

reflect

THE MAGAZINE OF NRDC | ISSUE 2 | FEBRUARY 2005

SPECIAL REPORT: Numeracy

Practitioners and researchers
consider the latest issues

Using the Reflect approach in ESOL

Kate Newman examines the
links between 'Reflect' and
the ESOL core curriculum

Literacy and the life-course

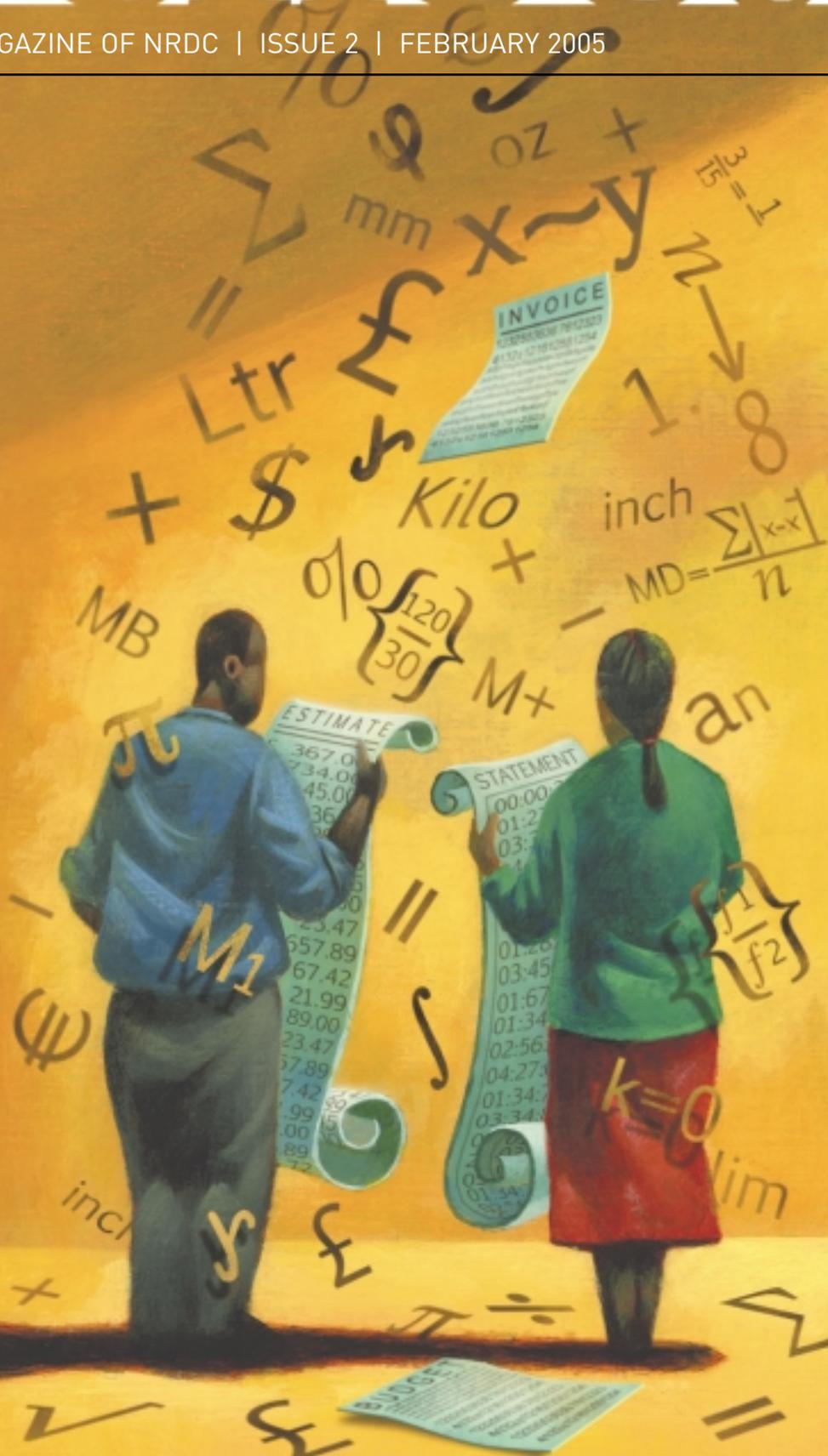
Stephen Reder considers the
value of investing in adult
basic skills education

Embedded teaching and learning

Tom Jupp and Celia Roberts
highlight the key messages of
recent NRDC research

Learning to write in 21st century England

Ursula Howard discusses the
motivations of 21st century
learners



Editor

David Mallows

Deputy Editor

Patrick McNeill

Design

Chapman Design

Marketing and Communications Officer

Sophy Toohey

Editorial Advisory Board (interim)

Ursula Howard, NRDC, Institute of Education, University of London

Helen Casey, NRDC, Institute of Education, University of London

Olivia Sagan, NRDC, Institute of Education, University of London

John Vorhaus, NRDC, Institute of Education, University of London

Nora Hughes, NRDC, Institute of Education/Hackney Community College

David Barton, NRDC, University of Lancaster

Alison Tomlin, NRDC, King's College London

Diana Coben, NRDC, King's College London

Richard White, DfES

Noyona Chanda, LLU+, London South Bank University

John Callaghan, Park Lane College/University of Leeds

Jayne Bullock, Hackney Community College

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

About NRDC

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

NRDC consortium partners

NRDC is a consortium of partners led by the Institute of Education, University of London with:

Lancaster University

The University of Nottingham

The University of Sheffield

East London Pathfinder

Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership

Basic Skills Agency

Learning and Skills Development Agency

LLU+, London South Bank University

National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

King's College London

University of Leeds

www.nrdc.org.uk

NRDC

Institute of Education

University of London

20 Bedford Way

London WC1H 0AL

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7612 6476

Fax: +44 (0)20 7612 6671

email: info@nrdc.org.uk

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



Contents

Issues in adult numeracy 4

Noyona Chanda

Images of numeracy 6

Maths4Life

Resources, pedagogy and jobs 8

Alison Wedgbury

What is good practice in adult numeracy teaching? 10

Jon Swain

Introducing Reflect 13

Desiree Lopez

Using the Reflect approach in ESOL 14

Kate Newman

Reflect in a global society 15

Phyllis Thompson

Literacy and the life-course 16

Stephen Reder

Embedded teaching and learning 18

Tom Jupp and Celia Roberts

Voices from the classroom 22**Learners' first language in the ESOL classroom 23**

Olivia Sagan and Helen Casey

Learning to write in 21st century England 24

Ursula Howard

The ILP debate

ILPs: option or requirement? 27**ILPs: a trivialisation of teaching and learning? 29**

Mary Weir

ILPs: related to real life? 31

Neena Julka

Teacher researchers 33

David Barton

Editorial



Cover illustration:
Jason Bennion

The big theme of Issue 2 of **reflect** is numeracy and maths, both in the special feature and also in the Maths4Life update. The update will serve as a regular home for articles on issues faced by numeracy and maths teachers and learners – as well as evidence and ideas about teaching and learning.

There is a lot happening in maths to read, write and talk about: NRDC will be publishing two major reports in the spring. They will add hugely to our knowledge about adults' maths and numeracy learning. John Bynner and Samantha Parsons have just produced a new report from their 'cohort' study entitled: 'Does Numeracy Matter More? It has some sadly predictable evidence about the impact of numeracy, especially on women. There is huge interest in the Maths4Life project. The conference on 22 February sold out in days - another is planned. The website is live and more practitioners are engaging with the project daily. It feels like maths and numeracy are coming in from the cold.

A topic of much debate is terminology. In an email exchange within these pages we explore what numeracy 'looks like'. Do we also need to agree what it should be called? Different meanings are in play; and different terms are often used by government, the general public and teachers. Some reflect the social, educational and professional contexts. To caricature, numeracy is sometimes seen as a subset of maths.

Within Maths4Life we will use the inclusive phrase "numeracy and maths", and review the situation as the subject takes its proper place in post-16 learning. We have set up a discussion forum ("the numeracy / maths debate") on the NRDC website <http://www.nrdc.org.uk>. 

The whole purpose of **reflect** is to provide a forum in which practitioners, policy-makers and researchers can share, think about, and learn from their own and others' experience so that practice, policy and research can be more mutually supportive. The reaction we have had to Issue 1 - as reflected in the continuing discussion of ILPs - has confirmed the thirst there is for engagement with the serious ideas that shape the environment in which we work. We believe that in this issue there are even more opportunities for you to hear from others and add your voice to the debate. Please contribute. 

Ursula Howard
Director, NRDC

Issues in adult numeracy

Noyona Chanda identifies the key issues for numeracy in 2004 and spells out the challenges for 2005.

2004 was a good year to grasp the opportunities, take up the challenges and tackle some of the issues in the field of adult numeracy.

Let's start with the issues. Many have been around for a long time but were given greater prominence in 2004.

- Newspaper reports highlighted the poor showing of the UK in the OECD international comparative study of maths, science and reading standards of 15-year-olds in 41 countries (1).
- Some celebrities were accused of doing a disservice to society with their throwaway negative remarks about maths. Jeremy Clarkson publicly affirmed his don't-care-if-I'm-no-good-at-maths attitude.
- In the 2004 Richard Dimpleby lecture, the industrialist and inventor James Dyson made the case for more investment in maths and science if the UK is to be competitive in global markets.
- The DfES Needs and Impact Survey (2) found that levels of numeracy amongst adults in England are lower than expected.
- The Adrian Smith enquiry (3) highlighted the importance of nurturing mathematics because of its central importance to the individual, technology, economy, citizenship and society.
- The Ofsted/ALI report (4) in 2003 had found that the quality of teaching in literacy, numeracy and ESOL is poorer than in other subject areas, with adult numeracy teaching practices singled out for particular criticism.

Everyone seems to be aware of the need to do something radical and far-reaching about numeracy, so why are so many old issues still unresolved?

Lack of vision and strategy

Who's really pushing for growth and development in adult numeracy? There is often no easily identifiable numeracy spokesperson in the national, regional or local agencies. The Government has recently appointed Celia Hoyles as Maths Tsar but her role is very dis-

tant from adult numeracy provision and practice issues on the ground. Many national development initiatives which encompass literacy, numeracy and ESOL have not had a strong numeracy component because of a lack of representation of numeracy interests.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers often gloss over (or merely pay lip-service to) numeracy development needs, perhaps because of their own maths fears and anxiety or their lack of understanding of this area.

Organisational structures

Lumping literacy and numeracy together under the 'basic skills' or *Skills for Life* umbrella has often meant that development on the literacy front obscures a lack of development in numeracy, thus marginalising numeracy. It has also resulted in literacy teachers 'doing a bit of numeracy', which may have contributed to the lack of numeracy specialists. Curriculum managers have traditionally come from a literacy/ESOL background and it is acceptable for them not to have numeracy expertise. But how likely is it that someone with a numeracy background would be considered as *Skills for Life* curriculum manager if they did not also have literacy experience?

The structural separation of maths from numeracy further marginalises numeracy, depriving both maths and numeracy of valuable opportunities to share expertise, resources and development opportunities. This separation is reinforced all the way up from local provision to national development initiatives. If numeracy and maths are indeed points on the same continuum, then numeracy is surely the bedrock on which strong maths foundations should be built.

Inadequate provision and resources

There is less provision for numeracy than for literacy, even though surveys over the years have consistently shown numeracy needs to be equal to, or greater than, literacy needs.



Numeracy is surely the bedrock on which strong maths foundations should be built.





The argument that numeracy provision is smaller because the demand is less may be a false argument. Can we be sure we are catering for those who would come forward if the provision were there?

It's been a vicious cycle: no push for growth results in low levels of take up; low take-up means less investment in provision and specialist resources; therefore providers cannot respond quickly to increased demand; so there is no push for growth.

Teacher capability and capacity

Existing teachers of numeracy will need to upgrade their skills and subject knowledge in order to address learner needs more effectively and to meet new teacher and inspection standards. The adult numeracy standards do not address the need for specialist pedagogical training and the incongruous mix and level of maths topics and skills may actually make some potential numeracy teachers choose not to specialise in numeracy.

Learner awareness and demand

Perhaps the most worrying issue is the fact that, given the scale of reported need, adults are not queuing up to join adult numeracy or maths classes. Is it because the population at large is unaware of the impact of limited numeracy attainment on theirs and their families' lives? This surely cannot be – one meets numbers at every turn in a technologically advanced society. Or



**Maths is a
tool for all of
us to make
sense of the
real world.**

does the national fondness for self-deprecating remarks about maths show that people feel it is OK to have poor numeracy skills? Or have the surveys got it wrong? Do we have all the maths we need? i.e. we see the maths that we can do as common sense rather than maths.

The misguided use of the core curriculum

Sadly, what should have been a useful tool for planning and assessment is now widely used as a prescriptive scheme of work, completely at odds with that other diktat – the need for an individualised, learner-centred approach in all teaching. Priority goes to achieving topic coverage, with learner calculation errors, lack of conceptual understanding and appropriate ways of expressing reasoning often shelved to be unravelled later, if ever. This does nothing to enhance learner confidence, subject enjoyment or independent use of number skills.

The need to grow mathematics

Lack of attention to improving the take-up and provision of adult numeracy today will only add to the critical problems in maths in the future. Maths is not just for engineers and scientists; it's a tool for all of us to make sense of the real world. There are adults out there who could become so enthused by numbers that they want to share their enthusiasm, foster an interest in maths in their families, and help their children with maths and science. There are adults out there who could get promoted to better jobs if they were able to pass numeracy tests. There are young adults whose expectations of their own maths capability should be raised for their benefit and for a prosperous future for economy and society. Mathematical language is the literacy and communication tool of the knowledge-based world we live in and of the decisions that drive our own and our community's destiny.

So the challenge, for each one of us, whatever our capacity or scope of influence, is this: address the issues in small steps and stages, but always strategically and with a vision.

- If you're a numeracy teacher, think about how you can make each lesson engaging and enabling of all those number skills that you and I use with confidence. Class activities and exercises are important, but how do you and the learner know if what has been taught in class is going to make a difference in the learner's life, leisure and work situations? How best can you replicate real life applications and contexts? Most important of all – how can you help learners to learn through their mistakes and blocks, rather than avoid them? Seek out interesting resources and demand them as a basic 'kit' for your numeracy teaching.
- If you're a vocational teacher, have you →

considered the work-related numeracy that would better prepare your learners for the world of work? You are best placed to integrate this development need into the training programme.

- If you're a curriculum leader or manager, think about whether and how every single learner in your organisation could improve their essential numeracy skills, and how provision for this should be organised. It is not good enough to hide behind the excuse that funding or teachers are not available. You need to make the case for funding of provision and resources and, at the same time, to grow your pool of numeracy specialists by giving them status, good terms and conditions and appropriate staff training and development.
- If you're a project leader or worker, consider where there is the scope in what you are doing to



develop numeracy, for all the reasons stated above. Are you in danger of not addressing numeracy because 'you're not a numeracy expert', even though you know you should?

Seize the time

There has never been a better time to seize the opportunity to take action – numeracy is high on the agenda at national, regional and local levels, and hence there is likely to be a more favourable funding environment for relevant development initiatives. Current national initiatives/resources include:

- The LSC Skills for Life Quality Initiative offers regional support for building capacity in numeracy, alongside ESOL and literacy. Numeracy is not yet using its full entitlement. www.sflqi.org.uk
- The Maths4Life project offers practitioners the opportunity to engage in research and develop-

The Maths4life team exchange ideas for visualising adult numeracy.

The NRDC is running Maths4Life, a major research and development project on adult numeracy. The project aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning in numeracy and non-specialist maths for learners in a wide range of post-16 provision.

We want to commission a series of photos representing adult numeracy to use in Maths4Life publications and on the Maths4Life website www.maths4life.org, so we need to brief a photographer. The project team was asked, via email, to suggest some images for adult numeracy.

Subject: IMAGES OF NUMERACY



Dear all,
 What do you consider to be images of adult numeracy? For example, I imagine we would want pictures of money being counted (as in loose change not 100 dollar bills!), of supermarket special offers etc – what else? The various contexts in which numeracy learning takes place will also need to be represented – what are they?

David Mallows, NRDC

 I think it would be great to incorporate some pictures of the lots of us who try to decipher pay slips, financial advice info on pensions, APR rates, etc. Financial capability is a big issue for many – empowering adults to understand and organise their finances is powerful as well as a big issue – especially pensions, supporting kids through HE, etc.

Maybe also images of people in different settings measuring medicines, chemicals and materials, etc, or workers measuring different batch requirements, etc.

Judith Swift, TUC

 Bottles of water, speed restriction signs, weights in a gym, traffic passing (speed?), road width restrictions, bottle of medicine with a teaspoon.

The maths that we really need these days includes issues of risk and probability e.g. life insurance, pensions, who to vote for, whether there's any point voting, whether it's worth voting for a strike in your union, cost of credit and risk of debt.

I think avoid 'coping' images (e.g. shopping). The message from the *Skills for Life* survey is that while the

SPECIAL REPORT

ment to add to what we know about effective teaching and learning. www.maths4life.org.uk

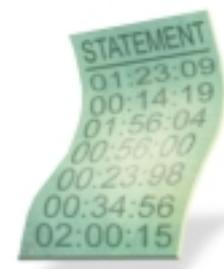
- The Adult Numeracy Professional Development Centre at LLU+, London South Bank University, is a unique resource to support the adult numeracy curriculum and develop teachers and provision. www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus
- The DfES Standards Unit work on activity-based learning in mathematics is developing more effective approaches to the teaching of mathematics at Level 3. www.successforall.gov.uk

Numeracy solutions need to be implemented simultaneously on a number of fronts – provision, practice, resources, learner demand, curriculum for learners and teachers, improving the maths capability of all teachers. This may sound like an impossible challenge, but the time for merely expressing concern and diffi-

culty is over; it's action time. Time is of the essence and the opportune time is now! ▣

For anyone fired up with enthusiasm or concern, contact me through the Maths4Life website www.maths4life.org and we can find a way together to take up the numeracy challenge.

(1) Learning for Tomorrow's World: First results from PISA 2003 OECD (2004).
 (2) The **Skills for Life** Survey: A National Needs and Impact Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Skills DfES (2004).
 (3) Smith, A. (2004) Making Mathematics Count: The Report of Professor Adrian Smith's Inquiry into Post-14 Mathematics Education. The Stationery Office.
 (4) Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages: a survey of current practice in post-16 and adult provision (Ofsted/ALI 2003).



government may think we're not coping, everyone else thinks we are.

On the other hand, if the images are to illustrate numeracy as defined in the core curriculum, much of the above is irrelevant.

Alison Tomlin, King's College London

I think it's important that the images reflect maths learning as well as the day-to-day aspects associated with the adult numeracy curriculum.

The images should not all be totally obvious. They could get people thinking by including images which people might not at first glance think are maths/numeracy, but they are.

Ursula Howard, NRDC

I would suggest that we try to get away from men measuring and building and women shopping and cooking! Also why should numeracy be associated with loose change and not million-dollar images?

Noyona Chanda, LLU+

In view of our responses to our earlier project "Making Maths Meaningful..." I would include a picture of a parent helping a primary age pupil with homework.

Margaret Brown, King's College London

This is a real challenge as we too often resort to obvious images – there was a great Ch4 prog on at 5.30am (!) today looking at the importance of maths in the production of films/stunts/special effects. Great images of film stars and action shots and great linkages with maths in relation to building stuff, making special effects, weight-bearing and safety but the images wouldn't 'speak' of maths.

Jan Eldred, NIACE

A number of roles for this photograph set is emerging. These roles tend to divide nicely into three groups. Some of the photos will be obvious, naturally occurring examples of numeracy in action (but hopefully not stereotypical) eg the use of financial practices. Others are less obvious images, but there to make people think about numeracy's breadth – I'd particularly like to see maths in use in the workplace in unusual settings (eg music recording studios). Thirdly, there's the use of images to show numeracy learning in both formal and informal settings (eg family homework). My main comment therefore is to try and obtain a balance between these three groups, and that using the original suggestions would be an excellent starting point.

Paul Worrall, Head of Financial Literacy The Basic Skills Agency

I would like to echo Paul's example of a music studio. I worked with music for a number of years and the use of sequencing software has meant quite a change to the way music is dealt with. I've tried to get some software and a keyboard for our centre – but I think people think I am having a laugh!

Graham Griffiths, LLU+

We had a concept in one of the Ufl products we made a while ago, of a "Maths finder". It took the form of a magnifying glass – you put it over something and lo and behold the underlying maths appeared in some form. The idea has more potential than was possible in that particular realisation. Maybe a maths X-ray machine?

Martin Good, CTAD

So what do you think adult numeracy 'looks like'? And what about ESOL and literacy? Let us know! d.mallows@ioe.ac.uk

"The invisibility of maths is pervasive - and something we have to struggle with at all levels."

Celia Hoyles - Chief Adviser for Maths at the DfES

Resources, pedagogy and jobs

Alison Wedgbury summarises ten practitioners' views on the burning issues for numeracy.

Towards the end of 2004, NRDC asked ten practitioner-members of our discussion groups for their views on the state of numeracy teaching. Our respondents work in FE colleges, community learning, family or hospital programmes, probation or 16-19 training in England, Scotland and Cyprus. Their length of experience in teaching post-16 numeracy ranges from two who were new teachers to over 20 years. They teach discrete numeracy or GCSE maths classes, numeracy for ESOL learners, or numeracy for vocational areas. Some also train numeracy teachers or manage provision.

We don't claim that the ideas expressed on these pages is representative of general opinion among the adult numeracy workforce. However, we do believe that many of the things they say will resonate with teachers of adult numeracy and we do hope that you will join the debate

What is the best way for new teachers to get support from the existing community of practitioners?

There was strong agreement that the best type of support for new teachers includes:

- learning on the job
- team teaching alongside experienced practitioners who can demonstrate a range of approaches
- regular team meetings to share resources, teaching ideas and experience of different learner groups
- structured mentoring.

Numeracy teachers are often in the job because they '...just love maths' and they want to share that enthusiasm. A dedicated online chat room was also suggested.

'I have experienced this team support with ESOL teacher training but not with numeracy.'

'Shadowing an experienced teacher shouldn't be used as a free way to get extra help in the class.'

'Personally I am limited by transport so I mainly do my own thing and have to build up my own resources.'

What numeracy-specific CPD do you think would be most useful and for whom?

Respondents called for practical, hands-on workshops on:

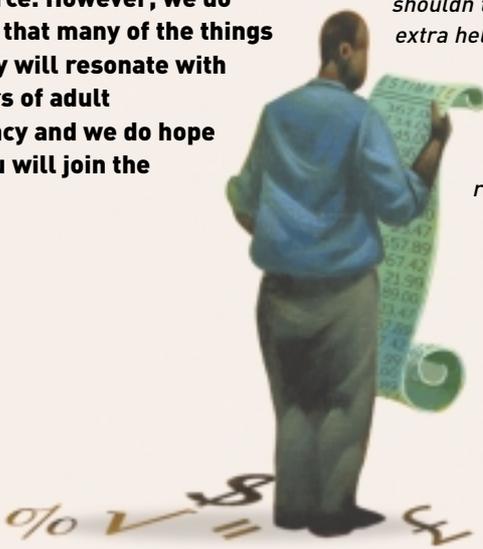
- teaching specific topics in maths at all levels, to adults rather than children
- workshops on how to support learners who have learning difficulties, disabilities or low-level language skills
- effective diagnostic assessment
- using the Core Curriculum creatively
- how to 'explain the maths behind things, rather than doing it by magic'
- how to develop problem solving skills.

What resources do you find particularly useful for teaching numeracy? What materials/resources would you find useful in training adult numeracy teachers?

Teachers were enthusiastic about a range of resources, both their own and published ones. Using real materials and objects was also popular. There was general support for ICT and the internet (and universal praise for BBC Skillswise) though access to hardware varies:

'There's only one data projector in the college that I know about but I would like to use software to demonstrate 'playing around' with maths.'

Where people had videos of effective teaching, they found these very useful in training. Others did not know of any videos but would like to have them. There were also some strong advocates of training teachers in how to use realia (e.g. tins of paint, dice, dominoes, posters, maps) in their teaching.



'People tend to get comfortable with using only worksheets and aren't aware of the other resources available, such as the internet.'

'I'd like to see more distance learning materials available. In this area, courses involve a lot of travelling.'

What is your view on the level of mathematics required in qualifications for numeracy practitioners? What is the case for/against numeracy-specific pedagogy in teacher training?

Teachers in England with less experience (and a few with some experience) were in favour both of the high level of maths in the new subject-specialist qualification and of numeracy-specific pedagogy:

'All teachers should regard themselves as numerate whether they are involved in numeracy teaching or not, because it will help to dispel the idea that it is OK not to be numerate.'

'The teacher should know how to adapt their teaching for what learners need to know.'

Most of the more experienced teachers were more likely to agree with these statements:

'You don't need degree level maths to be able to teach at Entry Level.'

'Often the worst teachers are those who are most highly qualified in maths.'

How useful is the Adult Numeracy Core Curriculum in supporting numeracy provision?

All respondents in England thought the Core Curriculum was a good framework and starting-point but many were concerned that teachers need help in developing how they use it so that it does not become simply a course.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of using ILPs for adults learning numeracy?

The principle of ILPs was generally accepted but everyone in England found their implementation too time-consuming and at worst '... a pain. I just want to be teaching, not filling in forms.' Some interesting comments relating to numeracy (rather than to learning in general) were:

'The ILP works well in reviews because of the short-term numeracy goals you can set.'

but

'I find that short-term goals in numeracy have to keep changing because I find gaps in students' knowledge that weren't apparent in initial assessment.'

'I question whether all numeracy learners can read and understand their ILP; some also have poor literacy skills.'

What do you feel is the most pressing issue in adult numeracy teaching at the moment?

Responses divided between a concern for learners and issues of teacher employment and continuing professional development.

Respondents are concerned that there are gaps in the recruitment and retention of learners, a lack of effective (and funded) recognition of learner achievement other than by qualification targets, and a lack of clarity about the parity between the National Test and GCSE Maths.

Capacity in the teaching workforce was flagged as a burning issue:

'Not enough money has been put into the employment of tutors. Part-time tutors are still only paid for the hours they teach. This excludes them from having time to develop their own maths skills or resources.'

'There should be full-time contracts and financial incentives similar to those offered to new secondary school teachers. If you need to work full-time, you often have to teach in different places, involving lots of travel, or across different subjects to make up the hours.'

Conclusions

All respondents were clearly interested in the wider issues around numeracy teaching – otherwise they would not have been involved in the NRDC or NIACE discussion groups in the first place. Despite this, the influence of their own context was very apparent.

Newer teachers seem to accept the FENTO standards for numeracy without great concern, while more experienced teachers' views on Level 4 may be influenced by their own route into numeracy teaching, sometimes as a literacy teacher who has learned to 'drip-feed some numeracy into their classes'.

If people work in an organisation that has a high inspection rating for numeracy/literacy/ ESOL, or a good continuing professional development infrastructure, they have a generally constructive view of initiatives and resources, even if not of the demands of the subject-specialist qualifications. If they work in isolation, or for an organisation where *Skills for Life* and CPD are less well developed, or where there is a shortage of numeracy teachers, it can be a different matter.

This small sample of numeracy teachers have had their say – what about you? Log on to the NRDC website, click on 'online discussion forums' and tell us what you think.

With thanks to:

Marjorie Drew, Edinburgh and Midlothian Councils
Gill Hampson, Brockenhurst College
Pierre Gerrard, City of Bristol College
Elaine Bristow, Oaklands College
Anne Seaman, RETRO course (NIACE)
Christina Ross, RETRO course (NIACE)
Ann McDonnell, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Deborah Bouch, Reading College
Jo Yeandle, City of Bristol College
Chris Roberts, Sheffield College

What is good practice in adult numeracy teaching?

Jon Swain is a researcher on various NRDC numeracy projects. Here, he outlines some early issues from the research.

Is this a sensible question?

It's a question to which policy-makers demand an answer but can anyone come up with a meaningful response? 'Good practice' means different things to different people, but we have to start somewhere. In purely practical terms, a teacher entering a classroom for the first time to teach numeracy to a class of adults needs to be able to base their practice on something tangible, a set of guidelines if nothing else. There is a wide range of empirical experience to draw on, from people who have been teaching adult numeracy for many years (including the teacher-researchers working on NRDC numeracy projects), and there is probably more agreement about what makes 'good practice' than many people might think.

Defining bad practice

However, it is probably easier to agree on what is meant by 'bad practice' than 'good practice'. For most people, bad practice would involve the teacher teaching mathematics using a series of procedures, with the students learning by rote without understanding. There would be no connections made to other areas of maths (e.g. the relationship between decimals, fractions and percentages); the students would not be expected to know the reason or the purpose of why they were learning the maths; there would be little talk or discussion between the students; they would be listening rather than 'doing', and so on.

Defining good practice

In her review of research into the teaching and learning of adult numeracy, Coben (2003) (1) reminds us that there is considerable confusion around the concept of numeracy. As a result, it is all too easy for practitioners, researchers, policy-makers and the adult learners themselves to be at cross-purposes in any discussion of what should be taught and learned, how, to whom and by whom, for what purposes and with what outcomes. She cautions that the knowledge-base for the teaching of adult numeracy is still insecure and does not support definitive statements on what constitutes good practice in any given situation.

NRDC projects 'Teaching and learning common measures, especially at Entry Level' and 'A study of effective practice in inclusive adult numeracy teaching' (both due for publication spring 2005) are exploring the question that provides the title for this article.

She also points out that the picture is not a great deal clearer with respect to pedagogy in mathematics education generally, which is dominated by studies of children's learning and teaching. Askew, in his review of studies of mathematics education pedagogy dating from 1968 to 2000, concludes that 'detailed comparative studies suggest that differences in pedagogic practices are as much to do with macro influences as variation amongst individual teachers. *In terms of implications for practice there is little specific to recommend*' (my italics) (Askew, 2001).

Teaching adults and teaching children

Some educators think there are major differences between teaching mathematics to adults and to children. My own view (and that is all it is) is that there is little difference between adult learning and the learning of children in terms of general methods and approaches. Rogers (2003) (3) maintains that teaching consists of a series of relationships between various identities including those of 'adult-or-child + student' and teacher. He suggests that, rather than the different ways in which they learn, it is how an adult constructs the experience of being a student and how a child constructs it that is the most important difference between teaching adults and teaching children.

An adult's construct of being a student is likely to be wider than and different from that of a child because an adult is able to draw on the experience of having once been a child and of now no longer being a child. Adults have had more time to reflect on and develop their own perceptions of what they feel they are good at and not so good at in learning terms (e.g. 'I'm hopeless at maths'; 'maths is a difficult subject'). Children are still in the process of developing these perceptions of their own abilities and have less experience to draw on.

Adult learners therefore come with a different set of motivations, interests and agendas. Some will want to use and find out things based on their own experiences; others will have a specific learning goal, such as wanting a specific qualification and expect a more formalised approach. It should be the expecta-

tions of the student rather than the preferences of the teacher and/or educational institution that determine the learning programme, although there may be a problem where students have limited expectations.

Teaching adult numeracy

An additional problem in adult numeracy teaching is that provision is so wide and varied. This makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a definition of good practice that covers every context. It is important to remember that the term 'good practice' is value-laden and socially and culturally specific, meaning different things to different people. It is also synonymous with 'best' or 'effective' practice. Questions need to be asked about 'Who should

decide?'; 'What criteria should be used?' and 'Can it, or should it, be measured?' Another important question to ask is, 'What is its purpose?' for there will be different and competing purposes, expectations and pressures from governments, providers, managers, teachers and students. For instance, for managers, the best practice is likely to be that which results in the maximum number of examination passes and while this may also be the case for some teachers and students, there will be others who regard the best practice as being that which results in the most learning, or the most enjoyment or engagement in the process of learning.

It is vital to understand the epistemological basis that underlies the teaching of numeracy in the adult classroom. Avis (2000) (4) writes that the approach →

Can we learn from good practice in primary schools?

A major study of effective numeracy teachers in the primary school was carried out by a team at King's College London between 1995 and 1996 for the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) (Askew, Brown et al., 1997) (2).

The connectionist orientation

The team found that what distinguished highly effective teachers from the rest was a consistent and coherent set of beliefs about how best to teach mathematics whilst taking children's learning into account. The theme of 'connections' particularly struck the team. Several of the highly effective teachers seemed to pay attention to:

- (i) connections between different aspects of mathematics, for example, addition and subtraction, or fractions, decimals and percentages;
- (ii) connections between different representations of mathematics, including moving between symbols, words, diagrams and objects;
- (iii) connections with children's methods, including valuing these methods, being interested in children's thinking and sharing the children's methods.

The team came to refer to such teachers as having a 'connectionist'

orientation to teaching and learning numeracy. Such an orientation included the belief that being numerate involved being both efficient and effective. For these teachers, being numerate required an awareness of different methods of calculation and the ability to choose an appropriate strategy.

Associated with the connectionist orientation was the belief that, given appropriate teaching, most children can learn mathematics.

The team identified two other orientations – the 'transmission orientation' and the 'discovery orientation'.



The transmission orientation

In this orientation, the teacher placed more emphasis on teaching than on learning. This orientation involved a belief in the importance of a collection of procedures or routines, particularly regarding paper-and-pencil methods. It

involved one method for doing each particular type of calculation, regardless of whether a different method would be more efficient in a particular case. This emphasis on a set of routines and methods that need to be learned leads to the presentation of mathematics in discrete packages. An example of this would be fractions taught separately from division.

The discovery orientation

In this orientation, learning takes precedence over teaching and the pace of learning is largely determined by the children. Children's own strategies are most important and their understanding is based on working things out for themselves. Children are seen as needing to be 'ready' before they can learn certain mathematical ideas. This results in a view that children vary in their ability to become numerate.

Askew argues that the orientations 'connectionist', 'transmission' and 'discovery' are ideal types; no single teacher in the project held a set of beliefs that precisely matched a single orientation. Nevertheless, teachers who were identified as having a transmission or a discovery orientation were shown to be less effective in their teaching than those identified as connectionist. It would be interesting to investigate whether these findings also held true for adult numeracy teachers.

Adapted from Sheila Macrae in Coben (2003) (1).

used in *Skills for Life* is to address the individual student and deal with their specific needs. If their particular problems or inhibitions that obstruct learning can be addressed, the student should be enabled to learn. All the teacher has to do is to draw upon the correct pedagogic technique and all will be well. However, the epistemology behind this is a narrow conceptualisation that views pedagogy as involving the transmission of knowledge, skills and understanding in a straightforward one-way process whereby students are empty vessels needing to be filled up.

Many educators wish to promote a more progressive model that is rooted in discussions between teacher and student and between student and student. It involves the process of meaning-making whereby students simultaneously construct and make sense of their world, and is also more democratic in the sense that roles of teacher and student can be reversed. However, this type of practice is directed towards meeting the needs of the students rather than the needs of the economy.

What makes a good numeracy teacher?

The research team for 'Making numeracy teaching meaningful to adult learners' (5) found that the teacher has the most important role in making mathematics as meaningful and stimulating as possible for adult learners, and that the quality of teaching is at least as important as the mathematical content.

Teachers need to show that mathematics can be useful in enabling students/learners to function more effectively, and that it can help people have a deeper understanding of the world they live in. However, teachers also need to emphasise the aesthetic qualities of mathematics and to engender a sense of excitement and wonder about the subject. Good practice involves teachers showing that mathematics is exciting.

The research shows that the key feature of a good numeracy teacher is that he or she gets to know the students, their backgrounds, their capabilities and their needs. This was confirmed when the students were asked about what they thought made a good teacher. Many were aware that there is more to teaching than just teaching, and that it's really about understanding, and taking account of, the student's individual needs.

Gurpreet: I think a teacher in maths should understand the background of the student, this is the main thing, if the teacher knows the background he [or she] can go more slowly or understand because some students, they never had maths, and you can't just quickly explain things, so then you have to step back and try to be patient to understand the way how they understand, I think it's quite important if the teacher understands this, every teacher can teach good but some teachers, they are just teaching you know.



Teachers need to emphasise the aesthetic qualities of mathematics.

Like the research team, students felt that the role of the teacher in the numeracy classroom was critical. Teaching consists of a series of relationships, and good relations between the student and teacher are absolutely crucial if effective learning is going to take place.

Joe: If you don't like the teacher, you ain't gonna learn nothing.

The teacher-researchers also thought that a good numeracy teacher should respect students as adults, be able to listen carefully, to explain clearly without talking down or being patronising, and make students feel comfortable and able to ask questions without feeling embarrassed or stupid. A good teacher is intuitive, endlessly patient, gives encouragement and praise, believes in the student and can recognise their potential. Finally, a good teacher has high expectations of their students and knows how to motivate them. ■

[1] Coben D, Colwell, D, et al. (2003) *Adult Numeracy: Review of research and related literature*. London, NRDC: 173.

[2] Askew M, Brown M, Rhodes V, Wiliam D, & Johnson D (1997). *Effective Teachers of Numeracy*. London: King's College London.

[3] Rogers, A. (2003) *What is the difference: a new critique of adult learning and teaching*, Leicester, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

[4] Avis, J. (2000) Policing the subject: learning outcomes, managerialism and research in PCET, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48, pp.38-57.

[5] Swain J. et al. (2005 forthcoming) *Making numeracy teaching meaningful to adult learners*, NRDC.

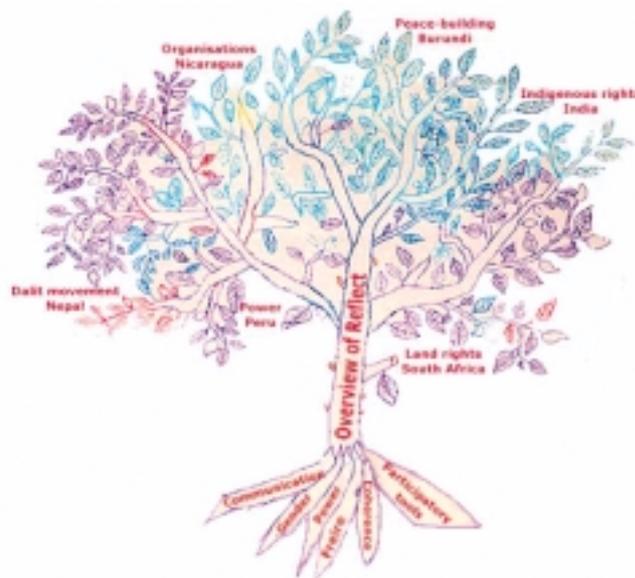
Introducing *Reflect*

Desiree Lopez gives a brief account of the history and rationale of *Reflect*, a unique approach to adult learning.

Reflect started life as three action research projects (in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador) in 1993, managed by ActionAid and funded by the ODA. Since then, it has grown into a worldwide initiative with over 350 projects in more than 60 countries. The *Reflect* approach is based on the theories of Paulo Freire, of which the central premise is that no education is neutral – it can be used for domination or for liberation. Freire argued that ‘illiteracy is just one of the concrete expressions of an unjust social reality’ and developed an approach to literacy which linked ‘learning to read the word with learning to read the world’.

The ODA evaluation of the pilot projects, published in 1995, noted that literacy was not in itself empowering, and that the pilot groups showed few signs of benefits in respect of health, productivity or community organisation. However, *Reflect* interweaves literacy with empowerment, and the real effects of the *Reflect* activities included increased community-level action and participation in community organisations. The pilots also had a positive impact on other areas, including gender roles and relations, health-awareness and children's education.

ActionAid produced the *Reflect* Mother Manual in 1996, which documented the purpose and outcome of the pilots and included ideas for the development of literacy skills. It also documented tools which tutors, community groups and volunteers could adapt in the development of their learner-centred practice, focusing on issues as diverse as ESOL, neighbourhood regeneration and health management. However, in



1998 the decision was taken effectively to abolish the Mother Manual and to focus on networking and the exchange of experience between practitioners, building from practical experience and direct exchange to keep *Reflect* alive rather than to produce a new fixed text. This has in turn led to the development of the publication ‘Communication and Power’ which provides practical examples, contributed by practitioners around the world, of ways of introducing different concepts and facilitating processes and discussions.

Reflect today

Today, the *Reflect* website at www.reflect-action.org includes teaching and learning materials on literacy, →



Paulo Freire and the work of *Reflect*

Paulo Freire was awarded the UNESCO 1986 prize for Education for Peace but is perhaps best known for his book ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ (1968, 1970). In 2003, the International Reflect Circle (CIRAC), a non-governmental organisation, was awarded a UNESCO prize for its work which built on that of Freire. The acronym REFLECT stands for ‘Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques’.

For an introduction to the work of Paulo Freire see www.infed.org/thinkers/et-freir.htm

numeracy and ICT and descriptions of projects and activities all over the world. The numeracy section, in particular, has an interesting debate on the role of numeracy in economic literacy and a highly self-critical account of how Reflect has approached numeracy in the past, which 'has tended to be reduced to abstract mechanical exercises containing numbers that have little bearing on the learners' reality'. Does that sound familiar?

As an ESOL practitioner, I first came across *Reflect* in 1999 when I was trying to adapt a community-based ESOL programme so that it would meet the needs of marginalised refugee and immigrant women in Canada. The experience was extremely significant not only in increasing ESOL literacy and numeracy skills in 'hard-to-reach' communities, but also in helping practitioners to develop ongoing reflection about their work, helping the programme to develop and prioritise ways of assessing alternative outcomes such as increased civic participation, and enabling learners to participate in decision-making both within their communities and beyond.

Reflect has direct relevance to both the **Skills for Life** and the citizenship agendas here in the UK. *Reflect* enables practitioners and learners alike to develop a rights-based approach to community and literacy development. If we are truly interested in an inclusive approach to adult education, exploring *Reflect* will bring us ideas, experience and accountability. ▣

Using the *Reflect* approach in ESOL

Kate Newman examines the links between *Reflect* and the ESOL core curriculum and invites teachers to get involved.



Literacy and language skills are important but, on their own, they will not change people's lives.

Literacy and language skills are important but, on their own, they will not change people's lives. Refugees and asylum-seekers arriving in the UK face many barriers and prejudices in accessing services and meeting their daily needs in an unfamiliar environment. They need to know how to obtain and use information, not just how to read it. They need to develop more than just linguistic confidence if they are to deal with the complex power dynamics inherent in their situation. They should feel as entitled as anyone else to speak out when their rights are abused, as entitled as anyone else to address problems for themselves and to propose their own solutions.

The ESOL core curriculum

The introduction of the national core curriculum for ESOL creates new opportunities to address these needs. The curriculum aims to address learners' short-term goals, their education and employment aspirations, their trauma and their personal learning difficulties. It emphasises a learner-centred approach to ESOL. Teachers and providers are expected to be aware of the range of needs, skills and aspirations that each learner has and the implications of these for the learning process.

Reflect offers a practical and proven way of achieving these aims and expectations. It can play a key role in linking the learning of ESOL to wider processes of social integration and community cohesion. A *Reflect* ESOL approach will enable learners to gain English



language skills alongside other skills. By linking language learning to the analysis of broader issues in learners' lives, *Reflect* can help break down the walls of the classroom, helping learners to develop and strengthen their language skills through practical use.

Learners as participants

The *Reflect* approach challenges teacher- or text-driven work, placing learners as participants at the centre of the process. Discussion and language learning are based on rich visual materials developed by the learner/participants themselves and related to their own immediate experiences. Thus the systematic learning of communication skills is linked to an individual and group process of empowerment and action. By addressing the existing power dynamics between teacher and learner/participants, *Reflect* can enable learner/participants to use their knowledge, skills and creativity to their full extent.

The adaptation of *Reflect* to ESOL in the UK is at an early stage but we are in the process of developing a pack of resource materials, which can be mapped to the ESOL curriculum, for use by ESOL teachers across the range of ESOL providers (FE colleges, refugee community organisations, etc.)

We are looking for ESOL teachers/providers who are interested in being involved in this *Reflect ESOL* initiative, whether helping with the materials development process, receiving training, experimenting with the approach, or joining the network. 📧

If you are interested please contact us:
Eamon Scanlon (eamons@actionaid.org)
and Kate Newman (katen@actionaid.org)
Tel: 020 7561 7561. For more details on
the *Reflect* approach see:
www.reflect-action.org

Reflect in a global society

Phyllis Thompson highlights how the *Reflect* approach can help students and tutors across the globe to learn from each other.

Adult literacy learners all over the globe bring their world into the classroom. Refugee women can talk about their trauma in a literacy class; the powerless peasant is able to question the unequal distribution of power in his society; fashion-conscious youth are encouraged to think about the labour behind the labels they flaunt; the housewife contemplates the un/fairness of the trade that brought the coffee/tea she will drink during the break from the class.

In recognising literacy learners as both local and global citizens, we should not lose sight of the socio-emotional dimension of the learning and teaching process and the place of experience in literacy. But how can we acknowledge learners' experience, clarify their curriculum expectations and, at the same time, maintain an educational focus? What do we do to students in a literacy class? What are authentic learning outcomes? What are the key literacy skills for a global society? How do we balance content and methodology? How do we assess and reward success in adult literacy? What is best practice?

If these questions challenge the pedagogy then they must also challenge our expectations of the literacy teacher. Are we facilitators? tutors? Community development workers? Social workers? Political activists? Educators? Paulo Freire and others have helped us to understand that we bring our particular world-view and values to the learning process. So, what background, training and competencies should we expect of the good/effective literacy tutor?

Communicating between worlds

Literacy is a means to social inclusion; it embodies learning as well as a social, political, economic and environmental agenda. The desire to communicate is at the heart of the learning and teaching of literacy.

If literacy is about communication, including communication between different worlds, we should ask 'How far do the literacy professionals communicate with each other, or enable learners to do so?' Literacy practitioners in both North and South testify to the added value gained when funders, partners, facilitators and learners discuss and agree a shared set of criteria for assessing the quality of learning outcomes in adult literacy.

So, how best can practitioners in different parts of the world, wherever they are on the learner-teacher continuum, learn from each other? The *Reflect* approach is designed to connect the local experience of the learner to wider themes and global issues. It is a powerful holistic approach to teaching literacy but, as yet, it is only an interesting possibility for practitioners in the UK. Opportunities to learn about it and test it in UK contexts are available to only a few, yet government funding, via DfID, promotes it as an effective method for learning and teaching literacy in the South. DfID and the DfES could surely help to establish dialogue between stakeholders in the South and the North, in the interest of **Skills for Life** and of sustainable development in our global society. 📧

This is an edited version of a paper in 'Linking literacy programmes in developing countries' (NRDC Spring 2005).

Literacy and the life-course

Investing in adult basic skills education is often justified in terms of the social and economic returns it brings.

Stephen Reder describes the Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL) in the US, which is testing this view.

The LSAL is addressing four major research questions:

1	2	3	4
To what extent do adults' literacy abilities continue to develop after they leave school?	What are adults' patterns of participation in formal basic skills programs and other learning activities?	How does participation in basic skills programs and other learning activities affect observed literacy development?	How do changes in literacy abilities affect social and economic outcomes in adult life?

Development of literacy

In response to the first question, adults' literacy abilities clearly do change over the life-course after they leave school. The LSAL measures literacy proficiency and everyday literacy practices. Proficiency is measured by Document Literacy assessment instruments developed by the Educational Testing Service and used in numerous other large-scale surveys of adult literacy. Engagement in literacy practices is measured by responses to questions about the frequency with which adults perform a range of reading activities (e.g. how frequently they read the main news section of the newspaper). A similar scale is used for engagement in everyday maths activities.

These measures reveal considerable variability among individuals in the amount and rate of observed change but neither measure is sufficient, on its own, to characterise the literacy changes that occur across the adult life-course.

In general, younger adults tend to exhibit increases in literacy proficiency and practices over time, whereas adults aged about 40 and above show the opposite pattern, i.e. decreasing levels of proficiency and less engagement in literacy practices. Further analyses will help clarify the extent to which these age-related changes reflect maturational changes or life experiences such as changes in employment, family and daily activities.

The decline in literacy that many older adults appear to experience may have important implications for policy and programs. Traditionally there have been two sources of new adults with basic skills needs:

- young people leaving school with basic skills needs; and
- immigrant adults entering with basic skills needs.

The LSAL results so far suggest a third and as yet unconsidered source:

- older adults experiencing new basic skills needs.

The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL) is the first research project to test the 'human capital' model of adult basic skills education using data collected over a period of time. LSAL is following a representative sample of about 1,000 from a population of low-education adults aged 18 to 44 in a large American city who dropped out of school and have not achieved a secondary credential. Data are still being collected and analyses are still in progress, but a number of interim findings have emerged from the LSAL study.

Given our increasingly graying societies and workforces, new types of policies and programs may be needed to help adults maintain their literacy and numeracy abilities.

Patterns of participation

The second research question considers adults' patterns of participation in formally organised basic skills programs and other learning activities. These patterns are complex. Many adults in the LSAL population do not participate in such programs, but most participate at least once. Among those who do, patterns of participation are often broken into multiple episodes, with learners participating in a course for a while, then stopping for a while, then participating again. These fragmented patterns often reflect the difficulties of fitting program participation into already busy lives filled with the competing demands of family and work. Adults often endeavour on their own specifically to improve their reading, writing or maths skills, a process here termed self-study. Some adults engage in such self-study while taking courses, others engage in self-study during periods between courses, while many others engage in self-study but never take basic skills courses.

In general, a picture emerges of an active learner deploying resources such as programs, tutors and self-study in sustained efforts to improve basic skills, rather than of a passive consumer of program services. From a program's perspective, students may come and go frequently, with exits construed as negative events, raising questions about program retention and effectiveness. In contrast, the patterns of participation in programs and self-study observed by LSAL appear quite different when viewed more holistically within the context of adult life. Overall participation rates appear much higher and learning trajectories much longer, reflecting a better fit with observed literacy development across the life-course.

Participation and change

The third research question examines the influence of these patterns of participation on changes in literacy observed across the life-course. Statistical modelling indicates that both program participation and self-study have a positive effect on engagement in literacy practices, and that increased engagement in literacy practices in turn leads to increases in proficiency. The most direct and immediate impacts of participation are thus evident for literacy practices rather than for literacy proficiency, though literacy proficiency in the longer term is positively affected by participation. These results indicate that evaluations of program effectiveness that attempt to link program participation to short-term proficiency changes may fail to capture the ongoing impact of programs on life-course literacy development. Impact would be better evaluated in terms of shorter-term changes in literacy and numeracy practices or possibly by longer-term changes in proficiency.

Social and economic outcomes

The fourth research question examines the impact of life-course literacy development on social and economic outcomes. Analyses of these relationships, now under way, will examine the impact of adult literacy development on a range of outcomes, including post-secondary education, employment and earnings. Future publications about the LSAL project will also consider a broad array of information collected about individuals' educational and family backgrounds and adult life contexts, and consider how these factors together influence literacy development across the life-course. ▣

Prof. Stephen Reder works at Portland State University, Oregon, USA, and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). Stephen was a visiting NRDC fellow at the Institute of Education from Oct-Dec 2004.

Dipping in and out

The Adult Learners' Lives project based at Lancaster University has been working with adults in college and community settings over the past two years, looking at the relationship between learning and people's lives. Using a qualitative, multi-method approach, we have identified many adults who have engaged with formal learning in ways similar to those described by Steve Reder. Their stories showed us how they had 'dipped in and out' of different programs and resources in response both to changing and developing life circumstances and goals, and to the relevance and effectiveness of the provision available to them at the time.

This was particularly true of the people we worked with in community settings, whose lives were often characterised by disadvantage and difficult and unpredictable events and situations. From the perspective of educational provision this can be seen as failure or 'drop-out', but within the broader picture of these individuals' lives it was often a positive and necessary step. Often, they were exploring new possibilities for their lives and learning, developing confidence in accessing formal learning, or accumulating social capital, as well as developing their literacy, numeracy and language practices. The effects of this engagement were not always apparent at the time but could be seen unfolding over longer periods.

Rachel Hodge

Embedded teaching and learning

The NRDC has recently completed a series of case studies of embedded teaching and learning of literacy, language and numeracy.

Tom Jupp and **Celia Roberts** highlight the key messages that emerge from these studies.



Many people with LLN needs do not want to attend LLN classes.



Photograph: Brand X Pictures

The national Skills Strategy aims to increase substantially the number of people who have a Level 2 vocational qualification. One obstacle to this is that many people who might want to aim for such qualifications have poor literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills, which will stand in the way of their success. The **Skills for Life** strategy recognises that many such people with LLN needs do not want to attend LLN classes. But it is also widely accepted that such people's willingness to work on their LLN skills is enhanced when they can improve them in the context of the vocational programme which is their primary motivation.

There are two models for providing LLN within the framework of a wider vocational programme:

- discrete literacy, language and/or numeracy support classes; or
- embedded literacy, language and/or numeracy.

The distinction between discrete LLN learning support and embedded LLN learning support is not clear-cut. As the NRDC research shows, there can be areas of overlap, but the organisation of the teaching and the learning experience are distinctly different. A defining characteristic of embedded provision is that

The organisation and scope of the research

The NRDC research examined a wide variety of embedded LLN provision, to reflect the diversity of vocational courses. The case studies were selected from the following curriculum areas: Construction; Entry to Employment (E2E) – engineering; Childcare; Land-based industries; Complementary Therapy; Nursing. The courses studied were standard

vocational programmes or specially designed preparatory vocational programmes. The fieldwork was predominantly classroom-focused and learner-centred, concentrating on the behaviour and responses of individual learners and teachers. The researchers emphasise that they endeavoured to take a holistic view of the learner – i.e. all aspects of his or her experience in the classroom, including the affective aspects (i.e. feelings) as well as the cognitive. The analysis of classroom observation focussed on ‘what is going

on here’ – the talking, the classroom organisation, the behaviour and interaction and the relationship between the vocational activity and the uses of and development of literacy, language and numeracy.

the processes and organisation of LLN learning have been redesigned so as to fit the vocational objectives and learning styles of the students on a particular programme. The approach is learner-centred.

Key findings

The case studies illuminate how embedded LLN can work successfully as an integral part of vocational courses and they identify some of the characteristics critical to this success. Many of the teachers – both vocational and LLN – appear to be both expert and strongly committed to this approach and we can learn more from their practice as a result. But we must still be cautious about the generalisations which follow from this small and diverse range of courses.

Motivation and vocational courses

The case studies describe how well-resourced and well-taught vocational courses offer learners the opportunity to acquire both practical skills and a new professional identity or, as some of the case studies describe, offer learners membership of a new ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991) (1). This is what motivates such learners, often in contrast to their former experience as ‘school pupils’. Tutors are both teachers and mentors. Learners are both ‘doing things’ and understanding the culture of their chosen jobs – the behaviour, values and ways of communicating – for example, as joiners, as child care workers, or as Indian head massage practitioners. This new identity, in turn, changes their attitude towards working on ‘theory’ and on literacy, language and numeracy if they see it as an integral part of the learning for the job they are aspiring to. Once learners value LLN in this way, they will accept focusing on improving their LLN skills.

The organisation of LLN learning

The case studies describe how LLN learning often takes place when the speaking, listening, reading, writing or calculating are directly linked to a practi-

cal task. This is very obvious in the observation of numeracy learning. There are many practical tasks in the construction and engineering courses observed which cannot be undertaken without calculation, measurement and estimation as integral parts of the process. It is easy to understand that extra help with these processes feels a lot more useful to a mathematical learner when he or she is ‘on task’ vocationally rather than in a separate classroom and at a different time. In any case, the gap between carrying out the particular task and the learner’s existing knowledge may only become apparent to the learner and the teacher as the task is carried out.

These activities involve learners working on their own or together, with the LLN tutor supporting them as part of the practical task. As well as providing learning through doing, this approach allows young people, in particular, to escape from the peer pressure of appearing weak in LLN. At the same time, to be successful, the relationships between learners and teachers have to be based on empathy and respect, particularly for LLN learning. The LLN tutor’s role was less effective if most of the vocational teacher’s time was spent in whole class ‘up front’ teaching.

The vocational subject and the LLN curricula

The case studies describe how ‘embedding’ is not just about interlinking different curricula; it is deeper and more complex than that. Mapping literacy, language and numeracy skills onto the vocational curriculum can only provide a starting point and give a general idea of what has to be learned. The LLN tutor has to learn, by participating in the vocational classroom, how literacy, language and numeracy are used both for the particular job and in this type of vocational classroom. The case studies describe how learners need and learn the ‘situated’ LLN skills of their chosen job (Chaiklin and Lave 1996) (2). But they also need the more general or ‘transportable’ LLN skills of classroom learning and reflection: for example, →



**Embedded
LLN can
work
successfully
as an
integral part
of vocational
courses.**

they need a range of adjectives to write aromatherapy instructions or to describe and compare plants in horticulture. These transportable skills provide an analytic language for talking about LLN that allows skills to be reconstructed in a new context.

The teaching team

Teaching skills and relationships between vocational and LLN tutors which led to shared purpose and planning were more important than general models of embedded provision. Shared purpose and planning were not just matters of agreed common purpose but involved finding shared values and a shared language to talk about this purpose. On all the courses described, the teachers planned and worked closely together. They shared, in their respective roles, the same vocational objective for their learners. They were strongly learner-centred.

Vocational teachers have a natural legitimacy on their programmes. They represent the role to which the learner aspires. The LLN teachers lack this immediate legitimacy because their role is one of support and enabling. Learners have to come to recognise the contribution of the LLN teachers to their vocational aspirations. The case studies suggest that this is more immediately recognised by learners who need help to develop their English language than by learners with literacy or numeracy needs.



The LLN teachers had to learn a lot about the vocational area.

This distinctive role for the LLN teacher in embedded teaching may not appeal to all LLN teachers; they have less control of the curriculum and of how it is taught than they experience as a subject teacher in their own right.

The characteristic of the successful teaching teams was that they were motivated to provide some embedded provision. They had the time to work and plan together, and both sorts of teachers were willing to learn. The vocational teachers were willing to try to understand the importance of LLN for their learners and to modify their classroom organisation and practice to reflect this. The LLN teachers had to learn a lot about the vocational area and how to provide effective LLN support for these learners in terms of both teaching approaches and content.

The teaching team has to share fully including, at times, sharing the same classroom, but the case studies show that the actual literacy, language and numeracy can be provided, and learners can be supported, in a variety of ways. Initial LLN diagnostic assessment is necessary, but much can also be learned by observing and supporting learners in their vocational settings. There is also a place for discrete LLN classroom work on such programmes, providing it is integral to the delivery of the vocational curriculum.

Example 1

Maths Anxiety

The term 'maths anxiety' refers to the negative perception that some people have about 'doing maths'. In these two examples, the trainers on an E2E course at a private training provider explain how they tackle this problem.

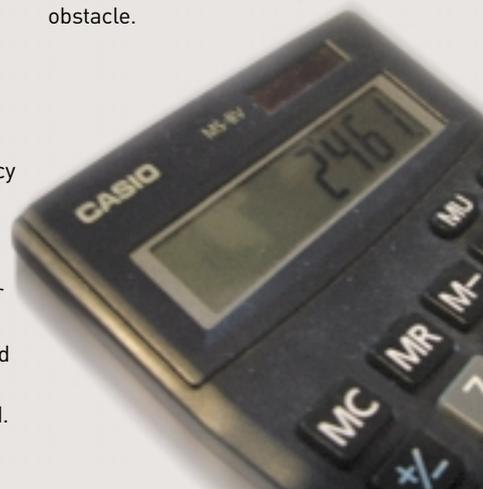
Researcher: 'Do you think that anything to do with maths or numbers sometimes scares them?'

Trainer 1: 'Basically you just have to remember not to make them look stupid, really. So I tend to do things in an easier way, in a day-to-day way. Instead of talking in very technical terms, I use something simpler.'

Trainer 2: 'I try and think about something, I don't know, like buying sweets or something, you know, packets of crisps or burgers from MacDonalds, rather, so that when it comes to numeracy for example, you ask them if you buy so many, what would be? A lot of the time you don't have any idea any way, so you have to go through it with them, and offer them the calculator if they want to use that, so when they do basic numeracy and they can't do it, you have to remember once again, not to make them look stupid. Is it something, say, like 100 divided and

they might not know, so I say well here's a calculator, do it on that, like it's quite normal.'

Note: The calculator plays an interesting role for Trainer 2; it enables the trainees to perform adequately in front of their peers. It becomes more than a tool for learning; it enables learning to take place because it removes an important obstacle.



Participation and success

Although all the learners accepted the fact that there was an LLN input on their course, the great majority of learners in the case studies would not be prepared to attend stand-alone literacy, language or numeracy classes.

For young people, there is a range of vocational programmes which include key skills and additional learning support. The question is whether these young people are more likely to succeed with an embedded approach to LLN or with discrete key skills and learning support arrangements. Does embedded LLN raise vocational achievement for young people?

For the four adult part-time programmes described in the case studies, the position is different. These courses were specially designed to provide literacy and language integrated with preparation in the chosen vocational area. Such programmes, if successful, can be a powerful strategy to widen participation and start learners on a route which can lead to a Level 2 vocational qualification or to accredited LLN programmes. But the case studies show that there can be a tension between the vocational preparation and the stand-alone literacy or English language qualification learners are being prepared for. An example of this was in the childcare and nursing courses, where learners were also studying for separate ESOL qualifications. On the other hand, success in these quali-

cations may significantly boost the learners' confidence in pursuing their vocational aspirations.

Conclusion

These case studies show that, while embedding LLN and ESOL in vocational courses helps to improve learners' motivation and successful completion of programmes, it does much more than this. It helps learners to develop new identities and practices, to learn how to be and act in new ways, to become someone in the building trade, or a nurse in the NHS, or a childcare worker, or to have expertise that is valued by family and friends and could lead to employment, such as massage skills. These new roles and identities would not be developed in discrete basic skills sessions, nor would learners appreciate the value of LLN in achieving vocational and recreational goals if their course paid little or no attention to LLN. ❏

(1) Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(2) Chaiklin, S. and Lave, J. (1996) *Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Does
embedded
LLN raise
vocational
achievement
for young
people?

Example 2

Trainer 3: 'Well first of all most of the trainees aren't happy to do maths. They've been put off maths in the classroom. So what we tend to do, for me on the trainer side of things, I deal with fitting, I deal with measuring and marking up, but I don't deal with marking it up initially, because it would be too intense, with the numbers and marking up.'

I would explain to them what they are going to try and make, even by use of a demonstration, an example of something someone else has done previously, I've explained different parts on the drawing; now what that then does, it opens them up to drawing measurements on there, or numbers on there, er, I'll show them how to do the measurements necessary for it.

Also what I like to do, is anyone who's done it before them – say to them, ask him, because that way it removes the barrier of the teacher aspects, it also helps with interaction between one person to

another about work, the person who's already done it before, gives them a sense of achievement that they can actually pass on a little bit of the knowledge that they've learned, and gives them a bit of confirmation that they've actually moved on, as they didn't know it to start with, so there were so many aspects from that.

...so the basic, core units of numeracy we're dealing with, so it's doing it in a way so they're not shying away from it or frightened of doing it, because it becomes part of the job. Initially they're reluctant to do it, because they're nervous about their own maths, but as you start pushing them a little bit, you'll find that they know more than they're letting on, because it's just lack of confidence most of the time.'

Note: This trainer identifies a critical role for peer support and interaction. Both the trainee who asks a question and the trainee who responds are actively engaged in negotiating learning.

These trainers aim to capture the essence of the process whereby mathematical thinking becomes vocational doing and vice versa, and to demonstrate this to the trainees. The trainees are motivated to do mathematics because of the situatedness of the task, while the trainers support their learning not only through explaining the mathematics, but also through an understanding of how they (the trainees and the trainers) socially construct their learning.



Voices from the classroom

We all know classrooms and we all have opinions about what goes on in them. One way in which researchers try to get inside the classroom and understand what happens there is by recording and transcribing what is said and then analysing these exchanges. This extract is part of a transcript taken by an NRDC researcher from a lesson for a group of beginning readers. How would you analyse this exchange? What does it say to you?

The original analysis by the research team is on the NRDC website at www.nrdc.org.uk/voices

Why not have a look and then share your own analysis with others, or comment on the NRDC analysis in the reflect forum on the website?

The context ESOL Level Two class – FE College - Leeds

The learners have been told that the text is about International Women's Day and have been talking in groups about what they think will be in the text, which they have not yet seen. The teacher is getting feedback on what they discussed.

- Tutor:** So what...what things did you think...Liliana, your table, what did you think was going to be in the article? What do you reckon?
- Learner:** It's about peace...
- Tutor:** Peace? Yes?
- Learner:** and freedom.
- Tutor:** Freedom, yes.
- Learner:** Freedom...not going to war...
- Tutor:** Yes.
- Learner:** Listen mothers, you know...
- Tutor:** Yes.
- Learner:** because if there is war there are many innocent children... and they die.
- Tutor:** Or suffer or become orphans, yes...yes that's a good one, that's one thing that I think it does talk about. Did you have any other ideas?
- Learner:** Equality?
- Tutor:** Equality, yes, good.
- Learner:** Yes.
- Learner:** about the history...of the woman...they...you know [indistinct].
- Tutor:** So something about the history of equality for women, yes, probably...
- Learner:** And what is the
- Tutor:** Yes...Henri?
- Henri:** Sometime just the...the temper of the women...because every time...she ...they are angry...they think that...they are under the domination of the men.
- Tutor:** OK...Yes ...talking about women's problem, women's problems.

Learners' first language in the ESOL classroom

Should learners' first or other languages be used in the ESOL classroom? Olivia Sagan and Helen Casey consider the issues.

When we were teaching ESOL in the multilingual classroom, we often used learners' first or other languages as part of our teaching strategy. ESOL learners in the UK have no shortage of spoken English around them and can be hugely supported by being able to discuss their learning using their own, more familiar, language. Furthermore, in working with groups of particularly vulnerable ESOL learners, where the development of trust and confidence is of paramount importance, it can empower learners' sense of safety and identity to use languages in which they feel more confident.

However, our research is picking up on some mixed messages and responses about the rights and wrongs of this; usually a sign of a good debate in the offing! For example, teachers moving into ESOL from EFL have found it a challenging idea. EFL learners often have little access to spoken English, so it is common practice to maximise its use in the EFL classroom.

What does the research say?

Some research findings confirm the importance of using learners' first languages in the classroom.

For example, Larry Condelli's study of ESL learners in the United States (1) found that one of the factors with the most impact on learning was the use of learners' first languages. Similarly, Heide Wrigley's research (3) discusses both the uses and the problems of using native languages in class, but makes a firm point about the boost given to participation when learners feel their identity is validated.

In the ESOL classroom in the UK, on



In terms of the native language, we do need to rethink that 'English only' idea. Heide Wrigley (2)

the other hand, it seems that the learners' first language is rarely used in a conscious and constructive way. Its use is seldom discussed, with some teachers being more aware of its potential than others.

Melanie Cooke from the NRDC research into effective practice (4) observes that: 'Some (teachers) do encourage students to use their own language to help each other and to work things out, especially in ESOL literacy classes...'

However, when a video clip showing ESOL teachers using language comparison methods with their learners was included in the national ESOL Core Curriculum training 'We were amazed at the amount of controversy these clips raised, with teachers all over the country protesting they would never use these kinds of methods.' (Helen Sunderland at LLU+).

In contrast, NRDC's research into Level 4 ESOL Teacher Training is finding that

some trainees from the EFL tradition welcome the use and discussion of first or other languages in the ESOL classroom. One trainee spoke about how she had 'intuitively known' she could allow students to use their own languages but that this had 'always been frowned on in the past...' (5).

Clarifying the issues

We both have very positive experiences of teaching ESOL while encouraging the use of learners' first or other languages in the classroom. In most cases, we did not speak the learners' native languages but, in one case, the teacher spoke the learners' own language and could use this constructively when teaching them English.

This discussion therefore needs to recognise at least two different contexts, calling for different skills and considerations:

1. the use of learners' own languages in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural ESOL group where the teacher uses only English.
2. the use of learners' own language in a mono-lingual class where the teacher speaks this language as well as English.

What are your experiences? Your opinions? Your examples? Did you learn English through the use or avoidance of your own language? Share your views with us. d.mallows@ioe.ac.uk ✉

(1) Condelli, L. (2002) Effective Instruction for Adult ESL Literacy Students : Findings from the 'what works' study. American Institute for Research, Washington DC.

(2) Wrigley, H.S. What Works for Adult ESL Students. Focus on Basics Volume 6, Issue C September 2003 <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/2003/wrigley.html>

(3) Wrigley, H.S. and Guth, G (1992) Bringing Literacy to Life. Aguirre International, Burlingame, California.

(4) NRDC ESOL Effective Practice Project (due to complete Summer 2006).

(5) NRDC (2005 forthcoming) ITE Programmes for Teachers of Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL .

Learning to write in 21st century England

How much has changed in 100 years?

In **reflect** Issue 1 (October 2004), **Ursula Howard** discussed the place of writing in the growth of literacy in the 19th century, and learners' powerful motivation to acquire and use this crucial skill. Here, she compares this with the situation today.

In the first article in this series, I explored how the motivational drive of learners in the 19th century led many people to engage in informal and community-based learning, and how church and state gradually built a formal education system built over the fertile ground for such initiatives. (1)

Does today's provision motivate enough learners to stay and succeed in what they want to learn? How much has really changed in 100 years?

One major difference is evidenced by in-depth interviews I conducted with a number of individual writers and community-based groups in the 1980s and 1990s about their experiences of learning to write. Many people learning literacy as adults in a society with a fully developed educational system do not remember their initial learning experiences in as positive a way as those who wrote down their experiences of learning in the 19th century. Failure and frustration stalk many modern memories. One learner compared the education system in the 1980s to a horse race in which 'the leaders were getting further and further away, and I finished the race as a complete failure – or was it the school that failed me?' One woman learner remembered that 'I always used to make up little stories for my children when they were small, and write snippets of poetry – very limited because my spelling wasn't too good. But I probably always wanted to write deep down and not really knowing how or having the time to'.

There are also striking similarities to the 19th century experience. Another woman I interviewed remarked :

'I used to scribble with chalk and things like that on the pavements, and remember things. And if people used to tell me their name ... I used to ask them how they spelt that, write it ... I always used to like things

written down. And I used to love notes. If anybody used to write a note ... if it was only one sentence 'see you later' or 'I'll meet you tomorrow', I used to hang on to it and keep looking at it. I think this is how I learnt to read because I used to collect little things, snippets of anything. I ... had a big old handbag tucked under my arm – there was always lots of paper in it – snippets of bits and pieces that I'd collected'.

Margaret Bearfield. Brighton (2)

Writing in the 21st century curriculum

Writing is assessed in the four key stages of the national curriculum for schools in England. However, while the Adult Literacy core curriculum (3) does cover speaking, listening, reading and writing, in that order, writing is arguably the skill to which the least attention has been given, despite research evidence that it is increasingly essential to jobs of all grades, that it is essential to achieve vocational qualifications, and that many people's sense of failure hangs on their bad feelings about their lack of writing skills. The opening statement in the core curriculum section on writing starts on a cautious note:

'Although the need to write extensively may be limited for many adults, writing nevertheless remains an important form of communication. In everyday life it is difficult to avoid filling in forms ...'

(page 102)

The introduction goes on to say that 'for many adults personal writing is a key to understanding and sharing their experiences'.

However, a strong message of the core curriculum is the importance given to structure and form in relation to content, and the emphasis on technical competence (spelling, punctuation, grammar) over creativity or critical intelligence. Two extracts from the core curriculum section on writing illustrate the approach:

Writing Composition

Adults should be taught to:

- use written words and phrases to record or present information
- understand that writing is a way of representing language in a more permanent form than speech
- understand that writing can be structured in different ways for different contexts and audiences eg in sentences, in a list
- understand that writers have to plan and organise their thoughts before writing them down.

Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (Writing at Entry level 1) England 2001 (page 104).

Adults should be taught to:

- plan and draft writing
- judge how much to write and the level of detail to include
- present information in a logical sequence using paragraphs where appropriate
- use language suitable for purpose and audience'

Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (Writing at Level 1) England 2001 (page 120).

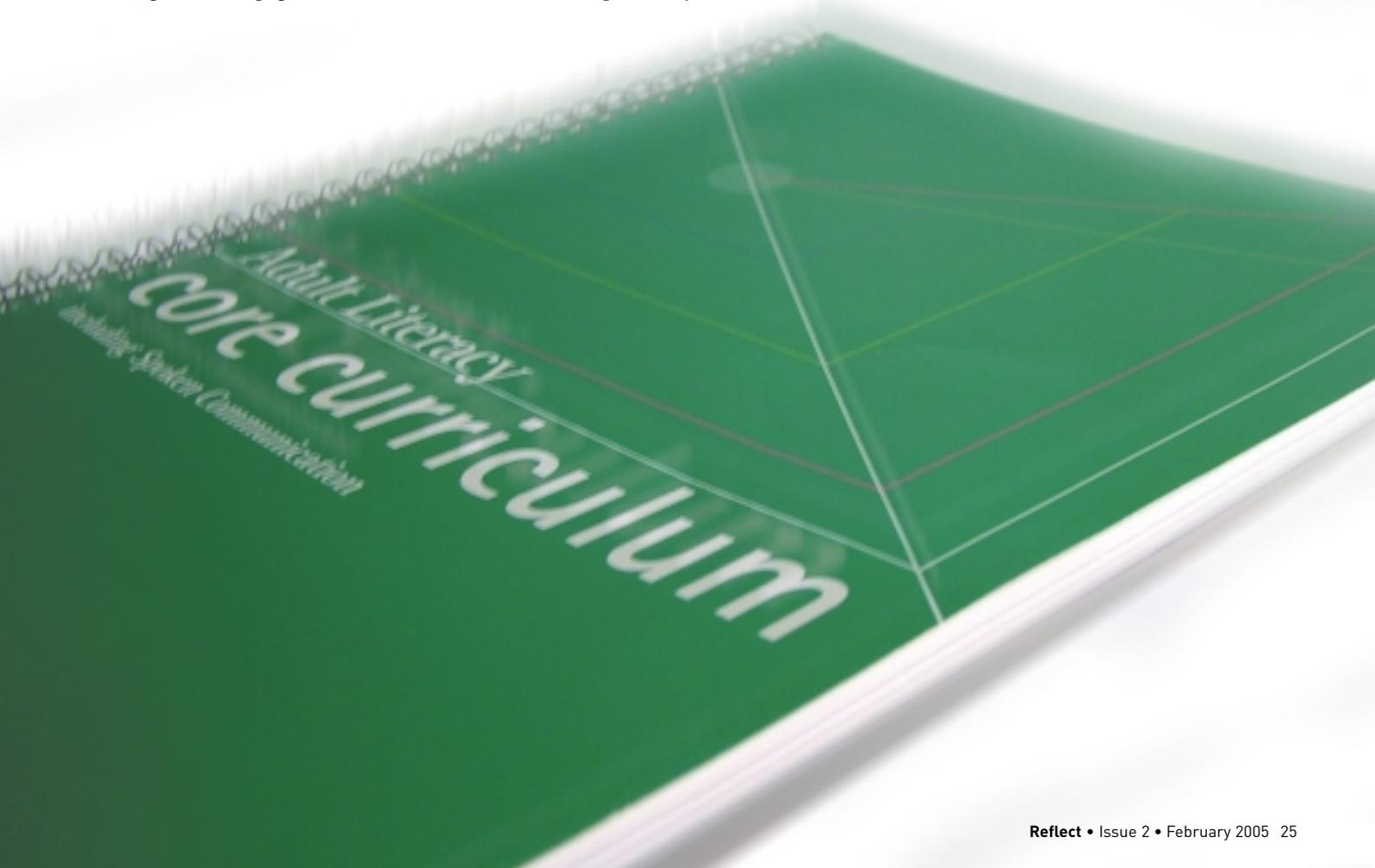
Current curriculum documents seem to be in a direct line of descent from the school 'standards' documents of 100 years ago, when there was also a strong emphasis on correct grammar, spelling and handwriting.

Back to basics ?

We can contrast these approaches with the views of the one-time teacher and fierce critic of the national curriculum in schools, Philip Pullman, author of the 'His Dark Materials' trilogy (4):

'So what I say is: back to basics They're often held to be things like spelling and grammar But as a matter of common observation, we all know that we can put the spelling right and fiddle with the grammar – how can something it's possible to leave till the last minute possibly be basic? But the joy of discovery, the thrill we feel when an idea strikes that might become a story – we can't add that on at the last minute. If that joy isn't nourishing the roots of the work, it's never going to show in the flower. That truly is basic. I'm all for the basics.'

There is little sense in the current core curriculum of the role of writing in developing creativity, self-expression or critical thinking. Nor is there any sense of the possibility of ambition in a learner-writer to be a →



writer with a capital 'W' in the way earlier generations aspired to. Margaret Bearfield's comment still resonates (2):

'what a wealth if women writers knuckled down to writing, what a store. When I was a girl only intellectuals wrote anyway. There were very few working-class writers – well I never saw any'.

The influence of the core curriculum

Does the strong functional/technical emphasis in the core curriculum matter? Teachers are free to interpret the curriculum, and the curriculum gives ample room for teaching writing in a variety of ways. For example, the introduction to the section on writing includes quotes from a poem by Blake ('O Rose thou art sick'), and from the autobiography of Tony Adams (Arsenal and England footballer), which serve as illustrations of the breadth of materials and strategies that teachers can use.

However, three factors make the core curriculum a powerful driver of how writing is taught, rather than offering a 'rough guide' to teachers:

- First, the growth in literacy provision which *Skills for Life* funding has enabled means that there are many underqualified, new, part-time teachers in the field. Their inexperience leads them to an over-literal implementation of the curriculum.
- Secondly, the emphasis on planning, grammar and spelling in teaching writing feeds people's fears of exposure and repeated failure. Writing is the most visible evidence of skills and mistakes.
- Thirdly, the curriculum is part of a wider 'learning infrastructure' developed as part of *Skills for Life*. The curriculum is the means to learners' achievement. Achievement is measured primarily (for literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners) by the new National Test. That test does not measure writing. It does measure spelling, but only by requiring candidates to identify (ie read) correctly spelled words in a multiple-choice assessment.



Three factors make the core curriculum a powerful driver of how writing is taught.

The importance of writing

Writing should be taught in a way that catches the imagination and sustains the motivation of learners. There is significant research, including by NRDC, which suggests that writing is increasingly needed in the workplace in jobs at every grade – and more and more through the medium of ICT. Writing is also needed for the portfolios required as part of the assessment regime for vocational qualifications (NVQs). Since literacy learning is increasingly taught in the context of other learning goals (hairdressing, horticulture, football coaching, engineering), writing will become a more and more important set of skills and practices in work and life. Writing can be linked, in the workplace and elsewhere, to ability, 'thinking skills', problem-solving, creativity and resourcefulness.

The quality of teaching and learning

In 2003 the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) published a thematic review of provision in adult literacy teaching and learning (5). In their view, there is widespread poor practice, leading to high levels of 'drop out'. Inspectors have observed lessons which are often boring and flat, dominated by worksheets and skills taught in isolation. New teachers have little support or mentoring in their workplaces to help them develop more exciting, risky strategies and approaches to learning.

NRDC's research supports the 'snapshot' picture which inspectors see on their visits. In addition, the Individual Learning Plans against which individual learners' progress and achievements are measured reinforce a learning system in which individualised learning has become isolated and learning experiences are fragmented. There is little group work – often the stimulus for expressive writing – and not much talk in the classroom.

With this apparent lack of fit between learners' motivation to learn to write and the teaching and learning of writing in the Adult Literacy core curriculum and in current provision, what does NRDC's research show? How could informal and community-focused teaching contribute? I will address these questions in the third and final article in this series. ▣

(1) Earlier editions of this magazine are on the NRDC website at www.nrdc.org.uk

(2) Quotes from oral interviews in Howard, U. 'Writing in 19th century England: uses and meanings'.

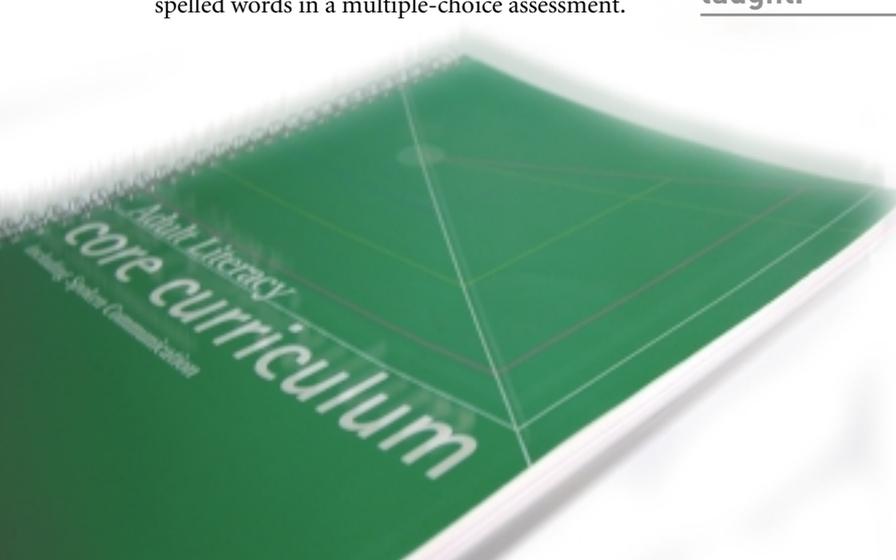
Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Sussex, 1994.

(3) Adult Literacy core curriculum. BSA/DfES 2001.

(4) Pullman, P. 'Give them a taste of honey' in Times Educational Supplement, London 8.2.2002 (writing about the National Curriculum for schools).

(5) 'The Skills for Life Survey: a national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills'.

Summary version. DfES, London 2003`.



THE ILP DEBATE

In **reflect** Issue 1, we invited readers to engage in discussion, perhaps through NRDC's online discussion forums, about key issues in Skills for Life. In this Issue, readers contribute to the debate about the role and value of Individual Learning Plans.

EMAIL FORUM

Subject: ILPs: option or requirement?



 In the next edition of **reflect**, can we try to dispel some of the myths surrounding the use of ILPs? I'm thinking particularly of the belief that they are an LSC requirement for funding and/or audit purposes. Our audit guidance makes it clear that this isn't the case. This might reassure those who believe that the 'added burden' of recording for audit purposes compromises the use of ILPs and distracts from their original purpose.

Thanks.

Anita Hallam
National Learning and Skills Council

 I'm puzzled by this message. The DfES draft document 'Planning learning and recording achievement: a guide for practitioners' (April 2003) said on page 92: 'What audit evidence is needed for achievement funding in non-accredited learning?'

The answer given was as follows: 'The LSC expects evidence to support such claims to be as robust as that presented in support of claims for achievement funding for nationally recognised, approved qualifications on the NQF. There are no additional requirements specifically for non-accredited learning aims.'

Auditors may ask to see:

- enrolment forms and records of attendance
- the learners' learning agreement stating the learning aim, based on the national standards
- a statement of the learner's goals, which may be on the ILP or a separate record
- records of progress, assessment and internal verification
- samples of learner's work
- a statement of achievement relating to the learning aim and goals. This may be on the ILP or on a separate record.

Where providers use ILPs to record learners' learning aims, goals and progress towards achievement, it is achievement of the stated aim and not of the ILPs that count as evidence for achievement funding. This is because ILPs often include goals that are personal to the learner and that are not strictly about the learning aim...Organisations must have procedures for moderating and verifying judgements about progress against the standards.'

Sincerely
Karen Heath

 I am also puzzled as much of non-accredited basic skills funding relies on ILP evidence in order to claim that funding. In addition, during our inspection, we were asked how we moderate our ILPs. I would be really keen to find out through **reflect** whether other learning providers have come up with a system for moderating ILPs because we have found this a tricky issue.

Cathy McDonnell
Sussex Downs Adult College

 I think the point here is that, while the LSC expects all providers to have evidence that learners have achieved their learning aims in order to claim achievement funding, there is no requirement that this evidence is provided in the form of an ILP. If providers choose to record the information required for auditing purposes on an ILP then so be it – many organisations don't. It's having the evidence that matters, not having it on an ILP.

Anita Hallam
National Learning and Skills Council

THE ILP DEBATE

EMAIL FORUM

Subject: ILPs: option or requirement?

 I am finding this debate quite intriguing as, despite the very common (and often extremely time-consuming) practice of devising detailed ILPs, the discussion so far seems to suggest that these are not necessary for funding and I can't find any specific reference to them in the Common Inspection Framework. Have I missed something? If not, how have we arrived at this point? Who is expecting to see detailed ILPs? Not auditors, not funders and, apparently, not inspectors. Is this a modern-day myth brought about by inspection paranoia? Something must have given us (the practitioners) the idea that this was compulsory. Can anybody pinpoint where it all started? Di Moseley
Rotherham College

 I'm not sure I could pinpoint where this debate started but I thought that, whilst planning learning with a learner, it is the ILP that would be used to record the programme of learning and non-accredited achievement would be on completion of the ILP, which is how we can measure progress. I realise I'm not stating anything new here but why should it be attached to funding when this is best practice? To draw up a plan of learning for learners, they need to know where they are going, how far they have travelled, and how much further they need to go. I think inspectors would look at ILPs when observing lessons to ensure the lesson is relevant to the learners' needs. Helen Thompson

 ILPs have been around for a long while. They were brought to prominence by the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark back in the early 1990s. We introduced them formally in the service I managed at that time, prompted by a desire to obtain the Quality Mark.

The introduction of achievement funding

for non-accredited basic skills by the FEFC in 1999/2000 raised issues about the evidence that might be needed when claims were audited and, in the absence of clear guidance, it was assumed that this should be the ILP. This led to concern about ILPs, which had previously been seen as the property of the learner, filling up increasing numbers of shelves and cupboards and waiting for the auditors.

On behalf of LSDA, I managed the Planning Learning and Recording Achievement project for ABSSU that eventually produced the guide for practitioners published in 2004. Through this we raised the need for clearer guidance on the issue of audit evidence for achievement funding. As a result, LSC clarified their position. This is set out on page 93 of the *Skills for Life* publication 'Planning learning and recording progress and achievement: a guide for practitioners' (2004) (1). This lists a number of things that the auditor may wish to see including 'a statement of achievement relating to the learner's learning aims and goals. This may be on the ILP or on a separate record.'

On page 94 the guide quotes from the ILR Audit Guidance for Further Education in 2002/3 which states that evidence for achievement could be a results slip from an awarding body or 'a record of achievement, institution certification and/or progress reports indicating achievement of the learning programme.' This means that organisations can choose to keep a record of achievement separate from the ILP therefore allowing learners, quite rightly, to retain their ILP for their own purposes and removing the need to fill valuable cupboard space with old paperwork.

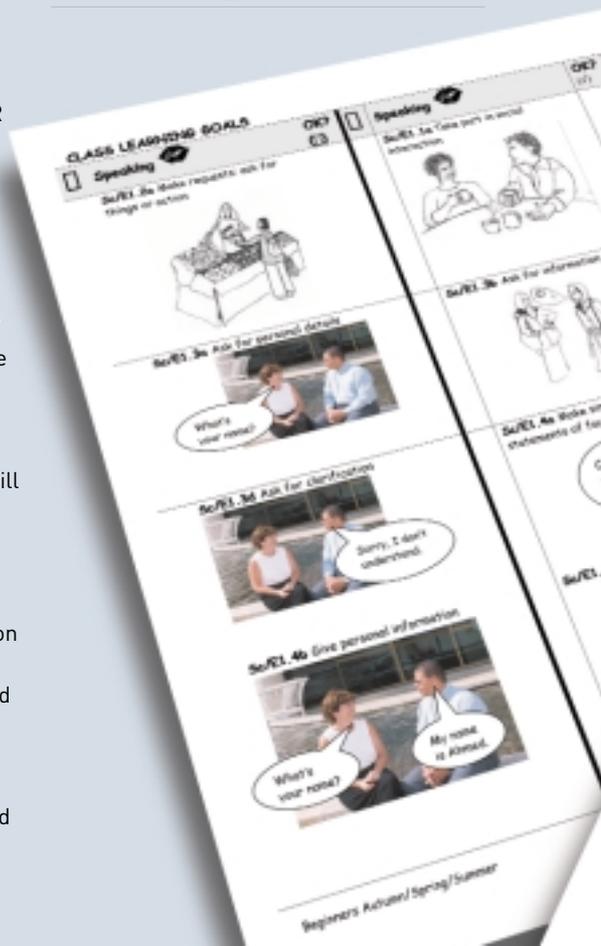
The other driver for ILPs is the Common Inspection Framework. It mentions ILPs on page 8 and there is no doubt that a learning plan that has been developed and regularly reviewed with the learner is an excellent way to ensure that the requirements of the CIF are met. Note however that it is the 'spirit' of the ILP and

the process that lies behind it, not simply its existence or its exact format, that is important.

My own position is that the use of ILPs where these are 'owned' and used by learners and teachers represents good practice. Where a whole group of learners shares common goals, as can be the case in ESOL and on short courses for literacy and numeracy, the role of the ILP is slightly different from the role it has in mixed ability groups where individual programmes are negotiated. However, the ILP can still provide learners with an understanding of their programme, their progress in relation to this, and an opportunity to record and review progress towards their personal learning goals.

Sue Grief
Learning and Skills
Development Agency

(1) This publication is available from the DfES Publications Team on 0845 60 222 60. The reference is PLRA1.





ILPs: a trivialisation of teaching and learning?

Mary Weir, ESOL tutor trainer and researcher, and language learner, expresses four major concerns about the role of ILPs in ESOL.

There have been staff-room mutterings about ILPs in ESOL ever since they were introduced. These have become increasingly vehement in the last year, during which my roles as researcher and as trainer have put me in touch with numerous ESOL tutors around the country. This article is based on conversations I have had with them.

No-one I have spoken to has expressed unqualified support for ILPs, though many tutors welcome the

opportunity to get to know their students better, especially when tutorial time is specifically set aside for this. Several tutors have pointed out that they have always put their learners at the centre of their planning. The introduction of a new form to fill in does not mean that the practice is new to all tutors, but it underlines that attention to the needs of the individual learner is good practice.

Four major concerns

Four major concerns about ILPs emerge from my conversations with ESOL practitioners. The underlying theme is that ILPs trivialise much of the good practice that they were intended to promote.

1 While the groundwork which leads to ILPs is useful and positive, its value is diminished by having to write learning goals and evidence achievement. The wealth of knowledge that a tutor can gain from tutorial time and the relationships we can build with individual students are almost impossible to convert into SMART targets or to express meaningfully and usefully in an ILP. For example, while I am no expert in the field of learning styles, I do understand that it is a complex subject. My own experience is that I need silence when I am studying but cannot cook or drive well without listening to music, so where does this place me on the spectrum of auditory sensitivity? Much research has gone into identifying the typical profile of a 'good language learner', but Bonny Norton (1) has shifted the focus of enquiry by asking in what circumstances someone is a good language learner. This is a fertile and interesting area to explore with learners but to condense an emerging and varied profile into a few words in an ILP seems to trivialise the issue.

2 Some ILPs allow for the inclusion of so-called 'soft' targets. These may be things like 'gain confidence in using English outside the classroom', 'try to attend class more frequently', or 'find more opportunities to →

ESOL INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PLAN and RECORDS OF PROGRESS
(Part-time courses)

City and Islington College
AUTUMN / SPRING / SUMMER TERM

LEARNERS		Student Number				
Name		Code				
Class		Date student finished				
Date student started		Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	
Student's level at start		Assessment notes				



THE ILP DEBATE

use English outside the classroom' But in what sense are these 'soft'? They may not be easily measurable and they may not be specifically itemised in the Core Curriculum but, in terms of increasing autonomy in language learning and developing language skills, competence and wider independence, they are vital. It is on issues like these that learners often report in tutorials with pride and a real sense of achievement. A student was delighted to tell me that, although in the past she had always nodded to her neighbour, they now regularly have a chat when they meet. She attributes this not to specific language items learned in class but to the greater confidence she has developed from classroom interaction and practice. We should allow learners the dignity of reporting and recording these achievements and invest them with at least the same status as SMART targets.

3 My main concern is the message that ILPs send to learners and inexperienced teachers about how languages are learned. That this occurs in an essentially social and holistic rather than an atomistic way has been highlighted in previous articles in **reflect** as well as in the literature of language learning. The problem is not simply that ILPs require tutors to do something which flies in the face of current understanding of the learning process; experienced and confident practitioners may grumble, shrug and play the ILP game when an inspection looms. What is worse is that inexperienced tutors and learners may be led to believe that learning really does occur in this way and that discrete learning items can be identified, learned and ticked off a checklist. Both groups end up spending large amounts of time struggling with an inappropriate system which leaves them with inadequate amounts of time, energy and commitment for planning and leading effective teaching and learning.

4 Giving your best as an effective ESOL tutor is challenging. What does good teaching involve? To select just a couple of key points from the literature, Michael Breen comments that;

'The classroom is the meeting point of various subjective views of language, diverse learning purposes, and different preferences concerning how learning should be done. Such differentiation brings with it potential for disagreement, frustrated expectations and conflict.' (2)

Richard Cullen identifies the teacher's role as making 'on-the-spot judgments' about how to balance the need to give students feedback on form and on content and sees this as one of many 'skills language teachers need to deploy constantly in almost every lesson.' (3)

Re-assessing the role of ILPs

If we are to develop the skills of practitioners and learners, a re-assessment of the purpose and content of ILPs in ESOL is urgently needed. If we have to have a document of some kind for each learner, here are some suggestions:

1 Change ILPs to ILRs – Individual Learning Records. These would be drawn up retrospectively by tutors and learners as a comment on and record of the progress they have seen and experienced. This would acknowledge a practice which occurs anyway; it is an open secret that the retrospective ILP is a common phenomenon in many institutions. It does not necessarily mean that the teaching and learning are less effective. ILRs would allow learners and tutors more freedom to follow up some of the unpredictable learning leads and needs that arise in the classroom.

2 Make room for and acknowledge the value of 'soft' goals. These may be included in the document for future attention as well as recorded as developing achievements.

3 Set more realistic timescales for compiling and reviewing student records and leave tutors time to plan and teach effectively.

4 Break the link between funding of ESOL classes and evidencing achievement of SMART targets in ILPs.

Whatever document emerges from a review, it must truly support learning and not perpetuate the tyranny of ILPs in their current form. ❏

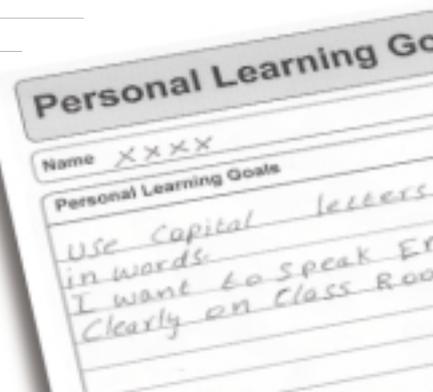
[1] Norton, B. & Toohey, K. (2001) 'Changing perspectives on good language learners' TESOL Quarterly 35 (2) 307-322.

[2] Breen, M. (1997) 'The Social Context for Language Learning: A Neglected Situation?' in Candlin, C. & Mercer, N. 'English Language Teaching in its Social Context' London: Routledge 122-144.

[3] Cullen, R. (2002) 'Supportive Teacher Talk: The Importance of the F-move' ELT Journal, 56(2): 117-127.



My main concern is the message that ILPs send to learners and inexperienced teachers about how languages are learned.





ILPs: related to real life?

Neena Julka shows how ILPs can help learners by shifting the balance from group teaching to individual learning.

Individual learning plans (ILPs) are a hot topic in ESOL. Thousands of words have been written or spoken in defence of and in attacks on both the concept and the document. But how can an ILP actually help the learner? Who 'owns' the document? Who uses it and how? These questions are often left unanswered, or even unasked, in the haste to fill in the paperwork simply for the sake of management compliance or quality assurance.

ESOL learners

We know that ESOL learners have rich and diverse backgrounds and come with different levels of skills in

reading, writing, listening and speaking. Some have higher education qualifications from their own country; some have many years of work experience and useful practical skills; some may not be literate in their own language. Yet, in many cases, all this valuable information is either not recorded at all, or is recorded elsewhere but seldom found on the ILP, which merely records the learner's language level at entry. But this is only part of the picture. The first task should be to record the learner's prior employment experience and educational attainment; only then should the ILP be drawn up, in the light of what is already known.

The motives of ESOL learners

Most ESOL learners learn English in order to progress to vocational courses or to find a job. Others want to learn English for everyday use. Some want to help their school age children and talk to the teachers. A recent pathfinder project entitled 'Vocational aspirations of ESOL learners in Kirklees' concluded,

'Most ESOL learners had vocational or employment aspirations in a diverse range of occupational sectors, from production work, banking, building trades, beauty therapy to nursery nursing. The progression route to these vocational courses is not clear to learners, nor did they know the level of English required to access these vocational options.'⁽¹⁾

All ESOL learners are asked to write their long-term goals or reasons for learning English in their ILP. This creates a real opportunity for tutors to use this real-life information to develop a learning plan which helps the learner to realise these goals. In a recent batch of observations, I noted the following long-term goals:

- to access an Arts course
- to find a job
- to work in a nursery
- to go on a nursing course

All these goals call for a demanding level of language – vocabulary, structure, listening and speaking skills in all these different contexts. Yet all the learners were doing the same topic from an Entry 2 Scheme of Work; there was no attempt to individualise the learning. A truly individual learning plan, drawn up with the →



ESOL learners have rich and diverse backgrounds.

Learning Goals

Name: XXXX
 Course: E-Sol
 Qualification: College Certificate

Ref	Date Tutor	Goals Achieved	
		1	2
1 & 2	24/06 10 25/06 10		
3	10/7 10		
3	10/7 10		
4	12/7 10		

Handwritten goals include: "I will be able to: Read and write a short letter", "Give personal information about m. and my children", "page at".

THE ILP DEBATE



help of the tutor, should help the learner to learn and practise the language, vocabulary and structures that are relevant to their real lives, their individual situations and their ambitions.

Finding the level and the context

Does teaching the core curriculum at Entry Level help ESOL learners to realise their ultimate goals as quickly as possible? The answer is no. Most ESOL courses are part-time, ranging from two to eight hours per week. Only a limited amount of language can be learned in that time. If you are a 42 year old man with three children, you haven't got the time to work through ESOL Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 before you become employable. You need to learn the language as quickly as possible so that you can move on to your long-term goals. You need an individual learning plan that will help you learn the language and practise what you have learned in real life contexts.

It is impossible to meet individual needs, at different levels, in a 'one size fits all' group teaching session. Effective ESOL teachers employ a range of techniques and give learners an opportunity to practise all four language skills in real-life contexts; they challenge learners and help them to become independent. Sadly, too often, the teaching I have seen is tutor- and curriculum-led and pitched at too low a level.

In any case, language learning is not a linear process. Learners do not need to be 'taught' the Entry 1, 2, 3 vocabulary and language before they progress to Level 1. The curriculum framework helps us to establish a starting point; it does not mean we have to follow the curriculum as though it were a programme of study. Learners need tools to learn in contexts that are relevant and interesting to them and strategies which will enable them to realise their long-term goals as soon as possible. Learners aspire to progress into their chosen vocational, academic or employment area; individual learning plans can help shift the balance from general ESOL teaching to vocationally-specific language learning.

ILPs, targets and goals

To be a worthwhile document, an individual learning plan should be of use to both the learner and the tutor. It should be useful, user-friendly and used. This means that ESOL learners must own the ILP. They need to record not only what they do but also what language they have learned, and how and when they have used it.

Learners need to see the links between their long-term goals and the language skills needed to realise those goals. It is true that learners do not know what language they need to learn. However, this is where a skilled language tutor can identify the language needs in different contexts and courses and set challenging tasks for the learner to learn and practise language in contexts that are relevant and meaningful to each individual. This also shifts the balance from 'teaching' to 'learning'. The core curriculum and the new curriculum materials are not linear topics to be taught but should be used selectively as and when they are needed.

An individual learning plan can be a powerful tool. It can plot the steps needed to achieve short-term targets and keep track of learners' progress. Setting challenging targets and meeting learners' needs are not mutually exclusive aims. Indeed, the best ESOL sessions engage and stretch learners to handle complex language in emotionally and intellectually engaging contexts. Meaningless core curriculum references on ILPs are to the detriment of real language learning.

All good teaching aspires to empower learners to become independent learners; an individual learning plan is the start of that journey. The role of the language tutor is critical in making it work and making it 'real' ■

1. Details of ESOL Pathfinder Projects can be found at www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/pathfinder_projects



Effective
ESOL
challenge
learners and
help them to
become
independent.

ESOL Learning Goals - speaking assessment record

Course: ESOL E2a screen
Tutor: xxxxxxxx
Name: *Maria Lopez*
Centre: xxxxxx Primary School
Date: 12/07/03

Description of task: Role play phoning school to explain child's absence.
Target language: This is Could I leave a message for
Could you tell that has got
Students to say teacher's name clearly, spell their child's name and say phone number clearly when prompted.

Evidence attached: Worksheet, Prompt cards, Phrases?

Learning goals

	Starting Emerging	Sometimes Consolidating	Always Established
Use stress and intonation adequately to make speech comprehensible and meaning understood		✓	
Express clearly statements of fact		Mostly clear and easy to understand ✓	
Respond to requests for information		You gave all of the information clearly ✓	
Use grammar appropriate to level		Answered all questions well. ✓	
Use range of vocabulary appropriate to context/function		Remember to use 's' e.g. she feels ✓	
Turn taking			

Teacher researchers

David Barton explains how the role of the teacher and the role of the researcher are complementary and how they can enhance each other's practice.

Every day, teachers in their classrooms try things out and observe the effects; they reflect on what seems to be working well and what seems to work less well; they evaluate their students both formally and informally. This is all part of the normal routine of classroom activities. On the basis of this day-to-day monitoring, teachers may subtly change and improve what they do.

The activities of observing, evaluating and checking are also the basis of research and teachers' routine work can be seen as research-like in many ways. Researchers do these everyday activities in a more systematic way, addressing or puzzling through a particular question and, crucially, making the work public and getting beyond the particular local situation by sharing the results with others.

This insight about the parallels between teaching and research is drawn upon when designing professional development courses for classroom teachers where they carry out research projects. Individual projects carried out by teachers can be of great value in that it is the teachers, the experts in the classroom, who, at the beginning, identify the questions to be researched and who, at the end, take responsibility for implementing change in their practice. Professional development courses can help teachers turn an initial problem or issue into a 'researchable question' and then support them through the research process. A wide range of methods, including observation, interview, and the analysis of language, can be drawn together in one study using quantitative and qualitative approaches. Exploring the literature helps students link in with



Teachers' routine work can be seen as research-like.

related studies done by others; theories help provide broader framing for understanding an issue. A research perspective can then feed back into teaching so that both the processes and the products of research support the inquiring practitioner in making professional judgements in the complex world of a particular classroom. Such teacher-research projects have been used as a central part of individual teachers' professional development.

Teacher research is a crucial form of research in many areas of education and it is central to the idea of research having an impact on practice. This approach has developed over the past twenty years, for example in the work of the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) group in Britain and with the work of Susan Lytle and colleagues in the United States.

RaPAL is an independent network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers in adult basic education. RaPAL publishes three bulletins per year and other occasional publications, and organises at least one event each year.
www.literacy.lanacs.ac.uk/rapal

The Practitioner-Led Research Initiative at NRDC is a nationally co-ordinated series of small-scale practitioner-led research projects. The aims of the programme are to:

- build research capacity in the field
- embed the activities of the NRDC in practice
- undertake important small-scale research projects which contribute to NRDC's overall programmes
- strengthen research networks linking practitioners, researchers and policy agencies.

The programme is aimed at groups of between three and six people who are directly involved in the delivery and development of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in any institutional setting anywhere across England. The first round of projects will report in spring 2005; round two projects began work in January 2005. www.nrdc.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=426&ArticleID=337

Teacher research forms the basis of many NRDC projects. Whilst this approach has its origins in classrooms, it has been expanded to other learning situations and to include other practitioners, such as managers. It has broadened out to working with groups of practitioners and has had an impact on whole organisations, such as with the Practitioner-Led Research Initiative. In other NRDC projects, practitioners are involved in all stages of research in many different ways. Teacher research can go well beyond individual professional development: it contributes to the field in that the knowledge, perspective and experience which teachers bring to research is crucial to the quality and validity of the research. ▣

NRDC publications

All publications are available for download from the "Publications" page on the website www.nrdc.org.uk and by post. To be sent copies and/or added to our mailing list, email us at publications@nrdc.org.uk

Recent

Success factors in informal learning – Young adults' experiences of literacy, language and numeracy. Interim findings from the YALP research project. Six page summary.

Success factors in informal learning: Young adults' experiences of literacy, language and numeracy. Full interim report. Web version only.

NRDC newsletter. January 2005.

Forthcoming

Putting good practice into practice. Exploring approaches to literacy, numeracy and key skills within modern apprenticeships. An evaluation of the LSDA development project.

February 2005.

Assessing adult literacy and numeracy: a review of assessment instruments.

February 2005.

Understanding the relationships between learning and teaching: an analysis of the contribution of applied linguistics.

February 2005.

Improving the literacy and numeracy of young offenders and disaffected young people: the first 18 months of the study.

February 2005.

Study of the impact of the *Skills for Life* learning infrastructure on learners.

February 2005.

Empowering mentors – building opportunities for bilingual adults to work in the wider community.

March 2005.

Provision of, and learner engagement with, adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL support in rural England; a comparative case study.

March 2005.

The report of the NRDC teacher research project into teaching and learning of common measures, especially at Entry Level.

March 2005.

'Beyond the daily application': making numeracy teaching meaningful to adult learners.

March 2005.



Glossary

C&G 9281 An introductory certificate in teaching communication skills to adults that predates the current qualification framework; roughly equivalent to current level 2

CTAD Cambridge Training and Development

DfID Department for International Development.
See <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/>

E1 Entry Level 1 on the Adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL core curricula

E2 Entry Level 2 on the Adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL core curricula

ESOL English for Speakers of Other Languages

GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education

IATEFL International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language

ILP Individual Learning Plan; document used to plan and record a student's learning

LEA Local Education Authority

LLU+ a national consultancy and professional development centre for staff working in the areas of literacy, numeracy, dyslexia, family learning and English for Speakers of Other Languages. See <http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus/>

LSC Learning and Skills Council; responsible for funding and planning education and training for learners over 16 years old in England

MoD Ministry of Defence (UK)

NATECLA National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults; the national (UK) forum and professional organisation for ESOL practitioners

NIACE The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education – England and Wales; a non-governmental organisation working for more and different adult learners. See <http://www.niace.org.uk/>

OFSTED a non-ministerial government department with responsibility for the inspection of all schools and all 16-19 education

PGCE / Cert Ed Non-subject-specific qualifications that give qualified teacher status

PLRA Planning Learning and Recording Achievement in Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL; DfES project led by LSDA. See <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/LearningInfrastructurePlanningLearning>

Skills for Life The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills in England

Get in touch

We would like to include a letters page in future editions of **reflect** so please write to us with your views on the articles in issue 2 or anything else you would like us to explore. We also plan to have a reviews section – would you like to write a review for us? What would you like to read a review about? Please email

d.mallows@ioe.ac.uk

2005 NRDC International Conference

Putting new knowledge into practice

Thursday, 10 March to Saturday, 12 March, 2005
Staverton Park, Northamptonshire, NN11 6JT.

In 2005, NRDC completes its first three years of work and the 2005 NRDC International Conference will be both a celebration of the work completed in that time, with the dissemination of the findings of major studies which are completing in March, as well as an opportunity to focus on the impact of NRDC research on practice and policy.

The conference will feature a number of influential academics and policy makers from the UK and overseas and we hope that you will also join us to help refresh and renew the *Skills for Life* strategy.

The conference will be of interest to researchers, practitioners and policy makers with an interest in contributing to the development of the *Skills for Life* strategy.

For the most up to date information on the conference visit
www.nrdc.org.uk/intconf

In order to book your place for this conference write to:

Richard Bull
NRDC
Institute of Education
University of London
20 Bedford Way
London
WC1H 0AL
Tel: 020 7612 6804

Or email:
r.bull@ioe.ac.uk



www.nrdc.org.uk/intconf