



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

reflect

THE MAGAZINE OF NRDC ISSUE 12 OCTOBER 2008

SPECIAL REPORT

Freedom to teach, freedom to learn

Creative professional development

INSIDE →

Writing what they feel

Does it help learners?

Reality TV?

Adult learners in the
spotlight

David Lammy MP

The Minister writes



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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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The requirement to demonstrate evidence of engaging in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) on an annual basis, introduced in the 2007 regulations for teachers, has placed a new emphasis on CPD. In recognition of this and to explore some of the issues, this edition of *reflect* has a focus on professional development through the theme of Freedom to Teach, Freedom to Learn.

The Institute for Learning (IfL) has developed an online CPD tool for recording professional development activity which, interestingly for readers of this magazine and for colleagues from ActionAid, is also called 'reflect'. Sue Colquhoun from IfL explains how teachers can work towards the new professional status of Qualified Teacher Learning Skills on page 16.

Research has shown the importance of teachers' confidence in their own professional judgement in planning learning to meet learners' needs and of having the confidence to 'go with the teachable moment'¹. On page 5 Aileen Ackland from Scotland describes the power of using action enquiry as a form of professional development which also uses games and e-technology to engage learners.

David Lammy, Minister for Skills, pays tribute to all of those who have contributed to meeting the 2010 targets two years early and reflects on what these figures actually mean in terms of transforming the prospects of millions of learners on page 17. In sharing his thoughts with us on the road ahead for Skills for Life, he calls for us all to join forces to help people unlock their own latent talent and realise their ambitions.

Creative approaches to engaging learners is explored further in our Media section: two recent television programmes in the UK and Ireland have used 'real learners' to raise issues and awareness. Compare their differing approaches for yourself (pp22-26). Our review of the controversial Channel 4 production, *Can't Read Can't Write*, has been written by Rachel O'Dowd, a recently qualified teacher, who is featured in *reflect* for the first time.

Elsewhere in this issue there are other first-time contributions: Liz Boyden explores ways to use Web 2.0 technologies with ESOL learners and Georgie Carrington describes how she used a piece from the Voices on the Page storybank to inspire her own learners to plan a piece of descriptive writing.

If you want to be next issue's new writer, we'll be happy to hear from you. See our contact details on page 2.

(1) Baynham et al. (2007) *Effective Teaching and Learning: ESOL*. London: NRDC

Articles or letters for *reflect* should be sent to Moya Wilkie, NRDC, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL or email m.wilkie@ioe.ac.uk

Freedom to teach, freedom to learn

Helen Casey and JD Carpentieri consider the balance between risk, freedom and confidence

Freedom, Janis Joplin lamented, means having nothing left to lose. That was in the context of love. But what does freedom mean in the context of teaching and learning? In this Special Report, we argue that it means having everything to gain – and, even more importantly, having the confidence and awareness to recognise and capitalise on the moments when learners are most likely to gain.

Where does such confidence and awareness come from? Some teachers have a greater stock of these faculties than other teachers do, but everyone can develop and improve. Teachers are learners and, like all learners, benefit hugely from formative assessment. However, teaching is an odd profession, with far fewer chances for critical feedback than most other roles. As Miriam Sampard notes (pages 8–9), while teachers in initial teacher education spend a great deal of time talking about teaching and learning, these opportunities tend to peter out once a teacher is qualified. A lot of great teaching happens in isolation, with no other teachers able to learn from it.

One of the core principles of CPD* is that teachers can and should always be learning from each other. Teachers need to talk to each other about teaching and learning, so they

can share good practice, improve their skills, and develop the confidence needed to be a great teacher.

Helping or hindering?

Classroom observation can play an important part in this process. But can it also hinder? On pages 14–15, John Sutter wonders if both the curriculum and classroom observation can serve to constrain teaching and learning. Does the best teaching and learning happen in the margins, away from the bright lights of observation and adherence to the curriculum, when teachers feel it is safe to let their guard down?

Teachers under observation can be afraid to go with the 'teachable moment'¹ because this means taking risks. Some teachers may simply lack the confidence to take these risks, while others may have the confidence but be justifiably anxious that they could be criticised for doing so. When this happens, observation becomes an exercise in demonstrating and assessing mastery, not of teaching but of the classroom. This is the antithesis of the confident, free teaching that is open to the teachable moment.

Taking risks

One of the goals of CPD has to be to increase teachers' willingness and ability to go with or capitalise on the teachable moments. As John Sutter

writes, quoting the NRDC ESOL* Practitioner Guide², you must 'be prepared to take some risks'. This statement has two meanings, both of them essential. One, you must be willing to take risks. Two, and this is where CPD comes in, to take the right risks in the right way, you must be well prepared. To experience freedom, teachers need command not just of the classroom but of the process. At the same time, teachers need freedom to develop proficiency and professional autonomy.

Ultimately, freedom to teach means having a lot of, for example, confidence and skill, yet not being afraid to risk losing them – that is, having no fear of giving up 'control', being ready to take chances and to go with the teachable moments from which learners gain the most. That's good enough for me and my Bobby McGee.

Helen Casey is Executive Director, NRDC

JD Carpentieri is Research and Development Policy Liaison Officer, NRDC

(1) Baynham, M. et al. (2007) *Effective Teaching and Learning: ESOL*. London: NRDC
(2) Cooke, M. and Roberts, C. (2007) *Developing adult teaching and learning: Practitioner guides – ESOL*. London/Leicester: NRDC/NIACE

*See Glossary p34

Professional development through professional enquiry

Aileen Ackland reflects on the value of action enquiry in professional development

Policy for adult literacies in Scotland explicitly adopts a social practices perspective; the Scottish Adult Literacies Curriculum Framework¹ advocates the following principles.

- Purposeful learning builds on learners' prior knowledge and experience to construct new knowledge.
- Learning is a social activity embedded in a particular culture and context.
- Learning occurs through engaged participation in the activities of knowledge communities.
- Effective transfer of learning from one context to another requires that the learner understand not only the facts but the 'big picture'.
- Knowing when and how to apply what has been learned is central to expertise, and can be acquired only through practice.

Charged with developing a CPD* programme for a Teaching Qualification in Adult Literacies (TQAL), we were determined to ensure that it was consistent with these principles. We saw parallels between the key principles of learning and teaching adult literacies and learning and teaching for professional development.

Accordingly, we began our programme planning not with a list of content we would deliver but by imagining a journey of professional growth. This was to be a shared journey in which programme tutors would model and scaffold learning through enquiry, which would provide a social context rich with professional discourse, would

take in the 'big picture' of Adult Literacies, would inspire creativity in practice, and during which we would, as peers, negotiate our definitions of professionalism.

Piloting the programme

Four practitioner groups were set up for the national pilot programme, associated with the Universities of Aberdeen, Strathclyde, Dundee and Forth Valley College. The groups met separately but were linked through a

Virtual Learning Environment. Routine use of Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs and wikis², established a community of practice within which professional concerns, innovative ideas and fresh understandings could circulate constructively.

In the programme, research awareness and skills are developed cumulatively through four modules. In the third module (Expanding Our Repertoire) participants are required



Action enquiry project: case studies

Brian

I was concerned I wasn't effective in demonstrating how and by what means learners' reading skills were progressing. I felt that reading goals seemed 'soft' as opposed to writing and numeracy, which are more tangible for me. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that reading took place in a social setting with the emphasis on reading for pleasure. I wanted to examine and improve my practice in this area.

A literature review helped define the direction of the enquiry. I reviewed learning theories and aimed to introduce a dialogical approach in my teaching. I wanted to bring a constructivist perspective to the reading activities, in which people engage and interact with the text. An audit of practice led me to consider adapting resources and creating games. I hoped to try out different teaching strategies: Paired Reading and Staged Reading.

I developed a diary format for learners to record their interactions with texts and to encourage creative writing. Specific software was useful – TextHELP³ encouraged phonological awareness and MindManager⁴ supported awareness of plot and character

to undertake an action enquiry project, sharing their experience with the wider community through their blogs. For many participants this task was a pivotal point in their learning on the programme. Here are three examples.

Reflection

For Brian, the action enquiry process had confirmed his professionalism: he learned, 'I am a good tutor and facilitator' (a significant insight in a field in which feelings of 'impostorship' can undermine teacher confidence). Reflective



development. Games encouraged interaction within the group.

Responses to a questionnaire and evidence gathered before and at the end of the enquiry, allowed me to map learners' progress. My own critical reflection was supported by maintaining a journal, and I established a forum for critical friends to feed back on the project via wikispaces.

I concluded that the use of games encouraged group dynamics and critical interactions with texts. The reading diary supported learners' progress in engaging better with texts. Assistive technologies were helpful in evidencing literacy progress.

practice had made him 'more disciplined ... my practice is robust and forward thinking. I am developing creative skills'. For Sharon, too, action enquiry was an experience that 'validated her voice'. She had gained 'a conscious awareness' in which 'theoretical understanding improved practical application'. She believes that this has resulted in 'informed support for the tutors' she manages, as well as benefiting learners. Tina found that 'In doing research, you become the learner. Values and assumptions get challenged, and sometimes changed.'

Sharon

My enquiry project asked: 'Are games-based resources effective for learning or are they only serving the purpose of "interesting hook" through "playing"?' The data for the action enquiry included a literature review, learner questionnaires, tutor focus groups, and observations of current tutoring practice.

The most relevant literature I found was the NRDC report *Greater Than the Sum*⁵, which highlighted the lack of game-based approaches in adult numeracy programmes and called for the development of games and simulations, in particular using ICT.

Following Ollerton⁶, ICT instruction can be categorised as:

1. Enabling exploration: software that enables learners to explore ideas and take control of how to use it; learners interact with the computer, using it as a resource to make decisions about how to proceed with a task.
2. Pre-programmed: learners answer questions either correctly or incorrectly. The programmes are electronic versions of textbooks that contain repetitive exercises designed to keep learners occupied by practising narrow skills.

Participants, as well as programme leaders, drew parallels between themselves and their learners: **'We ask learners to go outside their comfort zones in their learning [as] without this it is difficult to progress, so why should we not be pushed outside ours? It's good to see how this feels (on reflection of course!) and be reminded of how valuable it is to face challenges.'**

Source: TQAL blog

The focus on enquiry in TQAL has helped practitioners to take ownership of their own professional development. This has transformed

I found that, in the groups I observed, there was no use of games which would constitute the 'enabling exploration' environment. All learners used ICT in a pre-programmed environment, which included the use of CD ROMs and internet websites, such as BBC Skillswise. Many learners struggled to understand what they were being asked to do and a fair amount of guesswork interfered with the end results, suggesting strengths where in fact there was uncertainty. The majority of tutors did not appear to follow up the approach with any other learning material, nor were they clear about the purpose of the resource. Games were thought of as 'fun activities' rather than as having any specific learning purpose.

I doubted whether anything new could be learned by such activities, if used in isolation from other teaching strategies. Nonetheless, my literature review established the value and relevance of games; it is the way in which these games are created, engaged with and used that determines the quality of the learning and teaching. The development of contextualised, explorative games for adult numeracy could benefit numeracy learning.

Undertaking this action enquiry raised my awareness of my own daily activity; I was able to make more informed

decisions about resourcing, for instance, and, by reflecting on my findings with other tutors and colleagues, I feel I have moved from being a passive practitioner to a more consciously active one.

Tina

I was concerned that, as a tutor, I do not give enough emphasis to writing and I wondered whether, by encouraging learners to use ICT (in particular texting on mobile phones), I might develop their writing skills.

In a beginner level ESOL group, the women all owned mobiles but had never learned to send or receive text messages. I decided to research the effect of improving writing skills by using mobile phones.

I planned a group project which included comparing the features of different phones; creating and sending messages; discussing appropriate vocabulary and punctuation. The aim over the four-week period was to produce a phone handbook, which the women had written themselves.

I gathered evaluation evidence by a number of methods including an initial questionnaire, examples of learners' writing, and critical lesson reviews. After the project, we collected information via a learners' survey. I found that all the women had

used text messaging outside the classroom.

Many learners expressed a sense of pride in being able to text their tutor and friends, receive messages back and read them. All said their confidence about writing had increased. Some said they liked making their book about their own phone. They made the point that, because they had created it, they could read it.

Text messaging reinforces behaviours by providing instant feedback and information sharing. It is personal and convenient and has the potential to benefit everyone. I believe that mastering this can help develop writing in general, perhaps using computers. As a result of this project, the learners are much more interested in writing, and they are producing longer more detailed scripts.

This action enquiry has changed the learners' and volunteers' perspectives, as well as my own, and I hope to continue to develop writing by using mobile phone texting as an entry point to using a computer.



their self-confidence, sense of agency and professional identity. Action enquiry helps you examine your own practice and see whether it lives up to your own expectations⁷. In Brian's words, 'Action enquiry helped me see I'm living the right way'. All of us involved in the programme have negotiated a concept of professionalism that incorporates a willingness to question one's beliefs and preconceptions and to be open to change – through critical reflection and through exposing one's practices to others and to enquiry.

'We will all take many positives from

our TQAL experience, I am sure, but the most positive aspect for me is that we are more active in our practice, and more critically aware of how and why we practise and apply more critical analysis to our profession.'

Source: TQAL discussion forum

Aileen Ackland is Curriculum Leader of the Scottish Consortium that has developed a new Teaching Qualification in Adult Literacies (TQAL).

For more information about the TQAL programme see: www.nrdc.org.uk/TQAL

A conference paper – Ackland, A. and Wallace, D. (2006) *Teaching teaching as social practice* – which outlines the rationale for the TQAL

curriculum, is available at www.nrdc.org.uk/TQAL

[1] www.aloscotland.com/alo/43.23.html

[2] See Liz Boyden's article on p30.

[3] For more information see: www.texthelp.com

[4] MindManager is a commercial mind mapping software application developed by the Mindjet Corporation. See: www.mindjet.com

[5] Coben, D., Crowther, J., Kambouri, M., Mellar, H., Moge, N., Morrison, S. and Stevenson, I. (2007) *Greater Than the Sum*. London: NRDC

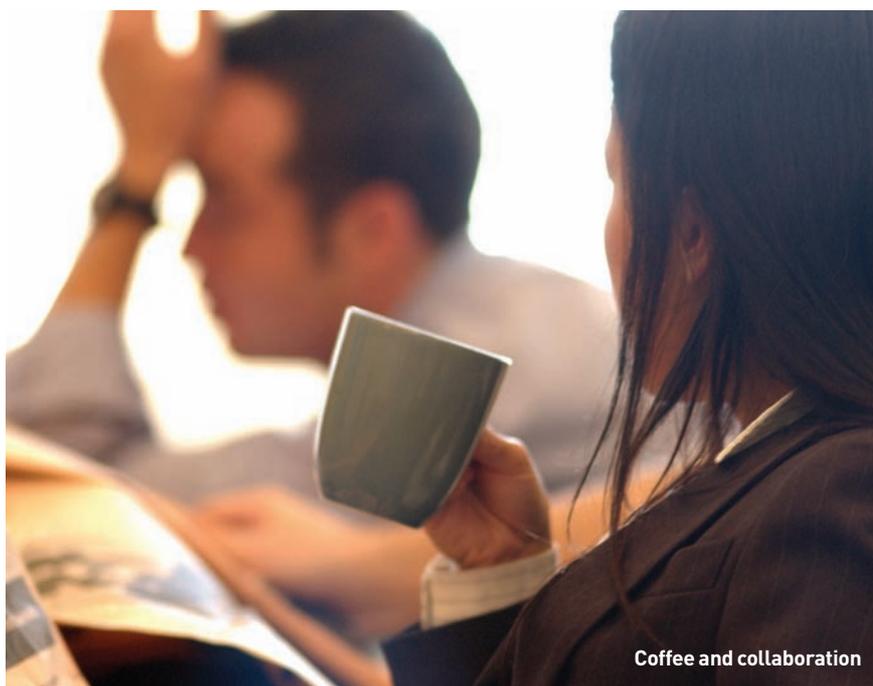
[6] Ollerton, M. (2003) *Getting the buggers to add up*. London: Continuum

[7] Whitehead, J. and McNiff, J. (2006) *Action Research Living Theory*. London: Sage

*See Glossary p34

I heard it in the staffroom

Miriam Sampson explores the potential of teacher learning communities



Coffee and collaboration

You are standing outside the door of your staffroom. As you open the door you tune in to the conversations that are going on. What are your colleagues talking about?

Are they puzzling over paperwork, fuming about funding or bemoaning bureaucracy? Or are they all so glued to their computer screens that no-one is talking to anyone else? What are the chances that you might find yourself eavesdropping on a conversation about teaching and learning?

Why does it matter if teachers aren't talking about teaching and learning? While critical discussion of each other's lessons is a recognised way of linking theory and practice in initial teacher education, it tends to drop out

of the picture once teachers are qualified. Yet initial results from the NRDC Teacher Study suggest that collaboration with colleagues, involvement in decision-making, and having a clear professional role all make a positive impact on job satisfaction: 'these factors all related to a sense of professional autonomy that allows teachers to have ownership of the processes that affect them and their learners'¹. Now that teachers in the further education sector are expected to undergo a process of 'professional formation' and maintain their skills through CPD*, it is important that opportunities are found for teachers to continue to engage in dialogue about teaching and learning and reflect together on their professional practice after they are qualified.

Lobbing a grenade

Earlier this year, Professor Frank Coffield, recently retired after many years in education and research, lobbed a grenade into the post-16 sector with his book *Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority...*². The catalyst was an Association of Colleges conference in 2006 at which, Coffield claimed, the topic of teaching and learning wasn't mentioned at all in three days of discussions! Coffield argues that teachers need to engage in real dialogue with their learners, and he goes on to suggest that dialogue with colleagues can grow out of this: 'Dialogue can have the further use of promoting professional learning among colleagues. Dialogue with learners is likely to lead on to discussion among tutors about particular students, but also about different approaches to teaching ... , tutors are encouraged to form "learning communities" or "quality circles" to discuss and plan the next stages of their work together.'³

Better teaching

From 2004–2007, I was involved in an initiative to support organisations that wanted to improve their inspection grades for literacy, language or numeracy provision. Some had 'failed' their inspections and others wanted to move forward from a 'satisfactory' grade. As other quality improvement initiatives at the time focused on systems and management, we chose to focus on teaching and learning, and what actually goes on between teachers and learners in the classroom.

Our starting point was to look at inspection reports of organisations whose grades for literacy, language and numeracy provision were low. We repeatedly found that inspectors drew attention to pockets of good classroom practice but commented that these were isolated examples so that the overall inspection grade remained low. Evidently, these organisations had good teachers on their staff but they were not giving them opportunities to share their skills and expertise in order to raise the standards of teaching and learning across their provision as a whole.

Organisations that joined our 'Better Teaching Partnership' overwhelmingly improved their inspection grades, and those that got the most out of the programme did so by building 'learning communities', using our materials as a catalyst. This involved creating opportunities for teaching staff to get together to think and talk about teaching and learning, and to learn from each other.

Making the most of materials

Since the start of the Skills for Life strategy in 2001, practitioners have been bombarded with materials from all sides. While early initiatives, such as the introduction of the core curricula and Access for All, were supported with extensive training programmes, more recent developments have had less practitioner training attached. Teachers have been left to sink or swim when it comes to getting the most out of materials. Yet inspectors have commented: 'Colleges have good access to the Skills for Life materials and other commercially produced resources. ... However, although access to resources has improved, the impact on teaching and learning is dependent on the skills of teachers.'⁴

The model for CPD promoted by the Institute for Learning emphasises professional development through reflecting on practice, and puts the individual teacher in the driving seat. This creates an ideal opportunity for groups of teachers to take the

initiative in their professional development, by sharing good practice and supporting one another to test out new approaches to teaching and learning. This could include modelling to colleagues ways in which they have used materials and acting as 'critical friends' to each other to support mutual improvement.

Reflecting on practice creates an ideal opportunity for groups of teachers to take the initiative in their professional development, by sharing good practice and supporting one another

In the Better Teaching Partnership, organisations sent representatives to termly briefing sessions where BSA/NIACE* staff modelled the use of training modules, allowing people to try out and discuss activities which they were then able to cascade within their own organisations. The materials were organised in 'bite-sized chunks' to enable maximum flexibility of use. People went away with ideas they could use the following week, either in staff development or in the classroom. Each term, they would come back and share what they had done since the previous meeting.

Organisations used these materials in a range of creative ways, all of which would work well as part of the implementation of the 30 hour CPD requirement. These included:

- Adding a 30–40 minute CPD activity into regular staff meetings, to stimulate discussion about teaching and learning.
- Producing a 'quiz' with key questions about teaching and learning for teachers to complete. The answers were cross-referenced to units of the Better Teaching Partnership materials which were reproduced as self-study packs so that people who wanted to improve their practice could find out more.
- Pairing teachers as 'buddies' to work together to support mutual improvement. This could include

observing each other's lessons, particularly when a new teaching approach was being tried, then providing focused feedback as a critical friend or acting as a sounding board for critical reflection after a lesson.

- Putting materials onto an online learning platform, to enable teachers to post comments and ideas as they tried out activities for themselves.
- Linking CPD activities to outcomes of classroom observation. The observer might recommend a section of the materials for self-study, or encourage two or three teachers to meet and work through activities together to develop a particular area of practice, such as questioning techniques or effective use of feedback.

One participant in the Better Teaching Partnership enthused to us about the lively conversations about teaching and learning that were now going on in her staff room, and the great ideas that her colleagues were sharing. Tellingly, this organisation's latest Ofsted* report praises the sharply focused staff development that has underpinned improvements in teaching, and commends the role of teacher partnerships in that process. How often do you encounter an idea that has the potential to improve outcomes for learners, boost teachers' job satisfaction and impress Ofsted as well?

Miriam Sampson is a member of the Literacy, Language and Numeracy team at NIACE

Resources from the Better Teaching Partnership can be found at:
<http://archive.basic-skills.co.uk/resources/>

- (1) Cara, O. and de Coulon, A. (2008) 'A comment by NRDC researchers, *reflect* 11, London: NRDC
- (2) Coffield, F. (2008) *Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority...* London: Learning and Skills Network
- (3) *Ibid*, p 37
- (4) Ofsted (2005) *Skills for Life in colleges: one year on*. HMI 2458

*See Glossary p34

Centres for Excellence

Alison Wedgbury provides the background to CETTs

The origins of Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training lie in the Moser Report¹ and in the Ofsted*/ALI* report². Together these led to the vision for the development of teachers that is contained in the report *Equipping our Teachers for the Future*³.

Before 2004, there was limited inspection of teacher training for the learning and skills sector in England. In fact, the first Ofsted report to focus on teacher training appeared in 2006, based on inspections during 2004/05⁴; it identified systemic weaknesses in provision. CETTs are a response to these and other reports, including those concerned with discrete Skills for Life provision⁵ and literacy, language or numeracy (LLN) support.

Eleven CETTs were set up in 2007, each supporting a network of partners⁶; there are currently 288 partners. Each CETT has its own membership, an office base, a small staff team and a website. They are funded until April 2010 by the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA – recently merged with CEL* to form the Learning and Skills Improvement Service).

What CETTs do

CETTs' plans vary according to their special focus or scope. They do not directly train teachers but work collaboratively with their partners to improve initial teacher training and provision of CPD*. They support

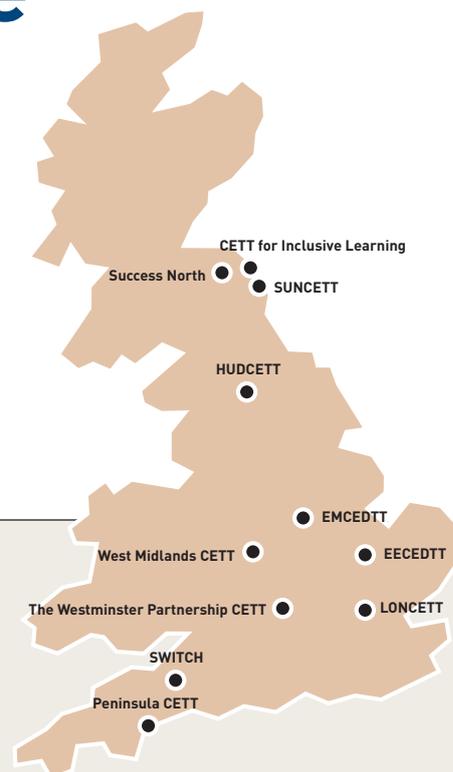
teacher-training provision offered in universities and FE* colleges that leads to qualified status. They run events, publish newsletters, host teacher-education network meetings, fund specific research and other projects, and disseminate resources.

CETTs and LLN

All CETTs promote national CPD offers and guidance on effective teaching and learning for priority provision where LLN underpins all other activity, eg in offender and NEET* learning. Some CETTs, while treating LLN as important subjects for development, see them as equivalent to other subjects in the FE range. Others (eg the East Midlands and the East of England CETTs) have taken on a special role in plugging a gap in teacher-training. They are helping to develop new, fully integrated numeracy Diplomas for teachers of numeracy in their region in 2008/09.

CETTs and you

Each CETT offers support, events, networks and training about teaching in general and about LLN in particular. If you are a teacher trainer, the CETTs want you to get involved. Find links to their websites at: <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/cett>. If you are a teacher looking for learning resources, use the main Excellence Gateway page at <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/>. If you want to get qualified or develop further, another contact is the Skills for Life Improvement



Programme: www.sflip.org.uk/workforcedevelopment.aspx

Alison Wedgbury is Development and Quality Improvement Officer, NRDC

For information about CETTs' membership, location, funding and expectations about quality, see the FAQs at http://excellence.qia.org.uk/page.aspx?o=cett_sfaqs

- (1) Moser Report (1999) *A Fresh Start – improving literacy and numeracy*. DfEE
 (2) Ofsted/AL1 (2003) *Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages: a survey of current practice in post-16 and adult provision*. Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate
 (3) DfES (2004) *Equipping our Teachers for the Future*. DfES, ref ITT Reform 1
 (4) Ofsted (2006) *The initial training of further education teachers: Findings from 2004/05 inspections of courses leading to national awarding body qualifications*. HMI 2485
 (5) Ofsted (2007) *Direct learning support in colleges: a survey of current practice*. HMI 2368
 (6) Details of CETT locations are on the QIA Excellence Gateway website at: <http://excellence.qia.org.uk/page.aspx?o=124172>

*See Glossary p34



Practical teacher training in London

Vera Hutchinson describes LONCETT's key research projects in its first year

At the heart of LONCETT's current work are three research projects.

Vocational teachers in further education and work-based learning

Led by Lewisham College, this project explores the transitions made by teachers from craft and vocational backgrounds as they move into teaching in FE* and work-based learning. Three vocational areas have participated so far: construction, hospitality and catering, and hairdressing and beauty therapy.

The project takes the form of action research, involving vocational teachers in reflecting, evaluating and attempting

The London Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training

LONCETT was launched in October 2007 to bring together teacher educators across London to do research, to develop the teacher training curriculum, and to share good practice and innovative ideas.

to improve their practice with the help of experienced researchers and other national 'experts' from the field of vocational education. The project has re-conceptualised ITT* as a form of situated learning where the trainee is seen as an apprentice developing

teaching skills in collaboration with more experienced colleagues who act as mentors in the FE workplace. It has highlighted the 'knowledge that you use every day', unearthing what is involved in the teaching of skills. The findings from the research will be applied from September 2008 to pilot a specialist mentoring framework for new vocational teachers. Curriculum resources will be made available online. Vocational mentors will be trained in applying these resources in their own curriculum area and a quality assurance framework for evaluating the effectiveness of specialist mentoring will be designed and tested.

This systematic and grounded approach to developing a new mentoring curriculum may be worth looking at for other areas in LLN teacher education.

Adult and community learning (ACL)

ACL provision in London is complex and diverse and there is a shortage of data. This research has been valuable in mapping provision and in identifying good practice. Led by City Lit, the project chose three research themes: exploring access to initial teacher

training for ACL tutors, use of RARPA (Recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning), and a study of mentoring practice. ACL providers, teacher trainers and trainee teachers identified a range of barriers to training for ACL tutors, including the lack of staff development strategies, finding the most appropriate routes, and resourcing. Plans for 2008–2009 include contextualising ITT and CPD* qualifications for adult and community learning, and customising mentoring

approaches for ACL contexts. Online resources will also be published to support the use of RARPA in different learning contexts.

Project for prison educators

There has been little research into the needs of teachers working in prisons. Led by City and Islington College, in partnership with St Giles Trust, five of the eight prisons in London have been included in this research. London prisons are distinctive: half of all prisoners are on remand, with average

ASSOCiate Online

Denise Robinson outlines the work of HUDCETT

Our primary aim at HUDCETT is to support professional development for teacher educators in the sector. We have a website (<http://hudcett.hud.ac.uk>) where we report on our projects (some 17 in 2007–08) and offer advice and guidance to ITT* providers; we also disseminate ideas, case studies and guidance through briefings, newsletters and events. We do not make awards or implement quality assurance; that is the responsibility of the awarding bodies and the provider institutions. Essentially, we, like other CETTs, offer networking opportunities as well as services and resources that support both ITT and CPD*.

ASSOCiate Online: 'MySubject'

A major activity at HUDCETT is its national remit to extend the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) known as ASSOCiate Online to as many ITT providers as possible. This has been developed over the last three years with central funding. It covers the 50 subjects identified in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF); minority subjects are catered for through a facility whereby the trainee/teacher can find other trainees/teachers who are working in the same subject area. It also allows cross-referencing to be made to level and context of teaching. Each subject

The Huddersfield University Distributed Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training

HUDCETT includes some 70 partner institutions from across the Lifelong Learning sector, with five ACL* institutions, seven WBL* companies and six other organisations with an interest in the CETT's role. The other members are the partners from the PCET* consortium as well as the pre-service courses at the University of Huddersfield.



area of the VLE is moderated (a critical feature if the system and appropriate support is to be made available) and a system of e-mentoring is being developed. E-mentors are teachers who are experienced and qualified in their subject; training is given as many teachers are still developing their skills in e-learning. Moderators and e-mentors are paid, with the added bonus of experienced teachers having the option of free access to ASSOCiate Online in exchange for undertaking e-mentoring of a trainee. This facility

offers genuine e-learning or blended learning; interactivity is the critical feature, rather than merely using the system to provide and receive resources (although the VLE gives access to relevant resources that have been designed, moderated and rated by users).

'MyStudents' and Skills for Life

Another section of the VLE is being developed to offer a similar facility of support on learner issues; for example, dealing with 14–19 year old learners, LLDD* learners, adult learners and Skills for Life learners. This is in its early phase of development (although we now have a website within the VLE for LLDD guidance) and we would be interested to work with Skills for Life teachers who could contribute case studies or resources; these will then be shared across the 5000 members we already have and the anticipated 8000 members we hope to have by summer 2009.

Denise Robinson is Director of HUDCETT

To find out more about ASSOCiate Online, please access the guest login at: <http://associate.hud.ac.uk>

For enquiries, please contact Denise Robinson at d.robinson3@hud.ac.uk

*See Glossary p34

stays of six weeks; a large proportion are ESOL* speakers and staff turnover is high. The profile of learners' characteristics presents particular challenges for teachers and highlights the importance of language, literacy and numeracy awareness and provision throughout the prison. In the prison population, 65% have numeracy at Level 1 or below in contrast to 23% of the general population, and 52% of men and 71% of women in the prison population have no qualifications compared to 15% of the general population¹.

This project has provided a picture of the context of learning in prisons and of the issues that prison educators face. Teachers suggested that a major difference between learning in a prison, in contrast to a college provider, is the emotional state of the learner, affected by prison overcrowding and by isolation from families and friends. The initial research has identified specific areas for development of pedagogy and materials in ITT qualifications for prison educators. Work has already started on a specialist PTLLS* certificate as a preparation for new teachers wishing to work in prisons, and there are plans for an optional module for prison educators that could be nationally accredited.

Looking to the future

LONCETT has been successful in giving a voice to a range of teacher education communities. Tony Nasta, Director of LONCETT in its first year, has suggested that CETTs can also have a role in collectively providing a barometer of how government policy is affecting provision.

Vera Hutchinson is Pre-service Placement Development Manager, London Strategic Unit at the Institute of Education

For more information on LONCETT projects, go to: www.loncett.org.uk

(1) Bromley (2006) *Bromley briefings: Prison Factfile*. London: Prison Reform Trust

*See Glossary p34

Reflections from the chalkface

Ian Jasper considers the implications of the new teacher training syllabus

A new syllabus for the specialised training of literacy teachers working in the post-compulsory sector has been in force since autumn 2007¹. One year into the new courses is a good time to reflect constructively on what this new syllabus has meant for literacy teachers and teacher trainers, and on what has been learned.

Firstly, after six years of teacher training in this area, I am more than ever convinced of the importance of continually evaluating what we do and never settling down to a one-dimensional explanation of our practice, eg that our job is to prepare learner to take a succession of official tests that 'measure progress'. This might satisfy those interested only in formal indicators of raised literacy levels but it does not lead to more literacy.

Explore and develop

The most important role of the literacy teacher today is to work with learners to develop the range of ways that they interact with text and the quality of these interactions. Literacy teachers should aim to influence the ways in which their learners engage with the world. The literacy teacher should constantly explore and develop different aspects of teaching and their understanding of the literacy life of learners. Courses for literacy teachers should aim to equip participants with the tools and knowledge they need to continue their own development.

Clearly, this goes well beyond finding the best ways to teach punctuation, sentence construction, spelling or other 'technical questions'. These are important, but I feel more strongly than ever that any efforts to reduce literacy teaching to this will not lead to a positive outcome. Teachers

should work to increase literacy and, if this comes into conflict with teaching people to pass tests, then the former should prevail.

Sustainability

The second major lesson for me is that issues of sustainability desperately need to be addressed if we are not to find ourselves continually returning to square one. My impression is that many of the teachers completing specialist training courses are working in unstable professional environments. At any one time, about half the participants on any particular course are uncertain of the circumstances of their employment; they are working either on short-term projects or in centres that are undergoing perpetual restructuring. As a teacher trainer, I see many teachers in precarious employment and I cannot imagine how, in their workplaces, they are able to develop the teams and communities that underlie successful teaching. If literacy teaching is to be sustainable, teachers' employment must be sustainable.

Lastly, I have learned, beyond any doubt, that the vast majority of teachers are dedicated to their learners and go well beyond what is formally required when trying to support them. When the histories of Skills for Life come to be written and judgements are formed from a longer perspective, I am sure that the efforts of literacy teachers will be positively recognised.

Ian Jasper is Senior Lecturer and Programme Director in the Department of Post-compulsory Education and Training, Canterbury Christ Church University

(1) See *reflect* 11, p21

Speaking from within: archaeological perspectives

John Sutter exposes underlying contradictions in teachers' practice



'The most effective teachers in the study also drew on learners' own experiences and lives outside the classroom – bringing the outside in – and, crucially, encouraged them to "speak from within". We observed that, where learners were speaking from within, they produced longer, more complex stretches of talk, which we know to be essential for language learning and acquisition to take place.'

In late 2006 I was asked to be a critical reader for the ESOL* Practitioner Guide in the NRDC 'Developing Adult Teaching and Learning' series¹. I read it with a mounting sense of excitement, and above all, of validation – it rang bells that chimed perfectly with my own experience and intuitions as an ESOL practitioner. In particular, among the 'Principles for ESOL classrooms', it suggested:

'If a student comes to class with a need to communicate, allow space for the story, problem, anecdote, request or query ... stretch learners beyond their prescribed level ... make judicious decisions about when to correct a learner ... encourage learners to set the agenda in speaking activities ... let go of your lesson plan ... be prepared to take some risks with topics and let go of control.'

At a time when mainstream ESOL practice appeared to be becoming more and more technologised, when ever-increasing importance seemed

A goal of all language teaching [must be] real communication, the ability to express oneself, to make meanings that are true to the speaker's intended message

to be attached to teachers' control of their lessons through planning, staging, and mastery of technique, this was revolutionary advice. And yet it fitted with my own intuitions and experience, and I was sure it would fit with those of other experienced teachers. This wasn't new – in fact, grandma could already suck these eggs. This wasn't revolutionary in the sense of being a whole new perspective on ESOL, or a shiny new methodology; it was, rather, a fresh archaeology of ESOL practice, a 'digging up' of teachers' knowledge and practice, exposing that this is what learning can be like.

So, at LLU+*, when we had the opportunity to disseminate the findings from the NRDC's work in a series of CPD* sessions as part of our work for the Skills for Life Improvement Programme, we leapt at the chance. We chose 'Speaking from within' as a title because it encapsulates what must be a goal of all language teaching – ie, real communication, the ability to express oneself, to make meanings that are true to the speaker's intended message. But we also chose it because it hinted that this was something out of the ordinary; it wasn't the kind of speaking that ESOL learners usually do in their lessons.

Emotion and commitment

Early in the CPD session, we asked participants to discuss what

'speaking from within' meant. And of course, teachers knew right away: it was learners trying to say something important to them; it was characterised by emotional investment and commitment, by a focus on meaning, by urgency, by the need to communicate, to tell a story, to opine.

So, we asked, when does it happen, this 'speaking from within'? Teachers felt that it occurred mostly in informal chat at the beginnings and endings of lessons, or in the 'looser' bits of group discussions and pair-work. In other words – remarkably, when you consider our remit is to teach people to communicate – the real 'stuff' of language learning, the most authentic communication, appears to be happening around the margins of ESOL lessons. This includes the amorphous beginnings and endings, the bits in between the 'stages' of the lessons, the 'lost' interchanges between teachers and learners, and between learners and learners, when a 'task' has not yet started, or has broken down, or been interrupted in some way (an aside, a joke), or has ended.

Problematic principles

And when we asked participants to consider the 'Principles for ESOL classrooms' cited above, they responded much as I had when I first saw them: they had very similar principles of their own, or they felt that these were things they already did. But many also felt that these could be deeply problematic things to do, particularly in observed lessons. Here, it was felt, the loss of teacher control was potentially dangerous for the teacher – whether by allowing learners to 'set the agenda', or allowing an unplanned learner story to unfold, or by 'letting go of a lesson plan', or by 'stretching' learners – perhaps beyond the confines of a curriculum level – or by failing to correct sufficiently in the eyes of the observer.

This is surely evidence for how anomalous the current ESOL context is: a profession with one set of values,

'Good language teaching is subversive. It encourages activity, noise, initiative, disorder. It conflicts with the ethos of the school. It conflicts with the syllabus, text book and the examinations. It gets the teacher into trouble.'⁴

principles and wisdoms that it keeps private, and a whole other set for public display.

How has this come about? Where have these constructions of 'good practice' come from?

Direction and control

Perhaps they come from our own history. In the session, we explored Holliday's analysis of EFL* methodology² which traces the origins of many 'mainstream' EFL/ESOL techniques and approaches back to audio-lingualism, with its essentially behaviouristic approach to language learning. Here can be found many of the roots of the techniques and discourses that still dominate mainstream ESOL practice – highly controlled lessons where learners are taught 'target' language, where the teacher has clear 'goals', where what is said, and who it is said to, is directed and staged. The teacher conducts the class as if it were an orchestra, eliciting the 'target language', correcting and repairing.

Holliday's analysis also explains the preoccupation with sentence-level work in speaking – it's another legacy of audio-lingualism. Discourse-level work – which both the ESOL Practitioner Guide and the earlier Effective Practice Project suggest help promote learners' speaking skills – is seen as being outside 'mainstream' practice.

Willis and Willis³ have a very similar analysis in their critique of highly structured grammar lessons, and use the word 'conformity' to characterise learner talk in such lessons – and perhaps it could also describe

teacher behaviours. This is display rather than discourse: learners may appear to 'master' a bit of language but this, as we know, is no guarantee that they will be able to use it outside the classroom.

These styles of teaching depend on teacher control, so they need a great deal of forward planning. Planning a lesson can itself be a highly controlling and teacher-centred activity. Current conceptions of planning – in particular the idea that a plan is a written object, made up of clearly defined 'stages' that together make up a series of steps towards a 'learning goal' or 'target language', seems to me to also be a direct legacy of our audio-lingual history and to militate very effectively against 'speaking from within'.

Trouble and subversion

What is particularly problematic are the competing claims of, on the one hand, teachers' willingness to 'follow' the learners and, on the other, the demands of 'planning'. Our archaeological work seems to reveal that, buried under an overwhelming public ethos of 'control', teachers have their own hidden domains of knowledge, wisdom, and intuition. Perhaps we should reach down to these domains, and 'teach from within'.

John Sutter is Senior Lecturer, ESOL Division, LLU+*

(1) Cooke, M. and Roberts, C. (2007) *Developing adult teaching and learning: Practitioner guides – ESOL*. London/Leicester: NRDC/NIACE

(2) Holliday, A. (2005) *The Struggle to Teach English as an International Language*. London: Routledge

(3) Willis, J. and Willis, D. (1996) *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Heinemann

(4) Rees, A. (1997) 'A Closer Look At Classroom Observation: An Indictment' in McGrath, I. (ed.) (1997) *Learning To Train: Perspectives On The Development Of Language Teacher Trainers*. London: Prentice Hall

* See Glossary p34

From qualifications to Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS)

Sue Colquhoun summarises the route to QTLS through the Institute for Learning

Having recently moved from teacher education and training in ESOL* to the Institute for Learning (IfL), I identified closely with the sentiments expressed in 'The new qualifications: one year on' in *reflect* 11¹. In particular, I agreed that the qualifications are over-assessed and sometimes too theoretical. However, I took heart from the comment that 'Perhaps the emphasis on professional development from the Institute for Learning signals a positive change'.

Professional formation

The IfL is the professional body for teachers, tutors and trainers in the FE* and learning and skills sectors. It is responsible for conferring the status of Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) and Associate Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS)². This status is conferred through a process called 'professional formation' which allows teachers to describe how LLUK's* new overarching occupational standards³ are evidenced in their teaching practice, along with aspects of subject currency, teaching and learning, reflective practice, and planning for CPD*.

There is no time limit on the process of professional formation, except that newly qualified teachers must achieve QTLS or ATLS status within five years of employment in the sector after first gaining their teaching qualifications. However, the IfL recognises that the achievement of QTLS and ATLS will depend on individual circumstances and each teacher's ability to meet the standards; some teachers may be able to complete the process in a very short time.

Members of the IfL, including those with QTLS and ATLS, must adhere to the Code of Professional Practice and remain in good standing through CPD. With these safeguards in mind, the IfL has settled on a robust self-evaluation model for evidencing professional development; in essence, teachers tell their stories through a 'professional formation account'.

The account

Applicants for QTLS and ATLS submit their professional formation account to the IfL online, via REfLECT⁴ (Ed: No relation!). It must include supporting evidence from a variety of sources, such as scanned documents, video, peer reviews, audio etc.

The account comprises two forms of evidence:

- 1 Mandatory: common for all candidates and all teaching roles.
- 2 Personalised: reflections and evidence appropriate to the individual applicant.

Mandatory evidence

- 1 An approved qualification (or equivalent) at a level appropriate to QTLS (Level 5) or ATLS (Level 3 or 4)
- 2 Numeracy and literacy skills at or above Level 2.
- 3 Supporting testimony from a member of the IfL who is in a category equivalent to the applicant.
- 4 Declaration of suitability – a self-declaration of fitness to practise as a teacher.

Personalised evidence

- 1 Subject currency – evidence of the applicant's expertise in their subject area, eg a Level 4 subject specialist qualification and/or a personal reflection on subject-

related expertise, and/or peer observation from a suitable expert witness.

- 2 Teaching and learning – evidence of the applicant's ability to use effectively the skills and knowledge acquired through initial teacher training.
- 3 Self-evaluation – an analysis of the applicant's learning needs and goals for the next 12 months.
- 4 Professional development planning – an individualised learning plan detailing how the applicant will address the needs and goals identified through self-evaluation.
- 5 Reflective practice – a reflection on the impact of professional development on the applicant's teaching practice and the benefit to learners.

Quality assurance

The Code of Professional Practice requires all new entrant teachers achieving QTLS or ATLS status to have their professional development sampled within the first five years of their teaching careers. The IfL recommends that all new teachers should be observed within 24 months of the award of QTLS or ATLS status.

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For more information, please visit www.ifl.ac.uk or phone 0844 815 3202

(1) Vargas, K. and Bird, B. (2008) 'The new qualifications: one year on', *reflect* 11. London: NRDC

(2) See *The Further Education Teachers' Qualifications (England) Regulations 2007* www.dius.gov.uk/publications/guide2007no2264.pdf

(3) See www.lluk.org/2799.htm

(4) REfLECT is the IfL's online personalised learning space for members.

*See Glossary p34

David Lammy

David Lammy MP, Minister for Skills in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, writes for *reflect*

The ability to read and write is so essential to modern life that anyone who struggles with basic skills is at a huge disadvantage – at work, in the supermarket, as a parent, as a citizen. In our knowledge economy, which places a premium on high-level skills, we cannot afford to have anyone of working age in this position.

Successes

Since 2001, we have invested £5 billion in Skills for Life. As a result, 5.7 million adult learners have improved their skills on 12 million courses – not only in FE colleges, but in waste management sites and bus depots, in libraries and union learning centres.

In June, I was delighted to announce that over 2.25 million adults have now gained first qualifications, meaning we have met our 2010 target two years early.

These figures are a tribute to the efforts of teachers, colleges, and the unions, whose dedication to engaging hard-to-reach learners, expanding work-based training and improving teaching has been recognised by the National Audit Office. More than that, these figures reflect a transformation in the prospects of learners themselves – men and women who can now help their children with their homework, perform more effectively at work, and are more likely to gain further qualifications.

Challenges and priorities

But let's not underestimate the challenges still ahead of us. An estimated 5.2 million people in England aged between 16 and 65 would fail GCSE English. Around 6.8 million lack the numeracy skills expected of an 11-year-old. There's clearly much more for us to do, and I want to highlight three priorities for the coming years.



The first involves remaining focused on reaching the Government's target for 95% of adults to have functional literacy and numeracy skills by 2020. Between now and 2011, we want an additional 597,000 adults to achieve a first literacy qualification (at Level 1 or above), and 390,000 to achieve a first numeracy qualification (at Entry Level 3 or above). After 2011, the targets become even more demanding, so it's vital that we increase participation rates through such reforms as skills accounts, the forthcoming Adult Advancement and Careers Service, and through embedding Skills for Life in other learning – especially vocational education.

Second, we must continue working closely with employers to identify and address basic skills needs. More than 54,000 learners have already started a Skills for Life programme through Train to Gain – at a time and a place convenient for them and their employers. Over 29,000 learners have achieved a qualification, fully funded by the Government. We have now extended eligibility for Skills for Life support to all employees with basic skills needs, irrespective of prior

qualifications, while the right to request time to train should be a powerful lever for increasing demand. By 2011, we expect Train to Gain to support more than 70,000 Skills for Life learners each year.

Finally, we require a special effort to make progress on numeracy and tackle the cultural acceptance of poor mathematical skills in this country.

Targets

For the current spending review period, we have set separate literacy and numeracy targets. We will expect all providers to screen their literacy students for numeracy skills needs. We have extended existing incentive schemes, including bursaries and 'golden hellos', to attract more specialised numeracy teachers. And we will build on the success of the 'In Our Hands' advertising campaign to encourage more adults to overcome their fears about returning to learning.

Meeting these various priorities won't be easy, but all the research conducted by the NRDC has been unambiguous about the benefits of adult basic skills – for job prospects, earning potential, and the educational attainment of children.

All of us – teachers and union learning reps, college principals and government ministers – must join forces as never before to help people unlock their own latent talent and realise their ambitions.

David Lammy MP is Minister for Skills in DIUS* with responsibility for the Commission for Employment and Skills, Leitch implementation, Train to Gain, Skills Academies, Skills for Life and apprenticeships.

www.davidlammy.co.uk

*See Glossary p34

Advocating adult literacy in international development

Jan Eldred describes the work of the Literacy Working Group

Current difficulties in financial markets highlight the reality of global interdependence in the most tangible and painful ways. No longer can politicians, alone, shape national economies; global influences are at play. Shifts of manufacturing and servicing from industrialised to developing countries, along with interdependency on food and fuel, highlight the need to not only understand global economics but also recognise that investment in skills is vital in developing flexibility, coping with uncertainty, and dealing with rapid change and competition. The UK has invested far more than any other industrialised country in adult literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages, recognising the importance of these skills to optimise human potential and fulfilment.

The same rationale must be applied to developing countries if HIV and AIDS, maternal ill-health and infant mortality, climate change and crop failure are not to have a devastating impact not only on the poorest people on our planet, but on all of us.

Our interdependence means that, if we neglect to invest in supporting emerging economies, we do so at enormous cost. Powerlessness, a sense that hegemony rests elsewhere, and inequality of opportunity to lead healthy, fulfilled lives lead, understandably, to unrest and protest. Helping to create a more equitable world, where wealth and influence are more evenly distributed, can be



supported by education and training; adult literacy has a vital role to play in advocating greater global harmony.

Education For All

Seven years ago, 164 governments and organisations committed to expand educational opportunities for children, young people and adults by 2015. The resulting Education For All (EFA) initiative set the agenda and the goals, including literacy, for adults and young people. The goals are concerned with:

- early childhood care and education
- universal primary education
- meeting the learning needs of young people and adults
- developing literacy and literate environments
- promoting gender parity and equality

- improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on the mid-term review of the EFA goals reported:

'Illiteracy is receiving minimal political attention and remains a global disgrace, keeping one in five adults (one in four women) on the margins of society.'¹

The statistics tell a graphic story: worldwide, 774 million people lack basic literacy skills; 64% of them are women. In addition, gender disparity is huge with only 59 countries achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005. The quality of teaching is of great concern, with crowded and dilapidated classrooms, too few materials, and

large pupil–teacher ratios. HIV/AIDS has impacted enormously on the teaching force. In addition, 72 million children remain out of school. One of the EFA goals is to reduce illiteracy by 50% by the target date.

The Literacy Working Group

Adult literacy and numeracy have been prioritised as essential aspects of living and working in industrialised countries; the Literacy Working Group advocates that aid to developing countries should reflect similar priorities.

The group was set up as a result of growing interest in this area, generated especially by the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2005)¹ which looked in great depth at the state of literacy in the world. The UK National Commission (UKNC) for UNESCO, the UK Forum for International Education and Training (UKFIET) and the British Association for Literacy in Development (BALID) organised linked events in December 2005 and January 2006 to discuss the findings.

Discussion at these events identified a need to create a continuing UK forum for the exchange of ideas, for support and promotion of international literacy programmes and campaigns, for advocacy for literacy development, and for mobilising UK literacy expertise on behalf of development efforts worldwide. The Literacy Working group was established as an autonomous group, made up of representatives of organisations and of expert individuals, committed to the promotion of literacy. It is linked to the UKNC but independent of it. The current membership is drawn from the three founder organisations plus NIACE*, ActionAid, NRDC, and some individuals who are highly experienced in this field.

The group aims to encourage the UK Government to develop policies, planning and implementation of more adult literacy programmes – including family literacy – in international development activities, and to encourage integration of literacy into aid programmes. The shared vision is

The development of their own literacy and numeracy skills equips teachers to influence the quality of the learning and achievement of their learners

that the EFA targets would be more effectively and efficiently achieved if such approaches were adopted.

Activities

Early in its formation, the Group met with the Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg, to hear about its literacy priorities. It commissioned and edited a position paper on literacy concepts and strategies, which was distributed and discussed at UKFIET and International Adult Learners' Week conferences. Members have met on several occasions with senior DfID* officials to discuss literacy in UK aid programmes and have produced for them, under contract, briefing notes on the concepts, issues and practices of adult literacy. The group responded to UNESCO (2007)¹ from a literacy perspective, as well as making input to the UK Confintea* report which will contribute to the global conference of Confintea in May 2009.

The group takes an holistic view of the EFA goals, arguing that many could be achieved more readily and sustainably if adult literacy was woven into the policies and programmes that deliver them. For example, the goals concerning early childhood, primary education and gender would be more effectively reached if family learning programmes were advocated and developed. Both in industrialised and in developing countries, the children and families experiencing the greatest poverty and disadvantage have the least access to learning support. We know the benefits of family programmes in supporting families with the greatest needs.

We also know that integrated approaches to learning, where literacy and numeracy are closely linked to

vocational education and training, are effective in developing both the technical skills and the literacy skills. Drawing on the expertise of teachers of adult literacy as well as of VET* teachers ensures that the learning is explicit, relevant and purposeful. Moreover, we are absolutely clear that the quality of teaching and learning is central to the achievement of EFA goals, just as the UK Skills for Life programme has invested massively in training and developing teachers to achieve its purposes. The development of their own literacy and numeracy skills equips teachers to influence the quality of the learning and achievement of their learners.

Future plans

The future work of the group includes a continuing dialogue with DfID and DIUS*, making presentations at conferences, and exploring how we can extend the advocacy role to include the media as well as politicians who are sensitive to the purposes and priorities of the group. We will continue to explore opportunities for enhancing and adding value to other DfID policy priorities. We will work to influence global meetings as well as through organisational and personal networks.

We recognise that as the demands of living and working in the 21st century change and increase, vibrant economies, which support social justice, active citizenship and lively democracies, also require lifelong learning policies and practices. The vision must also embrace UK aid programmes in developing countries where the needs are even more obvious and vital. We know how to take such imaginative steps; there must be the global, national and local political will to lead and support them.

Jan Eldred is Associate Director for Literacy, Language and Numeracy at NIACE and current Chair of the Literacy Working Group

(1) The UNESCO *Education for All: Global Monitoring Report* is published annually. See www.efareport.unesco.org

*See Glossary p34

Using Voices on the Page in an adult literacy class



The Voices on the Page online storybank contains more than 900 pieces of writing produced by learners in basic skills classes in England in the last two years. Here, **Georgie Carrington** describes how she used one of these to inspire her own learners to plan a piece of descriptive writing.

I teach literacy to a group of adult learners working at Entry 3 to Level 1 in a further education college in London. The learners come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including one deaf learner who uses British Sign Language through a communicator.

Rationale

I wanted a lesson that would revise and develop a range of literacy skills that would enable learners to plan a description of a person they know well. They had been working on descriptive writing techniques in previous

sessions, including extending their use of adjectives, using the senses, and making comparisons using simile. Most members of the group had completed at least one piece of descriptive writing, but some had found the planning process difficult, particularly using paragraphs to denote change of subject.

I decided to use an authentic piece of learner writing to encourage my learners to think of themselves as writers and also to consider allowing their own work to be read by others; this might be in the group, or by

submitting it to the next Voices on the Page competition. I chose 'Mandy in a Village' as it provided a clear description of Mandy's appearance, personality and lifestyle, which I felt really brought her to life on the page.

The lesson

First, we read the passage aloud, using a modelled reading approach; I read a few lines aloud and asked learners to repeat so that they could practise pronunciation, intonation and decoding skills using the teacher as a 'model'. The group then discussed whether they thought the description was

Mandy in a village

Ha Pan Tang

There is a small village in northern China where there grows a lot of tea trees. It is a very nice place where tea trees grow on the cliff, waterfalls and the river goes around the mountain. Mandy lives here.

She is a very traditional Chinese lady. She always wears dark traditional cloth and always wears a bun on her head with a little red flower. She doesn't speak much but she likes to talk to herself a lot. She is very independent with a strong

opinion and also very stubborn, she doesn't like people's help. She lives in a small stone bungalow which is next to her son's house. She refuses to live with her son. She prefers to live on her own because she wants more freedom to do whatever she likes in her own house. Although she is bossy and stubborn she is also a kind and very caring person. She looks after her grandson and does some housework for her son. She cooks her own dinner and after dinner she always takes a chair and

sits in front of the house. She puts her feet up on a stool with a pipe in her hand, watching people passing by and chatting with them. She enjoys this moment very much. The villagers respect her because she is always there when someone needs help.

I think she is just like an evergreen flower, cutting when leaves are green and sharp, but very beautiful when it is blooming. She never

sits down doing nothing, although she is seventy-six years old. She is like a bicycle. A bicycle runs slow, but is reliable and active. I will always remember her.



effective and why or why not. They all seemed to find it very effective; the discussion revolved around the clarity of the writing and how adjectives and imagery are used to create a vivid impression.

Next, we analysed the passage in more depth, starting by comparing the author's use of paragraphs with the learners' ideas about how they might organise the writing into paragraphs. This led to an interesting discussion on the conventions for using paragraphs and to what extent they are helpful to the reader. I asked the learners to highlight adjectives in the text, and learners who were familiar with their meaning gave definitions of key vocabulary. Learners also discussed the juxtaposition of the two similes used in the last paragraph to describe Mandy and the impression that they create.

I introduced the use of different planning methods by discussing the reasons for planning writing and the different planning methods that learners already used. Learners worked in small groups to trial three planning frameworks: flow charts, spidergrams, and sticky notes, using BBC Skillswise material. I asked each group to use the framework to plan a generic description of a person by deciding on the main features to be included; each group fed back their findings to the whole class, followed by discussion and comparison of the effectiveness of each framework. Through this process the learners were able to choose a planning framework that they found helpful and use it to structure their writing by applying the key features of a description to describe someone they knew well.

The learners' descriptions from this session were coherent and well-structured with a wider descriptive vocabulary than they had used before. Not all the learners wished to submit their work to Voices on the Page, but I am encouraging them to share their work with others by using it as the focus for more activities.

Georgie Carrington is a literacy tutor at the College of North East London

Learner feedback

The learners were enthusiastic about the use of authentic learner writing as a way of developing reading and writing skills.

'It was useful, it gave me lots of different ideas.' (Jalaruban)

'It is a good idea to read other students' work because you learn about how other people feel, what their thoughts are and you can read into it about the writer's psychology.' (Sara)

'Students learn how to write amazing or real things by looking at other people's work. In this way students are encouraged and motivated to write something and they write more.' (Kazi)

Kazi attended the Voices on the Page celebration in May and particularly enjoyed the discussion

with the competition winners about their writing. One of the winners talked about jotting down observations as they occur and using these in descriptive writing. Kazi was impressed by this suggestion and has started to use this approach to stimulate new ideas: 'This way I observe different people, doing different things which I can use in my writing.'

As a result of attending classes and taking part in the competition, Kazi now feels more confident in her writing: 'Before the course I didn't think about writing, now I know how to write. If I think something is interesting, I can write it down quickly.'

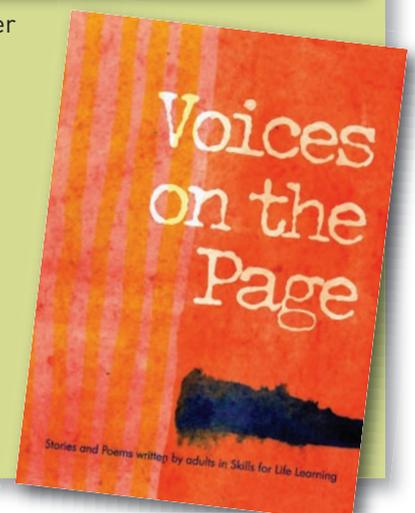
Voices on the Page celebratory event, May 2008



Above: Tony Benn, former cabinet minister and Labour MP, talking at the event

Above left: Winners of the Voices on the Page competition receiving certificates

Winning entries to Voices on the Page in 2007 and 2008 appeared as inserts in *reflect 8* and *11*. See also *Voices on the Page*, edited by David Mallows and Samantha Duncan, New Leaf Books



Written off?

Tom O'Mara describes a pioneering approach to distance education in Ireland



In 1997, the number of learners participating in adult education in Ireland was about 5000, approximately 1% of those found to be at Level 1 in the International Adult Literacy Survey¹. In response, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has been using mass media, particularly television, to highlight literacy issues, outline the support that is available, motivate people to return to education, and provide opportunities for learning in the privacy of their home. It has been groundbreaking and challenging work.

Previous approaches

From 2000 to 2004, we produced five TV series, called *Read Write Now*.

The fly-on-the-wall approach allowed us to keep the learners' needs central

These attracted an average of 122,600 viewers, 12% of the total TV audience. Each series featured real learners who had difficulties with literacy in everyday situations and included up to eight minutes of didactic learning. On average, 7500 learners called the supporting freephone line over the 12 weeks of each broadcast to request accompanying free workbooks and advice. Callers were told about local literacy centres, which subsequently

reported an increase in numbers.

In 2006 and 2007, we tried a new approach – *The Really Useful Guide to Words and Numbers*. This was a studio-based programme with a 'named' presenter, and was again accompanied by free print materials, freephone support and a website. The series attracted an average of 80,000 viewers, 10% of the total audience, in a 12 noon Sunday time slot. Although the viewing figures represented a good share of the audience for that time, we felt that we needed to get literacy back into a prime-time slot. We also knew there was money available from the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) for the

right idea². In order to access this round of funding we had to get the national public service broadcaster (RTÉ) on board, and then convince BCI that we had a new and innovative idea.

Making a change

There were two compelling reasons to change our format. Firstly, we wanted to increase the motivational aspect of the programmes, to encourage more people to return to education. Instead of simply picking up the phone and calling us for a free book, they would see on TV the implications of this decision and make a considered choice to return to learning. We would then monitor this take-up in order to better appraise the impact of television.

The second reason for changing format was to create something fresh, to reflect contemporary viewing habits, and to capture viewers who might not have watched adult literacy programming before. Following consultations with RTÉ and various production companies, it became clear that broadcast space today is significantly different from what it was in 2000. It would be almost impossible to get broadcast, production and funding support to develop TV programmes containing didactic content for a peak schedule slot in Ireland in 2008.

So, from 2007, and with €500,000 funding from BCI, NALA developed a new eight-part television series on adult literacy and numeracy to be broadcast on RTÉ One. We called the series *Written Off?*.

The series followed the everyday lives of 11 adult learners as they progressed through an eight-week specially designed intensive learning course in the classroom that brought in specific learning content related to real-life situations (budgeting for a meal, going for a night out at the dogs, etc). Unlike *Read Write Now* and *The Really Useful Guide to Words and Numbers*, *Written Off?* did not include didactic content. As a fly-on-the-wall documentary, the series showed the benefits of returning to education and the effects this has had on these learners' lives.

Course design

The course ran for eight consecutive weekends, with two break weekends in between. Learners arrived in the centre on Friday evening at 6pm and stayed until 3pm on Sunday. Over the eight weekends, the learners had 104 hours of classroom tuition, compared with a typical two hours' tuition per week in the local Adult Literacy Service (ALS).

For the most part, learners participated in group sessions, but one-to-one tuition was possible at any stage. This allowed learners to receive specific support on areas of individual weakness. Learners also worked on exercises during the week at home and participated in extra-curricular activities directly related to the classroom content.

Not quite reality

We made a clear distinction between reality television and fly-on-the-wall documentary-style programmes. The primary purpose of reality television is to entertain and appeal to a mass audience. The fly-on-the-wall approach on the other hand allowed us to keep the learners' needs central. We knew it would be important to have an entertainment element to attract viewers to the new series but we were clear that the dignity, privacy and needs of the learners should never be compromised for the sake of entertaining television. Core to the delivery of the course was adherence to NALA's Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work, which commit us to maintaining a learner-centred approach and designing content around individual learner needs. We

envisaged the series as a motivational call to action, where educational participation and progression would be presented in an interesting and entertaining but factual and ethical manner.

We therefore made sure that course designers, tutors, NALA staff, and television production personnel agreed baseline principles about ethical and pedagogical concerns before we started, and then met regularly to iron out any difficulties as the work proceeded. NALA staff were present for a significant proportion of filming time and commented on draft versions of each programme. The result was a successful compromise, creating a product that everyone was happy with.

Recruiting and supporting learners

The Media Advisory Group³ approved the participation of 11 learners, who were selected by interview after a national recruitment drive. We tried to select learners to represent a cross-section of the population with regard to age, location, school experiences, and socio-economic background. One of the selection criteria was that participants' learning needs and goals would be well served by a course designed to meet Level 2 standards in the National Qualifications Framework for Ireland⁴.

FETAC* validated the course and so provided the option of accreditation for interested learners. All 11 learners opted to work towards an accredited award and all achieved the Level 2 Certificate in General Learning.

Exploitation?

People involved in adult literacy work often feel protective of people with literacy difficulties, feeling that they may be vulnerable to exploitation. These concerns were heightened as NALA engaged with the media industry. The aim was to show the power of learning, particularly in a group. For those of us familiar with the experience, this is readily understood. For others it is an unknown. In using a television programme to portray it, we hoped to encourage and motivate others to engage in a learning opportunity.

Following the series, the course tutors and NALA engaged with each learner individually to support them in continuing with their learning. Nine of the eleven learners enrolled in additional adult learning courses within a short time of finishing filming of *Written Off?*

Impact

The programme enabled us to showcase adult literacy practice to a potentially very large audience of people who might like to develop their literacy and numeracy but, for whatever reason, have not taken that step. We knew that the series did not simulate exactly what a learner would encounter in their local ALS but we hoped that potential learners would be inspired by the learners on the programme and decide to take up a learning option. The programmes also informed the general public about the whole issue of adult literacy.

We benefited from extensive and positive pre-publicity. For example, we were 'Pick of the Week' in the TV section of five major Irish newspapers, both broadsheets and tabloids, and were featured on *The Late Late Show* (Ireland's best known chat show) – the first time that adult literacy and learning had received such high-profile coverage.

The series was given a prime time slot in May/June 2008, and attracted an average of 210,000 viewers a week, 14% of the viewing public. Considering it was up against *Coronation Street*, we were happy with this, especially as the largest numbers of viewers came from the farming community and people over the age of 55, both traditionally hard-to-reach groups. From May to July 2008 we received 650 calls. This was fewer than for the *Read Write Now* shows but might be because we did not advertise the freephone number within the programmes, nor did we provide the incentive of a free book to get people to call. In previous series, our freephone team spent a lot of time administering the distribution of books and had few callers who actively wanted to engage in learning



We see potentially limitless possibilities as broadcast, web and information technologies continue to converge in making learning and knowledge accessible across so many aspects of our lives

over the telephone. We wanted to move the service away from the public perception of a free book service to that of a true distance education service provider. In *Written Off?*, 142 people engaged with our tutors over an extended period, with 42 still working with us today.

Reach and motivate

The purpose of previous NALA TV series had always been to both 'reach' and 'teach' adults who would like support to improve their literacy skills. With *Written Off?*, the emphasis has shifted to reaching adults, showing them that support is available and that they can improve their skills, and motivating them to take that first step by contacting their local literacy service or calling our freephone number.

Callers to the freephone number are either directed to local literacy services or allocated to a Distance Education Tutor. This tutor, who is a trained adult literacy practitioner, calls the person back at a convenient time, conducts an initial assessment, and supports them for as long as is required, using print, web content and other materials.

In addition to the freephone service, we developed two websites to support learners.

www.writtenoff.ie allows people to watch each programme whenever it suits them. www.writeon.ie is an interactive learning website providing initial assessment, individual learning plans, interactive learning content, and post-assessment options at Level 2 to independent learners who have access to the internet and the skills to engage with interactive online learning materials.

The future

NALA is committed to widening opportunities for adults to engage with flexible learning options that suit their lives and interests. Adults with literacy difficulties need a flexible service that delivers results. We see potentially limitless possibilities as broadcast, web and information technologies continue to converge in making learning and knowledge accessible across so many aspects of our lives.

Tom O'Mara is Distance Education Co-ordinator at NALA

For further information, contact Tom O'Mara at tomara@nala.ie

All these projects were evaluated by external consultants. The evaluations are available on the NALA website at www.nala.ie/publications

(1) OECD (1997) *Literacy skills for the knowledge society: Further results from the International Adult Literacy Survey*. Paris:OECD

(2) The Broadcasting (Funding) Act (2003) gives the BCI responsibility for the disbursement of 5% of the licence fee to support new TV and radio programmes. A specific requirement is to support new TV programmes in the area of adult literacy. Funding for the non-broadcast elements of NALA's Distance Education Services is secured annually from the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

(3) The Media Advisory Group includes literacy learners, with representatives from NALA, government departments, practitioner and learner organisations, the TV production company and RTÉ.

(4) Corresponds to Access Level 3 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and to Entry Level in the England, Wales and Northern Ireland National Qualifications Framework.

*See Glossary p34

'Can't Read Can't Write'

Rachel O'Dowd reviews the Channel 4 series broadcast in July/August 2008

The three-part Channel 4 series *Can't Read Can't Write* followed the progress of nine adult learners who enrolled for a six-month literacy course taught by award-winning teacher¹ Phil Beadle. While the programme provided some moving footage of the varied experiences of a diverse group of adult literacy learners, I am sure I was not the only Skills for Life teacher in the country to feel infuriated by the way in which Beadle dismissed current professional practice out of hand.

Reinventing the wheel

Beadle is a self-confessed ingénue when it comes to teaching adult literacy. Yet, as he prepares for the task, he contents himself with a superficial review of the National Core Curriculum (NCC) before tossing the books aside in disgust. He observes what appears to be an ESOL* class (failing to acknowledge that this is a distinct discipline) and dismisses the provision as incompetent and inappropriate for native speakers. He then embarks on a learning journey of his own. In the course of his mission he manages to well and truly reinvent the wheel, taking credit along the way for insights and approaches that are common knowledge to professionals in the lifelong learning sector. At the same time he misses more than a few tricks.

Had Beadle had the humility to allow himself to be mentored, he would have realised that teachers across the sector use the NCC not as a textbook but as a frame of reference, working intelligently and creatively within and around it, using the very methods he goes on to 'discover' in the programme. A quick look at a website such as



Can't comment?

We asked Channel 4 what the aim of *Can't Read, Can't Write* was: were they planning to challenge and change government policy? Provide inspiration to adults with low levels of literacy? Showcase good teaching practice? Or create headline-grabbing sensational tv? They declined to comment on these issues, and also failed to provide any information on support offered to the featured learners once the filming had finished. One of the learners present at the launch event held before the programmes were broadcast, explained how frustrated he felt at not reaching his goal during the six-month course and asked for continued support to help him – support that clearly hadn't been forthcoming from the programme makers.

www.skillsworkshop.com reveals that awareness of differing learning styles is widespread, and that kinaesthetic, visual and auditory resources are used and shared by teachers across the country as a matter of course.

In his interview with Andrew Marr on *Start the Week* (July 7), broadcast in advance of the screening of *Can't Read Can't Write*, Beadle complained that there are 'no course materials based on synthetic phonics at all in the world of adult literacy'. It is not

clear which course materials he has been exposed to. The literacy teachers I know use phonics judiciously with those learners who can benefit from it. 'Materials' can include good old-fashioned pens and flipcharts. As the programme illustrates, the phonics approach does benefit many learners, but is not a panacea.

Personalised learning

Two of Beadle's learners leave the first session in tears. The *Start the Week* interview indicated that Beadle does have some familiarity with the Milestone levels in the NCC, but unfortunately he does not acknowledge this in the programme, complaining that Entry 1 is not a suitable starting point for beginners. Milestone materials would have helped him to carry out an initial assessment of his learners in a much more sensitive way.

Beadle seems intrigued to find that his learners all have different reasons for their inability to read and need different forms of help. Access for All, a government initiative with which all Skills for Life teachers are expected to be familiar, explores in some detail the diverse obstacles that adult learners face and suggests techniques and methods for removing these obstacles. Had Beadle taken a more sympathetic approach to the institutions or organisations currently dedicated to providing opportunities for adult learners, he would have found that it is a common requirement that they identify and acknowledge learners' unique backgrounds, goals and aspirations, and create and update individual learning plans. Non-celebrity Skills for Life teachers may not have access to nine space-hoppers or the luxury of calling upon the services of an expert calligrapher, but the challenge of differentiating within a group-teaching context is embraced, often with ingenuity and creativity, on a daily basis.

Tests

Successes and breakthroughs are celebrated in the series, but

Reinventing the wheel?

The LLU+ Professional Development Centre was used by Channel 4 during the filming of *Can't Read, Can't Write*, but LLU+ had no editorial control over the programme and no involvement in recruiting the students. They offered training to Phil Beadle, a self-confessed novice at teaching reading and teaching adults, but this was not taken up.



Beadle's desire to live up to his billing as 'controversial' and 'unorthodox' leads him to overlook important aspects of contemporary teaching policy and practice

curiously, in the final episode, Beadle uses the tests associated with the NCC, the very framework he previously disparaged, in order to assess the learners' progress and to validate his own performance. He sets the exams in an Oxford college, an environment which might inspire some but is surely likely to intimidate others. John, who is dyslexic, is urged to sit a paper which he is bound to fail. Kelly, who has made considerable progress during the six-month experiment, is castigated for failing the last paper by three marks and letting herself down. Beadle misleads star pupil Linda into thinking that a Level 2 literacy qualification is the same as a GCSE and is then disappointed when she has the courage and independence to question the whole operation, preferring to chart her own course.

Giving credit where it's due?

Beadle has written a letter, published on the Channel 4 website associated with the programme, that addresses itself directly to potential adult learners. In it he recommends several phonics books and provides a link to the British Dyslexia Foundation. Nowhere, however, does he suggest that there are classes available and teachers qualified to help². Fortunately the 'Find out more' link on the main menu of the site makes good this omission.

While *Can't Read Can't Write* succeeds in raising awareness of both the emotional issues around learning basic skills and the pedagogical issues involved in teaching them, Beadle's desire to live up to his billing as 'controversial' and 'unorthodox' leads him to overlook important aspects of contemporary teaching policy and practice. This conceit prevents him from giving credit where it is due and, more damagingly, suggests to potential learners that there is little to be gained from enrolling in government-funded classes taught by experienced, skilled, committed but ultimately 'ordinary' teachers.

Rachel O'Dowd is a recent PGDE* graduate, currently working at HMP Manchester

(1) Phil Beadle won the Guardian Award for Teacher of the Year in a Secondary School in 2004.
 (2) The ads on TV gave information about classes but this was undermined by the content of the programme.

Love it or loathe it?

Whatever your opinion of the programmes featured in this issue of *reflect*, they certainly provide a useful source of material. If you're a teacher trainer, consider the potential to use clips from the shows with your trainee teachers to prompt discussion of different teaching styles, as one example of many.

JD Carpentieri considers changing perceptions and shifting motivations

Teachers and targets: a tale of knights and knaves?

Why do targets play such a central role in lifelong learning, and what do teachers really think about them? New NRDC research on the impact of Skills for Life on practitioners is providing some interesting answers to that second question. But, before we get to that, we first need to take a brief look at the role that targets play in the welfare state as a whole, and understand how and why they have helped re-shape the British welfare state over the last 30 years.

Public servants

In the early years of the British welfare state, governments tended to view public sector workers as what Professor Julian LeGrand of the

London School of Economics and Political Science has called 'knights'. Like the white charger-riding heroes of old, these modern-day knights were characterised by self-sacrifice but, instead of rescuing fair maidens, they served the great British public. The key, says LeGrand, is why these public sector knights did their jobs – not out of self-interest, but for the benefit of others. Doctors practised medicine not for the relatively high wages, but to improve the health of their patients; teachers taught not primarily because they enjoyed teaching, but because they wanted to help learners. From the 1940s to the 1970s, LeGrand argues, this was government's perception of public

servants (note 'servants'). And, because these public servants were seen as putting the needs of the public ahead of their own, governments were largely content to avoid getting involved in how practice was carried out. The Treasury provided funds, and the experts were largely left to get on with their jobs as they saw fit. It's no surprise that, in compulsory education, this era has been called 'the golden age of teacher control'.

Thatcherism

But, in the late 1970s, something monumental happened to the public sector – Mrs Thatcher. Under her leadership, government took a

dimmer view of human nature in general and of public sector workers in particular. Under Thatcher and then Major, public sector workers were seen as being very much like workers in the private sector – self-interested. Doctors practised medicine not just to improve health and save lives, but also because of the high salaries. Teachers taught not just to help learners, but also because they preferred the autonomy of the classroom to the monotony of office work, and the long holidays. Thatcher saw public servants not as LeGrand's 'knights', but as what the same author has called 'knaves' – by which he means not the modern meaning of 'someone who is easily fooled' but the classical meaning: 'someone who is motivated primarily by self-interest'. In Thatcher's view, because public sector workers were human, they were self-interested, so government could not always trust them to do what was best for the public. Government needed to provide extrinsic motivations rather than depending on an intrinsic sense of public duty – that is, better outcomes could be achieved by using carrots and sticks than by relying on public sector workers' innate goodness. This was particularly true since, under this way of thinking, teachers and other public sector workers could not only not be trusted to do what was best for their 'users', they could not necessarily be trusted to even know what was best. The age of the autonomous expert was over, and targets became a powerful way of focusing practitioners' minds on what governments felt mattered most.

New Labour

Under Blair and Brown, this model of public sector motivation has been developed and refined (and in some ways softened), as discussed in detail in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit's 2006 paper². Like LeGrand, New Labour argues that the optimal public sector incentive structure is one that takes account of both knightly and knavish motivations – ie self-sacrifice and self-interest. This is because most individuals are neither fully knightly nor fully knavish, but fall

Most individuals are neither fully knightly nor fully knavish, but fall somewhere on a continuum between them

somewhere on a continuum between them. For example, doctors do want to help people, but are also motivated by pay. The unexpectedly large cost of the recent GP contract provides a case in point. The Government wanted GPs to perform certain practices more often, such as the monitoring of blood pressure and diabetes, and thus offered GPs financial incentives for these procedures. The Government significantly underestimated how much impact these financial incentives would have on GP behaviour, and now finds itself with a three-year bill for GP services that is £1.76 billion higher than expected³.

Income isn't the only external motivator, and it is far more common (and affordable) for government to use the stick of targets than the carrot of money to motivate public sector workers. We can see examples of this in NHS waiting list targets, Skills for Life targets and a host of other policy

areas. And, just as financial incentives are not the only extrinsic motivation, the desire for money is not the only knavish characteristic affecting job choice and motivation. One stereotypical knavish motivation is laziness, but positive characteristics can be knavish as well, so long as they appeal to one's self-interest – for example, many teachers find office work stultifying and get great personal satisfaction from the autonomy and creative expression traditionally afforded their profession.

A complex relationship

In all areas of the public sector, we can see evidence of a complex set of motivational interactions involving government, practitioners, and external incentives such as targets – with the public in the middle, feeling the impact of these conflicting forces. But it should be obvious to any observer that different public sector roles are likely to exhibit different levels of knightliness and knavishness. Most doctors are drawn to medicine both by the desire to do good and the desire to do well, but no one teaches literacy, language or numeracy in the hope of getting rich – or, if they do, then perhaps the modern meaning of 'knave' should

The NRDC Teacher Study

This three-year investigation of the impact of Skills for Life on teachers, trainers and other stakeholders, surveyed teachers three times between 2004 and 2007 (with 1027 teachers taking part in the first sweep, 755 in the second, and 560 in the third). In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with 63 practitioners from the survey sample. The study is an unparalleled resource for understanding the impact of Skills for Life on teachers and other lifelong learning professionals, and investigates an extremely wide range of issues, including assessment, salaries and job satisfaction. Reports and papers generated by the study are due for publication this autumn⁴.



Photofusion

apply. Adult education teachers are likely to be motivated by knightly concerns, particularly regarding social justice and helping the most disadvantaged. At the same time, in comparison with most workers, they have always benefited from a great deal of autonomy – and still do. How do targets impact on these overlapping motivations?

Critical but positive

In the NRDC Teacher Study, the vast majority of practitioners expressed a critical but positive view of Skills for Life. Learner participation and achievement figures are much higher than ever before, and, while practitioners were sometimes critical of certain aspects of Skills for Life, no-one wanted to go back to the 'pre-Skills for Life' days.

Looking specifically at targets, there was more criticism although, according to related NRDC research⁵, individuals' place on the delivery continuum appeared to affect their views. At the policy-making end of the continuum, targets are seen favourably, and as being based on the economic need of the country. For example, one senior regional development worker said that his only real complaint about the targets was that they were not high enough for his region to meet its future economic needs.

Most managers and coordinators were also largely happy with targets, arguing that they drove up quality and participation. 'I've welcomed the targets,' said one, 'because you can get people who've been sloshing about within basic skills for years. Now you have to make a decision as to whether you are actually doing any good for that learner, whether you're serving them best.' Another spoke of the relationship between targets and increased funding: 'I regard meeting those targets as payback time for all the money and advertising... I feel sort of comfortable with that because that's the reality of the world.'

At the coalface, though, many teachers were less happy with targets.

Central to this was the notion of autonomy: even though managers had no say over what the targets were, they still felt that they retained a great deal of autonomy over how those targets were met. Some teachers, in contrast, felt that the targets were reducing their autonomy, sometimes to a significant degree. However, what seemed especially important to teachers – and here we see their knightly nature shining through – was not whether or not they were losing autonomy in general, but whether or not they retained sufficient autonomy to do what they felt was best for their learners.



The vast majority of practitioners expressed a critical but positive view of Skills for Life

Strategy and targets

How does this ultimately knightly position affect the sector as a whole, and how does it relate to targets? To answer these questions, it helps to ask another: do targets drive the Skills for Life strategy or do they fuel it? This is an important distinction. If targets drive the strategy, then the strategy serves the targets rather than vice versa. But, if targets fuel the strategy, their role is that of necessary enabler, much like the petrol in a car engine. This notion was implicit in Neil Robertson's statements to practitioners at the National Skills for Life conferences in November 2007. Robertson, who was at the time Head of the Skills for Life Strategy Unit, argued that, in the most recent

government spending review, the achievement of the DIUS* Skills for Life targets had given him a tremendous competitive advantage. According to Robertson, he was able to tell the Treasury that, even though most Skills for Life teachers aren't exactly in love with the sector's targets, they had met and even exceeded them – thus holding up their end of the funding bargain. This provided concrete evidence that, in these tighter financial times, Skills for Life warranted, by the Treasury's own stringent criteria, a strong financial settlement. In policy areas where targets had not been met, Robertson told the audience, senior civil servants found themselves in much weaker bargaining positions.

In this view, targets or other external incentives are a necessary part of the bargain struck between government on the one hand and public sector professionals such as Skills for Life practitioners on the other. It's a long way from Beveridge's 1942 vision but it may be a more realistic arrangement. Now, if only Skills for Life practitioners could be given the same sorts of financial incentives as are offered to GPs...

JD Carpentieri is Research and Development Policy Liaison Officer at NRDC

(1) LeGrand, J. (2003) *Motivation, Agency and Public Policy: Of Knights and Knaves, Pawns and Queens*. Oxford University Press.

(2) Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2006) *The UK Government's Approach to Public Service Reform – A Discussion Paper*. Cabinet Office

(3) Carvel, J. (2008) 'GP practices earning 58% more for 5% less work, audit office finds'. *The Guardian*. February 28.

(4) For example, Cara, O. and Litster, J. (2008) 'Teacher attitudes towards the Skills for Life national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills', in (eds) Reder, S. and Bynner, J., *Tracking Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills: findings from longitudinal research*. Routledge.

(5) Appleby, Y. et al. forthcoming publication from Learner Study (NRDC 2008).

* See Glossary, p34

ICT within and beyond the ESOL classroom

Liz Boyden suggests some ways of using Web 2.0 technologies

The Project Experimental Teaching (PET) project at Ealing Hammersmith and West London College provides any teacher with the opportunity to be seconded to experiment with using technology in the classroom. They must share their progress and any tools they produce, with the aim of creating a group of 'e-skilled'

teachers. In my six-week secondment, I focused on how Web 2.0 technologies, particularly blogs and wikis, might be used in the ESOL* division.

I wanted to blend the content of learners' IT sessions with what was being covered in their Skills For Life courses. So, with the support of their

IT teacher, I suggested some tasks to learners and helped them to set up their blogs. I invited feedback on my PET project blog at www.lizboyden.wordpress.com, which enabled me to continually assess and adapt the tools.

Blogs

'**Twitter** (www.twitter.com) is a social networking micro blog tool which works in a similar way to full blogs but users only have 140 characters to make their updates, which are called 'tweets'. Users can be 'followed' by others so everyone in the group can view the tweets. Users can message each other directly as well which proved motivating as learners received immediate replies from classmates via a simple interface. Some teachers used Twitter as a class messaging platform (eg for homework reminders, or room change information).

'Students find Twitter a lot easier to navigate and use than their college email account. Some have sent me direct tweets to tell me about absence or ask a question. All seem to have found it a fun exercise!'

Florence – ESOL for Care tutor

This worked really well with Entry 2 learners who found the brevity of the updates less intimidating than writing an email. I left error correction up to the individual tutors – some went through errors in the next lesson but others encouraged learners to tweet each other when they saw a mistake in another's entry, thereby adding to the

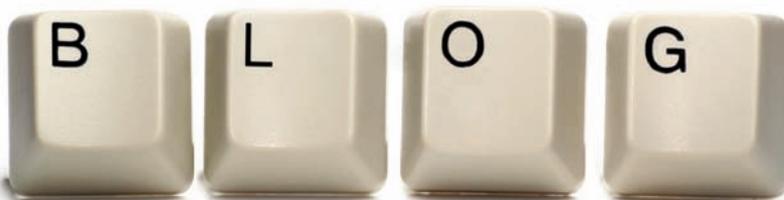
What you need to know...

Web 2.0: a variety of internet tools that encourage a creative and collaborative approach to content on the net. Some better-known applications include Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Flickr (a photo-sharing website) and a variety of blog applications. All these Web 2.0

tools are freely available on the internet.

Blog: an online diary.

Wiki: a collection of webpages that a group of invited guests can work on and modify collaboratively.



communicative potential of the tool. One teacher set a quiz through his Twitter update for his class where learners had to research the net to find the answer:

'Although it's rather artificial (learners are in the same room and therefore could tell each other the answers) it encourages independence and differentiation. It means that they can choose to do the quiz on their own or rely on their classmates' work. They have to make a decision as to who is giving them the right answer or query

the answers they get. I give an answer to provide a language model and occasionally make corrections to their language.'

Nikos – E2 Tutor

Tumblr (www.tumblr.com) is a blog that enables users to feature short multimedia posts on their 'tumblelog' such as photos, text, video clips and sound files. It was the most successful blog application used in the project. It has a visually attractive layout and more potential for learners to create a professional-looking webspace than

the relatively limited Twitter. Again, users can follow others but can send comments only to their Tumblr group, not to individuals. Among the tasks that we developed were projects about learners' home cities, and the area where they live. Learners could post photos from Google images and then make a text post explaining the image. A particularly successful use of Tumblr was as a daily online diary when learners were on work experience. Learners found their tumblelogs far more motivating than paper-based diaries. They could communicate with each other while in separate locations, and tutors could make encouraging entries for the whole group to access. As Mary, a Level 1 tutor commented: 'I'm really pleased with the work experience blog. It's a useful point of contact for the learners while they are all working in very different environments and it is obviously helping some learners to reflect on their experiences.'

Wikis

www.pbwiki.com provides free educational wiki software; I used it with an FCE* group as a kind of class webspace. The whole group and the class tutors had access to the wiki and I created a personal page for each learner to upload writing practice samples; they very quickly got into the habit of working on their own area in their weekly IT session. Their IT teacher encouraged activities where learners had to get information from another learner's pages to complete a task. The 'comments' function on each page facilitated meaningful dialogue between learners and teachers. Learners particularly enjoyed directing friends and family in their respective countries to the wiki to show them what they were doing in their English class. View it here: www.efl3.pbwiki.com

Liz Boyden is ESOL e-learning co-ordinator at the Barons Court site of Ealing Hammersmith and West London College

*See Glossary p34

Useful links

Blog sites

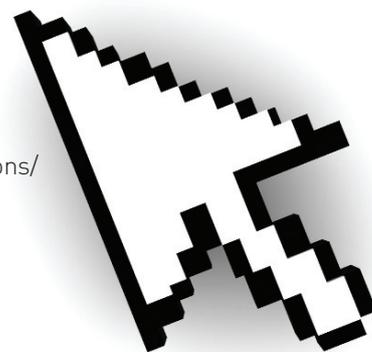
www.wordpress.com
<http://edublogs.org/>
www.blogger.com

Blogs on technology and Web 2.0

<http://theedublogger.edublogs.org/>
<http://joedale.typepad.com/>
<http://efoundations.typepad.com/efoundations/>
<http://tcoffey.edublogs.org/>

Wiki sites

www.pbwiki.com
www.wikispaces.com



Hints and advice

Some learners accessed their Web 2.0 applications outside class time but many needed teacher support and only worked on them in their weekly IT session. To encourage more autonomous use, try setting homework tasks based on the applications.

Try blogs first with your learners as they are less complicated than wikis and can have more immediate effects; wikis lend themselves more to long-term project work and are like class websites.

Wherever possible, encourage learners to keep a copy of the address/password they use.

Decide how you want to address the issue of error correction and discuss it with your learners before you try using blogs or wikis. Some may only want to publish work that has been corrected by the teacher whereas others might be happy to publish first, then to correct.

Make the tasks you set meaningful for your learners and think of ways to maximise their communication with each other both through the webspace and face to face.

Make it clear that these tools are there to help them practise their English and that their teachers will be

reading them. 'Textspeak' is not allowed!

Work out the privacy settings on the Web 2.0 tool you want to use with learners and keep your class as a private group.

Encourage learners to use only their first names when publishing on the net and on blogs; encourage them to use a visual as their identification, not a real photograph.

Raise awareness of personal online privacy – learners should not publish their date of birth/address/telephone number or publish a photo without the featured person's consent.

Especially with younger learners, make it clear that they should not publish anything that they would not say in person.

Use learners who are confident with Web 2.0 to help others in the class.

Don't use all the applications week in week out – as with any learning activity, variety is important.

If you do not have class access to computers, try setting up a Tumblr account yourself and post resources and useful links for your learners to access independently.

OPINION

Write about your problems

Kathryn Ecclestone challenges a growing orthodoxy

A toilet door in my university advertises for students to take part in an MA project about eating disorders and their impact on student life. A college project for 14-year-olds doing a Level 2 health and social care course requires them to look at articles about eating and health in magazines, do a survey of students and then do a presentation about healthy living. GCSE* History students have to write about what it feels like to be a slave/peasant/ historical figure so that they can develop empathy. Applications to study A-level psychology now outstrip sociology because, according to a colleague, 'students love learning about themselves'.

Purpose or by-product?

Of course, learning any subject can produce confidence, a positive attitude to learning, better communication skills, or more insight into one's strengths and weaknesses as a human being. But these by-products are rapidly becoming the main purpose of learning, and stimulus materials, topics, teaching and assessment activities increasingly focus on ourselves, on our feelings about life experiences, and about how to deal with those feelings and experiences, and then on celebrating and validating them, whatever form they take.

'Starting where students are' is now much closer to their emotional homes – literally and metaphorically. A recent book from Gatehouse¹ is a prime example of this trend. It offers 'a way in' to motivating adults to write through a series of short accounts about being bullied. These are written by adults and young people from

diverse backgrounds, with very different experiences and responses. The foreword is upbeat and celebratory, asking readers to interpret the accounts in particular ways, ie that victims can overcome terrible experiences with bravery and fortitude and grow stronger, that they are an inspiration to others, and that 'bullying is never, ever justified'.

Learning or therapy?

The book not only reflects an intensely emotional form of instrumental learning, but it is also part of a trend where educational content and activities are becoming therapeutic vehicles for therapeutic outcomes.

This undoubtedly works. Homing in on emotional difficulties as a vehicle for the content and process of learning resonates with a huge genre of 'tragic life stories' in books, reality TV and magazines that offers explicit accounts of life traumas that sometimes, but not always, result in transformation and self-help. The therapeutic orthodoxy that writing or talking publicly helps us get over something, that it enables us to empathise and relate to others, that it makes us emotionally brave and strong, and that this should be celebrated, is now prevalent in educational settings.

But we need to ask 'why bullying?' (or child abuse, or eating disorders, or divorce, or any other 'issue' of a similar nature). Why not different, less negative topics or topics outside one's emotional life? And why do we take individuals' accounts at face value and 'celebrate'

them? Where's the critical perspective on what comprises bullying and the best way to deal with it? And what can we really learn about bullying from these accounts? Is this more about celebrating and validating people's experiences rather than getting them to develop literacy skills?

Loss of nerve

Questioning such claims is a profoundly unpopular and unfashionable thing to do. Yet, far from being progressive and empowering, using emotional vulnerabilities and difficult life experiences is rarely a springboard to other things. Instead, it encourages students to seek other introspective topics. This is a diminished view of 'starting where students are' and is part of a wider loss of nerve that education should challenge us to learn about the world. Literacy was once a springboard for that educational goal. But, as with other subjects in other parts of the education system, teachers of literacy seem to be losing their educational nerve too.

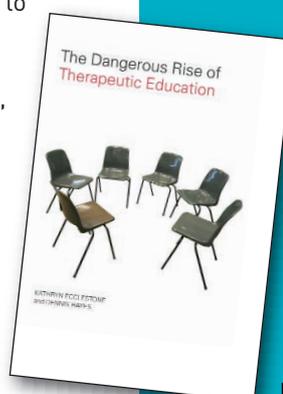
Kathryn Ecclestone is Professor of Post-compulsory Education at Oxford Brookes University

[1] *'Write about... bullying'* is published by Gatehouse. See www.gatehousebooks.co.uk/book/116

*See Glossary p34

Do you agree with Kathryn?

She expands on her views in the recently-published book *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education* (co-authored with Dennis Hayes), published by Routledge 2008. If you are interested in reviewing this for the next issue of *reflect*, please contact Moya Wilkie (m.wilkie@ioe.ac.uk or 020 7612 6797).



BOOKS

Literacy, Lives and Learning

Barton, D., Ivanic, R., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R. and Tusting, K. (2007)

Routledge: London

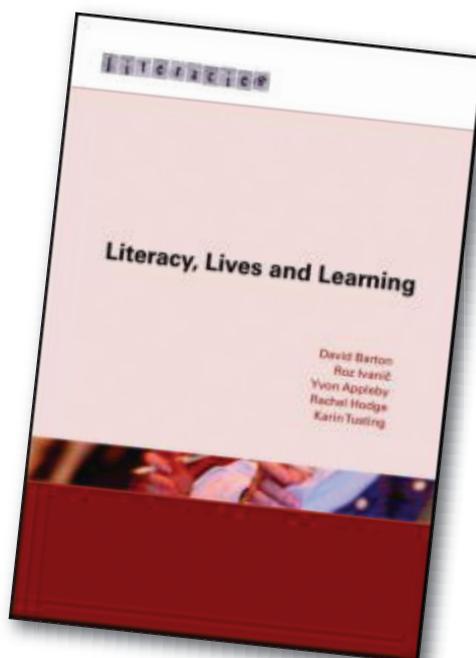
ISBN: 978-0-415-42485-1 (hardback)

978-0-415-42486-8 (paperback)

Reviewed by Siân Robinson

This book is part of the Routledge 'Literacies' series and gives a detailed examination of language, literacy and numeracy as social practices, with a focus on the relationship between people's lives and their engagement in learning. The chapters follow the rationale, methodology and findings of the research which has been carefully and ethically conducted over a two-year period. Importance is placed on building relationships and trust with practitioners and learners involved in the research. This appears to have had a positive effect on learners and contributed to a more collaborative approach.

The research took place at various sites in Blackburn, Lancaster and Liverpool and in a wide range of settings including a shelter for young homeless people, a women's refuge and a community college. The nine detailed case studies give a real insight into the lives of a diverse group of learners as they undertook educational programmes in language, literacy and numeracy, and discussed their everyday literacy practices. This close analysis showed that, while attending Skills for Life provision, the learners are leading highly literate lives in many other ways. There is a refreshing focus here on what people can do,



rather than on a deficit of skills that they need to acquire.

As the book explains, this is a move away from attempting to identify the most effective method of teaching towards attempting to understand the complexity of learning. It demonstrates the multifaceted lives of learners, which require a flexible response from teachers. It also highlights how lives and learning interact, and recognises the

importance of individuals' lives and contexts, thus promoting critical reflection on situated experience as central to the learning process. The rich literacy lives of learners can often remain hidden when they should instead be built on. This demonstrates the complexity of the factors that teachers need to be aware of and to which they need to respond.

The book also addresses the conflict between 'new professionalism' and responsive professionalism. Many teachers are under pressure to balance the cornerstone of their practice – to listen to learners, make their learning meaningful, develop supportive relationships and negotiate learning opportunities – while at the same time delivering the core curriculum, meeting targets and fulfilling institutional commitments. The latter makes it difficult to conceptualise language, literacy and numeracy as social practices. The social practice approach to pedagogy is discussed as well as the implications and challenges of this approach.

As a trainee ESOL teacher, I appreciated the terminology being clearly explained and the Skills for Life strategy broken down into phases. The detail and analysis are well structured, and the case studies are essential in demonstrating the intricacies of people's lives and the complex agenda that practitioners have to manage. This work is a valuable contribution to a trend of research that is well established.

Siân Robinson is training as an ESOL teacher

Letters

Learners' writing

Dear reflect

I read with interest the article 'Seeing yourself in print' (issue 10) and couldn't agree more with what was written about the benefits of using learners' writing as a teaching tool.

I thought other readers might like to know about a website – www.writing-about.net – which allows learners to share their stories and comment on each others' work. It started off as a literacy learners' site but is now used by all types of learner and there are

over 500 articles online. Use the 'Article Comments' link to see what learners are saying about their fellow learners' stories and poems. Or click on the 'Learning's Good' link to see the winners of the Adult Learners' Week 2007 competition.

I add 'Webmaster Comments' to each of the articles to try and encourage comments. There is nothing better than a learner who is doing literacy or ESOL, having to read an article, form an opinion and then 'pen' a reply. This involves the key skill of critical reading.

Take a look! We would love more people to comment on the articles.

Iain Yuill
Community Learning Worker
South Lanarkshire

What do you think?

Whatever it is you would like to contribute – comments on an article, ideas you want to share, issues you're concerned about – we want to hear from you.
Contact details on p2.

Glossary

ACL

Adult and Community Learning.

ALI

Adult Learning Inspectorate. Now merged into Ofsted.

BSA

Basic Skills Agency. Independent charitable agency funded by DIUS and the Welsh Assembly Government. Now located at NIACE.

CEL

Centre for Excellence in Leadership: <http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk>. National agency to support leadership in the post-16 sector. On 1 October 2008 CEL and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) transferred their operations to the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

Confintea

The Confintea conferences on Adult Education are organised by the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning. www.unesco.org/uil

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.dcsf.gov.uk

DfES

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

DfID

Department for International Development. www.dfid.gov.uk

DIUS

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

EFL

English as a Foreign Language.

ESOL

English for Speakers of Other Languages.

FCE

First Certificate in English. For details, see www.cambridgeesol.org

FE

Further Education

FETAC

National awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. www.fetac.ie/info/about_fetac.htm

GCSE

General Certificate of Secondary Education.

ITT

Initial Teacher Training.

LLDD

Learners with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities

LLN

Literacy, Language and Numeracy.

LLUK

Lifelong Learning UK. Sector skills council responsible for the professional development of staff working in the UK lifelong learning sector. www.lluk.org

LLU+

National consultancy and professional development centre for staff working in literacy, numeracy, dyslexia, family learning and ESOL. Based at London South Bank University. www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus

NEET

Not in Education, Employment or Training. Refers to young people aged 16–18.

NIACE

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

Ofsted

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

PCET

Post-Compulsory Education and Training.

PGDE

Post Graduate Diploma in Education.

PTLLS

Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector award.

VET

Vocational Education and Training.

WBL

Work-based learning.

NRDC publications

RESEARCH REPORTS

Learners' experience of work

David Barton, Karin Tusting, Rachel Hodge and Yvon Appleby

Available for download from: www.nrdc.org.uk/experience

Literacy, learning and health

Uta Papen and Sue Walters

Available for download from: www.nrdc.org.uk/health

Understanding literacy and health

A literature review from four fields of research

Uta Papen

Available for download from: www.nrdc.org.uk/health_LR

Value of basic skills in the British labour market

Anna Vignoles, Augustin de Coulon and Oscar Marcenaro-Gutierrez

Available for download from: www.nrdc.org.uk/value

NRDC PUBLICATIONS – FORTHCOMING

Skills for life teachers' qualifications and their learners' progress in adult numeracy

Analysis of data from the Skills for Life teacher and learner studies

Olga Cara and Augustin de Coulon

The digital divide

Computer use, basic skills and employment

John Bynner, Steve Reeder, Sam Parsons and Clare Strawn

The teacher study

The impact of the Skills for Life strategy on teachers

Olga Cara, Jenny Litster, Jon Swain and John Vorhaus

Improving reading: Phonics and fluency

Practitioner guide

Maxine Burton, Judy Davey, Margaret Lewis, Louise Ritchie and Greg Brooks



RESEARCH BRIEFINGS

Formative assessment

JD Carpentieri

Priority groups

JD Carpentieri

Progression

JD Carpentieri



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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)
- Family and Community Learning

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