

Literacy-friendly Further Education and Training

**An exploration of the potential for a
whole organisation approach to
integrating language and literacy in
further education and training in
Ireland**

December 2009

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A report on empirical research completed on behalf of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) January - August 2009

Written by: Ann Hegarty and Maggie Feeley

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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.

Contact NALA at:

National Adult Literacy Agency

76 Lower Gardiner Street

Dublin 1

Tel: +353 1 8554332

Fax: +353 1 8555475

Email: literacy@nala.ie

Web: www.nala.ie

Foreword

In January 2009, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) commissioned research on integrating literacy support and development into further education vocational courses at Level 5. We are very grateful to Michael King, Principal of Liberties College, and to the College's staff and students for their invaluable cooperation in this research. We would also like to thank Jacinta Stewart, Chief Executive Officer of City of Dublin VEC, for her cooperation.

The learning from this project will inform NALA's policy development and the various strands of our work to help increase the range of 'literacy-friendly' learning opportunities available to adults. NALA is pleased to publish the final research report from the project, to make the learning more widely available to policymakers, providers and practitioners in further education and training.

We would like to thank Dr Liz McSkeane for her initial exploratory research on our behalf, which helped lay the basis for this project.

Finally, we are grateful to Maggie Feeley and Ann Hegarty for their professionalism and enthusiasm in carrying out this research, and the Liberties College members of the Project Planning and Review Group for their support to the researchers.

Inez Bailey

Director, NALA

September 2009

Acknowledgements

From the research team: Ann Hegarty and Maggie Feeley

We would like to acknowledge the openness and support that we have encountered throughout the work of this research project both from the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and Liberties College of Further Education (FE). The NALA Integrating Literacy Coordinator and the College Project Coordinator have been responsive and efficient in meeting requests for information and in organising interviews and meetings. We fully recognise and appreciate how much this has freed us to focus on the business of data collection and analysis.

The principal, staff and students of the college welcomed us as frequent visitors and despite their own pressures of work and examinations made time to meet with us and share their experience and reflections about language and literacy issues. We have been impressed by the interest and dedication of all staff and their genuine quest for ways to improve the learning experience for all students.

The contribution of the Planning and Review Group (PaRG) has been constructive and welcome. The group's combined skills have steadily steered the course of the work and we appreciate their time and commitment.

A number of individuals and institutions agreed to provide additional interviews and to host visits and these were informative and enriching of the research process. Many thanks to Ann Marie Barr: Belfast Metropolitan College; Professor Mary Hamilton: Lancaster Literacy Research Centre; Fionnnaigh Connaughton: Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC); Jacinta Stewart: City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) and Andrina Wafer: Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

Dr Liz McSkeane carried out the initial phase of the project in April – May 2008 and we are aware that she established a sound basis upon which we have been able to build. Her initial report has been an invaluable reference point and we are grateful for her contribution to the project.

Thanks also to Jerome Finnegan for accurate and timely transcription of tapes and useful comments.

Our objective has been to carry out a methodical and realistic exploration of the potential for a whole organisation approach to language and literacy support and development at FETAC Level 5. We wanted to produce an honest and useful report that offers both immediate and longer-term guidance about making FE more literacy-friendly. Our research conversations have been full of insight for us and we hope that our distillation of that learning is of use to others who share our passion for literacy equality.

AH &MF

Members of the Project Planning and Review Group

Liberties College:

Deirdre Kearney

Margo Kelly

Anne O Donohue

NALA:

Tina Byrne

Bláthnaid Ní Chinnéide

Helen Ryan

Researchers:

Ann Hegarty

Maggie Feeley

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Main messages

This report introduces both theoretical and empirical evidence to support the adoption of a whole organisation approach to integrating literacy support and development across the further education and training sector.

The research that gave rise to this report was conducted by the National Adult Literacy Agency in partnership with Liberties College of Further Education in Dublin and focused mainly on language and literacy issues in the context of courses at Level 5 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Why is integrating literacy an issue in further education? Lifelong learning is now an accepted facet of our rapidly changing modern societies and a reality of the globalised economy. Consequently, further education colleges attract young people leaving school and older adults who want to gain vocational qualifications or move on to higher education. In turn, higher levels and fields of education introduce new concepts, language and different writing conventions and these present learning challenges for everyone in adult education. Changes occur at such a pace that we are never finished learning language and literacy. At the same time, research has shown that not everyone leaves compulsory schooling with even their basic language and literacy needs satisfied. This means that it is important to ensure that both basic and new literacy needs are addressed as part of all further education (FE) courses.

Research reviewed for this project shows clearly that where subject teachers are skilled at integrating literacy and where literacy specialists offer additional support then previously unmet literacy needs should not exclude someone from an FE course. Colleges have a complex task in the course recruitment phase, in determining whether students have all the skills needed for a particular course, and literacy is just part of the picture. In order to be fair, selection needs to be based on an in-depth analysis of all course needs and prospective students allowed to be part of the process of informed decision making.

When literacy becomes a recognised and an integrated feature of the curriculum on FE courses, empirical studies point unequivocally to improved retention rates and higher achievement outcomes. Research worldwide also shows that adults learn literacy most effectively in contexts that are personally meaningful and motivating: for those who are motivated to do a particular further education and training course, those conditions are well-met.

This report situates an empirical study carried out in an Irish FE college in the context of international literature about integrated literacy. A set of guidelines for integrating literacy in a further education and training context emerged from both the literature review and the local study. These guidelines, and key messages from the research project, are presented below.

- ✓ In order to appropriately carry out its role, the Further Education (FE) sector should be recognised and resourced as a significant first step in an inclusive third level education. The role of FE should include facilitating excellence in language and literacy for all adult learners.
- ✓ In keeping with their broader ethos, organisations should have a clear understanding and definition of literacy if they are to make appropriate provision for FE learners. Language and literacy are already embedded in all aspects of FE and central to the quality of learning provision.
- ✓ Language and literacy is a significant issue for adults in further education and training across many countries. Adopting an integrated approach to language and literacy development has been shown to provide an effective means of simultaneously dealing with literacy, vocational and other learning needs. A whole organisation approach to language and literacy has been most effectively introduced in places where robust national policy and resources are available.
- ✓ There are equity, efficiency and pedagogical arguments for adopting a totally integrated approach to literacy support and development. Adopting an integrated approach has been shown to improve retention and achievement thereby augmenting individual, community and national skills and social and economic wellbeing.

- ✓ FE college strategic plans should include systems and procedures to make the whole organisation literacy-friendly. A cross-college language and literacy group convened by a senior staff member should champion this task. Literacy should be a priority on all agendas.
- ✓ FE staff require appropriate professional development to support them in facilitating language and literacy in their courses. This should be a sectoral development based on the current NUI Maynooth Integrating Literacy course.
- ✓ Literacy specialists should be central to the FE college integrated approach to language and literacy. They will provide a range of support to students and staff and advise in the planning and development of the whole college literacy strategy. Specialist literacy support should be the hub of learning for students and staff and a collective repository for language and literacy resources.
- ✓ College departments and subject specialists should have a clear analysis of the language and literacy elements and practices in their courses and modes of delivery. In this way they can facilitate learning with greater clarity and precision.
- ✓ Colleges should work to give language and literacy a fresh and positive profile with learners. Progress that follows on from a fully integrated approach should be tracked, celebrated and modelled for other education sectors.

Box 1: Guidelines for literacy-friendly FE

- 1) Prioritise and define literacy.
- 2) Form a literacy steering group.
- 3) Make a 3-year literacy plan.
- 4) Create literacy-friendly systems.
- 5) Employ literacy specialists.
- 6) Provide literacy facilitation for staff.
- 7) Manage literacy in the curriculum.
- 8) Maintain good literacy learning relationships.
- 9) Build banks of literacy resources.
- 10) Track and celebrate literacy successes.

Introduction

Young people do not want to go back to things they are not good at. What they want to do is fly. (FETAC Policy Development Officer)

Further education marks a new start for people who are taking on the challenge of adult learning. Where earlier experiences of learning have often left gaps it makes sense to find new and better ways to approach these past omissions so that everyone, young and not so young, has a more equal chance to fly.

We know from national and international studies that as many as a quarter of Irish adults and a third of disadvantaged young people are missing out on fulfilling their literacy potential (Morgan et al, 1997; ERC, 2004; Eivers et al, 2005). This suggests that we urgently need to find effective ways to change the fact that our systems are failing a lot of people, neglecting to develop their language and literacy capabilities and to provide equally for all learners' most basic needs (Baker et al, 2004).

In recent years, the *integrated* or *embedded* approach to language and literacy support and development has been comprehensively implemented in other countries e.g. Australia and the UK. Since the turn of the century some Irish training organisations have also been exploring this approach to programme delivery with very positive results (Cramer, 2008). Many tutors have been trained and the FE curriculum examined to reveal the detailed language and literacy demands that it makes on teachers and students (McSkeane: 2008; Short, 2008). The rationale has been well established for recognising the pivotal and embedded nature of language and literacy in all social situations and particularly in learning (Gee, 1996; Barton et al, 2000; Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Hamilton, 2006). Alongside this has grown the need for whole organisations to embrace their role in enabling literacy to be prioritised and allowing learners and staff to have the satisfaction of achieving positive, successful learning outcomes.

This report gives an account of a case study of *Integrated Literacy* carried out in cooperation with one College of Further Education in Dublin city. The aims

of the study were to highlight the language and literacy issues that emerge 'real time' for FETAC Level 5 learners and their teachers in FE. Strategies for dealing with literacy issues used by college management, learners and teachers were explored and the subsequent lessons gathered as a means to help others working in similar contexts. Our core research question has been: *From a study of day-to day practice in FE, what guidelines emerge for a whole organisation approach to language and literacy in FE colleges in Ireland?*

This study has been a collaboration between NALA and Liberties College.

NALA

Established since 1980, the current mission of the Irish National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) clearly articulates NALA's commitment to inclusion and equality for all people whose literacy needs remain unmet.

NALA is an independent, member-based organisation committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. (NALA, 2007: 10)

NALA's principled, learner-centred approach to the development of literacy provision and services has earned praise from the international literacy field (Hamilton et al, 2001). In their autonomous methodology they remain true to an ethos of literacy as social practice that respects localised and situated responses to provision. Rather than imitate development trends elsewhere, NALA explores new ideas in the Irish context and seeks to ensure best fit between need and response.

By methodically exploring the process of a whole organisation approach to integrated literacy at a range of education and training levels, NALA continues the process of evolving guidelines that promote inclusion, equality and literacy-friendly Irish education (Ní Chinnéide, 2002).

Liberties College

Liberties College is located in the heart of Dublin city and provides a wide range of courses for 850 students. The college opened in 1968 as a post primary school under the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee and throughout its long history has endeavoured to respond to the changing needs of both the local and wider community.

In 1977 the college began to provide adult education courses including classes in adult literacy and in 1984 Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses were introduced.

Most recently two significant developments have resulted in fundamental changes in the college student population. Firstly, a shift in the demographics of the local community has resulted in a diminution of the second level school going population. Secondly, as a result of the increased interest in and uptake of adult education, the college has gradually phased out the second level school population. The academic year 2007/2008 saw the full transition of the college from second level school to institute of Further Education.

At the time of writing, the college offers 39 courses leading to FETAC awards at Level 5 and some at Level 6. The college also provides courses accredited by a broad range of national, international and professional bodies.¹

Liberties College Learning Support Service

In 1996 as a result of an increased demand on its services from adult students of the College, the Adult Literacy Scheme (ALS) based in what was then Liberties Vocational School suggested to the principal that an adult learning support service be established, staffed by tutors trained and experienced in adult literacy principles and approaches, and integrated within

¹ Cisco Networking Academy, CACHE - Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education, Edexcel, Galileo, American Montessori Society, The Mediators' Institute of Ireland, Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, Central Remedial Clinic, Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, Irish Association of Alcohol and Addiction Counsellors, Department of Education and Science and Highscope Ireland

the College timetable. An early advertisement for the service described its purpose as:

To support students who have difficulties with the basic skills needed to successfully negotiate the demands of their courses.²

Initially two hours a week were allocated for a tutor to work with students on Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) courses. This embedded the course-related literacy-support of students within the curriculum of the College and planted the seed that was to grow into the current Learning Support Service (LSS).

Over the intervening years the service has steadily expanded and extended. In 2007 the LSS became a section within the Department of Student Welfare and Services and became the responsibility of a designated Assistant Principal. This in turn led to the allocation of a LSS room, designed as an adult-friendly space in which 1:1 and small group literacy support could happen. By 2008 three tutors were involved in the provision of LSS with a total of twenty hours between them and the service had established a dedicated LSS base.

The profile of LSS in Liberties College has organically developed as a response to learner and staff needs. At the time of this research, LSS activities include 1:1 and small group language and literacy support; team-teaching of whole classes by a literacy and subject specialist and customised workshops delivered by the literacy specialist in response to student and staff identification of need across the College. The college and the LSS team are alert to the need for constant development of the service and this research project is part of that openness to reflection, critique and development.

The college has an evident appreciation of the centrality of language and literacy to its core provision. This is evidenced both in its dedication of time and resources to this research project and in its *Language Matters* staff development initiative. The latter involves a small group of teachers in reflection on the role of language and literacy in the FETAC Level 5 curriculum and has created a pool of expertise that is shared with the wider

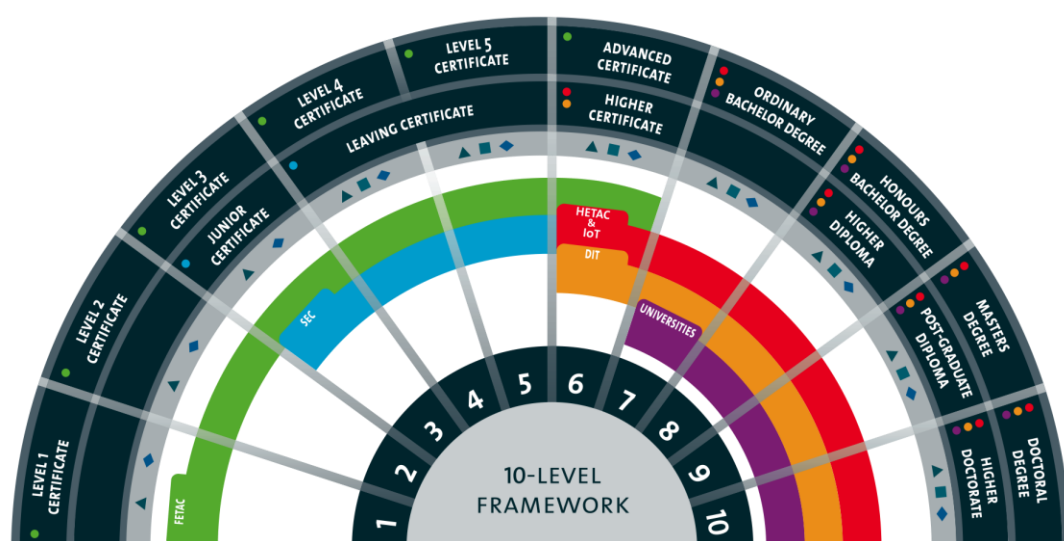
staff group. Such an initiative that raises language and literacy awareness and builds knowledge of literacy-friendly practice has relevance throughout the FE sector.

FETAC – Level 5

The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) is the single provider of awards at Levels 1-6 (see Figure 1 below) of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and has a key role in the European Network on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (ENQA-VET). FETAC awards have wide recognition and are available through an extensive range of further education and training providers including colleges of FE that are the focus of this study.

FETAC are creative and flexible in the manner in which evidence of competence can be presented. All awards are modularised and a 'component certificate' is awarded for each module successfully completed. Modules may be grouped or completed over a period of time. A full award at Level 5 requires 8 modules – 5 vocational, 2 general, one of which must be communications and one work experience module.

Figure 1 – 10-level qualifications framework



² Advertisement for the service in 1996

Source: National Framework of Qualifications – www.fetac.ie

A learner who decides to study for an award at Level 5 does not need a previous qualification and so admission to courses is at the discretion of each individual college and training centre. FETAC guidance in relation to language and literacy suggests only broad, general levels of capacity.

Learners entering programmes leading to awards at Level 5 will usually be proficient at reading, drafting, preparing and understanding information across a broad range of topics, including quantitative information. Texts might include information in relation to a family circumstance, a community concern or a work-based plan or solution. (FETAC 'Equipped to Participate' statements for providers)

In 2008 there were 737 FETAC providers and 138,000 awards were made. These awards open doors to work, further vocational and higher education training opportunities.

Wider relevance of this study

As part of the research process early discussion in the literacy field revealed an 18-week language and literacy support course for students who were university access candidates and students already enrolled on third level courses. This confirmed for us that across many sectors individuals are struggling with the cultural, language and literacy demands of being a student. In particular many adults want help with language and literacy. The support course in the Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC) attracts a wide range of students from FETAC Level 5 upwards, who are motivated to get extra support for their personal learning project. Although this additional opportunity for reflection and practice is an important part of provision it also highlights the scope for additional measures to be integrated into the mainstream system at a range of levels, FE, Institutes of Technology and Higher Education. Although aimed specifically at FETAC Level 5 it is anticipated that the guidelines emerging from this research will have relevance across a range of education and training levels and sectors.

Guide to the report

The whole report is mapped as follows:

Part 1 - A brief overview of the Irish FE context

Part 2 – A review of international literature

Section 1 – theoretical literature

Section 2 – empirical literature

Part 3 – Research design and implementation

Part 4 – An Irish empirical study

Section 1- course related language and literacy issues in FE for students and teachers

Section 2 – effective language and literacy support and development strategies used by students, subject teachers and learning support literacy specialists

Section 3 – emerging whole college systems and procedures for language and literacy support and development across FE

Part 5 – Conclusions

Section 1 – emerging guidelines for whole organisation approaches to language and literacy in FE

Section 2 – policy recommendations that will facilitate implementation of the guidelines

A detailed bibliography relating to integrated approaches to language and literacy and a list of useful websites is included at the end of the whole document.

Note on Terminology

Elsewhere Further Education corresponds to Vocational Training, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Further and Higher Education (FHE).

There are also a range of ways of naming literacy throughout the International literature. Depending on the country, literacy is variously called Adult Basic Education, Essential Skills, Skills for Life and may also include numeracy as in Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN). Here, we have not included numeracy as part of our study and use literacy and language and literacy interchangeably to refer to spoken and text based language use.

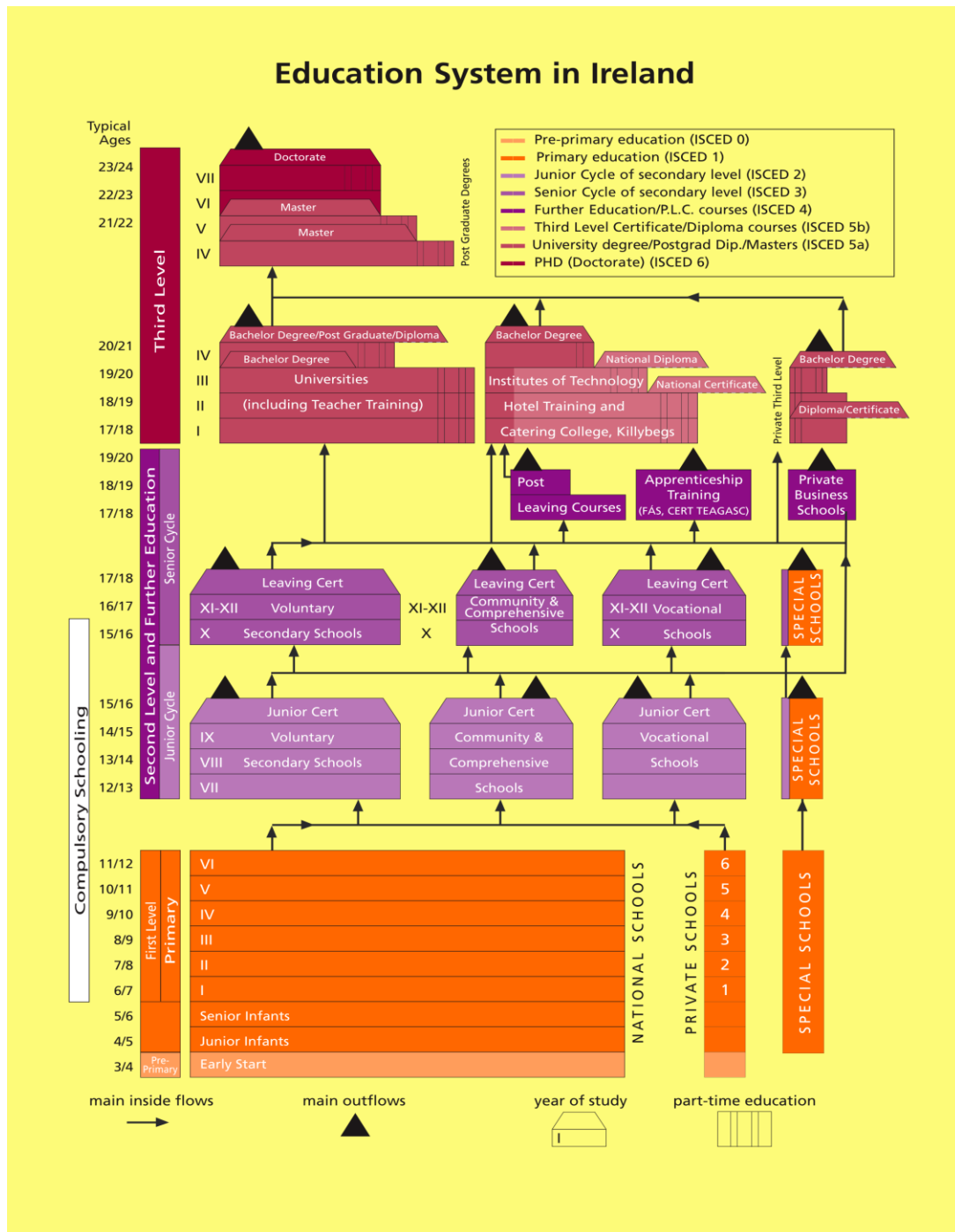
The term 'college' is used often in this report, mainly because the field work for the research was carried out in cooperation with a College of Further Education. However please note that in the generic sense we intend it to be used interchangeably with words such as 'centre'.

The study is set in the context of the Irish FE sector outlined next in Part 1.

Part 1 – A brief overview of the Irish FE context

The model below locates the Further Education sector within the overall Irish education system.

Figure 2: The Irish education system at a glance



Source: A brief description of the Irish education system (DES, 2004:2)

Further education describes the learning that takes place 'after second level schooling but which is not part of the third level system' (DES, 2004: 21). It therefore falls between two levels and as such has a less well-defined identity

than other sectors of education. Those working in FE keenly feel this cultural deficit.

We don't have our own identity. We don't have an identity as FE people. There are loads of FE colleges. You can name them all but I suppose a lack of recognition means we don't have this identity. *FE Teacher*

In its description of the FE sector the Department of Education and Science (DES) portrays the space between second and third level education as marked by its breadth and diversity of provision (Ibid.). FE gathers within its parameters the provision of several government departments, statutory agencies and voluntary and community education providers. It spans an age range from young school leavers to retired adults and a motivational continuum from economic necessity to the pursuit of leisure.

The provision of FE includes:

- Vocational courses
- University and college access courses
- Second chance and community education
- Adult literacy
- Programmes for young people
- Programmes for Irish Travellers
- Adult guidance
- Self-funded adult education

The most recent policy document for adult education was published (after wide consultation) in 2000. Although welcomed as innovative and enlightened at the time, some of the aspirations of the White Paper on Adult Education remain unrealised. In relation to FE the White Paper proposed 'a structural review ... of the management, organisational, administrative, technical and ancillary supports for post-leaving certificate (PLC) provision' (DES, 2000:86). This evaluative process was duly planned and implemented

and the subsequent comprehensive review document became known as the Mclver Report (DES, 2003).

The Mclver Report

The Mclver Report sought to establish FE as a distinctive sector, separate from the secondary sector and with appropriate vision, structures and staffing. The study sent questionnaires to all colleges and made 15 detailed study visits to a representative spread of large and small, urban and rural PLC institutions around the country. Comparative study visits took place to Northern Ireland, Scotland, Denmark and the Netherlands. The report's thorough and detailed recommendations represented a map for the creation of a vibrant, flexible, well-resourced Further and Higher Education (FHE) sector that would serve the learning needs of individuals, communities and industry. The needs of adult learners and the increased demands on staff were recognised in the proposal to reduce contact time and create non-teaching roles for advisors, counsellors and programme managers. Although the initial costs of the plan were high, the proposed funding scheme was incentive-based and linked to recruitment and retention figures. The image was one of a modernised, accountable sector with improved buildings, childcare, better links with industry and the capacity to provide both national (FETAC) qualifications and the customised training needs of business and industry. This was to be a sector that recognised real adult learning needs and where staff would be resourced and trained to respond to them positively and imaginatively.

The Mclver report remains unimplemented. Staff hours and staff-student ratios in FE remain high and funding does not reflect the complexity and range of adult learning needs and the changing work environment. Services like *Learning Support* have no adult learning policy basis and consequently no clear funding stream.

The National Competitiveness Council (NCC) recently warned that 'an education system that was largely created and developed to meet the needs of young people leaving school' will struggle to meet the skills shortages and training needs of a country faced with deep recession and growing

unemployment (NCC, 2009:35). The need for literacy to be a central feature of FE is also recognised at the heart of the sector itself.

The ideal answer to the PLC issue is cross-curricular literacy and every teacher having the knowledge and know-how to do it. The issue is that it needs to be systematic and that it has to be in some way national policy. Everyone keeps talking about the high quality skills we are going to need and you can't have them without high quality literacy. (CEO, CDVEC)

Where language and literacy support exists in vocational FE programmes it is largely because of the efforts of individual principals and staff who have found the resources and skill-base to make it happen. This may be through use of funds for disability support or through judicious use of allocated hours. The dedication and enthusiasm of staff is not always matched by appropriate resources and so it remains uncharted territory what impact FE might really have on unmet literacy needs.

To cope with rising levels of unmet literacy needs across generations Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and other FE providers need to be supported both with a strong, cohesive strategic plan and the resources to implement it. The case is strongly made by the NCC for prioritising adult literacy as a most basic requirement of a modern knowledge economy.

The theory and empirical research that demonstrate why and how such initiatives have been successfully implemented elsewhere are now explored in the literature review in Part 2.

Part 2 – A review of the literature

This study of integrated approaches to language and literacy in FE had a strong empirical dimension that will be described in detail in Part 4 of the report. This is preceded here by a review of the international literature organised into two distinct sections. **Section one** addresses the range of **theoretical perspectives** that may underpin integrated literacy. This begins by looking at various definitions of literacy and exploring how diverse ideological perspectives might inform FE practice in general and integrated literacy in particular. NALA's social practice definition of literacy is located within the spread of theoretical positions and the implications of this position are described. **Section two** discusses the **findings of empirical studies** of integrated or embedded literacy projects including in Australia, the UK, the US and Ireland. When read alongside the empirical findings from this Irish case study, the literature informs the generic guidelines for a whole college approach to integrating literacy that this report recommends in the final chapter.

Section 1: Theoretical perspectives underpinning integrated/embedded literacy

You can no more cut the literacy part out of the overall social practice, or cut away the non-literacy parts of the overall practice, than you can subtract the white squares from the chess board and still have a chess board. (Gee, 1996: 42)

Introduction

This review of the theoretical literature explores the issues that underpin the task of finding an effective approach to language and literacy inequalities and their impact on FE courses. The question should not be about *whether* to integrate language and literacy into all FE courses. In reality, language and literacy are already integrated or embedded into all our social practices as a central means of relating and communicating. Language and literacy are

inherently socially situated. Furthermore, drawing on Vygotsky (1986) Ursula Coleman reminds us of the role of language in cognition. Words are the tools we use in the processes such as perceiving, reasoning, judging, remembering, imagining, thinking and grasping concepts.

‘... words function as thinking tools which help us to sort out our thoughts and direct our mental processes (Coleman, 2006: 22).

Nevertheless, thinking is often left out of the loop when we describe the role of language and literacy in learning and yet thinking is what makes the otherwise secretarial processes of reading and writing become really meaningful. It follows therefore that we cannot possibly ignore spoken and text-based language use in FE, or any other part of the education sector, but must rather begin to see it as a pivotal factor in the process of all learning and teaching. When we refer to the support and development of language and literacy in this study we assume practices that are coterminous with cognitive growth and the generic process of learning to learn.

Literacy and equality

Literacy is not evenly distributed either globally or nationally and mirrors other aspects of social privilege. In the past the rich, the religious, the gendered cultural and political elite and the merchant classes have all used literacy to assert and sustain their dominant position and to maintain the subjugated position of others. Knowledge, information and the means to develop one's capabilities have always gone hand in hand with wealth, power and status and literacy was often historically bound up with the maintenance and reproduction of these inequalities (Clanchy, 1979; Crowther et al, 2001; Graff, 1979, 1981; Mace, 2001). Over time, as literacy has gradually become a more widespread resource in the west, so the relationship with inequality has persisted and the stigma attached to having unmet literacy needs has also grown. Literacy has historically reflected wider inequalities in society and yet this correlation is rarely articulated.

In Ireland as many as 25% of the adult population have unmet literacy needs (OECD, 1997; Morgan et al, 1997) and this percentage doubles in the surveys of prison population (Morgan and Kett, 2003). Trends in Ireland and across

Europe reveal rising numbers of school-age learners, especially by boys, whose literacy capabilities remain uncultivated by the education system (Lynch and Feeley, 2009). The same young people (and mature students) who face adult life without realising their language and literacy skills are also those who face other social inequalities and so educational disadvantage becomes part of a wider multi-faceted profile of inequality (Eivers et al, 2005; CEC, 2008). How literacy inequality is understood and tackled in the FE sector is determined by which ideological position is adopted from the range outlined below.

Three perspectives on literacy

Treatments of literacy have taken three main forms: **neo-liberal discourses** emphasising human capital, **critical theory approaches** focussing on agency and cultural activism, and **New Literacy Studies** (NLS), which sees literacy as a situated social practice. All positions agree that unmet literacy needs are undesirable but they vary in the degree to which they locate the cause in individuals or unjust social structures. They therefore also vary in how they visualise remedies to literacy inequalities. For example the more conservative perspective sees literacy as an individual, family or school responsibility. The radical position sees complex unequal structures as both causal and consequential.

The dominant, **neo-liberal literacy discourse** for most of the past two decades, justified by large scale international quantitative studies, has undoubtedly been one of 'falling standards' and the ensuing challenges for competitiveness across nations in the global capitalist market (Bynner and Parsons, 1997; Jones, 1997; Moser, 1999; Parsons and Bynner, 1998; Wagner and Venezky, 1999; Heckman and Masterov, 2004). The policy focus that resulted from such large-scale quantitative studies is on managing failed individuals and the perceived inability of the education system to furnish the market with sufficiently flexible and productive workers (Commission of the European Communities (CEC), 2001; Department of Education and Science (DES), 2000; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997). The constraint and injustice

imposed on those who have been short-changed by the education system is discounted in overriding concerns about weakened productivity. A neo-liberal view casts FE as a means to preparing members of a workforce who will in turn contribute to the maintenance and development of the economy.

Emphasis is on completion of instrumental job-related accreditation rather than enabling holistic learner-centred programmes that address language and literacy needs beyond the purely short-term and functional. FE courses are often time-pressured and accreditation driven and the resources for language and literacy support and development tend to be peripheral.

By contrast, **critical literacy theorists** have focused on agency and cultural activism as a means of transforming unjust social systems and their influence has transcended the field of education to wider movements of struggle (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993; Freire 1972; 1985; Giroux, 1983; Gramsci, 1971; 1995; McLaren and Leonard, 1993). Both the work of Paulo Freire and that of feminist scholars and educationalists radically influenced the development of the adult literacy movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Through defining and practising consciousness-raising, the politicisation of the personal and of collectivity, they defined the parameters of an empowering and egalitarian approach to adult learning that continues to be present in some literacy work today (Barr, 1999; Freire and Macedo, 1987; hooks, 1994; McMinn, 2000; Thompson, 1997; Weiler, 1988; 1991). However, despite much optimism around critical approaches to literacy, the translation into transformative pedagogy has proved problematic. Freire (1972: 62) stressed that his dialogical, pedagogical practice was only authentic if 'infused with love' and a desire to end all oppression. It could not be automatically transposed onto other circumstances but needed to be part of a wider transformational context where conscious and collaborative struggle for change is a present and embracing reality. Such a context, that welcomes and nurtures critical egalitarian change, has proved elusive. For the most part now, adult literacy work in Europe takes place under the shadow of the Lisbon Strategy³. Critical and affective aspirations are consequently restrained by

³ The European Council adopted the Lisbon Strategy in 2001 with the expressed aim of making the EU 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in

funding imperatives, accreditation targets and the increasing demands of a narrow, job-related curriculum. FE is by nature designed to support the status quo and to generate often low paid workers. Any mention of critical thinking is left to individuals and certainly not structurally resourced or encouraged.

Despite some intensification in the attention (and funding) given to adult literacy work as a result of the OECD adult studies of the 90s (OECD, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997) literacy as a concept continues to be relatively unproblematised. One exception to this theoretical void provides a third perspective in the work of **New Literacy Studies**. NLS brings together a range of theoretical and empirical writing that challenges hegemonic, mainstream views of literacy. With evident Freirean and Gramscian influences, NLS has become an alternative voice challenging assumptions about the meaning and use of literacy by individuals and in communities. From an NLS standpoint it is proposed that literacy is not fixed but rather an evolving, socially situated phenomenon that is deeply interwoven with historical and power-related societal patterns (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Crowther et al, 2001; Gee, 1990, 1996, 1999; Ivanič, 1996; Street, 1984, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2003; Tett et al; 2006). In particular, NLS emphasises the manner in which literacy is being reshaped by rapid developments in technological means of communication and how this does and should impact on learning processes (Kress, 2003; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003).

Through contextualising and deconstructing literacy practices, NLS has sensitised us to the social, cultural and affective contexts in which literacy and the uses of literacy are often defined. In their study of *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, Barton et al (2000) bring together a range of research of the Lancaster School that exemplifies the NLS approach. The collection spotlights the diverse contexts in which real texts and lived literacy practices play a part, for example, in the specificity of a prison community (Anita Wilson); a Welsh farming community struggling with rising levels of agricultural bureaucracy (Kathryn Jones); a computer conferencing group for Canadian students wishing to improve their capacities in academic English

the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and

(Renata de Pourbaix) and in a Catholic community preparing for children's First Holy Communion (Karen Tusting). These and a host of other studies place real and often undervalued vernacular literacies under the microscope as part of a contribution to reconceptualising literacy and recognising the real, complex role that literacy practices occupy.

NLS concentration on what people do and are required to do during literacy events is useful and counterbalances the growing mainstream *literacy deficit* narrative. On the other hand, the fact remains that, through no fault of their own, many people who wish to use literacy in both the vernacular and formal or schooled forms, are unable to do so and this is also an important part of the story. A NLS view of literacy is supportive of the notion of integrating literacies in the vocational or indeed other contexts. In fact the essence of NLS is that language and literacy are specific to cultural situations and events and become meaningless, test literacies when taken out of context (Gee, 1996 ; Hamilton and Barton, 2000).

NALA's perspective on language and literacy

NALA has adopted a social practice view of literacy that also recognises the role of literacy in changing unequal structures:

... listening and speaking, reading and writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. But it includes more than the technical skills of communication: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions.

Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change. (NALA, 2007)

NALA's view of literacy elaborated here incorporates elements of the functional, critical and NLS perspectives. The technical skills of a functional approach to literacy are acknowledged as a major concern, particularly for those whose learning needs have not yet been satisfied. However literacy is recognised as involving more than the secretarial skills of language and the situated and critical possibilities of literacy are also part of the picture. This balanced and learner-centred view of literacy has evolved over the years as indeed literacy itself evolves. In a review of literacy policy across Britain and

greater social cohesion and respect for the environment, by 2010.' CEC (2001)

Ireland, the Irish approach to literacy has been recognised as the ‘most distanced from market-driven rhetoric’ and avoiding the ‘narrowness’ of neo-liberal conceptions of literacy that predominate elsewhere (Hamilton et al, 2001:32). This reflexive approach in turn allows a more measured grounded approach to development than occurs where state schemes are imposed and funding determined by a profit-driven ideological perspective.

Why ideology matters

How literacy is defined and understood has implications for policy, funding, assessment and a whole host of curriculum and pedagogical issues (Lonsdale and McCurry, 2004). How literacy is defined also shapes the way that it is viewed as part of the FE curriculum, how it is taught and learned. For example, at a very simple level this means that if information and communication technologies (ICTs) are not recognised as part of literacy they will not be included in the menu of literacies available to learners. This will mean they are subsequently disadvantaged in terms of further opportunities for learning and work. Similarly, ideological perspectives determine the degree of personalisation and politicisation permitted in a vocational course, how support is offered and whether an instrumental or holistic view is taken of literacy support. A social practice perspective, such as that held by NALA, assumes a critical engagement with the role of language and literacy in the specific circumstances of individuals and communities. These literacies are diverse and ever-changing and providing support for them means thinking outside boxes rather than within them. NALA’s mission includes giving support to adult learners across a range of social contexts and easing access to and participation in a choice of learning opportunities (NALA, 2007). Exploring whole organisation approaches to language and literacy in FE contributes to this goal (NALA, 2002).

Academic literacies

In their feedback to FETAC the Irish Higher Education institutions regularly comment on new entrants’ lack of preparedness in terms of academic literacies. This criticism is also levelled at the secondary sector. FETAC do

not define academic literacies but they are understood in terms of the language and literacy skills needed to produce third level course work.

It's about getting what an essay is, how to structure an argument, how to use literature and base a case on it as well as personal views/conclusions, and how to reference, to quality assure research base etc. *FETAC Policy Development Officer*

The concept of academic literacy therefore has relevance in the FE context and in particular in this study that seeks to find clearer understandings of language and literacy issues for FE students and their teachers. The issue of ideology arises in defining academic literacy beyond the broad consensus that it refers to the language and text uses within courses through which learning takes place and is reproduced and developed.

A qualitative study in two universities, one 'new' and one 'old', asked teachers, learning support staff and students about the factors involved in student writing at post-secondary level. Lea and Street (1998) outline a three-tier model of perspectives on academic literacy in the context of higher education in the UK. These have salience also for the FE sector. They identify:

- The study skills approach
- The academic socialisation viewpoint and
- The academic literacies perspective

The **study skills approach** to student writing, as outlined by Lea and Street, is a deficit perspective that sees the student with flawed 'atomised skills' that need to be fixed (Ibid: 16). Problems with writing are reduced to surface issues of spelling, punctuation and grammar where literacy is understood as a purely instrumental skill. Support and development of broader language skills for both staff and students is not considered relevant. Fundamentally, in this model of academic literacy the onus is on the student to change.

At another level the **academic socialisation** viewpoint approaches issues in students' writing from the need for acculturation into the discourse styles of the academe. There is recognition of cultural context although this is simplistically assumed to be homogenous and the complexity of institutional

practices and diversity within them is left unexplored. In the research, tutors were often unable to define the language and literacy use they were seeking from students. They knew when their conventions were being thwarted and struggled to explain in practical terms what this meant. Success (or failure) in academic literacy was determined by the subjective judgements of a variety of individual tutors with diverse viewpoints. Again the prime impetus for change is on the student who must adapt to the new learning culture even though it remains unarticulated, operates at an implicit level and varies from department to department and from tutor to tutor.

The third perspective that emerged in the research was **academic literacies**. It is grounded in New Literacy Studies and **encompasses the other two viewpoints within it**. It includes and moves beyond the need for individual skills work and cultural adaptation to consider the institutional practices within which academic literacies are framed. Adopting an academic literacies approach requires the whole institution rather than just the student to think critically about the meaning and identity issues involved in the literacies that operate in third level education (and often only in the third person). At the same time it suggests that one of the core issues with student writing may result from 'the gaps between academic staff expectations and student interpretations of what is involved in student writing' (Ibid: 4).

More often than not, dominant ideologies within organisations are strongly influenced by the wider political environment, adult learning policy and the funding that follows it. Clear trends are apparent too in these ideological perspectives.

Shifting ideologies – an integrated turn

The concept of *integrating* or *embedding* literacy has arisen alongside the shifting cultures of adult education and the range of ideological perspectives and understandings of adult literacy that shadow that evolution. Like all forms of learning relationship, adult education and training is never neutral but infused in structure and content with the values and priorities of policy-makers, funders, governing bodies and individual practitioners (Freire, 1998; Baker et al, 2004). In general, those who hold power – in education as in

other spheres - tend to be disinclined to question or seek to change inequalities in the status quo (Lynch, 1999; Furlong et al, 2009). In FE colleges in Ireland, much is left to the discretion of individual principals and staff. For this reason, although adult education can and does function as a site of critical reflection and resistance it is more often a process infused with the acceptance and reproduction of dominant cultural norms. Rather than allowing for timely individual and group development, FE remains largely focused on the potential credential and economic outcomes for individuals and the economic system (hooks, 1994, 2003; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993; McGivney, 2001).

Rubenson (2002) defines three lifelong learning shifts in terms of three distinct 'generations' that are rooted in and mirror shifting international political ideologies.

1. The first generation that can be traced back as far as the 1960s emanated from a critical school of thought and highlighted the role that adult education could play in rebalancing educational inequalities, achieving social justice and strengthening civil society.
2. The second generation that began in the 1980s saw the focus shift clearly away from civil society to market interests in lifelong learning and an almost exclusively economic and 'training' perspective. This overshadowed but did not obliterate the critical approach that remains as a strand of resistance. This was the Reagan/Thatcher era when global capitalism became the dominant driver of education and training and the interests of civil society were overwhelmed in a discourse around the need for well-honed human capital.
3. The *third way* elaborated by Giddens (1998), and introduced at the brink of the twenty-first century, tries to locate middle ground between the former two perspectives. It focuses on lifelong learning that promotes both active citizenship and employability. The market still has been given a central role but the responsibilities of the individual and the state are also mentioned (Cruikshank, 2002). These social and economic emphases are frequently presented as being more or

less balancing motivating factors but it is questionable whether this equilibrium actually exists (Field, 2000, 2002).

David Barton (2005) warns of the danger to adult literacy work as shifts in policy begin to take attention (and funding) away from this area of work. He reminds us of the almost magical powers that have been attributed to literacy as it was claimed to hold the key to redressing a raft of social and economic disadvantages. This flawed analysis has clouded the realities of stubborn and deep-rooted social inequalities. It implied a simplicity and speed in repairing unmet literacy needs that is far from the truth and is inevitably failing to produce the desired results.

Economic imperatives

The economy of countries in a global marketplace depends on the skills and productivity of the workforce and this imperative has energised the attention given to literacy for over a decade. Recent Irish research has argued that investment in adult literacy brings returns not just for individuals and communities but also for the state (NALA, 2009). Nonetheless, hierarchies have developed in literacy work with local or vernacular literacies becoming increasingly overshadowed by the more powerful literacies that serve the needs of the market (Crowther et al, 2001). Funding is more readily available for courses that serve the interests of the economy than for those that satisfy the self-defined literacy needs of an individual or group. The same thinking has provoked the design of a prescribed literacy curriculum in England and Northern Ireland with associated, often compulsory assessment and testing (DfES, 2001; DEL, 2002). Literacy tutors can find their personal values at odds with those of the system in which they work and colleges are forced to collude in these trends because of the links between funding, recruitment and outcomes. It is not possible to align such dominance of economic priorities with a social practice view of literacy that views diverse literacies as of equal value (Lonsdale and McCurry, 2004). There is tension between the impetus to fast-track students through vocational training and the time needed to satisfy previously unmet language and literacy needs. Integrated or embedded literacy is proposed as a means of resolving at least some of this tension.

What is 'integrated' or 'embedded' literacy?

Adults usually have a choice of three forms of literacy support in the vocational context:

- ✓ discrete adult literacy outside the vocational setting,
- ✓ an integrated or embedded approach to literacy and/or
- ✓ language and literacy support in the vocational setting.

Integrated or **embedded** literacy describes the inclusion of adult literacy issues and practice in vocational and other adult education courses. This does not mean that language and literacy matters form an occasional addendum to FE courses but rather that courses are designed and delivered in order to simultaneously facilitate language, literacy and other vocational learning needs. Vocational and literacy development become 'interrelated elements of the one process' (Courtney and Mawer, 1995: 2).

A UK report provides an account of what 'embedding' involves and what benefits it produces for learners:

Embedded teaching and learning combines the development of Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) with vocational and other skills. The skills acquired provide learners with the confidence, competence and motivation necessary for them to succeed in qualifications, in life and in work.
(DfES/NRDC, 2004)

Nevertheless integration is just one aspect of a range of FE supports for those with unmet literacy needs. Achieving real learning equality also demands a cohesive and comprehensive learning support service (LSS) with a creative range of specialist literacy approaches to meet diverse needs.

Why integrate literacy in FE?

There are many reasons proposed for integrating literacy in FE and other third level learning programmes. A social practice view of literacy recognises that language and literacies are constantly changing and so we are never finished learning. Many of us have already radically changed the way we use literacy

in our lifetime. The widespread availability of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has required us to adapt to new ways of recording and accessing the ideas of others, new means of exchanging messages and new ways of encoding and decoding them. Few of us write letters now although we may often have done so in the past. At the same time, workplace practices have become more demanding in terms of text-based knowledge and skills. Almost all jobs require health and safety training, first aid and a degree of accountability and record keeping that is dependent on language and literacy use. New technologies and new legislative environments demand language and literacy capabilities to be more highly developed even in predominantly manual occupations. At the same time we know that a significant proportion of adults across the 'developed' world have not benefited from an education that means their literacy capability flourished (Nussbaum, 2001). So, an integrated approach to literacy in FE is a practical and timely way of redressing these educational inequalities.

A matter of social justice

Integrating literacies is not just practical but also a matter of social justice where FE does not penalise individuals and groups for the inability of the primary and secondary sectors to equally meet the needs of everyone. This is not meant as an indictment of teachers but rather recognition that without wider social equality, without equality of condition, an expectation of equal educational outcomes is futile (Lynch and Baker, 2005). Those who embark on FE courses without confidence in their use of academic language and literacy often carry with them the negative influence of the associated social and cultural stigma. It is worth considering what this may involve for the new FE learner.

Dismantling the stigma

Despite the awareness-raising work of NALA, having unmet literacy needs remains stigmatised in Irish society. So, for individual FE students, unmet literacy needs can sometimes result in negative and destructive emotions of fear and embarrassment. The consequential harmful affect can be experienced as humiliation and internalised as self-deprecation. In current

discourses about 'falling standards', blame and negativity can be attached to the learner whom the system has failed rather than to the structures that perform unevenly across the groups to whom they have an equal responsibility (Bailey and Coleman, 1998; Goffman, 1963, 1990; Owens, 2000; Field, 2000; 2002). Giddens (1994) argues that this internalised impact of structural inequalities on self-esteem acts as a self-activated exclusionary mechanism. This may mean that learners do not seek out the help available with literacy aspects of their FE course or it may result in students leaving courses when literacy demands become overwhelming. An integrated approach to literacy in FE can help eradicate negative aspects of self-image by providing a new, positive conduit for learning. Everyone benefits from the language and literacy elements of embedded provision and so the feelings of stigma can be dismantled as confidence and skills grow. At the same time organisations can work to change attitudes and give language and literacy a new profile in the vocational context.

No delay

Drawing on experience of adult education in the UK and the development field, Alan Rogers argues that there are further practical and pedagogical reasons why integrating or embedding literacy in adult vocational programmes makes good sense. The economic imperative to earn is a priority for many who are disadvantaged and so they are highly motivated to learn language and literacy that is relevant to that purpose. Having to engage in some form of generic literacy learning prior to vocational skills is not a necessary, useful or desirable option. This theory is evidenced in the low uptake of adult literacy provision that indicates an unwillingness to engage with literacy-only programmes. In Ireland only 7% of those with unmet literacy needs participate in some (identified) form of learning. The 'no delay' factor is not just attractive and motivating to adults with economic needs, it also means that the literacy at issue is the most socially pertinent and most likely to engage and sustain their interest (Rogers, 2005: 63).

Others uphold this view not only for pragmatic but also for pedagogical reasons. Our knowledge of how learning happens has grown and we now

know that IQ is not fixed and that there are multiple forms of intelligence beyond the verbal and mathematical domain (Goleman, 1998; Sternberg, 1996; Gardner, 1993). Similarly, the notion has been empirically refuted that adults need to learn simple forms of language before progressing to more complex forms. This is particularly evident in development projects using learner-generated materials where the focus of literacy is entirely socially situated (ACTIONAID, 1996; CCLOW, 1996). A non-linear understanding of adult learning is synchronous with a self-directed, learner-centred and social practice approach to adult learning (Tusting and Barton, 2003). Integrated literacy is the antithesis of the instrumental approaches that failed people in the past and allows for a purposeful, voluntary and adult approach to learning. It is an approach that is compatible with NALA values.

Literacy skills are best developed in the context of meaningful, relevant and purposeful activity. In pursuing a course which is interesting to them, and which has built-in literacy support, people with literacy difficulties can successfully complete the course and develop transferable skills. (NALA, 2002: 7)

Rogers argues that the appropriately skilled vocational tutor is best suited to provide socially relevant language and literacy support. Similarly, research in the UK found that vocational tutors have a natural legitimacy in the eyes of learners in that they already embody the identity or role to which the learner aspires (Cooper and Baynham, 2005). These tutors are well placed to promote language and literacy and to extend beyond the purely functional use of text to introduce a more critical approach to language work. There is no reason therefore for unmet literacy needs to screen someone out of a vocational programme of their choosing. On the contrary, this is the very set of circumstances where they are most likely to succeed (Rogers, 2005).

Unmet literacy needs in the context of work training have for some time been identified as a major consideration for the US. Carol D'Amico (2003) points out that the individual, social and economic potential in work skills are often betrayed by under-developed literacy skills. This inhibits the individual's scope for career advancement and constricts growth in the national economy. D'Amico, then Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education, argued that an education that prepares an individual for a job but that does not

prepare them with the basic skills to further develop their potential is not 'worth the Federal investment' (D'Amico, 2003: 1). In a rapidly developing communications age, she argued that people need adaptable and flexible basic skills both for their own continuing development and that of the state. An embedded approach to literacy is presented not only as a logical and economic matter but one of personal empowerment and choice. Beyond the immediate economic benefits to adults, there is evidence of spin-off benefits like increased reading to children, better individual and family health care and community participation (Sticht, 2003)

A UK study of 79 vocational courses provides evidence that an 'embedded' approach to FE, particularly a team approach, significantly improves measures of learner retention (by 15%) and achievement (by 43%). Courses compared ranged from fully embedded, mostly embedded and partly embedded to those where language and literacy were separately taught. The fully integrated approach was shown to most significantly increase achievement in language, literacy and the vocational area of study. Furthermore, learners felt more satisfied and better prepared for work in the future than did those on non-integrated course (NRDC, 2005).

Advantages and challenges of an integrated approach

There are both advantages and challenges to an integrated approach to literacy in FE. An immediate benefit is that it allows those with hitherto unmet literacy needs to participate in mainstream vocational adult learning opportunities and to expect educational, vocational and economic outcomes from that process that are equal to their peers. International and national measures of literacy have shown that outcomes from school vary for individuals, and between learners from different generations and social backgrounds (Morgan et al, 1997; Morgan and Kett, 2003; OECD, 1997, 1998; PISA, 2003, 2006). Consequently the starting place for learners in FE can differ considerably. Fundamentally this is an equality issue that cannot be solved in the educational domain alone. Deep structural disparities of class, power, ethnicity, sexual orientation, care, age and other identity factors intersect to create educational disadvantage for individuals and groups in Irish

society (Baker et al, 2004; Lynch and Baker, 2005). These educational inequalities are arguably a form of state harm that has lifelong impact (Hillyard et al, 2004; Feeley, 2009; Goddard, 2009). Whatever the cause, inevitably it means that FE colleges find themselves having to bridge the gap between prior learning and the requirements of the chosen vocational programme. The issue is not just the immediate learning issues faced in FETAC level 5. To be fair, in picking up the educational baton, the FE sector must bear in mind both past negative learning experiences and the future training and life needs of individuals. This is particularly pertinent in a context of significant unmet adult literacy needs, growing economic uncertainty and job insecurity (Psacharopoulos, 1997; O'Toole, 2003).

A brief note about adult learning theory

Much attention is given in the adult education literature to the use of effective and appropriate adult learning approaches. These are characterised by dialogue, solidarity and links to social activism (Barr, 1999; Thompson, 1997; Mezirow, 1981; Freire, 1972; 1985; Tusting and Barton, 2003). This is particularly important with those who have negative associations of prior learning and who have a (justifiable) sense that their particular set of strengths has never been recognised and still remains untapped (Gardner, 1993; 1999; Sternberg, 1998). The 'banking' methods of teaching have no place in adult learning (Freire, 1972). A behaviourist, one-size-fits-all method of learning that is rooted in the passive repetition of facts and procedures has largely given way to constructivist theory. Constructivism allows the student to actively build and attach new learning onto existing knowledge. This happens best when adults are able to identify their own learning style and when teachers create meaningful, relevant social contexts in which learning can take place (Coleman, 2001). In the context of adult learning, the FE teacher is not required to be the source of all knowledge. Rather, along with a team of colleagues, s/he becomes the architect of a process in which diverse learners develop confidence and competence as part of a participative, activity-based method of engaging with the curriculum (Tusting and Barton, 2003).

Affective aspects of learning

The recognition of affective matters as an important part of how and what we learn is increasingly growing in all areas of education (Cohen, 2006; Lynch *et al*, 2007; Noddings, 1992; 2006; 2007). The role of the emotions has only begun to be explored in depth in the recent past and has focused on a range of issues such as: care and the school curriculum (Cohen, 2006; McClave, 2005); teachers' emotional labour (Hargreaves, 2000; 2001); the role of the affective domain in educational ideology (Lynch *et al*, 2007); a school ethic of care (Noddings, 1992; 2006; 2007) and mothers' care labour in children's education (O'Brien, 2005; 2007; Reay, 2000). More recently care has been explored empirically in the context of literacy learning in Ireland (Feeley, 2009).

Where adults and young people have had unsatisfactory experiences of learning it becomes all the more vital that empathetic and respectful relationships underpin their return to education. How to develop an ethos of care in adult literacy work requires careful exploration. Although care is a vital and inalienable part of all our lives it is not something that we learn to do. Care is not part of the school curriculum and it is arguably undervalued because it is construed as feminine and often assumed to be without cost (Lynch *et al*, 2009). Despite remaining a low priority, relationships undoubtedly matter a great deal in all aspects of learning and merit much greater attention, especially where language and literacy are concerned.

Conclusions drawn from the theoretical literature

Section One has explored some of the considerations that impact on how we approach the design of an whole organisation approach to integrating literacy support and development in FE. It has highlighted the significance of an organisation's ideological perspective and definition of language and literacy for the way that learning/study support is made available. Unless these are made explicit then any support and development of language and literacy will be unguided and piece-meal.

There are clear moral and pedagogical reasons for taking a whole organisational approach to the support and development of language and literacy across the adult education and training sector. Morally speaking, those who have been unfairly treated in the education system do not deserve more of the same. FE provides a new motivational opportunity, for teachers and students, as learners assume a vocational identity in which strong language and literacy skills are pivotal. The interest, motivation and enthusiasm of young and older adult learners provide a chance for the system to redeem its past failures and allow vital human capabilities to flourish.

Pedagogically, there is strong evidence that language and literacy skills are best developed in the context of challenging subject matter where the student has a genuine and sustainable level of interest. Competent and creative teachers must capture and exploit this renewed fervour and optimism and deploy their skills to open their subject knowledge to all. This means scaffolding the acquisition of new language (and ideas) to which the learner is positively disposed. This can, in turn, fill in language and literacy gaps left by previous unsatisfactory learning experiences.

Although this approach is already visible in examples of excellent FE teaching it is by no means common practice, nor is it a standard policy applied systematically across organisations. We can learn much from other places about making an integrated approach to the support and development of language and literacy a core aspect of FE learning. **The following section describes empirical research from a range of countries** into the progress they have made with integrating/embedding literacy in adult education and training.

Section 2: A review of empirical research into integrated literacy

Introduction

In the literature there is considerable overlap in the vocational literacy issues involved in workplace, FE and vocational training. Nevertheless, here we have mostly restricted our review of empirical studies to those that deal primarily with language and literacy training 'off the job' in colleges or recognised training organisations (RTOs). Inevitably there are cultural differences between countries in the nature (and naming) of vocational education and training (VET) and how and where it takes place. We also minimise our attention to these contextual factors in favour of a focus on how literacy is supported and developed as part of adult education and training. Our goal has been to garner as much learning from the experience of others in order to arrive at a model of best practice in language and literacy support for the Irish FE context.

Here in Section 2 we look at empirical accounts of the design and implementation of integrated approaches to language and literacy in Australia, the UK including England and Scotland, and the US. Finally we examine empirical accounts of the progress made in Ireland to date in defining and implementing an integrated approach to literacy in post-secondary education and training. These examples of international best practice are described individually and discussed collectively at the conclusion of the section.

The Australian experience

In the 90s uptake of adult literacy in Australia was generally poor. The integration of literacy in the vocational context was seen to provide an opportunity to reach out to those with unmet language and literacy needs in a more meaningful and relevant manner. Since the early 90s the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme had evolved to provide

comprehensive work-based learning with support and funding from government and industry. Around this initiative grew delivery and assessment methods that prioritised effective language and literacy learning and use as core to individual, social and economic development. There is considerable literature that subsequently evaluated and claimed the success of initiatives that integrated or 'built-in' language and literacy in the workplace and in vocational education and training (Wickert and McGuirk, 2005; McKenna and Fitzpatrick, 2005; Balatti et al, 2006). This success has been attributed to a coordinated national approach that accepted a **situated or social practice** view of literacy. The Australian approach embraced the logical corollary that situated literacies are best learned and practised in real life circumstances where the learning styles and priorities of diverse adults are recognised and respected.

Training 'packages' and materials

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) developed a framework for vocational training that integrated language and literacy into all 'training packages' and provided accompanying training for trainers. Despite their misleading name, these packages correspond to FETAC module descriptors in Ireland and have been devised in close cooperation with the relevant industry. ANTA and a host of others separately provided support material with vocational themes including integrated and specific language and literacy resources.

Keeping language and literacy visible

Early studies into the success of the integrated approach to language and literacy in vocational training was carried out in 1999 by a consortium of 6 university-based research centres that make up the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC). The research indicated that there was initially some confusion about the move to competence-based training and assessment and patchy uptake and use of available resources. A call for more resources and professional development ensued. There was also concern that literacy had to take a 'back seat' as teachers and trainers focussed attention on the transition from broad

curriculum to competence-based learning (Sanguinetti and Hartley, 2000: 7). More fundamentally, the study identified a need to bring greater clarity to the definition of literacy as teachers vacillated between an instrumental and a more comprehensive understanding. A risk was identified in the study with the 'built-in' model of inclusion of literacy and language in industry standards and training packages. It was feared that the implicit rather than explicit presence of language and literacy issues might lead to their becoming overshadowed by the more demanding vocational and subject priorities. The debate about naming (stigmatised) literacy in adult learning continues but the six university groups in this study found in favour of more explicit naming of literacy, greater visibility and more finely honed language teaching skills to help cater to previously unmet needs (Ibid).

More recently, the Australian National Council for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) has carried out a number of research projects into the effectiveness of integrated vocational initiatives that have revealed useful conclusions. The Australians have persisted with the 'built in' rather than 'bolted on' model of developing language and literacy with adult learners (Commonwealth of Australia, 1998, 2000). National qualification standards and 'training packages' now more explicitly integrate language and literacy development at their core and the vocational teacher is required to be multi-skilled: a vocational specialist familiar with the theory and practice of their vocational area and at the same time a language and literacy facilitator. In vocational training then every teacher is a teacher of literacy, albeit systematically supported by literacy specialists whose central role is recognised as indispensable (Wickert and McGuirk, 2005). Integrated literacy is not about doing away with the role of adult literacy tutors but rather about embedding their skills and influence across all VET.

Making good partnerships

A qualitative study of the integration of literacy in 5 community-based and 4 workplace-training projects in Australia showed the pivotal role of successful partnerships in making integrated literacy work. These partnerships involve learners, educators and trainers, qualification awarding bodies and those from

the specific industry who provide on-the-job training and work experience. It is the latter who often model the practical aspects of language and literacy and who augment and reinforce classroom learning. The quality and effectiveness of VET is shown to depend on the strength and the cohesion of these inter-agency partnerships and yet they can be neglected through lack of recognition and resources (Ibid). Research into the operation of interagency adult learning partnerships in Northern Ireland showed that addressing inequalities amongst partners was essential to the partnership's smooth and effective functioning (Feeley, 2002). The Australian experience confirms that to bring about change, partnerships need to be real rather than merely nominal and professionals need to learn to work in this way.

McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2005) carried out qualitative research over a one-year period in three training centres. They observed and videoed delivery of the same 'training package' (The Community Services and Health (CSH) training package) across all the research sites using the recordings as 'video recall stimulus' in subsequent discussions with teaching staff. This method promoted in-depth reflective analysis about the practice of integrating language and literacy learning in VET courses. The study found that there were three main determinants of good 'built-in' literacy/vocational learning:

- Tutor competency in *understanding and planning* for integrated literacy in the vocational context
- Tutor competency in *delivery* of integrated literacy in the vocational context
- Financial, material and time *resources for learning support practitioners* to directly support language and literacy issues with learners and their vocational tutors.

It is worth highlighting the extensive preparatory work on the part of Australian examining boards that went into identifying the language and literacy that was embedded in different vocational areas. McKenna and Fitzpatrick describe how ethnographic studies were conducted in the workplace and extensive consultation took place that matched language and literacy with the new training standards and the competency-based packages that prepared

individuals for work. Nevertheless success still depends on the capacity of teachers to deliver the programmes and the implementation of the competency-based model generally (without specific reference to language and literacy) is described as still 'poor' and fraught with confusion (McKenna and Fitzpatrick, 2005: 34). The model has been devised and piloted but the full inclusion of the wider training community remains a work in progress and one where the resources need to be focused on the learning needs of staff. Australian research shows that **an integrated approach demands skills development on the part of staff and organisations** and is not a 'quick fix'.

Integrating literacy and building social capital

Although not uniquely carried out in the VET context, Balatti et al's qualitative study has important implications for affective dimensions of language and literacy work in the vocational context (Balatti et al, 2006). Their research with 57 students and 18 experienced tutors on accredited courses found that from their participation on the course 80% had social capital outcomes as measured against the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) social capital framework. In relation to this gain in social capital, 91% of interviewees had some socioeconomic impact as measured against the OECD indicators of socioeconomic well-being. Wider gains have been evidenced in an integrated approach to language and literacy and the researchers make the point that the narrow, neo-liberal focus on 'success' as accreditation means that these pivotal outcomes are neither recognised nor appreciated for their scaffolding role in other results.

Literacy and numeracy improvement often required the social capital outcomes noted above as a pre-requisite or co-requisite. For example, students' literacy skills improved when their membership of networks provided them with opportunities to learn, or to implement what they had learnt. (Balatti et al, 2006: 5)

Balatti et al argue for a change in the understanding of success in literacy away from 'a single economic bottom line' to a tripartite measure involving economics, social capital and community development (Ibid: 12).

The study claims that the vital and much undervalued role of relationships in the learning process needs to be made explicit in the training of teachers. We need to know more about the pedagogical practices that enable the different forms of affective and relational development that in turn build trust and confidence and open the doors to the social contexts where literacy can be practiced (Lynch and Baker 2005; Cohen, 2006; Feeley, 2009). Balatti et al (2006) suggest that social capital is strongly correlated to socioeconomic wellbeing and therefore it has an explicit relevance in vocational education and training.

Conclusions about the Australian experience

Studies about an integrated approach to language and literacy in Australia confirm that it is a complex and time-demanding process. Considerable planning and action has gone into redesigning the vocational awards system and placing excellence in language and literacy at the heart of all training. Defining literacy and accurately assessing the language and literacy demands of different vocational sectors has been carried out meticulously. Success in this phase has been dependent on a good inter-agency partnership approach to the task that also has obvious longer-term benefits for industry and vocational education.

Despite much activity around the issue of integration, evaluative research still finds that the performance of teachers is not always in step with the vision of a fully integrated system. **This illustrates the centrality of teacher's professional development and the provision of support structures for pre-service and in-service training and course delivery.** The Australian literature highlights the complex and skilled role of both the vocational teacher and the literacy specialist in the context of integrated literacy. The need for training, reflection time and partnership making are all described as pivotal. Teachers also need to learn more about the social capital outcomes from participation in adult literacy and what pedagogical strategies and techniques best facilitate them (Balatti et al, 2006).

Most importantly, Australian studies emphasise the necessity to keep language and literacy visibly on the agenda so that they remain in focus and are not subsumed by vocational imperatives.

The UK experience of embedded literacy teaching and learning

Integrated or embedded literacy is one aspect of a wide-ranging approach to developing *Skills for Life* (SfL) in the UK. The SfL strategy grew out of the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999) that was in turn a response to the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (OECD, 1997). The IALS revealed that the UK had the third highest unmet literacy needs of the surveyed countries, coming before only Ireland and Poland. The Moser Report recommended a comprehensive strategy to enhance the quality of childhood and adult literacy learning. For adults this included an innovative programme of workplace and trade union literacy that had an impact on the related nature of vocational training and education programmes. From this urgency and heightened awareness around literacy matters emerged an interest in integrated or embedded approaches to teaching and learning. A mandatory core curriculum and system of accreditation has been put in place for UK adult literacy learners and also for their tutors and this extends to vocational tutors in further education and training. Funding is linked to this accreditation system and this ensures that it is an integral (compulsory) part of every FE college and training organisation.

The NRDC study

In 2005, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) funded the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) to undertake research into the operation of embedded literacy, language and numeracy (LLN). In particular the study aimed to gather information about LLN in practice across 7 different sites and delivered in a range of vocational disciplines and settings. The diverse courses studied included engineering, nursing, horticulture, sport, complementary therapy and childcare. The research explored embedded LLN delivered as part of a standard vocational

course and also as an approach used on specially designed motivational, pre-vocational courses for adults. Seven comparable studies were carried out and initially written up separately. Summary documents along with their common findings, conclusions and recommendations are included in a final report (NRDC, 2005).

The NRDC findings

The NRDC study found that there was no definitive prescription for organising embedded literacy but that when this procedure was followed and LLN approached through the vocational context then motivation and learning are enhanced. In particular the study showed that addressing the embedded LLN in vocational practice was useful for adults just returning to learning. It both affirmed existing LLN skills and in a more hopeful, situated context, also highlighted gaps to be addressed in the future. Where LLN can have negative and frustrating associations for those with unhappy school memories, the study uncovered ways in which the embedded approach was successfully placing LLN in a more positive light for learners in that it was an integral facet of the new identity they were creating for themselves. In this regard, as Rogers (2005) also argued, vocational tutors make powerful role models who can raise the status of LLN and highlight the significant part it plays in the professional identity of a particular occupational role. Embedded practice was shown in the research to be key to widening participation of adult learners in LLN as well as improving learning outcomes for all students, both young and more mature.

Vocational motivation

In courses, the NRDC found that the vocational area initially captures learner interest and that LLN should only then gradually gather momentum in the team delivery. The preliminary stages of a course can be a time for unobtrusively assessing LLN needs within a group as practical tasks are worked on. Progressively, as its value rises, discrete LLN can become a time of critical reflection about the vocational area and a place for experimenting with LLN for application in the field. Prior negative associations can be overcome in this way.

Good working relations

Observation of a range of examples revealed that embedded literacy is not solely about mapping the LLN elements and requirements of a vocational award. This is an important beginning but as the Australian experience also showed there is a bigger picture. The LLN tutor has to become familiar with the vocational LLN uses as they arise in the classroom and importantly as they transfer (or are 'transported') to the workplace. In the NRDC study, situated and transportable literacies presented separate and interconnected challenges for the embedded team and their counterparts in the workplace. The process of identifying and planning for embedded teaching and learning was therefore found to be reliant on good learning relationships between a range of stakeholders. In recognition of the new skills needed by teachers in the embedded approach FENTO/NRDC have produced a quartet of standards and guidelines for teaching and supporting learning in an embedded setting. These address the teaching of literacy, numeracy, ESOL and the needs of the generic/vocational teacher (FENTO/NRDC, 2004). Professional development was found to be more important than materials. In fact the study goes as far as to assert that 'the qualities possessed by teachers and relationships between them were more important than general curricular models of embedded provision' (NRDC, 2005: 9).

Time and again these affective aspects of learning were found to be key to successful embedded LLN. **The NRDC study showed that the partnership that combined the skills of the LLN and vocational tutor was the key to success.** Relationships between LLN staff and vocational subject teachers needed to be cooperative, flexible and based on a mutual understanding and support of each person's role and expertise. Where a single vocational tutor was expected to be both vocational and LLN tutor then literacy progress was less remarked (Casey, 2006).

Because these teaching partnerships form gradually in the light of real-time classroom delivery it was found to be important that the exigencies of timetabling do not disrupt them but rather they are left to mature and develop over years. Relationships with learners too needed to be empathetic and

respectful and grounded in a facilitative, constructivist approach to learning rather than a banking or instructional method of teaching (Freire, 2000; Hegarty, 2005). Moreover, programme managers needed to recognise that teachers are adult learners too and that embedded teaching teams need time and resources to plan and reflect on how to make best practice a reality.

An evaluation of materials for embedded literacy

NRDC has subsequently commissioned an empirical evaluation of paper-based and ICT materials for supporting embedded LLN (NRDC, 2007). Researchers had 64 questionnaires returned from an initial 582 and also carried out interviews with 85 practitioners from 38 organisations. The findings were telling about integrated LLN as well as the materials that were the focus of the study. Although some welcomed the materials, both electronic and in hard copy, there was evidence of concerns about their bulk and currency over time. This was particularly mentioned in relation to vocationally specific legislation and some of the images used in the materials both of which it was found might date rapidly. The coloured images did not reproduce well in black and white when photocopied and the researchers suggested that a loose-leaf product might be better and could be updated when necessary.

Aside from design factors, there was evidence that the materials were either not used at all or used haphazardly as worksheets rather than to support embedded provision. Underlying reasons for this were often to do with time constraints and pressures that stopped tutors from becoming familiar with the materials or from having time for collaboration with colleagues around planning for their use. Time was a recurring theme in the research highlighting its centrality to quality provision. The study highlighted that the team teaching that embedded LLN requires was limited in a number of places by funding restrictions. This left the pressure on one tutor to embody both the vocational and LLN expertise singlehandedly and this was shown to be counter-productive.

An English - Scottish partnership study

The **Literacies for Learning in Further Education (LfLFE)** was a 3-year collaborative research project that involved two universities and four FE colleges. Lancaster and Stirling universities in partnership with the Scottish and English colleges conducted a project in three phases. Phase one looked at the literacy practices needed to be an FE student. The next phase examined the literacy practices of students in eleven curriculum areas and the final phase developed and evaluated pedagogical approaches that would redress the mismatch between learner skills and FE demands. A mapping phase of the project indicated that there are no fixed directives about the literacies involved in FE but that rather different maps are often produced of the same terrain (Mannion and Ivanic, 2007).

The project adopted a NLS theoretical view of literacy and so was concerned with ways of crossing the boundaries that often exist between diverse literacies in different domains (e.g. at home, at work, in formal education settings and even between different fields of study). It is at the crossing point between these literacies that exportable *border literacies* can be identified. Drawing on the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) the researchers took the view that these boundaries need to be seen as porous. In other words, there is scope for a two-way flow of communicative practices that dynamically changes both the context and the uses of literacy within it (Ivanic et al, 2008). There is a fund of potential in this mutual exchange of language perspectives that corresponds to the NLS 'academic literacies' approach outlined above. As such, the process of becoming an FE learner not only involves individual language and literacy support and student enculturation in FE language traditions. It also requires movement on the part of the whole FE College to embrace the rich language and literacy skills of each new individual student and student grouping.

The study revealed four types of literacy that students need in college for:

- ✓ Becoming a student
- ✓ Taking a course
- ✓ Being assessed

✓ Realising their vocational identity

The research showed that although there was a need for individual support, for many the challenge was not the lack of literacy as a technical skill but rather the acquisition of new literacies for new situations and purposes.

They need to know how to judge content, vocabulary, style and even technology for new purposes and audiences (Nash et al, 2008)

In the college studies, the researchers observed a tension between the language and literacy requirements of the vocational context and the 'academic literacy' of assignments and assessment. The study concludes that more thoughtful framing of assessment that taps into the use of 'border literacies' can allow learning to be both more accessible and meaningful. Some examples of the practical recommendations about harnessing aspects of students' multi-literacies are outlined below.

Rather than adopting the deficit view of literacy, Ivanič et al (2007:703) suggest that there is an 'abundance and diversity of possibilities for literacy' in the expansion of the text and semiotic landscape. To bear fruit, this optimism requires practitioners/teachers to question the dominant academic literacies and find ways of harnessing students' actual or vernacular uses of literacy in the pursuit of success in FE. The 10 characteristics of students' preferred literacy practices emerged from the study as:

1. shared, collaborative and interactive
2. produced for a clear audience
3. purposeful
4. self-determined in terms of, for example, activity, time and place
5. multimedia – involving for example paper and electronic text
6. multimodal- involving language, symbols, pictures, colour and/or sound
7. non-linear – involving complex, varied reading paths
8. generative – involving meaning-making, creativity

9. owned – the person feels ownership for the practice
10. agentic – involving an active role for the person (Ibid. 711)

These characteristics are often at odds with the parameters of the requirements of an awarding body like FETAC. Nevertheless it is also the case that teachers do not always explore or make available to students the full range of methods of presenting assignments (www.fetac.ie). Instead, they favour the dominant academic literacies of their own comfort zone and so deny the literacy scope and potential of many of their learners. For this reason, many of the students in the UK study were disaffected by much of the reading and writing on their course. Nor did they identify with either the purpose or content of many aspects of the FE curriculum. When tutors involved in the research gave consideration to the student assignments as a means of both harnessing students' strengths in literacy and satisfying the accreditation requirements they had a greater measure of success. When the 10 characteristics of students' preferred literacy practices were also recognised the results positively reflected this (Ivanič et al, 2007).

Analyses of pedagogical approaches across 30 courses in four colleges produced a theoretical basis for understanding how a range of situated and integrated literacies might be recognised and exploited to enhance learning potential on FE courses. There were four elements to the theoretical paradigm: design, contextualisation, identification and resonance.

Design refers to communicative aspects of learning that need to be enabled alongside the cognitive and practical elements that are usually present. This means that students require scope to express what they have learned because it is in that externalising they affirm their personal ownership of new knowledge. Assignments that allow literacy to be used as communicative practice in a way that is meaningful to the individual will succeed in engaging the student where one that is merely an exercise in regurgitation will not.

Contextualisation of literacy practices refers to the importance of having learners at the centre of the process so that the strength of connection between the tasks, their content and purpose is as closely related as is

possible to the learners' own reality and uses of literacies. The findings from the LfLE in FE study suggest that contextualisation of literacies can help make subtle shifts in pedagogical approach that more efficiently harness learning potential.

Identification is the third concept found to underpin successful language and literacy strategies in FE. If learning can be designed and scaffolded in such a manner that students feel there is a comfortable fit between them and the course expectations then positive outcomes are likely.

When students see literacy practices to be associated with their sense of who they are or who they want to become, they participate in them wholeheartedly. By contrast, if students associate reading and writing practices with identities which they resist, they are unlikely to engage in them. (Ivanič et al, 2007:718)

FE is challenged to pick up the educational baton in circumstances where students have had variable, and not always positive, prior experiences of learning and using language and literacy. Facilitating learning in FE therefore means making space for positive learning identities to (re)root and flourish.

Resonance was the final concept that emerged in the search for literacy practices that would successfully support students' learning in FE. A musical term for when two voices are a perfect match, resonance is used as a metaphor for the pedagogical processes that find a harmonious match between academic and vernacular literacies. This does not suggest a perfect fit (perfect pitch) but rather one that keeps shifting and adjusting (inharmoniously) in terms of keeping students engaged and hopeful throughout their course. It requires creativity and skill and constant dialogue to ensure that the 10 characteristics of students' preferred literacy practices are adhered to as closely as possible.

Rather than thinking of FE students as lacking in language and literacy skills the LfLE study adopted a view of students with an abundance of literacies available to be harnessed in FE. The study's findings help identify ways in which tutors must constantly be rethinking their pedagogical practice so that learners' ways of engaging with learning are opened up and new aspirational vocational identities can be realised.

A social practice approach to literacy tutor training

In the wake of the Scottish parliament adopting a social practice model of literacies, consideration has been given to what this policy implies for tutor training (Ackland and Wallace, 2006).

A social practice model of literacies positions the literacies tutor as a co-constructor of situated knowledge rather than the transmitter of authorised truths. (Ibid.2)

A social practice view of language and literacy challenges teachers to make the learning process more mutual and more relational. In the same way that the FE learner has to embrace a new identity so too is there a need for change in the professional development of tutors who adopt a social practice view of literacy. Training for such a new role promotes reflexive, critical, enquiring and creative approaches to facilitating learning. In the learning layers between adult literacy learner, tutor and tutor trainer is a common and continuous purpose of learning to learn. In Scotland this process of reflexivity was planned to be collaborative and make use of ICT as a facilitative tool.

So, the social practice literacy tutor doesn't rigidly impose a pre-set curriculum. Rather, they will deploy a blend of

theoretical knowledge, expertise, implicit learning, judgement, sensitivity, feelings, creativity and rumination...to inform their moment-by-moment decisions as they stay in relationship to the people they are alongside (Ackland and Wallace, 2006: 8/9)

Assignments

Using the learning from the LfLFE project a number of tutors on FE courses experimented with different types of assignment briefs that would allow learners to better exploit their language and literacy comfort zones. The research has revealed that learners preferred collaborative multimodal and multi-media, creative and visual approaches to their work and so tutors set assignments that respected this. One catering tutor set the task of designing booklets about how to manage and control different types of bacteria in the kitchen. This opened up the use of ICTs for those that were more comfortable

in that mode of expression. The students engaged with the task and accessed the knowledge and skills with greater ease than when they were set purely 'black and white' tasks.

A travel and tourism tutor offered the option to present work as a Power Point presentation, an exhibition or a report. Even though the students had said that they did not enjoy writing lengthy texts, when they were drawn in by the design element of their work they produced copious amounts of writing and found it 'less boring' and 'more visual'. Most importantly they learned useful knowledge in a way that made it accessible, retainable and enjoyable. They had been liberated by being allowed to deal in familiar language and literacy modes and in cultural contexts with which they could identify.

Whole organisation approaches to language, literacy and numeracy support and development

There is general consensus in the international literature around the need for a 'whole organisation' approach to language and literacy support and development (QIA, 2007; Wickert and McGuirk, 2005; NALA, 2002, 2008). In most cases this is further linked to explicit national policy guidelines and supported by the necessary enabling resources. In the UK context a whole organisation approach is defined as:

Where literacy, language and numeracy provision is central to the whole organisation at all levels, ranging from strategic leadership and management to delivery of practice. This includes embedding Skills for Life in teaching and learning programmes across a range of learning aims and goals and providing all learners with opportunities to progress and achieve qualifications.

Embedded teaching and learning combines the development of literacy, language and numeracy skills with vocational and other skills. The skills acquired provide learners with the confidence, competence and motivation necessary for them to progress, gain qualifications, and succeed in life and at work. (QIA, 2007: 6)

The UK Department for Education and Skills commitment to raising the quality of teaching and learning in language and literacy called for an holistic approach that spans an organisation from ancillary staff to members of the governing body. The Quality Improvement Agency for lifelong learning (QIA) devised and piloted a 'health check', a quality assessment framework for

providers of FE and training to support the integration and evaluation of language and literacy across a college or training organisation. The 'health check' may be used as a diagnostic tool to identify areas that need attention; it may facilitate a comprehensive overview or be targeted at specific sections of the establishment as part of a strategic, stepped development of language and literacy support (copies available at <qia.org.uk>).

The principles of integration, joined up thinking and partnership are exemplified on a grand scale in the 'whole city approach' to literacy development taken in Birmingham. The Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership began in 1995 with the goal of ending the 'drag down' effect that unmet literacy needs were having throughout the region. Rather than use regeneration funding to improve concrete infrastructure they instead argued to be able to invest in regenerating the skills of local people with a core focus on embedding language and literacy in policy and practice that might impact on literacy across the city. The project made a long-term commitment, envisioning a 15-year timeframe to achieve the goal of reducing the basic skills gaps by 50% by 2010. Using the metaphor of 'moving the mountain' the inter-agency partnership energetically pursued the goal of integrating literacy development from pre-school to adult education and the workplace. The mid-term review (Bateson, 2003) showed all targets being met and recommitted to ten strategic objectives for the 'second half' of the project. The strategy has been built around prioritising language and literacy and mobilising a cohesive effort in terms of resources, skilled delivery and enabling structures (Ibid).

Conclusions about the UK experience

In England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland language and literacy provision is not uniformly approached although the fundamental structure is determined by national policy emanating from Westminster. Each region has a parallel, specified literacy curriculum framework and accreditation system reaching from beginner level onwards. This qualification structure is nationally recognised and funding for literacy provision is determined by recruitment, completion and outputs from courses. All teachers, both subject and literacy specialists complete literacy training. The process of embedding

language and literacy in FE rests in a context where awareness of literacy levels is widespread and where tutor training prepares teachers for such a pedagogical approach. Nevertheless the research shows that embedding literacy in FE is a process of ongoing negotiation dependent on teamwork between students, vocational and literacy specialists.

All of the research in the UK, like that in Australia, has adopted a social practice view of literacy and it is clear that harnessing language and literacy as the key to unlocking learning is of fundamental importance. The UK research argues that teachers need to capitalise on their learners' abundant literacy strengths and learning styles to enable new learning identities to develop and flourish. Strong policy and a distinctive, positive FE identity help facilitate a focus on language and literacy development. Guidelines, resources, professional development and research all contribute to a concerted effort to promote an holistic, whole organisation approach to embedding literacy across FE. The research claims impressive results from this approach and despite the rather prescriptive nature of the curriculum and assessment structure there are lessons to be learned here both about strategy and commitment.

The US experience

Empirical research in the US also highlights the positive benefits of simultaneously providing for literacy and vocational learning needs and interests. Deborah D'Amico (2003) draws attention to the motivational and recruitment possibilities in an embedded literacy approach particularly with 'low-income' learners for whom the consequences of social inequality are greatest. D'Amico argues that embedded literacy strengthens the connection between learning and work and is relevant both in the workplace and in the pre-work training context. This echoes UK findings about the recruitment, motivational and pedagogical impact of an embedded approach to short taster vocational courses for adult returners.

Screening

One of the most interesting findings from D'Amico's research with over 300 learners in 5 institutions was that screening in relation to literacy levels at the outset of training was of little use. Although many training programmes had literacy levels established as gatekeeping mechanisms, in practice these proved inappropriate and irrelevant in terms of outcomes.

..at least in cases where workers have a great deal of on the job experience in an industry, literacy tests as predictors of performance in job training may do more harm than good. (D'Amico, 2003: 7)

Once again reflecting the findings of the UK LfLFE study, D'Amico argues the importance of contextualised literacies, communities of practice and the pivotal role of peer support and peer learning. The US study also confirmed the effectiveness of a partnership approach between education and industry and a team approach between vocational and literacy teachers. Both in work-based and work preparation programmes, it is argued that literacy levels should not be used to screen adults out of vocational learning.

Adult pedagogy and settings that simulate work environments, draw on peer support, respect and build on existing skills and knowledge of workers and adapt programs to the literacy needs and learning styles of adults can enable adults to learn new skills and apply them at work, regardless of their literacy levels. Programs should not require school-like testing that is unrelated to job-performance for entry to training. (D'Amico, 2003: 13)

The unnecessary and time-consuming separation of literacy from context is what also underpins the concept of Functional Context Education (FCE). With roots in behavioural and cognitive science, the concept of FCE was developed as a result of a 4-year empirical study with young people with unmet literacy needs that wished to train for the US military. Time was a crucial factor in training skilled soldiers who presented with unmet literacy needs and yet who were urgently required in the field. Combining the vocational and basic skills necessities in a short intensive programme proved successful for this purpose (Sticht et al, 1987). FCE has evident resonances with the emphasis of a social practice or situated view where literacy is conceptualised as something that is learned and developed 'while it is being applied' (Sticht, 1997: 2). Sticht (1997) empirically describes how an integrated/FCE approach has been used with positive outcomes in a range of vocational settings. Like others, Sticht (2003) has stressed the motivational

aspects of literacy learning when the context is meaningful and associated with economic and personal development:

Most adults are highly unlikely to invest time in educational endeavours unless beneficial outcomes are very apparent. This factor is coupled with the reality that social stigmas are commonly associated with 'remedial' literacy programmes. FCE provides opportunities for adults to improve reading and other skills within contexts that are conducive to their career and social goals. (Sticht, 2003:3)

As outlined in the theoretical literature above, the issue of stigma is an important one in the field of literacy both in schools and later in adult life. Social acceptance is a significant ingredient of becoming and feeling included in society and the negative associations of unmet literacy needs can be the cause of withdrawal and isolation from social settings. These settings include education and training. Sticht's observation that embedded literacy approaches can by-pass the stigma attached to discreet literacy provision is important. This is particularly true as unmet literacy levels rise and we struggle to attract people back into structures that have obstructive, unhappy memories (Bailey and Coleman, 1998; NESF, 2009). Working on removing the stigma from individuals with unmet literacy needs and clearly naming the failure of the state remains an important and longer-term goal (Goffman, 1986, 1990).

Drawing on a range of empirical studies Sticht (2007) has distilled six principles that facilitate an integrated/embedded/contextualised approach to literacy in the vocational training context. These echo findings from the Australian and UK research.

1. Make sure students understand the purpose of the programme and the usefulness of the knowledge and skills to be learned.
2. Consider the knowledge that students bring with them and build new knowledge on the basis of this old knowledge.
3. Develop and sequence new lessons so that they build on prior knowledge gained in previous learning.

4. Integrate instruction in basic skills into programmes as the course poses demands for these skills that potential students may not possess.
5. Derive objectives from careful analysis of the realistic knowledge and skill needed in the work, home, or other community contexts in which the learner lives.
6. Use, to the extent possible, learning contexts, tasks, materials and procedures taken from the future situation in which the learner will be functioning.

Conclusions about the US studies

The research of both D'Amico and Sticht adds an important dimension to the Australian and UK research in that they highlight the fact that unmet literacy needs are more often a feature of the lives of the poor and the disadvantaged than of other social groupings. Vocational training and education programmes designed and delivered by the more privileged and literate groups in a society can overlook some of the realities of poverty of which they have no lived experience (Hegarty, 2005). This reemphasises Roger's (2005) economic imperative that there be *no delay* created by designing vocational and basic skills learning as separate events. Those who need to earn in order to cover the costs of shelter and food do not have time for such impediments to earning. Both the US researchers also suggest that meeting learners' own basic survival and comfort needs is a prerequisite to learning that can be overlooked (D'Amico, 2003; Sticht, 1987).

Time becomes a pressure for both learners and tutors in vocational education and training. Tutors struggle to meet course targets and requirements with groups where additional supports may be necessary and learners lack self-esteem. The US studies emphasise the need for adequate time, smaller class groups and good levels of economic and material support for learners. There is however an inherent risk in all of this that 'functional' becomes the narrow norm and that the needs of the economy and the state once again

override the broader lifelong learning potential of the individual and community.

The Irish experience

In 2002, the National Adult Literacy Agency, with a number of adult training and education groups, developed and published guidelines on integrating literacy for further education and training centres (Ní Chinnéide, 2002). As was the case in many countries, the International Adult Literacy Survey had highlighted significant unmet literacy needs in the adult Irish population (OECD, 1997). This resulted in increased attention being given to post-school opportunities to improve levels of literacy both for young people and adults. Community and vocational training programmes were first to adopt an integrated approach and to begin to implement a whole organisation approach to literacy as recommended by NALA. Up until now the attention on tutor training and practice in integrating literacy has been concentrated in the community training sector with the FE sector only now coming into sharper focus.

Developing an integrated approach to language and literacy was in line with NALA's commitment to increasing education and training opportunities for adults who want to develop their basic skills. It also reflected NALA's adoption of a situated, social practice definition of literacy (NALA, 2007). Both of these standpoints suggest recognition of the presence of the pivotal language and literacy element in most social situations, including vocational training. Following on from that recognition comes a necessary rethinking of the content, pedagogical practice and organisational structure of adult education and training so that language and literacy development become integral throughout the process. NALA (2003) has published sample materials for use by vocational tutors adopting an integrated approach to the development of language and literacy and practitioners have welcomed these. The Irish approach to literacy policy development has always been organic rather than 'top-down' and although this is time-consuming it also reaps the rewards of consultation, experimentation and reflection (Crowther et al, 2001).

The *Guidelines* for further education and training centres present 10 facets of a whole organisation approach to integrating literacy that are motivated by goals of inclusion, efficiency and effectiveness. As well as directly addressing unmet literacy needs the *Guidelines* are rooted in values of adult learning, equality and social justice that require raising literacy awareness as an essential starting point. The *Guidelines* are divided into two sections. The first section deals with strategic management and planning. The second outlines aspects of programme design and delivery. They suggest that the following 10 areas of FE and training need to be considered an essential part of a whole organisational literacy strategy that is discussed, planned, reviewed and developed on an ongoing basis. Guidelines are given under each of the following headings:

Strategic management and planning

1. A strategic plan for literacy
2. Staff development and training in literacy
3. Resources
4. A literacy analysis of the centre's programmes
5. An inclusive access policy
6. Communication and timetabling systems

Programme design and delivery

7. Integrating literacy into learners' induction programme
8. Literacy assessment and an individual learning plan
9. Integrating literacy into teaching and training practice
10. Progression

In 2008, the national management of FAS Community Based Training organised workshops for the network of FAS Community Training Centres, at

which centres were facilitated to use the guidelines as a framework for planning the integration of literacy across the curriculum.

The guidelines have not yet been empirically evaluated, although individual centres have reported on their usefulness as a means of transforming literacy provision, particularly in a youth training and development context (Cramer, 2008). A major element in this success is the training programme that underpins both the restructuring of a literacy-aware organisation and the ensuing comprehensive integrated approach literacy practice. In 1999, NALA collaborated with the National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM) to develop a professional development course in integrating literacy. The **NUI Certificate Course in Integrating Literacy** is designed for subject tutors, teachers and trainers. The course aims to build literacy awareness, and literacy development knowledge and skills, so that the course participants 'will be able to integrate basic skills into their work environment' and into their own teaching practice (NUI Tutor Handbook, 2007-2008: 12).

An empirical evaluation of the **NUI Certificate Course in Integrating Literacy** found high levels of satisfaction amongst participant tutors and a corresponding positive practical impact in their education and training centres. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered. 29 centres completed evaluative questionnaires. A further 19 training centres were visited and interviews held with 12 centre managers, 23 vocational and subject tutors, 11 literacy tutors and 7 Vocational Education tutors (VEC). In addition to this range of views, the researchers also gathered information from participant and provider course evaluations over a 3-year period (2004-2007) (Short, 2008).

It is clear from the evaluation that the course is a valuable resource in implementing an integrated approach to language and literacy and that the delivery is professional and insightful. A number of recommendations reflected the changing needs of training centres to respond to a changing multicultural context and to deal with issues like dyslexia and initial assessment in more detail. These concerns are indicators of vocational tutors growing involvement in literacy development and the success of the

integration project. As emerged in other places, much emphasis was placed on the importance of relationships, team work and the need for stronger networks and peer exchange groups. The continuing need for literacy specialists to support vocational tutors was also apparent. Although some FE teachers have completed the course it is anticipated that some adaptation would be required to match the needs of mainstream FE tutors working at Level 5.

Preparation for an integrated approach

If the practice of integrating literacy is to be more than intuitive, research elsewhere shows that it must be rooted in a rich understanding of the literacy elements in each course (Sticht, 2003; Wickert and McGuirk, 2005). Working from a social practice perspective this becomes more than an analytical course-related paper exercise. A holistic approach to language and literacy development draws in the language and literacy not just of the course but also of the workplace for which the course is a preparation. The situated language and literacy of the course is important in its own right but acquires full meaning in its relationship to current and future vocational practice. In a sense the integrated approach to language and literacy development requires the tutor to straddle the distance between these multiple areas of practice so that an appropriate bank of transportable skills are built up (Ivanic et al, 2007)

The mapping of literacy demands of a vocational training programme such as that carried out by staff in Newbridge Youth and Development Centre (NYTDC) is part of a whole organisation approach to integrated literacy (Ní Chinnéide, 2002). The study (McSkeane, 2008) records the learning from a process of mapping the literacy requirements across levels 1-3 of FETAC. This was motivated in part by a desire to better provide for individual learner needs by mapping capacity against assessment goals at the time of induction. The group were emphatic that screening literacy was not used as a means of excluding but rather of better meeting real needs.

The Newbridge study mapped literacy demands across 14 FETAC modules. This allowed comparison of the degree of literacy in each module and the commonalities between them. It did not chart the additional language and

literacy demands carried in the methods and materials used in the course delivery that is already a part of the NYTDC whole organisation approach. The minimal level of language and literacy evidence required to complete FETAC modules surprised the researchers. Additionally, the study reminded tutors that FETAC accepts and recommends alternative and creative methods of presenting evidence that are not often fully explored. Consequently they concluded that many of the barriers for students are constructed through aspects of course delivery rather than actual FETAC requirements that demand only a minimal level of skill. The implication of these findings are liberating in that the literacy audit indicated scope for adapting practice so that it is less award-led and actually reflects locally situated language and literacy practices.

Although not highlighted, it is clear that the mapping process facilitated reflection and increased tutor awareness of the embedded aspects of their courses. The study carried out at Levels 1-3 recommends extending this process so that literacy and vocational tutors become conscious of the language and literacy needs contextualised in all FETAC modules and become aware of what distinguishes one level from another. This is clearly work that has relevance across other education sectors and most importantly at the level of pre-service and in-service teacher training.

The BTEI model

The DES established the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) in 2002 to expand access to FE for those young people and adults with less than upper secondary level education. The scheme allows those on low income to participate in FE whilst retaining social welfare payments and receiving some additional economic assistance, depending on their circumstances. BTEI allows participation at a range of FETAC levels from 1-6 and a percentage of students in the partner college would be participants in the BTEI.

With a focus primarily on FETAC levels 3 and 4 a series of guidelines have been drawn up to clarify aspects of BTEI activity and the partnerships involved in the work. The *Guidelines to Enhance Cooperation between Back to Education Initiative and Adult Literacy Programmes* are also particularly

relevant to the FE college context and anticipate some of the ground covered empirically in the research study (DES, 2009). The BTEI model suggests that bridging courses to FE are already giving serious consideration to an integrated literacy approach and that there is an organic movement in adult education towards this more learner-centred approach to adult and vocational education.

The BTEI guidelines map the basic features of an integrated approach to literacy that will inevitably be adapted to the local, specific context:

- Teachers of the core subjects know and use inclusive, literacy-aware methods and materials. They take account of the specific types of language, reading, writing and numeracy the students need to engage with in relation to each topic or class. They choose and use methods and materials to explicitly support students to fully participate in the core learning programme.
- Students have access to a dedicated course-related literacy support service. This is provided by tutors who are trained and experienced in adult literacy principles and practice, and skilled in providing course-related language and literacy development in adult and further education programmes at all levels.
- There is effective and systematic communication between subject staff and literacy support staff to jointly plan how to support students with their specific needs.
- Management have systems in place to facilitate that communication and teamwork. (DES, 2009: 6)

In this outline of *basic features*, language and literacy are given recognition as the essential driver of the learning vehicle. This is central to a social practice view of literacy that has implications for the way teaching and learning can most effectively take place. The guidelines highlight the collaborative relationships that underpin a successful integrated approach to language and literacy and suggest that peer support, group learning and team-teaching are compatible approaches with how adults learn. It is clear therefore that the relationship between vocational and literacy specialists is pivotal.

In order to deliver efficient and effective adult literacy support to BTEI programmes there must be clarity in relation to roles and responsibilities of subject teacher and literacy support tutor, and how the partnership between them will operate. The main focus should be on the provision of support to the learner, rather than on departmental or programme based structures. (Ibid: 9)

The BTEI guidelines suggest that some adults may benefit from a preparatory course before returning to learning after a considerable period of absence.

In general terms it is preferable for adult learners new to education to undertake a preparatory course before commencing programmes leading to specific qualifications, particularly at Level 5. (DES, 2009: 14)

Such preparatory courses may be needed not so much for literacy reasons as for language and cultural reasons: they would ensure that the new learner has space to settle into an unfamiliar place with new language and concepts and a different set of expectations, understandings and behaviours. However the literature suggests that the impetus to adjust should not be one-side, but that staff too need to be conscious of what they do and exactly how they are facilitating the learning process (Lea and Street, 1998).

As evidenced also in the UK studies described in this report the policy decision to recommend an integrated approach in the BTEI context has pragmatic administrative as well as pedagogical motives.

The provision of embedded literacy and numeracy improvement opportunities in tandem with specialised literacy support has proven to be significant in not simply improving basic skills but also in raising accreditation levels. It has also addressed high course dropout rates and increased self-esteem levels leading to improved transferability of new learning. (DES, 2009: 22)

The BTEI guidelines suggest a growing awareness and understanding of the way literacy is learned and practiced. Increasingly, the detail of how best we can facilitate unmet literacy needs across learning contexts is being given a higher place on the priority list in a training context.

Conclusions about the Irish experience

Much progress has been made in the Irish context in working towards adopting an integrated approach to language and literacy development in further education and training. A professional development course for training organisations has been designed, developed and positively evaluated. Guidelines for a whole organisation approach to integration have been

published and adopted in a range of sectors. As part of the whole organisation approach some work has been done on mapping the literacy demands of national training awards and materials for integrating literacy in vocational training have been published by NALA. It is timely now to explore an extension of an integrated approach throughout the wider FE sector with a focus on Level 5 and above.

Conclusions drawn from the empirical literature

Across countries the implementation of an integrated approach to language and literacy in adult education and training has been as a result of high levels of unmet literacy needs coupled with low uptake of discreet adult literacy provision. At the same time, the spread of a situated, social practice view of literacy has meant a corresponding recognition of the need for language and literacy to be explicitly part of adult learning. This is especially true as adults are motivated to take on a new vocational identity and can find a fresh, immediate way of approaching literacy learning as part of their career goal.

An integrated approach to language and literacy makes new demands on both vocational and literacy specialists and they need time for reflection, training and planning. Research has shown that retention and achievement are improved when good collaborative partnerships are formed between subject and literacy tutors. These relationships emerge time and time again as the pivotal factor in successful integrated projects and staff need to be supported and facilitated to form these effective teams.

In most countries an integrated approach to literacy support and development is embedded in strong national policy and accompanied by appropriate resources. The Irish culture of organic evolution of new processes allows time for reflection and dialogue that is restricted in places where standardised curricula and accreditation systems are imposed and linked to funding. This top-down way of changing educational policy and structures can be stressful for teachers and confusing for students. A more measured approach allows time for trends elsewhere to become embedded and the learning to be

disseminated. Nevertheless it is clear from the international empirical evidence that recognition of the language and literacy embedded in all learning demands both a policy and a pedagogical response and the resources to match these.

Against a backdrop of the international theoretical and empirical literature the account below describes an empirical study into the potential for a whole FE college carried out in a Dublin FE College over the period 2008-2009.

Part 3 – Research design and implementation process

Methodology

Debate about the most valid way to gather research information in any particular field is inevitably also about epistemological matters: understandings of the meaning of knowledge itself and assumptions about the nature of social reality (Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Cohen *et al*, 2000). Feminists, critical theorists and egalitarians have all argued against the dominance of the positivistic, measurement-based approach to educational research. They support respectful, cooperative research partnerships that allow hitherto unheard voices to shape their own narratives and outline their interpretation of their experience (Baker *et al*, 2004; Belenky *et al*, 1986; Byrne and Lentin, 2000; Freire and Macedo, 1987; Gilligan, 1982; Habermas, 1984; Harding, 1991; Lynch, 1999; 2000; Oliver, 1992; Weiler, 1988). Positivist inquiry inclines towards the abstraction of reality through quantitative studies that create generalisations about the nature and relevance of learning in society. Whilst claiming to be scientific and value-free, positivist studies in education are generally designed and funded by powerful groups within society and assume the integrity of the status quo (Harding and Norberg, 2005; Lynch, 1999; 2000). They do not seek to problematise accepted understandings of concepts like literacy and adult education but rather constrain meaning to that which can be 'objectively' measured. This approach excludes the vital, deep insider knowledge of research subjects that is left uncovered by mechanistic measures that negate the value of their experience (Hamilton and Barton, 2000). So that the voices of those concerned are central to this investigation process we have selected inclusive, participative methods that have evolved with our research experience and relationships.

An ethnographic approach

We have chosen an ethnographic approach to the empirical part of the study. Ethnography literally means writing about a people and is an approach to

research with a commitment to describing and explaining the social world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1994; Hammersley, 1995). It is a way of studying a group in depth and thereby accessing a new, hitherto hidden perspective on an aspect of social organisation. Ethnography involves becoming immersed in a community to the point where often-submerged meanings can be unearthed and shared as part of a natural relational presence and exchange. Feminists have highlighted the affective ingredient of the ethnographic process where it is neither possible nor desirable to remain aloof from the participant community (Edmondson, 2000).

Deep attitudes and ideas are expressed in the way people live their lives and important issues and perspectives are often expressed in the process of the familiar. This suggests that ethnography is important in the study of literacy that is understood as being socially situated, involving social practices and affecting whole groups and communities as well as individuals (Alvermann, 2000; Florio-Ruane and McVee, 2000). Hodge (2003) describes how ethnography allows the exploration of the particular in detail and involves:

- Studying real world settings
- Taking an holistic approach to whole phenomena
- Employing a multi-method approach and
- Maintaining contact with participants over a significant period of time.

Carspecken and Apple (1992), Carspecken (1996) and Cohen *et al* (2000) explicitly describe *critical ethnography* as an ethnographic process that moves beyond observation and description. Here the systemic roots of studied behaviour, of the truths gathered and shared, are articulated and the findings located within those systems so as to better promote emancipatory outcomes and structural change. For this reason we have described our learning about language and literacy in Irish FE in the context of the overall social and education context in Ireland. We do this to suggest that responsibility for educational inequalities and their remedies are not located in a single college or education sector but rather in the state's creation of well-resourced, fair and

just social structures.

We used ethnographic *case study* methodology as the core research method (Mitchell, 1984; Cohen et al, 2000). This does not mean that the research site was evaluated as an example of good practice but rather that the college became research partners who shared a mutual interest with NALA in learning what should be involved in developing holistic literacy support and development processes at FETAC level 5⁴. Ethnographic case study methodology involves looking in great detail at one set of activities so that important aspects of real practice are unravelled, challenges are understood *in situ* and solutions emerge organically from the process. In this case the focus was the issues that arise in relation to language and literacy for students and tutors in FE and how a whole college response might be implemented for the benefit of all.

Research design and implementation

A study in two phases – Phase 1

The integrating literacy research project was divided into two phases both of which had a common overall aim. This was:

To work in partnership with a further education college to research integrated approaches and whole college systems that help students to deal effectively with the language and literacy demands of their programmes. (Report on Phase 1, 2008)

Phase 1 lasted from April to May 2008 and was a scoping exercise for the main study that has spanned a large part of the academic year 2008/2009.

The initial phase of the research aimed to answer three broad questions:

1. Is the Liberties College learning support system a suitable subject for more in-depth research into learning support in FE?
2. If so, which elements of the learning support system should be analysed and how should this be carried out?

⁴ The Liberties College is most often referred to as the 'partner college', not to negate its identity but rather to signify its wider representative role in the enquiry.

3. What level of commitment, in terms of time, staff and other resources and actions, would be required, both from the college and from NALA, in order to accomplish the overall project aim?

The findings from the initial phase of the project firmly established the research partnership between NALA and the college. It demonstrated that sufficient scale of activity and interest in the topic of language and literacy development existed to make the research site a viable and meaningful context in achieving the common aims of each partner. NALA would be able to empirically pursue the goal of exploring the potential for a whole college approach to integrating literacy in FE. The college would continue a culture of reflection and research⁵ into ways of better providing for the needs of learners. Ultimately the FE sector would be the beneficiary of generic guidelines for how best to provide inclusive, literacy friendly adult education and training.

In the time that elapsed between Phase 1 and 2 NALA maintained the research relationship with both staff and students in the partner college. Field notes from this period and from Phase 1 are incorporated in the overall findings in Part 4.

Phase 2

By the time Phase 2 data gathering began in January 2009 many college staff and students were acutely conscious of language and literacy issues and this enriched the quality and depth of subsequent research discussions. Phase 1 had focused on the work of Learning Support Services with a particular group of students on the Youth and Community programme. The report from Phase 1 had made recommendations in relation to the work of LSS and many of these had already been absorbed into college practice when Phase 2 began, Other recommendations from Phase 1 are integrated into the findings that follow below.

⁵ The partner college has experience of a Mental Health in Education project (2005) in partnership with Schizophrenia Ireland. As part of an ongoing college project- 'Language Matters' – a small group of tutors is looking at the theory and practice of language and literacy in FE. Reports of this experience are very favorable.

The research team⁶ for Phase 2 was recruited in December 2008. In January 2009 NALA and the partner college signed a memo of understanding and the new phase of the study began immediately. There was an inevitable need for additional attention to the embedding of a new research phase and this was facilitated by the good will of all concerned. The terms of reference for this part of the project set out the following aims and outputs:

Research aims

Informed by an in-depth literature review and by fieldwork organised in partnership with the Learning Support Service in Liberties College, the research aims to identify:

- Literacy practices in formal further education courses at Level 5;
- Course-related language and literacy issues that arise for students and for course teachers;
- Effective strategies students and teachers can use to address those;
- Effective strategies learning support services can use to assist students and teachers to address course-related language and literacy issues;
- Whole-college systems and procedures that effectively address course-related language and literacy support and development across the curriculum and at all phases of FE programmes.

Expected outputs

Expected final outputs from the project are:

1. A research report for publication by NALA, documenting the process and the key nationally-relevant findings and recommendations arising from all strands of the research project.
2. An internal report for the college and NALA, identifying any particular recommendations that would inform the next phase of the college's

⁶ Researcher biographies are located at the end of the report.

strategy to develop its learning support service and to integrate literacy across the curriculum.

3. Short practical resources that emerge from the collaborative research process between the researchers, project participants and NALA:

- Sample session plans for student workshops based on the researchers' observation and evaluation of any such that may be delivered by participating staff in the course of the project
- Summary of practical strategies or guidelines for integrating course-related literacy support and development with course content and delivery⁷.

Project steering group

A project advisory and review group (PaRG) was established to guide the investigation. This group met periodically throughout the study to advise and support the fieldwork and to discuss emergent findings. The group was made up of the NALA Integrating Literacy Coordinator, a member of NALA's research unit, the college project coordinator who is a tutor with the Learning Support Service, a teacher from the Youth and Community programme, and the head of the college Student Welfare and Support Service.

Desk research

As well as the ethnographic research, the guidelines are informed by the theory and practice from other places. These were unearthed as part of the desk research that formed a parallel path to the fieldwork. A reflexive dialogue was maintained about the links between the findings of the empirical study and the literature and this was fruitful and enriching of the process of discovery.

Ethics and protocols

So that the research process would be transparent and respectful a statement of ethics and a set of research protocols was drawn up before the fieldwork

⁷ Excerpts from contract between NALA and the research team.

began. These were agreed by the PaRG and communicated to all research participants at the time of interview. The statement of ethics and protocols can be read at Appendix 1.

The research schedule was adapted for different staff roles and responsibilities and for students. The generic schedule for in-depth interviews is attached at Appendix 2. The short interview schedule for the student 'vox pop' is at Appendix 3.

Box 2: Fieldwork – a chronology of research activity

<i>Time period</i>	<i>Research activity</i>
<i>January 2009</i>	<i>Introductions:</i> Agreement of research plan; initial meetings with college; initial meeting with the PaRG. Desk research for literature review.
<i>February- March</i>	<i>Fieldwork:</i> College-based interviews and focus groups; study visits; transcription of interviews. Ongoing review of literature.
<i>April- May</i>	<i>Coding and analysis:</i> Entry of data into MAXqda; some additional interviews with CDVEC, FETAC and college tutors. Ongoing review of literature. Submission of interim research report.
<i>June - August</i>	<i>Writing up:</i> Final data analysis; writing up draft findings; completion of international literature review; draft final report; draft report to partner college; draft resource document.

A range of perspectives

Cohen *et al* (2000: 112) cite triangulation as a powerful means of 'demonstrating concurrent validity' in qualitative studies. Originally a navigational technique that uses a number of markers to more accurately pinpoint a target, triangulation analogously describes the use of a variety of methods and sources of data collection to confirm the validity and reliability of research data. This is particularly pertinent in ethnography where a single community of interest is being studied and the possibility of a collective script

and memory exists (Olick and Robbins, 1998). Within the partner college we spoke with a wide range of people holding diverse positions and roles within the organisation. As the study progressed a number of additional interviews and study visits were identified as having the potential to further enrich the data. These were incorporated into the process. In particular, a number of staff emerged from the focus groups as having a firm grasp of the process of integration and they agreed to do more in-depth interviews.

We spoke to a range of students from a wide diversity of courses both individually and in focus groups. All of these students received a certificate of participation in the research project and this could be used as evidence towards their accredited courses. One hundred students participated in short ‘vox pop’ interviews about their knowledge and experience of the LSS. This situated approach was most effective and produced significant data. As well as the staff and students of the partner college we interviewed the NALA Integrating Literacy co-ordinator, the CEO of the CDVECs and the Policy Development Officer of the awarding body FETAC. In this way we aimed to cross-reference opinions and chart the findings from a range of perspectives.

A further reference point was established during a visit to a large Northern Ireland college and to a UK language and literacy research centre that had completed a substantial integrating literacy project. Whereas the work with the partner college allowed for deep considerations of the implications of an integrated literacy approach in the Irish FE context the desk research and visits added breadth to this experience.

Box 3: Number of interviews

<i>Participant group</i>	<i>Number interviewed</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
<i>Academic Staff</i>	21	16	5
<i>Students</i>	113	75	38
<i>Other staff</i>	3	2	1
<i>Non-college</i>	7	7	-

<i>Total interviewed</i>	<i>144</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>44</i>
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A range of methods

We wanted to gather rich data from a wide range of people and matched our methods to facilitate this goal. In-depth interviews allowed for detailed individual narratives to emerge. Focus groups created dialogue and in this dynamic situation we were able to gather the diversity of opinion that exists when people come together to reflect on experience. Additional staff members were offered the opportunity to submit their views in writing and eight written submissions were received and incorporated in the body of data.

We used visual, non-text methods where possible and opted for shorter interviews with some students so that a wide range of perspectives could be gathered in an efficient timeframe. This prompted extensive feedback from the student group and also served as a reflective opportunity for them towards the end of their FE study.

Data coding and analysis

Research interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data were then coded and analysed using MAXqda one of the software packages for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) that facilitate the organisation and analysis of ethnographic data (Dohan and Sanchez-Janowski, 1998). Once data are imported into MAXqda, it allows the creation of a coding tree that is dictated by the data rather than some pre-imposed theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Data were allowed to dictate their own code branch and this process was completed before any thematic reduction was undertaken. The transcribed data therefore firmly led the shaping of the final text.

MAXqda facilitates the mechanical aspect of coding but does not replace the reflective and intellectual activity that is the core of data analysis.

Interpretation of utterances is supported by presence and participation during

the original discussion. Emotional emphases and intent are remembered as a feature of the research relationship and this influences the way data are understood and coded. Where CAQDA excels is in the processes of searching and retrieving data for comparison and in facilitating the writing of findings into the final research document.

The final part of the data sorting involved transposing the emerging themes onto mind maps so that an accessible, visual model of the initial findings was available for discussion with the steering group. The interim findings from the study were presented in this way. A final reduced version of these maps is included in the findings section.

A learning process

The research process helped in raising awareness of language and literacy issues across the college and assisted reflection about college systems and procedures. The genuine interest in improving services to students meant that staff were open to new ideas and it is hoped that both the research process and the outcomes will support that desire for constant development.

The outcomes from the study of one college suggest potential guidelines for the wider FE system and these findings are now outlined in some detail in Part 4.

The voices of research participants are purposefully prominent in the data so that they remain the clear source of expert opinion in their own experience.

Part 4 – Empirical research findings

The findings from an ethnographic case study in a Dublin FE college are presented in **three sections** below. The study explored the potential for a whole college approach to integrating language and literacy support and development at FETAC Level 5. The literacy practices required at Level 5 are referred to throughout the findings. As suggested in the literature, these include not only the demands of the FETAC award but also the language and literacy used by academic staff in their pedagogical practice and by colleagues in the workplace. These are context-specific and essentially integrated in the day-to-day shifts of college life. The issues that occur and the strategies evolved to match them in the partner college will have echoes for other organisations. At the same time a social practice view of language and literacy suggests that local structures must be organically and sustainably created (and re-created) to match local needs and aspirations. The experiences of the partner college therefore anticipates and traces a path for others whose quest is to provide holistic language and literacy support for the whole range of FE learners.

We found that language and literacy support and development can be provided in a range of ways, each of which has advantages and drawbacks:

- a. Support can be sought through the Adult Literacy Schemes run locally by VECs and separate from mainstream FE. This has the advantage of giving access to literacy specialists although it may not be able to address the FETAC Level 5 context unless it is specifically designed to do so. The Adult Literacy Scheme based in the college is not currently resourced to cater for the needs of FE. Furthermore, the focus of the Adult Literacy Scheme would be pre-Level 5. Although the relevance of the literacy specialist base did not go unnoticed, our main findings are therefore in relation to the following two options.
- b. Where it exists within a college, LSS can make available 1:1 or small group specialist literacy support. This has the advantage of using a

context-specialist literacy tutor but is limited by resources to the numbers it can serve. This individualised aspect of LSS is reported on in the findings Section 1 and Section 2.

- c. Language and literacy can be integrated into all FE courses through **collaborative partnerships between subject and literacy specialists**. This is ideal in that it makes support indiscriminately available to all students and again recognises the situated nature of the language and literacy at issue. It is limited by the resources both for planning and staff development in a radically new way of working and requires a whole college commitment to keeping language and literacy at the top of the agenda.

The findings in relation to LSS as part of a whole college approach to language and literacy support and development are included in findings Section 3.

The voices of research participants are central to the way that the findings are presented and this is in keeping with the **situated** view of language and literacy that runs throughout the project. In the sections that follow, it is in the words and the lived experience of students and staff that the findings are grounded.

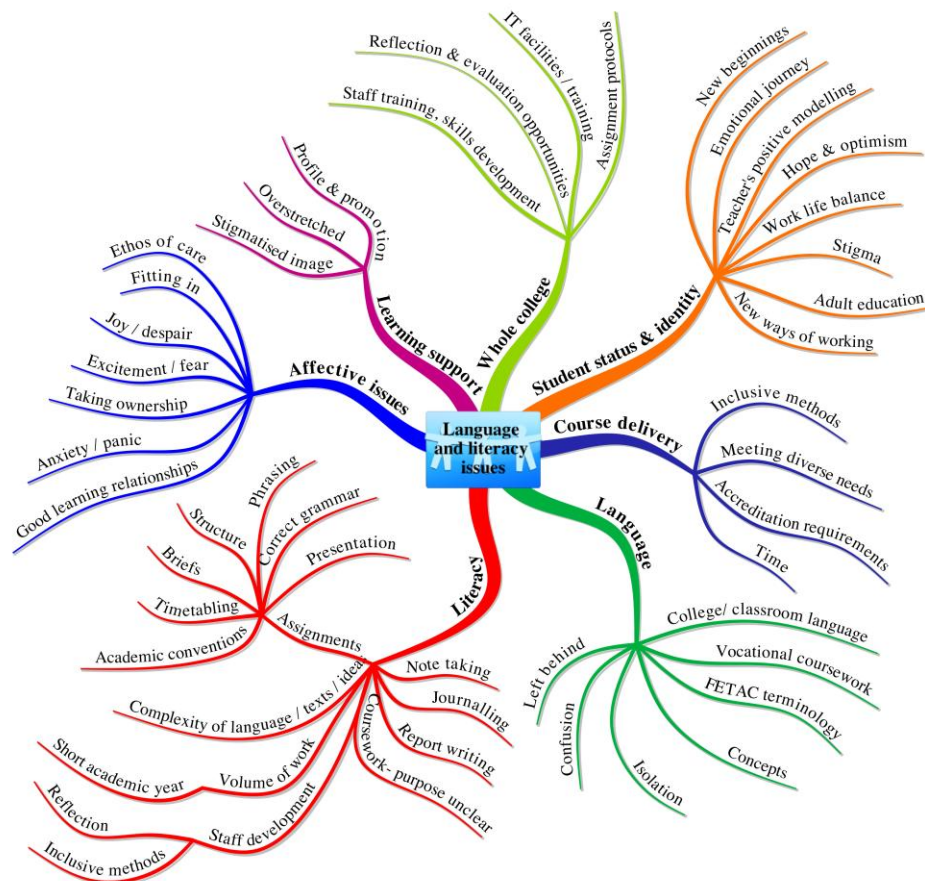
Section 1: Course related language and literacy issues in FE for students and teachers

Section 2: Effective language and literacy support and development strategies used by students, subject teachers and learning support literacy specialists

Section 3: Emerging whole college systems and procedures for language and literacy support and development across FE

Not surprisingly the findings reveal generic themes that recur across sections. The conclusions from the literature review and the empirical study are drawn together and presented in Part 5.

Mind map 1: Course related language and literacy issues for students and teachers



Section 1: Course related language and literacy issues for students and teachers

Language and literacy are already integrated throughout all our lives. They mediate all our relationships and determine our connection to the ideas of others whether spoken or written. In the context of FE, language and literacy take on additional importance as the main means by which we share our experience with others, access new knowledge, process it and reproduce it as part of the cycle of learning. Language and literacy are therefore an inalienable part of who we are and what we become.

It is not surprising that language and literacy emerge as pivotal aspects of both students and teachers experience and emotions in the FE context. This section of the findings explores what the language and literacy practice issues are for teachers and learners working at FETAC Level 5. These infuse the whole college experience from the outset.

Student identity and early college days

New beginnings for students

One student vividly described the experience of the transition to life in college as 'like walking into another dimension'. This transition was also described as akin to moving to a 'foreign land'. In this land a new culture and language must be learnt. There are new words carrying new concepts and new, unfamiliar styles of writing about those ideas. Mixed with the enthusiasm of new beginnings, both young and mature students alike expressed feelings of alienation and uncertainty in the FE environment.

Students coming to college directly from school have to negotiate not just a new place but also a new learning culture where they are expected to be independent learners and this transition needs support and time. Teachers observed how the Leaving Certificate⁸ pressure for amassing points meant that students had become adept at memorising rather than learning.

⁸ The Leaving Certificate is the examination at the end of Irish Secondary School education. It is the equivalent of FETAC Level 4/5

You're used to being spoon-fed at school and it's hard to make the change.
Student

What's happening with students coming is they don't know how to learn.
They've never been taught how to learn. *FE Teacher*

Mature students describe the decision to return to learning as momentous and life changing. For those who have been out of education for some time it is a confusing world they are entering.

If you knew where I am coming from, not doing even a junior cert, working for years and now coming back to college. It's a really big challenge for me.
Student

I have no frame of reference really to know what to do. *Student*

As with younger students, mature students carry both positive and negative experiences and memories in relation to their primary experience of education and these memories can deeply impact upon their self-assurance and engagement with FE.

For students with specific learning difficulties in relation to language and literacy management of their needs in the early days of term was crucial to a smooth beginning. Students with dyslexia had diverse experiences in the College. Those arriving with assessments felt well cared for but those students newly identified as dyslexic sometimes found long delays in accessing their rights from the DES/VEC and subsequently this had considerable impact on student progression.

Alongside all these concerns vied an excitement and deeply felt motivation for the chosen vocational path students were following.

I wanted to learn. I was like a little child running around that school. *Student*

For adult learners there are often other pressing concerns that run parallel to becoming a student and consume energy and resources.

Work / life balance

Students have rich and demanding lives outside of college and for some balancing the demands of course work with life outside of college is challenging.

A lot of people have lives outside which are complicated and demanding. The pressures on some are great. They drop away because of this. *FE Teacher*

Many students come from inner-city areas where there are high levels of unemployment and where people experience significant levels of inequality and disadvantage. Finding the financial resources for college was problematic for many students. Early days in college were particularly expensive when the hidden costs of college life had to be met: stationery, travel, course materials and computer support devices. The stress of finding these resources was exacerbated by any delays in student grant approvals and this impacted on students' ability to fully participate in their college courses.

It could affect a person's dignity, where you'd be that ashamed you'd hide. Coming in with no books, no money, hungry, dirty. *Student*

External demands that impacted on participation by students include caring for family members and holding down part-time work.

I'm into college. I go home, do my bit of studying then I'm off to work. I have a son, like. I'm busy. *Student*

Teacher's role in supporting new learning identity

The settling in period can also raise issues for teachers who strive to identify students who might need some extra support in adjusting to college life and the language and literacy course demands. Introducing the breadth and depth of the course modules to students was generally the first step for many teachers. This sometimes met with resistance and even disappointment from students who struggled to see the relevance of some exercises, assignments and modules to their chosen vocational course.

There was also an understanding amongst teachers of the status shift involved in moving directly from a school-based identity to one of college student. They did not assume that adjustment was an issue merely for students.

There is an adjustment. There is learning and they need to understand why things have to be a bit like they are. I think all of the pressure is on them.

Literacy specialist

They see their identity differently now and therefore do we also need to re-imagine ourselves, and our supports in this new framework of how they see themselves? That's so important moving on, moving away from school.

Literacy specialist

FE college teachers recognised the range of affective and practical difficulties faced by students during early college days. The success of this settling in period was seen to be of key importance in relation to the progress students made throughout the year.

There is resistance and fear in the early days. *FE Teacher*

Stigma

The stigma attached to having unmet literacy needs means that many students have no desire to repeat a learning experience with which they have negative and even shameful associations. While they are enthusiastic about their new course they are disinclined to tackle their literacy ghosts again. Teachers sometimes construed this reluctance as students misunderstanding the full relevance of literacy to their vocational course.

Some of them have very poor literacy but they don't want to work on their literacy. They just want the childcare qualification and you will do your best to get them that qualification. *FE Teacher*

Class numbers

Those with unresolved literacy issues have often become adept at concealing the fact. Identifying those students who needed extra support with language and literacy was therefore an additional challenge especially in a context of large class numbers.

They have strategies for avoidance so built into their normal approach to life it can be a long time before you would be sure somebody has an issue you know. *FE Teacher*

This year in particular class numbers are huge and you are not getting around them. They are not getting the individual attention. *FE Teacher*

New ways of working

The culture and approach of adult education is quite a new one for students freshly out of school and relating to teachers in an adult way can bring its own challenges. This challenge to make new learning relationships also exists for teachers who have only recently made a similar transition from secondary education practice.

It can be quite difficult for teachers to hand over power if somebody is coming up against them and behaving in a way that teachers see as bad behaviour. They can get into an *'I'm the teacher and you're the student'* kind of situation, without even saying it, but that can be the message. It's very easy for students to get that kind of message because it's not buried very far in them and they expect it and they're watching for it and if you fall into the trap then that's it. *Literacy specialist*

Time invested in relationship building early in the academic year was seen to produce long-term benefits. Using creative methodologies early on in the year worked well for one college department helping to form a strong cohesive group identity.

It held the group and we've had a better retention rate through the year. It gave them a bonding experience, so it was a good model. They said it got them beyond feeling shy. *FE Teacher*

Giving equal time to work on process and task issues with students was identified as a method of helping students in this transition to the adult learner identity. However, in practice as the demands of the year and the curriculum increased process work was usually abandoned in favour of getting required accreditation tasks completed.

What happens then is what always happens. I become fixated on the material and delivering with the assignments in view. I'm back into content driven stuff. *FE Teacher*

Language and literacy issues in course delivery

In the early college term it was possible for teachers to do some literacy support work with students. However, as the year progressed the volume and pace of work needed to complete the required assignments for the curriculum

overshadowed individual language and literacy needs of students. Additionally many teachers did not feel they had the specific skills needed to help students with unmet literacy needs to progress.

I suppose it is very frustrating. It's very difficult when you feel you're trying your best and you're still not able to get the message across. *FE Teacher*

Facilitating the different learning styles and paces of a diverse range of students was also of concern to teachers. Finding time to address individual needs and develop inclusive methodologies caused real tension and stress for teachers and students alike. There was a consciousness of the need to be addressing language and literacy but a need for new skills in how to do this in practice. Balancing these diverse needs and the pursuit of an inclusive practice inevitably caused some classroom tension.

And for the students who are competent and capable I suppose they get bored because you're like a parrot repeating the same stuff and they feel that things are moving at too slow a pace and they get frustrated. *FE Teacher*

But the literacy effect on the class is it does actually divert and slow down delivery and other students basically become quite irritated because somebody does not have the skills to keep up. *FE Teacher*

Whatever way learning and teaching is organised in the college has to be inclusive so that people who find it more difficult than others are included rather than set apart or identified as having difficulty. How people teach needs to include the fact that there are a number of people there that just find this really difficult or are disenchanted or are having difficulty. This is the challenge. *College management*

At the root of teachers' frustration was a sense of the pressures on both students and themselves to complete the FETAC Level 5 requirements in what is a relatively short academic year between mid-September and May.

I really feel so much for them. You'd want to be a horse of a woman or man to complete it. *College management*

A university student would not have the same schedule or demands as them. *College management*

Teachers vividly described the challenge of integrating literacy and language into the various courses being delivered in the college. Understandably, language and literacy demands varied across different modules, however all courses had significant literacy and language tasks at their core. There was no evidence that these had been fully analysed as a basis for teaching.

Finding methods and processes to integrate language and literacy into their vocational courses was the underlying theme in relation to concerns raised by teachers in relation to pedagogy.

Course-related language issues

One teacher identified the mismatch between the language code of teachers and students as being a possible block to learning. Again teachers showed they were open to reflecting about and changing their own practice.

We have a very middle class use of language here and what we often say is not heard. If someone is coming from a different language background in some way and they hear this kind of elitism they don't know it. Maybe we need to look at how that channel of communication – at what it is. *FE Teacher*

The gulf between language and understanding was frustrating for everyone.

Some teachers want perfection. 'Grammar perfect' we're told but no explanation about how to do it. *Student*

There's no point in writing in a brief 'analyse and evaluate' if they don't know what analyse and evaluate mean. *FE Teacher*

In relation to the language demands and oral communication of different courses, students described considerable difficulties and confusion. New language and terminology included the language of FETAC, of college life and of the chosen vocational course.

Language is often over my head and I feel I am on my own with it. *Student*

I haven't a clue about what the words mean. *Student*

Students had to grapple with a range of new thinking processes, a wide range of reading content and a lexicon of new language.

It is heavily text based. It requires students to explore ideas. There is quite a lot of conceptual work in it and then there is just the process of absorbing information. Fact based information, quantitative and structural information. *FE Teacher*

I think they are more embarrassed about not being able to keep up with discussions and conversations in class. *FE Teacher*

In subjects that present new conceptual challenges they obviously understand them at a certain level, but to what extent they make it their own and make it useful is another question. *FE Teacher*

Some unhelpful practice by teachers was also identified by students. Some students described leaving classes not knowing what had been said during sessions; or teachers rushing ahead assuming that students were keeping abreast of the progress of the majority of the class group.

Things are talked about but not explained. *Student*

Common assumptions made by teachers that every student was familiar with tools such as timetables, dictionaries and thesauruses were also described as problematic and disempowering for students.

It was nearly Christmas before I copped you need a dictionary, but I don't know how to use a dictionary. I've never been shown. *Student*

For many students lack of confidence and fear of being labelled as stupid by peers stopped them looking for clarification of the meaning of words and this in turn led to greater confusion and isolation.

Course-related literacy issues

Students interviewed described both the reading and writing elements of their vocational courses as significant. For some the load was felt to be overwhelming in size and dimension. Even the size of some texts was daunting.

Look at the size of that. Look at the contents page. Its four pages long, I'm never going to get through that. *Student*

It was acknowledged that different courses had differing amounts of both reading and writing. Much of the reading materials were described as complicated, complex and challenging for those with literacy needs. Furthermore students were not always clear about the purpose and relevance of required reading.

The main issues for students in relation to course writing included satisfactorily completing report writing, reflective journaling and course assignments. Issues identified were myriad. Understanding the assignment briefs, the challenge of structuring assignments - 'getting ideas into order and onto the page' - requirements in relation to 'academic' writing and

conventions, research skills, presentation, phrasing and 'correct grammar' are all referred to in the data.

Mirroring some of the data collected from students, teachers confirmed course literacy tasks as report writing, assignment preparation including research skills, note taking (in class and from a variety of reference sources), letter and report writing. Subject teachers had no doubt that many students had significant unmet language and literacy needs and this had a notable impact on the pace at which the curriculum could be delivered.

Literacy is becoming overwhelming in the college. *FE Teacher*

It's very difficult to get them to read the required reading. *FE Teacher*

Some students find it difficult even using basic skills of using an index, finding information relevant to the topic area and synopsising this. *FE Teacher*

Assignments and their timetabling greatly exercised students. The differing practice of teachers in relation to assignment briefs was highlighted; whilst some briefs were deemed to be excellent, clear and helpful others were described as confusing and unclear. Students wanted more time in class to discuss and clarify the work they were being asked to do.

If the teacher explains the brief it's useful. With more information you could do better in an essay. *Student*

The erratic assignment load has resulted in a negative cycle for some students, who said that they miss out college time in order to 'catch up' on work. This in turn makes it difficult to return to class as in efforts to catch up some students continued to miss class time and were falling further behind in terms of their work. There was anecdotal evidence that not everyone remained in college in the face of this pressure.

I missed a day yesterday because I was looking for information. Because of the pressure I had to take the day off to go and look for the information. I don't think it's right because I'm missing school over it (trying to find information). I was at the stage where I was going to leave the College I was so stressed. But somebody from outside talked to me and told me to stay. *Student*

I think the impact in the main with a lot of students with literacy difficulties is that they opt out. *FE Teacher*

In terms of computer literacy teachers also felt the pressure of course requirements. Juggling the demands of delivering the vocational course whilst addressing language and literacy issues of students is felt as a heavy load.

You just don't have the time to spend ages going through how to write a letter, where your comma should go, where your full stop goes. You're just focussed on getting them through. *FE Teacher*

Having the skills to address these language and literacy needs is also an issue for staff and one where different positions are taken.

Tutors would say, 'this is not what we are about. We can't be about this', and they can't. *FE Teacher*

Many teachers have full timetables and it is difficult to find time to reflect on and develop practice. Teachers were keenly aware of the difficulties students faced when completing assignments. Whilst many recognised the centrality of writing clear unambiguous supportive briefs for students, some teachers felt they needed training, support and guidelines around the task.

Having time to develop methodologies that are participative and engage students is also a pressure on teachers. In the past FETAC provided this type of training but this is no longer the remit of FETAC. This is a sectoral issue that may need attention as teachers are clearly seeking support.

Teachers are aware of the demand to keep up to date with development in IT and many believed they had fallen behind in this vital area of learning.

Affective issues

During the interviews with students and college staff much reference was made to the complex feelings and emotions experienced by students and observed by college staff. Terror, agitation, shame, embarrassment, panic, excitement and joy were all named.

Coming back into further education 'being a student - being a learner' all those broader things are what terrify people, or excite people. *FE Teacher*

You be so caught up in being stupid, or 'I can't take it in' or 'I can't retain it'. Its blocking me...people shut down. *Student*

Because it's hard to get past that, 'can I do it?' or 'Can I really do it?' or 'Would I be able for it?' *Student*

I'm having a great time. It's a good journey so far. *Student*

Students who have had a negative experience of learning in the past need particular empathy and understanding if they are to progress successfully to their vocational career.

See it's not about the actual learning. It's about the issues you have cooked up in you - the built up issues. *Student*

Course demands were lessened and made manageable by teachers who developed a respectful adult relationship with students. Students described the practice of many teachers as one of 'going the extra mile', staying behind after class to give individual feedback and support. Consequently, they felt that in general teachers cared deeply about their progress.

In a small number of cases, negative attitudes displayed in tone of voice or body language were also quickly picked up by students and consequently influenced how they engaged in courses and coursework.

The College's strong ethos of care was clearly apparent in the data collected from teachers. They expressed deep concern for student welfare and well-being.

What makes the college work is the nature of the relationship that tutors have with students. If you are in a relationship with students in a particular way you know more. You learn more about them and therefore you are able to help them. *College management*

You have to help them you know. You have to give them a second chance or a third chance or a fourth chance to hand their work in. *FE Teacher*

Substantial guilt and frustration was also expressed by staff that had difficulty '*getting the message across*' in their subject area and this was accompanied by fears about their students' preparedness and performance in exams.

Some staff realised that students' anxieties were dispelled through taking ownership of new concepts and that this was in turn dependent on their ability to make successful learning relationships. The gamut of emotions from joy to despair was described in relation to dealing with the language and literacy aspects of courses and staff members were conscious of the need to manage

students' fears about new language demands. Many staff interviewed spoke of the need for time, training and help in integrating language and literacy development into their courses so that their day-to-day work might become more effective and less emotionally draining.

Learning Support Service (LSS)

Those students accessing Learning Support found it both helpful and empowering. The literacy support specialists were highly praised in terms of expertise and attitudes. At the same time, student perception was that the service was often overstretched and this resulted in some students not accessing the service when they needed to. Ironically, some students sought help elsewhere so as not to overburden LSS.

Teachers too expressed high levels of satisfaction with the concept and practice of the LSS. However the data also suggests that a significant issue for LSS is its 'remedial' and stigmatised image within the college that in turn reflects the wider social culture.

There's a good few people in my class that would need to go but they won't go. I'd say they're thinking what other people would think you know. *Student*

It has some connotations about shame. Even the room, you learn. People saying, 'Oh! There's the room. *Student*

The name 'Learning Support' itself add to this image as many young students have negative associations with the term from their earlier educational experience. 32% of those interviewed in the student questionnaire had a negative image of the term 'learning support'. It is not only students who make this association. It is vital that staff throughout FE update their use of language and don't contribute to negative images of LSS by the use of stigmatised terms such as 'remedial.'

Presenting a positive image of the service needs systematic planning and whole organisation co-ordination. Despite efforts, many students interviewed did not know of the existence or location of the service until late in the academic year.

There isn't enough literature around the building giving information on where the Learning Support Service is. *Student*

I think they need to know that there is support there from the outset. No good when it is too late. It has to be early on. *FE Teacher*

Every student should be let know, maybe when they start college and it should be said a few times. I think the way of doing that is through teachers and through notices. *Student*

Time to maintain and develop relationships between the LSS and the wider teaching staff was also seen to be of importance in the success of the service.

The class tutor is very influential in deciding whether people will access this or not. *Literacy specialist*

The data confirm that LSS relieves pressure on teachers but that 1:1 tutorials alone are not enough. The presence of LSS has contributed to raised awareness of language and literacy needs and has correspondingly increased demand. This is inevitable and presents resource issues in terms of staffing and space, materials and staff development.

Both staff and students want the LSS to be more able to respond both to the predictable and the more spontaneous demands of students and colleagues. They also want a more visible, comprehensive service that includes vocational as well as language and literacy specialist support and includes IT as a necessary literacy for the contemporary workplace. The shape of this extended LSS emerges from the data as a pivotal part of a whole college approach to integrating language and literacy for all students and courses. LSS would also have a significant role in planning, supporting and delivering whole group workshops and course modules with subject specialists. Many staff asked for LSS to become a support for them as well as for their students.

Whole college

The data about whole college approaches to language and literacy support and development will be described and analysed in a separate section. However staff and students raised a number of issues that are noteworthy at this point. Teachers described feelings of isolation in relation to dealing with the issues of unmet literacy and language needs of students. Some teachers worked informally with other teachers, but there was a sense that there might be more cohesive college-wide coordination of action on this important issue.

Teachers appreciated and welcomed the college's ongoing efforts in relation to staff development and believed that building even more opportunities into the timetable for such work would be very beneficial to both staff and students. Time for collective reflection and group work would further help address and develop cohesive whole college approaches to tackling the issue of unmet language and literacy needs of the student body.

The research revealed a number of individual issues that were ripe for attention across the college. These include course assignments, staff support and development in the pedagogical issues of integrating literacy in subject delivery and the recognition and resourcing of IT literacy in the FE sector.

Assignment briefs

The range of approaches to assignment briefs epitomised a sense of fragmentation. The data suggest that tutors are aware of uneven practice in terms of writing assignment briefs and work is currently being done to address these issues.

Having multiple assignments to complete over short periods of time was highlighted as an unnecessary pressure. Students suggested that teachers should co-ordinate the timetabling of distributing assignments and that an assignment plan be developed and shared with the students early in the academic year. This step would facilitate students in the planning of their course work in the context of generally busy adult lives. This would provide a whole college solution to an issue that students feel acutely.

They hit you with assignments. They just whack you with them. *Student*

Information technology

Students described difficulty in accessing essential IT facilities. Many students did not have personal computers and relied on the college computers to do research and write assignments. Some had to use Internet cafes for this work and this was both inconvenient and costly for students.

Other students had little or no computer skills before entering college and this required a considerable learning curve for students. Many felt that the college had not adequately addressed this.

The biggest problem I have this year is people who are computer illiterate. They do not know how to use a mouse or keyboard. They are adults who are lost in a class that is based on research and internet research. *FE Teacher*

Teachers were also keenly aware of the lack of up-to-date IT facilities in the college and characterised these as 'inadequate' in an era where there was such reliance on ICT in the modern world of learning and work.

Conclusions about issues

Language and literacy issues emerge as central to FE. Students, staff and the whole college's systems are concerned in some ways with easing their integration in the day-to-day business of adult learning. The data show that new beginnings in FE are part of an emotional journey for many. A new identity is envisioned that is intricately related to achieving 'college student' status. With this comes the hope that additional skills will open doors to further study, work and greater economic independence. At the same time there often needs to be an opportunity to leave a negative learning history behind so that the imagined optimism can become reality. Students in the research described a roller coaster of hopes and fears about fitting in with peers and coping with college work. How these emotions are managed determines the ensuing steps into adult learning.

Language and literacy issues too need to be managed carefully in these early college days so that they do not lead to dashed hopes and dreams for new learners. This includes the prompt identification of support needs. However, adjusting to a new culture, language and customs require time and support and students articulate the need to find their bearings before being swamped with course demands.

The literature and the data both strongly suggest that in the first stages of an FE course, subject and vocational tutors have the potential to present a positive image of language and literacy as an essential part of the new and desired vocational identity. Their advocacy for language and literacy has the

capacity to transform the profile of LSS and the services it offers. When language and literacy are explicitly integrated throughout all learning they cease to be a fractured, stigmatised activity. Rather than remaining associated with past inadequacies LSS can then become a partner in achieving the chosen new identity, an essential part of which involves strong language and literacy skills.

There is a tension for staff between their desire to support learning and the resources at their disposal. Meeting the real-time language and literacy needs of FE learners requires a whole organisation approach that coordinates and paces course demands and supports staff across the college. The concept of integrating language and literacy support throughout all teaching requires opportunities for training, reflection and collaboration between subject and literacy specialists. It also requires access to the IT resources of the modern workplace. Some staff members have a greater understanding for and leaning towards this work and with some small resources they may be able to support other colleagues. Teachers want to develop their skills in integrating literacy and need support to take ownership of the process, develop subject-specific tools and approaches that are grounded in an inclusive, adult learning ethos.

Time and again relationships emerged in the data as vital to a good learning experience for both staff and students. Student research participants described the importance of a learning environment founded on power-sharing relationships of trust and respect. Peer learning groups, class groups, staff-student relationships and inter-staff collaborations were all highlighted in the data. Such pivotal significance attached to the affective aspects of learning suggests that work needs to be done at organisational level to ensure these learning relationships are effective and can flourish within an enabling college system.

The stigma attached to having unmet literacy needs does not remain outside the doors of FE colleges. Like other inequalities it is reflected in educational practices and structures. In order to change the culture of language and literacy within FE a conscious decision and concerted effort needs to be

made. The evidence from this study suggests that FE presents a significant opportunity to contribute to resolving the unmet language and literacy needs of individuals. In so doing, FE can develop an expertise in overcoming past literacy neglect that will make it the gateway to a more confident adult learning community. This has positive implications for individuals and communities and for the aspirations of civil society and the state.

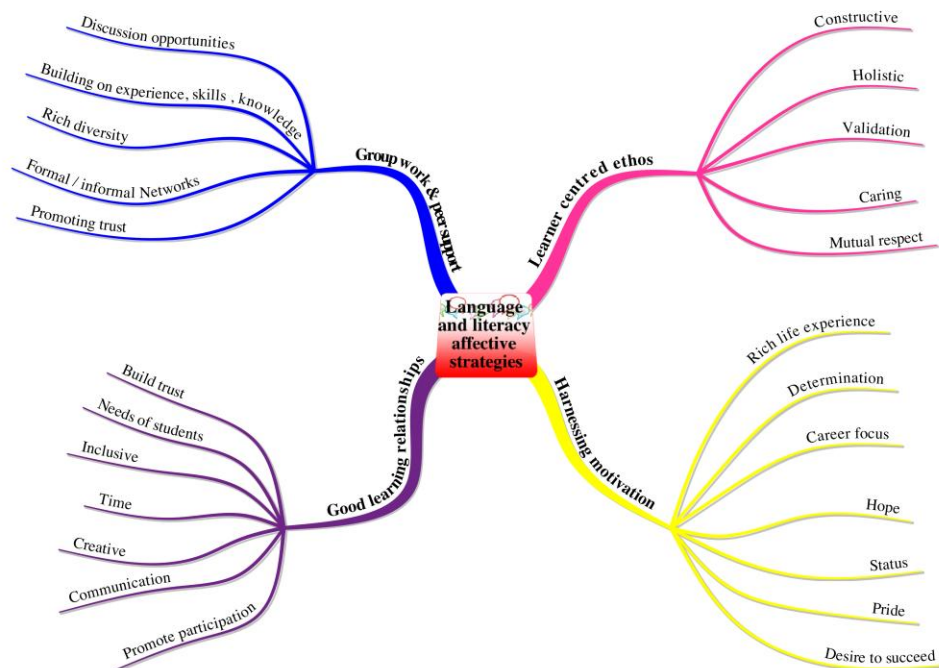
Section 2: Effective language and literacy support and development strategies used by students, subject teachers and learning support literacy specialists

Introduction

Section 1 of the findings outlined the issues that arise at FETAC Level 5 for students and subject teachers. Now in Section 2 we explore the data about strategies that are used by students, subject and literacy specialists to deal with those issues. Solutions to language and literacy challenges were clearly just as much affective as pedagogical in nature and this mirrors the importance given to learning relationships throughout the theoretical and empirical literature. Not surprisingly, a social practice perspective on language and literacy suggests that we recognise both the essential relational and skills basis of literacy learning and literacy events. The findings from our ethnographic case study of FE confirm that relationship matters, as well as skilled learning facilitation, are of pivotal significance in adult learning. This emerges as especially pertinent for those whose prior experience of learning have left them with less reason to trust the education system.

The findings about effective language and literacy strategies are outlined in two parts that deal with affective and pedagogical strategies used to support and develop language and literacy at Level 5. The practical issues of coming to grips with course demands have a strong relational ingredient but are included here as part of the pedagogical process. There is some inevitable, inseparable overlap between the two parts.

Mind map 2 : Affective language and literacy strategies for students and teachers



Strategies in the affective domain

A learner-centred ethos

Teachers interviewed in the partner college strongly believed that a learner-centred and holistic approach to teaching resulted in the best possible outcomes for students. Whilst a range of practical strategies was identified, the values and approach of the teacher was seen to be key in the successful engagement and participation of all learners. Throughout the College the strong ethos of care for individual learners and collective class groupings was apparent. This was borne out by student and staff comments alike.

Every single teacher I've had so far - they're just great help and I think they're actually great at teaching their subjects as well. *Student*

If they (students) are in trouble I say to them 'go to the tutor and explain. You will get nothing but kindness'. *College canteen staff*

If we give a place to a student, we then have a duty of care to that student.
FE Teacher

Harnessing motivation

While the transition into FE was identified in Section 1 as a time when difficulties could emerge for students, it was also identified as a time of opportunity. Teachers recognised that students were highly motivated early in the year and that this motivation and their rich prior life experience was a sturdy platform upon which to build.

The will to succeed in a formal education setting is there. It's powerful for somebody who hasn't succeeded in the mainstream and being part of a big college has great status. You take your place at graduation with others. So that's powerful and I think we have to continue to make that powerful. *FE Teacher*

Data collected from students confirmed this viewpoint. Students described high levels of excitement, pride and hope about their choice of vocational course. Many believed it was the first step onto a rewarding career path. Students described this motivation as a driving force that would help them to meet the challenges faced during college life.

I'll get there eventually. It is a career I'd like to pursue. *Student*

Students' strong desire to do well reflected the findings in the literature that identified this enthusiasm and energy as a pivotal force that needs to be actively harnessed as a positive base for language and literacy development.

I'm on the road to getting a career here and I hope I'm just going to stay in education for as long as I can. I'm just aiming to get all distinctions this year. *Student*

I really wanted to come in and get something. I wanted to be a youth worker. *Student*

A determination to succeed is particularly present in the early days of college and is closely linked to the perceived status of attending a full time FE course.

Good learning relationships

Teachers show a keen awareness of the needs of students in these early days and strive to place the formation of good relationships at the centre of their practice. Teachers highlighted the importance of creating an open, inclusive, participatory, safe and creative learning environment. These values were seen as fundamental to developing successful and mutually respectful relationships with students.

We've discovered what makes the college work is the nature of the relationship that tutors have with students. I think we invest a lot in that and believe in that. If you're in a relationship with students in a particular kind of way you know more, you learn more about them and therefore you can organise things in such a way that makes it easier for students to do what they need to do or to ask for help. *FE Teacher*

Teachers were cognisant of the fact that students carried different experiences of the education system into this new learning context and that those who had negative experiences needed time to adjust to this new learning environment

Maybe they didn't have a good experience of school before now. This is all different because they are meeting people who are open and friendly and who are not doing them down. *FE Teacher*

The way this ethos of care was implemented both generally, and specifically in relation to language and literacy, was reflected in the experiences recounted by many students of their college life.

She held our hand so to speak - did the first assignment bit by bit. *Student*

They'd stop and talk to you outside. Even teachers I wouldn't have but they'd know me and say, 'how are you getting on?' *Student*

They're very accommodating. If you are stuck you can bring your assignment in to them. They're on for helping. They will come in early and do it for everyone. *Student*

More specifically, LSS articulates a holistic model of building good working relationships with students in the context of language and literacy. The service recognises the importance of the impact of both students past learning experience and the wider context of their present lives on their attitude and approach to learning. Through attending to both the task and process of the

work undertaken with students they provide the basis for a useful and productive learning experience.

The purpose of it is to work with the students. I suppose the main focus being the academic or the literacy and language demands of their course. To make them as clear and manageable as possible and to help the students learn how to be students. How to access the kind of information they need but then how to make it their own in a way that makes sense to them. It is linked in with social practice and an empathy with where an awful lot of the students are coming from. *Literacy specialist*

Group work and peer support

Group work was a method frequently used by teachers as a way of generating discussion, developing relationships and trust. Teachers recognised that this method encourages the sharing of language, skills and experience and the possibility of highlighting and making explicit the expertise already present in the lived experience of students.

Students often learn more from each other than they do from a teacher. The student is coming in with ideas, and the bits that the student has understood that the teacher was talking about. That's better reinforcement for students than the teacher doing it. *FE Teacher*

Peer support can usefully extend beyond the classroom.

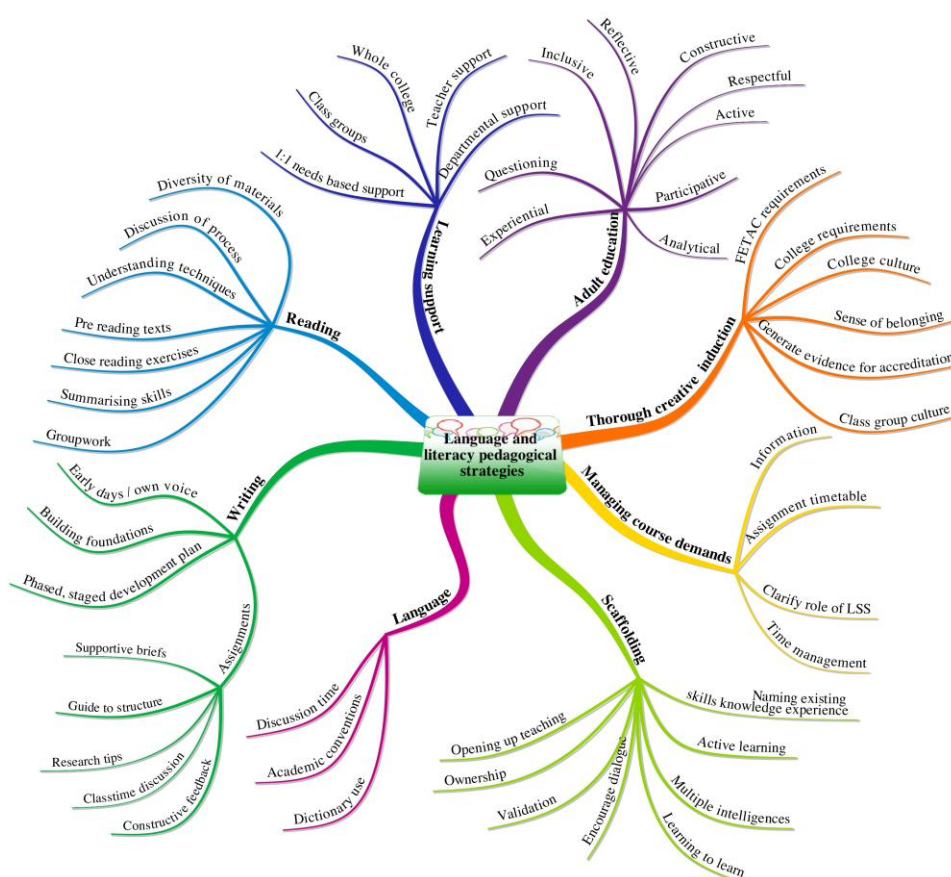
You're going along and not getting stuff done. It's not happening, you don't know where you're at. So we worked together as a class. *Student*

The data suggests that developing networks of peer support was one of the most successful strategies used by students. Tapping into the group experience and knowledge proved to be a rich pool from which to draw support and advice. Some students were involved in formalised arrangements with peers whilst others worked in more informal networks. Some of these groups worked together at specific times within the college whilst others met sporadically and at 'crisis' times outside of the campus in people's homes or local cafés.

One student gave an example of setting up a support group that successfully 'translated' assignment briefs into user friendly and familiar language for their class. Teachers actively supported this approach by helping to set groups up during class time especially at pressured moments.

At this stage of the year I would be saying to people, 'you've got to work with each other. You've got to help one another, share resources, pool them and reflect on the experience.' *FE Teacher*

Mind map 3: Effective pedagogical language and literacy strategies for students and teachers.



Effective pedagogical strategies

Practical strategies for the early days

Teachers and students highlighted the importance of the early days of college for coming to grips with the content of courses as well as the cultural aspects of FE. The ease or difficulty with which people moved into their new identity as college students closely impacted on their engagement and participation in their studies. Key factors of successful integration into college life during the settling in period included:

- Clear Information
- A sense of belonging
- Feelings of safety and security
- Validation
- A constructivist approach.

Time spent getting to know the culture of the classroom and college was felt to be important for new learners. Teachers described participation in a thorough college induction course as part of a strategy for building firm foundations as an FE student. In these early days students have many questions they need answered. These questions are in relation to both practical and emotional issues.

- *What exactly will I have to do while I am here?*
- *What is expected of me?*
- *Who will I be in class with? Will I fit in?*
- *Will I be laughed at?*
- *Will I be made to feel foolish?*
- *Will I be able to do this? Will I fail?*

Aware of the sensitivities around language and literacy issues, one college department used a creative text free approach to induction using drama and role-play as a means of integrating students into college life.

We tried to get people away from reading and writing in the early days, settle them in. *FE Teacher*

Student feedback identified this work as being key to helping them settle into college and teachers observed that a good group-learning dynamic emerged as a result of this work. Staff reported that a better retention rate resulted from this unpressured relational work in the first few weeks. Furthermore it sustained the group throughout the duration of the course.

One teacher studied student application forms from the college interview procedure as an advance indicator of possible issues around language and literacy needs of her class group. This additional information was useful in

planning and targeting strategies to support students with language and literacy needs in their early college days.

The Learning Support Service provides workshops for students in these early college days to support students to reflect on strategies that will help them take control over their own learning.

I break them into groups and I ask them to discuss with one another the kind of difficulties or obstacles that would hinder their full participation in the year. I ask them to look at possible solutions, to look at what they have control over and no control over. It's a good session. *Literacy specialist*

Learning to manage course demands

As part of the process of becoming an FE learner, students stressed the importance of taking personal responsibility for their own work in college. Managing and planning the workload over the course of the year was important for students and having detailed information about the demands of each module helped them respond to course requirements. Students suggested that a timetable of assignments mapping briefs for each module would be useful at the beginning of the academic year.

We need to know all of the demands in advance so we can plan. *Student*

Closely linked to having an accurate picture of course demands, learning to manage time efficiently was also believed to be key to success. Developing successful strategies in relation to this was perceived to be a core study skill by students.

At the same time as students become clear about the demands of their particular course they also need to be made aware of the supports available should they begin to experience difficulties. Students believed that knowing about the LSS early on in the year was essential and that it should be promoted more widely throughout the college and the academic year.

Have a learning support service in place and for it to be known from the get-go is vital. When you register it should be clear the Learning Support Service is here – for example have it on the website and on the leaflets. *Student*

Many students reported that it was difficult to absorb all the new information they were given at induction and strategies that ease this information overload were called for. There was an obvious need for the concept of support to be presented in an attractive and creative way and to be maintained and restated frequently.

Scaffolding language and literacy learning

One teacher described the role of the teacher in FE in terms of finding the communicative methods that allowed them to really share subject knowledge with students.

Opening up your teaching – finding a language and literacy way of doing it - opening up your subject to students. *FE Teacher*

This opening up of a subject's language requires certain pre-conditions to exist in terms of both the relationship and practice of teachers and students. It is built on an understanding of learning scaffolded around existing knowledge and interests and paced to support understanding at a deep level. The process is investigative and interrogative.

The only stupid question is the one not asked. *FE Teacher*

Developing a learning environment where questioning and discussion are the norm requires some attention to setting up class time in a way that is inclusive of all participants. Some teachers worked with students on developing a shared understanding and agreement about what is expected in terms of developing a safe and rewarding learning environment where everyone has a say and all contributions are valued. They abandoned traditional one-way exchanges of knowledge and facilitated the group to build their own learning collective.

Taking a constructivist approach to teaching and learning was described as positive and empowering pedagogy.

I'd be very conscious of starting from what they know and building on that. *FE Teacher*

Some teachers used Mind Maps as a learning tool to encourage students to use and develop their diverse ways of processing new knowledge. In this

way, as well as including verbal and numeric skills, they appealed to spatial, kinaesthetic and visual strengths and provided learners with new learning tools. The usefulness of including time to consider and understand different learning paces, styles and multiple intelligences early in the year also emerged from data collected from teachers.

I start to look at how they have been taught to learn and how they should have been taught to learn. They come to the realisation that there are new skills they can learn. They're doing keyword notation, memory schemes and rhyming schemes early on. *FE Teacher*

Teachers and students agreed that there also had to be an enjoyable, a fun element to learning. Building in this approach can dynamically enliven and energise both learners and teachers.

They appreciate the interactive classes. They like relating the texts to their own lives. I do things they can relax with, that they can have fun with. *FE Teacher*

You're always doing something different. You learn something new every day. Everyday is a new challenge and you're learning something and it is fun. You know it can be challenging at times but there's always a fun element to it. Student

Time invested in clarifying with students the breadth of demands of FETAC accreditation was seen to be a pragmatic method of giving some ownership of the course language over to students. One teacher had developed a glossary of FETAC language for groups and believed this to be a useful and supportive underpinning tool for use throughout the year. Others further extended this approach to develop a glossary of terms for each subject course module.

Teachers acknowledged and highlighted the range of levels of language and literacy within the classroom early in the college year. This approach brought the issue into the open and encouraged discussion. Teachers shared their own experience of learning and its challenges and found that this helped students to recognise mutual experiences. The approach encouraged students to discuss their past learning experience and current language and literacy learning needs and this in turn helped develop trust within the teacher student relationship and amongst the peer group.

I regularly get spellings wrong in class and I'd say, 'is that right?' and I would talk a lot about spelling and that sometimes the mechanics can be difficult. It

is as important to engage with the text. We can work on the rest together. *FE Teacher*

I would discuss openly my own issues around literacy. I mean I'm not great at spelling and I say, 'look, if I put anything wrong on the blackboard, let me know'. *FE Teacher*

It wasn't like a teacher. It was personal. Like at times they'd tell you their own things and you'd really mellow into it, you know. *Student*

The active promotion and use of dictionaries and thesauruses was also used as a means to further extend language skills.

Finding another en route to the target word is a beautiful way of learning. *FE Teacher*

It was wrong to assume that everyone owned or was able to use reference books and many needed support with this.

Providing a range of materials containing a variety of language usage across a continuum from colloquial to vocational to academic was a stepped approach to opening up new knowledge. It was a way to encourage students to 'translate' materials to user-friendly familiar language and to get access to and ownership of ideas. Teachers highlighted allowing adequate time for rehearsal, discussion and understanding of new words and concepts as key to the success of this learning process. In turn this approach promoted real ownership of and familiarity with new vocational and academic language.

Writing

An array of approaches is being used by teachers to develop students' writing skills. Teachers emphasised the importance of the first term – the term where robust foundations can be built. Staff described students' nervousness when it comes to the first writing exercises of the college year. Encouraging students to write in their own voice about interests and aspirations is the first step for many teachers in supporting students to put pen to paper. Others ask students to take a text passage and re-write it in their own words, encouraging ownership and confidence in the students.

Classes who have greater literacy and language needs initially require more class time to discuss and question course texts.

More time is spent answering their questions, the classes are more discussion based. I would also spend more time reassuring them to move them along with me. *FE Teacher*

Writing assignments

Much anxiety for students is centred on writing assignments. Teachers and students both suggested that assignment briefs are critical documents. Currently the style of briefs varies within the college and across departments. Teachers recommended that assignment briefs be supportive and clearly written for students. A range of strategies was suggested including providing a detailed guide for the structuring of assignments, a suggested outline of what might be included and an indication of where and how research might most usefully be carried out. Equally time given to class discussion and clarification of briefs was seen to be key in further supporting students achieve the best grades possible.

Time spent supporting students to draft assignments, to practice and develop writing skills and resourcing time for individual constructive feedback were all identified as helpful in growing students' writing confidence and ultimately to their ongoing engagement in courses.

Trust is the word I would use to describe what happens after the first assignment. When they do their first essay I give everybody a good twenty minutes or more of feedback and this draft goes into their final collection of work. I always find that people who were slumped in that area get a new energy after they get the feedback. *FE Teacher*

One teacher described a planned and staged approach where students were given a challenging paragraph to work on early in the first term. This paragraph was read individually and students were asked to discuss the meaning of the paragraph in small groups. Students then condensed the essence of the paragraph into one sentence. This was followed by more class discussion and writing. Students then summarised the paragraph in three sentences.

What I was trying to do was get them to actually in front of me, on the spot, to read and write to try and identify what was crucial, what was necessary, what was nice to know. To be able to filter out the superfluous for our process. Then I got people to write paragraphs and they really liked it. *FE Teacher*

Students enjoyed the 'instant success' factor of the exercise. At the end of the exercise each one had the first paragraph of an assignment completed. They also had a model of work that was portable across all modules. The teacher also noted that the exercise had the added bonus of encouraging good group bonding and they had opportunities to practice their communication and negotiation skills.

Some teachers approached assignments as a group task. One department took a creative approach and students designed their assignment around a group display. The assignment was broken down into different tasks during class discussion. Students then worked in pre-defined groups on different areas of the assignment. Background texts and information were presented to the group and these were studied and summarised in class through close reading and discussion. Language and literacy work was supplemented and developed through dictionary work and each student developed individual student notebooks with relevant glossaries of key terms.

Reading

One teacher outlined an approach to teaching students to understand and take control of reading tasks. Teaching the process and mechanics of reading is understood by this teacher to be a foundation skill for college work.

I brainstormed with the group what it is you need to be doing when you're reading. How you actually read. Down to the micro details. Pausing, re-reading and then the active questioning; the matching of what the person is saying with what you know already. *FE Teacher*

Other strategies used by teachers to promote, develop and extend students reading skills included supplying a range of materials with different levels of complexity and difficulty to all students. Early approaches in the term included using texts and materials that closely reflected the lives of students and as the year progressed teachers introduced broader and more challenging texts.

One teacher described her approach as careful selection and introduction of texts to students. She aims to select a number of readings that encompass

newspaper and magazine articles as well as more complex and challenging styles of texts. She acknowledges that some of these texts on their own could *'make some people give up'* but believes that in carefully choosing and presenting a range of materials she captures the imagination and interest of the whole class group. Texts are distributed in advance and students are invited to do some pre-reading of them before class. They are then read together in small groups in the classroom and salient points are highlighted and discussed before discussion begins in the larger class grouping.

Teachers frequently simplified texts and encouraged students to re-word them in their own language.

She's weaning us in. She's doing the right thing. You get all the background first. You get a bit of knowledge on what you're going to do. There's lots of discussion in the class. She explains an awful lot and lets you give your point of view. *Student*

Teachers were conscious of not 'short changing' students by oversimplifying texts or limiting the complexity of reading materials used by students.

I would not want them to be denied access to the thinking. I think that's important. *FE Teacher*

Focused close reading in small groups was also a successful strategy and had the additional benefit of encouraging the sharing of experience and expertise amongst students.

Effective Strategies used by learning support

Although LSS is a cross-college facility, it is involved in a range of strategic approaches to support and develop language and literacy that merit discussion here. The use of LSS is itself a coping strategy adopted by learners and encouraged by their subject teachers. Some staff also use LSS for advise and to develop their own practice in relation to language and literacy issues that they find challenging.

Methods of working with students

When students first begin work with the LSS they identify their support needs in discussion with the tutor. A realistic plan is agreed and a short-term review date is arranged. If further support is needed a new agreement is made.

Language and literacy work carried out with students is wide-ranging and varied. It can range from structuring ideas for reports and assignments, improving spelling and punctuation to helping students clarify their thinking and 'getting their ideas onto the page'. All work is situated in the course context.

She came about her spelling. We actually work on her assignments and it's through her assignments we work on her spelling. Like she'd have things like 'their' and 'there' or basic things she will have wrong. Sometimes she'll try and say something and it's not clear in her sentence. So it's only through her assignments or doing them that we'll work on the spelling. We wouldn't actually spend a class working on spelling in isolation. *Literacy specialist*

1:1 work in LSS

Subject teachers valued the 1:1 work done by LSS with students and saw it as one vital layer of support that provided students with additional resources to those available in the whole group situation.

If it's something new their head goes into panic and they immediately say I don't understand this. When they go to a learning support tutor they can breathe more slowly and they put a framework on it and then that hopefully helps the situation. *FE Teacher*

Throughout the year some teachers actively promoted the LSS as a support strategy for all learners to consider. This was mostly done during class time and integrated into teaching practice. In some instances teachers suggested to individual students that they might use LSS and this was generally done during individual feedback timeslots.

Students who regularly used the service were clear that it was a key factor in their successful engagement in their vocational courses.

The support is something else. I must say it is brilliant. Really, really good. *Student*

Puts you on track of being on your own feet. *Student*

I'd be lost if I didn't have it to go to. *Student*

1:1 provision was especially important to individual students who described the additional service as key to their ability to manage the language and literacy demands of their courses.

If a teacher sat up there and did that on the board and everybody else was sitting there I don't be able to take it in when there's an awful lot of people in the room. I need someone to be there with me and I'd be able to take it in. *Student*

You can sit in a classroom and be tutored and taught to take notes but if you don't have this (LSS) to back you up in there you're wasting your time in the classroom. You need someone to help you to break it down into language you understand. *Student*

Confidence gained from working with the LSS and charting progress was also significant for individual students in terms of strategies that would support them in continuing to flourish on their courses.

I can take all my learning and reflect it into my writing. I think I've come on in leaps and bounds since last year. The teachers have said it. My quality of writing and my style is getting a bit better and it can only get better. *Student*

Accompanying individual learners

Taking time to actively listen to the learning needs of students is core to the practice of LSS. This good relational foundation can in turn encourage students to accurately identify their language and literacy learning needs and exemplifies the need for a balanced affective/pedagogical approach.

I thought myself it would be all spelling and that, but sometimes they just need to talk out the concerns they are having around a certain topic. *FE Teacher*

A listening ear is part of the service. And I think building up confidence is part of the service as well. *FE Teacher*

She sat with me one day and read through stuff with me and then she'd say at times, 'I have to look that up myself' so then I'd start feeling more comfortable with her. She'd spell something herself and she'd go 'well I have to think about this' and then I start thinking well fair enough. So it was building up a bond. *Student*

What I like about it is that she just sits with you and that you can have time to get the work done. She kind of learns you more, like 'what do you think that means?' and like she'd read an essay out to me and she'd say well, 'you put it in your own words', like 'what do you think about it?' you know so it kind of opens your mind a little bit that way. *Student*

The starting point for this empowering practice is in recognising the prior skills, knowledge and experience already present when students first begin work with LSS.

And all you are doing while you are here is getting knowledge; specific knowledge that you need for your future. And all you are going to do is take that and add it to what you already know, make sense of it and be able to use it. That's what this whole thing is about. *Literacy specialist*

Building students confidence in taking on the role of 'college student' is also part of the learning work that LSS does with students. Students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences, hopes, fears and expectations in order to take hold of and direct their own learning and experience of college culture and life. What many students can do as part of a group, some need additional support with and LSS provided this as part of a holistic approach to learning.

I think a lot of the work we do is around that sort of empowering of people. We recognise that not everything can be accredited and there's so much that there's no Specific Learning Outcome for. *Literacy specialist*

LSS support for teachers

Teachers also recognised the importance of the support and advice provided to them by LSS. One example of this was the work done in partnership with a Childcare course. Class teachers were having difficulties clarifying for students an aspect of their course that involved carrying out and recording workplace observations. They worked together with LSS to devise a lunchtime workshop on the topic and this was very well attended and considered a great success by both teachers and students alike. This has led the Childcare Department to standardise the workshop and it is now being delivered across the vocational modules of the Department.

LSS whole class group work

Students mentioned group interventions by LSS as supportive when faced by the language and literacy issues related to course demands. They particularly liked the whole class approach as this did not single out individuals as being in need but rather assumed that all students were experiencing the challenges of coursework. These whole organisation aspects of LSS will be discussed in detail in Section 3 of the findings.

Conclusions about strategies

Much of the data relating to strategies that were used by students, subject and literacy specialists to support language and literacy were in the affective domain. This provided clear evidence of the centrality of relational and emotional aspects of learning. It particularly highlighted the affective needs of adult learners whose early schooling has been unhappy and has failed to identify and develop their strengths. Allaying fears, facilitating group formation and collective approaches to learning and building self-esteem were shown to be necessary strategies if learners are to settle into the FE college system.

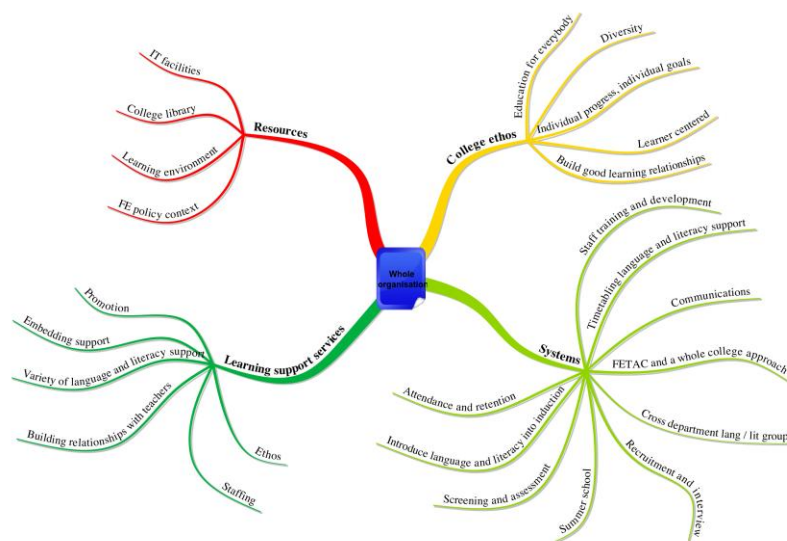
The strategies adopted by the partner college in the early days were important in determining student retention and achievement. Time spent on relationship-building and clarifying course requirements was well spent. When non-text ways of doing this group work were used this was found to be particularly inclusive and effective. It also emerged that it was helpful for students to find out about the range of learning supports as soon as possible so that they do not fall behind when challenges occur.

Some subject teachers had developed a range of ways of consciously supporting and developing language and literacy using an integrated approach. Many of these methods were constructivist in nature, building on existing knowledge and strategically scaffolding the acquisition of new language, concepts and knowledge. Where this integrated approach was planned cooperatively with literacy specialists this was shown to be an effective process that lead to learning being replicated and developed.

LSS is an important support and development service across the college. Students and staff both value the language and literacy expertise exemplified in LSS and would like to see them expand and develop across all courses. To some extent LSS already functions as a central hub for strategies that support an integrated approach to language and literacy. There is a strong belief in the benefits that would ensue if this pivotal role were to be further strengthened.

Section 3 now looks at the findings about emerging whole college systems and procedures for language and literacy support in FE.

Mind map 4: Emerging whole college systems and procedures for language and literacy support and development across FE



Section 3: Emerging whole college systems and procedures for language and literacy support and development across FE

Introduction

The ethnographic research process allowed us to gather data from individuals and focus groups about how language and literacy feature in their day-to-day college experience. The previous findings' sections have concentrated on identifying the language and literacy issues that arise at FETAC Level 5 and the strategies used by students, subject and literacy specialists to deal with those issues. Strategies were both affective and pedagogical. They were deeply rooted in efforts to make good learning relationships and, in the

absence of an appropriate sectoral in-service course, in a quest for learning facilitation methods that would allow students to flourish. Inevitably most of these efforts on the part of students and teachers are determined by the ethos and systems that are in operation throughout the whole college. This section presents the data on whole college structures as they supported the delivery of language and literacy across the organisation. We look at the college-wide ethos, organisational systems, learning support services and material and environmental resources.

College ethos

The partner college in the research had a clearly articulated ethos of care that formed a backdrop to all practical aspects of course provision. It was this same concern that initially motivated the provision of Learning Support Services (LSS) and now underpins the ongoing process of review and development about how best to intensify the integrated approach to language and literacy.

An education for everybody

The partner college has a long established history of working in the inner city and its inclusive culture has developed and strengthened over time. It is embedded in the College's desire to provide a positive learning experience for all students irrespective of their educational history.

We took a position that was quite rooted, I think, in the kind of practical assumption that there is an education for everybody. *College management*

In particular, the tradition of the college is one of recruiting students who might fail to be offered places in other colleges. It takes an egalitarian stance that offers all students a right to develop their full potential in a friendly, relaxed and empowering learning environment. Data collected suggests that the college and its staff have a proud commitment to this ideological position.

We have a reputation for taking people maybe we shouldn't take at all to give them a chance. We would have that kind of ethos and with most students there's a way of working things out if you sit down with them long enough. *College management*

We traditionally have been known as people who did much more work for people who had learning difficulties or found school difficult when we had a second level school. We did a lot of work with young people who found school difficult and I think that ethos continues. You know it is something people are very aware of. It is something we believe. *College management*

It's a good ethos for keeping us together and keeping us doing what we are doing. I think that most students buy in and probably feel they are being helped. *College management*

Diversity

It is clear from the data that the college believes that there is room for a rich diversity of students within its walls. Recruitment is not only about attracting 'high fliers'. The College takes a wider view and recruits students with a variety of educational attainment and backgrounds and provides them with an opportunity for a new start and a positive learning experience.

I think a lot of people, a lot of adults have had a bad education experience and I suppose we'd be very conscious that they don't want to repeat that. People get into patterns around how they are in education and we want to break those patterns. We want people to see how things can be different. *FE Teacher*

A lot of the students have been told they are stupid. They cannot do this. They are not able to do that and that. The climate in this school is completely different. It's more relaxed more friendly and it's more supportive. *College management*

Perception of Success

The College takes the view that the number of full FETAC certificates achieved by students is not the sole measure of success. Rather, success is closely related to the progress of the individual towards his or her own identified goals. These goals may not always have to do with attaining full accreditation.

It is something that we believe. We need to be facilitating everybody to achieve to his or her potential. Everybody needs to be able to do what he or she is able to do. We need to create the environment where that can happen whatever that might be - either by giving people one to one attention, reducing the number of modules they need to do in a year, allowing people two years to do the course instead of one. Whatever can be done I think we're willing to do it and we have an interest in that. *College management*

We do our best to ensure that the course each individual is embarking on is the best course at the moment for that person. *College management*

Relationships

At the very heart of the college culture lies a fundamental belief that making good learning relationships is key to achieving satisfaction with the learning experience for teachers and students alike. This focus on the centrality of relationships permeates the whole college staff and includes the way in which college porters, office and canteen staff approach and indeed support the students.

The best advice given to me by another porter was 'build a good trusting relationship with the students' and that is what I have done. *College porter*

College systems that encourage the integration of language and literacy

Staff training and development in language and literacy

Teacher practice in terms of language and literacy aims to mirror the inclusive and flexible ethos of the college. At the same time, working with diversity and a commitment to inclusiveness can inevitably bring its own challenges in terms of teaching and learning. The college sees it as their responsibility to support teachers in the intricacies of inclusive adult learning through appropriate training and professional development.

Whatever way learning and teaching are organised in the College has to be inclusive so that people who find it more difficult than others are included rather than set apart or identified as having difficulty. How people teach needs to include the fact that a number of people find this (language and literacy) really difficult or are disenchanted.

You know I think it's a big challenge to be absolutely inclusive in all your classes with people who are in difficulty in the class and to try to do that in a way that's comfortable for the people who find learning a bit easier. You know not going too fast, not going too slow. It's quite an art actually to learn how to do that. *College management*

Additional support and training for teachers are seen to be a priority if this approach is to work successfully for both students and teachers alike.

To date some in-service training has been successfully undertaken during term time to support teachers with these issues. The 'Language Matters' course has been especially tailored to explore language and literacy issues at Level 5 across the curriculum. The practical approach to integrating literacy into other subjects, as well as the opportunities it gave for discussion and cooperation, was welcomed by the ten staff participants.

The first strength is that it's dealing with Level 5 and in that it was different from literacy training. It was looking at strategies for Level 5 and it explicitly dealt with language and thinking. It also dealt with the fact that we were tutors teaching another subject. Normally we don't have time to compare what others are doing. *FE Teacher*

It is envisaged that a more comprehensive programme of staff training be developed and implemented into the future. In the meantime individual teachers have been making efforts in terms of their own practice.

I felt duty bound to make some effort as a teacher to address it rather than just kind of ignore it. *FE Teacher*

However there is some recognition that for a college wide impact to be made there is a need for a coherent and systematic effort to address language and literacy through awareness-raising and appropriate training for all staff. Such training has the potential to radically transform the learning environment for teachers and consequently students alike.

The language of the curriculum is very significant and we want people to work on that. We need to have a dialogue about this with staff and a discussion about the plan for this over the next two years. *College management*

Well it's a kind of a fallacy that has grown up over years that if I teach something like woodwork I don't have to worry about students' literacy. If I was the English teacher well then it was up to me to sort out the literacy stuff. But I think people are thinking more broadly now. I think people would welcome that kind of training now. *College management*

From its experience the college recognises that training must be prioritised and delivered within the college timetable if it is to succeed.

You identify a number of days or half days in the year where this will happen and you put it in as a priority. *College management*

Discovering the areas of training most needed by staff requires thorough consultation and dialogue. Presenting an initial array of staff development

and training possibilities can itself be the impetus for discussion and eventual clarity in relation to priority training needs of staff.

We go to the plan and identify ourselves what we feel is needed based on the kind of values that are evident in the (new strategic) plan. *College management*

Timetabling language and literacy support

The timetable is a central organisational tool for the whole FE college. Designing a working timetable for the college is a complex task and intricately influenced by the college ethos and values. It is helped in the modern age by software packages that allocate individual timetables for staff. This suggested draft timetable is then closely examined to see if it matches the real needs of the college. It generally needs some adjustments resulting in a tailor made college timetable that recognises the need for LSS even when targeted resources are not given by the State.

Learning support would be one of the things you'd put down as a priority on the timetable. We could decide in April or May how much time we can afford to give it the following year and then we will identify that and put it in. The amount of time available is determined by the allocation you get but you know when things are tight we have always set time aside for it. *College management*

'Stand alone' funding for learning support is not currently provided by the VEC however colleges are free to devote hours to it out of their existing allocation. This system leaves the provision of learning support on an *ad hoc* basis and reliant on individual commitment from college principals. This in turn suggests that the full value of adult language and literacy learning still remains unrecognised at national and VEC policy level.

The LSS and some staff members in the course of the research suggested that in the coming year support sessions for whole classes should be scheduled into all course timetables. This time could be used in a number of ways: an open door drop in session for individual students struggling with projects or assignments, or whole class interventions on relevant topics. College staff continue to look for ways to make language and literacy support accessible across the College in a less stigmatised manner.

Students aren't timetabled for every minute of every day and I put 'research' on that time so that people would do some learning for themselves. It's been suggested that some of those blocks of time are called 'learning support' or 'assignment' or 'project support', so it wouldn't necessarily be because I have a learning difficulty I might need help. It might just be because I wasn't in or I just don't get it and in that way it would include everybody. You would be putting it on the curriculum. You'd be putting it on the timetable and providing a teacher for every class group. *College management*

This new integrated system would benefit students who do not want to leave classroom time to engage explicitly with learning support. Providing LSS for whole college class groups would help:

- Raise the profile of language and literacy
- De-stigmatise the service for students
- Ensure all students gain access

Communications

The research revealed that in the FE system teacher timetables are usually fully taken up with class preparation and teaching. Some teachers with named posts are given hours away from class-time for co-ordination and management of such roles. This all leads to busy schedules and few opportunities to work with colleagues on reflective practice. On the other hand, teachers highlighted that taking time to establish such collaborative relationships can greatly enhance communication flow and encourage good practice within a busy college system. There was an apparent interest and willingness on the part of some staff to engage with language and literacy issues in a reflective and creative manner if the opportunity was available to them. The notion of an interdepartmental group arose in a staff focus group. This might focus on the specific language and literacy issues of courses and the wider college communications and strategic planning in relation to these matters.

FETAC and a whole college approach

To achieve a full FETAC Level 5 certificate in the College students complete eight modules one of which must be Communications. In its approach to these requirements the college strives to ensure that students achieve to the

maximum of their individual potential. This may not always be achieving the full certificate in one year and so the college provides alternative flexible models to match the needs of students. Assessment is carried out by internal verification that is then monitored by an external examiner. The detailed content and method of delivery of each course is the responsibility of each educational provider and in general at Level 5 the data suggests that the written word is heavily relied on as evidence for assessment.

You see FETAC are very flexible. There are very few modules that insist that evidence of competence is produced in written form. But I don't encourage it as I am so caught up in the written word that's being produced. Now obviously I also kind of feel that it's the right thing for people to get used to for moving on, but there's another bit of me that says that it's the easiest way that I can manage as the tutor to actually assess how people are learning. *FE Teacher*

Some tutors are obviously committed to an exclusively text-based approach to awards. Others are open to developing alternative and creative ways of providing evidence for assessment. However this does initially require additional resources in terms of both staff time and training. More creative approaches to completing awards might allow alternative means of showing competence and opening up subject knowledge. The ensuing growth in confidence might well then reduce barriers to engagement with language and literacy.

The data suggest that having an awareness of the various language and literacy demands of each FETAC module would significantly support teachers and college departments in more precise planning approaches to working with students with a range of learning needs. Literacy proofing courses could help minimise any literacy barriers that face students and maximise the support and development opportunities available to students.

We really need to go back to the drawing board and look at what these students need. *FE Teacher*

Examples of good practice exist including group approaches to evidence production that might usefully be shared with other colleagues. Nevertheless students and teachers commented negatively on the FETAC Communications Module (Level 5). Many students could not see its relevance to the vocational course they were following.

At the same time the options for producing evidence of learning outcomes are not fully explored. The FETAC directive that the Level 5 Communications module is ‘ideally integrated with other Level 5 modules’ is rarely investigated in practice (www.fetac.ie). Doing so would be an important step in a whole college approach to an integrated approach to language and literacy.

Recruitment and interview

Language and literacy emerged as a significant theme across the various stages of the college’s recruitment process. Students wishing to study at the college are invited to attend an open day early in February. They are then requested to complete an application form. This is followed by an interview in the College premises. On the day of their interview students for many of the courses are asked to complete an additional form asking them to outline their motivation for applying for the particular course. This completed form is recognised as the first indicator to the college if students might have language and literacy needs. The interview then seeks to clarify with students if the vocational course they have chosen is the best one for them. It also assesses students’ suitability for college courses.

Different courses in the college have different entry requirements. For example the Montessori course requires that students have a minimum of two honours in the Leaving Cert, whilst the Youth and Community Programme require that prospective students are interested in the course and have some experience of working with young people. This means that recruitment and interviews are specific to the departments where the specialist knowledge is held. It is important that literacy specialism is also included in the recruitment and interview process.

Screening and assessment of language and literacy

Issues in relation to screening are closely linked to any discussion of college recruitment. There are many differing views in relation to this ‘*hot topic*’ amongst teachers. The term itself is problematic for some with its connotations of health screening, of exclusion and the implications of ‘screening out’. Others link it with a pragmatic approach to deciding who

enters college and who does not. The possibility of setting people up to fail by accepting students with unmet literacy needs was a worry for some teachers. The impact of those who are 'behind' in their language and literacy on both students and teachers in a classroom setting concerned other teachers. On the other hand, some staff expressed the opinion that screening could unjustly exclude and demoralise those prospective students who had the motivation and experience to complete a course albeit alongside dealing with some gaps in their language and literacy skills.

NALA takes a positive view of literacy-related screening only when used as a student-centred process to support inclusion: a way for students and teachers to identify course-related literacy support and development need in order to make and implement an agreed plan. NALA does not support literacy screening as a tool for exclusion or as a determining factor in allocating places on vocational courses. They suggest that a range of options could be made available to students who have the motivation and ability to pursue their chosen vocational course and who have some gaps in terms of the required literacy. They recommend that all courses be delivered in a way that is inclusive and that explicitly helps students develop the language and literacy embedded in the course. Some students will require additional supports, which should complement – not replace – inclusive, literacy-aware delivery of vocational courses. Examples from a range of support options could be:

- an agreed language and literacy support package that involves a systematic partnership between literacy specialists and subject teachers;
- a preparatory or access course that would focus on academic literacies and on the cross cutting skills needed for all FE courses;
- a transition or bridging course that would contain elements of a student's target course and would prepare them for 'full immersion' in their vocational programme;

In order to be fair, any screening system would require providers to literacy proof the subject curriculum, This 'literacy proofing' or literacy 'audit' of

courses in turn requires training for teachers in how to identify the literacies they and their students use on the courses. It enables teachers to supply accurate clear information to prospective students about the literacy and assessment demands of each course. Students could then make an informed decision about the strategy they want to pursue.

A Summer school

Teachers, students and non-teaching college staff all suggested that offering a summer school focussing on generic skills could be a solution for students who had worries about their language and literacy skills. This summer school could also serve the purpose of helping students make the significant and often challenging transition to college life and culture in a less pressured way.

It is hard also for mature students to settle in and make relationships. That is the most important thing for them in the beginning. Maybe there should be a fresher course before college begins. *College administrator*

Maybe a summer school preparatory course would get your skills up to speed. *Student*

We did a taster course during the summer. It gave people a sense of what it would be like to be back in education. I think there was funding for that. It would depend on funding. *FE Teacher*

Introducing language and literacy into induction

During the first three weeks of college term there is an induction programme for all students. The programme aims to support students by allaying any fears or worries they may have in relation to their vocational courses and college life in general. During this time students are introduced to their course staff and the support systems of the College. A series of workshops are available to students covering four main content areas:

- General College Information
- Specific Course Information
- Student Services and
- General Social / Life activities

The workshops are planned and delivered by LSS, specialist teachers and speakers. They include both practical information and broad strategies in relation to being a student such as Learning Styles, Time Management, Money Management and Stress Management.

This induction period is seen by the college to be a key determinant in both student retention and end of year assessment achievement. In its commitment to good practice the programme is reviewed annually and additional refinements are being planned for September 2009.

Every year we try to put some improvements in induction because there is a direct correlation between induction and retention. We've tried to make the induction not just a two-hour affair on the first day they put their foot in college. *College management*

The induction plan is presented to staff early in September and each staff member is then responsible for implementing their portion of the plan. During the induction period the LSS staff visit each class group and introduce the service to students. There is some evidence that not all this information is absorbed and also that frequent reminders are needed. The research literature stresses the importance of language and literacy being presented as a positive aspect of a new career identity rather than as a deficit that may impair progress. This suggests articulating a delicately balanced message if people are not to be discouraged at an early stage.

Attendance and Retention

The data from both staff and students suggest that language and literacy issues contribute to poor attendance and overall retention. Different college courses have different criteria in relation to attendance requirements. For example the Montessori course requires 90% attendance whilst the awarding body FETAC has no attendance criteria. There is a tracking system in place in the college in relation to attendance and teachers fill in returns during the first and second terms of the academic year. This year there has been a small, focused pilot data collection project within the College with a group of tutors in relation to retention and this will be further developed. It would be interesting to be able to track any correlation between language and literacy, attendance and retention.

Teachers put a number of reasons forward for drop off in student attendance during the year. These were mostly related to the individual 'life issues' faced by students and this highlights the supports that are necessary for adults balancing complex life circumstances and the demands of lifelong learning. Nevertheless it should also be remembered that literacy difficulties may not easily be disclosed and may be concealed behind other issues and both of these factors require sensitivity and robust support.

We have a class where there has been a big drop out. But the tutor could go through every single one and say, had a baby; mother died; father was ill, she had to go home and look after him; they didn't have enough money; the part time job didn't keep the home going; she's responsible for somebody.
College management

More obviously related to language and literacy, another common reason cited for college drop out was in relation to the load and intensity of work for courses and the ensuing pressures on students.

Some students stayed out because they couldn't get their projects done or they found the assignments too hard. So when they stayed out for a certain time, it was too hard to come back. *FE Teacher*

Whilst there is plenty of anecdotal evidence in relation to college drop out there has been no long-term study focusing on students who do make the decision to leave their chosen vocational course as a result of language and literacy difficulties. This would be challenging but informative research.

In the data collected many students referred to LSS as crucial to their successful completion of their college courses and this strongly implies that language and literacy are crucial factors in attendance and retention.

Learning support services - a whole college support system

Learning Support Service is a vital cross college service that is planned and coordinated from a whole college perspective.

It can't exist in a room. It has to be in the fabric of the whole college. It needs to be edged out around the college and made relevant to all of the different groups. *FE Teacher*

LSS Ethos

Reflecting the whole college ideology, LSS is learner-centred and respects students as self directed adult learners. They begin from the understanding that students have a wide range of existing skills, experience and knowledge and that they need some particular focused language and literacy supports at different times throughout their college life.

An important point here is the student defines her/ himself as needing help. If people choose to go once and not go back again that's their privilege. I think the question of how people are; how they see themselves and how they are encouraged to define themselves in this is important. *College management*

The service does not concern itself with language and literacy issues of students in a stand-alone way. It sees language and literacy as socially situated in the whole college experience and so takes a holistic approach to the work.

I think that while they are here, apart from delivering the content of the course and meeting the SLOs, we have a huge responsibility to them as individuals and people to make sure that when they leave here, what ever they do, that we have opened up, helped them to sort of open up their minds to all sort of possibilities and probabilities. *Literacy specialist*

A lot of students are accessing the support service. It isn't just about this particular time in their lives. It's about everything that's gone before and it's about their journey and where they want to be. *Literacy specialist*

Staffing of LSS

LSS is staffed by three tutors with a total of twenty teaching hours between them. Two of the tutors share ten hours support work between them, and are also subject teachers on courses in the college. The third tutor is a literacy specialist who works solely as an LSS tutor and has an allocation of ten hours for that work. As a matter of policy, the learning support tutors who are also teachers on other courses do not support their own subject students:

I would never allocate a student to them from a class they teach because learning support is supposed to be complementary to what is done in the classroom, not to replace it and not just to repeat it. So if a student is having difficulty it's harder if the learning support tutor is the same tutor they haven't been able to follow in the first place. *College management*

Building relationships with teachers

The staff from LSS provides a number of supports to teachers throughout the College. Advice in relation to literacy-friendly approaches, group-work skills and the development of assignment briefs are common support areas. Additionally LSS staff collaborates with course teachers in planning and delivering team teaching interventions to support the language and literacy needs of students and this is currently being mainstreamed across the college. An annual timetable of language and literacy and study skills workshops has been suggested that could be given to students at induction. Team teaching and cooperative work between subject and literacy specialists has also been successfully piloted.

They can see LSS as a resource. If whatever they are trying is not working they can find out maybe if there's another way of doing things. *Literacy specialist*

Some subject teachers outlined the curriculum for the year to the tutor from LSS. They reported that this sharing of information really supported students as the 1:1 work done mirrored and reinforced the work done in class-time. Teachers and the LSS were eager to work even more closely together in future.

I would like more integration between the actual subject teachers and the learning support. *FE Teacher*

What I'd love is for a teacher to come along and to suggest that maybe the two of us can sit down and look at a particular issue or something that they've come up against and to see if we can plan what might help. *Literacy specialist*

The successful lunchtime workshops with the Childcare Department was highlighted by some teachers and the partnership model used in developing this workshop could be further developed and reproduced across the different college departments.

They have started workshops at lunchtime and they have gone down well. So maybe they should go into departments and explore if there are particular skills that the department would find it useful to work on. *FE Teacher*

A variety of language and literacy support

LSS currently provides support to students through a variety of methods. The LSS makes contact with every student group in the college during their induction period. Class workshops are facilitated across the college and the focus of these workshops is on helping students to make a successful transition to college life. These early workshops also highlight the range of language and literacy services provided by Learning Support Service throughout the year. These include 1:1 support, small group work, class group workshops and whole college workshops. Whilst 1:1 provision is seen to be essential for some students and by students, there is also a belief that this type of provision can contribute to the stigmatised and secretive image of the service. Some students had prior experience of being withdrawn from class in school for help with literacy and this separation from peers had negative associations.

We're trying to get away from 1:1 if we can. It's less cost effective and if you are working in groups and working with the whole class it stops it from being a secret. It stops it from being something that you shouldn't let anyone know about and so it kind of opens up the whole thing. *College management*

If I had money to spend I'd spend it on more staff specially geared to do work with students in groups because I think that most students just want to be the same as everyone else. They don't necessarily want to have to leave anywhere to do it. They want to do it all together. *College management*

Whilst 1:1 provision is often agreed and planned between tutor and student it can often be a 'quick fix' one off support session for those with pressing needs such as assignment deadlines. This requires great flexibility on the part of the literacy tutors and inevitably creates pressures.

I can come whenever I need to. *Student*

I would say we are very flexible really. Last year I worked three lunch hours and took my lunch late. You don't want them missing their classes. If someone comes to me and I'm free you know I'd do it. *Literacy specialist*

Whole-class group work is usually done in partnership with the class teachers and can be designed as a team teaching approach to issues or concepts that are proving challenging for students to grasp.

I think it's a useful idea if you could call on a resource teacher to come in with you over two or three sessions when you're doing something very important in terms of language and literacy. *FE Teacher*

The whole college workshops that have taken place are in response to more generic issues such as report writing, referencing conventions and exam preparation. These workshops have been particularly well attended throughout the year and consequently there was much support for the idea of timetabled LSS workshops where both staff and students could source appropriate support. Throughout the research process, staff repeatedly articulated the vision of an open drop-in facility.

I would love the idea of an open workshop every Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon so that there is someone there from the literacy support. You can just walk in with your notes and say 'I have to make an essay out of this.' *FE Teacher*

I'd love it if when people looked in they would see about three people in there and whatever your difficulty is whether its business studies, whether its English or whatever the difficulty that you are having, that it's like a one stop shop for all of the academic side of things. You bring whatever it is and you know that when you leave it is going to be sorted. *FE Teacher*

If there was an open workshop situation even tutors could drop in and get support or ideas or get them to look at the group with them. *FE Teacher*

Promotion of the LSS across the College

Several strategies are used by LSS to raise awareness of the service. The college diary which is distributed to all students early in the year contains information and contact details for the service. During induction all students hear about the service from both their individual tutors and the LSS tutors. Contact details are also distributed during these meetings. A number of contact cards are left in each classroom with a mobile number for the service. Students can leave a message on the phone and the Head of Student Welfare Services then contacts them to make an appointment with a literacy specialist.

She (LSS teacher) comes in at the beginning of the year and lays out her table and gives the students an idea of what's on offer and they are very, very interested in the idea of project support and assignment support. *FE Teacher*

We're trying to open up the whole thing of learning support and that's why the learning support tutors visit every single class and do a workshop at the beginning of the year. The cards up and the text number is on it and its all open. We're trying not to hide the whole thing. *College management*

Office staff and general operatives such as the college porters and the canteen staff are also aware of the service and pass on information to students who sometimes share with them their difficulties in relation to college work and life.

Many classes are re-visited throughout the year to remind the whole class of the LSS. This visit is sometimes done in response to a request from class teachers who may have noticed students who are not accessing support but who are having particular literacy challenges.

The LSS have also identified strategic times of the year when a visit by them to class groups might be just the intervention that will stop someone from dropping off a course that is becoming overwhelming for them.

I try to get in September and I try to get in before the mid-term break. Because we can loose people on the first break and I try then to make contact again before Christmas. *Literacy specialist*

LSS tutors informally remind students who have dropped away from the service that they are still there and are free to return as desired.

I'll see them in the canteen and I'll remind them that the door is open. They're very aware of me and what I do. *Literacy specialist*

She'd call you and she'd have her journal. 'I haven't seen you in a week. Do you want to slot in?' *Student*

Embedding support structures across the College

LSS has recently been given greater status and visibility within the College. It is under the stewardship of the Assistant Principal and Head of Student Welfare Services whose responsibility it is to manage and develop a coherent service in harmony with the ethos of the College. Appropriate systems and structures are organically evolving and becoming mainstreamed and fine-tuned. Likewise roles and responsibilities are under a process of ongoing evaluation and review. All LSS staff believed that a schedule of regular meetings throughout the year had greatly improved the quality of the service. These meetings enhanced communication, support, systems and creativity.

Each LSS tutor maintains an attendance database, recording details of participants' names, the courses students are studying and the work they do with LSS tutors. This database is currently under review and further information fields are to be added to it in the coming year. Opportunities may now be explored for tracking the use of LSS and monitoring outcomes. This will be crucial in the inevitable search (and justification) for funding.

The integration of the service in the past two years has been greatly influenced by the acquisition of a designated LSS space. Much thought went into the planning of the bright and welcoming room.

Quality, quality. It's not second rate. It's not the poor relation. When people see the quality in the furniture they immediately think they are being treated with respect. *FE Teacher*

The establishment of the service within a designated space also had an impact on the attitude of teaching staff to the service and its goals. Having a settled base raises awareness and makes referral and access easier.

So I think there is a big shift in people's awareness that learning support to some extent is everybody's responsibility and because somebody doesn't conform to what will make your perfect FETAC Level 5 student that the teacher has responsibility to do something about it. *FE Teacher*

More and more, teachers rely on the literacy expertise of the service and use it as a support for their own teaching practice.

When they come up against difficulties, they see it as a resource where they can find out if there's another way of doing things. It is good for them to see that a different approach yields results when they're in a difficult situation. *FE Teacher*

College resources

This section of the report focuses on data collected from teachers and students in relation to the resources needed for successful language and literacy support and delivery. As with other aspects of the report, resources are viewed from a perspective of socially situated literacy and hence begin with the wider context of college resources. This includes the funding arrangements that support the LSS, time resources and the material and environmental resources available within the College.

FE policy context

The FE sector has been neglected in terms of Government thinking, policy and resources. The Mclver Report (2003) raised hopes in the FE sector in terms of policy and resources but these were dashed as it became clear that the recommended changes were not to be implemented. Relying on resources from Government for an improved educational experience for students in a time of financial crisis such as the present one seems overly hopeful. This is reflected in the data collected during interviews with staff of the partner college.

There was to be a whole different set of arrangements that would include covering computer technicians' support and libraries – a big package that would require a lot of investment. It would have given us a significantly different internal structure where there would be academic managers, assessment and development. It opened up the idea of funding for particular purposes. It went away onto the shelf and was pretty well ignored. No money was available and we know no money is going to be available now. *College management*

The FE sector is neither completely independent of nor clearly connected into second or third level and without a ring fenced funding stream.

We're still just funded in a very simplistic way. The state of FE at this point is that it is currently running as part of the second level system in terms of the way funds are allocated. The pupil teacher ratio is that which applies to the vocational and training programme at second level. It has grown out of this without there having been any reorganisation or real separation. *College management*

Naturally this shaky funding situation impacts on the funding for Learning Support.

There's no real allocation from head office. ...They give us time. They give us an allocation of teachers and we have to decide ourselves how we use that time. So I mean we have prioritised learning support over the years. In recent time the Head of Department has extra time to organise it and then a number of teachers have time on their timetable to deliver support to their students. *College management*

The Learning Support Service in the partner college uses the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) additional support fund for students to fund a half time position for one LS tutor. This funding is dependent on maintaining the current VTOS numbers.

In the wider FE sector the implication of this lack of resources and recognition and the piecemeal nature of the funding means that Learning Support is dependent on the resolve and interest of individual colleges rather than existing in its own right. This leaves the provision of support to FE students who have unmet language and literacy needs in an uncertain position.

The learning environment

I mean you know schools should be places that facilitate learning, not cheapo breezeblock dungeons, oppressive, institutional, custodial places. It's a sad indictment of our (state) unwillingness to invest in education. *FE Teacher*

Bright, open, well equipped classrooms, study areas and communal spaces were the ideal images when students and teachers talked about the best possible learning space. They are also what McIver (2003) recommended during the boom years in Ireland.

The partner college is situated over two campuses and efforts have been made to modernise and update facilities over the past number of years. The buildings themselves were designed in previous eras and during times when the importance of creating an inclusive adult learning environment was not yet recognised.

Suggestions in relation to equipment and materials needed for a LSS space included access to modern computers, printers and the internet. Teachers were in favour of developing a central bank of useful materials for language and literacy work. These could include resource books, assignment brief models and copies of classroom sessions and approaches that had worked well for teachers and students.

Students suggested that several 'after-college' study areas within the college would be useful. These would be areas where small peer groups could meet to support one another with projects, class-work and assignments.

College Library

We have a library functioning fairly well A quiet place with shelves full of books. A nice space where students can go and explore books and read. *FE Teacher*

Students believed that the college library was a useful additional resource and many used it for research and study. Having a quiet place to study was much needed by students, as it was often impossible to find such space in their own homes. It was suggested that the more open library space should sometimes provide drop in LSS, for example over lunchtime.

IT

The importance of access to good quality IT facilities was referred to by teachers and students alike. Some students do not have access to such facilities in their personal lives due to disadvantaged economic circumstances and students and teachers described the lack of such essential study aids as a disadvantage.

For an ordinary student they'd have to buy their own laptop. Some students in my class could not afford that. *FE Teacher*

The significance of internet access was also highlighted during interviews,

What a great tool that would be for me to be able to bring up the internet and then to identify credible sources with students. *FE Teacher*

The computers in the college are ancient. The system needs updating and we need computer workshops. *FE Teacher*

Conclusions

The partner college in this study had an unambiguous, explicit ethos of care and inclusivity that was proudly embraced by staff. This college culture led organically to a quest for systems that would support all learners to flourish, including those whose language and literacy needs have remained unmet in previous experiences of schooling.

As the demand for support with language and literacy has grown, so too have day-to-day college systems become increasingly implicated in its organisation and resourcing. Marketing and the recruitment processes play a crucial role in making those with unmet literacy needs welcome and giving them the hope and support needed for a smooth passage through their chosen course. The **timetabling of courses and staff** has to leave room for

coordinating, developing and delivering a range of language and literacy supports with only a small number of specialist literacy staff. Based on the evidence from the data, **pre-service and in-service courses for staff** need to be developed sectorally as part of enabling a whole college literacy strategy. Such courses would initially raise the language and literacy awareness of staff. They might subsequently enhance delivery skills of subject teachers and contribute to a more cohesive integrated approach across the college. **Exploring the flexibility of FETAC accreditation systems** and sharing existing good practice within the College has the potential to reduce the pressure generated by Level 5 Communications skills.

The LSS role has gradually expanded in response to growing demand from students and staff alike. The cost-effectiveness of 1:1 support and the constant search for ways of de-stigmatising adult literacy has led to a growing focus on whole class interventions, team-teaching and whole college workshops. Increasingly the boundaries of LSS are expanding, as language and literacy become the business of all departments and staff. **A representative cross-college team** would sharpen communications and encourage recognition of the situated nature of language and literacy across all learning contexts.

Our findings suggest that FE is disadvantaged by the absence of clear policy guidelines and a realistic adult learning identity. To state that FE is the learning that takes place between second and third level (DES, 2004) indicates lack of recognition for its role of a solid first step in tertiary education. This Level 5/6 stage would allow for unmet language and literacy needs to be addressed and damaged self-esteem to be repaired before the next step into work, further training or higher education. As currently constituted, FE performs these functions without adequate resources and in often ill-equipped accommodation. Language and literacy are more and more concerned with ICTs and yet many FE students are restricted to using outdated hardware with only limited access to a whole world of resources. These are issues beyond the reach of individual colleges although it is they who must deal with their consequences on a daily basis.

The partner college in the research has been innovatively and systematically growing a comprehensive, whole organisation approach to integrating language and literacy support and development across the FE curriculum. This is done within an ethos of care and inclusivity and despite lack of recognition and appropriate resources. Based on the international literature and the empirical findings, the next and final chapter will present the conclusions and recommendations that have emerged from the study.

Part 5 – Conclusions, recommendations and guidelines for a literacy-friendly approach in Further Education

Introduction

In Part 5 we present the conclusions, recommendations and guidelines for a whole organisation approach to language and literacy in FE, with a special emphasis on FETAC Level 5. These conclusions are drawn both from the international literature review (Part 2) and the empirical research process (Part 4) and so reflect both the contextualised interests of Irish FE and the learning from other places. We are conscious of the Irish resource and policy environment and have tried to ensure that our recommendations and guidelines are appropriate and have potential for change within current limitations.

Throughout the study we have adopted a social practice view of language and literacy. This recognises that language and literacy have a skills element but cannot accurately or usefully be reduced to these mechanical or secretarial competencies alone. Nor should language and literacy be seen as static but rather as a dynamic, adaptable resource that changes constantly over time. A social practice perspective on language and literacy therefore emphasises that all aspects of the social context in which literacy is situated and used are an integral, meaningful part of literacy practice.

Working at Level 5 in FE, a social practice view suggests the need to recognise that language and literacy is already integrated in the culture of a college: in its spoken and written language usage; in its systems and traditions; in the way that individual staff present their subjects, interpret awards and expect course material to be given to them; and in the way that each new group of students relate to and change the college community. Neither are language and literacy unique to the FE College. Alongside this college language and literacy practice exist other literacies: in the home, the media, the workplace and a host of other real and virtual social contexts.

Students and staff embody this abundance of literacies and can draw on all of them to promote a rich learning environment. Consequently, recognising the pervasive nature of language and literacy across an organisation is a pivotal leap towards harnessing learning potential for everyone. If language and literacy are already embedded across the college community then we need to make sure that they are well-used to facilitate best practice in organisational management, in all aspects of communication and in quality, inclusive adult learning.

The conclusions from the fieldwork and desk research are presented in two sections:

Section 1 will outline conclusions and recommendations about how to implement a whole college approach to the support and development of language and literacy. Then **Section 2** will present a set of generic guidelines for integrating language and literacy in FE colleges.

Section 1: Conclusions and recommendations about how to implement a whole college approach to the support and development of language and literacy.

The findings suggest that implementing an integrated approach to language and literacy concerns everyone with an interest in FE from the individual student who uses the service to the decision-makers who articulate policy and then resource and monitor its implementation. Conclusions and recommendations are therefore presented with respect to all actors in the FE context. Finally some areas for further research are suggested.

- 1) National policy
- 2) FE sector
- 3) FE college
 - a. Whole college strategic and operational management
 - b. College departments
 - c. Learning Support Services
 - d. FE staff
 - e. FE students
- 4) Recommendations for further research

1. An integrated approach to language and literacy at national policy level

International empirical studies revealed that policy decisions to take an integrated approach to language and literacy were prompted by a determination to address unmet adult literacy needs. It was recognised that the potential of individuals, families, communities and the state were all limited by a failure to redress basic literacy inequalities. This persistent and escalating challenge was viewed both as an economic imperative as well as a matter of social justice. States reviewed adult education and training and saw that it was possible to provide opportunities for training that also address language and literacy needs in a motivating and meaningful context. Recognition of the situated language and literacy of the workplace was seen

to enhance the experience of education and training and also of performance in the workplace. These long-term policies were based on inter-agency partnerships and nationally resourced.

In Ireland, FE requires the vision, policies and resources that will liberate the good intent and potential of FE colleges and their staff. As well as the moral imperative for an intensive response to growing unmet literacy needs at secondary level and beyond, Ireland urgently needs imaginative, useful adult education strategies for an increasing number of unemployed people.

Implementing an integrated approach to language and literacy has policy and resource implications at national level:

- Language and literacy need to be recognised as central to all forms of adult education and training. A social practice view of literacy needs to be understood and adopted throughout FE as a means of addressing unmet literacy needs in the adult population. (A social practice view of literacy has relevance throughout the education system as a basis for an effective national language and literacy strategy).
- FE needs to be explicitly included on the sectoral map of Irish education rather than between second and third level. Having a clear identity is fundamental for FE management and staff to be able to take pride in the work that they do. FE functions as the first step in tertiary education and should be recognised and resourced as such. FE colleges are the bridge to work, further training and higher education. Rooted in a social practice view of literacy, they have the potential to become centres of excellence for the integrated approach to language and literacy that is seen as sound educational practice in other countries.
- A central function of FE should be to consult with industry, higher education and awarding bodies about their mutual and diverse

language and literacy requirements. In this way national training and education becomes relevant and responsive to real requirement.

- National FE policy should include opportunities for appropriate pre-service and in-service professional development including language and literacy awareness and facilitation skills. Vocational and subject teachers are role models for FE learners and need support to integrate, model and encourage good language and literacy practices.
- Extensive unmet literacy needs have emerged at primary, secondary and adult level. FE has to pick up the baton from other educational sectors to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to use literacy in their own development. This indicates that FE colleges need to employ language and literacy specialists and should be explicitly resourced to do so.

2. An integrated approach to language and literacy at FE sectoral level

The FE sector, as it is currently constituted, addresses a wide range of post-secondary, adult learning needs. Considerable progress has been made in FETAC Levels 1-4 at implementing an integrated approach to language and literacy across the curriculum. There is evidence of useful efforts to analyse the language and literacy practices at levels 1-4 and at least one training group has begun to implement a comprehensive whole organisation approach to integration (McSkeane, 2009). The NUI Maynooth course for FE training staff has been positively evaluated and there is scope to extend this learning throughout the sector to include FE colleges working at levels 5 and 6. In other words with some additional work, FE is well-placed to model an integrated, whole organisation approach to language and literacy to other education sectors. The evidence is that this approach may benefit the entire education system.

Supporting an integrated approach to language and literacy development at FE sectoral level requires certain proposals to be adopted:

- The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), as the representative body for 33 VECs, could take the lead in promoting a social practice view of language and literacy in further education and in ensuring that addressing unmet literacy needs is placed high on the FE agenda. This would involve persisting with the IVEA stance on the McIver Report and continuing to argue for the identity of FE to be recognised and resourced (IVEA, 2005, 2007).
- VECs should become champions of an integrated approach to literacy and facilitate dissemination of good practice throughout their area.
- Opportunities for further cooperation between the Adult Literacy service and FE colleges should be explored. Literacy support at Level 5 is not synonymous with all adult literacy work but there is certainly scope for dialogue between literacy specialists and FE subject teachers about ways of integrating literacy.
- VECs should explore an integrated language and literacy approach to pre-vocational and taster courses for FE. This has been shown to be effective elsewhere and presents a solution to the low uptake of adult literacy in the wider population. This would allow students to more knowledgeably become the judge of their own appropriate level of participation in FE.
- VECs should facilitate partnerships between FE, HE, industry and awarding bodies to ensure that the language and literacy that is integrated in the curriculum is the best fit for the workplace, further training and higher education.
- Shared sectoral training needs that would facilitate an integrated approach to language and literacy in FE colleges should be discussed and developed based on the existing course with NUI Maynooth.

- Provide training for staff in innovative and creative approaches to FETAC Level 5, particularly in integrated approach to the Communications module. This might be an inter-college action research project.

3 a. An integrated approach to language and literacy at FE whole college level

Apart from enabling policy and resources at national level, the most important work in developing a whole organisation approach to language and literacy is done at individual college level. The importance given to literacy is very much determined by the college ethos and the degree to which college management adopt and implement a culture of inclusivity for the great diversity of adult learners. In this regard colleges clearly have a strategic as well as an operational role to play, both of which are rooted in the ideological stance of the organisation.

We can conclude that adopting a whole organisation approach to the support and development of language and literacy makes strategic sense for a number of reasons. The number of adults and young people with unsatisfied literacy needs is not diminishing. Therefore, as the empirical findings have shown, FE colleges have a significant number of students for whom language and literacy needs to be addressed as part of their FETAC Level 5 course. It is clear also from the literature and experience elsewhere that literacy needs are best met in meaningful and motivating contexts such as a self-selected adult learning course. So, Irish FE colleges are well-placed to take on the role of promoting excellence in language and literacy both with young people leaving school and adults returning to learn after a significant gap. Research has shown that levels of retention and achievement benefit from integrated literacy methods and so consequently it makes strategic sense to pursue this approach as thoroughly as possible. A whole college approach to language and literacy has equity, efficiency and pedagogical arguments in its favour and needs to be based on a strategic, reflective process rather than assumptions.

Strategic whole college recommendations

- As part of the process of strategic planning, FE colleges need to articulate an explicit ethos and communicate this clearly to staff and students. This should include a clear college stance on language and literacy. The resulting college mission and values might take the form of a charter/set of promises to staff and students.
- FE colleges, including governing bodies, need to engage in a process of reflection and agree an understanding of language and literacy in the FE context, and in congruence with their expressed ethos.
- Excellence in language and literacy should be a goal across a college that is reflected in the process of strategic planning, in the design and operation of management systems and all written promotional, administrative and teaching materials.
- A cross departmental group, with leadership from college senior management, should be established to work with college literacy specialists. This group would ensure that integrated approaches to language and literacy become a matter for the whole organisation. This group might consider such issues as:
 - Developing a whole college strategy for language and literacy.
 - Planning the implementation and monitoring of the college plan for language and literacy.
 - Promoting and raising awareness of language and literacy as central to success in vocational training, adult learning and employment.
 - Steering and championing the organic development of language and literacy throughout the college.

- Facilitating discussion with departmental peers and student groups about good integrated language and literacy practice.

Staff development

A successful approach to integrating excellence in language and literacy across a whole FE college is dependent on a strategic approach to staff development. Each member of college staff needs to be literacy aware and to deliver their subject specialism in a literacy-friendly manner. For some people this may mean training in an unfamiliar concept. The college needs to have a clear picture of staff skills and exploit the diversity of strengths within the cohort of teachers.

The college strategic plan for staff development should take account of a whole organisation commitment to excellence in language and literacy and:

- Audit staff skills in relation to language and literacy including aptitudes in creative approaches to learning, group facilitation skills and resource design and development. The latter should include expertise in ICT-related learning methods.
- Arising from the staff skills audit a staff development strategy should be developed that will build the necessary team strengths to deliver on the language and literacy plan. This may involve lobbying for resources for sectoral staff training, in-service and in-house training and skills exchange between existing staff.
- Strategic communication channels for sharing ideas about literacy development across the organisation should be put in place and reviewed often. For example a language and literacy newssheet might be developed and produced by departments in rotation.
- Progress on adopting a whole organisation approach to language and literacy should be an agenda item on Senior Management Team meetings and departmental heads expected to report on progress with language and literacy integration in their area.

Strategic partnerships

So that provision remains relevant, colleges need to build relationships with those who have common cause in the development of more inclusive services for adults with unmet literacy needs. NALA is an important partner for those who wish to strategically address literacy matters and they are an important source of information on current research, pedagogical practice and relevant materials. Other partnerships may also be useful:

- Strategic local, as well as sectoral partnerships should be built with industry, higher education and awarding bodies so that the language and literacy in FE is appropriate to both the immediate and future context of learners.

Operational whole organisation recommendations

Creating literacy-friendly college organisational systems - resources

So that the college strategic plan in relation to language and literacy may be realised a number of resource implications have to be considered. In the current climate it may be a case of judicious allocation of existing resources and of sharing IVEA, VEC and sectoral funding so that some progress can be made in these matters. In some cases a whole college approach to language and literacy may be advanced by a different rather than an additional use of resources. This is a realistic rather than ideal position in that language and literacy merit adequate rather than piecemeal funding, especially if the legacy of past neglect is to be redressed. There are financial, material, time and human resource implications for a whole organisation approach to language and literacy to be operationalised. These are inevitably particular to each individual college but should take account of:

- Additional staff hours for language and literacy planning, coordination, curriculum development and team-building.
- Additional language and literacy resources including ICT-based resources.

- Environmental improvements to create an adult-friendly learning support centre. This should be open and accessible and a resource where students and staff alike can build language and literacy skills.
- Investment in literacy-aware promotional and administrative materials.
- Time spent in consultation with students about the best ways of supporting learning.

Creating literacy-friendly college organisational systems - timetabling

In a whole college approach to language and literacy all systems need to be reviewed and adapted to prioritise language and literacy. The college timetable is a central organisational tool that implements the strategic decisions about allocations of staff time and creates possibilities for collaborative planning and practice. The timetable determines whether team-teaching between subject and literacy specialists is facilitated and the extent to which whole groups can access language and literacy support and development. The college calendar also facilitates communications and staff development opportunities and creates potential for language and literacy to become a focus of discussion and action for change.

- The college calendar and timetable should facilitate the strategic plan for language and literacy both in terms of practice and development.

Creating literacy-friendly college organisational systems - recruitment

The FE college recruitment process extends from the design and production of the college prospectus and website to the application and interview process and ultimate acceptance of a college place. Few colleges make clear on their websites what language and literacy support they offer to students and a variety of ideological positions are evident ranging from a disability perspective to one of integrated learning support. In preparation for the recruitment process, staff members need to be aware of the language and literacy demands of each course so that the best match is made between

learners and courses. The literature and the empirical evidence suggest that this process is sometimes more intuitive than systematic and although tutor experience is important it also needs to be grounded in a thorough analysis of course content.

The current trend towards screening and assessment of literacy in FE tends to reduce language and literacy to mechanical tasks and ignores the integral social context that makes literacy practice meaningful. A brief, individualised, paper screening exercise is particularly ineffective in assessing literacy for the workplace, for group learning and for those who have anxieties about test situations, however benignly they are presented. Additionally, international research has shown that literacy screening is of little use in adult learning contexts and is a poor predictor of learning potential or outcomes. More useful, is clear course information and an opportunity for adults to select their own level of comfort and competence as a result of a careful relational process.

- Colleges should provide students with clear information about courses and their language and literacy demands. This should be based on careful reflection and analysis of the demands of the award and the methods and approach used by the course team.
- The recruitment period spans several months and should allow for more detailed conversations between staff and applicants about language and literacy in courses.
- Taster sessions or preparatory courses should be provided as a basis for course selection and/or preparation. Both students and staff in FE thought that there was potential in the notion of a summer school both for pre-course and in-course purposes. These could address the generic issues involved in becoming an adult learner, the language and literacy demands of FE and beginner computer skills. For ongoing courses a Summer School would allow for revision of past course elements and preparation for the coming year. Without additional resources the Summer School would either have to be self-financing or facilitated by flexibility in staff contracts.

- All promotional and administrative materials should use plain English and be produced in a variety of formats as required. Students might usefully be involved in this process.

Creating literacy-friendly college organisational systems - induction

Each induction is a new conversation between students and staff about how to approach college life and course requirements. Induction is the foundation for the year and a chance to build good adult learning relationships. It is a time when learners and teachers alike can explore a new identity and take a fresh approach to language and literacy in their work. Induction holds significant scope for establishing an integrated literacy-friendly way of working. Students have made clear that induction is often too hurried and they suffer from information over-load in relation to the language and literacy supports available to them. Their initial preoccupation is about forming relationships and settling into a new learner identity and this needs to be recognised as a priority on which other learning can be built.

A less hurried induction does not need to delay course progress. Many induction activities might be planned that also provide evidence of course competencies in group work, planning, cooperation, communication and personal development. At the same time teachers can become alert to potential language and literacy needs and begin planning strategies for support and development. Induction is when the college culture is embedded, when language and literacy can be given a fresh positive profile and when cooperative, participative, empowering, enjoyable ways of learning can be modelled.

Although FE staff should be constantly vigilant and supportive of language and literacy issues, the evidence from the literature suggests that the new learner identity should be allowed to form before language and literacy are brought sharply into focus. Because many students have negative associations with how literacy support was provided in schools it is crucial that FE adopts an explicitly different approach that is rooted in a positive adult education and training context. The literature suggests that literacy specialists use the early days of the academic year to identify potential future

needs rather than directly addressing them. It is suggested that team-teaching is a good way to establish a general profile for learning support without individuals being singled out. This is so that individual literacy support is provided positively in the context of the new course. On the other hand students stated clearly that it was a good idea to get support early on so that the possibility of losing momentum in learning was averted. This is a choice for individual colleges to make.

- Induction should be carefully and creatively designed as a time for embedding good learning relationships and a college ethos of adult learning. Students need time to find their way around – literally and metaphorically and induction activities can satisfy this need and allow new friendships to form. Participation in induction should provide opportunities for early course evidence gathering that would be highly motivating for everyone. This creative approach to induction and early accreditation may be another task for a cross-college group.
- A culture of teamwork and collaborative learning should be rooted at this time while a strong student and college identity and a sense of belonging are allowed to seed. These form the supportive context within which past literacy needs can surface and be approached afresh and in an unstigmatised manner.
- For those without a specific learning difficulty, the college needs to decide whether to introduce the details about language and literacy support at induction time or wait until classes are established and the new learner is ready to make a positive, informed choice.

Integrated communication skills module

The discrete FETAC Communication Skills module was described as problematic by staff and students. FETAC Level 5 guidelines propose that communications should be integrated through other course work. This is rarely done and should be considered more often. An applied communications pilot project has produced positive results and there is initial

support for this being further developed and extended. There may be a need for literacy, communications and subject teachers to collaborate in planning for this and for exploring FETAC's more creative multi modular approach. Such planning should aim to produce tools that enable learners to take ownership of their evidence gathering.

- FE colleges should facilitate a cross-college integrated approach to FETAC Level 5. This would ultimately allow for more realistic, contextualised language and literacy work and would produce staffing efficiencies. These could support team-teaching or curriculum development initiatives.

3 b Integrating language and literacy at college department level

A whole organisation approach means that all departments become responsible for language and literacy in the context of their own specialist area of learning. Departments must prepare to facilitate the development of the language and literacy as they are situated within each academic discipline. Such an integrated approach requires the skill and resources for a forensic examination of the different modules to identify language and literacy elements of FETAC Level 5 modules. The subsequent department-wide discussions will provide a rich learning opportunity for staff to take a fresh look at their subjects from a literacy-friendly perspective. They need to reflect not just on course content but on their own language use and course materials in teaching and scaffolding learning.

- College departments should identify staff with an interest and leaning towards language and literacy matters who could form a language and literacy sub-group. One representative of the department should sit on the cross-departmental language and literacy group. This person should be the link for the department with developments in language and literacy across the college.
- Language and literacy should be an agenda item at all departmental meetings.

- Heads of department should facilitate the sharing of good practice in integrating language and literacy support and development within all aspects of department work: course documents, resources, teaching practice and departmental staff development.

3 c An integrated approach to language and literacy at LSS level

Both the international literature and the empirical research findings are unequivocal about the pivotal role of the literacy specialist in developing an integrated approach to language and literacy. Literacy specialists must be appropriately qualified and have experience of literacy programme design and delivery in a range of adult learning settings. They should be able to work with a range of individuals, small groups and whole classes and to address a range of language and literacy issues including specific learning difficulties. Where this is not the case then staff must be given access to training as a matter of urgency. Using school-based methodology with adults may be stigmatising and detrimental to relationships and progress in learning.

The Learning Support Service (or whatever it is named) should be the engine room of the college with links to subject teachers, departments and college management so that language and literacy specialist advice is considered in all college strategic and operational planning as well as in all teaching practice. The status of language and literacy is determined by the manner in which it is staffed and the college literacy specialist should have the recognition of a full-time post. Giving language and literacy merely rhetorical importance will ensure it remains fragmented and stigmatised rather than integrated and respected.

All the research points to successful integrated language and literacy provision having a vital affective dimension and this care-work has to be recognised and resourced. At the same time the LSS needs to be systematic in its approach to coordinating literacy across the whole organisation. It should have an operational plan, regular internal and cross-college meetings, a data collection system linked to college retention figures and a proactive role in all aspects of college development.

The empirical evidence points to the vital role of LSS for staff and students alike. Inevitably each FE college must research and define the role of language and literacy support across its own organisational structure but the progress made in the partner college provide clear indications of what is possible.

- LSS should be involved in the promotion of language and literacy across the college both at specific times and on a regular basis – in the college prospectus, website, and diary; on notice boards and in classrooms and other public areas. LSS should experiment with creative ways of raising the profile of language and literacy both with staff and students.
- A range of language and literacy supports should be available: 1:1, small group, whole course group and cross college. These could be on request or based on experience of past needs.
- Students want to be reminded and encouraged to seek support and this might be done by text or email as well as through personal exchanges.
- Team-teaching between subject and literacy specialists should be expanded as a way of providing language and literacy support to many in an unstigmatised way. The art of collaborative class teaching is relational and needs to be practised and developed over time.
- LSS might support the integration of language and literacy in subject teaching through a series of workshops for teachers on group facilitation methods and inclusive ways of addressing multiple language and literacy needs.
- Based on knowledge of the college year, LSS should develop an annual programme of cross-college student workshops on learning to learn, report writing, workplace observations, assignment planning, writing and proofreading. This calendar of events could be

used to demonstrate a literacy-friendly ethos for new students at open days as well as a planning tool for staff and students.

- LSS should host reflection and praxis sessions with interested teachers and work in an advisory capacity as part of departmental and cross-college teams.
- The LSS facility should become a repository for literacy-friendly materials and resources and support their design, development and dissemination.
- The integration of FETAC Communications across subject modules should be piloted in cooperation with LSS who already have considerable skills in this way of working.
- Learning support and/or open learning spaces should have access to web-based, self-directed software for language and literacy development. Some of these programmes are free and highly motivating for young people. Yet others offer accreditation.

3 d An integrated approach to language and literacy at FE college staff level

A whole college approach means that every member of staff becomes concerned with language and literacy. In the partner college this was already the case with non-teaching staff that saw encouragement of students as part of their support role. Literacy awareness was evident in the canteen staff and porters and the administrative staff in particular who had considerable opportunity to observe language and literacy in practice. Subject teachers inevitably vary in their affinity with language and literacy and in a whole organisation approach opportunities to be literacy-friendly need to be extended to all further education staff. This is a training matter that may be addressed on a sectoral basis or within individual colleges where expertise exists to do so. Ideally, all teachers should learn about the situated language and literacy of their subjects and how to address this as part of good learning facilitation practice. Language and literacy are inseparable ingredients of

subject knowledge and as such need to be recognised and addressed as part of the learning process.

Teachers should be explicit in their requirements in relation to academic literacies so that students can understand exactly what is expected of them. They need to provide clear examples and build in time to draw out existing literacy talents and build on these. UK research demonstrated how when students were asked, in the first days of college, to study their own uses of language and literacy they uncovered an abundance of literacies that could be used in the course of learning and presenting evidence for awards. The same process helped to develop a culture where diversity of skills was appreciated and valued. It encouraged co-operative work, team building and development and gave tutors an opportunity to informally assess language and literacy.

- Group work approaches to learning should be used as opposed to entirely teacher-led methods. Team approaches provide rich opportunities for learning and reflection as well as developing useful social capital skills.
- A constructivist approach to pedagogy that starts from students' existing knowledge should form a positive base on which to gradually construct learning. Subject teachers should provide the scaffolding for learners to acquire confidence and competence in their specialist area. They are the architects of progress and the language and literacy part of the process is pivotal.
- Teachers are role models for adult students as they progress to further training, work and higher education. They are potent ambassadors for language and literacy and should both model excellence and raise expectations of it in their students.
- Good learning relationships are the most vital element in the successful integration of language and literacy across the whole college. Teachers should be aware of the influence of affective aspects of learning and become adept at building relationships that instil confidence and hope in students.

- Students need to be clear about what is required of them and subject teachers should ensure that they communicate information, both spoken and written, with precision and transparency.

3 e An integrated approach to language and literacy at FE student level

The findings suggest that FE students require considerable support in adapting to the role of adult learner. They need guidance about how to get organised and how to access the supports available to them. Nevertheless students need to find ways of taking responsibility for their own adult learning and the research has indicated some ways this may be done.

- Students should be aware that language and literacy are central to success in their new identity as an adult learner. We are never finished learning language and literacy and this needs time and effort if we are to succeed. It can be fun!
- Irrespective of past negative associations, students should establish a relationship with LSS as early as they feel comfortable to do so.
- Working with peers has been shown to be a useful way to break down language and literacy barriers and this is a self-help mechanism that all students should be encouraged to establish.

4. Further research in relation to an integrated approach to language and literacy in FE

Implementing a whole organisation approach to language and literacy is a relatively new field of study in FE. Consequently there is a range of possibilities for further investigation. We mention only a few here that may be useful in the short-term:

- The work already undertaken in the partner college in this study should be further resourced as an action research study from which other colleges might further benefit. This might involve tracking the culture

change as the college moves gradually towards total integration; recording new management systems and noting the impact on student retention; gathering examples of good pedagogical practice and collating teaching materials.

- College departments should analyse and record the language and literacy requirements of courses. This might be an inter-college project facilitated by the Further Education Support Service (FESS).
- The impact on retention and achievement of a preparatory summer school might be tracked over a number of years
- A study of early FE leavers should be carried out to establish whether language and literacy are a significant factor.
- A study of an integrated approach to language and literacy should explore the concurrent impact on social capital outcomes.

Section 2: A set of generic guidelines for integrating language and literacy in FE colleges.

The conclusions and recommendation in Part 5, Section 1 have been synthesised below to provide a set of guidelines for FE colleges that wish to explore a whole organisation approach to language and literacy support and development. The guidelines describe steps for helping a college progress towards the provision of excellence in language and literacy for all learners.

It has been suggested here that FE policy-makers should become proactive in establishing a distinct identity for FE . The role of FE would include the delivery of excellence in language and literacy so that confident learners could then progress to further study, training or employment. Some FE colleges continue to be innovative in the area of language and literacy despite an unsupportive structural environment and the guidelines are designed to support this process. Obviously robust policy and resources would impact favourably on potential outcomes.

Each step below forms part of a whole organisation integrated approach to language and literacy. The steps are not instantaneous but require reflection, discussion and action over a period of time. Like FE learners, colleges will begin the process with diverse history and expertise in the field of language and literacy provision. Individually and collectively the guidelines describe a process that needs to be maintained and reviewed so that the skills and resources of the college are deployed in a way that best matches the needs of each new student group. Some parts of the guidelines may already be in operation in an organisation whereas some may require ingenuity to get around resource restrictions. Ultimately they are interconnected points for consideration in the construction of a college language and literacy strategy that aims to harness all available resources to reduce educational inequalities.

The guidelines are summarised in Box 1 and then explained in greater detail below.

Box 1: Guidelines for literacy-friendly FE

1. Prioritise and define literacy
2. Form a literacy steering group
3. Make a 3-year literacy plan
4. Create literacy-friendly systems
5. Employ literacy specialists
6. Provide literacy facilitation for staff
7. Manage literacy in the curriculum
8. Maintain good literacy learning relationships
9. Build banks of literacy resources.
10. Track and celebrate literacy successes.

- 1) **Prioritise and define literacy.** Make literacy a whole organisation priority in the college strategic plan. Recognise that language and literacy are core elements of each college process and key determinants of equity, efficiency and quality. Adopt a clear definition of literacy (e.g. NALA's social practice definition) and instigate a whole college consultation from student to governor level so that there is clarity about the importance given to literacy within the organisation. Keep literacy on all agendas.
- 2) **Form a literacy steering group.** Appoint a representative cross-college literacy steering group that will ensure that language and literacy messages are heard throughout all college systems. The group should be lead by a senior manager and have wide-ranging membership that includes student representation. In consultation with peers, the group should spearhead an analysis of current language and literacy practices across all aspects of the organisation. This will demonstrate the centrality of language and literacy across the college.

- 3) **Make a 3-year literacy plan.** In cooperation with the senior management team, the literacy group should develop a 3-year plan for moving towards a totally integrated approach to language and literacy across the whole college. This should be an operational plan that has a realistic time schedules and resource base and reflects the college ethos and strengths.
- 4) **Create literacy-friendly systems.** All the college systems (timetabling, recruitment, induction, communications etc) should be literacy-friendly and implemented in ways that allow FE students to construct a new, positive learner identity in an adult learning environment. The opportunities to address past unmet language and literacy needs should be present throughout all college services and course activities.
- 5) **Employ literacy specialists.** As unmet literacy needs are pervasive in Irish society, each FE college requires specialist literacy staff who will support both students and staff in their progress toward a totally integrated approach to language and literacy. The literacy specialist will provide 1:1, small group, whole class and cross-college support with language and literacy. This will be most effective when done collaboratively with subject teachers and in a manner that positively avoids stigmatisation.
- 6) **Provide literacy facilitation for staff.** All subject teachers need opportunities for learning how to effectively address the language and literacy that is integrated throughout their specialist area. This awareness should be embedded in adult approaches to learning, group facilitation skills and a reflective consciousness of language and literacy throughout teaching practice. Opportunities should be taken for learning with and from peers.
- 7) **Manage literacy in the curriculum.** Both the language and literacy at the heart of course content and teaching methods need to be made explicit as part of the process of facilitating learning. In this way more creative and integrated ways of providing evidence of competency can be identified. This is the work of college departments in cooperation

with literacy specialists. Inter-departmental collaboration should also be explored.

- 8) **Maintain good literacy learning relationships.** Relationships are central to integrating language and literacy across the whole FE college. In classroom learning relationships, cooperation, sensitivity and respect are needed between staff and students and subject and literacy specialists. Other staff and managers also need to work collaboratively to ensure that college structures support the central business of learning. Strategic external relationships are needed about language and literacy in the context of industry, FETAC and other awarding bodies, higher education and the FE sector.
- 9) **Build banks of literacy resources.** As staff become adept at integrating literacy across their course work the resources they create can be shared and stored centrally for adaptation and development. Effective teaching strategies and techniques can also be recorded and disseminated. ICT resources need to be used where possible to encourage excellent computer literacies.
- 10) **Track and celebrate literacy successes.** An integrated approach to language and literacy improves retention and achievement and these successes should be recorded and celebrated. Literacy has negative associations for many adult learners and the opportunity to reduce the stigma attached to improving spoken and written language should be taken whenever possible. In this way the culture can be changed for everyone.

Final word

Achieving excellence in language and literacy requires optimism, skill and a caring learning community. The ultimate goal of this project has been to ensure that language and literacy practices across FE are inclusive and supportive of all learners and enable each of them to flourish in the context of their own life. In other words our search has been for the best ways to implement an integrated approach to language and literacy across FE. Recognising the dynamic nature of language and literacy in all aspects of society also means acknowledging that we are all constant literacy learners. So we need to be ever vigilant for new ways of reaching for language and literacy excellence. From this perspective, language and literacy become a priority on the learning agenda. This is not just a task for individuals with unmet literacy needs but for whole organisations throughout the education system.

List of acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ALNARC	Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium
ALS	Adult Literacy Scheme
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CAQDA	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
CCLOW	Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women
CDVEC	City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee
CEC	Commission of the European Community
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSH	Community Service and Health
DALC	Dublin Adult Learning Centre
DEL	Department of Employment and Learning
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Science
ENQA - VET	European Network on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
ERC	Educational Research Center
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
FCE	Functional Context Education
FE	Further Education
FENTO	Further Education Training Organisation
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
FHE	Further and Higher Education
HE	Higher Education
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IT	Information Technology
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association

LfLFE	Literacies for Learning in Further Education
LLN	Literacy, Language and Numeracy
LSS	Learning Support Service
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCVER	Australian National Council for Vocational Education and Research
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NI	Northern Ireland
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NRDC	National Research and Development Council
NUI	National University of Ireland
NUIM	National University of Ireland Maynooth
NYTDC	Newbridge Youth and Development Center
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PaRG	Planning and Review Group
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
RTO	Recognised Training Organisations
SfL	Skills for Life
SLO	Specific Learning Outcome
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WELL	Workplace English Language and Literacy

Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1 – Research protocols

Protocols for NALA *Integrating Literacy* Project

January – August 2009

Research participant:

Researcher:

Preliminary stage: explaining the process

Purpose of research

This research in Liberties College is being carried out by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in partnership with the college. The purpose is to explore what kinds of systems and supports would help students to overcome literacy barriers to learning and succeeding on their FE course.

It is hoped that the lessons learned will benefit not only the students and staff of the Liberties College but also the wider adult learning population. NALA hopes that the research findings will help all involved in adult learning to better understand how to meet the language and literacy needs of those in Further Education

Ethics and Confidentiality policy

A number of individual and group interviews will take place between January and June and the information gathered will be used to write a final report. The conversations about language and literacy in FE will be undertaken only with those who are interested and willing to voluntarily participate and of course people may withdraw at any stage during the research process, should they wish to do so. Throughout the research there will be a focus on respect and care for the well-being of all participants.

It is intended to use a tape recorder in order to capture fully, and in their own words, the participants' thoughts and perceptions. These tapes will be securely held in confidence until they are transcribed. This will be done within two weeks of recording after which the tapes will be destroyed. No identifying information will be contained in

the written record of the conversation. The data will, at all times, be held in confidence in the researchers care.

All those who express an interest in taking part in the study are invited by the researcher to sign a consent form. Should you have any questions that you would like to clarify before making a decision to take part, we will be very happy to answer them. Any questions that you may have after deciding to participate will also be addressed.

All information will be held in confidence, names and all identifying details will be changed, and where necessary, removed from transcribed interviews. You will only ever be identified in terms of broad background characteristics.

At the end of the interview process, participants will be invited to discuss the findings and shape their final presentation.

Consent Form: Project Copy

Project title: Integrating Literacy in FE

Researchers: **Ann Hegarty and Maggie Feeley**

Research Managers: Blathnaid Ní Chinnéide & Tina Byrne

NALA

Tel: 01 8554332

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or any information not included here, please ask. Please take the time to read/listen to this carefully.

This research project is gathering information about how people can best be supported with the language and literacy aspects of a Further Education course. It will involve a range of taped conversations with students and staff

about experiences of learning and facilitating learning in an FE context and especially about the reading, writing and language demands of courses.

Your signature on this consent form indicates that you have understood what the research is about and that you agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you have further questions concerning this research please contact either Ann Hegarty (0872398895), Blathnaid Ní Chinnéide or Tina Byrne at NALA (01 8554332)

_____	_____	_____
Participant's name	Participant's signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Researcher's name	Researcher's signature	Date

Interview process

Interviews will take the form of conversations about language and literacy in FE. You have the right to refuse to answer any question. We can stop the interview at any point and you can say if you have had enough at any stage. We will check with you at different points during the interview to make sure that you are OK with the process. There are no right or wrong answers; you are the expert on your own experience and whatever you say will be accepted and believed.

How long will it take?

Each interview will take no more than one hour. It will depend on how much you have to say but it will be possible to break this up, if need be, into different sessions.

What will happen to the information?

The information you give will be written up and become part of a NALA report or other published material. No individual will be written about separately or

named without their consent. Rather your words, in the form of excerpts from the interview, may be used to illustrate points about language and literacy in FE. The findings of the research may also be written about in academic journals or presented at seminars or conferences. The College will be kept informed about such plans and documents or other materials related to the project will be made available on request.

Thank you for taking part in this NALA research project. If you have anything else you would like to talk to us about don't hesitate to get in touch with Ann Hegarty

6.2 Appendix 2 – Sample Interview schedule

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW - COURSE TEACHERS

Notes for researcher – Get comfortable, outline flow of the interview – what we are going to do, step by step, no right answers, drawing from your own experience and expertise, stop at any time!

Stage 1: General warm up questions

How have you been involved with Learning Support Services (LSS) in Liberties College?

Do you think that literacy is a big issue in general / in college courses?

How would you describe your role in relation to supporting students with course related language /literacy needs?

Stage 2: Learning process and integrated literacy

Language and literacy issues

What are the course related language / literacy demands and activities students engage with on your course?

Thinking about your course and the language and literacy elements of this – what difficulties or challenges have you come up against?

What difficulties have students come up against?

How have you been managing?

How have students been managing?

Strategies and support

From your own experience of trying to address these issues, what has worked well?

Do you have any examples of approaches, techniques or sessions that have gone well?

Would you be happy to share them with others?

Can you email them to me – developing good practice handbook and guidelines from the Liberties' experience.

Tell me about the ways you have been supported with the language and literacy aspects of your course delivery.

Have you taken part in any staff training on language and literacy in subject-teaching?

What are your needs in terms of further supporting your students with their literacy and language development?

LSS

How do you understand the role of LSS in the college?

What has been your experience of working with the LSS?

How would you describe your relationship with LSS?

Students who don't engage with the LSS

Are you aware of students who would benefit from the LSS but are not currently doing so?

What do you think might be the barriers?

Any ideas on how to encourage these students to use the service?

Whole college

Are there any other suggestions you can make to the wider college / management in relation to improving the situation for students who have difficulties with language and literacy on their courses?

Are there any other suggestions you can make to the wider college in relation to improving life for course teachers who have students who are struggling with language and literacy on their courses?

Any other ideas in relation to Integrating Literacy across the college?

Stage 3: Resources for Integrated literacy

Environmental resources

LSS space

Where does learning support take place? Location? Accessibility?

Tell me about the place. Suitability? Atmosphere? Formal/informal? Can students drop in any time?

What facilities are available for course teachers? Is there something missing that you would like to see?

If you were re-organising a LSS place, what would it be like?

As it is now, how does it help the learning process? What works best? What changes would be useful?

Other issues about environmental resources?

Course teaching space

What facilities and equipment help – or would help – to make the classroom environment more literacy friendly?

Time

How much time do you spend on your course working on language and literacy issues?

Does support with language and literacy get enough/too much/not enough time during your course?

Do course teachers get enough time to source and develop course materials that are literacy friendly?

How long is each LSS session? Are sessions too long/too short/just right?

Are the times of LSS the most suitable for you and your students? Would other times suit as well/better?

How is LSS time allocated to students and groups? How is it monitored, recorded, managed, reviewed?

Other issues about time resources?

Staffing

What training would be useful for course tutors in relation to further supporting students with language and literacy issues?

Is there enough staff to respond to demands/needs of students?

Is there literacy awareness training available for staff?

Do all course tutors need training to support literacy needs of students?

Other issues about staffing?

Material resources

What resources are available in LSS? Computers? Books? Audio-visual equipment? Comfortable furniture?

Does your classroom have materials that might help students to use study-related literacy skills: Dictionaries? Thesaurus? Posters/visual aids related to the subject?

Are they used?

What additional resources are needed for LSS?

Are you aware of any literacy resources that are being used by other colleagues?

Is there a pool of resources from which course teachers can draw?

Are there further literacy resources needed in the classroom? – What might they be?

Do you adapt materials to suit a range of needs?

Funding

Does any of your course budget get spent on 'literacy friendly' materials?

If budget / resources were no object what recommendations would you make to the college to improve the LSS for students / for course teachers / for the LSS team?

Stage 4: Structures for integrated literacy
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Promotion of courses and LSS

What promotional strategies are used by the college to attract students?

How are the services of the LSS promoted at recruitment stage?

Application Process

Do you think that the forms used for application are easy to complete?

Do you get information from the application process that would help indicate possible course-related literacy needs of students?

Would it be useful if anything else were done during the application process in relation to this – and if so, what?

Induction

What is the role of LSS in the induction of all students to the college?

In your own course, are there early activities for all students that help you identify any language and literacy needs?

Would this be useful?

How and when do students first hear about the work of the LSS?

Have you any ideas about how the college might better promote the LSS?

LSS

Tell me about the current range of students from your courses that are availing of the LSS?

What data is gathered about LSS users?

What is currently in place in relation to developing learning plans with students?

Are there targets?

How are these set?

How is this working – any improvements needed?

How are the learning plans monitored and evaluated?

What communication system is in place between course teachers and LSS staff?

What communication system exists to track the progress of students who are availing of LSS?

How can communication and teamwork between LSS and course teachers be further developed?

What opportunities exist for collaboration between LSS and course teachers?

How is the success of LSS gauged?

How does learning from the LSS experience and from your experience of integrating literacy into your course get fed to management?

College plan

Are you aware if there is a college plan / strategy that includes literacy support? What does it involve?

In your opinion what are the strengths of this plan / what would you add?

Have you any ideas about how the college might better promote inclusion of students with literacy needs?

What plan is there in relation to the further development of literacy awareness development for staff of the college?

How can the college further facilitate collaboration between the LSS and course teachers?

Is there anything else about language and literacy in FE that you think it is important for me to know?

Coming to the end of the interview now – how are you?

How was it for you?

Any changes you would recommend?

REMINDER:

Any sessions / approaches / techniques that have worked – email them to me.
Distribute card with contact details.

Possible follow-up meeting:

Would you be willing to meet me again, briefly, if there's anything else that comes up in the course of my research that I'd like to check with you?

And/or, depending on content of earlier discussion:

Would you be willing to meet me again, briefly, to let me know how you get on with (x plan that might have been mentioned).

6.3 Appendix 3 – Student vox pop schedule

Short interview with 100 students	Yes/ No	Additional comments
Date		
M / F		
What course are you on?		
Are there a lot of reading/ writing tasks?		
Have you ever felt it would be good to get help?		
Do you know there is a LSS in the Liberties?		
Have you ever used it?		
Would you ever use it?		
Would you know how to use it?		
What would stop you using it?		
Has your class had a LSS workshop?		
What topic?		
What other topics would be useful?		
Any other comments?		

Distribute LSS contact card.

6.4 Appendix 4 – Researcher biographies

Ann Hegarty has worked as a literacy practitioner, community development facilitator and trainer of trainers. Her research interests include organisational development and equality issues including women's education, disability rights and workplace literacy.

Maggie Feeley is an experienced literacy practitioner and FE manager. She has worked extensively in adult and community education in Northern Ireland. Her research interests include literacy, gender and equality - in particular the role of affective aspects of equality in literacy learning.

6.5 Appendix 5

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Some useful websites for integrated literacy

www.anta.gov.au

www.basicsskillsbulletin.co.uk/pro_dev/index.cfm

www.coreskills.co.uk/index.html

www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

www.fento.org

www.fetac.ie

www.lancs.ac.uk/lflfe

www.langoz.anu.edu.au

www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/161740.htm

www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion

ww.litnet.dest.gov.au

www.nala.ie

www.nald.ca

www.nrdc.org.uk

www.workbase.org.nz

www.qia.org.uk

www.sflqi.org.uk

www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/

www.tlrp.org

