Research Report

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

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Executive summary

Synopsis

This is an analysis of theory and research in applied linguistics about classroom processes, and in particular about the active role of the learner in learning. It focuses firstly on factors that affect learning-teaching events from outside the classroom: participants' beliefs, participants' intentions and participants' resources, learning and teaching curricula and materials, the political and institutional context, socio-cultural factors and issues of inequality. It then analyses research on the nature of learning-teaching events themselves: characteristics of context, approaches to teaching, social interaction and the construction of social identities. Recognition of the complexity of the relationship between learning and teaching leads to a conceptualisation of teaching as the 'creation of learning opportunities', in which the management of learning, and engagement in learning are crucial factors. This analysis identifies six different types of potential outcome from learning-teaching events: learning about content, learning how to learn, learning about language, learning about social relations, re-constructing identities and wider benefits of learning such as increased confidence. The analysis emphasises throughout the implications for teaching of viewing learning from the perspective of the learner. The analysis was undertaken as part of the Adult Learners' Lives research project as part of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy's (NRDC) work in support of **Skills for Life**.

Key points

- Learning is infused with the complexity of learners' lives. A variety of different factors are interrelated and integrated in the learning-teaching process. Therefore, learning is therefore not predictable as a product of input, but created through constant negotiations between individuals, social environments and broader social influences.
- Teachers and researchers need to pay attention to the beliefs about learning, teaching, language, literacy and numeracy that learners and teachers bring with them to the learning-teaching encounter. Beliefs also shape curricula and teaching materials. There are likely to be matches and mismatches among these beliefs.
- Both teachers and learners come to class with purposes and intentions. Teachers and researchers should identify participants' intentions as a key factor in learning events.
- A full understanding of learning in adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) must take account of social aspects of learning, including the political and institutional context in which it takes place, the broader socio-cultural context in which learning is situated and the social life in classrooms.
- Social interaction is the key mechanism through which learning takes place. Its characteristics need to be studied in detail as a means to understanding the dynamics whereby teaching can facilitate learning.
- Teaching is best characterised as the creation of 'learning opportunities' through the management of interaction. The concept of 'learning opportunities' accounts for the way in which different learners learn different things from the same learning-teaching event and provides a rationale for approaches to teaching which do not attempt to specify precisely what is to be learned.
- There are several different types of potential outcome from learning-teaching events: learning about content, learning how to learn, learning about language, learning about

social relations, re-constructing identities and wider benefits of learning such as increased self-assurance.
- ■ Researchers and teachers should seek to ascertain learners' perceptions and interpretations of teaching-learning events.
- ■ Rather than trying to make generalisations about particular teaching methods, it is more useful to try to understand how learning opportunities and possible outcomes emerge in particular contexts.

Background and rationale for the analysis

Applied linguistics is a particularly rich source of understandings about relationships between learning and teaching for several reasons. Firstly, a main strand of applied linguistics is concerned with language teaching – usually the teaching of English as a foreign, second or additional language. This is of direct relevance to the language dimension of the work of the NRDC, and has in common with literacy and numeracy teaching a focus on learning 'how' (processes and practices) rather than learning 'that' (knowledge). Secondly, this concern with language teaching has resulted in the majority of applied linguistics research being conducted in adult, post-compulsory educational settings: this also makes it highly relevant to the field of adult LLN. Thirdly, applied linguists have developed a discipline-specific interest in the characteristics of classroom discourse: a factor missing from many more general studies of learning and teaching. Perhaps most importantly, a number of applied linguistics researchers over the past twenty years have turned their attention to understanding learning as a prerequisite to making recommendations about effective teaching (for example, Allwright and Bailey 1991, Breen, 2001, Nunan 1999, van Lier 1996): a focus which we believe will have valuable implications for research and practice in adult LLN.

Main elements of the analysis

The main aim of this analysis is to evaluate insights about the learning-teaching relationship obtained from applied linguistics, to examine their applicability to adult LLN, and thereby to indicate fruitful areas for future research and practice. By studying existing applied linguistics theory and research, and also by identifying gaps in this literature, we develop a working model of factors which should be taken into account in studying learning in adult LLN provision. The analysis provides an integration of theoretical perspectives on learning by focusing on the range of factors which contribute to learning rather than on the characteristics of teaching.

Potential audiences and uses for the analysis

The issues identified in this analysis are actively informing the NRDC *Adult Learners' Lives* project, and will be taken into account in the report on the nature of learning and teaching observed on the project. We consider that other projects within NRDC would also benefit from the findings of the research analysed here regarding the complexity of the relationships between method and outcomes.

The implications of the research analysed here for initial teacher training (ITT), and for staff development are that courses for all adult LLN practitioners should incorporate a significant

element devoted to a socially situated understanding of learners and learning. They should include ideas about how to adapt provision to different contexts and groups, and should encourage ongoing reflection on learning processes not only by teachers, but also by policy makers and by learners. In addition such courses should introduce adult LLN practitioners to 'exploratory practice': practical processes for working with learners to research learning and teaching as part of on-going professional development.

The analysis also brings to light certain issues which might directly inform policy. In particular, the theory and research discussed here points to the importance of taking context into account when considering what constitutes good teaching practice, and of recognising that different learners have different needs. It cautions against promoting any single teaching method or approach across all settings. The research supports policies which provide time for teachers to gain knowledge of a variety of different methods, and to develop their capacity to analyse the relative strengths and weaknesses of these in relation to the particularities of settings, and of learners with whom they are working.
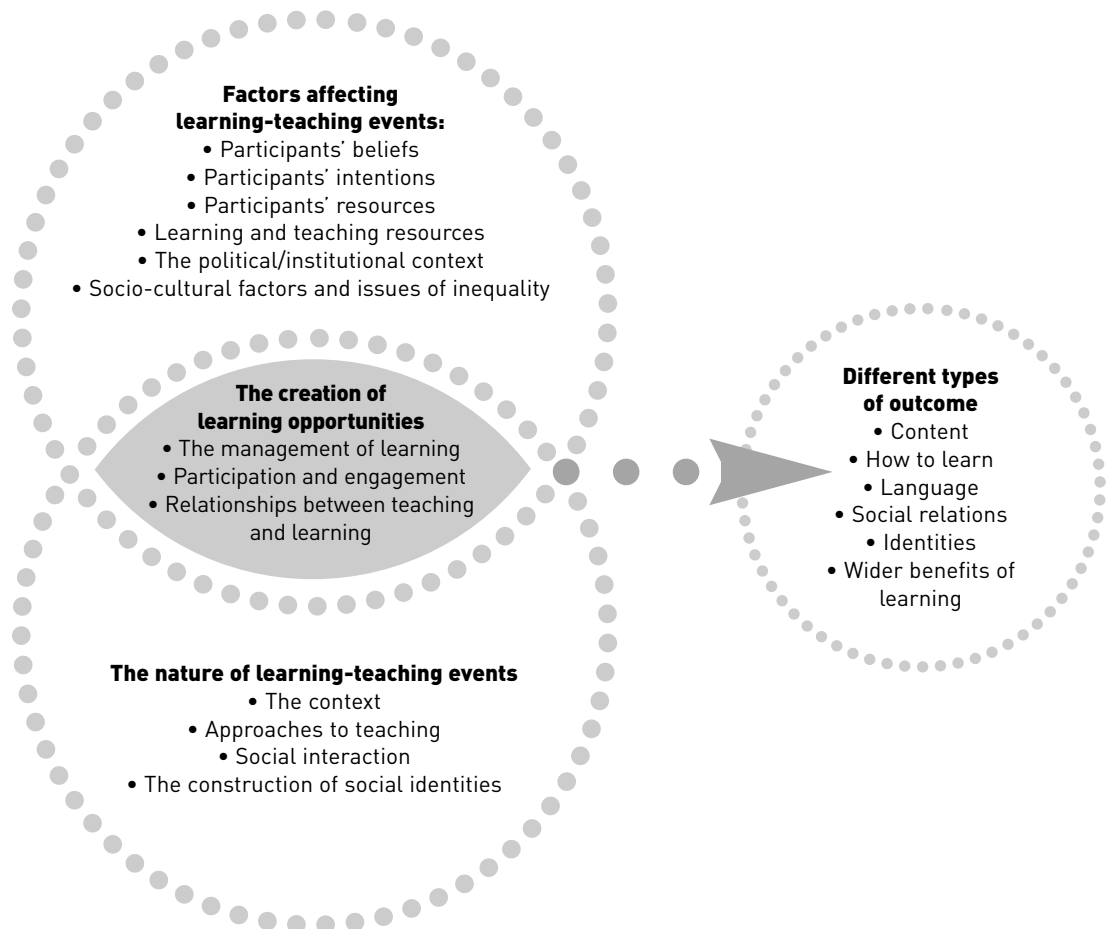
1. Introduction

This analysis is concerned with the full range of factors that should be taken into account when researching what brings about successful learning in educational settings. To do this, we draw on applied linguistics theory and research. Applied linguistics is a particularly rich source of understandings about relationships between learning and teaching for several reasons. Firstly, a main strand of applied linguistics is concerned with language teaching – usually the teaching of English as a foreign, second or additional language ('EFL', 'ESL' and 'EAL'). This is of direct relevance to the language dimension of the work of the NRDC, and has in common with literacy and numeracy teaching a focus on learning 'how' (processes and practices) rather than learning 'that' (knowledge). Secondly, this concern with language teaching has resulted in the majority of applied linguistics research being conducted in adult, post-compulsory educational settings: this also makes it highly relevant to the field of adult LLN. Thirdly, applied linguists have developed a discipline-specific interest in the characteristics of classroom discourse: a factor missing from many more general studies of learning and teaching. Fourthly, a number of applied linguistics researchers over the past twenty years have turned their attention to understanding learning as a prerequisite to making recommendations about effective teaching (for example, Allwright 1984a, b, 2001a, b, 2003b, Breen 1985, 2001, Nunan 1992, 1999, Pienemann 1984, 1989, van Lier 1996): a focus which we believe will have valuable implications for research and practice in adult LLN. The main aim of this paper, therefore, is to evaluate insights about the learning-teaching relationship obtained from applied linguistics, to examine their applicability to adult LLN, and thereby to indicate fruitful areas for future research and for developing practice.

By studying existing applied linguistics theory and research, and also by identifying gaps in this literature, we develop a working model of factors which should be taken into account in studying learning in adult LLN provision. The paper starts with a discussion of factors which enter into learning-teaching events, including participants' beliefs, participants' intentions, resources available for learning, the policy context and the social-cultural context. In sections 3 and 4, we look at investigations into pedagogic practices and the interplay between pedagogic practices and the possible accomplishment of learning. Section 5 describes the types of learning which might be accomplished. Section 6 is concerned with 'exploratory practice' – an approach which integrates learning, teaching and researching in the pursuit of understanding the nature of learning. In section 7 we return to the conceptual framework presented in figure 1 below to discuss how the understandings which have been developed in the analysis can inform our research on adults' experiences of LLN educational settings.

A common thread that runs through this paper is the complexity of the learning-teaching process, in which a variety of different factors are interrelated and integrated. This implies that a full understanding of learning in adult LLN must take account of social aspects of learning, with emphasis both on the broader social context in which learning is situated and on social life in classrooms. The multiplicity of factors contributing to learning would also imply there is little value in looking for generalisations about relationships between teaching input and learning outcomes; it is more useful to try to understand how learning opportunities and possible outcomes emerge in particular contexts. The pursuit of the understanding of learning should be a continuous process, as advocated by Allwright (2001b), Allwright and Bailey (1991), Breen (1985, 2001), and others, because learning is not always predictable as a product of input, but created through constant negotiations between individuals, social environments and broader social influences. A consequence of this complexity is that learning is rarely a simple sum of what has been taught in class.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the elements we have identified as significant factors in the study of learning in learning-teaching events. We will return to it again in section 7.

Figure 1. The relationships between teaching and learning: a conceptual framework

**Factors affecting
learning-teaching events:**
- Participants' beliefs
- Participants' intentions
- Participants' resources
- Learning and teaching resources
- The political/institutional context
- Socio-cultural factors and issues of inequality

**The creation of
learning opportunities**
- The management of learning
- Participation and engagement
- Relationships between teaching
and learning

The nature of learning-teaching events
- The context
- Approaches to teaching
- Social interaction
- The construction of social identities

**Different types
of outcome**
- Content
- How to learn
- Language
- Social relations
- Identities
- Wider benefits of
learning

Peer review

This report was critically read and peer reviewed.

2. Factors affecting learning-teaching events

Applied linguistics research has identified five major sets of factors affecting learning-teaching events: participants' beliefs, participants' intentions, resources available for learning, the policy context and the socio-cultural context. These factors exist beyond the immediate context of a learning-teaching event, but are of crucial significance when attempting to understand what is going on in the learning-teaching event itself.

2.1 Participants' beliefs

Applied linguists claim that it is crucial to understand teachers' views of the nature of learning, and of the role of teaching in relation to learning. Participants in adult LLN may have various views about teaching and learning and also about the nature of language, literacy and numeracy. Pinto (2001) warns that unpacking ideologies interwoven in the learning-teaching process is not likely to be straightforward. Not all values and attitudes are articulated through verbal interactions, and conceptualisations of learning may be affected by hidden messages conveyed through teaching materials or syllabuses. In this section, we discuss the significance and nature of such beliefs. In subsequent sections we discuss how these views and their discourses are enacted in pedagogic practices.

Teachers' beliefs are shaped by historical, social, political, and cultural beliefs and practices, through their biographical background, their own experiences of learning, pre-service training and professional experience. These beliefs permeate teachers' knowledge and affect their behaviour in the classroom (Gertzman 2001, Woods 1991:3–4). For example, if a teacher believes that learners learn what teachers teach, s/he is likely to specify the content for a lesson very precisely. Further examples of the interaction between teachers' beliefs about the learning-teaching relationship and their pedagogic practices are given when we discuss approaches to teaching in section 3.2.

Similarly, learners' beliefs about how learning takes place and how teaching causes or supports it are shaped by their experience. The student account data collected by Pinto indicates that learners are influenced more by beliefs of their own than by those of their teachers or colleagues. The scrutiny of the degree of similarity between teachers' and learners' beliefs, and among learners in a classroom, might reveal understandings which the analysis exclusively of classroom discourse often hides (Pinto 2001: 296–7). Researchers report that teachers' beliefs are often at odds with their classroom practice and with students' views, but there is no clear evidence that this necessarily causes misunderstanding in the classroom (Kumaravadivelu 1991).

Teaching and learning in adult LLN are underpinned not only by participants' beliefs about learning and teaching, but also by their ways of conceptualising literacy. What counts as literacy is highly contested, and should be discussed explicitly with participants in any research project on adult literacy provision. For example, literacy can be conceived of as a set of language-processing skills that are independent of context and transferable to all kinds of situations. Alternatively, it can be conceived of as *a social practice* (e.g. Barton 1994, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 2000, Baynham 1995, Street 1995), thinking about literacy in terms of

purpose and the people involved. This view is concerned with the social elements in literacy events and the socio-culturally constructed nature of reading and writing. The role of the teacher may be depicted as technician tutoring or assessing literacy skills, manager of the classroom, or facilitator to guide students in exploring their literacy practices. Researchers in literacy studies have identified distinctions among views of literacy that sustain practitioners' and students' approaches to teaching, learning, researching and devising policies. (For detailed discussion of different views of literacy, see, for example, Barton 1994, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 2000, Baynham 1995, Beder and Medina 2001, Cope and Kalantzis 2000, Hamilton 1996, Prentiss 1998, Purcell-Gates, et al., 1998, 2000, Street 1995; for an analysis of beliefs about the nature of writing, see Ivanič 2004.) There are also a variety of various views about the nature of numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), which have NRDC reviews devoted specifically to them (see Coben 2003 for numeracy, and Barton and Pitt 2002 for adult ESOL pedagogy).

In this section we have drawn attention to the importance, complexity and diversity of teachers' and learners' beliefs about learning and teaching, and about literacy, numeracy and ESOL, which participants bring with them to learning-teaching events. The revisiting of participants' beliefs in other sections of this analysis indicates the impossibility of isolating any factor from others, and also indicates the cyclic nature of learning and teaching. Views about learning and teaching, and about the nature of literacy, numeracy and ESOL, may underpin the curriculum, and/or educational resources; these, in turn, may reconfigure the beliefs of learners and teachers who encounter them. The ways in which such views are brought into learning-teaching events in the form of curriculum documents and classroom pedagogy will be discussed in sections 2.4 and 3.2 respectively.

2.2 Teachers' and learners' intentions

Applied linguists and educational researchers (for example, Block 1994, Ramani 1991, Woods 1991) argue that teachers' intentions are subconsciously affected by their personal beliefs, background knowledge and perceptions of classroom routines. These researchers emphasise that it requires longitudinal classroom observation and careful detailed data analyses to research teachers' intentions, as they are implemented in dynamic interaction with a myriad of factors in classrooms and have crucial impacts upon learning-teaching processes. Teachers' intentions include both prior planning and moment-by-moment decision-making, which may be implicit and unreflective. Teacher planning is understood to be both a psychological process and a practical activity. Both planning and decision-making are complex processes, shaping teachers' behaviour in learning-teaching events.

Learners' intentions, and their perceptions of what lessons are for, make an equally significant contribution to what happens in learning-teaching events (Allwright 1984b, Breen and Littlejohn 2000, Kumaravadivelu 1991). In Pinto's empirical research on teachers' and learners' intentions in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom in Portugal (2001), she found that learners' intentions for and interpretations of learning were forged by a combination of individual factors, collective understandings of school culture and social conventions. Their intentions are attributed more to personal long-term convictions about learning (Long 1989, Block 1994, 1996) or views of self, than to the learning tasks assigned to them. The heterogeneity among learners' intentions is worthy of exploration, offering a window on their awareness of learning, a way of tracing learning outcomes, and a means to developing learner autonomy (Allwright 2001b, Pinto 2001: 301–2).

In adult LLN educational settings, intentions for learning may be related to participants' perceptions of their social status. Reports of literacy education in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) lament the relatively high student drop out rate and adult educators' lower status in comparison with those in other school settings: teachers' powerlessness coincides with learners' poor self-image. In a study by Hart (1998) in the US, adult literacy programs were designed to involve participants in civic activities. For example, 'they participated in a canvass of some of the city's more troubled neighborhoods and later helped to present the results to the City Council and the County Board of Supervisors' (5). At the outset the participants were ambivalent and dubious. However, teachers and learners became less sceptical of their own power, more aware of purpose, and more convinced of their right to learn as they continued to participate. The researchers witnessed changes not only in their classroom participation but also in their lives. The influence of such work may not be seen within a short period but such intentions for learning make participants feel they are engaged in meaningful work both for LLN learning and for their personal lives (ibid). This study showed that learners can be motivated by intentions to learn something which they regard as beneficial for their lives.

Studies of adult LLN learning and teaching should, therefore, include the investigation of participants' intentions for learning, and of their differing perceptions of the purposes of lessons, both in order to contribute to a fully rounded picture of the learning-teaching event, and in the belief that explicit discussion of their intentions will be beneficial to both teachers and learners.

2.3 Participants' resources

As social beings, 'thinking, feeling, acting persons' (Breen 2001:1), learners do not arrive in classrooms as 'blank slates': they come from different backgrounds and have different attributes which they bring to the classroom. Language acquisition research, especially in second language acquisition (Breen 1985, 2001), has shown some learner contributions are affected by learners' inherent biological and psychological capacities. However, investigations which focus on the interface between linguistic data and learners' cognitive processes have been criticised for their narrow focus on internal factors and their neglect of affective and social dimensions of learning. Learners come to classrooms with a range of attributes, as researchers have noted (e.g. Larsen-Freeman 2001), including age, gender, aptitude, personality traits, motivation, cognitive styles, learning disabilities, social identity, life experience, interests, attitudes and values. Each of these tends to be seen and researched alone, but ought to be investigated with the others since all are integrated in their impact. Some of these factors are thought of as innate properties of learners, but should be understood to be affected and reconstituted socially (Ellis 2001, Oxford 2001). In other words, the properties in the learner's 'resource bag' are, in many cases, socially constructed. For example, a learner's aptitude may be closely related to innate intelligence on the one hand; but on the other hand, exposure to the content of learning is largely determined by the socio-cultural environment in which s/he lives. Lumby (2002:51), responding to a recent national survey of FE colleges in the UK, points out that curriculum managers offer different provision according to students' age, previous educational experience and ethnicity, but that such decisions may interfere with learning, since individual profiles are so diverse. Researchers and practitioners should, therefore, pay attention to the diversity of learners' resources and treat them as socially constituted rather than as biologically given.

Work on multilingualism has identified the rich repertoire of languages, literacies and learning styles which many people bring to learning (see, for example, Martin-Jones and Jones 2000). Learners' linguistic resources, learning and discursive social practices in minority language(s) need to be acknowledged as variables interacting with others in the process of learning. Likewise, teachers' linguistic backgrounds should be taken into account, as well as their professional knowledge. Researchers in adult LLN need to understand learners' and teachers' multilingual linguistic resources as potential contributions to learning, and to trace how these resources are, or might be, drawn upon in pedagogic settings.

2.4 Learning and teaching resources: curriculum documents, textbooks, syllabuses, and other teaching materials

In section 2.1 we identified participants' beliefs about learning, teaching and the nature of language, literacy and numeracy as key factors affecting learning and teaching in pedagogic settings. Here we draw attention to the way in which such beliefs can enter the classroom indirectly by being inscribed in the syllabuses, curriculum documents and learning/teaching resources that are used there (see Littlejohn 1992). In this way, policymakers, commercial publishers and practitioners devising teaching materials shape classroom pedagogy and learning outcomes. This is not the place for a comprehensive review of all adult LLN learning/teaching resources and the theoretical frameworks embedded within them. We can do no more than emphasise the importance of recognising how different theoretical frameworks are in one way or another reflected in different resources in different contexts. These resources will interact with classroom participants' beliefs about learning, teaching and literacy (section 2.1) – sometimes reinforcing them, sometimes conflicting with them. The use of such resources will to some extent depend on the educational objectives of dominant stakeholders, which we discuss next.

2.5 The political and institutional context

Looking for a one-to-one relationship between input and desirable learning outcomes in instruction overlooks the power relations embedded within learning and teaching. Participants' individual histories, beliefs, intentions, personal attributes, expectations, expertises and capacities to formulate plans for what should be taught or learnt are subject to political imperatives. Institutional constraints and (lack of) resources result primarily from control by government education authorities, funding regimes, assessments, prescribed curricula, institutional infrastructures and in particular, refinements and changes of policies (see Allwright 2001a, b, Carrington and Luke 1997). Learning and teaching are political acts operating in a context heavily influenced by current policies. Learners and teachers are not often allocated power to evaluate which outcomes of learning are desirable; rather, these are determined by the institutions which produce and administrate policies, curricula and inspection regimes. Learners' and teachers' intentions for learning and teaching (see 2.2) are renegotiated and shaped by such external forces, and teachers' autonomy over their pedagogic practices is thereby reduced. In our view, this is an important, and often neglected, factor to take into account in the study of LLN learning in pedagogic settings.

2.6 Socio-cultural factors and issues of inequality

Wishing to move beyond claims that the acquisition of literacy provides pathways to individual development and to social emancipation, Carrington and Luke (1997) argue the need to rethink the consequences of literacy by using Bourdieu's sociological model. Bourdieu (1977) proposes the notion of 'cultural capital' and attributes inequality of academic achievement to different distributions of capital among students from different social classes, rather than to innate abilities. The implications of Carrington and Luke's analysis for adult LLN research are that learners' cultural capital should be identified and analysed as a factor which will affect their learning. Cazden (2001) emphasises the importance of recognising the effects on teaching and learning of differential power and status.

Although there have been productive attempts to remind teachers, researchers and curriculum designers of the value of the culturally diverse literacy practices and resources that individuals bring with them as they embark on adult LLN courses, the focus has often been on the local context in which literacy practices are constructed such as home, school or community and the social imperatives embedded within them (Carrington and Luke 1997). A critical perspective on socio-cultural context treats socio-cultural differences as the norm (Carrington and Luke 1997, Cazden (2001), Holliday 1994). Such a perspective suggests that participants in sites of learning should search for means not merely to celebrate difference and provide differential treatment, but to incorporate the instability and diversity of the socio-cultural context into the fabric of classroom culture. That is, pedagogy should explicitly address issues of inequality that exist in the socio-political context, rather than 'sweeping them under the carpet'.

Researchers might productively identify the structuring of different contexts: an individual classroom at a school, the local context, the regional context, and the national context, within the all-encompassing context of globalisation (see also section 7 for discussion of the connection between local and socio-cultural context and a situated understanding of learning). Adult LLN research should pay attention to constraints, regulations and tensions alongside choice, coherence and freedom within the broader socio-cultural context of learning-teaching events which are being studied.

In this section we have presented six sets of factors affecting learning-teaching events. The sequence in our discussion does not suggest relative importance, and these factors are, in fact, hard to investigate in isolation because they interrelate with one another and contribute to learning in a variety of ways. Although learning does not only or necessarily happen in pedagogic settings, we are interested here in particular contexts that mark the learning process explicitly with the presence of a teacher. When researching such settings, it is vitally important to investigate how the factors presented here guide and inform pedagogic practices, in addition to studying the nature of the learning-teaching events themselves. In the next section, we draw on applied linguistics research to identify key elements which constitute such events.

3. The nature of learning-teaching events

Researchers need to get into the classroom as 'crucible' (Allwright and Bailey 1991:18) to see the interplay between prior experiences, beliefs, intentions, resources embodied in the syllabus, teaching materials, methodology and policy, and the political and socio-cultural context. The best of intentions and most carefully laid plans can be completely reshaped in the moment-by-moment dynamics of the event itself. Insights into the learning-teaching process can be gleaned from the triangulation of data; that is, bringing together, comparing and contrasting the analysis of data from different sources: learners' or teachers' accounts, classroom observation, interviews, curriculum documents and others. An important aspect of this is that different participants may interpret what happens in classrooms differently: there may well be a gap between teachers' and learners' perceptions (Allwright 1984a, Block 1996, Nunan 1996.)

Applied linguistics and literacy researchers have identified several key aspects of classroom processes that affect learning: structure of instruction, type of class, participation structures, power relations, sense of community, collaboration between teachers and students and among learners, sanctioning, tardiness or dropping out, change in literacy culture within and out of class, value expressions and others (Allwright and Bailey 1991, Beder and Medina 2001, Purcell-Gates et al., 1998, 2000, Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group 1992). This body of research suggests that, when looking at classroom practices, all these elements are significant. In this section, our intent is not to look at classroom processes for their own sake, but to pinpoint key factors to take into account in studying how learning is accomplished in pedagogic settings. We do this in four sections: the context of the learning-teaching event (3.1), approaches to teaching in adult education (3.2), social interaction (3.3) and the construction of social identities (3.4).

3.1 The context of the learning-teaching event

The learning-teaching event itself occurs in a specific physical context (see, for example, Breen 1985). A number of elements are worth bearing in mind for understanding the nature of learning-teaching events, including space, layout, arrangement, timing, social relations and use of resources. 'Use of resources' includes the use of information communications technology (ICT), the topic of another NRDC project (Mellor and Kambouri, 2004). 'Context' includes not only the physical aspects of the classroom environment but also the values, beliefs and intentions of participants, the political/institutional context, socio-cultural factors and issues of inequality, as described in the previous sections. These are brought into the event through the words and actions of the learners and teachers, by being inscribed in teaching materials and other resources, and often more indirectly. For example, the time and space available for a class may be determined by institutional values and funding regimes.

The context includes the social relations among participants, as theorised by researchers in Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (e.g. Green and Dixon 1993, Prentiss 1998). Their studies conceptualise each classroom as a local event, intertextually shaped by past events within participants' experience. In their theoretical approach, prior discursive and social practices create common knowledge which guides learners as to how to participate in class.

Learners experience institutional and classroom positioning, and negotiate social roles, relationships among members and situated understandings of text, context, meaning and content. These sets of studies take an ethnographic approach, emphasising the importance of paying attention to context in research on learning in pedagogic settings.

These studies indicate that research on adult LLN teaching and learning should document the characteristics of the immediate context in which they take place, and that this may be a useful starting-point for identifying the effects of the broader socio-cultural and political context, as discussed in the previous section.

3.2 Approaches to teaching

Central to the nature of a learning-teaching event is the approach taken by the teacher. This is related to her/his beliefs about learning and the role of the teacher in it, and her/his beliefs about the nature of language, literacy and/or numeracy (see section 2.1), and may either be in harmony with or at variance with the beliefs underpinning curriculum documents or resources available to the class (see section 2.4). Applied linguistics theory and research has identified a range of issues which inform, or should inform, teachers' decisions about how to teach. This section does not aim to provide a detailed explanation of each method, but to give an overview of issues which underpin them, and to relate these to research on adult LLN pedagogy.

There have been a number of critiques and studies (e.g. Allwright 2001b, Breen 1985, Nunan 1999) claiming that it is an illusion to think that lessons can be pre-packaged units designed by teachers to transmit knowledge to learners who will passively receive it. This model generates a highly structured and itemised approach to teaching, whereas a belief that learners will learn different things on different learning trajectories is more likely to be realised in a 'scatter-the-seed' approach (Allwright 2003b, Crabbe 2003). In such an approach, the teacher would plan activities which are likely to make a range of learning opportunities available from which different learners might pick up different things to learn.

In adult education, teachers, curriculum specialists and researchers have experimented with alternative ways of organising teaching and learning which take account of the maturity of the learners. The question, 'Should teaching adults be different from teaching children?', has been explored in theory and research, pointing to the significance of the wealth of experience adults bring to learning, and of the range of social roles they occupy (see, for example, Knowles 1970, 1984, Mezirow 1991, Freire and Macedo 1987). Models of adult learning have been debated and developed within different disciplines such as psychology, situated cognition, social learning, socio-cultural psychology, activity theory and brain science. Tusting and Barton (2003), reviewed these models, and it became clear that adult learning can only be facilitated by treating learning as being present in an interaction between individual cognitive processes and wide-ranging social or situational factors embedded within learning. Such awareness will, we hope, encourage more researchers, rather than looking for one right answer for how to teach, to find out how and why particular factors are instrumental in enhancing learning in specific situations.

Rogers (1986, 2002) and Schön (1983) identified two kinds of learning in adult education: *acquisition learning* as a subconscious learning process which takes place while people are undertaking tasks relevant to their lives, and *formalised learning* as a socially constructed

activity in which people master structured pieces of knowledge in specific settings for desirable purposes. These two terms should not be portrayed as a dichotomy, as learning is dynamic and both may be present at various times and at different points along the continuum of learning, as Rogers points out (2002). According to Rogers, the main task for teachers is to find ways to help acquisition learning in natural settings to interact with formalised learning. The capacity of instruction to imbue learners with strategies for literacy acquisition is one of the dimensions for further research pointed to by Beder and Medina (2001:115–6). Beder and Medina are interested in the linkage between what happens in adult basic education classes and literacy acquisition out-of-class. They hypothesise that different types of literacy learning in classroom settings may support or impede literacy acquisition outside the classroom, and are currently designing a study to investigate this. The training of learning strategies has become a core pedagogy in many second or foreign language classrooms (Barton and Pitt 2002: 9–10, Larsen-Freeman 2001, Naiman et al., 1976). Second Language Acquisition research into learner profiles indicates good learning strategies enhance language development, and this may apply to adult literacy and numeracy development too.

Lave and Wenger's term 'communities of practice' (1991) is prevalent in current theories of learning (Tusting and Barton 2003; see also Wenger 1998). It refers mainly to learning in workplaces and other everyday contexts rather than learning in pedagogic settings. In this paradigm learning is accomplished by apprenticeship: by identification with a community and participation in its social practices. The Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (e.g. Green and Dixon 1993, Rex 1994, Prentiss 1998, Yeager, Floriani and Green 1998) have independently developed a conceptualisation of teaching as building a classroom with a sense of community. This research suggests approaches to teaching which emphasise authentic and purposeful communication as the context for learning. Research on adult LLN might identify and, we suggest, critically evaluate such approaches.

Recent investigations in adult learning have supported theoretically motivated arguments in favour of individualised instruction, self-directed learning, and personal autonomy (Brookfield 1984, Hok 1980, Rogers 1992, 2002). They claim that the management of learning can be more effective in a context in which teachers serve as unobtrusive facilitators of a process in which learners are in dialogue, and share decision-making for lesson planning, with them. The rationale inherent in collaborative learning in ELT. (Nunan 1992) is that collaboration between teachers, students and researchers and redefinitions of their roles can be an incentive for learning. This is similar to concepts of teachers as equals of adult learners, and learners as researchers in adult literacy education (Brookfield 1984, Rogers 1986, 1992).

Approaches to teaching are also shaped by factors that are specific to adult literacy education. Purcell-Gates et al., (1998, 2000) in NCSALL-funded projects devised a typology across two dimensions to inspect the effectiveness of literacy education programmes in the US – the relevance of materials to learners' lives in terms of being *life-contextualised / decontextualised*, and the degree of learners' decision-making as being *dialogic/monologic*. The results of their survey in 1998 reveal that 73 per cent of the programmes studied are life-decontextualised, and monologic (teacher-directed) rather than dialogic (based on collaborative learning). Further, they hypothesised that the more dialogic the instruction is and the more based on authentic reading materials, the more at-home reading activities would increase. Although the effect of dialogic teaching methods upon enhancement of at-home reading activities still remains uncertain in their final report (2000), the relationship between authentic reading materials and at-home reading activity appears positive. These

researchers advocate the reformation of literacy education, which is mostly dominated by the skill-based model in the US, towards the life-contextualised and dialogic ends of the continua.

In reviewing these studies, we note that many are based on researchers' categorisations, not on learners' perceptions of authenticity. Purcell-Gates et al., referred to 'a balance of life-contextualised and isolated skill work *determined more by the teacher than by the students*"'(1998:20) (our italics). We infer from this that research on the learning-teaching process should prioritise learners' perceptions, as learners should be thought of as agents of learning, not recipients of instruction (on learners' agency, see also 5.5).

In this section we have focused on the core of a teaching-learning event: the approach(es) adopted to teaching adults. We have summarised factors shaping approaches to teaching which have been raised in theories of adult learning, and in research on adult ELT and LLN pedagogy. Another crucial element in any learning-teaching event is the social interaction which constitutes it, including the language in which it is conducted.

3.3 Social interaction in pedagogic settings

The research conducted by Beder and Medina (2001) is a rare investigation of classroom dynamics in Adult Basic Education (ABE) in the US. They chose classroom processes as the focus for their research, and learning is examined largely in terms of successful classroom strategies, such as teachers sharing information about their personal lives in order to develop and maintain a sense of community. Tardiness, dropping out and 'tuning out' were observed as part of the reality of ABE classrooms, highly tolerated and seldom negatively sanctioned compared to other educational sectors. In this section we consider what applied linguistics research adds to our understanding of social interaction in pedagogic settings by studying not only classroom processes but also the characteristics of language use within them. We focus first on the nature of talk, and then on its role in learning, with a view to identifying factors worthy of attention in research on adult LLN pedagogy.

Cazden (2001: 2) states that communication in classrooms is distinguished by the teacher's responsibility to control and monitor talk. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and Mehan (1979) identified the typical classroom exchange structure as IRF or IRE: initiation (I) by a teacher to elicit students' response (R), followed by feedback (F), usually with evaluative comments (E). Sinclair and Coulthard's system has been criticised for not paying attention to which kinds of discourse patterns correlate with students' learning (for example, Hatch and Long 1980). van Lier (1996) argues that IRF's strict regulation and the asymmetry of the teacher-student relationship embedded in its structure decreases students' motivation to contribute to classroom interaction. In spite of these criticisms, the identification of IRF and IRE structures can be a useful starting-point for the study of classroom interaction, since it can help the researcher see patterns in the language of classroom interaction.

Learners are often represented as the recipients of teacher talk, but classroom interaction might be better characterised as a co-production between participants, especially in adult LLN pedagogy. Learners are social individuals with agency, who shape and are shaped by divergent discourses of learning (see also 3.2, 5.5).

Although detailed analysis of classroom discourse can show the interaction patterns which

characterise learning-teaching events, this analysis should not be seen as an end in itself but as a means for tracing how learning is taking place: 'classroom interaction is … usually managed for a purpose outside itself – the advancement of learning.' (Allwright 1984b: 163). The influence of classroom discourse upon learning has been of interest to researchers in education, linguistics, literacy studies and other disciplines. The importance of classroom interaction comes from its characteristic of having a multitude of forces interact in complex ways to trigger learning outcomes. Participation in classroom processes is important for 'talking knowledge and understanding into being' (Green and Dixon 1993), for engagement, motivation, and confidence-building, whatever the subject-matter. Detailed study of classroom interaction can reveal the nature of the learning opportunities which are made available discursively to each learner, and the ways in which they are taken up. This can then be related to other factors identified in this paper to build an understanding of the relationships between learning and teaching. (For further discussion of the creation of learning opportunities, see section 4.).

The cognitive and the social dimensions of interaction are inextricably interrelated in that the content of talk (what is being learned) is developed in the context of the social relationships which are established through talk. Vygotsky (1993) points out that learning through a teacher's guidance, or working with supportive, capable partners, can assist children to reach the next stage in their mental development (their 'zone of proximal development') and acquire independent problem-solving ability. Bruner's concept of 'scaffolding' (first used in Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976) and Piaget's concept 'grasp of consciousness' (Piaget 1976, discussed in van Lier 1996:4) are similar accounts pointing to social interaction as the key to learning. Underlying these theories is the view that knowledge and understanding are socio-culturally and historically situated, and that learning therefore involves interaction with others in a shared socio-cultural context.

Mercer (1995) identifies three modes of talking and thinking in pair or group work in educational settings: disputational, cumulative and exploratory talk. 'Disputational' talk is characterised by misunderstandings and conflict among participants; 'cumulative' talk by unquestioning acceptance and adoption of each others' contributions, and 'exploratory' talk by hypothesising, questioning and openness to difference. Exploratory or 'accountable talk' (Cazden's term, 2001:170–2) is seen as the most effective talk that 'foregrounds reasoning' (Mercer 1995:105). The identification of talking as a means to activate exploratory thinking has educational implications for learning in group activities; opportunities for exploratory talk are fundamental to reaching both oral fluency and critical understanding of knowledge (Cazden 2001, Mercer 1995, 2000, Haworth 1994). While these theories and analytical distinctions have been developed in relation to children learning through talk, they are likely to be of use in research on adult LLN education, too.

While the mainstream literature on classroom discourse emphasises talk, Stables (1995) offers a word of caution, claiming that both sociability and solitude are equally important for learning, and that silence in the classroom can stimulate pupils' thoughts, alleviate the stress on less active children, and allow individuals to make sense of lessons alone, as well as through collaborative work. This observation may well be relevant to adult LLN pedagogical settings too.

Researchers in the ELT field have also shown how cultural expectations as regards communication mediate students' learning and participation (Dwyer and Heller-Murphy 1996, Lynch 1998, Flowerdew 1998, Sato 1982), which may be particularly relevant to adult LLN.

Power associated with participants' understanding of subject matter is also a factor in classroom learning. Bashirunddin et al., (1990) and Reynolds (1990) indicate that teachers' authority gives them the power to regulate classroom talk and switch the topics of conversation. To facilitate learner control over learning, teachers need to share classroom power with learners, allowing them to develop responsibilities to organise their learning through interaction.

3.4 The construction of social identities within pedagogic practices

An important aspect of learning-teaching events which should be considered in research on adult LLN pedagogy is the way in which they are shaped by and shape the social identities of participants. As mentioned above, cognitive aspects of classroom interaction are inextricably intertwined with social aspects. Participation in learning-teaching events is a social process which positions participants and affects their learning opportunities. Learners and teachers are positioned in relation to their ethnicity, gender, occupational or social status, age, sexuality, physical and intellectual capacities. Taking gender as an example (an aspect of social identity which has been the focus of a good deal of research about adult language learning[1]), learners may receive differential treatment from teachers according to their gender, be exposed to an asymmetry of gender roles if the textbook or classroom material contains gender stereotyping, and be disadvantaged or empowered depending on the way in which gendered identities are interpreted or reproduced in classroom discourse (Sunderland 1994, Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002, Sunderland et al., 2002). Meanwhile, learners' different use of learning strategies (Oxford, 1994), their receptivity to gendered discourse (Burns, 1994), or varied ways of treating gender in learner-learner discourse (Holmes, 1994) may shape what happens in the classroom. As many researchers in *Exploring Gender* (Sunderland 1994: a collection of selective studies on gender and education) point out, this two-way shaping process influences learning opportunities, as shown in learners' literacy practices, performance in tests, social behaviour, self-esteem and learning styles.

Research on the construction of social identities in educational settings should recognise their complexity, and avoid reduction to simplistic dichotomies. For example, binary thinking characterises many studies of gender; however, according to Sunderland (1998), polarised discussion of gender differences in education does not acknowledge the degree of diversity within male and female learners, or within a group of classroom learners. Research should therefore be concerned with tendencies rather than dichotomies, and with multifaceted identities.

Multifaceted identities, issues of power, and contested definitions of the construct 'student' have all been identified as factors which deserve more attention in the study of adult education (Brookfield 1984, Rogers 2002). Beder and Medina (2001: 59–60) observed that in classrooms which attempted to build a sense of community, learners negotiated and reconstructed their identities, resisting being positioned as less knowledgeable, passive readers. Within applied linguistics, studies in writing and literacy classrooms by Rex (1994) and Prentiss (1998) focused on the dynamic repositioning participants underwent in their learning. They point to the situated nature of student and teacher roles within the classroom context, and to the way in which classroom interaction and written discourse create shifting roles for participants. Through detailed analyses of particular classrooms, they both show how participants continually and mutually influence each others' construction of identities, as there are many complex ways to play and interpret the roles of reader, writer, teacher and

learner, as well as to establish relationships with others.

As these researchers show, the social identities and the positioning of learners in learning-teaching events is an important dimension to take into account in researching learning-teaching events. Specific aspects of identity such as gender, the broader issues of the construction and reconstruction of subjectivities, and shifting relations of power within classroom interaction are all highly relevant to research in adult LLN pedagogic settings.

In this section we have drawn on applied linguistics and other research to identify four aspects of learning-teaching events which need to be taken into account in research in adult LLN: the context, the approach to teaching, the nature of the interaction, and the construction of social identities. As shown in figure 1, these interact with factors which participants bring into the event from outside and beyond it. The focus of the next section is the point of intersection between these sets of factors: the 'learning opportunities' which may or may not be made available in a learning-teaching event. We explain what is meant by this concept and discuss factors which influence the extent to which pedagogic practices actually become opportunities for learning.

4. The creation of learning opportunities

Since the 1980s, there has been an ongoing focus in applied linguistics on understanding how learning is accomplished (if it is) in the classroom context. It is not possible to guarantee that learners learn what teachers teach (Allwright 1984a, b, Breen 1985, van Lier 1988, 1996): there is likely to be only a partial relationship between interactions in pedagogic settings and learning. Participants in classrooms do not go in 'empty-minded' but they bring with them their beliefs, resources and socio-cultural capitals. Will their needs for being in that specific educational setting be satisfied? How will learners' understanding of input be filtered by classroom interaction? Those questions will be addressed in this section, by focusing on issues which have been identified in theory and research in applied linguistics on the concept of learning opportunities (4.1), on the management of learning (4.2), on participation and engagement in learning (4.3), and on relationships between teaching and learning (4.4).

4.1 The concept of 'learning opportunities'

Classroom interaction is, as noted in many studies (e.g. Allwright and Bailey 1991, Cazden 2001, Mercer 1995, 2000), a means of transforming the content which a teacher plans to convey into knowledge and skills available for learning, through the co-production of *learning opportunities*. Interaction provides learners with opportunities to absorb knowledge from input, to practise the skills taught in class or to modify or polish learning strategies. The value of the concept of 'learning opportunities' is that it does not imply that what a teacher plans to convey is the same as what a learner gains from a lesson. Crabbe (2003:10) proposes that the concept of 'learning opportunities' should be inscribed in a curriculum, which should be considered as 'an organisation of learning opportunities' made public and easily identifiable by teachers. However, the take-up of opportunities by learners is rather private and less frequently reported. Investigations by the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group indicate that learners exploit opportunities to negotiate their understandings of content and meaning, their roles and their relations to others in classroom practices. Classroom interaction has the potential to give learners constant opportunities to engage in the process of clarifying and reconstructing their utterances (although they may not actually 'get' opportunities if the interaction is highly teacher controlled, (Allwright and Bailey 1991: 20–21).

In language education, classroom interaction has a dual function of providing opportunities for learners to learn both 'bits of the language' and 'bits of information about the language' (Allwright and Bailey 1991: Chapter 7 and 8). Crucially, it constitutes opportunities for practice in the target language. By analogy, in literacy and numeracy education, meaningful interaction with texts and with mathematical activities can provide opportunities for learners to learn literacy and numeracy practices by engagement in them: to learn by doing, as well as by talking about them.

4.2 The management of learning

The concept of 'learning opportunities' allows for the teacher's role to be redefined. Rather than taking full responsibility for determining what is to be learned' teachers are responsible for the altogether more flexible and creative task of 'managing' the creation of learning opportunities: for what Allwright and Bailey call 'the management of learning' (1991).

Allwright (2003b) suggests that, rather than hoping to identify the most effective method of teaching, teachers and researchers should seek to understand how learning is achieved, and hence be in a better position to manage the provision of learning opportunities. 'Learning opportunities' can, in principle, arise anywhere, not only in classrooms; when teachers are present, however, they can use their professional knowledge to facilitate, increase and enhance such opportunities.

The notion 'management of interaction', developed in the ELT field (Allwright and Bailey 1991:19), takes into account not only what teachers do, but also what learners do in interaction. Allwright and Bailey list five aspects of the management of interaction in the language classroom: 'participants' turn distribution, topic, task, tone, and code' (1991:19). According to Allwright and Bailey, these can be researched by asking the following questions: 'Who gets to speak?' (participants' turn distribution), 'What do they talk about?' (topic); 'What does each participant do with the various opportunities to speak?' (task); 'What sort of atmosphere is created?' (tone); 'What accent, dialect, or language is used?' (code). Management of interaction is complex since a variety of direct or indirect approaches may be adopted to achieve successful interactions for different participants.

Allwright offers an alternative to 'efficiency' as the goal for pedagogy: 'the productivity of learning opportunities may depend less on the quality of the work that goes into them than on the quality of classroom life in which they arise' (2003b; see also 2001a, b). 'Quality of classroom life' refers to the nature of the social relationships, the atmosphere of respect and trust, the search for personal relevance and the promotion of a spirit of inquiry which can be inculcated in learning environments. In the pursuit of creating productive learning opportunities, understanding what puzzles participants in learning-teaching events is pivotal. The production of situated understanding for a particular group of participants at the local level is claimed to be of more value than the search for generalised procedures for problem solving at a global level. The emphasis on 'quality of life' might avoid the danger of learners being merely attentive students who work hard for good classroom performance, and instead may promote an interest in lifelong learning (Allwright 2003b:4).

We suggest that 'learning opportunities', 'the management of learning' and 'quality of classroom life' are valuable concepts in research on learning in adult LLN education, placing the emphasis less on evaluating methods of teaching and more on understanding learning. Nevertheless, the concepts should be opened up for scrutiny: for example, should 'work' and 'life' be viewed as a dichotomy, and if not, what is their relationship? How should 'quality of classroom life' be defined? How is it to be recognised or evaluated, and by whom? These are questions for learners, educators and researchers to bear in mind when studying learning and teaching in adult LLN.

4.3 Participation and engagement in learning

Classroom interaction researchers have tried to demonstrate how learners' participation in turn-taking relates to their learning (e.g. Allwright 1980). Since not all forms of participation are observable (Allwright and Bailey 1991), it still remains a thorny issue for both researchers and teachers to identify what counts as evidence of participation. Research in ELT classrooms has shown that more obvious indications that learners are participating, such as how frequently they answer questions or volunteer contributions to classroom interaction, do not necessarily correlate with progress or achievement.

The notions of *participation* and *engagement* can more usefully be understood to refer to processing of learning in ways that require learners to invest their own effort. While the term 'participation' focuses on the social aspects of learning-teaching events, the term 'engagement' encompasses also the cognitive aspects. Both concepts foreground learners' perspectives on learning: visible and invisible evidence of participation and engagement suggest that learners are active agents of learning. As a follow-up to their classroom dynamics study in ABE, Beder and Medina (2001:114–5) are undertaking a study of engagement. They identify engagement as a key factor in students' relative persistence in learning. They are interested in what types of classroom teaching lead to engagement and how to reduce disengagements in order to ameliorate student drop out.

van Lier (1996) argues that 'engagement' is of central importance in the learning process. He describes the learning process as cumulative and contingent, with engagement as an initial step towards developing investment in cognitive, emotional or physical dimensions of learning. Researchers in adult LLN, therefore, should concern themselves with ways in which 'engagement' is achieved, as well as with ways in which the curriculum is delivered.

4.4 Relationships between teaching and learning

The complexities of the relationship between teaching and language learning have motivated applied linguistics researchers to propose various hypotheses regarding the role of classroom interaction in providing samples of the target language. For example, 'The comprehensible input hypothesis' (Krashen 1982), proposes that if the interaction in the classroom is comprehensible to the learner, s/he will learn language by participating in it, without needing direct instruction. 'The interaction hypothesis' (Allwright 1984 a, b), proposes that the quality and quantity of spoken interaction in which a learner engages in the classroom will have an impact on his/her language learning. The belief about language learning underlying these hypotheses is that different learners will learn different things from exposure to purposeful communication in the target language. They suggest that researchers should look carefully at language in the language classroom as 'input' in its own right rather than just as the conveyor of information, and that teachers should be aware of the potential of their language use to act as a sample of the language to be learned. It is impossible to claim conclusively that these teaching approaches are more effective than others, since there are so many factors in operation in any teaching learning event, and there are such enormous differences from one cultural context to another (as discussed, for example, in Tarnopolsky 2000). However, we believe that these 'interaction hypotheses' are worth taking into account in relation to the teaching of English as a Second Language to adults, and we suggest also that they may be applicable to literacy learning through interaction with written texts, including interactive electronic texts.

The 'learnability-teachability hypothesis' (Pienemann 1984) is more generally applicable to the whole field of adult LLN education. His interpretation of the relationship between teaching and learning is that learners will not learn new things until they are ready (1984, also in Allwright and Bailey 1991: 104). Inventing a concept of 'learnability', he argues that the things at just the next stage in the natural development of learners are the only 'learnable' things for them. This hypothesis accounts for the way in which different learners at different stages are able to learn different things, and the fact that not everything teachers teach will be learnable to all learners. It implies that any mismatch between teaching aims and learning outcomes may be partly due to the learners' ability to select those things taught by teachers which they regard as learnable.

Pienemann (1989) relates learning processes outside the classroom to the teaching in ESL classrooms, suggesting that systematic integration of these two is the basis of a successful course. This seems to be much in line with views held by those in adult LLN who consider that learners can act as ethnographers of the literacies in their own lives (Barton 1994, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 2000, Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group 1993), and those who propose to merge what they call 'acquisition learning' into formal learning in adult education (Rogers 1986, 1992, 2002 – see section 3.2) Pienemann further claims that the developmental process does not have rigid sequential stages, and that learning and teaching proceed not in a linear fashion, but in a continuous tension between the two. There is certainly a body of empirical evidence to keep Pienemann's learnability-teachability hypothesis alive (e.g. Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group 1992, Prentiss 1998), but it also raises challenges to teachers and researchers: Are things which are teachable also those which are learnable? Is there any means to sharpen teachers' skills in identifying learnable things and moments? How can instruction help the adult learner move on to the next stage of learning?

In this section we have foregrounded the idea of 'learning opportunities' in order to draw attention to theory and research which maintains that teaching cannot determine what will be learnt. A corollary of this is that it is somewhat fruitless to seek the best method of teaching, and rather more fruitful to seek understanding of how learning is accomplished. With this in mind, it is not possible to make claims that particular outcomes will necessarily follow from particular types of teaching. What is possible, however, is to identify the types of learning which may arise from learning opportunities which teachers have created. We need also to look at the cultural orientation of contexts and find innovative ways of perceiving learning opportunities.

5. From interaction to learning? – different types of outcome

The factors mentioned so far suggest that it is not easy to predict precisely the body of knowledge and skills that learners will learn from any learning teaching event, however carefully it is planned. Instead of seeking for precise relationships between teaching methods and specified outcomes, researchers might concern themselves with increasing their understanding of the learning-teaching process, and with looking for evidence of learning opportunities. While not expecting the total set of learning opportunities to be taken up, we need to know what different types of 'uptake' can constitute learning in relation to teaching 'input'. The term 'uptake' focuses on what people actually learn, which might be very different from what they are taught. In this section, we identify types of 'uptake' of learning opportunities, and other types of outcome from learning-teaching events, which are implied by the theory and research we have analysed in previous sections. The following categories are generated from our analysis of existing theory and research in applied linguistics and adult literacy.

5.1 Learning about content

The term 'content' translates, in adult LLN, into *knowledge about* language, literacy, and numeracy, and *ability to use* language, literacy and numeracy in practice. These forms of learning are the ones privileged by curricula, but are inextricably bound up with other types of learning, as described below.

5.2 Learning about learning

Allwright (2000, 2001a, b) and Pinto (2001) point out that through developing understanding of things that may accelerate or interfere with learning, learners become more explicitly aware of how they learn in educational contexts and in life. A range of terms are used to characterise various dimensions of this type of learning: metacognitive awareness, learner training, exploratory thinking, critical and rational thought, autonomous learning, learning culture, social responsibility, and others. Incorporating research into learning and teaching into the curriculum may have benefits for learning about learning (Allwright 2000, Burns 1999, Culham 2001).

5.3 Learning about language

Classroom discourse has been researched widely to suggest that, when classroom interaction works in tandem with explicit awareness-raising about what is being learned, it exerts strong influences on language, academic and social development. Learners learn to construct knowledge from talk. In terms of language teaching and learning, that knowledge not only involves capacity to use the target language (or to use written language in a language they already speak fluently), but also knowledge about language and skills of language learning (learner or learning strategies) (Allwright 2000, 2001a, Cazden 2001, Mercer 1995, 2000, van Lier 1996).

5.4 Learning about social relations

Researchers indicate that we need to have a perspective which locates learners within a social context. An analysis of learners' beliefs and values which isolates them in psychological processes does not account for the interpersonal and social decisions learners make in the process of learning (Allwright 1984a, Breen 1985, Green and Dixon 1993). In literacy and general educational settings, empirical studies undertaken by Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (Dixon and Green 1993, Rex 1994) illustrate how learners are able to construct knowledge through negotiations of tensions between individual perceptions and group expectations of what counts as knowledge. In the process of negotiation or interaction, learners also experience particular relationships and learn to define and construct their roles and social relations (Cazden 2001, Dixon and Green 1993, Prentiss 1998, Rex 1994).

5.5 Re-constructing identities

Learning as a social activity involves adopting distinctive social and personal positions. It thus implies complex transitions of identities, (Ivanič 1998, Wenger 1998), and the possibility for learners to change the sense of who they are and what is possible for them (what Bartlett and Holland, 2002, refer to as 'modifying *habitus*').

Norton (2000) proposes that learners do not only acquire skills in learning, but also engage in a complex social practice in which they have agency simultaneously to reproduce or shape their identities as communicating through different conventional patterns of discourses both in educational and social contexts (for discussion of learners' agency, see also 3.2). In other work (2001), she indicates language learners may move back and forth between three interweaving communities: their biographical-historical community, the learning community in which they engage in classroom practices, and the wider speech community outside the classroom context which learners imagine and hope to join. Learners conceptualise and identify themselves with those communities, which affects their participation in learning events, and their consequent repositioning is one outcome of participation. Wenger (1998) in *Communities of Practice* argues that learning is related to constructing and reconstructing identities in different contexts where learners are given or denied access to social groups in terms of power, and concludes that identity-work is an essential element in learning.

5.6 Wider benefits of learning

When learning is not conceptualised as sequences of teaching points but sets of learning opportunities, learning outcomes are not predetermined and limited to academic and professional achievement. One of the central concerns for educational or learning development agencies is the wider benefits of learning (Hammond and Preston 2002, Overton 2001, Vorhaus 2001).

Comparing accounts of students who decide to stay and those who consider leaving ABE classes in Further Education (FE) has caused recent personal development programmes in the UK to list things which students have gained such as 'increased confidence and positive attitude to themselves, enhanced social skills, assertion, self-respect and motivation'. (Overton 2001: 49; see also Appleby 2003). Garner (1998) presents a case study of one of her students in ABE in the US which shows that motivation is much enhanced by bringing

students into more effective participation in running the school. In Webber's (1998) work in a maths course in Australia, a learner is found to take more active control in learning, to modify her self-concept in relation to learning, and to experience a desire for personal change once she has been given opportunities to critically reflect on the value of her experiences of learning and make them meaningful. We consider these case studies to be promising research initiatives, and that more systematic investigation is needed into how such benefits can be obtained through learning-teaching events.

Denis Gleeson (2001:30–31), coordinator of a recent project: 'transforming learning cultures in FE', also asserts that the prevailing myth of a 'straightforward learning career path' should be dismantled and that the connection between learning in FE and wider social, economic and political processes should be consolidated. This sort of educational reform derives from theories of learning as a form of cultural practice, and is designed to diminish the alienation and passivity of learners and to work towards social integration by the development of citizenship and employability. Gleeson's mission statement for the project reinforces the idea that learning is not only a passport to an intellectual community but the entrance ticket to society at large.

In research on adult LLN learning in educational settings, it is important to pay attention not only to the first, but to all of these possible outcomes.

6. Learning and teaching as research: an aspect of professional development

In this section we give an overview of 'exploratory practice': a 'professionally viable alternative research paradigm' (Allwright, 2003b: 8) proposed within applied linguistics for investigating teaching and learning as an integral part of professional development. It was conceived of in relation to language learning, but we believe it has much to offer to research in adult LLN as a whole, developing ideas which underpin the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy group (RaPAL Bulletin 1985 – 2004; see also Hamilton, Ivanič and Barton 1992). It blurs the distinction between researching, learning and teaching, reconceptualising learning and teaching as the cooperative search for understanding. It focuses on the processes rather than the findings of research, processes which have the potential to enhance practitioners' own development through direct involvement in researching their practice.

Exploratory practice, initiated by Allwright (2000, 2001a, b, 2003a, see also http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/groups/epcentre/epcentre.htm) draws upon but is distinct from the perspectives of action research and reflective practice. It is 'a combination of approach and method' (2000:23) for the development of understanding of life in classrooms for teachers, learners and also researchers. It focuses on working for local understanding of 'puzzles' with practitioners, not problem solving or changes. To achieve that understanding, it is essential not only to avoid the research activity hindering teaching or learning but actually to ensure that it promotes them. That means, instead of setting up research projects to scrutinise what learners do in the classroom, collaboration between researchers, teachers and learners should lead learners to explore their own puzzles and meanings in relation to learning.

What is different from the classically conceived ethnographic or action research is that Allwright regards research as something which should not be done *on* learners, but *with* and *for* learners; the primary intent of exploratory practice is not to get research done but to get learning and teaching done. Teachers then move from being practitioners to being knowledge-makers who seek and develop 'helpful' understanding with learners for both learner and teacher development. In a larger sense, it opens up a new arena for teachers and learners to envisage the interplay between teaching, learning, and research for the sake of 'learning' and to recognise the roles one may play simultaneously in the classroom: teacher, learner and also researcher. The collaborative search for understanding can reduce the danger of teachers controlling how learning is encountered and perceived, and can acknowledge learners as experts.

Exploratory practice does not provide a definite procedure or detailed guidelines, but rather a philosophical framework for rethinking learning and teaching as part of professional development. The aim is not pedagogical reform but understanding what actually happens in the classroom and what may happen. Exploratory practice has the modest goal of achieving an adequate understanding for local events, rather than the unrealistic goal of reaching universal understanding. The local context creates fine-tuned learning opportunities and generates understanding of theory and practice (see also the ideas of the 'management of learning' and 'quality of classroom life' in section 4.2).

7. Back to our conceptual framework

In this paper we aimed to provide an integration of theoretical perspectives on learning by focusing on the range of factors which contribute to learning rather than on what teaching does. We have done this by analysing theory and research mainly from applied linguistics sources in order to identify insights and concepts which are relevant to future research into adult LLN education. On the basis of this analysis we proposed a conceptual framework (figure 1) with the intention of sketching the process of learning in the context of learning-teaching events. We now return to that framework to discuss it further in the light of the content of this analysis.

Learning is not a static entity because it is infused with the complexity of learners' lives. Referring to *How People Learn*[2] (Bransford et al., 1999: 11), Cazden writes, ' "constructivist theories of knowing" are about how people learn, not how other people should teach' (2001:77). We concur with this fundamental principle that understanding learning is the fundamental aim of educational theory and research, and the key to improving teaching.

The further we widen our lens from seeing the accomplishment of learning as merely the accumulative effects of contributing factors and classroom practice, the more we find learning is a dynamic and changing process: that, for example, learners' beliefs about learning can affect their perceptions of learning opportunities, and that these in turn may lead them to modify their beliefs. Accepting that learning is a cyclic suggests that figure 1 should not be viewed as a unitary event but as a dynamic, iterative process. Teaching and learning shape each other moment-by-moment: as learners are changed by teaching, so teachers may adjust their teaching to improve the chance of it leading to more learning. Teaching may lead to learning not only by those designated by the pedagogic setting as 'learners' but also by 'teachers-as-learners', and this type of learning, too, has the potential to feed back into teaching.

In this paper we have identified different factors which are brought into learning-teaching events (section 2), how they interact with each other and construct classroom interaction in ongoing ways (section 3) to shape learning opportunities (section 4) that have the potential to result in various types of learning outcome (section 5). In figure 1, what happens in the classroom (or other site of learning) is represented by the overlapping circles. 'The creation of learning opportunities' occupies the space at the intersection of the two circles to represent the way in which they are constructed in the interplay among factors contributing to learning and pedagogic practices. The reverberative effect of one factor on others is indicated by the dotted outlines of all three circles. These dotted lines also imply that researchers should remain open-minded as to what may happen in classroom practice and as to what can be named.

So far there is no evidence of a clear relationship between the possibilities for learning in classrooms and what each learner really learns: researchers have found that contributions, participations and accomplishments among learners in response to teaching are neither stable nor consistent (Breen 2001). The discussion of learning has to stay at the level of *management of learning* rather than *doing learning* (Allwright 2003a, b) – hence our focus on 'learning opportunities', and our tentativeness in representing the actual accomplishment of learning. The arrow between 'The creation of learning opportunities' and 'Different types of outcome' is drawn with a dotted line to indicate that not all learning opportunities will

automatically be translated into learning outcomes: the different types of learning and other outcomes of learning-teaching events are potential, not predictable, products of learning opportunities.

We believe that this conceptual framework provides a useful working understanding of the complexity of learning in pedagogic settings, representing relationships among factors which contribute to this complexity. Along with Allwright, however, we emphasise that more needs to be done to throw light on murkier spots and to allow more puzzles about learning to be unravelled.

8. Summary and implications for future research

Research specifically on the topic of learning in relation to teaching is scarce in adult LLN (Beder and Medina 2001). The aim of this analysis has been to identify issues which should be taken into account by NRDC researchers who are investigating what constitutes effective practice. Drawing mainly on theory and research about learning and teaching within the field of applied linguistics, we have presented a complex picture of the learning-teaching process, revealing a myriad of dynamic factors mutually influencing each other both within the social life of the classroom and in the broader social context (Allwright 2000).

These facets of learning and teaching, and the complex relationships among them are, in our view, worth taking into consideration in research on adult LLN pedagogy. These perspectives support adult LLN education projects which pursue socially situated understandings of learning: for example, those which pay attention to learners' everyday lives and literacy practices in connection with their experience of literacy education. The issues identified in this analysis are actively informing the NRDC *Adult Learners' Lives* project and will be taken into account in the report on the nature of learning and teaching observed on the project. We consider that other projects within NRDC would also benefit from the findings of the research analysed here regarding the complexity of the relationships between method and outcomes.

The implications of the research analysed here for initial teacher training and for staff development are that courses for all adult LLN practitioners should incorporate a significant element devoted to a socially situated understanding of learners and learning. They should include ideas about how to adapt provision to different contexts and groups, and should encourage ongoing reflection on learning processes not only by teachers, but also by policy makers and by learners. In addition such courses should introduce adult LLN practitioners to 'exploratory practice': practical processes for working with learners to research learning and teaching as part of on-going professional development.

The analysis also brings to light certain issues which might directly inform policy. In particular, the theory and research discussed here points to the importance of taking context into account when considering what constitutes good teaching practice, and of recognising that different learners have different needs. It cautions against promoting any single teaching method or approach across all settings. The research supports policies which

provide time for teachers to gain knowledge of a variety of different methods, and to develop their capacity to analyse the relative strengths and weaknesses of these in relation to the particularities of settings, and of learners with whom they are working.

Learning accomplishments in different contexts entail more idiosyncrasy than commonality in how learning is accomplished (Allwright 2000, 2001b, Breen 2001). Since participants interact with one another in unpredictable ways and achieve differentially, researchers might do well to focus on local and situated understanding of learning in relation to teaching (Prentiss 1998, Rex 1994). For these reasons, researchers should be wary of making causal links between teaching intervention and learning accomplishment; our aim should rather be to better understand the learning-teaching process by investigating how learning opportunities emerge in context.

We acknowledge that the picture of learning in relation to teaching presented here is disconcertingly complex, as more and more unsettling factors are brought into the picture. However, we believe that it can be inspiring and challenging to perceive pedagogy from the perspective that learning should be considered prior to teaching, putting learners in the central position in learning-teaching events - an insight which is not really new yet is often submerged in research inquiries which focus on teaching interventions. We hope to have uncovered territories that have been rarely trodden but are fertile for future researchers, teachers and learners in adult LLN to work on together, to complement and extend existing theories and findings, and to shed more light on the complexity of the learning-teaching process.

Endnotes

1. Currently, issues of gender in relation to learning in adult LLN do not seem to have been studied in depth, although Sunderland (1994: 12) indicated that the development of literacy for women who are refugees or migrants from developing countries would be a fruitful area for future investigations.

2. *How People Learn* is a report (1999) by the National Research Council in the U.S, parts of the content of which are referred to and cited in Cazden's *Classroom Discourse* (2001), in particular in Chapter 4: 'Classroom Discourse and Student Learning'.

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Appendix. Directory of abbreviations

ABE   Adult Basic Education

ELT   English Language Teaching

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

ESL   English as a Second Language

EAL   English as an Additional Language

ESOL   English for Speakers of Other Languages

FE   Further Education

LLN   Language, Literacy and Numeracy

ICT   Information and Communication Technology

NCSALL National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (in the US)

RaPAL   Research and Practice in Adult Literacy

www.nrdc.org.uk