



Initial Report

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Adult Learners' Lives Project: Setting the Scene.

Synopsis

This summary is based upon the initial report covering the activities on the Adult Learners' Lives project from September 2002 to June 2003. It provides an overview of research at the three case study sites, Blackburn, Lancaster and Liverpool including negotiating access to the sites and establishing the relationships for the research. The report covers the data which has been collected in the three sites and the initial data analysis. The Teacher-Researcher programme has been an essential part of the project and the process of setting up and running this is described in detail, along with initial reports of the six projects, covering literacy, numeracy and ESOL, which the teacher-researchers have been carrying out. In the first phases of the project we carried out focused reviews of topics which informed the research. Summaries of these reports are provided.

Firstly, we surveyed the earlier ethnographies of literacy which have been carried out. Secondly, we investigated the term informal learning. Thirdly, we reviewed work on retention and achievement, key concepts in *Skills for Life*. For the teaching and learning part of the project we completed a review of the literature on the relation of teaching and learning. In addition, we focused on a specific social issue, the relation of literacy and health. Finally, we were also able to link up with work in prisons and carry out a small questionnaire study into ESOL provision in prisons. The report also discusses: overall themes which have arisen in the first year of the research; the approach to impact which is being taken; and future plans. Further details on specific aspects of the project are provided in the appendices, including a list of impact activities.

Key Points

This is an interim report covering a wide range of initial activity. These are some of the initial themes from the research:

- ✘ Relationships matter in learning, including teacher/student and student/student relationships, also the networks of support learners are part of
- ✘ Learning environments often offer structure and stability in learners' lives
- ✘ Being in control is key motivation for learning
- ✘ Health is often a barrier to learning, both physical and mental health
- ✘ There is a need to assess and recognise small gains in LLN skills and the wider benefits to learning and learners. Learners value knowing what progress they have made.
- ✘ There is a complex relationship between teaching and learning: learners don't learn what teachers teach
- ✘ There needs to be more effective interagency response to the social and learning needs of students seeking asylum
- ✘ In ESOL classes, learners' often express satisfaction with their classes, but there is a need for more free use of language and "bringing the outside in" as part of the learning process
- ✘ Involving teachers in research projects can have great impact, on the teachers' professional

development, on the culture of their work-places, and on regional networks.

Background

The NRDC Adult Learners' Lives is based at the Literacy Research Centre, Lancaster University. The project started in September 2002. It is a detailed longitudinal study of learners' lives.

Main elements of research

The aim of the Adult Learners' Lives project is to understand the connections that adults make between learning and their everyday lives. The research is addressing questions about the significance of language, literacy and numeracy in the lives of adults who have difficulties, including their experience of learning programmes; it is exploring the relation between how people deal with difficulties and their classroom experiences, investigating the ways in which factors related to provision interface with factors related to the learners. In the classroom we are looking at links between teaching and learning, participation, motivation and persistence. We are interested to know what motivates and engages adult learners. Through collaborative research we aim to identify teaching and learning strategies that are more effective at encouraging and supporting Adult Basic Skills.

Research team

This report was written by David Barton, the overall director of the Adult Learners' Lives project, Roz Ivanic, who directs the work on the relation between teaching and learning, and Yvon Appleby, Rachel Hodge and Karin Tusting, the full time researchers on the project. There are also contributions from: Ganiyu Agbaje and Gemma Davies, who wrote a demographic report on the case study sites; Dianne Beck, Dianne Beck, Gill Burgess, Kath Gilbert, Russ Hodson, Andrew Hudson and Carol Woods, the College-based teacher-researchers; Uta Papen, who wrote a section on health; Anita Wilson, who wrote a section on prisons; and Lydia Tseng, who contributed to the review of teaching and learning

References

Parts of this working paper are being written up as separate papers. Details of these and other papers will be available on the Lancaster Literacy Research Centre web-site www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk and the NRDC web-site www.nrdc.org.uk.

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**The full report will be available from
June 2004 in PDF and Word formats from
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