

reflect

THE MAGAZINE OF NRDC ISSUE 11 JULY 2008

SPECIAL REPORT
**Family and
Community
Learning**

Same destination, different paths

INSIDE →**Learning via your mobile**

Ugandan farmers lead
the way

The language of health

How medical jargon
affects us all

Under pressure

Supporting tutors – advice
from the frontline

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About NRDC

NRDC was established in 2002 as part of the Skills for Life strategy. It is a consortium of partner organisations, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. NRDC is dedicated to improving literacy, language and numeracy and related skills and knowledge. NRDC brings together research and development to improve the quality of teaching and learning and extend adults' educational and employment opportunities.

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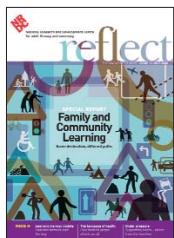
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'You can't know everything. You've got to think and discover.' Tony Benn, speaking at the recent Voices on the Page award ceremony (see insert for the winning entries), encapsulates the rationale for lifelong learning. He said that he learns something new every day but, as the quantity of 'things to learn' continues to grow exponentially, he becomes relatively more ignorant each day. He recommended that we all combat this inevitable condition by jumping on and off the 'education escalator' throughout our lives.

In this issue's Special Report on Family and Community Learning, we explore where that escalator has taken adults who are learning in strikingly different environments (eg libraries (p12) and prisons (p13)). We also look at who is doing the travelling – many communities are based not on location but on shared circumstances or characteristics (eg older learners (p10)). While 'community' is convenient shorthand, we shouldn't stereotype community learners: for example, whatever the needs of teenage parents, they will also have their own aspirations as young adults (p7). Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy, the subject of recent NRDC international research, may be uniquely positioned to address issues at an individual, family and community level (p9).

Family and community learning featured at NRDC's 6th International Conference, held in Nottingham over two days in March and bringing together practitioners, policymakers and researchers. Some of the highlights are scattered throughout this issue: read how mobile technology is developing literacy in the Ugandan farming community (p20) and read about the latest research findings from NRDC's Teacher and Learner studies (p18). Communities can unwittingly develop language that excludes others and, in the case of health professionals, this can have dangerous results. If we stop to reflect, it's easy to see why a 'positive' blood test might not give a lay person cause for concern. Carpentieri (p28) presents evidence from the USA, Canada and the UK on the implications of the high literacy and numeracy levels needed to navigate personal health care.

Elsewhere, two teacher educators reflect on the impact of the recent reforms of post-compulsory teacher education (p21). And Sarah Malins, a London teacher, follows up her debut article in *reflect* 10 with a discussion of the pressures experienced by Skills for Life tutors (p25).

Do you have something to say that we ought to hear about? At *reflect* we are particularly keen to receive practitioner contributions – perhaps yours could be next? See our 'Get Involved' feature (p34) for ideas on how to contribute.

**Helen Casey, John Vorhaus
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What do we mean by 'Community Learning'?

Carol Taylor reflects on some core concepts

Family and Community Learning is a vital part of the educational landscape in the UK. The involvement of families and communities in education opens doors, improves employability (ie the range of skills and experience needed to choose career paths, get a job, change jobs, leave a job), sets up the model for a learning culture, contributes to economic well-being, and improves community cohesion. And that's just for starters!

In this introduction to the Special Report, I want to reflect on what we mean by 'community learning' in the 21st century, and to set the scene for the articles that follow. I have also chosen to develop this theme to take in 'community literacy', a concept that for me grew out of 'family literacy' and the links between poor basic skills and a range of other social factors that are linked to poverty.

Places? Courses?

A quick skip through Google, and a look at a dozen or so sites that have 'community learning' in their mission statement (or even their title), reveals that it's an over-used and over-generalised phrase. While not disagreeing with the mission



statement 'We aim to offer opportunities to people who have gained the least from formal education and training', I ask the question 'But why is that "community learning"?' And the statement 'Learning is something you can do any day and at any time, whether you're in your local library, museum, cinema, art gallery or just exploring your local area' sees community learning as about place – in this case definitely not a formal learning setting such as a school. A Community Learning Service points out on its website that its mission is to 'provide a wide range of high quality part-time

courses for adults across the county'. So community learning is about courses?

As is often the case when exploring this field, Scotland is a good place to start:

'Broadly, we can approach community education as "education for community within community". In other words, something called "community" is not just the place or context in which education is to occur, fostering community is also a central concern. The process of becoming part of an existing social network in order to encourage dialogue and learning is sometimes labelled as "informal education" in UK discussions or as "community education" in Scottish debates'.

Mark K. Smith (2007)
www.infed.org.uk*

Learning together?

In 1987 I was employed as part of Derbyshire County Council's 'Community Education strategy'. The Council had decided to put several million pounds into the development of a wide-ranging, cradle-to-grave strategy to develop community education, based in primary and

secondary schools. I was assigned to seven primary schools, working in a cluster, with little steer from elected members at the start, and an exhortation to go out there and make community education happen. My aim, supported by the heads of the seven schools, was to bring the community into the schools and take the schools out into the community. The range of activity went from the expected – adult classes, reading support, after-school clubs – to the unusual – the community involved in whole school activity days, a community patchwork, writing a book about one of the villages, and so on.

To me, youngish, straight out of teaching, community learning was simple – it was about communities learning together, for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Perhaps to help your (or another family's) child in school, or in out-of-school provision; perhaps to work together to clear up derelict land for community use; perhaps to understand more about your community; perhaps simply because you felt brave enough, and supported enough, to decide you wanted to learn for yourself, and the primary school felt like the safest place to do it.

Family literacy?

By the mid-1990s, family literacy programmes appeared – four demonstration programmes in 1993, funded by ALBSU*, established the 'three-stranded approach' (working with adults, with children and jointly with both groups). A robust evaluation of this approach by Brooks et al.,¹ which demonstrated that family literacy was highly successful at engaging parents, improving children's language, and improving adults' literacy levels, led to national funding and the development of family literacy programmes in virtually every local authority.

This involved a rigid 92-hour model which, as a wide range of community groups began to deliver family literacy, began to cause frustration:

'There were increasing concerns about the rigidity of the approved "dominant" model and whether this programme could provide appropriate support for all families, especially those with particular social or language needs'.²

The blurring of 'family literacy' and 'community literacy' had begun – where does a family end and a community begin, for example, in extended families, or with children who are looked after? Or in situations where parents cannot engage with a model where they have to attend every week, so a neighbour may be the best person to support the child?

Community literacy?

The concept of 'community literacy' is particularly interesting when we think about teenage parents – often disaffected and with poor literacy and numeracy skills, too often from dysfunctional families themselves, and needing the support of a range of

places and people to enable them to survive and prosper. Recent practice shows that teenage parents rely on safe places to support their own and their child's development, and often need the presence of a 'surrogate' family, be that a voluntary organisation, a mentor or supported and tailored literacy provision, that embeds their own learning in that of being a parent (see Nicola Aylward's article on p7). Community literacy is key in thinking about offenders who are also parents, who rely on a range of people in their community (both social and geographical) to enable them to continue to support their children and to improve their own literacy through activities like 'Storybook dads' and Family Days. (See Antonia Rubinstein's article on p13.)

An NRDC-sponsored piece of research³ created an opportunity for a group of us to think more deeply about the issue of 'community literacy'. We were interested in taking





the concept of community learning one step further – what does it mean to do cradle-to-grave basic skills, with a community focus? The starting point for the study was that community-focused provision was under-conceptualised, under-researched and insufficiently appreciated in the current policy context. We sought to add to current understanding by looking at previous research and then conducting case studies of providers in England who were thought to be taking a community-focused approach. We wanted to find out what these people actually did and thought, and whether there were enough similarities to begin to come up with a concept of 'Community-Focused Provision'. The study concluded that there was indeed something that could be called 'Community-Focused Provision' and that those who were planning and managing provision in this way were robust in their own thinking about what it was.

Community learning at risk?

Community learning is currently at risk as the move towards longer courses, and those that carry qualifications, bites deep. According to the latest figures from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)*, 55,000 adult learners have been lost from publicly-funded 'safeguarded' adult learning (formerly Adult Community Learning) in the last year.

This means that, in just three years, there has been a fall of 184,600 adult learners in programmes for personal fulfilment, civic participation and community development. This fall is on top of the 1.4 million adult learning places that have been lost from all publicly-funded adult learning over the last two years⁴. (See also Graham Meadows' article, p16.) The decision to split the DfES* into, broadly, pre-16 and post-16 puts areas of work like family learning at great risk of being seen as only about one target group. Indeed the funding of Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy through the LSC puts the onus on providers to meet national PSA* targets for learners acquiring a Level 2 qualification. Even more at risk are activities that could be described as 'community literacy' – activity that is often located in the voluntary and community sector, and often working with the most disadvantaged and disaffected. Working in this way with the whole community to improve literacy skills so that people can be encouraged to 'have their say' is a long hard process, but one that pays off – not only in improving literacy skills but also in developing people's motivation and ability to improve other skills.

The articles in this Special Report highlight the range of activity that encourages people to improve their literacy, language and numeracy

skills in the context of community learning – learning that happens *in* communities and is open to all irrespective of age. Most importantly, community learning has at its heart the development of the skills of individuals, families and communities so that they can become part of a social network.

Carol Taylor is a Director at NIACE* and the former Director of BSA*. She has 30 years experience in literacy and numeracy, 'cradle to grave'.

(1) Brooks, G., Gorman, T., Harman, J., Hutchison, D., Kinder, K., Moor, H. and Wilkin, A. (1997). *Family Literacy Lasts: the NFER Follow-up Study of the Basic Skills Agency's Demonstration Programmes*. Basic Skills Agency

(2) Bird, V. in Marsh, J. and Hallet, E. (eds) (forthcoming 2008) *Desirable Literacies: Approaches to Language and Literacy in the Early Years*, 2nd ed. Sage/Paul Chapman

(3) Hannon, P., Pahl, K., Bird, V., Taylor, C. and Birch, C. (2003) *Community-focused provision in adult literacy, language and numeracy: an exploratory study*. NRDC

(4) Figures from NIACE, April 2008. See www.niace.org.uk

* See Glossary, p34

DIUS* says...

We will be spending around £1.5 billion per year on a full range of first step and progression programmes which improve skills levels and employability, help strengthen families and communities, and support social justice and community cohesion. We value informal adult learning. Whilst we have safeguarded a budget of £210 million per year up to 2010-11 we recognise that this hasn't been perceived as a priority area in recent years. That's why we have launched a consultation and national debate on this kind of learning. For more information, see www.adultlearningconsultation.org.uk

DIUS has committed £25 million per year from 2008 to fund family literacy, language and numeracy courses. The recent DCSF Children's Plan provides an additional £30 million over the next three years to support family learning, demonstrating a strengthening of the links between compulsory and post-compulsory education.

Young parents: raising aspirations

Nicola Aylward questions the priorities of learning programmes for young parents

The statistics below present a fairly dismal image of the life chances of many young parents and their families. How can the learning and skills sector help young parents to challenge and overcome the difficulties that they face?

We know that education is one of the main routes out of poverty and disadvantage. Research conducted by the NIACE/NYA* 'Young Adults Learning Partnership' (YALP) over the last three years has shown that, while there are many committed practitioners who strive to improve the lives of young mums, young dads and their children, there are questions to be asked about the longer-term impact of many learning programmes that target young parents.

A comfortable platform

Such programmes are mainly located in the voluntary and community sector, and often delivered through family learning. They provide an environment for young parents that embraces their role as parents and carers, and provides valuable peer support to mitigate the isolation and stigma to which they often testify.

Infant mortality rates are 60% higher for the babies of teenage mothers than of older mothers.¹

Teenage mothers are three times more likely than older mothers to experience postnatal depression.¹

By age 30, teenage mothers are 22% more likely to be living in poverty than mothers giving birth aged 24 and over, and are much less likely to be employed or living with a partner.²

Teenage mothers are 20% more likely to have no qualifications at age 30 than mothers giving birth aged 24 or over.²

Activities are overwhelmingly focused around the roles and responsibilities of parenthood, often involving arts and crafts and basic help with literacy, language and numeracy skills. This approach provides a comfortable platform for engagement for many young parents and enables them to develop confidence and self-esteem and, not least, to concentrate on being a good parent to their children.

However, do such programmes always provide young parents with opportunities that encourage them to aspire to their full potential, as individuals as well as young parents? The YALP research suggests that this is often not the case.

Raising aspirations

While confidence, self-esteem, engagement, peer support and feeling comfortable and safe are of fundamental importance, surely young adults who are parents have the right to opportunities that will enable them to aspire and achieve as individuals? This is the thinking behind learning and skills provision for their peers who do not have children, so why is it not always the case for young parents? Yes, their support needs are likely to be different and complex compared with those of their contemporaries but, while many young parents will be drawn to arts and crafts, some will have different interests. These young people should have access to more choices and be encouraged to develop their own identities as individual young adults in addition to their role as parents.

Practitioners should be able to extend young parents' horizons, and encourage them along their chosen pathway. A change in attitudes and



'It's important to remind young parents that they can still achieve what they wanted before they became pregnant – they don't have to give it all up because they have a baby.'

Manager of a young parents' project in London

culture may be needed if the learning and skills sector is to effectively engage young parents and enable them to make a successful transition to adulthood as well as parenthood. Could it be that the learning and skills sector needs to raise its own aspirations for young parents' learning?

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For a review of recent NRDC work in this area, see p9.

(1) www.dfes.gov.uk/teenagepregnancy
(2) Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Teenage Pregnancy: Accelerating the Strategy to 2010*. DfES

* See Glossary, p34

Two languages are better than one

Foufou Savitzky explains the value of bilingualism

Family learning should play a vital role in encouraging the use of the mother tongue at home, in the community and in places of learning. Just as family learning practitioners share with parents information about the benefits of activities such as the bedtime story and healthy eating, so we should share information about the benefits of bilingualism.

The gift of bilingualism

Firstly, all parents need to understand that one of the greatest gifts a parent can give their child is bilingualism. Whatever the social status of the family's language, having that language as well as English will benefit the child in a myriad of ways. There are the immediate personal benefits, which include being able to communicate with members of the extended family, greater family cohesion and the maintaining of relationships, as well as wider employment opportunities.

Bilingualism also contributes to social harmony, cultural sensitivity and greater tolerance. Research shows that bilingualism, if seen as a resource rather than a problem, helps with the development and understanding of concepts, and enhances analytical, reasoning and problem-solving skills. Parents need to understand that bilingualism will help children to develop skills in all areas of the curriculum as well as in the social aspects of school life.

Language development

Secondly, we need to convey to parents what is known about language development, particularly

as it affects bilingual children. We need to explode myths such as: 'bilingual children's language development is slower' – there is no evidence to support this; 'bilingual children mix up their languages' – they don't, they simply use all the tools they have so, rather than not asking for an ice cream at all, they will say 'please can I have a glacé'. We need to talk about how long it takes a child to develop Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (conversational fluency) in English¹ – about one year. This compares with the time it takes to develop Cognitive Academic Language – at least five years. Parents need to know that talking about school work with their children in their mother tongue will benefit the children as they will be exploring the concepts in a different language.

Social context

Thirdly, we need to help parents to understand the social and political context in which their children are operating. They need to understand that 'minority language development needs particular nurturing in political situations where another language is dominant'², and that children will need support to feel positive about their bilingualism, particularly if their mother tongue has low social status. For this reason it is also important that parents understand that, linguistically, their language has as much status and value as any other language.

Promoting bilingualism

Family learning practitioners should create situations where it is

possible to communicate this information either overtly, as part of a teaching session, or covertly in another context. We need to form relationships with local community groups and language schools, perhaps organising joint events for Family Learning Month or Adult Learners' Week, or running joint staff development sessions. We need to develop positive relationships with schools so that we can work together to ensure that bilingualism is seen as an asset and a resource rather than a problem.

When developing activities or games for parents to use at home with their children, it is important that parents understand that they should use the home language to play with their children. We should provide as many opportunities as possible for parents to develop materials that reinforce the value of the mother tongue and contribute to children's language development. We must of course also support parents in developing their skills in English, but never at the expense of the mother tongue.

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(1) Freeman, R. 'Reviewing the Research on Language Education Programs' in Garcia, O. and Baker, C. (eds) (2007) *Bilingual Education: An Introductory Reader*. Multilingual Matters Limited

(2) Baker, C. (2001) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 3rd Ed. Multilingual Matters Limited

Family literacy, language and numeracy: the international experience

JD Carpentieri considers how what we know about practice around the world can inform policy and practice in Britain

Life used to be so much simpler, didn't it? For practitioners and policy-makers alike, solutions to educational problems seemed a bit more straightforward in the old days. Take social mobility. We used to be pretty sure that education was the key (possibly even the sole key) to overcoming inequality. All we needed were more good teachers and more good schools, and every child would have a fair chance of success. Simple, wasn't it?

Sadly, we know now that things are not so straightforward. The best research evidence indicates that school quality accounts for only about 25% of a child's performance, with the other 75% attributable to other factors, especially parental income, education and involvement.¹ This knowledge gets us closer to real solutions, but it doesn't always feel that way – sometimes, the more we know, the more overwhelmed we feel.

If this is a more complex era for those of us working to improve education and reduce inequality, then family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) is truly a practice for its time. It isn't hard to see why: FLLN recognises that to help children, you must help families, and to help families you must work with communities. The evidence on the intergenerational transfer

The best research evidence indicates that school quality accounts for only about 25% of a child's performance

of disadvantage makes clear the need for such a holistic approach – but do we have enough evidence on how best to 'do' FLLN, and how much impact it actually has?

FLLN around the globe

On one hand, the answer to that question is 'yes'. Work done by Professor Greg Brooks and the NRDC² has illustrated the effectiveness of FLLN in England. On the other hand, we can't shout that 'yes' as loud as we might like to, in part because there has not been enough rigorous research of FLLN in England, but also because we have not paid enough attention to the world outside the nation's borders. Our knowledge of FLLN practice around the world is patchy. To begin to remedy this, Professor Brooks, working with CfBT Education Trust and NRDC, has recently led a review of FLLN programmes and practices around the world, including the UK.³

The review was a meta-study, meaning that instead of carrying out new primary research, Brooks and his colleagues reviewed and analysed the international evidence base, to see if clear messages could be found. One clear message, unfortunately, is that there is still not yet enough rigorous research evidence on FLLN, particularly in terms of the quantitative

analysis of programmes' impact. Because they limited themselves to programmes that had generated quantitative evidence, Brooks et al. were only able to review 19 studies spread over 14 countries. And because not every study was as rigorous as would be ideal, the amount of evidence is limited further still.

However, where there was evidence on particular outcomes, it was almost always positive. Take the question of whether or not FLLN improves parents' literacy levels. Here, three out of five programmes reported gains in parents' skills, as measured in tests. In numeracy, two out of two studies reported improved parental test scores – as did two out of two language programmes. One of the key goals of FLLN – and a key concern for policy-makers and practitioners in today's more complex world – is parents' ability to contribute to their children's education. Here, eight of eight studies reported gains, and numerous studies reported wider benefits, including improved child-rearing practices, increased parental involvement in their children's schools, greater parental self-confidence and increased employment.

What about improvements in children's skills? Here too the evidence was positive. In literacy, 12 studies reported improvements on test scores; in language, eight studies reported gains, and in numeracy six did so. In each subject, only a small handful of programmes reported no improvement.

But did these improvements last? Particularly when looking at outcomes for children, this question needs to be asked. No one wants to see improvements made at age six wither away by age nine. Unfortunately, researchers rarely have the opportunity to follow up their research several years later. However, of the 19 studies analysed by Professor Brooks and his colleagues, five did gather follow-up data. Of those five studies, four found evidence that the gains from the programmes were sustained – and in the one case where they were not, the losses were only partial. This suggests that FLLN programmes are capable of delivering both short and long term results.

Looking briefly at qualitative evidence gathered by the review, one finding in particular stands out, at least in regard to current UK efforts to

increase fathers' involvement in their children's education. While fathers in family literacy programmes around the globe still seem to be notable more by their absence than by their involvement, a significant exception is in Turkey, where a father-child programme has been running since 1996. In the most recent evaluation of the programme, significant differences were found between fathers who had participated in the programme and those who had not, particularly in terms of open communication.

Disadvantage starts early

All of this matters a great deal – common sense tells us so, but so does the research evidence. When families are cut off from educational opportunities, or do not feel that the available opportunities meet their particular needs, everyone suffers, especially the children. Recent NRDC research⁴ has demonstrated statistically significant links between parents' basic skills and their children's test scores, a correlation that holds even when taking the parents' level of education into account. But education levels have an impact as well: analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study of children born in the year 2000 has found that, in terms of vocabulary performance at the age of three, children of the least educated parents were already up to one year behind their more advantaged peers⁵. Such huge disadvantages start worryingly early, and we know from recent NRDC research⁶ that they tend to accumulate over time. It is precisely this sort of entrenched intergenerational transfer of disadvantage that FLLN can help to fight.

Advice and guidance

With the stakes so high, we all want to get family literacy, language and numeracy right. As part of the CfBT/NRDC project that led to the research review discussed above, a new FLLN practitioners' handbook has been published.⁷ Aimed at encouraging innovative and inclusive learning and teaching, this case-study-based handbook provides practical guidance and tips across a range of topics, including partnership working, recruitment, teaching environments and strategies, utilising home practices, and assessment and accreditation.

By its very nature, FLLN straddles a number of boundaries, both through bringing adults' and children's learning together and through the range of policy concerns it addresses. This

What learners say about FLLN

'My daughter is so happy that I come to the group... She can concentrate and she loves school now.'

'Yesterday [at Asda] instead of wanting a Power Ranger he wanted a new book.'

'I feel more confident. I've finally come out of myself... The thing is, I can read now.'

(Mallows⁷)

New evaluations: family literacy, plus FLLN for teen parents and grandparents

NRDC has recently completed a QIA-commissioned evaluation of FLLN programmes for teenage parents and grandparents. The aim of the research was to support the ongoing development of such programmes and to ensure that they meet the requirements for inclusion in the LSC FLLN menu. Among the key findings were that grandparents' main motivations were to help their grandchildren and to keep up with modern teaching methods; these things were more important to them than improving their own skills. To engage teenage parents, publicity and

recruitment take time, involve personal contact with learners and rely on effective partnerships between organisations.

QIA has also commissioned NRDC (working with The Alliance) to provide an up-to-date assessment of the impact and effectiveness of the Family Literacy Programme. This evaluation will inform decisions about further investment in the programme to be made in 2009 and whether the programme is expanded. The research's aim is to establish what impact both short (30–49 hours) and



intensive (72–96 hours) family literacy courses have on parents and their three to six-year-old children.

makes partnership working between organisations particularly important, but such boundary crossing can also be a challenge.

The same is true of recruitment. Head teachers report that the 'personal touch' is the most important aspect of the FLLN recruitment process: success in reaching learners is often largely attributable to the skills, confidence and cultural awareness of recruiters. One example of successful recruitment is the Parents as Learners (PALs) programme, in which former learners serve as learning champions, going out to speak to parents/carers and telling their own stories about coming onto courses.

Supportive teachers and learning environments are important in all areas of education, but are particularly essential in FLLN. As one teacher observes: 'Parents/carers and tutors often know that FLLN courses are memorable for the positive, welcoming, supportive, friendly, non-threatening atmosphere which is of particular importance to parents who had negative experiences while in school themselves.'

Assessment and accreditation have important roles to play in FLLN, but some learners are uncomfortable initially with the idea of being assessed, particularly if they have had previous negative experiences of learning. Assessment requires sensitive handling by staff, as it may be a barrier to recruitment and retention. However, the evidence shows that FLLN courses lead to increased confidence, which for some learners sparks an interest in quantifying progress and/or

Supportive teachers and learning environments are important in all areas of education, but are particularly essential in FLLN

gaining a qualification, whether to improve employment prospects, confirm their new abilities, or some combination of the two.

Here again we see the multifaceted impacts and outcomes of FLLN. Whether through qualifications, confidence or improved skills, children, parents and families see benefits, highlighting why FLLN can and should be central to future policy developments across a range of issues.

JD Carpentieri is Research and Development Policy Liaison Officer at NRDC

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- (2) Heathcote, V. and Brooks, G. (2005) *Evaluating Skills for Families – especially the role of local Skills for Families consultants*. Basic Skills Agency.
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Skilled for health and skilled for life

Margaret Siudek shows how the right context can stimulate community learning

It will be no surprise to Skills for Life professionals that there are links between Skills for Life needs and health inequalities. Skilled for Health¹ aims to reduce health inequalities in communities with the worst health outcomes, to enable individuals to make informed decisions about health and well-being, and to use health as an incentive to engage adults in improving their Skills for Life.

MLA London, the strategic regional development agency for museums, libraries and archives in London, is running Skilled for Health classes in libraries in several London boroughs. This pilot project aims to test the effectiveness of libraries as locations for informal learning and to trial the Skilled for Health teaching materials which embed Skills for Life at Entry 2 to Level 1 in the context of health literacy.

Teaching materials

The materials are in two large packs, which can be used both by Skills for Life teachers and by community health practitioners. They include teachers' guidance with specific notes on numeracy and on ESOL,



A fruitful lesson about healthy eating

advice on the help that these learners (and those with special needs) might be given, together with teaching and learning resources and detailed curriculum mapping. Topics include healthy eating, keeping active, substances, keeping safe, first aid, using the NHS, and mental well-being².

Classes

Skilled for Health classes are being held in libraries in Ealing, Barking and Dagenham, Haringey, and Newham. The lessons are led by a qualified ESOL teacher with support from local health professionals who have visited the classes to give advice about smear tests,

contraception and breast awareness. Learners have the opportunity to ask questions and find out what to expect during an appointment with a medical professional. Other sessions are attended by a Sport Outreach Officer who measures learners' blood pressure and body mass index and discusses heart-related health issues.

Feedback

Feedback from learners, teachers and health professionals has been very positive. Many learners are eager to move on from this introduction to learning, in a subject which is of real interest to them, to other classes.

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

(1) Skilled for Health is a national programme managed by the community learning organisation *ContinYou* (www.continyou.org.uk) with funding from the Department of Health and DIUS (see Glossary).

(2) The materials are available from prolog (0845 60 222 60; ref: embedded/SfH1 and /SFH2) and can also be downloaded from http://rwp.qia.oxi.net/embeddedlearning/skilled_health/

The practitioners say:

'The students tell me that they now feel more confident after having attended the classes, and are enjoying reading books in English. They also feel confident in helping their children with their school work.'

Shanthi Ahilathirunayagam, Ethnic Stock Librarian, Ealing

'The Skilled for Health materials are well laid out and extremely supportive in delivering the subjects... The

advice on how to present the lesson was an added bonus.'

Frances Brodie, ESOL teacher, Barking and Dagenham

'I think Skilled for Health makes people aware that the library isn't just for borrowing books and using the computers. It encourages people to come into the library and join.'

Panny Smith, Librarian, Haringey

The learners say:

'I am more confident in speaking, which was my problem.'

'I can talk to other people; that was really scary earlier.'

'I use less oil and salt when I'm cooking.'

'I am more aware of what I eat as I also look at labels on food which tells you exactly what is in them.'

'I couldn't speak before this class to make appointment in doctor's.'

'We want more classes about health and I will be great thankful if you begin here more English class.'

'I spoke about all the things I've learned with my friends. They were surprised how much I know that they don't.'

Games, drama and role-play: a unique approach to learning in prisons

Antonia Rubinstein describes how Safe Ground works with men in prison

More than half of the men in prison have no qualifications; 82% of all prisoners have a writing ability at or below Level 1¹. When these men bring with them such a poor experience of formal learning, how can we overcome their resistance to education in a prison environment?

Safe Ground² has been working in prisons since 1995, successfully using drama and story-telling as hooks to engage prisoners in learning. In 1999, HM Prison Service asked us to produce a parenting and family ties programme that would help prisoners who are resistant to addressing their offending behaviour progress into accredited learning and training in work skills; the new programme had to include assessment opportunities for adult literacy.

We now have two programmes: 'Family Man' and 'Fathers Inside'. Both programmes have, as their core theme, the importance of men in prison retaining (or, in some cases, rebuilding) their relationships with and responsibility for their partners and children during long periods of separation. Each programme is designed for a group of 20 learners of mixed age, ability and ethnicity; involves 120 hours of learning over six weeks; and provides assessment opportunities for four different QCA-approved* awards. We use drama techniques to unify and manage the group, engender peer learning, and enable participants to practise new ways of thinking and behaving.

Bespoke content

More than 600 prisoners contributed to the development of 'Family Man'

and 'Fathers Inside', ensuring that these programmes are bespoke to the learning needs of men in prison. The content, structure and methods used have been formulated to diminish the fear of learning, and participants soon come to realise that adult learning does not have to be the same sort of experience as being at school.

A short story, Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*³, and a film drama that was written and performed by prisoners, introduce the subjects of

Participants soon come to realise that adult learning does not have to be the same sort of experience as being at school

parenting and maintaining family relationships from prison. These are sensitive subjects for prisoners but they are very motivating and can be used to produce immediate and tangible improvements in their lives.

The story and the film both serve a dual purpose. They enable a degree of escapism and catharsis as learners identify with the situation of the protagonist in each resource, and they are used to stimulate discussions, improvisations and role plays that provide assessment opportunities for listening, speaking, reading and writing. Learners take part in a wide range of games, drama and written activities to explore what it means to parent and to maintain relationships with family members from prison. The climax of both 'Family Man' and 'Fathers Inside' involves the learners producing a presentation that

demonstrates what they have learnt to an audience of their peers, prison staff and relatives. This also provides portfolio evidence for assessment.

Motivation and self-esteem

Completion rates for each course are high, with over 50% of learners achieving a basic skill qualification at Level 1. The written assignments may not be the most popular aspect of the programmes but learners are motivated to complete their portfolio because they recognise that, by doing so, they will improve how they communicate with their relatives. By the end of the programme, their self-esteem has increased and they have demonstrated that they are capable and willing to learn new skills and ways of thinking.

'Family Man' and 'Fathers Inside' are helping to change the way men learn in prison. HM Prison Service has now acknowledged the potential benefits of involving relatives more closely in offender learning. As a result, new activities are being developed that enable the integration of relatives into both programmes. This approach aims to provide future learners with increased impetus to overcome the fears and difficulties they associate with learning.

Antonia Rubinstein is Director of Safe Ground

(1) Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*. The Cabinet Office

(2) Safe Ground is an educational charity. See www.safeground.org.uk

(3) The text of *The Selfish Giant* can be found at www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/

* See Glossary, p34

Dyslexia and older people

Lois Gladdish suggests that more research is needed



'I could not read when I left school so I taught myself to read; as a result of attending family literacy at school I found out that I was dyslexic. This was a relief because it felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. Finding out about the dyslexia I became determined to improve my literacy and joined several classes at school and college. I have overcome my difficulties because of

the tutors' encouragement and reassurance. I have been able to write my own Christmas cards for the first time, it was a lovely feeling, it really felt good.'

65-year-old female; nominee for Senior Learner of the Year

'I was unable to read and write and, at the age of 60, I decided I couldn't carry on like that. I couldn't go shopping properly or go to

the library, for example. I was unable to function normally. If I couldn't find someone to help me with letters or bills, I just threw them in the bin. I never really did overcome my difficulties before I came to college. I have enjoyed meeting new people. My learning has made me much more confident. For the first time I can express myself in writing. When I came to college I said I

wanted to write a book about myself. I have now done this. Although the book itself is only small, it has been a major achievement for me. I can also now do things like buy a TV guide and see what will be on TV. Little things like this make all the difference in the world to me.'

60-year-old male; nominee for Senior Learner of the Year

There has been a good deal of research into dyslexia but very little of it relates to how dyslexia affects older people. But, just as for the young, dyslexia in older people affects not only their literacy and numeracy skills but may also affect their quality of life, independent living, decision-making, and ability to access vital services and benefits. These difficulties, when combined with mobility or financial constraints, can lead to isolation or exclusion.

Assessment

The assessment of dyslexia in older adults can be complex as they may have developed coping strategies to compensate for the difficulties they experience. In addition, they may have poor eyesight and/or hearing, as well as medical conditions that affect their processing of information and their memory. Dyslexia may also affect the diagnosis of other

conditions, because of its impact on working memory, motor skills, concentration etc. All these need to be taken into account during assessment.

Accessing support

Younger adults who are assessed as dyslexic receive support either through participating in learning, or in connection with their workplace. Older adults who are engaged in learning tend to take part in informal or community-based learning. This provision often has less well-developed dyslexia support, so older adults find it more difficult to access dyslexia support services.

Research

More research is needed, asking some of the following questions.

- Do older people have different barriers to accessing dyslexia

services compared with other adults?

- What is the range of teaching and other support available for older adult learners with dyslexia?
- Do older people need assessment approaches different from those for other adults with dyslexia?
- What is the impact of dyslexia on older adults' attitudes to and experiences of learning?
- What impact does dyslexia have on older people's quality of life and confidence?

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*See Glossary, p34

Reading should be a pleasure

GENEVIEVE CLARK SHOWS HOW TUTORS CAN ENCOURAGE LEARNERS TO GET INTO BOOKS



A recent survey carried out by The Vital Link, in partnership with The Reading Agency and the National Literacy Trust, has shown how more and more Skills for Life practitioners are using 'reading for pleasure' with their learners – a timely finding in the National Year of Reading. The survey has also shown how reading for pleasure can engage, support and motivate learners.

A Dads group at a family centre in Swindon spent a happy morning designing paper pants as an accompaniment to sharing Giles Andreae and Nick Sharratt's picture book *Pants* with their children. Local library staff and a learning outreach worker were introducing the young fathers to a collection of books specially chosen for parents with low literacy. One of the Dads was encouraged to lead story-time sessions and, once he'd discovered that he had a real talent for working with children, signed up for an NVQ* in childcare and development. 'I only used to borrow games from the library, but now I pick up my books and the children choose theirs,' reports Paul.

ESOL learners in Lewisham are benefiting from a monthly reading group run jointly by their tutor and local library staff. They focus on the Quick Reads (see p31) and other books written specially for emergent readers from publishers such as New Island¹ and Sandstone Press². 'I'm enjoying our Reading Group activity and it is very useful because it is helping me to improve my reading skills and vocabulary,' explains Jie Ping. 'We share our feelings and opinions about the book we are reading. I think I'm achieving better speaking skills with the help of the librarian, teacher and friends who fill in the gaps if I get stuck.'

Other learners have been spurred on by a powerful combination of success and enjoyment achieved through reading books they have chosen. Since completing the Six Book Challenge in Yorkshire, Tina Hewitt, an adult learner from Hull, has started her own book group. She has also written about her learning journey in one of this year's Quick Reads titles: *RaW Voices: True Stories of Hardship and Hope*. As she

says: 'Respect from others has made me want to share my positive experience. Being able to read and discuss a book has made me feel good. Now I know it's OK not to like a book!'

The tutors' view

Tutors interviewed for The Vital Link's research endorsed the benefits for learners. Jan Wainwright, Skills for Life lecturer at Park Lane College in Leeds, explains: 'It's about engagement, giving feedback in reviews, speaking and listening, giving an opinion, opening up a dialogue – and learners are more prepared to ask about what they don't know. Sharing a book can make me realise their progress. I can underestimate their understanding until they tell me about a book they have read.'

Clearly tutors believe that such activity increases confidence, broadens knowledge and develops personal skills, taking learners out of the category of 'non-readers' in which they often view themselves. But there is still a gap between practitioners' enthusiasm for reading for pleasure and their readiness to use it as a teaching method, particularly among those who are newer to teaching. Now that more appealing books and guidance materials are available, we need to take every opportunity to support tutors in opening up the world of reading to their learners.

Genevieve Clarke is National Coordinator of The Vital Link at The Reading Agency

For more information, see www.vitallink.org.uk or contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

(1) The Open Doors series are available at www.newisland.ie/taxonomy/Term/6

(2) www.sandstonepress.com/vistaseries.php

* See Glossary, p34

Literacy: an end in itself?

Graham Meadows argues that the focus on learning for employability is marginalising older learners

The number of older learners (aged 50+) attending Skills for Life classes has fallen sharply in recent years, despite legislation aimed at extending opportunities via employment rights and funding. Why is this?

One reason may be the policy trend away from promoting education as an end in itself towards the assertive promotion, particularly since Leitch¹, of training for employment. This appears to have hit the older learner particularly hard, since those in need of nurturing and development have been sidelined by demands for vocational practice. The most marginalised are Entry and pre-Entry level older learners, those in fact for whom Skills for Life was originally intended – the ‘hard to reach’ learners – so the decline in their numbers is a policy issue.

Policy focus

It is interesting to look at the language used over the years to discuss inclusion. The notion of ‘Access for all’, a key term in New Labour’s campaign to widen participation, has changed in meaning. ‘Access’, which once meant ‘access to education’, has taken on the dominant meaning of ‘access to employment’. Combined with this has been the policy focus on choice as an indicator of opportunity to learn, a focus which can make refusal appear dog-in-the-manger, even perverse. Underpinning this is an emphasis on the promise to ‘tackle barriers to learning’, the flipside of the coin of making access available. The question of whether



such access is, in principle, truly obtainable, or of whether the goods on offer are appropriate to the recipient, seems to have been overlooked.

Motives and barriers

In my research for an MA (Adult Basic Education), I studied a group of older learners (aged 50+) exploring how their needs and interests as learners linked, if at all, with the general thrust of the curriculum. The research included a discussion with three learners, informed by evidence arising from earlier interviews. The three were chosen to reflect the wider cohort, which consisted of learners at Entry levels. The participants came from different backgrounds –

Hispanic, Arabic, and white working-class. All had lived in the UK for at least 20 years. One was moderately dyslexic, one a refugee (with experience of war), and one a fluent bilingual but without satisfactory writing skills in either language.

When asked what was, for them, the main purpose of attending literacy classes, their stated motives were complex, rather than being tied to single objectives such as employment. Uppermost for one was the thought of recovering lost ground, ‘not missing out on things’; for another, it was ‘taking back power to yourself’ after a horrendous schooling experience. For all three, the most significant

benefit of becoming literate was the dignity that came with being able to read and write.

When asked about 'learning barriers', the refugee, who had been severely wounded, mentioned medical difficulties that had interrupted his attendance at classes. The resulting social isolation, loneliness and displacement were at least as much of a problem for him as acquiring the language: 'I haven't got connection with other people, English people ... when I leave my own country, everything die.' The learner with dyslexia described how this had affected her life, from a disastrous schooling experience ('Cane ... corner ... door ... Head') to a relationship in which her partner took advantage of her verbal difficulties to abuse her: 'He said I was damaged goods ... words? ... he would twist me on them'. These examples illustrate the complexity of the barriers faced by needy learners, and of the solutions for disabled people.

Learning styles

As for the relevance of the curriculum content, discussion focused on learning styles. The learner with dyslexia said that she used friends to help read official letters, adding humorously that they also vexed her: 'If you ask anyone to read you a letter, they will read it to themselves but they won't read it to you; then they'll tell you half of what's in it.' She also volunteered how she learnt to do things without written instructions, thus avoiding unnecessary or embarrassing disclosure. She learnt, for instance, to assemble motorbikes by copying the mechanic. Her case demonstrates the agency of informal learning in the process of understanding things, as well as the importance of situation as a field of learning. This is particularly applicable at lower levels, where learners begin their learning in the community before accessing more formal education.

Curriculum

In relation to the current Skills for Life curriculum, with its emphasis on testing, employability and youth, the question is how the needs and interests of older learners such as these can be catered for, and whether, by its very nature, the curriculum itself is driving them away.

Cameron and Millar² present an interesting view of curricula generally, which may be relevant. The ideal curriculum, they suggest, involves a balance between 'developmental' and 'credential' elements. 'Credential' elements include 'vocation-orientated', 'skills-

ostensibly 'real' contexts in which Skills for Life builds its literacy programme.

Tackling the problem

This is the kind of imbalance anticipated by Cameron and Millar's model of the curriculum, and is indeed detrimental to the whole. But how should it be tackled? A basic problem is that Skills for Life has never been interested in real people, instead presenting role substitutes: the aspirant secretary, the active entrepreneur, the smart student, the wise team-player. What then should the real world of the older learner include?

Intergenerational learning is one possibility that deserves more attention. Families are potentially less judgemental places for older learners than the world at large, children being promising partners. However, there are plenty more situational contexts worth attention, and around which literacy practices could be developed. These include 'interest' workshops (eg in health, financial, and computer literacy), news-based literacy groups or reading groups that could lead to local publication or a voice in current affairs. Such possibilities depend, however, on a virtual sea-change in the way literacy for older people is seen by the powers-that-be. Perhaps they will see sense before the last older learners leave education for good.

Graham Meadows works as a literacy tutor in HM prisons and as a consultant

The most significant benefit of becoming literate was the dignity that came with being able to read and write

assessed' and 'market-based' features, while the 'developmental' involves being 'person-focused', 'transformative' and 'justice-centred'. It is worth drawing an analogy with the Chinese notion of yin/yang where, if one side is dominant, the other loses out, to the detriment of the whole.

Initiatives such as Train to Gain,* despite taking literacy into the workplace, have restricted it almost entirely to the credential model. Access is controlled by standard tests, and curriculum content is largely determined by the needs of work. This approach has no developmental features, which might allow a balance that is more favourable to the older learner, nor is there any reference to age as a resource for learning. In fact, older people get no attention at all, a fact confirmed by their omission from the

[1] Leitch Report (2006) *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. HMSO
 [2] Cameron, R. and Millar, P. (2004) *A transitional model of recognition*. CLR

* See Glossary, p34

Do better qualified teachers teach better?

Olga Cara and Augustin de Coulon describe the impact of teachers' qualifications on learners

Since the Skills for Life strategy was introduced in 2001, most research has focused on learners and their progress. Few studies have paid attention to the teachers, tutors and trainers.

However, a core aim of the Skills for Life strategy is to improve the quality of teaching (and hence of learning) through a new infrastructure of teaching qualifications. New Skills for Life teachers (at least in the period 2002–07, as requirements have changed more recently (see p15)) are expected to have a generic teaching qualification such as a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or Certificate in Education (CertEd) and a subject-specialist teaching qualification in the subject they are teaching. Existing teachers are being encouraged to take these qualifications and it is proposed that, by 2010, almost all existing teachers in the post-16 sector should be qualified.

The assumption here is that better qualified teachers will deliver higher quality teaching. But what is the evidence for this assumption?

Measuring 'teacher quality'

Many practitioners and policy-makers will argue that teacher quality is vital to learner achievement and progress. But what is 'teacher quality' and how can we measure it?

Most of the published research and literature produced to date comes from the compulsory education sector in the US (see opposite). Given the lack of evidence from the UK, and particularly in the learning and skills

sector, NRDC researchers have been addressing three main questions:

1. Is the level of teachers' qualifications related to learners' improvement, as measured by pre- and post-course assessments?
2. Does this vary according to the type of qualifications that teachers hold?
3. Are teachers' qualifications related to changes in learners' self-confidence and other attitudes?

The researchers found strong evidence in the sample that better-qualified teachers have learners who make more progress

In the research, test results and questionnaire responses were collected from learners at the beginning and at the end of their Skills for Life courses in 2003–04. The data allow a thorough investigation of any changes in both the performance and the attitudes of learners.

This data has been combined with questionnaire responses collected from the teachers of these learners (approximately 270 teachers of 763 learners). The combined data sets enable the researchers to shed some light on the three questions.

Is there a link?

A tentative answer to the first question is 'Yes'. The researchers found strong evidence in the sample that better-qualified teachers have learners who make more progress between the initial and final assessments. These results are obtained regardless of

other characteristics of the teachers and learners, including their ages and genders, and regardless of learners' ethnicity and initial qualification level. A possible explanation for this is that stronger learners choose the most qualified teachers. It is, however, much more likely that teachers with higher qualifications deliver higher quality of teaching that enables learners to make more progress.

Generic or specialist?

But, for the second question, what kind of teaching qualifications are we talking about?

The research has identified the teachers' highest qualification in the subject they were teaching (ie in mathematics for numeracy teachers, and in English for literacy and ESOL). The effects on performance were assessed in comparison with the effects of having a generic teaching qualification (eg CertEd, PGCE) and a subject-specialist qualification.

To date, the findings show that numeracy learners make more progress if their teacher has an A level, degree or postgraduate degree in mathematics, compared with those whose teacher has only a GCSE or lower level qualification. Moreover, learners make more progress when their teacher has greater experience in teaching the subject.

However, this link is much less apparent for literacy and ESOL, where teachers having higher qualifications in English does not markedly improve learners' performance. On the other hand, learners make less progress in

literacy if their teachers are part-qualified (ie have only either a generic or a subject-specialist teaching qualification) compared with fully-qualified teachers (ie those who have both these qualifications).

Enjoying learning

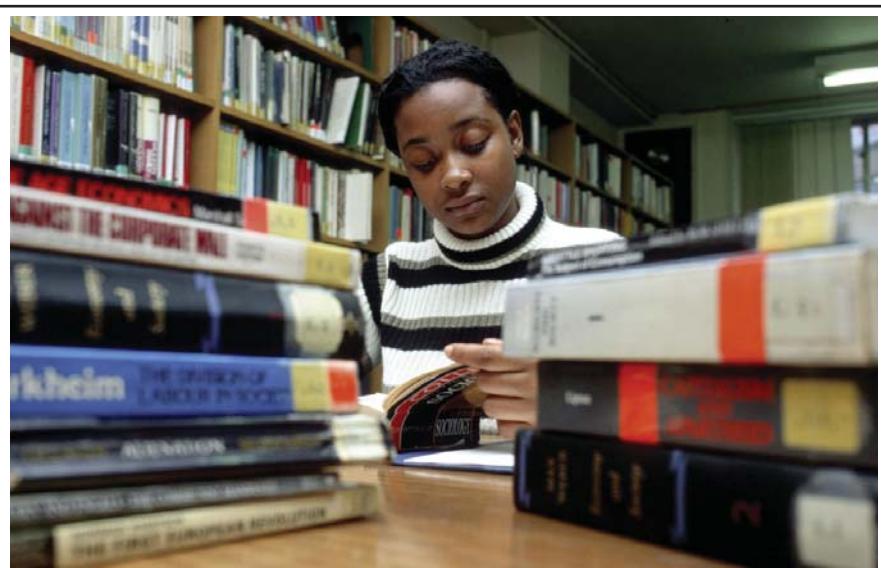
The answer to the third question is more mixed. On the one hand, learners' enjoyment of numeracy tends to be greater when their teachers have a degree or postgraduate degree in mathematics compared with those whose teacher's highest qualification is GCSE. This is also the case when a teacher has only a generic teaching qualification (eg CertEd or PGCE). On the other hand (and this takes us back to some previous studies) over-qualified teachers can also be associated with lower confidence in learners. For example, where the teacher has a degree or a postgraduate degree in mathematics, learners at the end of a course report finding numeracy/mathematics even more difficult, compared with those whose teachers have only a GCSE.

Literacy and ESOL learners experience a greater increase in self-confidence in their literacy skills if their teachers have a generic teaching qualification. Yet, as for numeracy, these learners have a smaller increase or even a decrease in self-confidence related to learning overall if their teachers' highest qualification is at postgraduate level.

So, while it is clear that learners make more progress if their teachers have mathematics qualifications at A level or above, learners' confidence may be undermined when the teacher's mathematics qualifications are at postgraduate level. Whatever the level of a teacher's mathematics qualifications, they will need excellent teaching skills.

Olga Cara and Augustin de Coulon are Quantitative Research Officers at NRDC

This article has described some early analysis of our data. The work is ongoing and we would welcome feedback and comments.
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What does earlier research show?

Some researchers have suggested that teacher quality is a powerful predictor of learner achievement and progress. Hanushek¹ shows that the difference between having a good teacher and a bad one can exceed one grade-level equivalent in annual educational progress. Rivkin et al.² conclude that teacher quality is the most important predictor of learner achievement. Darling-Hammond³ argues that the effects of teacher quality on educational outcomes can be more important than learner background characteristics, such as economic deprivation or ethnic minority status. Moreover, in the same studies she suggests that well-prepared teachers are more strongly associated with learner outcomes than reduced class sizes or even teacher salaries.

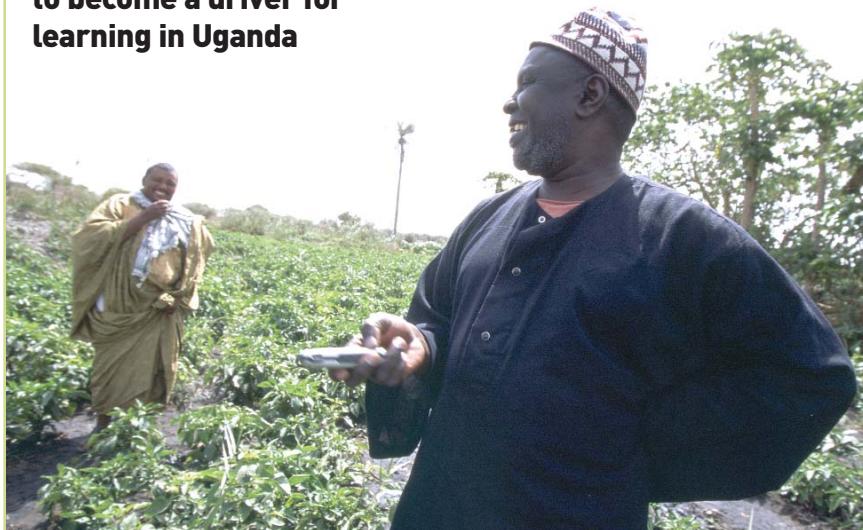
Some studies have looked at teachers' qualifications, degree level and certification status as a proxy for teaching quality. Yet these studies are inconclusive when looking at general teaching qualifications. However, other researchers who looked specifically at the subject of teachers' qualifications have found that learners' achievement gains in high school for mathematics and science are associated with teachers holding a mathematics or science undergraduate or master degree (Goldhaber and Brewer^{4, 5, 6}; Rowan et

al⁷). Also, and really interestingly, over-qualified teachers sometimes appear to do a poorer job. Thus, teachers holding a master's degree can have a negative effect on learner achievement in elementary school⁸.

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- (2) Rivkin, S.G., Hanushek, E.A., & Kain, J.F. (1998). *Teachers, schools, and academic achievement*. National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 6691
- (3) Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher quality and learner achievement: A review of state policy evidence. *Journal of Education Policy Analysis*, 8(1)
- (4) Goldhaber, D. D., & Brewer, D. J. (1997). Why don't schools and teachers seem to matter? Assessing the impact of unobservables on educational productivity. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 32(3), pp. 505–523
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- (7) Rowan, B., Chiang, F., & Miller, R. J. (1997). Using research on employees' performance to study the effects of teachers on learners' achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 70(October), pp. 256–284
- (8) Rowan, B., Correnti, R., & Miller, R. J. (2002). What large-scale, survey research tells us about teacher effects on learner achievement: Insights from the prospects learner of elementary schools. *Teachers College Record*

E-learning in Uganda

Ralf Kellershohn shows how technology enables business to become a driver for learning in Uganda



After a long day in his fields, Joseph Mbaki, Ugandan fruit farmer, picks up his mobile phone and connects to MarketInfonet to see whether his business partner, a wholesaler from Kampala, has left any messages for him. In three weeks they will meet in the market at Jinja, the second biggest commercial centre in Uganda, where Joseph will deliver 300 kg of mangoes.

'We made a virtual contract online,' Joseph says. 'A few months ago, my business partner posted his demand for mangoes in MarketInfonet where I have subscribed to an information

service that keeps me up to date on market demands for fresh fruit. I received a text message on my mobile phone, notifying me that there was a buyer for 300kg of mangoes.'

Joseph sent a text message to the internet-based system confirming that he would deliver the product. Now, the wholesaler can be sure that he will receive a specific amount of produce of appropriate quality on a specific date. 'And I have the guarantee to sell my product for a good price,' Joseph laughs.

This story is fictional, but it will become everyday practice for farmers in the Busoga region of Uganda as a result of Uganda MarketInfonet, an internet-based information and communication platform supporting agriculture in Uganda that has been developed by Bufanet (the Ugandan Busoga Farmer Network) and the Swiss e-learning developer Avallain.

'The system will offer several functions,' explains Ursula Suter, managing director of Avallain. 'It will connect vendors and suppliers, and provide farmers and fishermen with information on agricultural

techniques, prices, and measures for income increase.' Additional modules will present interactive exercises for literacy and numeracy that are directly relevant to everyday business – comparing prices, calculating the amount of fertiliser needed, writing an order, reading a manual. MarketInfonet will present basic skills learning as a key to improved business. Business becomes the driver for education.

Currently, most agriculture in Uganda is at subsistence level. 'Farmers and fishermen know too little about the possibilities of income increase, for

example through processing and added value,' says Patrick Kiirya, Director of Bufanet and founder of several literacy organisations in Uganda. 'Also, a lot of smallholders don't know the value of their produce. They negotiate prices individually with itinerant traders at the farm gate and sell their products below value. As a result, Uganda's agriculture remains far below its potential. Although employing more than 80% of the workforce, agriculture contributes less than 36% to the GDP.'

Using technology

Access to market information, agricultural education and improved basic skills are prerequisites to improve the effectiveness of individual farming as well as the capacity of the whole production chain. But is ICT an appropriate vehicle for learning? In Africa?

'The question is not whether conditions in Africa allow the use of ICT,' Ursula Suter emphasises, 'the question is whether we can develop solutions that meet the special demands and adapt to existing conditions.' Internet access is still limited in Uganda but more and more people have a mobile phone, so MarketInfonet will use mobile phones as its main channel to distribute information and learning.

'ICT can function as a supportive tool to contribute to increasing income and promoting basic education,' says Patrick Kiirya. 'Small-scale farmers and fishermen are very interested in expanding their capacities and skills to increase their income. When they understand that MarketInfonet will help them to conduct their business more successfully, they will make the effort to use it.'

MarketInfonet aims to become an example of how the 'mobile revolution' can contribute to the 'green revolution' – and become a driver for learning and development.

Ralf Kellershohn is Director of Communications for Avallain

The new qualifications: one year on

Krystyna Vargas and Brigid Bird consider the reform of post-compulsory teacher education

The broad features of the new landscape are clear, but much of the detail has yet to settle down. In this feature, two experienced ESOL* teacher trainers express some of their feelings about the process so far.

Major changes in post-compulsory teacher education in England were introduced with effect from September 2007 – the final step in a process that began with the publication of *Equipping our teachers for the future* in 2004¹. In the new system there are two qualification routes for Skills for Life teachers:

- ‘Integrated’ programmes lead to a single combined qualification with a subject specialism in either ESOL literacy, or numeracy. This is the Diploma for Teaching English (ESOL) in the Lifelong Learning Sector

[DTLLS (ESOL) or a DTLLS (literacy) or DTLLS (numeracy)].

- Alternatively teachers can take an Additional Diploma in either literacy, numeracy or ESOL – this is the ADTLLS which can be taken in addition to a generic teaching qualification, a slightly longer route.

The new qualifications aim to be comprehensive and cover many aspects of a trainee teacher’s development. They are based on the six Domains, shown in Figure 1 (LLUK²).

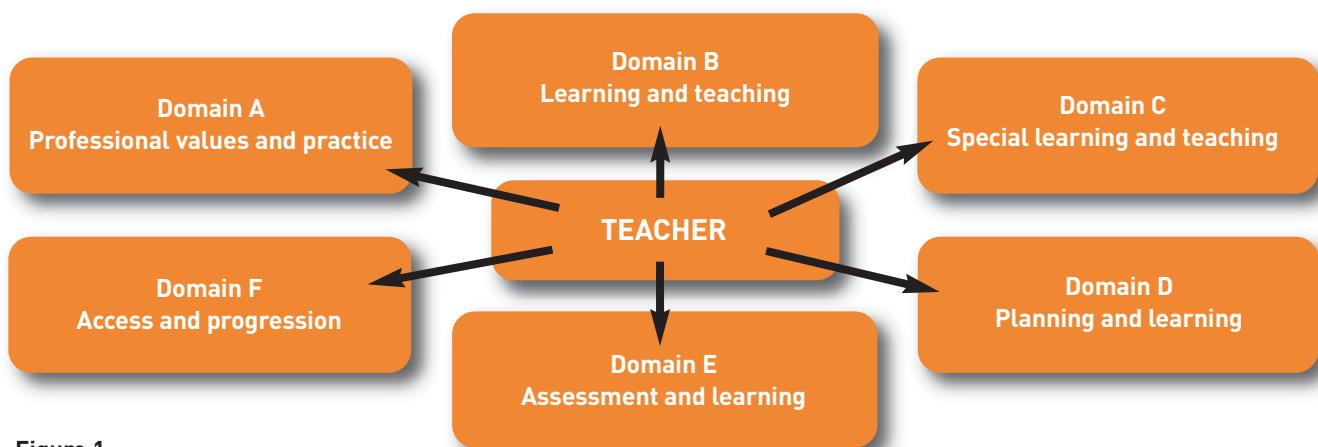


Figure 1

Vision and reality

Broadening the scope of training is a welcome development; as anyone who has signed a contract recently will know, the duties and responsibilities of a teacher go well beyond ‘just teaching’. They include enrolment, interviewing, initial and diagnostic assessment, formative and summative assessment, tutorials, ILPs, giving individual feedback to learners, and

giving learners advice and guidance for their future. All these have to be scheduled into the course.

Developing a new course involves consultation with practitioners, drafts, redrafts, and final documentation; it takes time and a lot of planning. The courses for the new qualifications, based on the new standards, were scheduled

to start in September 2007 but the run-up to the launch was fraught. Teacher trainers across the country were ready and eager to prepare their courses in time for the new academic year, but were frustrated by delays in the emergence of the final versions of all the required guidance. As a result, ESOL qualifications from the awarding bodies were unavoidably delayed.

When the 2007–08 academic year began, some colleges had abandoned the idea of delivering the Skills for Life qualifications altogether. Teacher trainers in other colleges found themselves apologising for their courses being underprepared, asking for understanding, and honestly admitting that they were developing the course as they went along – hardly a good example from professionals who should be modelling good practice.

Funding has also created unexpected difficulties. The Cambridge ESOL CELTA* and DELTA* qualifications have been the gold standards of ESOL teacher training for many years but, as a result of pressure on LSC* funding to colleges, they are being replaced by qualifications from local universities. LSC is asking colleges to prioritise Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications; teacher qualifications at levels 4, 5 and 6 are not a priority. These constraints on LSC funding are forcing a move to HEFCE* funded qualifications³. In some cases universities are new to ESOL as a specialism, which can be challenging for trainers used to



Continuous Professional Development needs to be an integral component of a career

working with an international 'gold standard' award like Cambridge ESOL. The battle to retain the long-established Cambridge ESOL teaching qualifications in some colleges seems to be lost.

A year's experience

After one year of the new courses, the overall impression is that trainees are

overwhelmed by the volume of assessment. There are six modules in Year 1 of a DTLSS course. Each module may require three or four assignments, making more than 20 pieces of work. Trainees are under continuous pressure to produce these assignments, which relate to the wide range of knowledge, understanding and practice included in the new qualifications. Often, the trainee's main focus will be on completing the written work on which they will be assessed.

In theory, practice is embedded in each domain, but the volume of assignments makes the practice element difficult to handle. Teaching practice is included in one of the modules but will only receive the trainee's attention when they are about to be observed and assessed. At other times teaching practice will take a back seat while the trainee concentrates on the more pressing need to get on with the written assignments.

Trainees realise this and ask that more time should be spent on

PHOTO: REPORT DIGITAL

Throwing out the baby?

Brigid Bird looks at the balance of theory and practice in the new ESOL teacher qualifications

ESOL is possibly unique in the post-16 sector in having well-established patterns of teacher education that produce people who are able to teach their subject through the constant linking of theory and practice. A major Ofsted* report, *The initial training of further education teachers*¹, identified the absence of this link as a weakness in most generic courses; the production of DTLSS² and the new suite of qualifications is largely a response to this.

The new courses introduced in September 2007 have been running for almost a year. It is early days but now is the time to consider if things are working as intended. As an ESOL teacher and teacher trainer I have two main concerns.

Weighting

There are 10 units in the full ESOL DTLSS qualification. Where these are delivered within the fully integrated programme, a thorough mix of subject and pedagogy can be achieved. However, the regulations require that only three of these are delivered in an ESOL context. Areas such as assessment, planning, teaching and learning can be delivered in the generic

part of the course. This is of particular concern for ESOL as so much subject specialist knowledge has to be covered, as well as teaching and learning theory and practice, in just these three units. This will also be a problem in the additional diploma courses to be taken by new ESOL teachers.

Criteria

My second issue is about the wording of the criteria in the units. For example, take one of the part 1 (Level 4) units: Enabling learning and assessment. Eight of the criteria are framed in theoretical terms, using words like 'analyse', 'critically discuss' and 'justify'. Four are framed in terms of actions, eg 'plan', 'establish'

teaching and learning. They find the other things – policies, quality assurance, research projects – interesting but they know that their main role is about teaching and learning. They need time to think through lessons, incorporate new ideas, reflect on their teaching, do peer observations and devote enough attention to their core activity. The overwhelming message, both from trainers and from trainees, is that too much time is spent writing assignments and not enough on developing practical teaching skills and strategies.

Outstanding issues

The new qualifications present course developers with a range of issues.

- How to make teaching the core of training.
- How to reduce the burden of assessment on trainers and trainees.
- In the case of ESOL, where knowledge of the subject needs to be acquired in addition to teaching skills, it is difficult to see how

everything can be fitted into an already over-assessed training programme.

Some of these issues can be resolved by the awarding bodies in consultation with practitioners but there is still a fundamental flaw: there is not enough time in the course for a trainee to learn all the practical skills they need. We must move away from the idea that teacher training is about producing a finished article and towards the idea that training is only the start of a process. Qualification planners need to recognise that training on the job is an essential part of learning to be a teacher: CPD* needs to be an integral component of a career. Part of initial training should be devoted to teaching practice, to focus trainees' attention on the classroom, undistracted by assignment demands. This will set a good model for the lifelong learning that will enable a teacher to grow and develop throughout their career. Perhaps the emphasis on professional development from the Institute for Learning signals a positive change here.

'record'. The balance is the same in the other units at this level, or weighted even more in favour of theory, even though Level 4 is intended to be geared more to practice. In all three of the Level 5 units, the criteria are described in almost entirely theoretical terms.

Presumably, the wording has been influenced by the kind of descriptors used at different levels and by the drive to produce reflective teachers. However, it pushes the weighting very much towards theory. It's much easier for course designers, especially the less experienced, to produce written assignments where 'analyse', 'explain' etc can be easily demonstrated. But the best courses link theory as much as possible to assessed teaching practice. This is done most successfully in groups where participants 'critically discuss' or

'justify' a lesson taught by one of their number. This is a much better link of theory and practice and reduces the heavy reliance on assignments which are such a burden to trainees, some of whom have substantial teaching commitments, but is not so easy to evidence to a course reviewer or inspector.

What can be done?

How can we alleviate these harmful effects? In fully integrated courses, much can be done through flexible interpretation of the weighting of the unit criteria. Do we really need 30 hours input on assessment? Or should most work on informal assessment be included in planning and teaching? Trainees' ability to use a range of assessment approaches should be assessed as part of teaching practice, as should their ability to 'justify' 'analyse' etc.

Figure 1 suggests that each domain is equally weighted. This could be misleading; teaching and learning are central. The diagram could be redesigned to more accurately reflect the real priorities of training.

The reforms introduce much-needed simplification to the array of teaching qualifications that were formerly in place. However, there are many loose ends yet to tie up.

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(1) DfES (2004) *Equipping our Teachers for the Future: Reforming Initial Teacher Training for the Learning and Skills Sector*. DfES

(2) LLUK (2007) *New overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector*. LLUK

(3) University qualifications, delivered both in universities and in colleges, are funded by HEFCE. National awarding body qualifications, delivered in colleges, are funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

* See Glossary, p34

The role of reviewers and inspectors will be crucial. They need to be sensitive to weighting, have a flexible view of where content is covered, and not be governed by expecting courses to be shaped strictly by the modular nature of the units. They need to positively encourage trainers to glean evidence for the understanding of theory from observed classroom practice. They could have a really useful role in discouraging course deliverers from relying on theory-based assignments rather than on assignments that are clearly linked to real taught lessons.

Brigid Bird is an experienced ESOL teacher and teacher trainer based in the West Midlands

(1) Ofsted (2003) *The initial training of further education teachers HMI 1762*, Ofsted
(2) For an explanation of these terms, see p21

What are we doing when we read aloud?

Sam Duncan has been listening to what learners say about their experience of reading aloud

Raise the subject of reading aloud with a group of adult literacy teachers, and it's likely you'll be bombarded with war stories, from legends of managers or inspectors banning it, to tales of learners loving or hating it, or accounts of what has gone well or badly. But do we really know what we are doing when we read aloud?

That we say 'reading aloud' more often than we say 'reading silently' indicates that reading silently is now seen as the norm, the 'natural', and therefore reading aloud is the abnormal, the form that needs justifying. Yet, reading aloud was the norm in most of Europe until more of the population could read than couldn't (probably about the mid to late 19th century in Britain). Reading became less a communal event and more an individual one, but the communal is still there; adult literacy learners may be more aware of this than others.

In my research into adult literacy learners' perceptions of reading (presented at the NRDC International Conference 2008)¹, I interviewed 35 learners, asking them Hogan's wonderfully phrased question 'What are we doing when we read?'. Their responses contain a range of insights into reading, including a strong emphasis on reading aloud. For these learners, reading aloud is two things: it is a method of improving their reading and a type of reading in its own right.

A method of reading

They spoke of reading aloud when alone as a way of facilitating the decoding process (their mouths

moving to explore the links between symbols, sounds and whole words as both sound and meaning):

'[when] I'm on my own at home, I'd read out loud ... So I can understand the words and the sounds as well.'

'It [reading aloud alone] helps you because you see the word and then you try to position your mouth to how the letters are written.'



They also spoke of reading aloud in groups to get feedback from others ('others can help or correct you') and of listening to others read while following the words on the page:

'You know before, when we used to read in class yeah, I used to pretend I was following, but I wasn't – but now I do follow it! And I notice that it helps me a lot ... when someone's reading it and you're following it, it helps – if you can't say that word, don't know what that word is and someone's reading it, and then it's "oh yeah," ... That helps a lot, it does.'

A type of reading

Yet, these learners also spoke of reading aloud as a type of reading,

something we do for particular purposes, such as reading the Bible or the Qur'an:

'It's better to read it [*aloud*] because you feel the words; every word you read you feel the word ... maybe because this is the Holy Book, maybe that's why I am putting all of my mind and my heart in it.'

Others spoke of the bedtime ritual of reading stories to children, and that hearing a story read aloud is important, 'I like to hear stories ... it's the way, the tone of the voice...' or that poems should be read aloud and listened to, in order for their meaning to be understood: 'I like someone reading poems to me, yes poems, I understand when someone else is reading.' In this way reading aloud is a social act, a life function – a type of reading.

What strikes me are the connections these learners stress – connections between reading aloud as an important social act and reading aloud as a way to get better at reading, as well as connections between things you do and things others do for you. For these learners, reading aloud, like reading silently, isn't something we need to debate; it is already part of our lives.

Sam Duncan is an adult literacy coordinator at the Institute of Education, University of London, and a literacy tutor at City and Islington College

(1) Download presentation and handouts at www.nrdc.org.uk/intconf2008

(2) Hogan, M.J. (2004) Review of 'Assessing Reading' (2000) by J.Charles Alderson *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 16

Skills for Life tutor: please handle with care

Sarah Malins makes a plea on behalf of Skills for Life tutors

If the Skills for Life strategy is to continue to be successful, we need urgently to look at how much – or perhaps how little – we value the tutors who are delivering the strategy at grass-roots level.

I teach Skills for Life (Literacy Entry 3) in central London to a class of 15 self-referred adults (male and female, average age 40). For the past two years I have undertaken in-service training towards full qualification and so have met tutors from institutions across London. Mainly women, my fellow tutors are often in Skills for Life because it provides a career that is compatible with other life commitments. They are employed for a limited number of hours a week in a rewarding career – an apparently ideal situation.

The reality

The reality is different. Many hourly-paid Skills for Life tutors work under great pressure, with little job security and limited pay; they often talk about looking for another job.

A major burden is the paperwork required to document 'success' for quality assurance purposes. Skills for Life tutors have to produce large volumes of paperwork. The workload for only a few hours' pay is now so great that some tutors are looking elsewhere.

Skills for Life classes are unlike any other. Learners may be any age, from any culture, and be first-, second- or even third-language speakers. Only three of my learners are native speakers; the rest speak Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Polish, Cantonese, Thai,



Skills for Life tutors have to produce large volumes of paperwork

Portuguese, Jamaican, Shona and Krio as their first languages. This is average for my college. Some learners have been in the UK for 40 years or more, yet cannot read or write English to the levels required. Many are not literate in any language.

Many learners are in Entry level classes to improve their chances for employment. They are often caught in the poverty trap, with low self-esteem. Often they have problems – physical or mental – that contribute to their initial inability to cope with learning. Often, too, they have exhausting domestic responsibilities. Skills for Life tutors are teaching a highly vulnerable group of people, each of whom needs individual support.

Recognising the reality

The LSC's direct linking of the funding of future courses to learner success does not recognise this reality. 'Success' is measured by a combination of attendance, retention and achievement. The demand on Skills for Life tutors that their learners should succeed is challenging and an hourly-paid tutor can lose work if a course is closed through lack of 'success'. In *reflect* Issue 10 I outlined the reasons for my learners' non-attendance, and the measures I took to improve the situation. Whatever effort I put into improving attendance would have been unremarked, as figures are measured only in black and white outcomes.

It is a similar story with 'achievement'. My accredited course is 'free for learners', but it requires a positive outcome – success in the City & Guilds 3792 assignment. Partial achievement does not count as 'success'.

The problem for Skills for Life tutors is that their learners often cannot progress in a smooth bureaucracy-friendly line. Every session reinforces this reality. Although the Skills for Life tutor materials are helpful, they provide the teacher, faced with a class such as the one described above, with no more than a backbone of support for the curriculum. The requirement to differentiate for effective Skills for Life teaching is huge; planning each session takes time. Yet, despite all this, it is onto these tutors that the greatest paperwork demands are imposed. The efforts of tutors with learners with spiky profiles – and the partial

successes of these learners – must be recognised.

Legislation such as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), together with the LSDA/DfES document Access for all (2002)¹, and the Tomlinson Report on Inclusive Learning (1996)² puts the learner at the heart of everything we do as teachers. We are, rightly, required to consider learners'

needs first, but the system is failing in its duty of care towards the tutors. To work effectively, Skills for Life tutors need a lot of support, both emotionally and financially, yet this is often unrecognised.

I teach for six hours a week. Table 1 opposite details the paperwork expected from me, while Table 2 offers some suggestions for improvement.

Sarah Malins is a teacher in South London and is taking an in-service course at Westminster Kingsway College

[1] Access for all LDSA/DfES 2002

[2] Tomlinson, J. (1996) Inclusive Learning. HMSO

[3] Gardner, H. (2004) Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition of *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Basic Books

A comment by NRDC researchers **Olga Cara and Augustin de Coulon**

Sarah Malins' article confirms some of the findings from the NRDC Teacher Study, which involved a sample of approximately 1000 Skills for Life teachers¹.

The study found that 63% of Skills for Life teachers work part-time and 37% work full-time. More part-time contracts are hourly-paid than fractional – 41% compared with 22%. There are more female Skills for Life teachers (77%), yet fewer female teachers than male teachers are employed on full-time contracts (33% and 50% respectively). Female Skills for Life teachers are also more likely to be hourly-paid than their male counterparts (43% compared with 35%). Overall, teachers on full-time contracts tended to be in their 30s.

One-fifth of part-time teachers have another job in post-16 education and training, and about a quarter have another job outside the sector.

The Teacher Study measured job satisfaction by means of 11 questions on different aspects of the job. Respondents gave each question a score between 1 (very dissatisfied) and 5 (very satisfied). By far the highest dissatisfaction expressed was about the time spent on administration. Not only were the teachers on average very dissatisfied by the volume of administration, but this view was nearly unanimous. The area with the next highest level of

dissatisfaction was 'salary and related benefits' (63% said they were mainly or very dissatisfied). The third highest area of dissatisfaction was 'career prospects' (31%).

There were however, many positive feelings too. The main areas where teachers expressed their satisfaction were:

- 'appreciation of your work by learners' (89% very or mainly satisfied)
- 'learner behaviour' (89%)
- 'learner progress and achievement' (84%).

In addition, in a smaller study², NRDC has investigated how the age composition of learners affects the job satisfaction of Skills for Life teachers. This study shows that teachers who work with a higher proportion of 16–19 learners are less satisfied.

Managerial support, collaboration with colleagues, involvement in decision-making, and having a clear professional role had a positive effect on job satisfaction

The Teacher Study also looked for explanations of teachers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with different aspects of their job. While most teachers, regardless of their contract type, were dissatisfied with the

amount of time they spent on administrative tasks, this dissatisfaction was higher amongst part-time than full-time teachers. 70% of hourly-paid teachers and 65% of fractional teachers were dissatisfied compared with 54% of full-time teachers.

Also, a higher proportion of part-time teachers were dissatisfied with their job security compared with full-time teachers; 32% of hourly-paid teachers were dissatisfied, 21% of fractional and 12% of full-time. Hourly-paid male teachers aged under 30 were the most dissatisfied with their job security. Further statistical analysis shows that job security would potentially improve overall job satisfaction.

Further analysis also shows other factors that have a positive effect on job satisfaction: managerial support, collaboration with colleagues, involvement in decision-making, and having a clear professional role. These factors are all related to a sense of professional autonomy that allows teachers to have ownership of the processes that affect them and their learners.

[1] Publication forthcoming (NRDC 2008) from The Teacher Study

[2] de Coulon, A. and Smith, A. (forthcoming 2009) 'Adult Basic Skills teachers and their teenage learners'

Table 1
Paperwork expected

ELEMENT	EVIDENCE
1. Course aims	Course information form
2. Initial assessment	Initial assessment strategies
3. Induction of learner/s	Induction form/s
4. Partnership with learner/s	Learning agreement/s
5. Diagnostic assessment	Diagnostic assessment strategies (11 tasks)
6. Differentiation of work	Learning styles questionnaire Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) Class profile
7. Learning objectives	Schemes of work (referenced to Adult Literacy Core Curriculum and revised versions). Lesson plans (differentiated).
8. Formative assessment	Progress reviews • ILPs • Homework records • Learners' work (marked) • Learners' session evaluation forms
9. Self-assessment; summative assessment	Class register Record of student absence/lateness Absence follow-up letter Learner feedback forms Course review form C&G 3792 assignment, marking and feedback
10. Liaison	Memoranda as appropriate to: • Management • Additional Learning Support • Library, Learning and Media Resources

Table 2
Some suggestions for improvements

1. REDUCE PAPERWORK
Initial assessment strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take time to allocate learners to appropriate course (to reduce differentiation later) Have good referral systems between colleges and other providers Have the financial confidence to 'lose' learners, eg those aged 65+, to more appropriate placement.
Diagnostic assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce to four tasks at Entry 2 to Level 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reading comprehension – free writing – alphabetical ordering – speaking and listening task.
Learning styles questionnaire
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cut. A good lesson should incorporate a variety of styles. Gardner (2004)³ states that an individual could be engaged with one content, and inattentive with another. It is not possible, or helpful, to label learners with one 'style'.
ILPs + tutorials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify Choose target/s that are meaningful to the learner SMART is not always appropriate.
Schemes of work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partly standardise Leave space for tutor preference and class needs (from Profile).
Lesson plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require outline planning only Reduce requirements, to ensure consistency Concentrate on materials and checks on learning Accept handwritten, one side of A4 only.
2. REDUCE CLASS SIZES
3. PAY TUTORS FOR INTERNAL MARKING OF EXTERNALLY ACCREDITED WORK AT ENTRY LEVEL
4. ACCEPT 'PARTIAL' SUCCESS FOR LEARNERS WITH SPIKY PROFILES
5. SAFEGUARD TUTORS' MENTAL HEALTH
Tutors need opportunities to talk, share good practice, ask for help and advice when needed and not feel constantly threatened by unemployment.
6. REDUCE VOLUME OF EMAILS
Visit colleagues in classrooms, or telephone. We all need human contact.

Does the doctor speak your language?

JD Carpentieri reports on research that shows the crucial links between literacy and health

No one's health is an island. That is, health (whether good or bad) does not happen in isolation – it is the product of interactions between individuals, society at large and the healthcare community. Increasingly, policy-makers are focusing on the responsibilities of individuals to manage their own healthcare. But this increased responsibility may require better health literacy skills than many people possess.

The Government's 2006 White Paper, *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say*, points to a new focus on prevention, self-care and self-management. The informal healthcare 'contract' between government and individuals is evolving so that individual responsibility is increasingly emphasised. At the same time, government has a duty to give individuals the support they need to play a more active role in their own healthcare, a point the Government itself makes in the White Paper, writing that 'public bodies can and should do more to support individuals and give everyone an equal chance to become and stay healthy, active and independent'.

Education, literacy, health

Giving everyone an equal health chance means taking account of the powerful role that poverty, inequality and social exclusion play in health and healthcare. Upcoming NRDC research² finds strong links between education and a range of health-related behaviours. Looking specifically at a cohort of British individuals who turned 34 in 2004 (the British Cohort Study 1970, or BCS70,

researchers found that more education significantly reduced the probability of being a smoker (and how much one smoked), of being classified as a binge drinker, or as obese. This finding is part of a growing body of research demonstrating strong links not just between education and health, but between literacy and health. In the US, for example, researchers have shown that patients with poor literacy skills are more likely to report poor health, less likely to engage in preventive health actions, less likely to understand their illness and how to treat it, less likely to understand how to take their medicines, less likely to successfully manage chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma, more likely to be hospitalised, and more likely to die earlier.

It is not only ESOL speakers who report problems with the language and culture of healthcare

Such findings will come as no surprise to the University of Lancaster's Uta Papen, who investigated the literacy, language and numeracy demands placed on individuals and healthcare settings and how they cope with those demands.³ Not surprisingly, many ESOL learners found it a challenge not only to understand medical instructions but to navigate the British health system. It is not only ESOL speakers, however, who report

problems with the language and culture of healthcare. One British woman in her early sixties, for example, reported struggling with 'medical-ese', and said she felt her doctor not only did not make enough effort to speak in plain English, but used 'big words' to 'feel and look important'. Written literacy was cited as particularly challenging. Forms were said to be especially frustrating, both in terms of understanding their demands and filling them in. For instance, one woman needed to detail her depression on a form, but because she could not spell 'depression', she simply wrote that she felt 'fed up', which she knew was an inadequate and possibly misleading description of her situation.

Mind the gap

Communication problems such as these are endemic in healthcare. In part this is due to patients' shame at their poor skills. In one American survey of patients with poor reading and/or writing, only one-third of respondents said that their doctor was aware of their literacy problems. But the medical profession should take most of the blame for the communication gap, argues Rima Rudd of Harvard University's School of Public Health⁴. In the US, where there is a large and growing body of research on literacy and health, materials tend to be written at a level exceeding the reading skills of the average American high school graduate. The problem, argues Rudd, is that healthcare professionals tend to internalise and accept as normal the jargon and complex written and

spoken language of the profession. To all too many patients, they may as well be speaking in code.

Creative strategies

There is evidence that people with poor literacy skills do develop creative strategies to help them navigate the healthcare system. Uta Papen has found that many individuals, particularly non-native English speakers, turn to others with higher skills for help. These 'health mediators' are often family members. This strategy has its pros and cons. For example, one woman with a chronic condition enlisted the help of a relative who did a lot of internet-based research on her behalf. Based on this information, the woman changed her consultant and, as a result, experienced a marked improvement in her condition. On the other hand, Papen points to the case of another woman who had received information about a smear test which she didn't understand. She asked her husband's advice and he told her not to bother going, so she missed out on an important screening service.

If individuals are to take more responsibility for their healthcare, the healthcare and education systems will need to continue doing more to empower people to understand their health and the options available to them.

JD Carpentieri is Research and Development Policy Liaison Officer at NRDC. With thanks to Liz Marshall for initial interviews and contributions.

- (1) Department of Health (2006) *Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services*. The Stationery Office, p25
- (2) de Coulon, A., Meschi, E. and Yates, M. (forthcoming 2008) *Education, basic skills and health 2004* UK. NRDC
- (3) Papen, U. and Walters, S. (forthcoming 2008). *Literacy, learning and health*. NRDC
- (4) For more information, see Rima Rudd's keynote presentation at www.nrdc.org.uk/intconf2008
- (5) Herman, A. (2007) *Empowering parents, benefiting children: a study of the impact of health literacy training on Head Start parents and the healthcare system* UCLA/Johnson & Johnson Health Care Institute.



Overcoming the intergenerational effects of poor health literacy

Health literacy is not just about one's reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. It is also about understanding particular health concepts and knowing what to do in particular circumstances. For example, if you are a parent and your young child is running a fever of 99.5°F (37.5°C), what should you do? Most parents know the answer to this question but, for parents with poor health literacy, minor healthcare woes like this can be tremendous challenges. It is thus little surprise that American research has shown that parents with low health literacy are more likely to make poor decisions when their children are ill, including taking their children to A&E for minor concerns or, alternatively, avoiding the healthcare system altogether because they find the paperwork or other aspects of the process too confusing or overwhelming.

However, such barriers can be overcome, whether through parenting guides pitched at the right literacy level or through

healthcare training for parents. The latter concept is at the heart of an exciting American programme run by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) University's Health Care Institute for Head Start. In the US, the long running Head Start programme provides childcare and other forms of support to low-income families, and the Health Care Institute was created in 2001 to help Head Start parents gain the knowledge and confidence to manage their children's healthcare needs. By 2007, the programme had trained roughly 10,000 parents in 35 of the 50 US states, affecting nearly 20,000 children. The effects have been wide-ranging and highly positive. Parents who took part in the training reduced unnecessary visits to A&E by 58% and experienced a 42% drop in the average number of workdays lost, while their children missed 29% fewer days of school. Researchers estimate that these changes in parental knowledge and behaviour save the US government up to \$554 per family per year in direct healthcare costs alone⁵.

A persistent gathering

Moya Wilkie summarises the NRDC annual international conference

How many LLN* tutors does it take to change a light-bulb? I don't know but, if everyone at NRDC's 6th International Conference had decided to change career, there was enough expertise in the room to set up a very successful electricity business. More than 130 delegates gathered to debate the themes of Social Inclusion, Persistence and Progression, and much more besides. Nearly 20% were teachers, with another third in weekly contact with learners, so discussions were firmly grounded in practice. An impressive 65% had 10 or more years' experience in LLN and, with representatives from New Zealand, Canada and the USA, as well as from Europe and all parts of the UK, the wealth and breadth of expertise was palpable.

The topics covered ranged from the macro – the Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Adama Ouana, challenged us to consider 'When is a society free of illiteracy?' – to the micro – Sam Duncan presented initial findings from her investigations with adult learners into 'What happens when we read aloud?' (Find out more on p24.) Adama's plea for more research, especially comparative work to make the most of what already exists, was supported by Helen Kaczmarek, then Acting Head of the DIUS Skills for Employability Unit. Helen acknowledged that the strength of Skills for Life relies on the strength of its partners and the data, research and evaluation they provide.

Barriers

The opening plenary explored the growing body of knowledge on persistence. Research into persistence has shown that the most significant barriers to progression are not socio-economic but instead

are the attitudes of learners themselves and the practitioners and organisations they learn with. (NRDC's QIA*-funded project 'Motivating Skills for Life learners to persist, progress and achieve' is producing practitioner and professional development materials¹.)

In another plenary, John Byner discussed NRDC work comparing UK and US data to explore connections and causality related to digital, economic and literacy divides². For example, initial findings suggest that literacy skills may decrease when people stop using PCs regularly. These and other findings are raising many new questions for research.

When Positive = Negative

Good practice was the clarion call of the speakers discussing health literacy, who noted the similar assumptions made by medical

professionals worldwide. Even if polysyllabic medical jargon is avoided, common words can take on different meanings: for example, a 'positive' blood test isn't usually cause for celebration. See p28 for a discussion of these issues.

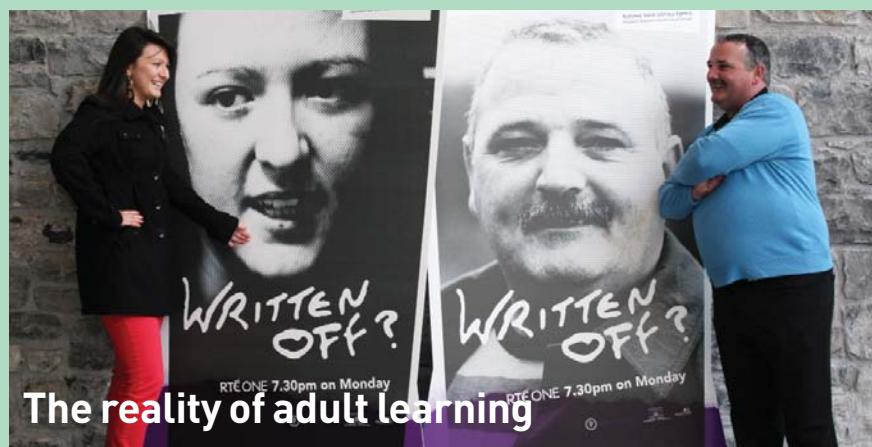
Moya Wilkie is Associate Director: Business and Communications at NRDC

Other articles in this edition of **reflect** discuss issues raised at the conference: see Cara and de Coulon (p18) and Kellersohn (p20).

Presentations from the conference (6th–7th March 2008) can be found at www.nrdc.org.uk/intconf2008

- (1) To find out more about this project and available resources, go to www.stickwithit.org.uk
- (2) Publication forthcoming (NRDC 2008) from project 'LLN and Digital Learning Divides: a Great Britain–USA comparative study'

* See Glossary, p34



Whatever creative techniques you've been using to reach and recruit learners, it's fairly safe to say that NALA* have gone one step further: they've commissioned a reality TV show. 'Written Off?' was developed by NALA to highlight adult literacy issues to a wide audience after their more traditional 'reach and teach' shows diminished in popularity. The title was chosen by the adult learners featured in the 8-part

series, screened in May and June 2008 on public television in Ireland. Love them or loathe them, there's no denying that reality TV shows have a big impact, and Kerry Lawless explained how NALA aimed to harness that to motivate potential learners, while ensuring that vulnerable participants were protected. Find out more about the issues and findings from this outreach experiment in **reflect Issue 12.**

'I think they're blimmin' brilliant!'

Sue Southwood reports on what learners are saying about 'Quick Reads'



Reading is not just about competence – it is also about attitude. Recent research by NIACE* shows that 'Quick Reads' foster a positive attitude towards reading; learners reported more positive social interaction at work and at home. In focus groups, learners discussed how they now helped their children with their homework and could interact more with their families. Tutors reported learners' leaps in confidence, progression to higher levels of literacy, and improved communication skills. Fifty-nine per cent of tutors reported that 'Quick Reads' had not only improved learners' reading but also their writing.

'I don't really like to talk in front of people or to read in front of them, which I did last week, and that was the first time, reading in front of seven other people. So it's nice to go home and say I was confident enough to do that in front of people because I would never have done that a couple of years ago.'

Kim, Widnes focus group

Those of us working in adult education have long suspected that success in learning comes from moving someone from thinking they cannot learn to believing that they can.

'I think to me personally, when the book was first given to me, I thought I'm not a reader. I have trouble reading.'

I've never kind of sat down and read a book, so when we were in class and started reading it, it was really good, I really enjoyed it.

Christine, Widnes focus group

This self-belief is vitally important in learner success and achievement.

But the strongest evidence showed how 'Quick Reads' helped to turn non-readers into readers. An impressive 78% of tutors said that half their learners went on to read another 'Quick Read' after their first one and 50% of learners had gone on to read other books after reading a 'Quick Read'. That's evidence of more than 15,000 learners picking up a book for the first time. Great news in the National Year of Reading, and a clear message for all publishers.

'I never used to enjoy reading but I'd still read to my kids even though I didn't enjoy it. Since I've read a Quick

The NIACE research was based on questionnaires and focus groups designed to gather respondents' views on 'Quick Reads'. The sample of 1500 literacy tutors and 30,456 learners represented 8.7% of Skills for Life classes for learners aged 19 and over. For a full copy of the report go to the NIACE website at www.niace.org.uk

Read and understood it, I enjoy reading with my kids and alone. It's really changed my life.'

Mina, Tooting focus group

'Quick Reads' appear to be embedded in Skills for Life teaching. The next steps are to persuade more authors to write new titles and to continue to gather feedback on how the books are being used by tutors in new and creative ways.

'I've read one other book that my daughter gave me and said "read that mum" when we were on holiday. And I managed to get through it, not reading everything, not reading all the big words but I managed to get through the story. And then when these came along, I found these were much easier, really good, and I've read most of them now. I read the first one, which took me a long time I must admit ... but then slowly I got more into them and more into them. And now, I keep saying to David [tutor], "Have we got any new ones? I've read them, have we got any new ones?" So yeah, I think they're blimmin' brilliant!'

Sylvia, Roehampton focus group

Sue Southwood is Development Officer (Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL) at NIACE

For information about 'Quick Reads', see www.niace.org.uk/quickreads/user/about.php or **reflect** issue 6 (Jackaman, p24).

* See Glossary, p34

BOOKS

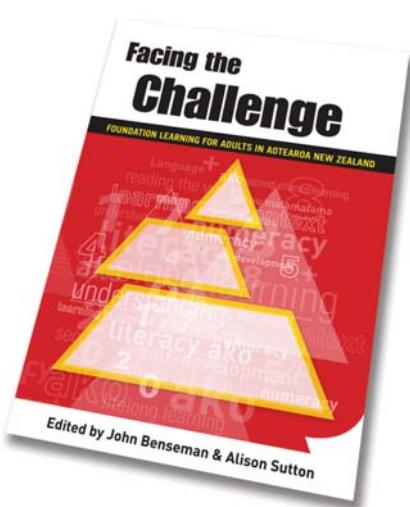
Facing the Challenge: Foundation Learning for Adults in Aotearoa New Zealand

Benseman, J. R. and Sutton, A. J. (eds) (2008)
Dunmore Press: Wellington
ISBN: 978-1-87-739930-5

Reviewed by Diana Coben

This book is billed as 'the first book published in Aotearoa New Zealand that focuses exclusively on foundation learning for adults. Written by experienced tutors, managers and researchers, it showcases local expertise and experience in the teaching of literacy, language and numeracy [LLN] to adults ... [including] English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and information and communications technology (ICT). It also examines teaching and learning in different contexts (including polytechnics, the community and workplace) ... [and] strikes a balance between theoretical perspectives and concepts and practical descriptions and analysis of real-life teaching and learning issues...'.

The 19 chapters are organised under four headings: Perspectives on foundation learning; Provision in different contexts; Teaching and learning; Insights from overseas. Contributors come from a wide range of backgrounds and professional contexts and draw from an impressively wide base of international and NZ research, policy and practice-based literature. The range and scope of the book is thus very welcome. The book aims to be a valuable resource for all tertiary education providers in NZ so, in writing this review for a UK-based journal, I asked myself 'What does this book offer to readers who are not "local" to New Zealand?'.



Throughout the book, issues are highlighted in ways that should be illuminating for those working with diverse learners elsewhere

My answer is: a lot. Readers will gain a valuable overview and unique insights into the state of play in LLN education for adults in New Zealand but they should also gain an insight into their own situation. 'Foundation skills' – or LLN for adults – are moving from the margins to the centre of public debate with respect to education, work and the national economy in New Zealand, as John Benseman states in the excellent first chapter. UK-based LLN practitioners are living through a similar change, brought about through the Skills for Life strategy in England and comparable strategies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Throughout the book, issues around working with diverse learners, including Maori and Pasifika learners, are highlighted in ways that should be illuminating for those working with diverse learners elsewhere.

The comprehensive section on 'Teaching and learning' is at the heart of the book, with chapters on: the nature and extent of adults' literacy issues'; the NZ Adult Numeracy Initiative; ESOL literacy; 'How we teach: a study of literacy and numeracy teachers teaching'; a model

of integrating foundation skills into other courses; the professional development of foundation learning tutors'; assessment in foundation learning; and using ICT in foundation learning. I found Chapter 13, 'How we teach...' particularly illuminating. It reports on a study of 15 teachers from a cross-section of LLN classrooms in NZ that aimed to describe and provide an insight into how professional practices can be debated and enhanced. One such practice is formative assessment, which has been introduced into NZ schools through the work of John Hattie of the University of Auckland and colleagues, and should be readily transferable to adult LLN learning environments, as recent research for NRDC at King's College London has found¹. Gill Thomas' chapter on the NZ 'Adult Numeracy Initiative' is also highly recommended.

To sum up: this book is of more than local interest and could be a useful model for a series of national studies of the state of play in LLN.

Diana Coben is Professor of adult numeracy in the Department of Education & Professional Studies at King's College, London

[1] Publication forthcoming (NRDC 2008) from project 'Formative assessment in adult numeracy' led by Hodgen, J., Coben, D. and Rhodes, V.

Publishing learners' writing

We would like to apologise for any misunderstanding that may have been caused by the article 'Seeing yourself in print' (*reflect* 10). Gatehouse Publishing has closed but Gatehouse Books are now produced and distributed by Gatehouse Media Ltd. For more information please see: www.gatehousebooks.com. Also, the website address given for New Leaf was inaccurate: it should be www.newleafbooks.org.uk

PRIME SITES

http://excellence.qia.org.uk

Gateway to Excellence?

Brian Creese looks at the revamped QIA website of ... everything

In its short history, the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) has had an enormous impact. It has the lead role in a number of national initiatives, including the National Teaching and Learning Change Programme, the Skills for Life Improvement Programme, and the Train to Gain Development Programme*. Few in the sector can be unfamiliar with QIA's trademark circles.

One of QIA's concerns is to ensure some legacy from these initiatives. As we all know, a new project starts with a huge flurry of activity, then the focus shifts to the next one. The Excellence Gateway is designed to alleviate some of this problem. It is an interactive repository of resources and shared experiences, and should be the first port of call for anyone looking at sharing best practice. The question is, does it do what it sets out to do?

A few weeks ago I wouldn't have been too positive but, as of April 2008, the discordant orange has gone and the shiny new, blue Excellence Gateway is with us. It is incomparably better, with content, design and navigation all greatly improved.

So let me get to the detail. The links to features highlighted on the front page are updated regularly, but include the Skills for Life pages. This latter category is a joy for those of us who never actually found the Skills for Life pages in the previous incarnation! There are also two 'Editor's choice'

features that will presumably change on a regular basis. The side navigation bar takes you to *Improvement services suppliers*, the *Ofsted Good Practice Database*, *Skills for Life*, *Personalisation*, *JISC TechDis*, *Glossary* and *Useful links*, while the top navigation bar is more about interactivity with *My Excellence Gateway*, *EG Community*, *Programmes and Services*, *Resources*, *News*, *Careers* and *Events*.

Size and scope

The size and scope of this site is extraordinary. The Ofsted guide alone is an enormous resource, with sections about building best practice and learner-centred self-assessment, all based on Ofsted reports and criteria. There is also a fascinating collection of over 300 case studies showing how good practice can be implemented.

But time to declare a personal interest. I have contributed many gigabytes to this site through my previous involvement in creating resources for the National Teaching and Learning Change Programme. Happily it is now much more obvious how to get to these (excellent!)

resources and download them; a random check suggested that the links and downloads were working well. My only disappointment was that the resource I produced a year ago was still filed only as 'Recent releases'.

The Skills for Life section is entirely revamped with sections aimed at employers and workplace learning, policy and funding, Skills for Life programmes, IAG for learners, research, and regional information, among others. There are links to the main suppliers of programmes, such as the Skills for Life Improvement Programme.

There isn't enough space to go through everything in any depth but, for such a huge site, navigation is largely intuitive and simple (a certain lack of consistency in how many times links need clicking and when new windows pop-up, but nothing serious), and it was always clear how to get back to the Home page.

Overall, I am delighted to report that, if QIA want the Excellence Gateway to be the first stop for those looking for good practice and quality improvement, this revamped site should do the job. If they continue to keep the links working, and regularly update the news and events, this should become a 'Favourite' on every FE teacher's navigation bar.

Brian Creese is Development and Quality Improvement Officer at NRDC

* See Glossary, p34



Get involved!

What do you think?

Good or bad? Love it or loathe it?
Please send us your opinions on the contents of reflect. We are always keen to receive comments, letters or articles about any aspect of Skills for Life, including practice, research, and policy.

What matters to you?

What would you like the world to know? What have you seen, done, or learnt recently that would interest the readers of **reflect**? Please tell us about it! Spread the word about issues that concern you, problems you've encountered, or good practices you want to share. Contact us with an idea, or even a first draft, and we can take it from there.

Be on the Board!

reflect's Editorial Advisory Board has vacancies for practitioners. Your involvement ensures that the magazine continues to reflect your views and interests. If you're able to commit to three meetings a year and want to help decide what will appear in **reflect**, contact us.

Take that first step!

reflect works best when it features the voices of practitioners from round the country. We aim to include at least one previously unpublished writer in every issue – next time, it could be you!

See yourself in print!

You – practitioners, trainee teachers and managers – are invited to write for reflect. It doesn't have to be an article. You could review a book, respond to an article, or comment on a new policy initiative. If you want to share your views, please get in touch.

If you want to be involved in **reflect**, please contact Moya Wilkie on m.wilkie@ioe.ac.uk or 020 7612 6797.

Glossary

ALBSU

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. Government agency established in 1980. Became independent charitable company in 1991. Became Basic Skills Agency in 1995, and located at NIACE since 2007.

CELTA

Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults.

CPD

Continuing Professional Development.

DCSF

Department for Children, Schools and Families. Responsible for all pre-19 learning in England and for children's services. www.dfes.gov.uk

DELTA

Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults.

DfES

Department for Education and Skills. In 2007, divided into DCSF and DIUS.

DIUS

Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills. Responsible for all post-19 learning in England. www.dius.gov.uk

ESOL

English for Speakers of Other Languages.

HEFCE

Higher Education Funding Council for England.

IAG

Information, Advice and Guidance; free and impartial advice service for learners, including adults.

INFED

Open independent not-for-profit website established in 1995 to provide a space for people to explore the theory and practice of informal education and social action learning.

www.infed.org

LLN

Literacy, Language and Numeracy.

LSC

Learning and Skills Council. Responsible for funding and planning education and training for learners over 16 years old in England.

www.lsc.gov.uk

NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency in Ireland.

NFER

National Foundation for Educational Research. Leading independent not-for-profit educational research organisation, providing evidence-based information for policy-makers, managers and practitioners in the UK.

NIACE

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education www.niace.org.uk

NVQ

National Vocational Qualifications are work-related, competence-based qualifications.

NYA

National Youth Agency. www.nya.org.uk

Ofsted

Non-ministerial government department responsible for inspecting and regulating care for children and young people, and inspecting education and training for learners of all ages. www.ofsted.org.uk

PSA

Public Service Agreement. PSAs detail the aims and objectives of UK government departments for a three-year period.

QCA

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Maintains and develops the national curriculum and associated assessments, tests and examinations in England.

QIA

The Quality Improvement Agency was established to guide improvement in further education. In 2008 it became (along with the Centre for Learning (CEL)) the Learning and Skills Improvement Service.

SENDA (2001)

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Train to Gain

The Learning and Skills Council's Train to Gain service provides impartial, independent advice on training to businesses across England. www.train2gain.gov.uk

NRDC in print



RESEARCH REPORTS

The right course

An exploratory study of learner placement practices in ESOL and literacy

James Simpson, Melanie Cooke and Mike Baynham

Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy

A review of programmes and practice in the UK and internationally

Published by CfBT

Greg Brooks, Kate Pahl, Alison Pollard and Felicity Rees

RESEARCH SUMMARIES

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

Samantha Parsons and John Bynner

Parents' basic skills and their children's test scores

Augustin de Coulon, Elena Meschi and Anna Vignoles

The value of basic skills in the British labour market

Anna Vignoles, Augustin de Coulon and Oscar Marcenaro-Gutierrez

PRACTITIONER MATERIALS

Working with young adults

In the 'Developing adult teaching and learning: Practitioner guide' series, co-published with NIACE

Bethia McNeil

Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy

A practitioner handbook

Published by CfBT

David Mallows



RESEARCH BRIEFINGS

Numeracy

JD Carpenter

Persistence

JD Carpenter

Family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN)

JD Carpenter



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www.nrdc.org.uk



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- Assessment
- Teacher Training
- Entry Level
- Effective Practice
- Learner Persistence
- Learners with Learning Difficulties
- Made to Measure (workplace)
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

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