Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Action:
six case studies of practice work in Ireland

Waterford Institute *of* Technology
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE

NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was established in 1980 and is an independent membership organisation, concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland. NALA has campaigned for the recognition of, and response to, the adult literacy issue in Ireland.

NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

This report presents six case studies on current teaching practices in adult literacy and numeracy provision in Ireland. The research was carried out by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The purpose of the research is to describe teaching practice based on the Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work and participation of the literacy staff in the NALA/WIT professional development programmes for Adult Literacy Development. The Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work sets out and explores the principles, approaches and philosophy which underpin good adult literacy work (NALA, 2012). The underlying philosophy of the Guidelines is that good adult literacy work is student centred. The principles for good adult literacy work are:

- Adult literacy work is based on a philosophy of adult education which is concerned with personal development and social action.
- Adult literacy learning is an active and expressive process. Students have the right to explore their own needs and interests, set their own goals and decide how, where and when they wish to learn.
- Adult literacy work respects different beliefs, cultures and ways of being. An ethical code of trust and confidentiality underpins all aspects of the work.
- Students' knowledge and skills are vital for the effective organisation of adult literacy work. Students should have the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of provision.
- Adults learn best when the decision to return to learning is their own and the environment is supportive, relaxed and friendly (NALA, 2012:p23-4).

In Ireland adult literacy tuition is mainly provided by the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) through their local adult literacy service. Each adult literacy service is organised by an Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) and adult literacy and numeracy tutors provide tuition on a one to one or group basis. The adult literacy service offers a range of programmes that include

Adult Basic Education, Numeracy, Family Learning, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and a Workplace Basic Education. The service also provides Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) that offers the learner the opportunity to access intensive tuition for up to six hours per week over a 14 week period. However, the vast majority of adult learners engage in 'mainstream' tuition which consists of either one-to-one or group tuition, typically for two to four hours per week, during the academic year. Data from the Department of Education and Skills shows that in 2011, there were over 56,000 adult learners in the VECs adult literacy service. The majority of learners took part in mainstream literacy and numeracy programmes. NALA published a report that highlights the demographics of adult literacy learners and tuition trends over a ten year period 2000 – 2009. This report is useful to both policy makers and literacy practitioners as a means of increasing information, knowledge and understanding of this cohort of the population (NALA, 2011).

Literacy tutors in Ireland belong to a distinct community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), yet like many educators, they get few opportunities to learn from observing each other. Lave and Wenger state that all communities of practice involve different levels of participation, and a substantial amount of skill or craft knowledge as a tutor is amassed through trial and error, or learning-by-doing. Research into adult literacy and numeracy practice has been neglected in an Irish context and we currently know relatively little about the teaching methodologies and pedagogies amongst Irish adult literacy and numeracy tutors. In an attempt to address the dearth of research in this area, NALA in partnership with WIT, set out to talk to ALOs and tutors to gain access to their experiences and views on a range of issues related to literacy and numeracy practice.

Research methods

The objectives of the research were to:
• Identify and capture teaching and learning literacy and numeracy practice in adult literacy center, and

- Provide detailed information on teaching and learning practice that will be a resource to adult literacy and numeracy practitioners.

The study sought to explore these and other key issues by qualitative means using a case study approach, involving the collection of data in the natural setting of different programmes, in adult literacy and numeracy education. These case studies also provided opportunities for observation of teaching and learning sessions, and provided the opportunity for tutors to recognise their own existing good practice.

Our initial task was to establish contact with all adult literacy schemes within the Vocation Education Committees (VECs) who might be potentially willing to participate in the study. All of the VEC's we contacted received a detailed description of the study aims as well as a written synopsis of the proposed research strategy. We received a number of responses and selected six based, on their use of Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work, involvement in the NALA/WIT programmes and their geographical location. We used a total of six adult literacy and numeracy sites around the country.

The selected schemes were:
- County Cork Vocational Education Committee, North Cork Basic Education Service,
- City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee, Crumlin College of Further Education,
- City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC), North Inner City Adult Education Service,
- County Meath Vocational Education Committee Adult Basic Education Service,
- County Roscommon Vocational Education Committee Adult Basic Education Service, and
- County Waterford Vocational Education Committee Dungarvan Adult Learning Scheme.

A case study methodology was used in this research. Case studies for educative purposes are regarded as useful to illustrate the complexity, as well as providing examples or illustrations of theory or practice (Yin, 2003). The techniques employed for use in the research were primarily qualitative methods. Qualitative methods were chosen because they are particularly designed towards discovery and they allow the researcher to explore identified themes and issues in great depth and detail (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). These methods were semi structured in-depth interviews with ALOs and tutors. A class observation was also carried out in one of the sites, and a self-administered questionnaire was filled out by the ALOs. The questionnaire comprised the quantitative component of data collection and provides an overview of available adult literacy and numeracy programmes provided and a profile of the learners in each of the six services.

Data Analysis

Verbatim transcripts of individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were prepared. Data analysis was guided by grounded theory methodology in which data collection and analysis occur close in time (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The research team discussed the interview process and, at this stage, interview questions, topics and language were modified where appropriate. Preliminary analysis was ongoing throughout the fieldwork phase of the research; for example, after the completion of individual interviews, it was standard practice for researchers to make a written record of notable issues and themes. The initial stage of the formal analytic process involved a thorough reading and re-reading of individual interview and focus group data. Open coding was used in the case of all transcripts to group concepts such as attitudes, events and behaviour under category labels.

Finally

NALA and WIT believe there is a continuing need to record practice in adult literacy and numeracy provision and to hear the voice of the learners and tutors. This report will form part of a series of case studies we intend

to gather over the next few years. They will capture and document day to day literacy and numeracy practice in Ireland. We will make this research available to tutors, teachers and other practitioners in order to broaden their repertoire and to add to their development as reflective practitioners.

Case study 1:

County Cork Basic Education Service – The Spelling Group

Name of service Literacy Practice	Co. Cork Basic Education Service, Mallow The Spelling Group
Contact Details	Tel: 022-51958 Email: eilishroche@gmail.com
Adult Literacy Organiser	Eilish Roche
Number of staff	In 2012 there were 15 paid tutors, 5 resource workers, one development worker and 32 volunteer tutors in Mallow. Their outreach centres are in Charleville, Kanturk/Newmarket, Millstreet and Mitchelstown.
Range of programmes and services offered	• One to one • Group Tuition • Spelling Groups • Family Learning • FAS community employment return to education • Skills for work • Intensive tuition • Basic Computers • Maths • Communications • Personal and Interpersonal Skills • Food and Nutrition • Photography • Self-Advocacy • Work Experience • Health-related Fitness • Consumer Awareness • 3 ITABE groups • Literacy support for the Leaving Cert Applied, Traveller groups, intergenerational groups and groups referred by the Department of Social Protection for literacy support. • Literacy awareness training provided for tutors in Youthreach and PLC colleges.
Current student profile	There is a change from mostly over-45s to younger people, particularly young men and people who have been in employment but who are now unemployed. There were 234 males and 375 females (total 609) attending the service in 2011.

The theme in this case study is Integrating Literacy into a VTOS Horticulture, Art and Upholstery course by providing an English Support class.

Background to the service

The Service was established in 1995. The Adult Literacy Organiser is Eilish Roche who has been in the role for over eight years. The Q Centre in Mallow, where the service is based, is shared with VTOS, BTEI and Community Education. It has an upholstery room, art room, a fully-equipped kitchen, and a horticulture tunnel. The Adult Basic Education service in Mallow's Q Centre is moving towards day provision because the move to the new premises a year ago facilitates this. The service used to cater for people coming in after work, but that is not in demand now. The availability of other further education services in the Q Centre facilitates the move of learners from Levels NFQ1 – NFQ3 onto BTEI General Learning at Level NFQ4 in the Centre.

Adult Basic Education involves all aspects of personal development – social, economic and emotional – in addition to reading, writing and numeracy. The outcomes of good learning experiences are increases in self-esteem and confidence.

Profile of students

Referrals are made by the Department of Social Protection, local community development agencies that have Jobs Clubs and the National Learning Network. Few learners come individually, most learners are referred. Learners are mainly Irish nationals. Referrals from district health nurses are made in Kanturk because the premises there are shared with the Health Service Executive. Learners stay with the scheme, on average, for two years.

Initial assessment

The learner initially meets with a resource worker. When appropriate, the learner is asked to read or write something, and appropriate tuition is suggested. The resource worker briefs the tutor and the ALO. The Co. Cork VEC Adult Education Service has developed a Student Assessment and

Progression book for each learner, and this is used by the tutor and learner. The Quality Assurance process involved checking with tutors about resources that are needed, both for the learner and the tutor.

Current context: The Spelling Group

The Spelling Group was developed by resource worker Celine Gyves. She is twelve years with the Adult Literacy Service and has a Higher Certificate in Arts in Literacy Development from WIT. The Spelling Group was developed by Celine to encourage people to move from the one-to-one relationship into a small group. Tutors on other programmes in the Q Centre became aware of it. The current Spelling Group arose from the need to provide literacy support to students doing the VTOS Arts & Upholstery programme, who are struggling to cope with Level NFQ4 Communications, and who have not completed Level NFQ3 certification.

Integrating literacy, means developing a learner's literacy, alongside their study of another subject, and teachers, with different expertise, working in a complementary way to meet learner needs. In some cases, the literacy is provided through a separate programme (discrete literacy) in addition to the vocational programme, in other cases literacy is an integral part of the vocational programme itself with various models falling in between the two. This case study is an example of the former approach.

The VTOS programme runs for 33 weeks. The group has committed to the Spelling Group for one hour a week, even though more time is desirable. Celine provides additional support to individuals after the hour with the group, and many avail of this. Spellings are something all learners need to work at, but are not necessarily something people associate with literacy. Spelling difficulties can lead to lack of confidence and a distorted view of one's own ability.

The work is based on what the learners are studying in class and also takes into account learners personal lives and experiences. It works with the

interests of the learner. The group is large in size with 16 attending. The work is constructed to avoid 'homework' as there is an overall anti-homework attitude in the group. Individual needs are first established. As Celine says: "It's really important to give that time at the beginning to find out exactly what their needs are".

Celine sees progression for this group as becoming more confident and becoming more comfortable with writing. "Getting into the habit of writing involves a bit of work on their part", and acquiring "the taste for more". The main aim is confidence building and the stopping of the self-limiting blocks to learning. She uses the origins of words to promote discussion, how the English language uses words from all parts of the world. The discussion gives learners a taste for more.

The Look, Say method involves putting the word into a sentence and writing it. Learners often find the physical act of writing painful, but using computers makes this task easier. If they don't write it, the word will not be recalled. Writing puts it into the longer-term memory. This also works well for visual learners.

Celine works with the VTOS course tutors to get a sense of what the learners are working on, and what they are interested in. This group watches television and enjoy discussing it. Celine then asks them to tell a story from what they are watching. Words are also assigned to the group each week but sent out by text to their mobile phones. Celine texts two new words that the learners have to look up in the dictionary and text the definitions or meanings back to her. The students then write the meaning into ten sentences for the next class. It doesn't feel like homework. If there is a delay in the usual text transmission time, Celine says she will get reminders from the learners.

Conclusion

Memory plays a large part in spelling, our memory works by building links and the teacher needs to help the learner develop their own strategy for remembering words; things that are of interest or of relevance in the students' lives; things they know something about. The tutor in this case did this by discussing television programmes and areas of their vocational course. She adopted an approach that was useful relevant and meaningful to the students.

The use of the mobile phone as a familiar technology extends the time spent by learners on literacy (Davis et al 2010). It also avoids the group seeing mobile-phone based work as 'homework'.

Good adult literacy practice puts in place learning events that are relevant to the people immediately in their presence, at the right pace and in a collaborative participative manner, although achieving this in every circumstance with every group may present challenges This case study supports the NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work in its approach to student-centred learning and its humanistic approach to working with adults. In this approach tutors facilitate the learning which the students wish to pursue. It also promotes collaborative facilitation between tutor and student (NALA, 2012:p18).

Case study 2:
CDVEC Crumlin College of Further Education –
Student Literacy Support

Name of Service Literacy Practice	Crumlin College of Further Education Dublin: Student Literacy Support on an Advanced FETAC Course
Contact Details	Tel: 01-4547054 Email: fward@crumlincollege.ie
Adult Literacy Organiser	Francis Ward
Number of staff	There are 33 part time tutors and 68 volunteer tutors working on average 10 hours per week.
Range of programmes and services offered	The service provides • One to one tuition • Spelling groups • FETAC Level 2 groups • FETAC Level 3 in Communications, Numeracy and Information Technology and other modules • FETAC Level 4 Communications as Progression • Junior Certificate English and Mathematics, Leaving Certificate English • ITABE • The service also provides family literacy programmes in local schools and education rehabilitation programmes for drug users stabilised on methadone. • Student learning support is offered to all students.
Current student profile	There are 564 adults (303 females, 261 males). Recent trends show an increase in the number of young male students. 68 students are in one-to-one tuition. Students are mainly unemployed or in unskilled work. A small number of students (15) are referred from agencies dealing with adults with intellectual disabilities. The majority of the students 88% are involved in group tuition whilst the remaining 12% are involved in one to one tuition.

This case study examines the role of a literacy service in supporting students in a College of Further Education in Crumlin where the Adult Literacy Service, is organised by ALO, Frances Ward.

Overview of service/assessment, induction and progression

All students are interviewed when they approach the service to determine their current learning needs and level, to agree what they would like to work on, what they hope to achieve, their experience of school and other education; and their future goals, regarding their personal and work life. The City of Dublin VEC last year introduced a tracking tool to track student outcomes under the following 9 headings:

- The ability to read words and texts;
- Read signs and symbols;
- Work with the main rules of reading and grammar;
- Find information in different types of documents;
- Use different reading strategies for different purposes;
- Write familiar words, phrases and greetings for everyday purposes;
- Write to convey information for different purposes and audiences;
- Write for personal and creative purposes; and
- Use accurate spelling and grammar.

Examples are given of what students should be able to do under each heading at Levels NFQ1 to NFQ4. In September each year the ALO conducts a training session with the subject teachers in the three Further Education Colleges to inform them about the Student Literacy Support Service for students.

During programme induction in the Further Education Colleges each student is given a note to say that this support service is available. Those seeking support are given a one to one session by the support literacy tutor

to establish their needs. Certain students may be suffering from lack of confidence in their own abilities; others may need help with study skills. Frequently a large number of students sign up for the service (24 in 2012) however this tends to level out throughout the year. During 2011 there were two groups of four; in 2012 there was one group of eight.

Students in the adult literacy service typically progress from one to one individual support to the Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education and then on to group programmes, usually for learning at NFQ3. Eighty percent of students' progress to second year and 60-80% to 3rd year, where the majority of students are accessing programmes at NFQ3, 10% of students progress into other courses in the College. Many students work towards a full award at NFQ3 and others complete partial awards with a view to improving their employment prospects.

Current Context: Student Learning Support.

The service is based in Crumlin College, where students are taking various employment related programmes, support is offered to any student experiencing literacy difficulty on their programme. In this case, the tutor is supporting students from two Level NFQ6, two year FETAC courses, Beauty Therapy and Sports Management. The focus of the support is the use of language in anatomy and physiology. Some of the students have completed biology and home economics at Leaving Certificate Level, but according to the tutor many are at Level NFQ4 or NFQ5 in terms of their learning skills. The students have difficulty with Greek and Latin spellings and anatomical questions and the literacy support they receive is addressed specifically at these areas. Students often have quite poor self-esteem and are fearful because they don't feel they have the language skills for their course. The tutor creates a relaxed and informal environment as much as possible, even though they are working with structured material. She enhances the idea that all are adults together; students share some of their experiences and as the support progresses students' confidence increases to the point that they ask questions in their course class and give answers. This increase in confidence makes a big difference to the students.

Teaching methods

The tutor, Gertrude Walsh has worked as a tutor for seven years. She has worked in health care for 13 years, and has qualifications in Psychology, Microbiology and Communications. She has also taken several modules in the WIT Higher Certificate in Arts in Literacy Development. Gertrude, provides support to the students on a weekly basis and the classes are usually one and a half hours duration. Her approach to the support is familiarising the students with a glossary of words; using drawing and colours to help memory; and working on multiple choice questions (the format of the written exam). The tutor is flexible in responding to students' needs on a weekly basis as they emerge.

The tutor develops a glossary at the start of the year and from this students become familiar with the Latin word for every anatomy system they are using. The tutor breaks down the Greek and Latin words by finding the root, for example, pro, ante, hypo, hyper, oleo, poly, mono; this involves adding smaller words together e.g. in a word like Hypoglycaemic they learn hypo means too little, glyc means sugar, anaemia means blood. Students spend time reading and pronouncing the words; and according to the tutor 'it's learning a foreign language', requiring a lot of practice and repetition. The tutor develops work sheets with the most commonly used words on their course, students are asked to practice at home by writing words out three or four times if they are having spelling difficulty.

In addition to the complexity of the language, students need to understand the anatomy systems they are learning in an integrated way. The tutor uses a factory as a metaphor for the body and makes connections between the different functions in the factory and the different systems in the body and how they are interconnected. The tutor demystifies the subject matter as much as possible by giving practical examples; using visuals through drawing diagrams and colour coding them, she uses ICT to demonstrate visually how our systems work, for example, in the heart, the blood which returns from the body goes into the right side of the heart is coloured blue, it goes to the

lungs, is oxygenated and comes back red so when students go into the exam they know the right side is coloured blue and the left side is red.

In each class the tutor introduces an anatomy system, for example, respiratory system, the students draw the system, ask questions, discuss people they know or family members who have been sick. They then go on to discuss any relevant items on television or in the newspapers or advertising about diet or health in general. The tutor asks the students to summarize the main points in bullet point format and then identify the main functions of the system and the diseases that are related to that system. The classroom is configured for group work with students working collaboratively and the tutor moving from one group to the next. The students sit around the table and the tutor works with them as they are doing various activities.

The learning environment and group working methodologies enable the tutor to identify students learning styles and learning difficulties. She explains different functions of the anatomy for learning; the use of your eyes (visual), ears (auditory) and hands (sensory). The tutor also works on finding students strength in a particular area. Students enjoy sharing information and helping each other, for example, ways of remembering things using rhymes, anagrams, or examples from another class. The tutor pointed out the importance of attendance; if a student misses out on a section of a course it's very hard to go back on it and pick it up.

The tutor concludes the class by summarizing the main points and then asks students to complete multiple choice questions on the topic. This helps students understand the formal examination genre. There are four possible answers within the multiple choice questions; the tutor uses each answer as an opportunity to elaborate on other systems that are relevant; or why an answer could be right or wrong; the tutor points to the group that two answers are likely to be completely wrong so if the student can eliminate these questions immediately the student has reduced down the possible answers to two. Understanding this concept from a logical viewpoint is

helpful to the students. It also helps the tutor recognise if someone has difficulty breaking down the word. The tutor spends considerable time revising topics from previous sessions and finds her use of revision helpful for the students.

Conclusion

In this programme the tutor provides more than language and spelling support in decoding unfamiliar words; she works with the students' learning needs and purpose in the subject anatomy and physiology in a holistic way. Literacy is contextualised to give the students the skills to understand the information they are receiving to enable them to pass their examinations and pursue their chosen career. No study has taken place to date on the impact of the support on examination results or course drop-out rate.

The importance of using different approaches to learning, depending on different student groups, was illustrated in the case study as this is the only project that the tutor uses the visual techniques of colour and diagrams. She ensured new words were used frequently in the literacy tasks students were undertaking.

The literacy in this case; anatonomical literacy; is contextualized and literacy support is given based on the needs of specific students and the programme. This case study is an example of student centred learning. It demonstrates literacy as social practice where the concerns, experience and needs of the students are the focus of the learning (NALA, 2012).

Case study 3:

CDVEC Dublin/North Inner City: Using a cultural event to advance literacy learning

Name of Service Literacy Practice	Dublin North Inner City Adult Education Service Cultural event for literacy learning
Contact Details	Tel: 01-8746607 Email: bernadette.sproule@parnell.cdvec.ie
Adult Literacy Organiser	Vacant at present
Number of staff	There are 46 part time tutors and 39 volunteer tutors
Range of programmes and services offered	Programmes on offer include • Unaccredited group and one to one literacy, group numeracy and IT • Accredited courses at Level 2,3 and 4 • ITABE • Basic ESOL • Family Learning • Programmes for Travellers, people in recovery, special needs • The Centre also participates in an EU study that promotes literacy and IT in a lifelong learning context. Other programmes include a Science for Fun Project and Storytelling • Study support
Current student profile	In 2013 there were 1146 learners in the Service. 46 in one to one provision and 1100 in group tuition.

This case study comes from the Dublin North Inner City Adult Education Service and highlights how attending a cultural event helped students to develop their literacy learning.

Overview of service

The Dublin North Inner City Adult Education Service, is located in the Parnell Adult Learning Centre, a very diverse and multicultural area. The scheme was established in 2000 and the Adult Literacy Organiser at the time was Mary Kelly McDermott, now retired.

Since this scheme is located in Dublin city, surrounded by many cultural activities and events, it is hoped that increasing literacy and the confidence of the learners will increase their ability to access activities that they may previously have perceived as not for them. This case demonstrates the potential learning unpinned by cultural exposures and select activities. It is centred on a cultural field trip to the theatre using the drama The Doll's House as the centre-piece to the exercise.

Current Context: A visit to the play The Doll's House

Many Literacy Schemes organise cultural events to enhance the learning of their students. This case study documents the process and the learning involved in a theatre visit to share with other tutors for comparative and learning purposes. The group who organised, attended and learned from the trip to the Doll's House play were mainly a group of young single mothers. Main themes emerging from this project are integrating all forms of literacy, including speaking and listening, through a fun-based cultural activity; use of group process to achieve a goal; how literacy can be used in a social context to enhance confidence and to raise social awareness. The case study shows how literacy involves, not just the technical skills of communication, but how it impacts on individuals' personal and social life.

There are two phases evident in the project, the preparation and activities before the event and debriefing and learning activities after the event relevant to it.

Phase 1 - Preparation

To set a goal, group discussions took place on the advantages and disadvantages of going to the theatre to see a play. This involved teasing out if it was a new experience and something that was appropriate to this group's traditional environment. The group explored what exposures to the format of live drama as opposed to, for example, videos, T.V soaps and so on would mean. The group decided to go to the theatre as opposed to another cultural activity, for example, a museum, as theatre was a new experience of a 'familiar' format such as film or soaps, but more intimate in the personal presence.

Research was carried out into the original work and theme prior to the event as the title of the play a Doll's House was misleading when un-interpreted. Presentations were made on the range of available plays in the various theatres and comparisons of the styles of play, for example, dramatic and comedy.

Students were delegated individual tasks as part of a team project planning. This included booking tickets, taxis/transport and meeting arrangements. Individual responsibility was taken for budgeting for a collective child-minding arrangement to facilitate the outing and arranging for re-imbursement of ticket costs. Learning how to be part of a group was evident including delegating team members to undertake tasks that had whole group implications, understanding roles in a group/team and confidence in the commitment of each individual's contribution.

There was discussion and decision regarding the range of reading, writing, numeracy or ICT tasks that the project would require, and the students' learning needs in relation to these. The dimensions of literacy learnt, taught or expanded on included:

- **Speaking** increasing self-development through voicing opinions in a group setting; decision making and negotiation which involved asking for and

clarifying information. Discussions expanded to include voicing opinions on existing cultural views, exposures and social conditionings. This raised social analysis at an appropriate level and illustrates how good literacy practice is concerned with personal development and social action. It also reflects Freire's (1970) approach in that, the teacher encouraged learners to reflect on and question the world around them.

- **Listening** to peer input, nature of the theme, information presentation on various forms of cultural activity and negotiation of the event planning.

- **Reading** of theatre listings, time-tables for transport, supporting information such as a summary of the book and researching topics related to the original piece.

- **Writing** including diary entry of the event, directions and details of meeting point, venue and so on.

- **Numeracy** involved purchasing tickets, contributing to child-minding, checking times and listings, and booking taxis and re-imbursement of ticket costs.

- **ICT** was utilised for mapping the location of the theatre and gaining information.

Use of the learning process by taking ownership of planning the event based on own interests; dealing with a public office in a theatre, negotiation of appropriate size vehicle and child minding rates; checking appropriate safety requirements for suitable minders, swapping emergency phone numbers. All of these skills can be used to advantage in several other contexts of daily life.

Phase 2 Debriefing and tasks - post attendance at The Doll's House

Personal reflection was carried out as a written piece with learners making entries in learning journals. Discussion occurred on 1-1, small and whole group basis. This included a reflection on the range of literacy skills used throughout the process and the learning included in the tasks. Cloze exercises were carried out on the difference of theatre versus other 'story-based' presentations, for example, television and film.

There was discussion on social issues, involving learners giving their opinions, speaking in a group, listening to others and researching ICT sources of support that could have assisted the character from the play. Post event, each student wrote a piece about their participation in the event. Spelling involved a language that was new, unfamiliar words and using a dictionary. The student corrected and revised their own work, assisted by the tutor. Independence and learning resulted from discussions and individual reflection on the theme in the play and their own life experiences. There was critical thought on social issues exposed in a 'new' format but highlighting issues crossing cultural and time boundaries. Communications Literacy was enhanced through media awareness, personal interaction, opinions and observations of non-verbal actions in the play; reading included supportive material widened to present day supports and information leaflets; numeracy involved budgeting exercises, for example, could participants go to the theatre independently or collectively as an on-going part of their own cultural development. Self-Development and Confidence of students happened as they gelled in a social/cultural context in unfamiliar surroundings. New learning occurred as a result of exposure to the 'standard protocols of theatre', for example, mobile phones off, quietness to allow projection of actors' voices; active participation in the listening and observation of the play as a different medium.

Conclusion

This exercise exposed a group of adult learners, predominantly single mothers, to a new cultural environment and activity. It involved learners in using a range of daily literacy tools to broaden their exposure to and understanding of cultural events that would normally be beyond their personal social exposures and financial capabilities. The role of the tutor involved exploring possibilities for learning; by exploring what students already knew, offering new possibilities and interests and by trying out a different way of doing things; and encouraging reflection. This illustrates good adult literacy work by respecting different beliefs, cultures and ways of being (NALA, 2012).

This case study demonstrates the principles of good adult literacy work by fulfilling the aim "of encouraging students towards an increasingly self-directed approach to their own learning" (NALA 2009:p5). The case study illustrates how adult literacy work respects adults' learners from different social and cultural backgrounds and how literacy can be used to enhance confidence and to raise social awareness.

Case study 4:
County Meath Adult Literacy Service - The Learning to Learn Strategy

Name of Service	Co. Meath Adult Literacy Service. There are 8 Adult Basic Education (ABE) centres throughout County Meath. These are coordinated from the Navan premises where ALO Bernie McKevitt is situated.
Contact Details	Tel: 046-9068280 Email: bmckevitt@meathvec.ie
Adult Literacy Organiser	Bernie McKevitt
Number of staff	There is one full time member of staff, 46 part time tutors and 59 Voluntary tutors. There is a lead tutor who coordinates the ABE programmes in each local centre (2011 statistics).
Range of programmes and services offered	• ITABE and an integrated approach to literacy is promoted throughout the service. • The service provides short introductory programmes for IT, Money Matters, and Spell Well. • Back to Basics programmes are available at FETAC Levels 1 and 2 and involve team tutoring, integrating literacy, numeracy and IT. • There is a Steps to Success Programme at FETAC Level 3 that comprises 6 modules including Communication and Mathematics. Other programmes include: • Family Literacy, • ESOL and • Skills for Work. Literacy Awareness Training, Writeon.ie Training and Literacy Development Training is available for tutors (group and volunteers) and external agencies including Home School Liaison Officers and crèche workers.
Current student profile	2,574 attending, (2011 stats that counts learners per module) 61 of whom are involved in one to one tuition. There is an equal breakdown in terms of gender, however in recent years the number of men participating in ABE has increased. There is a change from mostly over-45s to younger people, particularly young men and people who have been in employment but who are now unemployed. There were 1,143 males and 1,431 females attending the service in 2011.

This case study presents the structure of a specific learning to learn strategy that has been developed by County Meath Adult Literacy Service for learners starting back in Adult Basic Education.

Background to the service

The Scheme was established in 1996 and is currently organised by Bernie Mc Kevitt an Adult Literacy Organiser with over seven years experience. Initial assessment occurs when adults come into any of the further education services. An assessment instrument called 'Pre-course Placement Assessment' was developed for potential users of all services, the results of which are then communicated to the relevant course organisers. This enables literacy and numeracy needs to be identified. Counselling is given about how the learner's goals might best be achieved. Certification is optional for learners, however the majority avail of it.

Current Context: The Learning to Learn Strategy

The tutor on this programme is Barbara Smith. She has been working for the Adult Basic Education Service of Meath VEC since 2009. Her qualifications include a BA in English Literature and an MA in English.

Adult literacy tutors will be familiar with the 'learning to learn' performance indicators used in the National Qualifications Framework and FETAC qualifications. But how do learners achieve these desired outcomes? A specific Learning to Learn strategy has been developed in Co. Meath for new groups that are starting out on their further education career in adult basic education. It is based on the Dyslexia Strategies developed by Ron Davis (see www.dyslexia.com). The key is to avoid the onset of symptoms that stop the ability to learn. The Adult Literacy Organiser, Bernie McKevitt, observed that many adult learners display characteristics of learners that are associated with dyslexia such as loss of concentration and disorientation. During disorientation, all of the senses except taste are altered. Perceptions of time and task change. These distortions affect the ability to engage with the task correctly, and hear or read the instructions accurately. This idea,

when combined with the attempt to do learning differently, has resulted in the decision to make adult tutors aware that people who had difficulties first time round can acquire and practice some simple techniques that help them recover their concentration so that they can remember effectively.

The Learning to Learn strategy is the structure through which tutors can introduce significant ideas to learners, enable learners understand the reason for them and practice simple techniques or strategies that transform their ability to learn.

Priming people for learning involves enabling the learner to become aware of when their focus is lost and needs to be brought back. Effective learners already have this skill. Once a learner is aware that focus has been lost, it is an easy matter to decide to bring it back again. The strategy must be explained before teaching begins, otherwise the learner can react they way they did first time round. It is important not to draw learners back into the past but give them a way of forging a future. It is first explained in general terms, and by taking the group through a brief exercise, asking them to visualise a familiar scenario such as going home and making a cup of tea. This illustrates the point that the mind can wander while the body is physically present, and that there are two parts to learning – the physical presence in the room, but also the mental attention, or focus.

'Focus, Release and Dial' are the components of the strategy. Preparing to focus involves bringing the attention to the task, being aware of any tension and taking a big breath to release it and relax, then consciously identifying the ideal point for learning on a real or imaginary 'Energy Dial' and visualise turning the dial to the required point. The learner identifies the ideal number between one and ten that facilitates their learning, with one a state of extreme relaxation, and ten a state of being highly energised. The learner identifies the ideal number, checks this against their current state, and imagines dialling from the current number to the ideal. Focus is then brought to the task. The learner is primed for learning.

Introducing the techniques and practising them

The Learning to Learn strategy involves good practice in adult education generally, and literacy specifically, with the tutor attending to the structure of a session with a group, the setup of the room, the session place that gives learners time to prepare, time to absorb, reflect, then reinforce the learning, and then a chance to have a breather.

The tutor discusses the topic of focus before the teaching commences. It is part of the work of getting to know each learner in a group. The tutor explains these techniques to learners and establishes with learners when and how to use them appropriately. The tutor requests permission from each learner to raise awareness when they appear to lose focus and suggest the strategy, and gives the learner time to attend to this.

In the interaction between tutor and learner, the tutor prompts the learner when s/he becomes tense or disorientated, in order that the learner becomes aware of what is happening, and that they have the strategies to control their attention. Tutors initiate the awareness by group discussion and requesting permission "do you mind if I prompt you (to use the tools) until you get the hang of it yourself?" The prompt can be a comment about loss of focus or a suggestion to Release by taking a breath. This gives the learner more control, and responsibility can be taken by the learner when ready. It is important to explain it fully so that the learner understands it and decides to use it. Telling a learner to use it is never appropriate.

The Learning to Learn discussion also contributes to making learners aware that achieving their desired change, or goal, involves a number of steps, and each step is a change or a changed way of doing things. This involves being aware of acquired avoidance strategies that impede learning. Learners talk of being one step ahead to avoid panicking when a teacher asks them a question, or being 'the messer' to avoid being asked a question by the teacher. Allowing adult learners to be in control, to not answer if asked, usually requires only two to three weeks. After that, learners are more willing to try something different.

Awareness of the existing strategies learners use is also useful to both tutor and learner so that the need for strategies and how they arose can be understood as tools for survival, but that they have become bad habits and need to be replaced by good ones. Tutors recommend the avoidance of doubt because when the learner doubts, the focus can be lost. Other older strategies that the tutor observes can be body language, if the learner is frowning or looking confused, or if the learner is saying "what?" indicating that they don't understand and that clarification is needed. A learner can carry out a repetitive task correctly for the first three or four times, but then if something else appears to be happening and the task is not being carried out correctly, that can be evidence of disorientation.

Watching out for triggers

Tutors are reminded that adults have different triggers and that tutors need to watch out for them. This is not the first time round for adult learners, many have had poor experiences within the education system during their school years. Someone may have said in the past "come on you, wake up, focus". Triggers can also be the tone of voice or the use of a particular expression. Tutors can remind learners that the situation may be similar to previous ones, but the difference is that the learner is now in control.

The effects of the Learning to Learn strategy

The Learning to Learn strategy provides an ideal induction for preparing learners, but tutors also need to integrate it throughout programmes on an ongoing basis in order to avoid learners falling back into old, bad habits. The strategy can be stand-alone, but the techniques, and reminding learners about them, need to be applied on an ongoing basis.

Learners describe being able to shift the Energy Dial down calms them, stops panic taking over, and being able to then proceed with the task. Learners differentiate between physically being in the room but mentally leaving the room, and discover that once aware, it is only a matter of conscious choice to bring the focus to the task. We all lose focus, and all learners need to know that they can get it back.

Tutor Barbara Smith reports that it is an attractive and effective approach because it caters to each individual. When used in an integrated literacy programme, deep transformation in learners is evident, the kind that opens up new possibilities for learners. One example given by the tutor is where a deaf learner was very shy at the outset, but is now fully interacting with the group and feels confident in his ability to express himself. This is the fundamental start of a process of self-development, the escape from the internalised negative messages about the person's capabilities and potential. "We see them flower" says Barbara, which is always an indication that something good is allowing that to happen.

The tutor identifies one key element in the promotion of the techniques: "If they take it as normal from you, they start to accept it themselves". Showing a learner how relevant or how useful the tutor finds these techniques sends a powerful message.

Conclusion

The Learning to Learn strategy results in training the mind so that getting focus back becomes a new habit, because it is quick and easy to use. To use it is a decision of the learner. It can be applied in everyday tasks, not just in the classroom, whenever the learner feels overwhelmed. If a learner in a group doesn't understand it, it can be explained further in a one-to-one session with a tutor.

Learning to Learn promotes discussions with learners about bad learning habits or bad learning experiences that impact negatively on their ability to learn. The strategies, when practised, allow learners to have more control and also reflect a major difference between learning as an adult and learning as a child: that they are in control this time around. Control applies to recognising what it is they are avoiding, taking a break, relaxing, and coming back to maybe doing it in smaller chunks. These techniques have been found useful by older people, young people, and people with intellectual disabilities. This case study demonstrates a number of the

principles of good adult literacy work in action. In particular the principle that Adult Literacy learning is an active and expresses process. Students have the right to explore their own needs and interest, set their own goals and decide how, where and when they wish to learn most (NALA, 2012:P23).

It demonstrates good adult literacy practice through ensuing a learner centred approach and by ensuring that learning is an active and expressive process. Learning to learn is recognised as a key concept for adult learners and this case provides us with an example of this concept in practice.

Case study 5:

County Roscommon Adult Education Service – Engagement in literacy activities through computers and horticulture

Service Name Literacy Practice	County Roscommon Adult Education Service Engagement in literacy activities through computers and horticulture
Contact Details	Tel: 090-6627886 Email: bfullam@roscommonvec.ie
Adult Literacy Organiser	Briege Fullam
Number of staff	20 Voluntary tutors, 25 part time tutors, 2 full time tutors
Range of programmes and services offered	• Accredited programmes in Communications, ICT and General Learning • Skills for Life programmes • Family Learning • ITABE • Skills for Work • ESOL
Current student profile	The service has 431. The gender breakdown is 50/50 male to females and the highest number of students is in the 45-54 years age category. Most students are early school leavers

Co. Roscommon : Engagement in literacy activities through computers and horticulture

This case study shows how a group of men in rural Ireland, who initially were not interested in reading and writing, were engaged in a programme of learning and developed their literacy and education capacities.

Background to the service

Roscommon Adult Literacy service was set up in 1998 and is organised by Briege Fullam, an Adult Literacy Organiser with 15 years' experience. The Service has 5 centres, 3 run by resource staff. Students take on average 8 hours tuition per week, which ranges from 2 hours to 12 hours. The scheme has funding for 5 ITABE groups in

the county but applies the ITABE approach to all students where possible (intensive literacy support up to 8 hours per week). Computers classes are offered to all learners, with 6 beginner computer groups with up to 12 in each class. Family literacy programmes include beginner Irish and maths for parents of primary school children. The Scheme has a Skills for Work (SFW) Co-ordinator who recruits from about eight employers and among local farmers. There is one Level NFQ1 class for persons with intellectual disabilities and a number of ESOL groups. Classes are held mainly in the morning and in the evening for those who are working, Monday to Friday lunchtime. This scheme has very few one-to-one classes (less than 10); as a policy they try and get people into groups, which can be anything from 2 to 4 people. Resources for tutors includes each centre having their own books but most resources are on-line and tutors have their own website for sharing information; videos, recorders, camcorders, cameras.

Assessment, certification and progression

Individual assessment is carried out on all students using the English Education skills entry Level NFQ 1-3 for reading and writing. In terms of goals they are guided by the certification of ITABE and FETAC in addition to discussions with the students. Initially, students may have very vague goals, however after a number of weeks and some initial improvement and following a discussion, the student is in a position to think about setting a goal. The Scheme feels certification is good for the students and gives structure to the programme but tutors are flexible within it and may respond to particular needs on a particular day. The average length of stay in the Scheme is 1 to 2 years. Progression is mainly to the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). The FETAC Quality Framework is the main reference for Quality Assurance.

Consultation with other agencies

There is consultation with many agencies, FAS, HSE, National Learning Network (NLN) and Mental Health Agencies. It was as a result of the relationship with FAS that the Adult Literacy Organiser was asked to facilitate a group of 8 Community employment (CE) workers, male, aged 40-65,

wishing to learn but reluctant to focus on reading and writing initially because of low literacy levels (Level NFQ2) and unhappy experiences in earlier formal education.

Getting started on the project

The tutor on the project is Irene Greene. Irene has nearly twenty years experience as a tutor. She has worked as a volunteer tutor, part-time group tutor and is now a full time resource worker. On the first meeting of the group, all Irish males from a rural background, Irene was told by the men that they didn't mind what they did so long as 'there was not any of that auld reading and writing!'. Irene, established that the group was interested in learning about computers. She provided laptops and learning started with turning on and turning off the computer, an introduction to e-mail and using the internet. In the beginning, through the computers, students got comfortable with reading, writing and sending e-mails; then the tutor introduced more writing which involved word processing, followed by grammar, spelling and literacy aspects and the students writing, correcting and rewriting. Coming into the Spring season the students started on the horticultural project.

Current Context: Development of the project

The project started with drawings of a window box. The class made a computer version of it; measured it out and made the drawing to the measurement on paper. They then had to find out how much material was needed, sheets of decking, 4 x2s and the cost per foot. They enjoyed doing the costing and measurements; drawings were done in groups of two or three or as individuals if they wished. There was great discussion and sharing and helping each other, although individuals wished to complete the relevant task themselves.

The next phase involved carpentry, more costing, budgeting, ordering the materials, incorporating maths. Lists had to be handwritten to buy the materials in the shop. With great team effort the group got together and made the window boxes. The focus was on the strengths of individuals,

finding out what people were good at, not the weaknesses; thus contributing to confidence building in the group. All this was documented and kept in their folders for the FETAC award. All aspects were photographed.

When the window boxes were completed bedding plants and peat moss were bought. The theory of the life cycle of a plant, planting from seeds etc. was given by a horticulture tutor; he did a lot of flip chart work and the students copied down the information; students had to read the instructions on the back of the seed packet; the date, when to sow, where and how far apart to sow, watering and labelling; names of flowers e.g. pansies, begonias etc. The technique with spelling difficult or unusual words was to show students how to break down words into morphemes e.g. in 'board' students were able to see the small word 'oar'; and this related to one of the members who had a little boat on the Shannon, thus contextualising and building links to the everyday lives of the students which is a memory aid and a strategy for remembering words (NALA 2008).

Students also had to write out the labels; keep a weekly journal on what were the main learning points; recognise days and weeks in calendar form; enter records in a gardening diary, about what had been done and what needed to be done; identify gardening tools and their uses and recognise their shapes and sizes; learn health and safety aspects- read the instructions carefully, measurements for application of chemicals, to wear protective clothing, instructions on putting guards on machinery, storing pesticides. Students had to listen, ask questions and take notes. Work sheets, for certification, had to be filled in for the tutor.

The photo story was created around the process and it was used as part of the Level 3 evidence. The tutor initially created a short line-up of photos to show the group an example of a photo story. The students, in two groups of four; contributed a number of photos to the story; music, the Galway Girl was added.

Ancillary activities, not directly related to the horticulture project but

contributing to the 'fun' element of learning included a trip to the Dail and Croke Park, organised by the students. A poem was written about the trip. The tutor started off with a line or two and then asked the students to fill in what happened next in a way that fitted in. At a celebration at the end of the project and one of the students read and interpreted the poem.

These window boxes are outside the community centre now. The programme lasted for two years and students attended for 12 hours per week, during the day, for four blocks of 16 weeks. All progressed in literacy and numeracy, in that they achieved a Level NFQ3 award but their greatest progress was in getting rid of the barriers and blockages to learning coming from a lack of confidence in their own ability; when shown a different route all were capable of learning. When discussing further progression, involving reading and writing the tutor reminded students of the first day and made them think about all the reading and writing they had done since then without any problems.

Further student development and progression

Students completed the Communications and Maths modules and achieved a full award at Level NFQ3 (General Learning). As part of the Communications module students prepared their CV and a job application and letter; they had to give telephone numbers, get referees, write about their hobbies and work experience; mock interviews were practiced. From the confidence gained from these activities and the general social development students were more at ease in interviewing for their CE positions; one other gaining employment as a school caretaker. Two have subsequently started small gardening and landscape businesses.

A poly tunnel was acquired, through FAS and VEC, at a local Community Centre and the group became involved in horticulture/vegetable gardening as a community group, involving wider members of a small rural community, including active older people. The group then progressed to a Level NFQ4 Maths and Plants and Care Maintenance award, not organised by the literacy service, but through Roscommon VEC BTEI programme.

Learning processes and resources used in the project

The main learning process was the development of the group and working to individual strengths in a helping atmosphere. One-to-one tuition was supplied by the tutor after or before class when required. Resources used included gardening books, drawings, laptops, pictures, worksheets, Google; 'Write-On' series was used for teaching spelling and grammar, web sites like englishgrammar.org; a package called SEBRAN, good for memory, and for the mouse co-ordination and keyboard skills. All the students use the computers.The tutor created her own worksheets devised from the learning outcomes of the module and used by students from the beginning. The tutor filled in a post-lesson Appraisal forms and student and tutor Evaluation forms were completed.

Conclusion

The project showed that a group of men, normally regarded as a 'hard to reach' group, can be attracted into learning and make significant progress through areas of interest to them. There was a lot of co-operation and help for each other in the group. Group development, the inclusion of fun elements and a trained full-time tutor/resource worker capable of integrating literacy into areas of interests of the students contributed to the success of the project.

The case illustrates many principles that inform adult literacy practice. It demonstrates elements of transformative learning for students as they experienced events that changed their perception of themselves as learners. One of the principles for good adult literacy work outlines how students have the right to explore their interests and needs, decide how, when and where they wish to learn and to set their own goals (NALA, 2012). This case study demonstrates that principle in practice.

Case study 6:

County Waterford Dungarvan Adult Learning Scheme – 'Cook-It' numeracy through cooking

Service Name Literacy Practice	County Waterford Numeracy through a cooking course "Cook-It" Numeracy through Cooking
Contact Details	Tel: 058-42774/058-51436 Email: nicola@wd-vec.ie
Adult Literacy Organiser	Nicola McCarthy
Number of staff	There are over 60 voluntary tutors, 23 part-time tutors, three full-time staff and a coordinator. The profile of the volunteer tutor has changed in recent years. There has been an increase in volunteering amongst professional people and retired teachers.
Range of programmes and services offered	A wide variety of courses are on offer, from • basic computers and maths, • numeracy on a one to one basis, • skills for work, • E.S.O.L, • career preparation, • I.T.A.B.E, • Communications, • Return to Education, • computer skills, • family learning with parents in the Respond housing scheme, • Maths for parents with children at primary level and first year parents in a local 2nd level school. • Programmes are delivered between 9 a.m. to 10 p.m Monday to Friday
Current student profile	There are currently 1,479 learners in the Scheme, accessing programmes across 3 centres Dungarvan, Lismore and Tramore and a number of other locations including community facilities in the County. There has been a big increase in the number of men accessing support because of the lack of job opportunities. The age profile of learners in the scheme ranges from 17 to 92. Normally learners remain within the scheme for a maximum of three years depending on the individual needs. The overall aim is that everyone achieves a FETAC Level NFQ3 certificate after three years. Previously students worked towards completing one accredited module, this has now changed to many students working towards full awards.

Current student profile	Learners come into the Centre having heard about it by word of mouth or through local radio. A range of programmes is provided through the scheme and new developments include a Mens programme addressing horticulture, computers and maths The participants (24 men) were referred by the Local Employment Service (LES), and have now progressed to a BTEI programme. In addition to the group learning some learners participated in one-to-one sessions.

This case study describes how the Health Service Executive (HSE) 'Cook-It' programme is used to integrate literacy, particularly numeracy, in a number of settings in County Waterford.

Background to the service

The service has found that intensive literacy tuition has worked well and one of the scheme's most successful models is a men's group who are following an intensive programme of three hours per day, five days per week.

The Integrating Literacy course showcased in this case study has given staff the opportunity to learn from each other and exchange techniques and resources.

The work of the literacy service is supported through an excellent local training and education network, which meets monthly to share information, identify courses, interests, capacity and gaps in provision. The service works with Respond, Focus Ireland, the H.S.E, the Probation Board, St. Vincent de Paul and local employers; Department of Social and Family Affairs , Gardaí, LES, the Newport Day Centre (a psychiatric service) for referrals; and VTOS for literacy students' progression and predevelopment of VTOS students.

The assessment of learner needs

The initial assessment is carried out by the Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) who then shares information with the tutor. A reading, spelling, practical writing and maths tests, are used, the assessment offered is designed to

suit the individual learner needs. A student education plan follows, which is reviewed annually with the learner to facilitate progression. One-to-one learners are reviewed every three months with the tutor. There is a review two weeks into each programme and before the student leaves, usually at the end of May as part of the FETAC Quality Assurance process.

Current Context: Cook-It - Numeracy Through Cooking

The ALO became interested in this programme through contact with the St. Vincent de Paul organisation, which had identified that people's inability to budget causes severe problems. After discussions, the Health Service Executive (HSE) Cook-It programme was the vehicle chosen and it was integrated with other literacy programmes across the County, including Family Learning Programmes, ITABE and longer learning programmes. The objective of the Cook-It programme is to provide healthy meals on confined budgets. Cook-It course is accredited by the HSE. There is a continuing relationship with the HSE and staff from the HSE return to the group at the end of a programme to discuss learners' experiences and feedback. The programme is offered at Level NFQ2 Nutrition and Healthy Options. The tutor on the programme is Mary Cunningham, she has over seven years experience of tutoring adults and has qualifications in adult literacy development and cookery skills.

Learners access the programmefor 2/3 hours per week, generally over a period of 14 weeks and there is an option for learners to continue with the programme over a 26 week period. The programme has now been running for three years. There are currently 8 classes with a total of 56 learners, the age profile of learners is 40-49 years of age.

Initially learners were identified and referred to the scheme by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. However the Literacy Service now specifically offers the programmes to learners who may be accessing the scheme for literacy support but who may have education and financial worries. Learners access

the programme after attending open days in the literacy centre, contact with an information stall in the local shopping centre, or through word of mouth. In some cases learners with children who may be taking Home Economics in school become more aware of their need for cooking skills and approach the service independently. Other learners on the programme may have originally accessed the scheme to improve their computer skills and have subsequently opted to continue their learning via the Cook-It programme. Some learners may be referred by the Department of Social Protection.

As learners progress through the programme some individuals require and are provided with one- to-one tuition. 75% of the participants on the Cook-It programme are mothers. "They feel that they have no time to cook, but they have the time, just lack confidence" (tutor quote). The tutor finds that learners are afraid of machines and terrified of measuring ingredients wrongly. Many learners on the programme have not had experience working with cooking utensils (food mixers, processors and in some cases ovens) and have little or no experience of using these tools. One group consists of very young single mothers. The tutor for this group in consultation with the HSE designed a programme which was to increase awareness about nutrition, particularly for small children and infants. Literacy and numeracy support was integrated throughout the programme.

The programme

The first part of the programme introduces the kitchen layout. The tutor believes in visuals, and learning through feeling. Learners are familiarised with the equipment and are taught weights. The tutor starts off by showing different types of weighing scales, and learners weigh sugar, for example, in ounces and then in grams.

To increase confidence, the tutor starts learners cooking straight away. Learners are happy when they can make their first loaf of bread, and then proceed to understanding the weighing scales, oven temperature, and the fluids to put in to various dishes. The programme covers health and safety, kitchen hygiene and how to cook different food groups.

The learners bring in their shopping lists as part of the budgeting support and the list is also used to calculate the nutritional values of food and drink. Practical examples are used throughout the programme including measurement of sugar to demonstrate the amount of sugar in soft drinks. The tutor uses the Money Advisory and Budgeting Service (MABS) material for budgeting. On Mondays the tutor gets the learners to work a budget around the money they have. Maths is used in looking at value for money e.g. buying one big chicken that will provide two meals rather than a smaller one, possibly only slightly cheaper that would only be sufficient for one meal.

The programme is offered in three centres: in the main adult literacy centre in Dungarvan, in St. Joseph's National School, and St. Mary's National School. In the national school, the programme is offered to both the children and their parents or guardians. The children get involved in the programme by growing vegetables that can be cooked in the class.

Completion rates for the programmes have been exceptionally high. The programme is not explicitly a literacy or numeracy learning programme however it is a vehicle where literacy and numeracy support can be integrated throughout the programme. The curriculum design process does not involve identifying literacy and numeracy learning outcomes however these needs are identified and addressed as the programme progresses. Feedback from the tutors indicated that the programme could incorporate more reading which would be beneficial to learners if the programme had more time. The reading elements are reinforced by getting learners to download recipes from the computer after, for example, Rachel Allen's TV show.

The tutor photocopies all the menus for the classes, and checks that the learners are using them, reinforcing reading and spelling. She liaises with the Interpersonal Skills tutor for additional help for learners on the spellings in the programme.

The tutor interviews the learners individually three times during the course

to check if they are happy, whether they feel they are learning, whether they have they got problems, what don't they like or may be unsure of (for example oven temperatures). Evidence of progress in maths is with the 'little things' for example "they wouldn't have a weighing scales at home but will have obtained one by the second week, and they'll always buy a measuring jug" (tutor quote). Overall, evidence of progress is that the learners become interested in cooking for their families, and learn sufficient maths to enable them do so. Some learners have progressed to other programmes within the Centre upon completion of the Cook-It programme. Five learners out of the sixteen who took part in the course have gained employment, in coffee shops and childcare centres and have stated that this was due to the completion of the programme. The programme tutor feels that a progression route for learners would be very beneficial and could be designed around programmes at FETAC Level 3. The progression route for the HSE programme requires a HACCP-approved kitchen to meet the quality standards. This is not currently available in the Centre so students cannot progress on to further Cookery programmes they can however, go on to do a full NFQ Level 3 general learning qualification or Level 3 Food and Nutrition.

Conclusion

The tutor concluded that learners who completed the Cook-It programme enjoyed a sense of achievement, their fear of maths, returning to learning and more specifically being able to complete an adult learning course is gone. The students have learned to cook, nutritional values were understood and maths and its use as part of the learning process was integrated/in a way that was non-threatening and contextualised to a familiar setting.

The case illustrates an approach to integrating literacy into a programme of learning which is based on the specific needs of the learner and presents examples of how materials for the programme were contextualized to the real lives of learners.The case illustrates student centred and student directed learning where the needs and interests of the learner inform the learning goals and objectives. (NALA, 2012).

Conclusion

The six case studies presented in this report highlight literacy and numeracy practice as it happens on the ground. Each case study illustrates how the individual programmes are providing a range of courses to meet the varying and specific needs of the students attending. The case studies included in this report illustrate that there is no definitive way of ensuring 'best practice' on the ground. However, they do demonstrate aspects of the principles of good adult literacy work including student centred learning, literacy as a social practice and a humanistic approach to adult learning.

The case studies show how the services engage and retain their learners. The initial engagement with adult literacy and numeracy afforded many learners the opportunity to remain and progress within adult education long after their initial needs have been met. This practice very much supports the principle that adult literacy work is based on a philosophy which is concerned with personal development and social action. Students who were initially reluctant to return to education changed their opinion when presented with a different way of learning. This encouraged them to not only finish the programme they initially signed up to but to develop the confidence to move towards achieving accreditation. This supports the principle that adults return to learning when their needs and interests are being met and the learning environment is supportive, relaxed and friendly.

The process begins at the initial assessment stage where the resource worker, tutor and/or the ALO along with the learner identifies what the areas are that students want to work on, what they want to achieve and any future goals students may have. Importantly, this initial assessment also allows literacy and numeracy needs to be identified in a non intrusive way. This approach to initial assessment supports the principle in the Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work that states that students have the right to set their own goals and decide how, where and when they wish to learn.

A common thread throughout each of the case studies is how learner centred the programmes are. This approach illustrates many principles that inform adult literacy practice including student centred and student directed learning. It also highlights elements of transformative learning for students as they experienced events that changed their perception of themselves as learners, as demonstrated by the County Roscommon case study. This was also noticeable in situations where new learning occurred and students were exposed to cultural activities beyond what can be described as their normal day to day routine, for example, organising a trip to the theatre in Dublin north inner city case study.

The case studies highlight the important role of networking with other local services. The services have made concerted efforts to build good networking relationships with organisations such as the St. Vincent de Paul and the HSE. Some of the schemes emphasise the importance of this networking as fundamental to identifying and responding to local need.

The adult and literacy services included in this report have presented what can be described as innovative and creative programmes to meet the needs of adult students. No doubt this work is repeated in other adult learning services around the country. Recognising the value of this work NALA and WIT, by carrying out this research have taken a step in capturing it. We will, in consultation with other stakeholders, continue to research effective methodologies and the impact of teaching and learning in adult literacy and numeracy tuition.

It is hoped that this report when read in conjunction with the Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work will be a useful resource to individual practitioners and organisations working in the area of adult literacy and numeracy learning.

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Useful websites and other resources

NALA websites

www.nala.ie
www.nala.ie/resources
www.writeon.ie
www.simplyput.ie
www.makingcents.ie
www.healthliteracy.ie
www.helpmykidlearn.ie
www.literacytools.ie

Other useful websites

www.bbc.co.uk/skillwise
www.clarefamilylearning.org
www.dyslexia.com
www.englishgrammar.org
www.focusonphonics.co.uk
www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/Primary/phonics
www.niace.org.uk
www.nrdc.org.uk
www.peppercornbooks.com
www.readingcompanion.org
www.readwritenow.ie
www.scoileoin.ie/Dolch
www.wartoft.nu/software/sebran
www.wordshark.co.uk

Useful NALA resources

Integrating Literacy: Guidelines for further education and training centres. NALA, 2013.

This outlines key features of a whole-centre approach to literacy on further education and vocational training programmes. The focus is on building literacy support and development into the teaching and learning of other subjects and into all phases of the education and training programme.

The Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. NALA, 2012.

The Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work is the main document for those working in the adult literacy and numeracy field and should be used as a key reference for teaching and learning. It provides a clear expression of what adult literacy work is about and where it came from. It also aims to establish the right to develop literacy skills as a fundamental human right for adults who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy.

Becoming literacy friendly. NALA, 2010.

This whole organisation project is a research study that set out to explore the process of developing a whole organisation approach to supporting literacy in a community based organisation.

Curriculum development: An evolving model for adult literacy and numeracy education. NALA, 2009.

This evolving model of curriculum development shows how the principles, values and practices described in NALA's publication Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work apply to curriculum development in adult literacy work. This is seen as an evolving model to recognise that the model is likely to change, to evolve, as we all learn more about how curriculum development works in practice in Ireland.

Literacy friendly further education and training. NALA, 2009.

This report introduces evidence and a set of guidelines to support the adoption of a whole organisation approach to integrating literacy support across the further education and training sector.

Getting Started in Adult Literacy and Numeracy: A Tutor Training Resource Pack. NALA, 2007.

This pack is designed for trainers who are facilitating the initial tutor training course or other in-service tutor training events. The pack is designed so that trainers can dip in and out of it to suit the needs of their tutors. The material is designed for use in a variety of ways and for a variety of tutors. The pack has been divided into sections, which correspond roughly to the key topics which usually form part of an initial tutor training course for adult literacy tutors. Some of the sections include much more material than can be covered in the average two hour period. It is hoped that trainers can pick and choose sections or parts of sections to be used during the course. Some of the material and sample sessions may also need to be adapted in each case to meet the needs of individual schemes and groups of new tutors.

Curriculum Development in Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education. A report from on a research project in Ireland 2006-2007. NALA, 2009.

The report contains examples of everyday numeracy situations, multiple intelligence, community development links with literacy and numeracy, numeracy case studies, numeracy exercises and case studies

The Really Useful Guide to Words and Numbers Workbook. NALA, 2006.

A number of activities are demonstrated which can be used to help learners identify what they already know including getting from one point to

another; daily activities; using photographs to provide material for reflection and learning; publishing student work which involved the learners in writing, reading, proof reading, giving constructive feedback, group decision making, work planning and celebration. NALA resources, Monica McNamara books for basic numeracy, the King Street sets, Skillwise (advanced level), the Dodge list and Schoolhouse to go;

Mapping the Learning Journey. NALA, 2005.

Mapping the Learning Journey aims to reflect best practice in teaching and learning in adult basic education. It was developed to ensure that adults with literacy difficulty have access to a wide range of high quality learning opportunities.

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The National Adult Literacy Agency

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent member-based organisation, working on improving adult literacy in Ireland since 1980. We are:
- the voice of adults wishing to improve their literacy skills, and
- committed to raising adult literacy levels.

NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency

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    www.simplyput.ie (Plain English website)
    www.makingcents.ie (Financial literacy website)
    www.healthliteracy.ie (Health literacy website)
    www.helpmykidlearn.ie (Family learning website)

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NALA's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/nationaladultliteracy

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