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Adult literacy learners' difficulties in reading: an exploratory study

Sharon Besser, Greg Brooks, Maxine Burton,
Mina Parisella, Yvonne Spare, Sandie Stratford,
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Authorship

Greg Brooks provided oversight of the project, specified some of the analyses of the quantitative data and edited this report. The practitioner-researchers carried out the observations, testing and tutor interviews and contributed the reflections appended to chapter 3. Yvonne Spare wrote the review of phonics teaching materials. All other aspects of the project and of this report were the work of Sharon Besser: she managed the project day-to-day, chose and adapted the assessment instruments, recruited and trained the practitioner-researchers, conducted the focus groups, analysed all the qualitative and quantitative data, and wrote all of this report except the reflections and the review of phonics teaching materials.

Peer review

The report was read and peer-reviewed by Annabel Hemstedt, Executive Director of the Basic Skills Agency; Gay Loble, independent consultant, formerly of the Basic Skills Agency; and Gail Peachey of the Analytical Services Division based at the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit within the Department for Education and Skills.

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Summary

Aim and background

- An exploratory study of adult learners' difficulties in reading was carried out. The study was designed to investigate areas of reading difficulty in adult literacy learning through focused observation of practice and close study of learners.
- Very little previous information was available on what adult literacy provision is like on the ground, and no study expressly on adult learners' difficulties in reading was available. However, a recent comprehensive US review of the literature obviated the need to undertake a full literature review.

Main finding

- A wide range of strategies were being used to address adult learners' reading difficulties, but there appeared to be a less than perfect match between learners' difficulties and pedagogy.

Other findings:

- A review of recent British school-level research revealed that a substantial amount of work had been done on the phonological aspects of literacy and a little on metacognition – both with implications for teaching adults – but none on fluency or vocabulary.
- As a group, the adult learners in the study had difficulties in the following areas: word identification, comprehension (explicit and implicit), phonological awareness, decoding and spelling. Most exhibited the scattered pattern of strengths and weaknesses well known to practitioners as 'spiky profiles'. There were fewest difficulties with word identification, most with spelling. Correlations between difficulties in different areas were low, for example large numbers of oral reading errors were not necessarily associated with poor comprehension. This confirms the variability in individual learners' patterns of difficulty.
- When the assessment data were reviewed by individual subject and analysed for strengths and weaknesses, three groups, or reader profiles, emerged, each with distinct teaching requirements:
 - A small subgroup of competent readers with no discernible difficulties in any of the areas. These learners may be in provision for the sake of improving the compositional aspects of their writing (about which this project gathered no data) and might benefit more from a pre-GCSE English course.
 - A rather larger subgroup who appeared to have difficulties only in the phonological area, including spelling. These learners might well benefit from close attention to phonological awareness (including phonics) in the context of meaningful reading and writing.
 - The majority, who had difficulties in several areas. Very few had difficulties in every area – rather, this is the group with classic 'spiky profiles' – but it seems clear that, if they are to make progress, teaching must address both their areas of strength and their areas of weakness across all the subskills of reading and spelling.
- The interviews with tutors showed that they were fully aware of their learners' difficulties, for example that many of their learners did not seem to read for meaning, and acutely sensitive to the affective, motivational side of learners' literacy difficulties.
- Whilst teaching was observed that targeted some of the identified reading difficulties, intensive, focused reading instruction did not comprise a significant amount of the teaching that occurred during the sessions.

- In particular, little work at sentence level or on comprehension beyond the literal was seen.
- Despite extensive recent research in Britain and elsewhere on the phonological aspects of literacy at school level, no research was found which addressed this area with adult learners. A review of materials for teaching phonics to adults revealed very few materials of this sort. The assessment data showed that most of these learners had poor phonological awareness. In the observation data, much of the phonics teaching was done on the spur of the moment and there were instances of tutors' inadequate grasp of phonetics leading to inaccurate phonics teaching.
- Learners may not be making sufficient progress in reading because not enough of the class session is spent on reading activities.
- A greater amount of time was devoted to teaching reading during sessions where the teacher worked with a group of similar ability, compared to sessions where the learners worked on reading activities independently and received occasional feedback from their tutors.
- Although tutors were teaching word identification strategies and decoding strategies, teaching may need to be more intensive and focused. In addition, the observed strategies may not cover the range of difficulties that learners have with word identification and decoding.
- A larger proportion of adult literacy sessions needs to be devoted to reading activities and specifically-focused, quality reading instruction.
- Provision should be geared toward individuals with similar strengths and weaknesses: learners wishing to improve their writing and spelling should be grouped together, and those with difficulties in several areas should be taught separately.
- Spelling for those wishing to improve in this area specifically could be taught in an intensive 4- to 6-week course.
- Learners with difficulties in several areas should be given regular diagnostic assessments by their tutors so that the tutors can tailor their instruction to specific learners' needs.
- Learners need to engage in meaningful discussions with each other and with a teacher, and be offered a wide range of activities to cover text, sentence and word levels, in order to develop their comprehension skills.

Method

- Assessment: 53 adult literacy learners were assessed using a combination of diagnostic materials which covered word identification, reading comprehension and phonological awareness.
- Observations: 27 two-hour sessions in which those learners participated were observed at 21 different sites within six basic skills providers' areas. Vignettes of four contrasting sessions are included in this report.
- Interviews: 54 adult literacy tutors were interviewed, 27 individually after the observations, 27 others in four focus groups.
- Analysis: the assessment data were analysed not only section by section but also across the reading skills tested. Analysis of the observation logs yielded a classification of the strategies used by tutors to teach reading. Triangulation between the assessment, observation and interview data provided rich insights into the relationships or in some cases the lack of them, between teaching strategies and learners' needs.
- All fieldwork was carried out between January and March 2003 by a team of five practitioner-researchers, all of whom had extensive teaching experience in the field. They each contributed a reflection on their own practice to this report and one also contributed a review of some materials available for the teaching of phonics to adults.

Conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice at local and national level are set out in chapter 9, page 98.

Chapter one: origin, aims and scope of the project

1.1 Origin

The project reported here was conducted as part of the research agenda developed by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), which was established in 2002 as part of the *Skills for Life* strategy of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

During 2002, NRDC mounted a number of consultation conferences about its planned programme of research and development and the Basic Skills Agency ran many sessions of *An Introduction to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum* – this was a three-day (18-hour) training programme for practitioners on the new National Standards and Adult Literacy Core Curriculum. This programme had been developed by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) on behalf of the DfES, and the BSA managed the national roll-out of this training in 2001–03 with funding from the DfES and the Learning and Skills Council.

Feedback from both the consultation meetings and the *Introduction to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum* programme suggested that two major ‘sticking points’ for adults in reading are word identification and understanding indirect meanings. Given that many aspects of pedagogy could be investigated, it is sensible to concentrate on areas that practitioners have already identified as problematic. Clear findings on such areas would be of immediate relevance and use to practitioners and learners.

1.2 Aims

The main aim of the project was to carry out an exploration of particular areas of reading that are crucial to fluency and which appear to present special difficulty for adult learners.

Subsidiary aims were to (1) review the British school-level literature for possible relevance to adult learners’ reading difficulties; (2) review published materials for teaching word-level (phonetic) skills to adults; and (3) develop a hypothesis and recommend a design for a larger-scale study.

1.3 Scope

The project was carried out between September 2002 and May 2003 at the University of Sheffield under the direction of Prof. Greg Brooks and Senior Research Officer, Dr Sharon Besser. It was an exploratory project designed to find out what is going on in reading instruction for adult literacy learners.

The project explored areas of reading difficulty in adult literacy learning through focused observation of practice and close study of learners. This was done through observing a sample of 27 teaching sessions, studying and assessing 53 learners who participated in those sessions, and interviewing 54 basic skills practitioners – the 27 who taught the observed sessions and 27 others who attended four focus groups.

In most areas of research, it is necessary to begin with a review of the relevant literature. In this case, however, the work had largely been done, in the shape of the review entitled *Research-based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction* (Kruidenier, 2002) carried out by the (US) National Institute for Linguistics for the (US) National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

The Kruidenier review's coverage appeared to be comprehensive at the adult level (though as we know the amount of research at this level is not large); also at the school level in terms of research from North America. It was not clear that it adequately covered school-level research from Britain, e.g. on the National Literacy Strategy (NLS). Hence this project included a review of relevant school-level research from Britain, e.g. the approach and underpinnings of the NLS and research on phonological aspects and metacognition. As the Kruidenier review also noted, attempts to derive pedagogical ideas for adults from the school-level literature need to allow for the great differences between children and adults and in their learning circumstances.

One other aspect of the field seemed to merit a review. It was known that the greatly increased attention to phonics at school level in recent years had begun to influence the adult level, in terms of both practice and the production of teaching materials. Practice would be covered by the main part of this project, but there was no existing review of materials for teaching phonics to adults – this project therefore included such a review.

1.4 Structure of this report

A brief review of recent British school-level literature that is relevant to a study of adult learning difficulties is presented in chapter two. Chapter three is an outline account of the methodology of the project. (A detailed account is given in Appendix A.) Reflections from the five practitioner-researchers form an annex to chapter three. Chapter four presents the results of assessing 53 learners' strengths and weaknesses using a battery of tests and then in chapter five the test data are analysed in more depth to build up profiles of sub-groups of learners. Chapter six contains an analysis of the views of 54 adult literacy practitioners and chapter seven presents the findings from the observation of 27 teaching sessions, with a focus on strategies used to teach reading. There are two annexes to chapter seven: some vignettes from the observation data, and the analysis of phonics teaching materials. Chapter eight contains an analysis of the relationship between learners' difficulties and teaching strategies. Finally chapter nine presents conclusions and recommendations.

Various instruments used in the evaluation are reproduced in Appendices B–L.

1.5 The sequel

This project was exploratory and was always intended to lead to a larger-scale investigation. It was not a pilot study in the sense that methodologies were field-tested for use in the larger study. Instead, the present study was designed to identify salient issues and concerns with regard to reading instruction and learning for adults in England. This is something that had not been done before in respect of adult literacy provision. Knowing what these issues were, we were then able to design a comprehensive study which was grounded in present concerns about reading instruction from the perspective of reading research theory as well as those of local tutors in the field. For example, the question, 'What are some difficulties adult learners have with reading?' was addressed in the present study. Knowing what these difficulties are is

essential if one is to study the relationship between reading instruction and reading achievement, which is the focus of the sequel project.

The larger investigation began in July 2003, again commissioned by the NRDC and conducted at the University of Sheffield. It is a study in which practice is being observed in a wide range of classes, and learners in those classes are being tested at the beginning and end of the period of observation. Correlations will be calculated between aspects of teaching and the progress made by learners, using an adaptation of the methods successfully deployed in the *What Works Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students* directed at the American Institutes for Research in Washington by Larry Condelli (Condelli, 2003).

The NRDC study, entitled *Reading - Effective teaching and learning*, is part of a linked suite of five NRDC studies on reading, writing, ESOL, numeracy and ICT, which aim to provide evidence to support and develop good practice in teaching and learning across **Skills for Life** subjects.

Chapter two: review of British school-level research

2.1 Aim

The purpose of the review was to analyse the British school-level literature for possible relevance to adult learners' reading difficulties. The reason for looking only at school-level research and only at research done in Britain was that other relevant parts of the field had been comprehensively reviewed only recently.

The literature on adult basic skills generally was reviewed by Brooks et al., (2001b) in Britain and that on adults' reading skills more specifically by Kruidenier (2002) in the USA. Very thorough systematic reviews of randomised and non-randomised controlled trials in adult literacy (and numeracy) were carried out by Torgerson and colleagues (Torgerson, Porthouse and Brooks, 2003, 2004; Torgerson et al., 2004) for NRDC. These reviews effectively covered the research in the English-speaking world on adults' reading to date and it would have been superfluous to repeat that work. Much use has been made of Kruidenier (2002) in particular in preparing this report. Kruidenier's review also comprehensively analysed the North American literature on children's reading for its relevance to adults' reading.

Also, two comprehensive reviews of school-level literature on reading had recently been published in the USA: *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998), and the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NRP, 2000), the latter being supplemented by two very thorough meta-analyses on phonics and phonemic awareness (Ehri et al., 2001a, b). Each of these reviews covered much of the British school-level research up to 1999. In addition, the two editions of Brooks's review of intervention studies for primary-age readers in Britain (Brooks et al., 1998; Brooks, 2002) covered a number of studies that were not included in the US reviews.

However, the one area not covered in all these reviews was very recent school-level research in Britain. The review in this chapter was therefore undertaken to complement the reviews mentioned above. The focus was particularly on studies that might provide insights into adults' reading difficulties.

2.2 Method

The studies selected for the review met the following criteria:

- 1) They were published between 1999 and mid-2003;
- 2) They were conducted in Britain;
- 3) Implications from the studies had relevance to adult reading; and
- 4) The studies were not reviewed in another published review of the literature.

The following assumptions about adult reading difficulties framed the search for the literature. These assumptions were drawn from a recent review on adult reading difficulties conducted by the National Institute for Linguistics/National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy Reading Research Working Group in the United States (Kruidenier, 2002). Findings from this report suggested that adult readers can have difficulties in any or all

of the following areas: alphabets, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. More specifically, the report identified the following types of difficulties that adults may have, and that warrant further study.

1. Difficulties with alphabets

- Phonemic awareness among adult non-readers is almost non-existent and is only a little better among adult beginning readers
- Adult beginning readers have poor phonic or word analysis knowledge
- Sight word knowledge may be better than expected.

2. Difficulties with fluency

- Adults with poor fluency have an average silent reading rate that is much slower than that of fluent readers.

3. Difficulties with vocabulary

- Vocabulary knowledge may be dependent on reading ability
- Life experience can give adults an advantage as they begin to read, as their vocabulary knowledge is much better than their knowledge of alphabets; however, this advantage may disappear at higher reading levels.

4. Difficulties with reading comprehension

- Adults have difficulty integrating and synthesising information from any but the simplest texts
- Although it is likely that poor phonemic awareness, word analysis, fluency and vocabulary contribute to poor reading comprehension, most adults will need to be taught specific comprehension strategies.

In an attempt to locate suitable studies pertaining to the above assumptions about reading difficulty, recent issues (1999–2003) of the following journals were perused:

- British Educational Research Journal
- British Journal of Educational Psychology
- British Journal of Learning Disabilities
- British Journal of Learning Support
- British Journal of Psychology
- British Journal of Special Education
- English in Education
- Journal of Early Childhood Literacy
- Journal of Experimental Child Psychology
- Journal of Research in Reading
- Reading: Literacy and Language
- Reading Research Quarterly
- Research Papers in Education: Policy and Practice
- Research in Education
- Review of Educational Research
- Scientific Studies of Reading

2.3 Alphabets: phonological and phonemic awareness

Research on early reading acquisition in children has direct relevance to adult reading. What early behaviours are indicative of successful reading development? What are the developmental processes that readers go through? How do we know when a reader is making

progress? All of these are of great importance to the study of adult reading. The school-level research has been notably focused on these issues. Of these, the relationship between children's phonological skills and the progress they make in learning to read has commanded a great deal of research attention in the UK, as evidenced by a flood of experimental studies and theoretical pieces on the subject published in the last few years (see for example, Bowey, 2002; Byrant, 2002; Deavers, Solity and Kerfoot, 2000; Goswami, 1999, 2001, 2002; Hulme, 2002; Hulme et al., 2002; Macmillan, 2002; Moseley and Poole, 2001; Passenger, Stuart and Terrell, 2000; Savage, 2001; Seymour, Duncan and Bolik, 1999; Stuart, 1999; Stuart, Carless and Stuart, 2003; Stuart, Masterson and Dixon, 2000; Wood, 2002).

Whilst researchers seem to agree that progress in reading is critically dependent on phonological awareness¹ (and this finds support in the US studies mentioned above), there is considerable debate in the UK on the issue of which phonological skills are the most important. Walton and Walton (2002, pp.79–80) have defined phonological awareness as 'conscious access to the component sounds of speech within words and the ability to manipulate these sounds, ... involv[ing] primarily the sound units of onset and rime, ... and phonemes.' (Phonemes are the smallest units of spoken language that distinguish one word from another, e.g. /p/ in 'pin' versus /b/ in 'bin'. Onset refers to the opening consonant phoneme(s) of a syllable, if any; 'rime' refers to the rest of the syllable, the obligatory vowel phoneme plus the closing consonant phoneme(s), if any. The terms onset and rime are also frequently used to refer to the spelling units in written words which correspond to the spoken units. For this reason, some authors prefer to use the term 'rhyme' for the spoken unit and 'rime' for the written unit, but usage varies greatly; and there is no handy alternative to 'onset'.).

Phonological awareness encapsulates a number of sub-skills: rhyme awareness, onset-rime awareness and phonemic awareness. 'Rhyme awareness' refers to the ability to detect the sound of the rhyme in spoken words, in the absence of print. 'Onset-rime awareness' refers to the ability to notice that words with common rhymes often have similar spelling sequences and the ability to use orthographic analogies to decode words. For example, a learner faced with the unknown word 'book', but knowing the word 'look' and able to recognise the visual similarities between the words, reasons that, if the words look similar, they will sound similar.

Onsets that contain consonant clusters and rhymes which contain both a medial vowel and a final consonant(s), are large phonological units, while phonemes are small phonological units. 'Phonemic awareness' refers to the insight that spoken words are made up of a sequence of phonemes, which are the smallest units of sound which make a difference to the meanings of words; they are represented by the letters of the alphabet, either singly or in groups of two, three or sometimes four letters. Phonemic awareness is an essential prerequisite to literacy learning, and is measured by a variety of tasks which involve manipulating the phonemes in words including, for example, segmenting words into phonemes, or deleting phonemes and then pronouncing the words.

An exploration of the particulars of the debate is beyond the scope of this review, but issues related to phonological awareness and early reading will be highlighted and discussed for their implications for adult literacy. First, an issue that has received a lot of attention in the

¹ Phonological awareness has also been recently referred to as phonological sensitivity (see, for example, Bowey, 2002). Since the majority of the pieces reviewed for this study used 'awareness' as opposed to 'sensitivity', we have used 'awareness'.

recent UK literature is: what are the roles of the large and small phonological units in reading development? Goswami and Bryant (1990) claimed that children progress from being capable of dealing first with large phonological units such as syllables and onset-rime divisions of the syllable to later being able to deal with phonemes.

Furthermore, a developmental hypothesis proposed by Goswami and Bryant claims that children's progress in acquiring early reading skills depends on their onset-rime level skills. Rhyme, it is argued, is an important causal connection in beginning reading. Goswami and Bryant (1990) proposed that there are two routes from onset-rime awareness to reading. The first is an indirect route where onset-rime awareness is claimed to feed into the development of phonemic awareness, which in turn affects reading progress. The second is a direct route by which onset-rime awareness makes an independent contribution to children's reading. The authors do not discount the importance of the small units, but claim that phonemic skills become important later in development, possibly as a consequence of learning to read an alphabetic script.

Three main claims have arisen from this hypothesis:

- 1) Rhyme awareness is not only related to, but is predictive of, reading ability;
- 2) Rhyme awareness affects or determines reading ability; and
- 3) Rhyme awareness leads to phonemic awareness.

Implications drawn from these claims have influenced teaching practice in the UK. The National Literacy Strategy, for example, has a focus on developing rhyme and analogy skills.

However, the research cited to support these claims, e.g. Goswami (1988, 1999, 2001, 2002), has been heavily critiqued in the literature. The resultant debate centres on different interpretations of research evidence and methodological criticism of key studies. First, there are those who interpret the research evidence differently, claiming, for example, that the word reading strategy of analogy, which is most often cited in support of Goswami's claims, is not dependent on rhyme awareness, but on phonemic awareness (Savage, 2001; Wood, 2002). Secondly, the methodology of the key studies has been called into question, most thoroughly by Macmillan (2002) who analysed all the evidence for rhyme effects cited by Goswami and found the evidence to be unreliable on methodological grounds. Furthermore, upon analysis, Macmillan did not find evidence to support Goswami's claims.

In addition, it is interesting to note that in the two pieces published as a result of the National Reading Panel's (2000) report on beginning reading instruction (Ehri et al., 2001a, b) there is no mention of Goswami's work; most likely this is due to the fact that the studies did not meet the methodological criteria set by the NRP.

Another issue under current debate is which is a better predictor of early reading skill, phonemic awareness or onset-rime awareness? A number of studies have compared onset-rime and phonemic awareness as predictors of later word reading (see Bowey, 2002 for a review). Hulme et al., (2002), for example, conducted a study on the phonological awareness of children aged 5 and 6 and looked at initial phoneme, final phoneme, onset, and rime. They found that measures of phonemic awareness were the best longitudinal predictor of reading skill. Onset-rime, they claimed, makes no additional predictive contribution.

This debate also hinges on methodology and different interpretations of the research (see Bowey, 2002; Bryant, 2002; Goswami, 2002; Hulme, 2002). Bryant (2002), for example, argues, first of all, that the intent of his and Goswami's (1990) work was not to compare the strengths

of different phonological predictors, as Hulme et al., do, but to develop the hypothesis that rime awareness feeds into phonemic awareness. Hulme et al.'s evidence against this hypothesis, according to Bryant (2002), is not convincing because of methodological problems. Goswami (2002) argues that the dichotomy presented by Hulme et al., namely whether small or large units are used first in reading acquisition, is misleading. A model of reading acquisition based on small units, such as the one envisaged by Hulme et al., Goswami argues, does not adequately capture the processes involved in learning to read English. The nature of English is such that consistent mappings from spelling to sound do not always operate at the level of single phoneme-grapheme correspondences. Children learning to read, Goswami argues, must develop mappings at multiple levels, from graphemes to phonemes, from (written word) bodies to rimes and from whole word phonology to letter strings for words.

Using both her own work and an analysis of the key studies, Bowey (2002) argues that, whilst onset-rime awareness typically predicts school entrants' later word reading skill, phonemic awareness predicts more variation. In addition, Bowey raises an interesting issue and one that is not addressed in the key studies: what level of phonological awareness is needed? How can we detect children at risk for failure? This latter issue is of particular relevance for adult learners, who for the most part show some level of phonemic awareness, but perhaps as children showed lower levels of awareness than their peers.

What are the implications of this debate for early reading instruction? Does instruction in rhyme awareness and phonemic awareness improve beginning readers' ability to read words? The National Reading Panel's meta-analysis evaluating the effects of phonemic awareness instruction found (not surprisingly) that the impact of this instruction on helping children acquire phonemic awareness was large and statistically significant and that phonemic awareness instruction using letters helped children learn to read and write, but that phonemic awareness instruction without letters did not help children to learn to read and write.

As mentioned above, the NRP analysis did not include studies which measured the impact of rhyme awareness instruction. A recent UK study (Deavers et al., 2000), however, examined the effects of three different styles of reading instruction on the non-word strategies employed by beginning readers. The three styles of instruction were:

- a) Small-units instruction (the Early Reading Research project);
- b) Instruction emphasising onset-rime and rhyme awareness (the National Literacy Project); and
- c) Instruction that combined large and small units instruction (usual classroom instruction before the National Literacy Strategy came into effect).

Not surprisingly, the results suggested that, on the non-word tests, the children employed the strategies they were taught. For example, children given small units instruction (Early Reading Research) made significant use of grapheme-phoneme correspondences and the children taught onset-rime and rhyme awareness (the National Literacy Project) employed a rime-based strategy. One notable finding, however, was that the children who were given the small-units instruction were more accurate than the other two groups at reading non-words.

On the other hand, Savage, Carless and Stuart (2003) evaluated rime-based, phoneme-based and mixed (rime and phoneme-based) interventions with children aged 5–6 at risk of reading difficulties. A control group followed the National Literacy Strategy (the nation-wide (in England) successor to the National Literacy Project). The results showed greater phonological

onset-rime skills, letter-sound knowledge and non-word reading skills in all three intervention groups compared to the control group. There were no reliable differences between the intervention groups. The authors concluded (p.211) that 'There appears to be no simple association between rime- or phoneme-based teaching interventions and changes in the size of unit used by children following interventions.' This issue of instruction is still under debate in the UK and likely to continue for some time before there is agreement on how children, or adults, should be taught to read.

In the meantime, research on strategies children are taught to use when reading unfamiliar words is of particular interest to adult literacy, specifically research on prompting strategies. Prompting strategies are hints or prompts that teachers give children (or adult learners) to help them decode, e.g. 'sounding out' decoding with attention drawn to the first phoneme, looking for familiar words or letter strings within words, referring to context and using picture clues (Moseley and Poole, 2001; Seymour, Duncan and Bolik, 1999). The key research question is: what prompting strategies have been shown to be effective? Moseley and Poole (2001) compared two different strategies used to help children read unfamiliar words. The sample was a group of 22 children aged 6–7 randomly allocated to two groups. The intervention involved the children reading a book of their choice one-to-one with an undergraduate helper for a total of six eight-minute sessions spread over three weeks. During the reading sessions, when the children could not identify a word, they were helped using one of two strategies: word prompting or rime prompting. With word prompting, the children were given the correct word after a miscue or after they had attempted but could not read the word. With rime prompting, the helper wrote the correct word down on a piece of paper and highlighted the rime, e.g. *spent*. The learners' word reading performance was measured by comparing the pre and post results on both a word-choice test and a rhyme reading test. The results suggested that the rime-prompt group outperformed the word-prompt group. This study has limitations, in particular the small sample size and short intervention, so the findings cannot be considered conclusive. However, the rime-prompting strategy is interesting and warrants further experimentation, particularly with adults.

This raises another issue that has been a focus of recent literature. What early reading behaviours are indicative of later word reading success? Savage, Stuart and Hill (2001), for example, studied the relationship between word reading errors at age 6 (N=44) and accurate word reading at age 8 (N=30). They found that "Scaffolding Errors" (Laxton, Masterson and Moran, 1994) which are described as errors preserving both the initial and final phonemes (e.g. 'bark' misread as 'bank') were an indicator of later word reading success. On the other hand, errors preserving only initial letters (e.g. 'rain' misread as 'road') were not indicative of later success. Furthermore, children who did not make scaffolding errors at age 6, and instead made 'unrelated' or non-phonological errors (e.g. 'bean' misread as 'room') were found to be below average in reading ability at age 8.

The implication of this study for adult readers is that their errors can also be viewed as related to later reading success. It would seem that adults who make scaffolding errors are indeed making progress towards successful word reading. On the other hand, adults who rely only on initial phonemes as a word reading strategy, or who make guesses unrelated to phonology, may have difficulty making progress. The implication for pedagogy might be that teaching only initial-letter phonics, or no phonics at all, would be ineffective.

One last issue addressed in the literature relating to alphabets is the particular difficulty of learning to read in English. A recent study by Seymour, Aro and Erskine, (2003) examines the

claim that basic decoding skills develop less effectively in English than in other European languages, with their different orthographies. Seymour et al., conducted a study which compared letter knowledge, familiar word reading, and simple non-word reading in children learning to read English and 12 other European languages. They found that the acquisition of elementary word recognition and decoding occurs more slowly in some languages (Portuguese, French, and Danish), but that the delay is greatly exaggerated in English.

The contrast in performance between the children learning to read English and those learning to read the other European languages was explained with an examination of two characteristics of the languages and their orthographies hypothesised as likely to affect reading acquisition. The orthographies were classified on twin dimensions: 1) Syllabic complexity, which refers to the distinction between simple syllabic structure languages which have a predominance of open CV syllables with few initial or final consonant clusters (e.g. Italian and Spanish), and complex syllabic structure languages which have both closed CVC syllables and complex consonant clusters (e.g. English, German, and Danish); and 2) Orthographic depth, which distinguishes between shallow orthographies, those languages having writing systems which approximate a consistent 1:1 mapping between letters and phonemes (e.g. Finnish) and deep orthographies, those languages having writing systems containing orthographic inconsistencies and complexities including multi-letter graphemes, context-dependent rules, irregularities, and morphological effects (e.g. English, French, Danish).

Seymour et al., argue that it is these fundamental linguistic differences that are responsible for the different rates of development. Children from European countries whose languages have simple syllabic structures and shallow orthographies acquire foundation levels of literacy during their first year of school. On the other hand, children who are learning to read in a language with a deep orthography and complex syllabic structure, particularly English, but also French, Portuguese, and Danish, take twice as long to acquire foundation levels of literacy. The implications for adult literacy arise from Seymour et al.,'s contribution to reading theory, particularly their hypothesis that acquiring foundation literacy in a deep orthography entails a dual foundation: logographic (approximately whole-word approaches) and alphabetic (approximately phonic approaches). It would seem that a productive area of research on adult reading difficulties would be an examination of the development of this dual foundation.

2.4 Metacognition

The majority of the school-level literature falls under the heading of alphabets, as can be expected. In the other areas of reading in which adults have been found to have difficulty – fluency, vocabulary and comprehension – the only recent British school-level studies which were found were on comprehension. It is notable that there were no studies on fluency or vocabulary. This may reflect the current trend of research focusing on early reading behaviours, or there may be studies on these issues currently in progress in Britain.

Metacognition was the only aspect of comprehension recently addressed in the British literature. Understanding the role of metacognition in developing literacy is crucial for adult reading. Metacognitive awareness is gained through reflection on how learning has occurred and enables readers to achieve a deeper understanding of the learning processes involved (Williams, 2000). It would logically follow that the acquisition of metacognitive understanding would be empowering for adult readers, in addition to being aligned with their maturity levels.

Two articles on metacognition were located. The first explored the role of metacognition in developing literacy at Key Stage 2 (Williams, 2000). Williams looked at five case studies in an attempt to investigate the different ways teachers are developing metacognitive awareness. Williams concludes that teachers can enhance learners' metacognition by giving them an explicit repertoire of techniques to aid in their understanding of how they are learning. A repertoire such as the following (Williams, p. 8) would seem appropriate for adults as well:

- getting children to think about how they learn best in a particular situation, prompted through high levels of teacher questioning;
- modelling strategies used by successful learners, either the teacher or other pupils;
- direct teaching of how to learn in a particular situation, for example providing a mental framework for group discussion and writing;
- extending pupils' memory of the learning strategies they have at their disposal; and
- pupils assessing for themselves what they have learned in a particular lesson or series of lessons, and how this has come about, followed by the setting of individual learning targets for the future.

Teaching metacognitive awareness may not be as easy as Williams implies. In the second study, Fisher (2002) looked at metacognitive modelling during the literacy hour, conducting 170 hours of observations focusing on 20 teachers, and found that this modelling was rarely done. Teachers seemed to find it very difficult to do, at least during the literacy hour format.

Research on metacognition can also offer insights into reading problems. Good readers monitor their comprehension of text, poor readers do not seem to recognise when a text does not make sense. Fisher argues that children need to be aware of what they are doing, e.g. selecting an appropriate decoding strategy and continuously checking their understanding of text. The same goes for adult readers; in fact, many of the tutors interviewed for the present study noted that their learners did not seem to recognise when a text didn't make sense. This suggests that these adults do not have the prerequisite metacognitive awareness to make progress.

2.5 Conclusion

This brief review was designed to identify the current research trends in British school-level reading research and to examine their relevance to adult reading research. With the exception of two studies on metacognition, the current trend is to examine early reading behaviour, especially phonological aspects. Whilst this area of the field does hold relevance for adult beginning readers, who need to develop the dual alphabetic and logographic foundation mentioned by Seymour et al., (2003), the majority of adult learners are past the beginning reading stage. They are more likely to have reading problems with fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. School-level research in these areas would add considerable insight to adult reading research, but research on these aspects with adults might yield findings even more directly.

Annex to chapter two: summary of recent research on effective strategies for developing comprehension

Perhaps the most notable absence from the preceding review of recent British school-level reading literature is research on comprehension. This contrasts sharply with the major emphasis we have placed on comprehension in this study. Our findings suggest that, first, comprehension was a significant problem for the learners in the present study. Secondly, the observed instruction did not seem, overall, to adequately address the learners' comprehension problems. After the completion of the rest of the report, it was therefore decided that the reader would be able to bring more insight into the reading of this report with the benefit of a brief summary of current thinking on effective strategies for developing comprehension, in particular the Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000). This annex is not meant to be a comprehensive review, but a brief guide to current thinking about strategies. It provides a brief theoretical background and summarises the findings from the NRP's meta-analysis on comprehension as well as some recent classroom-based qualitative studies from current journals, specifically, **Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy**.

Effective strategies for developing comprehension can be grouped around two themes, or theoretical assumptions, derived from the findings of the NRP (2000) report:

- 1) The importance of the reader being able to apply a wide range of strategies and consequently instruction that helps develop those strategies
- 2) The importance of vocabulary development and consequently vocabulary instruction.

Strategies for improving comprehension

The importance of the reader being able to draw on many different strategies for comprehension is based on several current theoretical assumptions about reading. First is the assumption that reading comprehension is an active process whereby the reader actively engages with the text in order to make meaning (Anderson and Pearson, 1984; Goodman, 1994; Ruddell and Unrau, 1994). Secondly, reading involves simultaneous cognitive and linguistic analysis on the part of the reader (Anderson, 1994). Thirdly, it is believed that the meaning that is made during a reading is very much influenced by the reader's prior knowledge about the content (Anderson and Pearson, 1984). Current theory about reading instruction claims that readers are strategic in the way they approach a text and the way they problem-solve if they run into trouble understanding the text (NRP, 2000). Some readers ('good' readers) normally acquire strategies for comprehension informally, e.g. through reading (NRP, 2000). However, other readers do not seem to acquire enough strategies and have difficulty with comprehension. Adult learners probably fall into the latter category. It is now thought that comprehension can be improved by explicitly teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies to work through a text (NRP, 2000) and many studies have been conducted to determine effective strategies. The NRP report reviewed these studies.

In a review of 205 experimental studies on comprehension instruction from 1970-99, the NRP concluded that seven strategies in particular appeared to be the most effective and promising for classroom instruction. It is important to note that these strategies are both instructional strategies and reader strategies. The instructional aim for each is to teach readers how to incorporate them into their comprehension processes. These strategies are summarised here (see the full NRP report for details on the individual studies):

- 1) *Comprehension monitoring*: the student learns to be aware of his or her understanding of the text and to use specific strategies when needed.
- 2) *Cooperative learning*: students work together to learn comprehension strategies.
- 3) *Graphic and semantic organisers*: Students write or draw meanings and relationships underlying ideas.
- 4) *Question answering*: teachers pose questions and guide students to correct answers, enabling them to learn more from the text.
- 5) *Question generation*: students ask themselves what, where, when, why, what will happen, how and who questions.
- 6) *Summarisation*: students identify and write the main ideas of a story.
- 7) *Multiple strategy (reciprocal teaching and other strategy combinations)*: this is a blend of individual strategies used flexibly and in a natural context. The teacher models an approach by showing how she or he would try and understand a text, using two or more combinations of four strategies: question generation, summarisation, clarification and projection of what might occur.

In addition to the above strategies, a number of recent small qualitative studies have found positive effects on comprehension of instruction that 1) activates the reader's prior knowledge of vocabulary or content prior to the reading; and 2) teaches the background knowledge necessary for comprehension (see, for example, Barry, 2002; Fournier and Graves, 2002; Rhoder, 2002). It is thought that many comprehension problems are a result of the reader not having the prerequisite background knowledge due to cultural differences between the readers and the author of the text (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983/1998). It is likely that many adult learners would benefit from pre-teaching of content and vocabulary; and that this would improve their ability to comprehend a text. Most importantly, however, the reader needs to know and be able to use a wide range of strategies.

Vocabulary development

The importance of vocabulary development for reading comprehension is based on a theoretical relationship between reading ability and vocabulary size. Readers with a large vocabulary size are good readers, and vice versa. Logically, then, in order to become a better reader one needs to increase one's vocabulary. However, how crucial is vocabulary development to the comprehension process? Furthermore, how can vocabulary best be taught and learned? These two questions have framed numerous studies on vocabulary and reading.

With regard to the first question, the causal relationship between the two has been difficult to prove empirically. It is difficult to demonstrate that comprehension is based on vocabulary knowledge. When comprehending texts the reader processes the individual words, but it is often unclear whether the overall comprehension is based on 1) the word-level understanding which is vocabulary knowledge; or 2) strategic processing of the text which may lead to understanding the gist of a word, but not full understanding of the vocabulary. Most likely it is a combination of the two. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that there is a positive correlation between vocabulary knowledge and comprehension and the NRP (2000) meta-analysis supports this. It is much easier, however, to show a direct relationship between vocabulary instruction and improvement in comprehension, than vocabulary knowledge and comprehension so the majority of studies on vocabulary focus on the effectiveness of instruction in learning words.

In the NRP (2000) meta-analysis of 47 studies on vocabulary, seven claim that vocabulary

instruction leads to gains in comprehension. The rest of the studies in the NRP report focused on strategies to improve vocabulary. Six main strategies were found to be effective for children: incidental learning (e.g. through reading), repeated exposure (across the curriculum), pre-teaching of vocabulary, restructuring reading materials (e.g. substituting an easier synonym for a more difficult word), context method and the 'keyword method' (learning a keyword 'word clue' for each vocabulary word). The reader is directed to the NRP report for the details of these studies, but the following are implications for reading instruction based on the trends from the data (NRP, 2000, pp.4–27):

- 1) Vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly.
- 2) Repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important.
- 3) Learning in rich contexts is valuable for vocabulary learning.
- 4) Vocabulary tasks should be restructured when necessary.
- 5) Vocabulary learning should entail active engagement in learning tasks.
- 6) Computer technology can be used to help teach vocabulary.
- 7) Vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning.
- 8) How vocabulary is assessed and evaluated can have differential effects on instruction.
- 9) Dependence on a single vocabulary instruction will not result in optimal learning.

These implications seem relevant for adult literacy teaching. Two of them hold particular importance. The first is that it is important to use a variety of methods. Adult literacy teachers need a wide variety of strategies to draw on. Secondly, it must be emphasised that, at least in the case of children and adolescents, the majority of vocabulary used for reading academic texts is learned through reading (incidental learning) (Anderson, 1999). This poses a real challenge for adult literacy learners who do not read a great deal, or have not read a great deal over the course of their lives. Because of this, it is likely that adult vocabulary difficulties may be related to poor reading ability (Kruidenier, 2002). So it would seem that adults who are poor readers are often caught in a bind: they have difficulty reading certain texts because they don't know the vocabulary, but in order to acquire the vocabulary they must read a wide variety of texts, and often. Clearly these learners need both high-quality vocabulary instruction and frequent experiences with reading texts with difficult vocabulary.

Chapter three: our approach to the study – brief description

For a full description of the approach taken in the project, see Appendix A.

3.1 The sample of basic skills providers

Approximately 20 basic skills providers in the East Midlands and North of England were contacted and asked to take part in the study. From those who agreed to participate, six were selected for the study. Observations of classes, interviews with tutors, assessments with learners and focus groups were then conducted at a total of 21 sites within the six providers' areas. All data collection took place between January and March 2003.

The providers were selected to be representative of the range of settings in which literacy teaching takes place in England. The range of settings visited included large and small Colleges of Further Education, workplace basic skills support centres and basic skills centres. The nature of the adult literacy provision varied considerably, including weekly English classes, drop-in study centres and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

3.2 Practitioner-researchers

Five practitioner-researchers (usually called 'the researchers' in the rest of this report) were recruited on the basis of their expertise in the field of adult literacy and their keen interest in participating in the project. They conducted the observations of basic skills classes, interviewed tutors and assessed adult learners. Due to the sensitive nature of conducting both classroom observations and assessments of adult learners, having research staff who were known to both the tutors who were observed and the adults who were assessed proved to be not only beneficial to the data collection process, but essential in gaining access to the inner workings of the settings.

The researchers were provided with appropriate training to carry out the following fieldwork tasks: conducting classroom observations, writing up observation logs and schedules, interviewing tutors, assessing learners using diagnostic reading assessment tools, and analysing those assessments.

As part of their contribution to the project, each of the researchers provided a reflection on her own experience as a literacy tutor and/or during the fieldwork. In order to give a sense of their 'voices' within the study, in particular of the philosophies they brought to the research, these reflections are appended to this chapter.

3.3 Observations

Observations of teaching and learning sessions were conducted in order to explore the range of current practice in adult literacy instruction. More specifically, the purpose was to explore the extent to which practice is informed by, or supports, the understanding of the processes of teaching and learning reading reflected in the literature and the theory. Observations were conducted in as many different learning contexts as the scope of the project allowed.

The researchers conducted a total of 27 observations of teaching and learning sessions. The observations averaged two hours and generally proceeded in the following manner. The researcher approached a colleague (tutor) and obtained permission to observe her class session. Before the observation, the researcher spoke briefly with the tutor inquiring about the format of the class. During the observation, the researcher sat in an unobtrusive place in the classroom and wrote a handwritten detailed log of the session. The researcher focused on the teaching of reading, although the descriptions included practices related to writing and other skills as they occurred during the session. After the observation, the researcher typed up her log and submitted it to the lead researcher for data analysis.

In addition to the observation log, the researchers also completed an observation schedule for each observation. The schedule was designed both as a framework for the observations and as a means of reflecting on what was observed. The teaching of reading took many different forms and the researcher often needed to reflect on the events of the classroom session and analyse them in order to determine how the teaching practices addressed the learners' difficulties.

3.4 Tutor interviews

Vital to an understanding of and description of typical teaching practices was the perspective of the tutors whose class sessions were observed. After the observation, the researcher met with the tutor for a semi-structured interview. The purposes of this were to enable the researcher to discuss and clarify what was observed and to obtain the tutor's perspective on the learning difficulties of her learners and how her teaching practices were aimed at those difficulties. Since the number of sessions observed was 27 and each was taught by a different tutor, the number of tutor interviews was also 27.

3.5 Focus group meetings

Focus group meetings, four in all, were held with tutors from different teaching and learning contexts. These were undertaken to obtain the tutors' views on the teaching and learning of reading, their preferred approaches and the rationale for these and their opinions on the major difficulties learners encounter. Tutors who participated in the meetings were recruited from amongst the staff who worked for the various providers.

The number of tutors attending the groups ranged from five to nine. For the most part these were highly experienced practitioners, with many years of service (between five years and ten or more). The focus group meetings lasted two hours and were semi-structured. By coincidence, the total number of practitioners who took part in the focus groups was also 27.

3.6 Assessment of individual adult learners

One of the primary aims of the study was to explore areas of reading difficulty that appear to present special difficulty for adult learners. While this could have been done using standardised assessment materials with a large sample group, this would not have provided the level of detail needed to investigate the reading process thoroughly. Instead it was decided to assess the learners one-to-one. The researchers conducted the assessments, which took between 45 and 60 minutes. A total of 53 learners were assessed using the combination of diagnostic materials described below. The learners were recruited by the researchers from the 27 class sessions observed. However, we did not specifically focus our observations on

the learners who were assessed. Our intention in this study was not to correlate teaching to learning (this is being done in the following study – see section 1.5), but to identify typical strengths and weaknesses in reading as well as to identify typical teaching practices.

3.7 Choice of assessment materials

3.7.1 Areas covered

It was considered important for the study to address areas of reading that practitioners had identified as problematic for their learners. Such areas of reading were identified from the consultation meetings held with practitioners early in NRDC's work, from the BSA's *Introduction to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum* programme and from the literature, especially Kruidenier (2002).

The areas identified were: alphabets (phonemic awareness and word analysis), fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Within these, fluency needed careful definition, since the term is used in two rather different senses: reading rate (also known as speed of reading), and accuracy. Both refer to oral reading, but the former focuses solely on speed, while the latter focuses on the extent to which the reader's vocalisations correspond to the printed text. Encouraging fluency in the first sense is a routine practice (at least at school level) and widely researched in the United States, but is almost unknown in Britain. Since it would therefore have been unfair to learners to investigate it, fluency in the sense of speed of oral reading was omitted from our research. However, fluency in the sense of accuracy was investigated.

Knowledge of the literature and theory as well as an awareness of practitioners' concerns informed the choice of assessment materials. Assessment materials were therefore sought to examine the following areas of adult reading: word identification, phonological awareness, accuracy and comprehension.

No formal pilot testing of these instruments was done, as this was beyond the scope of the study. However, the instruments, in particular Qualitative Reading Inventory II (QRI) (Leslie and Caldwell, 1995) and the Phonological Awareness and Reading Profile - Intermediate (PhARP) (Salter and Robinson, 2001) had been normed for United States children. So, while it would have been ideal to have done pilot testing on the UK adult population, we felt that, given our constraints, the instruments were acceptable for the study. It should be noted that the absence of any suitable adult literacy assessment instrument for use in intervention studies led to the award, early in 2003, of a grant to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NRDC project B1.6) to develop appropriate reading and writing tests. The tests became available to NRDC early in 2004, well after the conclusion of the fieldwork for this study.

Since no suitable British instrument was available at the time of this study, suitable materials were developed by adapting diagnostic assessments and informal reading inventories available for use with adolescents and adults in the United States. The Senior Research Officer is trained as a reading specialist and was familiar with these materials.

3.7.2 Word reading

The aim of this part of the assessment was to:

- 1) assess the learners' ability to read (decode) words out of context; and
- 2) challenge the learner by having them read lists of words of increasing difficulty and then establish the limit of the learners' current competence.

The Word List Test from the *Qualitative Reading Inventory II* (QRI) (Leslie and Caldwell, 1995) was selected as the test of word reading. Although reading word lists aloud cannot be considered an authentic literacy task, the ability to identify words accurately and out of context is characteristic of skilled readers. These lists provided important information on the learners' word-recognition automaticity and enabled the researchers to predict how well the learners would be able to comprehend various reading passages.

The QRI has nine word lists of 20 words each, with each list more difficult than the preceding one. The spelling was anglicised where necessary, e.g. *aluminum* was changed to *aluminium*. Each list corresponds to a US grade school level. For the purposes of judging which levels were appropriate for the adult learners in this study, the levels were converted to English year group levels and then to English school and adult literacy curriculum levels. To obtain equivalence levels between the UK and the US we consulted colleagues who had done comparative work in the United States and Britain, in particular Professor Colin Harrison of the University of Nottingham. Table 3.1 shows these suggested equivalences, plus the first word of each word list. Since there were more lists than Core Curriculum Levels, the Core Curriculum levels were subdivided.

Table 3.1: Key to equivalence levels of word list test

Word list no.	US Grade Level/Fry Readability Level	Year Group in England	School National Curriculum level	Adult Literacy Core Curriculum level	First word of list
1	Pre-school	Reception	1	Entry 1	can
2	K	1	2	Entry 2	mother
3	1	2	2	Entry 2	bear
4	2	3	3	Entry 3	morning
5	3	4	3	Entry 3	lunch
6	4	5	4	Level 1	escape
7	5	6	4	Level 1	attend
8	6	7	5	Level 2	sewed
9	7	8	5	Level 2	commissioned

3.7.3 Comprehension

The primary aim of the comprehension test was to assess the learners' ability to understand indirect meaning, in contrast with their ability to understand direct meaning. The following requirements were established: a collection of prose passages of varying levels of difficulty but within the appropriate range for adults with limited literacy and prose whose content was at a level which challenged the reader to interpret the implicit meanings of the text.

A suitable test was found in a US study conducted by Bristow and Leslie (1988) and designed to investigate the validity of oral reading accuracy and comprehension as indicators of difficulty for low-literate adults. The materials consist of four descriptive passages of ascending difficulty from adult instructional materials in the US. The 180- to 200-word passages are descriptive, expository selections on the following topics: Sleepwalkers, Snow, Money, and Lightning. Bristow and Leslie prepared eight comprehension questions for each passage, four testing literal comprehension and four testing inferential comprehension.

The Bristow and Leslie assessment materials were also aptly suited for a miscue analysis which identified problems that the learners had identifying words in context. The passages needed only a few adaptations of spelling and phraseology to make them appropriate for the UK adult population.

3.7.4 Phonological awareness, decoding and spelling

Experts in the field of adult literacy and dyslexia were consulted and a newly published review of phonological assessment methods and tools (Sodoro et al., 2002) was shared with the project team. Of the many published materials reviewed in the article, one, the Phonological Awareness and Reading Profile – Intermediate (PhARP) (Salter and Robinson, 2001), seemed especially appropriate because it had an age range of 8–14, whilst the majority of the others were designed for young children.

The PhARP is theoretically grounded in research on phonemic awareness instruction recently reported by the National Reading Panel (2000): the tasks on the test are typical of those encountered in the NRP's literature search, e.g. phoneme blending, isolation, segmentation, deletion, and manipulation. This test was chosen for use in the study.

The PhARP test has four main components: phonological awareness, decoding, spelling and fluency (reading speed). A decision was made to use the first three components for the study, excluding the fluency section for the reason given above. The rest of the test was administered as it exists except that, in the spelling test, the order of the words was rearranged so that the easier, one-syllable words, e.g. "fuss", came at the beginning of the test.

3.7.5 Administration

The tests were given in the following order: Word List Test, Passage Reading, Comprehension, PhARP.

The administration of the Word List Test was essentially in two parts, designed first to locate a 'test list' for each learner and then to test the learner fully on that list. In order to locate each learner's test list, the researcher moved him/her quickly up through lists until the learner began to hesitate in identifying the words on a list. This then became the test list. Once the test list was identified and tested, the learner was not presented with any more lists.

Once the Word List test was completed, the researcher selected an appropriate reading passage for the learner to read based on the following guidelines:

- If they read list 1 only – ask if they would like to try "Sleepwalkers". Tell them that it is a difficult passage. If they have a difficult time of it, or appear to be very frustrated, discontinue the test and move on to the Phonological Awareness Test.
- If they read list 2, 3 or part of 4, go to "Sleepwalkers".
- If they read list 4 or 5, go to "Snow".
- If they are able to read list 6 or 7, go to "Money".
- If they are able to read list 8 or 9, go to "Lightning".

Once a passage was selected, the learner was asked to read the passage aloud. Whilst they read, the researcher followed along on her copy and took note of the learner's miscues. The researcher noted all miscues, including omissions and insertions. After the learners completed reading the passage, they were asked the relevant comprehension questions. The learners were allowed to keep the text in front of them to refer back to, but they were not

given a printed copy of the questions. The researcher recorded the learners' responses on a marking sheet carrying a copy of the questions.

The *Phonological Awareness and Reading Profile* test was given orally by the researcher, who initiated a series of tasks as prompted by the test booklets. The first set of tasks was grouped under the heading 'Phonological Awareness'. In this section there were nine subtests. One of the subtests, manipulation, was omitted because it involved moving coloured blocks around and was considered too childish. Each of the remaining tasks involved the researcher explaining the task, giving a spoken example, and then giving the task to the learner. The second section of the test was decoding. The learner was presented with a list of 41 'nonsense words' and was asked to read them aloud. The third and last section of the test was spelling. The researcher read out a list of words to the learner and the learner attempted to spell them on a piece of paper. As in a traditional spelling test, the researcher was free to explain the word and/or use it in a sentence.

3.8 Analysis

For the methods by which the data were analysed, see the relevant sections of chapters four – eight and Appendix A.

Annex to chapter three: the researchers' reflections

Reflection 1 – Maxine Burton

If you ask most literacy tutors what the main ethos behind their teaching strategies is, it would be summed up in the phrase 'student-centred', in other words that their teaching is tailored to individual student needs. The students are encouraged to identify exactly what they want to learn and to provide feedback on whether their needs are being met. Teaching strategies vary according to the individual student and cannot be predetermined, even when initial assessments are carried out for allocation to a Curriculum 'level'. In a sense, because no two students are the same, there are as many strategies as there are students. Strategies will also be affected by whether a student proves capable of working independently or needs constant attention from a tutor. I found some tutors reluctant to commit themselves to any judgement of a student's abilities, if they had not had the time to get to know that student really well. It is often a case of students continuing to demonstrate surprising strengths – and weaknesses – in their ability profile.

Many strategies, therefore, are formed on an *ad hoc* basis. If a particular strategy doesn't appear to work, and especially if the student reacts negatively, then another one is sought. I have seen a real sensitivity to students' agendas, which can override all other priorities. For example, one tutor found other work for a student to do, when the rest of the class were reading a text which had a reference to death, because that student's mother had died recently. At the same time, students are not allowed to 'get away with' irrational preferences. I was told of one instance where a student claimed not to like fiction and only wanted to read 'facts'; his tutor went along with this initially, but was working out ways of introducing him to fiction as well (one of which, she suggested, might be an initial exercise of putting pictures in sequence). Above all, the students' self-esteem must be boosted. I have seen a tendency on the part of tutors to have students working at a level which is low enough to ensure they don't struggle and become disheartened. (For example, their general allocation to a class is based on their writing, not reading ability, which is often well ahead of writing level.) Praise is generously given to students, but one tutor also pointed out that it must be 'honest' praise, although the extent of the honesty did depend again on the individual student and how secure he or she felt.

As far as my own teaching experience is concerned, I have also regarded group teaching as an important part of each session – and long before the new curriculum requirements were introduced. Some tutors have expressed a belief that group teaching is inappropriate for mixed-level groups, on the basis that they are too different to have any common ground and that the students themselves just want to get on with their own work. However, I have found that different abilities or interests can be catered for by choosing something topical, like an item of current news, or a topic of local or seasonal interest. For this, I have used short articles from newspapers or magazines and poems. Each student has been given their own copy, which I have read aloud. I have made no attempt to simplify the text, but at the same time have never put any student on the spot by asking him or her to read out to the class. The text forms the basis, firstly, for a group discussion and students are encouraged to contribute their opinions, although reticence is also respected. Students' oral abilities are generally ahead of their literacy skills and most students' self-esteem seems to be raised by the experience of having their contributions listened to and valued. Secondly, the text can form

the basis for other work, for example on vocabulary, grammar, etc., which can be set at different levels. I am not sure how useful the concept of group 'cohesion' is, although some tutors do seem to set great store by it. But if it can help to offset the feelings of isolation experienced by many adult literacy learners, then that is of immense value in itself.

Reflection 2 – Mina Parisella

Talking to the student and getting to know what makes them tick is very important. If you choose a topic that they are passionate in, say football, then the student is more likely to have the desire to learn. I once based a student's whole learning on his favourite football team because that is all he wanted to do. By familiarising yourself with the student and taking time to chat to them you will learn what teaching style suits them. Some may want to work alone, others may need to pair up and discuss and talk through ideas and others may enjoy the social aspect of being in a group situation with the tutor constantly at hand. Choosing the right teaching style is vital as this may be one of the barriers a student has in returning to learn, such as prior school classroom experience. Many people think that this (negative school experiences) will happen to them again and they live in fear of being pointed out and picked on to read aloud in class.

Constantly assessing students and reappraising their learning needs is essential. This is done through asking questions and through observation. If a student looks unmotivated the tutor needs to understand: Is it the work? Is it too hard or too easy? Is it dull? Does the student understand the relevance in what s/he is doing? Or is it something else, something outside of college? Constant observation and communication is necessary to help the student.

Advice from other tutors is invaluable – especially colleagues who I feel I can discuss strategies with and ask for a second opinion if I am 'stuck' or need reassurance on a particular student.

I use many different strategies to help students learn spelling and reading – underlining unknown words when reading comprehensions, using a different coloured pen to highlight the section of a word which was causing difficulties, using mnemonics to aid memory e.g. necessary – one c and two s's – one collar and two sleeves.

Engaging students in a discussion on the topic is so important. For example, asking the students' opinions on the subject they are writing about is vital to stimulate thought. No thought means nothing to write about. Keeping the student thinking and constant praise for what they have said gives them the ideas and the confidence to put pen to paper. You can't give enough praise to a student.

Reflection 3 – Yvonne Spare

Tutors are mainly concerned about getting to know their students. This allows them to choose resources and methods which are relevant, age-appropriate, will maintain interest and be at the right level. They want to take account of preferred learning styles and to avoid repeating previous failures.

There is concern about formal screening-type assessments, which may give information about levels, but nothing about what causes people difficulties. Secondly, that if someone else (a manager, for instance) has carried out an assessment and written an Individual Learning Plan,

they feel that they need to have time to build up a relationship of trust to tease out these other issues. Students will not always talk about past failures and may not know their own best learning style. They may give 'expected' answers or not have thought clearly about their aims.

Tutors feel that they need to try out a variety of methods and materials to find out what suits everyone. There is the feeling that adults carry with them all their experience of life, which affects their learning in a way that is not the case with children.

This leads, not only to a concern about resources, but also about an emphasis on certain teaching methods, such as phonics. It was said that, as adults, they had been used to using word recognition strategies all their lives, so it was thought that a combination of methods was useful, but that different strategies suit different people.

There is an emphasis on 'useful' learning, such as things students need to read or write in their everyday lives, or things which match an interest. Many tutors encourage students to bring in materials from home, from which they devise learning activities, or to choose important words to learn, which may be used, for example, to produce a personal dictionary. To sum up, tutors want to find a balance between a person's limitations and the teaching they provide.

Reflection 4 – Sandie Stratford

I have been very pleased with students' responses to discovering the skill of 'skimming'. In the past we and they were often given to believe that one had to sound out every word (even looking for clues in the picture was thought of as cheating!) and it came as a revelation that you can cast your eye over something and get a lot of meaning just from that... as we all do in real life, of course.

Basic Skills students from the least able upwards have universally appreciated this. In fact the least skilled in reading-for-meaning have been the ones to gain most from putting this skill to use. In practice what I do is to present a text (often a free leaflet from a supermarket, or a flier about a forthcoming fair) and say 'What can you find out about this in 30 seconds?' Then I ask them to turn it over and share what they found.

This has two aspects of success:

- 1) students feel good about the amount of information they have gleaned in a short time, when many consider themselves 'failing' readers; and
- 2) it prevents the practice in some of reading nonsense, i.e. their reading becomes purposeful: they are actually trying to find out 'what it says'.

The next stage is the detailed reading, which requires some comprehension questions, or other means of responding, to check understanding. But they are off to a good start.

Another revelation is the necessity for discussing things with peers. Maybe I went to the wrong schools, but again, sharing ideas was definitely cheating in the bad old days. Now we acknowledge that language needs to be used and that progress takes place when passive learning becomes active. Some students (like me) formulate ideas as they talk, whereas others (like my husband) listen and think and formulate the ideas in the brain before expressing them. I suspect most Basic Skills students are like me. So I was very glad when speaking and listening became an accepted part of the English curriculum, and I always expect students to discuss their ideas before writing, and as a group before reading. I am

alarmed that the 'silent approach' has returned in the reading component of the C&G 3792 Entry level test.

Also the notion of challenging what is in print was taboo in my youth. I watched with consternation as an ESOL tutor wrote the date spelt wrongly on the board. It was all I could do not to speak up... until I realised it was a deliberate strategy to break the taboo inbred in her students that 'teacher is always right'.

My experience both in carrying out the research and in the classroom would suggest that when it comes to sound-letter (grapho-phonetic) correlations, adult learners are quite unused to this, not to say alienated by it. I always precede tuition in phonics with an explanation about school and how phonics is taught there, and (an apology?) about it being necessary to revisit it before real progress in either reading or writing can be made. Perhaps it is unhappy experiences of school, or perhaps the feeling that working with sounds is 'beneath them', but most adult students are very reluctant to work with sounds. Is this why we English are very poor learners of foreign languages, or a consequence of it?

In the research work, some just couldn't handle the phoneme deletion at all. The syllable deletion could be laughed at a bit more:

'You say 'cucumber''.

'Cucumber' (harassed expression).

*'Now say 'cucumber' again but don't say 'cu-'.
(Just to humour you...)' Cumber'.*

(Laughter)

Parallel to this is the remark a student once made about the short vowel sounds: a, e, i, o, u – 'those are children's vowels'. Rightly or wrongly, we have a long way to go with phonic teaching before adults will be happy with it.

Having said all that, in the intimacy of a one-to-one tutoring situation, I have had successes with students who learned initial sound sequences and final clusters. Medial vowels have proved more difficult, perhaps because one phoneme generates usually a minimum of three possible vowel digraphs.

I have used letter tiles successfully to teach phoneme substitution in CVC words (following the example of a colleague, now retired, of many years' experience). This too depends on one-to-one work, and the embarrassment factor being low. It is not very macho.

Cloze procedure and other methods of prediction have a healthy pedigree in literacy tuition. I always enjoyed using the old Initial Assessment tests produced by ALBSU as it was then. The first passage, about the lottery, was fairly straightforward, but the second passage, 'Safe As Houses?' gave the tutor a lot of clues about the ability of the reader to use punctuation, to read ahead and to use syntax and grammar to construct sensible sentences. I invariably used the test in a one-to-one context, and gave immediate feedback... not to say teaching... based on the information it gave me.

Again I find that peer discussion, following a first attempt, helps the student to justify their choice of a given word over someone else's and there are usually several possible right answers. This lends credibility and value to the task.

Reflection 5 – Janet Wainwright

A tutor has to have a bank of strategies at his/her fingertips and use the one that is right on that particular occasion. It is important not to make assumptions about the nature of a student's difficulty. One student who took part in a discussion with inspectors said, "We were not what the inspectors were expecting. I have severe problems with spelling and reading new words but I do not wish to be condescended to. I am articulate and have skills."

The same student said she was terrified when she arrived for her meeting with the ABE Organiser because for 30 years she had kept her problems hidden. She said it was an amazing relief to realise she wasn't mad and to find the organiser interested and not shocked by the way she saw things, e.g. halo round print, reading from right to left. Use of coloured overlay has helped with reading and coloured paper with writing. Some students use a guide to help their eyes sweep down the page and stop constant backtracking which interferes with understanding – particularly useful with students who naturally read from right to left. However, this is a strategy that can only be suggested to some students and then only at the right time – it is still too closely connected with finger-pointing even though it is successfully used by speed readers.

Before students are able to move on sometimes an emotional block has to be addressed. One student needed to access the library but this revived painful memories of feeling foolish and humiliated. She was taken to the library and given the time to stand at the door and draw a sketch before finding the fiction section. Alphabetical order meant nothing until she touched each letter and walked round the alphabet. She drew another sketch and later explained how the library was organised. This student has since gone on and gained a B at GCSE but in order to succeed the hand-outs had to be in her preferred colour, font and font size. As work gets harder it should not necessarily be produced using smaller or more indistinct print.

A Basic Skills tutor has to be aware of best practice but also listen to what the student is saying. For instance during a paired reading session it is usual to prompt and then supply a word after a few seconds, but if a student's processing speed is slow then it may be necessary to let them think for much longer. One student said it made her very angry if a word was supplied. She was not embarrassed by the pause and often successfully supplied the word.

Another student attending classes at the moment is unable to read and by listening to her it seems as though her main approach has been a phonic one which because of her auditory processing difficulties has not been successful. She now understands that she needs to visualise a word to remember it and has had some success but the problem is enormous and the danger is progress will not be fast enough. One strategy is to keep her one step ahead of her son who is learning a few words at nursery school. She has written a book for him that she reads at bedtime and this is building her confidence with reading and giving her the practice she needs to commit new words to her long-term memory. She is also storing and remembering words by their shape and is starting to see patterns that keep being repeated.

Chapter four:

Adult learners' reading difficulties

The investigation of reading difficulties was carried out through close study of individual learners using diagnostic assessment techniques carried out by the team of researchers (as described in the previous chapter and in Appendix A). This chapter presents the results of the assessment.

Although it would have been very useful to share the learners' test results with the tutors we were unable to do this. This was because our agreement with the learners who agreed to be tested was that their test results would be confidential. There was one exception. One of the researchers conducted some assessments on her own students. She then shared the results with her students.

4.1 General characteristics of the learners

A total of 53 adult learners were assessed. General characteristics were established for each learner: first language (mother tongue), whether they were dyslexic or not and their reading and writing ability. The second and third of these were based on the tutor's judgment on the learner's reading and writing ability according to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum level system.

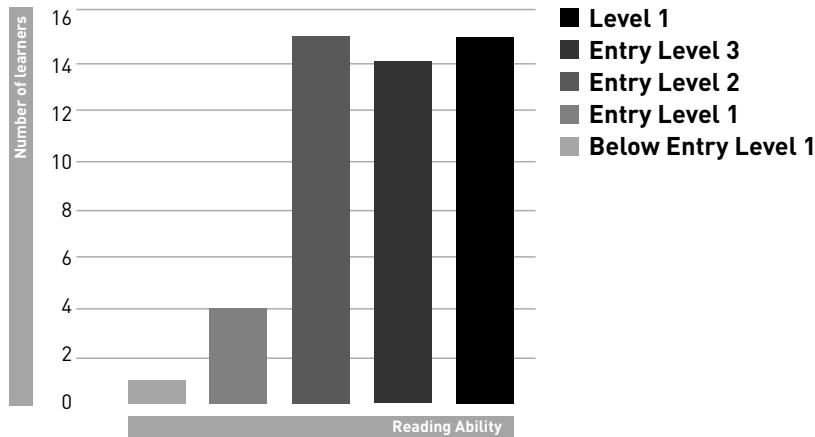
The majority of the learners (47) were native English speakers. Thirty were not considered dyslexic, sixteen were considered dyslexic², and the remaining seven were suspected by their tutors to be dyslexic but had not been formally tested.

The tutors' judgments on the learners' reading abilities were spread out between below Entry 1 and Level 1, with three large groups: 15 of the learners were judged to be at Entry 2, 14 at Entry 3, and 15 at Level 1. See Figure 4.1.

(N.B. Unless otherwise noted, in all the following graphs and tables the least able readers are on the left.)

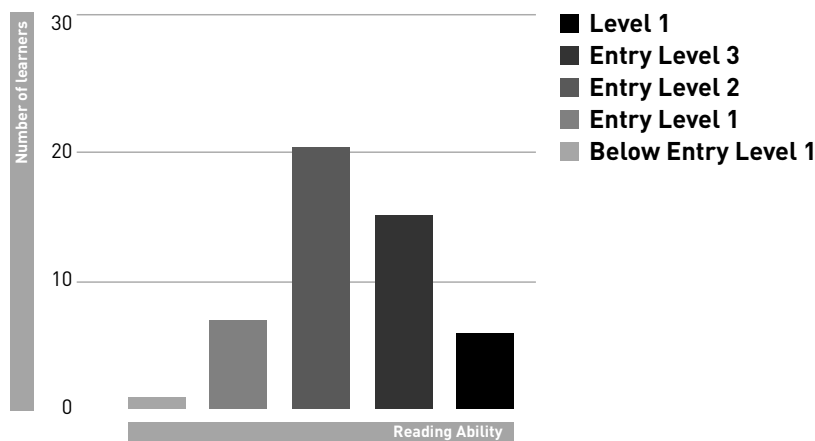
² Classification as dyslexic was in some cases based on actual psychological testing, but in other cases simply a judgment of the tutor who believed the students to be dyslexic based on professional wisdom.

Figure 4.1: Tutors' judgments of learners' reading ability



The learners' writing ability was estimated to be slightly lower than their reading ability: 20 of the learners were at Entry 2, 15 were at Entry 3 and 7 were at Level 1. See Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Tutors' judgments of learners' writing ability

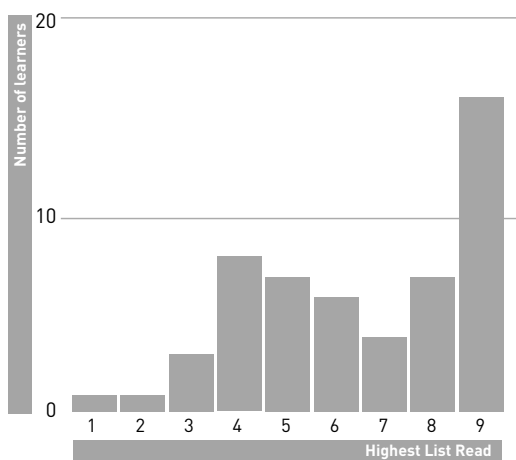


4.2 Word reading

The learners were asked to read a series of graded word lists. The administration of the test was designed to determine how difficult a list a learner was able to read. Each learner began reading the easiest list and progressed until they came to a list where they began to struggle. Struggling was defined as having difficulty identifying automatically roughly 15–20 per cent of the list. This percentage was based on the established reading levels of the word lists (see Appendix A). Learners who were able to identify automatically 18–20 words in a list, or 90–100 per cent, were said to be reading that list at an independent level, identification of 14–17 (70–85 per cent) of the words was considered an instructional level and identification of fewer than 14 words, or below 70 per cent, was frustration level.

The ideal test list was at an instructional level; however, the test list was not always given at this level as the researcher was required to make a quick estimate as to an appropriate test, as time did not allow for them to do the calculations required to figure out exactly the reading levels. The researcher established a test list: this was the highest of the graded lists that the learner was asked to read. Figure 4.3 illustrates the highest lists read by the learners.

Figure 4.3: Lists read by the learners



The highest list read corresponded roughly with a level that the learners were comfortable reading at. The spread is quite interesting: close to 90 per cent of the learners read lists above the third, but the numbers were spread out across the lists, with the greatest number of learners (16) reading list 9, which was the most difficult.

The data on word identification in isolation were analysed in two ways. First, an exact percentage of the words that the learners identified automatically (defined as reading the word within one second) was calculated. The results of all the learners were compiled and are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Percentage of words identified automatically

Percentage of words identified automatically	<45	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	>75
Number of learners	11	6	6	4	4	8	5	4	5

The mean percentage of words identified automatically on the highest list read by the 53 learners was 56 per cent, although the individual scores were spread between 15 per cent and 100 per cent, with the majority of scores clustering around the 45–70 per cent range. This indicates that the readability level was ‘Frustration’ for the majority of those learners. These scores were lower than expected. As explained above, the highest list read, or test list, was meant to be a list that the learners could read at an automaticity rate of 75–80 per cent, at an ‘Instructional Level’. Instead, only 14 of the 53 learners performed at this rate on their test lists. The rest of the learners had automaticity rates of less than 75 per cent, indicating that the test list was quite difficult for them.

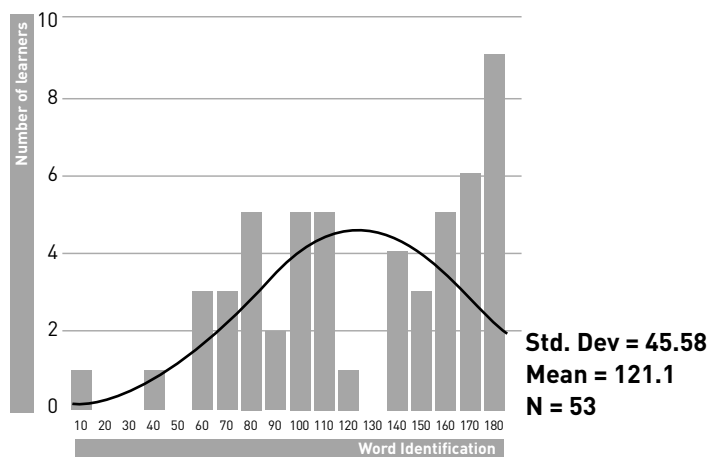
Several factors may explain why the learners were tested at a higher level than was expected. For one, the researchers may have misjudged the learners’ competence, having them continue to a level that was more difficult than the researcher expected. Secondly, the learners often wanted to challenge themselves further and thus asked to read a more difficult list. Thirdly, the order of the word lists may have led to a false sense of confidence in both the researchers and the learners. The learners were asked to read the first five words from each list beginning with the easiest list. Once they began to struggle with a list, then they were asked to read the whole list. It is possible that the lists are designed so that the less difficult words are in the first five words on the list and that the words increase in difficulty within the

list. Had the researchers asked the learners to read complete lists, they might have noticed that the learners' automaticity rates began to fall earlier on in the reading of the series of word lists.

It would seem, then, from the findings on word reading, that the findings on the highest list read may be inflated. The highest list read is indicative of a point of frustration, as opposed to the highest list that the learners could read at an instructional level.

The second analysis performed on the word list data was a calculation of the number of words the learners were able to identify eventually (total words identified). Unlike the automaticity ratings, this figure took into consideration words that the learners took several seconds to identify and words that the learners might have misread initially, but were able to self-correct without help from the researcher. This was considered to be a more accurate representation of what the learners were able to do on a test of word identification. Each learner received a total word identification score (0–180) that was based on a weighting system which took into consideration the difficulty level of the list the learner attempted (see Appendix A for a full explanation). For example, a score of 180 was a perfect score on list 9. Figure 4.4 shows the learners' scores.

Figure 4.4: Total word reading scores



As Figure 4.4 shows, the mean score was 124, which translates to a low score on List 7. It must be noted, however, that the standard deviation is quite large, at 46, reflecting the great range of scores. Furthermore, these scores do not align themselves along a normal curve. There appear to be three distinct scoring groups, those who scored 140 or above, a middle range group who scored between 60 and 120 and a small, low-scoring group who scored 40 and below. These word identification scores were used later in the reader profile analysis (see chapter five).

4.3 Word identification in context

Word identification in context was assessed using a miscue analysis on a passage that the learners read aloud. Each learner read one of four passages, selected to be at their level. As described in Appendix A, the researcher selected a passage she thought would be suitable based on each learner's performance on the word list test. Since the word lists were assumed to be predictive of reading level, the decisions that the researchers made as to what passage to test the learners at was based on the highest list read. It is not surprising, therefore, that

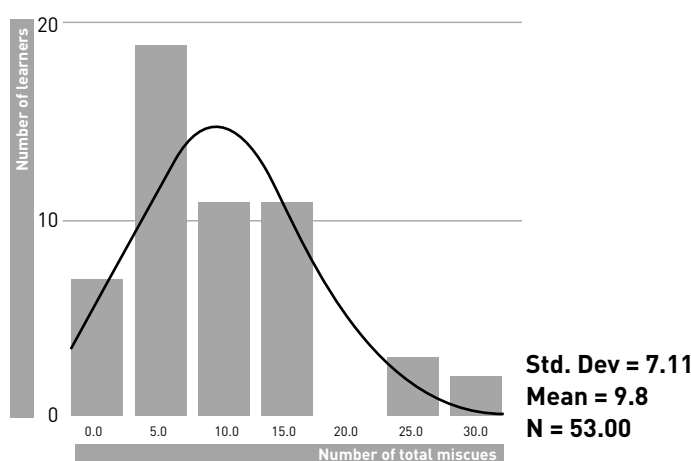
the most commonly read passage was 'Lightning', which is the most difficult passage. Table 4.2 shows the number of learners who read each passage. The passages are in order from easiest on the left to most difficult on the right.

Table 4.2: Passages read, by number of learners

Passage read	Sleepwalkers	Snow	Money	Lightning
Number of learners	11	9	13	20

Word identification in context was calculated by counting the number of miscues, or mistakes, that the learner made whilst reading a passage aloud. The miscues were summed for each learner and the distribution is displayed in Figure 4.5. Note that a low miscue score actually represents high performance since the aim is to be able to read a piece without any miscues. So in Figure 4.5, the high performers' scores are on the left.

Figure 4.5: Total miscue scores

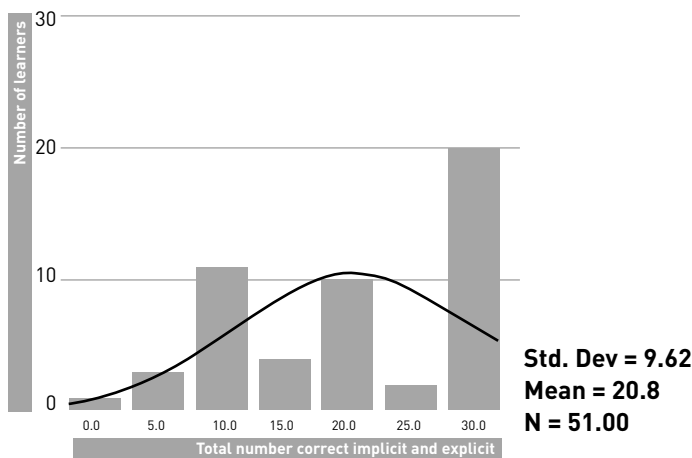


While the mean was 10, approximately half of the learners made fewer miscues than that (0–8), which is not considered a reading problem. A miscue score between 9 and 17 was considered average, suggesting that either the learner was uncomfortable with the oral reading task, or that they had problems with word identification or decoding. A score of 18 or above was considered poor. A poor score indicated that the learner was reading at frustration level (Leslie and Caldwell, 1995), suggesting that either the passage was too difficult for the learner, or that the learner had word identification or decoding problems.

4.4 Comprehension

Comprehension was assessed by asking the learners questions after they read the passage – the same passage that was used for the miscue analysis. The learners were asked eight questions, those devised for the passage they had read. The comprehension scores were weighted, as they were for word identification, so that all the learners' scores would fit on the same scale, regardless of what passage they read. The total comprehension scores ranged from 0–32 (see Appendix A for more detail). The distribution of these scores is presented in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6: Total comprehension scores



The mean score was 21, yet the scores do not fall evenly along a normal curve. Particularly notable is the large group of 20 learners who had scores averaging 30. These were the learners who read the most difficult passage and answered most if not all of the questions correctly (32 was a perfect score). These are able readers performing at Level 1 or above of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum. Also notable is the bottom tier of learners who scored 10 or less. These learners read either Passage 1 or Passage 2, which are approximately Entry Level passages and they had difficulty answering the comprehension questions. This group seems to have comprehension problems that are a cause of concern. The rest of the learners, who scored between 10 and 30, do seem to need help with comprehension, although they are further along than the bottom tier.

These total numbers are not revealing of the learners' abilities to answer implicit questions, one of the primary aims of the assessment. For this, it is necessary to look at the two types of question separately, explicit and implicit. Four of the questions on each passage were explicit questions whose answers could be found directly in the text. The other four were implicit questions where the learners had to infer the answer. These scores (again weighted according to the passage each learner read) are tallied separately and presented in Figures 4.7 and 4.8.

The mean numbers of explicit and implicit questions answered correctly were 10.6 and 10.2 respectively. These means are closer than expected, as one of the original hypotheses was that the learners might have difficulty with implicit meaning. Only six of the learners had implicit scores which were noticeably lower than their explicit scores (scores differing by more than one point). Except for one learner who had higher implicit scores than explicit scores, the remaining learners had implicit and explicit scores which were either equal, or differed by one point. Part of the problem here, of course, is the shortness of the scale – there were only four questions of each type on each passage.

Figure 4.7: Explicit comprehension scores

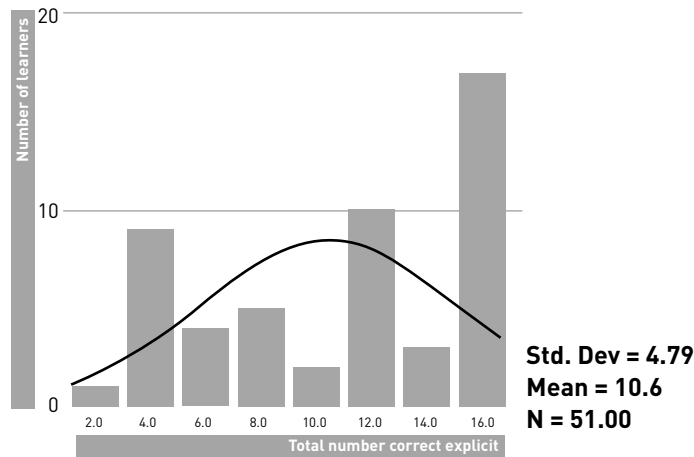
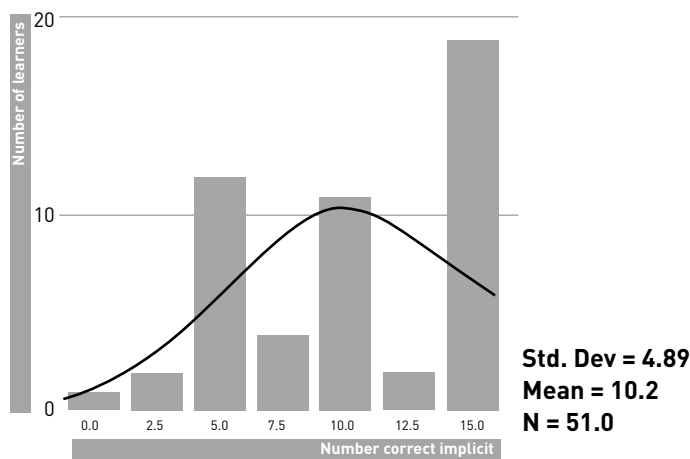


Figure 4.8: Implicit comprehension scores



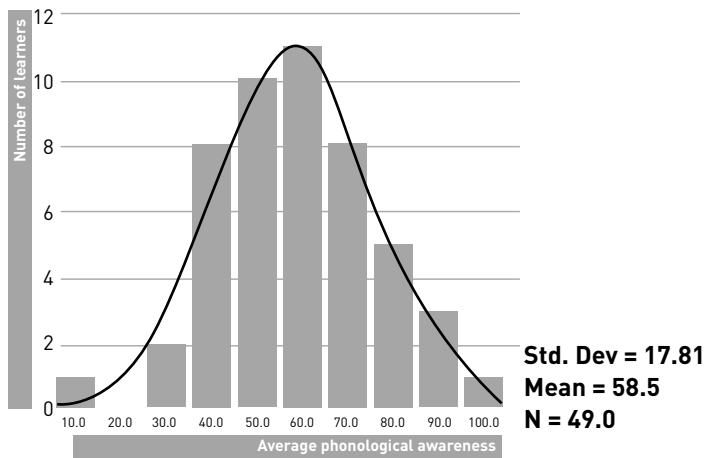
4.5 Phonological awareness

The *Phonological Awareness and Reading Profile* (PhARP) was used to test phonological awareness, decoding and spelling, and the findings are presented in this and the following two sections. The phonological awareness component of the test had the following subtests:

- 1) Blending
- 2) Isolation – Initial phonemes
- 3) Isolation – Final phonemes
- 4) Isolation – Medial phonemes
- 5) Segmentation – Syllables
- 6) Segmentation – Phonemes
- 7) Deletion – Syllables
- 8) Deletion – Phonemes

The learners were given a score for each subtest, converted to a percentage. The percentages were then averaged (this was arithmetically legitimate, since each subtest had the same number of items) and a total phonological awareness score was calculated for each learner. The distribution of these scores is presented in Figure 4.9.

Figure 4.9: Average phonological awareness scores



The mean score was 59 per cent. This is not a particularly high mean and serves as evidence in support of Kruidenier's (2002) finding that many adult beginning readers have poor phonological awareness.

It is noticeable that the phonological awareness results were the only assessment results that were distributed on (something very like) a normal curve. The other results were to one degree or another top-skewed, reflecting the skills of the sub-group of higher-ability learners tested. These phonological awareness results suggest that phonological awareness may be unrelated to ability in other areas such as comprehension. Learners who scored high on the comprehension test did not necessarily score high on the phonological awareness test. This is explored in more detail in the next chapter. Clearly, this is an area that warrants further study, particularly in the light of the many claims that phonological awareness is essential for reading success.

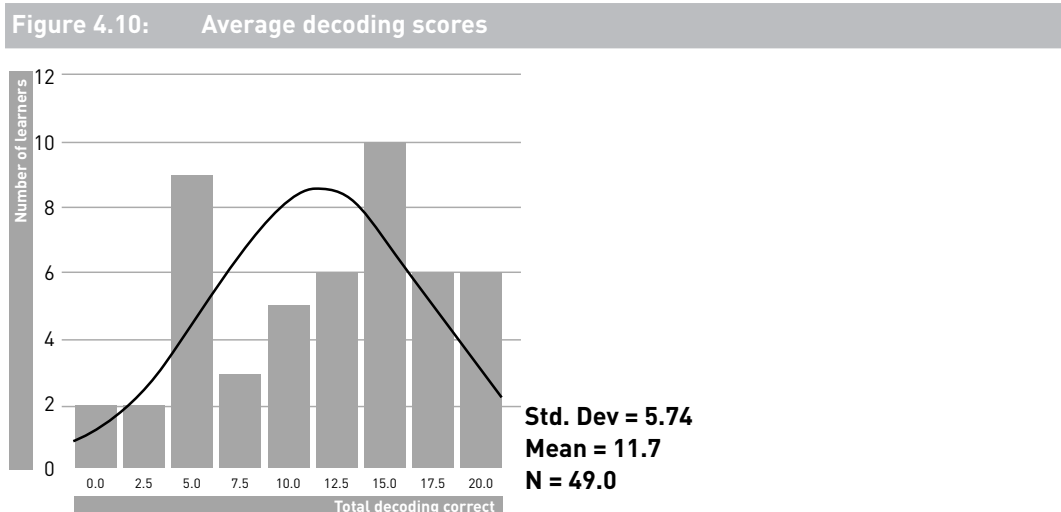
In terms of the eight phonological awareness subtests, the learners scored highest on the skills of isolation, both initial and final. These were tasks where they were asked to identify the first sound in a word, e.g. dog (/d/) or the final sound in a word, e.g. rope (/p/). Medial isolation, where they had to identify the middle sound in words and blending, where they had to say a word after the researcher isolated the sounds, e.g. /k-æ-t/ (cat), proved to be only slightly more challenging. Likewise, the average scores on the first segmentation task, syllable segmentation, were the same as those on the blending task, 60 per cent.

However, the scores were significantly lower on the second segmentation task, phoneme segmentation. For this task, the learners had to segment words by their phonemes, e.g. crust (/k-r-ʌ-s-t/). The task that created the greatest number of problems was syllable deletion. The following was a test item for this subtest: "Say *lumber*. Say it again, but don't say *lum*." Likewise, phoneme deletion was also very difficult, and the errors that the learners made were often attempts to make a real word when it was not appropriate. The researchers noted that the learners seemed reluctant to take words apart and replace them with put-together nonsense words – see the example in Reflection 4 in the annex to chapter three. This reluctance to play with words is something that Kruidenier (2002) also found, specifically that adult beginning readers perform poorly on phonological awareness tasks that require phoneme manipulation.

4.6 Decoding

The decoding component of the PhARP assessed the learners on their ability to decode 20 non-words. The learners' performance was analysed by studying their ability to decode 20 different categories of grapheme-phoneme relationships, e.g. initial consonants, initial consonant clusters, final consonant digraphs, etc. Many of the categories of grapheme-phoneme relationships were assessed by several different words and correspondingly each word tested various sub-skills: for example, the test word "wex" required the learner to identify the initial consonant, medial vowel, and final consonant cluster represented by one letter.

The test was scored in the following way: for each category of grapheme-phoneme relationships, the learner received a "+" indicating that the learner was successful, or consistently correct, in their use of that combination, or a "-" indicating that the learner was incorrect or inconsistent in their decoding of that category. A total decoding score was calculated for each learner by adding up the number of categories of grapheme-phoneme relationships that were consistently correct out of 20. Figure 4.10 presents the results.



Whilst the mean was 11.7, this does not capture the fact that the learners varied quite significantly on their ability to decode non-words. A low score on this task was below 8, and 13 of the learners had scores in this range, indicating that, for them, decoding is a serious problem. Eighteen of the learners had scores in the middle range, 8–14, scores which suggest that they could use instruction in decoding. The remaining eighteen learners had high decoding scores, 15–20. These high scores might suggest that these learners do not need any further instruction in decoding; however, for instruction purposes, decoding needs to be considered in context with the other aspects of phonology: phonological awareness and spelling. This is explored in the next chapter.

In terms of sub-skills within the decoding test, the learners were most consistent with their ability to decode initial consonants and initial consonant clusters, e.g. "bl". In addition, they did not seem to have problems with final consonants and final consonant clusters. Medial vowels were problematic, both short vowels spelt with a single letter and vowel digraphs, e.g. "oa" in "loak"³.

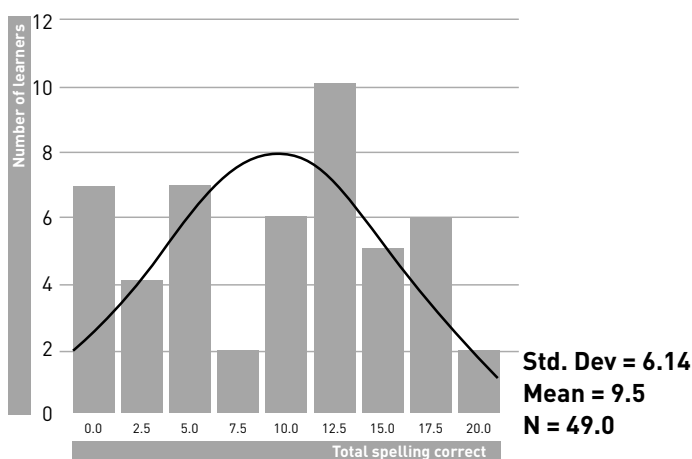
³ The term 'digraph' means two letters used to represent one phoneme. The vowel digraphs used in the Phonological Awareness and Reading Profile represent a mixture of diphthongs (loak, cait, poe) and long vowels (eath, ooch). See actual test in Appendix.

Many of the learners had difficulties decoding non-words with closed or open syllables, e.g. "expundle" where "pun" is a closed syllable, or "rable" where "ra" is an open syllable. The sub-test that posed the most problems was decoding vowel pattern syllables. An example of a word with a vowel pattern syllable was "bainly" with "bain" as the vowel pattern syllable. The low scores on this aspect could be due to both the inherent difficulty of the task and the fact that the test words in this group were at the end of the test - some of the learners were unable to finish. In addition, as observed on the phonological awareness tests, many of the learners' errors were the result of trying to make the nonsense word into a real word, e.g. reading "remeader" as "reminder".

4.7 Spelling

The last section of the PhARP was the spelling test. This too consisted of 20 items (see Appendix J for the list) and again each word was used to test various categories of phoneme-grapheme correspondences. A total spelling score was calculated for each learner by counting the number of categories of phoneme-grapheme correspondences that were consistently used correctly. There were a total of 20 categories of phoneme-grapheme correspondences. The results are presented in Figure 4.11.

Figure 4.11: Average spelling scores



The results of the spelling test were quite low, with a mean score of 9.5 out of 20. This test had the lowest average score of all areas tested. Spelling proved to be difficult for all but 10 learners who scored above 15. That spelling was a laborious task for most was evident first, by looking at the strained handwriting, and secondly, from the fact that not all of the learners completed the 20-word test because they became frustrated. As a result, they were not tested on all the categories of phoneme-grapheme correspondences. This in turn means that the mean score may not accurately represent the learners' performance. For example, if a learner only completed the first five words of the test, they were not tested on vowel digraphs, as these occur in words at the end of the test. The learner's score for vowel digraphs, therefore, was 0, and the highest score this learner could receive was 19 out of 20.

This needs to be taken into consideration in viewing the disaggregated scores. A different type of spelling test and/or scoring system may be needed for future studies. This was an interesting test, though, in that it tested the learners' knowledge of predictable relationships between phonemes and graphemes.

The spelling scores were disaggregated as they were for decoding. Performance was analysed by studying the learners' correct use of phoneme-grapheme correspondences. As might be expected, the learners were easily able to come up with the initial consonant when they attempted to spell the words. Vowel digraphs, e.g. "ou" and "oi", were the most problematic. Consonant digraphs, e.g. "ph", "ch", and "sh", were also very difficult, as were suffixes, e.g. "ture", "ous", and "tion". The results suggest that the learners had at best a tenuous hold on the predictable relationships between phonemes and graphemes. Although these findings are far from conclusive, they are interesting in that they suggest that the learners had more difficulty making the links from spoken language to written language (phonemes to graphemes), the skill which is required for spelling, than making the links from written language to spoken language (graphemes to phonemes), which is the skill required for reading. This would also be an interesting area for further study.

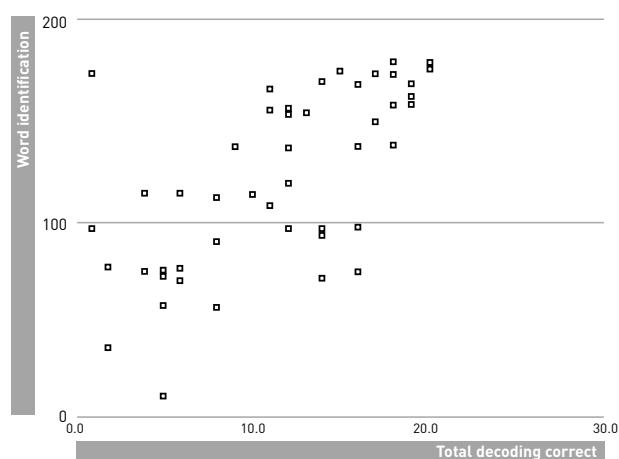
There is one final note regarding the PhARP. Some of the test items may have been confusing because they were geared towards speakers of American English. One of the deletion words, for example, was "baloney", a word that most of the learners were unfamiliar with. In addition, differences in pronunciation between American and British English may have affected some of the analyses on the sub-skills of decoding and spelling. Whilst these matters do not seem to have consistently affected the learners' scores, it is something to take into consideration in future studies.

4.8 Exploration of relationships between the subcomponents of reading

The previous analysis of the assessment data led to the development of a number of questions regarding the relationships between the different subcomponents, or skills, thought to contribute to reading achievement, e.g. word identification, phonological awareness and comprehension. For example, would a high number of miscues affect comprehension? This section presents several of these hypotheses along with some exploratory scattergraphs depicting the relationships among the variables in the current dataset. Whilst these are not conclusive, the aim is to raise questions that may guide further research in this area.

The first question was as follows: What was the relationship between ability in word identification (as measured by reading a list of real words aloud) and decoding (as measured by reading a list of nonsense words aloud)? Figure 4.12 shows a scattergraph of these two variables.

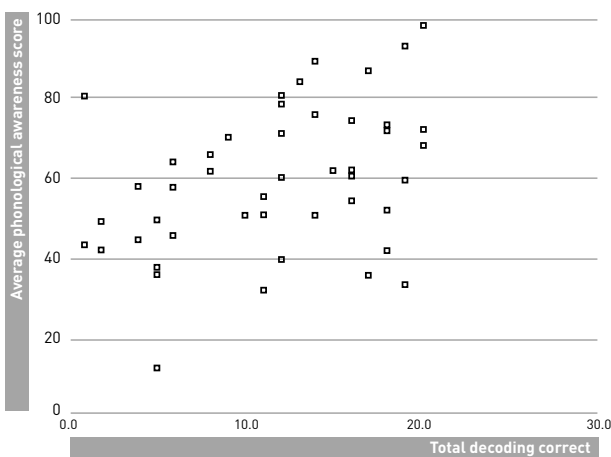
Figure 4.12: Scattergraph showing the relationship between word identification and decoding



There was a fairly strong positive correlation between the learners' performance on the two tests. It is interesting, however, that there are a few outliers whose abilities on the two dimensions do not seem to be related.

Next, the relationship between phonological awareness and decoding was examined. Would learners with good phonological awareness be better decoders than learners with poor phonological awareness? Figure 4.13 depicts the scattergraph analysis.

Figure 4.13: Scattergraph showing the relationship between phonological awareness and decoding

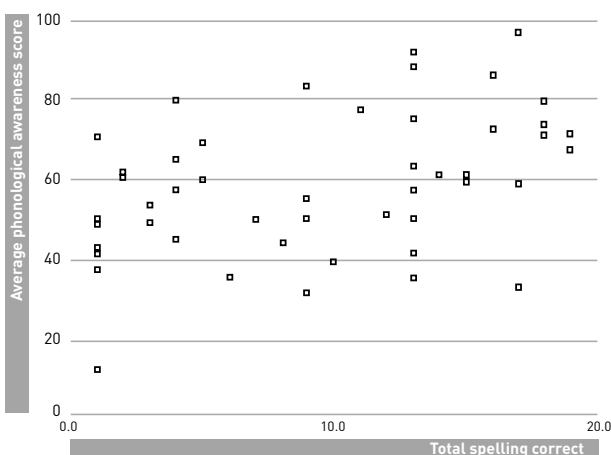


Although this scattergraph shows a slight positive relationship between phonological awareness and decoding, there are many individual learners whose scores are divergent enough to cast doubt on the correlation between the two variables. It would seem that, in some cases, learners who have high levels of phonological awareness are also skilled decoders, but in other learners this is not the case.

Would there be a correlation between phonological awareness and spelling? Figure 4.14 shows the results of that analysis.

Figure 4.14 shows a mostly random scattergraph indicating that there was no particular relationship between the two variables of phonological awareness and spelling in this group of learners. This is interesting in that it suggests that there is a significant divergence in the learners' ability to hear sounds (phonological awareness) and the ability to translate sounds into print (phoneme-grapheme correspondence).

Figure 4.14: Relationship between phonological awareness and spelling

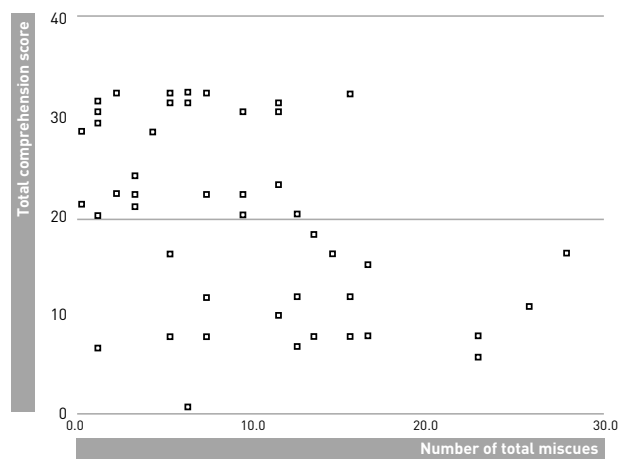


Whilst further research needs to be done on this subject, these findings may suggest that instruction in phonological awareness alone may not help spelling.

The last exploratory analysis looked at comprehension and miscues. Would a high number of miscues be associated with poor comprehension? Figure 4.15 shows the results of this exploratory analysis.

On this particular chart, high scores on comprehension and good miscue scores (a low actual number of miscues) are in the upper left quadrant and a strong relationship between the two variables would be shown by a trend from there towards the bottom right quadrant. There is no clear evidence of such a trend. Some learners had high comprehension scores but made a lot of miscue errors, whilst other learners made few miscues but had low comprehension scores. It is possible that the miscues the learners made were not the kind that affect comprehension, or that, regardless of how many miscues they made, some were still able to get the gist of the passage enough to answer the comprehension questions.

Figure 4.15: Relationship between comprehension and number of miscues



4.9 Summary

As a group, the learners assessed had difficulties in all the areas tested: word reading, miscues, comprehension, phonological awareness, decoding and spelling. The evidence is strong enough to suggest further research into the effects of instruction on each of these areas and into the relationships between these factors. However, the individual variations were so great on all of these tests that it is difficult to make generalisations for the whole group. The standard deviations were considerable and, except for phonological awareness, the scores did not fall along a normal curve. After analysing these findings, it became clear that further analysis needed to be done which examined individual learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter five:

reader profile analysis

5.1 Definition and method

Reader profiling entails, first, identifying individual learners' strengths and weaknesses across a number of skill areas thought to contribute to reading development; and secondly, matching learners with similar strengths and weaknesses in order to create groups of learners who share similar profiles. This type of analysis leads naturally to practical and theoretical implications and as such it proved an important follow-up to the analyses conducted and presented in chapter four. First, by creating groups of learners with similar needs, it becomes possible to suggest provision that would meet the specific needs of those learners. Secondly, this reader profile analysis is the first of its kind in the UK and, whilst small in scale, complements similar work done in the United States (Strucker and Davidson, 2002). In addition, this analysis may serve as a pilot project for a larger UK study.

A modified form of cluster analysis was used to group the learners on the basis of strengths and weaknesses. First, seven assessment areas were selected to represent the range of skills argued to contribute to reading achievement:

- 1) word reading;
- 2) miscues;
- 3) explicit comprehension;
- 4) implicit comprehension;
- 5) phonological awareness;
- 6) decoding; and
- 7) spelling.

Next, a way of representing the learners' strengths and weaknesses numerically was established for each area. It needed to be determined what particular score represented strength in a given area. In order to do this, findings from each category were reviewed. The reader will recall that in each area there was a large range of individual scores. The scores on word recognition, for example, ranged from 10 to 180, with a mean of 124 and a standard deviation of 45.6. In addition, the only area in which the scores fell along a normal curve was phonological awareness. In order to find common patterns among learners with such varied scores, it was necessary to collapse the scores into three subgroups that would represent strength, average ability and weakness, in other words, high, middle and low scores.

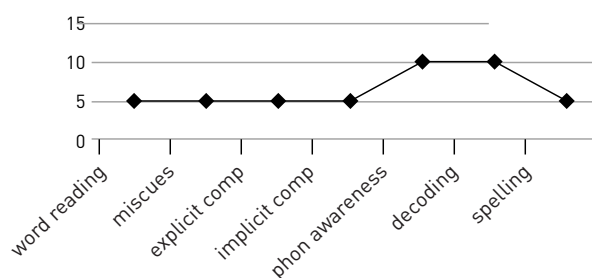
This was done by analysing the histograms for each area to identify the three subgroups. In most cases the data revealed natural cut-off places between the groups, for example, the scores were clustered together in three distinct groups. When the scores were not clustered in groups, the total score was divided by three to create the subgroups. See Table 5.1 for the corresponding scores and subgroups for each area. Because large numbers of miscues indicate poor reading and vice versa, the scores for miscues are in the opposite numerical direction from the other categories.

Table 5.1: Reader profile score clusters

Assessment Area	Possible points	High score	Middle score	Low score
Word reading	0–180	121–180	61–120	0–60
Miscues	0–30	0–8	9–17	18–30
Explicit comprehension	0–16	12–16	6–11	0–5
Implicit comprehension	0–16	12–16	6–11	0–5
Phonological awareness	0–100	71–100	40–70	0–39
Decoding	0–20	15–20	8–14	0–7
Spelling	0–20	15–20	8–14	0–7

High scores were given a point value of 15; middle scores 10; and low scores 5. Individual scores were then recoded according to this system. Each learner's converted scores were plotted on a chart which then became the learner's reading profile of strengths and weaknesses. See the following example:

Figure 5.1: Reader profile for learner A1.4



Next, the profiles were analysed by seeking and identifying patterns in the profiles for the purpose of grouping learners who had similar profiles. A total of 47 learners were included in the sample for profiling. Six of the learners were excluded from the sample because their test data were incomplete⁴. Three distinct profile groups were identified, with three subgroups.

5.2 Description of the reader profiles

This section first describes overall trends found during the profile analysis, then describes characteristics unique to each of the three main profile groups.

5.2.1 General trends

Table 5.2 shows the distribution of the individual scores in each assessment area. Note that this table is based on the total assessments given, n=53.

⁴ Cases not included: A2.7, A2.8, A2.9, A3.6, A3.13, A4.2

Table 5.2: Distribution of learners across high, middle and low scores by area

Assessment Area	High score	Middle score	Low score	Missing
Word reading	28	20	5	0
Miscues	28	18	5	1
Explicit comprehension	25	15	11	2
Implicit comprehension	21	17	13	2
Phonological awareness	12	30	7	4
Decoding	16	19	12	4
Spelling	12	18	19	4

The categories of high, middle and low are relative to the sample assessed and not the general adult population. This can be seen most clearly by looking at the word reading category, which most closely approximates the learners' actual reading level. 28 of the learners received high scores, meaning that they read word lists 7–9, which roughly correspond to Years 7–8/Adult Literacy Core Curriculum Levels 1–2 (see Appendix A for the conversion chart). Twenty of the learners received middle scores, meaning that they read word lists 4–6 (Years 3–5/Adult Literacy Core Curriculum Levels Entry 3–Level 1). Only five learners received low scores (Years 1–2/ Adult Literacy Core Curriculum Level Entry 1–2).

The miscue scores need a brief explanation. A high score represented a small number of miscues (0–8) made on the oral reading section of the assessment, a middle score 9–17 miscues, and a low score 18–30 miscues. The miscue count that was used was total miscues, which included miscues that did not substantially change the meaning of the passage. Whilst 28 of the learners had good miscue scores (a small number of miscues), it must be pointed out that the passages they read had between 180 and 200 words, and that up to eight miscues per 180/200 words could conceivably cause comprehension problems. Furthermore, 19 of the learners had poor miscue scores (a large number of miscues) suggesting that they were either poor oral readers, or had problems with decoding.

As with word reading and miscues, the comprehension scores (explicit and implicit) show that close to half of the number of learners scored in the high category. It must be noted, however, that the scoring procedure for comprehension included a weighting system, such that a learner who read the most difficult passage and answered all questions correctly received a higher score than the learner who read an easier passage and answered all questions correctly (see Appendix A). In order to receive a high score in either of the comprehension categories, the learner had to attempt Passage 4 "Lightning", to receive a middle score, the learner had to get at least half of the questions correct on Passage 2 "Snow" or attempt Passage 3 "Money", and learners who received low scores read Passage 1 "Sleepwalkers", or attempted "Snow" but got less than half of the questions correct. Therefore comprehension scores in the above table represent the distribution of passages read as well as performance on the comprehension questions.

Overall, the phonological awareness, decoding and spelling scores were considerably lower than the comprehension, miscue and word reading scores. More learners received low scores on spelling than in any other assessment area.

The simplicity of the distribution table is deceiving because when the learners' individual profiles were reviewed, they were remarkably inconsistent, exhibiting strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others. It was more usual, for example, for the learners to have a high

score in word reading, a low score in miscues, a middle score in comprehension, a high score in phonological awareness, and so on, than it was for a learner to have high, middle or low scores across all areas. The tutors interviewed individually and in focus groups were quite familiar with this phenomenon and referred to it as their learners having 'spiky profiles'. Whilst the tutors seemed to agree that it was common for dyslexics to have such profiles, in this study, both non-dyslexic and dyslexic learners exhibited spiky profiles.

Because of the spiky nature of the profiles, it is difficult to make generalisations correlating weaknesses in one area with weaknesses in another. For example, we might expect an inverse correlation between number of miscues and comprehension. An individual who makes a lot of miscues would theoretically have difficulty comprehending the text. This was not found to be the case – some learners had poor miscue scores (large numbers of miscues) but high comprehension scores, and the opposite was true for others (see Figure 4.18). Likewise, as was also shown in chapter four, there did not seem to be a relationship between comprehension and phonological awareness, as individuals could have low comprehension scores and high phonological awareness and *vice versa*. Nor was there a significant relationship between miscues and decoding.

5.2.2 Reader profile groups

The 47 complete individual reader profiles were grouped into three main profile groups, two of which had subgroups. Table 5.3 shows the characteristics of the three main groups along with the subgroups. The numbers in each group are indicated in the second column. The scores shown are average scores for each (sub)group for each category. In one case, where there were equal numbers of scores in two categories, the range of scores is indicated. The individual profiles in each (sub)group showed more variation ('spikiness') than the summary in Table 5.3 indicates, but each learner was allocated to the (sub)group with which s/he shared most characteristics. For example, learner A1.4, whose individual profile was shown in Figure 5.1, was included in subgroup 3C.

Table 5.3: Reader profile groups

Group	N	Word ident.	Miscue	Explicitcomp.	Implicitcomp.	Phon.aware.	Decoding	Spelling
1	5	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
2A	10	High	High	High	High	Mid	High	Mid
2B	3	High	Mid	High	High	High	Mid	High
3A	7	High	High	Mid	Mid	Mid	Mid	Mid
3B	10	Mid	Mid	High-Mid	Mid	Mid	Mid	Mid
3C	12	Mid	Mid	Low	Low	Mid	Low	Low

Group 1 consisted of five individuals who scored high in all categories. All these learners had identical profiles, the only group where this was the case.

The learners in Group 1 came from four different providers. An early hypothesis was that they belonged to advanced level classes, e.g. Return to Learn. This did not prove to be the case. With such high scores, why were these adults in basic skills provision? This may be part of a larger trend in adult basic skills education in the UK. For example, the *Progress in Adult Literacy* study (Brooks et al., 2001a), which included pre-testing of the reading attainment of 2100+ learners in basic skills provision, found that over half of the sample received scores placing them in Level 1 or above, suggesting that they already had reasonably developed reading skills. However, it may be that the Group 1 learners in the present study had weaker

writing skills and wished to improve them – we have no way of knowing this since writing was not assessed in this project – or may have been attending to maintain their skills and/or for social reasons.

Group 2 consisted of 13 learners who had high comprehension scores and mostly high word reading scores, but who had some problems in phonology, particularly spelling.

Group 2 is divided into two subgroups, with the majority of learners (n=10) in subgroup 2A, and just three learners in subgroup 2B. The learners in 2A had consistently high scores in word reading, miscues (representing a small number of miscue errors) and comprehension, but middle range scores in the phonology areas: phonological awareness, decoding and spelling, indicating a variety of phonological difficulties from mild to severe.

The three learners in subgroup 2B had high comprehension scores and a high word reading score, but middle miscue scores. Their phonology scores were similar to those in 2A. These miscues scores do not affect the comprehension scores and there is no clear relationship between the miscues and the phonology. It is likely that these miscues were a result of having to read aloud in a test situation and not particularly significant on their own. It is clear, however, that all the learners in Group 2 needed instruction in phonology in order to improve their spelling and decoding.

Group 3 was made up of the remaining 29 learners. These learners had spiky profiles but appeared to have weaknesses in several areas, including word reading and comprehension as well as phonology.

Group 3 was subdivided into three subgroups. All three exhibited considerable 'fraying' across the set of profiles in the phonology area, indicative of considerable individual variation in the phonological skills. Yet it was possible to differentiate the profiles on the basis of word reading and comprehension. Learners in subgroup 3A had high word reading scores and middle range comprehension scores. Subgroup 3B showed middle range scores on word reading, apart from one low-scoring outlier and comprehension scores that averaged in the middle range. Finally, learners placed in subgroup 3C had, for the most part, middle scores in word reading, but low scores in comprehension. Subgroup 3C represents the lowest tier of performance – difficulties in all or almost all areas.

As could be seen from reviewing the three subgroups, few individuals in Group 3 had identical profiles. The overwhelming characteristic of these profiles seemed to be the inconsistent nature of the learners' performance across the areas. Each learner seemed to have developed differently, with strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others. This phenomenon is not uncommon in the field of adult basic skills education. Tutors have always known about it, such that it has become part of their professional wisdom, and recent research in the United States has documented this as well (Comings, 2003). Comings and others have found, for example, that adults who score the same on comprehension tests might have vastly different sets of skills and abilities in other areas. In contrast, children who are the same age and have the same test scores often have similar sets of skills and abilities.

In addition, there is little evidence that can be gleaned from these profiles that would support consistent relationships between the skill areas. Relationships that might seem logical, such as between miscues and comprehension, or word reading and decoding, do not exist, at least not in this group of learners.

Even though the learners in Group 3 have a great amount of individual variation in their abilities, they could still be placed in the same provision, as all would benefit from instruction in all areas.

5.3 Conclusion

The reader profile analysis presented in this chapter has strengthened the conclusions on low correlations between skill areas reached at the end of chapter four, and deepened the analysis of the familiar phenomenon of 'spiky profiles'. Tentative suggestions for teaching have begun to emerge, namely that:

- There was a small subgroup of competent readers (n=5) who may have been in provision for the sake of improving the compositional aspects of their writing (about which this project gathered no data). These learners might benefit more from a pre-GCSE English course.
- There was a rather larger subgroup (n=13) who appeared to have difficulties only in the phonological area, including spelling. These learners might well benefit from close attention to this area within the context of meaningful reading and writing.
- But the majority of the learners in this study (n=29) had difficulties in several areas. Very few of them had difficulties in every area – rather this is the group with classic 'spiky profiles' – but it seems clear that, if they are to make progress, teaching must address both their areas of strength and their areas of weakness.

Chapter six: the tutors' views

6.1 Introduction

In addition to the test data analysed in the two previous chapters, the researchers sought out the tutors' perspectives on what they believed to be their learners' reading difficulties. These data were collected during the interviews with the tutors and the focus groups. This chapter presents the tutors' perspectives.

A key feature of the interviews conducted with the tutors after the observations was discussion about the learners' reading difficulties. The importance of investigating the tutors' perspectives on this aspect cannot be underestimated. First, their perspectives are grounded in years of experience in teaching and studying learners, and as a result they are quite credible. One of our researchers wrote that she

'found some tutors reluctant to commit themselves to any judgement of a learner's abilities, if they had not had the time to get to know that learner really well. It's often a case of learners continuing to demonstrate surprising strengths – and weaknesses – in their ability profile.' (See Reflection 1 in the annex to chapter 3.)

Secondly, beliefs about what learners need shape teaching philosophies, which in turn guide strategies and classroom practices. An understanding of what happens in the classroom, therefore, must be informed by an awareness of what the tutors believe to be their learners' abilities and difficulties.

6.2 Analysis

Using 'learner difficulties' as a data analysis code, the interview data were reviewed and all talk relating to learner difficulties was highlighted and compiled. This resulting compilation of data was organised around a set of themes, each describing a different difficulty, e.g. comprehension, dyslexia. Each mention of a difficulty was attributed to the tutor who identified it. This was done to indicate, first, that tutors typically identified more than one area of difficulty and secondly to give an idea of the frequency with which the tutors mentioned a particular difficulty. One category which did not come up in the interviews with tutors but was pointed out by one of the researchers was added.

6.3 The tutors' perspectives on adult learners' difficulties

The categorised list of difficulties which resulted from that analysis is shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Learners' difficulties – tutors' perspectives**1. Comprehension**

- (a) Successful at decoding, but not understanding (T2.2, T2.6, T4.4, T2.1, T5.1, T5.4)⁵
- (b) Learners do not read for meaning (T2.3)
- (c) Lack of strategies for working with an expository text (T2.3)
- (d) Unable to predict what will happen in story (T2.1)
- (e) Learners have difficulty with implicit meanings (T5.4)

2. Vocabulary/unfamiliar with the word (T2.2, T2.1, T3.4)**3. Motivation, lack of initiative for independent learning (T2.2, T2.3, T2.1)****4. Decoding (related to a lack of knowledge of alphabet and blends) (T2.3, T4.4, FG4)**

- (a) Word recognition (T4.4, T3.3)
- (b) Initial consonant blends (T4.1)
- (c) Unable to read out loud (T2.1)

5. Lack of general knowledge (T2.1)**6. Lack of fluency (T2.1)****7. Lack of confidence (T3.2, T4.7, T5.1)****8. Memory problems (T4.2, T4.7)****9. Language-processing problems**

- (a) Dyslexia (T1.1, T1.3, T1.4, T1.5, T2.6, T4.1, T5.1, T5.3, all four focus groups)
- (b) Visual problems needing coloured overlays (Researcher)

10. Specific problems related to ESOL

- (a) Difficulties with sounds (T4.3)
- (b) Not knowing the English language well enough (T5.2).

Table 6.1 presents a general picture of the types of difficulties the tutors had encountered during their teaching. As was pointed out in one of the focus groups, 'Clearly there is a huge range of problems, as there are so many different groups who need help' (FG4). The difficulties which were noted most frequently were dyslexia and the areas of comprehension, decoding, vocabulary and confidence and motivation. In order to get a clearer picture of the tutors' experiences with these difficulties, it is necessary to consider how they describe their learners' difficulties. Tutor T4.4 describes what it is like working with dyslexic learners:

"This student says he doesn't understand what I have read. That is typical of dyslexics – they can't even give the gist. They turn the page over and it's all gone. They have an inability to decode and no whole-word recognition especially with sight (non-decodable) words like night, work, want."

⁵ Each tutor was given a code. T = tutor interview, the first number indicates the provider area and the last number indicates the specific interviewee. T2.2 = Tutor interview at Site 2, interviewee number 2. FG = Focus Group.

6.4 Decoding and meaning-making

The nature of adult literacy needs is such that learners come in to classes with a range of reading difficulties and abilities. This needs to be taken into consideration when trying to understand these difficulties. As Tutor 2.3 explains, difficulties are related to ability or the stage where the learner is with their reading:

"The students' difficulties depend on their levels. Lower-level students have difficulty with letter names and sounds. This stops the flow of reading as the student is trying to decode the word so meaning is lost. The student doesn't read for meaning. Higher-level students can have difficulty with comprehension, skimming and scanning skills."

This tutor has described two different reader profiles, a reader who is just learning to read, e.g. learning to decode and a reader who can decode, but who has difficulty making meaning from text. Tutor T4.6 describes the first profile:

"Adults tend to hide their reading difficulties and find coping strategies. I find it takes a few sessions to discover what problems they are having. Many students don't know their phonic alphabet or blends, which makes it hard to decode words."

Tutors T2.2 and T2.6 describe the second profile:

"The main difficulty the tutor found with the students was with comprehension. This was at all levels. She said the students were decoding the words with no understanding. Also, there was no curiosity from the students to understand, no curiosity to discover what a word means. The tutor felt that the overall reading ability was poor, especially knowledge of vocabulary. The students might know a word in context but once the word is removed they don't understand the word or, if they did, they were unable to articulate what that word meant." (Tutor T2.2)

"At the higher end, the Level 1 students are not understanding what they read. They are taking in the words but not absorbing them, using them to form a mental picture or idea so not reading for meaning. A student like this could read a page of text and not have a clue what's been written." (Tutor T2.6)

This latter problem, identified by T2.2 and T2.6 – that learners decode, or 'take in the words', but are not reading for meaning – was mentioned by many of the tutors.

6.5 Cognitive and affective difficulties

The remaining difficulties in Table 6.1 were not specific to a certain profile but seemed to be problems for many of the learners. These can be divided into two categories: cognitive and affective. The cognitive difficulties were lack of vocabulary knowledge or of fluency and general lack of strategies. Lack of strategies seemed to refer most often to word recognition, e.g. 'when they see a long word, they can't break it down, so they just give up' (FG4). Other difficulties such as confidence and motivation can be considered as affective difficulties. The tutors interviewed believed that addressing these affective difficulties was crucial. T2.4, for example, believed that the affective issues need to be sorted out before the cognitive problems. Her words are paraphrased in the following example:

"The tutor felt that the main problem with adults learning or improving their reading was their perception of what reading is about. Adults come to the DISC [drop-in study centre] with so much 'negative baggage and misconceptions' about reading that she felt that the first thing that needed addressing was what this skill of reading was, and what the intention for reading was. She said that you would need to question the learner about how they felt about learning to read and what was involved. The tutor felt that the main difficulty in learning to read often came from the learners' misconceptions. She felt that these questions needed to be asked and addressed, initially in the assessment stage.

Some of the misconceptions she talked about related to school, e.g. reading aloud in class. The embarrassment they experienced then never leaves them. This puts people off and they worry that it will happen again. It prevents them from ever doing anything about it. Some students don't see reading everyday signs as reading, that reading is all around them. Some students say they can't read when they can. They put themselves down. Some people 'get by' on the little reading they do."

One of our peer reviewers commented as follows at this point:

"What's interesting here is the importance tutors place on the affective domain and, whilst this is certainly important, it does raise the question of whether too much emphasis is being given to this at the expense of the cognitive. Does this contribute, inadvertently, to a form of deficit thinking and low expectations of learners – a form of 'killing by kindness'? The tutors' views on vocabulary are also interesting, and perhaps reinforce my previous point. My experience is that adults with poor reading skills often have a much more highly developed oral vocabulary than their reading might indicate. Their active vocabulary often belies an extensive passive vocabulary and their reasons for not revealing this relate to issues such as social class, peer group pressure and lack of confidence."

The issue of what might be called 'learner dependence' has been taken up in the subsequent correlational study (see section 1.5). Whether such a process as 'killing by kindness' operates or not, the tutor perspectives on learning difficulties are an important source of data serving to triangulate the reading assessment data. In particular, affective difficulties were not addressed by the diagnostic testing, yet this is something that the tutors felt is incredibly important.

6.6 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter represents just a dip into the interview evidence, yet it confirms that tutors fully recognise their learners' difficulties. Indeed, they seem to see learners as having more difficulties with comprehension than the test data suggest – but we have to bear in mind that the tutors interviewed were speaking from their general experience, not just about the 53 learners we tested. What the analysis of the tutors' views adds, and could not emerge from the test data, is their emphasis on the affective, motivational side of literacy problems.

Chapter seven: findings from the observation data

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on findings from data collected from the observation logs and observation schedules. The aim of the observations was to investigate current adult literacy teaching in the UK for the purpose of being able to begin to describe what is typical. The observations and interviews were designed to answer the following questions: how are class sessions organised? What types of activity take place? How many of those activities are focused on reading instruction? What strategies do teachers use to teach reading? How common are these strategies? (Does everyone use them or only a few teachers?)

The fieldwork was structured around the following priority: to look at as many different class sessions as possible in a wide range of settings in a short period of time. The results of such a design give a general picture of what is going on in adult literacy teaching.

It can be argued that a general picture is not detailed enough to have direct implications for teaching. What can be drawn from a two-hour observation of a class session? Can we make correlations between learner progress and instruction from one observation? The answer, of course, is no. However, this was not the intention of this study. Exploratory studies such as this seek to describe problems in education and to develop hypotheses. For example, we know that adults have difficulty making progress with reading, but what are the factors that contribute to this lack of progress? Is not enough time being devoted to reading instruction? Are we using the most appropriate strategies? In order for these questions to be investigated, we need a benchmark, or a general picture of what is going on in real classrooms. This picture can be developed into a hypothesis or hypotheses that can frame future studies - studies that are designed to correlate instruction and progress and that would have direct teaching implications. The 'Effective practice in reading' study which followed this project was also designed precisely as a correlational study.

The findings presented in this section generate a detailed picture of what is going on in the adult literacy classrooms studied. These findings also raise a number of important issues in adult reading instruction which will be explored in the following chapter.

7.2 Data reduction and preparation

The researchers observed a total of 27 adult literacy sessions. In order to give a more detailed picture of the observation records, four are appended to this chapter as vignettes. After each observation, they interviewed the tutor of the session, 27 tutors in all. After conducting their observations and interviews, the fieldworkers completed an Observation Schedule and Tutor Interview Schedule for each session observed (see Appendices D and E). The purpose of these schedules was twofold:

- 1) to reduce the copious amounts of qualitative data in the form of observation logs and interview transcripts; and
- 2) to conduct a preliminary data analysis.

This analysis was conducted by the researchers, who analysed their logs and transcripts, pulling out data that pertained specifically to reading and reading instruction.

After all the schedules were completed, the data were then prepared for analysis. The analyses were achieved by organising the responses around the separate items in each schedule. For example, all the responses to Question 1 in the Observation Schedule were grouped together.

7.3 Data analysis

Data analysis was begun with a review of the research questions. The questions that pertained to this particular set of data were as follows:

- Aim: explore the extent to which practice is informed by, or supports, the understanding of the processes of teaching and learning reading reflected in the literature and theory
 - Research topic A. Identify general teaching practices
 - Research topic B. Identify teaching specifically aimed at learners' difficulties.
- These topics framed the subsequent analyses.

7.4 Analysis 1: structure and literacy activities

The first analysis was designed to address research topic A. It was decided to focus on two aspects of teaching practice, both of which help to provide a general description of the reading instruction observed. First, what was the structure of the practice, e.g. tutor addressing the whole group, one-to-one work, independent work? The second aspect was the type of reading activity.

In the observation schedules, the researchers were asked to comment on the structure of the session observed. They reported on the amount of time devoted to each of two possible structures:

- A) Tutor addressing the whole group
- B) Learners working on independent work with visits from the tutor.

Structure B was subdivided into three further structures:

- 1) Independent work with short, check-in visits from the tutor, typically lasting 1–5 minutes;
- 2) Independent work with longer tutorials from the tutor, lasting at least 15 minutes;
- 3) Independent work with constant one-to-one support from a volunteer or supplementary tutor.

Next, data on reading activities were compiled from the observation schedules. The researchers were asked to list the reading activities observed during the class sessions. These activities were compiled into a master list. A total of 154 activities were observed during the 54 hours of observations (27 observations lasting two hours each). These activities were then grouped into the following five categories:

- 1) Reading
- 2) Reading activities integrated with other language arts activities
- 3) Writing
- 4) Speaking/listening
- 5) Non-literacy.

7.5 Analysis 2: strategies for teaching reading

The second analysis was designed to address research topic B. There were two parts to this analysis. The first part was very similar to the previous analysis. During the interviews with the tutors, the researchers asked them to comment on the strategies they used for teaching reading. These comments were then compiled and grouped into four main categories:

- 1) Comprehension – text level
- 2) Comprehension – word level
- 3) Alphabetics
- 4) Other strategies used to teach reading.

In addition to using the tutor interview as a data source, it was decided to use the descriptive observational data as a second source to add validity to the data. By asking the tutors what strategies they used, their responses were indicative of what they believed they should be doing, which might not have reflected their actual practice. For this reason it was apparent that an analysis of the descriptive observation data would be important in that it would show the strategies in use. These descriptive observation data were found in both the observation logs and the compiled observation schedules.

The descriptive data were reviewed and data pertaining to the above four categories were sought and identified. In addition, an inductive analysis was performed on the data for the purpose of locating themes and patterns that would emerge from the data as opposed to being imposed on the data, as was the case when data pertaining to the four categories were located. The inductive analysis yielded a different set of categories which provided a depth and richness to the data, as well as contributing to the validity of the data.

7.6 Findings: structure

As described above, the fieldworkers observed 27 class sessions, with each session averaging two hours. Each class session was analysed in terms of the amount of time during the session in which the tutor addressed the whole group. The results are shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Proportion of time spent by tutor addressing whole group

	n	%
100% of time	2	7%
50%–70% of time	1	4%
25%–50% of time	5	19%
less than 25%	4	15%
none	15	55%

The amount of time tutors typically spent addressing a whole group was limited. During the majority of the sessions (70 per cent) the tutor spent less than 25 per cent of class time addressing the whole group. In 55 per cent of the sessions, the tutor spent no time addressing the whole group. In only two of the class sessions was the tutor observed addressing the whole class for the whole session. Typically, then, learners spent most of the time in these sessions working independently.

Learners doing independent work for some part of the class session was observed in 93 per cent of the sessions. The typical format for independent work was for the learners to be

working individually on tasks and the tutor would periodically check on them. These visits from the tutor typically lasted between one and five minutes. In addition, in 36 per cent (n=9) of the class sessions, the fieldworkers observed tutorials in which the tutor spent fifteen minutes or more with a learner. In 24 per cent (n=6) of the sessions, learners were observed to be working with one-on-one support from a volunteer or supplementary tutor.

7.7 Findings: activities

As mentioned above, 154 activities occurred during the 54 hours of observations. However, the average number of activities per two-hour class session was 5.7. Therefore, sessions typically included just a few of all the possible activities observed.

Of the 154 activities, 73 were considered reading activities. A reading activity was defined as one in which the primary focus of the activity was on reading skills, including skills involved in learning to read, e.g. word analysis and decoding, as well as skills involved in reading for a purpose, e.g. comprehension exercises. The following are examples of reading activities:

- Learner reads aloud a text containing target words, tutor makes corrections, placing them in context by repeating phrase or sentence.
- Learners are taught how to segment words into individual sounds.
- Learners practise letter sounds and letter names.
- Learners read and do comprehension exercises.
- Learners study vocabulary to help with comprehension.

The next group of activities fell into the category: *Reading activities integrated with other language arts activities*. These accounted for 25 activities. These were activities that combined skills involved in reading with other language arts activities such as writing. Examples of integrated activities are as follows:

- Word searches.
- Writing sentences with rhyming words, e.g. tin, bin.
- Dictionary work.

Writing activities accounted for 48 activities. Examples of writing activities were:

- Drafting, composing, revising.
- Filling out forms.
- Writing letters.
- Practising upper- and lower-case letters.

Speaking/Listening accounted for just three activities. These were used with ESOL learners. These activities involved listening comprehension and practice speaking.

The remaining five activities were unrelated to literacy development, e.g. numeracy or art work. The number of non-literacy activities is likely to be higher since the researchers focused their observations on literacy activities and were not asked to record class activities which are typical, e.g. class organisation and planning, or informal discussions during break time, but which are not considered literacy activities. Nonetheless, the proportions in which the various literacy activities occurred appears to be typical.

7.8 Findings: Strategies for teaching reading

The strategies observed for teaching reading were classified and are shown in Table 7.2. They

are organised around those crucial aspects of reading which have been found to be difficult for adult learners: comprehension, alphabets and fluency (see for example the Kruidenier (2002) report). All the strategies listed here were observed in the teaching sessions. These strategies occurred within the structures and activities described above. Next to each strategy is the number of the observation in which it occurred. These references to the observations are included to give the reader an idea of the frequency with which tutors used these strategies across the observations.

It must be noted that the following list is not meant to be exhaustive. Since the tutors were observed for one 2-hour session only, it is likely that their repertoire of strategies was much larger than observed. For this reason, when the tutors were interviewed they were asked specifically about what strategies they used. The interview data added another dimension to the observations, giving the researchers an idea as to whether a strategy that a tutor used was part of their permanent repertoire, or if it was just something with which they were experimenting. In addition, the interview data provided important insights into what the tutors believed about teaching reading and why they used the strategies they did.

Table 7.2: Catalogue of strategies used to teach reading

1. Comprehension	
1.1	Whole group engaged in one text (01.3, 01.6, 03.1, 03.4, 04.5, 05.4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor reads text aloud • Tutor questioning - during and after the reading • Group discussion
1.2	Individual work – one learner, one text (02.2, 02.4, 02.5, 03.2, 04.1, 04.2, 04.3, 04.4, 04.5, 04.6, 04.7, 05.3, 05.4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner reads text silently or to a tutor or volunteer • Tutor or volunteer checks for basic understanding • Learner completes written comprehension questions
1.3	Written exercises to develop comprehension related to text read <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answering questions based on reading • Comprehension exercises in published materials (04.2, 04.3, 04.6) • Comprehension exercises from tutor-designed materials (01.5, 03.4, 04.6, 04.7) • Cloze exercises (01.6, 03.2, 03.3)
1.4	Instruction on reading strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to do skimming and scanning (02.3, 04.3, 04.7, 05.4) • The importance of reading for a purpose (02.2, 04.3, 04.4) • How to read to find information (03.4, 04.3, 04.7) • How to interpret punctuation (01.6, 03.1, 04.3)
2. Vocabulary development	
2.1	Discussion of vocabulary during a reading (01.6, 02.1, 02.3, 03.3, 03.4, 04.4, 04.7, 05.2, 05.3, 05.4)
2.2	Dictionary work (02.2, 04.1, 05.3, 05.4)
2.3	Learners asked to underline words they didn't know while reading a text (02.5, 03.1, 04.4)
2.4	Tutors write vocabulary words on white board (03.4)
3. Alphabets	
3.1	Phonics – letter sound patterns and decoding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners are taught to sound out words (02.1, 04.1, 04.2, 04.7, 05.3) • Learners are taught letter-/sound correspondences (01.6, 02.5, 02.6, 03.4, 04.5, 04.7) • Tutor demonstrates whole word shapes (on flipchart), patterns within words – e.g. {oo} and {pet} with reference to graphemes rather than phonemes (02.6, 04.1, 04.5)
3.2	Phonemic awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction in blending (03.3, 04.4, 04.6) • Instruction in initial sounds (04.1, and elsewhere) • Instruction in segmenting (03.2, 04.4)
3.3	Word analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying word families (01.6, 02.5, 02.6, 03.4, 04.4, 05.3, 05.4) • Instruction in analysing words by syllables (05.4, and elsewhere) • Word identification while learner was reading a text
3.4	Word recognition/word identification <p>3.4.1 Word identification while learner was reading a text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners encouraged to use context clues to read words (01.3, and elsewhere) • Tutor corrects learner's miscues when reading orally (01.6, 03.2) • Learners taught to read words using analogy or word family strategies (01.6, 02.5, 02.6, 03.4, 04.4, 05.3, 05.4) • Learner taught to read words using phonics strategies (01.3, 01.6, 02.1, 03.2, 04.1, 04.2, 04.7, 05.3) <p>3.4.2 Word study out of context, e.g. with word lists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having learners memorise sight words (02.1) • Learners do word searches and word scrambles (04.4) • Learners practise reading words on cards (04.5)
4. Other strategies used to teach reading	
4.1	Selection of materials appropriate to learner interest (all)
4.2	Visual strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor uses pictures to help learners understand text (03.3, 04.2) • Tutor has learners study shapes of words, e.g. could, would, should are shaped like a train (04.4) • Tutor enlarges text for the learners (04.7) • Tutor has learners read using coloured overlays (05.2, 05.4)
4.3	Tactile strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor has learners use tactile individual letter shapes (01.5)
4.4	Oral strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutor models pronunciation including stress (03.4) • Tutor gives examples verbally (05.2) • Tutor models reading, for the learner to follow and imitate (03.2)

This list of strategies does seem to be representative of the type of teaching that goes on in adult literacy classes. First, a diverse group of tutors was observed who in turn taught classes to a wide variety of learners in all kinds of settings: rural areas, suburban areas, inner-city areas, further education colleges, dedicated basic skills support centres, weekly English classes and drop-in study centres, to name a few. Yet at the same time, many tutors used the same strategies. When this was the case, a strategy can be considered representative of basic skills literacy classes.

What is immediately noticeable in studying Table 7.2 is the great number of strategies that tutors use to teach reading. Approximately 55 different strategies were observed. In order that these data on strategies can be used to describe typical reading instruction it is necessary to examine these strategies in context. This will be done next using evidence from the observation logs.

7.9 Strategies used to help with comprehension

The first category of strategies is those designed to support the learners with their comprehension. Comprehension was further divided into text level and word level. Text-level comprehension refers to comprehension of cohesive texts, whereas word level refers to the understanding of vocabulary. (Interestingly, hardly any strategies were observed in this project which seemed aimed at sentence level. Many cloze exercises were seen, but usually based on whole texts and rarely on isolated sentences. The researchers also saw a lot of punctuation exercises, but these were more relevant to writing than to reading since they rarely focused on the interpretation of punctuation. However, for the subsequent correlational study the sentence-level category, with several sub-categories, was added to the classification scheme in the expectation that some sentence-level work might be seen.).

Comprehension at the text level was taught in two distinct ways. First, as part of a whole-group lesson where everyone in the group read the same piece of text. This occurred infrequently; the reader is reminded that whole-group lessons occurred in fewer than half of the sessions observed. However, the tutors who did use whole-group reading lessons used two strategies to foster comprehension. One was reading the text aloud. This seemed to enable the readers to focus on the meaning of the passage as opposed to the decoding of the text. The second strategy was questioning, either to check comprehension or to encourage interpretation. Most of the questioning occurred during the reading, either to check for understanding or to clarify a point that the tutor wanted to make. Consider the following example of questioning during the reading:

Example 1: questioning to check comprehension (01.6)

Text: Jim was not well. Sam had to get him to the vet. It was like this: on Sunday Sam and Jim went to the park. The day was hot.

Tutor: Have you understood it all? What's it about?

Learner: About a dog.

Tutor: How do you know? There are clues. What are they? I'll read it fast again (reads a short section). What does this tell us? It shows it's an animal. You wouldn't take a budgie to the park. Or a cat, really. It must be a dog – it's all it could be.

This example was from a lesson for a group of beginning readers. It raises interesting questions about teacher questioning techniques and is quite a contrast to the following

example. The tutor focuses on comprehension of implicit meaning. She directs the readers back to the text and has them look for evidence that "Jim" is indeed a dog – but does most of the work for them.

A different type of group comprehension lesson was one that was conducted after a reading. In this next example, with a more advanced group of readers, the learners were assigned a reading and a series of written comprehension tasks (example 2) to complete independently. Then the tutor brought the group together for a discussion (example 3).

Example 2: comprehension Lesson "Turkey Time" (03.1)

With Christmas coming it's time to talk turkey – organic turkey. Many of us choose this magnificent bird, with its wonderful taste, as the main part of our Christmas dinner. What is the history behind the tradition of eating turkey at Christmas?

It was in the early to mid 16th century that the turkey first arrived in England from America. In the early part of the 1600s King James I introduced it to his court at Christmas, but it was many years before poorer people changed from their favoured goose. Now of course turkey is a firm favourite.

The two oldest breeds introduced from America are the Mexican Black, which has evolved into the Norfolk Black, and the larger Bronze, now the Norfolk Bronze. Both are renowned for their succulence and flavour.

Two organic farms are at K1 near B..... and at K2 near S..... inshire. At K1 you can see them for yourself, if you follow the trail that's been created at the farm. "The turkeys are very special," explains Andrew. "They are kept in small groups and live among the trees. They have a wonderful life. They are not tampered with at all. They are completely free range and as a result they are more contented."

At K2 Pat says customers return every year.

"I have one customer in York who comes twice a year, at Christmas and Easter to pick up her turkeys. Being organic means they have to be reared on organic land and they have to spend two thirds of their lives outside. They take seven months to grow.

The difference in flavour between an intensively reared turkey and an organic one is immense. It's all due to how they are reared, the age of the bird, what they are fed on and how they are prepared.

Tasks:

1. *Underline any words that are difficult. Find out what they say or mean.*
2. *Use different colours to highlight the sections in the story that tell you:*
 - When the turkey was first eaten in England*
 - Where two organic farms operate*
 - What sort of lives turkeys have*
 - What "organic" means*
 - Where turkeys first came from*
3. *Use two different colours to highlight the parts of the story that give information and those parts that might be persuading you to have turkey this Christmas.*

Example 3: discussion of Turkey Time Comprehension Exercise (O3.1)

Tutor: We'll go through the text paragraph by paragraph. Remember, fact equals measurable truth. Which paragraph tells you when turkey first arrived?

Learner: Paragraph 2

Question and Answers continued until all answers for Section 2 had been covered.

The learners volunteered the answers and appeared to be getting it right.⁶

Tutor: The last task is the most difficult, information v. persuasion. What words in paragraph 1 are persuasive?

Learner A⁷: wonderful, tasty, organic, magnificent

The discussion continues, learners volunteer answers, disagreement allowed and accepted.

Genuine puzzle expressed: agree both information and persuasion can be found in the same place. Learner B and Learner C are quiet, Learner D disagrees about information v. persuasion and holds his own with reasoning:

Learner A: The number of customers who come back every year is measurable, but also a selling point.

Tutor: All happy?

In some ways, this lesson was typical of lessons we observed. First, it is an example of tutor-designed material. The reading was from a local newspaper and had been adapted into a comprehension exercise by the teacher. Secondly, the observation findings suggest that comprehension was most often taught by having learners read and complete written exercises. Most of this was done by learners working independently. Thirdly, most of the questions that learners are asked involve comprehension of explicit meaning, as they do in the second task the learners had to do in example 2.

However, this lesson was also unusual in that the learners were asked to do a task that asked them to comprehend the implicit meaning in the text, which was interpreting which parts of the text were designed to persuade the reader. (See the third task in example 2.) This was a challenging task for the learners and it seemed as if they had difficulty doing this on their own. The discussion that was encouraged about this task was notable in that the learners were empowered to argue and discuss at a level which seemed to facilitate their comprehension development.

As indicated in the earlier section on activities, the majority of the instruction was designed so that learners worked independently at their own level. Comprehension was addressed, for the most part, by having learners read short texts and answer written questions. While the learners worked, the tutor would check in with them to make sure they were reading for the purpose of making meaning, as it was often noted by the tutors that their learners will go through the motions of decoding a text without actually attending to its meaning.

Once it was established that the learners were reading for this purpose, the tutors or volunteers would ask questions for the purpose of checking if they were getting the gist of the reading. These exchanges between the tutor and learner were often very brief as the tutors had to split their time between all the learners in the class.

⁶ These examples are from the observation logs. The logs are a combination of direct quotes and narrative description. The narrative description is in italics.

⁷ When there is more than one student in an example, they are noted with a letter, e.g. Student A. These are only used within the example, so Student A in example O3.1 is not the same Student A in example O4.1.

The next example is from a class of six learners, four of whom were ESOL learners. The class was putting together a display presentation, much like one would find at a travel agency depicting different countries to visit and information about each country. Each learner was working on a different country. During the session, the learners were reading texts related to their independent contribution to the project. The tutor and one volunteer circulated around the room helping the learners.

Example 4: comprehension checks during independent work (04.3)

Tutor: (Turning to Learner A, looking at his worksheet) What is this about?

Learner A: [The local] County

Tutor: How did you know?

Learner A: It's got the [county symbol] on it.

That was the extent of the exchange; the purpose seemed to be to check if the learner was understanding what he was reading. Half an hour later, the tutor checked in with the same learner. This time he was reading a book.

Example 5: comprehension checks during independent reading (04.3)

Turning to Learner A, the tutor asks what his book is about, "[X] Park – The Story of a Stadium"

Tutor: Have a look at the book, then there are some questions. First have a look at the pictures, and then we'll have a look at the questions.

Learner A begins reading to himself, looking at the photographs and talking to the tutor.

It is unclear whether the learner actually knew what the book was about because the tutor quickly asked him to scan the pictures before he could really respond. Later it was determined that this tutor often has the lower-level and ESOL learners use pictures to help with their comprehension of the text.

In addition to teaching comprehension by having the learners write answers to questions from either tutor-made materials or published materials, many of the tutors observed use cloze exercises as well.

Some tutors gave explicit instruction on reading strategies for the purpose of enabling the learners to improve their comprehension while reading. Instruction was observed on the following: skimming and scanning, reading for a purpose, reading to find information, using context and using punctuation while reading. The following is an example of a tutor teaching strategies in a one-to-one session with a learner.

Example 6: explicit instruction on strategies (04.7)

He (the tutor) goes back to P. (learner) to ask her about the reading. "Had you heard of Renoir? No? Interesting? Very good artist apparently. Not that I know much about it – I was always playing football!!" P. laughs. He asks her how she found the information, prompting, "Did you look at every word?", and explains scanning. She [P.] says she wants to buy a dictionary and asks about a thesaurus. He asks her how she is going to answer the remaining questions and suggests a possible strategy may be to close read it the first time and then skim it to find information. Another strategy may be to read the questions first and then underline points in the text as she comes to them. He tells her his feeling is that she could do level 2 and surprises her by saying that the piece of writing she has been reading is higher than level 2 and that it is a confidence issue.

In this example, the tutor tailored instruction on strategies not only for the particular learner, but for the specific task she was working on. The tutor reminded the learner of the purpose of the reading, to find information and then he reviewed the strategy of scanning. Next he suggested two different strategies that P. could use to answer the comprehension questions (do a close read and then go back and skim the text for the answers; read the questions first and then hunt through the text for the answers). Then he did what the majority of the tutors did during the sessions, which was to boost the learner's confidence, by telling her that she had been reading a difficult text.

7.10 Strategies designed to develop vocabulary

It was readily apparent from the observations that the tutors considered vocabulary development to be very important. Some form of vocabulary instruction was observed in half the sessions observed. In all these sessions, the learners were studying words in context, either as part of a reading they were doing or in the context of their own lives. Although there were instances where the tutor would discuss the meanings of certain words, while reading a text aloud for example, the majority of the vocabulary curriculum was learner-generated. A common practice was having learners underline words that they didn't know while reading a text. A tutor would say to a learner, for example: "Read and underline words you find difficult – use your dictionary but I'll come back to you and discuss them" (05.1). Or the underlining activity would be part of a series of tasks that the learners did with a text – see example 2 above and example 7 below:

Example 7: underlining task (05.3)

Directions to learner:

1. Read the following passage carefully
2. Underline any words you are not sure of and look up the meaning in the dictionary
3. Answer questions at the end. Use a separate sheet of paper and make sure you write in sentences.

With assignments such as these, the learners selected the words that they wanted to study. Except for a few other cases, where the learners had a fixed list of words to look up in the dictionary after doing a reading, as part of some published materials for example, the vocabulary study was designed to be relevant to the learners' lives. In the next example (no.8) of an advanced ESOL class, the tutor used artefacts, instructions and recipes to develop vocabulary in written and spoken language.

Example 8: vocabulary development using multiple strategies (03.4)

- 10.50 Tutor had shopping bag with items in; she had photocopied the instructions and asked students to identify which item fitted with which instruction. She had also explained imperative verbs, and made a list on the whiteboard. Students reading silently; identifying imperative verbs.
- 11.00 Tutor asks which verbs they have found; students volunteer. Student asks what 'expire' means. Q&A follows, and discussion about meanings of several words. Tutor asks for meaning of 'dilute'.
- 11.12 Discussion on meaning of 'soothes'; student 4 suggests 'analgesic'!
Discuss 'persist', 'sprinkle'.....look for words in the text.
- 11.15 Students persist with task...'divide the dough'...'greased'...discussion about 'greased'...margarine, butter.
- 11.20 Further explanation of and discussion on new words...'blend', knead', 'pre-heat', 're-knead'.

- 11.26 Tutor asks for word which means 'wait for bread to get big'.
- 11.30 Tutor recaps, asks if ready to move on. Introduces new sheet with recipe on, and questions. Gives task: scan for measuring words/ expressions, and write in box. Silent individual work.

The tutor integrated several different strategies to develop vocabulary knowledge. The emphasis, however, seemed to be on reading vocabulary. First she brought in artefacts which related to texts. This seemed to activate the learners' vocabulary knowledge and helped them to identify the names of those objects in the text. If they were unfamiliar with the name of the object, then they learned that name. If they knew the name of the object, but did not know how to read it, they could scan the text looking for that particular word. Then the tutor engaged the learners in discussion about a number of different words, all of which pertained to the texts at hand. It is apparent from this example that in practice there can be an overlap between vocabulary study and word identification.

7.11 Strategies focusing on alphabets

The next group of strategies used to teach reading can be grouped under the category of alphabets. For the purpose of analysis an attempt was made to subdivide this category into the following: phonics instruction, phonemic awareness instruction, word analysis and word identification (see above). However the tutors tended not to distinguish between those categories. Phonics was used as an umbrella category referring to any or all of the following:

- instruction in grapheme/phoneme correspondences (referred to by the tutors as letter/sound correspondences)
- instruction in phonemic awareness, e.g. segmenting
- instruction in phonic sub-skills, e.g. blending
- instruction on word analysis, e.g. studying word families and breaking words into onset and rime and/or syllables.

Strategies for word identification, i.e. what to do when confronted with an unfamiliar word, were generally referred to as teaching learners to "sound out words" or "decode", and this included a range of prompts, for example, dividing the word into onset and rime. Furthermore, in practice the tutors tended to use a range of these alphabetic strategies over the course of a session or within one episode with a learner, as will be illustrated in the following examples.

Two types of strategy were used to teach grapheme/phoneme correspondences for the handful of non-readers in the sessions. The first strategy, and seemingly most typical, was to teach grapheme/phoneme correspondences in the context of a text. Consider the following example:

Example 9: grapheme/phoneme correspondences (04.7)

The tutor sits down by N, who has a book – 'Big Rigs'. They talk about the pictures. He starts to read aloud. He reads 'big rigs' as 'American rigs'.

Tutor: Does America begin with /b/? Bamerica?

N.: Big

Here, the tutor prompted the learner to re-read and pay attention to the initial grapheme and phoneme. Once the tutor pointed out that the first phoneme in 'big' is /b/, the learner was able to make the correction.

The second strategy used to teach grapheme/phoneme correspondences was to use published phonics materials. These were typically worksheets copied from materials designed for children. It was explained during the focus groups that there are few phonics materials available for adults. Excerpts from worksheets used in O2.5 and O2.4 follow:

Example 10: phonics worksheets

O2.5:

"Write st on the dotted line and then read the word"

__op __ep __ar

O4.2:

"Copy the -ug ending to finish these rhyming words" j__ (picture of a jug), m__ (picture of a mug)

In the next example, the tutor used several different strategies to build phonemic awareness. The lesson seems impromptu, originating from a problem that the learner (B.), who is an ESOL learner from Bosnia, had while reading.

Example 11: phonemic awareness instruction (O4.4)

The tutor turns back to B. and asks him to read from the beginning. He gets stuck on /th/. The tutor takes a pen and writes 'sh', which he knows and 'ch', which he does not. She says 'chips' and he repeats it and says /ch/. She starts to write words and asks him to tell her the sounds of the individual letters - /p/-/a/-/n/, /p/-/e/-/n/ and /p/-/e/-/t/. She tells him that if he can say the sounds, he may be able to think of the word. She then writes 'the' and he says 'these'. She demonstrates /th/ soft and hard [= voiced /ð/ and voiceless /θ/], then writes 'th-i-n-k', which she sounds out several times until he says 'think'. She says it is called decoding and asks him if he does it when he is reading. She says it is a good way to learn new words.

In this brief exchange, the tutor reviewed the graphemes <sh> and <th> and introduced a new one, <ch>, with their corresponding phonemes. She then did a blending exercise with him, teaching him how to combine the phonemes to make words, e.g. /p/-/a/-/n/. It was apparent that B. was still struggling with the different phonemes that can be represented by the grapheme <th> so the tutor spent some more time with that, combining that item with another blending exercise. She calls what she is doing with him "decoding."

These strategies to teaching phonemic awareness and grapheme/phoneme correspondences were used with non-readers. Word analysis, on the other hand, was used with more accomplished readers – readers who had an awareness of grapheme/phoneme correspondences but who needed to learn word recognition strategies. Learners were taught to break words into syllables, for example, by participating in an activity where they cut up words and re-ordered them.

Instruction on word families was often observed, e.g. night, light and tight. Learners were asked, for example, to look for the orthographic patterns in words. For instance, one tutor (O5.3) said that she teaches her learners to investigate letter patterns in the following way: the learners use an alphabet slide to discover how many words have the <ough> pattern and link those with a similar sound together (this, despite there being no more than about 30 words in English which contain the <ough> pattern). With more advanced learners the tutors designed activities which involved studying prefixes and suffixes. In the next example, the tutor discusses first general learning strategies and then word analysis strategies with learner P.

Example 12: word analysis strategies (04.2)

The tutor moves to P., tells him he used the key words correctly, and explains they are the words he should use in everyday writing. She gives him some sheets about memory, explains that one side of the brain works on pictures and the other on words. They talk about breaking down into rhymes and that memory can be helped by associating words with pictures. He says that in the past he has been told about different ways of remembering, including looking at the words upside down. The tutor demonstrates breaking words into syllables – 'marr-i-ed', 'temp-er-a-ture'. She sets him a task: to change letters to change the sound, e.g. 'ee' to 'ea'.

This explanation is a typical example of an exchange between tutor and learner about learning strategies, such as how the brain works and how to increase memory. The tutors often attempted to explain the rationale behind their teaching strategies on an adult-to-adult level. In addition, tutors and learners often examined past learning practices. After listening to the learner talk about his past experience, the tutor introduces a new strategy, breaking words into syllables and changing graphemes to change sounds – but the examples are poor, since in normal pronunciation *married* has two syllables and *temperature* three, and <ee> and <ea> sometimes represent the same sound.

While the majority of the instruction in alphabets consisted of brief mini-lessons like the ones in Examples 9 and 11, which lasted five minutes at the most, in other sessions the alphabets instruction seemed more of a feature. The following is an example of a tutor working with a group of four beginning readers. She spends the first part of this example listening to individual learners read and doing mini-lessons. The second part shows a more extensive phonics lesson in the form of a card game.

Example 13: integrated alphabetic strategies (04.5)

- 8.20 *The tutor listens to L. – he reads 'mobiles' for 'models' and also cannot get the ordinal numbers. She helps him by saying, "first, second, third ". In 'magic' she explains the /j/ sound of the 'g'.*
- 8.25 *The tutor hears A. read - he has now finished his worksheet. As he finishes each sentence, she repeats it slowly, pointing to each word. Again, he is stuck on the ordinal numbers. At the end she explains the new game and sits with him while he joins in.*
- 8.30 *L. deals the cards and they each in turn read the word on their card, then they all write it down. (maid, rain, tail, main, pain, mail, waist, plain, sail). When someone reads 'main', the tutor reminds them of the 'magic e' - 'man/mane' – and compares the spelling of 'main'. At the end some of them pass their cards to A. so that he can copy.*
- 8.40 *The tutor suggests they finish with another game of cards. L. suggests strip poker, but the tutor says, "Not this week, it's too cold!" (It is snowing outside.) The volunteer explains that the game is like 'snap' but to match vowel sounds. L. guesses 'sheen' for 'beach', despite following the volunteer's 'bean' (with the same initial sound) and L. guesses 'pen' for 'pea'.*

The first card activity was an example of a phonics activity that the tutors described as a word families activity, i.e. all the words shared the grapheme <ai> pronounced /eɪ/. This is potentially productive, especially for /eɪn/ spelt <ain>, which is probably more frequent (unusually) than the corresponding split digraph ('magic e') pattern <ane> – the learners may therefore have been confused by the teacher's reference to 'man/mane'. Word families could

also be groups of words that share a phoneme, though not necessarily a grapheme, e.g. *light, right, bite*. The second card game seemed to focus on the phonology, although it is difficult to get the gist from this example. Learner L. connected words with initial sounds as opposed to medial vowel sounds. Humour ran throughout these lessons, as can be seen from the strip poker comment.

7.12 Strategies for word identification

The last set of strategies in this section is word identification strategies designed to help learners read unfamiliar words. Except for the few examples of phonics games and worksheets, the alphabetic strategies had one main purpose – word identification. All the above strategies were used at one time or another for this purpose. Because of this there is significant overlap between word identification and the other alphabetic strategies, as can be seen in the catalogue in Table 7.2.

Occasionally a tutor would demonstrate a word identification strategy to the larger group, but in most cases these strategies were used in one-to-one situations. When a learner struggled with a word, the tutor might use any of the following strategies: give the reader the word, encourage the reader to use context clues, or prompt the reader using a variety of phonics strategies. See the following example of a lesson in which the learners were taking turns reading aloud. The learners' miscues are underlined with the actual text in parentheses. (N.B.: This is the same lesson as in example 1.)

Example 14: tutor prompting learners as they tackle unfamiliar words (01.6)

N. reading: He was a dustman. One day he was hit by a car. He broke his leg. His leg did not mend well. Now he has a lip (limp)

Tutor: No, not a lip. Look at the mp.

N: limp.

Tutor: Good!

(next learner reads accurately)

J reading: A lot of cars were on the road (roads)

Tutor: A lot of cars were on the roads.

(next learner reads accurately)

N reading: The driver did not see Sam and Jim. He parked (braked).

Tutor: Look at it again. He's driving a car

N: braked

Tutor: Good, Why did he brake?

Text: The driver did not see Sam and Jim. He braked. He braked too late. He hit Jim.

N: for traffic lights

J: for crossing the road

Tutor: who is crossing the road? She explains the scenario to them.

The tutor used several different strategies in response to the learners' miscues. With the first miscue, she prompted the reader to look at the consonant cluster <mp> in the text. When the next learner read 'road' instead of 'roads', the tutor re-read the sentence without commenting. For the third miscue, the tutor prompted the reader to think about what would make sense: "Look at it again. He's driving a car". So 'parked' would not make sense. Then the tutor checked on the learners' comprehension, "Why did he brake?" The responses the learners gave indicated that they had not understood the text. The tutor explained the text to

them and then the reading continued. It is interesting that the learners were not able to understand the explicit meaning in the text. Probably they were wrapped up in the cognitive demands of both decoding and reading aloud.

This strategy of teaching word recognition strategies in response to miscues was frequently observed, although most of this occurred during one-to-one reading sessions:

Example 15: whole word prompting (04.1)

The tutor pulls up a chair and sits next to C. She asks him the title of his book and he starts to read aloud. At the end of each page she asks him what it was about. When he hesitates, she allows him two or three attempts before she gives him the word, repeating the phrase and putting it in context. She asks questions ("So what does she think is going on?", "What did she ask him?")

She emphasises comprehension, reminds him at one point of the last book he read and what happened. She recaps words he didn't know.

The tutor's primary emphasis was on comprehension, and her prompting strategy of giving the reader the word and using the context reflected this.

In addition to prompting learners when they read, a number of tutors had their learners study lists of sight words, in particular the Dolch list which includes words such as *said, about, been, by*, and social sight vocabulary which includes words such as *on, off, salt, sugar, tea*. It was commonly believed by the tutors that the beginning readers needed to commit these words to memory. In addition sight words are part of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum. Learners studied them on cards or underlined them in texts in order to learn them.

Another approach to word study was to have the learners choose words that they wanted to study. One tutor in particular gave her learners notepads so they could "list words they need to learn to read in their everyday lives" (T4.6). In the following example, an ESOL learner (S.) has, with the help of the tutor, compiled a list of 'wh' words. The tutor goes over the list with her and gives her two activities designed to help her learn how to recognise these words.

Example 16: sight word study (L4.4)

The tutor takes out from a file a list of words that S. wanted to learn. The tutor reads them out, "when, then, them, they, there" and says that they may be difficult as they are very similar so she may add some different ones but that they will concentrate on one each week. The tutor explains to S. that the first word will be 'when'. She has devised a wordsearch containing the word 'when' but warns her that there are other words beginning with 'wh'. There is also a small piece of reading material with lots of 'when' included.

There were other examples of learners studying themed lists of words, e.g. words commonly used in forms, or words that are commonly found in travel brochures.

7.13 Other strategies

The last category of strategies used to teach reading falls under the heading of "other", see Table 7.2. Some of the tutors observed seemed to have a keen awareness of different learning styles, e.g. visual or kinaesthetic and employed strategies designed to support these. Visual learners were directed to the shapes of words, e.g. *bed* looks like a bed and *could* and *would*

look like train engines (04.4). Tutors often drew learners' attention to the pictures of texts to help with their comprehension (03.3, 04.2). Some tutors enlarged the text for learners because this seemed to help them read (04.7). Other tutors had learners read using coloured overlays (05.2, 05.4). Kinaesthetic learners were given tactile alphabet shapes (05.1) and in the next example learner D. worked with a volunteer on a manipulation activity.

Example 17: tactile phonics activity (01.4)

D. and a volunteer now have a box of alphabet letters out (lower case). Consonants are blue, vowels are red. They're working on 'oo' - poor, floor, flood, blood. The volunteer sets the words up, then takes them away, leaving 'oo'. The volunteer calls out the words and D. arranges the letters around the vowels. The volunteer asks, "What do you hear at the end of the word 'floor'?" - to try and help D. use the 'r'.

At the end this example shows the tutor, through incomplete phonetic knowledge, misleading herself and probably also the learner in an attempt to be helpful. In almost all British accents, there is no further sound to be heard at the end of words like *poor*, *floor* beyond the <oo> - or more accurately, the letters <oor> form one grapheme representing either the same sound as <or> in *for* or, in *poor*, possibly (though this phoneme is rapidly disappearing) the sound written <ewer> in *brewer*. It would probably have been more helpful to deal with <oor> separately from <oo>. The tutor could then have pointed out that the pronunciation 'uh' for <oo> in *flood*, *blood* is highly unusual - the two most frequent pronunciations for <oo> are those in *mood* and *look* (in their southern English versions).

The last strategy to be discussed, but the one that perhaps most typifies the reading instruction observed, was the selection and/or design of materials appropriate to the learners' interests. Whilst this strategy might seem obvious, this was incredibly important to the tutors, all of whom took great care to choose materials that had relevance to learners' lives. In most cases the tutors had to design their own materials, which they did from brochures, newspapers, recipes and magazines, on topics that the learners showed interest in, e.g. horse racing, football matches, cooking, interior design, etc. Whilst many of the above strategies are typical in primary school reading classrooms, this practice of custom-designing materials for the learners is not something often seen in primary school, yet represents a common practice in adult literacy provision.

7.14 Summary

Whilst teaching was observed that targeted some of the identified reading difficulties, intensive, focused reading instruction did not comprise a significant amount of the teaching that occurred during the sessions.

In particular, rather little work at sentence level or on comprehension beyond the literal was seen.

Much of the phonics teaching was done on the spur of the moment, and there were instances of tutors' inadequate grasp of phonetics leading to inaccurate phonics teaching.

A greater amount of time was devoted to teaching reading during sessions where the teacher worked with a group of similar ability, compared to sessions where the learners worked on reading activities independently and received occasional feedback from their tutors.

In many ways, dividing teaching practices up into structure, activities and strategies seems very artificial. In actual classrooms, these blend together. Tutors use many different strategies, often at the same time, switching rapidly from activity to activity. See the following description of one tutor's practice:

Example 18: variety of strategies employed (O4.7)

O4.7: He varies the reading material; discusses vocabulary, giving alternative meanings for difficult words; he enlarged a long piece of closely-written text; uses reading comprehension, both in verbal questioning and in written questions; he used phonics – sounding out reading words and spellings, particularly for the entry-level readers, and talked about the differences in what we say and how we spell.

However, these divisions do have a place, and in this study they have served to enable a description of a range of practices and of structures, all of which can be considered typical instruction. The extent to which these practices help learners make further progress will be explored in the next chapter.

Annexes to chapter seven

Annex 7.1: vignettes

Vignette 1: the drop-in study centre (DISC)

Context

- Course description: weekly drop-in for Basic Skills English
- One tutor
- Three female learners: two working at Level 1 (one aged 15); one working at Level Entry 2
- Time of session: 10:00–12:00
- Venue: Site 2A, drop-in centre at an inner-city FE College

Content and teaching

- Session begins. The tutor approaches the table where two students, S. (Entry 2) and J. (Level 1) are seated at the table already working. The tutor sits next to S. and asks for her homework on 'Reckless Driving', a reading with comprehension questions. The tutor proceeds to mark her sentences and then immediately spots her problem with capital letters and asks about her exercise sheet on recognising capital letters.
- As S. is looking for her sheet on capital letters, the tutor sits next to J., who had been working on her reading skills. She was working from a textbook called 'Real Life Reading Skills' based on a series of comprehension exercises based on real-life situations, with readings and multiple-choice questions. J. said it helped her reading having to answer the questions. The tutor replied that it made a difference knowing purpose of reading.
- A new student, L., enters and sits on the table next to J. L., 15, is reading a book of short stories called 'Contemporary Stories'. She has been writing short reviews of the stories and sits and reads through her work.
- The tutor leaves J. and she sits next to L. and asks her what she has noticed about the pieces in 'Contemporary Stories'. The tutor tries to engage L. in a discussion about the pieces, asking her questions about the style of writing, the way it was written and subject matter. L. was unresponsive. The tutor asks student if she feels she is becoming more critical. No response so the tutor changed word 'critical' for 'fussy' and changes the way she phrased the question. Student replies with an unassertive 'yeah'. The tutor asks J. to read through her reviews and select two for her to read.
- The tutor goes to S. and says she will be with her as she goes to fetch a comprehension exercise comprehension for J. She takes it to J. and asks her to read through it twice, think about text and answer questions. J. nods that she understands.
- The tutor goes to sit by S. (S. has been sitting waiting for the tutor for 25 minutes. This is the nature of the DISC at times.) The tutor works with S. on forming sentences with capitals and punctuation.
- The tutor checks to see if J. is okay. Asks if there are any words that she doesn't understand. The tutor comments on the comprehension, summing up in one sentence what it is about, i.e. women are responsible for how men turn out.
- The tutor returns to L. and asks for the reviews she has chosen. She reads them quietly. The tutor asks many questions about the piece and receives nods in reply, no eye contact from L. The tutor is not disheartened and continues to tell her they are all extracts from longer pieces. The tutor said it was possibly hard to read as it was written as one paragraph and very long sentences, very little punctuation.

- The tutor spots that S. has finished her sentence and interrupts her work with L. to tell S. to go through the other sentences and check for capital errors.
- The tutor returns to read L.'s second review 'Naomi'. All L. tells her, verbally, is that she didn't like it. The tutor asks her if reading all these descriptive stories and different styles of writing has helped her own writing. L. nods. The tutor tells L. that she is going to give her an RSA paper (English Language paper equivalent to lower level GCSE) with essay titles on. The tutor tells L. to use her knowledge gained on commenting on other people to use in her own writing. Tells her to write a story with a beginning, middle and end and to make a plan. The tutor shows L. the RSA paper and goes through each of the five titles reading and explaining them. Tells her it is very important to think and plan. Asks if this is okay. L. nods.
- Session continues for another hour with S. continuing to work on capitals, punctuation and some spelling. J. works on reading a comprehension exercise with the tutor explaining what the word 'bias' means, in addition to showing her how to look up the word in the dictionary. The tutor also tries to engage J. in a discussion about the reading, seeming to be trying to make J. think about what she's read. L. works on writing an essay. The tutor encourages her to use a thesaurus to come up with a better word for "got".
- As the session ends, the tutor asks J. if she wants a handout on essay writing. Gives her 'How To Write Informative Essays'. J. is happy with that and leaves. S. asks for homework. The tutor gives her two comprehension exercises from the Reading Tasks Entry 2 drawer.

Teaching strategies

- The tutor's style was one based on all drop-ins which is individual explanation with each individual working alone on their own programme of work.
- The tutor always tried to stimulate a discussion and an interest in the work, by questioning the student and trying to be enthusiastic about the work. She constantly checked for understanding changing and adapting her sentences, simplifying them in case the student did not understand and adding her own personal anecdotes to bring the text to life. Although the students were not very verbal it wasn't because they weren't interested. They were obviously attentive and taking in what she had said.
- The tutor used a pen and paper to illustrate what she was saying, e.g. to show the "drop the *e* before *ing*" rule. She also used a highlighter or different coloured pens to make things stand out.
- She discussed the vocabulary and ensured a dictionary and a thesaurus were handy for the students. The tutor encouraged the use of a dictionary and would not simply tell a student the meaning of the word, teaching them to use the dictionary and become independent learners. Two of the students had no trouble reading the texts given, i.e. they could read the words, but the tutor was teaching them to use the text they had read to form opinions of their own. In other words, there was a purpose to what they had read.

Vignette 2: high ratio of tutors to learners

Context

- Course description: Literacy Entry 1 and 2
- Two tutors, plus three assistant tutors and two volunteer tutors
- Eight learners (four females and four males)
- Time of session: 10:00–12:00
- Venue: Site 1C, dedicated Basics Skills Centre

Content and teaching

- Session begins informally. No general greetings/welcome. Everyone gets work out and makes

a start. Staff and students ensconced together at the 5 tables in the room. A murmur of activity.

- Student E. has been reading from a book, 'The coldest place on Earth' and is writing out the answers to the comprehension questions. Tutor 1 is sitting with him to help.
- Tutor 2 sits with G. They are going over a list of spellings from the previous week.
- Asst. tutor 1, with K., is working on his individual learning plan.
- D., with Asst. tutor 2, is working on spelling of pattern <pet> e.g. repetition, competition, highlighting the 'pet' in coloured highlighter.
- J., with Asst. tutor 3, is reading aloud from a book 'The mysterious illness'. Both tutor and student have a finger on the line, the student reads slowly along the line.
- Volunteer tutor 1 is helping T. They, like many of the other tutor/student pairs, are working on the Spelling Programme. They're doing short vowels.
- S. is working on her own with creative writing on the topic, 'shopping' (*Volunteer tutor 1 is also assigned to S.*)
- J. has brought a library book he's just taken out from his local library – a cowboy book. J. turns the pages of the library book but Tutor 1 asks him to continue with 'The mysterious illness' for now. She writes out, on the spot, some questions on the text for him to do. Asst. tutor 3, meanwhile, looks at the new book with J. and discusses it with him.
- D. and Asst. tutor 2 now have a box of alphabet letters out (lower case). Consonants are blue, vowels are red. They're working on 'oo' – poor, floor, flood, blood. Asst. tutor 2 sets the words up, then takes them away, leaving 'oo'. Asst. tutor 2 calls out the words and D. arranges the letters round the vowels. Asst. tutor 2 asks, 'What do you hear at the end of the word 'floor'?' – to try and help D. to use the 'r'.
- Tutor 2 is now sitting with S. S. has a spider chart in front of her. Tutor 2 tells me that they're working on starting off her writing; that she is encouraging S. just to write and not to bother about spellings.
- Tutor 1 tells me that they're going to do a group class session now. Not all students find upper and lower case a problem. So it's difficult to do a common session.
- Tutor 2: (Standing in front of flip chart) This is a very quick look at upper and lower case letters. Does anyone know what I mean?... Also called 'capital letters'.... Give me an example of a capital letter. (Students call out suggestions, she doesn't target individuals.) The opposite of upper is lower. Do you know why they're called that? (She explains the origin in old-fashioned printing and says she had to look it up herself to find out.) It's your fact to take away for the day! When you see signs – Tutor 1's going to show you – (Tutor 1 holds up large cards with STOP TOILET DOCTOR CLOSED, etc.) Why do you put them in capital letters?
 - To see them clearly.
 - Tutor 2: any other reasons?
 - Other students: they stand out..... It's important.
 - Tutor 2: a lot of signs are in capitals. They have more regular shapes. Capitals are almost always the same. Writing can be different.
 - Tutor 1: we've all got different handwriting. Before printing, all signs were handwritten – in capitals it's easier to read.
 - Tutor 1: when we give you a worksheet it's not usually in capitals. (She demonstrates by writing up the word SPORT) There's nothing to notice about this word, about its shape to help you remember. (She writes up 'sport' in lower case, drawing the shape round it to show how the 'p' and 't' stick down and up. The same is done with AEROPLANE and 'aeroplane' to show how the 'p' and 'l' make wings across it.)
 - Tutor 2: here's my favourite - BED and bed. (Draws shape round bed.) Some people get their 'b' and 'd' mixed up. See how you can draw a bed shape – a posh bed!
 - A worksheet is now handed out and the students are asked to work through this – changing

upper to lower and vice versa - on their own. Tutor 1 and Tutor 2 move round the tables.

- Tutors 1 and 2 go over the assignment with the whole group.
- After this, the students go back to independent work with their respective tutor helpers.
- The session ends with the tutors filling out the Individual Learning Plans and the assistant and volunteer tutors debrief with the main tutors about the learners' progress.

Teaching strategies

- Apart from brief period at front with flipchart, the tutors moved round constantly to sit with individuals.
- Emphasis on being relevant to individual needs and interests.
- Collaborative style, students encouraged to understand their learning styles and make choices of materials.
- Tutors demonstrated whole word shapes (on flipchart); the tutor points out patterns within words - e.g. <oo>, <pet> - with reference to graphemes rather than phonemes.
- Tutors listened to students read aloud; backed up reading with comprehension exercises.
- Tutors used tactile strategies- individual letter shapes.

Vignette 3: ESOL group literacy lesson

Context

- Course description: ESOL, daily class
- One tutor
- Five learners
- Time of session: 10:30-13:00
- Venue: Site 3B, FE college

Content and teaching

- Session begins. Tutor had shopping bag with items in; she had photocopied the instructions and asked learners to identify which item fitted which instruction. She had also explained imperative verbs and made a list on the whiteboard. Learners were reading silently; identifying imperative verbs.
- Tutor asks which verbs they have found; learners volunteer. Learner asks what 'expire' means. Q&A follows, and discussion about meanings of several words. Tutor asks for meaning of 'dilute'.
- Learners persist with task....'divide the dough'...'greased'....discussion about 'greased'...margarine, butter.
- Tutor asks for word which means 'wait for bread to get big'.
- Tutor recaps, asks if ready to move on. Introduces new sheet with recipe on, and questions. Gives task: scan for measuring words/expressions, and write in box. Silent individual work.
- Tutor addresses whole group and goes over previous task, explaining where necessary. Checks learners understand rest of task - they read out questions as requested.
- Silent individual work - learners read and fill in answers.
- Learner 4 has misunderstood task and written out whole instruction instead of just verbs, so tutor advises to underline. Tutor shows 'butterfly cakes' box, elicits different words for 'nice'.
- Whole group lesson. Tutor gives learners instructions to follow, e.g. stand up, stand by door, then mimes instructions for following recipe. Learners enjoy this and join in explaining as well as miming processes.
- Session ends with learners filling in their record books from an example on the board; tutor makes deliberate mistakes and learners correct. Tutor offers cake mix to whoever can bake the cakes.

Teaching strategies

- Whole group explanation with examples given (imperative verbs); learners then attempted tasks, i.e. identifying verbs in text; also guessing what the item was, given only a photocopy of its instructions. Possible 10–15 minutes allowed for silent reading of texts.
- Tutor then went over answers with group, checking understanding, as well as what learners could themselves explain, correcting where necessary.
- Learners were reading for meaning, in order to identify item, sometimes silently, sometimes aloud. Perhaps 80 per cent of session focused on reading of some sort. All spelling linked to a reading/pronunciation task.
- High quality tuition; excellent pace and rapport; high level of motivation and interest; learner-centred; focus on everyday tasks (learners had requested work on food instructions as most of them were living alone.)

Vignette 4: Dyslexia class

Context

- Course description: weekly class in basic skills, including ESOL. The learners in this class had either been diagnosed, or were suspected to be, dyslexic.
- One tutor, trained in dyslexia training
- learners (one African female, one Bosnian male, one English Afro-Caribbean male)
- Time of session: 13:30–15:30
- Venue: Site 4F, Urban community centre

Content and teaching

- Session begins with S. arriving. She tells the tutor that she has not been since before Christmas because her son has been seriously ill.
- The tutor explains to her that because she has missed several weeks, she will have to do new paperwork for her, a new learner agreement. The tutor fills this in, asking S. for details. She takes out from a file a list of words that S. wanted to learn. She reads them out, "when, then, them, they, there", and says that they may be difficult as they are very similar so she may add some different ones but that they will concentrate on one each week. She also reminds her that she asked for cheque-writing and suggests that they start with a sheet with numbers 1 to 100 written out as words. S. says that this is because she does not always want to use a cash machine.
- B. arrives and sits down. The tutor is explaining to S. that the first word will be 'when'. She has devised a word search containing the word 'when' but warns her that there are other words beginning with 'wh'. There is also a small piece of reading material with lots of 'when' included.
- The tutor goes to B. and reminds him that they were working on 'could, should, would' last week. She asks him if there is anything in particular he would like to work on. He has difficulty replying and she prompts, "Maybe a job?" He says, "Not yet" and she asks if he has any hobbies. She explains that she wants to give him reading that he wants to read about. He says magazines, hesitates and then says football. She asks him for his favourite team and he tells her Manchester United. She asks if he watches any type of TV programmes – he says, "BBC – don't know." She prompts, "Cars?" and he replies, "I practise in my country driving cars." (His spoken English seems very limited and it is not clear how much he understands.)
- The tutor takes out a worksheet 'could, should, would', turns it face down and asks if he can remember from last week how to spell them. B. thinks and looks out of the window. She says, "Can you remember, the words are shaped like a train?" No response for 30 seconds. She says, "It doesn't matter if you've forgotten, just say." He writes a word. She says, "That's right. Now can you remember 'should'? ... What makes the sound 'sh'?"

- S. interrupts, "c, h". The tutor says, "/sh/, s, h – now practise them."
- The tutor turns to S., who has circled the word 'when' in the word search. She reads the text aloud. "Way – sounds like day" and "know – without the 'k' sound." S. hesitates once on 'when', the tutor points to the top of the page, and she says, "Can't remember." She says 'ing' for 'night' and 'out' for 'now' – The tutor says, "Look at the first letter."
- The tutor then talks about the uses of 'when', saying it can come in the middle of a sentence, gives examples, and it can also be a question. She has three written questions and asks S. to read them. When she hesitates, the tutor tells her to guess or to look at the first letter or first sound. She then gives her a revision sheet from last time and explains that 'don't' and 'won't' mean 'do not' and 'will not'. She tells her to have a go and she will come back.
- The tutor turns back to B. and asks him to read from the beginning. He gets stuck on 'th'. The tutor takes a pen and writes 'sh', which he knows and 'ch', which he does not. She says 'chips' and he repeats it and says 'ch'. She starts to write words and asks him to tell her the sounds of the individual letters – 'p-a-n', 'p-e-n' and 'p-e-t'. She tells him that if he can say the sounds, he may be able to think of the word. She then writes 'the' and he says 'these'. She demonstrates 'th' soft and hard (voiced and voiceless), then writes 'th-i-n-k', which she sounds out several times until he says 'think'. She says it is called decoding and asks him if he does it when he is reading. She says it is a good way to learn some words, that it does not always work in English, but sometimes. She tries it with 'please' and says an enthusiastic "Well done" when he gets it right.
- The tutor turns back to S., who has used 'don't' and 'won't' randomly. The tutor explains "Will goes with won't, do goes with don't – have a go." She replies, "Can't follow it." The tutor explains again. "Do you understand?" "Can't follow it." She explains that it is just for practice and says to have a go.
- Back to B., the tutor tells him always to look at the first letter, to give him a clue. She explains that dawn means early morning and sounds out 'th-i-n-k' again. He reads 'could, should' and 'would' right every time and she says "very good" each time. He gets stuck on 'money'. The tutor re-reads the sentence and says "guess", twice. S. interrupts with "money". The tutor talks about re-reading the sentence and guessing words he doesn't know.
- The third student, C. comes in, says, "Been working" and sits down. The tutor gets out a laptop computer and a worksheet, which she explains is multiple-choice. She loads a CD Rom 'Driving Theory Mock Test'. She tells him to read the questions carefully.
- The tutor says to B. and S., "Perhaps we could do some joint reading next week. For today I've got separate things." She gives him a story, gives him a short précis and tells him to read it.
- She goes back to S., who is still getting 'don't' and 'won't' wrong, and tells her to make the first letter the same. She hears her read the passage.
- C. is working on the computer.
- The tutor is hearing B. read the story. She questions for understanding frequently and says "very good" whenever he gets his 'ould' words right. "This is the train word". He says, "could". She demonstrates 'ee' in 'keep'. She corrects him when he is wrong and he repeats the word. Sometimes she repeats the phrase, occasionally the whole sentence. At the end she says, "I know it's hard for you to know what it means as well as what it says. Read two sentences, then think about what it means, otherwise you'll forget it all." She revises the 'ee' sound, then gives him a cloze passage
- The tutor starts to write a new learning plan for S. She says they will revise what she did last term with word searches, underlining text and reading text containing the words. She says they will look at words with the 'ai' sound as well as her chosen words and that she will bring a selection of books for her to choose from.
- S. tries a dictation – The tutor shows her the word when she does not know. She spells 'want' as 'whant', 'off' as 'of'. The tutor tells her to remember the 'hat' in 'what'.
- C.'s test finishes. He ends the program and begins again. S. leaves.

- The tutor tells B. the missing words in the cloze passage and he writes them in. She hears him read the entire passage. He has most difficulty with initial blends. "Do you understand all the words in here? Will you tell me when you don't understand? You must tell me so I can tell you." She says that next week she will get some reading on cars or Manchester United and something more general, and they will keep practising 'could, should and would' and 'ai' sounds. He leaves.
- The tutor goes to C. – "How are you doing?" She looks at his worksheet, tells him to close down the program and says that next week he should tell her when he has finished so they can look at the answers. She explains that it gives him practice but does not actually teach him. She suggests half and half next week – learning and practising, because she knows he likes the CD Rom. C. leaves to go back to work. Session ends.

Teaching strategies (from interview with tutor)

- The tutor explained that she is trained to work with dyslexic students and that most of her teaching methods are related to that.
- The tutor worked with each student individually in turn. She uses large amounts of one-to-one tuition and varies the teaching methods frequently – no more than ten or fifteen minutes at a time. She explains every activity and checks for understanding before leaving them, giving examples as part of the explanation.
- She concentrates on a limited number of target words each session and uses word searches, cloze exercises and text passages for writing and reading.
- She models word shapes for illustration purposes (see the 'shape of a train' example) and spends a large amount of time using phonics methods, splitting words into sounds, and so on. She discusses vocabulary, checking for meaning at frequent intervals, and encourages students to look for ways of remembering.

Annex 7.2: review of phonics materials for adults

Yvonne Spare

Introduction

A subsidiary aim of the study was to review published phonics materials that met two criteria:

- 1) the materials were specifically designed for adult learners; and
- 2) the materials were readily available in the UK.

A thorough search for such materials was conducted in the following manner. First, a list of UK Education Publishers was compiled and each was contacted by phone or email as appropriate. If the publisher had appropriate materials, these were purchased. Secondly, the researchers contributed to the search by noting which phonics materials were being used during observations. Thirdly, tutors' opinions on the teaching of phonics and materials were gathered during the focus groups.

It is interesting to note, first of all, that only three of some 30 publishers contacted had materials that met the criteria: abc Production, New Readers Press and Brown and Brown. Furthermore, many of the publishers who did not have phonics materials expressed hesitation about the idea of phonics materials, arguing that teaching phonics to adults was not appropriate. It was apparent that they were taking a clear standpoint on the recent phonics debate. Other publishers claimed that they did not have phonics materials, but that they did have spelling materials. During the focus group interviews it became clear that, in some adult literacy circles, phonics was taught through spelling and that at times 'spelling' was used as a euphemism for phonics. Were the publishers marketing phonics materials as spelling materials so as not to be considered to be taking a controversial stand on the phonics debate? In order to account for this possibility and to investigate the conventional teaching wisdom that phonics skills and spelling skills are closely related, some spelling materials were included in the review.

The tutors also found themselves in the middle of the phonics debate and there were arguments and opinions on both sides. Some claimed that the current emphasis in the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum on teaching phonics represents a dangerous pendulum shift back towards an era responsible for a considerable amount of reading failure. On the other hand, there were those tutors who claimed that phonics did have a place in the adult curriculum, but that it needed to be carefully taught. A common complaint by some tutors was that phonics in current adult literacy classrooms was not taught properly, mainly because tutors relied on inadequate materials and independent work, as opposed to careful planning of instruction and working closely with the learners. There was also some evidence in the observations that phonics was taught inaccurately because tutors did not have adequate subject knowledge. Still others felt that since phonics was in the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, they were obliged to teach it, regardless of their beliefs on the subject.

How did the tutors who did teach phonics cope with the apparent lack of materials? First, tutors created their own materials, often adapting materials designed for children. Secondly, there was a small amount of anecdotal evidence, which came out in the focus groups, that some tutors are using programmes designed for children. At the time this report was being written, we were aware that one of these programmes, THRASS, was offering workshops on how to use THRASS in adult literacy classes. Thirdly, the tutors used the materials included in this review.

Five sets of materials from the three publishers mentioned above are described and critiqued in the following pages.

1. BLENDS

Publishers: abc Production

Format

This is described on the cover as 30 Photocopiable Worksheets for Adult Learners. It is an A4 ring-bound pack of worksheets with a bright yellow laminated front and back cover.

It claims to provide supplementary material for students working on their literacy skills, knowledge and understanding.

The first 29 worksheets are set out in an identical way, each based on a different consonant blend⁸, with four exercises as follows:

The student is asked to:

- add the blend to each of a set of letter groups and then to read the words they have made (16 words)
- look at a series of pictures and to write the correct word from the ones above in a box below the picture (4 pictures)
- read a set of clues and write the answer in a box (6 clues)
- choose three of the words from the top of the page to make sentences of their own.

The pages progress from blends of two letters to three, beginning with 'th' and ending with 'spl'.

Page 30 is a diagnostic test.

There is an introductory section addressed to the tutor and one to the learner, explaining the purposes of the worksheets, and a contents page for tutors with guide levels for each worksheet enabling them to map students' progress against the national standards.

The pictures are black and white, simple representations of objects, clip-art style and the whole book is produced using comic-sans font.

Objectives

The objectives are stated as being to meet the individual needs and interests of learners working at Entry Level 1 in the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, on word and sentence focus, specifically Reading Rw/E1 and Writing Ws/E1 and Ww/E1.

Specifically these are that:

"Adults should be taught to decode simple, regular words – understand that written words correspond to their spoken equivalents and are composed of letters in combinations, to represent spoken sounds.

Adults should be taught to construct a simple sentence.

Adults should be taught to use basic sound-symbol association to help spelling - understand

⁸ The term 'blend' is used in these materials to cover both consonant digraphs (pairs of adjacent letters jointly representing a single phoneme), e.g. <th> in thin, and consonant clusters in which each letter represents a separate phoneme, e.g. <tr> in train. Since this usage is widespread it is followed here.

that sounds are associated with letters and strings of letters - understand that there are more sounds (phonemes) in English than letters of the alphabet, so some sounds are represented by combinations of letters.

The objectives in *Blends* are spelled out in simpler terms to the learners: "We have used blends of letters which you need to learn and use in your writing. They will help you sound out a lot of new words."

The learners are also invited to use the checklist and to add comments of their own, encouraging independent learning.

The test at the end of the pack is designed to be used either as a diagnostic tool to identify areas of weakness or as an assessment to demonstrate progress.

Critique

Blends is an attractive, accessible pack of worksheets, of the type produced by many tutors for their own use, but put together in a bound collection. It does not have the appearance of a professionally produced textbook. The use of the comic-sans font and the clip-art illustrations will make it familiar to both tutors and students and the layout of each page is simple and well-spaced. The introductions to the tutor and students have a personal touch - 'good luck' and signed by the authors.

The exercises are repetitive and consist of commonly known words, mostly of one syllable, with some of two syllables, appropriate for the Entry Level adult students it is targeting.

The worksheets could be used to teach and practise one blend per session or no more than a small group of related sounds, for example 'th', 'sh', 'ch'. They could be practised one week and revised the next and students could go back and revisit earlier ones until they have built up to the whole pack.

Its format as a photocopiable set would make it easy to produce variations and extensions for further practice.

This pack was seized upon eagerly by tutors to whom the reviewer showed it and should prove popular as a useful additional resource, providing exercises mapped to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum.

2 FLIPPING PHONICS

(Publishers: New Readers Press)

Format

A pocket-sized book, ring-bound across the top edge, with flip-over sheets and a glossy, colourful and modern cover. It has a fold-out section at the back to allow it to stand upright on a table.

It has two instruction pages, one for the learner and one for the tutor. Thereafter, each page is split vertically into three sections, forming three stacks of cards, which can be flipped independently over the binder. Each card has printed on it one letter or blend, the first stack being consonants, the second vowels and the third mostly consonants, so that various combinations can be made. There are some blank cards at the back for learners to write their own.

Objectives

The stated objectives are to teach students how to read words quicker and more easily and to make learning to read fun. It explains to the learner that each letter stands for one or more sounds and that the sounds put together will make a word. It introduces the concept of word patterns by suggesting that flipping the first stack will give other words with the same pattern that rhyme and that by changing the vowel stack they can make new patterns, pointing out that not all the combinations they make will be real words.

To the tutor, the instructions explain that the purpose of the book is to introduce basic phonics and that it shows the letter combinations appearing most commonly in English words. It suggests that tutors should make sure that learners are familiar with the terms *consonant* and *vowel* and emphasises the need to explain that some of the words produced will be 'non-words', although these may actually be syllables in longer real words.

The common word patterns it illustrates are:

- vowel and consonant
- vowel, consonant and silent 'e'
- vowel, consonant and consonant blend or digraph
- vowel, vowel and consonant.

Critique

This material would be good for beginner readers or for those with specific learning difficulties like dyslexia. It could also prove useful for ESOL students, who sometimes have difficulty distinguishing vowel sounds.

It has a simple print style, blue on glossy white card and allows the making of words from one letter to five letters (blend, vowel, blend combinations).

It enables repetition, revision and the opportunity to make new combinations of one's own. The flip-over format means it could be used to make word games for small groups of learners working together, maybe identifying non-words and real words or playing snap-type games with vowels or consonant sounds. It can be used to support or extend a learner's own work or to illustrate examples.

It is appropriate for any age group and for students with any accent. It emphasises that learning can be fun and is therefore particularly appropriate for those students at Entry Level or with fears about returning to learning.

One small proviso – and this is pointed out in the tutor instructions – the cards may produce difficult letter combinations or offensive words, which the tutor may want to skip, although this may prove difficult if a student is left to work alone with the pack.

3. SPELLING CROSSWORDS

(Publishers: abc Production)

Format

This is described on the cover as '30 Photocopiable Worksheets for Adult Learners'. It is an A4 ring-bound pack of worksheets with a bright pink laminated front and back cover.

It claims to provide supplementary material for students working on their literacy skills, knowledge and understanding.

It consists of 30 crossword puzzles, each providing practice for the learning of a spelling rule or strategy, ranging from simple short vowel words and phonological patterns to more difficult spellings. The contents page lists each crossword, some based on one phonological rule, e.g.

- short vowel words
- blends
- silent 'e' words
- homophones.

Others are based on spelling rules, e.g.

- regular past tenses
- the 'i before e' rule
- the doubling rule
- plurals of nouns ending in <y>.

They are arranged into sets, mapped to an Adult Literacy Core Curriculum reference. The answers are given at the end of the pack.

There is an introductory section addressed to the tutor and one to the learner explaining the purpose of the crosswords and a contents page for tutors with guide levels for each crossword enabling them to map students' achievements against the national standards.

This is one of a set of packs, similar in format to the *Blends* pack.

Objectives

The objectives are stated as being to meet the individual needs and interests of learners working on Writing, word focus, through the range from Entry 1 to Level 2. These include knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and phonological patterns and spelling rules. It is suggested that students should have practised the appropriate spelling rule and then use the crosswords to reinforce their knowledge and to help them memorise particular words or patterns.

Critique

The actual worksheets do not teach any phonological awareness, but are used purely for practice, using a variety of techniques.

The crosswords are an enjoyable and fun way to practise spellings and many adults enjoy doing them. The fact that each is based on a particular spelling type helps to reinforce the learning. There is a full range, from simple short vowel words to irregular spellings and difficult words.

Like the *Blends* pack, it is an attractive and useful pack, which a tutor can use to allow a student to work alone as practice or revision material.

Like the *Blends* pack, it was enthusiastically seized upon by tutors as being useful new material.

4. EVERYDAY SPELLING

(Publishers: Brown and Brown)

Format

A small (A5 sized) softback book of 64 pages. It is described as a workbook which provides practice in spelling many of the most useful everyday words, covering the basics of spelling – key words, b/d confusion, vowels, silent letters and alphabetical order – and including some punctuation.

Objectives and methods

The majority of the exercises are made up of a range of methods, mostly based on letter and word recognition.

However the section on vowels does use phonics-based techniques for some of the exercises:

- Distinguishing long and short vowel sounds (*page 26*)
- Asking students to change a vowel in the middle of a word to make a new word, e.g. *pan, pen, pin, pun* (*page 29*)
- Asking for words which rhyme with other words (*page 32*).

Critique

The book does not attempt to teach skills, only to practise them. However some of the exercises, in particular the ones listed above, do lend themselves to being worked through with a tutor – they need to be read aloud to check that the changing vowel sounds have been correctly understood, for example.

The materials are entirely appropriate for adults, as are the skills and tasks being practised. The book is very commonly used by tutors and has been popular for many years. (It was first published in 1989 and this is the third edition.) It is considered a standard item in many tutors' basic set of materials.

The exercises are not mapped to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum.

5. SPELLING WORKSHEETS

(Publishers: Brown and Brown)

Format

An A4-sized softback book of photocopy masters for use with adult students, for fairly competent readers to use independently or less fluent readers with help from a tutor. The worksheets are intended to be used as additional practice on particular spelling points and not to be used for students to work through from beginning to end.

The cover states the title and the description '*Photocopy Masters*', with a background of the names of the exercises included in the workbook, for example, '*Homophones – Fill in the*

blanks – Prefixes – Suffixes – Homonyms' and so on, giving it the appearance of a book for tutors to use, rather than for students.

Objectives

The majority of the exercises use word recognition techniques. Even the section on homophones requires students to recognise the correct spelling for a particular context, e.g. *grate/great, male/mail*.

There is a 16-page section entitled '*Sounds and their spelling*', which helps the student sound out the spelling, e.g. "igh sounds like I or eye", but then goes on to emphasise word recognition in the practice exercise: "Words with this spelling pattern are often confused with words which sound the same but have a different spelling and meaning."

At the end of the book there are two exercises which concentrate on sounds:

- Write a few sentences ... spelling the words exactly as you would say them in your own accent (*page 44*)
- Write down other names which begin with the same sound as yours (*page 45*).

Critique

The materials are adult appropriate and up-to-date, using everyday words in the context of home, work, leisure, sport and travel, with some humour. Its appearance, however, is slightly dated in terms of font style and lack of white space.

This is another Brown and Brown publication and has been in use since 1994. It is a staple item for many tutors. It is not mapped to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum.

Chapter eight: matching teaching to learners' difficulties

The purpose of this discussion is to explore the relationship between teaching practices and learners' difficulties in order to develop hypotheses about how teaching practices could best address learners' difficulties and ultimately help learners make better progress. The following sets of data will be discussed: structure, activities and learner difficulties (word identification and comprehension).

8.1 Structure

Although there were notable exceptions, the majority of class time in the sessions observed was spent with the learners working independently. The tutors typically moved around the classroom assigning tasks and checking in with the learners to make sure they were progressing. Is this the most appropriate format for teaching reading?

Skills for Life and the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum are currently advocating a range of approaches to classroom management, including the use of group teaching, based on the literacy hour model and indeed more use generally than has traditionally been the case of whole-group teaching. It is recommended and at some provider sites it is mandated, that basic skills tutors design their lessons so that there is a group lesson followed by independent work. In practice, this was not often observed. One provider in particular had all sites organised around the drop-in study centre (DISC) format. At these DISCs, the classes were necessarily organised around independent work.

The tutor interviews and focus groups revealed that there is a great deal of disagreement amongst tutors on the most appropriate format. The whole-group teaching envisaged by the core curriculum seems to be based on the learners being at similar levels. Whilst many of the tutors were optimistic about working with such groups, in practice mixed-ability classes are the norm. As a result, many of the tutors felt that whole-group teaching is too difficult, because the individuals who would make up the group are so diverse in terms of ability, social needs, learning styles, and interests. As T1.5 explained:

T1.5 "It was a typical session in that the students were working on their own projects the entire time except for a brief general session in the middle. We think this is the best approach. The students are all too different for whole-class teaching to work. The students don't want group work either. They'd rather get on with their own individual work. As a group, we feel they don't really 'gel'."

Another factor is the learners' preference for independent work over group work, particularly in the area of reading. The tutors attribute this to embarrassment over not being able to read:

The tutor (T2.5) felt that some students prefer to work alone. They don't like the idea of working together, no-one wants to be with anyone else because of the personal 'baggage' they bring with them. They feel lost in a group or fear being 'picked out'. (Again school experience with sarcastic teachers.) And what would you call the group? Learning to Read? There is a stigma to being unable to read, no-one minds saying they can't do maths but reading is different. Huge embarrassment.

In addition, several tutors noted that the learners come into basic skills with certain learning agendas and they do not want to work on anything else that the tutor might design for a whole group lesson:

FG4 *"Some resistance comes from the learners themselves, who have certain things they want to learn, e.g. filling out forms, and don't particularly want to spend time learning about the history of spelling."*

The tutors who did favour some aspect of whole-group teaching, despite mixed abilities, cited benefits of this as social interaction between learners and as an effective way of dealing with a large class. T5.1 and T5.4 explain how they combine whole group and individual work:

T5.1 *"Structure varies. When I was teaching long/short vowels last term I used the board and taught the whole group. I also used this method when teaching the use of the apostrophe. However, individual/small group work is essential as well so I can juggle the emotional and educational needs of students."*

T5.4 *"This was a typical session because it contained a mixture of whole-group teaching, group work and tutorials. Format/class structure depends on mix - number of students and task in hand. Sometimes whole group work useful - at others work in pairs or small groups and at other times individual work appropriate. I have to be sensitive to the needs of the students on a particular day and be prepared to change formats accordingly."*

It would seem that one of the biggest challenges facing adult literacy practitioners is the fact that their learners have so many different abilities and profiles (see Chapter 5) and needs. Furthermore, there is often a great range of reading ability. In one class of six for example, it would be typical to have one learner who is an able reader working on critical reading, one ESOL learner who may or may not have dyslexia, one dyslexic learner and three learners whose reading abilities range from not being able to make grapheme/phoneme connections to being able to decode but not able to comprehend implicit meaning.

This great range of abilities needs to be considered in investigating the appropriateness of formats. Probably three research questions are needed:

- 1) What is the most appropriate format for teaching reading to a group of learners who have mixed abilities?
- 2) What is the most appropriate format for teaching learners of similar abilities? and
- 3) What is more effective for reading instruction – mixed-ability classes or similar-ability classes?

One hypothesis from the study, albeit tentative at this point, is that more direct teaching of reading happens in sessions where the teacher worked with a group of similar ability, compared to sessions where the learners worked on reading activities independently and received occasional feedback from their tutors. On the other hand, when teachers checked in with their learners during their independent work, they did teach reading. How effective is this latter type of instruction? The real question is about the nature of this reading instruction in either format and this needs further investigation.

8.2 Activities

Less than half the activities that the learners were engaged in could be specifically described as reading activities. The majority of the rest of the time, the learners worked on writing activities or reading-related activities such as looking up words in the dictionary. Why wasn't more time spent on reading? For the most part, the syllabus is shaped by the learners' learning interests. As the tutors explained during all four focus groups, rarely does a learner come in to basic skills and say they want to improve their reading. Learners come in and say that they want to work on their spelling, or their writing. They want to be able to do things such as fill out forms. The tutor, intent on keeping the curriculum learner-centred, designs lessons around the learners' interests. Although some learners come in because they want to be able to read with their children, most need to be coaxed into some kind of reading instruction.

As illustrated above with the discussion on structure, the learners' wishes play an important part in what goes on in the literacy classes. The tutors seem reluctant to impose lessons on them, as is done in primary school, because another major concern is making sure the adults come back. If they are not interested in what is being taught, the tutors argued, they will not continue coming to the classes. Furthermore, according to all four focus groups, for many learners reading was the area where they failed in school and were often humiliated. So there is a real hesitation to come to basic skills and get involved in reading again.

This hesitation to engage in more reading activities seems to be coming from both the tutors and the learners and it is an issue that needs to be considered when thinking about further research. The main hypothesis that can be drawn from this study's findings is that the learners are not spending enough time on reading activities. It is possible that the right kinds of activities, and the right kinds of instruction, are going on, just not enough of it. So along with that hypothesis, however, are two related questions:

- 1) How can we keep the learner-centred aspect of adult literacy instruction alive by teaching learners what they want to know, but at the same time convince them that they need more reading instruction? and
- 2) What kinds of reading instruction would be empowering and interesting enough so that learners would readily engage in them?

8.3 Reader profiles, reading difficulties and teaching strategies

The reader profile analysis was largely an attempt to contextualise the findings on reading difficulties. The findings presented in chapter four give a detailed account of the reading difficulties of the sample of learners tested. With some populations this presentation might have been sufficient. If, for example, the assessment data were aligned along a normal curve for each area, with the learners falling neatly into categories such as low-scoring, average, and high-scoring and furthermore if the scores had been consistent across areas, then there would not have been a need for further analysis.

However, this was clearly not the case with the learners studied. They scored high in some areas, average in others and low in still others, with few clear patterns between individual learners. Only by analysing each learner's strengths and weaknesses and then by grouping the learners who had similar needs, is it possible to consider the relationship between the type of teaching going on in basic skills and the needs of the learners. The purpose of this section, then, is to discuss the findings on reader difficulties in the light of the profile analysis

and to consider the potential of the observed teaching strategies to address the reading difficulties.

Reader profile group 1

Group 1 consisted of the learners (N=5) who scored high in all the areas assessed. From these high scores, it is estimated that they were performing at the equivalent of Year 7–8, or Levels 1–2 of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum. It could be argued that these adults did not need literacy provision. This may be a narrow view of adult literacy provision. However, adult literacy provision is inclusive of those higher-achieving adults who may wish to take GCSE, for example. Furthermore, academic instruction seems to be just one aspect of adult literacy provision. It was clear from the observation data and the interviews with the tutors that self-esteem development is a crucial part of the provision. Spending time in a supportive environment may be a key incentive for these adults to participate in learning.

Reader profile group 2

Group 2 was similar to Group 1, in that they were performing at the same high levels, Levels 1–2. The difference was that Group 2 (n=13) had some problems in phonology - spelling primarily, but also phonological awareness and decoding. Interestingly enough, the problems in phonology did not affect the learners' ability to identify words or to comprehend texts. These phonology problems, then, do not appear severe enough to be reading problems per se. Instead, they present themselves as spelling problems. Problems with spelling, incidentally, are one of the main reasons why adults enter provision. The assessment data confirmed that spelling was indeed a problem for the majority of those tested. Many of the learners were unable to complete the 20-word spelling assessment because they found the task laborious and frustrating. When the spelling findings were disaggregated by sub-test, it was found that the only skill the learners performed consistently well on was identifying the initial consonant when asked to spell a word.

The need to include spelling instruction in basic skills provision was clearly acknowledged by the tutors. Spelling instruction was integrated in the writing activities observed, as well as during activities where the learners were writing answers to comprehension questions and the like. Spelling instruction was not a key feature of the observations, as it was considered to be part of the writing dimension. So it is unclear how well the spelling teaching strategies used by the tutors addressed the specific areas of spelling that the assessment data showed to be problematic.

Reader profile group 3

The remaining 29 of the 47 learners with complete test profiles were placed in Group 3. This group had two main things in common. First, as a group they had weaknesses in all areas: word identification, oral reading (as evidenced by the miscue scores), comprehension, phonological awareness, decoding, and spelling. Secondly, as discussed in chapter five, these learners had very spiky profiles. This inconsistent nature of the learners' performance across areas helps to explain why there were no strong positive correlations in the data between areas hypothesised to be related, such as phonological awareness and decoding.

Given that the nature of each individual's weaknesses varied slightly (the reader will recall that Group 3 was further subdivided into three groups, a higher performing, middle and a low performing group), how well, in general, were the teaching strategies observed addressing these weaknesses? Whilst more research needs to be done in this area, the present findings on the observation data do suggest certain trends occurring in teaching pedagogy. It is

possible, therefore, to comment and raise some questions concerning the relationship between teaching practice and reading difficulties. To be discussed are strategies for teaching word identification, comprehension, and phonology (phonological awareness and decoding). Spelling was addressed above.

8.4 Word reading

The findings on word reading are difficult to interpret and to draw generalisations from because the learners were tested at various levels. Learner 45 was tested on list 6, for example and on that list was able to identify 75 per cent of the words automatically. Learner 12 also was able to identify 75 per cent of the words automatically, but on list 9. However, it does seem apparent that most, if not all, of the learners could benefit from instruction on word identification strategies. There was a fair amount of instruction on word identification strategies, most of which occurred when the learner was reading aloud. The tutor would give a prompt to help decode the word, such as drawing the learner's attention to grapheme/phoneme correspondences, particularly at the beginning of the word.

What needs to be investigated next is, how do these prompting strategies match the word-reading errors? It seems from the initial analyses that the learners have problems not with the initial part of the word, but with the medial part or end of the word. For example reading *made* as "makes" or *there* as "they". This would suggest that the learners need to be prompted to focus on the endings of the words. If the reader made errors such as reading *poison* as "person" or *pollution* as "politician" this would suggest that they needed to be prompted to look at the middle of the words. Tutors perhaps need to be made aware of the school-level research, cited in chapter 2, showing that word-reading errors preserving only initial letters (e.g. 'rain' misread as 'road') are not indicative of later success, whereas "Scaffolding Errors" (Laxton, Masterson and Moran, 1994) which preserve both the initial and final phonemes (e.g. 'bark' misread as 'bank') are an indicator of later word reading success (Savage, Stuart and Hill, 2001).

Another area of investigation that would give some insight into word identification difficulties would be a comparison between word reading errors on word lists and in passages. The hypothesis would be that readers would be able to identify more words in passages because of the assistance of the context, but this presumes a basic level of comprehension of the passage. Furthermore, a preliminary analysis of the comments that the fieldworkers wrote while doing a miscue analysis of the passage reading suggests that many of the learners read without attempting to use the context.

8.5 Comprehension

Comprehension was an area of difficulty identified in the diagnostic assessments as well as by the tutors. On the comprehension assessment, the learners read expository passages and then answered a series of eight comprehension questions. Only 18 of the 53 learners answered all eight of the comprehension questions they encountered correctly, suggesting that a good number of the learners did not fully understand the text. In particular, all the learners in Group 3 had problems with comprehension. This finding supports the tutors' perspective. As the tutors argued, many of their learners will 'read' the text, but this does not mean that they are getting meaning from it.

However, the tutors did involve their learners in activities designed to build their

comprehension, such as reading texts and answering questions. Another typical activity was having learners underline words that they didn't know and looking them up in the dictionary. How well do these practices address these learner difficulties with comprehension? Whilst more study needs to be done in order to investigate these practices in detail, the findings lead to several questions and hypotheses. First, it did seem that the purpose of the majority of the teacher-to-learner discussions about text was to make sure that the learner was getting the gist of the text. These were often brief exchanges where the teacher would check in with the learner and ask an explicit-type question. These questions did not seem to help the learner with implicit meaning. When higher-order questions were asked during these exchanges, they were most often about the learner's opinion of the text. Whilst forming an opinion about a text is an example of higher-level thinking, it is possible to form an opinion without fully interpreting the implicit meaning of the text. These exchanges between teacher and learner do need to be investigated further to study whether they are effective in developing in the learner an ability to understand the indirect meaning of a text.

It did seem in studying the few teacher-led group discussions of texts that these had the potential to develop the skill of gleaning the indirect meaning from the text. The discussion around the turkey text in chapter five, example 3, is a good example of this. The hypothesis that can be drawn is that learners need to engage in meaningful discussions with each other and with a teacher in order to develop their comprehension skills.

As discussed in the section on tutor perspectives on learning difficulties, the tutors were concerned that their learners were just decoding and not really reading for the purpose of making meaning. This problem needs further investigation. In discussion of school-age pedagogy, reading development is often referred to as having two stages, learning to read and reading to learn. Learning to read involves learning the correspondences between sounds and letters, phonemes and graphemes, and acquiring a range of strategies for word analysis. Once an individual can decode and recognise words automatically, they have mastered the first stage of reading. It takes children on average four years of intensive schooling to get to this point. Then they move on to the second stage, which is reading to learn. This is when children begin to read for a purpose - to find out information, to learn something, for entertainment. This is what reading is all about.

Adult literacy practitioners share this perspective on reading: real reading, they argue, is reading for a purpose. Helping their learners get to this point, this second stage, is a primary aim of reading instruction. One of the major sticking points in adult reading development seems to be moving between the two stages, from learning to read to reading to learn. Adult learners are learning to read - they are acquiring the skills involved in word recognition, but many do not make progress after that. As was explained by one of the practitioners interviewed, there seems to be a plateau in the middle where the learners get stuck (as indeed some children get stuck). In describing the difference between two readers, who both had the skills to decode and analyse words independently, T2.4 explains:

T2.4: "One [is] the reader who had just managed to gain independence skills but had plateaued out. The other [is] the reader who had better conceptual skills with an enquiring mind. The latter reads for interest and brings what they know to the text and forms their own opinions from it. This type of reader realises that it is not just a mechanical skill, i.e. reading words from a page, but know they can get something from it whether it's to be informed or to be entertained."

Lastly, in this section on comprehension, the effectiveness of two practices, in particular, seemed questionable: underlining words and dictionary work. Again they need to be examined in the context of a classroom, but the present data call into question the amount of time spent on these practices in the name of building comprehension. It would seem that asking the learners to underline words forces them to monitor their own comprehension levels. Developing metacognition is clearly useful, but it would be interesting to investigate the effect of looking these words up in the dictionary on comprehension and vocabulary development.

8.6 Phonology: phonological awareness and decoding

The findings on the assessments that tested phonological awareness and decoding revealed that the learners in Group 3 had difficulties on all the phonological awareness tasks (blending, isolation, segmentation and deletion). This suggests weaknesses in phonological awareness, as well as a reluctance to play with and manipulate words. In addition, the learners were also found to be weak on the decoding tasks which asked them to decode nonsense words.

Before discussing appropriate instruction, a number of questions need to be raised:

- 1) How does a weakness in phonological awareness affect decoding ability and vice versa?
- 2) How does weakness in phonology affect reading and comprehension in particular?

The research literature suggests a strong correlation between phonology and reading (see Chapter 2), although there is disagreement as to what level of phonological awareness is needed for reading achievement. The reader profile data suggest that this is not always the case, as there are learners who scored highly in phonological awareness but had low word identification and comprehension scores and vice versa. Again, more research needs to be done on adult populations in order to know how to target the instruction. However, the tutors observed used many different strategies to address phonological awareness and decoding.

Most of the instruction in phonology was done on the spur of the moment. Whilst reading with a learner, the tutor would capitalise on an error that the learner made while reading aloud and turn this into a mini-lesson on phonology. The tutor might ask the learner to segment the word, or prompt them to look at the first letter in the word. If the word in question was part of a family of words, e.g., *should*, *could*, *would*, the tutor would then write those words out as well as pointing out the similar spelling patterns. Whilst this instruction was seemingly ad hoc, these mini-lessons seemed appropriate for the particular learner and required skill on part of the tutor to pull them off.

What is unclear in the present study is how well the learners were able to learn from these mini-lessons and apply them in their independent reading. Furthermore, the current observation data are limiting in that they do not reveal the total range of these mini-lessons. Are all decoding sub-skills covered, e.g. diphthongs, other vowel patterns, suffixes, etc? This latter question applies to the focused group lessons in phonology which were observed, e.g. lessons in word families, or games where the learners had to read words on cards. How well do the lessons cover all areas in which the learners have problems? In summary, whilst it is clear that the learners in Group 3 need instruction in phonology, more research needs to be done to figure out how much the current phonology instruction is covering. Furthermore, what would effective instruction in phonological awareness and decoding look like in adult basic skills? How useful and appropriate are the materials reviewed in Annex 2 to chapter seven?

8.7 Dyslexia

This discussion concludes with a note on dyslexia. When the researchers tested the learners, they asked the tutors for background information on the learners. One piece of information was whether the learners were dyslexic or not: 16 of the 53 learners were considered dyslexic. However, whilst some of the learners had actually been psychologically tested and were therefore officially certified as dyslexic, the majority were classified based on the professional judgment of the tutor. When the reader profile analyses were conducted, the dyslexic learners were compared side-by-side with the non-dyslexic learners. For the most part, the profiles of the dyslexic learners were not significantly different from those of the non-dyslexics. Furthermore, the dyslexic learners were found in all profiles except for Group 1. As a result, no distinct conclusions about dyslexia have been made in this report.

8.8 Summary

In principle, the teaching practices address the learners' reading difficulties. The structure of the class is designed in accordance with the tutors' beliefs about how their learners will feel the most comfortable. The activities are varied and include some reading activities. The tutors use a number of strategies to teach word identification, comprehension and phonology, all of which have been shown to be areas where learners have difficulty.

However, it is also well known that progress in adult literacy is often slow and at times non-existent. Why then, is this the case? Besides the many social factors that affect adult literacy provision (such as drop-out and the limited number of instruction hours), it seems from this study that instruction could be more focused on reading difficulties. Whilst good instruction is occurring in areas that target a wide range of learner difficulties, e.g. spelling and writing, there seems to be a lack of intensive focused instruction in reading. This study was exploratory in nature and has raised many issues and the key issue that needs to be addressed next is, *How much instruction and of what type do adults need to make progress in reading?*

Chapter nine: conclusions and recommendations

This study was designed to explore the field of adult literacy instruction for the purpose of getting a sense of typical teaching and learning and to closely investigate the reading problems of a sample of adults. The purpose of such an exploration is to gather the necessary data to make informed hypotheses. First, the findings from the assessment data are summarised, then hypotheses from these and the observation data are presented. Lastly, recommendations are made for practice and further research.

Test findings

- The word identification findings can be interpreted as meaning that the average reader in the study was able to read a list of words at Level 1 of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum. There was a significant amount of individual variation, however, and a number of learners were only able to read word lists equivalent to Entry Level 2 or below.
- On the oral reading task, the majority of learners made fewer than ten miscues. These did not appear to interfere with their comprehension of the text.
- Comprehension was a problem for all but a small group of high-scoring learners. However, the scores on explicit comprehension were not considerably higher than implicit comprehension, as had been expected from the prior comments of practitioners.
- Scores on phonological awareness were independent of comprehension and word identification. The average score was 60 per cent, indicating a high number of learners had low phonological awareness.
- On the test of decoding non-words, the mean score was 12 out of a possible 20. There was considerable individual variation on this test as 18 learners had scores of 15 or above, 18 had scores of 8–14, and 13 had scores below 8. The learners were most successful with decoding using initial consonants, and least successful decoding vowel digraphs and other vowel patterns.
- Spelling was the area on which, on average, the learners were weakest. The mean score was 9.5 out of 20. A number of the learners did not complete the test because they were frustrated with the task.

Findings from the reader profiles

- Group 1 consisted of learners (n=5) who scored high in all assessment areas: word identification, comprehension, miscues, phonological awareness, decoding and spelling.
- Group 2 consisted of learners (n=13) who had high scores in word identification, comprehension and miscues, but lower scores in phonology, particularly spelling.
- Group 3 consisted of learners (n=29) who had spiky profiles which were the result of inconsistency across the skill areas.

Hypotheses on reading difficulties

- The number of miscues made seems not to affect comprehension of the passage. Miscues may be an artefact of the oral reading task as the learner may be getting the gist of the subject matter irrespective of the number of miscues they make.
- The tutors' observation that their learners do not read for meaning seems to be supported by

the evidence on comprehension.

- Differences in the ability to comprehend implicit meaning and explicit meaning need further examination. With only four questions of each type presented to each learner it would have been difficult to find a significant difference in the number of correct responses to the two types of question.
- The relationship between phonological awareness and reading performance as measured by word identification and comprehension needs further exploration. Evidence from this study suggests a tenuous relationship, though this goes against the current literature.
- Decoding needs further exploration. The evidence from this study suggests that there may be different skills involved in decoding real words, as in a word identification test and in decoding nonsense words.
- Spelling, in this group of learners, seems, rather surprisingly, unrelated to phonological awareness and reading.

Hypotheses from the observation evidence

- Learners may not be making sufficient progress in reading because not enough of the class session is spent on reading activities
- A greater amount of time is devoted to teaching reading during sessions where the teacher worked with a group of similar ability, compared to sessions where the students worked on reading activities independently and received occasional feedback from their tutors.
- Although tutors are teaching word identification strategies, and decoding strategies, the instruction may need to be more intensive, systematic and focused. In addition these strategies may not cover the range of difficulties that students have with word identification and decoding.
- In particular, tutors' subject knowledge relevant to phonics and their spur-of-the-moment use of phonics need to be investigated, in order then to investigate how their subject knowledge and planning could be improved and whether this would enable learners to make better progress.
- There appears to be limited availability of materials to develop phonic skills suitable for adults and tutors appear to rely on creating their own, often adapting materials designed for children. This may contribute to some of the resistance to incorporating phonics more systematically into teaching.
- Although a range of strategies to teach comprehension and vocabulary was observed, the predominant mode of instruction relied on having learners reading short texts and answering written questions, often working independently.
- The purpose of the majority of the teacher-to-student discussions about text was to make sure that the student was getting the gist of the text. These were often brief exchanges where the teacher would check in with the student and ask an explicit-type question. These questions did not seem to help the student with implicit meaning.
- There appeared to be limited opportunities for talk before reading to activate the learners' prior knowledge, or to discuss a text with others before, during or after reading.
- Reasons for the absence of sentence-level work in reading need to be explored with a view to determining if this is because tutors see sentence-level work as more relevant to writing than reading, coupled, perhaps, with lack of familiarity with appropriate teaching strategies, and whether increase in sentence level work would benefit learners.
- Equally, the purpose of much underlining of familiar words and dictionary work was unclear and needs to be clarified.
- It was noticeable that the emphasis on individualised learning and mixed level groups meant that most teachers tried to organise the classroom so that each student worked

independently on a tailor-made learning programme. Even where classes are small and there is a relatively high teacher learner ratio, the realism and effectiveness of this warrants further investigation. For example, we observed instances where learners spent time waiting for the teacher or where instruction with one learner was interrupted so that the teacher could respond to another. Furthermore, opportunities to engage in meaningful talk with peers as well as teachers may be limited.

Recommendations

At organisational level:

A greater percentage of the literacy session needs to be devoted to reading activities and specifically- focused, quality reading instruction.

Providers, especially on sites where there is a high volume of provision, should consider how the curriculum offer could be designed to facilitate more cohesive groupings of learners. Provision should be geared toward individual learners with similar strengths and weaknesses:

Group 1 and Group 2 learners should be grouped together and Group 3 learners should be in a separate group.

Spelling for Group 2 learners could be taught in an intensive four to six week course or other specifically designed programme.

Group 3 learners should be given regular diagnostic assessments by their tutors so that the tutors can tailor their instruction to specific learner needs. This recommendation is clearly applicable to all literacy learners.

At organisational or national level:

Quality assurance procedures, including inspection, should consider how far there is a balanced treatment of the Adult Literacy Core curriculum over time, evidenced in course outlines, lesson plans, Individual Learning Programmes and lesson observations.

At national level:

Initial teacher training and programmes of continuous professional development need to strengthen:

- teachers' subject knowledge of phonics and appropriate pedagogic practice and planning;
- the teaching of comprehension and vocabulary development;
- teacher questioning techniques and the role of talk before, during and after reading to develop comprehension and vocabulary.
- capacity to use a range of formats of classroom organisation, whole group, small group and 1:1.

To support these teacher education programmes, when the FENTO specifications for teachers of adult literacy are revised, consideration should be given to including an explicit range of direct teaching strategies to support the development of reading and teacher questioning skills.

In the short to medium term there is a need to provide teacher education resources specifically to address the place of and the teaching of *phonics*; and the development of reading comprehension. These might include short classroom focused 'What works' guides [on-line and in print], exemplar plans and curriculum outlines and case-studies.

There is a need to develop up-to-date interactive phonic materials, including games and ICT resources, suitable for adults.

Suggestions for further research

Throughout this report, we have raised questions and identified areas where more research is needed. Essentially, we need two types of research studies: first, those which contribute to theory-building for adult reading difficulties; and second, studies examining the relationship between practice and progress with the aim of identifying best practice for adult reading instruction. Our suggestions are summarised here.

Further research is needed which does the following:

- 1) conducts a series of focused observations over time in a large number of classrooms;
- 2) measures the progress of the learners in those classrooms using pre and post tests; and
- 3) carries out assessments and profiling with a large sample of adult learners.

Adult learners' reading difficulties – theory building

Further research in this area needs to investigate:

- The relationship between phonological awareness and comprehension. The findings suggest that learners who scored highly on the comprehension test did not necessarily score as well on the test of phonological awareness. This calls into question the assumption that those with high phonological awareness are naturally good readers. Instead, phonological awareness may be unrelated to ability in other reading areas such as comprehension.
- Spelling development compared to reading development. Spelling was very difficult for the majority of the learners in the study, good readers as well as poor readers. This suggests that learners had more difficulty making the links from spoken language to written language (phonemes to graphemes), than making the links from written language to spoken language (graphemes to phonemes). The former is required for spelling and the latter for reading.
- The relationship between the following areas of reading: word reading, miscues, comprehension, phonological awareness, decoding and spelling. Most of the learners had difficulties in all the areas tested. In addition to the relationship between phonological awareness and comprehension as suggested above, what are the relationships amongst and between the other areas?
- The effect of instruction on the following: word reading, miscues, comprehension, phonological awareness, decoding and spelling. Following on from the previous point, when instruction addresses these areas separately or in various combinations, what effects do we see on learner performance. The tutors interviewed reported the importance of paying attention to the emotional state of the learners. They found them to be particularly vulnerable, e.g. as a result of past failures in school. How do emotion, attitude and motivation affect cognitive growth with adult learners?

Furthermore, we hope other studies will continue to use reader profiling as a method of analysis. Using reader profiling makes it possible to suggest provision that would meet the specific needs of learners. This needs to be done on a larger scale.

Matching teaching to learners' difficulties – best practice

Research in this area needs to investigate:

- Correlations between instruction and progress. This exploratory study described a number of

problems which may contribute to this lack of progress, such as not enough class time spent on reading activities. However, we need research that studies individual classrooms and instructors over a period of time in order to be able to correlate types of strategies and progress.

- The relationship between teaching strategies and learner difficulties. What sorts of teaching are needed to address the observed weaknesses in reading, e.g. phonological awareness, decoding, and comprehension?
- Effectiveness of instructional format on progress. A hypothesis from the study is that more direct teaching of reading happens in sessions where the teacher worked with a group of similar ability compared to sessions where the students worked on reading activities independently and received occasional feedback from their tutors. This warrants further investigation. What is the most appropriate format for teaching reading to a group of students who have mixed abilities? similar abilities?
- The amount of time that needs to be spent on the teaching and learning of reading. The main hypothesis that can be drawn from this study is that students are not spending enough time on reading activities. How much time is appropriate and on what activities should this time be spent?

Further research underway at NRDC on effective teaching and learning

NRDC has embarked in five related projects designed to identify effective teaching and learning practices in the areas of reading, writing, numeracy, ICT and ESOL. The projects run from 2003-2006, and they build on methodological insights from the influential American Institutes of Research report, 'What Works Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students'. Methodologies and instruments are planned in common across all projects. One of the five studies - **Effective Practice in the Teaching of Reading to Adult Learners** - will explore some of the questions set out above, and the projects has already carried out fieldwork and amassed data of adult literacy provision on an unprecedented scale.

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Appendix A: full account of method

A.1 Research settings and research staff

At the outset of the study, a list of approximately 20 basic skills providers in the East Midlands and North of England was compiled. Project staff then solicited participation in the study from the providers on the list by contacting the appropriate person, which in most cases was the Basic Skills Coordinator for the site. Whilst all providers contacted were interested in the study, a number declined to participate because they were either participating in an assessment exercise or planning one. From the group of providers who agreed to participate, a sample of six was selected for the study. Of these, two were in the same local authority area. Observations of basic skills classes, interviews with tutors, assessments with learners and focus groups were then conducted in the six areas. All data collection took place between January and March 2003.

A.1.1 Description of the sample of research sites

As shown in Table A.1 below, providers were selected to be representative of the range of settings in which basic skills instruction takes place in England. There was a total of six providers, within which there were 21 individual sites. The nature of the basic skills instruction varied considerably, including weekly English classes (some mixed-ability, others catering to a specific ability group), drop-in study centres (DISCs) and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages). Table A.1 gives brief details of the research settings.

Table A.1: research settings and amounts of data gathered

Area	Provider(s)	Sites	Description of sites	Number of sessions observed & tutors interviewed	Number of learners assessed	Focus group
1	FE College	2 branches of	1A. suburban	4	6	Yes
		FE College	1B. suburban			
	Basic Skills Centre	Basic Skills Centre	1C. urban	2	5	No
2	FE College	4 branches of FE College	2A. urban 2B. urban 2C. urban 2D. urban	6	12	Yes
3	FE College	2 campuses 2 rural centres	3A. rural 3B. suburban 3D. rural 3E. rural	4	12	Yes
4	Network of basic skills providers	7 sites	4A-E. rural 4F. urban 4G. urban	7	11	Yes
5	FE College	3 sites	5A. suburban 5B. urban 5C. rural	4	7	No
Totals	6	21	8 urban 4 suburban 9 rural	27	53	4

Area 1

Area 1 was an urban/suburban area that included an inner-city neighbourhood and several surrounding suburbs. Two providers were chosen from this area. The first was a large FE College, covering a very wide range of subjects, academic, vocational and 'leisure'. The main site (1A) was a purpose-built college in a fairly affluent 'dormitory' suburb/market town, about ten miles to the south-west of a large Northern city. There was a smaller site (1B), converted from a school building, in a far less affluent area, about three miles to the north-west of site 1A. The second provider in Area 1 was a dedicated basic skills centre (Site 1C) that was privately funded. This was in the centre of a small city, about seven miles from the large city mentioned in Site 1A.

Site 1A had 1 literacy tutor, plus a couple of volunteers teaching three classes a week (2 day and one evening). There were between 20 and 25 learners, ranging from pre-Entry to Level 2. The Level 2 class was called 'Creative Writing'. The other two (mixed-level) classes were called 'Refresh your English' and 'Develop your English'. The classes took place in one medium-sized room, with four tables, also used by the numeracy classes. The location within the college of literacy and numeracy tuition was formerly a larger area on the ground floor, but for the past couple of years had been on the first floor, adjacent to the classroom for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Site 1B was shared with a secondary school. It offered a limited range of other subjects (mainly IT and dressmaking/upholstery) and also accommodated a crèche. There was one literacy tutor and one volunteer, teaching two classes a week (one day, one evening) called 'Develop your English'. There were 16 learners in all, ranging from Entry to Level 1. There was one small classroom, with one main table, used exclusively for literacy classes, since numeracy was taught in an adjacent but separate room.

Site 1C was a dedicated centre for literacy and numeracy, in a converted Victorian school building and also accommodated a crèche. Literacy classes ran five days a week and there was usually one each morning, afternoon and evening. Each class was 'double-staffed', i.e. there were two main tutors, and there was a large force of volunteers and ALS staff. There were well over 100 learners, and staffing levels (including volunteer/support) were close to one-to-one. Classes ranged from Entry to GCSE English and were simply known by their level, e.g. 'Entry 3/Level 1'. The room used was large, had six tables, and was capable of accommodating over 20 people. The literacy and numeracy classrooms were separate.

Area 2

Area 2 was a large northern city with one large provider, an FE college. Each of the four sites was a branch of the main college. The key feature of basic skills instruction at this college was that most of the classes were designed as drop-in study centres (DISCs). These had regular staffing, but flexible enrolment. Learners "dropped in" during the opening hours. Instruction was delivered on a one-to-one basis. Learners worked independently.

Sites 2A and **2B** were large college centres in different parts of the city. In both, the DISC exists independently within the college. The learners in the DISC study English, maths and computers or any combination of these if they choose to. Occasionally, learners on other courses in the college access the DISC for study support. The DISC was open 10-12 and 1-3 on a daily basis. The numbers of learners varied, but there were never more than ten per session. These centres worked as a drop-in, i.e. learners worked individually, but there were also several groups.

Site 2C was a DISC at a community centre based at the back of a small shopping parade. It was small, consisting of one large room. Its purpose was to serve the people of an impoverished part of the city.

Site 2D, in contrast to 2C, was a very stylish, plush DISC based within a sports complex.

Area 3

Area 3 was a large, mainly rural area. There was one main FE College for this region, and that college was divided into three campuses. Two of these campuses were research sites. One of these campuses (3A) was in a primarily rural area, the other (3B) in a more suburban area. The remaining two sites were small community centres loosely affiliated with the college. This area faces a number of challenges: poor public transport and access from the villages; cycle of poverty; stigma; shift work; low-paid jobs. The area used to boast a number of RAF bases, and a significant number of forces children were educated locally – many of those with disrupted education find the need to return for help as adults.

Site 3A was a small rural college campus affiliated with 3B, its catchment area covering a radius of about 20 miles, some of which is coastal strip with high turnover of workers and visitors. In the larger area there is a high level of rural poverty, although the town itself presents as quaint and middle class, and attracts retirees from far and wide. Basic skills consisted of three morning classes and three evening classes: two maths groups and four literacy groups. All learners were self-referred, then given a one-hour confidential interview before placement in a class, to establish their needs. There was a total of 36 learners in literacy and about 20 in numeracy, with some overlap. In addition, there was basic skills tutoring provided separately for learners aged 16-19 who were on the full-time and modular Foundation Studies Course (40 learners in all).

Site 3B was the main campus of the FE college serving the area. This campus offered the majority of basic skills provision in the area, with course titles such as "Improve your English" and "Improve your Maths".

Sites 3C and **3D** were rural community centres designed as a college initiative to make courses more accessible to people who live in remote areas of the county.

Area 4

Area 4 was a large county containing a mixture of suburban areas, rural areas, and a small city. The research in Area 4 was carried out in Community Education settings around the county. Basic skills provision in this county was managed by the two local education authorities. Overall, the county had 2,500 enrolled basic skills learners at 80 delivery points. The tutors observed were all qualified adult basic skills tutors, all working to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum. All worked part-time. One tutor had received dyslexia training and worked in specialist groups in the city, and one was an experienced ESOL tutor.

The learners had been assessed at all levels from E1 to L2, often in one group. Reading instruction was usually a lone activity, with learners reading something chosen for them or by themselves to match an interest. Reading was mostly integrated into other activities, such as spelling, writing or comprehension.

Sites 4A-E were five classes held in daytime or evenings at adult education centres or local schools in four small towns around the county. These were mainstream roll-on, roll-off basic skills groups.

Sites 4F–G were two specialist classes in the city, one a mixed-nationality ESOL class concentrating on whole-group work, the second a dyslexia group with a specialist tutor. There tended to be about six learners in each, often with no volunteer.

Area 5

Area 5 was a large area including a major northern city, a nearby suburb, and rural areas at the outskirts. Basic skills provision in this area was delivered by one large FE College. The research was conducted at three sites that were distinct branches of the college.

Site 5A offered basic skills at a youth centre housed in a hut on the grounds of a local primary school in a suburb of the large city. The centre served the housing estate that surrounded it. Many of the learners were the parents of pupils at the school. There was a locked cupboard for resources and the tutor supplemented this with her own material and the use of a laptop. This was a small centre with about 15 literacy learners, some of whom also attended numeracy classes.

Site 5B was an inner-city community centre with about 130 literacy learners on a roll-on, roll-off system. Tuition was available every day from 09:00–18:00, plus three evenings and two 16.30–18.30 sessions per week. Four experienced tutors, all with fractional contracts, shared the work, and learners attended on average five hours a week. This flexible delivery catered for shift workers and learners with young families. The crèche facility was one of the most vital resources at this centre. A tutorial system in operation supported the learners; they also had access to an Education Advice Worker and Counsellors. The main ABE classroom was well resourced and had access to the internet. Learners were taught in small groups with a mix of group work, paired work and individual tuition. After initial screening, formal and non-formal assessment for dyslexia was available. The type of assessment depended on the learners' wishes and/or needs.

Site 5C was in small market town on the outskirts of the city bordering a large rural area. Classes were in a building owned by the college and there was a well-resourced room available for tuition. There was access to computers and the Internet. Basic skills were taught every day to small groups. There were about 50 learners on roll and learners could enrol throughout the year.

A.1.2 Teacher-fieldworkers (researchers)

Five teacher-fieldworkers were recruited to conduct observations of basic skills classes and to assess adult learners. By definition, a teacher-fieldworker is a practitioner in adult basic skills who has been employed to do research, or fieldwork, for the project (and they are therefore generally referred to as researchers in this report). Those who worked on this project were recruited from the five local authority areas, as one of the primary benefits of having teacher-fieldworkers do the research is their familiarity and connections with the individual sites. Due to the sensitive nature of conducting both classroom observations and assessments of adult learners, having research staff who were known and well-liked by both the practitioners who were observed and the adults who were assessed proved to be not only beneficial to the data-collection process, but essential in gaining access to the inner workings of these settings.

The researchers were recruited on the basis of their expertise in the field of adult literacy and their keen interest in participating in the project. They were provided with the appropriate training to carry out the following fieldwork tasks: conducting classroom observations, writing

up observation logs and schedules, interviewing tutors, assessing learners using diagnostic reading assessment tools and analysing those assessments.

Training was carried out by the Senior Research Officer. First she prepared a training pack which included examples of observation logs and schedules. Then she met with each of the researchers individually for a two-three hour session. During this session she led the researcher through the processes of observation and assessment, tailoring the training to the researcher's experience and expertise. After this session, the researchers began their work. After their first observation and assessment, the senior research officer reviewed their work and provided feedback. This latter part was done via email and telephone. Once she was satisfied that the researchers were conducting their observations and assessments reliably, the formal training ended. However, the senior researcher did provide on-going feedback to the researchers on an informal basis as they conducted the fieldwork.

A.2 Data Collection

A.2.1 Observations

Observations of teaching and learning sessions were conducted in order to explore the range of current practice in adult literacy instruction. More specifically, the purpose was to explore the extent to which practice is informed by, or supports, the understanding of the processes of teaching and learning reading reflected in the literature and the theory. In order to achieve this, observations were conducted in as many different learning contexts as the scope of the project allowed. The result of an approach such as this is a collection of descriptions of typical teaching practices.

An alternative approach would have been to conduct a series of observations in one classroom, a method that results in a very detailed analysis of one particular teacher's practice, but one which does not provide insight into the wide variety of teaching practices found in adult literacy instruction. The investigation of numerous classrooms for this study resulted in documentation of this variety of practice and afforded an analysis which focused on exploring the relationship between practice and theory.

The researchers conducted a total of 27 observations of teaching and learning sessions. The observations averaged two hours and generally proceeded in the following manner: the researcher approached a colleague (tutor) and obtained permission to observe her class session. Before the observation, the researcher spoke briefly with the tutor inquiring about the format of the class, e.g. weekly English class, ESOL class, etc., and the goals of the lesson. During the observation, the researcher sat in an unobtrusive place in the classroom and took a detailed handwritten log of the session. The researcher focused on the teaching of reading, although the descriptions included practices related to other literacy skills, e.g. spelling and writing, as they occurred during the session. After the observation, usually later that day, the researcher typed up her log and submitted it to the lead researcher for data analysis. (See Appendix B for the observation protocol and Appendix C for a sample observation log.)

In addition to the observation log, the researchers also completed an observation schedule for each observation. (See Appendix D for the observation schedule.) The schedule was drawn up in consultation with an expert from the field who was later recruited as a researcher. The schedule was designed both as a framework for the observations and as a means of reflecting on what was observed. For example, the schedule was designed to identify general teaching

practices, and in particular those aimed at learners' difficulties. The teaching of reading took many different forms and the researcher often needed to reflect on the events of the classroom session and analyse them in order to determine how the teaching practices addressed the learners' difficulties.

A.2.2 Tutor interviews

Vital to an understanding of and description of typical teaching practices was the perspective of the tutors whose class sessions were observed. After the observation, the researcher made plans to meet with the tutor to discuss the lesson. This took the form of a semi-structured interview. The purpose of this was twofold: first, to enable the researcher to discuss and clarify what was observed, part of which was obtaining specific details on the learners; secondly, to obtain the tutor's perspective on the learning difficulties of her learners and how her teaching practices were aimed at those difficulties. Since every tutor of an observed session was interviewed the total number of tutor interviews was also 27. (The tutor interview schedule can be found in Appendix E.)

A.2.3 Focus group meetings

In addition to the observations and assessments, focus group meetings were held with practitioners from four different teaching and learning contexts. These were undertaken to obtain the practitioners' views on the teaching and learning of reading, their preferred approaches and the rationale for these and their opinions on the major difficulties learners encounter. Practitioners who participated in the meetings were recruited from amongst the staff who worked for the various providers. This process varied from provider to provider. For example, in areas 2 and 4, the local basic skills coordinator advertised the meeting on behalf of the research staff by posting flyers, emailing colleagues and talking to tutors. In areas 1 and 3, the relevant researchers organised the focus groups.

The number of tutors attending the groups ranged from five to nine. For the most part these were highly experienced practitioners, with many years of service (between five years and ten or more). The focus group meetings lasted two hours and were facilitated by the lead researcher. The meetings were semi-structured. The facilitator guided the discussion around a series of focus questions, whilst at the same time inviting discussion on relevant topics. The focus questions were developed using the following process: a set of initial questions was drafted by the lead researcher. These were then sent to one of the researchers and the project director for comments and feedback. Revised questions were then trialled at the first focus group. After that focus group, further revisions were made to the questions. The final set of questions which were used for the remaining focus groups can be found in Appendix F.

A.2.4 Assessment of individual adult learners

One of the primary aims of the study was to explore areas of reading difficulty that appear to present special difficulty for adult learners. Whilst this could have been done using standardised assessment materials with a large sample group, this would not have provided the level of detail needed to investigate the reading process thoroughly. Instead it was decided to assess the learners directly, one-to-one. The researchers conducted the assessments. A total of 53 learners were assessed using the combination of diagnostic materials described below. The learners were recruited by the researchers from the class sessions observed. The researchers arranged a suitable time and location with the learners and carried out the assessments, which took between 45 and 60 minutes.

A.2.5 Choice of assessment materials

It was considered important for the study to address areas of reading that practitioners had identified as problematic for their learners. The consultation meetings held with practitioners early in NRDC's work and feedback from the Basic Skills Agency's Introduction to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum training programme suggested that two major 'sticking points' in adult reading are word identification and understanding indirect meanings.

More generally, as outlined in chapter two, recent research on adult reading instruction suggests that learners can have difficulties with any of the following aspects of reading assumed to be crucial to competent reading: alphabets (phonemic awareness and word analysis), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Kruidenier, 2002). Knowledge of the literature and theory as well as an awareness of practitioners' concerns informed the choice of assessment materials.

Assessment materials were therefore sought to examine the following areas of adult reading: word identification, phonological awareness, accuracy and comprehension. The set of assessments was designed to gain an accurate and precise measure of the range of adults' learning difficulties.

The search for suitable assessment materials began from an early but almost complete draft of the review of assessment instruments for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC project B1.2) by Brooks et al., (2004). Brooks et al., reviewed about a dozen adult literacy assessment instruments used in Britain, and concluded that there were none that would meet the exact needs of this project or of the intervention studies which NRDC had begun to develop. The absence of any suitable adult literacy assessment instrument for use in intervention studies led to the award, early in 2003, of a grant to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NRDC project B1.6) to develop appropriate reading and writing tests. The tests became available to NRDC early in 2004.

Since those tests were not available at the time of this study, suitable materials were developed by adapting diagnostic assessments and informal reading inventories available for use with adolescents and adults in the United States. The Senior Research Officer is trained as a reading specialist and was familiar with these materials. The process of selecting and adapting these materials was as follows.

Word reading

The aim of this part of the assessment was to:

- 1) assess the learners' ability to read (decode) words out of context;
- 2) challenge the learner by having them read lists of words in increasing difficulty and then establish the limit of the learners' current competence;
- 3) test out the following working hypothesis: When learners are unable to read a word, is it because they do not know the meaning of the word or is it because they simply cannot decode the word?

Several reviews of test materials were consulted, including Vincent (1983) and Pumfrey (1985). The published tests that were considered included: the *Schonell Graded Word Reading Test* (Schonell and Schonell, 1950) and the *Qualitative Reading Inventory II* (QRI) (Leslie and Caldwell, 1995). In addition several vocabulary tests were considered: the *Wide Range*

*Achievement Test*⁹, the *British Picture Vocabulary Scale*, and the *British Ability Scales Word Reading Test*. The vocabulary tests were ruled out primarily because of costs and the level of training required to administer them. Both the word lists from Schonell and the QRI seemed initially appropriate, and although they are both normed for children, no graded word tests were found which were normed for adults.

The Word List Test from the QRI was selected because it covered a greater number of words (140) compared to 100 in the Schonell, but more importantly because in the QRI there were more words of high and medium frequency/familiarity compared to the Schonell, which jumps to rare words quite rapidly. For example the words *gnome* and *smoulder* appear within the first 50 words of the Schonell test.

Although reading word lists aloud cannot be considered an authentic literacy task, the ability to identify words accurately and out of context is characteristic of skilled reading. These lists provided important information on the learners' word-recognition automaticity and enabled the researchers to predict how well the learners would be able to comprehend various reading passages.

In addition, an attempt was made to add a vocabulary component to the word-list test used in the study. The hypothesis framing this part of the assessment was that learners would have difficulty reading aloud words with which they were unfamiliar in speech, but that they would not have difficulty with words with which they were familiar in speech. In order to test this, for each word that the learners attempted on the test list but were unable to read out, the researcher tested their knowledge of the meaning of that word. The researcher prompted the learner by giving them the word and then asked them if they knew the meaning of the word. A figure was then calculated representing the percentage of words that the learner did not know after being given the prompt.

However, during the analysis phase of the project, it was realised that there were several significant problems with the design of the vocabulary assessment. Firstly, the learners were only tested on those words that they were unable to read. This did not account for those words that the learners were able to decode, but perhaps did not know the meanings of. Secondly, using the word identification lists for vocabulary was problematic because the lists were designed to increase in difficulty for word recognition and not necessarily vocabulary. However, it was observed that learners who scored highly on word identification often scored low on word meanings and vice versa, learners who scored in the middle or low ranges on word identification tended to score highly on word meanings. This is not surprising given that as the word lists rise in difficulty, some of the words become more obscure in meaning, although not all of the words. Whilst the preliminary data suggested that there appears to be a trend that the higher-level readers need more vocabulary development, most likely the lower-level readers are lacking in vocabulary as well, yet the assessment procedures used in the study did not adequately address this. As a result, the findings from the vocabulary component of the assessment were deemed invalid and were not included in the final analysis.

Description of the word-list test used in the study

The word-list test was based on the word lists used in the QRI. The QRI has nine word lists of 20 words each, with each list more difficult than the preceding one. For the study these lists were printed on cards using the same type and size of font that was used in the QRI. The font was Helvetica, with printer's a's and g's. Lists 1–4 were printed in 14 pt and lists 5–9 in 12 pt. The spelling was anglicised, e.g. *aluminum* was changed to *aluminium*.

Each list corresponds to a US grade school level. For the purpose of judging whether these levels were appropriate for the adult learners in this study, the levels were converted to English year group levels and then to English school and adult literacy curriculum levels. Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 shows these suggested equivalences, plus the first word of each word list. Since there were more lists than Core Curriculum levels, the Core Curriculum levels were subdivided. Whilst arguably a rough division, it is clear that the selected word list test was appropriate for a wide range of adult learners.

Comprehension

The primary aim of the comprehension exercise was to assess the learners' ability to understand indirect meaning. The following requirements were established: a collection of prose passages of varying levels of difficulty but within the appropriate range for adults with limited literacy, and prose whose content was at a level which challenged the reader to interpret the implicit meanings of the text.

Finding a test that met the requirements proved to be difficult. The International Adult Literacy Survey (Carey, Low and Hansbro, 1997), for example, did not meet the requirements because the prose items were either too difficult, or did not lend themselves to questions designed to test comprehension of indirect meanings. A search through some of the journals addressing adult reading (**Journal of Research in Reading, Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, and Reading Research Quarterly**) was conducted in an attempt to locate a suitable comprehension test. A suitable test was found in a US study conducted by Bristow and Leslie (1988) and designed to investigate the validity of oral reading accuracy and comprehension as indicators of difficulty for low-literate adults. This study had a similar aim to the present study, namely to assess comprehension of both explicit and implicit meanings. In addition, the learners in Bristow and Leslie (1988) had the same levels of literacy as those in the present study, and the oral reading which is part of the test provided extra data for this study.

The materials developed by Bristow and Leslie consist of four descriptive passages of ascending difficulty from adult instructional materials in the US. The 180- to 200-word passages are descriptive, expository selections on the following topics: Sleepwalkers, Snow, Money, and Lightning. The contents are highly familiar and represent experiences universal to adults in the UK. Bristow and Leslie prepared eight comprehension questions for each passage. Four questions test literal comprehension, i.e. the answers were explicitly stated in the passage. Four questions test inferential comprehension, i.e. the answers were not directly stated in the passage, but required the reader to integrate information from the text with their background knowledge of the subject matter.

These passages were rated for readability using the Fry Readability Graph, a US rating system that correlates readability with US grade levels. In order to judge their suitability for the present study, the readability levels were then converted to National Core Curriculum Levels using the key found in Table 3.1. The titles of the passages and their corresponding levels were as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Sleepwalkers | Entry 2–3 |
| 2. Snow | Entry 3 |
| 3. Money | Entry 3–Level 1 |
| 4. Lightning | Level 1 |

The Bristow and Leslie assessment materials met all the requirements for the study. In addition to enabling an assessment of comprehension, they also were aptly suited for a

miscue analysis which identified problems that the learners had in identifying words in context. The passages needed only a few adaptations of spelling and phraseology to make them appropriate for the UK adult population. The passages as used can be found in Appendix H, and the comprehension questions based on them in Appendix I. The passages were printed on cards for the learners to read. As with the Word Lists, font style and size were adjusted to correlate with the level of difficulty of the text. The QRI provided the model for this, as Bristow and Leslie did not state what font style and size were used in their study.

Assessment of phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is used here as an umbrella term encompassing not only phonemic awareness but an awareness of larger spoken units such as syllables and rhyming words. In the research literature on school-age reading, in particular, correlations have been made between phonological awareness and success with early reading (see, for example, NRP, 2000; Ehri et al., 2001a, b). It would seem that this would hold true for adult early readers as well, and findings in the recent US review of adult reading instruction conducted for NifL/NCSALL (Kruidenier, 2002) suggest that adults who struggle with reading have significant problems with phonological awareness, specifically:

- 1) phonemic awareness among adult non-readers is almost non-existent and only slightly better among adult beginning readers; and
- 2) adult beginning readers have poor phonic or word analysis knowledge.

Because of this, it was decided to locate instruments that would test phonological awareness.

The following criteria were established for the instrument to be used in the study. The test needed to be:

- 1) capable of being administered by the researchers without significant training;
- 2) appropriate for adults; and
- 3) capable of being completed within 40 minutes.

With these criteria in mind, a search was conducted for appropriate tests. Experts in the field of adult literacy and dyslexia were consulted, and a newly published review of phonological assessment methods and tools (Sodoro et al., 2002) was shared with the project team. Of the many published materials reviewed in the article, one, the *Phonological Awareness and Reading Profile – Intermediate* (Salter and Robertson, 2001) seemed especially appropriate because it had an age range of 8–14, whilst the majority of the others were designed for young children. This test was located and considered by the project team.

The *Phonological Awareness and Reading Profile* (PhARP) is designed to identify areas in which a struggling reader may experience difficulty. It is theoretically grounded in research on phonemic awareness instruction recently reported by the National Reading Panel (2000): the tasks on the test are typical of those encountered in the NRP's literature search, e.g. phoneme blending, isolation, segmentation, deletion and manipulation. This test met the prescribed criteria and was chosen for use in the study.

The PhARP has four main components: Phonological Awareness, Decoding, Spelling, and Fluency. (In this context, 'fluency' means 'reading speed'.) A decision was made to use the first three components for this study, except for one of the Phonological Awareness subtests ("manipulation", which used coloured blocks and was considered too childish). The Fluency component was not used, for the reason given in section 3.7.1. The rest of the test was administered as it exists except for the spelling test. The spelling test has 20 words, with the

first word of the test being "orthographic". For this study, the order of the words was rearranged so that the easier, one-syllable words, e.g. "fuss", came at the beginning of the test and the more difficult words occurred at the end. This was done out of consideration for the learners' confidence levels with writing and spelling in particular. The 20 words are listed in Appendix J in the order used in this study.

A.2.6 Administration of the assessment materials

Each assessment began with an introduction and explanation by the researcher. Then the tests were given in the following order: word list test, passage reading, comprehension, PhARP.

Administration of the word list test

The administration of this test was essentially in two parts, designed first to locate a 'test list' for each learner and then to test the learner fully on that list. The ideal test list would be a list in which the learner was able to identify 70–85 per cent of words, a readability level of "Instructional" (see Table A.2).

Table A.2: Reading levels of the word list test

Independent:	18–20/20 words identified, or 90–100%
Instructional:	14–17/20 words identified, or 70–85%
Frustration:	Fewer than 14/20 words identified, or less than 70%

(Source: Leslie and Caldwell, 1995)

In order to locate each learner's test list, the researcher moved them quickly up through lists which were easy for them, as follows. The researcher presented the learner with the first word list card, and asked the learner to begin reading words from the start of the list. At the same time, the researcher recorded the learner's responses on her Examiner Word List. (One of these lists, for List 1, is given in Appendix K.) If the learner read the word within one second, this was noted as "Identified automatically". If the learner took longer than one second and/or made an error reading the word, but then made the appropriate correction, a mark was made in the column noted "Identified". If the learner automatically identified the first five words in the first list, s/he was asked to move on to the second list and so on until the learner began to hesitate in identifying the words on a list. This then became the test list. At this point the learner was asked to read all 20 words in that particular list. Once the test list was identified and tested, the learner was not presented with any more lists.

Scoring of the word list test

Because the learners were tested on different lists, it was decided that a common scale needed to be devised in which those who read more difficult lists received higher scores than those who read less difficult lists. Each learner received a score from 0–180. The learners' scores were calculated based on the number of words they were able to identify correctly (not identify automatically, but total identified correctly) on their test list, plus 20 points for each list below their test list.

There are a total of nine word lists, with 20 words in each. Each list was worth 20 points. Even though the learners only read the first 5 words on each list prior to their test list, it was assumed that the learners would have been able to identify correctly all the words on the lists below their test list. Example 1) If a learner's test list was list 5, it was assumed that they were able to read all the words on lists 1–4. Their score on list five was then added to 80

points, the credit they received for lists 1–4. If they scored 15 on list 5, their total score, therefore was $80 + 15 = 95$. Example 2) Learner B read list 8 as their test list and identified 18 of the words correctly. Their score was 140 (Lists 1–7) $+ 18 = 158$.

Table A.3: word list score ranges

List 1	1–20
List 2	20–40
List 3	40–60
List 4	60–80
List 5	80–100
List 6	100–120
List 7	120–140
List 8	140–160
List 9	160–180

Administration of the comprehension assessment and miscue analysis

Once the word list test was completed, the researcher selected a reading passage for the learner to read. The researcher's decision was based on the assumption that the word list test was predictive of reading ability. The goal was to administer a passage that the learner could read at Instructional Level.

The researchers chose one of the four reading passages for each learner based on the correlation between the word lists and the passages made using the key from Table 3.1, and their own judgment. The researchers were provided with the following guidelines:

Table A.4: guidelines for choosing an appropriate passage

If they read list 1 only –	Ask if they would like to try "Sleepwalkers". Tell them that it is a difficult passage. If they have a difficult time of it, or appear to be very frustrated, discontinue the test and move on to the Phonological Awareness Test.
If they read list 2, 3 or part of 4 –	go to "Sleepwalkers"
If they read list 4 or 5 –	go to "Snow"
If they are able to read list 6 or 7 –	go to "Money"
If they are able to read list 8 or 9 –	go to "Lightning"

(Note: these are guidelines only, feel free to use your judgment and indicate your reasoning in the comments section on the sheets. By "if they read" I'm referring to being able to read at an Instructional or Independent Level.)

Once a passage was selected, the learner was provided with the appropriate card on which the passage was printed. They were asked to read the passage aloud. Whilst they read, the researcher followed along on her copy and took note of the learner's miscues. The researcher noted all miscues, including omissions and insertions.

After the learners completed reading the passage, they were asked the comprehension questions orally by the researcher. The learners were allowed to keep the text in front of them to refer back to, but they were not given a printed copy of the questions. The researcher recorded the learners' responses on a marking sheet carrying a copy of the questions.

Scoring of the passage reading

Each learner received a score for reading a certain passage which was weighted for their level of difficulty. The scores were calculated based on the following: each passage was given a numerical value that corresponded to its level, Passage 1 was worth 1 point, Passage 2, 2 points, etc. It was assumed that if a learner read Passage 2, they were also capable of reading Passage 1, so they were given credit for Passage 1, which was 1 point, so their score was 1 for Passage 1 and 2 for Passage 2 = 3 points.

Table A.5: Reading passage scores

Passage 1	Sleepwalkers	1 point
Passage 2	Snow	3 points
Passage 3	Money	6 points
Passage 4	Lightning	10 points

*Scoring of the comprehension test**Explicit/implicit scores*

Because the learners were tested on different passages, it was decided that a common scale needed to be devised in which those who read more difficult passages received higher scores than those who read less difficult passages. Each learner received a score from 0-16 for explicit comprehension, and another such score for implicit comprehension. These scores were based on the number of correct answers on the test passage. In addition it was assumed that the learners would have been able to answer all questions correctly on the less difficult passages, so they received credit for answers from those passages. Thus a learner who read Sleepwalkers received a score of 0-4, while a learner who read Money received a score of 8-12 (see Table A.6).

Table A.6: Score ranges for implicit and explicit comprehension questions

Passage 1	Sleepwalkers	0-4 points
Passage 2	Snow	4-8 points
Passage 3	Money	8-12 points
Passage 4	Lightning	12-16 points

Total comprehension scores

These were calculated by adding the implicit and explicit scores together, using the same system of weighting (Table A.7).

Table A.7: Total comprehension scores

Passage 1	Sleepwalkers	0-8 points
Passage 2	Snow	8-16 points
Passage 3	Money	16-24 points
Passage 4	Lightning	24-32 points

Phonological Awareness and Reading Profile

As indicated above, the researchers had one test booklet for each learner. The test was given orally by the researcher, who initiated a series of tasks as prompted by the test booklets. The first set of tasks was grouped under the heading Phonological Awareness. In this section

there were nine subtests. One of the subtests, "manipulation", was omitted because it involved moving coloured blocks around and this was considered too childish. Each of the remaining tasks (these are listed in section 4.7) involved the researcher explaining the task, giving a spoken example, and then giving the task to the learner. Each task had five items in it. In order to shorten the test, the researchers were instructed to give the first three items of each of these tasks. They were also instructed to take into consideration learners' frustration levels during these tasks. For example, if a learner became frustrated during a task, the researcher would stop the task and move on. The researcher recorded the learner's responses in the booklet for later analysis and scoring.

The second section of the test was decoding. The learner was presented with a list of 41 "nonsense words" and was asked to read them aloud. The researcher recorded the learner's responses.

The third and last section of the test was spelling. The researcher read out a list of words to the learner and the learner attempted to spell them on a piece of paper. As in a traditional spelling test, the researcher was free to explain the word and/or use it in a sentence. The test was stopped if the learner became too frustrated.

Completing the assessment sheets

After the battery of tests was completed, the researcher performed a preliminary analysis for word reading and passage reading, and recorded the results on an Assessment Profile Sheet (see Appendix L). One sheet was completed for each learner.

First, the results of the word list test were compiled. The researcher took the test list and added up the totals and calculated a percentage for each category under Word Reading (correct automatic, correct identified, and total correct). Then each learner's overall reading level was determined based on the percentage of total words identified, as shown in Table A.2.

Next, the researcher counted the total number of miscues the learner made when reading the passage. Similar to the reading levels for the word list test in Table A.2, learners' reading levels on the passages were determined based on the number of miscues they made over the course of the passage, as in Table A.8 (derived from Leslie and Caldwell, 1995).

Table A.8: Learners' reading levels on the passages

Independent	0–4 miscues in total
Instructional	5–18 miscues in total
Frustration	19+ miscues in total

The researcher also noted any comments about the reader's strategies.

Originally, the researchers calculated two miscue scores. One counted only miscues that resulted in a change in meaning of the text, while the other was the total number of miscues including both meaning-change miscues and semantically acceptable miscues – see the following examples.

Meaning-change miscue

Text: Once snowflakes as big as your head fell from the sky.

Reader 3.6: Once snowflakes as big as your **hand** fell from the sky.

Semantically acceptable miscue

Text: Snowflakes are alike in some ways.

Reader 3.6: Snowflakes are **like** in some ways.

The reason for distinguishing between the types of miscues is that, theoretically, a high number of meaning-change miscues is a cause for concern, as it should affect the reader's comprehension, whilst semantically acceptable miscues should not affect comprehension. In practice, the researchers found that in some cases it was very difficult to judge whether the miscue was semantically acceptable or a meaning-change miscue, particularly when the miscue involved a tense change - see the following example.

Ambiguous miscue

Text: Snow is ice that comes from snow clouds.

Reader 2.11: Snow is ice that **came** from snow clouds.

When the assessments were being compiled, it was noted that there was a considerable amount of inconsistency in the way that the researchers had judged the miscues. Some judged a miscue like the one above as a meaning change and others judged it as semantically acceptable. It was decided to re-analyse the miscues for each learner. Four raters reviewed the miscues (two of the researchers, the senior research officer, and an outside rater) and made judgments on their semantic acceptability. Further disagreement ensued about the ambiguous miscues. On the one hand there was the argument that tense changes like the one above are acceptable in some dialects. On the other hand, there was the argument that when readers misread a tense they are not comprehending the subtleties of verb use intended by the author. As readers encounter more complex texts, verb usage becomes more specific and miscues with tense have more consequences.

This disagreement between the raters seems worthy of further study, but unfortunately beyond the scope of the present exploratory study. As a result, for this study, the miscue count that was used was the total number of miscues. This seemed the fairest and least subjective method.

After the miscue analysis, the researcher scored the comprehension test, entering the number correct explicit and number correct implicit. At the bottom of the Assessment Profile Sheet, the researchers were invited to comment on the administration of the test. Many took this opportunity to explain why they chose a certain passage for the learner.

The PhARP was analysed next using the recommendations of the publisher. The results were recorded on the summary sheet provided with the test booklets. The phonological awareness section was scored and percentages recorded for each task. The results of the decoding task were analysed in the following way: using an analysis sheet provided with the test booklet, the researcher studied the learner's responses one word at a time. Each word was divided into sounds - phonemes and consonant clusters. Each sound that the learner misread was noted. Consider the following example:

Test word: "draph"

Learner response: "drap"

Analysis: The learner misread the final consonant diagraph.

This was done for each word, which enabled the researcher to tally up the number of errors

in each category, e.g. initial consonants, initial consonant clusters, short vowels, long vowels, etc. For ease of scoring as recommended by the test publishers, if the learner got more than 50 per cent correct in each category, a + was marked on the summary sheet, if they got less than 50 per cent correct, a – was marked on the summary sheet.

The spelling test was analysed in a similar fashion to the decoding. Using the spelling analysis chart provided by the test publisher, the researcher studied each attempted spelling. Each word was divided into categories, e.g. prefixes, initial consonants. If the learner made an error in a given category it was noted and then the number correct in each category was totalled. The results were recorded on the summary sheet in the same way that the decoding was done.

The test materials for each learner were put together with two summary sheets, the Assessment Profile and the PhARP summary sheet, and submitted to the Senior Research Officer.

Further stages of statistical analysis of the results are described in chapters four to eight.

Appendix B: observation protocol – instructions to the researchers

Observation system

Before your observation:

Seek out tutors to observe. These can be people that you already know, or those who have been suggested by the manager. Make arrangements to observe a class session. When making these arrangements, briefly explain your purpose and role to the tutor. For example, your purpose is to "find out what is going on in adult literacy classes". Your role is that of an interested observer. You are there to learn about what is going on – not to evaluate, judge, or provide advice and feedback on the lesson. You will be taking notes about the nature of the activities. Assure the tutor that your notes are for you only and that you will protect the identity of the tutor and learners by making them anonymous when you write up your notes.

At some point you will want to explain your second purpose to the tutor, which is to assess some of the learners. Tell the tutor that you will not be doing this at the observation session, but at a later date. The purpose of the assessment is to "find out what sorts of problems adults have with reading". Explain that the assessments would be done on a one-on-one basis with you and that they would take approximately 30 minutes. You'll want to show the assessment instruments to the tutor, at a convenient point, but briefly you could say that the assessments will be based on a reading comprehension exercise. Also explain that you will be asking for the tutor's recommendation of adults who would be both willing to be assessed and have difficulties with reading.

If it feels appropriate at the time, begin negotiations with the tutor about when these assessments should take place and who would be assessed. (This can be done later as well, such as after the session.) The tutor might suggest that you could take the learners out of class to do the assessment (this may be the most convenient), but do not expect this to happen. If the tutor suggests that you'll need to arrange a time outside class, then you'll want the tutor to introduce you to several learners so that you can get their permission and arrange a time.

The observation

At the beginning of the session, have the tutor introduce you to the class. You can let the tutor explain what you are doing or explain it yourself. You might say to the class that you are interested in finding out what is going on in adult literacy classes so you are here to sit back and watch as a neutral observer.

Observer's Log

During the observation, keep a log. This is essentially a running record of what is happening (see examples). We are not interested in micro-details, so you will not need to get everyone's speech verbatim, but we are interested in a detailed description of the teaching and learning.

Pay particular attention to the following:

- The structure of the session, e.g. tutor addressing a whole group, individual tutorials, a combination of the above?

- Content of the lessons? What actually is being taught?
- What is the nature of the teaching? For example, does the tutor lecture? Engage the learners in discussion? Model things on a board? Read aloud? Use props?
- What materials are being used?
- If individuals are working on tutorials, what are they working on? What materials are they using?
- Does the tutor walk around and help individuals? What kind of help does she give?
- How much time is spent in each part of the session? e.g. 5 minutes lecture, 15 minutes individual work. (You'll need to keep a running record of the time as it passes during the session.)

When you are observing, you may have judgments, thoughts, or opinions that arise from the current situation, include these in your log, but distinguish them from the running record, e.g. use the convention: O.C. (Observer Comment).

If possible make a sketch of the room and its layout. Note the display and equipment, and anything of interest in the "atmosphere".

After the session, meet with the tutor to "debrief". Ideally this would be done right after the session, but do whatever is convenient. Use section 1 on your observation schedule to guide you in your discussion with the tutor.

Then complete the rest of the observation schedule. Try to do this as soon as possible after the observation so you don't forget anything.

Observation schedule

In addition to the log, you also need to complete the observation schedule. This will function both as a summary of your observation, as well as your analysis of the teaching and learning.

It is recognized that not all information can be collected at every session observed. Collect as much as feasible. If the answer to any question is "not applicable", enter "n/a".

Appendix C: sample observation log

Researcher's observation log, Jan 14th 2003, 1900-2100

(OC = observer comment)

- 18.50 Tutor Marge¹⁰ opens library, turns off burglar alarm, sets up tables in upstairs room. Warm room, adult sized furniture, surrounded by books (some old and fusty, some reference books – not very inviting – and some furniture, e.g. microfiche and filing cabinets). No whiteboard or flipchart.
- 18.55 Student DW arrives, so Marge sits down with her immediately. 1:1 reading sounds – initial blends, double consonants at first then trying triple. DW finds triples hard so Marge shows how to blend double with single and hear all three. Marge notes need for reinforcement next lesson. Leaves DW matching blends and word endings to make new words.
- 19.04 Two more students arrive, engage in conversation with Blanche (Volunteer tutor – she helps Marge on Tues and Marge is VT for her at a class for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at the same venue on Weds). Ernie (visually impaired) relates his holiday experience rather loudly, initially to Blanche and then to Pauline when she shows an interest.
- 19.06 Ian arrives, explains domestic problem to Blanche then sits down to work. Blanche explains Ernie's work to him (each student has a workplan written out by Marge for the evening; Blanche follows it). Ernie reads headings which he will use to write about his holiday. Marge continues 1:1 with DW – br- and -ing phoneme clusters.
- 19.07 Marge leaves DW to work alone; explains Pauline's task. P apologies for not having had time to do homework over holidays – sick husband and ailing mother. Reminder about spider diagram which P has found useful in planning and recalling what to write.
- 19.10 Ernie keen to continue talking about holiday – Blanche gently returns him to task. Marge sits with Ian; begins explaining his task and listening to his explanation of domestic problem. Reminds about work done before holiday – blends and word endings – gives matching exercise and asks him to do first half. Blanche assists P by reading out a text which P then answers questions on (listening task).
- 19.17 Marge greets and speaks to Ernie, continues discussing holiday; checks he has succeeded in reading headings, reminds him to just put down one or two words with each heading to begin with, as notes. He suggests ideas. Blanche discusses New Year with DW; clarifies writing task.
- 19.21 Interrupt lesson to explain my presence, now everyone has arrived. Pauline tells Marge how she got on with the listening task and how she jots notes down to help her remember things. Then S checks DW's matching work – 'excellent' – gives DW text to read and highlight morphemes which she has become familiar with over past weeks, then answer questions.
- 19.25 Blanche works with Ian – tick off endings you have used. Ernie attempts spelling of Lanzarote, reads words he has so far written, Marge prompts further ideas for words to summarise under headings.
DW reading and highlighting; P writing story to expand on ideas in listening text.

¹⁰ All names have been changed

- lan continues blends with Blanche. Marge (using thick felt tip) scribes Ernie's suggested words, asking him to spell them. [OC Ernie has limited vision and has to hold paper very close to his eye; almost no 'scanning' ability so good speller given his disability; also should not work his eyes too much.]
- 19.32 Marge asks Ernie to focus on his two main memories, notes key words. Gives him clear instruction to attempt two sentences under each heading as draft, which he will then type up at home. Reminds about punctuation.
- 19.35 Marge returns to P who has 'found task hard'; refers to spidergram; recalls facts from text; expands ideas by encouraging P to describe places and times. Speculate on details, refer to text for ideas; implicit questions from Marge prompts P's ideas.
- 19.40 Blanche helps Ernie expand ideas (he has done two sentences); discuss Lanzarote which means 'island of dogs' – I interrupt notes to look up London's Isle of Dogs in Atlas.
- 19.45 Blanche asks Ernie to differentiate homophones – 'weather', 'plane' and 'to' occur naturally. Continues writing. Marge looks at lan's work, encourages. Blanche and P discuss elderly mothers. Marge reviews Ernie's writing, don't use 'nice' twice; Ernie explains how he uses the thesaurus on his PC; Marge suggests choices, Ernie adds to list, giving more details.
- 19.55 DW copying out highlighted words. Marge asks Ernie the spellings he corrected earlier – gets them right – elicits more description. P explains domestic problem to Blanche – mum wanders off – will she go the same way? Laughter. [OC genuine rapport, warm atmosphere – is P's motivation for coming emotional as well as educational reasons?]
- 20.00 Blanche moves to lan. Marge hears DW read words she has written. Any she didn't know? 'I worked them out.' Next task is to write a letter. 'Oh no!'
- 20.04 Marge discusses punctuation with P – any full stops to change to commas? 'Can't make my mind up.' Length of sentence might inhibit reader. Encourages her to read out loud. P considers removing part of sentence, but decides it is best left. Marge reminds of commas in lists. [OC advanced level of reasoning demonstrated.] P using spelling dictionary to check spellings. Blanche to Ernie briefly.
- 20.15 (Blanche makes coffee). Marge helps lan to work out -th sound, spells Mablethorpe, then Lincolnshire. Students all work independently; Ernie stops – ready for coffee? Eyes tired?
- 20.20 Marge shows lan a picture of a kitchen – prompts ideas with open questions – lan reads questions and decides true, false or not enough evidence. Make guess – starting sound?
- 20.25 Coffee handed round. Ernie continues with new sheet – choose correct word from range. Marge discusses DW's letter.
- 20.45 Students gradually conclude and pack up.

Appendix D: observation schedule

Observer:

Date:

Times: Start of session

End of session:

Location:

Course Description: e.g. weekly class in English, Basic Skills support, Drop-In

Tutor:

Number of learners present:

Was anyone else present, e.g. volunteers? If so note who they were and their role in the session.

Using your observation log as a guide, comment on the following:

1. **Structure of the Session:** comment on the format, e.g. tutor addressing the whole group, individual tutorials, etc. Indicate how much time was spent on each format.
2. **Activities:** list the various activities or lessons, e.g. spelling activity, writing lesson, but especially the reading activities
3. **Strategies:**
 - *comment on the teacher's general method of delivery*, e.g. whole group explanation with examples on the board, walks around the room and helps individuals
 - *comment on general strategies the teacher uses to help the learners make progress*, e.g. engages learners in discussion, models for them what she wants them to do
 - *comment on general strategies the teacher uses that are related to teaching reading*, e.g. uses cloze examples, discusses vocabulary, writes word families on the board
4. **Materials:** list the materials the teacher used during the lesson
5. **Reading instruction:** comment on the nature of the reading instruction—What did you observe that could be defined as reading instruction, how much time was spent on it? If individuals were reading as a part of their individual work, what were they reading?

Other Comments:

¹¹ Note: While you should cover the content in these questions, use them as guidelines. Feel free to engage in a conversation. Your aim is to get the tutor talking about reading – instruction, difficulties that adults have, etc.

Appendix E: tutor interview schedule

Interviewer:

Date:

Tutor:

Date of observation:

1. **General Questions about the session observed:** how did you feel the session went today? Did you get through what you wanted to cover? What will you be doing in the next lesson?¹¹
2. **Questions you might have about the lesson and teaching strategies:** e.g. I noticed that you did ___, it seemed very effective, is that a regular part of your routine? Or I'm a little unclear about ___ can you tell me more about that?
3. **Questions you might have about the learners:** e.g. I noticed that (name) seemed to be having difficulty with the assignment, can you tell me a little more about her?
4. **Questions about structure:** e.g. I noticed that you began with a group discussion and then the learners went to different tables and were working on their own projects. Would you call this a typical session? Why or why not? Follow up with, What type of format or class structure do you think is most beneficial?
5. **Questions about materials:** e.g. Where do you get your materials from? Do you find that you design a lot of your own materials? Do you use phonics materials? If so, what?
6. **Questions about the reading difficulties of the learners:** e.g. Our study focuses on reading instruction and one thing that we are interested in is what kinds of problems with reading adults have. Can you tell me a little about the reading abilities of your learners? How do you know this? What kinds of difficulties do they have?
7. **Questions about reading instruction:** *if you observed some*, you could ask something like, I noticed that you did that cloze test, what sorts of other strategies do you use to teaching reading? *If you did not observe any*, you could ask: What kinds of support do you think the learners need in reading? Are there any specific things that you do?

Appendix F:

focus group topics and sample questions

Topic: introduction – Gist of the basic skills programme at the site

- What is your name and where do you teach?
- Tell us a little about your programme, would you describe it as basic skills support, dedicated basic skills, etc.
- How many other tutors are there that teach basic skills? Maths, English, etc.?
- What is the name (s) of the module/course that you teach?
- What is the purpose of the course?
- Who are the learners? Numbers, gender, ethnicity, language, average class size?
- How are they placed in your courses? (assessment, recommendation, etc.)
- How often does the course meet? What kinds of formats do you use?- whole class, individual work, etc.

Topic: reading instruction

- Do you have any involvement with teaching reading? If so, what?
- What kinds of strategies do you use?
- What kinds of materials do you use?
- How do you judge the suitability of texts?
- How do you encourage reading?

Topic: the learners as readers

- How would you describe the reading ability of your learners?
- How do you know this?
- What kinds of assessments do you use?
- How would you define a struggling reader?
- How would the learners define their reading ability?
- Do you have learners that come to you and say they need help with reading? Any who say they just want reading? Do more say they want help with other aspects, e.g. spelling?
- What sort of reading do they want? Do they say they want to achieve a specific goal, e.g. read a newspaper?
- Why do you think these adults have difficulty with reading?
- What would you say are the sticking points that are preventing them from making progress?

Topic: teaching the struggling reader

- What are some strategies that you know of that would help these readers?
- What are some materials you know of that you could use with these readers?
- Have you used phonics materials? If so, what?
- Given time, money, resources, how would you help these learners make better progress

Topic: tutor training

- For those with a primary teaching background, how helpful has this been for your adult literacy teaching?
- What kinds of training have you had on teaching reading?
- What training would you like to receive?

Appendix G: word lists for word list test

Source: *Qualitative Reading Inventory II* (Leslie & Caldwell, 1995)

List 1	List 2	List 3	List 4
can	mother	bear	morning
just	need	father	toy
I	them	find	room
work	what	rabbit	old
write	children	friend	trade
at	thing	song	promise
with	was	thought	pieces
my	animal	there	hatch
he	they	run	push
too	were	then	though
the	saw	move	begins
in	want	group	food
she	every	eat	light
other	went	air	ends
make	like	bread	clue
place	from	have	breathe
go	said	wind	insects
to	live	get	weather
many	comes	put	noticed
do	take	looked	money

List 5

lunch
 special
 believe
 claws
 lion
 rough
 wear
 tongue
 crowded
 wool
 removed
 curious
 sheep
 electric
 worried
 enemies
 hid
 clothing
 swim
 entrance

List 6

escape
 desert
 crop
 islands
 chief
 mounds
 busy
 pond
 signs
 ocean
 pilot
 fame
 precious
 settlers
 guarded
 passenger
 boundaries
 communicate
 adventurer
 invented

List 7

attend
 protest
 movement
 sailor
 month
 threatened
 continue
 tales
 creature
 wavelengths
 laser
 focuses
 arrested
 poison
 route
 convince
 giant
 pollution
 aluminium
 finance

List 8

sewed
 controlled
 championships
 messenger
 fortune
 memories
 abolish
 earthquake
 volunteers
 machines
 businesses
 shrinking
 research
 abdomen
 slavery
 howled
 homogenized
 connection
 fashioned
 behaviour

List 9

commissioned
 arduous
 tumultuous
 navigated
 straits
 initiated
 skirmish
 laboriously
 reluctant
 sovereign
 crucial
 tsar
 parliament
 majestic
 rebellion
 ammonium
 reign
 emperor
 meticulous
 mantle

Appendix H: reading passages

Sleepwalkers

Some people walk in their sleep. They get out of bed and walk around the house. Then they go back to bed. People who walk in their sleep are called sleepwalkers. Sleepwalkers do funny things. One woman got out of bed and began to cook food. She made a fine meal while she was asleep. No one was there to eat the food, though, because they were asleep, too!

Some sleepwalkers even walk out of their homes. One little boy walked out of the house. He walked until he came to a river. Into the water he jumped! When he woke up he was very wet and cold. One man got up in the night. He went out and cut down a tree. Then he went back to bed. In the morning when he got up again, he went outside. There was the tree on the ground. Some people say that sleepwalkers never get hurt. This is not so. Sleepwalkers can fall when they walk in their sleep. One man went up on the roof in his sleep. Then he fell off the roof and broke his leg.

Snow

When snow falls it looks like white stars falling from the sky. But there have been times when the snow has looked red, green, yellow, or black. There have been snowflakes of almost every colour. Grey snow fell in one place. The snow was mixed with ashes which made it look grey. Red snow has come down in other places. When this happened, the snow was mixed with red dust.

Most snow looks white, but it really is the colour of ice. Snow is ice that comes from snow clouds. Each snowflake begins with a small drop of water that becomes ice. Then more water forms around this drop. The way the water freezes gives the snowflake its shape, so no two snowflakes are ever just the same.

Snowflakes are alike in some ways. All snowflakes are flat and have six sides. What makes snowflakes big or little? When the air is cold and dry, the falling snowflakes are small and hard. If the air is wet and warmer, the snowflakes are big and soft. Once snowflakes as big as your head fell from the sky. It could happen again!

Money

Money! What do you think of when you hear this word? Do you picture a round metal coin? Or paper money? Most likely you think of one or the other. The money we use today is made of paper or metal. But the money of long ago was not at all like the money we use today.

Food and spices were used as money many years ago. Salt was the first thing ever used as money. Other foods, such as butter and cheese, were also used as money. Bricks of tea leaves were even used by some groups of people.

The first paper money was made from the bark of a tree. The largest piece of paper money ever made was about the size of this page. The smallest paper money was smaller than a stamp on a letter.

Coins have not always been made of metal. Soap, stones, and even whale teeth were once used for money, just as we use coins today. Coins were not always around either. Long ago some coins were made in the shape of a knife or a fish. Even today, money in the shape of rings and bracelets is seen in some places.

Lightning

A flash of lightning is a sight few people can forget. For most of us, lightning is something to be seen from a safe distance. Some people who study lightning, however, go in search of these "fireworks in the sky."

Lightning is formed when electric sparks in storm clouds leap from one cloud to another. Sometimes these giant sparks jump to the earth. The flashes we see are not very wide, about as wide as a person's finger. They are long, however, sometimes as long as eight miles. The flashes are very hot, hotter than the surface of the sun.

People who study lightning tell about many strange tricks it has played. Once lightning set fire to a house and also called the fire department. The bolt struck the building and then hit a fire alarm box nearby. Firemen raced to answer the alarm and put out the fire.

Some day we may be able to find a use for the zigzag streaks that light the sky. One flash alone could light all the lights in a city, if it could be used. Lightning may give us the electricity we will need in the years ahead.

Appendix I: comprehension questions for the reading passages, with example answers

Questions for Sleepwalkers

- 1) What did one woman do while she was asleep?
Explicit: *cooked a meal.*
- 2) What did one little boy do while sleepwalking?
Explicit: *jumped in a river*
- 3) What do you think the boy's parents did when they found out what had happened?
Implicit: *accept any reasonable answer, such as: dried him off, put a lock high on the door so he couldn't get outside at night, or laughed [Ask: "Why do you think they laughed?"]*
- 4) What did one man do while walking in his sleep?
Explicit: *cut down a tree; OR fell off a roof.*
- 5) How do you think he felt about what he had done when he woke up? Why do you think he felt that way?
Implicit: *accept any reasonable answer in which the answer to "Why" is appropriate to the feeling given.]*
- 6) According to this passage, do some sleepwalkers get hurt? (Yes) Tell how one man got hurt.
Explicit: *fell off a roof.*
- 7) How might the boy in this passage have got hurt?
Implicit: *accept any reasonable answer, such as: He might have hurt himself on a stone in a river; he might have drowned.*
- 8) Think of one of the people in this passage. What happened that night that might have woken up that person?
Implicit: *accept any reasonable answer which indicates knowledge of the person's experience as described in the passage.*

Questions for Snow

- 1) What caused red snow?
Explicit: *red dust.*
- 2) Given what you learned in the passage, what do you think might cause green snow?
Implicit: *accept any answer that indicates some sort of green particles are mixed with snow.*
- 3) What are some ways that all snowflakes are alike?
Explicit: *flat, six-sided. [If they say "wet" or "white," say, "According to the passage, what are some ways..."]*
- 4) What gives a snowflake its shape?
Explicit: *the way the water freezes as the snowflake is formed.*
- 5) Why do you think no two snowflakes are ever the same?
Implicit: *the water freezes in different ways.*
- 6) In what ways does the air affect the size of snowflakes?
Explicit: *accept any one of these: temperature, humidity, whether it is wet or dry, whether it is colder or warmer.*
- 7) In what type of air might snowflakes become as big as your head?
Implicit: *very wet and warmer*
- 8) Why do you think the passage said, "It could happen again?"

Implicit: *because if similar weather conditions occurred- if the air was like that again—it COULD happen again. [Note: If they say "Because it could happen again," probe by asking, "What could make it happen again?]*

Questions for Money

- 1) How was the money of long ago different from today's money?
Implicit: *accept any of these: shape, materials, size, durability, actual rather than symbolic value, or any other legitimately contrasting characteristic.*
- 2) Name two foods or spices used as money long ago.
Explicit: *salt, butter, cheese, tea.*
- 3) Name two things, other than foods or spices, that were used as money long ago.
Explicit: *soap, whale's teeth, stones, rings, bracelets.*
- 4) Why do you think these things were used as money?
Implicit: *they were available; they had some inherent value; whales teeth were scarce.*
- 5) According to what you just read, what unusual shapes were found in coins long ago?
Explicit: *knife, fish.*
- 6) Why do you think coins were shaped this way?
Implicit: *knives or fish were important to their lives, symbolic value; ability to distinguish from other objects.*
- 7) What was used to make the first paper money?
Explicit: *bark from a tree.*
- 8) Why is our money today easier to use than the money of long ago?
Implicit: *accept any of these: less bulky, less difficult to measure, more efficient [Ask "Why?"], less likely to be damaged from high usage, OR any other reasonable answer.*

Questions for Lightning

- 1) What causes lightning?
Explicit: *electric sparks in storm clouds.*
- 2) How wide are lightning flashes?
Explicit: *about the width of a finger.*
- 3) What did the passage mean when it talked about "fireworks of the sky"?
Implicit: *lightning is like fireworks.*
- 4) What other word or words did this passage use for lightning?
Implicit: *zigzag streaks, fireworks of the sky, giant sparks. [If they say "flashes," ask for another.]*
- 5) What strange trick that lightning played was described in the passage?
Explicit: *hit house and also fire alarm, OR called firemen to put out a fire it started.*
- 6) Why do you think things often catch fire when struck by lightning?
Implicit: *because lightning [the flashes, sparks, etc.] are very hot.*
- 7) What did this passage say lightning could be used to do someday?
Explicit: *accept either: light all the lights in a city, OR give us the electricity we will need in the years ahead.*
- 8) What else do you think lightning might do to help us in the years ahead?
Implicit: *accept any answers related to using lightning as a source of electricity.*

Appendix J: revised order of words used in spelling section of the Phonemic Awareness and Reading Profile (PhARP)

- 1 fuss
- 2 ply
- 3 quail
- 4 shout
- 5 cycling
- 6 padded
- 7 debased
- 8 mixtures
- 9 coaches
- 10 thorny
- 11 compartments
- 12 instructor
- 13 enabled
- 14 embroider
- 15 generous
- 16 remittance
- 17 reputation
- 18 impeachable
- 19 orthographic
- 20 interpolate

Appendix K: word list test score sheet

List 1 Entry 1a (Possibly Attempt "Sleepwalker" Passage)

	Identified automatically	Identified
1. can		
2. just		
3. I		
4. work		
5. write		
6. at		
7. with		
8. my		
9. he		
10. too		
11. the		
12. in		
13. she		
14. other		
15. make		
16. place		
17. go		
18. to		
19. many		
20. do		

Word reading

Total correct automatic _____ / 20 = _____ per cent

Total correct identified _____ / 20 = _____ per cent

Total number correct _____ / 20 = _____ per cent

Readability Level: (Circle one)

Independent: 18–20/20 words identified, or 90–100 per cent

Instructional: 14–17/20 words identified, or 70–85 per cent

Frustration: fewer than 14/20 words identified, or below 70 per cent

Appendix L: assessment profile sheet

Date:

Researcher: _____

Learner: _____

Native Language: _____

Dyslexic?: _____

Tutor's judgment of learner's reading and writing ability:

Word reading:

List no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
% automatic									
% identified									
Total %									
Level (Ind, Inst., Frust.)									

Passage reading

Name of Passage _____

Miscue Analysis:

Total number of miscues: _____

Indep/ Instru./ Frust. (circle)

Comments:

Comprehension:

Number correct explicit:

Number correct implicit:

Indep/Instru./Frust. (circle)

Comments:

Glossary

The National Literacy Strategy (NLS)

This campaign to raise standards in schools was introduced in all schools in September 1998 and supports teachers, trainee teachers and others working to improve literacy in our primary schools.

The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS)

This campaign to raise standards in schools was introduced in all schools in September 1999, supports teachers, trainee teachers and others working to improve numeracy in our primary schools.

Skills for Life

This is the National strategy in England for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills and was published in March 2001.

The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum

This was developed by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit at the Department for Education and Skills and sets out the specific literacy skills taught and learned from Entry level 1 to Level 2. It offers a comprehensive framework for teachers and tutors to help them identify and meet language learning needs. The curriculum is based on the national standards for adult literacy developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in 2000.

The Adult Numeracy Core Curriculum

This was developed by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit at the Department for Education and Skills and sets out the specific numeracy skills taught and learned from Entry level 1 to Level 2. It offers a comprehensive framework for teachers and tutors to help them identify and meet language learning needs.

The Adult ESOL Core Curriculum

This was developed by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit at the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that good quality English language provision is available to support people who have a first language other than English. It is based on the National Standards for Adult Literacy and is a parallel curriculum to the core curricula for literacy and numeracy. It offers a comprehensive framework for teachers and tutors to help them identify and meet language learning needs. The curriculum is based on the national standards for adult literacy developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in 2000.

Subject Specifications for teachers of adult literacy.

The subject specifications are set at levels 3 and 4 of the English National Qualifications Framework. They have been designed to ensure that from 1 September 2002, all new teachers of literacy are equipped with the appropriate and relevant knowledge, understanding and personal skills in their subject area.

Subject Specifications for teachers of adult numeracy.

The subject specifications are set at levels 3 and 4 of the English National Qualifications Framework. They have been designed to ensure that from 1 September 2002, all new teachers of numeracy are equipped with the appropriate and relevant knowledge, understanding and personal skills in their subject area.

Subject Specifications for teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

The subject specifications are set at levels 3 and 4 of the English National Qualifications Framework. They have been designed to ensure that from 1 September 2002, all new teachers of ESOL are equipped with the appropriate and relevant knowledge, understanding and personal skills in their subject area.



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- The University of Sheffield
- East London Pathfinder
- Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership

- Basic Skills Agency
- Learning and Skills Development Agency
- LLU+, London South Bank University
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- King's College London

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