

## **Themed or integrated family learning - family learning course in sewing and quilt making. Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB)**



Here we look at a family learning context where parents are learning a vocational skill with literacy and numeracy and digital literacy integrated across the content. This integrated approach engages those who are drawn to creative approaches to learning. With the focus on literacy and numeracy somewhat blurred, learners are absorbed in the practical aspects of the Sewing and Quilting course and enabled to learn valuable things incidentally. They are learning about their own learning process and how to facilitate learning (of literacy, numeracy and the vocational skill) with other family members.

The sewing and quilting family learning course has been delivered for 14 years by a tutor who is qualified in art, sewing, literacy and family learning. She teaches a number of accredited Art and Design courses, and the family learning Sewing and Quilting is accredited at QQI Levels 1-3.

The accreditation route is not pushed on new learners but sensitively presented as optional. In practice, the tutor finds that most people opt for the QQI pathway.

The approach is to scaffold subject specific language acquisition so that learning is incremental and measured.

*'I explain that almost everyone has a problem because the manuals that you get ...they're impossible to understand. Paper patterns are impossible to understand. So, you are starting at the very beginning. And then literacy isn't really that much of a problem, because you introduce these words really slowly and you write them up on the board and they write them into their purple book that I give them. And so, they get used to these words one by one and they know what they mean.'* **(LCETB Family Literacy Tutor)**

*The sewing and quilting course has reading and writing skills in-built. Acquisition of new vocabulary is stepped and learners given a method to note and learn the meaning of new terms. These are rehearsed in class and the way to retain new language is modelled from the beginning.*

*So their vocabulary when they've finished is pretty big, enormous. And we do a lot of writing onto the board and they copy it down to try and remind them, to get things in their head.* **(LCETB Family Literacy Tutor)**

Digital literacy is also practised, as phones and iPads are used in class to research topics and design details for quilt squares. Written notes are made and images stored for tracing onto fabric.

Numeracy is ever-present in measuring cloth, stitches, the dimension of panels and so on.

Learners' self-esteem and learning skills were transformed by their experience of integrated family literacy. Learners communicated a sense of engagement and inclusion in the culture of adult learning. Literacy, digital literacy and numeracy levels were raised. Many achieved QQI Levels 1-3 accreditation and aspired to progress to further training, work, including or self-employment. Parents shared their new learning and revitalised attitudes to learning with their children and other family members.



### **Insights from LCETB family learning provision:**

- Use family learning to build social networks for parents and encourage the notion of lifelong learning. Provision should foster adults' need for self-actualisation through the desire for further education and training.
- Family learning provision placed alongside other further education and training (FET) courses enables parents to gradually become part of a learning community. It also means that progressing to other areas and levels of study can be made less daunting.
- Promote relationships across subject areas and learning levels in such a way that transitions and progressions are part of daily provision.
- Collaborate with partner agencies in joint family learning ventures/outreach courses. These agencies help to engage learners and collaborate in making appropriate family learning available to parents throughout the community.
- Nurturing the learning development of parents is a fundamental factor in enabling the parent to more confidently embrace the role of their child's first teacher.
- Ensure provision is innovative, responsive to parents' learning needs and builds on their existing knowledge
- Develop a bank of practice guides and exemplar materials
- Provide vocational courses with basic skills development integrated across the content providing gateways into literacy learning through practical subjects eg sewing, cookery, stained glass making

*This is a summary – [click here](#) for the full Good Practice example 3 at page 38 of the Family Literacy Practice in ETBs Guidelines, Case studies and Recommendations*

