

reflect

THE MAGAZINE OF NRDC | ISSUE 5 | MAY 2006

SPECIAL REPORT: Entry level

Researchers, practitioners
and policy-makers
consider the issues

Literacy in Brazil

Timothy Ireland
describes the national
strategy to tackle
illiteracy

Mathematics and social justice

Teeka Bhattacharai and Kate
Newman discuss what is
worth fighting for in adult
numeracy

Dyslexia and the bilingual learner

Ross Cooper revisits a
seminal paper



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The board meets a few weeks after publication of each issue of the magazine, to comment on the latest issue and to advise on the next issue and on future editorial policy. We are very keen to recruit new members of the board, especially practitioners. If you think you could commit to three meetings per year and would like to contribute to the development of **reflect** please contact David Budge, email: d.budge@ioe.ac.uk

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 NRDC is dedicated to improving literacy, numeracy, language and related skills and knowledge. One of its 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 teaching and learning and extend adults' educational and employment opportunities.

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Basic Skills Agency
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For information on alternative 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

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**Articles for reflect should be sent to
David Budge, NRDC, 20 Bedford Way,
London WC1H 0AL or email
d.budge@ioe.ac.uk**

Editorial

Cover illustration:
Jason Bennion

The big theme of Issue 5 of **reflect** is Entry level. In **reflect** Issue 4, John Bynner and Samantha Parsons of the Institute of Education commented on the ways in which basic skills issues impact on people's working lives, social inclusion and health. They showed that those with skills at Entry 2 and below are especially disadvantaged. We decided to ask a group of practitioners and researchers what the implications of this might be for teaching and learning in *Skills for Life*; the resulting debate was wide-ranging, covering policy, pedagogy and research but always with Entry level learners, and the particular challenges and rewards they bring, in mind.

Elsewhere in this issue we have a special report on literacy in Brazil, where a major national initiative 'Brasil Alfabetizado', the 'Literate Brazil' programme, was launched by the federal government in 2003. We also focus on the influence of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, through his own words in an interview first published in the RAPAL journal and also through the words of Tom Sticht, who worked with Freire. Sticht describes Freire's philosophy of literacy for liberation and freedom and considers what his enduring legacy might be. One element of that legacy is a method of literacy teaching widely used in Brazil. Freire himself denied there was a 'Freirean method', but Maria Madelena Torres, a literacy educator who works with excluded communities in satellite towns of the Brazilian capital, Brasilia, is in no doubt about the influence of Freire on her teaching; she describes a typical course on page 28.

Freire's work was one of the major influences on the development of the social practice model of literacy teaching and learning. In Issue 4 we reported on how this model was being used in Scotland; here David Barton and colleagues give us a succinct description of what taking a social perspective on literacy means in practice.

The aim of **reflect** is to provide a forum for dialogue between research, policy and practice, to give a voice to the research-informed practitioner and to the practice-informed researcher. We hope you are stimulated by the articles in this issue and that you use our Letters page or our online forums to respond with your ideas and widen the debate. Or why not submit your own article? We look forward to hearing what you think and sharing your ideas with others. ▀

**Ursula Howard
Director, NRDC**

The Entry level debate

Ursula Howard introduces the debate and emphasises the social agenda of the *Skills for Life* strategy.

What would the modern-day equivalent of the man (sic) on the Clapham omnibus make of the discussion on Entry level learners that fills the next six pages of this magazine?

Parts of the discussion must be totally bewildering to those outside the *Skills for Life* community. Pre-entry and Entry 1, 2 and 3? ESOL? LLN? Only the cognoscenti understand these terms. Nevertheless, what follows is much more progressive educationally and socially than those official labels suggest.

Ground-breaking research

This important discussion was triggered by genuinely ground-breaking research by John Bynner and Samantha Parsons (see below). It revealed that adults with literacy and numeracy skills at or below Entry 2 are even more disadvantaged than had been thought. Not only do they find it much harder to get jobs, they are

more prone to health and psychological problems than their peers and are more likely to suffer multiple social disadvantages.

A survey of more than 7,000 adults included in the 1970 British Birth Cohort Study showed that men with the lowest basic skills are more likely to lead a solitary life. Women with low-level skills are also more likely to be without a partner but often have large families.

The average literacy and numeracy scores of their children are also markedly lower. As Bynner and Parsons said, this is therefore 'an issue of inequality with profound and long-term implications'.

However, the most disadvantaged adults may not recognise their learning needs. Substantial numbers neither acknowledged any problems nor had any desire to do anything to improve their skills', the researchers said. 'No more than 3 per cent reported they had been on a course to help them improve their reading, writing or

reflect Issue 4 (October 2005) included an article by John Bynner and Samantha Parsons of the Institute of Education in which they described preliminary results from longitudinal research using the 1958 and 1970 British Birth Cohort studies. Among other things they commented on the ways in which basic skills issues impact on people's working lives, social inclusion and health. They showed that those with skills at Entry 2 and below are especially disadvantaged and that poor numeracy has a particularly strong impact, especially on women.

'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.'



We asked a group of practitioners, researchers and policy-makers to engage in an email debate to consider what the implications of this might be for teaching and learning in *Skills for Life*.

number and maths calculations'.

The Government is aware of this longstanding problem and in 2001 launched its hugely ambitious and successful *Skills for Life* strategy. As Skills Minister Bill Rammell has said, this represents the 'best opportunity to tackle our historic skills weakness and to achieve economic and social benefits for all'. Many thousands more adults are in learning now than five years ago. All over the country, lives are being changed for the better.

Chinese whispers

However, we have also seen that numerical educational achievement targets can unwittingly distort priorities. Messages from the Department for Education and Skills and the Learning and Skills Council can also be misunderstood at local level – the 'Chinese whispers' effect.

Adults with the greatest needs may not be targeted by some learning providers because they cannot gain a national qualification relatively quickly. Learners who can easily reach a target level may be more attractive to providers than adults with a history of educational failure, or those who use learning simply to maintain their existing skill levels. There have consequently been press reports of further education colleges turning away people who are eager to join Entry 1 and 2 courses – particularly in ESOL.

Much has been said about the so-called '80/20 balance' of provision and its relationship to the *Skills for*

Life target, which starts with assessment at Entry level 3. Let's remember that the 80 per cent also includes Entry levels 1 and 2, where learners take nationally recognised qualifications, but we clearly need to offer even more help to those at most risk of social exclusion. This is what *Skills for Life* has always intended to do – but powerful economic arguments and the logic of targets sometimes obscure the Government's social and emancipatory agendas.

This **reflect** feature is, first and foremost, a discussion about how best to work with learners. Practitioners who are more concerned with the pedagogical and motivational challenges posed by Entry level learners will also find much to interest them in these pages.

Supporting learners

Our discussants suggest how teachers can support learners' journeys from Entry levels 1 to 3 and beyond. They emphasise the importance of seeing each learner as a unique individual with individual strengths and individual aspirations. Most importantly, they display a deep understanding and respect for adults with the greatest learning needs.

As Jan Eldred of NIACE says in her contribution which will doubtless be quoted often in the future: 'Entry level literacy learners are not Entry level people'.

Ursula Howard is director of the NRDC.

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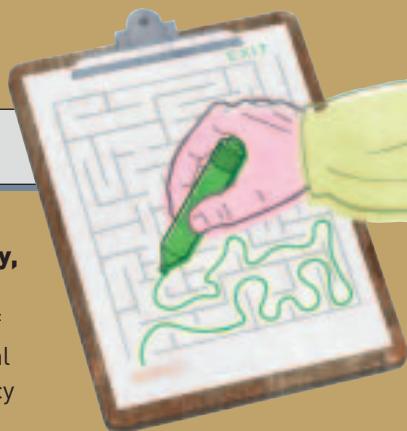
Subject: ENTRY LEVEL

Juliet Merrifield (Director, Friends Centre, Brighton)

 Research is always good when it tells us what we already know. I welcome the evidence that the people most in need are the ones that have been the traditional focus of adult literacy work. I think we have to question ourselves about how effective we have been at supporting learners to move on, up and out. Progression is much easier (I didn't say easy) for the classroom assistant who needs a Level 2 test to get into training than for someone facing multiple challenges and difficulties of the kind highlighted in the **reflect** article.

John Comings (Director, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, NCSALL, USA)

 One approach to serving this group of adults might be to provide educational services that help them improve their literacy and numeracy skills. This requires a comprehensive assessment of their strengths and weaknesses and a teacher trained to provide instruction that builds on the strengths and addresses the weaknesses. This approach also requires a good deal of time-on-task, but would probably lead to increases on a test of reading or maths skill. Our field is trying to take this approach, but our programmes often lack the resources to make it work and our learners often do not spend the time-on-task necessary to make gains that would show up on a test. Another approach might be to help adults in this



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group learn how to use their limited skills to accomplish the tasks of adulthood that are now causing them trouble. NCSALL has some emerging findings from its longitudinal study in Portland, Oregon that indicate that some adults may expand their literacy practices after participation in programmes even when their skill scores do not increase, and so it might be possible to help adults in this group accomplish more reading and maths tasks. This approach might not produce an increase in scores on a test of reading or math skills, but it might lead to positive life outcomes.

Another approach might be to teach adults in this group to use assistive technology to accomplish these tasks (software that reads text, for example). We would need a new type of test that measures the ability of someone to read and employ maths with assistive technology. This approach might provide an immediate benefit and lead to positive life outcomes.

An experiment that tested these three approaches might provide us with an answer as to how best to serve this group in a way that has an impact on their lives. Or it might lead to a new approach to services that combines all three approaches in such a way that these adults achieve an immediate benefit but also increase their skills over time.

Hal Beder (Rutgers University, NCSALL, USA)

 I think we need to be careful when we define the 'literacy population' as those who fall into Levels 1 and 2 because that implies that the 'literacy population' is clearly defined by performance on the test and homogeneous in respect to the need for literacy education. In the United States, as in most developed countries, the economy has become 'hollowed out'. At the top there is a group of well-educated, highly skilled workers who are doing quite well and will continue to do well. At the bottom there is a group of less skilled, less educated workers who work primarily in the service sector for poor wages. Income for this group tends not to increase over time. The middle, which used to be

 **Another approach might be to help adults in this group learn how to use their limited skills to accomplish the tasks of adulthood that are now causing them trouble.**

John Comings, NCSALL

comprised of relatively well paid (with benefits) manufacturing workers has declined significantly.

So one might argue that, because employment in the bottom sector is relatively high (i.e. there are jobs for the taking) and because the work they do is necessary to the economy (and perhaps because no one else is willing to do it), we don't have a problem. The skills of the labor supply are quite consistent with labor demand and, after all, the hollowed-out economy is a product of globalization and we all know we can't do anything about that. Add to this the very convincing evidence that, while the labour market returns for successful completion of adult literacy education (as measured by obtaining a General Education Diploma in the US) are very modest and flat over time, the returns to post-secondary education are substantial.

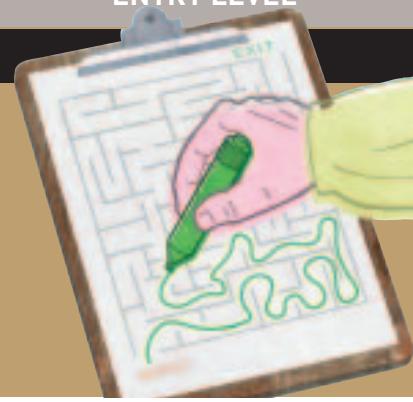
The implication for me is that we should not think of providing adult literacy education alone as dispatching our social responsibility. Rather, adult literacy education should be considered as a necessary means for enabling the transition into post-secondary and other skills-enhancing education. Without that second step, are we simply helping to slot folks into the bottom of the economic heap from which, without additional skills, they are unlikely to escape?

Juliet Merrifield (Friends Centre, Brighton)

 I think the research is showing (consistently with what I know about our literacy learners) that people with the most limited literacy skills are much less likely even to be on the first rung of the employment ladder, those low-wage, service-sector jobs. They may want to have that option. We know from other research that working is in itself a major boost to confidence, health and well-being, even when it's not a very high-powered job. The Bynner/Parsons research seems to indicate the holistic nature of poverty and deprivation and, while I don't think that literacy education answers every (or even many) problems, it is part of the work that needs to be done.

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Juliet Merrifield,
Friends Centre



“We need to shift our education policies from a focus on one life cycle, as in ‘lifelong education’, to a focus on multiple ‘Life Cycles education’.

Tom Sticht, US education consultant

Jan Eldred (NIACE)

One might suggest that adult literacy and numeracy learning provision was designed for the people to whom Bynner and Parsons' work refers. The *Skills for Life* strategy embraces achievements up to Level 2, in order to support wider skill development in England and, while one wouldn't argue with that, there's a danger that those operating at lower levels have become neglected in the drive to meet targets. We need to re-focus on some of the target groups which the strategy identified.

The linkages between poverty, poor health, lack of access to and participation in community, political and social activities, and poor literacy and numeracy, might not previously have been strongly evidenced through research, but anyone who has taught in this field could describe the association. The kinds of literacy activities with which people ask for help are clear indicators: forms related to benefit claims, letters from local and national government offices, dialogue and communication related to health issues, problems related to a lack of understanding of their children's education, perceived injustices over rent and council taxes, and difficulties in understanding rights and responsibilities when unemployed. Tutors regularly deal with such literacy matters.

However, I have a worry that the education and training system then believes that people with lower levels of skills should be taught how to complete forms, write letters to the council or understand the education system. This can result in an arid and unimaginative approach to literacy learning. Reading between the lines of the recent interim report from the Department of Work and Pensions on mandatory basic skills for Job Centre Plus users (1) suggests that some customers experienced just such uninspired provision. If you've been through the education system and still struggle, you want the most creative and imaginative approaches to learning we can design. Just because you have difficulty with your council tax (and the Deputy Prime Minister does), or understanding your son's

Tom Sticht (International Consultant in Adult Education)

One of the major findings of the Bynner and Parsons research was that parents' basic skills were related to their children's achievement in literacy and numeracy.

Given the important intergenerational effects of parents' education level on the achievement of their children, I believe we need to shift our education policies from a focus on one life cycle, as in ‘lifelong education’, to a focus on multiple ‘Life Cycles education’. A Life Cycles approach to education explicitly recognizes the means by which parents transfer their educational achievements to the achievement of their children. This includes an intergenerational transfer of interest in and motivation to succeed in education.

A second major finding by Bynner and Parsons was that there is a low level of awareness among the least literate adults about their own skills limitations and how greater literacy might improve their own lives. This poses major problems for outreach to bring the least literate adults into provision. However, it may be possible to reach out to many of them with a strong campaign about Life Cycles education and their own role in the intergenerational transfer of basic skills.

Entry level literacy learners are not Entry level people.

Jan Eldred, NIACE

References

- (1) Joyce, L. et al (2005) Evaluation of basic skills mandatory training pilot and national enhancements: interim report Research report No. 307 Department of Work and Pensions

national curriculum challenges, doesn't mean that you can't be inspired by poetry, literature, amazing facts and the wonders of the internet. Physical and economic poverty might be linked with low levels of literacy but that doesn't mean low levels of thinking and appreciation.

Let's not fall into traps of generalisation or stereotyping. But do let us offer a rich and wide range of learning opportunities which inspire, create awe and wonder, tap into motivations and



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purposes, but also offer help with bureaucracy as and when it's asked for. That's the way to develop confidence, self-esteem, dignity and a positive self-image. Entry level literacy learners are not Entry level people.

Pip Kings (London LSC)

 I agree with Hal Beder's comment regarding the critical role of basic skills in social development and responsibility – recognising the ability to formulate opinions not just receive them. We are largely working with people who, for a variety of reasons, have not been able to access education at earlier developmental stages in their life in order to progress and who now need the opportunity to develop basic learning concepts (i.e. basic skills). So we must ensure that we do not deny the appropriate *Skills for Life* entry points to people.

Chris Taylor (NIACE)

 Learners find it difficult, perhaps, to access the full range of media – newspapers, websites, journals, magazines, books – to make a fully informed judgment on some issues. But most of the literacy learners I've worked with are mature adults, informed and thoughtful. They don't just 'receive' opinions. I agree absolutely with what has been said on the 'criticalness' of basic skills but we need to be careful that we don't make assumptions about learners, who are not a homogeneous group of people, as we know.

For me, this has come out clearly from the ESOL Citizenship project that NIACE and LLU+ have been leading, and the wider citizenship debate. Just because an ESOL learner doesn't have English language skills at Entry 3 or above (and therefore may not pass the *Life in the UK* test) doesn't mean they aren't already an active citizen. A learner who works or volunteers in a refugee community group, youth club or supplementary school, or teaches in the local mosque, or helps out in their child's school, is already demonstrating a commitment to 'social development and responsibility'.

 **We need to be careful that we don't make assumptions about learners, who are not a homogeneous group.'**

Chris Taylor, NIACE

John Sutter (LLU+, London South Bank University)

 I worry greatly about our starting point of 'literacy' (or 'language') itself; we seem, as practitioners, to pull back from dealing with the sometimes oppressive nature of these structures. Many academics would argue that particular constructions of 'literacy' and 'language' (including the dominant ones which we are working with here), far from offering opportunity and social mobility to learners, can actually function against them, as indeed do apparently 'neutral' discourses around 'skills' or the lack of them. Indeed, one can question whether it is any longer academically respectable to promote 'literacy' or the mastery of certain language practices as some sort of 'salvation' – but this still seems to be the terms in which the debate is largely conducted. How can those of us who work in some of the very institutions (universities, colleges, government departments) that promote these ideologies of language and literacy use our influence to contest them? (see also John Sutter's article on page 20)

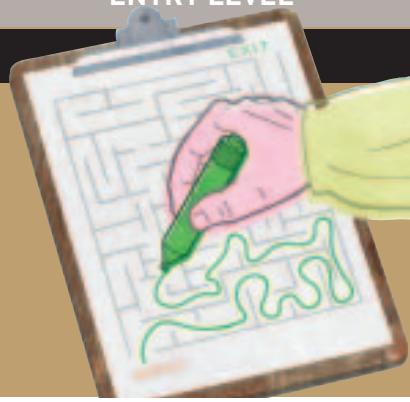
 **Many learners attending these programmes were neither ready nor willing to address their own LLN needs.**

Chris Atkin and Anne O'Grady, University of Nottingham

Chris Atkin and Anne O'Grady (University of Nottingham)

 We need to think more carefully when designing training programmes for adults who have language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills at Entry level. This includes programmes in prisons, Jobcentre Plus, and FE colleges.

Our research showed that many learners attending these programmes were neither ready nor willing to address their own LLN needs. Mandatory attendance at training is unlikely to result in engagement and participation, and can result in hostility and subversion. Those trainees who are ready to address their LLN needs may find that their opportunities are compromised by



“When we are all together it gets boring if you don’t understand it, and those who understand more can get bored with it.”

Adult learner, UK

the contractual obligations imposed on training organisations that deliver training on behalf of Jobcentre Plus.

The government should consider the work of John Comings and colleagues from the USA who advocate an approach to LLN provision that highlights flexibility and persistence in a training programme, allowing learners to ‘dip in and out’ of training, in line with the chaotic nature of their lives.

**Greg Brooks, Maxine Burton and Pam Cole
(University of Sheffield)**

Since the focus is on the implications of different levels of literacy ability in the adult population, it would be instructive to see what levels of literacy provision are actually out there for learners, and to consider the opinions of learners and tutors about how different levels affect the classes.

Over the two years of data collection, 2003-04 and 2004-05, for the NRDC/University of Sheffield study of adult learners' progress in reading, learners from 59 different classes were given one of two versions of a reading assessment: (a) for those up to Entry 2 and (b) for Entry 3 and above. Of 339 learners, 133 took the easier (a) version and 206 took the harder (b) version; in other words, 61% of learners receiving provision were at Entry 3 or above and only 39% were at Entry 2 or below. We imagine this is a representative selection of adult literacy learners in England since the providers were drawn from a wide range, in which FE and Adult and Community Learning predominated, but there were also LEA groups and training providers, plus one *learndirect* centre and one prison. This would seem to reflect concerns already voiced (by Jan Eldred) about the danger of those operating at lower levels being neglected in the drive to meet targets.

Nearly all literacy classes observed in the reading study were ‘mixed’, i.e. with a range of at least three levels of learners between pre-Entry and Level 2. Many of the tutors expressed

concern about these ‘mixed’ classes, claiming that it made whole class teaching (as required by the core curriculum) much harder and that it was difficult to give learners at the lower levels the individual support they needed. When volunteers were available, they were often paired to work one-to-one with the weaker learners even though this may not always have been the best pedagogical solution.

To this issue must be added some learners' views. The reading study did not conduct interviews with learners but in the NRDC study of the impact of *Skills for Life* on learners, the following opinion about streaming was voiced. A class had started with mixed levels and the learners themselves had asked if they could be put into separate classes according to level: ‘When we are all together it gets boring if you don’t understand it, and those who understand more can get bored with it.’ Once they had been moved into separate classes, they were much happier and felt they were ‘learning something’.

Susie Kusnierz (Acton and West London College)

As a long-time teacher of pre-Entry and low Entry level learners, as well as being an Entry 1 Arabic learner myself, I would just like to say that in ESOL there is a very big difference between these learners and our Entry 3 and above. Pre-Entry learners are acquiring written language for the first time. Children with nothing better to do in their lives, and six hours a day, five days a week to do it in, take a minimum of six years to acquire this skill to an employable level. Quite why anybody expects adults in part-time programmes with jobs, families, housing problems and health issues to do it any faster is a mystery to me. Supporting learners in making the leap from low Entry levels to ‘threshold’ level is a multifaceted task. From a whole raft of observations, here are a few examples.

Firstly, it has to be acknowledged that not all learners have the extrinsic motivation to do it – they live in communities where most of their →

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everyday transactions are conducted orally and at level 1.

Secondly, having spent two or three years attending classes to progress from Pre-Entry to Entry 2, many learners can no longer afford the time and effort needed to dedicate a large proportion of their week to language learning.

Thirdly, those who do continue need a different approach to their learning from those who come to us at this point. Having spent several years studying language and literacy as a discrete subject, they need to switch to 'applied' language courses to rekindle their enthusiasm. Those who have progressed more quickly, or come to this country with Entry 2/3 English, are more likely to want 'English only' courses for their first year or two.

From Neena Julka (SNJ Services Ltd)

 We can motivate learners by making the content of learning relevant to learners' lives by:

- encouraging them to take control of their learning (dare I mention ILPs without unleashing the wrath of my colleagues?);
- using ICT;
- introducing vocational/occupational/own interest elements in lessons;
- getting constant feedback about whether they're finding what they're learning enjoyable and useful;
- setting them interesting, challenging tasks;
- encouraging them to progress to other levels and areas;
- giving them tips and strategies for learning;
- shifting the balance from teaching to learning.

Learners benefit from short, intensive and flexible learning. They need to be able to see the progression and know when they'll progress and how. Factors that motivate people to enrol are different from those that help to keep them there. To keep learners engaged depends very much on what they perceive they learn and how

Factors that motivate people to enrol are different from those that help keep them there.

Neena Julka

much they need the qualification or the knowledge/skill. It requires a really skilful and inspirational tutor to get learners out in the evenings to attend a *Skills for Life* class. What motivates people to succeed and persist are their personal, social or financial needs.

Finally, enjoyment is also a very big factor. As learners ourselves, we know that we'll persist at something we enjoy and see as a challenge.

From Ruth Moulton (City and Islington College)

 My experience of Entry level learners is that there are more individual and personal differences between them than between those studying at higher levels:

- differences with skills in other areas (e.g. dyslexia, physical disability, mental health, learning disability);
- differences in the way that they conceptualise maths topics and the ability to take on board a different approach;
- differences in life experiences and self-confidence.

I think teaching and learning is different at Entry level. It might take much longer for an Entry level learner to progress. This may be because as adults they have found coping mechanisms for numeracy in life, so might not practise new skills learned in the classroom; hence there is less reinforcement to help learning.

Most Entry level numeracy learners appear to benefit from attending over a long period, with more than one session a week to be able to practise and consolidate new ideas and skills. My experience is that many (not all) learners learn more slowly, and need longer and more practice, to gain the self-confidence needed to progress to higher levels. Some learners however have different level numeracy skills in different areas of the curriculum, so we should beware of labelling people as 'Entry level people'. ▀



Learners, progression and self-esteem

Catherine Menist describes a coordinated approach to working with Entry level learners with a background of homelessness.



I work on a one-to-one basis with learners who are or have recently been homeless, and are often at Entry level in literacy, numeracy or ESOL. Two other tutors at my centre, Broadway Homelessness and Support, Hammersmith, provide training in ICT and in independent living skills.

Learning and living

This work is vital if vulnerable adult learners are to be supported as they progress from isolation into community and/or college-based learning, voluntary work or even employment. It is also vital in helping clients to secure and maintain their tenancies. Having worked in this way for nearly four years, we are, little by little, seeing real progress by clients who, I am convinced, would otherwise still be isolated and lacking in the confidence and sense of self-worth needed to get through the front door at Broadway, let alone into community learning and beyond.

I am not claiming that it is only the progress in learning that is responsible for this growth in confidence, but I am saying that progress in learning at lower levels makes a very significant contribution. As Mel Harakis – our Independent Living Skills Coordinator – says

‘...people learn differently and at different rates; equally, people suffer at different rates; people do everything at different rates.’ As with anything connected with people, while some generalisations can be helpful, we must not pigeon-hole the learner.

Learning and self-confidence

Being in the unusual position of teaching in an otherwise non-educational organisation, I see the teaching of essential skills to our clients as part of a whole system of support, rather than a stand-alone service as in a college. In this context and at this level it is essential to take the whole person into account. This might seem obvious, but I find myself spending more of my time addressing issues of clients’ confidence than issues of their skills – an approach which is proving successful in helping clients to progress.

For example, take Margaret, a client I have been working with on a one-to-one basis for the last year. When she first came to me, she was convinced that she could neither read nor write. She had huge issues around self-esteem and could not consider the real possibility of making step-by-step progress in literacy that would ultimately lead to further learning or employment. She was,

People
learn
differently
and at
different
rates; equally,
people suffer
at different
rates; people
do everything
at different
rates.





in effect, at a 'pre-learner' stage and it was her lack of confidence that kept her from seeing that she did in fact have the basic ability to read and write. One year on, she has progressed from Entry 1 to high-end Entry 3, has just started IT classes, and is looking to sign on at *learndirect* to work towards her National Certificate Level 1 as part of her moving on and becoming independent.

She is not unique in making this kind of progress. Factors such as the client/tutor relationship, the opportunity for clients to learn in a safe environment at their own pace, to be given plenty of feedback and encouragement to believe more in themselves, accompanied by regular reviews of SMART targets to demonstrate real progression in small areas: these are all vital to progression from Pre-Entry/Entry 1. Not that these factors are necessarily unique or different from teaching at higher levels, but I find that the tutor support that clients at this level need is both different and vital. As they progress to higher levels, the process becomes more about the learning and less about actively building clients' self-esteem. At higher levels, increases in confidence tend to be natural outcomes of the learning, whereas at lower levels we find that confidence-building needs to be addressed directly, just as much as the nuts and bolts of formal learning.

Monitoring soft outcomes

To this end, as one of the PLRIs (Practitioner-Led Research Initiative) funded by NRDC, we have developed a 'soft outcomes' monitoring tool which breaks confidence down into easily recognisable areas that relate to areas of learning. We have then mapped these areas to the core curriculum. As an extension to this research, we are currently working with support workers in Broadway to see how and if ILPs can feed in to clients' overall support plans and vice versa. As a teacher, I find it invaluable that I can work with a client in tandem with their support worker because a learner's progress at this level (whether or not the client is from a background of homelessness) is never achieved in isolation from the wider context of their life.

Perceptions of entry

As has been pointed out in the Entry Level Debate that appears elsewhere in this edition of *reflect*, it is not the adult learners that are Pre-Entry/Entry 1 but their level of basic skills. There is a much wider argument here about the true nature of intelligence and how we see and interact with lower level learners. Is teaching and learning different at Entry level simply because of the teacher's perception of an adult with low level basic skills and how, as a result of this perception, they set about teaching them?



Formative assessment and motivation

As mentioned earlier, we have found it very valuable to monitor the soft outcomes of learning and to present findings to clients in a visual format that they can readily understand. This is a powerful and motivating tool in their learning process. We haven't done any formal research to see whether the motivation varies according to the level of the learner but, observationally and through anecdotal feedback from support workers, capturing the soft as well as the hard outcomes has a direct impact on the wider life of a lower-level learner. For example, a client might express a desire to go into detox, another might reduce their drinking, others might start doing homework and turning up on time for appointments.

I recognise that a one-to-one approach can, at least initially, skew the reasons for the client's motivation towards getting some personal attention – which may for some be a first. However, after a while, they begin to take more responsibility for their own learning journey.

A three-pronged approach

Our approach involves:

- a tool that can be used to measure distance travelled on an individual basis;
- working with clients so that, through small but measurable achievements, their attitude shifts from 'I can't' to 'I can';
- ongoing support from other external services.

This three-pronged approach seems to have a more marked impact on motivation with clients who come to learning with low levels of literacy/numeracy/English. A client less in need of support and working at a higher level may not be any less motivated – on the contrary – but the mechanisms for motivation lie more firmly with the client. ▀

If you would like a copy of our research report when it comes out, or a poster summary (available now) please email me at catherine.menist@broadwaylondon.org

A social perspective on language, literacy and numeracy

The concept of 'a social perspective' is established in the research literature.

David Barton and the Adult Learners' Lives team identify what it means in practice.

Literacies and numeracies

Taking a social perspective on language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) involves paying attention first and foremost to the everyday contexts, purposes, and practices in which language, written language and numbers play a part, including home, work and community, as well as educational contexts. People's everyday lives are complex and varied, and the roles of languages, literacies and numeracies in them are equally complex and varied. There are many varieties of any language, many 'literacies' and many 'numeracies', varying from context to context. For example, the ways in which language and numbers are used in a betting shop are very different from the ways they are used in a kitchen, which are different again from reading, writing and working with numbers in educational contexts. The LLN classroom context is very different from the contexts of people's everyday lives, and sometimes the language, literacy and numeracy being practised in the classroom is hard to relate to other contexts.

Reading and writing for a purpose

The social perspective does not view literacy and numeracy as itemised, transferable skills. Focusing on skills narrows attention to linguistic and numerical patterns, distinctions and rules, and to 'reading', 'writing' and 'calculating' as if they were processes which are easily detachable from context. But we don't just 'read' and 'write': we always read and write something for a particular purpose, in a particular way, in a particular time and place.

Many people who come to LLN

provision read, in their everyday lives, texts which are entirely different from those they are invited to read in classes, and they read them with specific purposes. For example, the magazine *AutoTrader* would be read for the specific purpose of keeping up to date with the car industry.

Adult learners' lives

A social perspective on teaching and learning takes account of learners' lives, of the classes they attend, and of the social interaction between participants. It recognises the substantial differences between learners' lives, particularly as regards their motivations and goals, and the wider social context, including the institution in which the provision is located, the practices which are typical in that context, and the policies within which the provision operates.

Research has shown (1) that the contextual factors which can shape learning include:

- learners' and teachers' beliefs about learning, teaching, language, literacy and numeracy;
- learners' and teachers' motivations, goals and intentions for the class;
- the resources learners bring with them to learning from their everyday experience;
- the nature of the curriculum and teaching materials;
- the political and institutional context which enables and constrains what can be done in class;
- the socio-cultural context for learning, including issues of inequality.

Research has also shown (1) that the

aspects of learning/teaching events which are significant are:

- the physical context for learning;
- the approaches to teaching;
- the nature of the social interaction in the classroom;
- the construction of identities in classroom settings.

Creating learning opportunities

The main finding of research in the 1960s and 1970s on different methods of language teaching was that learners differ in their knowledge and their needs and that these differences are more important than the methods or techniques used. The research suggested that it is useful to conceptualise teaching as 'the creation of learning opportunities', from which different learners will benefit in different ways. This emphasises the active role of learners in setting their own agenda, and engaging in learning opportunities on their own terms.

By taking a social practice view of LLN, teachers can ensure that provision starts from learners' lives, and that the elements of the core curriculum are not ends in themselves, but are encountered in the context of relevant and meaningful learning opportunities. □

Professor David Barton is director of the Lancaster Literacy Research Centre

(1) Reports on the Adult Learners' Lives projects, including full references to the research referred to in this article, will be published by NRDC in the near future and will be available on the website. NRDC will also publish practitioner guides to the social practice model.

Mathematics, numeracy and social justice

If we have a commitment to social justice, what is it in adult mathematics and numeracy education that we think is worth fighting for?

Teeka Bhattarai and Kate Newman respond to this question, which was addressed by an international panel at the 2005 conference of Adults Learning Mathematics.

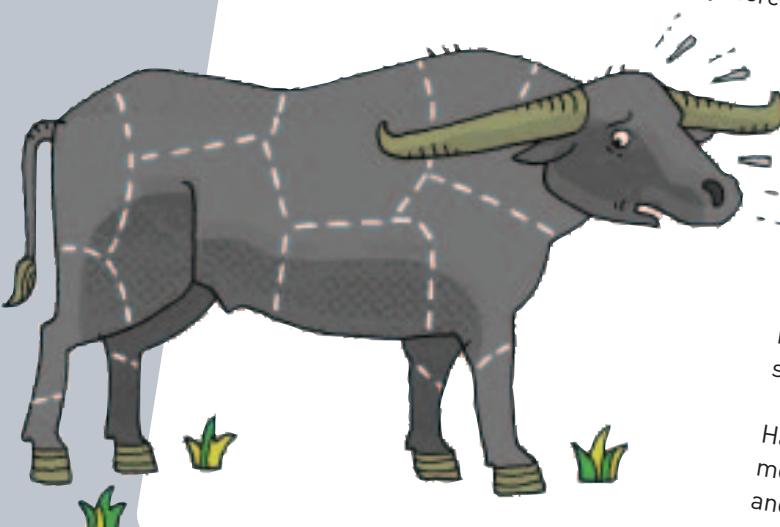
Let's begin with a story...

It was monsoon. 1998, I believe.

Sher Bahadur, an avid meat-eater from Wasbang, was very conscious that he had not had any meat for over a month. He consulted Harilal, a neighbour who had the same feeling.

They went round a number of villages door to door asking if anyone would want meat shares if a buffalo was slaughtered. A share would cost 60 Nepali rupees and each family could decide how many shares they wished to buy. The normal size of an order would be two shares per family but many ordered more than two, and some only ordered one.

Many, of course, didn't have the money but promised that they would pay at a later date – usually within a couple of weeks. Sometimes Sher and Harilal went together; at other times, they went separately to houses where they were already known.



When they had sold some 60 or so shares, mostly on credit, they set off to find a buffalo. They went to a village, Salleni, half a day's walk away. This was the place where they would normally enter into a bargain to buy a buffalo.

When they got to Salleni, they made an advance payment on a buffalo and set a date to complete the payment. They led the buffalo towards their village. The buffalo was rather big and the trails were narrow and steep. The buffalo couldn't walk on the slippery trails.

Harilal stayed with the buffalo and Sher went ahead to the village to inform the shareholders that meat was to be delivered. He then teamed up with two more people and went back to the spot with slaughtering equipment and a traditional balance called a dharni (2.5 kgs).

The deed was done! The meat was divided and people were able to choose their portions. By custom, the head of the slaughtered animal, plus two shares of meat, belonged to the organisers.

Some of the buyers paid up on the spot, others would pay within the week. Many did not pay within the prescribed period. Sher and Harilal made another round of the village to collect money from the buyers who had not yet paid; it was customary to provide food and drinks to the organisers when they paid a visit to collect the money. People paid by hook or by crook – this sometimes involved taking out a loan.

Harilal walked to the buffalo-seller and paid the money. He also took this opportunity to eye another buffalo for next time.

Hari laland Sher did all this accounting without using pen and paper. Everything was calculated mentally. For example, the buffalo cost around 15,000 rupees, so they had to calculate the transaction of 300 shares mentally.

Their literacy is confined to signing their names – an outcome of several adult literacy classes, from which they are both drop-outs. In a valley with a population of some 2,000 people, Sher and Hari are not the only ones to have dropped out.

Numbers and daily life

So, to return to the question, if we have a commitment to social justice surely one key aspect of mathematics education is how to enable people to enhance their mathematical skills without losing their ability to make mental calculations.

Adult numeracy programmes which respond to learners at their existing level of mental mathematics are rare indeed. We need to look further at how to value and strengthen this existing knowledge. We need to ask how to move away from teaching the four rules of arithmetic and start understanding the relationship between numbers and daily life. How do we overcome the view, seen so often around the world, and reinforced in Nepal (where people are treated almost as ‘untouchable’ if they do not recognise letters) which suggests that, if people do not know how to write, they do not know how to count or quantify either?

Another story, another reflection:

In a government department in Nepal there was a messenger named Junge Budha – an old man with an impressive moustache. He came from a village east of Kathmandu.

One day, the grounds of the offices were being levelled by a roller. Some staff were looking at the roller, appreciating its weight and how effective it was at levelling. Automatic machines are still a matter of amusement to many people in Nepal. An engineer remarked ‘It must weigh as much as 14–15 tons’. Junge Budha, who was in the habit of commenting on everything, asserted ‘No, sahib, it must be more than that!’. □

We sniggered and looked at each other, exchanging smiles. We knew that he had no sense of metric weight. In Nepal, we still use a different system of weight: dharni, bisauli etc. Most people cannot make sense of metric weight; many of us don’t know how metric weights link to our systems.

So, to consider the question again: another key area to focus on in adult numeracy learning is how to build links between the measurements we are familiar with and the ones that are increasingly used and are becoming more and more powerful. We should value our traditional knowledge and ways of working, but we also need to understand and engage with these newer systems because they have the potential to exclude us from many areas of life.

Critical mathematics

‘Reflect’ is an approach to adult learning and social justice. It is based on participatory methodologies (many of which, such as maps, matrices and chapatti diagrams are intrinsically mathematical) and on Paulo Freire’s radical philosophy of education. Numeracy in Reflect is understood broadly – it is about solving problems, analysing issues, and expressing information clearly and concisely, and it covers written, oral and mental forms. The focus is on discovering and using prior knowledge, linking this to the idea of critical mathematics. In a process of conscientisation, people analyse their situation, identify their problems and their causes, and then look for the best ways to overcome them. Numeracy is a key element of this.

So, if we understand social justice as being about challenging inequities of power and strengthening the voices of poor and marginalised peoples so that they can access their human rights, then the question as to what is worth fighting for in adult mathematics can be answered quite simply.

We should:

- challenge traditional understandings of mathematics, and highlight and strengthen the mathematical skills that participants already have;
- value local knowledge and systems;
- enable people to build bridges between what they know and what they need to know, in order to engage with the power-holders. This could be mathematical language, such as metric measures, or it could be to understand how mathematics is used and abused in daily life through the mystification of numbers, and the use of statistics, budgets and market pricing;
- promote the critical reading of existing ‘texts’ and the active construction of alternatives, whether this is through reprioritising budgetary expenditure, producing alternative statistics or devising alternative markets. □

ALM is an international research forum bringing together researchers and practitioners in adult mathematics/numeracy teaching and learning in order to promote the learning of mathematics by adults. For more information see www.alm-online.org

Reflect is an innovative approach to adult learning and social change. For more information see www.reflect-action.org

Teeka Bhattarai is a development worker in Nepal involved in ‘learning for transformation’ and Reflect.

Kate Newman works for Action Aid International.

If we could do all this within mathematics education we might move closer to social justice.

James Simpson, Mary Weir and Michael Hepworth respond to an article in *reflect* Issue 4 that aimed to summarise the Adult Learning Inspectorate's views on the characteristics of a Grade 1 ESOL lesson.

An ESOL lesson took place not long ago where the learners began by playing a game of Chinese Whispers, shouted themselves hoarse with a rowdy cross-classroom dictation activity, discovered 'whodunit' in a murder role-play game, and read in the paper a story about a stowaway snake in a tourist's backpack. The learners had a great deal of fun while developing vital language skills. It was an outstanding lesson.

Or was it? A recent article in this magazine describes the attributes of a lesson which would achieve a score of Grade 1, i.e. be judged to be 'outstanding' in an ALI inspection. Many of the Grade 1 criteria outlined were missing in the lesson described above: no use was made of the ESOL curriculum materials; the teacher's lesson plan comprised just a few notes scribbled on the back of an envelope; the lesson was teacher-led; there was not a computer in sight; there was no obvious differentiation; there was no clear link between classroom activities and learners' lives outside their classroom.

There are, however, some positive points in the article. For example, the use of ESOL Curriculum materials and no others is not viewed as a necessary characteristic of an outstanding lesson; neither is the sprinkling of lesson plans with a confetti of ESOL curriculum

references. Having said this, the implication is that inspectors are going to approach ESOL lessons with a preconceived notion of excellence as a prescription which involves high levels of teacher control and is part of an inspection-driven culture which can only be damaging to teaching and learning. We take issue with many of the points raised in the article by framing them in terms of freedom and control and conclude that truly excellent teaching can exist beyond the narrow description in the article.



ONE GRADE FITS ALL? A response

“ Total engagement with the lesson is not realistic for all learners at all times.

Freedom and control

The article states that an outstanding lesson is one where ‘learners use computers as a natural activity within the lesson’. But, while the use of computers in daily life is very common, its status as ‘natural’ is open to debate. And what of the cases where the computers have been stolen or are broken, where a centre’s computer booking system fails, or where there are simply no computers in the centre in the first place? Can tutors working in such conditions ever expect to achieve a Grade 1 inspection?

Elsewhere in the article, and as an example of outstanding practice, an ‘orally fluent learner... concentrated on written work whilst the rest of the class practised oral language structures’. Again, it is easy to pick holes. Tutors might infer that to do well in an inspection, differentiation should be made obvious. But does differentiation have to be so ham-fisted? Is it not often best done in an understated way through careful questioning, or through pairing and grouping of learners who are able to work on the same activity at different paces? Such subtleties are not necessarily captured in a written lesson plan, and may well be made in response to classroom contingencies. Would tutors practising less heavy-handed differentiation achieve the coveted Grade 1?

Minor points such as these can obscure some serious issues of control which arise from the article. This control can be conceived as existing on a number of levels. We discuss three:

- first, the level of control the tutor exerts in classrooms;
- second, the more covert control of teaching by inspecting bodies and other ‘outsiders’;
- third, control of topic and content.

Tutor control in ESOL classrooms

In outstanding lessons, according to the article, ‘learners are in charge’ – a statement which introduces a set of contradictions for, elsewhere in the article, there is heavy prescription at the level of planning and of lesson structure. For example, outstanding lessons have ‘a detailed, thought-through lesson plan’ and ‘a logical structure’. They ‘start by questioning the learners about their previous learning’. There are ‘clear aims and objectives shared with the learners’. In an outstanding lesson ‘the tutor...is quick to correct, albeit subtly, errors of grammar and pronunciation’. Assessment of written work is ‘rigorous’. Under such conditions, learners are

unlikely either to be in charge or to feel they are in charge. Nor are they likely to be ‘not even aware of language learning’ in Grade 1 lessons, which are described paradoxically as ‘tutor-directed but learner-led’.

The Grade 1 lesson characteristics described, in fact, point to a high level of tutor control. Moreover, the emphasis on structure and rigour in planning and ‘delivery’ hardly allows for the responsiveness to learner contributions that learner-led interactions demand. Flexibility and intuitive reactions are frequently required in real ESOL lessons: tutors are often not sure who will attend, and what psychological state they will be in if they do. Perhaps they will be amenable to ‘outstanding teaching methods’ that ‘totally engage all the learners’. Perhaps, however, the fact that they have managed to come to class at all is to be applauded: total engagement with the lesson is not realistic for all learners at all times. Sometimes thorough planning and logical progression of activities must take second place – with justification – behind the imperatives of learners’ lives.

External control of ESOL classrooms

At a more abstract level, the article implies a level of domination by inspectors which is part of a worrying current pattern of attempts to control what happens in ESOL lessons from the outside. For example, tutors in some centres are obliged to adhere strictly to lesson plan and scheme of work pro formas, to obsessively map materials and plans to the Adult ESOL core curriculum, and to submit to slavish use of ILPs. It is very important for purposes of funding (among other things) for centres to achieve high scores in external inspections. Thus it is possible that the article, written as it is by an ALI inspector, will be taken by managers and tutors alike as a directive for lesson preparation. The thinking in such circles may be: ‘This is what we need to do in lessons; this is how to behave in an inspection’. But should the tail wag the dog in this way? Should inspectors really be embarking on ESOL lesson observations with such preconceived notions of what constitutes ‘outstanding’? Surely they should be judging lessons on their merits according to the exigencies of the situation as they find them.

Control of topic and content

In the original article, the range of activities proposed as comprising typical content in outstanding lessons is rather restricted. Mention is made of obtaining information about travelling, of form-filling, of vocational

“ Surely they should be judging lessons on their merits according to the exigencies of the situation.





“ Learners should be dealing with, criticising and evaluating a variety of texts and language situations.

texts and manuals. Books and magazines are for independent study only. There are strong echoes here of the competency-based and ‘survival English’ materials and courses based on target needs analyses which gained currency in the 1970s. Such pedagogy has attracted criticism over the years, not least on the grounds that it only prepares immigrants for menial work (e.g. Auerbach, 1986). We feel it should not be the case that, well into the 21st century, such a position is being promoted in relation to ESOL learners. They should be dealing with, criticising and evaluating a variety of texts and language situations beyond the pedestrian fare suggested in the article.

Play in the classroom

What is more, there is not nearly enough play in classrooms. We are not simply talking about games which can be helpfully employed in language learning; we refer more broadly to what Cook (2000:192) calls ‘the human predilection...for the patterning of linguistic forms.’ Recent theories of language learning stress the importance of the playful function of language in learning as well as in daily life. A lack of understanding of this vital aspect of learning is betrayed by statements in the article such as ‘...new language structures are practised in adult and/or vocationally relevant contexts’, and the stress on ensuring that ‘Tasks, activities and teaching materials are relevant to the needs and interests of learners’. Does ESOL teaching always have to be so needs-driven and vocationally relevant?

It seems that the article reflects a philosophy of language teaching which works from a perceived end need: only that which has been identified as practically useful to learners’ lives must be admitted to ESOL classrooms (train timetables from the internet, work manuals, forms to fill in, polite service encounters). This excludes a play element in learning which might usefully be

encouraged in ESOL lessons and materials. By integrating games, song, jokes, poetry, fiction and literature, purely form-focused activity, the study of advertisements and soap operas, or even the language of ritual and prayer, we may attempt to satisfy needs in the learners that are other than the dully everyday.

Who says so?

The lesson described at the beginning of this article was observed for the NRDC ESOL Effective Practice Project, where researchers have been grappling for the past two years with the issue of what effective practice might be. What has become clear during the course of the project is that there are as many ways of teaching an ESOL lesson as there are teachers. Plenty of these ways involve outstanding practice of one sort or another, and very few would fit neatly into the pattern described in the original article. There is more than one way to teach a good lesson, just as there is more than one way to learn one. The underlying message from the original article – that certain characteristics must exist for a lesson to be considered outstanding – gives quite the opposite message.

Beware of prescription

But ‘So what?’ we might ask. In our opinion, *a priori* decisions by those in an inspection role about what constitutes outstanding teaching behaviour need to be treated with caution, particularly if such prescriptions are built on less than solid theoretical bases. We need to question where the criteria in the **reflect** article come from. In short, ‘Who says so?’ And perhaps such a prescriptive set of ‘outstanding’ characteristics might work against the imagination which draws talented and skilled individuals to ESOL teaching in the first place. □

James Simpson works at the University of Leeds.

Mary Weir and Michael Hepworth are ESOL tutors and trainers.

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“ There is more than one way to teach a good lesson, just as there is more than one way to learn one.

Not another conference...

Jenny Hunt proposes a radical change of approach – the *Skills for Life Show*.

After reading Carol Taylor's article on conferences (**reflect** Issue 4) I began to wonder if it was time to think 'outside the box' about what sort of event should be organised for people who are interested in *Skills for Life*. If we want people to learn, take action and make things happen as a result of what they experience by attending a conference, and given that people want to network, hear from experts, see examples of good practice, and look at and try out new resources, why don't we have a series of national *Skills for Life* shows? Something along the lines of the BETT Show which attracts thousands of people every year.

Engaged and involved

The challenge, bearing in mind that facts don't influence and change behaviour but emotion does, is to deliver something that is atypical and to invest in an experience which keeps people engaged, interested and involved. It's common for conferences to use exactly the same formats year after year and throughout the day i.e. plenaries, workshops and panel sessions. So something which is more interactive and a real experience may be what is called for.

The new *Skills for Life Show* could be an exciting, eclectic mixture of workshops, expert seminars, practitioner demonstrations, e-learning hands-on sessions, a networking area, message boards, resource displays, model lesson demonstrations, poster sessions, videos, 99-second presentations, surgeries and learner testimonials. Such a range of attractions, formats and styles would ensure that everyone could get what they wanted from the event.



What people remember about a good experience is that it was fun, they learned something new and they felt inspired.

And why would this work? One reason is because what people remember about a good experience is that it was fun, they learned something new and they felt inspired. Another is because of the way adults find out about things. Evidence shows that most people remember and learn from an activity in which they were actively involved. How many people remember much about a presentation five minutes after it has finished?

Diversity and learning styles

The *Skills for Life Show* would reflect the diversity of needs that conference-goers have (which Carol identified) and would also address differentiation in relation to how people benefit from and receive information.

It would support different learning styles. We know that individuals differ in their ability to learn, depending on how it is conveyed. Some people are

visual learners, others auditory and others kinaesthetic. So, for learning to occur, a successful event would have to use a variety of media and formats. The visual learners could pick up handouts to read before they attended seminars, and look at visual displays, videos and flipcharts. The auditory learners could attend lectures, workshops and testimonials, take part in discussions and talk things through. The kinaesthetic learners could get involved in practical hands-on sessions.

Speakers and experts

This new model *Skills for Life Show* would also call for a fresh approach to what was expected of keynote speakers and experts. They would have new demands made on them because, in order to be flexible and cater for a range of delegate choices, they would have to agree to prepare a transcript of their presentation, to be videoed so people could look at it later, and even perhaps to be prepared to join in discussions or sit on a panel of experts to answer questions from the field. Also, we might (dare I say it?) ask them to change the way they present, moving away from the standard PowerPoint to something which is more interactive and that integrates the audience in the discussion.

This new 'market-place' approach would need a lot of coordination, hard work and imagination. But wouldn't it be fun, and wouldn't it give *Skills for Life* a cutting-edge profile, not only in this country but worldwide? □

Jenny Hunt is a director of Schemeta Ltd, which provides consultancy to support the development and implementation of e-learning strategies. For more information see www.schemeta.com

What does 'deliver' mean?

A good starting point might be the Answers.com definition.

This gives nine meanings of 'deliver' in its transitive form, as follows:



1. To bring or transport to the proper place or recipient; distribute: *deliver groceries; deliver the mail.*

2. To surrender (someone or something) to another; hand over: *delivered the criminal to the police.*

3. To secure (something promised or desired), as for a candidate or political party: *campaign workers who delivered the ward for the mayor.*

Return to sender?

John Sutter challenges the delivery metaphor and its implications for our perception of teaching and learning.

I can't remember when I first heard the use of 'deliver' in relation to teaching, as in 'deliver a lesson', 'deliver training', 'deliver a class', but I imagine it would have prompted – at most – a wry smile or a quizzically raised eyebrow. Lately though, it is my hackles that are being raised, especially now that I seem to regularly catch myself talking about 'delivering' this and 'delivering' that. It had always seemed to me to be management-speak of the kind a teacher or teacher-trainer like me could politely ignore – so why have I (and like-minded colleagues) found it increasingly difficult to avoid using it?

'Delivering' something 'educational' seems to have become such a commonplace formulation that it is beginning to acquire the status of common sense. The metaphor has so colonised our educational talk that it seems a literal description of what happens in a classroom. Indeed, it increasingly appears to be the only way that some people and institutions can talk about teaching. The metaphor has become both invisible yet at the same time dominant in many educational contexts.

Secondly, we can cite the work of Michel Foucault, in particular the idea of 'discourses' as structures which run through language and society, and which produce reality. Here again, metaphor plays a very important role.

So, if how we talk about something constrains and shapes how we think about it, how we experience it, and perhaps even produces the social reality we live in, we need to critically examine the various 'linguistic spaces' in which we live our lives. What exactly is the effect of the 'delivery' metaphor on the way we view and construct teaching and learning?

Though 'lecture' is given as an definition 6 above, the meaning here is extremely narrow. As used generally in education, all the above will probably shade into the meaning of 'deliver', but it seems to me that the dominant meaning is (1), perhaps along with (8), and these carry strong business connotations. What gets delivered is a product, often prior to consumption. Learning is thus conceptualised along the lines of production, and of supply and demand (similar to Foucault's conception of universities and other institutions as 'knowledge factories'). Given current attempts to tie education ever more closely to employment and the economy, this is probably not surprising, but it does represent a colonisation of the language of one world (education) by another (business).

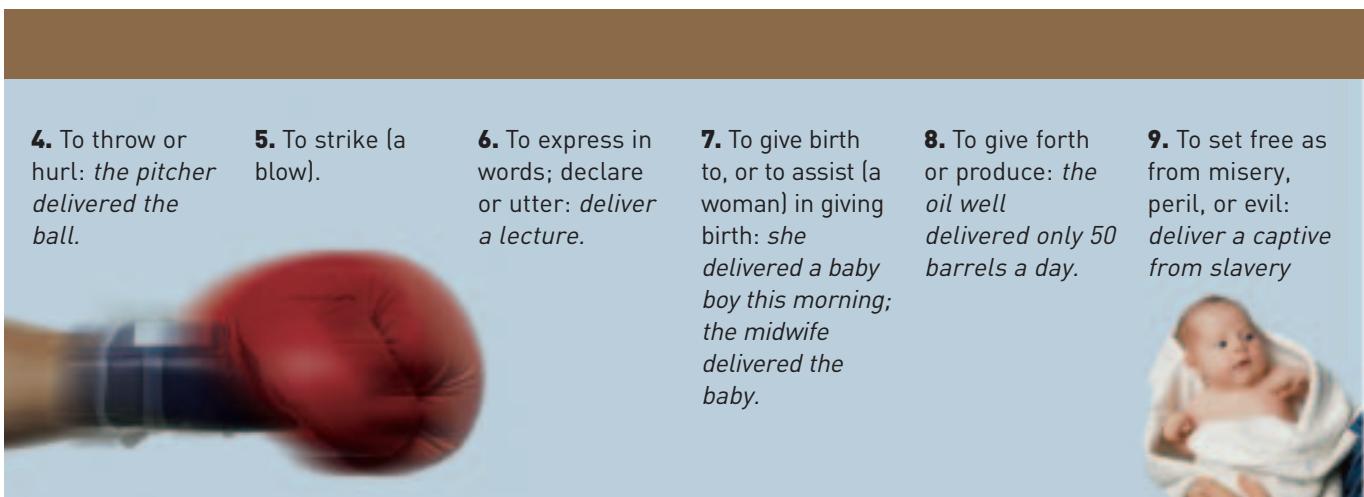
Why is this important?

First, there is the generally accepted notion of 'linguistic relativity' and the psycholinguistic evidence that goes with it: the idea that language and thought are in some way intertwined, that the language we use has some bearing on the thoughts we are apt to have, and therefore the way in which our minds construct reality. Metaphors in particular may frame our thinking; they can limit our ways of understanding something, or even determine what can or can't be said about it.

Learning as object

It is not just the metaphor of production that is the problem: a consequence is to conceptualise learning (and, by implication, education) as a thing which can be passed

Metaphors may frame our thinking; they can limit our ways of understanding.



4. To throw or hurl: *the pitcher delivered the ball.*

5. To strike (a blow).

6. To express in words; declare or utter: *deliver a lecture.*

7. To give birth to, or to assist (a woman) in giving birth: *she delivered a baby boy this morning; the midwife delivered the baby.*

8. To give forth or produce: *the oil well delivered only 50 barrels a day.*

9. To set free as from misery, peril, or evil: *deliver a captive from slavery*

from its originator or creator (the materials writer? the curriculum writer? the government?) to an agent (the teacher) who will pass on this object to learners. All the definitions of 'deliver' given above carry this sense of an object, even if it is a baby. The metaphor further suggests that this 'carrying', 'passing on', and 'giving' is unproblematic; it is, to borrow from literacy theory (Street 1994), an autonomous model of teaching – one that suggests that learning is a neutral, quantifiable, context-free object that you can give someone.

Process, exchange and context

And yet, to most of the teachers I know, teaching and learning are not activities primarily concerned with objects, products and things which get passed from teacher to learner. On the contrary, they seem to be more to do with processes and two-way piecemeal exchanges, negotiations and accommodations that do not lend themselves well to metaphors of learning as a 'package'. And far from being an unproblematic exchange, as the autonomous delivery model would imply, teaching and learning seem to be deeply problematic, bound up with identities and the construction of identities.

As well as denying these links between learning and identity (both the learner's and the teacher's), the delivery model fails to locate teaching and learning, or learners and teachers themselves, in any sort of context. The 'product' is presented as somehow independent of any local considerations. By this I refer not only to the worlds of the learners, but to the worlds of the teacher, the school and, crucially, the worlds and interests of the producers of this 'product'. The learning, the lesson, is presented as ideology-free when, of course, it is anything but.

We might here suggest connections between definition (9) and constructions of education as a 'civilising' force bringing 'light' to the 'darkness' e.g. the almost missionary zeal that has sometimes hovered around literacy 'campaigns'.

Teaching as tasks

Moreover, teaching becomes 'technicalised' as an 'activ-

ity' that can be split up into several 'tasks' each requiring different 'skills'. Lesson delivery can be separated from lesson preparation and lesson planning, assessment and recording. The 'skills' and sub-skills needed for each of these tasks can be identified and listed, to provide requirements of what teachers must be able to do, to set professional standards, and to monitor or assess the performance of these tasks.

The result of this is to disconnect teaching and learning from the contexts in which they occur, and from the people who are actually engaged in these activities – the teachers and the learners. It is not important who 'delivers' the learning, for the learning is conveniently detached, like a pizza, from its deliverer. Likewise, for all the talk of learner-centredness, the real, individual learner is irrelevant. 'Learner-centredness' here merely means a match between predetermined 'objects' (outcomes?) and the learner's preferences – the ILP as menu. Superficially, this is a nod to the learner but this is not the learner as a real, personalised, individual – this is the learner as a set of consumer choices (Holliday 2005).

The teacher as agent of production

If teachers are, in this way, detached from the process of curriculum writing, from making choices about course content, from pedagogy and, above all, from the learner, they are consequently de-skilled and de-professionalised. They are, in fact, turned into expendable, replaceable, and supremely trainable agents of economic production.

This is perhaps a long way to come from the one word 'deliver' but language sometimes needs to be challenged. As practitioners, we know that teaching is not context-free; we know it is about process as well as product. We should resist ways of talking about education that hide some elements of teaching and learning and promote others, and right now that means we need to decide whether we would rather deliver – or teach. ▀

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John Sutter works at LLU+ and has a particular interest in ESOL professional development.

For more information, see www.lsbu.ac.uk/lplus

All together now!

Sue Southwood explains why collaborative literacy learning is particularly effective in workplace settings.

'Cognitive apprenticeship' is a method of peer learning. It is used in groups where a learner who is more capable in a particular skill area helps a less capable learner by modelling, mentoring, scaffolding or coaching. This approach is particularly relevant in the workplace where, due to the complexity of scheduling classes around work patterns, different sites and learners' lives, it is rare that there are enough learners to organise them into groups with similar levels of ability.

As part of a Practitioner Fellowship with the NRDC, I have carried out a small-scale study to investigate how adult learners learn collaboratively with peers in workplace literacy programmes. The study involved three sites with two public-sector organisations based in London and included observation, teacher and learner interviews, teacher perspective inventories and learner focus groups.

The research aimed to identify emergent themes and issues in collaborative learning. So far, the evidence has shown that:

- **relationships and work roles outside the classroom can impact on how adults learn collaboratively;**
- **peers can play an important role in helping those who lack confidence, are negative or worried, or have low self-esteem;**
- **learners can adapt their behaviour to work collaboratively.**

Relationships and work roles outside the classroom can impact on how adults learn collaboratively

At one site, evaluation by learners has shown that, for some people, the make-up of the group can be critical. They need to feel part of the group; the quality of the teaching alone will not be enough for them to stay.

"We have examples of learners giving up after one class but then returning six months to two years later and then sustaining their attendance. One of our long-established, successful and high-achieving classes is at a site where all the employees are friends as well as workmates. They have good relationships inside and outside the classroom and have worked together for many years." (Tutor)

When teaching in the workplace, tutors need to be sensitive to the



roles that learners have outside the classroom and appreciate the impact this may have inside the classroom. When a learner has a supervisory or managerial role, it may be difficult for them to have their level of literacy exposed. This

may be compounded by asking learners to work collaboratively. Where the whole team attended the same class together, learners appeared to be defined by their work role, the class talk revolved around their work outside and, as they were in working hours, the classroom seemed to be an extension of the workplace even though it was held off site.

In contrast, classes held on work premises, but made up of learners from all areas of the business, seemed to help them to be less affected by their work roles. Their fellow-learners were largely unknown to them so their behaviour was more like that of a regular literacy class.

Peers can play an important role in helping those who lack confidence, are negative or worried, or have low self-esteem

This is well illustrated through the case of Bill.

Bill is an apprentice and the newest member of the group. He had originally come to the computer class and was referred by the tutor because of his severe dyslexia. His confidence is low; he makes very few contributions to activities and discussions. When he said that working in a group made him feel he was slower than everyone else, the group tried to encourage him. David's was the most vocal response:

“No, it's different here. It's not like school. That's what you're probably thinking of. I left school with nothing, I didn't even know the alphabet and I've learnt everything as an adult. It was frightening at work and I bluffed for years and years. It stems back from school. I hated writing when I first came but now it's OK.”

The tutor is aware of Bill's abilities and his low confidence and includes him by prefacing some questions with his name. She encourages collaborative learning by getting the more capable peers to answer Bill's questions and then builds on their answers.

In one lesson, the tutor gave the learners chopped-up words in bundles and they worked in pairs to make compound words. They had about 60 single words that would make 30 compound words. If they were left with words that didn't fit, they called them out – the pairs helped each other and rearranged the words to make them fit. The tutor helped them, explaining why some didn't work. She says:

“Experimenting with different combinations takes the pressure off

as they don't have to spell the words themselves.’

She feels the class learn from each other and can take pressure off each other through working together.

“Someone can hold back and allow someone else to take the lead. Discussions in pairs are often more creative than in a large group. It forces independence, they don't look to the teacher all the time but feel safe and use peer support.’



Another learner, Pat, thinks that collaborative learning is about being cooperative, working with others, and being open-minded to their suggestions. Asked why she thought the tutor encouraged it, she said:

“It's the right way forward, getting other people's ideas. It builds trust and teamwork and it allows the tutor to get on with other things.’

Pat said she liked it because she got to know the other members of the class. She felt it built trust and she got other people's ideas and views. She said that it helped you see there were different ways to do things and

that, when she said something out loud, it 'sunk in'. Pat felt that if her answer was different from her partner's, she could have another look at it. The supportive environment of the class enabled Pat to build her confidence, reflect on her contributions and work towards becoming an independent learner.

Peer support

In the UK, half of those with poor basic skills are in employment and many would not access traditional educational provision. Offering opportunities for workplace learning at times and locations to suit employees can be a major motivation for people to take the first step to improve their skills. Workplace colleagues can play a critical role in supporting the teacher to create a climate that is conducive to learning.

Employees with dyslexia may be particularly vulnerable, especially if their problem is not disclosed at work. Their coping skills may break down as the workplace changes, leading to stress and anxiety. Providing opportunities for them to come together means they can use the support of peers in their journey towards independent learning and adopt better strategies to cope with their dyslexia outside the classroom.

Paul, a learner with dyslexia, thinks that collaborative learning means bouncing ideas off each other. He says it makes him feel confident as everyone in the class finds the activities challenging. Outside the classroom, Paul's dyslexia makes him feel slow and inadequate. He says that the more his confidence grows in the classroom, the more he feels he can contribute. He recently completed a routine writing task at work independently – for the first time in 20 years. ➔

Learners can adapt their behaviour to work collaboratively

Jenny has lost her job due to health problems and has 12 weeks to be redeployed within the company. During this time, she is applying for jobs and taking courses in IT and Report Writing. She has a lively sense of humour which she uses to break the ice, get her point across and to hide her concerns about her work. When asked her reasons for joining the course she says:

“It's a good thing to do, you can never learn too much.’

Jenny believes that you don't necessarily have to speak when part of the whole group but, in pairs or small groups, you have to contribute.

When the group break into pairs and are asked to brainstorm their ideas for a report, the tutor asks Manny and Jenny to work together. Jenny is lively, talkative and more confident orally than Manny although their written ability level is similar. Jenny moves to sit closer to Manny and takes the lead in the task. Manny is reticent; Jenny appears to notice this immediately, stops directing and starts to help Manny to cooperate with the task. She leans towards him

and tries to build on his comments instead of making her own points. She appears to make a conscious attempt to work at Manny's slower pace. Immediately they disagree but they are able to discuss their points and reach a compromise.

When asked about the strengths of having learners work together in pairs or in small groups, the tutor says:

“Learners do not always think at the pace of a large group; small groups give them more time to grasp points themselves without holding up lots of

other people. It is important to remember that most of these are people who have failed in traditional forms of education. Collaborative learning allows them to work and learn at their own speed but not in an isolated way.'

In the large group all Jenny's contributions were either amusing comments or inviting or directing behaviours. When working collaboratively with Manny, a serious and contemplative learner, she slowed down and was more focused on the task.



Photo: UK Socrating

Tutors' philosophy and leadership style

The tutors knew the varying levels of ability in the group and used this knowledge skilfully to facilitate learning and promote a collaborative approach. All the tutors showed a dominant nurturing profile on their Teaching Perspective Inventories and shared a belief in building trust and confidence among learners to create a climate conducive to learning.

“Discussions are often more creative than in a large group. It forces independence; they don't look to the teacher all the time but feel safe and use peer support.'

“I think the tutor should be clear about the purpose of both the lesson and the tasks. I try to build up positive experiences in reading, writing and oral skills and create a safe environment to ask questions. I

take them through an ordered structured path.'

“I might set up pairs and use only one dictionary to force them to work together, or one handout between two, otherwise some will still work alone. Sometimes I give them specific roles in a pair or small group e.g. reading, listening or writing.' **■**

Ross Cooper revisits a seminal paper and emphasises the importance of a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to ESOL teaching.

Dyslexia and the bilingual learner

How can ESOL teachers know whether their learners are dyslexic? Many teachers imagine that, somewhere, there exists a quick and foolproof test – but diagnosing dyslexia is a process rather than an event.

Diagnosis as process

In her paper *Dyslexia; what does it mean for ESOL learners?* (Sunderland et al. 1997), Helen Sunderland takes the view that diagnosing dyslexia is, or should be, an exploration of the evidence with the learner rather than a set of tests done to them. It should be a process of discovery. Sunderland highlights particular elements that inform our judgements, including:

- exploring any difficulties that the learner may experience in their first language;
- recognising sub-types of dyslexia, so that unusual patterns of strengths and weaknesses can be recognised;
- identifying inconsistencies between oral and written abilities that cannot be explained by educational experience;
- highlighting the significance of whether the learner has difficulty in responding to appropriate intervention.

She also points out that the various definitions of dyslexia are rooted in the assumptions that underpin the research and the conceptual models and that language should be used carefully in the diagnostic process.

Deficit or potential

Recently, the social model of disability

has led to the articulation of disability as a phenomenon that arises out of individual differences on the one hand and social expectations and requirements on the other, rather than as individual deficit. This is particularly important in relation to bilingual learners, since none of the minority languages involved in LLU+'s recent Pathfinder research (1) had any words for 'learning difficulty', let alone 'dyslexia'. The research reminded us that our own language of 'learning difficulty' remains rooted in deficit models rather than an understanding of learners' potential or that the barriers presented by social and educational expectations and requirements are disabling.

Sunderland's case studies illuminate how diagnostic decisions can be made as you sift through the evidence that can and cannot be explained by the experience of bilingual learning, and stress the importance of developing greater dyslexia expertise amongst ESOL practitioners.

A multidisciplinary approach

The Pathfinder project has made it very clear to us that one of the

Our own language of 'learning difficulty' remains rooted in deficit models rather than an understanding of learners' potential.

problems with the *Skills for Life* strategy is that teachers' expertise is fragmented into distinct areas (e.g. learning difficulty, ESOL, dyslexia, mental health), whereas, in stark contrast, learners arrive with many combinations of difficulties. We need to start with the learner and develop multidisciplinary expertise and teams. Vulnerable learners are finding that the separation between our different categories of expertise is creating real barriers to their learning and gaps through which they fall and are then inadequately supported.

Sunderland (1997) goes on to outline appropriate teaching methodologies for dyslexic support for bilingual learners. She proposes six principles: multi-sensory, holistic, inductive, explicit, structured, and that learning needs to be personally meaningful to the learner.

The experience of developing a better understanding of how to work effectively with bilingual learners who may be dyslexic (amongst other disabilities) through the Learning for Living Pathfinder has highlighted the importance of Sunderland's paper and I would strongly recommend it to teachers working with bilingual learners. ▀

Ross Cooper is Head of the Dyslexia, Literacy and Learning Styles Division at LLU+. Helen Sunderland is Head of the ESOL Division at LLU+. For more information, see www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus

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(1) LLU+ has recently completed a two-year action research project in the ESOL Access for All strand of the Learning for Living Pathfinder. Materials from this project, which include a new Access for All for the ESOL core curriculum, will be launched in the near future.

Literacy in



Timothy Ireland describes an ambitious national strategy to tackle illiteracy.

**Education
is seen as
part of the
process of
building a
conscious
and active
sense of
citizenship.**

The statistics for educational exclusion in Brazil are staggering. Of a total population of about 184 million (of whom 62% are aged under 29) there are 65 million young people and adults aged 15 or over who have not completed primary education. Of these 65 million:

- 33 million are functionally illiterate and have not even completed 4th grade;
- 14.6 million are completely illiterate.

In the 15 to 24 year age bracket – an important age-group that will provide the future critical mass of the country – 19 million people have not finished primary education and almost three million are completely illiterate.

These numbers illustrate the need to rescue the idea of education as a right of all young people and adults who have been excluded from the education system. Although Brazil has made significant progress in the field of education, especially in adult and youth education, the Brazilian government recognises there is still much to do, particularly in confronting a range of inter-related illiteracies: in education, culture, politics and citizenship.

Literacy as political priority

Literacy expresses the political priority that President Lula, Brazil's first left-wing president for 40 years, set out at the beginning of his term of office in January 2003 – literacy as the means of access to full citizenship, providing access to education as a right for all at any stage in life. For young people and adults who have not had access to school, a brief period of literacy teaching is unacceptable. Literacy is now directly articulated with the need to increase the availability of education for young people and adults.

Between 2003 and 2005, the most significant changes

related to the political recognition of education as a fundamental human right of all citizens that requires special provision for those segments of the population living in precarious social conditions. Education is seen as part of the process of building a conscious and active sense of citizenship, respecting both the plurality and the specific needs of individuals.

To achieve this, the agenda for Brazilian education is being built on the basis of large-scale collaboration between the three levels of government – federal, state and municipal – and society as a whole, so that combined efforts can produce results in the shortest possible time in response to the challenges posed by the country's historic educational debt. This response cannot be limited to one-off short-term solutions but must be defined in a perspective of lifelong education establishing commitments to democratising education systems and to creating instruments that guarantee education for all.

Literacy and social inclusion

The Ministry of Education organises its action strategy by giving priority to the articulation between social and educational inclusion and literacy. In addition to being a right, the articulation between literacy and programmes of social inclusion is strategic and re-defines the horizons of citizenship. Links within the federal sphere and also with local state and municipal programmes and links between literacy and the income transfer programme (Bolsa Família) permit an important focus on those living in extreme poverty. The literacy and adult and youth education agendas form the structural base of inclusion. The articulation with vocational courses expresses the role of literacy as the gateway to inclusion and citizenship.

The Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy

Evolution of coverage of national literacy programme

	BENEFICIARIES	MUNICIPALITIES	US\$MILLIONS
2003	1,668,253	2,729	62.1
2004	1,717,229	3,661	68.3
2005*	2,200,000	5,563	89.5
TOTAL	5,585,482		219.9

*Target

Source: MEC/SECAD, 2005.

and Diversity (SECAD) translates the organisational principles into action. ‘Continuing Education’ expresses the focal point of the agenda for young people and adults. This goes beyond the limits of formal schooling and emphasises the idea of lifelong education, above all for the millions of Brazilians who have not yet benefited from access to school. ‘Literacy’ expresses the political priority and focus on citizenship. ‘Diversity’ represents the powerful concept not only of educational inclusion but, above all, of respect for, proper treatment of, and full value for the multiple aspects of Brazil’s ethnic-racial, cultural, gender, social, environmental and regional diversity.

Brasil Alfabetizado

‘Brasil Alfabetizado’, the ‘Literate Brazil’ programme, was launched by the federal government in 2003. Its main object is to achieve educational inclusion by means of effective literacy teaching (reading, writing, oral expression and mathematics) for young people and adults over 15 years of age who have not had access to such courses, in order to promote the notion of education as a right.

As shown in Table 1, 1.67 million young people and adults attended the Literate Brazil programme in 2003. In 2004 the number rose to 1.7 million with resources totalling US\$68.3 million.

Resources for developing this programme are transferred directly to institutions, in the case of public bodies, and by means of legal agreements in the case of non-governmental organizations, higher education institutions and private companies, after teaching programmes have been approved and learners, literacy teachers and co-ordinators have been registered. The plan finances literacy courses lasting between six and eight months, providing payment for the training of

each teacher and a basic payment per month for all teachers, plus a further payment per learner/month.

It is the responsibility of partner institutions to train teachers, enrol learners and organise the whole teaching process, including classroom space, teaching materials, supervision and monitoring. Institutions are free to use the teaching method that best suits the communities in which they are working, as long as they guarantee that learners will be able to read, write, understand and interpret texts and carry out basic mathematical operations by the end of the course. One such institution is described below.



Centro de Educação Paulo Freire de Ceilândia

The Paulo Freire Educational Centre (CEPAFRE) is based in Ceilândia, a town of 344 000 people on the outskirts of the Brazilian capital, Brasilia. Ceilândia is poor in contrast to Brasilia. It was not planned but grew to house the workers who built Brasilia and subsequently those who serviced the middle classes. It suffers from a lack of infrastructure and is predominantly poor with high levels of unemployment and violence. The illiteracy rate is very high.

CEPAFRE was founded in September 1989 by a group of

students doing an MA in education at the University of Brasilia. They joined forces with a group of local people who had started a literacy project based on the methods of Paulo Freire in the Escola Normal (vocational course for the training of primary school teachers) of Ceilândia in 1985. CEPAFRE has so far taught 7,880 adults to read and write and has developed projects with NGOs involved in the training of basic literacy teachers. In 1996 Paulo Freire himself visited CEPAFRE, an event that attracted 2,500 educators.

The method and the process

Maria Madalena Torres on putting Freire's ideas into practice.

To use the method of Paulo Freire, a team of researchers must first talk to the community to identify the words that are frequently used by those who are illiterate and that have great significance in their daily lives. This process is called 'Survey of the lexical universe' ('Pesquisa do universo vocabular'). About a hundred words are collected. The next step is to choose from among these the generative words that will be used in the literacy programme. Several criteria are used to select the words:

- how easily the word can be represented in a picture;
- the replicability of the phonetics of the word;
- how central the word is to the life of the community.

Thus, for example, in a rural community in the North East of Brazil 'água' is one of the chosen words.

Once this information has been collected, groups of learners can be organised. They meet for a period of six to eight months, four times a week; each class is two-and-a-half hours long. At each of the first three classes of the week one of the generative words is worked on; on the fourth day the learners revise those words and the work that has been carried out around them.

Three phases in the classroom

In the first phase, the methodology is as follows. The teacher shows a flash card with a picture of one of the generative words and the word itself written below the picture. The



Above: Maria Madalena Torres at CEPAFRE

learners discuss what that word represents for them and for their community. The role of the teacher is to encourage the learners to reflect upon the issues related to that word. For example, the word 'ônibus' (bus) may lead to questioning of why public transport is so expensive and unreliable. By leading the debate the learners reach their own conclusions and feel empowered to find solutions to the issues identified. After the discussion all the learners read the word aloud with the teacher's help. The second flash card has the word without the picture. Again the learners read the word as a group and then individually.

The third flash card has the word separated in syllables. The teacher

introduces the idea that, like people, words also have families.

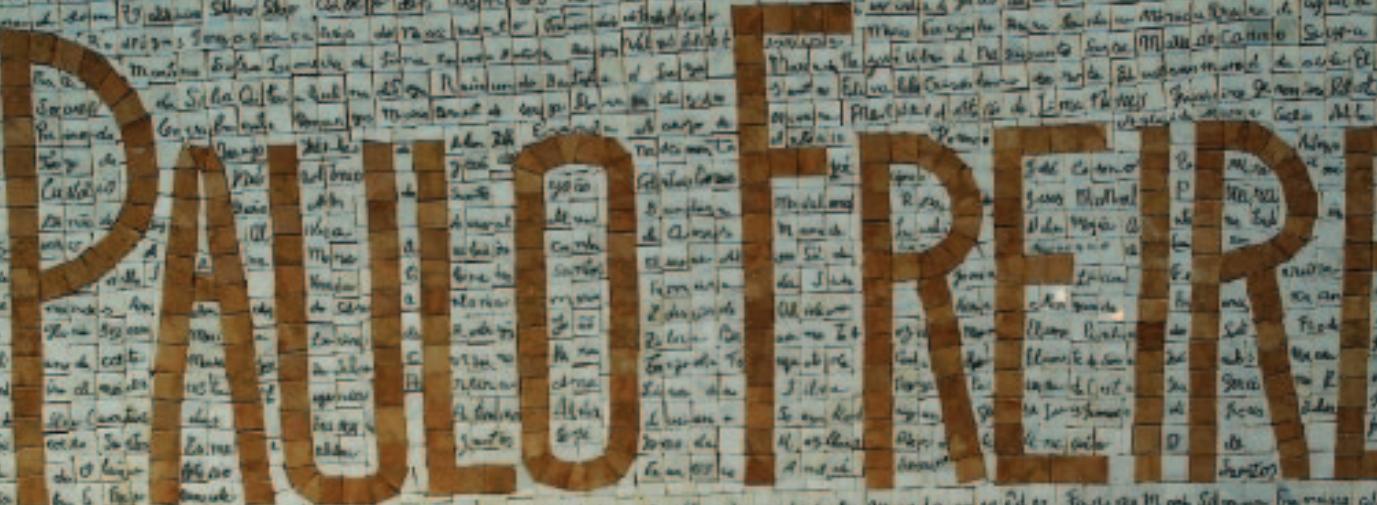
The second phase is the post-alphabetization; its aim is to revise and deal with any difficulties the learners may have with some of the words. They work with syllabic families, write short notes and letters, read silently and orally, and study intonation, punctuation and interpretation in order to gain coherent and cohesive writing skills.

In this phase the idea of citizenship is emphasised through the use of newspaper articles, leaflets, booklets and texts that talk about, among other things, the environment, health, education, gender, diversity and politics so that learners develop their reading skills as well as their understanding of their own reality.

The third phase is numeracy. Again, this is developed around generative words that are relevant to the daily lives of the learners and may lead to recognition of the mathematical skills that learners have already acquired in their lives. Thus the word 'transporte' (transport) may lead to a discussion of bus fares, journey times, timetables etc. With this knowledge of the extent of the mathematical understanding of the learners, the teacher gradually introduces basic mathematical functions such as addition and subtraction using practical problems familiar to the learners. For example, when the Brazilian currency switched from Cruzeiro to Real, the learners had to deal with converting bus fares, the price of goods, utility bills etc from the old to the new currency.

A foot on the ladder

At the end of this process the learners are ready to join the first stage of the National Adult Education Programme (EJA), which is equivalent to primary education. Completion of this phase of the compulsory education system is the minimum requirement to move from the lowest rung of the job ladder in Brazil. □



Literacy for liberation and freedom

Tom Sticht considers Freire's legacy.

My personal knowledge of Paulo Freire comes from the nine years, from 1987 through 1995, during which I worked one week each year with him when we both served as members of UNESCO's International Jury for Literacy Prizes.

Already an international giant of adult literacy education when he joined the Jury in 1987, Paulo brought his philosophy of literacy for liberation and freedom to the evaluation of candidatures for literacy prizes from countries where millions of adults were oppressed. He brought a passion to the evaluation of candidatures, often expressed by clenching his hands in a fist, clutch-

ing his chest and saying 'I love this programme!'. He was also quick to provide a critical commentary when he thought that a program had mistakenly claimed that it followed 'the Freirean method', and he admonished the jury, pointing out that there was no such method.

Nature and culture

In his work, Freire developed an approach to education aimed at helping adults liberate themselves from the oppression of others. To do this he first concentrated on teaching adults to 'read the world' so they could then 'read the word'. By 'reading the world' he meant help-



Pictured: Mosaic of
Paulo Freire outside
the Ministry of
Education and
Culture in Brasilia,
Brazil



Oppressive conditions are cultural and hence capable of being changed by humans.

ing adults understand the differences between the world of nature and the world of culture. Nature is made by natural forces and is not subject to change by humans. Culture on the other hand is made by humans and can be changed by humans. We 'read the world' to know what is nature and what is culture. Oppressive conditions are cultural and hence capable of being changed by humans.

Changing the cultural context

Literacy is a technology for helping humans change the cultural contexts in which they live so that they can achieve social justice; hence it is worthwhile learning.

This line of reasoning was to motivate adults to learn to read and write. To start the process, Freire introduced the use of 'multiple literacies', though he did not call his practice that. He used pictures that adult literacy students 'read' to distinguish what in the picture was due to nature and what was due to culture, i.e. human actions.

He listened to the learners discussing the various situations depicted in the pictures and demonstrating that they possessed a lot of knowledge about the world, including both nature and culture. This knowledge was drawn on in teaching reading.

This method of 'reading the world' and then 'reading

An interview with Paulo Freire

Sean Taylor interviewed Paulo Freire in his home in 1996, six months before his death.

In 1994 I gave up working in literacy teaching and writing development in East London and went with my wife to live in São Paulo in Brazil. Once I had learned to speak fluent Portuguese, I decided to try to find Paulo Freire.

It turned out he lived in a quiet street three or four miles from us. I asked to interview him, saying his thoughts might be some inspiration for people involved in literacy in the UK. We met but, realising I knew little of his work other than *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he sent me away with six new books and rearranged the interview for three weeks later. 'At seventy-five I haven't got time to tell people where I was born', he said, with a twinkle in his eyes. What follows is a shortened version of the conversation we had the second time we met, on 19th November 1996.

How do you define an illiterate person?

Well, first of all I think I need to draw attention to something obvious, which is that only lettered cultures, which have mastered and which use graphic language, know illiteracy. That's to say that unlettered cultures, full of voices and spoken words, do not have illiteracy. An illiterate person is only a



A culture which knows graphic language and coexists with people who have not mastered graphic language is a form of violence.

man or woman who participates in a culture which knows and uses letters, but does not have command over those letters. I think this is what illiteracy is. It is ignorance of graphic

language within a culture which already uses graphic language. And look: a culture which knows graphic language and coexists with people who have not mastered graphic language is a form of violence. So illiteracy is a restriction and a violence to the right of people to participate in culture, which those who know and use the written word must not carry out.

Are there ways that people working in education in the north of the planet can help the development of literacy and good educational practice in the south?

I think it's the south of the world which should be helping the north of the world. I am against the supremacy of either the north or the south. For me, one of the serious problems we will continue to face in the next millennium is the relationship between the north and the south.

Marcio Campos, at the University of Campinas in Brazil, has carried out a fascinating analysis of the verb 'nortear'. This is a verb in Portuguese meaning 'to give direction' and also meaning 'to point someone towards the north'! This is profoundly

the word' was used extensively to build on the knowledge that adults possessed and to teach them to read the language that they already used to express their knowledge. Then new knowledge was introduced to stimulate adults to take actions to change their oppressive situations.

Participatory education

Freire contrasted this learner-centred, participatory approach in which the adults helped determine the content and direction of their own education with the more traditional, school-centred education in which policy-makers, administrators or teachers determine the

content and direction of education and attempt to deposit and 'bank' knowledge in learners' minds even if they do not understand the value of the new knowledge.

Through the work of Reflect and numerous other groups around the world, Paulo Freire's learner-centred, participatory approach to adult literacy education continues to help marginalised, socially excluded adults develop the confidence and abilities they need to not just 'read the world'; but to change it. This is the enduring legacy of the work of Paulo Freire. □

Thomas G. Sticht is an International Consultant in Adult Education. Email: tsticht@aznet.net

The adults helped determine the content and direction of their own education.

ideological, because no one says 'sulear' or 'point towards the south'. In my opinion the question you have raised is not to do with preserving the 'northerning' nor is it for the south to start 'southerning'. What I think is that the north and south should respect one another and should take up their historical roles as subjects, not as objects.

For this to happen it is necessary for the north to be humble. The north has to invent a humbleness for itself, and discard its characteristic arrogance. Europe, for example, thinks that it started history. The north must discover that the south also exists, and is active and powerful. The south also creates. The south also produces. The south also thinks. It is not only the north that thinks. So there is no doubt in my mind that, the deeper the dialogue between the north and the south, the better for them both. But there has to exist in the north and in the south the humility of those who want to complement each other rather than those who want to dominate.

The national programme that you and others designed for Brazil in the 1960s was never implemented.

Why?

A few elements of the programme were put into practice but then the whole project was simply aborted by the military coup. We were sent to

There has to exist in the north and in the south the humility of those who want to complement each other rather than those who want to dominate.

prison for our programme, so we had no time to evaluate it.

If you could re-create the programme today, what form would it take?

Today, 30 years later, history has moved on and the emphasis would be different. We would have new things to do, to say; new ways of operating, new politics of action. From the point of view of the understanding of the role of the educational practitioner, the role of the students learning to read and write, from the point of view of respect for the language and syntax of the student, from the point of view of understanding literacy learning as an act of creation, and in terms of ensuring that the literacy student is also the subject, it would all be the same. I think that in the next millennium these things will remain constant in a progressive, democratic and humanist perspective.

I say now, with more force than I said it 30 or 40 years ago, that the literacy

student has to be seen as a creative subject of his or her process of learning to read and write, and not as a patient under the orientation of the educational practitioner. For this reason I emphasise a critical understanding of people's language. It's necessary to respect the syntax of the literacy student, which is also a syntax of his or her social class. It is from the universe of the student's thought and language that the process of literacy learning, the process of mastering the written representation of your language, should begin. □

Paulo Freire 1921 -1997

Born September 19th in Recife, Brazil; educator and political philosopher of education. During the early 1960s Paulo Freire developed his radical educational policy in Brazil and was involved in planning a national strategy for literacy.

Sean Taylor is a writer and teacher currently living in East London. He has written a number of books for adults and children and has a chapter on teaching writing in 'Literacy, Language and Community Publishing', edited by Jane Mace (Multilingual Matters 1995)

This interview was first published in RaPAL Bulletin No. 34, Autumn 1997. To join RaPAL or subscribe to the journal visit <http://www.literacy.lancaster.ac.uk/rapal/index.htm>

Letters

Address your letters to:

Letters, reflect, NRDC, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL
or email: info@nrdc.org.uk

Still teaching after all these years...

It was interesting to read Jo Mackriell's experiences as a new *Skills for Life* tutor (**reflect** issue 3 June 2005). I'd like to offer an account which explains why, after 25 years as a teacher, I still enjoy teaching literacy to adults.

I originally trained as a secondary teacher and remember arguing the case that, although I was teaching Textiles/Food at GCSE and A-level, I should also be teaching English to my learners. I did the volunteer training in 1981 and soon found that the 'Basic Skills' night class that I taught was more challenging than my full-time teaching. This could also have been a result of producing individualised materials for each member of the group; a 'Cinderella Service' springs to mind.

Through working in varied community settings, it became apparent to me that many individuals were keen to support members of their communities to succeed in adult education. The training available at the time was geared towards classroom volunteers and not really relevant for people active in other community roles. In response to this need I wrote a Basic Skills Awareness module which was delivered at Trafford Hall, the National Tenants' Resource Centre, on a residential basis and was funded through a Basic Skills Agency ACLF (Adult and Community Learning Fund) initiative. The module was subsequently extended into the Supporting Community Programme on the National Open College Network. I'm

not sure if I understood why I wanted to leave my partner and children to spend my weekends at Trafford Hall with strangers from all parts of the UK, but a 2.00am discussion with participants from the Foyer, the Salvation Army, health professionals, soup kitchen workers and members of inner-city Residents' Associations sometimes helped to clarify it for me.

Part of the *Skills for Life* strategy was to recruit 6,000 supporters from across the most deprived areas of England and I was privileged to be part of the BSA Link Up team which wrote and developed what we now know as the Level 2 qualification for Adult Learner Support. Meeting and working with learners, supporters and peers in their own settings across the country fuelled my enthusiasm. Feedback from prisoners stating that they now had a 'reason to get up in the morning' because they were supporting others in the prison was particularly inspiring.

I've recently achieved the Diploma in Adult Literacy and, in true further educational style, have already been delivering the Level 4. Without a doubt, doing the course made me question what I do and how I do it, but the learners have always been able to reassure me as to why I do it.

Clare Owens

Workplace and Community Skills for Life Coordinator
 West Cheshire College
 Chester

The importance of initial training

I would just like to emphasise the pertinence of Helen Casey's article in **reflect** Issue 4 (October 2005). Some initial training for *Skills for Life* teachers before they start teaching is essential, and we are coming across many people who are finding themselves caught in the double bind she mentions (i.e. 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 teacher training qualifications).

For a few years now, we have offered a customised City & Guilds 7407 Stage One for prospective ESOL teachers, providing a placement with an experienced teacher. I have recently heard of it being used to accredit pre-service literacy teachers.

Isabel Arnold

ESOL Teacher Education
 Bradford College

Quantitative or qualitative?

Pat McNeill compares two kinds of data used in social and educational research.

Essentially, there are three ways in which a social or educational researcher can collect evidence:

- by asking questions;
- by observing behaviour and interaction;
- by analysing documents and information that have already been recorded by others.

Each of these methods can be used to collect either quantitative data (in the form of numbers) or qualitative data (usually in the form of words, often quoted directly from the people being studied, but sometimes in other forms, such as images). Different types of research, with different purposes and different contexts, and researchers from different theoretical backgrounds, will tend to favour one or the other kind of data, though many will use a combination of the two.

Quantitative data

Some research aims to collect primary quantitative data about people's social or material circumstances, or about how they live their lives, or about their attitudes or beliefs. In these cases, the researcher will usually carry out a survey of a representative sample of the population being studied. The questions may be presented in the form of a questionnaire, possibly delivered through the post or online, or a structured interview, where the researcher asks the questions face-to-face and notes the responses. The responses are classified into pre-set categories and analysed using a range of statistical techniques.

A large amount of secondary quantitative data is available in the official statistics that are published by government and its agencies. Some of

this data is collected through surveys (e.g. the British Cohort Survey from which Bynner and Parsons derived much of their data) and some through routine administrative procedures (e.g. the number of adult learners enrolled on programmes in a year).

Qualitative data

Researchers whose purpose is to understand and describe the meaning of social action and experience for the people involved will tend to favour qualitative data. They argue that people are active, conscious beings who act with intention and purpose because of the way they make sense of the social situation they are in. For example, a class of learners is not just a number of people enrolled on a particular programme; it is a group of people each of whom perceives himself or herself as a member of a class in a particular setting at a particular time and who acts accordingly, thus both responding to

the setting and creating and maintaining it. Social phenomena are created by people who share an understanding of the situation, so researchers need methods that enable them to get at these shared understandings.

Researchers who want to collect primary qualitative data will often use observation, which may be either participant or non-participant, and either covert or overt. They may also use interviews but these will tend to be unstructured; the researcher has a relatively informal conversation with the participant but asks a lot of questions and ensures that the discussion focuses on the topic that is being researched. The respondent is encouraged to express themselves in their own terms rather than respond to preset questions.

Qualitative secondary data often takes the form of letters, diaries and other personal documents, as well as film, video and TV. These can be interpreted and analysed in terms of their meanings, symbols and use of language.

'Hard' or 'soft'?

Quantitative data is sometimes described as 'hard' and qualitative data as 'soft'. Such terms imply that quantitative data is somehow more reliable and valid than qualitative data and that it is safer to base policy and expenditure on 'hard' data than 'soft'. While it would obviously be foolish to reject this view altogether, it is equally foolish to discount the most important aspect of human experience – that we act and react as conscious, thinking and reflective beings, not as objects in the world. The most effective policies will take account of a wide variety of evidence, whether it is 'hard' or 'soft'. □

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NRDC in print

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‘Beyond the daily application’: making numeracy teaching meaningful to adult learners
Jon Swain, Elizabeth Baker, Deborah Holder, Barbara Newmarch and Diana Coben
October 2005

The implications for post-16 numeracy and maths of the Smith and Tomlinson reports, the 14-19 White Paper and the Skills White Paper. A Maths4Life policy discussion paper.
Caroline Hudson
January 2006

Maths4Life Pathfinder report
Caroline Hudson with Jo Colley, Graham Griffiths, and Sue McClure
January 2006

Does numeracy matter more?
Samantha Parsons and John Bynner
February 2006

Relating adults’ lives and learning: issues of participation and engagement in different settings.
David Barton, Yvon Appleby, Karin Tusting & Roz Ivanic
April 2006

Linking learning and everyday life: a social perspective on adult language, literacy and numeracy classes.
Roz Ivanic, David Barton, Yvon Appleby & Karin Tusting
April 2006

The full academic case studies of embedded provision on which the recent NRDC publication ‘**Embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL; Seven case studies** Roberts et al. (August 2005)’ was based are now available online – see <http://www.nrdc.org.uk/embedded>

Glossary

ALI

Adult Learning Inspectorate. See www.ali.gov.uk

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

DWP

Department of Work and Pensions. See www.dwp.gov.uk

E1, E2, E3

Entry levels in the adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL core curricula

ESOL

English for Speakers of Other Languages

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.

LEA

Local Education Authority

LLN

Language, Literacy, Numeracy

LLUK

Lifelong Learning UK. 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

NCSALL

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. Federally funded US research and development centre focused solely on adult learning. See www.ncsall.net

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/

PGCE/Cert Ed

Non-subject-specific qualifications that give qualified teacher status

PLRI

Practitioner-Led Research Initiative at NRDC. See www.nrdc.org.uk

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/

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 NRDC is dedicated to improving literacy, numeracy, language and related skills and knowledge. One of its 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 teaching and learning and extend adults' educational and employment opportunities.

reflect

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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



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