



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

reflect

THE MAGAZINE OF NRDC | ISSUE 10 | MARCH 2008

Where were you last week?

Improving attendance at adult literacy classes – a teacher's tips

Empowerment through mathematics

Celia Hoyles describes how to demystify maths in the workplace

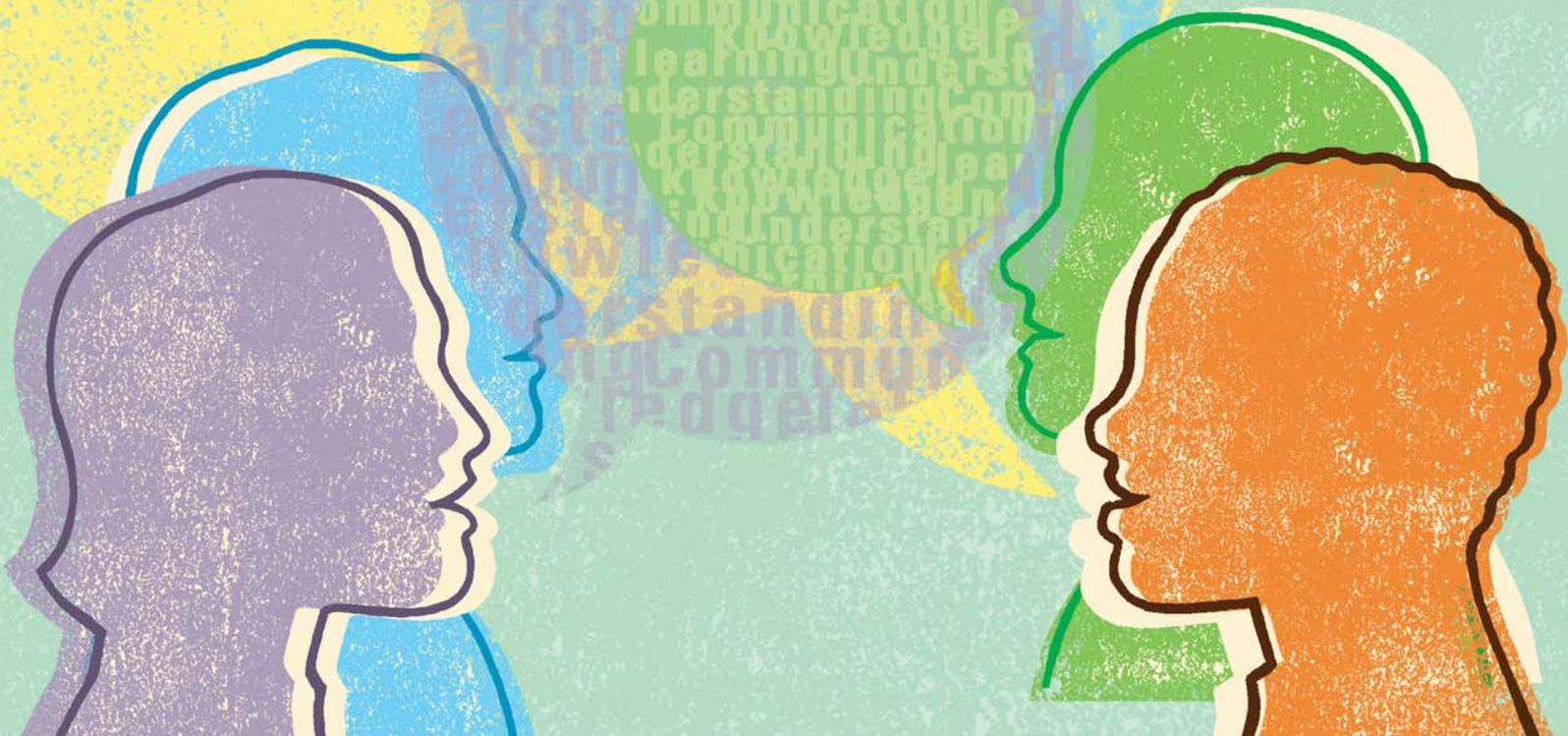
Seeing yourself in print

How publishing one learner's writing can motivate the whole class

SPECIAL REPORT

ESOL

**The ever-changing
face of provision**



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Published by the National Research
and Development Centre
for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

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pdf and text-only format from the
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About NRDC

NRDC was established in 2002 as part of the **Skills for Life** strategy. It is a consortium of 12 partner organisations, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. 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.

NRDC consortium partners

The Institute of Education, University of London with:

Lancaster University

The University of Nottingham

The University of Sheffield

East London Pathfinder

Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership

Basic Skills Agency at NIACE

Learning and Skills Network

LLU+, London South Bank university

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

King's College London

University of Leeds

Funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills as part of **Skills for Life**: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills.



Cover illustration:
Jason Bennion

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ESOL is changing fast. But it has always been a dynamic and changing sector, representing and responding to wider changes in our society, as Sheila Rosenberg explores in her wonderfully rich history of ESOL (reviewed on p31). Recent analysis of 2005/6 LSC data reveals that London now accounts for less than a third of ESOL learners nationally, compared to 50% in 2001/2. In addition, a much greater proportion come from the expanded European Union: the whole picture is changing. The challenge for policy is to ensure that *Skills for Life* learners with the greatest educational and social needs are given priority and have all the support they need to improve their skills, wellbeing and life chances – and their children's. They may need literacy, ESOL, numeracy or a combination of all three: support needs to respond flexibly to learners' situations and motivation to learn.

'The importance of English language training for all communities' was accepted in *Our Shared Future* (2007). Yet recent changes have prioritised funding for certain groups. Do you think the balance is right? What would you do differently? How will local implementation work? The Government's current consultation on ESOL [see www.esolconsultation.org.uk or phone 0870 0010 336] runs until the 4th April – make sure your voice is heard.

All of which makes our special report on ESOL timely. Simon Mahoney presents striking evidence of the advantages of ESOL training on the shopfloor (p12), where staff turnover dropped from 180% to 12%, while four practitioners discuss the complexities of supporting learners in a completely different context – the prison sector (p7). New occupationally-specific ESOL qualifications are considered by Rob Gray (p6), and by Nina Julka and Anders Timms (p11). And Peter Lavender updates us on recent developments, following NIACE's 2006 ESOL report 'More than a language...' (p15).

Elsewhere in *reflect 10*, we hear from Sarah Malins, who shares her practical insights into improving attendance rates in the classroom (p16). Celia Hoyles (p20) describes how interactive learning materials allow workers to 'play' with mathematical variables in complex processes without affecting production, thereby increasing their understanding, confidence and motivation in the workplace. David Mallows and Anne Chester (p24) advocate a similar principle – using authentic materials to motivate and build confidence – for literacy learners. While regular *reflect* readers will be familiar with Voices on the Page, now in its second year, there are other examples of published adult learners' writing, often recounting life stories, which can motivate readers and writers. And, if we're encouraging learners to reflect and then use their voices, we should do the same ourselves: think about what we do, what we're trying to achieve, and what we want to say: including through the ESOL consultation.

Ursula Howard, Director, NRDC

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ESOL today: politics, pedagogy and performance measurement

Helen Sunderland reviews the state of play

One Friday last autumn, I attended a NATECLA¹ one-day conference. In the morning I listened to a talk on ESOL research, and attended a workshop on talk in ESOL and another that questioned the extensive planning teachers are expected to do nowadays. At lunchtime I had a conversation about inspection and another about whether a colleague could count her ESOL Diploma towards the new standards for teachers. In the afternoon, I went back to work and read an email from the Save ESOL campaign. My experiences that day highlight many of the current issues in ESOL, which I have loosely categorised as politics, pedagogy and performance measurement.

Politics

ESOL has been in the news a lot in the last two years. On January 4th 2008, under the heading 'Migrants language lessons rethink' the BBC website announced the government's plans for free English lessons to be targeted at long-term residents in the interests of social cohesion. This article heralded a public consultation (www.esolconsultation.org.uk) about which particular ESOL groups should qualify for free English lessons, given that fees for some were introduced in September 2007. The link between language learning and social cohesion has been particularly highlighted since 2004 through the

language requirements for citizenship and, more recently, for settlement (Taylor 2007). This has made more demands on ESOL classes at a time when, it would seem, there are fewer places available.

"When I started English classes it was like being in a big family. We help each other and try to understand. My teachers as well help me and push me to work hard and make plans for my future. English classes are very important for asylum seekers and refugees because it is like water. You can't live without water and you can't live without English language in this country."

With thanks to James Simpson and Naheed Hussain for submitting this quote from the excellent Huddersfield College 'Save ESOL' video

The question of cuts is sensitive and hotly disputed. Speaking at the *Skills for Life* conference in November 2007, David Lammy stated vehemently that there have been no cuts to ESOL. And yet teachers tell us all the time that there are fewer courses available, particularly at Entry level. How can this be? It would seem that, though there are no official or intended cuts, other measures, designed for different reasons, have impacted on ESOL provision. These include:

- measures that prioritise Level 2 qualifications and 16–19 provision
- the emphasis on qualification-bearing courses
- cuts in 'residual' provision (ie non-target-bearing provision)
- fees which, according to NATECLA research (NATECLA News autumn 2007), are affecting some providers, though not all.

The net result, according to members of LLU+ networks, is that there are fewer lower level courses for adult ESOL learners.

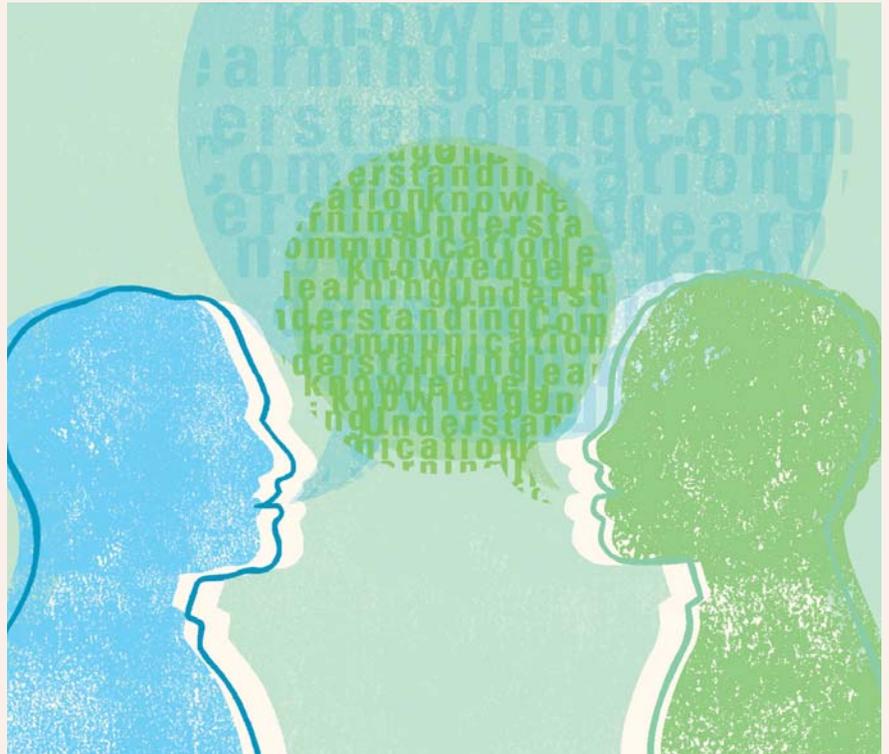
ESOL constantly changes in reaction to world events. War, famine, poverty and civil unrest all result in large movements of refugees trying to make a safe life for themselves and their families. But it was a peaceful and, some would say, positive political change that has resulted in the biggest recent upheaval in ESOL in this country. This was the entry to the EU of the Accession States in 2005, resulting in large numbers of European residents taking up their right to live and work in the UK. ESOL provision grew enormously after 2005 and expenditure went up with it (Grover 2006), resulting in a raft of measures to try to control this growth. These included fees for learners 'able to pay', a special suite of ESOL for Work qualifications (which attract less funding)², and exhortations to employers to fund English lessons for their staff.

Pedagogy

ESOL teachers are getting used to hearing about their learners in the morning news but, since 2004, they have had the benefit of research on their area of work for more or less the first time (see Mallows in *reflect* issue 9). The NRDC's Effective Practice research points to the advantages of a less controlled classroom and highlights the importance of teachers' 'professional vision' and of teachers who can be flexible and make on-the-spot judgements (Baynham et al 2007). The NRDC practitioner guide (Roberts and Cooke 2007) stresses the need to give more talking space to learners and disseminates some of the ways in which teachers promote meaningful talk among their learners. Action Aid's 'Reflect ESOL' pilot programme (nothing to do with this magazine, except that it shares a name) is equally fluid in its approach. Its theoretical basis is Freirian and it effectively hands over decision-making to learners, using a small range of visual and kinaesthetic tools (see Newman in *reflect* issue 1). The NATECLA conference workshop against the tyranny of lesson planning (Sutter 2007) continues this trend.

With the push towards ESOL for work, and for a number of other reasons including the advent of ESOL with citizenship, the practice of embedded ESOL is gaining ground again after a 15-year lull. Though the Moser report (1999) had specifically asked for the (then) new curricula to be context-free, teachers responding to the review of the ESOL Curriculum in summer 2007 asked for more contextualisation of examples, particularly in the 'new' contexts of work, family learning, citizenship and offender learning.

Although you might expect me to say that technology has made an impact on pedagogy in ESOL in 2007, I'm not sure that I can. There still seem to be plenty of ESOL learners who do not have regular access to IT and I'm not aware of any particularly new or inspirational ways of teaching ESOL



that are made possible by technology³.

Performance measurement

The debate is now more muted but teachers still complain to me about ILPs at every opportunity. It's not the process of sitting down with learners they object to but the need to set and monitor measurable targets which they and the learners find difficult. The problem with measuring progress is that the temptation is then to teach what is measurable. It's what one respondent to the curriculum review consultation called 'surveillance' and what others call 'audit culture'. It includes grumbles about excessive paperwork, about inspectors (particularly those without a background in ESOL or language teaching), and about ever-changing teacher qualifications. There is a tension between keeping a handle on good quality teaching and learning and overburdening professional ESOL staff. It is small consolation that it is by no means only ESOL teachers, or even only teachers, who complain about ever-increasing levels of administration and accountability in today's world.

What happens next?

In spite of performance measurement, and maybe because of the politics and the pedagogy, teachers and learners don't give up. As teacher trainers, we see a continuing and enormous enthusiasm for teaching. Often it's the learners that keep us going.

Helen Sunderland is Head of ESOL Division at LLU+, London South Bank University

Baynham, M. et al (2007) *Effective Teaching and Learning: ESOL* NRDC
 Grover, D. (2006) *More than a language ...* Final report of the NIACE Committee of Inquiry on English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) NIACE
 Moser report (1999) *A Fresh Start - improving literacy and numeracy* DfEE
 Roberts, C. and Cooke, M. (2007) *Reflection and action in ESOL classrooms* NRDC
 Sutter, J. (2007) *Against Planning* NATECLA News Autumn 2007
 Taylor, C. (2007) *ESOL and Citizenship - A teachers' guide* NIACE

(1) National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults
 (2) See Julka and Timms on page 11 for an example.
 (3) See Jo Kirby and Jenny Hunt's article on page 14, for some potential new ideas.

Linking language to work: new routes for learners

Rob Gray explains how integrating ESOL with training in vocational skills improves migrants' job prospects



Many refugees and migrants to the UK are limited in their job prospects not so much by their lack of vocational skills as by their low standard of English. For the last three years, the Progress GB project and the Steps to Success project¹ have been supporting people in these groups to develop and adapt their skills so they can move from unskilled into more appropriate employment.

An important part of these projects was to encourage participants to resume their ESOL studies. Many had undertaken ESOL studies before but had stopped when their ESOL skills had reached Entry level 2. Although ESOL at this level is just about enough for everyday communication, it is significantly below the level needed for many of the job roles which would enable the participants to use their existing vocational skills.

Occupational ESOL

Many of the potential learners were working long hours in temporary unskilled employment and were also attending part-time vocational courses. As a result, they were

hesitant about returning to ESOL studies which would take up even more of their limited free time. Therefore, to make ESOL provision as attractive as possible, the project developed occupationally-specific ESOL courses. These courses appealed to the learners because they identified with an occupation and appreciated the importance of being able to understand and use occupational terminology. To make the courses even more attractive, they were combined with units from vocational courses or with occupationally-relevant IT studies. For example, Sage² level 1 and 2 was incorporated within the ESOL for Accountancy course. This vocational content enabled the learners to extend their vocational skills beyond the level that was possible through their vocational courses. Each occupationally-specific ESOL course was made even more appealing to the learners by helping them develop the literacy and speaking skills involved in applying for jobs.

Applying for work

The more the learners used their ESOL skills in an occupational context, the more they appreciated

the need to further develop these skills. However, the importance of developing them to the level expected by employers became fully apparent to the learners only when they began to apply for skilled work. Several learners remarked that their ESOL skills were in fact the only skills being tested at interview; interviewers gave them the opportunity to describe their vocational skills but were in fact testing their ability to communicate.

During the projects, courses in ESOL for Accountancy, ESOL for Retail, ESOL for Administration and ESOL for Health and Social Care were developed and delivered by tutors at Leicester and Derby College with support from NIACE³. Embedding ESOL in vocational courses would have been an alternative and possibly more effective approach. However, the development time needed to create fully embedded courses was beyond the scope of the projects. The lesser development requirements of the occupational ESOL courses offered many of the benefits of fully embedded provision and were feasible within a short-term project.

Rob Gray is Senior Project Officer at NIACE

(1) NIACE is the lead partner in Progress GB, an EQUAL Round 2 Development Partnership. See www.niace.org.uk/Research/ASR/Projects/Progress-GB.htm. The Steps to Success project is co-funded by the European Social Fund and the Learning and Skills Council. See www.niace.org.uk/projects/stepstosuccess/Default.htm
 (2) Accountacy software package
 (3) As a result of this initial developmental work, NIACE and the Association of Accounting Technicians are exploring the possibilities of developing Accountancy ESOL provision to support AAT students with ESOL needs.

Prison provision: coping with increasing demand

Jo Fisher, Jackie Harvey and **Judy Fitt** spell out the challenges posed by working with ESOL learners in prisons

London's prison population includes a large proportion of foreign nationals (up to 40% in some cases). Dealing with issues relating to English as a second or other language is therefore a high priority. There is a huge diversity of languages among offenders and widely varying levels of English language skills, with the majority at a basic level.

The primary aim of ESOL provision is to equip learners with the English they need to operate effectively within the prison. At the same time, they should be helped to achieve formal qualifications. The pressure of numbers continually arriving adds a logistical dimension to the design and management of ESOL provision; we aim to minimise waiting lists for classes and ensure that all incoming prisoners are integrated into the system as quickly as possible.

Addressing these needs is a daily task for those responsible for induction, education and training, and delivery of work regimes in custodial settings. In our experience, successful strategies include the following.

Syllabus

- Devising a prison-related syllabus, based on the Adult ESOL Curriculum but using language, topics, functions and grammar relevant to the prison environment in order to enable integration, including access to prison services, work areas and other classes in Education.
- Developing authentic prison-related materials to support this syllabus (eg 'Skills for prison life') including self-



study materials for those unable to attend classes.

- In response to the fast turnover of learners in remand prisons, the syllabus is made up of self-contained classes to enable all learners, new and continuing, to learn something in each class.

Provision

- Providing additional language support to enable ESOL learners to access vocational training through embedded learning. This includes language materials, classroom support,

and ESOL embedded in vocational syllabuses (eg in Holloway, ESOL BICS (British Institute of Cleaning Sciences), ESOL Cookery, ESOL Literacy and ESOL Computer classes; ESOL Numeracy provision is being planned).

- Ensuring flexible provision (with its funding implications) to respond to sudden changes, eg a sudden increase in numbers of learners, or a sudden influx of a particular language group (eg in Holloway, Chinese speakers and, currently, Roma speakers) with widely varying levels of motivation.

■ Providing outreach sessions (short one-to-one sessions outside the Education Department). These have enabled women working full-time in the prison workshops to pass exams and have also identified special learning needs.

Support

■ Providing welfare services specifically for foreign nationals, such as the female prisoners' welfare project Hibiscus, to which teachers can refer learners.

■ In Wandsworth, representatives from the Education Department attend the weekly meetings of the foreign national group, and the foreign national prisoner representatives are being trained to seek out men who are not on the Education Department's lists.

■ Also in Wandsworth, the prison authorities are buying dictaphones and tapes to enable new prisoners to start learning some English while waiting for a place in a class.

Pressing issues

While the strategies described above are addressing the need to a large extent, there are some pressing issues.

Numbers and funding

■ The large increase in numbers has a ripple effect on areas other than ESOL classes. These include: the library, where there is a need for more dictionaries and foreign language books; other classes, where ESOL learners may dominate; demands for translation and interpreting; other prison activities.

■ There is a need for responsive and flexible funding for additional classes to meet increased numbers, including embedded learning and language support.

■ There is also a need for funds for new classes to respond to the specific needs of a language/ethnic group, eg the non-literacy of many Roma women.

Placement

Non-English speakers must be appropriately placed in education and training; we must not make assumptions about what is in their best interests. Some non-English speakers do not see ESOL classes as a priority, however much we may feel the classes are in their best interests. These learners can disrupt classes and affect the learning of other, often

The 50-language challenge

Sue Saxton, who as Head of Regimes is responsible for a wide range of education, work-based training and other support for the men in HMP Bullwood Hall, spoke to *reflect* about ESOL provision

Bullwood Hall in Essex is a Category C prison¹ for around 200 adult male foreign nationals who are in the last year of their sentence. It has fulfilled this role only since August 2006; before this it was a prison and YOI for women. The men are all 'of interest' to the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) who will decide whether, at the end of his sentence, a man should be deported, allowed to stay in this country, or be further detained. Though many prisons in England and Wales hold foreign nationals, Bullwood Hall is one of two that provide only for this group. Typically, there are prisoners from every continent and, at any given time, some 50 first languages are spoken, though the 'top ten' are Arabic, French, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Punjabi,

Romanian, Russian, Urdu and Vietnamese.

What are the particular challenges that you face in your ESOL work and how have you responded to these?

Even more than in the outside world, each man is unique. Some have been in the UK for years, are orally fluent, have families in the UK, and are familiar with British culture. Others may have been convicted soon after their arrival and speak no English at all, let alone write it. When they arrive, they don't know whether they will be given leave to stay in this country after their sentence, so they don't know what language or other skills they will need on release. Some are with us for a week or so; others for up to a year. This means that Individual Learning Plans are even more important and that bite-sized

chunks of learning are essential. For some, the emphasis is on preparation for life after release. For others, developing the skills they need within the prison is more urgent. For example, men who have no English but are placed in the prison workshops need a crash course in vocabulary relating to health and safety.

When the role of the prison changed in 2006, we had to develop a completely new approach to our work in *Skills for Life*.

What is your current provision?

We have 10 ESOL classes delivered by Milton Keynes College. Two are Pre-entry level and eight are multi-level Entry (of which two are for spoken English only). Most men are working towards Entry 1 or 2. Men

very keen, learners. Women who do not want to learn English and who attend classes only because they are paid to do so, or to speak with their friends, often respond very well to alternatives, eg ESOL-supported training and work.

Interpreting

Provision for interpreting and translating needs to be improved.

Initial assessment

Initial assessment of language needs should also identify learners with other special needs such as learning difficulties, disability, mental health, general health (many of our learners from developing countries have general health problems). More one-to-one provision for such learners is needed. These issues should be addressed in liaison with all our

partners in the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS).

Qualifications

We need the exam boards to be more flexible in their enrolment procedures and in the content of exams. *Skills for Life* focuses on living in Britain. Many of our learners will be deported and don't need to know about the NHS, children's schools etc. In addition, learners who have progressed from pre-Entry to Entry 1 exams have not followed a 'Living in Britain' syllabus and therefore find the content of the exam difficult. In terms of enrolling for exams, while we have managed to do Cambridge SfL Reading and Writing, the process for the Speaking and Listening (involving named learners, six weeks' notice, Living in Britain) means we can't offer these exams, though many of our longer-term

learners would like to do them.

Training and recruitment

All prison staff and teachers should be trained in language awareness and the use of simple English in instructions, prison signs and notices etc.

It is difficult to find suitably qualified and skilled ESOL teachers. This is aggravated by the fact that we depend on sessional staff who can receive better rates of pay in other educational settings including that of the Lead Provider FE Colleges, where they can also work longer hours, unrestricted by prison regimes.

Jo Fisher is ESOL Coordinator and Jackie Harvey is Head of Learning and Skills at HMP and YO1 Holloway. Judi Fitt is Head of Education at HMP Wandsworth

who are assessed at Level 1 and above attend Adult Literacy classes. We also have a substantial amount of outreach work where teachers work one-to-one with men on the wing and in the various work parties in the prison, such as the kitchens, workshops and laundry.

What have you learned from your ESOL work to date?

We learned very quickly that not all Pre-entry learners can learn in a group so we also work one-to-one through outreach. Following initial assessment (for example, in a two-month period, we received 29 new admissions at pre-entry level) we identify the best way to meet needs. This might be outreach before progressing onto a Pre-entry group or a mixture of both.

At first, we had a problem with accreditation. We needed a form of accreditation that suited the fact that many men were here for a short and unpredictable period. Now, we use the City & Guilds system which provides single modules of assessment that fit our 'bite-size' provision. It is much more motivating



for the men to achieve 'little and often'.

Also, the teachers have formed good working relationships with work party staff, so we can integrate language learning into the training context, where the men's poor language skills may hold back the development of their vocational skills. We have put a lot into staff development of colleagues who are not formally qualified as teachers and it is paying off. In partnership with outreach staff, they come up

with lots of good ideas. For example, they have made 'language boards' in their workshops, with photos of tools or equipment with English language captions.

We are also proud of the men's high levels of engagement. In December, only 17 of the 184 men were not engaged in learning and skills work of some kind, underpinned by our ESOL provision.

But perhaps the greatest success is our use of RARPA². Some staff weren't sure about it at first but the men love it because it values 'distance travelled'. Every bit of progress is a milestone for them and they can achieve recognition of that progress regardless of the time they are here. We have had to unlearn our assumption that target-setting is about accreditation; that is not the be-all and end-all. RARPA has helped us to become even more learner-centred.

[1] A closed prison with emphasis on training
[2] Recognising And Recording Progress and Achievement in non-accredited learning. See www.niace.org.uk/Projects/RARPA/Default.htm

It's not just the numbers

Noyona Chanda tackles the problem of linking learners' ability in maths with their level of English

When teaching maths to learners whose first language is not English, how can we make sure that the maths is developed at the level of the learner's mathematical ability rather than being constrained by their level of English language?

A learner with a degree from her country of origin is not going to be motivated if, because she finds the English language difficult, she is placed in an Entry level numeracy class. Conversely, teaching methods that are familiar to native speakers of English will not be helpful with learners who have had limited schooling in their first language. We need a range of different approaches.

Problems without numbers

A learner whose experience of maths education is learning by rote and copying the method demonstrated by the teacher is not likely to develop reasoning skills simply by being given tasks expressed in simple English. He or she will need to engage in activity that requires the use of reasoning and, more importantly, the need to explain that reasoning to peers or the teacher.

For example, posing a problem in words but without numbers is an effective way to encourage reasoning, eg 'How will you work out how much money you need for your child's lunch and bus fare?'. The response is likely to include some thinking and naming of numbers in first language, translation from first language to English, and then the speaking of sentences and numbers in English. This is a much more

effective approach to introducing problems of addition and subtraction than using diagrams with words and symbols.

Language and reasoning

A learner who says they have studied accountancy or engineering beyond school leaving age, and hence is at a higher level of maths, should be encouraged to work semi-independently using English language texts and websites at their mathematical level and to address the language issues as they arise (this is the teacher's critical intervention) so that they can evidence their knowledge in English. They can use maths textbooks in their first language, with bilingual dictionaries and illustrated maths dictionaries as support materials. The teacher's use of questioning to check full understanding in English and to give the learner practice in articulating reasoning in English is a key strategy for effective learning.

At the other end of the scale, learners who are not yet literate in any language and have no experience of formal education are likely to have some conceptual understanding of numbers in

A learner with a degree from her country of origin is not going to be motivated if, because she finds the English language difficult, she is placed in an Entry level numeracy class

everyday life. Here, the key is to create an environment in which the learner can build a bridge between their informal usage and understanding and the formal conventions for reading and writing maths in English. For example, you can use a learner's recent real life experience of money, time, or measure, describe a problem using maths notation, solve it, and check the solution in a group. Practise saying the numbers in English using the appropriate conventions, then use this as the basis for language drill and further usage.

Creating resources

Encouraging learners to create learning resources for themselves enables them to use their thinking and communication skills in a purposeful way, eg creating accurate matching pairs of cards or dominos for their children. Using English for maths purposes happens naturally. The need to check for accuracy is the learner's motivation rather than the teacher's. The teacher can assess each individual learner's capability and gaps in understanding and address these at the point of need as well as in the longer term.

We need to start maths learning from the learner's level of maths ability, not of their competence in English. Mathematical concepts are more universal than you might think. Teacher strategies are more important than specialist resources.

Noyona Chanda is Head of Numeracy Division at LLU+, London South Bank University

English for Work – the qualification for ESOL learner employees

Neena Julka talks to Anders Timms of Airbags International Ltd

Ask any ESOL learner why they want to learn English and you'll find 'getting a job' is one of the main reasons. A suite of 'ESOL for Work' qualifications was launched in October 2007 to provide shorter, more job-focused courses with a more flexible approach to assessment. I met with Anders Timms, Learning Academy Group Leader at Airbags International Ltd¹, to hear about their experience.

NJ: Why did you get involved in ESOL?

AT: We had a number of employees from Poland, Portugal and Slovakia who were finding it difficult to communicate at work because of their weak English. We already offer a range of NVQ courses but ESOL is crucial if we are to ensure our operational employees are fully equipped to do their jobs.

NJ: Have you run ESOL courses before?

AT: We started our first ESOL course in 2007. However, due to the length of the course and the complex nature of our shift patterns, we decided to put the course 'on hold' until the 'ESOL for Work' qualification became available. We have gained funding through NRDC to launch an 'ESOL for Work' course early in 2008.

NJ: What benefits does the company see as a result of investing in employees' language skills?

AT: Communication between employees and their line managers is better and there is improved retention.



NJ: How did you prepare to run the 'ESOL for Work' qualification?

AT: We attended the *Skills for Life* conference in Birmingham in Autumn 2007 and worked with key providers to better understand the qualification. We liaised with NRDC and obtained funding from the QIA SfLIP 'Flexible models of delivery' project to support the development of the qualification in our workplace. We also maintained close contact with 'Business in the Community' who supported, along with other key organisations such as TUC and CBI, the launch of Best Practice 'ESOL for Work' case studies in December 2007.

NJ: Can you tell me about the pilot?

AT: We have a pilot group of 14 employees ready to start the 'ESOL for Work' qualification, which we are expecting to launch by early March. The weekly commitment will be about two hours in their own time, with full support from our team of Union Learning Reps and the Learning, Training and Development department. Macclesfield College is delivering the course.

NJ: Have you had any feedback from the learner employees?

AT: Following their experience of

working towards the ESOL qualification in 2007, they are very keen to start the 'ESOL for Work' qualification. They welcome the focus on helping them fit into their workplace and maintain good communications with fellow employees and line managers.

NJ: What would be your advice to other employers who are thinking of offering ESOL training?

AT: Contact other employers who have benefited from the experience and get started as soon as possible. ESOL is just one of a number of opportunities available to employers to encourage employees back into learning and skills development, which benefits all concerned.

NJ: What is the cost to the company?

AT: The 'ESOL for Work' qualification requires an employer contribution of £330 per employee. I believe the training provider receives government funding.

NJ: Is there a danger that your employees will leave after improving their language skills?

AT: There is always that risk but we believe our employees will recognise the learning and career opportunities available to them by staying with us².

Neena Julka is Managing Director at SNJ Services Ltd

Further information about 'ESOL for Work' is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/planning_and_funding

[1] Part of Autoliv, the world's largest supplier of airbags for use in cars.

[2] For further evidence that this is the case see *The benefits to employers of raising workforce basic skills levels: a review of the literature* Ananiadou K., Jenkins A. and Wolf A. (NRDC 2003)

Troika: a three-handed approach

Simon Mahoney describes what has been achieved by union, managers and colleagues working together



Picture, if you will, a medium-sized Service and Recycling Centre in the East Midlands that operates on behalf of one of the big four supermarket chains. The work is deemed to be unskilled and more than 80% of the workers are migrants. They come from Eastern Europe and from all over Africa and the Middle and Far East. At the last count, more than 30 different mother-tongues were spoken on the shop floor.

Four years ago there was very high turnover of staff and frequent conflict on the shop floor; all the supervisors were English and the place was a powder keg waiting to go up. Typically, a shouted warning to a colleague to avoid some falling object would be met with the response 'yes please'. Something had to be done.

“The place was a powder keg waiting to go up”

Introducing ESOL

As Union Rep for the site I argued that we should introduce English lessons for our migrant worker colleagues on grounds of Health and Safety and also of productivity. Fortunately, management not only agreed but embraced the idea with real enthusiasm. After a lot of hard work, we launched Project Troika, a small-scale experiment in running English classes (ESOL) in the workplace.

In spite of enormous problems, some predictable (eg opposition from first-line managers who still had to meet targets when staff were off-shift in ESOL lessons) and some not (eg the provider pulling out without notice) we managed to get Troika up and running. It took nine months of hard slog before the first class, not because of management opposition but because of the difficulty in persuading the provider to give us what we wanted and not what they wanted to give us. In the event, they pulled out in the second week and management solved the problem by employing the tutor directly.

Immense benefits

The predicted outcomes of improved Health and Safety and greater operational efficiency emerged fairly quickly. What took us by surprise were the other immense benefits of the ESOL programme.

- Staff turnover dropped from 180% to 18%. It has now stabilised at 12%.
- Colleagues of different ethnic backgrounds and faiths not only worked well together but spent time with each other during the breaks.
- Conflict was reduced dramatically, as was the number of disciplinary hearings.
- Three years on, the effect of the initial Troika programme has filtered through, so that now eight of our ten first-line managers are migrant workers.
- In spite of all the grumbles, the shopfloor workers feel valued and, in spite of being one of the lowest-paid sites in the area, people stay.

All this happened; there is no disputing that. What we cannot know is how much can be directly attributed to ESOL. My own view is that, without ESOL, it would not have happened and that ESOL at the very least helped to create a climate in the Service Centre that allowed other management initiatives to be effective. ESOL is not of itself a cure-all but, in combination with other measures, it can be highly effective in promoting communication and establishing a more benign working environment. ESOL was also

We were able to influence the culture in the company and create a win-win scenario for the union, for colleagues and for management

important in workers' lives outside work; colleagues on the ESOL course found it easier to access the services we all take for granted and spent less time off work with stress.

Social inclusion

And then there is the Holy Grail of social inclusion. It is pretty clear that, if migrants are able to speak English, not only can they access services and understand their rights both in work and elsewhere, they are also in a position to make a positive contribution to society as a whole. The earlier migrations to the UK, from the 1950s onwards, were largely from areas where English was either a first or second language and there is no denying how those migrants have enriched life in this country. Recent migrants, particularly from Eastern Europe, have not spoken our language and have as a consequence faced immense difficulties in surviving, let alone contributing. It is unfortunate that the powers-that-be have decided that the ESOL programme was too successful to afford and have proposed drastic changes in the funding, despite ESOL being a prudent investment in all our futures.

Benefits of training

Troika attracted a huge amount of

good publicity for the company, including two trade union awards, positive recognition at the ESOL lobby of Parliament last year, and recognition by the then Chancellor, Gordon Brown. Perhaps most importantly, the Troika project and its good press has helped to influence the company's attitude towards training in general and ESOL in particular. Both the site manager and I have argued for and presented evidence to demonstrate the benefits of ESOL in a variety of arenas. ESOL is now actively promoted throughout the company and, once the ESOL learners were fluent enough, NVQs in warehousing were introduced.

About 30% of colleagues on my own site have undertaken ESOL training and a further 20% have been able to benefit from the NVQ programme. We are about to start the third Troika programme which will involve nearly 50% of shopfloor colleagues. The withdrawal of funding was a blow at first but, by exercising some ingenuity, we are still able to have access to ESOL at the right price. This will be developed into literacy and numeracy skills embedded in IT.

From a small programme involving only 16 people we were able to influence the culture in the company and create a win-win scenario for the union, for colleagues and for management. Troika was nothing special but it had an enormous effect on the lives of colleagues and, now in its third year, is continuing to do so. Troika was characterised by continual setbacks and disappointments and it was largely through the site manager buying into the project and refusing to give up that it became a reality. This was perhaps the key to the success of the whole project – the willingness of both management and the union to see solutions to a whole raft of issues and to get results; come what may.

Simon Mahoney is Union Learning Representative for USDAW

e-learning for ESOL

Jo Kirby and Jenny Hunt explore the increasing range of possibilities for using e-learning technologies in the ESOL classroom

ESOL learners come from a wide range of backgrounds and have a wide range of experience and ability. Information technologies can help teachers to cater for this diversity but, while the technology is developing at an exponential rate, it is hard for teachers to keep pace. In this article, we give some suggestions for what can be done.

Digital photographs provide a powerful stimulus for personal narratives about self, family, interests, neighbourhood, and country of origin. Cheap digital cameras take photos of suitable quality to insert into word-processing or presentation software. Scanners can be used to digitise printed photographs.

MP3 recorders are handy for capturing sound clips or longer recordings. Learners will benefit from hearing the teacher's voice or a local accent. Short clips can be inserted into documents and presentations to create speaking and listening exercises. Longer recordings can promote listening practice outside the classroom. You could even try making your own podcast. There are free downloadable tools such as Audacity for editing sound recordings
<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

Combining digital images and sound, free tools such as Photo Story (from www.microsoft.com) enable learners to create a slideshow from a series of still photos, incorporating captions and a sound commentary.

Google Earth <http://earth.google.com> will enable you and your learners to 'visit' anywhere in the world through the power of satellite photography. Projecting Google Earth onto an



ESOL learners create their own induction guide

Towards the end of the year, it emerged from a class discussion that the learners felt that, at induction, they had not been given the information they really needed. The tutor encouraged them to create their own induction guide. They started by taking photographs around the college – including what they considered essential information, such as directions to the canteen and the correct change to use for the drinks machine. They put these into a presentation to which they added captions and hyperlinks to further information. They were extremely proud to demonstrate this to the next learner intake.

interactive whiteboard enables the whole class to contribute to discussion.

Working online with Google Maps <http://maps.google.com>, learners can explore a town (at home or abroad) and mark favourite places, draw lines and shapes to highlight paths and areas, add their own text, photos and videos, and share the map with friends and family.

A class blog is an excellent way of motivating learners to use written English. They can write their own entries and comment on those made by other learners. For an example, see <http://besol.blogs2teach.net>. Pictures and links to other websites

can easily be added to enrich this online environment.

Interactive presentations such as PowerPoint can be created to teach sequencing. They also provide opportunities for speaking and presenting, using photographs and images.

The internet provides a number of free translation services. In particular the BBC World Service translates the news into 33 languages – a wonderful way to relate learning to relevant and interesting aspects of learners' lives. The BBC World Service has a Learning English site that has lots of ideas for teachers and learners www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learning_english

Developing your e-skills for ESOL

The following websites are a good starting point, and there may be someone in your organisation who is already championing e-learning.

- www.lsneducation.org.uk/programmes/portals.aspx?ProgID=5
- <http://learningandskills.becta.org.uk>
- <http://aclearn.qia.org.uk>
- <http://ferl.qia.org.uk>
- www.niace.org.uk/Conferences/TrainingCourses/eguides.htm
- www.jisc.ac.uk

Jo Kirby and Jenny Hunt are consultants in e-learning and Skills for Life

NRDC and NIACE have recently published 'Using ICT' in their Practitioner Guide series. This publication contains a wealth of ideas that can be adapted for use with ESOL learners.

NIACE has a series of booklets called 'e-guidelines', one of which is called 'e-learning for Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages.'

More on 'More than a language...'

Peter Lavender reviews progress made since the publication of the NIACE report on ESOL

The NIACE report on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), *More than a language*¹, was published in October 2006 and included 39 recommendations.

Three of the most important were that:

- there should be a cross-departmental review of the current provision of, expenditure on, and future need for ESOL across the full range of government policies
- a minister should be given lead responsibility for ESOL
- a forum should be set up to act as a source of expertise and advice to government on ESOL issues.

All three of these recommendations have been adopted, as follows.

- A number of inter-departmental working groups have been set up and it is understood that there has been Cabinet discussion as well.
- Bill Rammell MP (Minister of State, Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education) is responsible for ESOL at DIUS.
- The 'ESOL Forum', managed by NIACE for DIUS, has been meeting regularly and is consulted on confidential and significant matters related to ESOL. Derek Grover (who chaired the NIACE Committee of Inquiry) is Chair and the adviser is Jane Ward, working with DIUS officials. The Forum provides an excellent way of ensuring that ESOL is kept at the centre of two interconnected government priorities – the economic and the social cohesion agendas.

Other developments since the Inquiry reported reflect its recommendations.

- The DIUS consultation paper published in January 2008 (www.esolconsultation.org.uk) says 'We believe local authorities and their partners are best placed to define the issues which are hampering community cohesion in their areas and design the solution to the specific questions they face.' This approach is directly linked to recommendation 2 in the NIACE report.
- ESOL has received more attention than any other aspect of *Skills for Life* (recommendation 4), though the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is urging a renewed effort on numeracy this year.
- Work-related ESOL has been the subject of significant work by the National Employment Panel and the inter-departmental sub-group facilitated by DIUS. The consultation on ESOL suggests that work-related language training should be addressed in Regional Economic Strategies and the work of Regional Strategic Partnerships (recommendation 6).
- A project on the links with Every Child Matters has been completed (recommendation 7).
- The national survey by Ofsted on the quality of ESOL is under way (recommendation 13).
- The disparity between literacy and ESOL is to be ended with a merger of qualifications at Level 1 (recommendation 16).
- It is accepted that information about ESOL funding, entitlements,



rules and priorities must be clear to everyone involved (recommendation 30). Anita Hallam at NIACE leads on monitoring the ESOL position in the new funding arrangements.

The DIUS consultation, which ends on 4 April, will increase our knowledge of the level of need in each local area, how that need is currently being addressed, and how local ESOL plans might be created.

So far so good, but what next? We want to see:

- an increase in the number of qualified teachers
- better quality ESOL provision
- support and access for all who need to learn English
- a variety of provision
- continued action and progress on all 39 recommendations in *More than a language*.

What matters for ESOL provision is a balance between what individuals need to thrive in society and the needs of the wider society and the state. The ESOL consultation document is a good start.

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(1) *More than a language: NIACE Committee of Inquiry on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)* (NIACE, 2006)

For a free executive summary of the NIACE report, see www.niace.org.uk/publications/M/MoreThanLanguage.asp

To respond to the Government's current consultation on ESOL, please visit www.esolconsultation.org.uk by 4 April

Where were you last week?

Sarah Malins describes how she has responded to the problem of adult learners' non-attendance at literacy classes

I teach Literacy to a daytime class of twelve Entry 2 adult learners in Central London. Two learners are retired on low incomes and, of the other ten, only one is employed. Seven have children; three are single parents. Three have children under five years of age. Two care for elderly relatives. Two learners (both of them parents, and one a single parent) are affected by mental illness, and one has mental difficulties requiring semi-sheltered care. Five learners have frequent hospital appointments. One (a single parent) has a son requiring regular hospital visits; this same learner has serious housing difficulties. One learner has alcohol problems. Four are Muslim and follow strict religious observances, for example in Ramadan and Eid. Three Christian learners will not come to class on certain Christian festivals, such as All Souls' Day. Ten learners are second-language speakers and allegiance to their mother-country,



Frequent hospital appointments are a regular reason for non-attendance

usually African, remains strong; they miss class for celebrations such as an anniversary of Independence Day. On top of all this, learners are absent for the usual problems that affect everyone, such as waiting at home for an electrician.

That's a reasonably typical group.

Non-attendance

They are also typical in that there is a serious problem of non-attendance. There were 107 absences in a single term, which meant 321 hours of potential learning lost during the 864-hour course (72 hours per learner). The reasons for this are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reasons for non-attendance in an Entry 2 Literacy class

Learner	Financial Problems	Childcare (Illness/school INSET days/lack of child minder/financial problems)	Care of elderly relative	GP visit	Illness (mental health /disability)	Illness (physical)	Alcohol problems	Hospital appointments	Housing problems	Religious /cultural observance
1		●		●	●	●		●		●
2		●		●		●		●		
3	●	●		●		●		●	●	●
4			●	●		●				●
5				●		●		●		●
6		●		●		●		●		●
7	●	●		●		●		●		●
8	●				●					
9	●			●		●	●			
10			●					●		
11	●	●		●	●					
12	●	●								

Non-attendance is not only a problem for the individual; it directly affects the tutor and the other learners and, indirectly, the college, the funding bodies, employers, and the national economy.

Of course, attendance per se does not necessarily mean progress is being made, but it gives an indication of the learners' attitudes and indicates that the teaching is at the correct level and that the learners are gaining something from the class.

Aiming to improve

Much of the above will be familiar to many practitioners but, while the last decade has seen a massive increase in the emphasis on the needs of adults with low literacy skills, not enough attention has been paid to the problem of maximising their attendance at classes. Most of these learners have little or no previous experience of the process of learning but are expected to attend regularly, and funding for their courses is linked to attendance and retention.

I have tried various ways of improving attendance, as shown in Table 2, with mixed success.

Personalising and motivation

Many commentators, and my own experience, confirm that motivation is the key to improving attendance. With this in mind I created a personalised 'Attendance and evaluation sheet' (after Soifer et al. 1990) for each learner to maintain for him/herself. Please see Figure 1 (page 18). It is apparent that the form itself provides several learning opportunities.

Learners kept their own record for the last four weeks of term. The attendance/lateness pattern of ten of the twelve learners improved markedly, ranging between 80% and 100%, though this may have been partly influenced by the imminence of their City & Guild's Assignment 3792. There was also a noticeable improvement in their learning outcomes.

Table 2: Methods of improving learner attendance

Action	Result	Reflection
Completing Departmental Absence Record	Learners afraid of form: rather than be late would not attend at all, or would bring in children's medicine bottles to prove reason for absence. One learner angered by form: threw it back at me.	Form useful to confirm tutor has kept accurate attendance records, but causes a lot of stress and may increase absenteeism. Learner couldn't cope with stress this form gave her.
Making Diagnostic Assessments less intimidating	Need to be done slowly over several sessions otherwise absence rates will rise due to boredom.	Start at beginning of term, for short while each session, but anticipate will take several sessions.
Completing Individual Learning Plans, making attendance part of Ipsative Assessment¹	Learners encouraged when they see improved attendance rates.	Remain encouraging at all times: learners who have not improved are often overcome by life's difficulties.
Monthly prize (chocolates)	Attendance improved, three winners! Created some jealousy. Muslim learner would not accept; wary of contents. Winners absent a lot in following month.	Uncertain, worth trying again, using different prize.
Vary learning styles	Many learners dislike tactile and kinaesthetic styles because think they will show up their inadequacies in front of other learners. Absence at next session increased following session predominantly using these styles.	Persevere, but be continually aware of learners' lack of confidence.
Access Learning Support	Got Learning Support Worker to assist four named dyslexic learners: attendance of learner with mental ill-health markedly improved.	Repeat, within financial constraints.
Encourage learners 50+ to return to learning	Best attendees in class were two older women: tried their hardest, also tended to 'keep going' through ill-health. Made slow but steady progress.	With ageing population such learners will be needed in the economy. Repeat.
Rescheduling hospital appointments	Encouraged learners to book early (09.00) appointments and then come to class a little late. Better than leaving at 11.00.	Learners had not thought of this. Repeat.
Accompany learners to coffee break	Learners enjoyed my more relaxed manner at break. Some learners did not come to canteen as too expensive, or else wanted cigarette.	Many learners come to class for social reasons. Break time important. Organise coffee in 'packed lunch' area (cheaper).
Explaining to learners cost of running course and how attendance will affect future courses for them and others	Learners listened politely, but no improvement in attendance.	Learners often overcome by personal difficulties; rarely visualise a situation some way ahead. Not productive.
Telephoning absent learners	Always promised to return next session, but often didn't.	Learners used to mobile phones, tend not to respond to phone calls.
Writing to absent learners	Departmental form, although innocuous, always made learner attend next session.	Learners concerned about letters; gets results. Repeat as appropriate.
Tutorials	Discussion of absence can highlight learner's personal difficulties and solutions may be found.	Always productive, but sometimes time constraints.

Some recommendations

Non-attendance does not necessarily mean that a learner is not interested in learning, that the College is not good, the tutor is not skilled, or the curriculum inappropriate. At Entry Level, it is likely to mean that learners are, quite simply, overcome by life's pressures; attending a Literacy class is necessarily a low priority. It may also be saying that these learners need a different, more caring approach to learning if they are to succeed, and that emotional support should play as large a part as academic support in their curriculum.

My recommendations are:

- Avoid Monday daytime classes for learners with children: (a) Mondays are school INSET days; (b) a child will be taken to a doctor on Monday if ill over the weekend.
- Morning classes should not start too early, to enable learners to sort out their domestic responsibilities.
- Access as much Learning Support as possible, particularly to encourage men – whose self-esteem is often particularly low – to participate.
- Encourage learners aged over 50 that they can succeed.
- Create a class 'coffee break', priced so that learners can afford it and

Be aware that religious/cultural observances may cause absences



where companionship is encouraged.

- Advise learners to make hospital appointments early, and come to class later.
- Be aware that tactile and kinaesthetic approaches can cause stress to those learners who are trying to conceal their perceived 'inadequacies' from their peers.
- Be aware that religious/cultural observances may cause absences.
- Be wary of 'prizes': they can create distress.
- Enquire about absence via letter rather than telephone, which can be intrusive on family life and is usually less productive.
- Allocate time for an unexpected tutorial.
- Have ongoing short-task

assessments to maintain impetus rather than assessment at the end of an academic year.

- Create attractive 'attendance record' paperwork that learners will be responsible for themselves, to chart their own progress.

Sarah Malins is a teacher in South London and took an in-service course at LLU+, London South Bank University in 2007

(1) Assessing learners' present performance against their own prior performance, rather than against wider 'norms'. Measures the 'distance travelled' over time.

Soifer R et al. (1990) *Program Development and Management in The Complete Theory-to-Practice Handbook of Adult Literacy Teachers* College Press

Figure 1: Attendance and evaluation sheet

Student name				Class				Tutor			
To be filled in at start of lesson				To be filled in at end of lesson							
				What did you do today?				What did you learn today?			
Long date (eg 11th January 2008)	Short date (eg 11/1/08)	Attended (✓ or ✗)	Late? (Number of minutes)	Speaking (✓ or ✗)	Listening (✓ or ✗)	Reading (✓ or ✗)	Writing (✓ or ✗)				

Putting it into practice

Maggie Galliers and Louise Hazel describe how the Whole Organisation Approach is working in their college

'We will not achieve strong communities and world class skills unless we can engage those who have lost out and help them progress through learning into sustainable employment. That is the key reason why pre-level 2 learning and progression is a high priority.'

John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills



John Denham's statement (above) was music to the ears of many of us working in FE. In Leicester, the issue is particularly acute. We have well over a third of adults with low or no qualifications, the highest non-white population in the country, low educational achievement pre-16, and high levels of deprivation; there is a significant need for *Skills for Life*.

Leicester College is the main provider of *Skills for Life* in Leicester; our response to this need was critical and we realised that we had to raise our game. This prompted us to adopt a Whole Organisation Approach¹ to *Skills for Life*. 'WOA' was a new concept for us but quickly became a means of securing wholesale change and improvement.

Priorities

A crucial element of the strategy was engendering a sense of shared responsibility. Although it was important to identify a champion at senior level, much of the early work involved getting cross-College engagement and putting a new vision for *Skills for Life* at the core of College activity.

We identified priorities for development, including improving

initial assessment and target setting, tracking learners' progress and developing teaching capacity. There is evidence that embedding *Skills for Life* in vocational areas can increase success rates, so developing embedded provision was also a priority.

Improvements were made in the recording and interpretation of results from diagnostic tests. Three teacher-led improvement projects generated discrete and embedded provision and *Skills for Life* qualifications are now delivered in all curriculum areas.

Improvements

There were some significant and rapid improvements. Learner numbers increased by 9.5% among 16–18 year olds and by 38% among adults. This helped us to buck the trend at a time when the impact of fees for ESOL was starting to bite.

Quality improved and Ofsted inspection rated our discrete literacy and numeracy as 'outstanding'. It also identified very high achievement rates and progression to vocational courses, and highly effective teaching and learning and sharing of good practice.

There were other, unanticipated, impacts. We started to think differently about assessment, including pioneering online assessment with OCR² and changing our approach to accreditation. This increased the urgency for a sound IT infrastructure, particularly in our community venues, which had to be networked to allow online testing in places that were convenient to learners.

It also raised issues around staff development. Pre-empting the Skills Pledge, we had cleaners attending *Skills for Life* programmes and hairdressing lecturers taking key skills. We also recognised the need to upskill our teaching workforce and so established a portfolio of level 4/5 specialist teacher training.

Networking

Adopting a Whole Organisation Approach has linked us into a wider network of providers including other colleges, the learning partnership and the probation service. This has enabled us to work with a wider community, to learn from others' expertise and to access the support needed by different groups of learners. Networks like this will be important in the increasingly integrated employment and skill system that the Government is planning.

Clearly, there is still much more we can do around the Foundation Learning Tier and progression routes, 14–19 functional skills, and in enhancing teaching capacity. But the Whole Organisation Approach has helped us make a step-change in how we deliver *Skills for Life*. Perhaps most importantly, it has reaffirmed to us the importance of these vital first skill levels and the need to put them at the heart of our offer.

Maggie Galliers is Principal and Louise Hazel is Policy and Planning Officer at Leicester College

(1) See www.woasfl.org

(2) Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations, an awarding body

Empowerment through mathematics in the workplace

Celia Hoyles shows how demystifying mathematics improves understanding and performance in the workplace

We know that many adult learners have been ‘turned off’ maths by their previous learning experiences. We also know that work processes in many modern workplaces are underpinned by maths. Thirdly, we know that a powerful motivator for adults to return to and engage with maths is that they can see its relevance to their life and work rather than being just a ‘box of tricks’ to be performed in a classroom setting.

Motivation and performance

An irony of many modern workplaces is that, while the underlying processes are becoming more mathematically sophisticated, computers are reducing or removing the human input to these processes. As a result, workers have less understanding of what is involved and are less engaged with it. Lack of involvement and engagement leads to less motivation, less work satisfaction and, crucially, lower performance.

The ‘Techno-mathematical Literacies in the Workplace’ project set out to tackle these issues. We aimed to identify the combinations of mathematical and technological skills that people need in modern workplaces (their ‘techno-mathematical literacies’ or TmL) and to develop these by creating flexible interactive resources to support employees in developing the TmL relevant to their work. These could eventually be combined with workplace technical training materials.

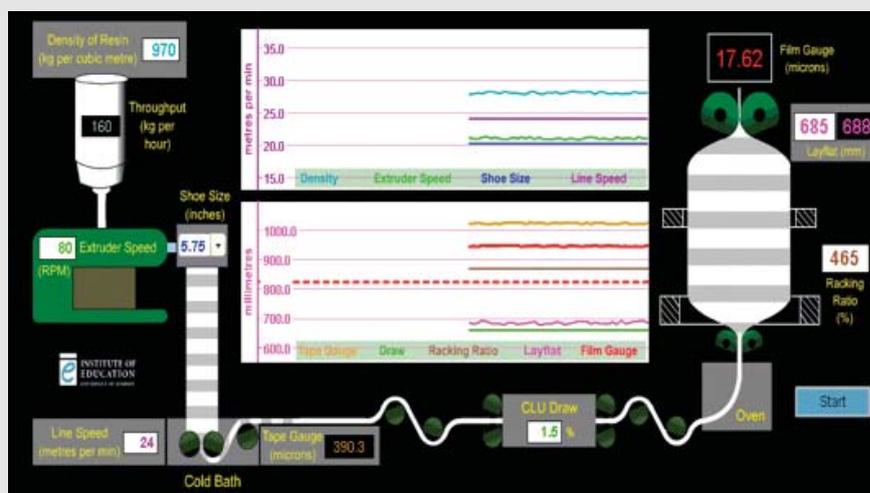


Figure 1: From resin to film: an interactive learning opportunity

We worked with companies in financial services, packaging, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and the automotive industry. After a period of in-depth study of workplace activities, we designed, in close cooperation with the employers, a number of interactive computer-based ‘learning opportunities’ that simulate a scenario or process directly relevant to the day-to-day work of the learner employee.

Maths and plastic

For example, we worked with a packaging company to help shiftleaders and operatives on the shopfloor to develop their understanding of a complex plastic extrusion process that converts raw material (resin) into very thin film (15 to 20 microns) to be used in shrink-wrapping. The project team had identified from extensive work in the factory that achieving an

understanding of the whole work process and ‘what affects what’ was crucially important. For the learning opportunity, we co-designed an interactive simulation of the factory process in which the learner could adjust the input speed, the density of the resin, and other control parameters, to achieve a target thickness for the final film (the output). The learner was also presented with scenarios of problems with the process and asked to deal with them. With the simulation, things can be tried, variables tweaked and mistakes made without incurring the significant costs of experimenting with the actual process – and it is fun! Figure 1 shows a screen from this learning opportunity.

Maths and money

In the financial services sector, we worked in areas where employees

have to explain the life cycle of products, such as current account mortgages, to the customer. Our research showed that customers' understanding of key variables such as interest rates and administration fees, and their ability to interpret graphs that showed estimates and predictions, was being hindered by employees' use of what were often 'pseudo-mathematical' labels, eg the 5% attached to an instrument simply designated a type of product, with little or no recognition of what the 5% meant. Accordingly, we worked with the employer to co-design interactive models of current account mortgages, with the emphasis on employees using these models to help them explain the mortgage to customers. Figure 2 shows a slide from this model.

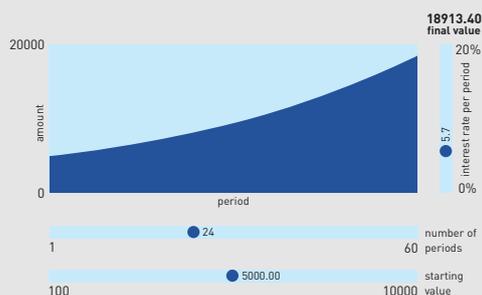


Figure 2: Compound interest

Key messages

The project has confirmed how learning – particularly learning mathematics – promotes personal and professional development through empowerment, and that practitioners and researchers need to work with employers to co-design interactive tools that take workplace activity as a starting point.

Celia Hoyles is Professor of Mathematics Education at the Institute of Education and Director of the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics

For more about the TmL project, see www.ioe.ac.uk/tlrp/technomaths/index.html

Transforming knowledge into practice: making the evidence count

Muriel Green shows how the work of QIA in *Skills for Life* is underpinned by sound research

Improving the quality of the learner's experience and increasing success rates are at the heart of the Quality Improvement Agency's (QIA) reform and development activity in *Skills for Life*. Learner motivation and engagement are key to these. QIA has a number of national projects and programmes that can help practitioners improve learners' motivation and success.

Findings reported in October 2007 from an external evaluation of QIA tell us that, in a sample of 1645 providers, where 441 senior managers were interviewed, 77% had been involved in QIA *Skills for Life* projects and programmes and reported that support activity had been most beneficial. We are keen to build on this success as we work to address the challenging targets set out in 'World Class Skills' ¹.

Meeting the need

QIA's priorities for reform and development will continue to reflect national policy and provider need. The focus, shape and form of the support offered is very much informed by the wealth of information about adult literacy, language and numeracy that has been generated by NRDC's research over the last six years.

Current priorities include:

- workforce development: getting more staff qualified, building the capacity of the regions to train more teachers and mentors, and continuing professional development (CPD)
- using tried and tested quality improvement tools and techniques to adopt a whole organisation approach to *Skills for Life*
- transferring evidence-based innovation to strengthen teaching and learning.

Key themes of all our work include embedding, numeracy, progression to Level 2, and employability. Our projects and programmes work across different contexts and settings including family literacy, language and numeracy, local and health authorities, and a wide range of private and public sector employers.

The QIA team and partner organisations have drawn extensively on NRDC's research findings, as well as other significant research, to inform support packages. We are keen to continue to work with NRDC to make the evidence count. The table on page 22 provides an overview.

Muriel Green is Programme Director, Strategic Reform and Development, at the Quality Improvement Agency

(1) World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England, DIUS (2007)

Focus of activity	Research that has informed activity	Providers/people engaged
Workforce development: creative routes to qualified status	Creative Routes: Skills for Life Teacher Education Development Activity (NRDC 2006-08)	Up to August 07: 1470 teachers trained From September 07: 1400 to be trained
Workforce development: building regional capacity by training trainers, teacher educators and mentors	A literature review of research on teacher education in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL (Morton, NRDC 2006) Skills for Life core curriculum training programmes 2001/03: characteristics of teacher participants (Casey, Lucas and Giannakaki, NRDC 2004) New initial teacher education programmes for teachers of literacy, numeracy and ESOL 2002/03: an exploratory study (Casey et al, NRDC 2004)	Up to August 07: 630 additional trainers, teacher educators and mentors trained From September 07: 230 to be trained
Workforce development: Continuous Professional Development (CPD)	Student achievement through staff development (Joyce and Showers, 2002) Influences on student learning (Hattie, 1999) Assessment for Learning: putting it into practice (Black and Wiliam, 2003) Effective teaching and learning research reports (NRDC 2007) Embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL (Roberts et al, NRDC 2005)	Up to August 07: 15000 people trained From September 07: 19355 people to be trained in Quality, Embedding, Assessment; to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities; and to use 'Move On Up' resources
Improving quality: Whole Organisation Approach (WOA)	For information on the KPMG Pathfinder see: http://excellence.qia.org.uk/WOA Evaluation of the DfES materials for embedded learning (Atkin, Rose and O'Grady, NRDC 2006) Also see NRDC embedded reports (Roberts et al, 2005, and Casey et al, 2006: full references below)	Up to August 07: 35 pathfinders and 400 providers engaged in Whole Organisation Approach From September 07: 400 providers engaged
Teaching and learning: Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN)	New Light on Literacy and Numeracy (Bynner and Parsons, NRDC 2006) Family literacy lasts (Brooks et al, 1997) Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: A Practitioner Handbook (Mallows, CfBT/ NRDC 2008) A review of programmes and practice in the UK and internationally (Brooks et al, CfBT/ NRDC 2008) Analysis of the family literacy programme (QIA, 2007 – 2009) Illuminating disadvantage (Bynner and Parsons, NRDC 2007)	Up to August 07: 100 pilots, reaching over 900 parents/carers from a range of priority groups 2008-09: QIA research will consult with 100 local authorities and 1430 individuals
Teaching and learning: embedding	"You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering..." Embedding literacy, language and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes – the impact on learning and achievement (Casey et al, NRDC 2006) Embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL (Roberts et al, NRDC 2005)	Up to August 07: 216 providers engaged 106 providers embedding Move On Up From September 07: 300 providers engaged 131 providers embedding Move On Up
Teaching and learning: assessment	Assessing adult literacy and numeracy: a review of assessment instruments (Brooks and Pollard, NRDC 2005) Assessment for learning (NRDC research project 2005-7); outputs include "Inside the black box - teaching, learning and assessment for adult foundation skill learners" (OECD, 2008) QIA evaluation of DFES Initial Assessment Tools (LSN)	From September 07: 90 providers engaged in assessment October 07–August 08: The 'Motivating Skills for Life learners to persist progress and achieve' project (PPA) will involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 sites testing rough guides for learners, practitioners and managers • consultation with 150 learners and 20 practitioners and managers • testing intervention strategies at 16 core sites with 495 individuals

For more information: www.sflip.org.uk | www.move-on.org.uk | www.stickwithit.org.uk
 FLLN website: due online in February 2008

Listening and responding – revising the core curricula

Ross Cooper reports on the work being done by LLU+ in response to the recent QIA review

Most readers will be aware of the review of the adult literacy and numeracy core curricula and the pre-entry curriculum framework (PECF) that was commissioned by the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) in August 2006. A commitment to this review was made when the documents were introduced in 2001.

The review included all types of provision for adults in England and across all relevant sectors and had two main aims:

1. to carry out the review by consulting key stakeholders, managers, practitioners and their learners
2. to propose revisions based on the findings and recommendations.

The consultation followed a phased and iterative process, with the findings from each phase informing the approach taken by the next. It was also informed by desk research of previously published evaluations of the curricula including research by NRDC and the Basic Skills Agency (BSA). Research methods included a paper-based questionnaire, an online survey, national consultation events, focus groups, and interviews. Responses were gathered from more than 1200 practitioners, managers, learners, inspectors, subject experts and other stakeholders including materials developers, awarding bodies and relevant professional networks, in all relevant sectors and age groups and at all levels of engagement.

Findings

Responses were surprisingly consistent across the whole

consultation. Most respondents felt that the curricula and the PECF were generally fit for purpose (only seven percent of online respondents said they were not), although the documents needed updating and revision for accuracy and clarity. Making the curricula more accessible to non-specialists in a wide range of settings was also emphasised.

Respondents also wanted smaller more manageable documents with more relevant content – a request that can be met through an electronic version.

Many practitioners reported that navigation would be improved through better use of colour-coding and changes to the layout. They also felt that helping teachers to use the curricula and the PECF more flexibly to support learning would be enhanced by:

- accessible guidance
- up-to-date exemplification (especially integrated examples)
- stronger links to support progression between levels.

This last point is particularly important since 47% of respondents to the online survey agreed that they liked to use the curricula and the PECF as a syllabus, despite the introductions making it clear that this is not their intended purpose.

Respondents raised wider issues about external factors and constraints that were perceived as having an impact on effective use of the core curricula and framework. The link between training and the effective and creative use of curricula

was emphasised repeatedly. While consideration of these wider issues is outside the scope of the review, it may be possible to partially resolve some of them through additional content, changes in presentation, and exemplification.

The QIA review of the adult ESOL core curriculum, which was originally published later than the other documents, began in June 2007 and was completed in October.

Dr Ross Cooper is Assistant Project Director LLU+, London South Bank University

LLU+ are now engaged in

1. implementing recommendations for revising and improving the literacy and numeracy curricula and the pre-entry curriculum framework
2. revising the ESOL curriculum (although the final recommendations are still being finalised)
3. developing an electronic version that updates the original documents rather than replaces them. This will realise their potential as flexible, accessible and creative resources for planning teaching, learning and assessment. This involves additional consultation about how an electronic version might be used.
4. revising the PECF milestones to ensure clearer progression routes between milestones and between Milestone 8 and Entry 1.

Seeing yourself in print

David Mallows and **Anne Chester** describe how publishing an individual learner's work can motivate all learners

In the 1970s, adults who came forward to seek help with their reading and writing were all too often presented with children's reading books – a patronising and frustrating experience for learner and tutor alike. In response to this, many practitioners began to work collaboratively with their learners to produce texts. From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, learner writing became an important and influential element of practice in literacy classes as tutors and learners began to recognise the opportunities to empower learners to develop as writers through writing from experience.

Tutors and learners began to recognise the opportunities to empower learners to develop as writers through writing from experience

Publishing adults' writing

The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP) was established in 1976 for writers' groups and publishers who wanted to share their skills and work with their communities. The members shared a belief that *'writing and publishing should be made accessible to all'*. One

outcome was *Write First Time*, a national broadsheet that featured learner writing, edited by tutors, that was published for ten years. Another original member was the charity Gatehouse Publishing, a dedicated learner writing project set up in 1977 in response to the need for appropriate reading material for adults with reading and writing difficulties. Sadly, these organisations have now closed but their ethos, philosophy and learner-centred approach continue to thrive with a number of exciting projects such as NRDC's 'Voices on the Page', now established as part of Adult Learners' Week, a story competition run by tutors at Orpington College with First Bus employees¹, and a collection of Army poetry that was developed as part of the BBC RaW (Reading and Writing) campaign (see poem, left).

There is also an increasing number of books being published that have been written by people whose stories would not normally be told in print. They make fascinating reading and are especially useful for adults working on their reading and writing; the best people to write for adult learners are those who have been through the same experience. Authentic everyday adult themes and content often inspire readers to recall similar experiences and stories of their own which they may then write or have scribed for them to produce their own initial texts.

Boosting confidence

As we've seen from the huge response to the 'Voices on the Page' initiative, writing is important to many learners

Jamaica

by Fusilier Henry

Jamaica the land
Surrounded by water
You have the birds
They sing in the morning,
Wild, eating vegetables.
The factory
Makes loud sounds,
And the animals
That run away first
Are so sweet.
The animals eat all day
The people love the
Big waves in the sea,
The roaring sounds that the
Sea makes.
Oh Jamaica
A land of woods and water.

This poem was written as part of an Improving English Literacy programme, and is published in *Readings Between The Lines*, produced by the Education and Training Services [Army] in conjunction with RaW (www.bbc.co.uk/raw). Free copies are available by emailing ets2@detsa.co.uk



and seeing their words in print can have an extremely positive effect on their confidence.

'I can't believe they chose my story. I never thought I had a chance of winning or that anyone would be interested in reading it.'

These were Thomas Campbell's words on learning that New Leaf peer readers had selected his writing for publication as a New Leaf beginner reader book. New Leaf Books is a dedicated learner writing project which publishes books written by and for adults with reading and writing difficulties². Thomas is a man in his 40s who, because of epilepsy, had no schooling until the age of nine. He left school aged 16 unable to read or write and only started literacy classes in 2002. Thomas attended writing workshops run by New Leaf and was encouraged, with the aid of a scribe, to put his words on paper. In a supportive and safe environment, Thomas was able to reflect on his experiences and decided to write about the abuse his mother suffered at the hands of his drunken violent father.

The development of his story, *My Mother*, was slow but the process enabled Thomas to develop his thoughts, which in turn gave him strength and confidence. Since the publication of *My Mother*, Thomas has read extracts from his writing before large audiences. The public attention he has received has been daunting but liberating and empowering at the same time – empowering for Thomas and for other learner-readers and writers.

The publication of *My Mother* and other beginner reader books gives learners the opportunity to benefit from the experiences and strengths of the writers – their fellow learners.

David Mallows is Senior Communications Advisor at NRDC and Head of Teacher Training at Bell Switzerland. Anne Chester is with New Leaf Books.

(1) Published as *First attempts!* by Orpington College, sponsored by First Group Ltd
(2) See www.newleafbooks.net

Vicky Duckworth tells us how one learner's story was published

A learner's story

"A fantastic book that offers encouragement to anyone who is trying to improve their life."

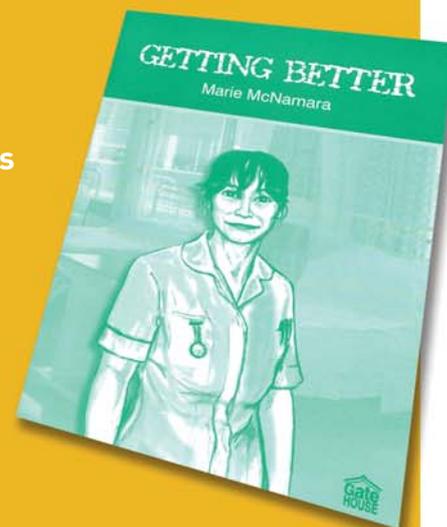
Baroness Helena Kennedy QC

For the past three years, I have been actively involved in an ethnographic study based at a local Further Education college. The research follows the impact of thirteen *Skills for Life* learners joining a basic skills programme. When learners leave the course, their journeys are followed. The study has also facilitated close observation of the drawbacks and leaps the learners have experienced and it has enabled me to nominate the group for awards.

One of the learners is Marie McNamara, a single mum, with an older son and two young children. She described how, 'I thought I was thick. I left that school not being able to spell... If I knew what I know now I'd 'ave made them teachers come to them lessons and teach me. But it's also made me who I am.'

That 'who I am' is a woman with true grit. On hurdling the barriers and progressing from basic skills learner to Access to Health learner and to learner nurse at university, her goal 'to be a good role model for my children; getting a career can give us all a better future' has driven her forward.

I nominated Marie for a NIACE award (her first ever award which she proudly displays on her living room wall) and the Helena Kennedy prize, which she collected at the



House of Commons. We also made contact with Gatehouse, a specialist publisher working with learners and tutors to encourage new writing to help adult learners. Marie was able to tell her story as a learning journey autobiography, one of a number of books written by and for learners reflecting Gatehouse's ethos that 'a beginner reader is not a beginner thinker'.

Marie's journey has been truly liberating and one she describes as 'making me think about where I've been, where I'm at and where I'm goin' '. Marie wants to share her experience with the community. Already, neighbours are stopping her and asking how to enrol at college. 'The woman across the road has enrolled on an English course – her first qualification', Marie told me. 'That's what makes it all worthwhile; getting people to believe in themselves.'

Vicky Duckworth is Senior Lecturer in Post-Compulsory Education and Training at Edge Hill University

Getting Better by Marie McNamara is available from Gatehouse Media Ltd www.gatehousebooks.com



The 'Storybook Dad' project introduced many prisoners to learning

Learning in disguise

Barry Norris explains how Adult Learners' Week uses indirect ways to encourage adults back into learning

Only one in three of adults who say they have done no learning since leaving school think they might take it up in the future. When pressed, they sometimes tell researchers that learning can help you keep your job or get a better one, that it helps your children, or that learners have more interesting lives, but they still say 'it's not for the likes of me'. For 17 years, Adult Learners' Week has been addressing this challenge and successfully persuading adults that it is worth fitting learning into their crowded lives.

Adult Learners' Week events work best when they are like Trojan horses – dressing up learning in a variety of disguises. Learning is an everyday activity for all of us but we enjoy it and take it in more when we don't consciously recognise it as learning, when we are concentrating on something else, or when it is involuntary, almost like breathing.

Successful disguises

One example is a project that took place two years ago in Dartmoor prison, where prisoners, in order to record themselves reading bedtime stories to their children, learnt a wide range of media literacy skills. This project, 'Storybook Dad', introduced many prisoners to learning they might otherwise not have been interested in. A similar project is currently being used to help soldiers

serving overseas keep in touch with their families.

Another example: on Cultural Diversity Day 2007 a 'Culturefeast' took place in Stockport town centre. Stages showcasing music and dance and an international market were connected by learning activities and taster sessions. In an evaluation, more than 75% of respondents said that the event added to their knowledge and understanding of culture. But the event worked because of its focus on the stage acts and the unusual food in the market. This year, it will be 'Cultural Diversity Weekend' and will take place on 17th – 18th May.

Current trends such as the interest in family history initiated by television programmes like the BBC's *Who do you think you are?* have been popular 'disguises' too. Libraries in particular have been using this theme as a way into adult learning because most people have a natural interest in their identity and their family history. Before people have had a chance to think twice about it, they are learning – involuntarily.

Partnerships

When building your own 'Trojan horse', it is important to remember the crucial role that partnerships can play. The more help and support you have, the bigger and better your Trojan horse will be. And the most successful way of building it is through partnerships that benefit all

those involved.

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), which coordinates Adult Learners' Week, recently organised a series of regional roadshows to talk to practitioners face-to-face and to offer advice and guidance on partnerships and how to organise events.

At each roadshow, practitioners were asked: *What percentage of people started or enrolled in a course as a result of contacting learndirect during Adult Learners' Week?* Most practitioners guessed a figure that was much lower than the correct answer, which is 57%. Most respondents were also surprised to find out that as many as 74% of people who had participated in some form of activity during Adult Learners' Week had stated that the Week made them think seriously about starting some form of learning.

So, if learners know about the benefits of learning but do not think it is for them, 'learning in disguise' tactics are clearly a great way of getting them, and in fact all of us, to think 'Maybe learning is for me'.

Barry Norris is Assistant Publicity Coordinator at NIACE

For more information on Adult Learners' Week, visit www.alw.org.uk

Crossing the Rubicon – learner motivation and persistence

Marcin Lewandowski reflects on what he has learned from the Persistence Progression and Achievement project

The learners at our training centre are either referred from Jobcentre Plus or are self-referred through our marketing or referral agencies. There is a noticeable difference between the two groups' motivation and attitudes to learning. The self-referred group are often more motivated and eager to learn than the referrals, many of whom perceive training as something that they 'have to do'.

Phases of motivation

In thinking about what motivates our learners, I found Dörnyei's model of three motivational phases particularly useful. Dörnyei (2001) describes a 'preactional' phase of 'goal setting', 'intention formation' and 'initiation of intention enactment'; an 'actional' phase where the intention is implemented; and an evaluative 'postactional' phase. Between the preactional and actional phases, people cross the 'Rubicon of Action' which commits them to a given course of action.

Most of the referred learners at our centre are in the preactional phase and have not yet set their goals. They attend classes because they have been advised to do so by an official who in the future may have the power to reduce their benefits. They tend to lack motivation, and the practitioner's role is to demonstrate why it might be important for them to engage in learning and help them to formulate and set realistic goals. With self-referred learners, who have already completed the 'preactional' phase by enrolling on a course, the practitioner can facilitate their intention and ensure that they cross the 'Rubicon of Action.'

These are complex issues but involvement in the *Motivating Skills for Life learners to persist, progress and achieve* (PPA) project gave me the opportunity to reflect and made me realise the amount of good practice we already have in place to facilitate learner persistence.

Rolling programmes

For example, our centre provides rolling programmes where new learners join existing groups every week, yet it has been shown that learners generally prefer lessons and courses which are well-organised and structured. With the help of a consultant from the *Skills for Life Improvement Programme*, we developed new modular schemes of work. Every week we have a new theme, eg health, jobs. At the beginning of each week, learners are told what is going to happen in that week (where possible these targets are negotiated with the learners) and, at each lesson, the lesson aims are written on the board. As a result, new learners start at the same point as everyone else and can integrate with the group more effectively.

Although learners sometimes find regular scheduled assessments stressful, they also find them stimulating

Formative assessment

Formative assessment plays an integral part in all our programmes. Although learners sometimes find regular scheduled assessments stressful, they also find them stimulating. Formal tests give the less motivated learners the necessary stimulus to revise. Learners often compare their scores with each other, which encourages healthy competition. Although results are not made official, tutors discuss them with learners individually and the feedback is used in reviews and in setting new targets for Individual Learning Plans. Tutors and learners use scores to monitor progress.

The PPA project has highlighted the issue of individuality, ie each learner has their own reasons for being in the class. Tapping into these reasons gives the teacher the opportunity to motivate individual learners and help them to persist. We achieve this through tutorials, individual reviews and informal conversations with learners. We have found that personal contact with learners not only helps us to review a learner's progress but also, and perhaps more importantly, it allows us to establish a special rapport with them. Our learners have often commented that their teachers are more than just teachers – they are friends.

Marcin Lewandowski manages the Learning Resource Centre for Action Acton

Dörnyei, Z. (2001) *Teaching and researching motivation*. Longman

Books

Measures of Success; Assessment and Accountability in Adult Basic Education

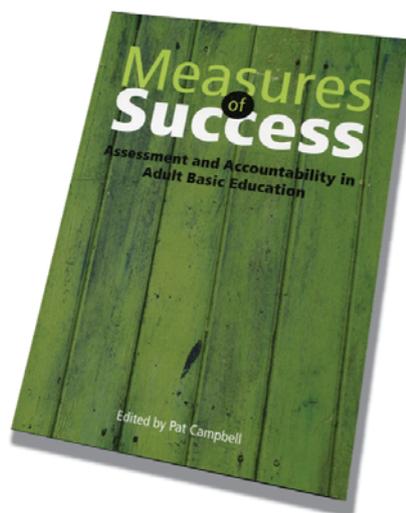
ed. P. Campbell

Grass Roots Press: Edmonton, Alberta

Reviewed by Brian V Street

Those working in the field of adult education have long questioned how it is envisaged by policy-makers and how it is designed and taught in government-funded programmes. But, however positive individuals' experience might have been, and however exciting their ideas, the wider world – and in particular funders and policy-makers – have insisted that innovations be subject to measures of success to determine that they are 'effective' and accountable. Many a 'progressive' programme has floundered at this barrier. So it will be a great relief to all these parties that a book has now appeared, written by an international group of practitioners and researchers, that can justly claim to bridge this divide. On the one hand, there are accounts of the progressive thinking that underpins the best of adult education provision – and rejects any 'one size fits all', centralised, top down model. On the other, there are realistic accounts of how such programmes might be subjected to measures that ensure their accountability both to the participants and to the people who pay.

The editor has ensured that, despite the authors' general preference for accountability to the learners and educators, a balance of approaches is presented. The first section of the book consists of four learned



The editor has ensured that, despite the authors' general preference for accountability to the learners and educators, a balance of approaches is presented

chapters on 'Types of Assessment Tools' characterised as 'standardised', 'diagnostic', 'competence' and 'performance'. While some, such as competence-based tests, are seen to serve the interests more of funders and policy-makers and others, such as diagnostic, are more attuned to educators and learners, all the authors attempt to achieve 'balance' and to realistically assess the strengths and limitations of each. The second section addresses 'International perspectives' and offers both comparative and country-specific accounts. Those reading this book in the UK, and especially those working with NRDC, will find of particular interest the chapter by Jay Derrick, Kathryn Ecclestone and Juliet Merrifield on the assessment dimension of the *Skills for Life* policy

and its implementation. Finally, the authors engage in an international 'conversation' among themselves about accountability systems.

Two areas of theorising stand out in these accounts. 'Assessment and accountability of what?' is seen to depend in the first place on the content and definitions of learning. Here, the literacy dimension of adult education is given considerable attention; there is special focus on 'social practice' approaches that have swayed many practitioners and researchers in recent years but may not have penetrated far into policy circles. Literacy is recognised as differentiated; it varies from one context to another, from one culture to another. Just taking a single Literacy (with a big L) into varied contexts is likely to lead to rejection and failure, as locals insist that their needs for reading, writing and numeracy are taken into account rather than those the programme providers imagine they need. An example of this, cited in the opening chapter, is the notion that the form of literacy familiar in schooling is what should also be taken to adults. The authors cite manifold examples of where this doesn't work, building on decades of research and practice by leading figures, many of whom are represented by these writers and by the authors they cite, such as Alan Rogers, Jan Eldred, E. Stein, and R. Stites. What is to be assessed and to whom it is accountable depends, then, on where the assessors stand in debates such as this.

A further conceptual issue that underpins much of this work is located in the assessment field itself. Here the shift from assessment *of* learning to assessment *for* learning is

the key issue that runs through the book. Citing especially the work of Black and Wiliam in the UK on 'Assessment for Learning' and their concern for 'formative' rather than 'summative' assessment, the editor in her Introduction argues the need to get beyond definitions of competence, performance, output indicators etc and instead engage in practice-based assessments that take into account the 'learner's cultural and personal histories'. Assessment for learning optimises students' learning and 'privileges the needs of students and educators'. What this means in practice is explored and justified in many of the chapters.

Christine Pinsent-Johnson, in the opening chapter of the volume, neatly brings the two areas together by arguing that assessment too can be seen as a set of social practices rather than simply a technical tool. For instance, as Jay Derrick pointed out at a Directorate Panel in Canada attended by many of the authors of this volume, 'a learner's success or progress is a reflection of a programme's support, services and practices'. It is the whole programme, its personnel, context, environment and ways of working that will affect the desired outcomes and not just the formal technical features of the particular tools used for assessing outcomes. The social and institutional features need to be taken into account.

These approaches are explored in detail with respect to programmes across the English speaking world – in Canada, the US, the UK and Australia – building on a depth and range of experience that was indeed necessary if such radical claims were to be sustained. My main disappointment is that it is only these 'English speaking' countries that are signalled. Even if the English language was a limiting factor, in this era of World Englishes we might still reasonably have expected to hear of work going on in other countries using English as a 'lingua franca' (ELF). But beyond that specific

linguistic reference, it would also be good to learn of work in social practices approaches to education, literacy and assessment across the world more broadly and across languages and cultures. But this criticism is also, of course, a measure of the book's success – had it not been so challenging and insightful, I and other readers would not have been so concerned about the application of these ideas more broadly. As it is, I now look forward to a companion volume that builds on this work and applies it in a genuinely international context.

Professor Brian V Street is Chair of language in education , King's College London

Details about this book, and two accompanying DVDs, can be found at www.literacyservices.com

Developing Adult Literacy: Approaches to Planning, Implementing and Delivering Literacy Initiatives

Juliet McCaffery, Juliet Merrifield and Juliet Millican

Oxfam GB (September 2007)

978-0-85598-596-7

£15.95

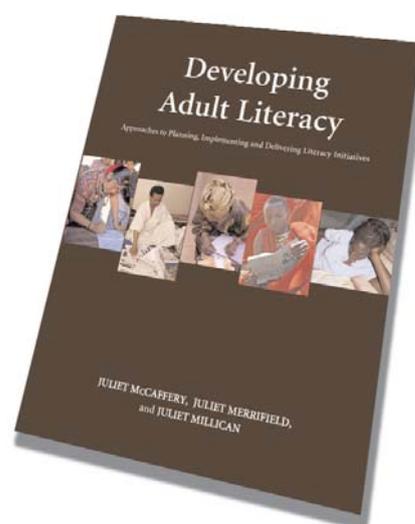
Reviewed by Jane Mace

This book does what it says it will: it sets out, for those who plan and deliver adult literacy programmes, the key concepts of literacy and describes how these are being applied to the development of such programmes in many countries. The design and presentation is airy and clear. The structure, introduced in the contents page, is sensible and unfussy. Acronyms are dealt with early on. References are provided in full. And the index (too often a neglected area) is inviting and properly detailed. The book draws on a wide range of examples and provides well-articulated theory. Let me get the quibbles over with first. Here and there, the term UK is

used, when the example given refers only to England and Wales. The account of student writing in British adult literacy work implies that this is all over long ago (omitting any reference, for example, to the Scottish learner-publishing initiatives, or the more recent 'Voices on the Page' project)¹. NRDC research is mentioned, but the more recent – and equally useful – practitioner guides to effective practice² are not. Sources are sometimes missing for data on participation or for examples of training programmes. Most of all, while I respect the authors' decision to restrict themselves to literacy, I am sorry that they left out the possibilities of integrating numeracy in adult literacy programmes.

Now for the main review. Between them, the authors have an impressive array of experience in many countries, as managers as well as advisors and evaluators. They write with respect about settings where the tutor or facilitator, often unpaid and only briefly trained, faces the challenge of teaching groups of forty or fifty with her or his own wits and energy as the main resource. Their discussion on primer-based teaching is a model of proper reflection on this. On the one hand, they remind readers

This will become an invaluable source of reference and practical guidance



of the criticism that primers have been over-prescriptive and patronising. On the other, they point out the risks of abandoning primers altogether – not least, the reaction from students who have nothing to take home to practise their learning in settings ‘where text is scarce’. From research and experience, the balance they recommend is a combination of ‘well-written series of relevant reading material’ with training for teachers in generating discussion and exercises in class.

The decision to use a four-part matrix of skills, tasks, practices and critical reflection as the conceptual framework for the book is well-judged. The authors present these as approaches that have often grown up as alternatives, and advocate an understanding of these not as separate matters but as interconnected circles or layers. This is a bold move, and it encourages readers to be aware that the approach they are already working with is only one of several.

There are thorough chapters on the international context, on gender, on training and resources. For me, the most outstanding is the one on monitoring and evaluation. The pressure to show the effectiveness of programmes has always been where the heat is greatest. As the authors point out, the need to evaluate outcomes has become ever more pressing and they write on this topic with sympathy, expertise and skill. This will become an invaluable source of reference and practical guidance for the readers they identify, and also for anyone working in the fields of international development and development education.

Jane Mace is an independent consultant and researcher in adult literacy education
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(1) See page 24 for more examples
 (2) For details see www.nrdc.org.uk
 Select ‘Publications’

ESOL: The context for the UK today

Jane Ward

NIACE (December 2007)

978 1 86201 322 3

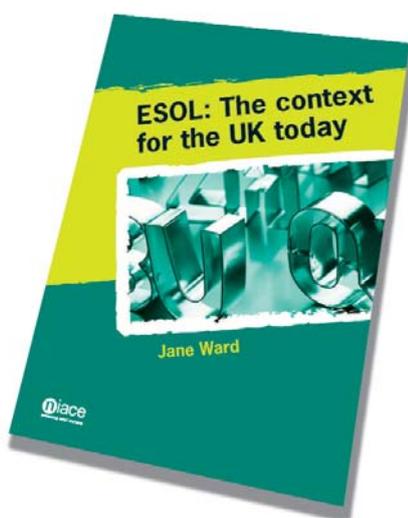
£12.50

Reviewed by Margaret Siudek

‘ESOL is characterised by diversity and complexity’. Jane Ward’s comprehensive book lays out most, if not all, of this diversity and complexity in a clear, well-signposted format. She also addresses the third characteristic – change – which encompasses ESOL teaching today. It must have been difficult to know where to draw the line and declare the book finished, since government policy – just one of the facets with which she deals – can seem to change on a weekly basis.

The book deals with ESOL from 1990 to the present day, ending with the report of the NIACE committee of enquiry into ESOL in October 2006, though most of the emphasis is on the period after the Moser report in 1999. It makes interesting reading alongside *A critical history of ESOL in the UK*

Jane Ward’s comprehensive book lays out most, if not all, of this diversity and complexity in a clear, well-signposted format



1870–2006 by Sheila Rosenberg (see review p.31) which recounts how many of these issues were dealt with in the past. The different sections of this book deal with policy, the identity of the learners, teaching, learning and support, teacher recruitment and training, and funding. There is also a section that defines what ESOL is; the different topics discussed in this chapter show the depth of the coverage and include:

- pedagogy – the debate about whether ESOL should be located within literacy or language teaching
- embedded learning
- ESOL learners with disabilities and learning difficulties
- English for employability and for workers
- ESOL for social justice and citizenship
- ESOL and family learning
- ESOL for community activism
- ESOL for offenders.

The writer describes the present context of ESOL as a ‘cratered landscape pitted with many challenges’, some of which were created by the inclusion of ESOL within the *Skills for Life* initiative, which offered both benefits – not the least of which was increased funding – and challenges. The book teases out these challenges, as well as the positive effects. The learners may be migrant workers, new spouses or children joining parents in the settled communities, or refugees and asylum seekers. Each may have different learning needs and special issues, whether that is dyslexia, worker exploitation, the trauma of refugees, the difficulties of getting to classes in a rural area, or not being literate in their own mother-tongue. The book also highlights the need to understand the differences between ESOL and literacy, and the variables of language and ethnicity.

This book does not set out to provide answers or solutions to these challenges, but aims to show how we reached this point post-Moser, as well as the parameters of some possible solutions. Perhaps this can be done

by returning to the earlier days of ESOL and linking language learning to the battles against exclusion, disadvantage and racism.

Margaret Siudek is the *Skills for Life* manager at Museums, Libraries Archives London

A critical history of ESOL in the UK 1870-2006

Sheila K. Rosenberg
 NIACE (December 2007)
 978-1-86201-268-4
 £22.95

Reviewed by Pam Frame

- How did the quarter of a million Belgian refugees who fled to England in 1915 learn English?
- Which well-known course writer published 'English for the Allies: Books 1 & 2' in the 1940s?
- Why did EFL and ESL polarise in the 1970s?
- When was Industrial Language Training abolished?
- How did ESOL come to be included in the *Skills for Life* strategy?

Whatever your question about ESOL provision in the UK in the last 130 years, you are sure to find the answer in this fascinating and detailed historical account.

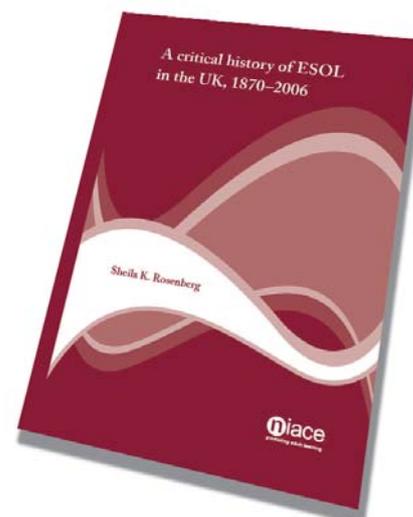
The book is organised around major periods of change, eg the chapter '1950s-70s' focuses on postwar immigration from the New Commonwealth, while 'The 1970s' is subtitled 'A time of expansion'. The author skilfully interweaves a complex set of themes through this chronological account. These themes cover the immense diversity of the learners themselves, the patterns of immigration to the UK across the whole period and how different governments responded to these arrivals while all being influenced by political factors and the climate of tolerance, or racism, towards newcomers to the UK. Readers also learn how challenges in

developing suitable teaching methods and materials were faced: we read about the Scope project in the 1960s¹, the impact (1970s) of the European Threshold Framework², and the influence on language teaching in the 1980s of wide-ranging academic research in applied linguistics, sociology, anthropology and psychology.

Key agencies also had a significant impact: the BBC promoted and shaped learning opportunities from the 1970s onwards. Also in the 1970s, the ILEA established the Language and Literacy Unit (now LLU+), and the Royal Society of Arts supported, through its qualifications, ESOL-specific teacher training pathways.

Some parallels with the different path of development followed by adult literacy teaching, and the disappointing failure of ALBSU³ to address its ESOL remit, are also traced. There are summary accounts of the impact of legislation, and of major reports that bring us right up to date with the Leitch Report⁴, and the NIACE Committee of Enquiry into ESOL⁵, both in 2006. Not surprisingly, given the author's own active and continuing involvement, there is a particularly engaging account of how NATECLA⁶, as a voluntary but independent organisation, has carved out a national role in developing provision, supporting teachers, and shaping policy.

This history is not only comprehensive in its scope, thoroughly researched and with an extensive and invaluable bibliography, it is also, as the title conveys, relentlessly critical of the continued failure to establish a coherent or sustained strategy for the teaching of ESOL to adults in the UK. Even though the recent investment in *Skills for Life* ESOL has greatly increased learning opportunities and given a much-needed boost to course design, learning materials and teacher-development, many contradictions and tensions remain unresolved. There is tension between social inclusion, citizenship and



Whatever your question about ESOL provision in the UK in the last 130 years, you are sure to find the answer in this fascinating and detailed historical account

employability; between the needs of the economy, of the individual, and of minority communities; between legislation promoting equality or inclusion and the attitudes expressed in popular media. ESOL practitioners continue to face the challenge of how best to deliver language learning that meets such complex needs and policy directives yet still, and most importantly, enables the individual to achieve.

Pam Frame is a Teacher Educator ESOL at the Institute of Education

- (1) Schools Council Project in English for Immigrant Children 1967-76 Schools Council
 (2) Van Ek, J.A. (1975) *Systems Development in Adult Language Learning: the Threshold Level*. Council of Europe
 (3) Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit
 (4) HM Treasury (2006) *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy: World Class Skills* (Leitch report) HMSO
 (5) NIACE (2006) *'More than a language...?' NIACE Committee of Enquiry on English for Speakers of Other Languages: Final Report* NIACE
 (6) National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults www.natecla.org.uk

RESEARCH

Effective Learning for Adults with Learning Difficulties

Scottish Government (November 2007)

Research conducted for Learning Connections by Applied Educational Research Centre, University of Strathclyde

Downloadable from www.aloscotland.com

Reviewed by Alice MacGregor

Taking a social perspective on literacy learning involves recognising that literacy is always embedded in particular social contexts and purposes (Ivanic et al. 2006); there are many 'literatecies' that vary from context to context. This suggests that literacy learning and teaching should start from an understanding of learners' lives. A recent research and development project, funded by Learning Connections, argues that the social perspective may require us to rethink the way literacy learning is delivered to adults with learning difficulties.

Effective Learning for Adults with Learning Difficulties explores how engaging with care and support systems can enhance literacy learning for adults with learning difficulties. The study makes a convincing case for closer collaboration between literacy tutors, carers and support workers, to ensure that literacy learning opportunities are better integrated into learners' everyday lives. The findings from this project will be of interest to literacy tutors working with learners with learning difficulties, support workers, carers, managers and policymakers interested in provision for adults with learning difficulties.

The study involved nine learners from community-based literacy projects and an FE college in Scotland, together with their tutors, support workers and carers. An understanding of the learners' interests and timetables was developed through in-depth interviews and activities with learners, support workers and carers. Literacy



One of the project participants has a work experience placement in a charity shop

The social perspective may require us to rethink the way literacy learning is delivered to adults with learning difficulties

tutors used these insights into the learners' lives to identify additional learning opportunities and key individuals who could support learning outside class. For example Tom, one of the project participants, has a work experience placement in a charity shop. Tom's literacy tutor and the shop project coordinator worked together to develop literacy-based activities for tasks that Tom enjoys, such as producing instructions for other volunteers about how to clean the shop windows.

The key message from this study is that greater collaboration between learners, tutors, carers and support workers can benefit learners with

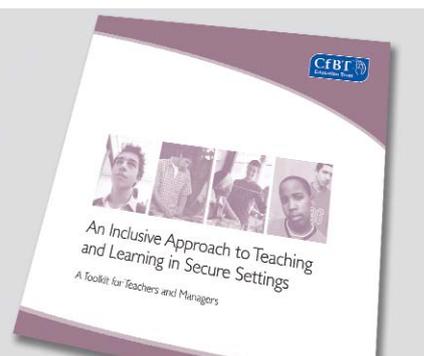
learning difficulties, by grounding their literacy learning in activities and interests beyond the classroom. As well as requiring tutors to have a detailed understanding of learners' daily lives, the success of collaborative approaches depends on support workers and carers recognising their potential to facilitate everyday learning opportunities. Researchers found that making clear links between literacy development and greater independence for learners with learning difficulties can help to engage support workers and care organisations.

The report highlights a number of challenges involved in initiating and maintaining more collaborative models of practice, in particular the time demands placed on tutors, support workers and carers. For the purposes of the study, the project researcher played a key role in developing contacts and facilitating communication, which raises

Next issue

We review CfBT's 'An Inclusive Approach to Teaching and Learning in Secure Settings'

Available now to download from www.cfbt.com/YOIToolkit or order hard copies from research@cfbt.com



questions about how the model can successfully be replicated. The authors suggest that a development worker role could help to negotiate some of the challenges involved in engaging with care and support systems. It would be good to see further reflection about practical or policy measures to help collaborative models of literacy provision become more widely established.

There are a number of user-friendly outputs from this study, including a summary of findings and a DVD featuring learner case studies. The DVD is valuable in bringing the benefits of collaborative models of working to life. However, the case studies would be more compelling if we heard directly from the learners themselves, as well as from their tutors, carers and support workers. An accompanying worksheet raises some key discussion points for tutors, support workers and carers interested in developing this model of practice. Again, it would be good to see some resources for engaging learners in the discussion, particularly given the initial unease some project participants felt about sharing experiences from different parts of their lives.

Effective Learning for Adults with Learning Difficulties is a valuable source of ideas for literacy tutors who want to locate learning more effectively for adults with learning difficulties. This new study suggests that, although working together to integrate literacy into learners' everyday lives may be demanding, the rewards for learners are likely to be great.

Alice MacGregor is a Research Officer at NRDC

The DVD and print copies of the summaries can be obtained by phoning 01738 621177 or emailing: duncan@ppd-pinpoint.co.uk.

Ivanic, R., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R., Tusting, K. and Barton, D. (2006). *Linking learning and everyday life: a social perspective on adult language, literacy and numeracy classes*. NRDC

Roi Kwabena

David Mallows remembers a good friend and colleague

Poet, story-teller, musician and historian Roi Kwabena has died from cancer at the age of 51. Roi was born in Trinidad in 1956 where he was a prominent public figure involved in cultural and political activity. He later served as a Senator and was writer-in-residence at Trinidad Public Library.

In England, where he had lived since 1985, Roi continued his work as a cultural activist. Using a distinctive style of dialogue, drama and rhythm he conducted workshops in the Caribbean, Europe and Africa in various universities and schools, as well as performing with Hugh Masekela, Linton Kwesi Johnson and many others.

He was Poet Laureate of Birmingham in 2001–2002 and was included in a list of history's greatest black achievers that was unveiled last year at Liverpool's International Slavery Museum.

Roi published more than 20 books of poetry and cultural anthropology; he was an expert on indigenous cultures and founded and edited the magazine 'Dialogue'.

His poetry was commissioned by many different groups, including NRDC. He performed his poem about literacy – *Re:vision* – at the *Skills for Life* conferences in 2005 and made a number of contributions to NRDC's work. At the recent Voices on the Page awards ceremony, Roi spoke to the winning writers with good humour, passion and generosity of spirit.



'For Nefer'
when it comes
unafraid
as the night. Dark
happiness
commanding new
vistas. Places
untamed.
Trees grow
in spaces filled
with departures.

Roi Kwabena (1956–2008)

PRIME SITES

www.nln.ac.uk

Fancy a bite?

Brian Creese browses the world of bite-sized learning objects

One reason why attending *Skills for Life* events is so enjoyable is the enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment of the practitioners you meet. But there is another reason why practitioners enjoy these occasions – they find lots to take away with them! I have seen delegates staggering away with a pile of boxes, books, cards and discs, enjoying that great British obsession – a bargain! And what a bargain. Many of these materials, generally available free of charge, are first class, well trialled and researched and produced to high standards.

But why, in the modern age, is it necessary to carry a suitcase to get hold of quality teaching resources? Shouldn't this material be available at the click of a mouse?

In fact a huge number of resources are available online – the problem is knowing their quality. You need a site which has quality assurance built in, something like the National Learning Network, NLN.

The NLN materials were originally developed as part of a national partnership programme designed to increase the uptake of Information Learning Technology. The NLN provided a support programme, information and training, as well as the NLN materials themselves. The initiative began in 1999 and the Government's total investment in the NLN totalled £156 million over a five-year period. Recently it has rationalised its organisation, with the site being hosted by JANET (the academic and research network) in partnership with the LSC.

So what do you get on the site? The first challenge is to register. Hopefully your organisation will already be registered, and you will know someone who has the password. NRDC was not registered, so I had to go via the support menu to a local Regional Support Centre contact who could add NRDC to the registered organisations and allow me onto the site: the process took a couple of days.

Subjects and levels

The subject areas covered are *ACL, Basic/Core/Key Skills, Subjects and Vocational*. Selecting *Basic/Core/Key Skills* brings you to *Numeracy/application of number, Literacy/communication skills, IT and Wider key skills*. For each category, you can select materials at different levels from Entry 1 to Level 3. Though cumbersome to describe in words, this is actually a very quick and intuitive design, and worked very well. Clicking on an activity brings up information about the

Why is it necessary to carry a suitcase to get hold of quality teaching resources? Shouldn't this material be available at the click of a mouse?



activity, supplier, level, a tutorial in PDF or RTF format, and the option either to copy a url or to 'play online'.

NLN materials are flexible 'bite-sized' learning objects. All are multimedia to some extent and include a range of activities including knowledge acquisition, a chance to practise, and some form of assessment – usually a quiz. The tutorials, which you can download, cover the whole of a section, so you don't have to keep downloading the guidance notes for every activity. If you do have any problems downloading, there are plenty of places to go for support.

Most of the resources I looked at were dated 2002 – 2004 and, while I don't want to comment specifically on the learning materials, having only had a chance to browse them, there is the expected mix of qualities – some excellent, some poor and much that is OK. Some of the mathematics materials seemed to do the thinking *for* the learner rather than making them engage in any effort themselves, but overall there are many useful activities.

So, if you want a selection of bite-sized activities on a large range of subjects at different levels, this is the place to look. Look carefully at any learning objects before you download but, if you are comfortable with e-learning, you will find plenty that is worthwhile on NLN.

Brian Creese is Development and Quality Improvement Officer at NRDC

NRDC in print



Five years on Research, development and changing practice NRDC 2006-7

Edited and compiled by
JD Carpentieri

Illuminating disadvantage Profiling the experiences of adults with Entry level literacy or numeracy over the lifecourse

Samantha Parsons and
John Bynner

Maximising the impact of practitioner research

A handbook of practical
advice

Mary Hamilton, Paul
Davies and Kathryn
James

Insights: Skills and social practices: making common cause

Alix Green and Ursula
Howard

Programmes for unemployed people since the 1970s

The changing place of
literacy, language and
numeracy

Karen Tusting and David
Barton

Developing adult teaching and learning: Practitioner guides (co-published with NIACE)

Responding to people's lives

Yvon Appleby and David Barton

Bridges into learning for adults who find provision hard to reach

Yvon Appleby



The publications listed here
can be ordered from the
publications page of the
NRDC website
www.nrdc.org.uk.

Forthcoming titles from NRDC

The right course: An exploratory study of learner placement practices in ESOL and literacy

Research report

This report sets out to answer the question:
How do ESOL or bilingual learners get placed or
place themselves in literacy and/or ESOL
classes?

James Simpson, Melanie Cooke and Mike
Baynham

Literacy, learning and health

Research report

This report examines relationships between
literacy, learning and health, examines how
people cope with the literacy/language
demand of health and offers
recommendations for practitioners including
health in their teaching programmes.

Uta Papen and Sue Walters

Research briefings

Nine six-page A4 leaflets summarising NRDC
research on the following topics:

- Embedded teaching and learning
- Family learning
- Formative assessment
- ICT
- Literacy and ESOL
- Numeracy
- Persistence
- Priority groups
- Progression

Working with young adults

Practitioner guide

The latest title in the 'Developing adult
teaching and learning' series, co-published
with NIACE, is designed to help practitioners
working with the 16 to 25 age group in a
variety of settings.

Bethia McNeil

The value of basic skills in the British labour market

Policy briefing

This paper argues for greater investment in
improving the literacy and numeracy of the

workforce, based on growing demand and
wage and employment gains.

Anna Vignoles, Augustin De Coulon and Oscar
Marcenaro-Gutierrez

Illuminating disadvantage: Profiling the experiences of adults with Entry level literacy and numeracy over the lifecourse Research summary

Evidence from the British Cohort Studies.

Samantha Parsons and John Bynner

And two reports from NRDC research, produced by CfBT.

**Effective and inclusive practices in family
literacy, language and numeracy:**
A review of programmes and practice in the
UK and internationally

Greg Brooks, Kate Pahl, Alison Pollard and
Felicity Rees

Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy:
A Practitioner Handbook

David Mallows

NRDC was established in 2002 as part of the *Skills for Life* strategy. It is a consortium of 12 partner organisations, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. 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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