



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

Progress for adult literacy learners

Research report

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Contributions to the research and to authorship

Maxine Burton directed the project and devised and delivered much of the material for the training days. All members of the team contributed substantially to the training days, in particular:

- Greg Brooks and Janet Whitfield to phonics, plus a presentation from Frances Woodward, one of the participating teachers
- Jan Wainwright to oral reading fluency, and
- Yvonne Spare to sentence combining.

The fieldwork was shared equally by Maxine Burton, Judy Davey, Margaret Lewis and Louise Ritchie.

All team members except Shirley Riley-Lake contributed to the writing of the report. Greg Brooks carried out all the statistical analyses, wrote the spelling analysis in Section 4.2.1 and the commentaries on the statistical findings, and advised throughout on content. Judy Davey wrote Sections 6.2.2–3 and 6.3.2–4; Margaret Lewis wrote sections 4.2.2–3 and 4.3.2–4; and Louise Ritchie wrote sections 5.2.2–3 and 5.3.2–4. The rest of the report was written by Maxine Burton. The following percentage contributions were agreed amongst the team.

Name	Research (%)	Authorship (%)
Maxine Burton	50	60
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Margaret Lewis	15	10
Louise Ritchie	15	10
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Preface: Policy context

Since this research was undertaken, the government has committed itself to the ambition of being a world leader in skills by 2020, benchmarked against the upper quartile of OECD¹ countries (Leitch 2006). For Skills for Life, this means ensuring that, by 2020, 95 per cent of adults possess at least functional levels of literacy and numeracy – defined as Entry level 3 numeracy and Level 1 literacy.

To make progress towards this ambition, the government has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target that between 2008 and 2011:

- 597,000 people of working age achieve a first Level 1 or above literacy qualification;
- 390,000 people of working age achieve a first Entry level 3 or above numeracy qualification.

To deliver this target and in doing so drive progress towards the 2020 ambition, the government published a refreshed Skills for Life strategy in March 2009 (DIUS 2009a). The refreshed strategy focuses on three central themes:

1. Focusing Skills for Life on employability, ensuring that the literacy, language and numeracy skills we help people develop will support them to find, stay and progress in work.
2. Raising demand for literacy, language and particularly numeracy skills among individuals and employers, changing the culture and attitudes to Skills for Life that prevent people from embarking on learning.
3. Delivering flexible and responsive Skills for Life provision which meets learner and employer needs, is high quality, delivered in innovative ways and embedded in wider skills provision where that is the best way to meet individual learners' needs.

The priority learner groups identified within the overall refreshed strategy are:

- people who are unemployed and on benefits;
- low-skilled adults in employment;
- offenders in custody and those supervised in the community; and
- other groups at risk of social exclusion.

Since this research pre-dates the refreshed Skills for Life strategy, there may be information in this document that relates solely to the original strategy and information which does not reflect more recent developments including those set out in the refreshed Skills for Life strategy.

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Summary

Headline finding: Adult literacy learners made statistically significant progress in reading comprehension, spelling and writing following the teaching of phonics, oral reading fluency and sentence combining.²

- The strategies of phonics, oral reading fluency and sentence combining were selected because they had rarely been observed in adult literacy classes in England but research elsewhere suggested they were promising.
- A total of 140 learners, from teenagers to 60+-year-olds, in 23 classes located over a wide area and taught by 20 teachers took part in the project in the autumn term of 2007.
- Most of the learners were within Entry level at the start, but some were at pre-Entry, Level 1 and Level 2.
- The learners made significant gains in reading comprehension (phonics and reading fluency strands), spelling (phonics strand), and writing (sentence combining strand). The gains amounted to between a third and a half of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level.
- The progress was achieved in a very short time, on average 5½–6 sessions.
- The confidence of learners in all three strands improved, but this was not correlated with their progress in any strand.
- The only factors found, across the strands, to correlate with progress were high ratings of the teachers' general teaching strategies and, for the phonics and sentence combining strands, also regular attendance by learners – a consistent and familiar story.
- All three strands demonstrated a need for relevant accessible schemes with resources adapted for adults.
- The project also demonstrated the value of effective training and support for adult literacy teachers as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

² However, it should be noted that the samples in all the strands were relatively small and therefore the results should be treated with some caution.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

This project forms the literacy element of a larger project, 'Improving the quality of teaching and learning in adult literacy and numeracy, 2007–08', funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) through the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC). The numeracy element was led by a research team at King's College London, and their research is described in a separate report (Hodgen et al. 2009). From April 2007 to March 2008 the University of Sheffield conducted the literacy research which features in this report, in order to explore the effectiveness of various teaching strategies with adult learners.

There are currently few established correlations between the specific teaching strategies used in adult literacy classrooms and adult literacy learners' progress. The large-scale NRDC Effective Practice in Reading (Brooks et al. 2007) and Writing (Grief et al. 2007) Studies did identify as effective some generic features of adult literacy teaching, such as the importance of group and pair work in class, regular attendance and self-study between classes (Brooks et al. 2007, p. 32); and the provision of meaningful contexts for writing tasks rather than only decontextualised exercises (Grief et al. 2007, p. 45).

This project was predicated on:

- The finding from the Effective Practice in Reading Study that various promising teaching strategies were rarely seen in adult literacy classrooms (Brooks et al. 2007, pp. 49–50)
- Findings in the research literature that phonics, oral reading fluency and sentence combining are all strategies that may help learners make progress in their literacy.

Because these are strategies which have not often been observed in adult literacy classrooms, the project also incorporated, as a prior element, the development of appropriate methods and materials, and training of teachers in the use of these strategies. Full details of these for the phonics and fluency strands can be found in the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008).

1.2 Structure of this report

Chapter 2 sets out a review of the research literature on the three teaching strategies of phonics, oral reading fluency and sentence combining. An account of the methods used is given in Chapter 3. The report next deals with the findings from the strategies in turn: under each main strategy heading (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), there is first a description of the characteristics of providers, learners and teachers; then follows an account of learners' progress, in terms of trends in the assessment data, and the learners' and teachers' views; the teachers' practice is then described, with the final section devoted to factors related with progress.

Conclusions and recommendations across the project strands are given in the final chapter.

1.3 Notes on statistical terms used

All the statistical calculations reported here were performed within Excel.

Standard deviation

The abbreviation 's.d.' denotes a measure of the dispersal of scores around the average ('mean'); a small s.d. indicates that the scores are tightly bunched, a large one that they are widely spread. The s.d. is calculated by subtracting each individual score from the average, squaring each difference, adding up the differences, dividing the total by the number of scores and taking the positive square root of that number.

Statistical tests

For each of the differences between pre- and post-test average scores reported here, the statistical significance of the difference was tested using a paired t-test.

Each of the correlations between two sets of data reported here is the relevant correlation coefficient calculated using Excel – which, however, does not name the type of coefficient or provide statistical significances of the correlations.

Statistical significances

The statistical significance of the difference between two scores is expressed as a 'p' (probability) value. For example, $p < 0.05$ means that the result could have occurred by chance only once in 20 times at most ($0.05 = 5\% = 1$ in 20). This is usually taken as the minimum level of statistical significance that is considered reliable, and all the results stated in this report to be statistically significant were so at at least this level. The other two levels often indicated are $p < 0.01$ (less than 1 chance in 100 that the result was due to chance), often described as 'very significant', and $p < 0.001$ (less than 1 chance in 1000 that the result was due to chance), often described as 'highly significant'.

Effect sizes

An effect size is a statistical measure of the impact of a programme based on the gain, i.e. the difference between a group of learners' average scores at pre- and post-test, and is expressed as a decimal. Ideally, calculation of this statistic also requires data from a control or comparison group of learners who did not receive the teaching. In this study this was impossible: there were no such learners. Alternatively, where a standardised test is used, data from the standardisation exercise can be used, on the assumption that the people who provided those data can be treated as an 'unseen' or implicit control group. In this study this was possible for the scaled scores on the reading assessment (see the Phonics and Fluency chapters), which was standardised by the National Foundation for

Educational Research (NFER) during development, but not possible for the spelling test or writing assessment, which have not been standardised.

The usual rule of thumb for interpreting effect sizes is that those below 0.25 are very small and probably not educationally significant; those between 0.25 and 0.5 are small; those between 0.5 and 0.8 are medium; and those above 0.8 are large. In this report, the effect sizes have been calculated by dividing the average gain in scaled reading scores (= average post-test score minus average pre-test score) by the standard deviation of the standardisation sample, which is 10.

Correlation coefficients

A correlation coefficient is a measure of the interdependence of two variables, showing the extent to which they are related. Correlation coefficients are often shown as 'r =' followed by a numerical (usually decimal) value, and they range in value from -1 to +1. A coefficient of -1 indicates perfect negative correlation (as one variable increases, the other decreases), a coefficient of zero indicates no relationship at all, and a coefficient of +1 indicates perfect positive correlation (as one variable increases, the other also increases).

2. The research background

The three teaching strategies of 1. Phonics, 2. Oral reading fluency, and 3. Sentence combining (the 'specific project strategies') implemented by the participating teachers in this project were identified as 'promising' and worth investigating on the basis of evidence from research. This chapter examines the rationale behind the choice of strategies and outlines briefly what the literature has to say about their effectiveness.

2.1 Phonics

A significant impetus for investigating a phonics approach in adult literacy teaching is the renewed interest in phonics in initial teaching. By phonics we mean an approach to teaching reading and spelling which focuses on the association of phonemes (sounds) with particular graphemes (letters or letter groups), and of graphemes with particular phonemes. In other words, attention is consistently drawn by the teacher to the relationship between letters and sounds. There is now strong evidence that systematic phonics instruction, within a broad and rich literacy curriculum, enables children to make better progress in word identification than unsystematic or no phonics instruction. This finding rests on two systematic reviews of the research evidence, Ehri et al. (2001) in the US and Torgerson et al. (2006) in the UK. Although there is as yet no research evidence to support the use of synthetic phonics rather than analytic phonics, the Rose Review (Rose 2006) did advocate the former, and the new DfES/DCSF phonics materials, *Letters and Sounds* (DCSF 2007), are firmly synthetic.

The growing research evidence to support the use of phonics in initial literacy has no comparable research base in adult literacy teaching. The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (DIUS 2009b) makes little mention of phonics (the word 'phonic' appears only at Entry 2 reading (word focus), though 'decode' appears at Entry 1 and 3 reading (word focus), and 'sound-symbol association' or 'sound-symbol relationships' appears under Entry 1, 2 and 3 writing (word focus); there are no such references under other focuses or at Levels 1 and 2), and indeed in the UK there has traditionally been a reluctance to promote it as a useful teaching strategy for adults. For example, a recent National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) teacher handbook in the 'Lifelines in adult learning' series cautions that, for many learners, phonics 'may bring back memories of trying to learn to read at school and their subsequent failure to do so' (Lindsay and Gawn 2005, p.40). A US teaching manual, *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults: First steps for teachers* (McShane 2005) devotes an entire chapter to phonics and phonemic awareness, drawing particularly on Kruidenier's (2002) recommendations for adult learners, which are based almost entirely on school-level evidence.

This does not mean that phonics is never used in adult literacy classes in the UK. The phonics scheme known as *Toe by Toe*³ is in widespread use in prisons and with young offenders. There are also a few instances of other phonics schemes

³ For further information see: www.toe-by-toe.co.uk

designed for children, such as *Sound Reading*⁴, *Sounds~Write*⁵ and *THRASS*⁶, being used systematically by individual teachers in adult literacy and ESOL classes. However, what recent UK research into the teaching and learning of reading in adult literacy classes (Besser et al. 2004, pp.69–74; Brooks et al. 2007, p.57) has shown is that, when phonics is used, it tends to be spur-of-the-moment – incidental rather than systematic – and is often inaccurate and misleading. This state of affairs may be as much due to lack of underpinning knowledge about English phonetics as lack of conviction about the suitability of the strategy for adult learners.

2.2 Oral reading fluency

By ‘oral reading fluency’ we mean reading aloud to one or more people in a rapid, accurate and expressive way, with the momentum unbroken by the need to decode. There is more to it than just reading aloud, as it involves guided practice on the part of the learners, using a selection of one or more distinct methods. An important characteristic of the strategy is supporting the learners by supplying unknown words immediately and not allowing learners to struggle and lose momentum. The main research is from the US, where a huge literature search and analysis on teaching literacy to young children was carried out in 2000 by the National Reading Panel (2000a, b). Many of their findings formed the basis of Kruidenier’s work on reading instruction for adults (Kruidenier 2002). Non-fluent readers, whose reading is typically ‘choppy and filled with hesitations, mispronunciations and false starts’, have eye movements which reflect their lack of fluency: ‘They take in less with each fixation of the eyes on a text and move backwards or skip words more often than good readers’ (Kruidenier 2002, p.55). Encouraging oral reading fluency has been shown to increase reading achievement, using the measures of comprehension, fluency (rate and/or accuracy) and word recognition.

Reading fluency is widely used in the US at adult level as well as in schools, and an entire chapter is devoted to the strategy in a US adult literacy teaching manual (McShane 2005). Recent large-scale research (Brooks et al. 2007, p.49) highlighted the absence of oral reading fluency practice in UK adult literacy classes and led directly to a small-scale development project on this strategy (Burton 2007a). This demonstrated that teachers’ worries about using the strategy with adults proved to be unfounded in most cases. It also indicated that not only was reading fluency a popular strategy with most of the participants, both teachers and learners, but it also seemed to increase learner confidence. Building on the findings of the pilot project, the project reported here aimed to establish whether oral reading fluency is also an effective strategy for helping learners make progress with their reading.

2.3 Sentence combining

Sentence combining is not a familiar term in UK literacy teaching but common in the US (where it is usually referred to in one word as ‘sentence-combining’). By

⁴ For further information see: www.ourrighttoread.com

⁵ For further information see: www.sounds-write.co.uk

⁶ For further information see: www.thrass.co.uk

sentence combining we mean ‘techniques of splicing together simple sentences to make compound or complex ones’ (Andrews et al. 2006, p.42). In other words, it is a way of teaching writing which focuses on ways of expanding simple (one clause) sentences by using conjunctions, in order to make longer sentences which have two or more clauses. The basic concepts can be tabulated as follows:

Table 2.1 The structure of English sentence types

Sentence type	Number of main clauses	Number of subordinate clauses	Examples (main clauses in bold)
Simple sentence	1	none	He slept soundly.
Compound sentence	2 or more	none	He slept soundly but she stayed awake.
Complex sentence	1	1 or more	He felt tired although he had slept soundly.
Compound-complex sentence	2 or more	1 or more	He felt tired although he had slept soundly, but he got up early anyway.

The effectiveness of most forms of teaching formal grammar as a way of improving the quality of students’ writing was discredited by a comprehensive review in the 1960s (Harris 1962), a finding which was supported by a more recent systematic review (Andrews et al. 2006). However, this latest review identified one exception in the teaching of grammar, namely sentence combining, which can be shown to improve writing quality. Much of the evidence is from school-level research, with little on its applications to adult literacy learners, apart from possibly just one study in the US dating back 30 years (Mulder et al. 1978). Other forms of grammar teaching do, of course, still have an important role to play in the acquisition of other literacy skills and are indeed essential for ESOL learners. This project did not aim to be a study of ESOL learners and in the sentence combining strand, of the 28 learners involved, there were only two for whom English was not their first language.

In the recent Effective Practice Study in Writing (Grief et al. 2007) sentence combining was not reported as a strategy in adult literacy classes. However, the focus in that study was more on progress in ‘free’ writing, and the recommendations from the report mention the ‘technical aspects of writing’ (including ‘grammatical correctness’) only to place them ‘within the contexts of meaningful writing tasks’. Furthermore sentence combining is not flagged up as such in the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (DIUS 2009), but there are references in the Writing section under sentence focus to simple and compound sentences at Entry 2 and to complex sentences at Level 2.

2.4 Summary

The three specific project strategies rest on firm research bases, but most of the evidence comes from studies done in the US and/or with children. The recent large-scale UK research studies (Brooks et al. 2007, Grief et al. 2007) could offer little information about their use. This study aimed to go some way towards remedying the lack of evidence on the effectiveness of these strategies for adult literacy learners in England.

3. Method

3.1 Aims and design

The overall aim was to investigate the use of three promising teaching strategies, thereby helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning in adult literacy. Before this could be done, focused training of teachers in the strategies had to be undertaken. In order to ascertain a) the best design and delivery of training for adult literacy teachers in the specific project strategies, and b) whether use of the specific project strategies correlated with better progress and/or more positive attitudes on the part of the learners, the project ran in three distinct phases:

1. Development of materials and methods, and training of a group of teachers in each of the three strategies;
2. Implementation and evaluation of the teaching approaches during the autumn term 2007; and
3. Refining of methods and materials in the light of the previous phases; preparation of guidelines and resources for teacher training and classroom practice.

Each strand of the project – Phonics, Oral Reading Fluency and Sentence Combining – was run independently for the purposes of training and data collection. However the methods employed were the same. The project also benefited from further overlaps in the design: three experienced practitioner-researchers were appointed as consultants, one for each specific project strategy; the oral reading fluency consultant was also a participating teacher in the phonics strand. The sentence combining consultant also undertook fieldwork in two of the strands. One teacher took part in both reading fluency and phonics strands. Each of the three Sheffield-based research associates had responsibility for one strand, but they all contributed to all training and feedback days, and undertook fieldwork in all three strands. Finally, the teachers from all three strands met together in Sheffield for two feedback/consultation days on 9th November 2007 and 11th January 2008.

By means of this research design it was hoped that conclusions and implications for policy and practice might also be drawn in overall terms across all three strands, in addition to the strand-specific findings. Furthermore, since several of the research instruments were the same as those used in the Effective Practice Studies, this would also provide additional potential for parallels to be drawn between the findings of those projects and this study.

3.2 Phase 1 – Training of teachers

Four phonics training days were held between June and September 2007 and two further training days, one each for oral reading fluency and sentence combining, were held in September. Detail on the content of the training days for phonics and fluency can be found in the companion practitioner guide (Burton et al. 2008). At this stage, background information on the participating teachers was

also collected so that profiles of their qualifications, experience and prior use of the specific project strategies could be assembled. A total of 20 participating teachers (nine phonics, eight reading fluency, four sentence combining, with one teacher receiving training in both phonics and reading fluency) attended training days.

3.3 Phase 2 – Implementation and evaluation of teaching strategies

A full list of the research instruments and the order in which they were administered can be found in Table 3.2 at the end of this chapter.

Following the completion of their training, the teachers started using the strategy in their classrooms and submitting weekly log notes electronically, together with lesson plans and resources, in order to report on their experience of using the strategy with their learners.

In advance of the first round of fieldwork, learner consent forms, profiles and pre-questionnaires on attitudes to literacy were administered by the teachers. These instruments were based on those used in the Effective Practice in Reading Study (Brooks et al. 2007). A total of 140 learners completed these three instruments (63 phonics, 49 reading fluency, 28 sentence combining). The learners were selected by their teachers from one (and, for one teacher, from two) of their classes, as learners they considered would benefit from being taught the specific project strategy.

During the first three weeks of October, visits were made by members of the research team to a total of 23 adult literacy classes across England. At the first visit, a total of 125 learners completed pre-assessments (58 phonics, 45 reading fluency, 22 sentence combining). Each strand used a mixture of assessment instruments, but for all strands these included either the complete assessment of reading (Phonics and Reading Fluency) or the first task from the writing assessment (Sentence Combining), both of which had been specifically designed for NRDC by NFER and were appropriate for learners from Entry level 1 to Level 2 (see Brooks et al. 2007, pp.17–18; Grief et al. 2007, p.16).

The reading assessment used two issues of a simulated magazine and tested reading comprehension by means of 30 items (easier level) or 39 items (harder level), which were a mixture of multiple-choice and open-ended question types. There were two levels of the comprehension task – an easier ‘a’ form and a harder ‘b’ form. The writing assessment also used this magazine as the stimulus for the writing task, and the marking scheme took account of clear expression of opinion and punctuation, as well as sentence structure; sentences were judged in terms of the use of sentence types (simple, compound and complex) and use of conjunctions. The number of words and number of sentences were counted so that average sentence length could be calculated. Parallel forms of the reading and writing tests were used pre and post.

In addition, for the phonics strand, a pre- and post-spelling test was devised to encompass most of the basic phoneme–grapheme correspondences for both consonants and vowels. Experience in the field suggested that there would be a

wide range of attainment in spelling among the learners to be recruited, from very low to quite capable, even though we had asked for classes with learners at Entry level. Very few commercially-produced spelling tests for adults are available, and none would have been suitable here because of cost and the off-putting nature of the formal layout and large number of items.

A very short test (23 items) with a simple layout – two columns, with the numbers 1–23 in the left-hand column and spaces for answers in the right-hand column – was therefore designed. The words were chosen to cover all but three of the phonemes of (most British accents of) English and the graphemes they are most typically represented by, plus the 2-phoneme sequence /ks/ spelt <x> in *six* – for the list of words see Table 4.7. Because the list was constructed on a phonetic basis, word frequency and familiarity could not be controlled, except that all the words would be familiar to all native and most non-native speakers of English, and rare and unfamiliar words were of course avoided. Also, all but one of the words were monosyllables; – this was done primarily in order to make the test accessible to as wide a range of abilities as possible. It was not intended to reflect the teaching the learners received or impose any limits on it.

The same spelling test was used both pre and post. It was administered dictation-style; that is, the administrator named the words aloud one at a time, allowing sufficient time for learners to write their attempts. Where necessary to avoid misunderstanding, context for the words was supplied by means of actions, synonyms, or collocations.

Finally, with regard to the spelling test and, indeed, all the assessments, it is important to state that the training the teachers received was in no way linked to the assessments administered to the learners. The teachers were given no prior indication of the content of any part of the assessments and would not have been able to tailor their teaching to these assessments.

At this first visit a class observation of any remaining teaching time was also carried out. Detailed observation log notes were taken and an analysis done of the general teaching strategies observed, using the same instrument as in the Effective Practice in Reading Study (Brooks et al. 2007), which was in turn based on the What Works Study in the US (Condelli 2003). This instrument is reproduced in the Appendix. A further analysis of the elements of the specific project strategy was also undertaken, using coding forms specially designed for each strand. Each form listed ten items which were drawn from the training guidelines and related to aspects of background knowledge and pedagogy which might be expected to feature during the implementation of the strategy.

A second visit to the class was undertaken during the first three weeks of November 2007 to conduct an observation of the full class running time and analyses of general and specific strategies, as above.

The third and final class visit took place between the end of November and mid-December in order to administer the post-questionnaires and post-assessments, and to conduct an observation of any remaining class time. A total of 91 learners completed post-assessments (phonics 42, reading fluency 32, sentence combining 17), an overall retention rate of 73 per cent of the learners who had been pre-assessed. During or after this final visit, the learners also completed

evaluation forms to ascertain their reactions to being taught the strategy and taking part in the project.

A summary of the number of learners at each stage of the project is shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Learner numbers

Stage	Recruited	Questionnaire		Assessment		Evaluation
		pre	post	pre	post	
Phonics	63	63	52*	58	42	50
Fluency	49	49**	40	45	32	38
Sentence combining	28	28	17	22	17	22
Total	140	140	109	125	91	110

* The total of phonics post-questionnaires completed was 53, but for data analysis purposes is reduced by one as one learner had not completed a pre-questionnaire or any other instruments.

** The total of reading fluency pre-questionnaires was 50 but for data analysis is reduced by one as one learner had filled in no other instruments.

Two feedback and consultation days for the participating teachers from all three strands were held in Sheffield in November 2007 and January 2008. These aimed to give the teachers an opportunity to share concerns, ideas and resources with the research team and with each other; and on the second of the days, also to complete a detailed evaluation form to ascertain their reactions to a) the training, b) participation in the project, and c) the implementation of the strategy in the classroom.

3.4 Phase 3 – Revision of methods and preparation of teaching materials

The work for this phase was informed by the class observations, teaching logs, discussion during feedback/consultation days and particularly by the teacher evaluations completed in January 2008. (Full details of teaching methods and materials for phonics and fluency can be found in the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008).

Table 3.2: Research instruments used in the project

Instruments common to all 3 strands	Instruments specific to particular strands		
	Phonics	Oral reading fluency	Sentence combining
<i>Administered prior to the first class visit</i>			
Learner consent form* Learner profile*	Phonics teacher questionnaires	Fluency teacher questionnaires	Sentence combining teacher questionnaires
Learner attitudes pre-questionnaire p.1*	Learner attitudes pre-questionnaire p.2	Learner attitudes pre-questionnaire p.2	Learner attitudes pre-questionnaire p.2
<i>Throughout the implementation of the project</i>			
	Teaching log notes	Teaching log notes	Teaching log notes
<i>At the first class visit</i>			
	Reading comprehension pre-assessment* Spelling pre-assessment	Reading comprehension pre-assessment*	Writing pre-assessment, question 1*
<i>During all class visits</i>			
Coded analysis of general teaching strategies*	Coded analysis of specific strategies	Coded analysis of specific strategies	Coded analysis of specific strategies
<i>At the final class visit</i>			
Learner attitudes post-questionnaire, p.1*	Learner attitudes post-questionnaire p.2	Learner attitudes post-questionnaire p.2	Learner attitudes post-questionnaire p.2
	Reading comprehension post-assessment*	Reading comprehension post-assessment*	Writing post-assessment, question 1*
	Spelling post-assessment	Reading 'performance' evaluation	
	Learner evaluation form	Learner evaluation form	Learner evaluation form
<i>After the final visit</i>			
Teacher evaluation form			

* Instrument also used in the Effective Practice Studies (Baynham et al. 2007, Brooks et al. 2007, Coben et al. 2007, Grief et al. 2007 and Mellar et al. 2007).

4. Phonics

This chapter describes the findings from the phonics strand of the project in terms of the sample, the learners' progress, the implementation of the strategy in the classroom and the search for factors associated with progress.

4.1 The providers, learners and teachers

4.1.1 The providers and settings

Seven of the ten participating classes represented the Further Education (FE) sector and the remaining three were Adult and Community Learning (ACL). All classes were held in college or adult education centre settings. They covered a wide geographical area of England – Bedford, Cheltenham, Derbyshire, Doncaster, Leeds, Lincoln, London, Sheffield and Worksop. All were 'single purpose' adult literacy classes. Sessions were mainly of 2 hours in duration, with three classes having sessions lasting 2.5 hours. All were daytime classes except for two held in the evening.

4.1.2 The learners

The initial sample consisted of 52 learners who completed consent forms, learner profiles and both pre- and post-questionnaires. Their characteristics are set out in Table 4.1. (Note that in some cases the numbers (percentages) do not total 52 (100 per cent) as not all learners responded.)

Prior to the pre-assessment, the teachers were asked for their judgements about their learners' levels. The largest number were judged to be at Entry level 3, followed by Entry level 1. The great majority (83 per cent) were at or below Entry level 3, a range of learner ability at which, it might be expected, most benefit from this strategy would be derived.

Table 4.1: Background characteristics of the 52 learners

		N	%
Gender	Men	20	38
	Women	32	62
Age distribution	16–19	0	0
	20–29	10	19
	30–39	15	29
	40–49	9	17
	50–59	7	13
	Over 59	11	21
Ethnicity	White	38	73
	Other	14	27
First language	English	44	85
	Other	8	15
Occupational status	Employed (full-/part-time)	15	29
	Unemployed	9	17
	Unwaged	24	46
	Under 15	9	17

Age of leaving full-time education	15	13	25
	16	22	31
	Over 16	4	8
Highest qualification	None/no response	30	58
	Literacy certificate	18	35
	CSE/GCSE/O-level	4	8
	NVQ/BTEC	0	0
	A-level or above	0	0

The teachers' judgements corresponded on the whole closely with the levels indicated by the reading pre-assessment results (Table 4.2). Differences affected only seven learners – three cases where the teacher's judgement was one level higher than the test result (E2 for E1), three where it was one level lower (E3/L1, E2/E3) and one where it was two levels lower (E1/E3).

Table 4.2: Learner levels according to pre-assessment – phonics

Level	N	%
L2	2	3
L1	8	14
E3	20	35
E2	11	19
E1 or below	17	29
Total	58	100

On the evaluation form at the end of the project teachers were asked about the levels of learners they had used the strategy with and types of learners for whom they thought the strategy was most useful/unsuitable. The range of learners taught by each teacher is shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Levels of learners who received phonics instruction

Teacher	Pre-entry	Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2
1		√				
2		√	√	√	√	
3		√	√	√		
4					√	√
5		√	√			
6	√	√				
7	√	√	√	√		
8		√	√			
9				√		

Thus the teachers used the strategy with learners from a mix of abilities from Pre-entry to Level 2. Most of the teachers (seven) used the strategy with learners at E1 level, while five groups contained learners at E2 level. Only two groups included Level 1 learners and only one group learners working at Level 2. In terms of range of ability within each group, one group included learners ranging from E1 to L1, and another learners ranging from Pre-entry to E3. Only two teachers had learners who were all at one level, E1 in one group and E3 in the other.

In terms of the types of learners (age, level, background, etc.) who might find the phonics approach most useful, there were mixed responses. Most teachers felt that age was irrelevant here, with one teacher reporting 'I used it with adults aged

20s to 80s', although one teacher considered that the strategy was most suitable for younger learners. One teacher felt that phonics was appropriate for learners for whom English is the first language, while another felt that it was most suitable for ESOL learners. Another teacher related it to the purposes for which it is used: 'I think it is useful for different purposes at different levels, e.g. reading/spelling – Entry levels; spelling – Level 1/2'. One teacher had found that the strategy worked well for learners with mild learning difficulties or dyslexia; another felt that phonics was suitable for 'those learners who have missed out on these reading skills at school rather than those who have significant learning difficulties'.

One teacher highlighted the need for a systematic approach, which might seem too slow and laborious for learners who come to a class expecting a 'quick fix' – even though 'these were the very people who needed the systematic approach to learning!' This teacher found that the strategy was useful for learners who lacked confidence and who were prepared to take time to learn.

Teachers were also asked if they thought that there are learners for whom phonics would be unsuitable. A range of views were expressed. Two of the teachers thought the approach would be suitable for all groups of learners, and a third believed that phonics would only be unsuitable if learners are 'uninterested'. One teacher 'would hesitate to use it with a deaf learner', while another asserted that 'phonics does not work for my dyslexic learners, especially because they have severe auditory processing problems'. A teacher whose learners were at Pre-entry and E1 level pointed out the need to go slowly, with lots of practice, for some learners, but that 'it can work for them all'. Another teacher flagged up that phonics proved problematic for one learner who 'felt challenged because he had to move out of his comfort zone'.

4.1.3 The teachers

Nine teachers took part in the phonics strand, one teaching two classes, and at the first training day they completed individual profiles:

- **Gender:** Eight of the nine were women, and eight of the ten classes were taught by women.
- **First language:** English was the first language of seven of the nine teachers. One teacher had Spanish as her first language, and another had Urdu, although the latter teacher had spent her entire life in England and had native speaker competence in English.
- **Teaching experience:** Their basic skills teaching experience ranged from 3 to 17 years with an average of about 6.5 years; all but 2 had additional teaching experience in other subjects.
- **Phonics experience:** Six had received at least some prior training in phonics, if only briefly as a component of Level 4 training; three had some prior knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA); only two had never used phonics as a teaching strategy before – the others had all used it at least occasionally.
- **Qualifications:** Seven had already completed, or were in the process of completing, their Level 4 literacy training; all had at least generic teaching qualifications.

4.2 Learners' progress

The learners' progress was assessed by:

1. Pre- and post-assessments of reading comprehension and spelling
2. Their views of their own progress, obtained mainly from the learner evaluation forms and pre- and post-questionnaires
3. Their teachers' views of their progress from the teacher evaluation forms, observational data, teaching logs and additional data from feedback days and correspondence.

4.2.1 Reading and spelling attainment

Two measures of progress were used for the phonics learners – a test of reading comprehension and a spelling assessment. A total of 42 learners from 9 classes completed both assessments at both pre-test and post-test.

Reading

The average scaled reading scores at pre- and post-test are shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Average pre- and post-assessment scaled reading scores – phonics strand

	Pre-test	Post-test
Sample size	42	42
Average score	19.2	24.3
(standard deviation)	(18.3)	(19.6)

The learners' pre- and post-test average scores were well below the national average of 50 derived from the piloting of the assessments by NFER, consistent with the majority of learners (83%) having pre-assessment levels of Entry 3 or below (Table 4.2). The average scores were also lower at both points than those of the learners in the oral reading fluency strand.

However, the average score improved by 5.1 scaled-score points between pre- and post-test, and the effect size was 0.51 (medium). The difference was highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The standard deviations at both points were larger than the norm of 10, which suggests that the samples were diverse; indeed on both occasions there were learners who scored zero and learners whose scores were in the 60s (increasing to 70s at post-test).

An important question is what the gains imply for the ability in reading of the learners in this study. This can be judged better from the average raw scores, which are shown in Table 4.5. A sub-sample of 29 learners took the (easier) 'a' form at both pre- and post-test, and 11 took the (harder) 'b' form. The maximum score on the 'a' form was 30, and the maximum score on the 'b' form was 39.

Table 4.5: Average pre- and post-test reading raw scores, phonics strand

Test form		Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
a (N=29)	Average score	8.8	10.8	2.0
	(standard deviation)	(5.4)	(7.0)	(3.6)
b (N=11)	Average score	15.0	17.4	2.4
	(standard deviation)	(7.3)	(6.7)	(5.1)

The 'a' group's gain was highly statistically significant ($p=0.005$) but the 'b' group's was not significant ($p=0.16$), probably because of the small sample.

The average gains of 2.0 and 2.4 raw score points were equivalent to about 7 per cent and 6 per cent of the maximum scores of 30 and 39 respectively. The pre-test average raw score for the learners who took form 'a' would put a learner with this score very near to the upper end of Entry level 1, and the form 'a' post-test average score would put a learner with that score over the threshold into Entry level 2. The pre-test average raw score for the literacy learners who took form 'b' would put a learner with this score just into Level 1, and the form 'b' post-test average score would put a learner with that score further into Level 1. In both cases the average gain was equivalent to about one third of an NQF level.

Spelling

The average scores for the spelling assessment, based on number of words correctly spelt from a total of 23, are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Average pre-and post-assessment spelling scores

	Pre-test	Post-test
Sample size	42	42
Average score	12.5	13.9
(standard deviation)	(7.4)	(7.1)

The average score improved by almost one and a half words correct between pre- and post-test, and the difference was statistically significant ($p=0.002$). This was despite the fact that four of the learners scored full marks at both stages. Nine learners' average scores went down (including two who had had perfect scores at pre-test), seven scored the same at both stages (including the four just mentioned), and 26 improved. The biggest improvements were made by a learner whose score went up by 12 (from 5 to 17), and another whose score went up by 8 (from 13 to 21).

Except where stated, all the figures quoted in the rest of this sub-section are based on the 38 learners who did not have perfect scores at both stages, since correct spellings can contribute nothing to error analysis. (In Table 4.7, the four who did have perfect scores at both stages would contribute a further four correct spellings at each stage.)

Table 4.7 shows the number of correct spellings of each word, pre and post, in decreasing order of number correct at pre-test. (This is not the order in which the words were presented.)

Table 4.7: Number of correct spellings of the words, pre and post

Word	Pre	Post
cup	33	34
six	32	33
book	32	34
van	30	31
this	27	29
den	26	28
rock	22	26
thing	22	22
sheep	22	23
zip	21	29
year	21	22
north	17	18
roof	17	21
light	17	19
chair	16	14
owl	14	16
church	13	14
farm	13	18
puff	10	16
quiz	10	10
waiter	9	13
goal	8	13
join	7	10

The number of correct spellings went up on every word except 'quiz' and 'thing'. At pre-test, no single word was spelt correctly by all these learners, but at post-test this was true of 'cup' and 'book'. Very high frequency and familiarity would seem to account for most of the words at the top of the list, but lower frequency and familiarity seem unlikely to have accounted for the words at the bottom. Rather, 'join', 'goal', 'waiter' and 'quiz' contain phonemes with strongly competing spelling choices (<oi, oa, ai, er, z> v. <oy, o.e/ow, ay, or, s>). This factor may also have affected the ranking of the words from 'north' to 'puff', since the alternatives to <or, oo, igh, air, ow, ur, ar, ff> pose some, though less strong, competition. Vowel phonemes were misspelt more often than consonant phonemes were.

Spelling error analysis

A detailed analysis was made of the misspelt words. A few (15) could not be analysed because of illegibility of the learner's handwriting. A further 56 defeated attempts to analyse them, for example 'chair' spelt 'hiaē', 'owl' spelt 'aer', and 'year' spelt 'hat' (which was therefore an error even though a real word). There were also several instances of learners writing just one letter for a word, sometimes one of the letters of the correct spelling (which enabled the rest of the word to be classified as omissions; see next paragraph), e.g. 'T' for 'waiter', 'O' for 'owl', sometimes a letter that did not appear in the correct spelling, e.g. 'S' for 'rock', 'C' for 'six'. Words in the latter category were classified as uncodable.

Subtracting correct, omitted, illegible and uncodable words left 349 attempted words at pre-test and 320 at post-test where the errors could be analysed in more detail. The detailed analysis was based on the system used in Brooks et al. (1993), and had five major categories and two minor ones. The major categories were Insertion, Omission, Substitution, Transposition and Grapheme Substitution,

and minor ones judged whether an error was a real word and/or seemed to be a 'better error'.

The first four major categories are largely self-explanatory; examples are:

Insertion:	<i>thing</i>	spelt	<i>theing</i>
Omission:	<i>farm</i>	spelt	<i>arm</i>
Substitution:	<i>den</i>	spelt	<i>dan</i>
Transposition:	<i>this</i>	spelt	<i>Tihs</i>

The fifth major category was called 'grapheme substitution'. It was used only for errors which appeared to be attempted spellings of a single phoneme at the correct point in the word but using an incorrect grapheme, e.g. 'dis' for 'this' and 'gole' for 'goal'.

The distribution of errors across the major categories is shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Spelling error frequencies, major categories

Category	Pre		Post	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
Insertion	63	(10)	73	(13)
Omission	307	(50)	260	(46)
Substitution	138	(23)	138	(25)
Transposition	17	(3)	12	(2)
Grapheme substitution	85	(14)	78	(14)
Total coded errors	610	(100)	561	(100)

Omissions were by far the largest category at both stages, as might be expected of less competent spellers. Most omissions were of single letters, but sometimes more, e.g. where just one letter of the word was written. Substitutions were also quite frequent, insertions and grapheme substitutions occurred less often, and transpositions were rare.

The total number of errors dropped by 8 per cent, but otherwise the amount of change from pre to post was small, as was to be expected given the small change in the overall average score. Nevertheless, it is a positive sign that the proportion of omissions went down, and also that the proportions of insertions and substitutions went up – meaning that learners were on average more prepared to have a go than to leave something out.

Another positive sign was that the number of errors which resulted in a real word went down, again suggesting that some learners were more willing to have a go at the target word rather than write one similar to it. Also, there were scattered signs of some learners making 'better errors', in the sense of ones that were closer to the target and more likely to lead on to the word being spelt correctly. Some examples are:

Target	Pre	Post
<i>zip</i>	<i>cep</i>	<i>sip</i>
<i>join</i>	<i>yoen</i>	<i>Joijn</i>
<i>chair</i>	<i>hiae</i>	<i>hear</i>
<i>goal</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>golle</i>
<i>roof</i>	<i>ru</i>	<i>ruft</i>

While these and other errors do show closer approximations to the targets, this tendency could not be quantified because of the very subjective nature of the judgments required.

4.2.2 Learners' views of their progress

Attitudes questionnaires

The attitudes pre- and post-questionnaires asked about the learners' general self-confidence in a range of language-, literacy- and learning-related situations (nine questions common to all three strands) and about attitudes to reading and spelling (two questions specific to the phonics strand). All were rated on a scale of 1 to 4. The two specific questions were:

10. When I have to work out what a word says I feel...
11. When I have to spell a word I feel....

Fifty-two learners completed both pre-and post-questionnaires. Confidence increased from an average rating across the 11 questions of 2.4 (pre) to 2.6 (post), and this change was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Most differences on individual items were not statistically significant, but there were significant improvements on three items (1. When I think about speaking in front of a group of people, I feel...; 6. When I have to fill in a form...; 8. If I have to read a set of instructions...) and highly significant improvements on items 7 (If I have to read something out loud) and 11 (see above). Confidence did increase on item 10 but not significantly. Improvements therefore affected not only the areas of decoding and spelling, which might be expected to benefit directly from phonics instruction, but also other skills, including oracy (items 1 and 7).

Evaluation form

Fifty of the learners who took part in the phonics strand completed a learner evaluation form at the end of the project. This form had seven questions to elicit information about learners' understanding of the concept of phonics and experience of it, and whether they wanted to continue to learn in this way. Two of the questions dealt directly with progress and enjoyment, and provided a valuable source of information on how learners viewed the progress they felt they had made. The responses to these questions are summarised below.

3. Do you feel it has helped you read and/or spell better? (a lot/a little/not at all)

Of the 48 learners who responded to this question, 28 stated that they felt that phonics had helped them 'a lot' to read and/or spell better, 18 learners felt that it had helped 'a little' and one learner felt that it had not helped at all. One learner simply wrote 'yes'. Of the learners who wrote 'a little', one learner explained that it had helped with 'small words not long ones' and another wrote 'spell a little bit'. The learner who wrote that phonics had not helped at all qualified this with 'I think it will help – 2 and 3 letters (blends).'

4. What have you enjoyed most about phonics?

There was one respondent who wrote 'not a lot' in answer to this question (although this learner stated later in the form that they would like their teacher to carry on using phonics in lessons). However, almost all the learners provided a positive comment, and overall there seemed to be a high level of enjoyment connected with the experience of phonics in the classroom. As well as positive references to 'fun' and 'games', several responses to this question related either

directly or indirectly to progress. Many comments referred to 'sounds' and learners explained that they had enjoyed the way phonics helped them to listen to sounds – 'it has helped me listen to the sounds more and I've enjoyed that', 'listening for sounds that I couldn't hear before'. 'Sounding out words as a class activity and individually' was the response of one learner. For one learner, focusing on sounds through phonics had impacted upon his life beyond the classroom – 'familiarising myself with the different sounds and it helps me with my hobby'. In terms of specific resources, 'flip flap books' were singled out by one learner as the most enjoyable aspect of phonics instruction.

Three learners felt that phonics had improved their spelling, while another highlighted that they had enjoyed 'getting to know what letters go on the end of words and in the middle.' Four learners wrote about progress in terms of learning more words, either for their meaning or being able to read them. Three felt that phonics had improved their learning generally – 'I'm learning something – I enjoy learning – I'm doing more than I have ever done before', 'I feel like I have been able to take more in and remember better'.

The final question was open-ended and gave the opportunity to highlight any aspect of the experience:

7. Is there anything else you would like to say about taking part in this project or using phonics?

Thirty-four learners wrote a response to this. Apart from the statement 'it does not help me', the comments were almost exclusively positive, and many related to progress in some way, especially in terms of motivation, enjoyment, and helping them to learn. Three of the more detailed responses included:

'I wish it would carry on. It's a great way phonics is put across to us. And it's an easy way of remembering the words. I would never have remembered as many words without this. In 60s we never learnt this.'

'This has helped me a lot with my writing and my spelling and I feel better about myself and my spelling because now I can sound the words out and spell them.'

'It's made me understand how to read more – I will try to sound the word out more carefully. It helps me when I am on my own'.

As well as the information gathered on learners' views of their progress from the evaluation forms, a couple of situations arose during the research that provided additional insights. In one case, before the start of a lesson, a researcher asked a learner (aged 22, with dyslexia and Asperger syndrome) what she thought about the phonics teaching her group had experienced. The learner said that she had done more than ever before and was clearly delighted with her progress. Secondly, a lorry driver, who had apparently driven lorries for many years, said in the course of a lesson that it used to take him more hours than necessary to complete a journey. Now he felt more able to read road signs.

4.2.3 Teachers' views

Teachers' views of learner progress were drawn from a variety of sources, including teaching logs, semi-structured interviews and especially the evaluation

forms, completed anonymously at the end of the project. Note that all references are to 'she' and 'her', although one of the teachers was a man.

Evaluation forms

Question 23 requested views on the extent to which phonics tuition had impacted upon learners; teachers were asked to rate, on a scale of 1–5 (5 being the most positive, 3 representing no change, and 1 and 2 representing a negative impact), how they felt phonics had affected their learners':

- a. enjoyment/engagement in class
- b. confidence
- c. ability to decode
- d. ability to spell
- e. reading comprehension
- f. peer support/'gelling' of class.

In each of the six areas there was at least one teacher who felt that there had been no change in terms of learners' progress. However, apart from one who thought that phonics had had a negative impact on learners' ability to spell, the majority of teachers felt that using phonics had had a positive impact on each of the aspects outlined in this question.

The area in which most progress was reported was enjoyment and engagement in class. Almost all the teachers (eight out of nine) reported that learners had enjoyed and engaged with the strategy, with six rating their learners' progress at 5 and two at 4. Only one teacher felt that there had been no change in this respect. Another area where the strategy seems to have impacted positively on learners is peer support and 'gelling' of class – five teachers rated progress in this area at 5 and only one teacher reported no change. Confidence levels were also felt to have increased when using the strategy, with three teachers rating learners' progress at 5 and only one teacher reporting no change.

Perceptions of change in actual literacy skills were not as positive as those for the 'softer' areas of impact, but teachers did report progress in ability to decode and ability to spell; in both areas six teachers rated learners' progress as 4. Even in the area where least change was reported, namely reading comprehension, where five teachers felt there had been no change, four of the teachers rated learners' progress as 4. (The teachers had been given no information about the gains on the reading assessment.) As mentioned above, the only area where a negative impact was reported was in the ability to spell, where one teacher rated learners' progress as 2.

Teachers were also asked, in the second half of this question, 'Did you notice any other effects on your learners?' One teacher noted that, as a result of the phonics tuition, the learners had become 'very proficient in the use of dictionaries'. Another pointed out that all the learners had continued throughout the course, with no withdrawals, commenting that this was an achievement for a Skills for Life class.

In question 32 of the evaluation form, teachers were invited to identify a key point or high spot that had emerged during their use of the strategy, for example an

individual success story. From this came a wide range of ‘success stories’, including the following vignettes:

‘In a session I taught this week, I decided to re-cap everything we had done so far, to see if learners could remember their learning after the Christmas break ... I showed pictures of CVC words and asked individuals to sound out the phonemes ... I very quickly became redundant as they discussed alternatives and 90 per cent of the time arrived at the correct spelling as a group.’

‘One of my learners had no sound/symbol recognition and was desperate to learn to read. He has worked very hard at home learning the sounds. He finds it difficult to blend, but is making progress rapidly. He can now read 3 and 4 sound words, including consonant digraphs. His confidence has soared – he is happy and I can’t wait to see how far we can get by June!’

‘One learner has made particularly good progress with her spelling and reading and general confidence. The use of small group work has benefited the learners and they have become very supportive of each other... The learners have obviously enjoyed the approach and still have a lot to learn.’

More informally, one teacher reported in subsequent email correspondence that:

‘An LSA [Learning Support Assistant] was allocated to my class today who had worked with these learners [who took part in the phonics strand] regularly last year. She commented on her amazement at the progress which two of the Entry 1 learners had made with their reading and she echoed my thoughts that neither of us felt these learners were aware themselves of the fluency with which they are now reading and the progress they had made, largely I believe, due to the work we have done on phonics. It was very rewarding, I can tell you!’

Comments from the teachers in their teaching logs or as a result of semi-structured interviews after observed sessions provided detailed information on how they viewed learners’ progress week-by-week. The majority of views were positive about the progress being made, although many made the point that it was very slow – ‘measurable but slow’, as one teacher expressed it. Several mentioned the need for reinforcement and consolidation before moving on in order to avoid confusion, and ‘the value of revision in reinforcing the link [between phonemes and graphemes].’

One learner’s progress was described by her teacher as going well beyond phonics instruction:

‘N was rather distressed when she arrived this morning due to personal events, but really blossomed during the phonics! Again, her confidence seems to grow by going back to basics in order to move forward. I must take care not to rush these learners by moving too quickly! Pace will be everything!’

‘I feel N. has really benefited from “going back to basics” as she has confidence difficulties and perhaps mental health issues and consolidating existing knowledge is giving her a stronger foundation upon which to build new learning. I have worked with N for the last two years and she has always

had one-to-one LSA support. This is largely because of her confidence issues and she has always felt the need to check almost every word she writes with the LSA before she puts pen to paper. I have noticed that N is now beginning to complete phonics tasks herself without constantly having to seek the LSA's approval. This appears to be very slow progress but it is a major step for N's development as she also participates a little more in speaking activities.'

'N in particular impressed me this week as she has poor memory and sequencing ability. Last year she would not have spoken in class but today she directed our support assistant from her house to the church she attends. She spoke in front of the class very confidently with a bit of back up where needed!'

4.3 How the strategy was implemented

A detailed account of recommended methods and materials for teaching phonics, with examples from practice, can be found in the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008). This section concentrates on giving an account of the teaching that took place over the course of the project, both from classroom observations and from the teachers' own descriptions of their practice. Information was obtained from observation log notes and strategies analysis sheets, teaching logs and teachers' end-of-project evaluations.

4.3.1 General and specific teaching strategies

Each of the ten classes was observed on up to three occasions (at the end of the pre- and post-assessment sessions if any teaching time remained, and a full observation at one point between), and the teaching and learning activities were coded according to the general and specific strategies analysis sheets. A record was also kept of the total amount of teaching time observed during each visit (over which the general strategies applied) and the length of time spent on delivery of the specific strategy. For phonics, the average amount of teaching time observed was 96 minutes, and the strategy was used on average for 48 minutes per session, that is for half the teaching time.

The teachers' general teaching strategies were rated during the observations on a schedule containing 19 items, divided into two parts: A. General teaching strategies (11 items) and B. Opportunities for learner involvement (8 items). Each item was rated for every class observed on a four-point scale where 0 represented 'not observed' and 3 'observed to a high degree (characteristic of the teacher)'. The Effective Practice in Reading Study concluded that the whole instrument could be treated as a measure of a single latent factor, 'quality of teaching observed' (Brooks et al. 2007, p.47). For the purposes of this study too, both sections have been combined to give a total score. The ratings per class, averaged over the sessions, ranged from 0.8 to 2.5, representing quite a wide range of teaching quality. The average across all classes was 1.6, which (the maximum score being 3) can be interpreted as reasonably good overall, although not outstandingly so.

The specific teaching strategies schedule, against which the observed sessions were also rated, contained 10 items relating to aspects of background knowledge

and pedagogy which might be expected to feature in the course of phonics teaching. These activities corresponded closely with the guidelines given to the teachers during the training (for further details see the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008)), and the list was therefore less a snapshot of quality of teaching than a measure of the fidelity with which the strategy was implemented. The items are listed below:

- Provides teaching that accurately reflects the underlying principles of English phonetics and phonology.
- Maintains a clear and accurate distinction in teaching between graphemes and phonemes.
- Encourages learners to sound out and blend for reading, modelling as appropriate.
- Encourages learners to segment and sound out for spelling, modelling as appropriate.
- Makes sure, when appropriate, that learners realise some phonemes have more than one spelling and that some graphemes have more than one pronunciation.
- Encourages wider reading beyond phonic texts.
- Can respond to learners' questions and concerns, adapting methods and materials as appropriate.
- Uses existing worksheets/guidelines appropriately and creatively; is inventive in devising new materials and activities.
- Provides systematic teaching, building on the learning from previous weeks in a systematic way; doesn't move on too fast but allows time for consolidation.
- Provides opportunities for self-study of strategy by setting homework/making suggestions for activities between classes.

Each item was rated on a 2-point scale where 0 represented 'not observed' and 1 'observed'. The average ratings for the specific strategy items ranged from 0.2 to 0.9, again a wide range, with an average of 0.6. Table 4.9 shows the average ratings by class for both general and specific strategies.

Table 4.9: Average general and specific strategies ratings, phonics strand

Class no.	General	Specific
1011	0.8	0.2
1021	1.4	0.6
1041	1.6	0.6
1042	1.4	0.6
1051	1.5	0.6
1061	1.7	0.6
1071	1.6	0.6
1081	2.5	0.9
1101	1.9	0.9
1111	1.7	0.8

4.3.2 Patterns of strategy use

The time devoted to phonics was recorded in observation documents and in the weekly teaching logs. The time spent on the strategy ranged from 10 to 131 minutes per session, representing a proportion of the whole teaching time which varied from 9 per cent to 100 per cent. The average time spent on phonics was 48 minutes. Two of the teachers used the strategy with a sub-group within the class, but most involved the entire class in the delivery of phonics.

In most lessons the phonics element seemed to be clearly defined and formed a self-contained part of the session. For example, in one observed lesson, the teacher introduced the phonics section by telling the learners that she was now putting on her 'phonics hat'. One teacher, however, was quite clear that she wanted a more 'holistic' approach and felt it was important to deliver the phonics as an integral part of her lesson rather than as a discrete unit. Even though the phonics was delivered by most teachers as a self-contained section, it was noteworthy that many of them referred wherever possible to the phonics and made links in other parts of the session with the phonemes and graphemes they had been studying.

A range of patterns of classroom activity was observed, the most common being a whole-group presentation by the teacher, either to revise or to introduce graphemes/phonemes, followed by pair work or work in small groups, and some time spent on individual activities. Games or other activities often featured in lessons as whole-group activities, for example bingo or dominoes. Some teachers were constrained by room size and this meant that work in small groups would have been difficult. The presence of one or more Learning Support Assistants in the classroom also impacted upon the patterns of classroom activity, for example the LSA might take a small group of learners and play a game based on phonics, such as snakes and ladders.

4.3.3 Teachers' approach to the strategy

Eight of the nine teachers reported that they had used phonics for both reading and spelling, with one using the strategy just to improve spelling.

Teachers started at a wide range of points in terms of phonics progression. Some teachers started by introducing the so-called long vowel sounds, while others started back at basics with the recommended starting-point of 's a t p i n' one-to-one correspondences. A clear progression could be charted in most cases; one group, who had begun the strategy with 'satpin' letters was tackling <qu> by the final week. In another class, where the learners were divided into two groups according to ability, the teacher noted that by the end of the strategy the lower-level group had reached the point at which the higher-level learners had begun. The breadth of activities used to deliver phonics was impressive, and teachers had clearly spent a great deal of time and effort to find or create suitable materials to use with their learners. It is worth noting that teachers seemed to maximise the opportunities to use games with their learners to make the phonics enjoyable. Many of the games used were produced either by teachers or by LSAs.

On the evaluation form, teachers were asked for their views on how user-friendly they found the *Letters and Sounds* scheme (DCSF 2007) which was recommended during the training days. Three of the teachers felt the scheme was too child-centred to be of much use in adult literacy settings. In general however, the scheme was felt to be relatively accessible and easy to use, but time-consuming to absorb. As one teacher put it, 'The structure is there but not "How to do it".' What teachers do seem to have appreciated is its use as a reference document and as a source of ideas for activities; the lists of nonsense words and assessment tasks were singled out in this regard.

A further question asked which resources or worksheets they had found most helpful in class and if they found they had to create most materials themselves. Most of the nine teachers reported that they had created most of the materials themselves. One teacher felt it was 'generally best to create own materials', given that 'it is difficult to find resources which introduce sounds in the same sequence as *Letters and Sounds*.' Three respondents mentioned making or adapting games to use with their learners. Other resources and schemes were used, tailored as necessary, and one teacher was able to rely on worksheets used with previous groups.

4.3.4 The teachers' experience of participating in the phonics strand

Four phonics training days for the participating teachers formed the first part of the phonics strand of the project, followed by two feedback days to which teachers from all three strands of the project were invited, in order to share their experiences, ideas and concerns. The teachers were given the opportunity to express their views on the training received and on their overall participation in the project in the evaluation form. The responses of the nine phonics teachers to the questions are summarised below:

What was the most useful aspect for you of the training and/or the materials?

Five of the teachers talked about the value of being able to share resources and practical approaches to use in the classroom and generally being able to discuss experiences with other teachers. Several stated that they found this training useful because they had received little or no training in phonics before this project; one teacher's comment was 'apart from doing a small amount in Level 4 Literacy course, I had had no phonics training before, so this gave me a firm foundation for developing materials to use with learners.'

One of the teachers described how the series of training sessions had helped to inform her practice:

'For me, the training provided a whole new approach to teaching reading and spelling skills to my low entry level learners. I was interested in the structured approach to phonics described in the *Letters and Sounds* publication and have used this as a basis for my teaching. Whilst participating in the project, I was also prompted to spend a good deal of time researching websites and useful resources. Therefore, along with the wonderful ideas and resources which the group shared, I now have a very useful bank of resources and activities to use with my learners to reinforce the work on phonics and lots of ideas how to develop these resources for more advanced levels.'

What was the least satisfactory aspect of the training and/or materials?

A range of comments was made by the six teachers who responded to this question. Some focused on the difficulty of assimilating the underpinning knowledge of phonetics and phonology. They would have preferred a broader phonics training and more practical examples of phonics in action. However, many of the teachers did appreciate the theory as 'interesting for background knowledge but not that useful for the actual teaching of phonics', for raising awareness 'of the sounds we use and the way we enunciate the sounds' and for increasing their confidence to deliver phonics: 'looking at inconsistencies in schemes gave me the confidence to adapt material for my learners'.

What else would you have liked to have had included in the training days?

Of the seven teachers who responded to this question, three mentioned resources in terms of wanting more time to create or share resources before teaching and observations took place, as well as more emphasis on resources and teaching strategies generally. One teacher felt that it would have helped to video classroom sessions of phonics teaching to show other members of the group.

How important was it that the training sessions could be attended in person? Or do you think that being sent all handouts and materials could also have worked?

Eight of the nine teachers felt that it was better to attend the training sessions and receive the handouts and materials in person. The value of exchanging ideas and interacting with colleagues was highlighted, and it was pointed out that the handouts would have been difficult to understand without the explanations and discussions that were a feature of the training sessions.

Overall, how well do you think the training days prepared you for delivering the strategy in the classroom?

Five of the nine teachers felt that the training days had prepared them sufficiently for delivering the strategy in the classroom. Several highlighted that the training had increased their confidence to plan and deliver phonics tuition. The lack of time spent on phonics training during the Level 4 subject-specialist course was mentioned by another teacher, who now feels able to 'work with colleagues to help them deliver phonics as part of their adult literacy courses ... I feel not only able to plan programmes of learning, but also to create resources to use with adult learners'.

How helpful did you find the feedback day on 9th November (2007)?

All but one of the teachers felt that it had been a valuable experience. Again, the opportunity to share ideas, resources and experiences with other phonics teachers was valued – and to hear about the work being undertaken on the other project strands. One teacher explained that 'sharing feedback and experiences was both inspirational and reassuring at the same time. Inspirational in that we enthused one another and bounced ideas for resources, schemes of work etc from one another and reassuring to know that phonics hadn't been totally plain sailing for the other teachers and that we all experienced 'tricky' moments with our learners.'

Views on:

1. Being observed in class

None of the comments on being observed was negative. It is important to note that, given the nature of the project, researchers who observed the lessons were given the brief that they could share reflections afterwards with the teachers on how the sessions had gone. Several teachers seem to have found that the process added value to their work; comments included:

‘I didn’t feel that I was being observed. It was more a case of somebody sharing in the educational journey.’

‘It was good to have an outsider see my ideas and feed them back to development of adult reading.’

‘To have the views of an experienced teacher on my work ... particularly early in the project, gave me some degree of reassurance that I was on the right lines!’

2. The level of support offered by the research team

All but one of the teachers who expressed their views found the level of support good or excellent. Access to the research team to respond to queries and problems was particularly appreciated, as was the ‘confirmatory and supportive feedback’ and help with locating resources. The teacher who seems to have felt more negative explained that ‘support was available, but I was unable to share in this practice due to lack of support from my institution.’

3. Support for your participation by your institution and/or work colleagues

On the whole, teachers did feel supported by their institution and work colleagues and valued this. Two pointed out that their participation could well have future benefits for their institution and colleagues; one said ‘I have been asked to deliver feedback and ideas for incorporating phonics into our literacy classes during training sessions for colleagues’, and another reported that ‘my fellow English teacher intends to use some of the material and followed my lessons with interest’. One teacher commented that, although her head of department was ‘indifferent’, her colleagues were ‘very supportive’.

4. Opportunity to meet and consult with other participating teachers

Most teachers’ responses confirmed that this aspect of the research – sharing resources, teaching ideas and general support – was felt to be of key importance, with one stating that ‘this was the most valuable part of the project’. Another teacher wanted to thank colleagues taking part ‘for their generosity in sharing their ideas and resources’.

5. The requirement to send in weekly log notes, resources, etc.

Several teachers felt that this process required discipline and had initially posed quite a challenge, but most appreciated that, once they had geared themselves up to reflecting on and writing about the delivered lesson, the process could add value to their work. One teacher wrote that it was useful in making her ‘focus fully on the session and evaluate the progress of each individual learner’. Others realised that a reflective log can be useful for future planning, with one stating that it was ‘satisfying once you started writing and very helpful in terms of refining

plans for the next week'. One teacher felt that 'weekly contact via log notes etc was useful for tracking and feedback purposes'.

Overall, the reactions to training and taking part in the project were positive, and highlighted how important and useful the teachers considered:

- practical, focused training, offering teaching ideas and resources, and which also included some theoretical underpinning; delivered face-to-face rather than by distance learning;
- ongoing support, reassurance and guidance on their teaching, both in the classroom and by means of distance mentoring;
- recognition and support from their institution;
- opportunities to meet with other teachers;
- opportunities to reflect on their practice.

4.3.5 Learners' attendance and self-study

The learner attitudes post-questionnaire, administered at the last class visit, included questions on the number of sessions attended between pre- and post-assessments and on the number of hours of self-study the learners estimated that they spent each week on average outside class time. This information was obtained from all but one of the 52 learners who completed post-questionnaires.

The time between pre- and post-assessments varied from 7 weeks to a maximum of 10 weeks, which included a half-term break. The number of sessions attended by the learners (not including the sessions at which the pre- and post-assessments took place) ranged from 4 to 8, with an average of 5.6.

The number of hours reported as spent in self-study ranged from 0.5 to 10 hours a week, with an average of 4.3 hours.

4.4 The search for factors associated with progress

In pursuit of factors that might be associated with progress in reading, spelling or writing, a number of correlations with other data were carried out. For the phonics strand, gains in reading and spelling were first correlated with each other, and then each was correlated with changes in attitudes, number of sessions attended between pre- and post-assessment, number of hours of self-study reported, and general teaching strategies. Most correlations were carried out at individual learner level, but for those between teaching strategies and progress the strategies were averaged for each class across sessions and the gains were averaged for each class across learners.

Most of the correlations were low and non-significant. The two which were stronger and appeared significant for the phonics strand were:

- between number of sessions attended and gain in spelling: $r = 0.20$
- between rating on general strategies and gain in reading: $r = 0.27$.

But both were quite weak, explaining just 4 per cent and 7 per cent of the variance respectively.

4.5 Summary

- A total of 52 learners in 10 classes located over a wide area and taught by nine teachers took part in this strand.
- Most of the learners were within Entry level at the start, as judged by their teachers and as shown by their pre-assessment reading scores.
- All but two of the classes were mixed ability groups composed of up to four different levels of learner.
- The learners made significant gains in both reading comprehension and spelling. The average improvement in reading was equivalent to about one third of an NQF level. In spelling, the average overall improvement was accompanied by a trend towards making 'better' errors. While modest, the gains seemed worthwhile for these learners.
- Also, the progress was achieved in a very short time, on average 5.6 sessions. Since, in contrast to the Effective Practice Studies (Baynham et al. 2007, Brooks et al. 2007, Coben et al. 2007, Grief et al. 2007 and Mellar et al. 2007), this was an intervention study, there are implications for policy and practice, which are examined in Chapter 7.
- The learners' confidence improved, as measured by the attitudes questionnaire and reflected in both the learners' and the teachers' comments. This included, in particular, improved oracy skills.
- Enjoyment and engagement in class, together with increased peer support and 'gelling' of the class were reported by the teachers as further positive outcomes.
- Most of the learners reported that phonics had helped with their reading and spelling to at least some extent, and that it was an enjoyable way to learn.
- In general, the teachers implemented the strategy faithfully and with good quality teaching, and most expressed enthusiasm for the strategy and their participation, and what they had learnt; and through their feedback on this, highlighted the aspects of participation that would be most valuable when designing effective CPD for adult literacy practitioners.
- The teachers felt that phonics could be suitable for a range of learners.
- Although learners' confidence improved, this was not correlated with their progress.
- In fact, the only factors found to correlate with progress were regular attendance by learners and high ratings of the teachers' general teaching strategies.
- The strand demonstrated a need for an accessible phonics scheme with resources adapted for adults.
- The strand also demonstrated the value of effective training and support for adult literacy teachers as part of their CPD.

4.6 Conclusions and discussion

Although the focus of this intervention was on phonics, and the phonics teaching occupied, on average, half the class time, the outcomes went far wider than just improved decoding and/or spelling ability. Any concerns about the perceived narrowness of a phonics approach seem to be addressed by the findings of improved reading comprehension according to the reading assessment and also, in the opinions of both teachers and learners, increased confidence in other literacy activities including speaking; enjoyment and engagement in class were also reported together with increased peer support.

Phonics was used with learners across the age range 20s to 80s, and of levels ranging from pre-Entry to level 2, but most were within Entry level. All but two of the classes were mixed ability, and the teachers coped with this challenge by using differentiated activities (see Chapter 2 of the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008)). There was no consensus about whether or not phonics was particularly suitable for learners with dyslexia or learning difficulties, as the teachers' experience differed. However, overall, we can conclude that phonics is a strategy which can benefit a wide range of learners, can be implemented in mixed ability classes, and therefore deserves to be more widely used in adult literacy classes.

5. Oral reading fluency

This chapter describes the findings from the oral reading fluency strand of the project in terms of the sample, learners' progress, the implementation of the strategy in the classroom and the search for factors associated with progress.

5.1 The providers, learners and teachers

5.1.1 The providers and settings

The eight participating classes represented the sectors of FE (six), Local Authority (one) and ACL (one), with five of the classes held at college sites and the remaining three at adult education/community centres. They covered a wide geographical area of England – Gloucester, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Sheffield and Stockport. All were 'single purpose' adult literacy classes. The classes were all daytime classes and were held once a week. Four classes were of 2.5 hours duration, three lasted 2 hours and one class 1.25 hours.

5.1.2 The learners

The initial sample consisted of 40 learners who completed consent forms, learner profiles and both pre- and post-questionnaires. Their characteristics are set out in Table 5.1. (Note that in some cases the numbers (percentages) do not total 40 (100 per cent) as not all learners responded.)

Table 5.1: Background characteristics of the 40 learners

		N	%
Gender	Men	15	37
	Women	25	63
Age distribution	16–19	7	17
	20–29	12	30
	30–39	5	12
	40–49	9	23
	50–59	4	10
	Over 59	3	8
Ethnicity	White	28	70
	Other	12	30
First language	English	34	85
	Other	6	15
Occupational status	Employed (full/part-time)	12	30
	Unemployed	5	13
	Unwaged	21	53
Age of leaving full-time education	Under 15	2	5
	15	4	10
	16	17	42
	Over 16	7	17
Highest qualification	None/no response	18	45
	Literacy certificate	6	15
	CSE/GCSE/O level	9	23
	NVQ/BTEC	6	15
	A level or above	1	2

Prior to the pre-assessment, the teachers were asked for their judgements about their learners' levels. There was a more even distribution of reading ability than with the phonics learners – 60 per cent were at Entry 3 or below, 40 per cent at Level 1 or Level 2. This seemed to reflect our recommendations to the teachers that practice in oral reading fluency could benefit learners over a wide range of levels.

The teachers' judgements corresponded fairly closely with the levels indicated by the reading pre-assessment results (Table 5.2), although not as closely as for the phonics classes. There were five overestimates by one level, five underestimates by one level and one underestimate by two levels. It seemed to be easier for the teachers to judge levels when most of the learners in the class were at a similar level; the discrepancy may indeed reflect the fact that the strategy was used with mixed-ability classes.

Table 5.2: Learner levels according to pre-assessment – Reading fluency

Level	N	%
L2	1	2
L1	17	38
E3	7	16
E2	7	16
E1 or below	13	29
Total	45	100

On the evaluation form at the end of the project, teachers were asked about the levels of learners with whom they had used the strategy, and types of learners for

whom they considered it most useful/unsuitable. The range of learners taught by each teacher is shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Levels of learners who received reading fluency instruction

Teacher	Pre-entry	Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2
1		√	√	√		
2					√	
3		√	√		√	
4		√	√	√	√	√
5					√	√
6		√	√			
7		√	√			
8	√	√	√			

Teachers used the strategy with learners from a range of abilities from Pre-entry to Level 2. Most teachers (six) used the strategy with learners at Entry level 1 and 2. Half the teachers (four) used the strategy with learners at Level 1. Only one teacher used the strategy with Pre-entry level learners. In terms of range of ability within each group, all but one of the groups included learners at two or more different levels, and in one case these learners were not of adjacent levels (Entry level 1, Entry level 2 and Level 1).

When asked about which types of learners (age, level, background, etc.) who might find the reading fluency approach most useful, almost all the teachers thought that it suited all types of learners. According to one teacher it suited ‘All levels, ages, backgrounds ... the strategy can be adapted to fit’; another simply stated, ‘Everybody’. Another teacher reported that lower-level learners appeared to find it more useful: ‘My E2 students appeared to make the most progress and also enjoyed it the most’.

The majority of teachers on this project did not consider the strategy unsuitable for any particular type or level of learner, except perhaps for those with speech difficulties. Most could benefit as long as care and tact were taken to ensure learners ‘really want to take part’.

5.1.3 The teachers

Eight teachers took part in the reading fluency strand. At the training day they completed questionnaires about their qualifications and experience:

- **Gender:** seven out of the eight teachers were women
- **First language:** seven had English as their first language, and one was a native Spanish speaker
- **Teaching experience:** their basic skills teaching experience ranged from 3 to 25 years, with an average of just over 9 years; all but one had additional teaching experience in other subjects
- **Reading fluency experience:** three had not used the strategy before; one reported frequent use of it, the remaining four had used it at least occasionally, with two of these having the previous experience of taking part in the oral reading fluency development project (Burton 2007a). Three had prior reservations about using the strategy with their learners

- **Qualifications:** five had already completed their Level 4 literacy training; all but one also had generic teaching qualifications.

5.2 Learners' progress

Progress was assessed by:

1. Pre- and post-assessments of reading comprehension;
2. Learners' views of their own progress, obtained mainly from the learner evaluation forms and pre- and post-questionnaires;
3. Their teachers' views of their progress from the teacher evaluation forms, observational data and teaching logs and additional data from feedback days and correspondence.

5.2.1 Reading attainment

A total of 45 learners from 8 classes completed the reading assessment at pre-test, and 32 at post-test. Their average scores are shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Average pre- and post-assessment scaled reading scores – reading fluency strand

	Pre-test	Post-test
Sample size	32	32
Average score	26.3	33.3
(standard deviation)	(19.8)	(22.9)

Although the scaled scores at both points were below the national average of 50 derived from the piloting of the assessments, the average score even at pre-assessment was still higher than the average score in the phonics strand at post-assessment (24.3).

The average score improved by 7 scaled score points between pre- and post-assessment, and the effect size was 0.7 (medium). The difference was highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The standard deviations at both points were larger than the norm of 10, which suggests that the samples were diverse; indeed on both occasions there were learners who scored zero and learners whose scores were in the 60s (increasing to 70s at post-test).

An important question is what the gains imply for the ability in reading of the learners in this study. This can be judged better from the average raw scores, which are shown in Table 5.5.

A sub-sample of 17 learners took the (easier) 'a' form at both pre- and post-assessment, and 11 took the (harder) 'b' form. The maximum score on the 'a' form was 30, and the maximum score on the 'b' form was 39.

Table 5.5: Average pre- and post-assessment reading raw scores – reading fluency strand

Test form		Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
a (N=17)	Average score	9.7	12.2	2.5
	(standard deviation)	(5.9)	(7.5)	(3.3)
b (N=11)	Average score	17.4	22.5	5.1
	(standard deviation)	(4.5)	(5.9)	(4.0)

The ‘a’ group’s gain was highly statistically significant ($p=0.007$) and so was the ‘b’ group’s ($p=0.002$), despite the small sample.

The average gains of 2.5 and 5.1 raw score points were equivalent to about 8 per cent and 13 per cent of the maximum scores of 30 and 39 respectively. The pre-test average raw score for the learners who took form ‘a’ would put a learner with this score right on the threshold between Entry levels 1 and 2, and the form ‘a’ post-test average score would put a learner with that score high up in Entry level 2. The pre-test average raw score for the literacy learners who took form ‘b’ would put a learner with this score some way up into Level 1, and the form ‘b’ post-test average score would put a learner with that score close to the threshold of Level 2. In both cases the average gain was equivalent to at least half an NQF level.

5.2.2 Learners’ views of their progress

Attitudes questionnaires

The attitudes pre- and post-questionnaires asked about the learners’ general self-confidence in a range of language-, literacy- and learning-related situations (nine questions common to all three strands) and about attitudes to reading aloud (a further two questions specific to the reading fluency strand). All were rated on a scale of 1 to 4. The two specific questions were:

- 10. When I read aloud to one other person I feel ...
- 11. When I read aloud in front of a group I feel ...

Forty learners completed both pre- and post-questionnaires. Confidence increased from an average rating of 2.3 (pre) to 2.6 (post) and this change was statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

Confidence increased on all individual items but one (3. When I think about myself as a learner I feel ...); some differences on items were not statistically significant but there were significant improvements on items 1, 2, 7, and 8 (1. When I think about speaking in front of a group of people, I feel ... ; 2. When I need to use a telephone ...; 7. If I have to read something out aloud ...; 8. If I have to read a set of instructions...) and on specific item 11 (see above); there was a highly significant improvement on item 10 (above). Significantly increased confidence was therefore seen in all the activities that required oral skills (i.e. 1, 2, 7, 10, 11).

Evaluation form

Thirty-eight of the learners who took part in the reading fluency strand completed a learner evaluation form at the end of the project. This form had seven questions to elicit information about learners’ understanding of the concept of reading fluency and experience of it and whether they wanted to continue to learn in this

way. Two of the questions dealt directly with progress and enjoyment, and provided a valuable source of information on how learners viewed the progress they felt they had made. The responses to these questions are summarised below.

3. Do you feel it has helped you with your reading? (A lot/a little/not at all)

Almost all the learners who took part in this strand of the project reported that the strategy had helped with their reading. Of the 37 responses, 23 learners thought the strategy had helped them 'a lot', whilst 14 learners reported that it had helped them 'a little'. No learners replied 'not at all'.

4. What have you enjoyed most about reading aloud in class?

There was a mixed set of responses to this question. Five learners reported that what they had enjoyed the most was the way it helped to build their confidence. One learner stated, 'I know I can do it and I feel more confident'; another reported 'I have enjoyed the confidence it has given me reading aloud to other people'. Another learner highlighted that 'I felt it has helped me conquer my shyness'.

As well as confidence, two learners also reported that they enjoyed the sense of achievement that reading aloud could bring. One learner stated that 'it makes me feel pleased when people enjoy hearing me read'. One learner claimed that the most enjoyable part was the opportunity it provided for everyone to read together. Several learners felt that listening to other learners read was particularly enjoyable. Two learners also reported that they enjoyed being listened to as well as listening to other learners.

Just under a quarter of the learners on the project related their enjoyment to specific types of texts. Four learners commented on how much they had enjoyed the poems they had read, and three referred to the plays they had read in class.

Nine learners made reference to their improved reading skills. One learner highlighted that they enjoyed 'reading better', a further two reported they enjoyed 'getting the words right' and two more learners referred to improved comprehension ability. Four learners commented on the fact that reading aloud gave them the chance to read expressively and develop expression in their reading.

Two learners most enjoyed the opportunity the strategy gave them to work alongside and interact with fellow learners. One learner thought hearing other learners' ideas was particularly beneficial.

In response to question 6, 'Would you like to carry on with practising reading aloud in class?' The overwhelming majority (82 per cent) of learners reported that they would like to continue with the strategy.

The final question was open-ended and gave the opportunity to highlight any aspect of the experience:

7. Is there anything else you would like to say about taking part in this project or reading aloud?

Many of the learners chose to answer this in terms of progress and described the effect as increasing their 'confidence' or making them 'feel better/really good' (ten such responses). Five learners also referred to enjoyment or 'fun'. 'I did find it

hard but once you start and have done it [it] makes you feel really good. Thank you.'

5.2.3 Teachers' views

Teachers' views of learners' progress were drawn from a variety of sources including teaching logs, semi-structured interviews and especially the evaluation forms completed anonymously at the end of the project. Note that all references are to 'she' and 'her' although one of the eight teachers was a man.

Evaluation forms

Question 24 asked the teachers to assess on a scale of 1–5 (5 being the most positive, 3 representing no change and 1 and 2 representing a negative impact) how their learners had responded to the strategy in 6 key areas:

1. enjoyment/engagement in class
2. confidence
3. reading with fluency/expression
4. reading more widely/for pleasure
5. reading comprehension
6. peer support/'gelling' of class

The area in which teachers reported learners had responded most positively was in terms of peer support and 'gelling' of the class. Five teachers rated progress in this at 5 and three at 4.

Another key area was learner confidence. Again, all the teachers reported a positive impact on learner's confidence levels, with three rating it at 5 and five teachers at 4.

Most of the teachers did report that learners enjoyed and engaged with the strategy in class. However, two reported no change in levels of enjoyment and engagement in class.

It was not just the 'softer areas' of impact where progress was reported. There was also some perception of change in learners' reading skills. All the teachers reported progress in their learners' fluency/expression in reading. Five teachers reported that the strategy had improved reading comprehension, although the remaining three teachers were not convinced, reporting either no change in comprehension or, in one case, a negative impact. (None of the teachers had been given any information about the results of the reading assessment.)

The only area where most of the teachers felt there had been no impact as a result of the strategy was in terms of reading more widely/for pleasure. Five reported that their learners had not been encouraged to read more widely/for pleasure, although it should be noted that the teachers had not been asked to promote this specifically.

In the second part of question 24, teachers were also given the opportunity to note any other effects on their learners. Two teachers commented on the fact that learners appeared more confident and ready than other learners (in any

classes) to engage with other tasks, such as willingly taking part in group activities, working one-to-one with the teacher and support assistants, and finding their own poems independently to bring and discuss in class. Other comments included 'sheer enjoyment and pride' and 'increased conversation in break – a better sense of whole class rather than separate individuals'.

Question 32 of the evaluation form invited teachers to identify a key point or high spot that had emerged during their use of the reading fluency strategy. They all highlighted various successes for their learners, especially gains in confidence, increase in peer support and collaborative work, and enjoyment and enthusiasm. Their 'success stories' included:

'I feel the high point for me is how two of my learners have worked together and supported each other. They both really enjoyed the play and approached the reading with enthusiasm. One of the students is autistic and is generally a loner at times and difficult to work with but through the project he has worked extremely well as part of a pair.'

'I have a learner who has multiple physical and mental health difficulties and to see her wheel her chair to the front of the class and read loudly and confidently to the group was wonderful. She has since volunteered to read aloud to the group and again they spontaneously applauded her.'

'One student who was very under confident has now taken an assessment for a GCSE course and been accepted...overall it's growth of confidence ... increase in comprehension abilities ... students working in pairs correct each other so reciprocal teaching ... lovely to sit back sometimes and give the moment to the students.'

Teachers' views were also obtained more informally in conversation and correspondence. One teacher emailed after the end of the autumn term to share the exciting news that one particular learner, nervous in the extreme about reading aloud to anyone, had somehow found courage and 'went on to read out her poem at her brother's works do to about 40 people and was ok about it! Quite an achievement!'

5.3 How the strategy was implemented

A detailed account of recommended methods and materials for teaching oral reading fluency, with examples from practice, can be found in the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008). This section concentrates on giving an account of the teaching and learning that took place over the course of the project, both from classroom observations and from the teachers' own descriptions of their practice. Information was obtained from observation log notes and strategy analysis sheets, teaching logs and teachers' end-of-project evaluations.

5.3.1 General and specific teaching strategies

Each of the eight classes was observed on up to three occasions (at the end of the pre- and post-assessment sessions if any teaching time remained and a full observation at one point between), and the teaching and learning activities were

coded according to the general and specific strategies analysis sheets. A record was also kept of the total amount of teaching time observed during each visit (over which the general strategies applied) and the length of time spent on delivery of the specific strategy. For reading fluency, the average amount of teaching time observed was 94 minutes and the strategy was used on average for 24 minutes per session, that is for about a quarter of the teaching time.

The teachers' general teaching strategies were rated during the observations on a schedule containing 19 items, divided into two parts: A. General teaching strategies (11 items) and B. Opportunities for learner involvement (8 items). Each item was rated for every class observed on a four-point scale where 0 represented 'not observed' and 3 'observed to a high degree (characteristic of the teacher)'. The Effective Practice in Reading Study concluded that the whole instrument could be treated as a measure of a single latent factor, 'quality of teaching observed' (Brooks et al. 2007, p.47). For the purposes of this study, too, both sections were combined to give a total score. The ratings per class, averaged over the sessions, ranged from 0.7 to 1.9. The overall average for all 8 classes was 1.5, which (the maximum score being 3) can be interpreted as teaching that was reasonably good, although not outstandingly so.

The specific teaching strategies schedule, against which the observed sessions were also rated, contained 10 items relating to aspects of background knowledge and pedagogy which might be expected to feature in the course of teaching oral reading fluency. These activities corresponded closely with the guidelines given to the teachers during the training (for further details see the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008)) and the list was therefore less a snapshot of quality of teaching than a measure of the fidelity with which the strategy was implemented. The items are listed below.

Each item was rated on a 2-point scale where 0 represented 'not observed' and 1 'observed'. Here the specific strategy scores ranged from 0.3 to 0.8, with an average across the classes of 0.6. Table 5.6 shows the average ratings by class for general and specific strategies.

1. Provides teaching that accurately adopts the guidelines given and demonstrates an understanding of the underlying principles of the strategy of reading fluency
2. Encourages expressive as well as fluent reading, e.g. by modelling
3. Allows sufficient time for the learners to practise/repeat until fluent
4. Provides texts of appropriate level and content, adapted if necessary
5. Does not allow learners to struggle and lose momentum but prompts quickly
6. Provides opportunities for and/or builds on peer support during reading
7. Encourages and supports reluctant/nervous learners in taking the risk of reading aloud
8. Actively encourages learners to read aloud to whole class/group if appropriate
9. Checks on comprehension by allowing time for the discussion of the text/ explanation of vocabulary, etc
10. Provides opportunities for self-study of strategy by setting homework/making suggestions for reading activities between classes

Table 5.6: Average general and specific strategies ratings – reading fluency strand

Class no.	General	Specific
2011	1.1	0.7
2021	1.9	0.7
2031	1.8	0.8
2051	1.6	0.6
2061	1.7	0.3
2071	1.8	0.5
2081	0.7	0.5
2091	1.8	0.7

5.3.2 Patterns of strategy use

The time devoted to reading fluency was recorded in observation documents and weekly teaching logs. The time spent on the strategy ranged from 7 minutes to 35 minutes, representing a proportion of the whole teaching time which varied from 7 per cent to 51 per cent. The average time spent on the strategy was 26 minutes. Two of the teachers involved the entire class in reading fluency practice, although most used it with a sub-group within the class.

For the most part, reading fluency activities were self-contained and treated as a separate activity – consistent with the fact that most teachers were using it with groups within a class. There were only a couple of examples of embedding the strategy in whole-class practice.

5.3.3 Teachers' approach to the strategy

For full descriptions and illustrations of the methods that can be used for oral reading fluency, see the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008). The methods referred to here are summarised below:

- Paired reading: The learner reads with a teacher/assistant or another learner at a higher level. They start reading the text together until the learner signals that s/he is happy to read alone.
- Choral reading: a group version of the above.
- Repeated reading: The same passage is read again and again over the course of a few weeks so that faultless fluency is achieved.
- Modelled (echo) reading: Here the teacher reads a phrase/short sentence aloud first and the learner repeats.
- Performance reading: Preparing for a 'performance' by rehearsing the reading.

By using data collected from the teachers' weekly logs and class observations, a picture of the methods employed over the course of the project was constructed. The analysis of the methods employed in the classroom was not an easy process. We found that many teachers used a combination or hybrid of different methods. For example one teacher frequently used modelled (echo) reading but with a choral element. In addition, examination of the weekly logs revealed that the terminology used by teachers to describe methods did not always match the description of the practice that took place. Therefore, our analysis of the reading fluency methods employed by teachers serves only as a guide to the actual classroom practice that took place.

Nevertheless, a number of points can be made about the reading fluency methods adopted. The most popular method was 'paired reading'. Six of the eight teachers on this strand reported using this method, and five were observed putting the strategy into action in the classroom. However, the paired reading that took place was not paired reading per se but what we have termed 'partnered reading' (sometimes known as 'buddy reading'). This tended to take the form of learners reading aloud to each other in turn rather than two learners (or learner and teacher) starting by reading together. 'Partnered reading' took place in approximately 30 different sessions and involved learners of similar or different levels reading to each other; and sometimes a learner reading to a teacher or assistant. Moreover, the strategy was highlighted by half the teachers as one of the most useful methods they had tried. One practitioner reported that 'partnered reading provided a safe way for learners to practise and make mistakes without everyone else knowing'. Another commented, 'reading was very successful as partnered ... the learners naturally helped and supported each other'.

'Choral reading' was also a strategy adopted by 6 of the 8 teachers in a total of 21 sessions. Most of this reading included some form of echo reading. One teacher stated: 'I think that I could have done more echoing really in the session as it proved to be valuable with demonstrating expression'.

Views were mixed on the usefulness of choral reading. One teacher reported that this was the most useful strategy she had tried, stating:

'This method suited the number in the class and enabled me to hear and observe student participation and progress. I thought this would be a less exposed way to encourage the students to read aloud when others could hear but were also doing their reading – this would also help them to keep going if they lost their place and could join in again.'

Another teacher reported that she thought choral reading was 'good for Entry learners but not L1, L2'. One teacher, however, reported that choral reading was the least successful part of the strategy she had employed because 'not everybody could read text at the same speed'.

Half the teachers reported that 'modelling' pieces of text for learners to repeat, also sometimes referred to as 'echo reading', was one of the most useful techniques they had tried. Indeed most of the teachers used this method in more than one session. Three teachers used it regularly as a means of developing expressive reading.

'Repeated reading' was employed by seven out of the eight teachers at some point during the project. The number of times learners repeated the same piece of text varied considerably, from twice in one case to over 10 times in another. One teacher claimed it was one of the most useful techniques she had adopted.

All teachers on this strand of the project were asked by the research team to prepare their learners for a 'performance read' during the final class observation. This resulted in many of the sessions towards the end of the term including practice for the final performance, which in several cases provided an opportunity for the learners to read aloud to the whole class.

Two teachers said that they had found it hard to find appropriate materials for reading fluency. However, the majority found that plays and poetry were the most useful resources.

5.3.4 The teachers' experience of participating in the reading fluency strand

A training day formed the first part of the reading fluency stand of the project, followed by two feedback days to which teachers from all three strands of the project were invited in order to share their experiences, ideas and concerns. The teachers were given the opportunity to express their views on the training received and on their overall participation in the project in the evaluation form completed on the final feedback day. The responses of the eight reading fluency teachers to the questions are summarised below:

What was the most useful aspect for you of the training and/or the materials?

The responses included meeting other teachers, information on resources and materials, and the demonstration of reading fluency by the consultant teacher

What was the least satisfactory aspect of the training and/or materials?

All the teachers reported being satisfied, although one might have liked to have had the handouts in advance 'so we can read and reflect on them before the training day'.

How important was it that the training sessions could be attended in person?

Most of the teachers seemed to regard this aspect as important – 'opportunity to network'; 'for expertise of others'

How well do you think the training day prepared you for delivering the strategy in the classroom?

Only one teacher found it had not prepared her sufficiently – 'I did feel inspired by it then couldn't seem to put it into practice' but the rest replied with 'well' or 'very well'.

How helpful did you find the feedback day on 9 November (2007)?

Most replies involved the words 'useful' and 'helpful' and related to sharing ideas and concerns with others.

Views on:

1. Being observed in class

Most teachers had no problems with being observed; two mentioned that it was 'supportive' and one found it 'reassuring' with 'lots of helpful pointers' from the observer.

2. The level of support offered by the research team

Responses were generally very positive and support was valued as 'good', 'wonderful', 'readily available'.

3. Support for your participation by your institution and/or work colleagues

Most teachers reported positively about the support, but two were less positive – one had received 'no support whatsoever' and another spoke of her colleagues being only 'mildly interested'.

4. Opportunity to meet and consult with other participating teachers

All were enthusiastic about this – ‘one of the best bits’, ‘very worthwhile’.

5. The requirement to send in weekly log notes, resources, etc.

Three teachers had issues with finding time to do this. The others found it helpful – ‘a good way to reflect on what had happened in the session’; ‘the most useful way to reflect and feed back’.

Overall the reactions to training and taking part in the project were positive and highlighted how important and useful the teachers considered:

- practical, focused training, offering demonstrations of teaching ideas and resources; delivered face-to-face rather than by distance learning
- ongoing support, reassurance and guidance on their teaching, both in the classroom and by means of distance mentoring
- recognition and support from their institution
- opportunities to meet with other teachers and share ideas and concerns
- opportunities to reflect on their practice.

5.3.5 Learners’ attendance and self-study

The learner attitudes post-questionnaires, administered at the last class visit, included questions on the number of sessions attended between pre- and post-assessments and on the number of hours of self-study the learners estimated that they spent each week on average outside class time. These pieces of information were obtained from, respectively, 33 and 37 of the 40 learners who completed post-questionnaires.

The length of time between pre-and post-assessments varied from 7 weeks to a maximum of 10 weeks, which included a half-term break. The number of sessions attended by the learners (excluding the sessions at which the pre- and post-assessments took place) ranged from 2 to 9, with an average of 5.6.

The number of hours reported by the learners as spent in self-study each week ranged from 0 to 9.5 hours a week, with an average of 4.3 hours.

5.4 The search for factors associated with progress

In pursuit of factors that might be associated with progress in reading, spelling or writing, a number of correlations with other data were carried out. For the reading fluency strand, gains in reading were correlated with changes in attitudes, number of sessions attended between pre- and post-test, number of hours of self-study reported, and general teaching strategies.

Most of the correlations were low and non-significant. The only one which was stronger and appeared significant for the fluency strand was:

- between rating on general strategies and gain in reading: $r = 0.59$.

This was moderately strong, explaining 35 per cent of the variance.

From this we can conclude that progress in reading comprehension was correlated with high ratings of the teachers' general teaching strategies analysis.

5.5 Summary

- A total of 40 learners in 8 classes located over a wide area and taught by 8 teachers took part in this strand.
- Slightly more than half of the learners were within Entry level at the start, as judged by their teachers and shown by the pre-assessment reading scores.
- All but one of the classes were mixed ability groups.
- The learners made significant gains in reading comprehension, equivalent to about a half of an NQF level.
- The progress was achieved within a very short time – on average 5.6 sessions. Since, in contrast to the Effective Practice Studies (Baynham et al. 2007, Brooks et al. 2007, Coben et al. 2007, Grief et al. 2007 and Mellar et al. 2007), this was an intervention study, there are implications for policy and practice, which are examined in Chapter 7.
- The learners' self-confidence improved, as measured by the attitudes questionnaire and reflected in both the learners' and teachers' comments. Confidence improved significantly with regard to activities that required oral skills.
- Increased peer support and 'gelling' of the class, and also enjoyment and engagement in class, were reported as further positive outcomes by the teachers.
- Most of the learners reported finding the strategy helpful for improving their reading and boosting their confidence and were keen to continue their learning in this way.
- The teachers adapted their implementation of the strategy to suit their learners and most expressed enthusiasm for the strategy and for their training and participation in the project strand; their feedback on this highlighted the aspects of participation that would be most valuable when designing effective CPD for adult literacy practitioners.
- The teachers felt that reading fluency was suitable for almost all learners at all levels of ability.
- Although learners' confidence improved, this was not correlated with their progress.
- Only one factor was found to correlate with progress – high ratings of the teachers' general teaching strategies.
- The strand demonstrated the value of effective training and support for adult literacy teachers as part of their CPD.

5.6 Conclusions and discussion

Practice in oral reading fluency can lead not just to increased confidence in reading aloud and in speaking generally, but also, according to the reading

assessment, to improved reading comprehension, which is of course the ultimate aim of any strategy which focuses on reading skills. Even when the research-based methods were not strictly adhered to (as with the popular 'partnered' reading) the benefits of fully supported and unthreatening reading aloud still seemed to be evident. Prior perceptions of the strategy as inappropriate for adults, and therefore risky for teachers to undertake, would seem to be unfounded. As well as measurable progress in reading comprehension and confidence, participants noted enjoyment and engagement in class and, particularly, increased peer support.

Oral reading fluency was used with learners from teens to 60+, and of all levels ranging from pre-Entry to Level 2. It was judged to be a strategy that could benefit almost all learners and as such deserves to be more widely used in adult literacy classes.

6. Sentence combining

This section describes the findings from the sentence combining strand of the project in terms of the sample, the learners' progress, the implementation of the strategy in the classroom and the search for factors associated with progress.

6.1 The providers, learners and teachers

6.1.1 The providers and settings

Three of the four classes represented the ACL sector, and one was FE. All classes were held in colleges or community settings. Classes were observed in Leeds, York, Matlock and Sheffield. All were 'single purpose' adult literacy classes, with a range of learner abilities from Entry 1 to Level 2. All classes catered for a mixture of learners of between two and three different levels. Three classes had sessions of 2 hours' duration and one of 2½ hours. All were daytime classes except for one held in the evening.

6.1.2 The learners

The initial sample of learners consisted of 28 learners who completed consent forms, learner profiles and pre- and post-questionnaires. Their characteristics are set out in Table 6.1. (Note that for some categories the numbers (percentages) do not total 28 (100 per cent) because not all learners supplied a response.)

Table 6.1: Background characteristics of the sample of learners

		N	%
Gender	Men	5	18
	Women	23	82
Age distribution	16–19	1	4
	20–29	8	29
	30–39	3	11
	40–49	8	29
	50–59	6	21
	Over 59	2	7
Ethnicity	White	23	82
	Other	5	18
First language	English	26	93
	Other	2	7
Occupational status	Employed (full-/part-time)	8	29
	Unemployed	7	25
	Unwaged	12	43
Age of leaving full-time education	Under 15	3	11
	15	8	29
	16	10	36
	Over 16	2	7
Highest qualification	None/no response	3	11
	Literacy certificate	6	21
	CSE/GCSE/O level	12	43
	NVQ/BTEC	6	21
	A level or above	1	4

In the absence of pre-assessment results that could be mapped onto the NQF levels, as with the reading assessment marks for the phonics and reading fluency strands, the only measure of learner levels came from the teachers themselves (Table 6.2). In view of how closely the teachers’ judgements matched the levels according to the pre-assessments for the other strands, their judgements can probably be regarded as fairly accurate here too.

Table 6.2: Learner levels according to teachers’ judgements – sentence combining strand

Level	N	%
L2	2	9
L1	3	14
E3	12	55
E2	3	14
E1/2	2	9
Total	22	100

On the evaluation form at the end of the project teachers were asked questions relating to the levels of learners they had used the strategy with and types of learners for whom they thought the strategy was most useful/unsuitable. The range of learners taught by each teacher is shown in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Levels of learners who received sentence combining instruction

Teacher	Entry 1	Entry 2	Entry 3	Level 1	Level 2
1		√	√		
2		√	√		
3			√	√	√
4		√	√	√	

All the teachers used the strategy with learners at a mixture of levels. All used it with Entry 3 and three used it with Entry 2 learners. Two used sentence combining with Level 1 and one with Level 2 learners.

Teachers were also asked for which types of learners (age, background, etc.) they considered the strategy most useful. Two considered that it would be useful at all levels. The remaining teachers thought that all learners above Entry 1 would benefit. One teacher thought that the strategy was most useful at Level 1 at all ages, and another that Entry 3 level was the most ideal and for all backgrounds and all ages.

6.1.3 The teachers

Four teachers took part in the research and on the training day completed a questionnaire about their qualifications and experience:

- **Gender:** All four teachers were female.
- **First language:** All had English as their first language.
- **Teaching experience:** Their basic skills teaching experience ranged from three to seven years, with an average of four years.
- **Qualifications:** Two had already completed their Level 4 training.
- **Sentence combining experience:** All had used the strategy at least to some extent before, as well as teaching other aspects of grammar such as punctuation, word classes and subject/verb agreements.

6.2 Learners' progress

The learners' progress was assessed by:

1. Pre- and post-assessments of writing
2. Their views of their own progress, obtained mainly from the learner evaluation forms and pre- and post-questionnaires
3. Their teachers' views of their progress from the teacher evaluation forms, observational data, teaching logs and additional data from feedback days and correspondence.

6.2.1 Writing attainment

A total of 17 learners from 4 classes completed writing pre- and post-assessments. Table 6.4 shows the average scores for each category. Note that the total possible score for the first 3 categories is 11 (with a maximum of 7 marks possible for sentence structure). There can of course be no maximum score stated for the last three categories, although a high score according to the

sentence structure criteria was unsurprisingly related to a higher number of words written.

Table 6.4: Average pre- and post-assessment writing scores

Category	Pre		Post		Gain		p
	Ave.	(s.d.)	Ave.	(s.d.)	Ave.	(s.d.)	
Functional adequacy	1.6	(0.5)	1.6	(0.5)	0	(0.4)	ns
Sentence structure	2.9	(2.4)	4.6	(2.2)	1.7	(2.5)	0.011
Punctuation	1.7	(0.5)	2.4	(0.6)	0.7	(0.7)	0.002
Total	6.2	(2.9)	8.6	(2.9)	2.4	(2.8)	0.003
No. of words	41.2	(35.5)	54.1	(34.5)	12.9	(12.7)	<0.001
No. of sentences	3.5	(2.6)	3.8	(2.0)	0.3	(1.9)	ns
Av. sentence length	10.8	(5.6)	14.2	(6.2)	3.4	(6.8)	ns

s.d. = standard deviation; ns = statistically non-significant

There were gains in almost all categories of the marking scheme. The gain in sentence structure was statistically significant, and the gains in punctuation and number of words written were highly significant. The time allowed for the writing was the same at both pre- and post-assessments (10 minutes), and the instructions to the learners were the same both times ('What do you think of Go! magazine. Please write a few sentences').

6.2.2 Learners' views

Attitudes questionnaires

The attitudes pre- and post-questionnaires asked about the learners' general self-confidence in a selection of language-, literacy- and learning-related situations (nine questions common to all three strands) and a further two questions about attitudes to writing which were specific to the sentence combining strand. All were rated on a scale of 1–4. The two specific questions were:

10. When I think about writing a word I feel
11. When I think about writing a sentence I feel I....

Seventeen learners completed both pre-and post-questionnaires. Confidence increased from an average rating across the 11 questions of 2.2 (pre) to 2.6 (post), and this change was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Most differences on individual items were not statistically significant, but there was a significant improvement on item 7 (If I have to read something out loud, I feel ...) and a highly significant improvement on item 9 (If I have to take a test ...). It is interesting that confidence in writing, including the focused question on sentence writing (item 11), though it improved, did not do so significantly.

Learner evaluation forms

Eighteen learners who had taken part in the sentence combining strand of the project completed an end of project evaluation. This form had seven questions to elicit information about learners' understanding of the concept of sentence combining and their experience of it, and whether they wanted to continue to learn in this way. Two of the questions dealt directly with progress and enjoyment, and provided a valuable source of information on how learners

viewed the progress they felt they had made whilst taking part in the research. Their responses to these questions are summarised below.

3. Do you feel it has helped with your writing? (a lot/a little/not at all)

All the learners felt that the strategy had helped with their writing, with 13 reporting that they felt it had helped a lot and 5 that it had helped a little. No learners said that it had not helped at all.

4. What have you enjoyed most about working on your sentences?

All responses to this question were positive, although there were some generalities such as *'everything'*. More detailed responses related to better understanding: *'making sentences I can understand'*, *'how to make a sentence'* and *'helped to make a sentence make sense'*.

Longer or better sentences were specifically mentioned by five learners: *'making longer sentences'*, *'being able to write sentences better'* and *'I've enjoyed learning that there are difference ways to put sentences together rather than just the basic and/or/because'*. One learner said *'It is nice to feel a bit more confident about it'*. In the final space on the form, where there was an opportunity to add other comments, two learners mentioned an increase in confidence.

All learners felt that they wanted to carry on with sentence work in class.

As well as information gathered on learners' views of their progress from the evaluation forms, one situation arose during the research which provided a further insight. The teacher reported that one learner stayed behind at the end of the class especially to talk about her progress:

'S (the learner) actually stayed behind to say that she would have struggled and had a panic prior to this work if asked to write a paragraph, but she is pleased at her progress and feels her writing style and her confidence are improving.'

6.2.3 Teachers' views of learners' progress

The evaluation forms filled in by all the teachers at the end of the project had a range of questions covering different aspects of their participation in the project, both in general and strand-specific terms. Question 24 asked the four teachers involved in the sentence combining strand of the project to assess how they felt their learners had responded to the strategy in six key areas:

1. enjoyment/engagement in class
2. confidence
3. understanding of grammar/syntax
4. sentence construction
5. wider/creative writing
6. peer support/'gelling' of class

On a scale of 1–5 (with 5 being the most positive, 3 representing no change, and 1 and 2 representing a negative impact), all the teachers felt that there had been

an improvement in confidence, with one rating increase in confidence at the highest rating of 5.

Three of the four teachers considered that learners had a better understanding of grammar/syntax, and three reported that there was an improvement in sentence construction, with two rating this as 5, and one indicating no change. The rating for wider/creative writing again showed an improvement in three of the four classes, with one teacher scoring this as 5; the remaining teacher reported no change. Three of the four teachers saw greater enjoyment and engagement in class and three also noted improved peer support.

In the second part of this question the teachers were asked, 'Did you notice any other effects on your learners?' Some comments expanded on the area of confidence, for example: 'The learners have greatly increased confidence to write – they were previously reluctant to write any quantity or develop sentences because of fear of making mistakes'. Another comment expanded on enjoyment in the class: 'They were desperate to put theory on sentences into practice and use their new found techniques'.

In question 32 of the form, teachers were asked to identify, if possible, a key point/high spot that emerged during use of the strategy. All the teachers responded to this question, and three described a marked improvement in one or more individual learners. Their comments included:

'Three learners have vastly improved confidence to write extended pieces of text now with complex and detailed sentences. All learners involved have improved to some extent.'

and

'All enjoyed putting theory into practice in their writing.'

One teacher described her feelings when learners read their writing aloud to the rest of the class:

'It was wonderful when G read aloud a descriptive paragraph with such confidence and when J read her complete, successful, descriptive simple sentence.'

Further insights were found in observational data and in the logs which teachers completed weekly after each session. Three teachers reported a steady and sustained improvement in writing both for individual learners and in more general terms. One teacher reported that improvement was 'significant' in one case. Other comments included:

'They are comfortable to use a wider vocabulary in their writing and to use more complex word orders.'

'I felt that learners are becoming more confident in their use of sentences, and realised this lesson that they can use sentences in different combinations.'

The advantages of sentence combining were summed up by one teacher in terms of its relative straightforwardness for the learner: 'I have seen the benefit to

the learners of not being tied up with all the technical vocabulary ... joining sentences to 'make sense' is a much simpler way of teaching grammar.'

6.3 Teachers' practice

A detailed account of recommended methods and materials for teaching sentence combining, with examples from practice, can be found in the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008). This section concentrates on an account of the teaching and learning that took place over the course of the project, both from classroom observations and from the teachers' own descriptions of their practice. Information was obtained from observation log notes and strategy analysis sheets, teaching logs and teachers' end-of-project evaluations.

6.3.1 General and specific teaching strategies

Each of the four classes was observed on three occasions (at the time of the pre- and post-assessments and at one point between), and the teaching and learning activities were coded according to the general and specific strategies analysis sheets. A record was also kept of the total amount of teaching time spent during each visit (over which the general strategies applied) and the length of time spent on delivery of the specific strategy. For sentence combining, the average amount of teaching time observed per session was 100 minutes, and the strategy was used on average for 50 minutes per session.

The teachers' general teaching strategies were rated during the observations on a schedule containing 19 items, divided into two parts: A. General teaching strategies (11 items) and B. Opportunities for learner involvement (8 items). Each item was rated for every class observed on a four-point scale where 0 represented 'not observed' and 3 'observed to a high degree (characteristic of the teacher)'. The Effective Practice in Reading Study concluded that the whole instrument could be treated as a measure of a single latent factor, 'quality of teaching observed' (Brooks et al. 2007, p.47). For the purposes of this study too, both sections were combined to give a total score. The ratings per class, averaged over the sessions, ranged from 0.9 to 2.4, with an overall average for the four classes of 1.8, a rating that was towards the high end. In other words the general quality of teaching was judged to be quite high.

The specific teaching strategies schedule, against which the observed sessions were also rated, comprised 10 items relating to aspects of background knowledge and pedagogy which might be expected to feature in the course of teaching sentence combining. These activities corresponded closely with the guidelines given to the teachers during the training (for further details see the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008)), and the list was therefore less a snapshot of quality of teaching than a measure of the fidelity with which the strategy was implemented. The items are listed below:

1. Provides teaching that accurately reflects the underlying principles of English grammar.
2. Uses text study to identify and explain different sentence structures.
3. Defines and explains what a simple sentence is.

4. Models ways of appropriately combining simple sentences into compound sentences.
5. Models ways of appropriately combining simple sentences into complex sentences.
6. Provides appropriate sentences for learners to combine.
7. Guides learners in generating appropriate sentences of their own to combine.
8. Uses existing worksheets appropriately and creatively; shows inventiveness in devising new materials and activities.
9. Links the strategy to wider writing activities as well as presenting it in the form of decontextualised tasks.
10. Provides opportunities for self-study of strategy by setting homework/making suggestions for writing activities between classes.

Each item was rated on a 2-point scale where 0 represented 'not observed' and 1 'observed'. The average ratings for the specific strategy items ranged from 0.3 to 0.8, with an average across the classes of 0.6. Table 6.5 shows the average ratings by class for both general and specific strategies.

Table 6.5: Average general and specific strategies scores for sentence combining strand, by class

Class no.	General	Specific
3011	2.0	0.5
3021	2.4	0.8
3031	0.9	0.3
3041	2.0	0.7

6.3.2 Patterns of strategy use

The time devoted to sentence combining was recorded on observation documents and in weekly teacher logs. The average length of time spent on the strategy varied from 92 minutes in a 2½hour session to 34 minutes in a 2-hour session, representing between 26 per cent and 61 per cent of the total teaching time. The average amount of time spent on the strategy was 50 minutes. Three of the teachers used the strategy with the entire class; one teacher used it with a sub-group of learners within the class.

Two teachers integrated sentence combining into the sessions, and two teachers treated the activity as a self-contained section of the session which contained a range of other literacy strategies.

Classroom layouts varied. One class used a room which was laid out with computers and desks facing the walls, two had one large table/horseshoe layouts and one had four smaller tables to seat four to eight. This variety of layouts may have affected the patterns of classroom activity to some extent, although some teachers used activities which necessitated the learners being mobile or physically moving into groups. Three of the teachers used a combination of whole group and learner pairs/small groups for a high proportion of the time spent on the strategy. Three of the teachers used ICT. In two classes this was used to input learners' own handwritten text, and in the other the teacher used interactive exercises.

6.3.3 Teachers' approach to the strategy

Although all the teachers approached the strategy in a similar way, by first looking at simple sentences and progressing to compound and complex, methods varied. An interesting comment from one teacher would suggest that it is valid to start at a very low level and not assume prior knowledge:

'From verbal feedback on simple sentences I realised that even Level 2 students were not clear on what constitutes a simple sentence. I realised that I must reinforce this before I begin expanding to compound and complex.'

In one class simple sentences were developed, building on complexity according to learner levels during the project. A similar approach was adopted each week, with learners building simple sentences from a chosen picture and joining these to produce compound and/or complex sentences. The final stage was paragraph writing. Learners were encouraged to improve simple sentences by use of a wider range of adjectives and adverbs.

Teachers also used a variety of activities. In two classes teachers both constructed and deconstructed sentences, and one analysed sentence structure using a variety of realia. In the second session of one class, which included analysis of text, the teacher reported:

'The direct approach on sentence combining in this lesson really went well. I think that embedding it in their writing has also paid off; and analysing text has also helped them to look at writing critically.'

Three teachers used commercial resources, including BBC Skillswise and ABC resources. Three created some or all of the resources they used in the classroom. Two used an interactive whiteboard for some of the lesson time. One created her own resources and felt that 'The use of the interactive PowerPoint was essential for the structure of the session.'

6.3.4 The experience of taking part in the project

A training day for the participating teachers formed the first part of the sentence combining strand, followed by two feedback days to which teachers from all three strands of the project were invited, in order to share their experiences, ideas and concerns. The teachers were asked for their views on the training received and on their overall participation in the project at the final feedback day, when they completed a detailed evaluation form.

Overall, the reactions to the training and taking part in the project were positive and highlighted how important and useful teachers considered:

1. practical, focused training, which offered teaching ideas and resources, and also included some theoretical underpinning; face-to-face delivery was helpful but not essential
2. ongoing support, reassurance and guidance on their teaching, both in the classroom and by means of distance mentoring
3. recognition and support from their institution
4. opportunities to meet with other teachers, especially a large group of teachers with whom to share ideas

5. opportunities to reflect on their practice.

The responses of the four sentence combining teachers to the questions are summarised below:

What was the most useful aspect for you of the training and/or the materials?

Only three teachers were able to attend the training day and the remaining teacher was sent the information and offered verbal support. All thought that the training session was beneficial, with comments such as 'hearing the past experience and ideas of consultant teachers', 'concentrating on one topic in my teaching and learning how better to teach it at all levels' and 'having a very defined skills focus to work with and to rediscover the theory behind it'.

What was the least satisfactory aspect of the training and/or materials?

One teacher considered that the small number of participating teachers (only three) resulted in 'a limited pool of knowledge' and 'little sharing'. Two others felt that it would have been useful to have more examples of resources and good practice. This topic was mentioned again in a section for any other comments and when the teachers were asked to suggest additions to the training day – 'more creative/inventive methods', 'more practical help', 'more resource ideas'.

How important was it that the training sessions could be attended in person?

The three teachers who attended felt that it was advantageous to have done so, but one also thought she could have worked with the materials without attending.

How well do you think the training day prepared you for delivering the strategy in the classroom?

They all felt satisfied, with a range of responses from 'fairly well' to 'very well'.

How helpful did you find the feedback day?

The comments were very positive, e.g. 'interesting and inspiring to learn of the other strands', 'helpful to share strategies and experiences'.

Teachers were then asked questions about the process of taking part in the project.

Views on:

1. Being observed in class

There was mixed reaction to this. One found it 'a bit daunting' and another 'a bit nerve-wracking' but 'learners enjoyed having a visitor in the group'. The remaining two teachers felt quite happy with the process. One of these was very positive about the supportive aspect of this:

'My observer ... made the situation non-threatening and her comments were very astute and helpful.'

2. The level of support offered by the research team

All teachers valued the support from the team and mentioned the prompt email responses to queries and the weekly feedback on log notes.

3. Support for participation by the teachers' institutions

All found their institutions supportive, but one mentioned she found it difficult to obtain cover for her class to attend feedback days, and another was not given any extra time for the additional project work involved.

4. The requirement to send in weekly log notes

It was generally felt to be time-consuming but two of the teachers found it a positive and helpful experience: 'It provided an opportunity for reflection', 'helped me to make the strategy a success from week to week and enabled me to clarify individual learners' progress and build on it for the next session.'

6.3.5 Learners' attendance and self-study

The learner attitudes post-questionnaire, administered at the last class visit, included questions on the number of sessions attended between pre- and post-assessments and on the number of hours of self-study the learners estimated that they spent each week on average outside class time. This information was obtained from all but one of the 17 learners who completed post-questionnaires.

The length of time between pre- and post-assessments varied from eight to a maximum of nine weeks which included a half-term break. The number of sessions attended by the learners (excluding the sessions at which the pre- and post-assessments took place) ranged from 7 (the maximum possible) to only 2, with an average of 5.8 sessions.

The number of hours reported by the learners as spent in self-study each week ranged from 0 to 7, with an average of nearly 3 hours a week.

6.4 The search for factors associated with progress

As with the other two strands, a number of correlations between measures of learners' progress and other data were carried out. Here, gains in various aspects of writing were correlated with changes in attitudes, number of sessions attended between pre- and post-test, number of hours of self-study reported, and general teaching strategies.

The aspects of writing correlated with those factors were average gains in:

- a. the total of functional adequacy, sentence structure, and punctuation;
- b. number of words written;
- c. number of sentences written; and
- d. average length of sentence in words.

Yet again, most of the correlations were low and non-significant. Those which were stronger and appeared significant for the sentence combining strand were (figures in brackets show the percentage of variance explained):

- between number of sessions attended and gain in writing total: $r = 0.45$ (20 per cent)
- between number of sessions attended and gain in number of sentences written: $r = 0.36$ (13 per cent)

- between rating on general strategies and gain in writing total: $r = 0.31$ (10 per cent)
- between rating on general strategies and gain in number of words written: $r = 0.91$ (83 per cent)
- between rating on general strategies and gain in sentence length: $r = 0.34$ (12 per cent).

Those explaining 20 per cent or less of the variance were still quite weak, but the one above this figure was very substantial. Even so, given that only four teachers and their classes were involved, too much significance should not be read into this.

Thus regular attendance by the learners and quality of teaching as measured by the ratings on general strategies were shown to correlate with improvement in various aspects of writing.

6.5 Summary

- A total of 17 learners in 4 classes taught by 4 teachers took part in this strand.
- The learners ranged from Entry 2 to Level 2, according to their teachers' judgements, and were all taught in mixed ability classes
- The learners made significant gains in various aspects of writing.
- Also, the progress was achieved in a very short time, on average 5.8 sessions. Since, in contrast to the Effective Practice Studies (Baynham et al. 2007, Brooks et al. 2007, Coben et al. 2007, Grief et al. 2007 and Mellar et al. 2007), this was an intervention study, there are implications for policy and practice, which are examined in Chapter 7.
- The learners' confidence improved generally, as measured by the attitudes questionnaire and reflected in both the learners' and the teachers' comments; confidence in reading aloud improved as well as confidence in writing tasks.
- The learners reported finding the strategy helpful in terms of their understanding of sentence structure and general confidence in writing, and were keen to continue their learning in this way.
- The teachers endorsed the use of the strategy with their classes, reporting particular benefits for their learners in confidence, improved sentence construction and wider/creative writing.
- The teachers felt they had benefited from receiving training in the strategy and taking part in the project; and, through their feedback on this, highlighted the aspects of participation that would be most valuable when designing effective CPD for adult literacy practitioners.
- In general, the teachers implemented the strategy faithfully and with good quality teaching, and felt that sentence combining could be suitable for most learners from Entry 2 upwards and particularly for Entry 3/Level 1 learners.
- Although learners' confidence improved, this was not correlated with their progress.

- However, factors that were found to correlate with progress in various aspects of writing were regular attendance by learners and high ratings of the teachers' general teaching strategies.
- This strand again demonstrated the value of effective training and support for adult literacy teachers as part of their CPD.

6.6 Conclusions and discussion

Sentence combining produced measurable gains in various aspects of writing, both in quantity and in quality. Confidence improved significantly over a range of language-, literacy- and learning-related activities, including oral skills – another example of an outcome wider than the specific focus of the strategy, as was also noted for the other two strands.

Although the sample of learners for sentence combining was smaller than for the other two strands of the project, there were still valuable findings in an area in which virtually no previous research on adult learners had been carried out. Sentence combining is not intended to replace other kinds of formal grammar teaching but, as a straightforward way of improving the quality of writing for learners from Entry 2 upwards, it has an important role to play in adult literacy classes.

7. Summary and recommendations

This chapter draws together the findings from all three strands, states the limitations of the research, discusses the implications and offers recommendations for policy and practice. Further information about the project, in particular the implementation of the strategies in the classroom – including guidelines on methods and resources, and illustrations from practice – can be found in the associated Practitioner Guide (Burton et al. 2008).

7.1 General summary

- A total of 140 learners, from teenagers to 60+-year-olds, in 23 classes located over a wide area and taught by 20 teachers took part in this project.
- In terms of ethnicity, the range of learners recruited across the strands was very close to national figures (75 per cent white, compared with 73 per cent nationally in Skills for Life in 2003/04) and more so than in the Effective Practice in Reading Study (84 per cent) (Brooks et al. 2007, p. 22). In terms of ESOL learners, the sample in this study (12 per cent) was very similar to that in the Effective Practice in Reading Study (11 per cent) and only slightly below the national figure of 19 per cent.
- Most of the learners were within Entry level at the start, as judged by their teachers and as shown, for the phonics and reading fluency strands, by their pre-test scores. However, the levels of learners who took part did encompass the entire range from pre-Entry to Level 2.
- The learners in all three strands made significant gains, in reading comprehension (phonics and reading fluency strands), spelling (phonics strand), and writing (sentence combining strand). While modest – amounting to between one third and at least one half of an NQF level – the gains seemed worthwhile for these learners.
- Also, the progress was achieved in a very short time, on average 5.5–6 sessions.
- The confidence of learners in all three strands improved, as measured by the attitudes questionnaire and reflected in both the learners' and the teachers' comments.
- The benefits to the learners went wider than improvements in the area of learning on which the specific strategy focused. In particular, increased confidence in oral skills was noted across the project strands, and improved peer support and 'gelling' of the class was an outcome particularly of the reading fluency and phonics strands.
- Most of the learners found the strategies helpful and enjoyable and wanted to continue using them.
- Scarcely any research had previously been conducted on using phonics and sentence combining with adult learners, and little on reading fluency except in the preceding development project, making the findings on all three strands particularly valuable.

- In general, the teachers implemented the strategies faithfully and with good quality teaching, and most expressed enthusiasm for the strategy they implemented, their participation, and what they had learnt, and felt that the strategy they implemented could be suitable for a range of learners.
- Although learners' confidence improved, this was not correlated with their progress in any strand.
- In fact, the only factors found, across the strands, to correlate with progress were high ratings of the teachers' general teaching strategies and, for the phonics and sentence combining strands, also regular attendance by learners – a consistent and familiar story.
- All three strands demonstrated a need for relevant accessible schemes with resources adapted for adults.
- The phonics and reading fluency strands (the sentence combining strand less so) also demonstrated the value of effective training and support for adult literacy teachers as part of their CPD.

7.2 Limitations

We acknowledge the following limitations to our research:

- The range of providers and settings used in the project did cover a wide geographical area of England but was otherwise limited to FE or ACL classes providing 'single purpose' adult literacy instruction, mainly in college/adult centre settings. It was thus fairly representative of mainstream adult literacy provision but not of the full range, which would include, for example, integrated and work-based learning, prisons and young offender institutions, etc.
- Samples in all the strands were relatively small and therefore the results need to be treated with some degree of caution.
- Although measurable progress was made, in the short time scale of little more than two months at most between assessment points, it was not possible to gather evidence of sustained progress or do any follow-up.
- Only three teaching strategies were investigated out of many possibilities; the selection of these three should not be taken to imply any hierarchy of teaching strategies; still less that they should be the only strategies in teachers' repertoires.
- The sample of teachers and learners for the sentence combining strand was smaller than the others; with only 4 teachers and 28 learners on which to base the findings, any conclusions must be more tentative than for the other strands.
- The writing assessment used in the sentence combining strand was very brief; although derived from the assessment used in the Effective Practice in Writing Study (Grief et al. 2007) it had not been previously piloted in the form used for this project, and it was not possible to map the results to NQF levels (as was possible with the reading assessment).
- This was an intervention study, but the lack of control or comparison groups of learners must temper the significance accorded to the positive findings.
- Finally the possibility must be acknowledged of a 'Hawthorne effect', whereby participants appear to make progress because of the extra attention they

receive from researchers and teachers by virtue of taking part in a research project. Here the learners were made to feel valued because of their fully acknowledged contribution to the research. In such cases, progress and other observed benefits may be at least partly due to this effect rather than to the use of a particular strategy, i.e. to the intervention itself.

7.3 Implications and recommendations

The project was designed in a way that enabled comparisons to be drawn between it and the Effective Practice in Reading Study (Brooks et al. 2007, see Section 3.1). In particular the use of the same two versions of the reading assessment over a similar timescale in the autumn term between assessment points (pre to post in this study, pre to mid in the Effective Practice in Reading Study) highlights the implications of the measurable progress that was observed in this study on all three strands. The correlation of progress with regular attendance for two of the strands reflects previous findings. In this study, however, there is the additional finding, across the strands, that high quality of teaching, as measured by the analysis of general teaching strategies, correlated with progress. This would seem to strengthen the case for our recommendations on teacher training and CPD (see below).

Unlike the Effective Practice Studies (Baynham et al. 2007, Brooks et al. 2007, Coben et al. 2007, Grief et al. 2007 and Mellar et al. 2007), this, importantly, was an intervention study. Even allowing for the limitations noted above, the apparent benefits to the learners of giving teachers training and support in a specific strategy, which is then implemented in the classroom, must be taken seriously. This all seems to suggest that the complexity of factors leading to progress for adults may on occasion have been overplayed. At the same time, despite the measurable progress in a relatively short time, none of these strategies should be regarded merely as a 'quick fix'. Sustained achievement is what counts; however, any strategy that can deliver speedy results must be an immense confidence booster for the learner, making persistence and continued progression more likely.

Our recommendations in the areas of adult literacy theory, policy, practice and further research are listed below.

For theory

- Traditionally in adult literacy pedagogy, there has been a reluctance to draw on models of child learning to inform models of adult learning. Some of the reluctance is justified by practitioners' desire to acknowledge that adults are not 'beginner thinkers', and to avoid replicating the school experience, which for many learners was far from positive. However a distinction must be drawn between the medium and the message: the research base for the three strategies used was almost entirely child-/school-based, but the project demonstrated that such strategies, suitably adapted for adults, can produce good results. The fact that a strategy works for children should not be a reason for rejecting it outright for adults. Furthermore there is scope for family literacy practitioners to use such strategies with parents as a way of helping them appreciate methods used to help their children's literacy.

- There has also been a reluctance to focus on a skills-based approach to adult literacy, at the expense of a wider social practice approach. These different narratives need not be regarded as mutually exclusive (Burton 2007b, p. ix). Furthermore this project has demonstrated that a narrow teaching focus does not necessarily produce 'narrow' results; there were positive outcomes, especially with regard to confidence in oral skills, which went wider than the specific strategy focus.

For policy

- The findings from this project have clearly demonstrated that continuing investment is needed to improve/develop/make available good quality initial teacher training, CPD and support networks for practitioners. Receiving such training and support has demonstrable benefits for teachers who can thus be empowered to help learners fulfil their potential.

For practice

- There are messages in the findings about the importance of good generic teaching skills as well as accurate subject-specific pedagogy; and the benefits of providing opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice.
- Initial Teacher Education and CPD programmes need to be designed with a sharper focus on training in specific pedagogies and on underpinning knowledge and theoretical frameworks; teacher trainers need to be aware of the importance of a strong practical element in the training, and be able to incorporate demonstrations of practice and examples of resources, e.g. by modelling specific teaching methods.
- Practitioners' teaching and well-being benefit considerably from having contact with their peers; support and mentoring networks could be set up.
- There should be support and commitment from institutions for practitioners' participation in such training programme and networks.
- Above all, this project has demonstrated the need for accessible teaching schemes with good resources adapted for adults (especially for phonics); there is also a need for a thorough 'audit' of existing materials, as some are poor and/or misleading.

For research

- Other teaching strategies await investigation, for example, reciprocal teaching and language experience. Both are outlined in the Practitioner Guide on Reading (Burton 2007b, pp.11, 14–16). Reciprocal teaching in particular would seem to score highly both as a specific strategy and as inherently requiring intensive student engagement; and working in pairs was indeed shown by the Effective Practice in Reading Study (Brooks et al. 2007, p.51) to help learners make progress. Reciprocal teaching is a teaching approach developed by Palinscar and Brown (1984, Palinscar 1986). The overall aim is to improve reading comprehension, and learners are gradually encouraged to take over the teacher role as they gain confidence. The whole approach is predicated on the idea that poorer comprehenders can improve by being shown and

explicitly understanding and adopting good comprehenders' strategies. At adult level, reciprocal teaching was the focus of the strongest single research study (randomised controlled trial) in the field: Rich and Shepherd (1993) found positive effects on reading comprehension.

- Investigation of other promising teaching strategies would involve designing and delivering appropriately focused teacher training; trialling the strategies in the classroom; and refining methods and materials after feedback from teachers and learners and in the light of classroom observations.
- Since the timescale for implementing the three strategies of phonics, oral reading fluency and sentence combining was so short, there is scope for building on the research findings. A larger-scale and stronger research design, over a longer period of time, would enable: 1) the delivery of teacher training which was further refined and improved in the light of this research, and 2) assessment of the extent to which progress made by the learners can be sustained.
- The importance of good quality subject-specific pedagogy has been demonstrated and must be acknowledged.

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Appendix: Coding sheet analysis of general teaching strategies

Observation Analysis: General Strategies

Class

(site).....ID:.....Observer:.....

Date:.....Length of observation (hrs/mins).....

Key: 0 - Not observed

1 - Observed to a very limited extent

2 - Observed to some extent

3 - Observed to a high degree (characteristic of teacher)

A General teaching strategies	Emphasis
Tutor ...	
1. Shares the overall goal for the lesson as well as individual activities; brings lesson back to the overall point or theme	0 1 2 3
2. Is flexible and responds to learners' concerns as they arise Goes with the teachable moment	0 1 2 3
3. Engages in direct teaching When point is unclear, pattern or point needs to be highlighted, a generalisation is in order	0 1 2 3
4. Provides a range of activities that keep learners involved and engaged	0 1 2 3
5. Provides opportunities for practice	0 1 2 3
6. Asks for open-ended responses	0 1 2 3
7. (Not used)	
8. Links what is learned to life outside the classroom	0 1 2 3
9. Brings 'outside' into the classroom Field trips Guest speakers Realia	0 1 2 3
10. Provides opportunities to work together, do projects, jointly solve problems, read and write collaboratively	0 1 2 3
11. Provides feedback in class to learners on their work and understanding of what is taught	0 1 2 3
12. Provides praise and encouragement	0 1 2 3

Class ID.....Observer.....Date.....

B Opportunities for learner involvement	
Opportunities provided in class for learners to:	
1. Contribute ideas based on their experience	0 1 2 3
2. Learn with and from each other	0 1 2 3
3. Make choices regarding content and ways they want to learn	0 1 2 3
4. Think about a task and discuss it and how to approach it	0 1 2 3
5. Spend sufficient time on a task to 'get it'	0 1 2 3
6. Express themselves (even if it means making mistakes) without being immediately corrected	0 1 2 3
7. Be engaged in different types of literacy Textbook exercises, functional tasks, songs, rhymes	0 1 2 3
8. Make the connection between school-type task and the challenges they face outside the classroom	0 1 2 3