Read all about it:
Case studies of
teaching reading to
adults in Ireland

Waterford Institute *of* Technology
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE

NALA
National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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.

The Literacy Development Centre, incorporating the NALA/WIT Accreditation Project, is a national partnership between the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), established in 1997 to design, develop and deliver third level qualifications to practitioners working in the adult literacy sector in Ireland. The Literacy Development Centre is based in the School of Lifelong Learning and Education in WIT.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

This research, carried out by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), presents six case studies on reading practice in adult literacy in Ireland. This report is the third in a series of case studies that research and describe a range of literacy and numeracy programmes across Ireland[1].

The purpose of the research was to gain an in-depth insight into specific reading strategies that support adult literacy development. Strategies for teaching reading include giving feedback immediately, discussion of vocabulary during reading, studying words through lists, puzzles, word searches, using dictionaries to find meaning, oral reading, explicit comprehension strategies, accurate phonics teaching (NALA 2009, p93). The case studies in this report focus on different aspects of practice including:

- approaches to teaching and learning,
- general teaching practices,
- specific reading strategies, and
- the use of technology as part of a blended learning approach in the classroom.

The practice showcased in this report was collected at six Adult Literacy Services (ALS) throughout the country. The services were:

1. Altrusa Literacy Service, Cork ETB;
2. Donegal Basic Education Service, Donegal ETB;
3. Word Aid Kilkenny, Kilkenny and Carlow ETB;
4. County Louth Adult Learning Service, Louth and Meath ETB;
5. Ballina Further Education Centre, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB; and
6. South Tipperary Adult Learning Centre, Tipperary ETB.

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[1]The other two reports in the series are: Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Action: six case studies of practice work in Ireland and What really counts: Case studies of numeracy practice in Ireland

Background

In 2013 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published the findings from its first survey of adult skills. The survey, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), was designed to provide an insight into the availability of key competencies and to measure proficiency in skills such as literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology rich environments (OECD, 2013).

To measure literacy skills PIAAC used three basic reading tests. These were: word meaning, sentence processing and passage comprehension. Irish adults who were assessed at being at or below Level 1 on average answered correctly:

□   95% of word meaning;
□   84% of the sentence processing; and
□   91% of passage comprehension tasks.

The survey results for Ireland show that 18% of Irish adults scored at or below Level 1 on the literacy scale. Current Department of Education and Skills policy states that adult literacy programmes should be focused on learning outcomes at Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Levels 1-3.

In 2013 before the PIAAC results were published, the Department of Education and Skills published its review of the adult literacy provision in Ireland. The review set out 32 recommendations to improve adult literacy provision. Following the publication of the review, the Government enshrined an Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy as part of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy in the Further Education and Training Act.

In 2014 two major publications were launched that focus on the development of further education and training in Ireland. 1) Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future (McGuinness, et al, 2014) sets out the historical evolution of further education and training provision in Ireland. It details patterns of provision in terms of overall distribution of places and the balance between full-time labour market programmes and part-time provision with a more community education and adult literacy focus.

2) The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019, accompanied by implementation plans, aims to develop a high quality integrated system of further education and training in Ireland. The two broad objectives of this strategy are that it will meet the needs of citizens and promote economic development (SOLAS, 2014).

In 2012 data from the DES show that the total number of learners in the ETBs' adult literacy service was nearly 55,000. Tuition was delivered by 1,350 paid tutors and 2,735 volunteer tutors (DES, 2013). Adult literacy and numeracy provision is provided by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) through local ALSs. The ALS provides tuition on a one-to-one or group basis and offers a variety of programmes. These include Adult Basic Education, Numeracy, Family Learning, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Workplace Basic Education and Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) to adult learners. Classes are typically for two to four hours per week, during the academic year. The ITABE programme offers the learner the opportunity to access intensive tuition for up to six hours per week over a 14 week period.

Government policy recommends the integration of literacy into all publicly funded FET provision. The SOLAS and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) reports outline the important role played by FET in promoting social inclusion and lifelong learning. By capturing and documenting practice in adult literacy provision, these reports intend to add to the discussion around quality provision for adult learners in Ireland.

Methodology

Aim
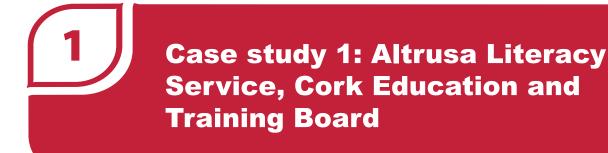
The aims of the research were to:
- capture and document effective approaches in using specific reading strategies with adults with literacy difficulties;
- provide detailed information on teaching and learning practice that will be a resource to adult literacy practitioners; and
- disseminate examples of practice to stakeholders within adult literacy and numeracy, adult basic education, community education and further education.

A case study methodology was used. Case studies for educative purposes are useful to illustrate the complexity, as well as providing examples or illustrations, of theory or practice. The techniques employed for use in the research were primarily qualitative methods. Qualitative methods were chosen because they are particularly designed towards discovery and they allow the researcher to explore identified themes and issues in great depth and detail (Strauss and Corbin, 2007). These methods were semi-structured in-depth interviews with tutors.

Data analysis

Verbatim transcripts of all individual in-depth interviews were prepared. Data analysis was guided by grounded theory methodology in which data collection and analysis occur close in time (Strauss & Corbin, 2007). The research team discussed the interview process and, at this stage, interview questions, topics and language were modified where appropriate. Preliminary analysis was ongoing throughout the fieldwork phase of the research.

For example, after the completion of individual interviews, it was standard practice for researchers to make a written record of notable issues and themes. The initial stage of the formal analytic process involved a thorough reading and re-reading of individual interview and focus group data. Open coding was used in the case of all transcripts to group concepts, such as teaching and learning styles and reading strategies.

Case study 1: Altrusa Literacy Service, Cork Education and Training Board

Background information on service

Altrusa, one of the Cork literacy schemes, was set up in 1974 by the Altrusa Club of Cork (a women's voluntary service organisation). It is now an integral part of Cork ETB, with a half-time Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO). It is based in Cork City centre, attached to St John's Central College of Further Education, and has over 200 students. Half of the students are learning English as a second language. The other half of the students are Irish, and include early-school-leavers, job-seekers, learners with dyslexia, and learners with a mild learning disability. The service has over 100 volunteer tutors and seven tutors are on part-time contracts. Tuition is provided in basic literacy – reading, spelling, writing; basic numeracy – computational operations, money, time; Communications at QQI Levels 2 and 3; Mathematics at Levels 2 and 3; Personal Effectiveness at QQI Level 3, and Computers at QQI Levels 2 and 3.

The tutor

Clare Hatcher has been working in the literacy service for the past ten years. Clare facilitates literacy groups at QQI Levels 2 and 3, primarily on reading and writing. The accredited modules she teaches include Communications and Personal Effectiveness at Level 3. Her qualifications include the Higher Certificate in Arts in Literacy Development, and in teaching English (TEFL and CELTA). She is currently participating on a Degree course in Adult Education at Level 7 and takes part in in-service training provided by the ETB and NALA. Clare is deeply committed to the social practice approach to literacy.

Preparation and planning

Tutor's understanding of literacy

Clare views the decoding aspects of reading as existing on a spectrum from the very basics of recognising a word and that it has meaning. She talks about a learner who was able to do word searches by matching symbols, but she was unable to read any of the words. Other students learned to read at school but they have no comprehension. To Clare, this is like an opera singer, singing in Italian, who doesn't understand the language. She cannot sing it from her heart unless she knows what the words mean. But once there

is word recognition (even of a few words) with meaning attached, the learner is on the spectrum of reading.

Identifying learners' goals and levels

Learners' goals are assessed when they first come to the scheme, by the ALO or Resource Worker. Learners are often defeatist about their skills, saying they cannot read or write, but they usually have some literacy skills. Getting them to identify what they can do and where they would like to improve can help in the goal setting process. Learners can be very general at explaining what they want to achieve. Talking to them about what they like to do can help them to identify goals. An example of this might be somebody who cannot read menus and goals can be developed around reading menus or any materials relating to food. Clare reviews goals mid-way through each term and she encourages the learner to self-assess by reflecting on what they have learned.

Supporting learner styles

The groups Clare works with are working towards QQI accreditation at Levels 2 and 3. Within these levels there are learners with stronger abilities in certain areas. This can be a challenge when developing approaches and methodologies.

In general, Clare finds that she has plenty scope for innovation in her work but sometimes QQI learning outcomes can be narrow and so being innovative can be challenging. She feels the opportunities are there but tutors need to be resourceful. Whenever possible she encourages her group to organise activities from which a range of learning outcomes can be achieved. On one occasion they organised an awards event. The ALO gave them permission and they did all the planning: deciding on a date and venue, organising the food and issuing invitations and thank-you letters. Many of the learning outcomes from Level 3 Communications and Personal Effectiveness modules were met through running the event. There were many opportunities to practise writing, for example, the group wrote a thank-you letter to the person who had come to give a speech. This involved learning how to address envelopes. They also used the events to create photo collages and various other pieces of writing.

When this group had completed their QQI portfolios, they said they would like to read a book together. To help them choose a book, Clare went to the Open Door website and got a list of the books with a summary of each. Each learner was given a summary to read and to explain to the group what the book was about. They then voted for the book they would

like to read as a group. This took time due to the varied interests of group members. Some liked science fiction and others liked romance. Finally, they agreed on an adventure story called 'The Bank Robbery'. However, they had problems identifying with this story because it is UK-based. Clare did not want the group to struggle with meaning because members didn't understand the cultural aspects of the story, so she took the text and rewrote it as if it was happening in the South Mall in Cork. The bank's name was changed to AIB. She also changed names and the language where appropriate. By changing the place names, the people's names and the language she was making it relevant to their lives. As she pointed out: 'Otherwise you're struggling, with things you don't need to struggle with'.

Barriers to learning

Clare finds that the greatest block to learning is anxiety. She encourages learners to focus on what they can do, rather than being limited by 'I can't' thinking. Language is fundamental and changing learners' language can change their frame of mind. By moving from 'I can't' to 'I can', they change their outlook.

Creating a relaxed learning environment is essential to relieving learners' anxiety. She likes to make the classroom a relaxed and open place. Recently a learner said she loves getting up on Mondays, because she is coming to class. When she was in school she hated Mondays.

Clare feels uncomfortable labelling people with specific learning difficulties like dyslexia. She recognises if people confuse their Bs and Ds, or if they have a difficulty with particular letter blends. She deals with these people by tackling the particular block they experience by talking with the learner and by discussing the issue with the ALO.

Preparing resources

At the start of each term, Clare will have an overall plan but she will have an open mind to how outcomes will be met and will respond to learners' needs, to emergent topics and learning opportunities. For example, an open day at Cork Institute of Technology will provide ideas and materials for a lot of activities.

Approaches to teaching and learning

Encouraging discussion and collaboration

Clare finds that a paired reading approach works well because the burden is not on one individual to get everything perfect. If the group is working well together they want to help one another. The only thing to be conscious of is the people who want to jump in too quickly with a word. Clare encourages them to hold off and give everybody a chance to think it out for themselves. Collaboration is partly joining in and partly holding back and knowing which is appropriate.

Discussion on reading is often generated by asking questions about what is going on in the story. An example was of teenage boys who ended up in court. There was very little understanding about the terms 'guilty', 'not guilty' and 'acquitted'. They thought that 'not guilty' meant you got away with it. Lack of understanding of these basic concepts impedes understanding of the whole story.

Clare gives her Level 3 group a chapter to read at home and they work on comprehension questions or activities on word use, which Clare has devised. Recently Clare has added in a question to stimulate free writing. For example, with Bullet in the Ark, which is an adventure story, she will ask them if they have ever been on a boat trip or if they can imagine how a particular character might feel. She sometimes asks the learners to predict what might happen next. This allows learners to think about this at home rather than be expected to answer immediately in a group discussion during the session. In this way they are developing creative writing skills. Having the vocabulary about the topic from the chapter gives them confidence in their own writing about their experiences. They might manage to write half a page and this activity also highlights areas where they might need help with writing.

The tutor's teaching style

Clare uses a collaborative teaching style and is always on the look-out for opportunities for inductive learning where learners discover things for themselves. For example, noticing patterns in words, like dropping an e. In learning new words, Clare tries not to give them the strategy of looking for smaller words within the bigger word but, by writing the big word on the board, she asks them what they notice about it. With the word 'important', somebody might see 'an', another will say 'ant', another might see 'port'. She asks them how that will help them so they realise it is a strategy for breaking down the word into

manageable pieces. In this way they have discovered their own strategy. Sometimes giving the strategy can be stressful for learners as they try to get it right. But, if they are looking with an open mind they are not worried, just curious. 'It frees up the thinking process'.

Clare has noticed that it is common for learners, when reading back over what they have written, to not notice their errors. For example, they might write 'it was rain morning' and, when asked to read this back they will say 'it was raining in the morning'. She asks them to count the words they have written and count the words they are saying and they find that they have said six words but have only written four. It is then that they realise there is a mismatch. They find it difficult to understand how they missed this at home but, now they are in class, they can see the error. She tells them they are in 'the zone' and she explains 'the zone' in her own words, drawing on the work of Vygotsky and the zone of proximal development, to illustrate how learning can be extended by just being with somebody else. She encourages them to create their own 'zone', being their own tutor, by using matchsticks to count out the words and seeing if they match. By using this strategy, Clare found a remarkable improvement. This skill is an important one because small words are important to the meaning of what is being written. Acquiring skills like this that they can use at home can really empower learners. This was a good example of capitalising on a teachable moment.

Taking advantage of teachable moments

An example of a teachable moment was when the learners were writing an envelope addressed to NALA and noted the post code within the Dublin area. Through discussion, it emerged that nobody understood the relevance of post codes. One learner had lived in London and had no idea what the post code there meant. Small things like this can be a huge thing in reading. A similar issue is the 'dot coms', or the 'dot ie' and what these signify. Talking about these issues helps the learner connect more with what is going on around them and it extends opportunities to learn outside of the session.

Clare uses relevant reading material when she can. In particular, if learners get a letter from the ALO, these letters are used in class because the language will be more accessible. Some correspondence can be quite difficult for learners to understand. For example, a learner once got a letter about her Child Benefit and it was well beyond her reading ability. In cases like this, Clare will deal with it on an individual basis and not make it a topic for the class. However, there was general interest about the Property Tax as many of the learners had received forms and letters and they were worried about it. The group worked on the actual form which Clare was able to get from the library. There

was a lot they could not understand. For instance, they were asked for their pet's name (as a password) and did not understand what that had to do with the tax. They were very confused.

At the last census Clare found the NALA resource on completing forms to be very useful and that was done in class. Anything to do with citizenship is worthwhile when working with groups. It encourages participation. When there is an election coming up Clare will check to see if everybody is registered to vote. Working through the voter registration form was very difficult because there is a lot on the form about exemptions and data protection. Clare finds that simplifying such texts is necessary because otherwise they will be put off forms for life.

These collaborative and inductive strategies and approaches to learning are learner-centred and in keeping with the general ethos of adult literacy practice.

New teaching ideas and approaches

Clare is an avid learner and attends as many in-service training opportunities as possible. In some cases, she facilitates training workshops and finds that she learns in both situations. She also uses the internet to keep up with international trends and to avail of new resources. She finds the Scottish and New Zealand sites to be particularly useful for techniques and resources. BBC Skillswise is particularly useful for literacy and ESOL resources.

Reading strategies

The use of questioning

Clare gets learners involved in their own learning by asking them questions about what helped them to read something that they found difficult before. For example, if they used to mix up words like 'reading' and 'riding' and can now read 'reading' correctly, they might say that, while they knew it began with a 'r' sound and ended with and 'ing', they now slowed it down to check what was the middle bit. So the strategy they have developed is slowing themselves down. Another learner had managed a long multi-syllable word and, when Clare asked him how he managed this, he said he had broken it down. She had been encouraging him to use this strategy for two years and now he was using it for himself. Another learner was working on prefixes and suffixes and as Clare encouraged him to take off the 'in' and the 'ble' he recognised that he was left with the word 'opera' and, when

he put the word back together again, he said he could now understand what doctors had been saying about his father's illness.

In relation to metalanguage, Clare would have avoided using the language of grammar but she now finds that terms like nouns, verbs and syllables can help learners who are at an appropriate level to extend their own learning, by using computers. For example, if a learner working at Level 3 could practise prefixes and suffixes on a website in their own time, they will need the terminology to get optimum use of the resources being presented. The website will use the technical terms, not word beginnings and word endings. The word 'suffix' can be difficult for learners and Clare has a learner who cannot say the word but this does not prevent him understanding it and using it to work on a website. In this way, Clare is introducing metalanguage more than she would have in the past but it is all based on the learners' need for understanding and being able to use resources.

Critical reading

In a group situation it is important that there is a general interest in the topics discussed. Elections are a good discussion topic. Learners talk about posters - why they are there, which posters are in learners' localities, why some candidates have more posters than others, what is different in other areas and so on.

Some time ago the group visited the Dáil and organised the whole event – transport, train times, organising a TD as sponsor of the group. After this trip, Clare used a free leaflet published by the Dáil on a typical day in the Dáil. It featured a young woman TD, who cycles to the Dáil and is an environmental campaigner. Because of their recent trip the group could see that this depiction was in no way typical and they discussed why the Dáil was being depicted in this way. Encouraging this type of critical thinking is difficult, but even if they can see that a typical TD is male then that is critical reading. Some are better at this type of thinking than others. It will depend a lot on background and it has to be nurtured. Clare is careful about using the language of 'critical' thinking or reading because of the negative connotations of the word 'critical'.

Another way to promote 'critical thinking' is to encourage groups to think about where the power lies when decisions are made. In one Level 3 group, where there were concerns about funding cuts, Clare suggested they work on a mind map to help them describe using their own words why the literacy work they are doing in class is valuable to them and communicate this to the ALO. Through discussion, Clare suggested that it can sometimes be more important to hear from the students than the tutor. Some members of the group

were dubious that they, as learners, would have a bigger say than a tutor. But one learner suggested that is what is meant by being 'learner centred'.

Clare has used critical reading techniques by getting the group to do a book review. At first the group said why it was they liked a particular book but, through discussion, they were able to look deeper into the circumstances of the three little boys in the story. One learner said that the boys were wild; another suggested the boys just wanted to be loved and that the story was more about the consequences of one boy's mother having left. In that way they took an adventure story and discovered the subtext. Clare plans to extend this idea to get them to think about why people write stories. Is the story the important thing or are we being told something else?

Another approach is to get the group to consider why these three boys were chosen: why did the author not choose three boys in a private school in Dublin? Critical reading has to be a slow process because not everybody in the group has the same cognitive ability and the realisation of a deeper meaning might come to them more slowly. On the other hand, these people might be the better spellers. Making sure that everybody takes part in a group is always a challenge.

The best way to ensure understanding of individual words is to get the learner to put the words into a sentence in a different context. In reading, they don't have to write the sentence, but just to use words in a variety of ways.

Using phonics and decoding words

Phonics are important. Learners can have poor phonological awareness and often need help developing this approach. They don't hear the sounds and rhymes in words in the same way as children. Asking adults to identify the sounds they hear can be problematic because they might think making the 'ba' sound, for example, is childish. They are afraid of saying a wrong sound. Learners who have children or grandchildren in school have an advantage because they hear the children sounding out words for homework.

Clare uses the whiteboard to add and subtract letters from words to see if they make word sense. Sometimes a learner might have a difficulty with a particular letter blend, for example BL blends, and Clare uses focused exercises on particular blends and by practising with these the difficulty can be overcome.

Clare has developed her own repertoire of flash cards. She puts the picture on one side and the word on the other (unlike the children's variety with the word and picture together).

She also uses picture dictionaries. One of her learners is a landscape gardener and he uses a picture dictionary to ensure that he knows all the tools and plants and how they are written. In that way he knows what he needs to work on.

Clare uses the Language Experience Approach with learners and when they have written some sentences, she will type them up, cut them out and get them to put the sentences in sequential order. She plans to use sequencing in stories more in the future.

Simplification is something that Clare often uses, in particular if there is an important news item and she can get a newspaper article to simplify and use the text in class.

Using whiteboards

Clare finds that the whiteboard accommodates all learning styles, as she encourages all learners to write on it. Perhaps somebody has written a sentence at home and brings it into class. They then dictate the sentence to another learner, who acts as a scribe. The group then assesses if there is anything that needs to be changed, in terms of spelling or syntax. Being in front of the group can be uncomfortable for them but it gets them more involved in their learning. Once learners are used to it, several report that it is something which helps them enormously and which they really enjoy. It allows the opportunity for the learner to self-check the version which they wrote at home and allows some 'checking time' to be of benefit to the whole group.

Using technology

To introduce technology, Clare uses catalogues, leaflets and NALA resources to build familiarity with the language around technology. This approach has already enabled two of her learners to enrol on a basic computer class.

Clare's one-to-one learner was afraid of computers but they were able to use the computer at the centre and, eventually, Clare introduced him to Write On. By using Write On he was able to do his own work between the one-to-one sessions and his literacy skills dramatically improved. Before NALA provided online resources, Clare encouraged this learner to use BBC Skillswise and Spelling City. The Cambridge on-line dictionary was very helpful because when he got stuck he could use the audio button. The only problem was that the centre didn't have adequate speakers, so she encouraged him to go to the library to use the computer there. He thought this would be publicising his literacy difficulties, but when the centre got flooded he did not have any choice and in time he got

comfortable with being in the library. After, he decided to get his own computer. They spent three weeks researching together what it was that he needed, in terms of specifications. He went to the Harvey Norman store and they were very helpful with information and with getting him set up. Since then he has completed the entire Level 2 and Level 3 on Write On, with some support from Clare. This was only possible because he had his own laptop.

He is now doing creative writing and typing up his own stories. The spell check and grammar checks are very helpful. Clare bought him the Franklin spell checker. This is a hand held device, which can be bought on the internet, and it helps by guessing how a person with dyslexia would spell a word. Between the on-line dictionary, with the audio button, and the Franklin spell checker he is really gaining independence. Not everybody will have the resources to get a laptop.

2 Case Study 2: Donegal Basic Education Service, Donegal Education and Training Board

Background information on service

Donegal ETB developed a programme mapped to the Level 1 standards on the National Framework of Qualifications. The programme, validated by QQI and delivered over the last three years, has been made available to other ETBs for their use. The programme was developed to validate learning at this elementary stage and to support and encourage progression to Level 2. The title of the programme is Core Skills and the component awards are: reading, writing, listening and speaking and quantity and number.

In summer 2013 Donegal ETB's Basic Education Service (BES) developed a Core Skills Workbook to support delivery of the programme and meet an identified need for an adult friendly resource at this level. Both the programme and the resource have drawn the attention of schools and organisations working with children with special educational needs who have expressed an interest in using it with their learners. The programme provides a context to meet learner needs and to affirm that learning. This enables both learners and tutors to measure progress which encourages persistence.

The tutor

Caroline McCabe has been working as both a volunteer and a part-time group tutor with Donegal ETB's Basic Education Service since 2012. Caroline is qualified as a Certified Public Accountant and is also a member of Accounting Technicians Ireland. She has completed the ETB's Initial Tutor Training Course and also participated in a number of in-service training courses.

Planning and preparation

Identifying learners' goals and needs

The learners that Caroline works with are at QQI Level 1. As part of the initial assessment process, the Basic Education Service uses a 'Skills Checker' to determine the correct entry level. The Skills Checker takes less than ten minutes to complete and is mapped to the Framework for Qualifications. According to Caroline it can be difficult to assess people as they do not like 'being judged'. Therefore, it is extremely important not to frighten them

away. In her experience many first time learners who have literacy difficulties also lack in confidence. She finds that their biggest fear is that they will be the 'lowest' in the group. Caroline finds that usually there are some learners in the group who are slightly 'more advanced' than Level 1 but are not quite ready for Level 2. These learners usually present with what is commonly referred to as a 'spiky profile[2]' where they are weaker in some areas than others. She explains that some learners can make a 'good stab' at reading, but may be weaker when it comes to spelling. She finds that this is not unusual with most learners at Beginner Level and points out that individual learners have different skills.

Working with groups

When working with the group, Caroline ensures that she 'caters' to the needs of all learners and that 'no one gets left behind or gets bored'. She actively encourages peer support, collaboration and discussion within the group. At an early stage she will identify the hobbies and interests of the individuals and will use these for learning purposes. For example, there is one learner whose hobby is wildlife. During one session she encouraged him to share his interest with the group. The class had a discussion on wildlife, where to find wildlife and the different wildlife they encounter in their daily lives. This generated interest and discussion in the group and opened up other learners to discussing and sharing their own hobbies and interests.

Designing a class contract

From the very first class Caroline spends class time talking to the learners, getting to know them better and talking about their reasons and motivation for returning to education. One of the first exercises for the group is to draw up a class contract. This sets out ground rules for the group. These ground rules are the learners' own rules and when both tutor and learners are happy that they have included areas that they wish then these are agreed by all. One key rule is that 'everything that happens in this class is confidential and will go no further than the classroom'. Caroline feels that naming these guidelines or rules is a good way to ensure a relaxing environment that will help participants thrive and learn. She will read the contract to the learners and write it on a white board using 'common words' that the learners know. Once the rules are agreed the learners copy down the contract, agree it and sign it.

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[2]A spiky profile refers to learners who have a mixture of literacy and numeracy strengths and weaknesses

So on the very first day I would write out the contract on the board, I would also put everyone's name on the board so that nobody starts to panic. They can write it down and read it whenever they want.

Another rule or guideline is about the use of mobile phones during class time. The class has to agree how phones will be used, should they be turned off, put on silent mode or put on buzzer. This provides a platform for the group to have a good discussion at their initial meeting and one in which everyone can contribute.

Caroline is aware that some of the learners may be embarrassed about taking literacy classes and that their families and friends may not know about it. So as part of the contract she assures the learners that she will also adhere to the confidentiality rule – even to the point that she will not speak to them in public, unless they speak to her first.

Preparing resources

Caroline uses the Core Skills Workbook, designed and published by Donegal ETB, as her main resource. She also downloads online materials such as crossword puzzles, and uses supermarket advertisements and flyers, household bills and official documents such as passport and driving licence forms. She also consults primary school materials such as Jolly Phonics and Spellbound for ideas, but is aware to avoid too many primary school materials as they tend to be child orientated rather than adult centred.

Approaches to teaching and learning

The tutor's teaching style

Caroline describes her style of teaching as facilitative. She sees her role as providing a positive and comfortable learning environment for the learners and to support them in their learning. She describes how one of her own biggest learning experiences was discovering that when it comes to tutoring adults there is a need to understand that there is no 'one fits all' way of teaching. Each learner learns in a different way and this must be taken into account at all times.

Core Skills Workbook for beginner learners

The Core Skills Workbook was developed as a resource to support both learners and tutors participating in and/or delivering the Level 1 programme. The aim of the workbook

is to provide an adult-centred learning resource that is contextualised to the learner's own environment. The Core Skills Workbook is mapped to standards of knowledge, skills and competencies at Level 1. This workbook is designed to build and reinforce knowledge and skills and also alerts learners to their own existing skills. The main challenge in producing the workbook was to design and use materials that were suitable for use with adults as opposed to children or young people. The workbook contains materials that include handouts, bills and worksheets based on local business including a made up supermarket called Super Duper Supermarket.

The workbook follows a spiral sequencing format where Caroline covers a particular topic but can spiral back to the topic at a later stage, albeit through a different approach. For example, when the learner starts to read they are initially introduced to 22 frequent words such as: and, in, it, that, had and they. They then move on to writing the words, then putting the words in sentences and using the words to write their own sentences. The sentences are used to practise reading, writing and spelling. The learners are encouraged to say the words, write the words, hear the words and sound out the words. This spiralling sequence reinforces the learning and it uses a multi-sensory approach without having to, at an early stage, introduce concepts such as phonics or referring learners to the Dolch List.

The BES stresses the importance of tutors having the skills to adapt materials to meet learner(s) needs, and Caroline supplements teaching from the workbook with other resources. She provides each learner with a copy book into which they can write to reinforce learning that has already taken place. She encourages the learners to write down words that they are unfamiliar with, words they do not know how to spell, or words that they do not understand. Time is spent practising writing and spelling the words, and the group will discuss new words and what they mean. For example, she will have the learners call out any new words they have written down and she writes them on a white board. If they've taken down something and the spelling is wrong they can copy down what I've written. So, if they've made a mistake they can correct it and nobody knows.

Reading strategies

Critical reading

Caroline introduces the concepts of comprehension and critical reading right from the start. She will use materials that the learners have a particular interest in, for example, the local newspaper, and pick a small article with as few words as possible. To ensure that the

learners have understood what they read, she has a discussion on the piece afterwards. She gives an example of how the group had read an advertisement for the coffee morning in the local parish centre and a discussion took place around the event. The discussion focused on 'who had organised the coffee morning?' 'what was the reason for organising it, was it to raise funds for a charitable cause?' and 'who might attend the coffee morning?' The purpose of the discussion is to encourage the learners to not only read but to think critically about what they have read so that they understand better the meaning of the text. Caroline has discovered that as the group progresses and their reading skills start to improve their confidence in their ability to learn also increases. The learners become more independent and will often source their own reading materials, start their own discussion on comprehension and oftentimes move beyond the reading materials that she has provided them with.

There is one particular lady, and I'd say she's now at Level 3, she could be doing Level 3 reading. She has raced ahead of the others and is starting to read works of fiction and she's devouring them, she absolutely loves them.

In order to enhance and develop the learners' reading skills Caroline has suggested that they visit the local library. However, this has been met with resistance on the part of some of the learners who feel that 'they are not quite there yet.'

Using Phonics and decoding words

Caroline uses phonics instruction as a part of her reading practice in class and the learners are taught the 42 main letter sounds. However it is her view that phonics are not for everyone, doesn't work for everyone and that some learners don't 'get' phonics. Therefore, she doesn't stick rigidly to teaching phonics but incorporates them into her practice if and when necessary. For example, when reading a piece of text she will get the group to sound out words that they find difficult to pronounce or that they 'get stuck' on.
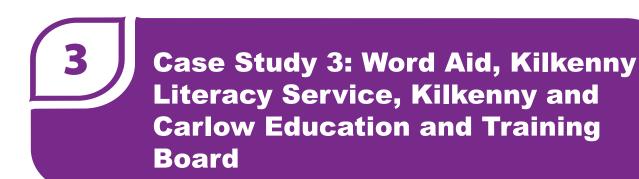
The group is introduced to Phonics, Finding words, Word families, Words that rhyme, Working on words with the same letter, Looking at the beginning and ending of words, Word recognition, Dolch list, Social sight vocabulary, Flash cards, Look-Say. And the beginner readers learn frequent words, Social sight vocabulary, everyday words relevant to learners, Look-Say, Read-Write-Say, alphabet recognition and place of letters, alphabet order for common and relevant words.

Evaluation

Caroline records learner progress at the end of the each lesson and at the end of the course. When preparing for a class Caroline draws up a lesson plan. The lesson plan is an outline of how the session will go and the resources she will need for each session. For example, to ensure the class runs smoothly she will allocate a certain amount of time to each subject and notes down if certain areas, say spelling, need more time than others. She also writes notes at the end of each session recording how the each learner 'got on' in the session. Each lesson plan informs how Caroline plans and prepares for the next class. When planning her lessons, she ensures that she uses a variety of resources that will be of interest to the learners and will enhance the learning through the use of different resources in different contexts.

Caroline finds that the Core Skills Workbook is a good way of charting learner progress as it has all their work in one place. It also allows the learners to reflect on their work and skills development from the time they start the course to the time they complete it. Learners who successfully complete the workbook build a portfolio of work to show that they have reached QQI Level 1 standard. Caroline believes that accreditation is important to learners – they are eager to get it, they are dying to get it completed and to be able to say 'I've passed that.'

Case Study 3: Word Aid, Kilkenny Literacy Service, Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board

Background information on service

Kilkenny's literacy service is called Word Aid, a name prompted by its learners in 1990. Learners said that they came to the service because of their difficulty with words, and they received aid. That ability to provide aid for literacy and numeracy has continued and grown, with over 1,000 adults a year now using the Word Aid, which is based in Kilkenny City and in several outreach centres in the county.

Word Aid looks after the literacy and numeracy needs of adults returning to education. Learners who want to can work towards achieving QQI Accreditation for their learning Word Aid uses information technology to support its programmes, including NALA's Write On programme.

The tutor

Margaret Ryan has been a tutor since 1998. She started as a volunteer tutor in Camphill where she worked with adults with special needs. She works with groups and teaches literacy, numeracy, ICT, personal skills, personal and interpersonal skills and other topics. Margaret works at QQI Levels 1, 2 and 3, as well as with ESOL students who have no formal education. Currently, she is working with two ITABE groups.

Margaret has gained qualifications from the WIT modules and from the NUI Maynooth Certificate in Adult and Community Education. NALA training, and in-service days are also availed of, such as a recent workshop provided to Word Aid tutors on the topic of Family Literacy.

Planning and Preparation

Tutor's understanding of literacy

Margaret understands reading as involving recognition, comprehension, application, evaluation and transferring it, or applying it in a context other than where it is learned. Recognition includes recognising that there is a reading strategy, then learning another reading strategy, and being able to use different technologies for reading.

Identifying learners' goals and needs

The Adult Literacy Organiser of Word Aid carries out an initial assessment of the learner's needs. She then discusses them with Margaret, and both she and Margaret meet the new student. Thereafter assessment is regular, especially when a plan of work is near achievement, and the learner is asked what s/he might like to do next. Assessment is also incorporated into the curriculum development process. Initially a learner might not have thought through what they want in terms of goals, so it needs to be checked throughout the process.

Margaret understands that learners' goals can change especially after discussion. She finds that learners sometimes don't share their goals due to embarrassment or shame. It is not until the learner is comfortable within a group that they will be confident enough to express their goal or goals. The more negative a learner's previous experience with learning, the longer it takes them to say 'Actually, this is what I want to do'.

The ideal is that a group has the ability to negotiate a learning plan together. If needed, Margaret will propose ideas.

Preparing resources

Margaret starts by doing some research. If a group want to work on healthy lifestyles, Margaret's research can identify nearby organic farms. She can then organise a visit to the farm. These types of visits reinforce learning or help learners acquire new knowledge. Reading skills can be embedded in the activity.

As Margaret says: 'the job takes over your head' so that as tutor, she is always thinking of suitable activities, researching them, but also working out how to fit in what the group wants to do with the available QQI certification.

Margaret values the new ideas she gets from fellow tutors. This sharing of ideas is new for Margaret as it is in stark contrast to the years of 'splendid isolation' she enjoyed as a voluntary tutor. The centre facilitates many conversations about new ideas, as the culture of the centre is open and enthusiastic about talking about trying new resources or websites.

Working with groups

One of Margaret's Special Needs groups has a wide age range, from 24 to 75. Learners

are also at different levels, from Level 1 through to Level 3. A good group dynamic enables the regular use of peer teaching. Margaret scaffolds a different complexity of tasks with them, so sometimes they are working on completely different tasks, or they might be working in pairs. For example, if the task is to sequence a set of pictures and tell a story, they will have to do it together, by listening to each other, communicating with each other, and presenting it to the rest of the group, and answer questions from the wider group. This group is functioning well as a result of four years in ITABE. Some of them have completed a full Level 2 certificate. When the ability to work independently in the group exists, Margaret is then able to work with individuals at Level 1 on a one-to-one basis.

In one of the centres, there are 32 students working with four tutors, and all of the students are working at different rates. Some of them need more complex tasks, so tutors have to be more creative, add more activities, change activities and make them more complex.

Group Management

Settling into a group and managing the dynamics of dealing with other people is part of what a learner has to deal with, in addition to being able to focus on achieving learning objectives. Many learners start out being very aware of how they themselves are feeling, but not as aware of how other people in the group are feeling. But when these feelings are expressed, the learner can get a sense that they felt it too, and in turn feel more able to express their own feelings.

One group had 2011 as the Year of Listening. This helped the group focus on the role of listening and the skills involved in effective listening. Margaret sees this as part of the socialisation of a learner into a group.

For some learners, progress is that they attend class. They will find it easier to do this if they:
- have confidence in the group
- are allowed to give their opinion
- can complete a task unaided or with lesser help than they needed in the beginning of their course
- can clearly articulate their needs.

All of these things show progress.

Barriers to learning

Margaret uses a range of exercises to help learners identify their learning styles. The Honey and Mumford exercise is available in pictorial form. Margaret might also get learners to pick out pictures of how they like to do things. The Adult Educational Guidance Service can also provide a session on Multiple Intelligences, or Margaret can read over an exercise.

The process model at the core of adult literacy practice ensures that safety issues and other basic needs such as heat, warmth, and food are addressed. As Margaret notes, she may be moving around the classroom, but the learners may not be. She is aware that they can get very cold.

Approaches to teaching and learning

Style of teaching

Margaret describes her style of teaching as more facilitative rather than didactic. She doesn't like to stand and tell learners what to do, and prefers listening to what they have to say. She is curious about human nature. The best class is the one where she hasn't heard her own voice, but instead she has heard the voice of the quieter learner.

Margaret makes learning fun. Sometimes the work is about keeping attendance high, facilitating the learning and observing if it is going right. It is the tutor's job to leave her life at the door when s/he comes to the classroom because if this is not done, learners are very aware of it because so much communication is unsaid.

Using innovative teaching ideas and approaches

The Word Aid service is described by Margaret as a place where tutors are encouraged to try different materials, technologies and ideas. Margaret's confidence to use her imagination has grown over time, and increases through training and meeting other tutors, and discovering what works in practice.

Ensuring transferability of learning

Making the learning relevant is the best way to ensure the transfer of learning into different settings. The learning has to meet whatever need is there. Immediate needs must be

dealt with. The tutor can help the learner make connections in their community, assisted by the Adult Education Guidance Service. Many women are dependent on their family environment and how much encouragement they get at home, but this is outside of the tutor's control.

Sometimes Margaret uses a simple task, but with no input from her in it, so that the task can be completed independently. This is important for its transferability. As Margaret notes 'as they become more independent, you matter less and less'.

Reading strategies

The use of questioning

Asking open questions is used to elicit what the learners know; asking closed questions can give learners confidence that they can give the tutor an answer. Sometimes a learner may feel put on the spot if they cannot select the answer to an open question. Margaret notes that for many learners with special needs, they may be unaccustomed to being asked questions, especially about what they want out of the learning. They may not be used to being given choices. Nowadays, a lot of learners have stronger opinions of what they want to learn and what they don't want to learn. Choice may not be something that they ever even thought about before. Margaret consults the group and asks them 'what would you like to do this term?' If the reply is, for example, 'we'd like to go on a trip', then Margaret says 'okay, let's make this educational. How can we do it?' and the negotiation starts from there. Last year, this group did a project on the Gathering, visited the Blackrock Castle observatory in Cork, and sent their video into space. They took part in something that other people in the community were doing. It felt good. The idea came from a flyer that another tutor had given the group, and a discussion about space in the class.

The learners in this group will question Margaret about the purpose of a task and if something better or more interesting can be done.

Critical reading

Need can present opportunities for critical reading. For example, if a letter needs to be sent to an organisation, questions are asked about what is needed, what does the learner need to do. Margaret encourages any reader to consider why something is being read, what is the perspective of the writer, what is the message of the piece. Elections, for example, provide opportunities to simplify text, and examine what the text means. The discussion can lead to identifying things that learners can do in relation to the election.

Discussion can also trigger something else that they need to deal with, or raise questions about something that isn't happening but that they would like to see happening.

For the Special Needs group, learners with ageing parents have a major question in their lives about where they will go later on, and these learners become more conscious of this big question in their lives. Or the news about a tutor getting engaged to be married raises questions for these learners about what they want in their own lives, of if they feel they are missing out on something everybody else has that seems to come naturally to others but not to them. Such learners may form an attachment to a care worker, or to a friend who hasn't special needs: there's no reciprocity there and then they have to deal with the effects of that.

Using technology

Margaret integrates the use of technology in the classroom, whether as smart pads or laptops, the option is always there for the learner. In one case, a learner faced considerable anxiety at the thought of opening a book, but did not have the same fear in using the computer. In any group, there may be a mix of computer skills, and the more confident learner can help the less confident learner, so peer teaching results. Margaret also uses the computer for spelling, reading, and the Write On programme.

Margaret selected the use of a reading pen for one of the special needs group learners, because it enables him work on his own during the class using the little earphones. The learner also takes the reading pen home and uses it, and is able to read a little of the text and tell Margaret what it is about in the next class. Another of the learners uses an app on his phone to read the newspaper. A major advantage in the availability of technology is that the tutor is as much a learner as the student, creating a sense of partnership in the learning process.

If a learner doesn't feel ready to use some new technology, Margaret will show it to them and tell them that she thinks they are ready. Providing positive results such as making a birthday card or making a calendar helps learners gain confidence with technology. It doesn't take much effort and settles learners. It is about finding the hook that will work for the learner. Some learners love making jigsaw puzzles, others like using online sites. When the learner can go home and use the technology, they feel more on a par with their computer-literate children.

Using phonic and decoding words

A favourite teaching strategy of Margaret's is using phonics as learners can sound the words. In some cases, it involves pictures and matching pictures to sounds. Flashcards, word endings and patterns in words are also used. Sometimes rhyme works with groups who are strong auditory learners as they love a song. The strategy depends on the group. The Special Needs group like matching words to pictures or matching words to words. A good word game is SWAP, having to find words ending in 'ot', then 'it' and 'ut' and there are elements of competition and challenge. They read the words as well, especially unseen words. It's a good way of introducing unknown vocabulary into the text, in a way that they become aware of it. When they get it themselves, they become more independent as learners.

Meaning-Making and Comprehension

Margaret finds that groups like cloze exercises. The retelling of a story works well with the Special Needs group, and it also involves sequencing a task, which Margaret feels is underrated in learning. Sometimes the story is cut into words, sometimes sentences, sometimes paragraphs, depending on the individuals. Or the task can be to sequence the story in pictures, and then match the sequence of pictures to the sequence of sentences.

Text Use

Groups have brought in newspapers. One group member is a Special Olympian who won a bronze medal, so the articles in the local paper and in a national paper were used. The group were able to look at it, read it, and take different bits of information from them.

Accreditation

Margaret and the Word Aid service do not allow the desire for accreditation to overrule the need to be learner-centred. Accreditation can be deferred. All learners say they want the certification, especially at Levels 1 and 2, but many may not be aware of what it involves, or how long it will take. Margaret describes it to learners as building the foundation for a house: the foundations need to be good for the house to be solid and that it is done in little steps. Sometimes a learner thinks 'I can't' and Margaret will say, 'actually, you have that done if you look at that now'. They can be surprised and say 'I've actually learned that'. Evidence for accreditation can be mind maps, worksheets which could be cloze exercises, questions and answers, photographs, and sometimes DVDs. Margaret believes that there
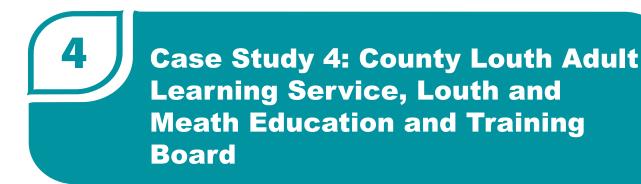
is always a way to get some form of assessment, for example, a group made models of 3D shapes and they took pictures of those shapes in the community. The photographs were evidence of 'doing shapes'. Learners are also learning other skills such as learning to use a digital camera, how to upload pictures, and how to print pictures.

It is respectful to tell learners that the evidence is being collected for their portfolio of work. Assessment is not presented as an 'exam', but as a means of showing the work to prove that the learning has been done. Learners have a certain pride in their work and that someone else is going to see it is validating. Their folder also gives them a sense that they are somewhere where everyone else is as well.

Evaluation

Formal and informal evaluation methods are used in the service. There are formal evaluations at the end of every term and then at the end of every year. The learners and tutor do a formal evaluation. Then informal evaluation is done for formative purposes. Margaret makes paddles with smiley faces on one side, and a face with a frown on the other side, and the learners love using them. While evaluation can never be totally neutral, the tutor is observing, especially how the affective side is working. Most adults have had a fairly positive experience of formal education, but for some learners, it has been hugely negative. Learners may have been ignored or worse, bullied, so keeping an eye on the process is essential.

Margaret has described above several indicators of progress, but she uses evaluation to enable learners to tell her what progress is for them. Questions are essential for gathering such information, and Margaret states that reflection is a huge part of the job. While the practice may be intuitive, she needs to think about her work and how it fits the needs of learners so that they learn. Reflection is a way of processing all of this. This enables Margaret say to the group that she too has to develop in order to be one step ahead, so that she too, is a learner, and has to be open to learning.

Case Study 4: County Louth Adult Learning Service, Louth and Meath Education and Training Board

Background information on service

The County Louth Adult Learning Service provides tuition to adults who wish to improve their English, Maths or ESOL skills in a supportive environment. Classes are designed to meet the needs of each learner. Learners may work in a one-to-one setting or in a small group. Day and evening classes are available. The service is free and confidential.

The practice highlighted in this case study focuses on reading strategies with an ITABE group of adult learners using phonics instruction based on the Jolly Phonics Programme used in primary schools. The learners receive six hours tuition per week and are divided into two three hour classes. One class concentrates on reading and numeracy while the other is based on improving writing and IT skills. The learners in the group are mixed ability, ranging from beginner readers to improver readers, and they are aiming for QQI Level 2 accreditation.

The tutor

Angela Cahill is an experienced tutor who has been working with adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties for over seven years. She has been involved in delivering literacy, numeracy, ITABE and family learning classes in County Louth Adult Learning Service (ALS) where she works as a full time Resource Person and is involved in tutoring, tutor support and learning support. Before joining County Louth ALS, Angela taught as a lecturer in Dublin City University (DCU) as well as in primary and secondary schools. Currently she is delivering an ITABE programme, literacy and numeracy courses at QQI Level 3 and Junior Certificate English. Her qualifications include a Degree in Biotechnology and a Masters in Science from DCU. Angela has completed the Higher Certificate in Literacy Development from WIT and is currently undertaking the MA in Learning and Teaching in Further and Higher Education at WIT. She has undertaken initial tutor training, in-service training and Grundtvig training in Active Learning Methodologies in Maths. Angela delivers in-service tutor training and has co-presented a number of workshops at the annual Tutors' Forum, the Family Learning Event and the Numeracy Conference organised by NALA.

Planning and preparation

Tutor's understanding of literacy

It is Angela's view that there is a general misconception that 'reading' is 'literacy'. From her own perspective she views literacy as not just word by word reading, rather it is comprehending the meaning of what you are reading, being able to read in different situations, such as having the ability to read text messages and emails, reading information in leaflets and official documents, and reading for pleasure. The importance of reading is the ability to gain meaning from what is being read. She often finds that beginner learners will say 'oh yeah, I can read that but I don't always get the gist of it'. She feels that it is part of her job to show learners how to recognise when and how they read. As they progress they will begin to recognise their increased level of word recognition, their ability to decode words, the improved fluency of their reading and their increased level of comprehension.

Identifying learners' goals and levels

The ITABE group is a group of learners that are at QQI Levels 1 and 2. Learner needs, goals and levels are assessed through an initial assessment process. This is usually carried out by the ALO or Resource Person. She describes how the initial assessment process has been refined and improved upon over the years. For example, this year they have added in more questions on numeracy and on basic IT skills. This is due, in part, to the increasing number of learners who are using Facebook and other social media, as well as an increased demand by learners for numeracy refresher classes.

Angela describes the initial assessment as a 'guided conversation' from which she can identify the interests of the learners, their level and the areas they want to improve. For example, she explains how 'we might ask them, would you read the newspaper, do you text, would you read teletext? If the learners say 'no' well that puts us at a certain place. However, if we ascertain that they have no problem in these areas we would move on to enquire what kind of reading they do and if they read for pleasure'. This guided conversation approach has been particularly useful when assessing the needs of Beginner and ITABE learners.

Progress for ITABE learners is assessed via a structured assessment tool. Learners are assessed by the ITABE coordinator and the relevant tutor at the beginning, middle and end of a fourteen week period. Ability in reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy is

assessed on a scale of 1 – 3 and each category is sub-divided into a number of specific targets. Assessment is also on-going via completion of worksheets, oral checking of reading comprehension and tutor verification of reading accuracy.

Supporting learner styles

At the start of a course the group fills out a short VAK (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) questionnaire. The aim of the VAK survey is to allow Angela to get a feeling for the different information processing styles of the group. It also allows the learners to think about what suits them when faced with new learning. She suggests that in a basic literacy class it can be quite empowering for a learner to realise that traditional methods of learning such as 'chalk and talk' might not have been suited to them if they have, for example, a stronger kinaesthetic modality.

The tutoring of reading in the ITABE group is underpinned by Phonics instruction. Therefore, there is a demand on a learner's auditory processing skills. Angela has acknowledged to the group that hearing the sounds (phonemic awareness) is really important for the success of a phonics approach. However, other methodologies are also incorporated in the class so that a multi-sensory approach is taken.

Preparing resources

When preparing for her class with adult beginner learners the first thing that struck Angela is the lack of reading material and resources at beginner level. In her experience materials developed for children may be useful, but care needs to be taken to avoid obviously childish resources. She feels that she is lucky that her Centre has a well stocked Resource Room and she sources a lot of her materials from this. The Centre does not have a Staff Room and the Resource Room is 'really good for sharing ideas among ourselves.' The Resource Room has a lot of basic texts and workbooks, including Skills Builders[3] and NALA workbooks such as Better Handwriting for Adults. She uses the Resource Room as a forum for sharing ideas with other tutors in the Centre. The tutors will put information on any new resources or websites they find on the Notice Board in the Resource Room. This is particularly useful for volunteer and part-time tutors who may not always have the time to invest in sourcing new resources to use in their programmes.

[3]Skills Builders is published by Axis Education, England. (www.axiseducation.co.uk)

She also uses local /national newspapers, local posters, supermarket flyers and adverts found in junk mail and a number of useful websites[4] for both English and numeracy.

Approaches to teaching and learning

The tutor's teaching style

Angela uses a range of teaching approaches with adult learners but she describes her overall style of teaching as behaviouristic in teaching the basic skills but humanistic in approach.

> I need to break things down, because when I learn I need to put things into steps for myself. So I know that when I teach, especially with numeracy or with Phonics I try to break down the learning and teach the fundamental skills. So in that way I'm quite behaviouristic in my approach, for me it's quite a logical approach to doing things.

She also describes her style as holistic, facilitatory and learner centred in that she defers to the group and encourages an equal relationship in the classroom. She believes that it is important that the learners trust her. She tries to empathise with and understand where they are coming from in terms of understanding the context in which they learn. Angela believes that her style is appropriate for teaching ITABE and basic classes where there is less of an emphasis on achieving accreditation. She explains that there can be a certain pressure involved in delivering programmes that are funded by other agencies. It is also her view that it is harder to be innovative and creative in the classroom when you have to deliver to a specific deadline.

New teaching ideas and approaches

Angela gets some of her teaching ideas from other tutors who work in the Adult Learning Service. She is in a good position in her role as Resource Person to be a go between person who can pass on resources from tutor to tutor. She also attends workshops and conferences and attends in-service training provided by the Service where she works. She has linked in with teachers who work in other areas of education, 'so if I hear about something that is happening in another field and I think, how can I adapt that to what I'm doing here?'

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[4] www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise www.skillsworkshop.org and http://learningoutcomes.weebly.com/ a new website set up by Peter Cleary from Tipperary ETB for QQI Level 2 reading and writing modules

Taking advantage of teachable moments

Angela is more than happy to allow the learners to take the 'lead' in the classroom as long as it doesn't distract from the learning or take the learners off on a tangent. She has learned over the years to distinguish between what is a teachable moment and what is a time wasting tactic! However, she believes that on certain occasions, if the subject matter is relevant allowing 'teachable moments' to happen can add to the learning taking place. She gives an example of how one woman in the group used what she learnt in her numeracy class and in her Slimming World Class to help with her son's maths homework. The learner described how having to calculate the number of calories and grams of food she was allowed each day enabled her to help her son with addition, subtraction and fractions.

Angela also describes how one of her male learners was diagnosed with Haemochromatosis . Bringing this up in class provided the group with an opportunity to discuss food, food packaging and food labelling. Angela gave the class some work to do on choosing three everyday packaged foods, for example breakfast cereals, and had them write down the constituent parts of the food, look at the sugar and salt levels in the food and identify iron and other vitamins contained in the food. She explains how this exercise may have enabled and encouraged the learners to be more discerning about the foods that they buy and eat.

Reading strategies

The use of questioning

Angela uses questions in a number of different ways. She uses questioning to gauge the learners understanding of, amongst other things, the subject material. The learners will ask questions of each other and themselves. She gives an example of how when working in a group one learner might question another on how they got an answer to a question that might be different to their own answer. Under no circumstances is a learner 'put on the spot' with direct questioning. Rather, it happens organically and only when the learners are comfortable answering questions.

Questioning also allows her to distinguish where each learner 'is at' in terms of level and their overall comprehension.

I will use oral questioning to establish if they get the gist of what it is they're reading. I'll ask

questions on recall, for example recalling facts or specific information. But I will also use questioning to probe further, so for example, I'll ask them their opinion on a piece of text. Overall, the level of questioning will very much depend on the ability of the learners in the class. This approach ensures that learners are asking and answering questions in a non-threatening environment.

Critical reading

With her ITABE group Angela introduces the concept of critical reading very early on. She points to how she incorporated the idea of healthy eating - through critically examining food packaging and labelling – as an example of how the learners might examine particular texts and vocabulary rather than accept it at 'face value.' This has also allowed her to suggest to the group how supermarkets plan and strategise their sales techniques. So there has been some critical interpretation of what is happening, you know, from the reading very early on. I mean, if someone is not able to read something particularly well, it doesn't mean that they don't or can't have an opinion on it.

She also encourages learners to be more discerning and critical of all written texts. She gives an example of how the class was talking about a poster for a Bric-à-brac sale. The discussion centred around asking questions such as 'how clear is the message' 'are you getting it' 'does it appeal to you' 'would it encourage you to go to the sale.' These are questions that everyone in the class can have an opinion on, and as a result it stimulates interesting and lively debates on whatever topic is being discussed.

Using Jolly Phonics as a reading strategy

The reading practice that Angela uses with the ITABE group is underpinned by phonics instruction. The phonics system used with the group is based on the Jolly Phonics programme used in many primary schools.

A systematic and predictable approach is used providing learners in the group with plenty of opportunity to practise blending sounds in order to help with the decoding of phonetic words. In this synthetic phonics approach the learners are taught the 42 main letter sounds. This includes alphabet sounds as well as digraphs such as sh, th, ai and ue, the 42 sounds are divided into 7 groups of 6. A Jolly Phonics wordbook, which is simply a list of words based on the seven groups of sounds, is used for practice. For each group of 6 sounds, the group practises sounding out the individual sounds. They then try blending sounds to make 3 and 4 letter words, and then move to blending longer,

multi-syllabic words. For example, group 2 sounds are c, e, d, m, r and h. A learner would already have learned group 1 sounds so would now have 12 sounds to make words. A 4 letter word from the sounds of groups 1 and 2 might be nest and a longer word would be transparent. Phonemic awareness is practised by asking learners to remove a sound from a word (either at the beginning or end of the word) and then to say that word. Practice with nonsense words (phonetic words with no meaning) is used with these nonsense words made up of the sounds already established. Practice with nonsense words is useful as learners have to rely solely on their phonic knowledge to decode a word rather than recalling a word from visual memory. The spelling of phonetic words is practised to help learners segment the sounds in the words from the target group. Each group of 6 sounds is practised in this manner before the next group of 6 sounds is introduced.

Too much phonics in a lesson or too serious a tone in practising phonics will not work in the adult basic education classroom. Angela is aware that using Jolly Phonics with adults may not be a strategy that some adult literacy tutors would support or advocate. Angela acknowledges that some practitioners would wonder why she uses it because it is used with children and 'sounds childish.' Angela is aware that there are other phonics programmes and she has used them in the past. But, for her, using the grouping of the 42 sounds as it is done in the Jolly Phonics programme is an effective way of delivering literacy tuition to this group of learners. She explains that it works particularly well within the Service with learners who have children who are in preschool and infant classes in primary school. Angela feels that giving parents phonic skills may help them to become more confident in helping their own children.

It is really important when using phonics that Angela explains to the group why they are using this approach. Learners may feel that 'sounding out' is childish and she needs to make their reasoning for using phonics very explicit.

One man in the group was feeling very 'silly' in his own words practising phonics in the class and as a result was not taking it seriously. This was then having a negative effect on the rest of the group. However, he then had a 'eureka' moment when sounding out the word 'belt'. He tried a few times then said 'If I say 'buh', 'eh' 'ul' 'tuh' I get belt, it says belt'!! All of a sudden he made the connection between the sounds and the squiggles on the board, since then he is a lot more focused in the class!

Phonics is the starting point in the class and the group spend around half an hour on phonics. The class also uses other reading strategies including a language experience approach, practising and improving reading fluency, building word vocabulary (using the

Dolch list and words used in everyday situations) and modelling simple comprehension techniques. The learners look for rhyming words and patterns in words. Angela takes time to explain to the learners that although they are learning phonics, English is not completely phonetic and there are always going to be words where there will be a 'strange combination of letters coming together' and that these words will have to be committed to memory. However, she describes the use of phonics as giving learners a 'tool box'. If a learner can break up or sound out an unknown word, it can give them a much better chance of reading or spelling that word.

It is Angela's experience that the challenge with using phonics and other reading strategies in order to build basic or functional skills, is to not forget to use real-life contexts and reading material which is personally significant and useful to the learners. She explains how she uses published workbook material which has themed topics aimed at adult learners, but 'we also incorporate authentic texts for reading practice'. When using authentic texts, she tries to encourage learners in the concept of critical reading and encourages them to offer an opinion on what they are reading and to 'become critical' of what is presented. For example, the class recently looked at a supermarket flyer and an interesting debate began on the merits of the 'bargains' offered. News events that people mention, either local or national, are also discussed and read about. The text may be simplified if necessary.

The use of phonics to improve vocabulary

Angela describes how the use of phonics has assisted the learners to expand vocabulary and improve pronunciation. Many of the learners are reluctant to try out 'new words' as they fear they may mispronounce them. Initially Angela highlights the difference between mispronouncing a word and using local dialect for example when pronouncing the word 'bath' as 'bat.' However, where pronunciation affects the spelling or the meaning of a word she will intervene. She also uses homophones, antonyms and synonyms to build vocabulary. Ultimately, she believes improving pronunciation also improves the confidence of learners, although she does admit that this can be hard to quantify.

The use of whiteboards

Much of the phonics work is done using mini-whiteboards which allows learners to try out different answers with ease and allows Angela to see at a glance how the learner is doing. Use of the mini-whiteboards also promotes active learning as learners make decisions about what they have heard and can change what they have written easily, if needed.

Practise with nonsense words is done in pairs so that each person can practise their blending skills and develop their phonemic awareness. It usually results in a bit of fun in the lesson which is very important.

If the learner makes a mistake they can erase it immediately and no one will know. Whereas if you make a mistake with pen and paper you have to cross it out and it leaves a visible sign that may be embarrassing to the learner.

The whiteboards have been so successful that many of the learners who are also parents within this group and other classes have asked the Service to order mini-whiteboards that they can take home and use when helping their children with their homework.

The use of visual and auditory methods

To help develop short-term visual and auditory memory, Angela uses memory games from a Prim-Ed resource book. She explains to the learners that when someone comes back to education it is a good idea to do a bit of 'brain-training' to exercise the brain. She compares it to warming up the muscles before doing some physical exercise. When it comes to visual memory Angela uses pictures from the resource book. She will show them the picture which has a bit of variety and detail in it for thirty seconds, turns it over and then asks the group specific questions about the picture. For example, how many sausages on the barbecue, what was the name of the shop?

To improve auditory and listening skills she will read a piece of text and then ask questions about it. Another strategy is to read a list of five things to remember, then she will read it a second time in a different order leaving one thing off the list and ask the learners to identify the missing item. She uses these strategies to aid in developing memory skills which is particularly useful when it comes to remembering spellings.

Accreditation

The learners in the ITABE group are currently working towards QQI Level 2 accreditation. Angela believes that this group of learners need to work to an achievable and concrete goal. She is focused on covering the learning outcomes, developing the learners' fundamental literacy skills and ensuring that the learning experience is an enjoyable one for the learners. The Service has recently become registered to deliver accredited programmes at QQI Level 2. This is an important development for the Service especially with the revision upwards of the QQI Level 3 awards.

Evaluation

Angela writes up notes at the end of every class. She identifies and reflects on 'what worked well' and 'what went down like a bomb.' She also gets informal feedback from the learners by way of asking them how they felt the session went. She is meticulous about keeping a record of each class: 'you need to write it down, because you'll think you're going to remember, but you won't.'

She also keeps her own learning journal in which she records any issues that arise in the class or any changes that she might make to her practice and how she delivers literacy tuition to the adults. She identifies in the journal the techniques she uses to teach decoding, comprehension reading of authentic texts and uses this as a guide to ensure she is on track with what she needs to cover with the learners.

The learners also have their own folders with different sections, including a section where they will keep their homework and assignments. The folders enable Angela to chart learner progress and importantly they are a physical indication to the learners of how far they have progressed during their time on the course.

Case Study 5: Ballina Further Education Centre, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board

Background information on service

Ballina Further Education Centre was established in the 1980s and is organised by Marion Cusack, an Adult Literacy Organiser and BTEI coordinator with over 20 years' experience. Ballina Further Education Centre is one of 8 designated adult part-time learning centres in Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB. Ballina is a densely populated town, second largest to the county town of Castlebar. Unemployment figures are high. The centre runs courses under the Back to Education Initiative as well as under Literacy and Skills for Work. A number of programmes from QQI Levels 1-5 are delivered in the centre, as well as core skills such as literacy, numeracy and IT. There are also ESOL programmes running in the centre to facilitate migrant workers, mainly Polish and Eastern European. Many learners find the centre through word of mouth, but the centre also takes referrals from the Department of Social Protection and through contact with many other agencies and organisations. The centre has 7 part-time tutors, as well as the Organiser and a Development Officer. Classes are held mainly in the morning and afternoon from Monday to Friday, with classes in the evening for those who are working.

The tutor

Fiona Kieran has been working as a literacy tutor since 2010 in the Further Education Centre in Ballina. She also teaches communications at QQI Levels 5 in a VTOS centre. Her main interest lies in QQI Levels 1-3, specifically reading and spelling strategies. Fiona is also interested in the areas of dyslexia and numeracy as well as integrating literacy with use of technology. Her main area of study has been in English. She has a BA in English and History, a Diploma in Journalism and an MA in English Literature & Publishing. She has taken part in many in-service training programmes relating to FETAC, family learning, dyslexia and maths. Most recently she completed a CPD certificate in Dyslexia: Identification and Early Interventions. She undertook and completed Volunteer Adult Literacy Tutor Training with Mayo VEC in 2008.

Tutor's understanding of literacy

Fiona's understanding of reading as it relates to literacy is that reading is the keystone of all other literacies including numeracy, spelling and IT. For her, reading goes beyond

the methods of decoding of words, the meaning of words and the interpretation of text; to reflection on and critical analysis of text and of how that relates to everyday life. She believes learner successes with reading are when the text is closely associated with their social, community and work lives. The art or skill of reading is taking information from the text, for example, learning how to interpret a timetable or an article in a magazine or newspaper.

Identifying learners' goals and needs

Learners have an initial interview with the ALO who meets with them and helps them complete an application form. At this initial meeting the ALO gets an indication of a general level and of the learner's goals and needs. The ALO will gather background information on the learner which will be passed onto the tutor who will then carry out a more detailed assessment with the learner. As part of the initial assessment, the tutor and learner will decide on an individual learning plan that will identify the learner's long and short term goals. For example, a short term goal may be to develop the skills to fill out an official form such as a passport form, or to write a note to their children's school. The next step is to talk the learner through the skills they will need to complete the task, such as, decoding and breaking down words, learning to spell common words and to use nferNelson[6] letter and word chains. These are an assessment tool that come in two parts; letter chains to screen for visual-motor dysfunction and word chains to provide a broader check.

In order to ensure that learner goals and needs are being met and fulfilled, Fiona reviews the individual learner plans at the end of every term to see what has been achieved and to set some new short term goals. When appropriate a 'free writing' task will be used. Fiona will ask the learner, if they are at Level 2-3, to write a few short sentences about who they are and where they come from. She tells them not to worry about spelling, just to write. This exercise shows her many things about the learner, such as, their spelling ability and where they are at with punctuation and sentence structure and shows her where the learner is at from the start.

According to Fiona, it is important to listen to the learners and to note their reasons and motivations for returning to learning. It is her experience that over time the learning journey can take different directions. Therefore, it is important to be able to show the learners how they have worked towards and achieved the goals they originally set for themselves.

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[6]nferNelson is an independent provider of tests and other assessment products for education in the UK.

Preparing resources

Fiona sources her teaching materials from a variety of sources including the internet and worksheet and workbooks, such as Better handwriting for adults, a NALA publication. Fiona tailors teaching materials to individual learner need and she will adapt worksheets to suit their needs and interests. For example, while browsing skillsworkshop.org she came across a set of worksheets about the television soap series Emmerdale. She adapted the worksheets for use with a learner who was interested in the RTE soap Fair City. She provides this as an example of taking inspiration from resources produced in another country and adapting it and changing it to suit the need of a learner. This approach had unforeseen benefits when, eventually, the learner began to go on line, open a web browser and Google things she was interested in learning. The learner has since joined a computer class.

Fiona takes screenshots for the NALA learning website www.writeon.ie and recreates the content in written worksheets. She 'uses the content of the website rather than follow it' with her beginner learners. It is her experience that beginner learners may not always have the skills required to use the website at Level 2. Her top three websites are the NALA Tutor Resources Page, BBC Skillswise and Skillsworkshop.org. Along with using printed dictionaries she also uses dictionary.com and encourages the learners to download dictionary apps to their phones and computers. Another much used resource is 'Spell it Yourself'[7].

Working with groups

Fiona usually works with groups who have learners of mixed ability within the same level. It is her view that diversity is a common feature of adult learning particularly in terms of the range of starting points that learners have. For example, at beginner level she initially adopts a one-to-one approach as she finds this to be the most effective at this level. It is the experience of the tutor that learners who come for twenty to thirty minutes two to three times a week have the highest success rate. Working with learners in one-to-one situations gives her a good grasp of their ability and they are integrated into a group from there. She also finds that with groups of learners with similar abilities there are gaps in people's knowledge so it's important to get to know the learner on an individual basis.

[7]Spell it Yourself is an Oxford publication that is currently out of print but is available online

She sets learners with different abilities the same tasks and she has extra tasks she keeps in reserve. For example, if a learner is particularly good at handwriting and is finished an assignment before the rest of the group, she sets them to work on an iPad or on the computer.

The tutor believes that most if not all of the learners in her group have some degree of anxiety or embarrassment about returning to learning. In most cases this can be traced back to their initial experiences in the formal education system. She states that it is a revelation to learners when they realise they are 'not the only ones' with literacy difficulties and this realisation opens them up to the possibility of what they can achieve.

Approaches to teaching and learning

The tutor's teaching style

Fiona describes her style of teaching as relaxed but very focused: relaxed in the sense that learners are 'allowed' to make mistakes and focused in that she is very aware that she has a job of work to do. She describes herself as a visual learner and will discuss learning styles with the group as she feels it is important for the learners to understand that everyone learns in different ways. She finds that this gives the learners the confidence to know that there is more than one way to learn and that despite previous difficult experiences they can succeed this time. Fiona believes that learning styles are especially important when learning how to spell. She gives the learners a short quiz which indentifies their learning styles and shows them learning strategies which will suit them best. From the beginning Fiona wants learners to learn in the way that is best suited to them. It is important to her that learners are reading and working with material that is relevant to them and that they can connect with.

People's ability to learn, especially reading, is what I really care about and when I give them materials that are very personal to them, I think they see and understand that.

Taking advantage of teachable moments

Fiona has a class plan, a plan of what she intends to do, but she doesn't stick rigidly to it. If an opportunity arises or if a question is asked that is of relevance and interest to the group she will adapt her plan and allow a discussion to take place. However, if it is off point and not relevant to the learning at that particular moment she will jot down the idea on a white board and come back to it later. This shows the group that she is interested in what they have to say and that she appreciates the validity of their questions.

Reading strategies

The use of questioning

Fiona uses questioning in a variety of ways but mostly she uses questioning to check for understanding and she encourages the learner to think through a word or a small piece of text. Her 'system' of questioning depends on where the learner is at in terms of their reading and comprehension abilities. Initially, she will prompt an answer from the learner but as the learning progresses she uses more open–ended, hypothetical and direct questioning to test for understanding and comprehension. She states that it can be difficult to ask questions in a group setting because inevitably there are learners who will always speak up and learners who will not. In this circumstance she will use worksheets or have a review of where each individual learner is at. It is her view that not a lot of critical reading takes place at beginner level but the use of questions is a good indication of whether learners are understanding the material.

Fiona encourages the learners to question themselves, each other and the tutor herself. Wherever possible she will apply questioning to the life experience of the learners. Fiona uses peoples' previous experiences as a way of generating discussion within a topic.

Using context effectively

Fiona understands that the contexts for the reading she teaches are the learner's lives. She emphasises the importance of focusing on learner need, learner level and learner skills and providing a mixture of real world and application to real life and meaningful context. If she provides a context for a particular learning situation, she uses a relevant and transferable one. She provides an example of how she introduced suffixes to a learner. The learner had recently joined a weight loss programme and she brought to class the recipes that she was provided with. The class had at this point been working on sounds and common sight words. This provided the perfect opportunity to introduce -ing and –ed, two of the most common suffixes to words like cook, boil and chop.

Fiona uses news stories from the webpage of the local radio station to provide the class with local 'meaty' issues. She used the recent stories on the Garda Síochána to introduce the class to word endings that sound different to the actual spelling of the word. For example, words that end in 'tion' sound like 'shun' such as information, caution and conditions. She uses this example to illustrate that one suffix, in this case 'tion' can open up a whole subject area by explaining the origin of the suffix and how it came into use.

When producing reading materials Fiona will usually adapt something, for example, a news story. She likes to write 'plain' English versions of news stories – inspired by thetimesinplainenglish.com (ESL resource), also sites like simple.wikipedia.org (the simple English version of Wikipedia).

Using a sound recognition sheet that Fiona keeps for the learner, she will always add sounds that they have done already for revision. Then she will introduce a new sound or sounds. She tries, when possible, to use word families (i.e. same root word but different endings) depending on how many endings the learner is familiar with. If she is using a new suffix, then she makes sure to use it several times so that the learner can see the pattern. She likes to add a long word that she knows the learner will be able to decode by sound, perhaps a compound word or a 3-4 syllable word with distinct parts that they can decipher. She then adds a few tricky, unknown words that they will have to stop and break down. This is where the learner really has to work. She includes words that she thinks the learner will be able to guess based on the sentence or the subject. If these are longer words, she goes back at the end of the reading and gets the learner to break them down even though they guessed the word correctly.

Fiona believes this practice in breaking down words is important and the faster the learner gets the more fluent their reading becomes. Of course there may be a word that a learner cannot break down so it is important that they know that not every word counts and sometimes skipping a word and moving on is the best step. So many learners over-emphasise the importance of getting every word correct and this can be frustrating for them when often it will become clear what the word is later in the sentence or it may not have been important to the overall meaning of the piece.

Fiona has a number of official forms that she copies and uses in class to improve reading and writing. These include supplementary welfare forms and medical card forms. The learners fill in the forms as part of class work, and this has a dual purpose, it takes some of the fear out of completing official forms and allows the learners to identify the different ways that forms ask for the same information. Form filling is a very good way of practising reading and writing, of having the learners becoming familiar with their own information and learning how to fill out their details in different formats.

Phonics and decoding words

To introduce the concept of phonics at beginner level, Fiona will encourage the learners to 'sound out' words. She does this through using consonant sounds; follow by short

vowel sounds, silent 'e' rules, commonly used sounds such as sh, th, ch, followed by other commonly used letter blends. The group also learn Dolch words and in order to keep their interest and to make the learning meaningful to them they will learn words that relate to their family, jobs and hobbies. The words are put on flash cards that the learners learn by sight. Fiona relies on phonics as a reading system and blends it with the whole language approach for maximum results. She emphasises the importance of using learning materials and approaches that are suitable for use with adults. She studiously avoids phonic resources designed for use with children or young people as she has found that the learners typically find phonics 'very babyish' to begin with. Fiona also uses a Sound Checklist which includes consonant sounds, consonant digraphs, short and long vowel sounds, vowel diphthongs, prefixes, suffixes and blends. This helps her to remember what the learner has learned and any sounds they are having difficulty with. Later, it helps her to produce reading material for the learner. Fiona uses the Phonics Genius app when teaching phonics. The app is free to download and the learners can download it to use at home. According to Fiona, the Phonics Genius app is like a library of words with particular sounds. The app also pronounces the word which is helpful for learners.

To show learners how breaking down words works, Fiona uses 3-4 syllable words that are easy to break down. It is her experience that using bigger words and being able to sound them out encourages learners to tackle bigger unknown words at a later stage in their learning.

> With the word festival, they break it down into three syllables 'fest-iv-al.' They are fine with the 'fest' and the 'al' so it's the 'iv' in the middle that we work on. I point out that the i is not pronounced 'eye', it is a shorter sound. This leads on to decoding other words like education. They now know that 'tion' is pronounced 'shun'. So now they listen for sounds when they break a word down.

Fiona uses the Read, Write, Now workbooks as part of the class work, especially as part of revision. Her experience is that learners like to 'go over' what they have learnt in the classroom and will often ask for 'homework.' She stresses that she never gives them additional work or homework until they ask for it as introducing it too early can be counterproductive. However, when learners do ask she primarily uses the NALA Read, Write, Now workbooks.

The workbooks are good because the instructions are there, and the tips are there, they are really easy to follow, and writing. I primarily use the workbooks for revision and homework.

Using technology

Fiona uses technology to complement and blend her teaching of reading. She believes it is important for the learners to know that reading and writing is not just a pen and paper exercise. Using technology can give the learner a sense of empowerment and can demonstrate how the ability to use technology and the ability to read and write can be intertwined. When the learner's reading improves and if they show an interest in IT, Fiona will offer a dedicated computer class with literacy integrated, and many learners take it up. The Centre has a computer room so the learners have easy access to PCs. She finds that technology is a useful tool for engaging learner interest and that majority of her learners have a rudimentary knowledge of how to use computers, iPads and the 'most common leveller' mobile phones, including Smartphones. During a discussion on how and when learners use their phones the tutor will ask questions as 'do you read the instructions when putting credit into your phone?' The answer is usually 'no' so she will produce a credit receipt and go through it. She encourages them to turn off the predictive text function on the phone to improve their spelling.

Fiona has developed worksheets that have instructions that simplify the use of technology. The worksheets also include illustrations or screenshots so that they are easy to follow and show the learners what they should be seeing on the screen. The different worksheets describe a computer, for example, what is a keyboard, what is a screen, what is a mouse? There are worksheets that have instructions on how to turn a computer on and off, how to access the internet, and how to use search engines. It also makes it easier for the learner to do these tasks at home. Fiona also uses the computer to use with the learners in a spelling group. Firstly, the learners will sound out a word, then they will spell the word and lastly, they will use spell check on the computer.

Accreditation

With her current group of learners the majority started out at the basic beginner level. Over the course of the programme some have gone on to enrol in other programmes including a computer course and a numeracy course. The tutor finds that the progression of some learners gives confidence to others and encourages them to progress themselves.

> I want them to go, I want them to spread their wings. But everyone is different, they have different styles and a different pace and you have to work with that.

The learners have completed full certificates at Learning for Living, QQI Level 1. This
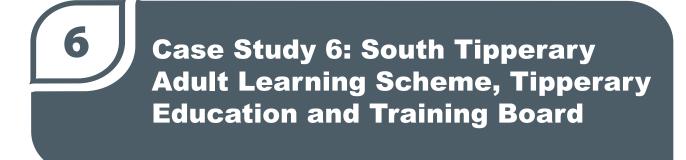
includes modules on reading, writing and using numbers. At Level 2 the learners will complete four core modules on reading, writing, using technology, and speaking and listening. Other modules are also available to them. Fiona states that completing QQI Levels 1 and 2 requires a decent body of work and contains the learner's best work. There is no pressure on the learners to produce work for accreditation and some of the learners choose not to do it at all. Fiona acknowledges the importance of accreditation to some learners, that they measure success in different ways to tutors. Therefore, 'getting the cert' epitomises 'what is successful' to them. Progression and accreditation is a 'big deal' to learners, and Fiona believes that accreditation and progression are positive indications that the learners have not only achieved the initial goals that they set for themselves, but that much 'broader' learning is taking place.

Evaluation

When it comes to reviewing and evaluating the progress of the learners, Fiona is systematic in her approach, and she reviews learner progress on a term by term basis. She also encourages feedback from the learners and will build this into class time along with time for review and questions at the end of each term. She does this in an informal, relaxed and structured way. She keeps a learning journal of what did and didn't work in each class and will adjust her plan accordingly at the end of each class. It allows her to identify how much time she should spend on the different topics covered in class, for example, she may have allocated fifteen minutes to a subject when in fact it need an hour. She also writes up a monthly review on each learner to help her keep 'tabs' on where each individual is at and what areas they need most help in.

Case Study 6: South Tipperary Adult Learning Scheme, Tipperary Education and Training Board

Background information on service

The Tipperary ETB Adult Learning Scheme has a central base in Clonmel and five other permanent centres across South Tipperary. The five centres are in Tipperary Town, Cashel, Cahir, Killenaule and Carrick-on-Suir. The Adult Learning service works with adults who want to learn new basic skills or brush up on old ones. This case study focuses on the way in which one tutor uses technology to create resources.

The tutor

Peter Cleary has worked as a literacy tutor for ten years, teaching various components at QQI Levels 2 and 3, especially Communications and Information Technology. He has worked with BTEI groups, and does general adult literacy with three groups as well as one-to-one learners, in centres based in Cahir, Cashel, Tipperary Town and Clonmel. He has previously worked in Lismore, Dungarvan and Waterford City. Peter has completed the WIT degree and a graduate diploma in adult education from Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. In-service training is provided for tutors based on the needs they have identified; tutors are also encouraged to attend training by outside bodies such as NALA and WIT.

Planning and preparation

Tutor's understanding of literacy

Reading means the ability to decode words with fluency and understanding in a number of formats including hard copy such as newspapers, forms, signs, books, packaging, labels, and digital forms such as web pages, the television screen and phone messages.

Identifying learner goals and levels

There is an initial assessment when the individual comes to the service. If the learner is then placed into one-to-one tuition, the learner and tutor will talk about some short-term goals during their first class. Similarly, the goals will be discussed between the learners and the tutor in the first few classes with a group.

The initial assessment identifies the level of the learner. This assessment is based on a literacy assessment devised by the Basic Skills Agency, and is included in the conversation between the learner and ALO or resource worker.

Supporting learner styles

The service tries to place individuals into groups at the same level, and this minimises diversity in learning ability. Diversity exists in the groups in terms of language ability, age and gender, and ability to use a computer. Peter uses a themed approach as a way of meeting the needs of a diverse group, for example, producing a magazine: Peter will spend time with individual learners in class, while all of the group are working on a project that interests them.

Each learner will have different goals as to what and why they want to read. Some will want to be more fluent readers and will want to get over the challenge of 'getting stuck' on the odd word. Other learners will be at the stage where they are ploughing through text spending a lot of time on each word and consequently losing the overall story. The most common need is to read to young children or be able to read a child's school book.

Preparing resources

Peter likes to create his own learning material because it allows him make it specific to individual learner's needs and interests. One website created by Peter to support reading and comprehension is Read Online[8]. This is a resource to support reading, listening and topic exploration. Each story has audio which can be played by clicking on the play button on the audiobox at the top of each story. The stories can also be downloaded and printed. Some stories have an interactive element to foster exploration of the topic. The website is best used in Google Chrome with Google Dictionary added to the browser, so that way the learner can double click any word on the page and get its definition, and can also listen to the word. These Google chrome browser extensions can be found on the Google Chrome Web store and are free to add to the browser.

The inspiration for Peter's production of audio resources for other tutors to use with their learners was the lack of reading material that the learner might find interesting but not patronising. Peter writes the real-life story in basic language, and does comprehension exercises to go with them that can be used during class time. The local tone in terms of

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[8]http://tutor-resources.weebly.com/index.html

words and voice helps overcome difficulty in decoding because of how people hear the word. Previous use of text to speech software found that people don't like the computer-generated voice.

Peter also uses other sites such Easy Reading[9] developed for English language learners but is useful for the adult literacy learner learning to read. There are two hundred stories supported by audio, and there are exercises on each story including cloze, crossword, sentences and dictation.

The Easy World of English site[10] is for English language learners but is also useful for beginner readers. This section is divided into three levels: beginner, intermediate and upper-intermediate. Each level is composed of twenty stories supported with audio.

Peter usually creates his own worksheets in Word. For example, if the topic is a shopping list, he downloads pictures from Google Images and pastes them into a Word document. He also uses SNIP Literacy[11] and Quizlet to create spelling tests to embed into a class website[12]. A class website enables the members of the group to have access to the teaching and learning material outside of class time.

There are three main sources of new ideas that Peter uses: conversations with his peers, following educators' blogs and websites using Feedly, and the service has a website where tutors share resources.

Using audio files

Peter likes to prepare audio files to meet individual learner needs. The file is recorded with the learner in the class. For example, a one-to-one learner learning to use the laptop asked could his wife come in. The learner helps his wife access the sound file at home, and opens it for her. The sound recorder is on the laptop, embedded in Powerpoint.

To make the audio file, Peter opens a blank page in Powerpoint, clicks the option 'insert sound', and clicks Record. He types two to three lines from a Level 2 book. He speaks the words, then the learner says whether it is too fast or too slow.

[9] http://www.rong-chang.com/easyread/index.html

[10] http://easyworldofenglish.com/readings/readings.aspx?c=2f1dbe126863ea88

[11] http://www.snip-newsletter.co.uk/pdfs/downloads/literacy programme 1.pdf, www.spellingcity.com, http://amblesideprimary.com/ambleweb.lookcover/lookcover.html

[12] http://thursdayclasscahir.weebly.com/spelling.html

A whole audio book can be generated and the learner has the book at home as well. She can listen to the tutor first, then read it herself, and then read it with the tutor. Level 1 and Level 2 readers are happy using the audio file method.

Group management

Group sessions are two and a half hours once a week. Class time is two hours, but Peter invites learners to come in a half hour beforehand to work on their own, trying things out. It gives them time to work on what they couldn't do at home, and can also be settling-down time.

Generally Peter starts with a group doing a warm-up exercise such as completing a worksheet. He also discusses what was covered in the previous class and goes over any issues that may have arisen. This is often the point where a learner will bring up a life issue, which will then be factored into the lesson. Activities enable the group to work while Peter works with individuals as necessary. The last part of the class will be a group session.

Barriers to learning

Understanding the learner's view of a block is the starting point for overcoming barriers to learning. For example, it is not of much use for a learner to know their own learning style if they cannot get a quiet minute to work in their own house, or if there are emotional barriers to learning. Therefore the conversation with each individual learner is very important, as is the relationship of trust that must exist before the learner is ready to take on more learning. Learners have to trust both the speaker and the message.

Encouraging collaboration and discussion

The general discussion with the group often leads Peter into an unexpected direction, but it gives learners an ownership of the class when they are more involved in the process. They are more likely to become active participants as a result.

Approaches to teaching and learning

Style of teaching

Peter sees himself as a facilitator, but there are elements of the demonstrator style when required.

New teaching ideas and approaches

Peter relies on ongoing training, his peers and his online sites to find new ideas and approaches.

Opportunity for using innovative teaching ideas and approaches

The service is open to innovative teaching ideas. Peter gave a workshop on learning activities for Level 2 reading and writing, which is available on www.learningoutcomes. weebly.com.

Taking advantage of teachable moments

Teachable moments arise during discussions with a group. If appropriate, Peter engages with the subject immediately or arranges with the class to return to the topic later, and then prepares something for the next class about it.

Reading strategies

The use of questioning

Questioning is used to assess understanding or get feedback. At all times, Peter tells the learners that they can question anything he does. This helps to foster an environment where the learner feels comfortable to question how things are done, or know that their opinion counts.

Critical reading

Learners are encouraged to stop reading and reflect on the words they have just read. This facilitates comprehension. Allowing a learner to plough through text without stopping often results in them getting lost in the detail of figuring out words. They can lose the overall story. The Language Experience Approach used by Peter means looking for appropriate level reading material based on the learner's interests. Class activities are embedded in real-life situations. It helps when learners come to the service with specific life-centred goals. It is easy to assess if these goals are being met through work in the classroom.

Using technology

As described above, Peter uses technology in two ways: first, technology for learning, and second, assistive technology. The purpose of both is to extend and complement the teaching. More learners are starting with some level of computer ability, whether it is being signed up to Facebook for the younger ones or through the use of Skype for some of the older ones who may have children abroad. More learners are open to using information technology than before. Many may still be at a basic level, but very few learners are presenting with no knowledge. Generally there is a willingness to learn information technology, and there is an acceptance of its importance. Assessing the readiness of the learner involves a good deal of conversation about their particular needs and the relevance of IT to that.

Decoding

Peter uses Ultimate Phonics, also the Dolch list. The SNIP Literacy site is a good resource developed by English teachers working with dyslexic learners, and many of Peter's learners find it very useful. Peter favours using phonics because he finds that if the learner can decode the sound of the two or three letters, they will figure out the word when this is aided by context.

Any tools or methods that do not rely on memory are useful. Activities like word families, words that rhyme, working with words with the same letter, are enjoyable but of limited value weeks later when a learner is trying to read a sentence. Peter likes to get learners into the habit of approaching reading the same way each time by using the tools, saying the letters and thinking about the other words in the sentence. Learners are therefore not relying on memory but employing a method of decoding. Peter encourages learners to keep a list of words and do dictionary work, and to use the words in a sentence outside of the context where it was first seen.

Evaluation

Evaluation is ongoing. The learner's progress is recorded monthly in reports, and to compile this, the tutor and learner review the previous month's work, identifying what worked well and what didn't work well. This serves to inform the tutor, and is also useful in the event of there being a handover to a new tutor.

Discussion

Introduction

The case studies presented in this report feature literacy programmes run by the ETBs that offer learning opportunities to adults who want to improve their general learning or workplace skills. The programmes on offer are flexible, adaptable and differentiate between different ability levels among adult learners. All of the programmes offer accreditation as an option to learners who wish to work towards a qualification.

About the tutors

The tutors profiled in this report are highly experienced and qualified practitioners. The practices they engage in demonstrate aspects of the principles of good adult literacy work, including literacy as social practice and student centred learning. The tutors stress the importance of making reading relevant to 'real world' situations that the learners can relate to.

There was some uniformity in how the tutors teach reading, such as, using phonics, critical reading and decoding words. However, there were difference in the teaching strategies adopted by the tutors and in the materials and resources they used with learners. The tutors agreed that reading is more than word recognition. It is when the learner understands what they are reading that the real learning takes place.

Practice in the classroom

The Social Practice Model

The case studies show that tutors are very aware of the context for use of text for reading, which is at the core of the social practice model. The context influences the type of literacy that is to be used or acquired: reading a newspaper at home is different to reading a property tax form. The learner is more relaxed with the newspaper, but getting the property tax form wrong carries risks. Learners are made aware of the difference between their own use of language and the formal use of language, as recommended in Curriculum Development (NALA 2009). Tutors are telling us how and why they adapt materials to reflect learners' own worlds, including creating audio files that speak the words but in a familiar accent, as described by Peter Cleary. The Donegal Basic Education Service developed their own Core Skills book to meet the needs of their adult learners. All of the

tutors illustrate how the social practice model requires them to get to know the learner's world, their reasons for wanting to improve their reading, and how they like to learn. Fiona Kieran views the knowledge and review of learner goals as being at the core of her practice. Margaret Ryan shows an awareness of the capability of the Special Needs group of learners in setting their own goals, and helps them have as much say as possible in the planning of learning activities. Caroline McCabe describes the process for generating a class contract.

The Language Experience Approach

A related aspect to the creation of materials using words that are familiar is the Language Experience Approach, in which materials are created from the learner's own words. The tutor acts as a scribe, using open-ended questions to co-create a text of maybe four sentences with the learner in the learner's own words to produce reading material for beginner learners.

The idea is to aim for maximum success in being able to read back the piece. (NALA 2009 p95).

The Four Resource Model

The Four Resource Model (Gawn et al 2009) is a way of enabling tutors to structure what they are doing when they are supporting the learner to progress. The Four Resources are:
1. Code Breaking (decoding)
2. Meaning-making (comprehension)
3. Text Use
4. Text Analysis (critical reading)

For example, one step can be progression from decoding to meaning-making. However, it is always appropriate to use opportunities to develop the higher cognitive skills when there is a teachable moment – the Model is not a hierarchy. The tutor can create opportunities for hopping from one stage to another and back again. So, for example, even at the critical analysis level or text analysis, we might have to come back to the decoding. The model is a guide to tutors as to what needs to be checked periodically. It is a frame that describes the work involved in teaching reading and is useful when planning or even diverting from a plan so that the tutor can recognise and name what is actually happening for the learner. For example, just because a learner cannot read and write, does not mean they cannot critically understand what is being discussed or read (Schwab 2010). Recognising such

skills reflects the 'wealth model' that recognises and builds on the learner's own knowledge and experience (NALA 2012).

Decoding is usually the first level to be operated. The case studies show that tutors use phonics with adapted materials. The adaptation of texts contributes to the next level of comprehension, and tutors use oral, aural and visual methods to check understanding. The next level, text use, can provide opportunities for text to have a meaningful context. Spelling goes across the board because it is a skill in its own right.

Critical reading

The case studies reflect instances of how tutors create and use opportunities for learners to read the word to read their world (Freire 1972), as illustrated when Margaret Ryan observed that the reading activity enables the Special Needs group to raise questions about their future, and Clare Hatcher's use of election posters to understand the general election. Angela Cahill uses supermarket flyers to provide an opportunity for critical reading. The core of adult literacy is enabling people name their own world, as it is a precursor or necessary condition for them to take any action. Tutors also show themselves as learning from their learners, modelling for the learners how to respond to a question or even being allowed to ask a question in the first place. This enables learners understand how they learn and is characteristic of the humanistic approach in adult literacy. This approach states that the desire to grow and learn is the very definition of being human, and we all share it (NALA 2012 p.15).

Confidence

Sweeney (2013), in his review of further education for the NESC, identifies QQI Levels 1-3 as those that achieve outcomes that are of great personal relevance to the learners. Only the learners can tell us what those outcomes are, in contrast to the higher QQI levels that are usually assessed in terms of 'hard' outcomes of progression to the next QQI level or employment. These case studies tell us of tutors who build on the interest and goals of the group to plan activities that will, in fact, result in excellent learning opportunities that enable learners gain confidence. The modules need never determine the learning activity but they can provide a good framework for observing and capturing learning (Stewart 2011). Caroline McCabe tells us of the confidence that the learners gain when they achieve a QQI accreditation, and that the availability of accreditation is part of being learner-centred. Fiona Kieran states that if accreditation is handled well, it is motivating and confidence-building for the rest of a group of learners when one of them achieves a QQI Level.

Final word

The case studies in this report provide valuable insights into how adult learners read, their motivation for learning to read and reading as a social practice. They also provide useful examples of the strategies tutors found useful when working with adults to improve their teaching skills. It is intended that the documenting and recording of reading strategies used by adult literacy tutors will be a useful resource to those working in adult literacy in Ireland.

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Appendix 1

Table of Practice

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Decoding – phonics, Dolch list, word recognition	Peter Cleary uses Ultimate Phonics, also the Dolch list. The SNIP Literacy site is a good resource developed by English teachers working with dyslexic students, and many of Peter's learners find it very useful. Peter favours using phonics because he finds that if the student can decode the sound of two or three letters, they will figure out the word when with the help of the context factors. Any tools or methods that do not rely on memory are useful. Activities like word families, words that rhyme, working with words with the same letter, are enjoyable but of limited value weeks later when a learner is trying to read a sentence. Peter likes to get learners into the habit of approaching reading the same way each time by using the tools, saying the letters and thinking about the other words in the sentence. Learners are therefore not relying on memory but employing a method of decoding. Peter encourages learners to keep a list of words and do dictionary work, and to use the words in a sentence outside of the context where it was first seen.	Tipperary
	One of Margaret Ryan's favourite teaching strategies is phonics because learners can sound out the words. Other teaching strategies Margaret uses are matching pictures and matching pictures to sounds. She also uses flashcards, word endings and patterns in words. Sometimes rhyme works with groups who are strong auditory learners as they love a song, so the strategy depends on the group. The Special	Kilkenny

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Decoding – phonics, Dolch list, word recognition	Needs group like matching words to pictures or matching words to words. A good word game is SWAP, where learners have to find words that end in 'ot', then 'it' and 'ut'. This game is interesting as it is a little competitive and poses a challenge for learners. They read the words, especially unseen words. It's a good way of introducing unknown vocabulary into the text, in a way that they become aware of it. When they get it themselves, they become more independent as learners.	Kilkenny
	Caroline McCabe uses phonics instruction as a part of her reading practice in class and the learners are taught the 42 main letter sounds. The group is introduced to Phonics, Finding words, Word families, Words that rhyme, Working on words with the same letter, Looking at the beginning and ending of words, Word recognition, Dolch list, Social sight vocabulary, Flash cards, Look-Say. The beginner readers learn frequent words, social sight vocabulary, everyday words relevant to learner, look-say, read-write-say, alphabet recognition and place of letters, alphabet order for common and relevant words.	Donegal
	The phonic system Angela Cahill used is based on the Jolly Phonics programme used in many primary schools. In this synthetic phonics approach the learners are taught the 42 main letter sounds. This includes alphabet sounds as well as digraphs such as sh, th, ai and ue. The 42 sounds are divided into 7 groups of 6. A Jolly Phonics wordbook, which is simply a list of words based on the seven groups of sounds, is used for practice. For each group of 6 sounds, the group practises sounding out the individual sounds. They then try blending sounds to make 3 and 4 letter words, and then move to blending longer, multi-syllabic words. For example, group 2 sounds are c, e, d, m, r and h.	Louth

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Decoding – phonics, Dolch list, word recognition	A learner would already have learned group 1 sounds so would now have 12 sounds to make words. A 4 letter word from the sounds of groups 1 and 2 might be nest and a longer word would be transparent. To practise phonemic awareness learners are asked to remove a sound from a word (either at the beginning or end of the word) and then to say that word. Practice with nonsense words (phonetic words with no meaning) is used with these nonsense words made up of the sounds already established. Practice with nonsense words is useful as learners have to rely solely on their phonic knowledge to decode a word rather than recalling a word from visual memory. The spelling of phonetic words is practised to help learners segment the sounds in the words from the target group. Each group of six sounds is practised this way before introducing the next group six sounds.	Louth
	To introduce the concept of phonics at beginner level, Fiona Kieran will encourage the learners to 'sound out' words. She does this using consonant sounds; followed by short vowel sounds, silent 'e' rules commonly used sounds such as sh, th, ch and then other commonly used letter blends. The group also learn Dolch words. To keep their interest and to make the learning meaningful, they will learn words that relate to their family, jobs and hobbies. The words are put on flash cards that the learners learn by sight. Fiona relies on phonics as a reading system and blends it with the whole language approach for maximum results. She emphasises the importance of using learning materials and approaches that are suitable for use with adults. She avoids phonic resources designed for use with children or young people as she has found that the learners typically find phonics 'very babyish' to begin with.	Mayo

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
	Fiona also uses a Sound Checklist which includes consonant sounds, consonant diagraphs, short and long vowel sounds, vowel diphthongs, prefixes, suffixes and blends. This helps her to remember what the learner has learned and any sounds they are having difficulty with. Later, it helps her to produce reading material for the learner. Fiona uses the Phonics Genius app when teaching phonics. The app is free to download and the learners can download it to use at home. According to Fiona, the Phonics Genius app is like a library of words with particular sounds. The app also pronounces the word which is helpful for learners.	Mayo
Comprehension/ meaning making	Peter Cleary likes to create his own learning material because it allows him make it specific to individual learner's needs and interests. One website created by Peter to support reading and comprehension is Read Online at http://tutor-resources.weebly.com/index.html. This is a resource to support reading, listening and topic exploration. Each story has audio which can be played by clicking on the play button on the audiobox at the top of each story. The stories can also be downloaded and printed. Some stories have an interactive element to help explore the topic. The website is best used in Google Chrome with Google Dictionary added to the browser This way the learner can double click any word on the page and get its definition, and they can also listen to the word. These Google chrome browser extensions can be found on the Google Chrome Web store and are free to add to the browser. The lack of relevant and non-patronising reading material for learners, inspired Peter to produce adult appropriate audio resources for tutors to use with their learners. Peter writes the real-life story in basic language, and develops comprehension exercises to go with them. These can be used during class time. The local tone in	Tipperary

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Comprehension/ meaning making	terms of words and voice helps overcome difficulty in decoding because of how people hear the word. Previous use of text to speech software found that people don't like the computer-generated voice. Peter also uses other sites such Easy Reading (http://www.rong-chang.com/easyread/index.html) developed for English language learners but is useful for the adult literacy student learning to read. There are 200 stories supported by audio, and there are exercises on each story including cloze, crossword, sentences and dictation. The Easy World of English site (http://easyworldofenglish.com/readings/readings.aspx?c=2f1dbe126863ea88) is also for English language learners but is also useful for beginner readers. This section is divided into three levels: beginner, intermediate and upper-intermediate. Each level has 20 stories supported with audio. Peter usually creates his own worksheets in Word. For example, if the topic is a shopping list, he downloads pictures from Google Images and pastes them into a Word document. He also uses SNIP Literacy (http://www.snip-newsletter.co.uk/pdfs/downloads/literacy programme 1.pdf , www.spellingcity.com, and http://amblesideprimary.com/ambleweb.lookcover/lookcover.html) and Quizlet to create spelling tests to embed into a class website, for example, http://thursdayclasscahir.weebly.com/spelling.html. A class website enables the members of the group to have access to the teaching and learning material outside of class time.	Tipperary

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Comprehension/ meaning making	Margaret Ryan finds that groups like cloze exercises. The retelling of a story works well with the Special Needs group, and it also involves sequencing a task, which Margaret feels is underrated in learning. Sometimes the story is cut into words, sometimes sentences, sometimes paragraphs, depending on the individuals. Or the task can be to sequence the story in pictures, and then match the sequence of pictures to the sequence of sentences.	Kilkenny
	Clare Hatcher has adapted a text to make meaning more accessible. When her group had completed their QQI portfolios, they said they would like to read a book together. To help them choose a book, Clare went to the Open Door website and got a list of the books with a summary of each. Each learner was given a summary to read and to explain to the group what the book was about. They then voted for the book they would like to read as a group. The book selection was difficult because of the varied interests within the group. Some liked science fiction and others liked romance. Finally, they agreed on an adventure story, called The Bank Robbery. However, they encountered problems getting involved in this book because it is UK-based. The shop names are English names. Clare didn't want the group to struggle with meaning as a consequence of not understanding the cultural aspects of the story so she took the text and re-wrote it as happening on the South Mall in Cork. The bank's name was changed to AIB. She also changed names and, if necessary, the language used. By changing the place names, the people's names and the language she was making it relevant to their lives. As she pointed out: "Otherwise you're struggling, with things you don't need to struggle with".	Cork

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
	Discussion on reading is often generated by asking questions about what is going on in the story. An example was of teenage boys who ended up in court. There was very little understanding about the terms 'guilty', 'not guilty' and 'acquitted'. They thought that 'not guilty' meant you got away with it. Lack of understanding of these basic concepts impedes understanding of the whole story.	Cork
Text use	Margaret Ryan tells us of how groups have brought in newspapers. One group member is a Special Olympian who won a bronze medal, so the articles in the local paper and in a national paper were used. The group were able to look at it, read it, and take different bits of information from them.	Kilkenny
	Clare Hatcher adds in a question to stimulate free writing. For example, with Bullet in the Ark, an adventure story, she will ask learners if they have ever been on a boat trip or if they can imagine how a particular character might feel. She sometimes asks the learners to predict what might happen next. This allows more reflective learners to think about this at home rather than be expected to answer immediately in a group discussion during the session. In this way they are developing creative writing skills. Having the vocabulary about the topic from the chapter gives them confidence in their own writing about their experiences. They might manage to write half a page and this activity also highlights areas where they might need help with writing.	Cork
Text analysis	Clare Hatcher has used critical reading techniques by getting the group to do a book review. At first the group said why it was they liked the book but, through discussion, they were able to look deeper into the circumstances of the three little boys in the story. One learner said that the boys were wild; another suggested the boys just wanted to be loved and that the story	Cork

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Text analysis	was more about the consequences of one boy's mother having left. In that way they took an adventure story and discovered the subtext. Clare plans to extend this idea to get them to think about why people write stories. Is the story the important thing or are we being told something else? Another approach is to get the group to consider why these three boys were chosen: why did the author not choose three boys in a private school in Dublin? Critical reading has to be a slow process because not everybody in the group would have the same cognitive ability and the realisation of a deeper meaning might come to them more slowly.	Cork
Critical reading	Responding to a need can present opportunities for critical reading. For example, if a letter needs to be sent to an organisation, the tutor asks the student questions about what is needed and what does they need to do. Margaret Ryan encourages the reader to consider why they are reading, what is the perspective of the writer, what is the message of the piece and so on. Elections, for example, provide opportunities to simplify text and to examine what text means. Discussing an election can identify things that learners can do in relation to the election. It can also trigger something else that they need to deal with, or raise questions about something that isn't happening but that they would like to see happening. For the Special Needs group, learners with ageing parents have a major question in their lives about where they will go later on, and these learners become more conscious of this big question in their lives. Or the news about a tutor getting engaged to be married raises questions for these learners about what they want in their own lives, of if they feel they are missing out on something everybody else has that seems to come naturally to others but not to them. These	Kilkenny

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Critical reading	learners may form an attachment to a care worker, or to a friend who hasn't special needs: there's no reciprocity there and then they have to deal with that.	Kilkenny
	In a group situation it is important that discussion topics are of general interest. Elections are a good discussion topic. Learners talk about posters - why they are there, which posters are in learners' own areas, why there are more of one person than another, what is different in other areas, where are the posters located and why this is so. Some time ago the group visited the Dáil and organised the whole event – transport, train times, organising a TD as sponsor of the group. After this trip, Clare produced a leaflet on a typical day in the Dáil. It featured a young woman TD, who cycles to the Dáil and is an environmental campaigner. Because of their recent trip the group could see that this was in no way typical and they discussed why the Dáil was being depicted in this way. Encouraging this type of critical thinking is difficult, but even if they can see that a typical TD is male then that is critical reading. Some are better at this type of thinking than others. It will depend a lot on background and it has to be nurtured. Clare would be careful about using the language of 'critical' thinking or reading because of the negative connotations of the word 'critical'.	Cork
	Caroline McCabe introduces the concepts of comprehension and critical reading right from the start. She will use materials that the learners have a particular interest in, for example, the local newspaper, and pick an article with as few words as possible. To ensure that the learners have understood what they read, she has a discussion on the piece after they	Donegal

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Critical reading	have read it. She gives an example of how the group had read an advertisement for the coffee morning in the local parish centre and a discussion took place around the event. The discussion focused on 'who had organised the coffee morning?', 'what was the reason for organising it, was it to raise funds for a charitable cause?' and 'who might attend the coffee morning?' The purpose of the discussion is to encourage the learners to not only read but to think critically about what they have read so that you better understand the meaning of the text.	Donegal
	With her ITABE group Angela Cahill introduces the concept of critical reading very early on. She points to how she incorporated the idea of healthy eating - through critically examining food packaging and labelling – as an example of how the learners might examine particular texts and vocabulary rather than accept it at 'face value.' This has also allowed her to suggest to the group how Supermarkets plan and strategise their sales techniques.	Louth
Visual oral/aural methods	Peter Cleary likes to prepare audio files to meet individual student needs. The file is recorded with the student in the class. For example, a one-to-one learner learning to use the laptop asked could his wife come in. He helps his wife access the sound file at home, and opens it for her. The sound recorder is on the laptop, embedded in Powerpoint. To make the audio file, Peter opens a blank page in Powerpoint, clicks the option 'insert sound', and clicks Record. He types two to three lines from a Level 2 book. He speaks the words, then the learner says if it is too fast or too slow. An entire audio book can be generated and the learner has the book at home as well. She can	Tipperary

Topic	Teaching strategy and/or learning activity	Taken from case study
Visual oral/aural methods	listen to the tutor first, then read it herself, and then read it with the tutor. Level 1 and Level 2 readers enjoy the audio file method.	Tipperary
	Margaret Ryan selected the use of a reading pen for one of the special needs group learners, as it helps him to work on his own during the class using the little earphones. The learner also takes the reading pen home read a little of the text for class and then tells Margaret what it is about in the next class.	Kilkenny
	To help develop short-term visual and auditory memory, Angela Cahill uses memory games from a Prim-Ed resource book. She explains to the learners that when someone comes back to education it is a good idea to do a bit of 'brain-training' to exercise the brain. She compares it to warming up the muscles before doing some physical exercise. When it comes to visual memory Angela uses pictures from the resource book. She will show the group a picture which has a bit of variety and detail in it for thirty seconds and then turn it over and ask the group questions about the picture. For example, she may ask 'How many sausages are on the barbecue?, 'What was the name of the shop?' and other questions relevant to the image. To improve auditory and listening skills, she will read a piece of text to students and then ask questions about it. Another strategy is to read a list of five things to remember, then she will read it a second time in a different order leaving one thing off the list and ask the learners to identify the missing item. She uses these strategies as an aid to developing memory skills. This is particularly useful when it comes to remembering spellings.	Louth

Appendix 2

Useful websites

NALA websites

www.nala.ie

www.nala.ie/resources

www.writeon.ie

www.simplyput.ie

www.makingcents.ie

www.healthliteracy.ie

www.helpmykidlearn.ie

www.literacytools.ie

Other useful websites

http://amblesideprimary.com/ambleweb.lookcover/lookcover.html

www.bbc.co.uk/skillwise

www.clarefamilylearning.org

www.dyslexia.com

easyworldofenglish.com/readings/readings.aspx?c=2f1dbe126863ea88

www.englishgrammar.org

www.focusonphonics.co.uk

http://learningoutcomes.weebly.com

www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/Primary/phonics

www.niace.org.uk

www.nrdc.org.uk

www.peppercornbooks.com

www.readingcompanion.org

www.readwritenow.ie

www.rong-chang.com/easyread/index.html

www.scoileoin.ie/Dolch

www.snip-newsletter.co.uk/pdfs/downloads/literacyprogramme1.pdf, www.spellingcity.com

http://thursdayclasscahir.weebly.com/spelling.html

tutor-resources.weebly.com/index.html

www.wartoft.nu/software/sebran

www.wordshark.co.uk

Appendix 3

Useful NALA resources

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): Blended learning project report, 2014.

This report describes the findings from a research project carried out in 2013 by NALA at the request of the Limerick ESOL Partnership. The focus of the project was the use of NALA's interactive website www.writeon.ie, as part of a blended learning approach with ESOL learners. The ESOL learners who took part in this research confirmed how adopting a blended learning approach using www.writeon.ie along with face-to-face tutoring has helped to meet their learning and language needs.

What really counts: case studies of adult numeracy practice in Ireland, 2013.

The report illustrates numeracy practice with a focus on the delivery of learning and teaching on a day-to-day basis. It is intended to be a resource to tutors working in the area of adult numeracy in Ireland, providing ideas and inspiration about teaching ideas, learning activities and resources. The research will inform the continuous professional development workshops and seminars that NALA offers to adult numeracy practitioners.

Adult literacy and numeracy in action: six case studies of practice work in Ireland, 2013.

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

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

The Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work is the main document for those working in

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A number of activities are demonstrated which can be used to help learners identify

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

Mapping the Learning Journey. NALA, 2005.

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

Appendix 4

Continuous Professional Development: opportunities for adult literacy tutors

The requirement for professional development for practitioners was clearly identified in a range of government policy documents following the disappointing results of the International Adult Literacy Survey for Ireland (OECD 1997). The most recent of these is the Further Education and Training Strategy (SOLAS 2014).

WIT and NALA collaborated to design, develop and deliver third level programmes specifically to be of relevance for adult literacy practitioners and the Literacy Development Centre was set up for this purpose. The programmes are typically modular in structure, often delivered on an outreach basis and incorporate elements of blended learning. These aspects facilitate easier access to CPD for adult literacy practitioners in the field.

Literacy tutors can start at Level 6, and select modules such as Group Dynamics, Curriculum Development, Psychology of Adult Education etc. leading to a full Higher Certificate award. Graduates of the Higher Certificate can proceed to obtain a Level 7 BA (Ordinary) in Adult Education, and then onto a Level 8 BA (Hons) in Teaching in Further and Adult Education. The BA (Hons) in Teaching and Further and Adult Education is designed to provide participants with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies required to teach in a variety of settings within the adult and further education sector. It is recognised by the Teaching Council of Ireland as a teacher education programme for further education (see www.teachingcouncil.ie).

More details are on www.wit.ie/ldc, or phone 051 302689

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