

Developing Independence through Literacies Learning

Guidelines for Linking Learning and Care

Learning Connections with Lead Scotland

These *Guidelines* draw on the principle lessons from a number of projects and events focused on making learning for adults with learning difficulties more effective.

They would not have been possible without the knowledge, experience and commitment of researchers from Strathclyde University, adult literacies practitioners and managers, carers and key workers and day centre staff. The work of all these people would have been wasted without the willing cooperation of the learners.

All the research papers, training reports and seminar discussions are available online [Developing Independence through Adult Literacies Learning](#)

Background

Adult service users want: *'Improved health, quality of life, making a positive contribution, exercise of choice and control, freedom from discrimination and harassment, economic well-being and personal dignity'*

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Learning and Care sectors share an agenda: to support the development of independence.

Learning should be meaningful and should increase the capacity for independence, choice and action. However, the contribution the learning can make is limited if confined to the classroom/group. All learning needs to be practised and reinforced in real life situations.

Adults with complex support needs who wish to learn may be receiving other help from a variety of sources. Those who provide this help have an impact on what they can learn and how they can put the learning into practice. Recent research and training projects produced evidence that effective learning for adults with learning difficulties requires the involvement of 'significant others' in their networks of care and support.

The research set out to trial the creation of collaborative working, to record the effect it had for the learner, tutor and carer and to identify the issues and challenges that had to be resolved. The aim was to create robust evidence that could inform the development of more effective teaching and learning which would enhance learners' ability to make choices and decisions, and develop greater independence.

The training sought to raise the awareness of carers, key workers and support workers about literacy and numeracy and how they impact on the lives of their service users. The aims were to embed literacy learning within the working practice of care workers so that they can more effectively enable the people they support to develop and maintain their own literacy skills. It created in effect one of the steps necessary to resolve some of the challenges to effective learning identified by the research.

The findings of these projects complement each other: both demonstrated that collaborative working resulted in improved learning and greater capacity for independence. They make a strong argument for significant changes in the way the literacies provision is organised and in the way care services realise their goal of enhancing independence.

¹ Leadership and Management in Social Care, Halford-Letchfield T, Leonard K, Begun N & Chick N F; Sage Publications, 2008, p58

Introduction

These guidelines present some of the major lessons from the research and training projects in the hope that they will be useful for

- learning practitioners and managers who wish to increase the effectiveness of learning
- care practitioners and managers who wish to increase the contribution that learning can make to the development of independence

Many of the ideas in these guidelines came from the participants in 2 seminars held in November 2008. All the papers and feedback from the seminars are available, along with the original research and training reports, on [Adult Literacies Online \(ALO\)](#) ²

The research, "Effective Learning for Adults with Learning Difficulties", the training project "Literacies - with Care", and the seminar report "Developing Independence through Literacies Learning" exposed recurring issues which need to be, and can be addressed in order to make learning a more effective contributor to the development of independence. All can be accessed through the above link.

Feedback from the Seminars:

"Yes, a good event, but would have liked more practical ideas, i.e., I'm convinced of the need, but want more suggestions about what to do"

(Feedback from seminar evaluations)

Whatever research tells us about improved practice, applying the ideas and implementing change always needs commitment and cooperation from colleagues, managers, carers and teachers and above all, learners. No single person can achieve significant change without cooperation and support from others.

We asked people in small groups to consider four questions -

1. **What is needed to make this approach a practical possibility (in your organisation)?**
2. **Who would you need to talk to / win over / get on board?**
3. **What's the first step you need to take?**
4. **and the next?**

What they discussed may be useful to others, perhaps to prompt discussion, and the details are available through links in the online report, [Developing Independence through Adult Literacies Learning](#). All the seminar presentations and workshop notes are available through this link.

² <http://www.adultliteraciesonline.com/alo/viewresource.htm?id=310>

However, the seminar discussions were particular to the participants. The whole purpose was to help them to focus on their own situation and begin the process of planning for change.

It was clearly only possible in a short seminar to develop ideas up to a point. Beyond that, the ideas have to be adopted by others and implementation has to be developed locally.

However, although each organisation has its own range of issues to deal with, a similar process to engage people with the ideas is suggested as a necessary step toward enabling staff and organisations to commit to

- making changes in their own working practices,
- developing collaborative work with other organisations.

From the research findings:

The research was very clear that there are observable benefits from collaborative working and that barriers can be overcome if action is taken at the appropriate levels in each organisation.

"The most positive experiences for learners seem to arise from instances where their learning could be developed within a network of different people all of whom were aware of their learning and aspects of this which they were able to support." ³

Organisational issues for learning providers

- Address organisational constraints that frustrate the development of teaching and learning; in particular engaging effectively with carers.
- Negotiate cooperative working at organisational level as well as at individual levels.
- Establish secure funding to enable consistent teaching and learning over time.

Issues for Tutors

The best use of tutors' time is made by focusing on specific reading and writing tasks. However, teaching and learning are more productive as tutors understand more about learners' lives. This requires:

- allocating time to enable regular meetings and exchanges necessary for effective communication with carers and support workers,

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/13115549/5> (Summary)

- establishing protocols and permissions to protect learner confidentiality while allowing exchange of relevant information,
- exchanging information at appropriate levels so that learners' timetables can be understood,
- working with carers to prepare learners to take responsibility for their learning,
- assisting tutors to develop a broader engagement with literacies.

Providers of literacies programmes face challenges in terms of addressing the ways in which literacies can be more effectively realised for adults with learning difficulties.

These include

- creating learning opportunities that engage more fully with the lives of adults with learning difficulties,
- ensuring that tutors understand how this may be achieved, and
- providing opportunities for greater continuity of learning.

Organisations providing care and daily activities for people need to be alerted to the potential role of literacies programmes in the lives of people with learning difficulties; in particular the ways in which an individual's literacies development can impact on their independence and general well-being:

- carers and support workers need to be aware of the ways in which they can nurture an individual's literacies development.
- organisations employing care and support staff should establish support to learning as a key aspect of their role.

Closer collaborative working between providers of literacies programmes and those providing care and support is essential to bring these strands of development together. The research evidence suggests that this is a worthwhile objective that may be realised by a moderate amount of

- awareness raising,
- training and
- collaboration,

Tutor time is too limited to enable them engage fully with carers/support workers to exchange information about learners' activities/lives:

- a development worker, engaging strategically with a number of different organisations and tutors would be able to support the broader development of this approach

What specific activities used in the research help?

- Commit time to nurture relationships with a variety of carers and support workers even though they might be affiliated to a number of different organisations.
- Engage effectively with learners and be aware of how literacies could be more fully realised in their everyday lives: gain insight into their learning history, interests and everyday activities.
- Joint meetings of tutors and carers are useful in developing both the learning and care programmes. They also allow tutors and carers to exchange ideas and findings as the learning progresses.
- Use camcorders and cameras to record aspects of learners' everyday lives to be used as a basis for engaging learners in discussion about learning. Support workers will also find this process a useful way to engage with learners.
- Use descriptive literature about specific projects that tutors and learners are or have been engaged in, and examine learners' plans, for example, some learners produce substantial life plans with their carers as a basis for developing their daily activities.
- Set up a system of easy informal communication as a means for tutors to contact and converse with fellow tutors and with carers.
- Provide feedback to management to ensure they are aware of effective approaches.
- Work towards change over time to ensure each step towards new ways of working is succeeding
- Engage everyone concerned at the earliest stage: understanding the changes and observing their effects and benefits enables buy-in and commitment
- Effective planning with learners is an ongoing and iterative process. Where projects in the research incorporated these approaches, tutors, learners and support workers were able to work more effectively together. Tutors reported exchanging ideas with support workers a satisfying and useful experience.

Lessons from the LEAD Scotland project: "Literacies - with Care":

Participants in the training sessions acknowledged the value of raising their own awareness of literacy content in activities with their clients and responded positively to the idea of a change in practice to recognise literacy needs. In addition staff became aware of the valuable work they are already doing in this field (but which they hadn't defined as 'literacy'), and grew in confidence as a result. The training evaluations highlighted the need for on-going resource support - and someone with whom to discuss literacy issues. Literacy staff subsequently visiting the initial project acknowledged its value and successful outcomes in terms of engagement.

The inter-agency working set up as a result of this project created sustainability in terms of support and resources for its continuation, and the involvement of literacy staff in the initial sessions offered reassurance of their involvement and support. This isn't the complete answer to creating sustainable literacies but perhaps offers a model to make wider and more effective use of resources to widen opportunities for learning.

- This development stage has emphasised the need for and success of collaborative working.
- No single agency can have all the skills and expertise required to support clients in both their care and learning.
- Working together enriches knowledge, raises awareness of challenges and leads to effective solutions more quickly in most situations.

The main findings are:

- The role of coordinator/trainer is crucial to maintain the links between Care and Learning - and should be pivotal.
- The development of work with informal/unpaid carers will reach more prospective learners and engagement should be pursued
- Links with agencies, such as WEA and the STUC, that provide workplace learning offer necessary support for staff and should be part of the overall strategy
- Early involvement of literacies workers reinforces the sustainability
- Care Staff have said that a Professional Development Award/SVQ module would be useful both for personal development and to gain the appropriate skills to work with clients with literacy needs.
- Literacy staff should be trained to understand the implications of collaborative working in a similar way to the awareness raising training for Care Sector staff. This would clarify approaches and differences in Person Centred Planning and Individual Learning Plans

The training programme continues to be delivered across Scotland, and in one centre has become mandatory.

Lynda Wilde, Lead Scotland

(Further notes available: [Developing Independence through Adult Literacies Learning](#))

Conclusion

Key to a new approach is the recognition that working in isolation does not bring the results that partnership working can; that change has to be planned, and that it needs support from management and institutions.

Key to partnership working is the understanding that each contributor to an individual's personal development and care provides only a part of what is needed; that others make necessary contributions and that time and resources will be wasted unless these contributors work together.

Literacy is a vital underpinning part of the development of independence but it is not the only part. Many other forms of personal and social support are needed if literacy skills are to be useable - and of course a great deal of reinforcement and practice is necessary for learning to become embedded and useful in everyday life.

Similarly, personal and social support without some mastery of literacy and numeracy will leave any individual to some degree dependent.

If literacy tutors and their managers and care providers and their managers work together, both will be more likely to achieve their outcome of helping learners/service users to develop greater independence

These guidelines offer ideas about how to develop more effective learning in order to enhance the development of independence. Every individual will be different in what he or she needs, and every organisation will be different in the ways it can adapt to new approaches and develop collaborative working with others. The steps to be taken will be different but there **will be** steps to take and changes that can be made. Perhaps the important thing is to find the first step for you ... and then the next?

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