to articulate (and sometimes defend) the nature of their practice and the knowledge and values that underpin it. In highlighting key aspects of the work of RaPAL members, we offer examples of literacy, numeracy and ESOL staff doing just this.

My role as a practitioner-researcher

Catherine Menist, Essential Skills Coordinator at Broadway Homelessness and Support, reflects on what she has learned from her experience as a practitioner-researcher.

'If practitioners are to believe that they can build research into the infrastructure of their practice and create new knowledge in response to their urgent questions, we believe that the opportunities created to assist them must be practitioner-researcher centred.' *(Fairclough et al. 2004)*

For the past nine months I have been working on an NRDC practitioner-led research initiative that has provided just such an opportunity. Our focus was to look at measuring soft outcomes for essential skills learners from a background of homelessness and poor mental health.

I work as Essential Skills Coordinator at Broadway, one of a number of homelessness agencies in London. The most positive progress we see with clients in relation to learning interventions lies in the softer outcomes around confidence that lead to lifestyle changes. While funding bodies agree that soft outcomes are important, they provide no specific funding for them and no guidelines for measuring them.

We wanted to develop a tool that would capture this kind of data meaningfully and would give us much stronger evidence to argue the case for change with the funding bodies. We recognised that we needed to have a stronger voice as a provider of essential skills to vulnerable adults. While we were wrestling with the need to deal with this problem, the PLRI (Practitioner-Led Research Initiative) opportunity with NRDC presented itself.

Despite being very motivated by this opportunity, once we had had our bid approved, I found myself needing to address some serious questions.

- **Why research something I think I already know the answer to?**
- **Does research make a difference anyway?**
- **Should Broadway bother providing essential skills support at all?**

I now have answers that are significantly different from what I thought six months ago.
Soft outcomes in the lives of our clients are what enable them to move, as our strap-line says so neatly, 'from street to home'. As a learning team in a homelessness agency, we needed to develop an outcomes monitoring framework to try to capture these soft outcomes as a result of learning interventions. As a provider of essential skills under the *Skills for Life* framework, we needed to see if those soft outcomes could be effectively integrated into Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and mapped to the National Curriculum. We asked 'Could this be done and is it helpful?'.

Being such a small team there were concerns that the £10,000 research grant was not going to cover the cost/benefit to Broadway, but the argument was clear. Doing this research would take us further towards our team and client goals, not away from them. In the voluntary sector particularly, this is important.

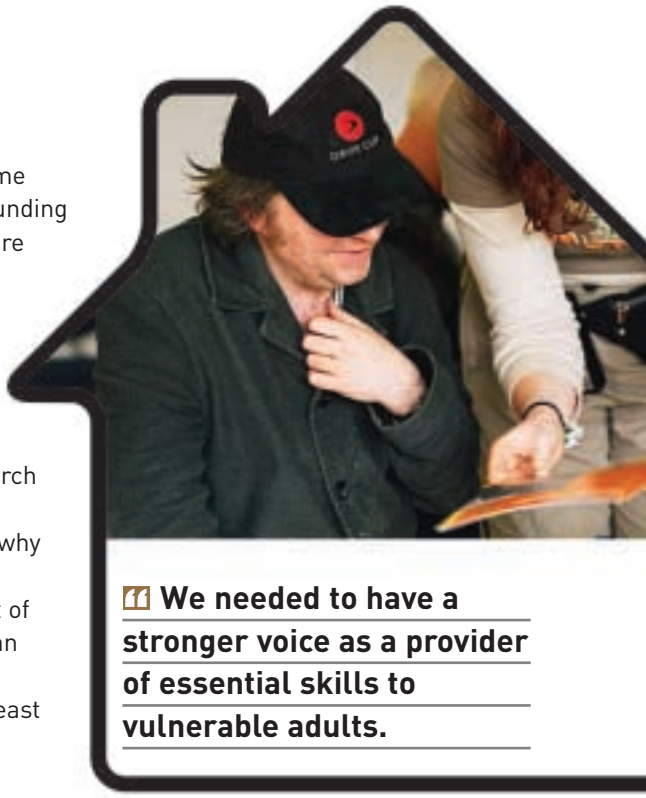
This is a reflection on the actual process of being a practitioner-researcher which at the same time highlights some issues around funding and essential skills that I know are shared by many of us.

Reflecting on the process
When I joined Broadway, which has a strong research ethic of its own, the whole concept of practitioner-led research and the work of the NRDC were completely new to me. I wonder why an introduction to the action-research approach in the context of practitioner-led research is not an integral part of the basic skills teacher training curriculum, at least not in my experience.

In engaging clients, I was very concerned that those who agreed to take part would become less important than the research. Ethically, I was concerned that it would be a benefit to us, while they were simply guinea-pigs. However, what I believed and what I communicated to clients was the same – that the monitoring of soft outcomes was something that would be ultimately, if not initially, useful to them. They proved to be largely willing participants.

The whole process has brought some amazing insights and in some cases, personal progression – my own included. Allowing my values and 'wrong' or 'wrong-headed' assumptions as a tutor to be challenged and changed as a result of that process has been enormously supportive and beneficial – not least to the clients I work with.

Frameworks that free
I find it interesting that the requirements of research to develop a consistent and rigorous approach have also pointed me towards the benefits of having that sense of rigour in the initial interview stage with clients. As much of the work I do is on a one-to-one basis due to client vulnerability, I had assumed an approach of a 'free conversation' when doing the initial interview, as it felt less imposing.



We needed to have a stronger voice as a provider of essential skills to vulnerable adults.

The unspoken assumption was that I would always think of the right questions to ask, ask them in the right way and always therefore have the right information in order to inform ILPs and schemes of work. Doing the action research has not entirely changed this, but the opportunity of working within the PLRI framework has brought a structure at the initial interview stage that makes me feel I have greater freedom with my approach, while being able to monitor my and my client's progress at the same time.

I now feel a lot closer to the process of assessment, review and evaluation because we have found a framework which specifically suits our clients. It has also provided a shift away from simply evaluating what we teach to evaluating our approach to the individuals we work with. This 'self-reflective cycle' has required me '..to plan, act, observe and reflect more systematically and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life'. (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000).

This must be a good thing. →

Beyond the hierarchies of the organisation

Having an action research project has given me a good reason to question my peers on their own thoughts and perspectives on our theme and to challenge their assumptions, and it has provided a framework for that discussion. Having worked for myself for many years, I was beginning to enjoy benefiting from the skills and input of others. The action research project has been the hammer to drive in the peg.

We have had the opportunity during this initiative to host workshops at RaPAL and ReOPEN, presenting our interim findings and receiving valuable input and feedback on our processes and assumptions. Not working in an educational establishment, having this kind of opportunity to share good practice and share our project was really helpful and made me feel part of a greater whole.

So what of my initial questions?

Why research something I think I already know the answer to?

What I discovered was that the point in PLRI is not whether you feel you know the answer to your research question. As a practitioner, it is the taking part that counts. Yes, I do feel the benefit lies not necessarily in the conclusions we have drawn but in what we have learned from the whole process. As I said earlier, allowing my values and 'wrong' or 'wrong-headed' assumptions as a tutor to be challenged and changed has been difficult at times, yet overwhelmingly positive. And we have emerged from the process with something that will hopefully be useful beyond our own organisation.

Does research make a difference anyway?

I had always had doubts about the benefit and validity of much research as it always seemed to be used for political gain, or simply to reinforce what we already know. The change for me is this. Research is now something I value. Yes, it has its pitfalls but it also has its merits and it does give credibility to what might otherwise be assumptions without foundation.

There is opinion out there that suggests that homelessness agencies serve to create dependence rather than independence. There is some limited merit in that argument. We always endeavour to move clients towards accessing external services, specifically to help them work towards independence. But significant numbers of our clients, lacking in literacy, numeracy and ESOL, need the safety of one-to-one support before they are willing or able to make that step towards accessing external learning opportunities. The cost of not addressing this far outweighs the cost of more appropriate funding. If we even manage to fuel the debate about gaining more appropriate funding then perhaps this research really could make a difference.

Research gives credibility to what might otherwise be assumptions without foundation.

Should Broadway bother providing essential skills support at all?

Yes it should. Absolutely. And it should be bigger and better resourced. I am now convinced by the power of even the most basic education to impact profoundly on the wider lives of our clients. For those who engage, most benefit. It might sound dramatic or worthy, but we are in the business of changing lives, or at least contributing to that change. And the most important thing is to empower our clients to do it for themselves, to have confidence in their selves, their abilities and their opinions.

Becoming a learner again

Being a practitioner-researcher makes you a learner again. It forces you to look more carefully at what has already been done so that, in your ignorance, you don't embark upon something cutting edge to find you have merely reconstructed orthodoxy.

The feeling of disempowerment that comes with trying to achieve difficult targets with a chaotic client group can at times be overwhelmingly frustrating. Being involved in writing the bid and overseeing the fieldwork on our project has been enormously empowering and has served to channel much of that frustration in a positive way. And because we were doing the research from the inside, we managed to obtain data that might have been unobtainable to a professional researcher.

The value of the whole process lies in it being practitioner-led. It has served to build research into our teaching infrastructure and has provided new knowledge in response to our questions. The benefits of taking part in this time-consuming initiative have definitely outweighed the desperation I felt when I thought 'Will this fieldwork never come to an end?'. Quite simply, it has served to make me a more effective and reflective tutor. And I enjoyed it.

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What are conferences *for*?

Carol Taylor of the Basic Skills Agency reflects on the whys and wherefores of the conference circuit.

Like most teachers, I get invited to many conferences. I get invited personally. I get invited through randomly generated email lists. I get paper invitations to events that have absolutely no relevance to my life and to conferences where the organisers want £800 for a day listening to 'top people'. I get invitations to things that sound interesting but are irrelevant in my current job ('Implementing a Practical Pay Structure') and to things that are very relevant to my life but sound deadly dull.

Why do we go to conferences?

At a recent conference, I attended a workshop about working with 'non-voluntary adult basic skills learners'. The researcher began by dividing learners into two categories – 'elective' (those who have choice over whether to go) and 'non-elective' (those who don't). She then further broke down the 'non-elective learners' into those who were recruited through the 'carrot' approach and those where the 'stick' approach was used.

It seems to me that we could categorise those of us who go to conferences in a similar way. The 'non-electives' go to a conference because we are told to go. This could be because 'someone has to go' or 'you haven't had your staff development this year and we have targets to meet/an IiP assessment' (the stick approach). It may be because you might find out more about, for example, LSC funding issues or 'I think you ought to go because you will get so much from it' (the carrot approach).

'Electives' go because we want to go. We may be presenting, in which case we have to turn up and then decide whether to stay for the rest of it. Sometimes we think we will genuinely learn something of interest, or be encouraged to see things in different ways, or we may want to be seen, or we may want to network.

Sometimes we think we will genuinely learn something of interest.

What do we learn at conferences?

More and more, I ask myself – what have I learnt at that conference? And the answer influences whether I will go again. So, for example, several years ago I picked up, from an American academic, a project which became the 'Backpack Project' – working with families on developing literacy through creativity. Or it may be that I was faced with a new way of thinking about something, like the first time I heard about 'Literacy as a Social Practice'. Good, research-orientated conferences should make you stop and think about the importance of research to what you are doing, whether teaching literacy to a group, developing a new programme or constructing a policy. Conference presentations which have stopped me in my tracks include:

- listening to learners talking about their experiences of being in a group;
- a video presentation by young care leavers about the place of literacy in their lives;
- quantitative analysis of data on retention and engagement of adult learners; and
- listening to people like Jane Mace talking about writing.

Don't forget the social side

But we need also to recognise the social side of these things. Conferences are places where you can talk to like-minded people, having the same problems as you are. You can set the world to rights over a glass of wine and go back to work on a Tuesday evening knowing that others are doing the same. You can become re-energised as you see you are part of a bigger whole.

And you can often be surprised and come away with things that are totally unexpected. At a RaPAL conference a few years back, at the end of a workshop, I was offered £70,000 from a national trust fund to develop further work on literacy in communities – with no strings attached.

Oh, and I never have found out about LSC funding issues!

Characteristics of a grade 1 ESOL lesson

Neena Julka outlines some lessons that can be learned from recent inspection reports on the delivery of ESOL.

Recent inspection reports on ESOL have been critical of the large number of unsatisfactory lessons observed. However, all is not doom and gloom. The reports also state that there are now more 'outstanding' lessons than in the past. This is good news. It means that more grade 1 lessons are being delivered. This article attempts to identify the characteristics of outstanding lessons, as described by inspectors, and offers some advice to tutors who want to polish their delivery and who aspire to delivering outstanding lessons.

Planning: what will the learners be doing and why?

In outstanding lessons, planning is always thorough. It is not just filling in the pre-formatted lesson plan showing what will be done and when. There is a detailed, thought-through lesson plan, with clear aims and objectives shared with the learners. It not only helps the tutor but, more importantly, it tells the learners what they will be learning and 'doing' in the lesson.

The best lesson plans have a variety of appropriate and engaging activities – speaking, reading, writing and listening in adult contexts. The plan allows time for learners to acquire and then practise skills. For example, enough time is allowed for learners to complete a writing task. Learners are not rushed from one activity to the next. The plan outlines learning content and learner activity. Individual needs of learners are acknowledged and differentiated activities are planned for.

Learners use computers as a natural activity within the lesson, e.g. looking up prices on the internet as part of an activity. There is evidence of previous lessons being evaluated by the tutor and planning for future lessons is modified in the light of previous evaluations.

Structure: tasks, activities and teaching materials

Grade one lessons have a logical structure. They start by questioning the learners about their previous learning. Learners are able to recollect what they have learnt and are keen to respond. They are eager to share their 'news' with the rest of the class. Aims and objectives are shared with the learners. Tasks and activities are clearly explained.

There are differentiated tasks to cater for the needs of individual learners. For example in one lesson, an orally fluent learner needing practice in writing concentrated on written work whilst the rest of the class practised oral language structures.

Learners know what they need to do and work collaboratively. Tasks are relevant, interesting, challenging and inspiring. Learners are given a choice to discuss or research a topic as their project. Tasks and activities build on what has been learnt previously.

There are clear explanations of grammar points and new language structures are practised in adult and/or vocationally relevant contexts.

There is a variety of teaching materials which are attractive and up-to-date e.g using current train timetables from the internet to teach about obtaining information for travelling. The ESOL curriculum materials are used effectively along with other materials. Individual vocabulary books are routinely used to record meanings and spellings of 'new' words.

Learners are encouraged to read books and magazines independently and to keep a record of this. Learners with prior vocational skills and experience are introduced to vocational texts and manuals. Tasks, activities and teaching materials are relevant to the needs and interests of learners.

Teaching methods

Outstanding teaching methods totally engage all the learners. Learners are not even aware of language learning but use language as a means to communicate and to accomplish tasks in hand. Learners are in charge.

The lesson is tutor-directed but learner-led. The tutor's role is to guide, at times to introduce new language and teach, but mostly to facilitate learning through tasks and activities that give learners autonomy. Learners know what they are doing and work collaboratively. Learners do most of the talking and the tutor facilitates, introducing new language and managing the process and the activities that help learning. Learners are helped and encouraged to ask questions and to challenge each other.

Good use is made of current affairs to stimulate discussions and increase learners' understanding of current issues.

Assessment

Outstanding lessons have ongoing and built-in feedback to learners. The tutor is clear how learners will be assessed and gives timely, straightforward and encouraging feedback but is quick to correct, albeit subtly, errors of grammar and pronunciation.

Good use is made of 'incidental learning'. For example, the tutor may ask individual learners to enunciate a word that another learner may have found difficult to pronounce. Thus, assessment creates opportunities for whole-class learning and re-capping. Peer and self-correction is always encouraged.

There is an agreed marking policy that is available in the staff handbook and new staff are briefed on how to use it. Assessment of written work is rigorous. Internal and external moderation procedures are in place and are used to assure quality of assessment.

Overall, feedback to learners identifies their strengths and weaknesses but, most importantly, effective guidance is given on how learners can improve their written and oral language.

Learner attainment and progress

In outstanding lessons, it is clear to see how learners have progressed and what they have attained so far, judging by their oral interactions, level of confidence and accuracy, and by evaluating the written work. Good use is made of diagnostic assessment to concentrate on the skills most needed by learners and developed through individual learning plans. For example, one reasonably fluent learner made real improvements in writing in English as he needed this skill urgently to complete tasks at work. Progress from letter formation to filling in forms was evident in one term's written work.

Tutor evaluation

Outstanding lessons are no accident. They are the result of individual tutors being self-critical and constantly trying to modify methods, materials and delivery to improve their lessons. These tutors are open to new ideas and welcome feedback both from colleagues and from managers. In outstanding lessons, language learning is not only fun for learners but tutors enjoy and take pride in helping learners progress to other courses or to gain employment to achieve their true potential.

Thanks to Helen Sunderland and Pam Frame for their contributions to this article.

Why England should look North for inspiration

Juliet Merrifield sees great potential in the new adult literacy and numeracy strategy in Scotland.

For the last five years, Scotland has been developing a remarkable adult literacy and numeracy strategy. Those of us working within the English government's *Skills for Life* strategy have at least three reasons to look north of the border for inspiration and ideas:

- the strategy – its focus on community learning, a social practices view of literacy and numeracy and a commitment to involving learners;
- the literacy and numeracy curriculum – its conceptual and research base, its intent to be a framework and tool for dialogue between teachers and learners; and
- the approach to support and training for practitioners – taking a developmental rather than a deficit approach to teachers.

The strategy

Scotland's adult literacy and numeracy strategy is built on its distinctive history and infrastructure of education. Community education has played a much stronger role in adult education in Scotland, both as a set of institutions and a way of working.

A working group on the future of community education, writing in 1998 (before devolution), emphasised its importance for other policies such as social inclusion and active citizenship. It noted the significant aspects of community education:

- its focus on motivation and confidence;
- its aim to develop the capacity of individuals and communities to improve their quality of life; and
- its experience of working in partnership.

(Working Group on the Future of Community Education, 1998:8)

Given its distinctive educational history, reinforced by the independence that devolution brought, it is not surprising that Scotland's route to a national adult literacy strategy was so different from that in England. The Scottish Executive first commissioned a report, *Literacies in the Community*, as part of a National Development Project (2000). It set the tone for the strategy by outlining seven guiding principles for community literacy and numeracy, and emphasised the shift away from seeing literacy as functional skills towards seeing it as a set of real-life practices.

The Scottish strategy adopts a social practices model, which 'sees literacies as a key dimension of community regeneration and a part of the wider lifelong learning agenda. Such an approach recognises that:

- literacy and numeracy are complex capabilities rather than a simple set of basic skills; and
- learners are more likely to develop and retain knowledge, skills and understanding if they see them as relevant to their own context and everyday literacy practices.'

(Learning Connections website)

Above: Homing in on Literacy Project, one of eight adult literacies pathfinder projects funded by the Learning Connections team. It works with young homeless people in Perth and Kinross to improve their confidence and skills in literacy and numeracy with a view to them sustaining their tenancies. The project is run by a partnership of local agencies.

The social practices conceptual approach results in goals that are strikingly different from the *Skills for Life* strategy in England. Among others, the strategy identifies:

- a lead role for community learning strategies;
- a commitment to develop provision that is relevant to learners' lives – a lifelong learning rather than a deficit approach; and
- creating 'a system that learns'.

John Leavey's article (page 22) outlines the seven research projects on which the strategy was built, including consultation with learners. The strategy sets a clear direction from which the curriculum and development have followed.

The curriculum

England modelled its *Skills for Life* curriculum on what was already in place for schools. It specifies in great detail the content to be taught and learned. Scotland took a very different approach (Learning Connections, 2005). The curriculum sets out its research and conceptual base to ensure that practitioners understand what they are doing and why. It maps out a framework of principles and approaches rather than the detailed content of what is to be taught and learned.

The premise of the Scottish curriculum is to provide a tool for a process of dialogue between teachers and learners. Through this dialogue, learners voice their learning goals and the teacher uses the learning wheel to identify the skills, knowledge and understanding required to achieve them (see Audrey McAlindon's article on page 24).

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the Scottish curriculum is the degree of trust that it places on tutors and learners. It assumes the ability of learners to identify their own learning goals and the professional skills of tutors to define and then address the learning needed. While the English curriculum tries to leave nothing to chance by specifying every detail, the Scottish curriculum specifies the framework and provides a tool for dialogue, then leaves everything to the tutor and learner. As McAlindon suggests, the Scottish approach is challenging for tutors. Only time will tell whether the trust has been wisely placed.

"Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the Scottish curriculum is the degree of trust that it places on tutors and learners.

Support and training

Given the degree of openness and learner-centredness in the Scottish approach, support and development are →

central to its success. Learning Connections is the 'development engine' for adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland. Consistent with the whole Scottish approach is its location, not in the education department but in Communities Scotland, the department with responsibilities for regeneration activities. The adult literacies team works alongside community learning and community engagement teams. The team includes staff based in the regions, works in partnership at many levels, and encourages practitioner and learner engagement in innovation, research, professional development and disseminating good practice.

Lessons

A grand experiment is going on in Scotland, one of the most dynamic and exciting places in the world right now to be an adult literacy or numeracy practitioner. The rest of us can only watch (with envy perhaps) as the story unfolds. So far, there is much to encourage us that a social practices approach can be operationalised not just within the classroom but at a national policy level. Of course, it is easy to idealise the situation from the opposite end of the country. I'm sure there are still frustration, confusion, dissatisfaction and resistance. But the idea is what inspires us. We all have much to learn and Scotland is helping move the whole field forward.

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Adult literacies:

the Scottish approach

The Adult Literacies Team in Scotland provides a focus for the development of national policy and strategy on adult literacy and numeracy. John Leavey reports on its work.

The adult literacy and numeracy strategy in Scotland is built on what was learned from a number of different research projects as well as a number of UK and international adult literacy programmes. The team's findings and recommendations are in the Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland (ALNIS) report (1), which provides a definition of literacy and numeracy, identifies targets, and provides the key principles by which literacies issues in Scotland will be approached.

Recognising the needs of adult learners

The research had shown that an effective approach to voluntary involvement in learning would have to recognise the motivations and priorities of the adults it intended to reach. Adults learn best when they feel they need to learn. Learning is most effective when it meets a need acknowledged by the learner and serves a real and immediate purpose. Learning opportunities therefore have to be responsive to learners, identified learning goals rather than imposed curriculum and learning outcomes.

This approach is reflected in the ALNIS report's definition of adult literacies:

> The ability to read and write and use numeracy, to handle information, to express ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners.

This is a broad definition that recognises literacies as inextricably linked to all spheres of life. It calls for a lifelong learning approach that focuses attention on the

interplay between demands and opportunities that trigger and maintain voluntary participation, especially among those in greatest need. This in turn calls for collaboration and synergy of effort across all sectors and policy areas so that all adults with learning needs are systematically matched with the resources available.

Strategy and targets

The strategy is two-pronged.

1 Funding is routed through the 32 local authorities to Community Learning and Development Strategy Partnerships. It is for the partnerships to decide collectively how funds should be used to help improve low levels of literacy and numeracy locally. The Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department (ETLLD) of the Scottish Executive has overall policy responsibility for adult literacy and numeracy.
2 National support is delivered by Communities Scotland's Learning Connections Adult Literacies Team. Communities Scotland is part of the Development Department and has a wide range of regeneration responsibilities.

Targets are set nationally and the partnerships submit Action Plans and reports to ETLLD who monitor progress. Over £40m has been allocated to the partnerships to help 150,000 learners for the five years up to March 2006. A further £25m has been committed for the years 2006-8.

Partnerships are expected to focus on a number of priority groups.

- People with limited initial education, particularly young adults.
- Unemployed people and workers facing redundancy.
- People with English as a second or additional language.
- People who live in disadvantaged areas.
- Workers in low-skilled jobs.
- People on low incomes.
- People with health problems and disabilities.

The national support for partnerships from the Learning Connections adult literacies team includes:

- encouraging innovative approaches to the provision of adult literacies, for example, through pathfinder projects;
- making the best use of electronic information and technology to support adult literacies learners;
- identifying, developing and disseminating information and resources about adult literacies;
- engaging in and encouraging research into the provision of adult literacies;
- exploring and disseminating good practice;
- encouraging professional development through a national training framework and training programme;
- providing training in response to the priorities identified by colleagues in the field; and
- liaising with practitioners and promoting the sharing of good practice.

National training standards and professional development

The development of professionalism within a discipline that is so diverse, both in the demography and geography served and in the range of sectors providing tuition, is a major challenge. In a move towards creating national training standards, Learning Connections instigated a professional development award (PDA:ITALL) which was launched by the Scottish Qualifications Agency in 2003. It was targeted at tutor assistants and people new to adult literacies teaching, and was the first national qualification available in Scotland.

Benchmarks for a new qualification, Teaching Qualification: Adult Literacies (TQAL), were published in July 2005 and the development of a course that is to be significantly practice-based will be commissioned this year. Both qualifications have been mapped to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. The PDA:ITALL is at level 6. The TQAL will offer options to qualify at levels 8 or 9.

Improving standards at local level

The drive to improve standards is also pursued at local level. A resource pack for managers and practitioners, known as the LiC pack, was developed in 2000 (1). This provides principles for designing the learning programme:

- promoting self-determination;
- developing an understanding of literacies;
- valuing difference and diversity;

and for developing the organisation:

- promoting participation;
- developing equitable, inclusive and antidiscriminatory practice;
- developing informed practice; and
- drawing on partnerships.

Emphasis is placed on the importance of integrated guidance to ensure that learners make the most appropriate choices, and that providers use the capacity of other partners to create the most effective response.

LiC also provides an assisted self-evaluation model which the literacies partnerships use to support continuing improvement.

At the heart of practice is the negotiation and continuing development of an ILP for each learner. This seeks to identify learning goals, to record and recognise progress towards them, and to reflect on the learning to develop new goals. ILPs can be used in group →

> Learning is most effective when it meets a need acknowledged by the learner and serves a real and immediate purpose.

learning and enable shared learning experiences to be reflected upon for each individual.

A curriculum framework for Scotland

Learning Connections has published this year *An Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland* (1) that will further support the development of high quality provision. It aims to promote the Scottish approach of a 'social practice model' to adult literacy and numeracy in whatever context they are delivered and to show how this can be done with the learner at the centre of the process.

It has been constructed in two parts. The first part summarises some of the main findings from research in order to identify the key principles of learning, teaching and assessment that should underpin the adult literacy and numeracy curriculum. The reason for this is that practitioners who understand what they are doing, and why, can be more effective.

The second part provides a very practical toolkit that will support practitioners in developing learning programmes that implement the key principles. Case studies of current adult literacies practice provide practical examples for guidance.

Together, these parts explain the processes undertaken by learners and tutors to identify, plan, carry out and

The Curriculum Framework for Scotland: the Wheel

Audrey McAlindon, Buddies for Learning, Renfrewshire Council, introduces a curriculum planning tool that has been developed in Scotland by Learning Connections.

The recently-published *Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland* takes a social practices approach. It does not define what is to be learned; instead, it provides guidance about how tutors can work with learners to identify, define and then address their learning goals. The emphasis is on teaching the learner, not the course.

This approach can be extremely challenging for a tutor. It can be difficult to identify and negotiate the direction of travel, in order to help the learner to progress and ultimately achieve their goals.

'The Wheel' has been designed to help this planning process and its use is fully explained in the Curriculum Framework document. The Wheel is not a static diagram; it is a dynamic planning tool to support a step-by-step process. By starting from the middle (the individual learner) and rotating each segmented circle in the Wheel in response to the individual's needs, it is possible to generate a huge variety of combinations. The Wheel can reveal all the activities and areas which can be explored in relation to the learner's goals and learning experience. As a planning tool, the Wheel helps to focus both the tutor and the learner, providing motivation, clarity and content as the teaching and learning resources are derived from the learner and the context of their own lives.

An holistic planning process

The Wheel not only depicts the complexity of the interaction and dialogue that should be occurring between learner and tutor, but it also provides a systematic process to ensure that the practice encompasses all aspects of literacies development. This guarantees a holistic approach for the developing learner. The Wheel encourages experienced tutors to explore teaching methods and resources they may not have considered before, while also providing inexperienced tutors with a process to follow, which builds their confidence.

Using the Wheel has helped me to think 'out of my usual box', and to break out of some of the limitations which I was previously unaware that I was bringing to the learning situation. For example, until I had used the Wheel, I would not have thought of encouraging a learner to use the computer when the identified goal was 'to write a letter to the school'. However, with the Wheel, it is impossible not to consider this option when the ring reaches 'use ICT to communicate information' or 'promoting self determination'. This does not necessarily mean that the learner would use ICT to write the letter. It does however guarantee that we discuss the possibility.

The end product is a mutually reinforcing cycle, which ensures and further develops good practice while encapsulating the principles of the social practice model.

An Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland can be downloaded from www.lc.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/cs_008875.pdf

review learning programmes for individual learners.

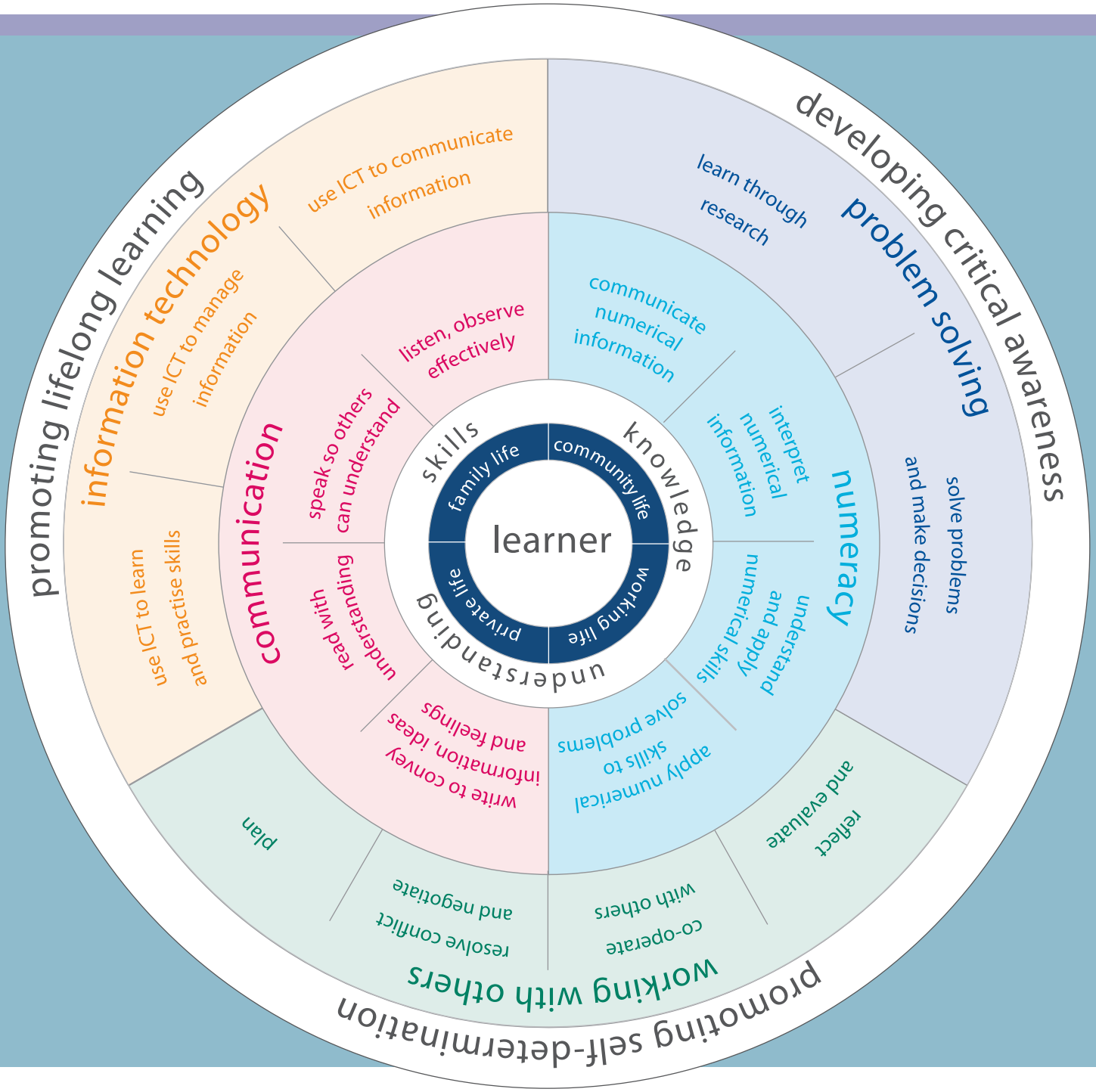
Partnership and communication

The Scottish approach is made up of a number of elements, all of which are needed if we are to achieve our goal. It requires partnership working on many levels and a high priority is given to communication with the adult literacies field in Scotland. For example, Learning Connections produces a regular email bulletin, a print newsletter *LC News* (please register on our website) and there are regular national meetings with key personnel from the literacies field. In addition, the Development Coordinators maintain close contact with specific geographic areas. All of these contacts are seen as vital in maintaining an informed system that is capable of responding to and learning from developments in the field.

The Learning Connections website (1) carries up-to-date information on our various initiatives, programmes and publications. Should you want to contact us, contact details for staff are included, there are discussion forum opportunities and links to useful sites.

John Leavey is a Communities Scotland Development Coordinator based in Aberdeen.

(1) For details of the work of the Adult Literacies team in Scotland, including research reports and other publications, go to www.lc.communitiesscotland.gov.uk



Integrating literacies: the CAVSS approach

Susan Bates, Literacies Co-ordinator, Renfrewshire Council, compares the CAVSS model with the approaches described in a recent NRDC research report.

There are many models for embedding or integrating literacies into main learning programmes. The case studies included in the NRDC research report *Embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL: Seven case studies of embedded provision* (NRDC 2005) illustrate some of these. CAVSS (The Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills) is a model designed to integrate literacies in the delivery of vocational training.

What is CAVSS?

CAVSS was developed and nationally accredited in Australia in 1999. It is being delivered in the Further Education sector in Scotland, and was recently successfully trialled in Renfrewshire with young learners in a community context. Like the NRDC case studies, CAVSS reflects a radical approach to supporting learners' literacies needs. There is significant common ground, in particular, in terms of the centrality of human relationships and the matter of respect.

CAVSS is not a course or a curriculum. Rather, it is a specific methodology for team-teaching but it is unlike other team-teaching approaches. The CAVSS model for team-teaching is narrowly defined and necessarily inflexible in order to achieve specific, essential outcomes. It defines the relationship between the two lecturers and, by doing so, provides a mechanism which ensures that the literacy support being offered is wholly and immediately relevant to the students and, just as importantly, provides a means for the literacy teacher to fit within, and be accepted and trusted by, the industry training environment.

CAVSS is designed to improve vocational training outcomes by addressing the barriers faced by students who will struggle or fail to meet the literacy and numeracy demands made by vocational course competencies and/or by teaching, learning and assessment methods. Now in its sixth year of delivery in Australia and third in Scotland, CAVSS is producing those results and a great deal more. It is also providing important insights into collaborative teaching models as a means of engaging learners and into how literacy and numeracy processes are most effectively learned and taught.

> CAVSS reflects a radical approach to supporting learners' literacies needs.

The CAVSS model in practice

The CAVSS teacher and the vocational lecturer work together and take turns to teach the group of learners. The vocational lecturer teaches the industry skills and knowledge. The CAVSS teacher teaches students how to do the reading, writing and maths that they need to achieve the industry-related competencies e.g. understanding concepts of scale and ratio to read building plans, or applying formulae to calculate an area to be tiled. The CAVSS teacher is not the 'remedial teacher' and neither teacher is relegated to being responsible for the students who 'can't keep up'. The CAVSS teacher teaches literacy and numeracy processes in the same time and place as the students need to apply those processes to an industry task, using the actual industry tasks as the context for teaching. The teachers share responsibility for making sure that every student is able to complete the task successfully.

What makes CAVSS effective

The core elements of CAVSS reflect two central issues in adult literacies:

- that language, literacy and numerical practices are socially and politically embedded, and vary significantly according to the discourses from which they emerge; and
- that there is a potent stigma associated with needing help with reading and writing.

A central principle of the CAVSS model is that no student should be singled out in relation to literacies support. The aim of this is to position literacies support as a normal, unremarkable element of vocational training and something that every student and teacher is engaged in. When literacy support is directed to all students and no-one is singled out and made to feel deficient, and when the support that students receive is wholly relevant to the industry training or assessment activity that they are

Embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Seven case studies of embedded provision **can be downloaded from the NRDC website at www.nrdc.org.uk and is available on paper from NRDC publications.**

undertaking in that moment, students respond very positively.

Relationships and respect

It is interesting to compare the case studies included in the NRDC research report (NRDC 2005) with the CAVSS model. Two particular aspects, 'respect' and 'the role of the literacies teacher' reveal considerable resonance between the models, as well as a significant point of difference.

The issue of respect and the importance of the quality of relationships between all participants in the delivery of embedded/integrated literacies are common to several of the NRDC case studies. The CAVSS model was designed to give primacy to students' interests, on the basis that there was no point in delivering support that was not acceptable to the recipients.

Vocational lecturers report that students who have had CAVSS support:

- are more actively engaged in the learning process;
- start to speak up, ask questions and take part in discussions;
- demonstrate increased motivation and confidence.
- readily work together with other students;

and that:

- 'the first thing they do when they have finished is turn around and see if someone else needs a hand.'

This may indicate that the collaborative approach being modelled to learners is displacing more competitive (and defensive or isolating) behaviours.

These are significant changes, possibly indicating that some healing has taken place in terms of the damage inflicted on many learners by previous failure in formal learning environments. While students who are enrolled in CAVSS cannot be categorised as 'literacy students' (they have chosen to enrol in a vocational qualification), many of them will have had experiences similar to those of adult literacy students i.e. of being undervalued, and of having their skills, interests, talents and goals regarded as 'second-rate' while they were at school.

Respect is also a crucial element in establishing and maintaining a productive partnership between CAVSS teachers and vocational lecturers. It is important for CAVSS teachers to understand that vocational lecturers were once vocational students and will not only have their students' interests at heart, but will relate personally to the students' values, goals and aspirations.

> The teachers share responsibility for making sure that every student is able to complete the task successfully.

Vocational students and lecturers are very quick to recognise a CAVSS teacher's genuine interest in the craft of the industry and the goals and achievements of the students, just as they are very quick to recognise when that respect is not there.

The role of the literacies teacher

The case studies illustrate a range of approaches taken by literacy teachers to develop resources and materials that relate to the vocational course content. CAVSS takes a very different approach.

CAVSS teachers do not prepare teaching and learning materials. The primary resource for CAVSS teachers is the vocational lecturer and his/her knowledge and experience of the course and of which concepts and tasks students find difficult. CAVSS teachers teach at the point of need, identifying and teaching literacy and numeracy processes as those processes are being applied, either in a workshop setting, or in more paper-based lessons. This reflects the concept of literacies as social practice in that it ensures that the support students receive is directly related to achieving industry training outcomes and, on another level, interrupts the ways in which dominant (academic) language cultures, and the values and practices associated with them, tend to become manifest in learning environments even when they are not relevant to, or are even at odds with, the values and practices of the industry culture.

At present, CAVSS is being delivered or trialled across approximately ten different industry areas in a number of further education colleges in Scotland. In response to demand, a National Scottish CAVSS Network has been established to assist new providers in implementing the model.

For more information about CAVSS, contact Susan Bates, Adult Literacies Renfrewshire-Buddies for Learning on 0141 889 8864 or at buddies.learning@renfrewshire.gov.uk

Words, power and sound

Samantha Duncan, literacy tutor at City and Islington College met the poet and cultural activist **Roi Kwabena** to discuss *Re:vision.*

ROI KWABENA was born in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 1956. As a cultural activist, he has lectured, performed and conducted workshops at the request of numerous governments, city councils, universities, schools, libraries and cultural bodies across the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. A former opposition Senator in his place of birth, he was Poet Laureate of Birmingham for the period 2001-02. To learn more about Roi and his work please visit http://nefertamu.tripod.com

On writing Re: vision – ***stirring curiosity***

I was commissioned to write *Re: vision* for **reflect** and it is a great honour and a pleasure to have written it. I was asked to write something on the journey of learning and the whole connection it has with our being.

On education – ***erudition is vital for mutual survival***

Education exists to ensure that we are abreast with each other on what is happening on the planet. The more that we can learn about ourselves and the universe the better; this should be our goal for education. The more educated we are about ourselves, our environment, and the cultures in which we live, the better the world will be. But it is how education is used by certain agencies and politicians and governments that we need to look at.

On adult literacy teaching – ***an eternally evolving landscape***

We live in a particular time and space whereby we have recognised that there are a lot of people who are referred to as 'disadvantaged' who fall through the net. I do not think it is in the interest of any society, culture, empire or nation to want people to fall through the net, because it would not be working in their interests if people are uneducated. You notice the poem is entitled *Re: vision*. This title could mean 'revising' how we look at literacy education and it could also mean 'reference to the vision,' the vision that we should all try to embrace, for more people to be included in what we refer to as life today.

A lot of people are excluded. Every person should be given equal access to education. We have governments fighting to raise literacy levels all over the world and yet what a lot of people have overlooked is the need to harness the cultural literacy resource of the country, the resource of human knowledge. Any country needs this human resource in order to achieve the sort of success and goals it sets itself. You've got to have people involved; the welfare of a nation is not about buildings, it's not about machines, it's about humans. I am of the opinion that, as my poem says, 'the multitudes still denied'. Yes, they are still denied; there are a lot of people who are denied, through no fault or reason of their own sometimes. And so we are all denied.

On functional versus cultural literacy – ***acquisition of dexterity***

What do I mean by cultural literacy? Cultural literacy is a necessity and, though we hear more about functional literacy, the two are part and parcel of the same thing. Functional literacy is usually defined as being able to do the reading and writing required to live our daily lives in the societies in which we live. Functional literacy would not be legitimate without cultural literacy. Cultural literacy is about knowing and caring about different cultures.

→

Re: vision

Dr Roi Ankhkara Kwabena

unfoldin' lingua within/without
hesitation. Inspiring concentration,
stirring curiosity,
exciting senses of all. Unexplored

the vistas. Welcome
all candidates come devotees
to seasons of abundant
opportunities

at the temples

trepidation diminishes
on acquisition of dexterity
confidence grows
for wonders never cease
through disciplined immersion,

only our nurtured
inhibitions constrain
learners' journeys
at quantum speed
to an eternally evolving
landscape of
over-standing. Life-long
learning be critical
necessity,

prerequisite for success
everywhere on terra

openly dipping in and out
is legitimate

Essential for clients deemed

"Uninitiated"..?

Not ILPs, codes, targets
mottled policies but

Good practice: Luxury

of time, space,
a listening ear
advice
patience and support

to comfortably
swim as infant turtles
in an un-charted ocean
requires confidence. Fulfilling

advance to master
crucial skills for effective
relocation. As sheer bliss

of awareness
all have experienced
to diverse degrees

more times calculated
in a lifetime of determined
poise and control. Circumstances

motion endowed agility
as toilers balance
daunting integers. So

literacy: nascent dynamic
functional
political
social
cultural

In essence

erudition is vital
for mutual survival
of the species
in post modern times. As multitudes

are still denied
unfettered access
to growth-nee competence

On the role of poetry in adult literacy teaching – *an uncharted ocean*
Poetry is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Some people refer to poetry as a 'higher language,' but poetry is life itself. For me, poetry is a necessary medium to communicate with people, to harness their creative potential, to allow them to explore things about themselves that they have never explored before, to give them a tool for self-realisation, a key to open doors hereto foreclosed to them. That's what I see poetry as; that is what it has meant to me all my life.

Poetry is very important in the literacy classroom. If poetry is not included, it is not a literacy class at all, because of all the missed opportunities that could have occurred. Imagine a class of students representing different cultural groups. Can you imagine the wealth of information there that could be brought out by discussing song and poetry?

Poetry helps to highlight the spoken word within the written word. There is a problem or an argument that you often hear people bringing about – whether the spoken word or the written word is more important. Societies that held oral traditions in high esteem have traditionally been denigrated. I believe that the spoken word and the written word are one and equal, and poetry embodies this. Sound and the ear are important.

Poetry is essential in terms of promoting a better understanding of different cultures – that's cultural literacy – in terms of writing, spelling, sound, the way words work. Once you can get the student to express themselves, you are miles ahead in the learning process, because people can be all bottled up inside. In adult literacy classes you need to cross barriers, and poetry can do this. Job applications, form filling, more 'functional' literacy is all relevant but you need to use poetry or creative writing to reach that target.

On poetry, memory and adult learning – *effective relocation*
Poetry unlocks our potential for self-expression. This works by tapping into the memory. Now, the greatest possession any human being could possess on the face of this earth is his memory. Memory is a precious resource that gives adult learners a whole wealth of information and experience to draw on. In fact, when, in workshops, we do harvesting of memories, we discover that people are stimulated not only to discuss things that they would not normally discuss, but to go away and explore further things about their memories and their creativity.

Poetry is very important in the literacy classroom. If poetry is not included, it is not a literacy class at all.

On introducing writing poetry to a class – *sheer bliss of awareness*
I am constantly asked how I engage learners in the classroom. The answer is simple – by writing poetry. It's very easy. What you do is very clearly show them the link between their popular culture and poetry. For example, rap or the popular songs that we sang as children, these are poetry. You have to break the ice and show them that the songs that they listen to and sing are poetry.

I work with different people, elderly people, prisoners, business people, all people who may not normally be writing poetry. It's easy to get them started. First of all I read them a poem I have written. I work with a drum as well; this has its own impact, because I use this for caller response, for emphasis on sound. Words, power and sound – these are important things.

I am constantly asked how I engage learners in the classroom. The answer is simple – by writing poetry.

On writing poetry – *unfoldin lingu within/without*
I write poetry for different reasons. Sometimes I write because of sadness, like the sadness that is taking place in New Orleans. But it's not just sadness that makes me write. I write poetry for different reasons. I use poetry to send people on their way at funerals, I use poetry at naming days, I use poetry at schools, universities, government agencies. I use poetry for celebratory occasions, birthdays, performances and political occasions as well.

On the future of literacy education – *advance to master*
Of course this is an optimistic poem. Is it a sad poem? 'As multitudes are still denied...'. This is a fact. It should be the goal of all involved in literacy to cut down these multitudes, to cut down the number of people that are falling through the net of education. I know sometimes people get all caught up in the 'ILPs' and the 'codes' and the 'targets', but this poem gives clear advice to literacy teachers; we should provide good practice: luxury of time, space, a listening ear, advice, patience and support.

ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de

Ralf Kellershohn describes an e-learning portal that has been developed as part of the APOLL (Alfa Portal Literacy Learning) project in Germany.

ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de (I want to learn how to write) went online on 8th September 2004. Specially designed for adult functional illiterates, it provides learners at all levels with initial assessment followed by individualised learning packages that provide daily practice units to match the learner's level of competence. There is audio material to support the exercises, and pictures, symbols and animations provide additional help in understanding. The individual learner's progress is recorded automatically, and their learning calendar is adjusted accordingly.

ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de can be used either as part of a literacy course or by an individual user. As the project is fully funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, access to the portal is free.

Initial assessment
As a first step, the user is asked to self-assess their level of literacy. The user then completes a series of exercises at that level. In the light of the result, the user's competence level is determined.

ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de distinguishes six different levels of writing abilities ranging from functional illiterates to advanced learners who can write but want to improve their standard.

The exercises
There are 25 different types of exercises, which have been written by ten experienced literacy trainers. The content of each exercise is taken from one of eleven areas of everyday life (e.g. banking, the home, public authorities, friends and relationships, nature, etc.). Eventually, there will be more than 17,000 individual exercises (so far, there are 2,000) arranged in the six levels.

The learning calendar
Between one and four learning units are provided in the daily learning calendar. Learners can postpone individual days, thus defining their own learning process.

ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de gives automatic feedback and additional help, with audio support, on the linguistic topic. The learner can set up an individual learning file with the exercises or words that he or she wants to practise, or with background information on linguistic topics.

Evaluation and progress
Weekly progress is assessed and recorded automatically, and the following week's learning units are adjusted accordingly. If language topics have been mastered successfully, the learner moves on in the curriculum. If exercises were not completed correctly, or were not even tackled, the same linguistic topics are presented in the context of new exercises in the following weeks. The system is also capable of identifying mistakes that recur from earlier language topics, and provides appropriate supporting exercises.

Tutorial support
Users who are enrolled in literacy courses are supported by their course tutors, who administer their courses on the learning portal, correct the exercises and monitor learning. Individual learners who are working alone are supported by an online tutor, who corrects exercises, keeps in contact via e-mail and voicemail, and gives feedback on progress.

The future
Besides *ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de* for literacy the APOLL project will develop content for numeracy ich-will-rechnen-lernen.de (I want to learn how to calculate) and for basic English.

Conclusion
ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de provides a virtual classroom but it is not an attempt to replace face-to-face teaching. No ICT-based solution can claim to substitute for direct teaching.

ICT and distance learning can be very helpful in reaching certain target groups that have access to the internet and do not yet have the courage to participate in a literacy course, maybe because they have already had a negative experience of such a course.

If we limit our expectations concerning distance learning and ICT, and do not expect ICT to offer an all-embracing solution for literacy, it can provide us with helpful and supportive tools. *ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de* is an attempt to use these tools to the benefit of adult learners. The first results are encouraging.

Web links

www.ich-will-schreiben-lernen.de
The web-based e-learning portal for adult functional illiterates.

www.apoll-online.de
Information on the APOLL Project, news and events to do with literacy and basic skills.

New light on literacy and numeracy

John Bynner and **Samantha Parsons** of the Institute of Education, describe preliminary results from longitudinal research using the 1958 and 1970 British birth cohort studies.

An important part of the evidence considered by the Moser Committee, whose report led to the *Skills for Life* strategy, was drawn from basic skills data collected for the Basic Skills Agency in a 12 year programme of longitudinal research. The research focused particularly on identifying people's earlier circumstances and experiences, which were then connected with the difficulties they experienced with literacy and numeracy later in their lives.

This work was based on the 1958 and 1970 British birth cohort studies, known respectively as the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 Cohort Study (BCS70). These are longitudinal studies that follow up all babies born in a single week, from their birth in the year the study began through to adulthood. The studies involve thousands of people.

We have collected and analysed new data at regular intervals throughout the lives of the cohort members. These studies look at a wide range of social and economic issues, not only literacy and numeracy, and can help to make sense of social and economic change and trends. So, when we look at adult literacy and numeracy, we can see how these issues relate to other factors in people's lives such as health and well-being, work, gender and family structures.

In 2004, as part of the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) programme, the latest surveys included new literacy and numeracy assessments (1). These were completed by all BCS70 cohort members when they were aged 34. In addition, funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) allowed the project to assess the skills of all natural or adopted children residing with the family, from a randomly selected 1 in 2 sample of cohort members. So, nearly 4,000 children up to 16 were also included in the study, giving us the opportunity not only to understand more about adults' literacy and numeracy needs but also to ask about the impact on children of their parents' literacy and numeracy skills and learning.

This article offers results from our analysis of preliminary data from the survey, based on 7,180 of the 10,000 BCS70 cohort members who were finally interviewed. The report supplies descriptive data about the cohort members' literacy and numeracy skills and attitudes, and correlates these with other aspects of people's lives. We believe these results have real significance for the future development of the *Skills for Life* strategy.

Photography: PhotoAlto

Self-awareness and motivation

Among those people we surveyed, there was clear evidence of continuing low awareness of, or importance attached to, basic skills difficulties. This is not surprising among adults; most of them manage their lives well and learn to cope with any difficulties that they have.

Cohort members who were at the lowest literacy and numeracy levels (entry 2 or below) were most likely to acknowledge problems with basic skills , and those who did were more likely than others (i.e. those at higher levels) to want to improve their skills. However, substantial numbers neither acknowledged any problems nor had any desire to do anything to improve their skills; no more than 3 per cent reported they had been on a course to help them improve their reading, writing or number and maths calculations.

In policy terms, what is particularly significant is that, once a person's awareness is triggered, interest in improvement tends to follow. The very low number of adults who report difficulties with reading, writing or numbers and have actually been on a course to help improve their skills needs to be set against the significant proportion of those who acknowledge a problem who say that they want to improve their skills. And this is most true of people with the greatest learning needs.

These are the first challenges and opportunities that the *Skills for Life* strategy needs to address. How to:

- stimulate awareness of problems;
- translate people's awareness into information and motivation to re-engage with learning;
- make provision available that closely matches the specific needs identified by potential learners, facing the changes needed to the system to make responsiveness mainstream.

Entry level

Substantial differences in life chances, quality of life and social inclusion were evident between individual adults at or below entry 2 compared with others at higher levels of literacy and numeracy competence. Entry 2 skills were associated with lack of qualifications, poor labour market experiences and prospects, poor material and financial circumstances, poor health prospects and little social and political participation.

Gender differences were also marked in some of these relationships, including the tendency for men in their mid-30s with poor reading, writing and maths skills to lead a solitary (single) life without children. In contrast, women with the same levels of skills were also more likely to be without a partner but more typically were parents, often with large families.

Getting better and getting worse

Improvement and deterioration in literacy and numeracy performance in the assessments was found for a substantial minority of cohort members. Most 'movement' in performance was associated with numeracy, highlighting the more fluid, less ingrained nature of numerical skills. Further analysis will help to shed light on what life experiences bring about improvement or deterioration in skills.

For now, we have enough evidence to suggest that the improvement of skills between age 21 and 34 has a wider and more substantial influence on people's quality of life at age 34 than the deterioration of good skills across the same age period.

Skills may deteriorate through lack of use with little impact on life chances or quality of life. But skills enhancement is more likely to open up opportunities and improved self-confidence which is reflected in the wide range of positive life outcomes associated with it. This gives powerful support to the Moser group's analysis and *Skills for Life* strategy's goals of the importance of enhancing literacy and numeracy skills to achieve social inclusion.

The average scores for children of parents with the poorest grasp of literacy and numeracy were markedly lower.

Intergenerational transfer

We tested the skills of the cohort members' children, using the British Ability Scales II (BAS II). These were matched with the parents' literacy and numeracy levels. The average scores for children of parents with the poorest grasp of literacy and numeracy were markedly lower.

The gap was particularly marked between cohort member parents at entry 2, and to a lesser extent entry 3, and higher levels. The gap was also most evident for the younger rather than the older children and for parents' literacy more than numeracy. In fact for the older children there was barely any relation-ship between parents' numeracy and children's number skills.

Although much more penetrating analysis will be needed to understand the basis of intergenerational skill transfer, it seems that parent literacy and numeracy is an important part of it, especially in the case of parents whose skills are at the lowest levels.

Implications

The findings reported here establish the huge potential of the BCS70 data to enhance understanding of the consequence of poor literacy and numeracy in adult life, as well as the benefits of learning for adults and for the transfer of skills across generations. They also re-affirm many earlier findings, while recasting them in terms of the categories through which the *Skills for Life* strategy is delivered.

They point to the considerable disadvantage faced by adults at the lowest literacy and numeracy levels as exemplified by entry 2 and below – a disadvantage that is subsequently passed on to their children as reflected in the children's relatively poor literacy and numeracy acquisition. This is clearly an issue of inequality with profound and long-term implications.

(1) For details of the development of the assessment instruments for the BCS70 age 34 follow-up see Parsons, S. and Bynner, J. (forthcoming) Measuring Basic Skills for Longitudinal Study: The design and development of instruments for use with cohort members in the age 34 follow-up in the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70). London: NRDC.

Reflections on writing

Sue Grief asked a number of practitioners and researchers to share what they believe is important in teaching writing to adult literacy learners. These are some of their responses.

EMAIL FORUM

Subject: **OBSERVATIONS ON WRITING**

It has always seemed to me that writing is a risky business. Every time we allow someone else to read a fragment of our writing, we reveal something of ourselves to them. Our fear is that what we reveal will be our weakness, not our strength: a poverty of expression, a weakness in spelling or grammar. Sometimes, however, there can be surprise. When we come to read back our own writing, not all of it is rubbish. Somewhere in the middle of it all will be a gem that, until then, we had not known was there: a new thought, a recalled memory.

Jane Mace

One can 'handle' language. Writing is a sensuous activity. Writing is a complex, absorbing activity, simultaneously creating a completely unique text and drawing on knowledge/experience of writing/words/text types/genres/layouts/fonts, and dealing with the particular stimulus to write at all, and making the fine motor movements of writing/typing, and looking at and interacting with the emerging visual product.

Suzanne Thompson

Subject: **INFLUENCES ON THINKING AND PRACTICE**

As a practitioner, I have found Frank Smith's book *Writing and the Writer* (Smith 1982) inspirational. It was published in 1982 but is still very relevant and says important things about writing which I think are not given enough emphasis in the Core Curriculum. The following quotations give a flavour of the book.

"Writing cannot be taught directly; it is learned by writing, by reading and by perceiving oneself as a writer. But teachers are influential as models and guides."

"Writing is not learned in steps; there is no ladder of separate and incremental skills to be ascended. Writing develops as an individual develops, in many directions, continually, usually inconspicuously, but occasionally in dramatic and unforeseeable spurts. And, like individual development, writing requires nourishment and encouragement rather than a restraining regimen."

Amy Burgess

The biggest inspiration for me has been Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1966), especially the third chapter on 'generative themes'. When using generative themes, material, vocabulary and form come exclusively from the students' experience. 'Generative themes' can be drawn from the things around us that are easily accessible, that are to do with intimate, urgent concerns of daily life. That way the students can use subject

matter that will motivate them to write.
In my experience, ongoing class discussion is the best tool for building up pieces of writing. Through collaboration, the class can find the 'generative themes' for the term's work. They can build up vocabulary and discourse with which to talk about these themes. Using their own vocabulary, present in their minds through the discussion, helps the students to be fluent when it comes to writing. They can use the words confidently for their own ends.
Henrietta Cullinan

I have run many creative writing groups and have based them on the work of Paulo Freire. The learners explore their worlds and their lives and try to make sense of them, using discussion, imagination and writing. This approach has worked with college and community groups and also for the three creative writing groups for people with mental health difficulties.
Helen Ruddock

"We do not consider that teaching in itself matters very much...a special method for teaching long division is of no significance, for long division is of no importance except to those who want to learn it." (Neill:1968)

This summarises the importance of identifying learner motivation and the ability to translate this into a learning process. From my own teaching experience and research it is apparent that it does not necessarily matter what the method of teaching is compared with learner motivation. One recommended pedagogical 'best practice' does not fit all.

Talking to the learners it is clear that the majority benefit from an approach which allows them to explore their own creativity. One learner explained how important it was that she was allowed to study the topic of interest to her, make notes and write up her findings. She has written two pieces, one on the rock group U2 and one on tigers. She insisted that, if she had not been allowed to write what she wanted, she would have stopped coming.
Elaine Fisher

I pay tribute to the wave of research into children's writing development in the UK in the 1970s. It provided a climate for newcomers to work in, and teaching principles which have stood the test of time. It told of the importance of teaching learners about their intended purpose and audience. Sociolinguists provided evidence for the value of bringing speech and writing closer together. Now as then, such work gives authority to adult literacy teachers' use of the "language experience" approach, used with groups as well as with individuals.
Jane Mace

By far the most important reason for teaching writing, of course, is that it is a basic language skill, just as important as speaking, listening and reading. Students need to know how to write letters, how to put written reports together, how to reply to advertisements and, increasingly, how to write using electronic media. They need to know some of writing's special conventions (punctuation, paragraph construction etc.) Part of our job is to give them that skill.
Carole McGivern

One learner insisted that, if she had not been allowed to write what she wanted, she would have stopped coming.

Illustration: Clive Goodyer

EMAIL FORUM

Subject: TEACHING WRITING: WHAT WORKS

Teachers should...provide opportunities for people to write for real purposes and real audiences. And "real purposes" encompasses more than utilitarian purposes such as writing to convey information. It includes things like writing to explore your own and other people's ideas and feelings, writing to make sense of your life, writing to preserve your experiences, and writing for pleasure or "just for fun". I think it's also important for teachers to respond to people's writing as writing, rather than as an 'exercise' or a test. This means responding first of all to the content of the writing.'

Amy Burgess

In my experience a successful writing programme should:

- help people to understand the difference between speech and writing. Many difficulties are the result of trying to transfer the skills used successfully in one mode of communication directly into the other mode.
- help people learn how to write for an audience. This helps beginner writers to understand the point of punctuation, and different styles and formats.
- be based on something of great personal interest to the writer, thus enthusing people to try writing outside the classroom context.

I have found that the most effective way to combine these factors is to encourage students to undertake a piece of research into something of interest to them. They then present their topic to other group members. Recent research projects have included the life of Freddie Mercury, Greek island hopping, and the slave trade. The students become "experts" in their field. They tend to write much more outside the classroom context and they begin to develop their writing skills to meet the needs of an audience. Furthermore, we all learn things we didn't know before.

Linda Cook

Subject: ELECTRONIC MEDIA

...sometimes I wonder "Do we as teachers look to out-dated methods of teaching writing – paper, paper and more paper. Surely this is not the way forward?"

Perhaps some of the reasons why individuals refuse to write in class are that the written work has to be corrected, marked and crossed out. It doesn't boost confidence, especially to a basic skills learner. Yet we see learners using 'text', in the classroom, on buses, shopping, all with great enthusiasm and motivation. Why?

I believe some of the answer lies in the fact that in our fast-moving world, electronic media are non-judgmental, nobody is going to laugh or shout if you get a spelling wrong, or if you don't use paragraphs. Using a mobile phone, ICT, or ILT is an excellent way to develop writing and, although it doesn't solve all problems, in getting students to use language skills it should be encouraged, especially for writing skills.

Carol McGivern

Subject: FURTHER RESEARCH

Helping adult learners improve their writing seems in the main to need relentless effort. Improvement for most appears to be slow and hard-won. In the Progress in Adult Literacy study (Brooks et al., 2001) we found rather little evidence of progress...But many of the learners involved had not attended all that many hours of provision between pre- and post-assessment, the writing prompts may have been less than inspiring, and perhaps the marking scheme did not capture whatever improvement was happening. So the search for what really works is still wide open.

Greg Brooks

It seems to me that these discussions have not reflected a 'skills' view. Skilled and interesting though the descriptive social science...often is, I am still not convinced that descriptions of what people do with their 'capabilities' to read and write necessarily gives us much help in deciding how best to teach reading and writing.

Such academic interest in adult literacy as exists seems to focus more on the socially structured ways in which people use their 'skills', and not how these skills were acquired, or might best have been acquired, in the first place in childhood or later in life.

Karen Heath

We would welcome readers' responses to the views expressed here. If you would like to share your views, you are welcome to join the discussion group on WRITING on the NRDC website www.nrdc.org.uk

Brooks, G. et al., (2001) Progress in adult literacy: do learners learn? Basic Skills Agency

Freire, P. (1966) Pedagogy of the Oppressed . Available in various editions.

Neill, AS (1968) Summerhill Paul Avrich Collection (Library of Congress)

Smith, F. (1982) Writing and the Writer London Heinemann

Longitudinal research

Alison Smith, NRDC researcher at the Institute of Education, describes the longitudinal approach to research and considers its value for educational research and the *Skills for Life* strategy.

One of the limitations of most survey-style research is that it gives only a snapshot of the social context being studied. On its own, it is unable to track changes over time or to identify the cause-and-effect of, for example, an educational policy, by carrying out before-and-after studies.

Tracking change over time

Longitudinal studies are an attempt to respond to this problem and usually take one of two forms. In one form, such as that taken by the British Social Attitudes Survey or the British Crime Survey, a sample of the population is surveyed at regular intervals and any changes over time are measured and reported. However, the sample is made up of different individuals on each occasion. This sort of study gives us a series of snapshots but, in each snapshot, we see different individuals so we cannot be sure that any changes we observe are due to differences between these individuals or to the individuals themselves having changed after exposure over time to what we are trying to measure (such as the impact of the *Skills for Life* strategy).

In the other form, the panel or cohort study, the same group of respondents are surveyed on a number of occasions over a period of months, years or decades. In this form of research, we can be more confident that we are tracking the real effect of social changes, provided of course that our original cohort is representative of the population we wish to study.

A well-known example of a cohort study is the National Child Development Study, which has been following the development of all the 17 000 children born in Britain in the week 3-9 March 1958. It is assumed that they are representative of their generation. A whole series of reports, covering a range of themes and by different authors, have been based on the data collected by this study.

Another example, on a much smaller scale, is the NRDC's Teachers' Study. This study is collecting data from a panel of *Skills for Life* teachers and trainers, covering information about, for example, individual wages, hours worked, and level of education. These teachers were first interviewed in the academic year 2004-05 and will be re-interviewed at several subsequent points in time.

Cause and effect

The opportunity to study change in the same group of individuals as a result of policy change makes longitudinal data invaluable to educational research. When evaluating educational policy, the researcher's goal is to test whether one variable has a causal effect on another (such as the effect of teacher qualifications on learners' success). Simply finding an association between these two variables might be suggestive but, unless causality can be established by looking at before-and-after data, it is rarely compelling.

In this form of research, we can be more confident that we are tracking the real effect of social changes.

Another advantage of panel data is that it may also allow us to study the importance of time delays in behaviour, or the medium- to long-term result of exposure to learning. This information can be significant since many *Skills for Life* programmes can be expected to have an impact only after some time has passed.

Bynner and Parsons

The work of John Bynner and Samantha Parsons (see page 32 of this edition of **reflect**), makes use of the data collected by the National Child Development Study and by the British Cohort Study, whose cohort is the 17000 babies born in one week in April 1970. Members of this cohort have been surveyed in 1975, 1980, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2000. Some 11 000 of the original cohort are still involved. Bynner and Parsons have reanalysed the data about these individuals, including tests of their levels of literacy and numeracy, to show how these affect their life-course and life-chances.

For more information about a wide range of longitudinal research, see the websites of the UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC) at http://iserwww.essex.ac.uk/ulsc and of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at www.cls.ioe.ac.uk

NRDC publications

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Report

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Measuring basic skills for longitudinal study: the design and development of instruments for use with cohort members in the age 34 follow-up in the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70).
Report
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Six full embedded case studies.
Web only documents
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Report
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Measurement wasn't taught when they built the pyramids. The report of the NRDC teacher research project into the teaching and learning of common measures, especially at entry level.
Report and summary
November 2005

Success factors in informal learning: young adults' experience of literacy, language and numeracy.
Report
December 2005

Glossary

BSA

Basic Skills Agency. Independent charitable agency funded by DfES and the Welsh Assembly Government. See www.basic-skills.co.uk

CPD

Continuing professional development.

DfES

Department for Education and Skills. See www.dfes.gov.uk

E1, E2, E3

Entry Levels in the adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL core curricula.

EFL

English as a Foreign Language.

ESOL

English for Speakers of Other Languages.

FENTO

Further Education National Training Organisation. No longer active, See LLUK.

HEFCE

Higher Education Funding Council for England. Distributes public money for teaching and research to universities and colleges. See www.hefce.ac.uk

IATEFL

International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language. See www.iatefl.org

ILP

Individual Learning Plan. Document used to plan and record a student's learning.

ITE/ITT

Initial teacher education/training.

LEA

Local Education Authority.

LLUK

Lifelong Learning UK. SSC responsible for the professional development of all those working in libraries, archives and information services, work-based learning, higher education, further education and community learning and development.See www.lluk.org.uk

LLU+

National consultancy and professional development centre for staff working in the areas of literacy, numeracy, dyslexia, family learning and ESOL. See www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus

LSC

Learning and Skills Council. Responsible for funding and planning education and training for learners over 16 years old in England. See www.lsc.gov.uk

NATECLA

National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults. National (UK) forum and professional organisation for ESOL practitioners. See www.natecla.org.uk

NFER

National Foundation for Educational Research. See www.nfer.co.uk

NIACE

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education – England and Wales. Non-governmental organisation working for more and different adult learners. See www.niace.org.uk/

OFSTED

Non-ministerial government department with responsibility for the inspection of all schools and all 16-19 education. See www.ofsted.gov.uk/

PCET

Post-compulsory education and training.

PGCE/Cert Ed

Non-subject-specific qualifications that give qualified teacher status.

QCA

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Non-departmental public body, sponsored by the DfES. See www.qca.org.uk

RaPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy. Independent network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers in adult basic education. See www.literacy.lancaster.ac.uk/rapal/

SSC

Sector Skills Council. SSCs are independent, employer-led UK-wide organisations licensed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to tackle the skills and productivity needs of their sector throughout the UK. See www.ssda.org.uk

Skills for Life

National strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills in England. See www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/

www.nrdc.org.uk

NRDC
Institute of Education
University of London
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7612 6476
Fax: +44 (0)20 7612 6671
email: info@nrdc.org.uk

National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund