



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy



Getting the practical teaching element right :

A guide for literacy, numeracy
and ESOL teacher educators

Helen Casey, Jay Derrick, Samantha Duncan and David Mallows
April 2007



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Contents

- 5 Introduction
- 6 Theory and practice
- 7 The organisation of teaching practice:
 - 8 Group teaching practice
 - 11 Paired teaching practice
 - 12 Individual teaching practice
- 15 How to organise group teaching practice or 'training groups'
- 18 More than just teaching - opportunities for observation
- 20 'Practise as you preach' - the role of modelling
- 21 Putting it all together
- 22 Innovative partnership arrangements
- 24 Methods of assessing teaching practice
- 29 Formative and summative assessment
- 31 References
- 32 Appendices
 - 32 Appendix 1: Examples of job descriptions for teaching practice mentors
 - 34 Appendix 2: Examples of timetables for teaching practice groups
 - 37 Appendix 3: Example teaching practice feedback record sheet

Introduction

In response to recent reports from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted 2003 and 2006a) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES 2004), and building on recent research, this guide draws on the experience of literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teacher education programmes to share practical strategies used in building firm links between theory and practice. It is intended as a resource for teacher educators to use in designing and organising their programmes.

Recent and forthcoming NRDC publications (Lucas *et al.* 2004; Lucas *et al.* 2007) have explored and evaluated literacy, numeracy and ESOL teacher education, and reviewed the wider research in this area (Morton *et al.* 2006). NRDC has identified some interesting and innovative examples of how individual teacher education partnerships and providers meet some of the challenges of ensuring that the practical and theoretical elements of their courses are fully integrated.

In writing this guide we revisited the data from the NRDC research and also interviewed a number of teacher educators who had developed programmes with strong integration of theory and practice as well as of subject specific and pedagogical knowledge. There are quotes from them throughout this text to illustrate how they managed individual arrangements on their courses. We hope that others will find these experiences useful in reflecting on and addressing the organisation and structure of their own programmes.

Building on recent research and development work, this document draws on the experience of:

- literacy, numeracy and ESOL teacher education programmes that integrate generic teacher training with subject specific training
- programmes in which trainees experience different models of teaching practice support at different stages of their training
- programmes in which well-supported teaching practice is placed at the heart of teacher education programmes
- partnerships in which organisations with different expertise encourage each other's development.

→ Theory and practice

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL teacher education programmes include both a theoretical taught element and a practical teaching element. For pre-service trainees the practical element comes in the form of a teaching practice placement, while for in-service trainees this is usually provided by their place of employment. For the purposes of this document, the terms 'teaching practice' or 'placement' are used to refer to the experience of both pre-service and in-service trainee teachers.

Inspection reports (Ofsted 2003 and 2006a) and research evidence (Lucas *et al.* 2004; Lucas *et al.* 2007) suggest that while the taught 'input' sessions are being delivered effectively, the practical elements are weak and do not sufficiently support the development of trainee teachers:

There is still a striking contrast between the quality of the taught element of ITT courses, which is generally good, and the quality of the practice elements, which is inadequate. (Ofsted 2006a)

Trainees often experience the theoretical and practical elements of the course as quite separate and disconnected. The challenges faced by teachers in working with learners are often insufficiently addressed within the taught element of programmes. A number of factors contribute to this.

There is often a physical separation between the taught elements of the courses and the teaching practice placements as the trainees are usually based in a different organisation for their teaching practice. There is often a complete division of labour between the training team in the teacher training institution and the people organising and supporting the teaching practice placements.

Trainees often experience the theoretical and practical elements of the course as quite separate and disconnected.

Communication between the two groups is at best ad hoc or occasional, and at worst non-existent. In effect the assumption is made that individual trainees will make the necessary conceptual and practical links themselves, both in their practice and in assignments which ask them to illustrate theoretical models from their practical experience. Formative support for teaching practice is typically unconnected to the content of the taught sessions and can even conflict with it, which can be confusing for new teachers early in the development of their practical teaching skills.

The experiences of the programmes drawn upon in this guide are those in which innovative approaches have been taken to bridging this gap between theory and practice.

A further common limitation, even when teaching practice is well-supported, is that it is often limited in the range of settings and levels at which literacy, numeracy or ESOL teachers might find themselves working. Few programmes offer more than one teaching practice placement, and that is mostly in a further education (FE) college rather than in prisons, adult education settings, or workplaces. This means that trainees are rarely offered the opportunity to experience a different environment and thus broaden their perspective in preparation for potential employment across the full range of contexts in the learning and skills sector. It is also often the case that trainers have little or no recent experience of teaching in the range of settings in which their trainees are working.

→ **The organisation of teaching practice**

Novice teachers develop expertise in how to teach through engaging in teaching practice with learners. The ways in which providers of training programmes plan and organise the practical element of programmes can have far-reaching effects on the trainee teacher's experience.

From the many programmes NRDC has explored three broad models can be identified for the organisation of teaching practice, each providing a different level and type of support to the trainee: group, paired and individual teaching practice.

These three models are described here, with an assessment of their strengths

and weaknesses. The less prevalent 'group teaching model' is discussed in some detail, in response to demand from within the NRDC professional development networks for more guidance on how to set up and manage training groups.

Group teaching practice

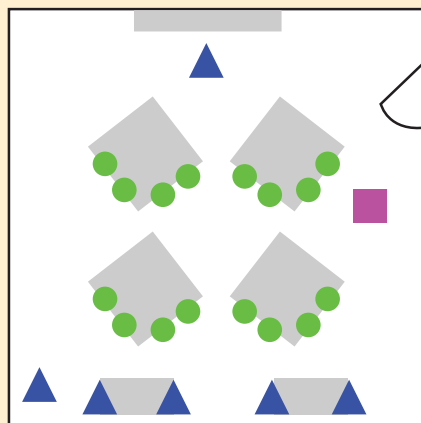
In this model, groups of learners are shared between small groups of trainee teachers for their teaching practice; it is an intensive model in which trainees can learn quickly, provides the highest level of support to the trainee and is very effective in the initial stages of a course.

Working with a shared group of learners, trainees take turns to teach a part of each lesson, observed by their peers and their teacher trainer. They plan sessions collaboratively with each other and their trainer and then meet immediately after the taught session to reflect and evaluate and begin the process of planning for the next session.

This model is used extensively in English language teaching (ELT) training and

Group teaching practice

This diagram shows a group of six trainee teachers working with a shared group of learners. The trainees take turns to teach the learner group, observed by their peers and their trainer. An in-depth feedback discussion between the trainees and their trainer follows each session, and leads into the shared planning for the next time. This model is very useful in the early stages of training and offers strengths in the integration of theory and practice.



Trainees take turns to teach a whole group of learners, with the teacher trainer present.

In the classroom are 6 trainee teachers; 1 teacher trainer; a group of learners.

has also been used for literacy and numeracy by providers in London (LSU 2006). Recent research carried out by the University of Plymouth (Burghes 2006) used a similar model of collaborative teaching practice working in groups, and found parallel advantages. The Plymouth evaluation concluded that 'the model represented a real enhancement in the quality of initial teacher education (ITE), particularly for the first teaching placement for trainees', and that it established strong links between theory and practice.

In this model trainees get feedback from both the trainer and their peers and all the trainees can contribute to collaborative formative discussions on the basis of shared experience with a known group of learners. Trainees benefit from co-planning the teaching practice with their peers and their trainers. A key advantage of the training group model is that trainees can work together on planning with the same students in mind. One trainer commented on their own experience of adopting this model:

'Previously where people were out there in their own workplaces and coming into the course, in response to a suggestion for a particular learning activity, they'd say: "oh, that wouldn't work in my situation or with my learners"; with training groups this resistance never happened again, because you've got a shared group of learners, you are doing collaborative planning. And you can support trainees in trying out approaches they feel uncomfortable with.'

In this model, the trainees learn from watching each other; they develop ways of working collaboratively and offering mutual support. It is also possible for the trainer to model techniques with the training group and for the trainees to observe more experienced teachers teaching the group. Again, as this is shared experience it lends far greater focus to the group feedback discussions and can be drawn on in the input sessions enhancing the link between theory and practice. This link works in both directions. In formative feedback discussions it is possible to refer to a taught session to illustrate or elicit a point.

One trainer described an example of how she was able to use the content of a taught session to revisit and clarify the issues around an activity used with beginner readers:

'I can remember observing someone doing a language experience activity and she was really getting into a tangle and getting stuck and as soon as we sat down to reflect on it I was able to say "do you remember when we looked at it in

the session, what were we focusing on?" And she made the connections herself. But if I hadn't been in that input session, I wouldn't have been able to do that.'

This example also illustrates a point to be returned to later, of the importance of the size of the teacher training team, and/or of the connections between a wider team in ensuring integration of theory and practice.

Within the group teaching practice model, teacher trainers can set practice teaching tasks to ensure trainees try out a range of methods and cover a range of subject knowledge. They can also give observation tasks to the whole group and focus on this in the feedback session.

The group practice model also has the advantage of saving on travel time for trainers to observe their trainees, with a group working together rather than visiting trainees spread in placements over what can easily be a large geographical area.

It is rare for learners to have problems with the training groups, but sometimes trainees do:

'There are sometimes trainees who can't cope with it, who find the whole process in front of peers and then discussing and evaluating in front of peers too much, though they are usually people who in the end, for one reason or another, turn out not to be suited to teaching....it doesn't work in teaching if you want to go and do it with nobody looking or if you aren't able to get into those reflective, self-evaluative discussions without seeing it as a criticism of you, rather than as a development.'

In this sense, training groups have the further advantage of helping those trainees who may not be suited for teaching to find this out sooner rather than later. This finding is echoed by the Plymouth research which also includes as an advantage of this model:

'Trainee teachers quickly came to realise whether or not they were suited to a career in teaching.' (Burghes 2006)

The centres using this group approach were typically working with a small and

close team of two or three trainers, responsible for the teaching practice observation and assessment, and much of the input in the taught element of the course.

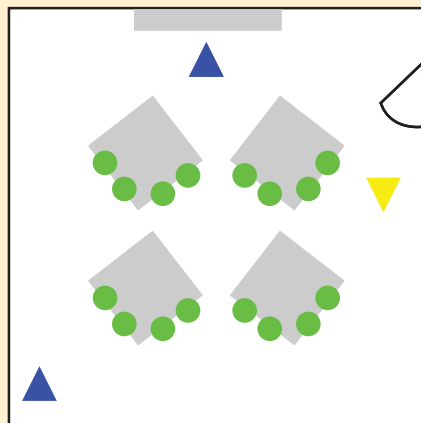
Paired teaching practice

Paired teaching practice is something of a halfway stage between the group model outlined above, and the more familiar English model of individual placements described below.

In this model, two trainees share responsibility for teaching students within a single group of learners at a placement organisation supervised by the teacher normally responsible for the group, teaching half the session each. An alternative version sees trainees working in the classroom together, taking half of the learners each, again under the supervision of the class teacher, with formal visits from their trainer; this gives greater opportunity for the trainees to watch each other teach a known group, and give feedback to each other.

Paired teaching practice

In this model two trainees work together with a single group of learners. They may teach alternately, observing one another, or sometimes take half the learners each, dividing the room in two. Observations may be from their teaching practice (TP) mentor or from their trainer. This model benefits from some peer observation but does not enjoy the strong connection to the taught course experienced in the group model, with the teacher trainer present.



Two trainees take it in turns to teach the entire group with the TP mentor present.

In the classroom are: 2 trainee teachers; 1 TP mentor; a group of learners.

● Learner ▲ Trainee ▼ TP Mentor

The experienced teacher is expected to help them to learn from their practice through co-operative planning, informal feedback and discussion. Formal observations for the purposes of assessment are usually carried out during periodic visits by the trainer. The learners can be grouped in different ways (for example by level or by topic) to suit their needs and to challenge the trainees. Trainers make formal visits and observe both trainees.

In this arrangement, trainees share the planning and support each other, and share reflections based on knowledge of the same students. They play a gradually increasing role in planning, supported by the class teacher, who is given training in their support role by the trainers. Trainees receive feedback both from the class teacher as a 'critical friend' and more formal assessment feedback from the trainer, plus some peer feedback from their partner.

The involvement of the class teacher can be the first step towards them becoming a trainer, and can contribute to capacity-building within a local partnership.

There is some efficiency in the use of the trainer's time, in terms of travelling to make observations, as they can see two trainees teach on one visit.

Individual teaching practice

In this more prevalent model, trainees take sole responsibility for teaching a group. Where the trainee is already working and aiming to get fully qualified while 'on the job', this model is often the only one experienced. For a pre-service trainee it may include an element of shadowing the existing teacher but the trainee would quickly assume responsibility, simulating the future professional pattern. It has the advantage that the trainee experiences the full responsibility of teaching in the sector, and also that they have the chance to earn while training. However, there are disadvantages, particularly if this is the only model used from the beginning of the programme, as it does not easily foster strong links between theory and practice.

The collaborative planning, observation and feedback central to the group teaching practice model means that opportunities for support from trainers and fellow trainees is maximised. However, in independent teaching practice away from the eye of the trainers the trainee may receive no support or feedback on their practice except when their trainer visits.

The use of individual placements tends to result in an extended training team,

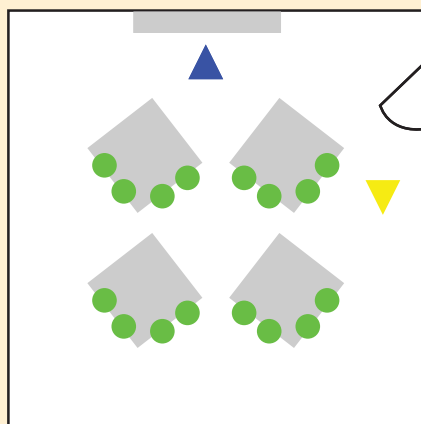
with workplace-based mentors operating as the outer circle to the inner team responsible for the taught programme and the formal assessments. A broader team of this nature is not able to create the tight feedback loops between the taught and the practical elements that the group model facilitates. Training teams need to give thought to the support given to trainees in the workplace and to how they keep up to date with the trainee's progress.

For in-service trainees employed in smaller organisations in the sector, there are additional difficulties with this model. A trainee may easily be the only literacy, numeracy or ESOL teacher in their place of work. Their teaching practice mentor will need to be externally sourced, and they will have to operate without the peer group of Skills for Life professionals that is too often assumed by those managing teacher education programmes. In some settings the procedures and expectations operating may also not provide models of good professional practice for the trainee.

Mentor support, provided by the more experienced teacher with whom trainees

Individual teaching practice

In this more familiar model, the trainee teacher is alone with a group of learners, observed by a teaching practice mentor. This model is closer to everyday professional practice but does not bring the advantages of a collaborative group approach in the integration of theory and practice.



One trainee is matched to a TP mentor and their learner group

In the classroom are: 1 trainee teacher; 1 TP mentor; a group of learners.

Source: www.talent.ac.uk

share a class, needs to be seen as integral to the training team. The need for coherent links between the practical sphere and the taught programme puts a premium on systems ensuring regular and rich communication between the trainees, trainer and mentor. Without strong patterns of communication there is no guarantee that the trainees' developing practice will be linked appropriately with and informed by relevant theory. It cannot be assumed that trainees will report to the trainers and their peers on issues raised in the feedback they have received in the workplace. Tutorials will need to be carefully structured to include the contributions of the three perspectives of trainer, mentor and trainee.

To assist trainees in their development, robust systems for sharing records of progress in teaching practice need to be in place to support the maintenance of these essential links between theory and practice.

Workplace teaching practice mentors need to be selected carefully, and to be appropriately trained in their roles. At present it is common for them to be appointed in an ad hoc way, based mostly on the willingness of an experienced teacher to take on the role. In a quality-assured training programme, all the key people contributing to training should be carefully selected on the basis of the skills, experience and dispositions needed for the job. A number of partnerships have developed procedures for professional selection of teachers wishing to support trainees in the workplace, based on agreed role definitions and job descriptions. These typically combine indicators of high teaching ability, such as consistently high grades in observations of their teaching, with testimonials from professional colleagues and perhaps learners, and with assessment of performance in individual and group tasks, highlighting observation of teaching and the giving of formative feedback. Standardisation of approaches to mentor recruitment between the partners and stakeholders can allow for procedures to be centralised and ensure that processes are transparent. Example job descriptions are included in Appendix 1.

In the summary of the review of research, Morton (2006) concludes:

'The crucial role of collaborating mentor teachers should be recognised. These teachers need to be helped to develop a whole new set of mentoring skills. It should be recognised that being an experienced teacher does not mean that one is necessarily a good mentor of novice teachers.'

→ **How to organise group teaching practice or ‘training groups’**

First you need a couple of groups of learners...

The starting point is to secure agreement to work with at least two groups of learners at different Skills for Life levels, to form an integral part of the programme, on whom the trainee teachers can practise.

Ideally these are an existing and stable group of learners for whom certain sessions can be allocated for the trainee teachers. This can be by adding extra teaching time to an existing group with learners being given additional hours on their timetable entitlement. In this way the groups can be recruited according to the normal organisational procedures and work fully within the administrative and quality systems of the organisation. It also means that there is no undercutting of the quantity of qualified teacher time the learners are entitled to, as the teaching practice session is additional. The relationship between the teacher trainer and the learner group’s regular teacher is very important to ensure that the trainees contribute coherently to the learning programme. There is a need to liaise about what areas of the curriculum the trainees should teach and any evidence that needs to be collected for learner assessments.

Where it is not possible to add hours on to existing courses, groups of learners can be specifically recruited on free courses; this is very common in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, but can have negative consequences in terms of erratic attendance, mixed ability groups and a lack of systematic needs analysis which all makes for a very challenging experience for the novice trainee teachers. Training teams should ensure that the learner groups are recruited and administered in as similar way as possible to other groups in the organisation. This adds to the authenticity of the trainees’ experience as well as enables more effective quality assurance.

Setting up the learner basis for training groups needs careful planning and often requires a partnership at an organisational level. For higher education institutions (HEIs) this may mean a partnership with a college or an adult education provider to arrange access to learners of adult literacy, language and numeracy. As one trainer points out:



'You need a lot of discussion and exploration in order to build enough trust to get an agreement, especially if people are new to it, new to the concept, they need a lot of talking through. Getting the green light takes a lot of work and sometimes a long period of notice - but it's well worth it.'

Then you need to add some reassurance...

Partner organisations are often anxious about letting trainees teach their learners, in order to protect quality. Reassurance will be needed. Evaluations from learners who have been in teaching practice groups have been very positive, particularly because they get lots of extra personal attention. They also like helping the trainee teachers, as one trainer put it,

'...it's very interesting, the learners get quite protective of their "baby" teachers and want to help them succeed in graduating as teachers...'

Another frequent evaluation finding, reported by Burghes (2006) is that learners

'benefitted from the contributions of creative, energetic (novice teachers) at the cutting edge of research and development.'

And organise the timetable...

This can seem challenging at first, but only until the patterns are established. With two groups of learners at different Skills for Life levels, the trainee teachers can be split into two sets. Each can be assigned to one level before swapping with the other set at the mid-point of the teaching practice period (see example 1 in Appendix 2). Alternatively, a more fluid system can be set up in which individual trainees first observe a group, teach a slot and move on to the other group to observe and then teach that group (see example 2 in Appendix 2). The latter system is more complicated to timetable and administer but provides a richer experience for the trainees, allowing them to see all of their peers teaching at both levels. It also avoids what can be an awkward shock when trainees, having become accustomed to one level, are asked to adapt to a new one.

For example, if a teaching practice group meets twice a week for a two-hour lesson with six trainees working together, they may each teach two 20-minute slots in the first week. In the next week this may move on to three trainees teaching 40-minute slots. Later in the course each trainee can take one hour of the lesson. This needs to be carefully timetabled at the beginning of the course

to ensure that each trainee teaches for the required number of hours. The order in which trainees teach is also important to ensure that they all have experience of beginning and ending a lesson.

Trainees are supported by the trainer, and increasingly by their peers, in planning their slots. When they teach they are observed by the other trainees and by the trainer. Each session is followed by group discussion and reflection, with the formative support of the trainers.

A similar range of models is outlined in a publication by NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Derrick and Dicks 2005). New literacy, numeracy and ESOL trainee teachers have much to gain from a group teaching practice experience, leading perhaps through a stage of paired work to an individual phase which they can then start with a firm grounding in practical skills. Unlike teachers of many other subjects in FE, where newcomers bring with them an existing professional or vocational identity, new Skills for Life specialist teachers need a supported stage of pre-service training before taking sole charge of a group of learners (Casey 2005).

And shadow some training groups...

Setting up training groups for the first time can be a challenge. A lot can be learnt quickly by shadowing a programme which is already using this model. Once the basic architecture is in place the door is open to explore the benefits of working with a shared group of learners for training purposes.

→ **More than just teaching – opportunities for observation**

Teaching – with and in front of peers in teaching practice groups; on teaching practice placements and in their own regular paid or voluntary work – is central to trainees' development. NRDC research also demonstrates that observation and modelling have a key role to play in aiding a trainee to become a teacher.

Trainees can benefit greatly from observing more experienced teachers at work. Some programmes offer structured, organised opportunities for this to take place. Observation of peers is also of great use particularly where trainees observe their peers teaching a group they know and are therefore able to see how

learners react to a different style of or approach to teaching. For this the group teaching practice model is ideal as it dramatically increases the amount of classroom experience the trainee gains in the form of peer observation:

'if there are six of them in the group, for every bit of teaching they do themselves, they see five times as much watching their peers.'

Observation of teaching in a variety of contexts is also very important and for all trainees, particularly those in teaching placements without much support, opportunities to observe their peers in a variety of placement and work place settings are of great use:

'they found it very useful, particularly where they were seeing different kinds of working contexts.'

However, this can be difficult to organise:

'It's a bit tricky because you end up with lots of "oh I can't do that because she only teaches on Monday and I have yoga on a Monday."'

To address this problem one teacher educator we spoke to used a weekly timetable grid on a chart on the wall on which all the trainees had to put what they were teaching and in what context and then they could sign in to request visits to each other. This appeared to be very effective in helping people know what was on offer within their own group in terms of when and where they were teaching,

'...so if someone was teaching at a prison it might take a few weeks to organise but they could set it up. It was a bit of a lottery, but they did do it and they found it very useful, particularly where they were seeing different kinds of working contexts.'

→ **‘Practise as you preach’ – the role of modelling**

NRDC research reveals positive feedback from trainees where their trainers have self-consciously and explicitly modelled good teaching practice in taught course input sessions. One teacher educator, who takes care over this aspect of her work, told us she gives her lesson plan for every session to her trainees to make the structure of the training session clear.

‘So, pretty well everything I do with them, I’m doing it explicitly so they’re aware that I’m modelling what I want them to do in the classroom.’

Trainers self-consciously and explicitly modelling good teaching practice is often called ‘loop input’ (Woodward 1991) or sometimes ‘the mirror’ and is referred to in the NRDC publication *A literature review of research on teacher education in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL* (Morton 2006):

Teacher education programmes for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL need to be based on what is known about how adults learn... in terms of the pedagogies participants will use with their own learners...

Loop input allows trainees to experience techniques as learners and then step back and try to evaluate, from outside, as teachers. Microteaching of peers is another activity that allows for modelling of techniques for trainees. In both cases trainees get to experience what it feels for learners to be taught in such a way, particularly through activities that take trainees beyond the threshold of their own knowledge in maths or through experiencing an unfamiliar script. Morton reports a consensus in the wider literature on literacy, numeracy and ESOL teacher education that:

teachers should be taught as they are expected to teach by taking part in practical professional development activities...which help them to ‘see’ the subject from their learners’ point of view.

→ Putting it all together

Teaching, observing teaching and the modelling of good practice should all be understood as aspects of the practical element of training as they allow trainees to access a broad range of classroom experience. This wider definition of teaching practice was mirrored in interviews with experienced teacher educators. One spoke passionately of the importance of trainees getting as much classroom exposure and experience as possible through extensive observation of a wide range of teaching and having the opportunity to identify, discuss and evaluate key issues.

‘The key thing is that they should have as much time in the classroom as possible – get them into teaching situations as early and as much as possible.’

Organising courses with group teaching practice in the early stages offers trainees a high level of initial support. This requires effective links between the training team and the placement organisation, and a training programme built around supported teaching practice and ongoing expert feedback on that practice. This approach, often described as ‘scaffolded’ based on the work of Bruner and Vygotsky, proposes that as trainees learn, they need gradually reducing levels of support from their teachers:

‘When students are learning new or difficult tasks, they are given more assistance. As they begin to demonstrate task mastery, the assistance or support is decreased gradually in order to shift the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the students. Thus, as the students assume more responsibility for their learning, the teacher provides less support.’

Larkin (2001)

Beginning with a group teaching practice model, and then moving on to a more independent phase where trainees are either out on placements, perhaps in a buddy system, or teaching in their own workplace but with appropriate and co-ordinated support, provides trainees with the opportunity to develop as teachers. As trainees move into the more independent sphere, the strength and quality of the connection between mentor and trainer becomes critical to the integration of theory and practice.

→ Innovative partnership arrangements

Where teacher education programmes are not based in organisations which are themselves Skills for Life learning providers, partnerships are essential. Two recent reports have demonstrated ways in which partnerships can deliver more consistent high quality training and teaching practice while making better use of limited resources; these are *Recruitment and training opportunities for new literacy, language and numeracy teachers* (Derrick 2005) from the RETRO project¹ and *Change Direction, Teach Adults* from the London Strategic Unit (LSU) for the Learning and Skills Workforce (LSU 2006b).

Strong partnership working, in addition to securing a supply of teaching practice placements, can support the organisational development of each partner. An organisation which provides some adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL learning can be attracted into a teacher education partnership. One benefit is access to a potential supply of prospective new teachers, another is the impact on quality of involving your staff in the process of training new teachers. In return, the teacher education provider needs the opportunity to use some groups of learners as training groups, or to find placements for some pairs of or individual trainees.

A learning provider offering teaching placement capacity to a teacher education programme can benefit from the increase in reflective awareness of practice that this involvement brings with it:

'it sort of rubs off on all around, as reflection and discussion of practice increases within a group of staff.'

Similarly, a teacher in a college, newly engaged in supporting trainees from an externally-based teacher education programme, can also lead in-house staff development sessions on formative feedback, for example, based on the new experience of working with trainees and informed by the training received.

¹ Recruitment and Training Opportunities for New Basic Skills Teachers – a project run by NIACE on behalf of the DFES from October 2003 to March 2005 with the aim of exploring ways to recruit new basic skills teachers.

Partnerships are critical in developing and maintaining the supply of teaching practice placement settings: if all the training providers and all the organisations that employ teachers are partners, then a collective approach to ensuring supply and quality can be taken, based on the strengths, capacities and specialisms of each partner.

Close partnerships between individual teacher education providers (for example, HEIs) and nearby providers of learning such as colleges or adult and community learning (ACL) organisations can create the possibility of training run jointly with direct input from both full-time teacher educators and practising teachers, for the benefit of trainees, trainers, and practising teachers. For one experienced teacher educator, having experienced and/or practising teachers involved is essential:

'...the integration of theory and practice, that's absolutely key for our course, and everything we do ... all the staff on the course are experienced literacy or ESOL teachers, with many years of practice behind them.'

Partnerships including a wide range of organisations within the sector are particularly useful in providing a supply of opportunities for observing experienced teachers at work in a range of contexts, and for building some experience on different contexts. The RETRO report also points out how partnerships at the regional level can be effective mechanisms for discussion and decisions between a wide range of stakeholder organisations on issues such as minimum quality standards and common admissions criteria.

A well-developed example of such a partnership is in the London region, in which workforce planning, marketing campaigns for training programmes, handling enquiries, initial advice and guidance, admissions procedures, mentor selection and training, and the organisation of teaching practice placements are all to some extent centralised through the LSU. The LSU also provides and maintains the Talent website offering news, job advertisements, learning materials, and information about professional development opportunities. The LSU has a regional placement development manager, whose role is to monitor and chart the availability of placements for Skills for Life teacher training programmes across the London region, to support the mentors where necessary by developing training programmes, and to develop new placements, particularly in shortage areas.

The LSU report on quality assurance in teaching practice in London argues

strongly for more formal agreements between training providers and placement providers, in order to ensure higher and more consistent quality standards. It also suggests a standardised form of agreement, and argues for working towards agreement on costs and benefits of various organisational roles within training, so that funding can be allocated more transparently.

In a context where the provision of teaching practice placements is carefully and strategically planned, it should be possible to get beyond situations in which prospective new teachers are expected to find their own placements in order to access pre-service training. For those already working, and who use their own classes as the locations for their teaching practice, this can provide them with a range of different settings for teaching practice, and broaden the quality of support they receive. Many such trainees work in organisations for which education is not the prime focus and are without the capacity to provide teaching practice support. Teaching practice is a matter for strategic planning and organisation, and that individual training providers, even large ones, team up with other organisations to improve consistency and quality.

The aim should be that agreed standards of support are made available to trainees wherever they need to carry out their teaching practice, in a range of different placements, and with gradually-reduced levels of direct support.

→ **Methods of assessing teaching practice**

NRDC research with trainee teachers and teacher educators accentuates the fact that teaching practice assessment is both formative and summative, developmental and graded. It is carried out in four main ways:

- observations with feedback on trainees' teaching
- reflective logs
- teaching portfolios
- written assignments.

Each of these transfer trainees' classroom experience onto paper, translating the process of learning how to plan, manage, check and develop learning in the adult literacy, language and numeracy classroom into a concrete form that can be discussed and developed individually and collaboratively.

Observations and feedback

Teaching observations range from informal observations carried about by mentors, peers, or other teachers, to more formal observations conducted by teacher educators, both formative and summative in nature. What is being assessed here is, importantly, not just the trainees' performance in the classroom, but their planning, aims and objectives setting, materials creation/selection, teaching techniques, response to learner need within the classroom and their self-evaluation, both on paper and in a face to face group or individual feedback session.

Constructive feedback on teaching practice observations is an essential part of teacher training. Trainee teachers need clear and honest feedback to help them reflect on their strengths and act on their weaknesses progressively as they develop their expertise.

In group teaching practice situations, the group of peers contribute to the feedback, with the teacher educator steering the process and saying less as the trainees develop confidence and experience:

'I do expect towards the end of a training group phase that as the trainer I'd be saying very little. I'd want that kind of critical faculty developed to the point that they could take it away and use it, with less attention from the trainer.'

Trainee teachers consulted in NRDC research felt that the process of peer feedback in training groups and microteaching sessions was invaluable for all involved, though some did express anxiety about their own confidence and ability to comment on others' teaching. Feedback direct from the teacher educator was also of clear value; over three quarters of the trainees on the courses NRDC studied commented that observation feedback from teacher educators was the most valuable part of their teacher training courses (Lucas *et al.* 2007).

Both teacher educators and trainee teachers highlighted the importance of producing a written record for the trainee and educator to take away from the discussion as a record and to clarify the action points for attention on the next occasion. One teacher educator used carbon paper to produce two sets of 'on-the-spot' notes so that:

'...you both walk away with a record of it, and I think having the discussion as the trainees go away in reflective mode and thinking about the next session, you don't retain everything from those discussions and you need something written to capture the points you may not have fully absorbed during the discussion.'

The teacher educators interviewed spoke of the importance of teaching observations being conducted by a member of the core teacher education team so that feedback both refers to past course input and also informs future course input, thus ensuring a thorough feedback loop, contributing to a full integration of theory and practice:

'...the tutor is the ongoing link, they know that person's teaching and obviously they try to link their feedback to what they have been doing on the course.'

'...for example when we found that one thing that everyone seemed to have difficulty with [in teaching observed by teacher educators] was setting objectives on their lesson plans and so [...] we added in a session for everyone on setting aims and objectives.'

'...people bump into new problems when they are actually in the classrooms (observing). Those are issues we'll come back to the training course with and we'll look at strategies and pump those back in.'

These points highlight the importance of shared systems for monitoring in all contexts, but particularly where there are three people involved: trainee, trainer and mentor. Written records of formative feedback discussions are essential both as a record for the trainee and as reference for the trainer and mentor. Where different people are involved in observing an individual trainee at different times, it is the written record of action points agreed that forms the essential continuity for the trainee (see example format in Appendix 3).

'I need to know, in observing a trainee teach that, for example, one of the action points they agreed at their last observation was to focus on the clarity of their instruction giving, so that I can be sure to reflect on progress with this as well as focus on additional areas.'

All of which adds to the case for keeping the team as small as is practicable, though with a minimum of two.

Observations of trainees' teaching range from weekly (or more frequently in some examples of the training group model) to perhaps once a term for models using placements or trainees' own teaching. NRDC research shows that not only was it better to have as many observation occasions as possible, to increase the number of essential feedback loops, with as much time as possible for feedback. The timing of feedback was integral - though potentially very personal: not 'too soon' or 'too late'. Once again, teacher educators echoed this point:

'There are different schools of thought on this, there are people who think it should be done the next day so the individual has time to sleep on it, but I prefer doing it when it's fresh; I think you lose something otherwise and if it's been an uncomfortable experience, 24 hours is long enough to start distancing yourself from some of the bits that don't feel right. Memory shifts things around and loses things that you don't want to hang onto.'

Reflective logs

Reflective logs provide the space for learners to tease out their thoughts, anxieties, theories and analyses of their developing classroom experience in writing, usually by choosing their own jumping off points, such as the arrival of a new form of learner assessment, something that happened that day in a class they observed, an example of excellent peer practice and why it worked or perhaps an article they read which echoed their experience. Reflective logs allow trainees to write their own narratives transforming the difficulties of teaching, and of the uncertain nature of literacy, numeracy and ESOL teaching, into something which can be more readily understood.

Trainees speaking to NRDC researchers were very positive about the use of reflective logs, both as a near therapeutic tool and as an excellent means of creating links between theory and practice, between course input, classroom observations, classroom teaching and their own reading. This is true even of

those courses in which theory and practice are explicitly linked by the course team; in these cases reflective logs provide a valuable opportunity for consolidation. What's more, this initially very private process can be expanded for collaborative learning:

'They have to write a weekly reflective journal and I expect them to write in some detail about everything they've done and seen in the classroom and what they feel they've learnt from it, what they feel was successful, why it was successful, what went wrong, why it was wrong [...] I expect them to write in detail about any time they've been in the classroom and they've found that very useful particularly as they share these reflective journals; they swap them around [...] they've found that very useful, sharing, because one person will notice something that someone else hasn't thought of looking for.'

Teaching portfolios

Many courses require trainees to produce teaching portfolios with all, some, or a small selection of documents from the lessons they have planned and taught themselves. These might include:

- lesson plans
- materials
- self-evaluations
- tutor feedback

Besides forcing detailed attention to planning, evaluation and materials production, this allows a paper trail of teaching development to be looked back upon, by the trainee, teacher educator or ideally both in a tutorial. The NRDC publication *A literature review of research on teacher education in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL* (Morton 2006) and *Equipping our Teachers for the Future* (DfES 2004) both identified teaching portfolios as a way to reflect on and emphasise the continuous nature of teacher development. Potentially such portfolios could span several courses or phases of training. While trainees, teacher educators and external moderators all comment on the value of compiling such portfolios, they stress that:

'less is more. Keeping less documentation, but with more thoughtful reflection, is preferable to stockpiling your own weight in lesson plans.'

Written assignments

Key to the integration of theory and practice on any teacher education course is the written assignment, which requires a trainee to address a theoretical issue with specific reference to their own classroom experience. These assignments are drafted, developed and marked in terms of the effectiveness of links made between theory and practice, requiring trainees to draw upon their own developing classroom experience:

'If the assignment is looking at a theoretical aspect I would expect it to be illustrated all the way through with examples from their recent practice.'

NRDC research shows that assignments which required explicit links to classroom experience were by far the most popular with trainees, and indeed for all aspects of the course trainees wanted things to be related directly and clearly to teaching practice.

→ Formative and summative assessment

The methods of assessment outlined above are seen by the teacher educators we interviewed as primarily formative; teaching practice assessment exists to develop and formalise classroom experience, to record those issues discussed in the classroom, with peers, with teacher trainers, to generate new ideas in post-discussion reflection, and to continue a spiral of watching, thinking, trying, learning, thinking, trying... These assessment methods are - in the best practice discussed by both trainers and trainees - opportunities for nurturing a reflective mode. They embody connections made in the trainees' minds: between aspects of the course; between trainees, between trainees and trainers; and between trainees and learners.

All of these connections contribute to the construction of a network of experience. Yet, the summative, graded (whether pass/fail or with differentiated grades) aspect of teacher education is also essential to literacy, numeracy and ESOL teaching as professions. So how are these two related?

In our interviews with teacher educators it was clear that there is tension in the assessment of teaching practice between two main reasons for assessment: assessment as a tool to diagnose learning needs, strengths and weaknesses and to review and develop learning, and assessment as a tool to decide whether or not

to award a qualification. The former is by nature formative. It is a vehicle for diagnosing and developing learning and involving students actively in the process. Formative assessment is therefore carried out for the benefit of the learners who need to improve, and the teacher who needs to help them do so. The latter is summative because it provides a publicly accountable confirmation as to whether someone is ready to take responsibility for adult learners who need the best professional help available.

While some teacher educators disliked assigning marks they agreed that clear criteria were essential in giving formative feedback for each observation, because

'it's got to be absolutely clear what's achieved and what isn't and what needs working on'.

It is therefore essential that trainees are given a clear indication of their strengths and areas for development, using a set of criteria that apply to all teaching practice assessments. In this way, the formative assessment leads naturally to the summative. Grading can be used formatively or summatively but clear criteria for allocating grades are essential.

With this in mind, formative assessment should be carried out in such a way that it is the core of both teaching and learning processes. Summative assessment should clearly provide grounds for awarding the qualification or not doing so, using a consistent, transparent set of criteria that are discussed frequently by trainees and teachers. A clear relationship between formative and summative assessment is therefore essential.

'...if you are going to say to someone that they haven't met the pass criteria it's much easier for candidates to cope with that if they have known where their weak points are all along.'

Through teaching practice assessment, a trainee begins to gain classroom experience, learns how to teach and qualifies as a teacher. If it is done well, assessment on teaching practice provides a good model for how teachers might carry out formative assessment with their own learners: this makes it crucial for teacher educators to consider carefully how their own formative and summative practices offer models of practice.

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Appendix 1

Examples of job descriptions for teaching practice mentors

A number of development projects have provided outline specifications for teaching practice mentors.

Example 1 (from Talent, London – see www.talent.ac.uk)

Roles and responsibilities of teaching practice placement tutors

- *To inform trainees about learners' basic skills learning needs, eg pace of teaching, learning goals, additional learning needs*
- *To negotiate realistic learner/trainee contact hours*
- *To liaise with and give feedback to the lead body/course co-ordinator*
- *To create a phased approach for teaching practice, ie starting with observing the group, leading to whole-group teaching*
- *To model teaching methodology to the trainee*
- *To know the teaching practice requirements of the course in terms of placement hours and observation schedule*
- *To have an overview of the teacher training course assignment/coursework requirements*
- *To support the trainee with scheme of work writing*
- *To support the trainee with lesson planning*
- *To offer constructive feedback and comments on teaching, orally and informally*
- *To keep an overview of the syllabus and accreditation goals for the students*
- *To maintain responsibility for the class during the lessons*
- *To liaise with the trainee teacher's course tutors*
- *To invite the trainee teacher to course team meetings as an observer (when appropriate)*
- *To provide the trainee with information about the course, the learners and the organisation, while maintaining confidentiality*
- *To carry out formal observations if required (eg for City and Guilds Level 4 stages 1 and 2)*

Example 2 (from the Birmingham Core Skills Partnership – see www.niace.org.uk/projects/RETRO)

Role of the mentor

What is expected:

- *To allow the trainee to observe their teaching sessions*
- *To advise and counsel on aspects of pedagogy*
- *To review lesson plans before a teaching session*
- *To observe the trainee*
- *To give 24 hours notice of any formal observation*
- *To check lesson plans before the teaching*
- *To allow the trainee to teach unsupervised when it is agreed that they are competent to do so*

When giving feedback on teaching, mentors need to consider:

- *The adequacy of preparation*
- *Context and relevance of the lesson to the scheme of work*
- *Objective setting*
- *Level of approach*
- *Appropriateness of learning aids and resources*
- *Appropriateness of teaching strategies and methods*
- *The logic and structure of the lesson*
- *Communication skills*
- *Questioning skills*
- *Classroom management*
- *Assessment skills*
- *The appropriateness, accuracy and currency of the content*
- *A pace that maintains learners' interest and ensures their engagement*

What isn't expected

- *To 'hand over' classes to the trainee from the outset*
- *To mark the trainee's assignments*
- *To summatively assess the trainee*
- *To deal with problems beyond the remit of the mentor*

Appendix 2: Examples of timetables for teaching practice groups

Example 1: Group teaching practice with midway changeover – 12 trainees, 2 groups of learners (see page opposite)

Example 2: Group teaching practice with 12 trainees, 2 groups of learners (see page 36)

Example 1: Group teaching practice with midway changeover – 12 trainees, 2 groups of learners

Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Day	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs
Date	12th Sept	14th Sept	19th Sept	21st Sept	26th Sept	28th Sept	3rd Oct	5th Oct	10th Oct	12th Oct	17th Oct	19th Oct
Group/Tutor	DM	DM	DM	JS	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM
Entry Level 2 Group 2 hr sessions	No TP	Amanda	Amanda	Amanda	Lalita	Nicola	Nicola	Michelle	Bitqueece	Bitqueece	Nina	Alia
	No TP	David	David	David	Amanda	Sarah	Sarah	Nicola	Michelle	Michelle	Bitqueece	Nina
	No TP	Sally	Sally	Sally	David	Lalita	Lalita	Nicola	Nicola	Nicola	Michelle	Bitqueece
	No TP	Katja	Katja	Katja	Sally	Amanda	Amanda	Sarah	Sarah	Sarah	Nicola	Michelle
	No TP	Huma	Huma	Huma	Huma	David	David	Lalita	Lalita	Lalita	Sarah	Nicola
	No TP	Alia	Alia	Alia	Alia	Huma	Sally	Sally	Amanda	Amanda	Amanda	Lalita

Group/Tutor	JS	JS	JS	DM	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS
Entry Level 1 Group 2 hr sessions	No TP	Nina	Nina	Nina	Alia	Katja	Katja	Sally	David	David	Amanda	Lalita
	No TP	Bitqueece	Bitqueece	Bitqueece	Nina	Huma	Huma	Katja	Sally	Sally	David	Amanda
	No TP	Michelle	Michelle	Michelle	Bitqueece	Alia	Alia	Huma	Katja	Katja	Sally	David
	No TP	Nicola	Nicola	Nicola	Michelle	Nina	Nina	Alia	Huma	Huma	Katja	Sally
	No TP	Sarah	Sarah	Sarah	Nicola	Nicola	Nina	Alia	Alia	Alia	Huma	Katja
	No TP	Lalita	Lalita	Lalita	Lalita	Bitqueece	Michelle	Bitqueece	Nina	Nina	Alia	Huma

Number	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Day	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs	Tues	Thurs
Date	24th Oct	26th Oct	31st Oct	2nd Nov	7th Nov	9th Nov	14th Nov	16th Nov	21st Nov	23rd Nov	28th Nov	30th Nov
Group/Tutor	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS	JS
Entry Level 2 Group 2 hr sessions	Alia	Katja	Katja	3	Amanda	Amanda	Lalita	Sarah	Nicola	Michelle	Michelle	Michelle
	Nina	Huma	Huma	Katja	David	David	Bitqueece	Lalita	Sarah	Nicola	Nicola	Nicola
	Bitqueece	Alia	Alia	Huma	Sally	Sally	David	Bitqueece	Lalita	Nina	Sarah	Sarah
	Michelle	Nina	Nina	Alia	Katja	Katja	Sally	Bitqueece	Lalita	Nicola	Sarah	Nicola
	Nicola	Bitqueece	Bitqueece	Nina	Huma	Huma	Katja	Sally	Nicola	Bitqueece	Lalita	Lalita
	Sarah	Michelle	Michelle	Bitqueece	Alia	Alia	Huma	Huma	Sally	David	Bitqueece	Amanda

Group/Tutor	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM	DM
Entry Level 1 Group 2 hr sessions	Lalita	Nicola	Nicola	Michelle	Nina	Nina	Alia	Huma	Katja	Huma	Sally	Sally
	Amanda	Sarah	Sarah	Nicola	Bitqueece	Bitqueece	Nina	David	Huma	Katja	David	Katja
	David	Lalita	Lalita	Sarah	Michelle	Michelle	Amanda	Alia	Alia	Sally	Katja	Huma
	Sally	Amanda	Amanda	Lalita	Nicola	Nicola	Michelle	Nina	Nina	Sarah	Huma	Alia
	Katja	David	David	Amanda	Sarah	Sarah	Nicola	Alia	Amanda	Alia	Alia	Nina
	Huma	Sally	Sally	Lalita	Lalita	Lalita	Lalita	Sarah	Michelle	Michelle	Amanda	Nina

indicates active teaching role with name indicates observation

Appendix 3:

Example teaching practice feedback record sheet

Teaching Practice Feedback

Name:	Date:	Assessed lesson no:
No. of learners:	Minutes taught:	Trainer:
		Level of learners:

Stage of lesson	Strengths	Areas to work on

Summary comments:

Points to focus on for next session:

Trainer's signature

- pass standard for this stage of the course
 not to pass standard for this stage of the course

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- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
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