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# Research Report



## Teaching and learning writing: a review of research and practice

Susanna Kelly, Luxshmi Soundranayagam, Sue Grief  
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Susanna Kelly, Luxshmi Soundranayagam, Sue Grief

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## Foreword

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Writing is a vital skill. Gaining skills and confidence in writing can open up opportunities at work and empower learners to take on new roles as citizens within the community. It provides a powerful means of self-expression as well as a support for further learning.

Adults are more likely to need help with writing than with reading. However, compared to reading, the teaching and learning of writing for adults has received very little attention from researchers. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) is therefore pleased to be undertaking a major research study on writing as a key partner in the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.

This report brings together the findings of the first phase of the project. It includes two literature reviews, which will be of interest to teachers of adult literacy as well as to researchers and will provide a valuable resource for teacher trainers leading courses for new qualifications for **Skills for Life** teachers. Together with a review of current practice these reviews provide a picture of the current state of knowledge about the development of writing skills for adult learners and a strong basis for the second stage of the project.

LSDA would like to thank the project advisory group for their expert advice and support on all aspects of the study. Thanks are also due to the organisations that kindly allowed us to collect data from their classes and the practitioner researchers who engaged on the project with such enthusiasm.

**Kate Anderson** *Director of Research, Learning and Skills Development Agency*

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### **Independent peer review**

This report was read and independently peer reviewed by Annabel Hemsteadt, Executive Director of the Basic Skills Agency; Gay Loble, independent consultant, formerly of the Basic Skills Agency; and Sue Gardner, NIACE.

# Summary

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## Synopsis

This research is the first phase of a project that aims to identify principles of effective teaching and learning of writing for adult literacy learners. The report presents the findings of three reviews designed to provide a basis for the research to be undertaken in phase 2 of the project:

1. a narrative review that looks at the ways in which, studies, which conceptualise writing and writing development, contribute to an understanding of how adult learners develop as writers.
2. a systematic review of primary research that addresses the question, "What factors in adult literacy programmes enable learners to develop effective writing skills?"
3. a review of current practice.

## Key Points

- The review of this literature suggests that writing should be viewed as a process in which the writer interacts with what he/she has written. Planning and revising a text are as much part of this process as physically writing it.
- It also suggests that writing is intimately connected to the writer's processes of thinking as well as his/her feelings and self identity and cannot be separated from its social, cultural and political contexts.
- There is very little sound research evidence on the factors in adult literacy programmes that enable learners to develop effective writing skills. There is a particular need for research that will help to identify the variables that impact on adult learners' development as writers. This would make it possible to provide an empirical basis for recommendations on the teaching and learning of writing for adult literacy learners.
- Most of the primary research studies were outcome evaluations, but few reported specific causal factors. Use of authentic literacy practices in the classroom was the only variable found to be significantly and positively related to changes in learners' literacy skills and practices.
- Responsiveness to the needs of individual learners and the use of a variety of tasks and approaches are held to be important by the teachers interviewed as part of the review of practice.
- Learners placed value on the mastery of spelling and punctuation and identified these as aspects of writing that caused them the most difficulty. The teachers valued the expression of ideas above, or in addition to, correctness in the surface aspects of writing.
- Classroom observations indicated a heavy use of exercises that focused on the sub-skills of writing, which may reflect teachers' concern to respond to the needs of the learners.

- Findings from the three reviews suggest a number of variables that may be significant in the teaching and/or learning of writing. In order to test whether these factors can be identified as predictors of learner progress, they have been developed as dimensions of teacher and learner practice that will be used in phase 2 of the project. The dimensions include the degree to which practice involves:
  - authenticity of materials and communication
  - collaborative approaches to writing
  - making the process of writing explicit to learners
  - contextualisation of writing tasks and relevance of teaching and materials to learners' lives.

**Implications for policy and practice are set out on page 58**

### **Background and rationale of research**

Writing is a vital skill in modern society and in work. It is a skill that adult learners value highly. Far less research has been undertaken on the teaching and learning of writing for adult learners than on reading. As a member of the consortium that makes up the NRDC, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) proposed a major study that had writing as its primary focus. Phase one of the project aimed to inform both the research questions and the methodology for phase 2 which commenced in January 2004.

### **Main elements of research**

In reviewing what was known about the teaching and learning of writing that might be relevant to adult literacy learners it was important to include insights from research from a range of sectors. To make the task manageable, two separate literature reviews were undertaken. The first was a narrative review, which drew on a wide range of sources and included studies written in the context of schools or higher education. The second was a systematic review, which looked specifically at primary research in the field of adult literacy and addressed the question; 'What factors in adult literacy programmes enable learners to develop effective writing skills?'

Phase 1 also included a review of current practice. This involved four focus groups with teachers and one with learners in addition to nine case studies across a range of provision in eight of the nine English regions and one penal establishment. Observation of 2 classes in each of the nine organisations, interviews with teachers and group interviews with learners were undertaken by trained practitioner researchers. The small scale of the review requires that any generalisations drawn from it must be treated with caution. The findings have informed the design of research tools for phase 2 which will provide more authoritative evidence.

Consultation meetings with practitioners, managers and researchers in the field of adult literacy provided invaluable feedback on the findings of the three reviews and this has been incorporated into the report.

# 1. Introduction

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This report draws together the outcomes of the first phase of a four-year project on "Effective approaches to the teaching and learning of writing" which is being undertaken by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, a partner organisation in the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC). Phase 1 commenced in July 2002 and was completed in December 2003.

## 1.1 The project as a whole

The aim of the overall project is to identify features of effective practice in the teaching and learning of writing for adult literacy learners.

The Government's *Skills for Life* strategy has set ambitious targets for the reduction in the number of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy in England. To achieve these targets the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit has identified the need, not only for a substantial increase in the quantity of provision but also for an improvement in the quality of the learning opportunities on offer. Practitioners who took part in the consultation events on the findings of phase 1 were agreed that teachers and teacher trainers would welcome sound evidence of effective practice in the teaching of all aspects of adult literacy. It is planned that the findings of the project should contribute to a resource for teachers on the teaching of both reading and writing.

The aim of phase 1 was to lay a foundation for the research project by reviewing what is known about the teaching and learning of writing in relation to adult literacy learners and by putting together a picture of current practice. The findings from these activities have informed the design of the second phase of the project and an evaluation of the review of practice has been of great value in the development of the research instruments to be used in this phase.

Phase 2 will investigate the correlations between classroom practice in relation to the teaching and learning of writing used in adult literacy provision and the progress of learners in the development of the skills of writing and their confidence as writers. The data collected will be both quantitative and qualitative. Statistical analysis will be used to correlate pedagogical approaches with learners' progress and their attitudes to writing.

## 1.2 Phase 1

The outcomes of phase 1 take the form of three reviews. Each will be of interest in its own right. However, by bringing the three together this report attempts to highlight the inter-connectivity of the three and to draw out the questions they raise in terms of policy, practice and further research.

The primary focus of the project is the development of writing for adult literacy learners. However, in planning how to undertake a review of the literature, it was recognised that studies that relate to the development of writing in children and, for example, to learners in Higher Education can have relevance to adult literacy learners. It was not feasible to broaden the scope of the review to include all studies on the teaching and learning of writing so two separate questions were identified and addressed through separate reviews undertaken using different methodologies.



*(i) A review of relevant theory*

The first review focused on theoretical studies that arose from work in other sectors of education as well as from work in adult literacy. It addressed the question:

*How do relevant studies, which conceptualise writing and writing development, contribute to an understanding of how adult literacy learners develop as writers?*

*(ii) A systematic review of empirical research*

The second review focused on reports of research and was restricted to studies relating to adult literacy learners. It addressed the question:

*What factors in adult literacy programmes enable learners to develop effective writing skills?*

This review was undertaken as a systematic review using an approach developed at the Learning and Skills Development Agency and closely modelled on the methodology used by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (the EPPI-Centre), which is part of the Social Science Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London.

*(iii) A review of current practice*

The final review was the review of current practice. This was a relatively small study, the aim of which was to examine in some detail practice in a number of classes, across a representative range of organisations providing literacy for adults and young people. It addressed the question:

*What range of approaches to the teaching, learning and assessment of writing do practitioners and learners in adult literacy currently use?*

Detail about the methodology used for each review can be found at the beginning of the appropriate section.

**1.2.1 Practitioner researchers**

Practitioner researchers were used to undertake the fieldwork for the review of practice. This reflected the policy of the NRDC and the practice of LSDA. The role played by the researchers, the nature of their contracts and conditions of service were influenced by the Human Resources policy of LSDA and represented one model of practitioner involvement evaluated in the NRDC project, 'Varieties of practitioner involvement' (Hamilton and James 2004).

**1.2.2 Consultation**

Drafts of all three reviews were shared with practitioners at four consultation meetings between October and December 2003. The discussions at these meetings were of great value and have informed both the writing of this report and thinking about the methodology for phase 2.

To the majority of the participants at the consultation events the findings of phase 1 were not surprising but they welcomed the fact that this knowledge had been drawn together and recorded and believed the report of phase 1 could provide strength and stability to practise and enhance teachers' confidence.

### 1.3 Background to the project. Why focus on writing?

The decision to make writing the focus of the project arose from a belief that writing is a vital skill in modern society together with a concern that writing has received much less attention than reading, from both researchers and policy makers.

Completing reports and forms for quality assurance at work, presenting personal credentials for officials, employers and financial institutions and supporting children in their education all require confidence in writing. In addition the rapid development of information and communication technology, far from diminishing the need to write, has made writing more essential. Accessing information or goods on the Internet and keeping in contact with friends and family by text or email are increasingly part of everyday life.

Underpinning the study is a belief that gaining the skills and confidence to write, not only has a significant impact on a learners' sense of self-esteem and identity, but can also empower individuals. Writing can provide a new and powerful means of self-expression, open up new roles, at work, in the home and as citizens in the wider community and support the process of learning.

Writing is understood to include the skills and processes of creating and composing text and the use of writing to organise and communicate meanings appropriate for a range of purposes in a range of contexts. Competent writers are able to use the rules of syntax, to spell and to use punctuation. Writing also involves the mechanical skills of handwriting or word-processing. It is however recognised that it is possible to communicate ideas in writing without mastery of the sub-skills of writing through the use of a scribe or with the help of a teacher or technological aids such as spell checks. It is also recognised that all writing is undertaken within a social, cultural and political context and that this must be taken into account when writing is taught.

As part of the Government's *Skills for Life* strategy in England core curricula for literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) have been introduced. The core curriculum for adult literacy provides clear guidance in relation to the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling, separating out skills at word, sentence and text level. The guidance for teachers provided in the curriculum document stresses the importance of integrating of these skills. However, use of diagnostic assessment materials linked to the curriculum and the need for practitioners to demonstrate that learners' goals are based on the curriculum, can encourage an approach to the teaching and learning of writing that involves the acquisition of a set of discrete skills in a set sequence. There is a strong tradition in adult literacy that places emphasis on writing as a means of communication and personal expression and on the empowerment of learners. This project will explore how practitioners balance the two and whether the introduction of the core curricula is influencing the way in which the teaching of writing is approached.

An understanding of the nature and purposes of writing and how it is learned can help practitioners in building writing into their programmes. It is hoped that the reviews presented in this report will be of value to trainers and teachers involved in both initial training and continuing professional development programmes.

It is difficult to address writing in complete isolation from reading and the close relationship between the two is explored in the first review. The relationship between learning to read and

learning to write is a complex one. Both require similar knowledge and cognitive processes but writing requires the learner, not only to engage with the thoughts of others, but also to have the confidence to commit thoughts to paper. It is often assumed that reading precedes writing but engaging in writing can also support learners in their understanding of the reading process.

Writing has sometimes been presented as a skill that adults need to a lesser extent than reading. However, experience of interviewing adults enrolling for literacy classes suggests writing is frequently their main concern. Hamilton (2001) notes that studies of need, such as those based on the National Child Development Study data, indicate that adults are more likely to need help with writing than with reading.

A review of research on Adult Basic Skills (Brooks et al., 2001b) notes the greater volume of research on literacy and numeracy in the United States and, in particular, the number of impact studies. However, summarising two separate reviews of such studies, Brooks concludes that 'There was no evidence at all on writing.'

One reason why writing has not featured more strongly in research is the difficulty of assessing writing and learners' progress in writing, particularly in large-scale projects where volume of marking is a consideration. A British study of progress in adult literacy (Brooks 2001a) did include assessment of writing gain. However, only very small improvements were registered, as measured by the number of words and the quality of the handwriting. A recent survey found no assessment tools readily available that were suitable for research. (Brooks et al., 2003) As a result the NRDC has commissioned a new assessment for reading and writing for research purposes and this will be used to assess learners' progress in phase 2 of the project.

Research instruments and assessment tools that rely on multiple choice questions can only measure a limited range of the sub-skills of writing such as spelling and punctuation. Use of such tools for summative assessment may impact on the way writing is taught. The research for phase 2 is commencing at a time when increasing emphasis is being placed on learners achieving national qualifications. At Levels 1 and 2 achievement of these qualifications currently requires no demonstration of extended writing. The observation data for phase 2 will reflect any impact these assessments are having on the range of writing skills being taught.

#### **1.4 The structure of the report**

This report includes each of the three reviews in full, including references and appendices. One exception is the annotated bibliography created for the first review. This will be available on the NRDC website. In this format it will be possible to add any further relevant studies that come to light and to update it if new studies need to be included.

The final section of the report takes an overview of the project. It analyses the findings of the three reviews and the extent to which the findings of one reinforce the findings from another. It draws out the themes that connect the three reviews and outlines the ways in which the outcomes of the phase 1 have informed the focus and methodology of phase 2.

## 2. Literature Review Question 1

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How do relevant studies, which conceptualise writing and writing development, contribute to an understanding of how adult literacy learners develop as writers?

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is to review what is known about how adult learners develop as writers. The literature sourced is focused on adult basic literacy learners, but studies that relate to the development of writing in children and learners in higher education have been included where they have been judged to provide insight into the development of writing in adult basic literacy.

### 2.2 Methodology

Literature was obtained from a variety of sources, including available reviews of literature, bibliographies of known texts, electronic databases, websites and where necessary, hand searches of journals. The search strategy was developed using the following definitions:

- 'Writing' includes the skills of composition, organising and creating meaning for a range of contexts, the ability to spell and use rules of syntax and the mechanical skills of handwriting and word-processing.
- Adult learners are defined as learners in post-compulsory education.
- Adult literacy is understood to focus on those learners whose skills are below the equivalent of Level Two of the National Standards for Adult Literacy (England).

The following inclusion criteria were defined:

- The focus of the study is the processes of learning and teaching of writing (including the inter-relationship of reading and writing, and the use of new ICT).
- They were published in the period 1973 – present. This date marks the launch of the 'Right to Read' campaign in England and Wales.
- Studies written in English.
- They are published works (with the exception of unpublished doctoral theses).

It was decided that the following would be excluded: teaching handbooks or manuals, unless they include a theoretical justification of the methods used, texts produced by adult literacy learners and studies that focused exclusively on ESOL literacy learners.

The following review will first examine various conceptualisations of writing and writing development, including writing as a process and its relationship with cognition, followed by its more recent conceptualisation as a social and political activity and its relationship with the writer's identity. The special relationship between reading and writing will then be looked at, followed by a discussion of the degree to which conclusions from studies with children can be applied to adult learners.

The second section of the review will consider the implications of the ideas mentioned above for teaching practice. What do the writing theorists and researchers recommend as best practice for the teachers of adult learner writers? The review will cover implications for the

writing curriculum, as well as specific classroom activities. The use of ICT and writing in the workplace will also be considered in special sections.

## 2.3 Conceptualisations of writing and writing development

### 2.3.1 Writing as a process

By the late 1970s, the idea of 'writing as a process' was finally displacing the traditional conceptualisation of 'writing as a product' (Dyson & Freedman 1990). The finished essay/poem/letter was becoming less interesting than the activities that had to be carried out to produce the end product. Teachers and researchers started to focus on activities such as planning and editing of both beginning and accomplished writers in an attempt to explain the processes going on, and to also reflect on the development of the novice into the expert.

A significant early model of the writing process was that of Flower and Hayes (1981), who presented an essentially cognitive view of writing. In this model, writers are engaged in the three processes of planning their work (which includes the generation and organisation of information), physically writing down some text, and revising the produced text. Flower and Hayes saw these processes as both recursive and interactive, occurring in no fixed order. While these basic activities have not been disputed, later theorists have broadened the writing process to include important social and political dimensions (see below).

Process approaches may also suggest how writers develop. Flower (1979) described the shift from the 'writer-based' (self-directed or egocentric) efforts of the novice to the 'reader-based' (reader-oriented) prose of the expert. According to Smith (1982), the need to attend to both transcribing (the mechanics of writing) and composing are often too demanding for the inexperienced writer to address simultaneously. In the cognitive view, extensive practice would result in the transcribing processes becoming more automatic and the increasingly expert writer could then allocate more cognitive resources to the composing processes. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), the beginning writer focuses on 'knowledge telling' or text generation, which gradually develops into a 'knowledge transforming' orientation where planning processes modify knowledgetelling according to the demands of the task. This view also saw novices as practising less revision, with attention to local or surface changes, while experienced writers did a lot more revision, with a focus on high-level, global changes. Interestingly, Smith (1983) saw both the writer and what is written in a 'dynamic interaction', where each element influences and changes the other.

The view of writing as a process has informed both research and pedagogy in the last three decades. Shaughnessy (1977) took a process view in her seminal work on college students' writing errors. Rather than seeing errors as a mark of failure, she presented them as a source of learning for teachers and students. In this study, an analysis of the errors led to valuable insights (such as that errors were rule-governed rather than arbitrary) into the problems adults face in the process of writing. Crew and Easton (1990) described the State University of New York's 'Curriculum Outline for Teaching Writing to Adults' as supporting the teaching of writing as a process. More recently, Eves-Bowden (2001) suggested that giving students an explicit understanding of the process of writing (in terms of Flower and Hayes' model) leads to improved writing in practice. This may be especially important for adult basic writers, who are likely to hold assumptions about the writing process, such as that writing is a linear task, that have to be overcome before they can develop as writers (Greenberg 1987, Phillips 1992, Russell 1999).

While 'writing as a process' is now accepted as the mainstream approach in literacy education, writers such as Arrington caution that the product and process views are not necessarily opposed and argue that effective writing pedagogy needs to be based on a dialogue between both theories (Arrington 1986).

### 2.3.2 Writing and cognition

Written language has been considered an intellectual aid as well as a stimulus for intellectual development (Stubbs 1980) and these benefits had been noted even in the 19th century (Street 1997). Goody (1977) discussed how historical developments in the use of writing (e.g., in lists or tables) may have influenced developments in ways of thinking (e.g., about the relationship or classification of units). Similarly, Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) model viewed writing as 'a way of processing and developing knowledge'. Ong (1987) suggested that writing is necessary for analytically sequential thought, while Smith (1982) perceived writing as a creative process that 'liberates and develops' thought. In a series of studies on the effect of writing on thinking in school students, Langer and Applebee (1987) found that writing activities, especially those that encourage a complex manipulation of information, lead to better learning and reasoning. The reverse influence, of cognition on language, has also been discussed. Smith (1983) argued that language is learnable only if it makes sense to the learner. Also, Hartwell (1987) suggested that beginning writers ultimately learned 'codes of writing' in a top-down rather than bottom-up fashion.

An important line of research relating writing and cognition deals with the link between writing development and cognitive maturation (e.g., Carlin 1986, Taylor 1984), although this is more relevant to writing development for children than in adults. Britton (1970) has written about language and cognitive development in children. He viewed language primarily as the means whereby human beings construct their own mental representation of their world. He proposed several functional categories of language which illustrate the relationship between language and the cognitive processes involved in its use. These categories could provide a useful means of classifying and describing various types of writing for adults.

### 2.3.3 Writing as a social and political activity

The idea that writing (and reading) necessarily produces certain universal cognitive effects has been challenged, notably by Street (1984). Bernardo (1998) and Scribner and Cole (1981) have pointed out that it is important to distinguish the effects of literacy from the effects of schooling. A number of researchers (Street 1984, Barton 1994, Clark and Ivanic 1997, Ivanic 1998) have argued that writing is strongly influenced by and itself influences the social situation in which it takes place. The relationship between writing and the social purposes it serves has been considered by Coe (1999), Barton (1994) and Barton and Hamilton (1998), amongst others. Hayes (1996) described an updated version of the Flower and Hayes (1981) model that included effects of the social environment. Apart from the social context of the immediate situation, a broader view would also need to encompass factors of genre, culture and power relations (Clark & Ivanic 1997, Ivanic 2003, Street 1984, Street 1995). These factors might be considered especially significant in the adult education classroom, where learners tend to be particularly diverse and non-homogenous (Hamilton and Stasinopoulos 1987).

Writing development has been linked to social and political empowerment. While Steedman (1982) explained how writing in children could lead to social empowerment, Hall and Robinson (1994) argued that empowerment in the classroom would allow students to become successful writers. Literacy texts and materials are also implicated in relations of power (A. Luke 2000), where the interests of different groups can be represented or excluded. The

'genre' approach to writing is concerned with extracting the underlying generic features of texts (that have been written for the same or similar purposes), which can then be explicitly taught to allow learners to manipulate and participate in the genres important in a particular society (Spiegel & Sunderland 1999, Cope & Kalantzis 1993). The introduction of new technologies in the teaching of literacy has raised further issues of inequity of access, expertise and instruction (Cochran-Smith 1991, C. Luke 2000), although the former notes that these issues have thus far been largely neglected in the writing classroom.

Reading and writing have also been described as political activities, with literacy development closely linked to political empowerment (Freire, 1973, 1981; Goody, 2000). According to De Lattre (1987), becoming literate requires more than the acquisition of literacy; it also involves the ability to avoid being conned. Hoyles (1977), however, observed that literacy may also be used for repression and control, a point also reflected by Brandt (2001). Similar issues are important in Luke's (2000) critical literacy approach and in Critical Language Awareness (Clark and Ivanic 1999), both of which are based on the belief that language is always implicated in power relations and that it can contribute to social change.

Conventional definitions of writing often downplay the significance of writing outside the educational context (Barton et al., 1993; Barton et al., 2000; Street & Street, 1991. Also see Hull & Schultz (2001) for a review of research on writing and literacy in the 'out-of-school' context). Barton (1991) identified two other social domains, work and everyday life, where reading and writing also take place. Not only do writing practices vary across all the three domains, but also within each domain over time and by society. The concerns and issues of adults learning to write may be most often located in the everyday domain (Barton). These contextual issues need to be acknowledged, explored and exploited for the benefit of the learners, as suggested by A. Luke's (2000) critical literacy approach.

#### **2.3.4 Writing and identity**

Recent discussions have made a connection between writing and the writer's sense of identity. In a general sense, writing development may be fostered if the learners are identified, by others and themselves, as writers (Frank 2001). According to Ivanic (1998), issues of identity are at the heart of learning to write. When people write in certain ways, they align themselves with other people who typically write in those ways, and may feel enabled or constrained by these identities. Writing might also allow writers to explore issues of identity and different alternatives for understanding and acting (Luce-Kapler 1999). Writing has also been linked to issues of personal transformation (Garland 1999, Gillespie 2001; Fingeret and Drennon 1997).

### **2.4 Relationship between reading and writing**

The interconnectedness of writing and reading is supported by an extensive literature. In fact, some theorists treat them as essentially inseparable (Greene & Ackerman 1995, Jelinek 1988, Kazemek 1984). In their review of research on the 'reading-writing' connection in children, Shanahan and Tierney (1990) noted three different theoretical perspectives on the relationship between reading and writing. One is based on the assumption that reading and writing require similar knowledge and cognitive processes. The second perspective focuses on the similarities between the ways in which writers anticipate the needs of readers and vice versa. The third perspective considers the integrated uses of reading and writing. These theoretical perspectives may be applicable to adult learners as well. For example, Ward (1988), based on work with adult literacy students, suggests that the same cognitive skills, such as the ability

to connect new information to what is already known, underlie both reading and writing.

Several studies point to the primary role played by reading in the development of writing (Troyka 1987, Lunsford 1987). Hayes (1996) included reading in his model of writing, noting that reading is critical to the revision and evaluation processes in writing. He also pointed out that reading is important to gather accurate information from source material, and also to fully understand the writing task. Salvatori (1987) described a student's writing development following the reading of assigned texts.

The differences between speaking and writing and the implications of these for learners are highlighted by Halliday (1994) and Stubbs (1980). Smith (1982) explained that reading is an essential source of knowledge about writing, especially about the complex conventions of writing. Dutt (1996) also acknowledged reading as a source of information for writing in unfamiliar contexts. The reverse influence, of writing on reading, has also been noted. According to Friedman (1992), writing down comments and personal associations after reading can facilitate comprehension and the ability to think critically and interpretatively about the text.

## **2.5 Adult versus child learners**

Much of the research on writing development has been related to the acquisition and development of writing skills in children. Gillespie (2001) warns that little is known about how adult learners develop as writers, compared with children. An important issue therefore is to determine to what extent the findings from this area can be applied to the case of the adult beginning writer and to specify in what ways the development of writing in children and adults might differ.

Models that link writing development to cognitive maturation in the child are clearly less applicable to the adult learner, although concepts such as decentration (becoming more aware of others, e.g., the reader) may be relevant to the adult if applied specifically to the case of writing (Gardener, 1991). Models that specify novice-expert differences, with development linked to practice (Smith, 1982) rather than to maturation, are more likely to be applicable for learners of all ages.

Important differences between adult and child learners include the fact that most, though not all, adults may be presumed to have well-developed language and cognitive abilities, which can be used advantageously in teaching (Shaughnessy 1977). Adults also bring with them a wealth of experience, which again can be exploited to enhance learning. Adult learners are also motivated to attain specific educational outcomes, especially those that are immediately applicable to their lives (Kerr 1995).

However, some of the adults' past experience may result in assumptions and ideas that act as an impediment to their progress (Russell, 1999). In a general way, they are likely to have anxieties and fears associated with the educational situation. They might also hold specific ideas about writing, such as that they need to first perfect their spelling (Schweterman & Corey 1989).



## 2.6 Implications for practice

### 2.6.1 To what extent can the ideas discussed above be applied in adult literacy classes?

It is also essential to examine the practical value of the theoretical positions on writing and writing development in adult literacy learners. In other words, to what extent can these ideas be applied in the writing classroom? What recommendations can be made for the teacher of adults learning to write? What benefits might be expected to accrue for the learners? Below, we consider the implications of the approaches discussed above for the writing curriculum and for teaching and learning activities in the writing classroom. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) provide a comprehensive overview of recent theory and suggest teaching methods based on it, whilst Gillespie (2001) summarises research on writing from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s and considers its implications specifically for adult literacy education.

### 2.6.2 .The writing curriculum

A number of researchers have detailed the inadequacies of literacy and writing curricula. According to Kazemek (1983), too much policy and programme development assume that literacy is something to be acquired rather than developed over time, leading to a narrow, utilitarian view of literacy learning. Curricula will be ineffective if they are based on a view of learning as a linear process (Gillespie 2001), as it has been made clear that writing is non-linear, recursive, and interactive. Curricula will also fail the adult learner if they fragment teaching and learning activities into text, sentence and word levels (Frater 2000), or downplay the significance of writing outside the educational context (Barton et al., 1993). Healy (1995) also criticised generic writing programmes that present writing instruction as a tidy hierarchy of discrete skills to be imparted in a systematic progression, a point reflected by Connors (1987). In these programmes, the teacher acts as a manager, with little flexibility, and the learners lose motivation as writing becomes decontextualised.

Mace (1992) argued that authorship (e.g., via publication) is the central principle in adult literary education, strengthening reading as well as writing and increasing the learner's confidence. She advocates Language Experience as a teaching strategy based on this principle (Mace 2002. See also Moss 1995). The New London Group (2000) advised that literacy curricula need to incorporate cultural and linguistic diversity, and multimodal communication. According to them, the curricula should also engender a pedagogy based on situated practice (the 'immersion' of learners in a learning situation that includes other learners of all skill levels, and practices that have personal meaning for them), overt instruction (sensitive guidance from the teacher in the form of 'scaffolding'), critical framing (critical reflection on the various contexts, e.g., sociocultural, of practices being learned) and transformed practice (revised practices informed by critical framing, as well as re-framing in terms of the learner's own purposes). A. Luke (2000) reiterated the point that literacy education should have a critical dimension regarding power and the use of texts, which should include questioning as to whose interests are represented/excluded by any given text. The 'whole language approach' to literacy for adults (White & Norton 1991) suggested a framework that includes the integration of language in all its forms (speaking, reading and writing), the use of language in context and for a purpose, in a learner-centred and collaborative environment. Kress (2000), too, argued for a curriculum of communication, where writing is one element among many.

### 2.6.2 Recommended activities for the teaching and learning of writing

#### 2.6.2.1 Implications from writing as a process

The pedagogical importance of the process approach to writing has been noted (Barton 1994,

Bruffee 1987), shifting the teacher's focus from 'what students have written to the way they write' (Bruffee 1987). Reflecting process models that emphasise the importance of practice for the novice writer to gain expertise, it is apparent that classroom activities need to, above all else, present learners with more opportunities for writing (DeAngelis 1997).

Giving students an understanding of writing in the process framework is also important for student progress (Clark & Ivancic 1997). Adult beginner writers are likely to have a limited grasp of the more complex processes, such as planning and revision (Gillespie 2001). It is only through an understanding of the ongoing processes of reviewing and revising that students can gain real independence in writing and become their own teachers and editors (Gardener 1991). Teachers and students should also become aware of and discuss assumptions in learners that could possibly block development (Greenberg 1987). For example, some beginners feel that one's writing is either right or wrong (Phillips 1992) and that they need to be perfect the first time (Russell 1999). It is important to note that, unlike in traditional models of teaching, teacher interventions occur during rather than at the end of the writing process. However, Zeller-mayer (1989) cautions that inappropriate teacher feedback could have a negative effect on student motivation.

Following process models of writing, the teacher needs to encourage fluency rather than competence (Bartholomae 1987, Greenberg 1987). Elbow (1998) suggested the use of free-writing exercises, where writers could initially write quickly without censoring in any way, to help develop the writer's 'voice'. Austin-Ward (1988) even argued for the inclusion of communication skills in other subject courses (in the context of Further Education), to encourage better planning, organisation, style and tone in student writing.

An important element of the writing process is revision (Farrington 1999). Moran (1997) develops this further by drawing a distinction between revising and editing and notes that it is important for learners to become aware of the difference between these activities. She also suggested that learners be encouraged to read aloud during revision to help pick up on stylistic problems. Error analysis should also be recognised as part of the writing process, and as part of the ongoing conversation about writing (Bartholomae, 1987; Shaughnessy 1977). Lunsford (1987) suggested additionally that errors should always be analysed in context for maximum effect, while Clark and Ivancic (1997) recommended a 'critical discussion' of the conventions of correctness in writing.

Certain aspects of the writing processes, such as spelling and handwriting, have received less attention from researchers. Adult learners, however, are often found to focus on spelling correctly and writing neatly (Schweterman & Corey 1989). Wallis (1994) discusses the beliefs about spelling, grammar and punctuation which many adults bring to their classes, and suggests how best to approach the teaching of the formal aspects of English. Clark and Ivancic's (1997) discussion of issues of standardisation and correctness in writing challenges some common assumptions and considers the matter in relation to the sociopolitical aspects of writing. According to Gillespie (2001), research shows that spelling is more than memorisation. It involves a growing recognition of the patterns underlying the ways words are spelt, and an understanding of the relationship of the pattern to sound and meaning. Spelling instruction is also touched on by Harris (1995), who proposed a move away from phonics to a more visual approach, a strategy supported by Smith (1982) and Kerr (1995). Peters (1967) considered whether spelling can be learnt incidentally in the course of reading and writing, or whether it needs to be taught explicitly. The research literature offers few thoughts on handwriting (Sassoon 1995 (a) and (b)), which may be partly due to its replacement by other

technologies. It is recommended (Gillespie 2001) that beginning writers regularly receive brief sessions in spelling and handwriting instruction, along with opportunities to apply what they have learned in the context of their regular assignments. With practice, less conscious attention will need to be paid to handwriting and spelling, making them more automatic (Humes 1983).

Berninger et al., (2002) tested the efficacy of a particular method for teaching spelling and investigated the results of teaching spelling alone compared with teaching spelling and composition together. However, it must be noted that this study, like many others on spelling, was conducted with children, so it is not safe to assume that its findings would necessarily apply to adults.

#### *2.6.2.2 Implications from writing and cognition*

Rose (1987) argued for a holistic approach in remedial writing, where students are shown the link between writing and thinking. Cognitive activities can be used in the classroom to improve writing. Ward (1988) recommended the use of 'semantic mapping' as a pre-writing activity for generating and organising ideas. It is recommended for group and one-to-one teaching and is based on a notion of writing as a collaborative activity.

#### *2.6.2.3 Implications from writing as a social and political activity*

Reflecting the approach to writing as a social and political activity, it has been noted that there is a need to use authentic materials and to engage in authentic activities in the adult writing classroom. For example, Ivanic and Moss (1991) emphasised the importance of taking context into account, along with socio-cultural variations in literacy practices. They also stressed the importance of writing for real-life purposes for a real audience, as opposed to writing out exercises for the teacher. These points have also found to be valid in the teaching of children (Heath 1983). The importance of using material familiar to the learner has also been noted by various authors (Gardener 1991, Watson 1996).

Authentic activities include student publishing (Mace 2002, Martin 1989, O'Rourke & Mace 1992, Fitzpatrick 1995). Mace (1996) adopted a broad definition of publishing that includes books, wall displays, reading evenings, magazines, publishing events, reports, leaflets and newsletters. Benefits of publishing include the opportunity for adult learners to write for a real audience on subjects of interest to them and to provide a meaningful context for skill development. Gregory (1991) also stressed the value of community publishing for self-education. According to Mace (2002), writing for publication helps to democratise learning by giving a voice to people who are often marginalised and silenced, to enhance self-esteem and to counter isolation. More broadly, Morley and Worpole (1982) pointed out that the publication of 'working class' writing could challenge established definitions of 'literature'.

Writing journals is another authentic activity that could enhance writing development. Kerka (1996) described different types of journals, which not only serve as a record of information, but also as a stimulus for reflection and insight and which can also be shared with others. According to Kerka, benefits of journal writing for adult beginner writers include giving them an informal, non-threatening context in which to practise their developing skills and to also find their own voice. Garland (1999) described how the content of students' writing journals can also be used as material for teaching the technical aspects of language. Bardine (1996) stated that journals encourage students to write from their own experience and enable students and tutors to write collaboratively. Other benefits for students include the opportunity to integrate reading and writing. However, Kerka also suggests that beginner

writers need to be given guidelines, to fully realise the potential benefits of journal writing.

Narratives and personal writing are also thought to play an important role in writing development, (see Britton 1970 for a discussion of this in relation to children and adolescents), as does 'creative' writing. However, Wallis (1995) cautions against drawing a simple distinction between 'creative' and 'functional' kinds of writing. According to the US Department of Education (1988), adults may need to begin with narrative and personal writing before they move to other kinds of writing. Soliday (1994) advocated the writing of 'literacy narratives', in which students relate their own experiences with literacy and compare them with other peoples' accounts. Personal narratives may also be subjected to critical framing (Kamler 1998) to disengage them from the personal and locate them in the broader socio-political context. Mace (1992) pointed out that the conventional distinction between functional and creative writing is in fact false and suggested that students should be encouraged to write stories as this affirms that they have something worthwhile to say.

Lastly, classroom activities that involve researching and writing projects serve to contextualise writing for the learners, and are based on theories of whole language development and empowerment (Hutchings, 1986).

Activities that require writers to collaborate and interact in groups are also seen to enhance writing development (Bruffee 1987, Bryan 1996, Clark & Ivanic 1997, Lunsford 1987), and encourage the empowerment of learners (Robinson 2001). The positive effects of writing in the social context of peer response groups have been described in terms of Vygotskian theory (DiPardo and Freedman, 1988). Collaboration appears to help learners combine their strengths, in contrast to the individual learning situation where the focus is on the student's weaknesses (Bishop 1995). Collaboration also provides an immediate audience and feedback from peers, which helps beginning writers become aware of the need for a clear message (Porto 2002). The safe audience of a co-operative and supportive group also gives learners the security to take risks with their writing (Phillips 1992). Hodges (2002) pointed out that collaboration can actually promote autonomy and can make the process of revision more meaningful. In individual writing there is tension between the writer's thoughts and how to express them. In collaborative writing the tension is between what individuals want to say and the needs of the group, but this tension can be shared and discussed.

The teacher's role has also been seen as ideally a collaborative one (Smith, 1982). Hall and Robinson, (1994) showed that when teachers consciously withdrew from a dominant role, the fluency of children's writing increased as a result of their empowerment. The basic skills writing classroom might also benefit from a redress in the balance of power. The role of the teacher should be more of that of a facilitator (Smith 1983), who encourages and develops discussion while not taking control of the group, and who provides feedback positively to ensure progress, without becoming the source of knowledge. The genre approach to writing also suggests that generic models be taught within a collaborative teacher-learners relationship (Spiegel & Sunderland 1999). According to Lillis (2001), tutors can provide feedback through a collaborative dialogue of participation. This can even be carried out through the medium of class letter-writing (DeAngelis 1997, Medley 1999). Himley et al., (1996) mentioned that 'a close, respectful, textually-driven collaboration and co-authoring' is the best that can be done to achieve a power-sharing teaching dynamic.

A particular conception of the collaborative role is the portrayal of the teacher as scribe (Mace 2002, Moss 1995). The intention is to empower learners by allowing a free expression of

ideas without the intervention and distraction of having to transcribe these into written words. However, these authors also point out that the interaction between scribe and student has certain dangers such as imposing new meaning and erasing the student's words and redirecting the student's original intent.

Collaboration can also be extended into research activities. Gillespie (1989) examined the value of writing within participatory action research as a tool for collective (social and political) analysis and action. This approach promotes equality between tutors and students, allows students to write for real purposes and audiences and empowers students by enabling them to use writing as a means of changing some of the aspects of their lives which may previously have impeded their development as writers.

Several writers discuss the relationship between teaching and research in writing, suggesting that the areas where the two activities overlap are particularly fruitful sites for writing development to take place. Ivanic (1998) proposed an approach to adult literacy education that 'turns tuition into research' by requiring tutors to suspend their preconceptions about the "correctness" or otherwise of students' writing in order to explore with them why they write as they do. Such an approach has the advantage that it is not based on a deficit view of learners, but recognises the understandings the learners already possess and uses these as a starting-point for teaching. Mace (1992) proposed that students as well as tutors should be encouraged to see themselves as researchers. She defines research as 'planned learning' and suggests that teaching activities can usefully be based on the idea of 'researching words'.

#### *2.6.2.4 Implications from writing and identity*

Beginning writers may be encouraged to identify themselves as writers through activities to reflect on their own and others' behaviour as writers (Bartholomae, 1987). According to Frank (2001), taking on the identity of a writer involves participating in the social practices of writers. Gallaher (1999) recommends that learners be given the opportunity to write about what really interests them, and to be taught about the 'writer's mind', for example, how established writers handle distractions. DeAngelis (1997) described 'audit' letter writing and anonymous class sharing to increase students' self-confidence and motivation and to help them identify themselves as members of a 'community of active learners and thinkers'. Dobie et al., (2002) point out that working collaboratively in a group encourages shared practices or 'rituals' that help learners identify themselves as writers in a group of writers.

#### *2.6.2.5 Implications from the relationship between reading and writing*

Many everyday tasks require reading and writing to be done together and a number of researchers have pointed out the benefits of integrating reading and writing in the classroom (e.g., Bardine 1996, Jelinek 1988, Lunsford 1987, Mace 1992, Mace 2002, Watson 1996). For example, students' own writing can be used for learning reading, with the benefits that the material will be at the right level, and obviously meaningful and familiar (Kerr 1995). Reading their own work will in turn aid the further development of writing skills. According to Troyka (1987), if learners become aware of the idea of prediction in reading, they can then begin to imagine expectation in their own reader. In activities that use this idea, students become more confident self-readers and thus better writers. Schriver (1992) tested the efficacy of a particular method for teaching writers to anticipate the needs of readers. Dutt (1996) noted the role of reading in the acquisition of new information that can later be used in writing. Stadulis and Shearer (1992) suggested a framework for the integrated teaching of reading and writing, focusing on the person, process and product.

### 2.6.3 Use of ICT

The use of ICT for teaching writing to adult learners has more commonly been through the use of basic word-processing programmes rather than dedicated software packages. Word-processing programmes have been found to be helpful mainly in aiding revision and editing, as well as enabling collaboration amongst learners (Hansman-Ferguson & Wilson 1995, Moeller 1993). Cochran-Smith (1991) cautioned that collaboration may not happen automatically, but might require teacher intervention. Further, the increase in revisions when using word-processing seems to refer more to the type of revisions the students already practise rather than to an improvement in revision strategies. Sophisticated tools such as speech synthesis programmes have also been used, to allow students to listen to the text they have composed (Minas et al., 1995). This type of approach holds potential, but the practical problems of software development mean that any expectation of widespread classroom implementation is premature.

The use of IT and computer-mediated communication can be helpful in finding ideas for text generation (Moeller 1993, Southwell 1987) and can also aid writing for 'genuine purposes and real audiences' (Maring et al., 1997), opening up to adult learners learning options such as email partnerships and collaborative learning (C. Luke 2000).

However, according to Hartley et al., (2001), while the use of word-processing has facilitated writing, it has not necessarily led to improvements in the end product. Kellogg (1993) explained this through a cognitive model, suggesting that the word processor does not improve access to knowledge, so there is no gain in writing performance. It has also been noted that the use of word processors may cause less planning and hinder recursive processes because of the screen limit (Cochran-Smith 1991). Marcus (1999) also discussed the confusion in some classrooms between 'teaching word-processing' and 'teaching writing using word-processing'.

### 2.6.4 Writing in the workplace

The workplace of today places increasing demands for at least basic levels of writing skills from all workers (Branot 2001). In addition to general skills, workers also need to meet the writing demands of their specific duties. This has implications for literacy teachers preparing adults for the workplace, and those training adults in the workplace.

Mikulecky and others (sic) (1987) recommended using process models such as Flower and Hayes' 'Cognitive Process Theory of Writing' (1981) as a basis for training adults for workplace writing, along with the use of realistic, job-related materials. Additionally, Dixon-Krauss and Jennings (1990) emphasised the importance of social context in their workplace literacy curriculum.

In a call for further research in this area, Davies and Birbili (2000) also propose that, in addition to general 'foundation knowledge', workers need 'conceptual knowledge' to facilitate the transfer of general skills to the demands of the job situation and the development of job-related writing skills.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In this review we have considered modern conceptualisations of writing and writing development in adult literacy learners. It seems clear that writing needs to be viewed as a recursive, interactive process, that cannot be separated from its social, cultural and political

contexts. It is intimately connected to both cognitive and affective processes in the writer and it may be most helpful to think of both the writer and what is written as changing and developing in interaction.

These conceptualisations have also been seen to have important implications for curricula and teaching practice in the adult writing classroom. Making the writing process explicit, using authentic materials and activities and implementing a collaborative environment have all been recommended as making significant contributions to the development of writing in adult learners.

The next step is to determine whether there is any empirical evidence to support the contentions and recommendations made with respect to writing and writing development in adults. This will be covered in the next section of this report.

A full annotated bibliography will be made available on the NRDC website [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk)

## 3. Literature Review Question 2

What factors in adult literacy programmes enable learners to develop effective writing skills?

### 3.1 Introduction

The following section will review primary research in the field of adult literacy learners acquiring writing skills. The main characteristics of these studies will be analysed in terms of nine keywords to produce a 'descriptive map' of current research. Relevant research studies were selected by means of a systematic review modelled on the EPPI-Centre system.<sup>2</sup> (EPPI-centre 2001). A systematic review requires the methods used to search for relevant studies and to select the studies included in the final review to be fully transparent and capable of replication.

### 3.2 Methodology

Studies were sourced from electronic databases and library catalogues. The search strategy was developed using the following definitions:

- 'Writing' includes the skills of composition, organising and creating meaning for a range of contexts, the ability to spell and use rules of syntax and the mechanical skills of handwriting and word-processing.
- Adult learners are defined as learners in post-compulsory education.
- Adult literacy is understood to focus on those learners whose skills are at or below the equivalent of Level Two of the National Standards for Adult Literacy (England).

As part of the EPPI review process, strict criteria were set for the inclusion or exclusion of studies. The following inclusion criteria were defined:

- The focus of the study is the processes of learning and teaching of writing (including the inter-relationship of reading and writing, and the use of ICT).
- The study reports primary research.
- The study was published in the period 1973-present. This date marks the launch of the 'Right to Read' campaign in the United Kingdom.
- The study is written in English.
- They arise from work undertaken with adult learners whose literacy skills are assessed to be below the standard expected for entry to further education.

Studies that focused exclusively on ESOL literacy learners were excluded.

Following EPPI-Centre guidelines, a standard procedure is used to assess the quality of the evidence presented in relevant studies. An in-depth quality assessment and review of the included research studies follows the discussion of the descriptive map. The data extraction and quality assessment allows the identification of empirically supported factors that enable adult learners to develop effective writing skills.

### 3.3 Definition of terms

The protocol of the literature review defines the elements of the question as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre, which is part of the Social Science Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London.



*Adult literacy:* The focus of the review is on learners whose skills are at or below the equivalent of Level Two of the National Standards for Adult Literacy (England). The review will include the development of writing for bilingual learners who take part in literacy programmes but will not address the development of writing skills in ESOL programmes. Nor will it include studies for which the primary focus is a specific learning disability, e.g., dyslexia. These topics need to be addressed in detail in separate reviews.

*Programmes:* This term is used to include the full range of approaches to delivery of adult literacy. These will include not only direct teaching but also opportunity for independent learning and the facilitation of activities that support the development of skills, for example, the involvement of learners in the editing and publication of writing.

*Develop:* This term is used to focus on the ways in which writing is learned, which may or may not be the result of activity initiated by teachers.

*Effective:* This is used to place emphasis on skills that the learner can transfer from the learning context to the demands of everyday life at work, at home and in the community, and to the use of writing for adults' own purposes.

*Writing:* This includes the skills and processes of creating and composing text (composition); the use of writing to organise and communicate meanings for a range of purposes in a range of contexts; the ability to spell and use rules of syntax to transmit meaning; and the mechanical skills of presentation such as handwriting or word-processing.

### 3.4 Summary of item selection, keywording and descriptive map<sup>3</sup>

A total of 20 reports were selected in two stages – first a group of 12 on the basis of a systematic search, and then a group of eight on the basis of a non-systematic search. The following inclusion criteria was applied to studies: include if primary research on the teaching and learning of writing in Adult Basic Education, reported in English and is after 1973. Studies that focused exclusively on ESOL learners were excluded.

Nine keywords were developed to describe the main characteristics of the 20 studies selected. The first four of these were generic while the remaining five were specific to this review:

- Study type
- Source
- Status
- Educational setting
- Programme approach
- Teacher orientation
- Learner level
- Use of ICT
- Success factors

The keywording of the studies revealed that few studies have been undertaken to investigate the development of writing skills in adult learners: in the selected group, only five dealt exclusively or primarily with writing. Most of the studies were evaluative rather than purely

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for a full discussion of the item selection, keywording and the descriptive map.

descriptive and pre and post measures were frequently included. It is recommended that due to the small sample size, all 20 studies are used for the next step of in-depth data extraction and evaluation of methodological soundness.

### 3.5 Data extraction and quality assessment

#### 3.5.1 The process

The data extraction process was carried out on 20 primary research studies (selected as described above) that investigated the development of writing skills in adults. These studies are listed below:

- Askov and Forlizzi (1990)
- Brooks, Gorman, Harman, Hutchison, and Wilkin (1996)\*
- Brooks, Davies, Duckett, Hutchison, Kendall and Wilkin (2001)\*
- Cooper and Garside (1996)\*
- Fahy and Morgan (1999)
- Fingeret and Danin (1991)\*
- Forrester (1988)
- Hansman-Ferguson (1994)
- Mlynarczyk (1996)
- Moulton (1997)
- Nurss (1989)
- Paratore (1992)
- Parrish (1997)
- Perin (1994)\*
- Pomerance (1990)
- Posey (1993)\*
- Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson and Soler (2002)\*
- Scane (1990)
- Stino and Palmer (1999)\*
- Thistlethwaite (1989)\*

The data extraction process followed the LSDA quality assessment guidelines for systematic reviews and involved selecting and describing details related to the aim of the study, the study type and design, sampling and recruitment of participants, data collection and data analysis, and principal findings. It also entailed highlighting any attempts to address reliability and validity, the extent of original data provided, and the match between the findings and the research questions – all leading to an assessment of the overall methodological quality of the study.

Of the 20 studies, only nine were rated to have at least a moderately sound methodology. (Marked \* in the list above.) These nine studies will form the basis for further discussion of the question 'what factors in adult literacy programmes enable learners to develop effective writing skills'. (Please see Appendix C for methodological details of these nine studies.)

The remaining 11 studies were excluded due to one or more of the following reasons: small sample, lack of control group, unstructured/informal data collection, haphazard administration of tests, inadequate or ambiguous reporting, errors in reporting, inappropriate use or interpretation of statistical tests, lack of statistical comparisons, post hoc comparisons, or subjective assessment and analyses. (Please see Appendix D for further details.)

### 3.5.2 The nine selected studies

In all cases, writing was investigated alongside reading. The studies covered a variety of settings, including Adult Education, Further Education, the workplace, family literacy, community and correctional settings.

Two of the nine studies were large-scale, cross-programme investigations, five dealt with the impact of individual literacy programmes (two well established, two short-term), while the last was a small study evaluating an intervention designed for a single class.

### 3.5.3 The large-scale studies

- Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson and Soler (2002). (Note: This study was termed large-scale due to its wide geographical coverage.)
- Brooks, Davies, Duckett, Hutchison, Kendall and Wilkin (2001a)

Both these studies were judged to have highly sound methodologies.

Purcell-Gates et al., (2002) looked at the effect of two dimensions of classroom instruction on change in the frequency and/or type of real-life literacy practices. The two dimensions of interest were 'authenticity in the classroom' and 'student-teacher collaboration'. The authors tested 159 adult literacy students from 77 classes selected from 22 states across the USA.

Writing was included in the questionnaire on real-life literacy practices (17 out of 50 questions). An example of a writing question would be, 'In the past week, did you write a cheque?' The two dimensions of instruction were not, however, related to individual literacy practices, but to an aggregate of all items. Thus writing was subsumed under 'literacy practices'.

Findings revealed that of the two classroom dimensions, only authenticity was significantly and positively related to change in literacy practices. While this was a correlational study, tentative causality was also suggested by the authors, based on appropriate analyses. Other significant predictors of change in literacy practices included the level of the learner at the start of the class (the lower the initial level of the learner, the more likely they were to report change), and hours of instruction completed (the more hours completed, the more likely they were to report change).

Brooks et al., (2001a) looked at ongoing basic skills provision to measure student progress in literacy skills (both reading and writing) and to identify student and tutor factors related to progress. For writing, the authors pre-tested 1724 adult literacy students in 49 Colleges of Further Education and 22 local education authorities across England and Wales. The number post-tested was 937, or 54 per cent of those pre-tested. For reasons which were never uncovered, no writing post-tests at all were received from Wales, and the findings summarised here therefore refer only to the 36 Colleges of Further Education and 15 local education authorities involved in England (G. Brooks, personal communication, 2003). Two writing samples, separated by up to 20 weeks and 60 or more hours of instruction, were gathered in response to the prompt, 'Please write a bit about what you hope to learn (or have learnt) here'.

Findings revealed significant but 'very small' improvements in writing as measured by number of words and quality of handwriting. No factors were found to be related to this progress.

### 3.5.4 Individual literacy programmes

- Fingeret and Danin (1991)
- Brooks, Gorman, Harman, Hutchison, and Wilkin (1996)
- Cooper and Garside (1996)
- Perin (1994)
- Posey (1993)
- Thistlethwaite (1989)

The Fingeret and Danin (1991) and Perin (1994) studies were judged to have highly sound methodologies, while the Cooper and Garside (1996) and Thistlethwaite (1989) studies were judged to have moderately sound methodologies. The Posey (1993) study was also found to be moderately sound although very small, involving only 13 learners. The Brooks et al., (1996) evaluation was judged to be moderately to highly sound.

Brooks, Gorman, Harman, Hutchison, and Wilkin (1996) aimed to evaluate the impact of the Basic Skills Agency (United Kingdom) Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes. Impact was measured through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data on parents and children's reading and writing attainment, employment and education history and literacy activity at home. 353 parents participated along with 371 children. The evaluation was successful in finding evidence of the programmes positive impact. Certain of the factors identified as contributing to programme success can clearly be seen to also contribute to learner progress. These included: the strong motivation and clear objectives that parents brought to the programme, the joint purpose and group cohesion achieved by parents, the individualised and reflective teaching, the genuinely inter-generational nature of the teaching, clear and open planning in parents' sessions contributed strongly to the success of the joint parent-children sessions.

Fingeret and Danin (1991) aimed to evaluate the impact of an established literacy programme called Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC). Impact was measured through progress and changes in the students' literacy skills, their attitudes and self-concept, and their out-of-school literacy practices. The authors tested 102 adult literacy students at seven centres in New York that were running the programme.

Writing was included as part of 'literacy skills' in the student focus groups and other interviews. In addition, two writing samples (as generated in the programme), separated by 50 hours of instruction, were collected.

The study found progress in students' literacy skills (e.g., some students could now write stories), improvement in their attitudes and self-concept (e.g., growing feelings of confidence and competence), and changes in their out-of-school literacy practices (e.g., formal correspondence). An analysis of the writing samples showed gains in overall scores between the first and second pieces of work and the largest gains were seen in the early stages of instruction, i.e., for the newest students. (Note that differences in scores were not tested statistically.)

Features of the LVNYC programme that could underlie these improvements included general characteristics such as student-centred learning and small group instruction, as well as specific characteristics of writing instruction such as emphasis on meaning and communication, the approach to writing as a social practice and the publication and celebration of students' work.

Cooper and Garside (1996) also evaluated the impact of an established literacy programme. This was the Newstart programme, a 200-hour, vocationally-oriented course. Impact was measured through students' self-reported ability to transfer their skills to other real-life or vocational contexts. The authors interviewed ten students who had completed the Newstart course, in Brisbane, Australia.

Writing was subsumed under 'literacy skills'. Participants were asked about their use of writing (along with reading, numeracy and communication skills) in contexts other than the Newstart course, and also rated their confidence in using these skills.

Findings showed that participants generally rated themselves as confident in using most of the skills taught and they all had some success in transferring skills. It also emerged that success in the transfer of skills seemed to depend not only on knowledge, but also on knowing how to use a skill, confidence and being willing to accept mistakes. Transfer was also more successful across similar contexts.

Features mentioned by Newstart teachers that may have encouraged successful transfer of skills included practicing skills in different situations, simulation of work environments and the fostering of independence and initiative, as well as tolerance, cooperation and peer support.

Perin (1994) and Thistlethwaite (1989) also investigated the impact of organised literacy programmes, but dealt with short-term programmes that were specific to a time and place. Both of these, like Cooper and Garside's Newstart programme mentioned above, were also workplace-oriented programmes.

Perin (1994) investigated whether instruction in a six-month-long, job-specific literacy programme would lead to gains in literacy measures and whether the gains could be predicted by certain student variables. The student variables included student demographics, newspaper reading practices, knowledge of current affairs, hours of instruction and number of learning goals held by the students. The author tested 413 learners (Mental Hygiene Therapy Aides (MHTA)) in five psychiatric hospitals in New York City.

Writing was assessed by the 'MHTA Writing Test' (developed specifically for the programme) where participants had to write a description of a patient for a co-worker.

The results showed a significant pre-post gain in the writing test. None of the student variables were statistically related to the gain. However, an informal 'exploratory' analysis comparing two extreme groups – those with the largest gain in the writing test and those with the smallest or no gain – revealed that the former seemed to be characterised by 'a tendency to follow current affairs, frequency of newspaper reading, a match between the worker's learning goal and the purpose of the course, higher education level and educational credentials and possibly lower age and fewer years on the job'.

Thistlethwaite (1989) measured the effect of a three-week job training programme on literacy variables such as performance in reading, ability to communicate in writing, attitudes to reading and writing, and knowledge of reading and writing strategies. The author tested 36 participants ('disadvantaged youth') in a residential programme held in the American Midwest.

Writing was assessed through pre and post writing samples, while attitudes towards writing and self as writer were included in a 45-item attitude survey. Concepts of writing and strategies to deal with problems in writing (and reading) were tested in a battery of five open-ended questions (e.g., 'When you need to write, what can you do to help think of ideas to use in your writing?').

Findings revealed that pre-post improvement in writing samples was not statistically significant. There was a significant gain in positive attitudes towards writing (and reading) and toward themselves as writers (and readers), but this was for male participants only. Participants also showed a significant improvement in their knowledge of concepts and strategies in writing (and reading).

Characteristics of the programme that may have led to the significant changes as noted included the workplace atmosphere (where work-related writing skills were emphasised), the flexibility of the programme structure, the opportunities for students to participate in different groups, the use of computers for writing, publication of student writing and the use of outside speakers such as journalists.

Posey (1993) compared the progress in writing of two groups of learners, one using word processing, and one not, in a basic writing class (which was itself a component of a class in basic English composition). 13 learners were recruited as volunteers by the teacher; six learners opted to use computers, while seven elected to use pen and paper. A 40 minute writing sample was completed by learners at the beginning and end of the course and used as a pre and post test. The findings were that word processing per se did not stimulate better writing (including text revision). The results suggest that the greatest advantage of word procession may be that basic writers who use it, write more.

### 3.5.5 Single class intervention

#### ■ Stino and Palmer (1999)

This study was judged to have a moderately sound methodology.

Stino and Palmer (1999) investigated the impact of process-based writing instruction and a participatory approach on writing skills and motivation. The authors assessed ten women at a correctional facility in Florida, who were attending an adult literacy class as part of their remand programme.

Writing performance was measured by different versions of an official essay test, administered as pre, mid and post measures. A short 'post' questionnaire measured motivation.

Findings revealed a significant increase in essay scores between pre and mid tests only. Questionnaire responses showed that most respondents liked the small-group, women-only approach, felt that the class had improved their writing skills and made them feel better about themselves. These findings were interpreted to reflect the success of process-based writing instruction within a participatory learning approach.

### 3.5.6 Success factors

It is apparent that nearly all the studies found, quantitatively or qualitatively, an improvement in writing skills. The exception is Thistlethwaite (1989) and in this case, while pre-post writing

gains were not significant, improvements were noted in attitudes towards writing and towards the self as writer and in knowledge of concepts and strategies of writing.

The question now is – what factors overall were found to be associated with progress in writing?

Only Purcell-Gates et al., (2002) formally related defined classroom variables with change in literacy skills. The success factor in this study was authenticity in the classroom. Additional factors were student variables: the (lower) level of the learner at the start and (increased) hours of instruction.

Two other studies, Brooks et al., (2001) and Perin (1994), related student/tutor variables to progress in writing. Neither found significant relationships. Perin, however, continued with an informal analysis of extreme groups to speculate on factors associated with larger gains in writing. All the other studies discussed factors that were felt to characterise the various programmes of instruction and therefore felt to be likely candidates for success factors – however, these were not statistically related to progress in writing/literacy and therefore remain speculative.

Speculative success factors included those relating specifically to writing instruction, to the overall programme and exclusively to the learners:

1. Instructional factors reflected process writing (process-based writing instruction, an emphasis on meaning and communication), authentic practices (publication and celebration of students' work, practice of skills in different contexts and situations) and the use of IT.
2. General programme factors reflected collaboration and participation (writing as a social practice, student-centred learning, small group instruction, participatory learning, fostering of tolerance and cooperation, peer support), varied practice (opportunities to participate in different groups, flexibility of programme structure, use of outside speakers), and authenticity in the simulation of work environments (along with fostering of independence and initiative).
3. Student factors (mentioned by Perin) included following current affairs, reading the newspaper, goals matched with course goals, higher educational qualifications, younger age and fewer years on the job.

### **3.5.7 Themes that emerged from the studies excluded following the data extraction**

Some of the findings of the 11 studies excluded following the data extraction suggest questions that it may be worthwhile to investigate further. In this section, some of these studies are considered in this light.

The use of ICT was found to be a success factor in some of the nine included studies. Askov & Forlizzi (1990) investigated a computer-based literacy programme for over-40s to discover whether it was an effective means of developing job-specific literacy instruction. The use of attitudinal surveys of students and tutors suggests a possible way to develop the methods used in the present review of practice. The paper also describes a useful method of analysing students' writing, which enables the writing process as well as the product to be considered.

Hansman-Ferguson (1994) (and Parrish 1997) explored how computers can be used to provide authentic literacy activities for adult learners and how they can enhance the social relations

between learners. The findings suggest that the computers can enable students to devise successful writing processes and that using computers facilitated interaction amongst students and encouraged them to critique each other's work. A similar study in a United Kingdom context would be useful. Hansman-Ferguson combined before and after student interviews and written reflection by students. Analysis of before and after student writing would also be informative.

Nurss JR (1989) evaluated a particular piece of software, but, since it was carried out in 1989, it is likely that the software has been superseded. However, the design of the study, which combined pre and post-tests of reading and writing with data from interviews with students and tutors, could inform the development and piloting of computer software for adult literacy students in this country.

Parrish, like Hansman-Ferguson, examined how using computers can enable students to become co-operative and participatory learners. The study was also concerned with the use of computers to prepare students for a Literature and Arts exam, although no findings on this aspect of the study are presented. The teaching method used in this project, which was based on students reading and writing poetry, has not been well researched in the UK. Some writers, for example Mace (1992) and Gardener (1992) have suggested that there is not necessarily a clear-cut division between 'creative' and 'functional' writing and that the former can play an important role in adult literacy education. This study suggests that 'creative' writing activities might promote the development of writing skills in general. It indicates an area where more research is needed.

Scane (1990) studied the effect of using computers in a process approach to teaching writing. Both the methodology and the reporting are inadequate, so it is difficult to gain any useful information from this study.

A second theme of training for tutors and current practice emerged in two studies. First, Fahy and Morgan (1999) investigated current practice in the teaching of writing by carrying out telephone interviews and a Delphi computer conference with 60 teachers. The study indicates a possible way of building on the present review of practice, particularly if the views of students were also included. The Delphi method might encourage more reflective responses from tutors and might throw up issues which were not included in the interview questions. It could also be used to assess tutors' development needs; in the study reported here the findings were used to inform a professional development project. However, this method is not likely to be appropriate for students, many of whom would obviously find writing difficult.

Second, Pomerance (1990) studied an adult literacy tutor training programme that emphasised 'holistic approaches to reading and writing, with primary emphasis on comprehension' and a collaborative relationship between learners and tutors. However, the results cannot be generalised and the training programme was for tutors working with individual students rather than groups, so the approach may not be widely appropriate in the UK. Collaboration between tutors and students is a common aspect of current practice (as the review of practice demonstrates).

Three of the studies discuss the effectiveness of particular teaching strategies or types of intervention. Mlynarczyk (1996) examines the ways in which beginner writers can be encouraged to make meaning-based revisions to the content of their writing, rather than restricting their revisions to surface features. Data were collected from two drafts of one



student's essay and tape recordings of two student-teacher conferences relating to the same student. The study found that when the tutor acted as an 'empathic listener' and expressed interest in the content of the writing, the student did make meaning-based changes to the writing. It is not possible to generalise from the findings, since they relate to one student, although it would be possible to repeat the study on a larger scale. The findings of other small-scale studies like this one might also deepen our understanding of the writing process and of the role of the teacher in fostering writing development. As such, the study can be compared to case studies of children's emergent literacy. Although relatively few such studies have been carried out, they have nevertheless proved illuminating and influential. It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that some further studies similar to the one reported here could be useful in the field of adult literacy, both to generate theory and to formulate hypotheses, which could be tested by more quantitative research.

Paratore (1992) focused on an intergenerational approach to literacy teaching. It investigated the effects of this approach on the development and use of literacy by adult basic education students and on the incidence of shared literacy activities between parent and child. The nature of the 'intergenerational approach' is not specified however. A similar, but more rigorous study into the impact of an intergenerational approach has already been conducted in this country (see Brooks et al., 1996)

Forrester (1988) aimed to show how one adult developed her literacy skills by being encouraged to draw on her experience of learning in other contexts, in particular by taking the risk of making mistakes and by 'active thinking-trying'. This has traditionally been an important aspect of teaching in adult literacy education and whilst there is anecdotal evidence that it is successful, this needs to be supported by research findings if it is to be developed to its full potential.

Moulton (1997) is the only study included here which investigates literacy learning and use outside formal education. It aims to show that successful literacy activities in the real world enable adults to view themselves as readers and writers, to gain confidence in their literacy abilities and increase their literacy learning. Although it is not possible to generalise from the findings because of weaknesses in the methodology, the study may provide a starting point for further research into the relationship between literacy practices in everyday life and progress with literacy learning. This study suggests that we cannot assume a simple causal link between the two, but that there may be a correlation.

### **3.6 The need for further research**

The selection and review of the 20 research studies to determine the factors that enable adult learners to develop effective writing skills has also shown that there is an urgent need for further research in the area. Furthermore, the results of the search for research studies reveals that there is a gap in research carried out in British contexts: the majority of the 20 included studies were conducted in the USA or Canada.

First and foremost, there is the need for studies based on a sound methodology. From the above review, it is apparent that only nine out of the 20 selected studies were even moderately sound. A strong underlying methodology would allow results to be accepted with confidence. Some of the studies excluded following the data extraction may, however, suggest methods, which, if improved upon, could prove useful for future research.

It is clear that there is a need for studies with a primary focus on writing (such as Stino and Palmer, 1999). The review has shown that most studies looked at writing along with reading, as part of a generalised 'literacy'. In some cases, writing was merely an addendum to the reading part of the study. As a consequence, interesting questions pertaining to writing only (for instance, on process versus product writing) have rarely been addressed. The investigation of writing as a distinct and important skill would help fill in the gaps in our understanding of how adult learners develop as writers.

Lastly, there is also a need to make planned analyses to determine the classroom and programme variables related to, and predictive, of progress in writing (as in Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). In this way, recommendations for pedagogy would have an empirical rather than a speculative basis.

## 4. Review of Practice Report

What range of approaches to the teaching, learning and assessment of writing do practitioners and learners in adult literacy currently use?

### 4.1 Purpose and methodology

#### 4.1.1 The aims of the review

The purpose of the review of practice was to provide a picture of current practice that would enable us to begin to answer the question:

What range of approaches to the teaching, learning and assessment of writing do practitioners and learners in adult literacy currently use?

The review also aimed to explore the extent to which practice is informed by, or reflects, the understanding of writing apparent in the literature. Lastly, the review was intended, in conjunction with the review of theoretical and empirical studies, to help identify questions and develop hypotheses relating to effective practice in the teaching of writing. This would then inform the design and methodology of the second phase of the project.

#### 4.1.2 The size and scope of the review

The review drew on information from two sources:

- focus groups with adult literacy practitioners and learners
- in-depth case studies of ongoing adult literacy classes.

It must be emphasised that this was a small-scale study which, while attempting to cover a representative sample of provider organisations, contexts for learning, teachers and learners, included a limited number of sites and observed each class in the sample on only one occasion. It would not be appropriate to make general statements about the teaching of writing in adult literacy in England based on the findings from this study. However, taken together with the review of literature and the review of research it has provided useful insights and has proved of great value in the planning the focus and the methodology of the larger study that will be undertaken in phase 2 of the project.

#### 4.1.3 Focus groups

Focus groups were used to get an idea of the range of opinions, attitudes and experiences regarding writing, in the population of practitioners and learners in adult basic skills in the UK. The findings from the focus group interviews were also intended to inform the observations and interviews in the case studies carried out later. The focus group interviews were undertaken by an external research consultancy. This enabled the project to benefit from the company's broad experience in the running of focus groups. The researchers were not *Skills for Life* specialists and could therefore maintain an entirely neutral role. Their unfamiliarity with the subject matter is reflected in some of the terminology used in their report.

The research objectives for the focus groups were to:

- determine the range of methods and approaches practitioners use in teaching writing and the

factors that influence them

- seek information on factors in the development of writing skills that learners and teachers find particularly challenging
- investigate the relationship between reading and writing in the classroom
- explore perceptions of balance between the mechanical and expressive aspects of writing
- understand attitudes towards and methods of assessment
- explore learners' experiences.

Separate focus groups were held with teachers and learners. Initial planning was for four focus groups with practitioners and two with learners. Teachers were recruited through networks and were invited to apply (self-selected). Organisations were also approached and asked to encourage teachers to participate. Learners were recruited through a range of literacy-providing organisations, with organisations themselves being asked to secure learner participation.

The four focus groups with practitioners included a total of 18 participants (age range 29 to 58 years) and were held at four locations: Leeds, Newcastle, Norwich and London. Due to recruitment difficulties, only one focus group was held with learners in Newcastle, with nine participants (age range 21 to 78 years).

#### 4.1.4 Case studies

The research objectives of carrying out the case studies were to:

- identify strategies used across a range of adult literacy teaching contexts in England
- develop an in-depth picture of the relationships between what is observed in the classroom, teachers' intentions and the perceptions of learners
- identify ideas and themes in the current delivery of writing instruction, and the extent to which these are informed by, or supported by the literature.

Eighteen case studies were carried out, using a number of methods including recorded class observations and structured interviews of both teachers and groups of learners.

Ten sites (literacy-providing organisations) were originally selected, one in each of the nine English regions and one in a penal institution. These sites reflected the range of contexts and providers of adult literacy education in England, including FE colleges, work-based training, prisons, LEA adult education, voluntary organisations and family literacy. Case studies at one site were not carried out due to unforeseen problems on the part of the researcher. Two classes were selected at each of the other nine sites. Therefore, a total of 18 classes formed the basis for the case study part of the review.

Practitioner-researchers were recruited to undertake the observations and interviews. The person specification, for this role, included experience of adult education and some experience of research. Experience in teaching and/or managing basic skills was listed as desirable but in the event all of the researchers appointed had experience of basic skills. Two of the ten researchers recruited were unable to take part in the end, so a total of eight researchers carried out the observations and interviews for the 18 case studies.

#### *Classroom observations*

The researchers made one observation of each class. In each case, the researcher met the teacher beforehand to get an idea of the objectives of that day's lesson and the materials and resources to be used. At the beginning of the class the researcher was introduced to the

learners and then took up an unobtrusive position from where they could observe the ongoing activities in the class.

The researcher noted the number of teachers (including assistants) and learners present in the class and sketched a plan of the physical layout of the room. Observations were entered into a log sheet, with the intention of providing five-minute 'snapshots' of the ongoing activity. The majority of researchers typed up their logs but the analysis of these was undertaken by the project researcher based at LSDA.

#### *Learner interviews*

Following the observed sessions, the learners were interviewed as a group. The researcher followed a semi-structured interview procedure (see Appendix E for a list of the eight interview questions). The overall aim was to get a picture of how learners understand writing and how the class was helping them learn.

#### *Teacher interviews*

The teachers who led the observed classes were also interviewed by the researchers, using a semi-structured procedure (see Appendix F for a list of the 13 interview questions). The overall aim was to get a picture of each teacher's understanding of teaching writing, strategies they used in the classroom and the rationale for their use.

## **4.2 Results**

### **4.2.1 The views of teachers based on focus groups and interviews**

It is interesting to note the significant overlap of opinion, whether supplied in individual interviews or in the focus group context. While the former ensured personal responses 'uncontaminated' by the influence of others, the latter allowed the development of in-depth discussions and collegial support for responses that might be seen to question the establishment, e.g., the ambivalence towards the Core Curriculum that emerged in the focus group discussions.

To avoid repetition the key points arising from both sources are summarised below. The summary notes the agreement between the two sets of data and highlights any areas of divergence. The full text of the summary report on the focus groups produced by the research consultants, Cragg Ross Dawson, (Woolcott 2003) is included as Appendix G.

Teachers in the focus groups perceived writing as a distinct skill in principle, although in practice they found it was difficult to separate it from other aspects of adult literacy. As a distinct skill writing was felt to have both practical and emotional value for students. The practical applications of writing were numerous, while being able to write could be emotionally empowering. This generated particular barriers and difficulties, however, since writing is a 'public' skill by which learners can expose themselves to others. Fear of embarrassment and making mistakes could inhibit students from expressing themselves freely or experimenting with their writing. As a result, writing was seen as something that teachers should build up to, rather than launching learners in at the deep end.

Asked about the relationship between reading and writing both sets of teachers saw the two as closely interlinked. In the focus groups, teachers spoke of a clear progression from reading to writing. However, they did not think reading could help to improve the sub-skills of writing such as spelling or punctuation. On the other hand some of the teachers interviewed for the

case studies referred to the value of reading in helping learners with spelling and sentence structure. Reading was also seen to help writing by acting as a springboard for writing or providing a model.

*"...they (learners) need to read things that are pertinent to their lives. This encourages them to write."*

On learners' views of writing the teachers in the case studies believed that while learners' views of writing varied, learners were likely to feel that writing was harder ('more of a struggle') than reading. Both sets of teachers referred to barriers or 'mental blocks' that learners can bring with them (e.g., negative previous experiences, bad habits). On the whole they found learners motivated and enthusiastic but lacking in confidence, which was often linked to concern about poor spelling. Further, some learners had to struggle with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. In order to counteract negative experiences, teachers were keen to differentiate the adult literacy environment as fully as possible from the school system.

Both sets of teachers were asked about their approaches to the teaching of writing and the factors that influenced these. The summary of the report on the focus groups states;

*"Teachers felt they did have their own teaching style, but found it difficult to articulate how this had developed."*

This statement would also be true for the teachers interviewed for the case studies. Both groups made frequent reference to teaching strategies and approaches that are geared towards the needs of individual learners and their goals and interests, although some of the focus-group teachers felt that this was sometimes difficult in practice.

*"The main influence on how teachers went about teaching writing was the student him/herself. Ideally, it was thought that every lesson should take account of each student's goals, interests and learning style. In practice, the diversity of most adult literacy classes made this extremely difficult."* [Summary of report on focus groups].

In the focus groups tailoring lessons according to the student's interest was thought vital to maintain enthusiasm. However, it was also recognised that focusing on the student's goals could be a constraint, since these could be short term and limited and teachers had a role to extend their learners' ambitions.

Teachers also made reference to initial assessment, individual learning plans and to the need to provide individual attention, using a variety of tasks and approaches and covering a number of skills. Reference was made to setting achievable goals by breaking learning into manageable chunks and using a variety of tasks and approaches. Respect for learners' expertise in other areas and the use of praise, encouragement and reward were also mentioned. Two of the teachers interviewed stressed the importance of learners understanding the reasons for the things they do in class. One spoke of using group work to develop ideas for writing and another of free writing being her aim for learners.

Teachers were asked how they viewed the balance between the need for learners to write correctly and the development of expressive writing. The distinction was familiar to both groups and for both communication and the expression of ideas were felt important and to be

encouraged before correctness, (e.g. learners might be asked to 'get their ideas down first'). In the focus groups there was a view that writing to communicate ideas should be encouraged from an early stage as it was enjoyable and motivating. Some teachers however felt that the emphasis should depend on individual learners' needs and level. Beginner writers may need to spend more time on the sub-skills of writing. One teacher noted:

*"You have to give them the tools."*

Both sets of teachers were asked questions designed to probe the extent to which teachers' approaches to the teaching of writing were informed by the literature on the subject. A few found these difficult to answer but others believed that knowledge of literature and research had influenced their teaching. Reference was made to keeping up with journals such as the Basic Skills Newsletter, Update, the Basic Skills Bulletin and the Times Educational Supplement but no specific studies or authors were mentioned. Some mentioned the difficulty of finding time to read about research or to explore web-sites.

Teachers in the focus groups believed that theory and literature have an effect on how teachers teach, "but in an unconscious rather than a deliberate way." There was little sense of an agreed body of knowledge and some respondents perceived a wide gulf fixed between researchers and practitioners.

Both sets of teachers mentioned the influence of training on their teaching and many referred to the core curriculum training. Advice from more experienced colleagues and observing others teach were also mentioned. The report on the focus groups sums up the discussion on these questions in the quotation below.

*"Training and theory were thought to have an osmotic rather than a conscious effect on teaching approaches."*

Good resources were regarded by the focus group teachers as a valuable asset, and teachers were always on the lookout for these. Ready-made resources were often felt to be not quite right for the teacher's needs, either in content or in tone – many were seen as patronising to the learner. As a result, teachers made many of their own resources, but this was time-consuming.

The teachers interviewed obtained resources through a variety of channels, including borrowing ideas from other teachers. Websites and in particular the BBC Skillswise materials were mentioned as well as real forms and newspapers. Learners themselves sometimes suggested exercises or brought in resources.

Teachers in the focus groups discussed the core curriculum for adult literacy. In principle, teachers generally welcomed the introduction of the core curriculum and felt it provided a structure to literacy teaching that had previously been more ad hoc. There were some concerns, however, that the focus on the individual student could be weakened.

In practice, attitudes towards the curriculum were ambivalent. It was still very new and teachers acknowledged that they had not yet become accustomed to using it. Even taking this into account, however, the curriculum was often criticised for being too detailed and prescriptive. Adult literacy was regarded as a holistic area and attempts to dissect and codify it were felt to be problematic.

*"If you took all those dozens of indicators and cut them up and took the levels off and threw them on the table and asked the teacher to put them in the right order they wouldn't be able to do it because there are so many where it's not clear why this is a higher level skill than that."*

In line with the emphasis placed on the individual learner, teachers spoke of working to learners' objectives and mapping these to the curriculum rather than using the curriculum to shape their teaching. The practical hints and tips and suggested activities were welcomed.

While not asked directly about the core curriculum teachers interviewed on a one to one basis did express views on this. Some cited it as an influence on their teaching.

*"I have formalised my approach more with the core curriculum with students. I do more work on grammar and the fluency of writing."*

*"All work is tracked to curriculum."*

Issues relating to the curriculum arose most often when discussing the assessment of writing.

When questioned about the assessment of writing teachers responses related to both formative and summative assessment. Some discussed correcting learners' writing and their concern not to destroy learners' confidence by the 'red pen treatment'. One teacher explained that she ticked words spelt correctly rather than highlighting errors. Ongoing assessment was a basic feature of teaching and usually took the form of monitoring a student's work in an informal way taking into account individual needs.

In the focus groups initial assessment was regarded as problematic and this view was echoed by some of the teachers interviewed on a one to one basis. Although it was thought necessary to assess students, the tools available were not considered sensitive enough to do this job well. Assessments that rely on multiple-choice answers and do not require learners to put pen to paper were felt not to provide a valid assessment of writing.

In relation to summative assessment several teachers raised issues relating to the core curriculum for adult literacy, citing anomalies where learners can provide adequate responses to a task but not meet the criteria for the level they are working at because, for example, their answers do not include a compound sentence. The difficulty of differentiating between levels, the subjectivity of assessments and the need for moderation of these were mentioned. There was concern that learners did not always do justice to their abilities in one off tests.

*"...assessment must be reliable over several sessions."*

The focus groups discussed the way in which the increasing importance and pervasiveness of IT had introduced new writing models and contexts such as text messages and email and had created the need for teachers to convey to learners the kind of language and structure appropriate for these contexts. The language of text messaging was not always thought to be easier for learners.

*'...even that has a format to it .... There's a logic to either not using capitals or using capitals.... It's a definite language'*



In the interviews a number of teachers reported 'some' to 'routine' use of IT, especially for word processing, while others mentioned that they had access problems or would like to use it more. The internet was used by some for research projects with learners. Others directed learners to specific websites such as BBC Skillswise. Both sets of teachers were aware that learners enjoyed using ICT, mentioning that it helped them present their work well and helped to build confidence.

It was also acknowledged that some learners might be reluctant to use ICT, although in family literacy classes this could be overcome by planning joint ICT sessions with the learners' children.

The focus groups addressed the question of 'sticking points'. These were seen as largely individual to the learner. Certain problems were thought to occur time and again, however, in particular, spelling, drafting and lack of practice. Some teachers also perceived a significant step up between Levels 1 and 2 (of the National Standards for Adult Literacy), which could act as a barrier to progress. The reason was that the gap was felt to be wide and that crossing this was a question of refining skills rather than developing new ones. Learners found this difficult to achieve and teachers to assess.

#### **4.2.2 The views of learners based on the focus group and interviews**

This report of learners' views is based on group interviews with learners in each of the 18 classes observed and one focus group discussion. Some of the questions that were discussed in the focus group were different to those used in the group interviews. Where views relating to these are reported it is made clear that these reflect the single focus group. Further detail on the focus group can be found in the text of the summary report prepared by Cragg Ross Dawson (Woolcott 2003) included in Appendix G.

For the group interviews the answers of the learners were categorised and sorted to determine the range and frequency of responses to each question and the results are presented in Table 1. (Note that these results are based on learner responses from 14 classes. Due to variation in the recording of responses during the interviews, the frequency of responses could not be determined in four classes). As learner responses were very variable as regards length and complexity, the first main element of each answer was selected to form the basis for the following analysis. For any one question, the number of learners choosing to answer varied between 64 and 74. Individual responses to the interview questions were understandably sometimes influenced by peer responses.

**Table 1. Summary of learner interviews**

## Question

**Q1. Do you think writing is harder to learn than reading?**

43 per cent writing was harder than reading

18.9 per cent reading was harder

16.2 per cent both were hard

**Q2. Which bits of writing are difficult?**

52 per cent spelling was the most difficult

9.9 per cent punctuation

9.9 per cent grammar

**Q3. What do you think is most important when you write?**

23 per cent punctuation

19.1 per cent spelling

13.2 per cent neatness in writing

**Q4. What sort of things do you want to write?**

33.3 per cent letters

13.0 per cent creative writing such as stories

7.2 per cent poetry

8.7 per cent form filling

7.2 per cent work-related writing

**Q5. Has this class helped you achieve what you wanted?**

12.2 per cent referred to a 'good tutor'

9.5 per cent referred to confidence they had gained

4.1 per cent commented that it was just like school

4.1 per cent childish

**Q6. Which bits of the class do you find the most helpful or interesting?**

20 per cent 'everything'

20 per cent use of computers

9.2 per cent a supportive tutor

**Q7. Is anything unhelpful?**

75 per cent Nothing

More help time

More computer time.

Overall learners judged writing to be harder than reading. Several learners who expanded on their judgement attempted to express the fact that writing requires the writer to engage in a multi-layered task.

*"Writing is much more difficult, there's a lot more involved."*

*" I find writing harder ...punctuation, content, tenses, spelling"*

*"you have to think of your own words and know how to write them"*

*"Its harder 'cos you have to have the ideas in your head first"*

A significant number of learners however were clear that reading was more difficult.

*" I don't read a lot – I usually forget what I've read by the end of the page. I don't mind writing ... emails, using a keyboard."*

In a few cases this may have reflected a rather narrow view of writing as the ability to form letters and copy text.

Learners in the focus group discussed reading and writing in more general terms than the learners in the group interviews. They tended to separate literacy into discrete skills, namely reading and writing. The practical importance of writing was thought obvious. It was seen as necessary in so many situations, particularly in work contexts. Writing also held a certain cachet, and not being able to write was embarrassing.

Learners in the interviews were asked "What do you think is most important when you write?" While punctuation, spelling and neatness were most commonly mentioned a few learners made reference to the audience of the writing.

*"Somebody can read what I've put and it makes sense."*

*"Writing that makes sense to the reader."*

Another wrote:

*"getting started and thinking about it first."*

The distinction between mastering the sub-skills or 'mechanics' of writing and writing for communication and expression was familiar to learners, even if the terms were not. Learners were more likely than teachers to perceive the process of learning to write as a clear progression from one to the other. The need for this was underlined by a sense that poor spelling, for example, could undermine the fundamental value of a piece of writing.

*"You've got to start small before you can go big on the writing. You've got to sort the basics out. Write a basic letter...then you can put more and more into it...I started like that...but now I'm starting to get into the descriptive side. You can start putting more into your writing."* Learners, Newcastle

Spelling was the most common worry for learners. Not being able to spell was publicly embarrassing and difficult to overcome. Punctuation was less emotive, but still a problem for several. Formatting work was a particular concern.

*"Postcards, I cannot stand them, they're really hard. Because it's small...or if you've got to write an application form and you've got to write wee...it's terrible. It goes everywhere, there's no lines, you find yourself going downhill or uphill."* Learners, Focus Group Newcastle

Writing more creatively tended to be seen as the reward for mastering the basics. There was a sense of satisfaction and creativeness in writing down one's own ideas that went beyond the practical benefits of writing.

Interestingly when asked what sort of things they wanted to be able to write a high percentage of learners in the interviews referred to stories, poetry and descriptive writing. The range of responses was very broad and included:

*"Any thing – just getting the spelling right."*

*"A book about (my) own culture."*

*"Poetry. I would really love to do this."*

*"I find it difficult to write letters – official letters. I can write simple ones."*

*"Manchester United"*

*"proper essays"*

*"labels for work"*

*"Christmas cards and addresses"*

*"..poems – about love."*

When discussing whether the class had helped them to achieve what they wanted to achieve and which parts of the teaching they found most useful learners were generally very positive. The teacher or 'tutor' was mentioned frequently as an important factor;

*"She's pushing me to greater levels"*

*"The tutor is good at explaining things"*

*"...gets it across, helps us to understand, prepared to repeat, easy going, not made uncomfortable about mistakes" (Group discussion)*

The minority that responded negatively were young and were not volunteer learners as was the case in the majority of classes. The contrast between these responses and those in other groups is marked.

In the focus group the learners tended to prefer teachers to negotiate with them in setting tasks. There was a preference for exercises that covered interesting topics or taught a useful practical skill.

Access to computers and the degree to which computer use was integrated into the activity in the classroom varied very significantly from class to class.

While a few responses were negative:

*"I'm frightened to death of them"*

most students had a positive attitude towards computers, with about a quarter already using computers and others wanting to learn how and to have access to them in class. They had a

range of views about how computers helped them to improve their writing.

*"The computer makes me write"*

*"It helps me with my spelling"*

*"Its easier to alter your work if you use a computer"*

*"Its good for handwriting"*

*"computers (are) useful for editing"*

*"..you can work at the right level for you so you can build up your skill at your own pace."*

Others had differing views;

*"..you cannot learn spelling or listening using a computer. ...I can't use a computer because of my spelling."*

In the focus group there was some discussion of assessment. Formal assessment was viewed with a mixture of aspiration and dread. Most were keen to possess some sort of qualification, motivated by the desire for a marker of progress and a sense of achievement but the experience of sitting a test was considered traumatic. Informal assessment was seen as part and parcel of teaching, and caused no particular concerns.

#### 4.2.3 Results of Classroom Observations

A preliminary coding of about half the classroom observations indicated that it would be helpful to code the teaching and learning activities according to task, grouping of individuals, learner activity and teacher activity. This was based on discussions within the project team. All observations were then coded to follow this general scheme. All coding was carried out using the analysis package 'Atlas.ti.'

Therefore, for each classroom session observed:

- Each writing task or subtask was coded once per session, in terms of materials used (e.g., worksheet, textbook), the intended audience (e.g., self, teacher, peers), the type of task (e.g., exercise, diary, form completion) and the focus of the task (whether word, sentence or text, and whether fragmented/de-contextualised or integrated/contextualised).
- Each five-minute block of time was then coded for the activities of the learners and teachers. This included the type of grouping(s) that were apparent (e.g., one on one, small group), specific learner activity (e.g., planning, copying) and specific teacher activity (e.g., instructing, dictating).

The frequencies of each individual code were found for each classroom, and also across all classrooms (see Appendix H). It should be noted that one coder coded all the classroom observations and two second coders re-coded eight and three classrooms respectively. A close association was found between coders on the total distribution of codes over all classrooms (with correlation coefficients of .88 and .84 between the first coder and each of the second coders). A reasonably close association was found when individual classrooms were considered (with combined-classroom correlation coefficients of .65 and .72 between the

first coder and each of the second coders). These levels of inter-rater reliability were deemed quite acceptable, especially when considering the subjective and qualitative nature of the coding judgements.

The table in Appendix H gives us a picture of common practices in the basic writing classroom. The 'total' column on the extreme right shows at a glance the most frequent codes in each category, e.g., under 'writing task materials', handouts were more common than computers. The rows in the table show the distribution of a code across all classrooms, e.g., it is apparent that computers were used in four classrooms, overwhelmingly in classroom A. The columns in the table allow us to compare the variety of codes within each classroom, e.g., under 'task type', it is apparent that classroom H only offered exercises, while classroom D offered creative, informational, diary, poetry and game tasks.

This summary and distribution of codes allows us to draw certain general conclusions about the adult writing classrooms observed:

It appears that the most frequent writing task in the adult literacy classrooms observed was the writing exercise such as spelling exercises, punctuation exercises and making sentences from a list of words. Exercises were used in ten out of 18 classrooms. This is followed by creative writing (including story completion and poetry) occurring in six classrooms and informational tasks (such as writing a news article or describing a picture) in eight classrooms.

The focus of a high percentage of the tasks was at the word level and in over half the cases these were without an overriding context (i.e., 'fragmented'; for example, looking up the meaning of a list of words in the dictionary, or making words from a group of letters). Some classes seemed to offer a variety of task focuses (e.g., classroom A and G), while others were more narrow (e.g., classrooms H and Q).

Most classes (11 out of 18) relied on handouts and worksheets as their basic materials, although their use ranged between one and nine per class. This use seemed to reflect differentiated activities for individual learners in some classes (e.g., classroom A) and a succession of worksheets used by the same learners in other classes (e.g., classroom F). Reference books (dictionary or thesaurus) were used less frequently than handouts, but across a similar range of classrooms. Real materials (such as newspaper articles and holiday brochures) were used in eight classes. Computers were also in use (in four classes), but with only one class (A) using them heavily. Computer programmes used seemed to be a mixture of specially designed software and general applications, e.g., word-processing.

Overwhelmingly, the intended audience of the learners' writing was someone other than themselves. Teachers were almost always the immediate audience, with peers included less than half the time.

Most commonly, learners tended to be working individually, either doing independent work or receiving one-on-one attention from the teacher, rather than working in pairs or small groups. Whole-class instruction was also common.

While the learners were mostly engaged in task-related writing (including drafting and copying), there were also frequent discussions and time given to planning, as well as reading (either to oneself or aloud). Peer support was also observed. There was also seemed to be an

element of student choice in some classrooms, indicating that students could choose some tasks or materials.

Teachers were observed to be mostly engaged in two activities, either directly instructing learners or supporting them as they undertook writing tasks. They also spent time offering feedback to learners (e.g., comments, praise), as well as assessing their progress/understanding, often through 'question and answer' with the whole class.

While this coding exercise has given us an idea of what goes on in the adult writing classroom, it should also be noted that:

- Only one observation was made in each class and it is therefore debatable whether we picked up the 'usual' practice in that class.
- Observers recorded 'everything'. The researchers contributed to an exercise, during their training, to identify categories that might be useful to describe the activities observed and the result of this had been shared. However, they had no other guidelines to frame their records.
- Coding was carried out by someone other than the observer; inevitably some detail/meaning was lost.
- A different scheme of coding and categorisation might lead to different conclusions.

#### 4.2.4 Features of different classes and types of provision

In addition to the analysis above, the data was examined alongside information on the particular features of each class and the programmes of which they were part. This provides a context for the strategies employed by teachers and suggests a number of factors that need to be taken into account when planning the larger research study planned for phase 2 of the project.

##### *Further Education Colleges*

Six of the observed sessions took place in FE colleges. These classes all met weekly for one-and-a-half or two hours and student numbers ranged from three to eight.

Classes A and B were designated as workshops which explains why the focus in both was on one-to-one teaching. Another reason for this may have been that the students in both classes were working at Entry Level and therefore required a high level of support. This is reflected in the activities of the teachers. In class A the teacher spent most time supporting and giving feedback, and in class B the focus was on instructing and giving feedback. The eight students in class A spent most of their time on writing and silent reading.

Class G provides evidence of the diversity, which can exist within one class. There were eight learners working on literacy and/or numeracy whose abilities ranged from Entry Level 1 through to Level 2. In contrast to classes A and B the students in this class spent most of their time on discussion and oral planning. This class featured the highest use of real materials with students engaged in 'creative' activities as well as the more functional, such as form filling.

In class M there were only three learners whose abilities ranged from E2 to L1/2. There was no independent learning; teaching was either whole class or one-to-one and it seems likely that this was a function of the small number of students. There was no text level work in this class, possibly because the teacher had chosen to focus on technical skills, which, as interviews revealed, were particularly important to students.

Class N contained 5 learners whose abilities ranged from E2 to L1/2. This particular session included a considerable amount of oral work, with students spending most of their time on discussion, reading aloud and participating in an oral exercise. There was a considerable amount of whole-class teaching, but more activities in small groups and pairs than most classes. This may have been because it is easier for students of differing abilities to collaborate on oral rather than written tasks.

Class H provides a contrast to the other FE classes in that it was specifically designed for students intending to progress to GCSE English. The emphasis on whole-class teaching and independent work would be appropriate for students at this level and provide an introduction to the kind of teaching they might expect on a GCSE course. It is also significant that a considerable amount of time was spent on silent reading and that each student's writing was read only by her/himself; indicating a high level of confidence.

### *Prisons*

The two classes that took place in prisons combined both literacy and numeracy. In both classes the learners spent most time learning either individually or one-to-one with the teacher. There are two possible reasons for this. First, there was a wide range of ability, including students who were working at pre-entry level and who would therefore require a high level of support. Second, it is possible that some students worked only on literacy and others only on numeracy, which would have made it difficult to organise whole-class or small group/pairs activities.

### *Work-based training*

Four observations were undertaken in work-based training companies; (E, F, O and P). One of these (E) ran for two hours per week; however two classes (O and P) ran for 30 hours per week and were part of short intensive courses. These classes were slightly larger than most of those observed (they contained nine and 12 students respectively) and this may have been one reason for the higher level of peer support than observed elsewhere. They also covered a wide range of abilities, from pre-entry to Level 2. In classes O and P the teacher spent more time assessing than in other classes. Whether it was assessment for accreditation or some other purpose was not recorded.

### *Local Education Authorities*

Of the two classes run by LEAs, one was a creative writing class (Class I) and the other an English workshop (Class J). In the former students spent most of their time on discussion, oral planning and drafting, whilst the teacher's main activity was supporting students. All of this would be expected in a class whose main aim would be to foster individual talent and encourage learners to experiment with writing and to use it as a means of exploring their own ideas. The English workshop seems to have been similar to the workshops in FE institutions in that the focus was on independent work and one-to-one teaching and learning and the students spent most of their time reading silently or doing task-related writing. Although there were only four learners there was nevertheless a range of abilities from E2 to L2.

The two classes run by voluntary organisations were very similar to those provided by FE colleges and LEAs.

### *Family Literacy*

Classes Q and R were family literacy classes that ran for six hours per week. Parents and children attend some sessions or parts of sessions separately and others together. In both



classes the students were all working at similar levels (E3 to L1). In class Q there was an emphasis on whole-group teaching, which would be appropriate for students of similar abilities. Discussion was the most frequent activity and the audience for the learners' work was often their peers. These are common features of family literacy sessions. In these groups the adults all share a common interest, namely their children and the aim of the learning is usually to promote shared literacy activities within families. Class R was the only class where the students participated in a drama activity.

The links made in the above descriptions, between the features of the class and the teaching and learning strategies employed, suggest that in phase 2 we need to take note of the following factors:

- The nature of the delivery. For example, is it organised as a workshop or drop in session or as an on-going course?
- How wide is the range of ability among the learners?
- At what level(s) are the learners working?
- How large is the class?
- How long is the course and for how many hours each week?
- Are literacy and numeracy being addressed in the same class?
- Does the class have a shared interest, for example, supporting their children's literacy or moving to a GCSE class?

#### 4.2.5 Use of learning resources

Many of the observed classes made considerable use of handouts and worksheets, although their use ranged between one and nine per class. In some cases this use reflected differentiation of activities for individual learners (e.g. class A) and in others a succession of worksheets used by the same learners (e.g. class F). Reference books (dictionary or thesaurus) were used less frequently than handouts, but across a similar range of classrooms. Real materials (such as newspaper articles and holiday brochures) were used in 8 classes.

Looking at those sessions in which handouts were not used, one, Class G (FE literacy and numeracy) used more real materials than most. Class J used reference books, real materials and text material and Class P (work-based training) used reference books, real materials and ICT. Class Q (family literacy) used reference books and real materials. This reflects the focus of family literacy classes on texts which children and their families come into contact with and use in their everyday lives.

The highest use of ICT occurred in class A (nine tasks involving computers), however, the length of the task is significant. Class L had only one task using computers, but only three tasks were set during the session. Class A had the largest range of activity in terms of task focus. Further research might explore whether the use of ICT affects task focus.

### 4.3 Discussion

The primary aim of this review was to provide a picture of current practice in the teaching and learning of writing in the adult literacy classroom. This was explored through the direct observation of adult literacy classes, as well as through interviews and focus group discussions with teachers and learners.

#### 4.3.1 Comparison of responses from teachers and learners

It is valuable to compare the responses of teachers and learners in this study. All seemed to agree that writing was a difficult skill for adult learners to master, with some indication that this could in part be due to negative past experiences and a lack of confidence. Teachers and learners also agreed that the use of IT was beneficial to the development of writing skills.

However, teachers and learners seemed to differ in their conceptualisations of the writing process. While teachers were anxious to emphasise the expressive aspects of writing, learners seemed clear that their focus was on the mastery of mechanical skills before 'progressing' to expression. On the other hand it is important to note that learners' expressed interest in being able to write for a very broad range of purposes, functional, personal and creative.

#### 4.3.2 Comparison of interview responses and classroom observations

Keeping in mind the stated approaches of the teachers to teaching writing and the stated needs of the learners in developing writing skills, it is instructive to re-consider the results of the classroom observations.

In the 18 classrooms observed, the most frequent writing task was the exercise in mechanical skills such as spelling and punctuation. While this does not seem to reflect the teachers' stated emphases on expression, it does reflect their orientation to the needs and goals of the learners. Letter writing, mentioned frequently by learners, was not, however, frequently observed.

Practitioners taking part in the consultation suggested that the level at which the learners were working would influence the time spent on handwriting, spelling and punctuation. They expressed surprise at the high level of decontextualised word level activity coded for the observed lessons and suggested that teaching strategies such as providing vocabulary and spellings prior to a contextualised writing activity might account for some of the occurrences. The small number of references to scaffolding such as the use of writing frames was noted. The use of writing frames, encouraged in the adult literacy curriculum, was seen as one way to strike a balance between the technical and expressive aspects of writing and of adapting writing activities to suit the needs of different learners.

On average, only a small range of task types were available to learners (2.3, with a range of 1 to 5), although learner activities other than unspecified task-related writing averaged 4.5 (range 2 to 9). While these numbers are not excessively low, they do show that at least some classrooms are not offering the 'range' and 'variety' of tasks and activities suggested as necessary by the case study teachers.

Handouts and worksheets were common materials, reflecting the teachers' discussions of their primary resources and also perhaps their concern with addressing the individual needs and interests of the learners. Computers were in use, though not extensively (and the field researchers noted that access to computers was very varied and that when they were available they were not always used).

Learners seemed to be receiving a substantial amount of one-on-one attention from teachers, again reflecting the teachers' commitment to the individual learner. Learner activities also included a fair amount of reading and this supported the teachers' view of the integrated nature of reading and writing.

## 5. Discussion of the reviews of literature, research and practice

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### 5.1 The structure of the discussion

The previous sections of this report have set out the findings of three separate reviews. This final section considers what looking at these findings together can reveal by identifying connecting themes and corroborating data.

The aims of this analysis, as set out in the proposal for the project, were to identify:

- gaps in the knowledge about the teaching and learning of writing with adult basic skills learners
- stages in the teaching and learning of writing skills that present particular challenges to learners and teachers
- questions and hypotheses, relating to effective practice in the teaching of writing, to be addressed in the second phase of this project.

To begin to address these aims the findings of the reviews will be discussed in relation to two questions:

1. How far is critical thinking about adult development of writing skills corroborated by empirical research?
2. How do the results from the review of practice compare with findings from the literature on writing?

Three concluding sections follow this discussion. The first provides comment on the need for further research on writing in adult literacy. The second looks more specifically at the way the findings from phase 1 have informed the hypotheses to be tested in phase 2. The third briefly considers the implications of the study for practice and policy.

### 5.2 How do the findings from the empirical research relate to the body of knowledge in the theoretical literature?

The findings from research studies reveal a number of common themes with critical thinking in the theoretical literature. The extent to which the empirical studies can be seen to support predictions and recommendations for practice is considered below.<sup>4</sup>

There has been an overall shift from a view of writing as a product of technical skills, to a more holistic understanding of writing as a processual event that has social purposes. Some support for approaching writing as a process comes from Stino and Palmer (1999), whose study also included the explicit teaching of a process model of writing. The LVNYC programme described by Fingeret and Danin (1991) also emphasised process aspects such as meaning and communication in writing. Meaning and communication emerged as dominant themes in the theoretical literature on writing development. As such, writing is emphasised as a processual event with intimate and complex links to individual writers' lives. The importance of using material familiar to the learner and activities relevant to the context of learners' lives is highlighted in the theoretical literature.

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<sup>4</sup> All references in this section refer to empirical studies discussed in the review of research.

The importance of linking writing learning to the context of individual learners' lives is, however, also clear in the empirical research. Features of literacy programmes that reported learner progress included the use of teaching materials familiar to learners, the authenticity of materials and communication in the classroom (writing for real life purposes for a real audience), an approach to writing as a social practice and an emphasis on meaning and communication.

The different domains in which writing skills are practiced in learners' lives emerged as an important theme in both theoretical and research literature. Writing outside the educational context was particularly significant. That the concerns and motivations of adults learning to write are located most strongly in the everyday domain is reflected in the empirical research. Cooper and Garside (1996), Perin (1994) and Thistlethwaite (1989) all investigated workplace writing skills. Success was thought at least partly to stem from the programmes' ability to simulate a workplace atmosphere, and to foster appropriate skills such as independence and initiative, as well as tolerance and cooperation (Cooper & Garside). Writing outside the educational context was also reflected in measurement tools that focused on 'out of school' literacy (Fingeret & Danin, 1991; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002).

The research findings reported by Purcell-Gates et al., (2002) directly support the value of using authentic materials and activities. An emphasis on authenticity can be seen in opportunities for students to transfer skills from the classroom to 'real-life' contexts. (Cooper & Garside 1996). This study also stresses practising literacy skills in different situations, and the simulation of work environments. Thistlethwaite (1989) and Fingeret and Danin (1991) also mention the publication of students' work, which provides a real audience outside the classroom.

The theoretical literature on process models of writing emphasises the importance of practice in learning. Additionally, classroom activities are also needed to present learners with more opportunities for writing. Opportunities for literacy practice was a variable reported to have a possible impact upon learner progress in the research studies.

The importance of collaborative and group activities, posited in the theoretical literature, is supported by the results of several research studies that mention participatory learning, (Stino & Palmer 1999), writing as a social practice, student-centred learning and small group instruction (Fingeret & Danin 1991) and the fostering of tolerance, cooperation and peer support (Cooper & Garside 1996).

The potential impact of ICT is supported by Thistlethwaite (1989), who noted the popularity of the use of computers for writing. However, few of the research studies emphasised the use of ICT in the literacy classroom (seven out of 20 studies). Of these studies, only two refer to the use of literacy specific software. This corroborates the literature, which suggests that the use of ICT has more commonly been through the use of word-processing programmes rather than dedicated software.

It is apparent that the empirical research studies selected for review have between them covered many of the factors identified in the theoretical literature as important to the development of writing in adult learners. The close relationship between reading and writing is reflected by the fact that all the studies investigated both skills, some using a common measure of 'literacy'. Some of the factors neglected in the empirical research include the effect of cognitive activities (as described by Rose 1987, Ward 1988 and issues of identity

(Bartholomae 1987). It is also important to remember that the majority of the factors that seemed to 'work' were selected by the authors when discussing the likely correlates of the improvements in writing that were measured. These factors still need to be clearly defined and tested empirically.

### **5.3 How do the findings from the review of practice relate to the literature (research and theory) on writing development in adults?**

Apart from providing a picture of current practice in the teaching and learning of writing in the adult literacy classroom, this review also sought to investigate the extent to which practice is informed by theory and research in the relevant literature. The following section considers findings from the case studies within the themes identified in the theoretical literature. It is worth noting in this context that the responses made by teachers, in both the focus groups and interviews, indicated that the impact of theory and research on classroom practice is very often indirect and is not always recognised by teachers.

#### **Writing as a process**

The review of practice found that both teachers and learners appreciate the distinction, made in the literature, between an emphasis on writing as a means of communication and expression and a focus on the sub-skills and mechanics of writing. In interviews, learners emphasised the primacy of the skills of spelling, punctuation and handwriting. This supports assertions by Schweterman and Corey (1989) that adults hold specific ideas about the need to perfect their spelling before tackling other aspects of writing. Teachers in the review of practice were shown to value the ability of learners to express their ideas over correctness in skills such as spelling, reflecting recommendations in the literature (Bartholomae 1987) and indications from research studies (Fingeret & Danin 1991). However, classroom observations noted a heavy use of exercises that focused on the sub-skills and the mechanics of writing, and (surface) editing activities rather than (deeper) revising. Mlynarczyk (1996) notes that beginner writers often limit their changes to the surface features of writing and proposes that students may not revise effectively because they do not re-examine the content.

Practitioners who contributed to the consultation on the draft reviews commented on the need to consider the extent to which the level of the learners' skills in writing influenced the emphasis placed on the sub-skills of writing by teachers. The high use of one-to-one teaching and independent work observed, linked with the teachers' emphasis on responding to the individual learner's needs may also help to explain this gap between teachers' stated ideas and their practice. The more precise analysis of observed practice in phase 2 should provide data that will illuminate these speculative links and answer more specific questions than can be addressed in the present research. Namely, does the balance between a teaching emphasis on the sub-skills of writing, or expression and content, shift with learner progress? Similarly, does prioritising communication and meaning lead to sub-skills being less systematically taught? Additionally, in the present research we have not been able to comment in any detail on the potential impact the national curriculum and assessment for national qualifications is having and will have on this balance, and the teaching of writing more generally

Russell (1999) found that adults' past experiences might impede their progress. In interviews, teachers concurred: learners often hold assumptions that block their progress. It was not clear, however, whether this was something that would be discussed with learners (as advocated by Greenberg 1987).

### **Writing as a social and political activity**

Purcell-Gates et al., (2002) demonstrated the importance of the use of authentic materials in the literacy classroom. The review of practice observations revealed that there was some use of 'real materials' (e.g., newspaper cuttings) and authentic activities such as filling out evaluation forms and writing journals/diaries. Learners expressed most interest in writing that had an immediate function such as letters and forms. Teachers also mentioned the need to provide activities that were relevant to the learners. However, analysis of the classroom observations indicates that learners were engaged in a substantial amount of activity at word and sentence level that was not contextualised.

The publication of students' writing was a feature of literacy programmes that reported learner improvement in the review of empirical research. The importance of student publication, with concomitant features of learning such as collaborative work and writing for an authentic audience also emerged in the theoretical literature, particularly from the United Kingdom as a potential success factor in learner progress. Student publication was a feature of adult literacy teaching in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s through publications such as 'Write First Time'. This was not mentioned by any of the teachers interviewed in the review of practice, which may simply be that no specific question was asked about publication of learners' writing. It would be worth exploring the extent to which this practice has been continued. The value of publishers such as Gatehouse, which publishes learners' own stories, in inspiring other learners to write, was raised at one consultation event. The Internet provides new opportunities for publishing, for example through the section of the BBC Skillswise website devoted to 'Your Stories' ([www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise](http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise))

The potential value of collaboration in the classroom has been indicated in adult literacy research (e.g., Fingeret & Danin 1991,; Stino & Palmer 1999). Although all the classes in the review of practice had more than one learner, collaboration in pairs and small groups was seen much less than independent work and one-on-one with the teacher. While teachers reported that one-on-one work with the learner and whole-class instruction were important, collaboration was not mentioned as an instructional strategy.

### **Reading and writing**

Teachers viewed reading and writing as integrated skills, with a progression from reading to writing. This reflects dominant themes in the literature (e.g., Jelinek 1988, Troyka 1987, Mace, 2002). In the classrooms observed learners developing their writing skills were involved in related reading activities. In interviews conducted with learners, however, it emerged that learners perceived reading and writing as separate. A large minority thought writing was the more difficult.

### **Use of ICT**

The potential value and limitations of ICT in the writing classroom have been noted in the literature (e.g., Hansman-Ferguson & Wilson 1995, Moeller 1993). These observations are borne out in the review of practice, which showed that while computers were used in the adult literacy classrooms visited, they were not used extensively (in only four of the 18 classes observed). Furthermore, classroom observation revealed that computers were not always used when available. In the light of the Government's expectations of ICT to improve the quality and accessibility of learning (DFES 2003) and the teachers' commitment to meeting the needs of individual learners, this level of ICT use could be viewed as a cause for concern. However, the findings reflect those of research undertaken for the University for Industry (Mellar et al., 2001), which noted that use of ICT with adult literacy and numeracy

learners was patchy and often at an early stage of development. In interviews, teachers stated that they use the Internet as a resource for developing classroom tasks and activities and that they were aware of the potential of computer work for learners, especially to build their confidence. The learners themselves were generally positive about the use of ICT, and wanted more access and training. The motivational impact of ICT on learners has been well documented (Mellar et al., 2001) but there is little research evidence to support the view that the use of ICT, in and of itself, aids the development of writing skills in adult learners. (Grief & Lockhart 2004, Cochran Smith 1991, Posey 1993)

One dimension of adult learning of writing revealed in the review of practice, but not found in the literature is the age of the learner. Learner interviews and focus groups with teachers indicate that younger learners within this sample were more likely to be disaffected and cynical than older learners. It is interesting to note that for those learners who stated that the class had not enabled them to achieve what they wanted, three of the four reasons given mention that the class was 'like school', that it was 'childish' or 'boring'. The report of the focus group discussions notes that younger learners have more recent experience of full-time education. It is also relevant to note that for many younger learners on training courses their involvement in literacy learning is not voluntary as it is for the majority of adult learners.

It therefore seems that writing practices in the adult literacy classroom do reflect to some degree the understanding of teaching and learning writing apparent in the literature. However, it is also clear that further work is needed to bring a clearer understanding of the complex relationship between teaching strategies, student practices, and the development of writing in adults. This will be addressed in phase 2 of the project.

#### **5.4 Further research on the teaching and learning of writing in adult literacy**

The systematic review of research, while identifying some useful studies, served to confirm the view cited in the rationale for the overall project, that there is a paucity of research evidence on the factors that enable adult learners to develop effective writing skills. It underlines the need for studies based on a sound methodology, which would allow results to be accepted with confidence. It also confirms the need for studies with a primary focus on writing. Interesting questions that pertain specifically to writing, for example the balance between emphasis on expression and the need to support learners with skills such as spelling, have rarely been addressed. The investigation of writing as a distinct and important skill would help fill in the gaps in our understanding of how adult learners develop as writers.

Emerging from both reviews of literature (theoretical and empirical) and the review of practice are a number of themes that have been developed into hypothetical indicators of effective practice. These measure the opportunities learners have to engage with authentic materials, tasks and communication; collaboration and small group work; writing as a process; contextualised writing tasks; varied practice and critical thinking about writing. These indicators will be tested in phase 2 and are expanded upon below. (Section 5.5)

In addition a number of other possible factors have also been identified in the studies selected in the systematic review. These include the number of hours of instruction, the degree to which learners' goals coincide with the objectives of the teaching programme, opportunity for practice, the use of ICT and opportunities for socialisation. Further research could usefully subject these to more careful definition and testing.

The discussion of the review of practice has also highlighted questions that would repay further study:

- research on effective practice that takes careful account of the levels of the learners;
- research that takes careful account of the age of the learner. (Comparison between the progress of learners in provision where writing skills are embedded within the learning of other subjects, and in particular vocational learning, would be particularly valuable with younger learners and with learners for whom literacy learning is not a voluntary activity.);
- closely focused research into the impact of different uses of ICT in the teaching of writing. This needs to include: the use of generic programmes such as Word, Powerpoint, and email, the use of specialist software designed to improve writing skills and use of the Internet.

The findings of the reviews provided little evidence on the stages in the learning of writing skills that present particular challenges to learners and teachers. Practitioners who participated in the consultation suggested that the transition from Level 1 to Level 2 provides a significant challenge to learners and might need to be a focus for teacher training. It would be valuable to analyse the nature of the steps learners need to make to write at Level 2 and to identify the practice that best helps them to achieve these.

The scope of the reviews of theoretical literature and research did not embrace research undertaken on the effective practice in schools. It is, however, worth noting the similarity between the themes that emerge from the three reviews outlined above and the results of two research projects that addressed effective practice in the use of the National Literacy Strategy in schools. A study of Effective Teachers of Literacy (Medwell and Wray 2003) found that effective teachers show learners specifically how literacy activities at the whole text, word and sentence levels contribute to meaningful reading and writing and use texts collaboratively with children. Frater (Frater 2001) identifying the features of the teaching of writing at Key Stage 2 in successful schools stresses the priority given to text level work and the emphasis on interesting and purposeful writing tasks with a real readership. He describes how word and sentence level activities were not permitted to be free standing or discrete but served the purpose of the larger writing task. It would be interesting to investigate to extent to which other features of effective practice, identified by these studies in schools, also have impact in adult literacy. For example, the teaching of aspects of writing such as spelling, grammar and punctuation in a systematic and highly structured way (Medwell and Wray 2003) or being 'unflinchingly explicit' (Frater 2001) in the use of metalanguage to discuss the technicalities of writing.

## **5.5 The ways in which the reviews undertaken in phase 1 have informed the design of phase 2**

The second phase of the project is part of the programme of studies of Effective Practice being undertaken across a range of subjects by the NRDC over the period 2003–2006. In line with the other studies in this programme it will be a large-scale correlation study. It will seek to establish whether correlations can be made between observations of naturally occurring practice in the teaching learning of writing and learners' development as writers as measured by their performance on standardised tests and by a questionnaire to ascertain changes in their attitudes towards writing and their use of writing outside the classroom. Fieldwork will be undertaken between May 2004 and July 2005. Data will be collected from 75 classrooms across 25 sites representing the full ranges of organisations that provide adult literacy. Quantitative data will be supported by qualitative data obtained through interviews with a sub-sample of learners, discussion with the teachers as well as reflections of the practitioner researchers who will undertake the fieldwork.



The review of current practice and the seminar for practitioner researchers proved invaluable in informing the design of the instruments to be used in phase 2. The feedback from the consultation exercise also proved extremely helpful in planning the schedule for learner interviews and the detailed coding for the classroom observations.

The most important way in which the findings of phase 1 have informed the research in phase 2 is through the identification of hypotheses relating to the effective development of writing in adult learners to be tested.

Analysis of the three reviews suggests a number of variables that may be significant in the teaching and/or learning of writing. These variables include the use of authentic materials and activities, learners working in small collaborative groups, a collaborative relationship between the teacher and learner, the emphasis placed on the process of writing (and, potentially, critical thinking about the writing process), the emphasis placed on contextualising the writing task, and finally, learner goals coinciding with programme objectives.

In order to test whether these factors can be identified as predictors of learner progress, and thus effective practice, they have been developed as dimensions of teacher and learner practice that will be used in phase 2 classroom observations. Observers will thus rate each session against the set of dimensions. The detailed coding of the observation, as well as the practitioner researchers' overall assessment of the session will support this rating.

*Use of authentic materials and activities* – This dimension measures to what extent the class provided opportunity to use authentic materials and to engage in authentic tasks and communication, as opposed to classroom-only relevant tasks and activities.

*Collaboration and small group work* – This dimension measures to what extent the class focused on collaborative tasks and activities, as opposed to those carried out independently. Additionally, the degree to which teachers and learners have a collaborative relationship to work together on writing tasks.

*Process* - This scale measures to what extent the class focused on writing as a process, as opposed to writing as a product.

*Contextualisation* – the degree to which writing activities (at word, sentence and text levels, for example) are set within the context of a larger text or writing task.

*Varied Practice* – The degree to which the class provides learners with a variety of tasks and activities and opportunities to work in different modes (independently).

*Critical thinking about writing* - The degree to which the teacher focuses learners' attention on the process of writing and the degree to which critical thinking about the process of writing is present in the classroom.

## 5.6 Implications for policy and practice

### 5.6.1 What does the study provide for practitioners?

On completion of the study, guidance for practitioners on the teaching of writing will be produced. At this stage, it is hoped that the theoretical review will provide a useful framework, not only for practitioners' own thinking and reading on the subject of writing, but also for discussion and debate between practitioners and researchers. Together with the annotated bibliography that will be made available on the NRDC website the theoretical review should also form a valuable source for teacher trainers leading courses on the new subject specifications for literacy and practitioners undertaking higher level courses.

In the light of the themes that emerge from the theoretical review and the review of research studies teachers may find it interesting to measure their own classes against the six dimensions listed in the previous section (5.5)

Teachers may also find it useful to consider:

- how they would respond to the questions asked of the teachers who took part on the review of practice (see Appendix G)
- to what extent the writing activities in their classes reflect their own beliefs writing and how it is best learned
- whether the priorities of the learners in their classes, in respect of writing, differ from their own and how they address this in their teaching?

### 5.6.2 Policy issues

In terms of policy it is important to ask to what extent the *Skills for Life* strategy in England and the learning infrastructure that it has put in place supports and encourages the practices that emerge from the study as potential indicators of progress in writing.

The introduction to the core curriculum for adult literacy emphasises the need for activities that integrate text, sentence and word level learning and stresses the importance of contexts for writing that are meaningful to the learner. The individual curriculum elements include an understanding of the process of writing and the suggested activities provide plenty of ideas for collaborative work. However, the organisation of the curriculum with its clear division into text, sentence and word level and the detailed breakdown of individual elements may have the effect of focusing attention on discrete skills. This was suggested by the views expressed in the focus groups for the review of practice. The diagnostic assessment materials that generate learner targets in terms of individual curriculum elements and the widely held belief that everything needs to be 'mapped to the curriculum' may also have the potential to encourage an emphasis on the sub-skills of writing at the expense of activities that focus on learners wider goals for communication. The review of practice found a high use of exercises that focused on discrete skills, especially at word level. While this is not attributed directly to the influence of the curriculum or the diagnostic assessment materials it does indicate a tendency that these resources could serve to reinforce.

The adult literacy core curriculum includes examples of integrated activities for each curriculum level for reading. Similar examples for writing would be useful. Such examples could stress not only the integration of the three levels text, sentence and word, but also the importance of identifying real audiences and purposes for writing that have meaning in terms of the learner's needs and experience. Guidance could also be included on the ways in which reading and writing interrelate.

Of even greater concern is the impact of the National Tests in Adult Literacy at levels 1 and 2. The absence of any free writing within the tests severely limits the skills in writing that can be measured. Given the importance of the tests in relation to national and local targets there is a real danger that the need to get learners through the tests will lead to the teaching of writing being neglected.

In phase 2 of the study fieldworkers will discuss with teachers the ways in which the core curriculum and the National Tests are influencing their teaching of writing.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

It is hoped that the three reviews will each prove of value to researchers working on writing, to teachers pursuing courses in initial or in-service training, to practitioners undertaking advanced studies in literacy and to the trainers who design the courses. Taken together they provide a picture of the current state of knowledge about the development of writing skills in adult literacy and provide some signposts for the direction of further research. It is the role of the research undertaken in phase 2 of the project to provide the more authoritative guidance that the title 'Effective approaches to the teaching and learning of writing' promises.

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# Appendices

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**Appendix A**

Review 2: search results

**Appendix B**

Review 2: item selection, keywording and descriptive map

**Appendix C**

Review 2: summary of information extracted from the nine studies reviewed (in alphabetical order)

**Appendix D**

Review 2: summary of information extracted from the eleven excluded studies (in alphabetical order)

**Appendix E**

Review of Practice: learner interview questions

**Appendix F**

Review of Practice : teacher interview questions

**Appendix G**

Review of Practice: summary report on focus groups provided by research consultants Cragg, Ross, Dawson

**Appendix H**

Review of Practice : summary of coding of observed sessions

**Appendix I**

Review of Practice: feedback from consultation meetings

## Appendix A. Review 2: search results

Search string	Between Years	Database	Date	Items
Adult education + writing	1973-	ERIC	11/10/02	1535
Adult education + writing skills	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	279
Adult education (- funding) + writing	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	1470
Adult education (- funding) + literacy	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	3803
Adult education + illiteracy	1973-	ERIC	11/10/02	561
Adult education (- funding) + illiteracy	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	653
Adult literacy (- funding)	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	5956
Adult literacy + writing	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	1217
Adult literacy (- creative writing)	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	7
Adult education (- creative writing) + illiteracy	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	0
Adult education + writing skills (- creative writing)	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	0
Writing skills (- creative writing)	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	0
Low-literate adults	1973-	ERIC	11/10/02	34
Writing + literacy	1973-	ERIC	11/10/02	7042
Wordpower	1973-	ERIC	15/10/02	5
Writing skills+ research report? -children	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	58
Writing program* + effectiveness - children	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	136
Writing skills + program*	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	4053
Writing program* + literacy -children	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	53
Writing teaching' + literacy -children	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	21
Writing instruction + literacy - children	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	1401
Literacy program* - children + research	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	342
Literacy program* - children + evaluation	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	585
Literacy program* - children + program assessment	1973-	ERIC	17/10/02	4
Adult literacy + writing + learning	1973 -	ERIC	22/10/02	647
Adult literacy + writing + teaching - ESL	1973-	ERIC	25/10/02	410
Adult literacy + writing + learning - ESL	1973-	ERIC	12/11/02	563
Adult literacy + writing - reading + teaching - ESL	1973-	ERIC	29/10/02	98
Adult literacy + writing - reading + learning -ESL	1973-	ERIC	31/10/02	140
Adult literacy +writing + teaching -ESL + research	1973-	ERIC	5/12/02	105
Adult literacy +writing + learning -ESL + research	1973-	ERIC	5/12/02	163
Writing education	Unspec.	Institute of Ed. Library Catalogue	7/11/02	31
Adult literacy	Unspec.	British Library Public Cat.	4/11/02	163
Writing skills	Unspec.	British Library Public Cat.	11/10/02	225
Illiteracy	Unspec.	British Library Public Cat.	11/10/02	140
Writing + literacy	Unspec.	British Library Public Cat.	11/10/02	6
Illiteracy	Unspec.	British Ed. Index	11/10/02	1
Writing + literacy	Unspec.	British Ed. Index	11/10/02	6
Adult literacy + writing	Unspec	Education-line	26/11/02	9
Basic skills + literacy	Unspec	DfES Research webpage	26/11/02	2
Writing skills	Unspec	CERUK	26/11/02	38
Adult literacy	Unspec	CERUK	26/11/02	3
Adult literacy + writing skills	Unspec	CERUK	26/11/02	0

Search string	Between Years	Database	Date	Items
Writing development OR writing difficulties OR writing teaching Unspec	CERUK	26/11/02	7	
Writing	Unspec	LSC	13/12/02	2
New titles	Unspec	Avanti books	18/12/02	52
Basic skills	Unspec	Avanti books	18/12/02	1
Writing	Unspec	Avanti books	18/12/02	7
Education	Unspec	Avanti books	18/12/02	5
Reading and writing Unspec	Avanti books	18/12/02	130	
Key skills (literacy)	Unspec	Avanti books	18/12/02	12
Research Publications: Published Reports	Unspec	DFES	20/12/02	523
Research Literacy	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Literacy Research	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Literacy	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	41
Research	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	78
Primary Research	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Adult Literacy	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	5
Adult Basic Skills	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	6
Research Adult Literacy	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Adult Literacy Research	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Writing Research	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Adult Basic Education	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	1
Writing	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Learning Writing	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Teaching Writing	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Literacy including ICT	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Adult Education + Writing	Unspec	LSC	9/1/03	0
Research	Unspec	Planning Exchange	10/1/03	39
Research Adult Literacy	Unspec	Nfer	10/1/03	8
Research Writing	Unspec	Nfer	10/1/03	15
Current Research Writing Adult Education and Post-16	Unspec	Nfer	10/1/03	16
Current Research Literacy Adult Education and Post-16	Unspec	Nfer	10/1/03	16
Current Research Literacy Teaching and learning	Unspec	Nfer	10/1/03	13
Current Research literacy literature review	Unspec	Nfer	10/1/03	0
Completed Research literacy adult education post-16	Unspec	Nfer	10/1/03	15
Published research, writing post 16 teaching and learning writing	Unspec	Basic Skills Agency	16/1/03	0
Published research, primary research writing post 16	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Published research, writing post 16	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Latest news regarding basic skills	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
News Archive Search	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Information regarding ongoing programmes	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Latest press releases	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Past news and press articles	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Research published research writing	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	8
Recently Published research	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	2
Full listing of published research	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	3
Browse useful links by subject, writing post 16	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Browse useful links by subject, writing, literacy, post 16	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Browse useful links by subject, research, writing, post 16	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0



Search string	Between Years	Database	Date	Items
Browse useful links by subject, literacy, post 16	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	0
Back issues of the Basic Skills Magazine	Unspec	BSA	16/1/03	14
Adult literacy	Unspec	BSA resource centre, London Uni IOE	16/1/03	140
Literacy	Unspec	BSA resource centre, London Uni IOE	16/1/03	104
Writing	Unspec	BSA resource centre, London Uni IOE	16/1/03	40
Research: primary, secondary, adults	Unspec	Literacy Today	31/0/03	3
Writing	Unspec	Literacy Today	31/1/03	10
Research Adult Literacy writing Publications and Resource	Unspec	National Literacy Trust	5/2/03	3
Ongoing research adults and literacy: writing	Unspec	National Literacy Trust	5/2/03	13
Completed research projects post-16 and adult	Unspec	National Literacy Trust	5/2/03	2
"Research Projects"	Unspec	NCSALL	11/2/03	2
"NCSALL Publications"	Unspec	NCSALL	11/2/03	0
ALNARC publications	Unspec	ALNARC	12/2/03	2
ALNARC Forum – Authors and Papers	Unspec	ALNARC	12/2/03	1
"National Center on Adult Literacy – Current projects"	Unspec	literacyonline	12/2/03	0
"National Institute for Literacy – Publications"	Unspec	NIFL	13/2/03	0
Canadian National Literacy Group - Research	Unspec	ABC CANADA	14/2/03	0
Canadian National Literacy Group – Our Publications	Unspec	ABC CANADA	14/2/03	0
OECD	Unspec	OECD	14/2/03	0
National Centre for Adult Literacy - Projects	Unspec	Literacy.org	17/2/03	0
National Centre for Adult Literacy – Publications	Unspec	Literacy.org	17/2/03	0
UNESCO -Publications	Unspec	unesco	18/2/03	0
UNESCO -Survey	Unspec	unesco	18/2/03	0
National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education	Unspec	niace	18/2/03	1
National Learning Network - Reports Language Australia – Publications	Unspec	nln	18/2/03	0
Catalogue – "writing" (search string)	Unspec	languageaustralia	18/2/03	1
The Centre for Literacy Library Catalogue Publications	Unspec	Centre for Literacy in Quebec	19/2/03	1
The Centre for Literacy Library Catalogue – "adult + literacy + writing" (search string)	Unspec	Centre for Literacy in Quebec	19/2/03	1
The Adult Literacy Resources Institute – Special Projects	Unspec	arli.org	24/2/03	0
The Adult Literacy Resources Institute – Publications	Unspec	arli.org	24/2/03	0
National Adult Literacy Database – Resource Catalogue	Unspec	nald	24/2/03	7
National Adult Literacy Database – "adult NEAR literacy NEAR writing OR teaching" (search string)	Unspec	Full NALD site	24/2/03	5
National Adult Literacy Database – Resource Catalogue/"Browse listings by date"	Unspec	nald	24/2/03	1
National Adult Literacy Database – Newsletter	Unspec	nald	24/2/03	1
Gatehouse Books – New Books	Unspec	Gatehousebooks.org.uk	3/3/03	0
Gatehouse Books – Projects	Unspec	Gatehousebooks.org.uk	3/3/03	1
Federation of Worker Writers and	Unspec	ourworld.compuserve.com	3/3/03	0

## Community Publishers

Search string	Between Years	Database	Date	Items
Read Write Plus	Couldn't access anything – try again	DfES	3/3/03	
RAPAL – Publications	Unspec	literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal	4/3/03	0
RAPAL - Bulletin	Unspec	literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal	4/3/03	2
National Literacy Trust – Published Research Findings/Research: 'writing' [search string]	Unspec	literacytrust.org.uk	4/3/03	9
Research, writing	Unspec	Institute of Education	6/3/03	43
Research, publications, writing	Unspec	Institute of Education	6/3/03	43
Adult literacy	Unspec	Institute of Education	6/3/03	149
Writing, research	Unspec	National Adult Literacy Agency (IOE)	6/3/03	18
Research	Unspec	National Adult Literacy Agency (IOE)	6/3/03	1
Writing	Unspec	National Adult Literacy Database	6/3/03	30
Writing, research	Unspec	Institute of Education	6/3/03	547
Writing	Unspec	Eurydice	6/3/03	0
Writing research findings	Unspec	Voice of the Shuttle	6/3/03	0
Writing	Unspec	Voice of the Shuttle	6/3/03	73
Publications, Writing	Unspec	London Language & Literacy Unit	7/3/03	7
Publications, research	Unspec	London Language & Literacy Unit	7/3/03	9
Publications, writing	Unspec	London Language & Literacy Unit	7/3/03	0
Publications, Adult literacy	Unspec	London Language & Literacy Unit	7/3/03	0
Publications, Literacy	Unspec	London Language & Literacy Unit	7/3/03	2
Projects, writing	Unspec	London Language & Literacy Unit	7/3/03	7
Research, writing	Unspec	South Bank University	7/3/03	0
Education Review – "writing"	Unspec	Education Review	20/3/03	5
Journal of Basic Writing	Available online 1996 Vol 15(1) onwards	Journal of Basic Writing	24/3/03	0
Journal of Composition Studies – Archives	Available online 1972 to 1991, TOC only	Journal of Composition Studies	24/3/03	39
Journal of Composition Studies – Current Issue	Available online 1991 Vol 19(3), TOC and some abstracts	Journal of Composition Studies	24/3/03	2
Written Language and Literacy – "writing"	Unspec	Written Language and Literacy	24/3/03	4
British Journal of Education and Work	Available online March 2000 onwards Hand searched 1987 onwards at IoE	British Journal of Education and Work	24/3/03	0
English Today	Available online 1997 TOC Vol 13(1); and 2001 Abstract/Full Text Vol 17(3) Hand searched 1989 onwards at IoE	IoE/ATHENS	24/3/03	0
Journal of Literacy Research	Available online 1996 TOC Vol 28(4) Hand searched 1996 onwards	Journal of Literacy Research	24/3/03 28/3/03	3 7
Literacy and Numeracy Studies (Australia)	Available online 1990 TOC Vol 1(1)	www.cll.uts.edu.au/lrs/cll_lrs_home.html	25/3/03	2

## Appendix B. Review 2: item selection, keywording and descriptive map

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### Item selection

A total of 20 reports were selected in two stages – first a group of 12 on the basis of a systematic search, and then a group of eight on the basis of a non-systematic search.

The first 12 reports were selected as the result of a systematic search through electronic databases and other bibliographies, and hand-searches through journals (these sources had been identified in the protocol). Initially, a total of 34,436 items were located (see Appendix A for a history of the search, including search-strings used, databases and catalogues searched, and number of items located). Item titles and abstracts were then screened and included if the following criteria were met: primary research on teaching and learning of writing in Adult Basic Education, published in English, between 1973 and the present.

This screening narrowed the items down to 261 provisional studies. The full texts of these 261 were obtained, and the same criteria re-applied. This resulted in the sample of 12 items.

A further, non-systematic search was carried out on the advice of the project Advisory Group. In this search, 47 items were selected as further potential candidates based on whether their titles reflected the inclusion criteria. These were sourced through paper and electronic reference lists and bibliographies, the Question 1 item pool, Question 2 items that had been previously excluded due to unavailability, Internet searches using generic search engines, and manual searches through relevant journals.

The inclusion criteria were then re-applied to either the full texts or the abstracts of these items, which resulted in the selection of an additional sample of eight, bringing the total number of reports to 20.

### 3.3.3 Keywording

Based on a series of discussions within the project group, nine keywords were chosen as appropriate to describe the main characteristics of the 20 studies selected. The first four keywords ('generic keywords') were drawn from the Eppi-Centre Educational Keywording Sheet, while the remaining five were developed as keywords specific to this review.

#### Keyword 1: *Study type*

This keyword described the type of study carried out (e.g., outcome evaluation).

**Table 1: Study type**

Code	Frequency	Per cent of total
Outcome evaluation	12	60.0
Process evaluation	6	30.0
Description	3	15.0
Methods	1	5.0

Note. Frequency total may be more than 20 if one or more studies were given more than one code

Table 1 shows that the majority of studies were outcome evaluations, i.e., they attempted to measure the outcome or effect of a particular variable (or variables) on the teaching or learning of writing. Of the 12 studies coded 'outcome evaluation', ten were sub-coded 'pre and post test', meaning that some type of before-and-after measures had been used.

'Process evaluation' refers to studies that focused on 'what went on' in a particular programme. 'Description' refers to studies that were primarily descriptive, and that did not focus on the effects of an intervention or particular variables. Finally, 'methods' refers to a study that dealt with the development of a tutor-training programme.

#### **Keyword 2: Source**

This keyword identified the source of the report (e.g., electronic database).

The majority of the reports (16 out of 20) were sourced from an electronic database, in all but one case from ERIC. One report was located as the result of a manual search through journals, two through bibliographies in other items, while the source of the last report is unknown.

#### **Keyword 3: Status**

This keyword described the publication status of the report (e.g., published).

Eleven out of the 20 reports were published, while the rest were unpublished.

#### **Keyword 4: Educational setting**

This keyword identified the educational setting where the study was carried out (e.g., workplace).

**Table 2: Educational setting**

Code	Frequency	Per cent of total
Adult education	9	45.0
Further education	4	20.0
Community based	3	15.0
Higher education	2	10.0
Correctional setting	1	5.0
Workplace	1	5.0

Note. Frequency total may be more than 20 if one or more studies were given more than one code

Table 2 shows that the studies were commonly set in an Adult Education context, followed by a Further Education context.

**Keyword 5: Programme approach**

This keyword was developed to describe the programme's approach to teaching writing. The two broad categories were authentic literacy practices and skills training. A third approach that could overlap with either was collaboration, and described whether the programme promoted a collaborative relationship between teachers and learners (e.g., students sharing in decision making).

**Table 3: Programme's approach to teaching writing**

Code	Frequency	Per cent of total
Authentic literacy practices	12	50.0
Collaboration	9	37.5
Other	1	4.2
Not applicable	2	8.3

Note. Frequency total may be more than 20 if one or more studies were given more than one code

Table 3 shows that the majority of programmes mentioned in the selected studies included authentic literacy practices, while collaborative practices were found in half the programmes.

**Keyword 6: Teacher orientation**

This keyword described the teacher's orientation towards the learner(s). In other words, were planning and delivery oriented towards the individual or the group? A third category allowed for a mixed orientation.

**Table 4: Teacher orientation towards learner**

Code	Frequency	Per cent of total
Individual	5	27.8
Mixed	4	22.2
Group	3	16.7
No information	3	16.7
Not applicable	3	16.7

From Table 4 it can be seen that, where information was available, more teachers followed an approach geared towards the individual rather than towards the group.

**Keyword 7: Learner level**

This keyword identified whether (yes/no) the effects found in the study varied by learner level. For example, was a particular approach more effective for beginners than intermediate learners?

**Table 5: Whether effects vary by learner level**

Code	Frequency	Per cent of total
Yes	5	27.8
No	1	5.6
No information	9	50.0
Not applicable	3	16.7

Table 5 shows that, in the six studies where information was available, the most reported that effects varied by learner level.

**Keyword 8: Use of ICT**

This keyword identified whether (yes/no) the study emphasised the use of ICT. Yes responses were further sub-coded to note whether the software was generic or literacy-specific.

**Table 6: Use of ICT**

Code	Frequency	Per cent of total
No	10	55.6
Yes	6	33.3
Not applicable	2	11.1

Table 6 shows that a third of the studies reported the use of ICT. Of these six studies, four referred to the use of generic software, while two detailed literacy-specific software.

**Keyword 9: Success factors**

This keyword identified the variables mentioned in the study as contributing towards learner progress in writing. These included hours of instruction, students' learning goals matching programme objectives and teaching strategies. An other category served as a catch-all for any other variables mentioned.

**Table 7: Success factors**

Code	Frequency	Per cent of total
Teaching strategies	14	42.4
Hours of instruction	5	15.2
Students' learning goals	1	3.0
Other	11	33.3
None found	1	3.0
Not applicable	1	3.0

Note. Frequency total may be more than 20 if one or more studies were given more than one code

Sixteen of the 18 studies discussed success factors. Table 7 shows that the success factor most consistently mentioned was teaching strategies (e.g., degree of authenticity, grouping procedures), followed by hours of instruction. The congruence of student goals with programme objectives was mentioned in one study. Other success factors included opportunities for literacy practice, the use of ICT and socialisation opportunities.

**3.3.4 Conclusions and recommendations of keywording exercise**

The keywording exercise identified the basic characteristics of the 20 studies selected to answer question 2 of the literature review. It is clear that few studies have been carried out to investigate the development of writing skills in adult learners. Even in the selected group, only five studies dealt exclusively or primarily with writing. There is therefore an urgent need for further research in this area.

It is positive that many of the studies were evaluative rather than purely descriptive, and that pre and post measures were frequently included. However, almost half the studies were unpublished, and therefore unlikely to have been subjected to any peer review process. The results of these studies may have to be accepted with caution.

It is recommended that, due to the small sample size, all 20 studies be used for the next step of in-depth data extraction, and evaluation of methodological soundness.

## Appendix C. Review 2: summary of information extracted from the nine studies reviewed (in alphabetical order)

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### Title of the paper:

Brooks, G., Davies, R., Duckett, L., Hutchison, D., Kendall, S., & Wilkin, A. (2001). **Progress in adult literacy: Do learners learn?** London: The Basic Skills Agency.

### Aims:

To investigate:

- the progress made in literacy by adults in dedicated basic skills provision
- factors associated with improvement in literacy by adults in such provision.

In addition, the study investigated how good the progress in literacy was in 'national terms', i.e., 'in relation to national adult norms for literacy' and 'in comparison with the performance of school pupils'.

### Participants:

N: Reading: pre-test 2135, post-test 1224; Writing: pre test 1724, post test 937.  
Population of interest: adult literacy students in dedicated basic skills provision.

### Data collection:

- Reading test: two alternate forms (as well as two levels of each form, 'simple' and 'very simple'). 'Half the sample (randomly assigned) took each form at pre-test, and the other form at post-test.' the reading tests simulated 'real-world literacy tasks'. Items were drawn from previous studies. Further details of items are provided.
- Writing test: 'One-sentence writing prompts were also used at pre and post test'. E.g., 'Please write a bit about what you hope to learn (or have learnt) here.'
- Student Profile: collected background data on the students.
- Tutor Questionnaire: collected information on adult literacy teaching, e.g., management support, assessment, planning, etc., from 177 tutors.

### Data analysis:

- Reading test: 'a complex and innovative statistical process was used to equate the test forms'. All items were scaled according to the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) items in the study, and these values were used to calculate scores for each student.
- Writing test: samples were 'analysed in terms of length (number of words), number of errors in various categories (grammar, style, spelling and other orthographic conventions) and quality of handwriting'.
- Student profile and tutor questionnaire: frequency distributions across categories were found for each item.

- 'The reading and writing results were then related to the background variables from the student profiles, plus number of hours of tuition... and several items from the tutor questionnaire.'

#### Findings:

- Reading: 'Students achieved a small but statistically significant improvement in reading.' This 'represented a move from the 19th to the 22nd percentile of the national distribution'.
- Writing: 'Students achieved a very small but statistically significant improvement in writing in terms of length of script and... in quality of handwriting.' Students seemed to have better reading than writing skills.
- Factors associated with progress: Reading: 'Very regular attendance was associated with greater progress', as were the tutor factors presence of classroom assistance, and qualified teacher status of tutors in the area.

#### Overall methodological quality:

This study shows a sound methodological quality. Findings, especially for reading, have good validity and reliability, and are based on a representative sample. These can be generalised with relative confidence.

#### Bibliographic reference

Brooks, G., Gorman, T., Harman, J., Hutchison, D., Wilkin, A. (1996). **Family Literacy Works – The NFER Evaluation of the Basic Skills Agency's Demonstration Programmes.** The Basic Skills Agency.

#### Aims and study type

The aim was to evaluate the extent to which the Demonstration Programmes in Family Literacy achieved their aims:

- to improve parents' own literacy
- to improve parents' ability to help their children with the early stages of learning to read and write
- to boost young children's acquisition of reading and writing.

As well as seeking evidence for the achievement of these aims, the research focused on the processes by which the aims were achieved.

The study follows a cohort of people and so has a prospective design.

#### Population and sampling

Parents who performed at or below Level 1 of the Agency's Communication Skills Standards. Particular priority was to be given to people performing at or below Foundation Level of the standards and it was envisaged that at least 30 per cent of the participants would be from this group.



The four Programmes returned 361 parent profiles and 392 child profiles in the four terms of the evaluation.

The four Demonstration Programmes which are the subject of this evaluation were set up in areas of multiple deprivation in Cardiff, Liverpool, Norfolk and North Tyneside

### Data collection and data analysis

The forms of evidence collected by NFER were:

#### Quantitative data

On parents: - background information  
 - reading attainment  
 - writing attainment  
 - literacy activities undertaken at home with children

On children: - background information  
 - vocabulary development  
 - early reading development  
 - early writing development

#### Qualitative data

- interview with parents
- interviews with Programme Coordinators
- observations of teaching sessions
- teachers' impressions

In addition, the Programme Coordinators supplied NFER with their termly reports to the Agency, with information on parents' attendance, retention, accreditation and destinations, and with a great deal of other relevant information and documentation.

#### Quantitative data-collection instruments

Adult Profile form covering sex, date of birth, ethnic group, first and any other languages, occupation, highest qualification and whether the parent had been on adult basic skills courses before.

Child Profile form covered sex, date of birth, ethnic group and languages. Information on family structures was not collected.

To provide an estimate of their reading attainment, parents were asked on each occasion to complete a three-part cloze (gap-completion) test. To provide an estimate of their writing attainment, parents were asked on each occasion to answer three questions in writing. The writing task for the beginning of the term required parents to write their name and address, the names and dates of birth of their children and short answers to three open questions.

#### Children's vocabulary and literacy development

Information on children's vocabulary, reading and writing was gathered for NFER by the Early Years Coordinators.

For 'writing', the objective was to elicit at each stage the most advanced form of emergent or early writing which the child could produce independently.

For vocabulary and reading: the Peabody Picture vocabulary Test – Revised, Form L, and the Reading Recognition subtest of the Peabody Individual Achievement Tests. These tests were both used in the National Child Development Study (NCDS) in 1992, and the data collected then provided ‘control group’ data for the children in this evaluation. The Peabody data from NCDS provided the necessary quantitative check on the attainment of the children in this study.

Information on literacy-related home activities home activities

Qualitative data collection

Interviews with parents during the courses conducted by three NFER researchers

Interviews with Programme Coordinators (both Adult and Early Years)

Observations of teaching sessions were carried out by the NFER researchers..

### Data analysis

Parents’ scripts were first assessed holistically (impressionistically) on a rising 7-point scale (1=low, 7=high), which reflected the range of performance in the sample as a whole. In addition to the impression mark, the number of lines in the parents’ scripts was counted, and the scripts were assessed according to a detailed analytic scheme. Briefly, it encompassed:

- a set of linguistic categories covering formal features of writing (knowledge of orthographic conventions; knowledge of stylistic conventions in written English; handwriting)
- a set of detailed content categories.

The analysis according to linguistic categories was used as background to the general impression marking and the main findings are reported in the section on parents’ writing attainment. Part of that analysis was based on an error/length ratio calculated by:

- adding together the number of errors in the grammar and style categories
- dividing that total by the number of lines written.

The ratio was calculated because the scripts parents produced at the end of term and at follow-ups tended to be considerably longer than those from the beginning of the term.

No control group of any sort existed for any other forms of quantitative data gathered in this evaluation, since no appropriate instruments had yet been standardised. This meant that the ‘standard’ rate of progress in writing for children of this age-range (or indeed for older children), or for adults on any of the measures taken here, was not known.

Comparisons of children’s and parents’ test performances at different stages are made on the basis of ‘returners’ only. The subsamples of parents who returned for testing at each later stage were ‘self-selected’ (only those who were willing to be re-tested came back, and the rest stayed away), and the subsamples of children who returned were, in effect, selected by their parents. There is the possibility that those parents who had lower initial scores might have a greater tendency not to return for re-testing; in other words, that there might have been ‘differential attrition’. This in turn might have pushed the later average scores up, artificially.

To overcome these difficulties, the test data in those chapters were presented in a way which allowed the results for those tested at each stage to be compared with the results from earlier stages for only the same people, that is, only for returners. In this way, the different numbers of cohorts were allowed for and differences which arose genuinely from improvements by the people concerned could be distinguished from differences which might have arisen spuriously from differential attrition.

## Findings

### Benefits to the children

- The children made greater-than-expected average improvements in vocabulary and reading during the courses and in the 12 weeks after them.
- In writing, they made substantial average improvements during the courses, and in the 12 weeks after them and in the next six months.
- Thus many of the children had benefited in all three aspects of language.
- Some of the specific gains made by children were:
  - The standardised mean score for vocabulary rose from 85 to 93
  - The proportion whose lack of vocabulary would leave them struggling in school fell from 54 per cent to 31 per cent
  - The standardised mean score for reading rose from 84 to 92
  - The proportion whose low reading level would leave them struggling in school fell from 24 per cent to 9 per cent
  - During the courses, the proportion of school-age children who had not yet made the crucial transition to writing words fell from 62 per cent to 43 per cent
- Therefore the initiative was working for the great majority of children; a high proportion of them were better equipped for school learning.

### Boost to the parents' ability to help their children

- There were substantial increases in literacy-related home activities, and these became firmly embedded in family practice.
- Parents also reported substantial increases in their ability to help children with language and literacy and in doing so.
- Parents seemed to feel that a barrier between school practice and home activities had been crossed.
- Parents were beginning to enjoy their own success as they saw their children's progress.

### Benefits to the parents

- 91 per cent of parents who started a course completed it and attendance rates were consistently high.
- During the courses, the parents improved their average reading test scores by 5 per cent of the maximum score, and their average writing score by 10 per cent of the starting level.
- 95 per cent of all the parents attained partial or full accreditation of a level of Wordpower.
- Over half (52 per cent) of the parents responding also referred to a growth in their confidence, and many reported other improvements in social skills.
- The number of parents actively involved in their children's schools increased significantly.
- At the end of the course, over 80 per cent of parents planned to go on studying, and 12 weeks after the course 70 per cent were actually doing a further course.

### Bonus effects

Not only were all the Agency's aims fulfilled, but the Programmes' achievements also

extended considerably beyond the stated targets:

- The Programme acted as women's' access courses.
- All the gains made by parents and children during the course were at least sustained up to nine months afterwards, and in many cases there were further improvements.
- Communication between parents and children improved markedly.
- Parents reported considerable improvement in their ability to communicate with their children's teachers.
- Though the extra courses set up during the lifetime of the evaluation, the Agency's model was shown to be applicable in different settings.

### Human Factors in the Programmes' Success

The most important of these were:

- The clear purpose set by the Agency.
- The careful selection of the Programmes and teachers.
- The focusing of everyone's minds on achieving a great deal in a fixed time.
- Detailed and collaborative joint planning.
- The strong aspirations and motivation that parents brought to the Programmes.
- The clear picture given to parents of what they could achieve for themselves and for their children.
- The joint purpose and group cohesion achieved by parents.
- The excellent and reflective teaching.
- The massive boost given to the parents' confidence.
- The genuinely intergenerational nature of the courses.
- The creative synthesis in the joint sessions, with their immediate feedback, the sense of achievement they gave parents and the enjoyment and learning they gave children.

### Quality

Medim-High. There is very detailed reporting on the methods of data collection and instruments used, gives example of questions asked and presents forms that children and adults completed in the report, charts and tables of data are presented showing mean scores and frequencies. However, because of the nature of the data collected we have to rely solely on the authors' interpretation of the findings.

### Title of the paper

Cooper, M. & Garside, S. (1996). Are literacy and numeracy competencies achieved by Newstart clients transferred to the clients' real-life context? In J. J. Cumming & C. E. van Kraayenoord (Eds.), *Adult literacy and numeracy: Assessing change*, 117-138. Melbourne: Language Australia Publications.

### Aims:

The aim was 'to determine whether competencies achieved during the Newstart programme were transferred to other contexts' (Newstart is a 200-hour vocationally oriented course for unemployed people to improve their literacy and numeracy skills).

### Participants:

N: 10.

Population of interest: Newstart students who had achieved literacy and numeracy competence in a particular curriculum (CNL03, the certificate of vocational access).

### Data collection:

- Semi-structured interviews were carried out to collect information from participants as well as from representatives of relevant 'communities of practice' – teachers at the college, supervisors at worksites and a case manager from CES (Commonwealth Employment Service). Interviews lasted up to one hour, with one researcher asking questions and another recording the information.
- Interviews with participants: questions covered 'their use of the literacy competencies achieved on the Newstart course in other contexts'. Participants were also asked to recall actual events in various contexts where they had used literacy skills (critical incident approach) – they 'were asked to recall a time when things went really well, a time when they had a problem to solve and they did something about it, and a time when things did not go well'.
- Participants also rated, on a 3-point scale, their perceived ability to use Newstart competencies in other contexts.
- Interviews with representatives from communities of practice: questions were related to the norms and literacy practices of each community. Questions were asked, for example, about location and layout, expectation of literacy behaviour and the values and concerns of the community.

### Data analysis:

There were no direct details of how data were analysed. However, from the presentation of results, it may be inferred that some sort of categorisation and frequency count of responses was carried out.

### Findings:

From participant interviews:

- Rating scales: all 10 participants 'felt confident about using the majority of their stated literacy and numeracy competencies'.
- Interview responses showed that the 'ability to transfer competence is not only about having the knowledge but it is about knowing how to use that knowledge and having a belief in yourself being able to use the knowledge in an unfamiliar context'. Also needed was a willingness to accept mistakes. Participants also gave examples from when literacy/numeracy events went well, and when there were problems. It seemed that 'successful transfer (was) most frequently related to "near" transfer of skills', e.g., measuring in metric, as opposed to 'far' transfer; e.g., letter writing in a different context.

### Overall methodological quality:

The overall methodological quality of the study may be judged as about moderate. Attempts were made to produce valid and reliable findings and data were gathered from different sources. However, this conclusion has to be qualified by the fact that there were gaps in

reporting (e.g., of data analysis). Further caution in generalising from these results is advised due to the small sample size. However, the findings are reported in some detail, and seem to fulfil the descriptive aims of the study.

### Title of the paper

Fingeret, H. A., & Danin, S. T. (1991). "They really put a hurtin' on my brain": Learning in literacy volunteers of New York City. Raleigh, NC, USA: Literacy South.

### Aims:

The aim of the study is to evaluate the impact of a literacy programme (Literacy Volunteers of New York City) in terms of 'changes in students' literacy skills', 'changes in attitudes and self-concept related to literacy development' and 'changes in involvement in literacy tasks outside the programme'.

### Participants:

N: 102 students, 20 tutors, 16 staff members.

Population of interest: students enrolled in the literacy programme (7 centres) and tutors and staff members at these centres.

### Data collection:

Focus group interviews:

- Students: the topic for discussion was experience in the literacy programme, with the general themes of student goals and 'changes in literacy skills and practices inside and outside the programme'. Interviews were audio-recorded.
- Tutor committee: questions covered view of self as tutor, view of programme, and view of students.
- Centre directors: questions covered critical incidents, emerging and changing policies, evaluation decision-making structure, student issues and improvements in programme.

Observations:

- Students: focus groups were observed during an instructional session. Observations recorded physical setting, social environment, roles, programme activities and participant behaviours, informal activities and nonverbal communication. Also observed was the 'last student Pre-enrolment Program (orientation) meeting'.
- Tutors: tutors were observed during three stages of training: 'during a session on how to instruct writing', 'while on-site working with students' and 'the first whole group session after their on-site experience'.
- An annual 'celebration' of students' writing was also observed.

Individual interviews:

- Students: these were mostly administered outside the centre. Two or three interviews were carried out with each student and lasted one-and-a-half to two hours. Questions referred to experiences in the programme, changes seen, literacy skills used outside the classroom and their relationships (and how these have changed since starting the programme). In four of these cases, a family member or friend was interviewed as well. Drop-outs from the

programme were also interviewed.

- Tutors: these were unstructured debriefing interviews with tutors before and after observations.
- Staff: interviews carried out with key staff such as student advocates, the Education Director, etc.

Student test scores: these were standardised test scores from the Test of Adult Basic Education and the Adult Basic Learning Examination and were being generated as part of the programme, at 50-hour intervals. A minimum of two test-scores were collected in as many cases as possible (261).

Student writing samples: Two writing samples with a 50-hour or greater interval between them were collected from as many students as possible (234). These were generated as part of the programme.

#### Data analysis:

Qualitative data analysis (i.e., focus groups, interviews and observations):

- Data analysis seen as iterative and recursive with data collection and theoretical frameworks.
- Coding of data was inductive, where 'categories or codes came from the data itself'. Consensus was reached between both coders, after which a preliminary analysis was carried out.
- Findings were related back to the original evaluation questions, and organised along three dimensions: 'Skill change measured', 'change in students' literacy behaviours' and 'change in students' self-concept'.
- Member check: the preliminary analysis was presented to representatives of the study participants and stakeholders for confirmation and feedback.
- The analysis was completed, and the data 're-examined for theoretical validation'. Accuracy was again checked through sharing with selected stakeholders and participants.

#### Quantitative data analysis:

- Student writing samples: samples included were those with the widest possible interval of time between them, and also those that showed minimal editing. This reduced the sample to 96. Each was scored according to a scheme that reflected content and organisation, vocabulary, structure and mechanics. Each dimension was scored on a 4-point scale. Difference scores were calculated for each student.
- Student test scores (reading): limitations of the test score data (e.g., some beginning scores missing) led to the selection of a representative sample of 114 that 'reflected varied grade levels at entry, and varied lengths of time in the programme'. 'Gain scores' were calculated for each student's reading scores. A regression analysis on the later test scores examined the 'relationship between the length of time students were in the programme and their gain score'. An ANCOVA also controlled for the 'differences in students' reading ability' at entrance to the programme.

#### Findings:

Qualitative findings:

- Responses (from 'students' testimony, the perspectives of members of some students' inner social networks..., judgements of tutors and Centre Directors') agree that students' literacy

skills are changing and developing. For example, some students can now write cheques, fill out application forms, read to their children, etc.

- Findings show that 'students experience positive change in attitudes and beliefs in a number of areas'. For example, some students are now willing to 'take risks with new literacy practices', feel more self-confident, etc.
- Responses reflect changes in literacy practices outside class, especially in public literacy acts taking place in private situations, e.g., formal correspondence, paying bills.

Quantitative findings:

- Writing samples: mean difference scores showed that the largest gains were seen in students who had spent the shortest time in the programme, i.e., 'rapid gains are seen in the initial stages of instruction'. The difference in scores was not, however, tested statistically.
- Reading test scores: the average gain in scores was found to be not related to the length of time in the programme. Also, the ANCOVA showed no significant effects on gain 'based on length of time in programme, grade level at entry', or their interaction. The authors note that the qualitative data reveal that students felt that the tests were 'unrelated to their experience in the programme and unrelated to their knowledge about literacy'. They agree that this calls into question the validity of this tool.

#### Overall methodological quality:

The overall methodological quality of the study is high. The triangulation of data, the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative data, the repeated attempts to cross-validate findings, all serve to increase the confidence with which we can accept the results.

#### Title of the paper

Perin, D. (1994). **Relationship between student variables and pre-post gain in a workplace literacy program**. New York: CUNY, Center for Advanced Study in Education.

#### Aims:

The aim of this study was to examine whether the amount of gain in literacy measures taken pre and post workplace literacy instruction could be predicted by student demographics, newspaper reading practices and knowledge of current affairs, hours of instruction and number of learning goals held by students.

#### Participants:

N: 413.

Population of interest: Mental Hygiene Therapy Aides (MHTAs).

#### Data collection:

- The first three instruments were developed specifically for the programme)
- MHTA Reading Test: consisting of 'a passage of approximately 500 words that simulated a patient treatment report, followed by 14 literal and inferential short-answer comprehension questions'.
- MHTA Writing Test: the task here was to write a description for a co-worker of 'the most



difficult patient or the most interesting patient you've worked with'.

- MHTA Self-Efficacy Scale: 'Participants had to rate their confidence in their ability to accomplish 15 different job-specific literacy tasks'.
- Test of Applied Literacy Skills (TALS), prose section (reference provided).
- Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) (reference provided).
- Further 'data on student demographics, newspaper reading practices and knowledge of current affairs, and students' learning goals were drawn from registration forms'. (Description and examples of questions provided.). The number of hours of instruction were taken from attendance rosters.
- The author notes that standardised procedures were followed in administration of the tests.

#### Data analysis:

Scoring details are provided for each measure.

Mean scores were determined for each pre and post measure and compared by t tests. The discrete and nominal predictor variables 'were examined separately in relation to each of the five post scores, with the pre score as a covariate'. 'The continuous variables... were each examined using partial correlations with the post scores, controlling for the pre score'.

No worked examples of data analysis were provided. Missing data were acknowledged.

Post hoc data analysis on writing test results: 'Two extreme groups were created, students who showed pre-post gain on the writing test of 5 or more points... and students who showed no change or a 1-point change, up or down, from pre to post'. These two groups were then 'informally' compared on the predictor variables.

#### Findings:

Significant pre and post gains were found on all measures except the TALS prose.

'Three significant relationships were found between the amount of literacy gain and the other variables. The number of hours spent in instruction was related to gain on the MHTA Reading Test and the MHTA Self-Efficacy Scale. Self-reported knowledge of current affairs was significantly related to the MHTA Self-Efficacy Scale.'

Informal comparisons of extreme groups (A=large gain on writing test, B=small or no gain) showed that group A was characterised by 'a tendency to follow current affairs, frequency of newspaper reading, a match between the worker's learning goal and the purpose of the course, higher education level and educational credentials and possibly lower age and fewer years on the job'.

#### Overall methodological quality:

The overall methodological quality of the study seems good. Both pre and post measures were used, and standardised procedures were followed. In addition, post hoc analyses were acknowledged as informal and exploratory.

### Title of paper

Posey E. (1993) **Word Processing in the Basic Writing Classroom: The Promise of Classroom Research**. *Teaching English in the Two Year Classroom* 20: pp23-30.

### Study type:

Evaluation: Researcher-manipulated

The study is a trial with a before and after design, and non-matching intervention and control groups with participants self-selecting to each group.

### Study aims

The author studied student's basic writing processes and finished papers to determine whether word processing changes basic writers attitudes toward writing and whether these changes result in improved writing. p.25

### Data collection

The study involved 13 students enrolled in one section of basic English composition for a semester. The students scored below 40 on the test of standard written English portion of the SAT but scored above 290 on the verbal portion or scored between 12 and 19 on the ACT English test. These students were initially assigned to a basic writing class on their ACT English or SAT TSWE test scores; they then completed a writing sample to confirm that they were correctly placed. The students were advised that they were participating in research to improve writing skills, but no expected results were shared with the group. During the first week of class the tutor recruited volunteers to do writing assignments using word processing. None of them had used word processing before but all had at least rudimentary typing skills. Six of them elected to use the computers and seven opted to be in the pen and paper group.

All students completed a forty-minute timed writing sample both at the beginning and the end of the semester to be used as a pretest and posttest for more detailed study. Three raters agreed on pre and post test scores for each participant. Thereafter the individual scores were compared between pre and post test, and between groups, in order for the author to arrive at his/her conclusion on the significance of the findings. No tests for statistical significance are reported.

### Findings

The data collected as a result of this study suggest, as have other studies, that the greatest advantage of word processing may be that basic writers who use it write more. The students who used word processing perceived that they wrote more and that they put more effort into their writing. All of the students in the class were taught revision strategies in class, through peer editing and while conferencing with tutors. The students in the computer group, however, for all of their extra writing effort, did not seem to revise in ways that were substantially more beneficial than did the students in the non-computer group.

The primary trait scoring results on the pre-tests and pro-tests did not support that word processing per se stimulated better writing - at least not on in-class, timed writing prompts.

Although some students in each group were able to demonstrate improved scores on the post-test, the computer users did not improve over those not using computers. Again, as was true when they revised, each student's writing improvement seemed to depend more on individual student effort and ability rather than on whether they used word processing.

Pre- and post-tests are scored on a scale of 1-4, where a score of 4 is the highest.

#### Control group (pen and paper)

	Pre test	Post test
Student 1:	2	2
Student 2:	3	4
Student 3:	2	3
Student 4:	1	3
Student 5:	3	2
Student 6:	3	2
Student 7:	1	1

#### Intervention group (computer)

	Pre test	Post test
Student 1:	2	2
Student 2:	3	2
Student 3:	2	2
Student 4:	1	2
Student 5:	2	2
Student 6:	2	3

#### Title of the paper

Purcell-Gates, V., Degener, S. C., Jacobson, E., & Soler, M. (2002). 'Impact of authentic adult literacy instruction on adult literacy practices'. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 37(1), 70-92.

#### Aims:

To examine the relationship between two aspects of instruction ('degree of authenticity of the activities and texts employed in the literacy class' and 'degree of teacher/student collaboration around activities, texts, assessments and program governance') and 'change in out-of-school literacy practices of the students, both in frequency per type of practice and in types of practices'.

#### Participants:

N: 159 (out of 173) adult literacy students, in 77 classes.

Population of interest: adult literacy students, with literacy levels ranging from 'preliterate to 11+ grade levels'.

### Data collection:

Classroom data protocols were used to gather data on authenticity of materials and activities and teacher/student collaboration. Three protocols tapped three different sources (teacher, students, observer) to allow triangulation of data.

Teacher questionnaire: short-answers, check-off items, Likert scales. 'The items elicited information about specific literacy activities and their purposes, materials and texts read and written, the involvement of the students in the decisions to use these materials, the extent to which teachers felt the activities and materials reflected real life activities and materials, the extent to which the students collaborated in choosing these activities and texts, how student work was assessed and the extent to which students were involved in the assessment and the extent and type of student involvement in the overall program and program administration and policies.'

Class observation protocol: allowed holistic descriptions plus Likert scales. To be completed following the class observation.

(Group) Student interview protocol: asked volunteers from the class for descriptions of class activities and texts, which were then rated (on Likert scales, recorded by vote) for authenticity and collaboration.

All three protocols were piloted on non-participating classes. No examples of items are given.

Student home literacy questionnaire: dealt with reading and writing outside the classroom. 'The questionnaire included 26 items pertaining to adult reading, 14 items pertaining to adult writing, seven items pertaining to adult-with-child reading and three items pertaining to adult-with-child writing.'

'For each item, the students was asked (a) in the past week, did you read/write X? (b) Can you show me or tell me about an example? (c) (If no) Have you ever read/written X? (d) (If yes) When was the first time you did this sort of reading/writing (e) How often? (f) Do you still do this sort of reading/writing?' Open-ended questions were also included, to cover items not mentioned in the questionnaire. Details of item origin and piloting of questionnaire are provided. Also details of provisions for Spanish-speaking and ESOL students.

### Data analysis:

Class data: information from the three classroom data protocols were entered into a matrix (details provided), and an 'authentic' plus a 'collaborative' score were assigned 'holistically' according to (provided) criteria. No worked example provided. Details of how inter-rater reliability was achieved, is provided.

Home literacy practices data: relevant information from Home Literacy Practices Questionnaire was entered into a matrix (details provided). 'Change' was decided 'based on the questions that asked about dates of beginning the class, dates that practices began, and the direct questions about beginning the practice or engaging in it more frequently'.

Further analyses were not performed on individual literacy practices; instead, all practices and respondents 'were placed on a common scale', using Item Response Theory (IRT).

According to the authors, 'when aggregating responses over the entire set of items answered by each respondent, the reliability of the resulting scale is much higher'. This resulted in a score for each student, 'estimating a propensity to, or probability of, change for each literacy practice'. 'IRT scaling was also conducted to create a scale of literacy practices engaged in by the first administration of the Home Literacy Practices Questionnaire... (producing) a single score for each respondent, estimating that respondent's propensity to, or probability to engage, in literacy practices.' No worked example provided.

Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) was used to investigate the effects of authenticity and collaboration on change in literacy practices. In the model, both respondent-level predictors (attendance, incoming literacy level, gender, whether English speaker, whether one-on-one tutoring, days from starting class) as well as classroom-level predictors (hours of class, authenticity, collaboration, whether classroom format was ESOL/Adult Basic Literacy/family literacy) were considered significant enough to be included. Further details of the modeling process are provided.

Lastly, the HLM and IRT models were synthesised to 'determine the predicted impact of increasing authenticity... on the number of literacy practices reported as changed'.

#### Findings:

Literacy engagement and change scales:

- Literacy practice engagement scale: 'the distribution of the scaled scores had a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1... all but two practices had thresholds of less than 0. This indicates that at the time of the first administration of the survey, most respondents had engaged in most of the literacy practices included in this survey.' Examples are provided to help interpretation of the scale.
- Literacy practice change scale: 'about two thirds of the literacy practices had thresholds of larger than 0. This indicates that most respondents had not reported change in most of the literacy practices included in the survey.' Examples are provided to help interpretation of the scale.

HLM: 'the final respondent-level model included three... predictors: (a) literacy level of the student upon entry to the class..., (b) whether or not the student was in an ESOL class, and (c) the total number of days the students had attended the class prior to the first administration of the home literacy practices questionnaire. The final classroom-level model of the respondent-level intercepts included only one predictor: the degree of authenticity of materials and activities in the class...' 'There was no statistical effect of the degree of collaboration between students and teacher on reported change in literacy practices.'

Synthesis of HLM and IRT models ('to determine the predicted impact of increasing the authenticity in a classroom on the number of literacy practices reported as changed'): according to this analysis, most students who moved from instructional contexts of low to high authenticity would show an increase in changed literacy practices by more than 50 per cent. This effect 'is greatest for those students who would change least in a highly (inauthentic) classroom'.

#### Overall methodological quality:

Considering the repeated attempts to maximise validity and reliability in data collection and

data analysis, as well as the choice of analytical design and tools to maximise meaningful results within the constraints of the question and characteristics of the target population, this study reflects a sound methodology that could serve as a model for other research in this area.

### Title of the paper

Stino, Z. H., & Palmer, B. C. (1999). 'Motivating women offenders through process-based writing in a literacy learning circle'. **Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy**, 43(3), 282–291.

### Aims:

The aims of the study are to show how 'process-based writing instruction in a participatory, gender segregated learning circle leads to increased motivation and improved writing skills'.

### Participants:

N: 10.

Population of interest: 'adolescents and adults (women) who have received court sentences for drug or alcohol sales or abuse', remanded at a correctional facility and attending a General Educational Development class as part of their treatment.

### Data collection:

- Essays: writing performance was measured via the official half-length General Educational Development Official Practice Tests, at 1, 9 and 18 weeks. Administration was carried out according to the test manual.
- Questionnaires: this was an 'after' measure only. Students completed a short questionnaire with the following questions: Has this class helped you to improve you reading and writing skills? Has being in this class helped you to feel better about yourself? Do you like being in a small group in the classroom? Is it better for this class to be women only? (Further elaboration was also requested for each question.)

### Data analysis:

- Essay scores: essays were scored according to the prescribed standards for essay scoring – two readers scored each essay holistically, on a 6-point scale. If they differed by more than one point, the essay was re-scored by a third reader. Individual scores were averaged to give class mean scores, and the mean scores were compared between occasions 1 and 2, and 2 and 3, by t tests.
- Questionnaires: the percentage of participants agreeing or disagreeing with each question was determined, as well as popular reasons for these answers.

### Findings:

- Essay scores: the class mean essay scores were found to increase significantly between pre and mid tests. Mean essay scores did not increase significantly between mid and post tests.
- Questionnaires: most students 'agreed that the class helped them improve their reading and writing skills'. The 'also indicated that participating in the class made them feel better about

themselves'. A majority also liked being in a small group and preferred the women-only characteristic of the class.

#### Overall methodological quality:

The overall methodological quality is moderate. Validity and reliability were addressed by the use of an official essay test, which was also cross-validated by the subjective responses of participants from the questionnaire. However, there is at least one methodological concern, in that the use of repeated paired comparisons (the use of two sets of t tests on pre and mid, and mid and post measures) may have led to inappropriate conclusions of significance. A more appropriate test would have been to test all three measures at once with an analysis of variance.

For this reason and also due to the small sample size and lack of a control group, caution is advised in generalising from these results. However indications from the study may provide an interesting basis for further research, especially in similar populations.

#### Title of the paper

Thistlethwaite, L. (1989). 'Reading, writing, and cooperative learning in a JTPA summer program'. **Adult Literacy and Basic Education**, 13(2), 81–98.

#### Aims:

The aims of the study are to measure the effect of a three-week job training programme on attitudes to reading and writing, performance in reading, ability to communicate in writing and knowledge of reading and writing strategies.

#### Participants:

N: 36.  
Population of interest: 'disadvantaged youth'.

#### Data collection:

Formal assessment:

Attitude survey: 45 items 'measured participants' attitudes regarding reading and writing, self evaluation of reading/writing ability and attitudes toward independent and cooperative learning'. Examples of these are provided when reporting results.

'SDRT' (A 'standardised reading test') comprehension subtest: No examples provided.

Pre and post test writing samples

Concepts of reading and writing: 5 open-ended questions (all 5 provided).

Informal assessment also made of the 'general attitude toward program and participation in the reading/writing activities'.

**Data analysis:**

- Attitude survey: pre and post scores were compared using t tests.
- SDRT comprehension subtest: pre and post scores were compared using t tests.
- Pre and post test writing samples: scored 'holistically'.
- Concepts of reading and writing: 'free response' answers scored according to specific criteria (given). Pre and post scores compared by range and distribution of scores, as well as t tests.

No worked examples provided.

**Findings:**

- Attitude survey: significantly positive gain in attitudes toward reading and writing. However, this was only for males. (Nine items were noted that showed the largest gain).
- SDRT comprehension subtest: 'significant gains were made by the participants most severely disabled in reading.'
- Writing samples: while scorers noted improvement within scoring level, 'the improvement was typically not great enough to advance a student's score to the next level'.
- Concepts of reading and writing: range and distribution of scores improved from pre to post test. 'A t test comparison of pre test and post test assessment scores indicated that the mean gain... was significant.'
- Informal assessment of attitudes: attitudes at the end of the programme were judged to be more positive than attitudes at the beginning – 'more open and trusting'. Most positive were 'older, less able readers'.

**Overall methodological quality:**

The methodological quality of the study is fairly good, including both formal and informal assessment. However, the results should be generalised with caution, as there are questions regarding the representativeness of the sample, the short time frame of the study and other points with respect to reliability. However, the results would form a good basis to inform the author's own programme and to provide indications for future research.



## Appendix D. Review 2: summary of information extracted from the eleven excluded studies (in alphabetical order)

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### Title of the paper

Askov, E. N., & Forlizzi, L. A. (1990). Older displaced writers write to read: A computer-assisted, work-related basic skills program using the process approach to writing. Final report. University Park, PA: Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University.

### Aims:

The aims were to:

- evaluate the effectiveness of a computer-based literacy programme for students in the over 40's age group
- evaluate the effectiveness of the programme to develop job-specific reading and writing instruction.

Further aims related to the development of guidelines for a process approach to writing, and the development of a programme manual.

### Participants:

N: 13.

Population of interest: adult literacy students over the age of 40.

### Data analysis:

Students' reading ability:

- Slosson Oral reading Test (SORT): before and after scores were compared to note changes.
- Bader Reading and Language Inventory: before and after scores were compared to note changes.

Attitude questionnaires: responses were compared from different times in the project, to note 'changes in attitudes about using the computer as an aid to learning'.

Closeout surveys: responses were summarised.

Writing samples: number of words per sample was measured and compared across revisions of the same piece and across all first drafts. Types of changes made across revisions were also noted.

### Findings:

Students' reading ability: only one student was re-administered the SORT and Bader reading assessments, as the other students did not accumulate enough intervening hours.

- Slosson Oral reading Test (SORT): improved from 1.4 to 1.5 (grade level).
- Bader Reading and Language Inventory: improved from 'could not complete' to pre-primer level.

Attitude questionnaires: although intended to be collected throughout the project, these were apparently obtained only at the end.

- Students: the questionnaire was completed by eight students; responses were summarised from six students who put in at least five computer hours. Students 'believed that using the computer was helping to improve their literacy skills, and their attitudes towards literacy skills'. They 'enjoyed using the computer', although 'by the end of the project, many still felt unsure of their ability to use the computer'.
- Tutors: the questionnaire was completed by 13 tutors; responses were summarised from seven tutors who completed five computer hours. Tutors 'were confident in their ability to use the computer as an instructional aide', but 'were uncertain about the programme's ability to assist their students in developing reading skills'. However, those tutors who 'frequently used the word-processing module with their students to write text felt that the programme helped improve their students' writing skills'.

Closeout surveys:

- Students: the survey was completed by eight students, and the responses of six who had put in at least five computer hours were summarised. Overall, 'students enjoyed working with the computer', but 'disliked the slowness of the courseware, and they disliked the sound of the speech synthesizer'.
- Tutors: the survey was completed by twelve tutors, and the responses of six who had completed at least five computer hours were summarised. It was apparent from the findings that the courseware was used in different ways by different tutors. Tutors liked best 'that it gave their students confidence'. Like the students, the tutors 'disliked the slowness of the system and the sound of the speech synthesiser'.

Writing samples: the results of two students are considered, these two being the only ones to use the word processor long enough so that improvement in writing could be assessed. The students' writing showed improvement after even 'a small amount of work with the word processor'.

- The number of words increased across revisions and across first drafts.
- Types of changes made: One student made changes involving the clarification of meaning, while the other made 'low-level changes involving spelling or punctuation'.

Guidelines were developed for a 'writing instructional approach using the process approach to writing and emphasising the needs specific to older displaced and underemployed workers'.

A programme manual was also developed, including guidelines and procedures.

#### Overall methodological quality:

The overall methodological quality of the study is low-moderate. While attempts were made to produce reliable and valid findings, these were offset by the small sample size, and inability of many tutors and students to cover enough computer hours to contribute meaningfully to the findings. Another disadvantage was the lack of a control group for comparison purposes, and the mixing of younger students with the target 'over 40s'. The results may also have been affected by technical problems with the courseware and the opportunity for the students to

have benefited from the programme may have been affected by the tutors' lack of training.

The findings, however, would be useful in informing future research in the area.

#### Title of the paper

Fahy, P. J., and Morgan, D. (1999). 'Seeking the 'phenomenological nod': Report of an inquiry into current writing practices in adult literacy programs in western Canada.' Unpublished report. Note: a shorter version of this paper was published in *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XLV(2), Summer, 209–211.

#### Aims:

'To explore the real state of writing instruction in... Adult Literacy programs'.

#### Participants:

N: Telephone interview: 60 Delphi computer conference: Not reported.  
Population of interest: adult literacy tutors/instructors/coordinators.

#### Data collection:

- Telephone interview: questions covered (a) programme activities (e.g., What kind of writing is being done?) (b) 'participant's views on and their satisfaction with the teaching of writing' (rating on a scale of 1 or very unimportant/unsatisfied to 5 or very important/satisfied), e.g., 'satisfaction with materials available for teaching writing' and 'importance of writing as a life skill for students', and (c) open ended questions on attitudes towards writing.
- Delphi activity: questions were posed by email and responses were interpreted, summarised and fed back to the participants by the moderator, who also developed subsequent questions. For example, 'In what way(s) do literacy students benefit from the practice of writing?' There were four questions in all.

#### Data analysis:

- Telephone interview: all answers were recorded in writing. Frequencies of programme activities were determined. Mean ratings of satisfaction and importance on each aspect were found and compared across provinces. Most common attitudes were also determined from free-response questions.
- Delphi activity: subjective evaluation of participants' degree of agreement regarding the value of writing as a literacy skill and its impact on the lives of learners.

#### Findings:

- Telephone interview: '78 percent of writing in literacy-level programmes consisted of three types: spelling and grammar drills/skills (35 per cent), personal stories and letters (28 per cent), and journals (15 per cent)'. Tutors 'recognised writing as an important life skill' and literacy skill. 'With the exception of the amount of time to prepare and to teach writing, practitioners were generally positive about the writing portion of the program.'
- Delphi activity: this 'added a deeper understanding of some of the experiences of being a writing teacher'. Participants agreed on the value of writing as a literacy skill and its impact on the lives of learners.

### Overall methodological quality:

This study aims to describe the 'real' state of writing instruction in adult literacy programmes. The telephone interview and follow-up Delphi activity reflect this with varying reliability and validity. However, an overall weakness in the methodology is that the results rest on the responses of the tutors only and are therefore open to bias. There is no cross-validation of their reported practices with observations, or responses from learners.

Lack of objectivity might make it hard to replicate these results and caution is advised in generalising from this study. However, it would be a good source of ideas for future research, or could be used as a comparison study for views of learners.

Overall, it is a good source of information on tutors' opinions and needs and would fulfil the authors' intention to use these results to inform a professional development project.

### Title of the paper

Forrester, A.D. (1988). 'Learning to read and write at 26'. **Journal of Reading**, 604–613.

### Aims:

The aim of the study was to show how one adult student developed literacy skills as the result of an intervention (being encouraged to draw upon her own experience and to make rough approximations to practice these skills).

### Participants:

N: 1.

Population of interest: adult learners of literacy.

### Data collection:

- Evidence of literacy skills before the intervention, e.g., tests evaluating sight-word reading vocabulary, and spelling and composing skills.
- Evidence of literacy skills after the intervention, e.g., letter-sound correspondence skills, letter-writing ability, etc.
- Description of literacy skills as intervention progressed, e.g., spelling ability, use of newly learned rules, reading fluency, etc.

### Data analysis:

- Literacy skills before and after the intervention compared.
- Comparison of participant's progress to 'Literacy Continuum' (steps in literacy development in children).

**Findings:**

- Comparison of literacy skills before and after intervention was evaluated as 'remarkable progress'. For example, before the intervention, the participant would guess or stop completely when faced with unfamiliar words to read. After the intervention, the participant would try 'the initial consonant as an aid to sounding out'.
- Comparison of the development of the participant's literacy skills over time was judged as similar to the established 'Literacy Continuum'.

**Overall methodological quality:**

The overall methodological quality of the study seems to be low-moderate. There was some attempt to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. However, the evaluation of the participant's literacy skills was carried out by the author only and in an unstructured fashion. Caution is advised on generalising from the results, due to the small sample size and subjectivity of the evaluations. The study may however be helpful in providing ideas for future research.

**Title of the paper**

Hansman-Ferguson, C. (1994). The implications of situated cognition and authentic activity on adults learning to write. In L. Martin (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 13th Annual Midwest Research-to-Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing and Community Education, Oct 13–15, 1994* 124–129. Milwaukee, WI, USA: University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

**Aims:**

The research question was to describe/clarify how computers aid adults with writing tasks, in terms of the provision of authentic activity and social relationships in computer labs.

**Participants:**

N: 7.

Population of interest: adult learners in entry-level developmental writing courses at university.

**Data collection:**

- Face-to-face semi-structured individual interviews. Questions include being asked to describe 'previous experience with computers', 'how they thought the computer might help them with their writing', and 'relationships they had formed with other students in the writing lab'.
- Students also 'asked to reflect in writing upon their own changes in their writing, how they used computers as tools for writing, and the relationships they had formed with other members of the writing class'.

**Data analysis:**

Interviews: 'individual responses from interviews were taped, the tapes transcribed verbatim

and coded and emerging themes and patterns were continually examined and placed into categories.'

### Findings:

- Feelings of apprehension: the 'before' interview 'revealed apprehension' of both writing and computers. The 'after' interviews revealed less apprehension. Also, 'students who used the computers more both during and outside of class reported less apprehension sooner than those students who were reluctant to write using the computer'.
- Writing experience with the computer: 'after' interviews showed processes devised to complete assignments. For example, most students brainstormed on the computer or on paper and then typed up a first draft. Editing and revision was then carried out based on feedback from the instructor/peers. 'Written reflection' showed that the computer was gradually used more and more habitually.
- Computers as tools for writing: students described 'tools' as: helpful functions within the word processor and as being able to 'see what they had written' on the screen. Both, they felt, aided writing.
- Control over their own writing: students also felt that computers gave them control over 'what and how they wrote'.
- Social interaction: interviews and written reflections showed that all students had interacted socially with other students. Peers were seen as helpful in critiquing writing as well as helping with computer use.

### Overall methodological quality:

This study would seem to have low to moderate methodological quality – it is hard to tell due to the lack of detail provided. Consistent before and after comparison of data would have been helpful, as would have been further details of the degree of agreement between interview and written data. There was also no indication of the frequency of the 'reflections in writing' (i.e., whether they were also pre and post measures). Lastly, a second rater/coder could have been added to increase reliability.

Overall, caution is recommended when generalising from these results. However, the study does provide ideas for future research.

### Title of the paper

Mlynarczyk, R. W. (1996). 'Finding Grandma's words: A case study in the art of revising.' *Journal of Basic Writing*, 15(1), 3–22.

### Aims:

The aim of the study is to show how teacher responses based on content rather than structure can encourage beginner writers to make meaning-based revisions.

**Participants:**

N: 1.

Population of interest: adult basic-writing students.

**Data collection:**

- Transcriptions of the tapes of the first two student-teacher conferences (1/2 hour each) of the semester.
- Two drafts of the student's essay, one written before the first student-teacher conference and the other (a revised draft) written before the second conference.

**Data analysis:**

- Conference transcriptions were analysed to reveal the content/rhetorical-space oriented responses of the teacher and responses of the student.
- First and second drafts of the student's essay were compared, to highlight revisions.
- Responses of teacher and student from conferences were related to specific revisions made in the draft, to help explain them in global terms.

**Findings:**

- The analysis of the conference transcripts showed that the teacher used two approaches – one of authority (reflecting rhetorical space oriented responses) and the other of an empathic listener. The latter was judged more helpful in encouraging the student to 'move back into content space to engage in further retrospective structuring of her ideas'. The teacher was also seen to move into the content space herself, showing her 'concern with the ideas of (the) essay'.
- Comparison of the first and second drafts of the essay, plus analysis in global terms.
- Surface changes in grammar and wording: (no further analyses).
- Addition of a title: more conscious of meaning and focus of essay.
- Reorganisation into chronological order: more reader-based orientation.
- Expansion of river scene: retrospective structuring, where the student 'went back into her experience to express inner meaning'.
- Expansion of concluding paragraph: student 'seemed to be dealing with her own need for retrospective structuring of experience' as well as with the expectations of the reader.
- The student passed a 'minimal-competence in writing' exam that she had previously failed.

**Overall methodological quality:**

The overall methodological quality of the study is low. This is a qualitative study that rests on subjective analysis and evaluation. It could have benefited from a larger sample, a control group, or a second rater/analyst. Caution is advised when generalising from the results. Its main use may be in supplying ideas for future research.

**Title of the paper**

Moulton, M. R. (1997). 'Overt literacy action: A key to success in adult literacy learning'. *Journal of Adult Education*, 25(2), 2–20.

**Aims:**

To show that successful literacy action in the real world ('overt literacy action') enables adults to see themselves as readers and writers, gain confidence in their literacy abilities and increase their literacy learning.

**Participants:**

N: Variously described as 6 or 9. The case studies refer to 6 individuals, but 9 are mentioned as 'staying with the programme'. Note: the 6 are subsumed in the 9, and the participants are drawn from different studies.

Population of interest: adult literacy students.

**Data collection:**

Formal interviews (tape recorded and transcribed), informal conversations, observations, written work, reading inventories (reading level was tested at beginning and end). In addition, 'individual tutoring sessions were... tape recorded and transcribed'. 'In the multiple case studies, family members also provided similar data'.

**Data analysis:**

Data from each study were 'analysed using the constant comparative method... Statements, actions and observations were coded or labeled' and examined for emergent themes/patterns. 'Overt literacy action' emerged as a concept in the most recent study and this was used to revisit the data from the earlier studies 'comparing across cases in different contexts, part of (a) "conditional matrix"'. The review of data and 'axial coding' showed that 'overt literacy action and student feelings of successful learning were closely related'. No worked examples are provided, although case studies are used to illustrate the results.

**Findings:**

Case studies for six individuals are described. Three illustrated the effects of both successful and unsuccessful overt literacy action, two the effects of successful action only and one the effect of no overt action only. (The author does not explicitly distinguish between unsuccessful literacy action and lack of literacy action.)

Most overt action taken was writing (four out of five students). Successful literacy action seemed to give students self-confidence in reading and writing. Reading scores (measured by 'informal reading inventories') improved 'between two and five levels'. Unsuccessful literacy action led to a sense of failure and loss of self-esteem. The one participant (plus three others whose cases were not illustrated) who had not taken overt literacy action had reading scores improve by not more than one level.



**Overall methodological quality:**

This is hard to assess as there is little evidence of the data analyses apparently carried out (e.g., axial coding) and the narratives of individual cases were (necessarily) selective. Caution is also advised as the data were drawn from several different studies (that had different aims, criteria for sample selection, etc.) and the assumption of causality between overt literacy action and success in literacy learning is not supported by the design of the study.

However indications from the study may provide an interesting basis for further research.

**Title of the paper**

Nurss, J. R. (1989). **PALS evaluation project**. Atlanta, USA: Georgia State University, Center for the Study of adult Literacy.

**Aims:**

The aim was to determine whether the IBM Principles of Adult Literacy (PALS) programme 'produced gains in reading equal to or greater than those produced by a traditional non-computerised program'. Writing progress was also measured.

**Participants:**

N: PALS: 135, Control: 74.

Population of interest: adult basic literacy students.

**Data collection:**

- Reading: measured by Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), level E. Forms 5 and 6 were used as pre and post tests.
- Writing: pre test writing samples were collected from PALS groups only. Post test samples were collected for both PALS and control groups.
- Other measures were the evaluation procedures recommended for the PALS programme: Functional Literacy Test, oral word reading tests, Phonemic Word Making Test, and Bio-sketch.
- Interviews: PALS 'teachers and aides were interviewed at the beginning and end of the programme'. A sample of PALS students was also interviewed pre (N=28) and post (N=41) the programme.
- PALS classes were also observed, although only 'anecdotal notes' were made.

**Data analysis:**

- Reading test: Pre- and post-test mean scores were compared by t tests for each centre separately, as well as by combining data from the PALS centres.
- Writing test: 'Writing samples were scored using a process scoring technique which evaluated the content and communication of the writing rather than the mechanics. All writing samples were scored by two trained raters who were blind to the treatment condition of the subjects'.
- Scores for other tests were found and compared by t tests where pre and post measures were available.

- The above tests were also inter-correlated, along with demographic data.
- Interview data were analysed by frequency of response across categories.

No worked examples were provided.

#### Findings:

- Reading: no significant pre-post gains were found for either the PALS group or the control group. There was also no significant difference between the PALS and control groups in post-test scores. When the PALS data were considered by centre, a significant gain in reading scores was found at Columbus.
- Writing test: no significant pre-post gains were found for the PALS group. There was also no significant difference between the PALS and control groups in post-test scores. When the PALS data were considered by centre, a significant drop in writing scores was found at Columbus.

#### Overall methodological quality:

While the type and design of the study was judged appropriate for its aim and while the principal findings seemed to address the aim, questions must be asked about the overall quality of the study. First, the control group was very small (with an N of 11 for the reading results) due to low retention. Also, the controls only received some of the assessments – the TABE and writing tests. Haphazard administration of the other tests and errors in data reporting were further difficulties. Caution is therefore advised in generalising from these results. However, the results would be helpful to inform future developments of the PALS programme itself, and to provide ideas for future research.

#### Title of the paper

Paratore, J. R. (1992). An intergenerational approach to literacy: Effects on the literacy learning of adults and the practice of family literacy. Paper presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, San Antonio, TX, Dec 2–5, 1992.

#### Aims:

There were two aims: (1) To determine 'the impact of an intergenerational approach on the literacy development and use of adult learners enrolled in an adult basic education program', and (2) To determine 'the impact of an intergenerational approach on the incidence of shared literacy events between parent and child'.

#### Participants:

N: 367 families (represented by 246 mothers, 73 fathers, 27 grandparents, ten aunts, eight uncles, one sibling, and two caretaker adults). The families also had 816 children (270 pre-school and 546 school age).

Population of interest: adult learners enrolled in an adult basic education programme and their families.

**Data collection:**

- Reading fluency: 'parents chose an assessment passage in English from a representative sample of materials adults encounter on a daily basis', e.g., current newspaper articles. 'The chosen selection was used for pre and post assessment. A running record of each adult's oral reading behaviours, performed a silent reading of text, was completed.' Data were collected for a sample of nine parents 'whose pre test performance on the running record exceeded a error rate of ten per cent'.
- Attendance: daily attendance was recorded.
- Attrition/retention: number of participants completing one instructional cycle was noted.
- Parent/child literacy: 'self-report data on the incidence of parent-child literacy activities in the home setting were collected on a weekly basis', e.g., 'number of times joint writing occurred'. Data were collected from a sample of ten families.

**Data analysis:**

- Reading fluency: 'percentage of oral reading miscues observed' was found for the pre and post test situations and compared.
- Attendance: mean attendance rate was found for each instructional cycle. Also compared to national and local rates.
- Attrition/retention: rate of instructional cycle completion was found, i.e., the percentage who completed out of learners who remained in the programme for at least two weeks. Also compared to national and local rates.
- Parent/child literacy: 'the change in family literacy behaviours was measured by the number of literacy events reported during the first and last weeks of the instructional cycle.' Also: 'The average incidence of literacy events per family per week was computed during the last eight weeks of the instructional cycle.'

**Findings:**

Parents' literacy learning: measured by attendance, attrition, and reading proficiency.

- Attendance: 'the average attendance rate was 74 per cent', which contrasted with 50 per cent nationally and 32 per cent in the same community.
- Attrition/retention: The retention rate was 85 per cent (average over 3 years), compared to 50 per cent nationally, and 57 per cent locally.
- Oral reading proficiency (N=9): Percentage error (reading miscues) was compared for pre and post test. The average decrease was 13 per cent. Also, six participants shifted performance from 'difficult' to 'learning', while one shifted from 'difficult' to 'easy'.

Practice of family literacy:

- Comparison of first and last weeks: there was an increase in family literacy, e.g., children were read to three–four times a week as compared to about twice in the first week. There were reported to be no shared literacy activities before the start of the project.
- Routine family literacy in last eight weeks: Frequent shared literacy - mostly shared storybook reading and homework-related activities rather than writing activities or visits to the library.

**Overall methodological quality:**

The methodological quality of this study is low to moderate. While measures such as

attendance and attrition rate are based on the whole sample, only small numbers underlie results for the reading test and the family literacy data, which make them less likely to be representative of the sample as a whole. The use of self-report only in collecting the family literacy leaves room for large biases in reporting. Further, the lack of a control group, or the use of inferential statistics, also makes it hard to judge the significance of the findings. Caution is therefore advised when generalising from this study. However, these results may be useful in the internal evaluation of the programme, and in producing ideas and indications for future research.

### Title of the paper

Parrish, L. W. (1997). 'Hooked on learning: The Internet project.' **Focus on Basics**, 1(D).

### Aims:

The aim of the study was to show that using ICT could help students in a writing class become participatory and cooperative learners, as well as prepare them for a Literature and Arts exam.

### Participants:

N: Not specified, but 'usual' number in class reported as 10-12.

Population of interest: adult learners in a writing class.

### Data collection:

- Students' initial selection of five poems, found on websites, to start off poetry notebooks.
- Final assignment (to write a poem based on list of observations contributed during the class).
- Tutor's ongoing journal during the class.
- Interviews with three students (taped). No further information provided.

### Data analysis:

Data were analysed by tutor's subjective evaluations.

### Findings:

- Poetry notebooks: poems selected included classics as well as the 'expected' 'love poems, the modern, profane language'. Several students, including those who had difficulties in reading and spelling, started writing their own poetry and also sharing it with the class.
- Final assignment: every student wrote a poem and the tutor noted the students' enthusiasm.
- Tutor's journal: findings not reported.
- Interviews: findings not reported.
- Tutor observed that students were enthusiastic about and more active in the learning process (compared with her former experience of passive students showing little excitement). She also noted cooperative learning.

No findings reported for the research objective of preparing students for a Literature and Arts exam.

**Overall methodological quality:**

The overall methodological quality of the study is low. While various sources of data were utilised, data collection was informal and unstructured, and evaluation subjective. Some findings (e.g., interviews) were not reported and part of the research question was not addressed. There were also no control or comparison groups. Caution is therefore advised in generalising from these findings. However, the study may have value in informing teaching in the same programme and in providing ideas for future research.

**Title of the paper**

Pomerance, A. (1990). **A collaborative adult literacy training workshop for tutors and students: The student-tutor orientation**. Pennsylvania: The Center for Literacy.

**Aims:**

The aim of the study is to demonstrate the effectiveness of a new adult literacy tutor-training programme that emphasised 'holistic approaches to reading and writing, with primary emphasis on comprehension' and a collaborative relationship between learners and tutors.

**Participants:**

N: 97 tutors and 97 students completed the training.

Population of interest: the sample represents adult literacy tutors as well as adult literacy students.

**Data collection:**

Quantitative evaluation data:

Attendance statistics, including tutor retention, tutors trained compared to tutors matched to students, months of tutoring given, hours of tutoring per month.

- Qualitative evaluation data collection: (STO stands for Student-Tutor Orientations, i.e., the training programme).
- Written student and tutor evaluations of the STO.
- Assessment interviews with students after the STO.
- Interview with tutors about the STO and their subsequent tutoring.
- Tutors' written reports of their own tutoring after the STO.
- Staff observations about the STO, including the quality of tutoring between STO pairs, compared to others.
- Student comments about their own learning during and after the STO.

No examples of questions or items provided.

**Data analysis:**

Quantitative data from STO and previous 'regular' training were compared by eye, i.e., in terms of more/less. No statistical comparison of means/sd's.

#### Qualitative data:

- Interview with students: (here, eight students from the STO group were compared with eight students from the control group). These were analysed for the students' 'sense of progress, student-tutor relations, decision making, use of real-world materials and goal-related reading and writing'.
- Interviews with tutors: (here, ten tutors from the STO group were compared with 40 tutors from the control group). From the results, it is inferred that these were analysed for reports of work on writing, use of real-life materials and feelings of confidence.
- Evaluations of the training (by students and tutors): from the results, it is inferred that positive comments were gathered.

### Findings:

#### Quantitative findings:

STO training was found to surpass the previous regular training in:

- retaining tutors during training (87 per cent against 81 per cent)
- matching trained tutors with students (94 per cent against 61 per cent)
- months of tutoring given (77 per cent against 71 per cent of the months observed)
- hours of tutoring per month (8.5 against 6.4).

#### Qualitative findings:

- Written student and tutor evaluations of the STO: These were '86 per cent positive'. Both tutors and students 'valued the hands-on practice in reading writing, the different suggestions on how to read... hearing about what other people did', getting to know their partner better and 'learning with others'. 'Tutors also stated that the format of the workshop helped to break down belittling myths and stereotypes about adult literacy learners.' Further comments from tutors 'in a final report for a college class' described their relationship with their students as partnership, which they felt to be 'more effective than traditional authoritarian relationships'. 'They also knew how to measure progress by observing changes in their students' willingness to read print... and by comparing samples of earlier and later student writing.'
- Interviews with students: STO students were more likely to 'talk positively about their progress', to describe 'doing goal-related reading and writing and using real-world materials', to be 'more articulate... in explaining what kind of reading and writing were done in and out of sessions', to make 'suggestions for improving instruction' or complaints and to focus 'first on the content and meaning of reading and writing' rather than on a 'skill-based view of literacy'. Control students, however, 'were more likely to say they were involved in the decision-making'.
- Interview with tutors: STO tutors were more likely to work on writing, to use 'goal-related, real-life materials', and to feel 'greater confidence... about their ability to tutor'.
- Staff observations about the STO: two 'unsolicited communications' were presented as being representative of the staff response. These emphasised the great amount of writing being done by students, the regular meetings of the student-tutor pairs, the positive feedback received, the 'equal footing' of tutor and student, the hands-on training and the opportunity for students to learn techniques of learning. Staff member also requested STO training in their areas.
- Student comments about their own learning during and after the STO: Several examples are provided of the students' 'extremely enthusiastic comments', that reflect their positive feelings, as well as 'how the instruction after the STO had affected their daily lives'.

**Overall methodological quality:**

The methodological quality of the study may be considered fairly acceptable from the point of view of a post hoc study and one that would be used to inform practice and policy of the learning centre where it was carried out. It might also be considered a good first step that could inform further controlled research on the same topic at that location. Otherwise, it has limitations as regards validity and reliability, and the results should be generalised with caution.

**Title of the paper**

Scane, J. (1990) Process/conferencing writing and computers for adult basic education students. (ERIC Database # ED349465)

**Aims:**

The aim of the study was to assess the impact of a process approach to writing, with and without word processors, on the writing skills of adult learners.

**Participants:**

N: 167.

Population of interest: learners enrolled in adult basic education classes.

**Data collection:**

Quantitative data:

- Two attitude questionnaires were administered as before and after measures. Questions were designed to 'gauge the students' feelings... about writing, about the writing programme, and about computers'.
- Two writing samples (compositions) were collected from each student, one from the beginning and one from the end of the project period. In the process writing classes, these represented the first drafts of compositions, and the drafts written after peer conferencing.

Qualitative data:

- Teacher interviews: conducted in person or by phone.
- Classroom observations: no further information provided.

**Data analysis:**

Quantitative data:

- Attitude questionnaires: no information provided.
- Writing samples: these were assessed based on 'holistic ratings of language, content and composition features, and measures of cohesion and grammar'.

Qualitative data:

- Teacher interviews: no information provided.
- Classroom observations: no information provided.

**Findings:**

The authors stated that 'process writing with computers classes... showed a consistent, high level of improvement in every measure'. 'The results shown by the students in the process writing without computers classes do not... compare unfavourably with those in the control groups.'

Quantitative data:

- Attitude questionnaires: students in the 'process writing with computers' classes showed a 'higher level of satisfaction with the programme than did either of the other groups. In addition, this group of students felt that they were now encouraged to write more than they had before'.
- Writing samples: no specific information provided.

Qualitative data:

- Teacher interviews: no specific information provided.
- Classroom observations: no specific information provided.

**Overall methodological quality:**

The overall methodological quality of the study is low. Positive points about the study are the relatively large sample, the apparent use of qualitative and quantitative measures, plus the inclusion of a control group (although the overall design is unbalanced – see 3.6). However, the scanty, selective, and sometimes ambiguous reporting makes it difficult to judge the reliability and validity of results, leading to an overall negative evaluation.



## Appendix E. Review of practice: learner interview questions

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1. Do you think writing is harder to learn than reading?
2. Which bits of writing are difficult?
3. What do you think is most important when you write?
4. What sort of things do you want to write?
5. Has this class helped you achieve what you wanted?
6. Which bits of the class do you find the most helpful or interesting?
7. Is anything unhelpful?
8. What about using computers?

## Appendix F. Review of practice: teacher interview questions

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1. How do you think learners in your classes view writing generally?
2. How do you understand the relationship between reading and writing?
3. How do you deal with this in your teaching?
4. Do you see writing as presenting any unique difficulties for adult learners?
5. What tactics do you use to overcome these?
6. How do you see the balance between the need for learners to write correctly with the development of expressive writing?
7. What would you list as your primary sources of teaching and learning materials? (E.g. Published books and packs, the Internet, colleagues, self-developed worksheets etc. Get as full a list as possible.)
8. What about the use of ICT in the classroom?
9. How do you target your teaching of writing to meet the needs of different learners?
10. Would you say that you have a particular approach to the teaching of writing? (If the teacher finds it difficult to respond, it might be helpful to ask what approach he or she uses with an Entry Level 1 learner.)
11. Would you say that your knowledge of literature and research on writing influences your teaching? If yes, how so?
12. What other factors influence your approach to teaching writing? (For example, the Core Curriculum, initial or in-service training.)
13. Do you think that the assessment of writing presents any particular difficulties? If so, what are they?

## Appendix G. Review of practice: summary of report on focus groups provided by research consultants Cragg, Ross, Dawson

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### Teachers

#### *(i) Overview of attitudes*

In general, teachers enjoyed their work and compared adult literacy favourably with teaching in a school environment. Those who experienced the most frustrations tended to be those teaching predominantly vocational courses, where the external pressures were greater.

The needs of the student were placed at the heart of adult literacy teaching, and outweighed all other factors. Teachers viewed the adult literacy 'industry' as less bureaucratic than the school education system and in a sense more amateur (in the sense of working for the love of it). Most felt that some standardisation was needed, but were concerned that the essential responsiveness of the system should not be lost. Teachers tended to regard themselves as guided mainly by practical rather than theoretical considerations and were keen that this should remain the case.

#### *(ii) Role of writing and its perceived value*

Although writing was perceived as a distinct skill in principle, in practice it was difficult to separate it from other aspects of adult literacy. As a distinct skill, it had both practical and emotional value for students. The practical applications of writing were numerous, while being able to write could be emotionally empowering.

This generated particular barriers and difficulties, however, since writing was a 'public' skill by which learners exposed themselves to others. Fear of embarrassment and making mistakes could inhibit students from expressing themselves freely or experimenting with their writing. As a result, writing was seen as something that teachers should build up to, rather than launching learners in at the deep end. In spite of the importance of writing, teachers had some sympathy with vocational students who were taking practical courses and who perceived little relevance for themselves in literacy skills.

The importance and pervasiveness of IT had introduced new writing models and contexts such as email, and had created the need for teachers to convey to learners the kind of language and structure appropriate for these contexts. Word-processing could be of some help in breaking down confidence barriers, since learners were able to alter text and check their spelling. Using technology could be a motivation in itself for some learners, but was off-putting for others who were unfamiliar with computers.

#### *(iii) The learner – difficulties and sticking points*

Teachers reported that learners had often had bad experiences at school, and that this could affect their attitude towards adult learning. Older learners had often missed the opportunity to learn in their youth, and tended to be enthusiastic students. For younger learners these bad experiences were more recent, and could make individuals cynical or disheartened about learning as adults. Young male learners in particular were liable to hide their educational problems under a veil of bad behaviour.

In order to counteract these negative experiences, teachers were keen to differentiate the

adult literacy environment as fully as possible from the school system.

'Sticking points' were largely individual to the learner. Certain problems were thought to occur time and again, however, mainly with spelling, drafting and lack of practice. Some teachers also perceived a significant step up between Levels 1 and 2 (of the national standards for adult literacy), which could act as a barrier to progress.

*(iv) Balance between mechanics and expression*

This was a familiar concept, although teachers tended to view it in practical rather than theoretical terms. Most found it useful to separate the more mechanical aspects of writing, such as spelling and punctuation, from activities focusing on expression of ideas, since concerns about spelling, for example, could inhibit learners from expressing themselves freely. Teachers were keen that learners should express themselves as quickly as possible, since this was enjoyable and could motivate further development in writing. Respondents used a variety of strategies for encouraging students to do this.

*(v) Relationship between reading and writing*

The two skills were seen as closely interlinked, with a clear progression from reading to writing ability. As a result, writing exercises were very rarely used to help develop reading skills. Reading could help writing by acting as a springboard to written work, or acting as a model. However, reading was not thought to improve mechanical writing skills such as spelling and punctuation, which required active learning.

*(vi) Approaches to teaching writing*

The main influence on how teachers went about teaching writing was the student him/herself. Ideally, it was thought that every lesson should take account of each student's goals, interests and learning style. In practice, the diversity of most adult literacy classes made this extremely difficult. Focusing on the student's goals could also be a constraint, since these were often short term and limited. Tailoring lessons according to the student's interest was thought vital to maintain enthusiasm.

Training and theory were thought to have an osmotic rather than a conscious effect on teaching approaches. Teachers felt they did have their own teaching style, but found it difficult to articulate how this had developed. Similarly, although most found training useful, the concept of actively applying theory to the practice of teaching was alien.

Other factors such as curriculum, inspection, funding and assessment also had some influence. Curriculum and assessment could be a constraint, but generally did not require the teacher to make wholesale changes. Funding and inspection could be more problematic, since these sometimes required teachers to act against what they saw as the best interests of the student.

A variety of activities were mentioned. Preferences were largely individual, although many favoured project work which allowed diverse students to work on different tasks but under the umbrella of a single theme.

*(vii) Resources*

Good resources were regarded as a valuable asset and teachers were always on the lookout. Most felt that the provision of resources was improving, but still inadequate. Ready-made resources were often not quite right for the teacher's needs, either in content or in tone –

many were seen as patronising to the learner. As a result, teachers made many of their own resources, but this was time-consuming.

Respondents obtained resources through a variety of channels, including borrowing ideas from other teachers. Learners themselves sometimes suggested exercises or brought in resources.

*(viii) Literature and theory*

Teachers regarded theory and literature as having only an indirect impact on their work. There was little sense of an agreed body of knowledge and respondents perceived a wide gulf fixed between researchers and practitioners. As a result, teachers did not feel engaged in the debates taking place in the wider industry.

Training was seen as the best way to tap into new thinking, but this was only available on a sporadic basis. There was some feeling that the increasing professionalisation of the industry would mean that training would be more widely available in future.

*(ix) The core curriculum*

In principle, teachers generally welcomed the introduction of the core curriculum, since this had given some structure to a previously formless industry. There were some concerns, however, that the focus on the individual student would be weakened.

In practice, attitudes towards the curriculum were ambivalent. It was still very new, and teachers acknowledged that they had not yet become accustomed to using it. Even taking this into account, however, the curriculum was often criticised for being too detailed and prescriptive. Adult literacy was regarded as a holistic area and attempts to dissect and codify it were resisted. The practical hints and tips were welcomed, but most teachers appeared to use the curriculum by teaching as they always had and then mapping their work back. Many also felt that the curriculum was too ambitious in terms of how quickly the content should be covered.

*(x) Assessment*

Initial assessment was regarded as problematic. Although it was thought necessary to assess students, the tools available were not thought sensitive enough to do this job well. In particular, the Basic Skills Agency assessment pack was thought inadequate for testing writing ability. There were also concerns about the wisdom of subjecting new, nervous students to an assessment straightaway.

Ongoing assessment was a basic feature of teaching, and usually took the form of monitoring a student's work rather than setting tests. The value of external assessments tended to be viewed through the eyes of learners – some were keen to achieve qualifications while others had no interest. Problems only arose when students were forced to undergo assessment for which they were not ready, or when they did not want to do so.

#### 4.2.1.2 Learners

*(i) General points*

The group comprised a mix in terms of age, ability and learning context. Most were self-referred, although one or two were attending classes out of necessity.

Motivations for improving literacy skills were largely personal. Most wanted to better themselves, improve their lot in life and build their confidence. Some also had specific aims such as improving their job prospects or writing letters. The elderly respondents felt they were taking up an opportunity denied to them earlier in their lives.

All the learners described bad experiences at school. For younger respondents in particular these experiences seemed to have contributed to a sense of low self-esteem. The adult learning environment was described as much more supportive and enjoyable than school and most were enjoying their courses.

*(ii) Attitudes towards writing*

Learners tended to separate literacy into discrete skills, namely reading and writing. The practical importance of writing was thought obvious – so many situations, particularly in a work context, required an ability to write. Writing also held a certain cachet, and not being able to write was embarrassing.

The concept of separating writing into mechanics and expression was familiar to learners, even if the terms were not. Most saw a clear progression from mechanics to expression – you had to master the basics before you could write down your thoughts and ideas. Spelling was the commonest worry for learners. Not being able to spell was publicly embarrassing and difficult to overcome. Punctuation was less emotive, but still a problem for several. Formatting work was a particular concern.

Expression tended to be seen as the reward for mastering the basics. There was a sense of satisfaction and creativeness in writing down one's own ideas that went beyond the practical benefits of writing.

*(iii) Learning writing skills in practice*

Learners tended to prefer teachers to negotiate with them in setting tasks. There was a preference for exercises that covered interesting topics or taught a useful practical skill.

Reading and writing were perceived as separate skills, of which writing was the more difficult. Learners were not aware of reading and writing being linked in the classroom to any great extent, although reading was sometimes used as a warm-up for writing. Learners were also encouraged to read back over work they had written themselves.

*(iv) Assessment*

Formal assessment was viewed with a mixture of aspiration and dread. Most were keen to possess some sort of qualification, motivated by the desire for a marker or progress and a sense of achievement. The experience of sitting a test was considered traumatic. However. Informal assessment was seen as part and parcel of teaching and caused no particular concerns.

## Appendix H. Review of practice: Summary of coding if observed sessions

### Observation coding summary: Task definition across classes A to N

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	Total
<b>Writing task materials</b>															
Handout	9	3	4	1	1	4		2	1				1	2	28
Dictionary/Thes			1		2				1	2	2	1	2	2	13
Real materials					1		6	2		1		1	1		12
ICT	7			3			1					1			12
Text material								1		1				1	3
BSA			1												1
<b>Task audience</b>															
Teachers	8	4	5	1		1	3		1	2		2	1	1	29
Peers					2	3	4		1		3	4	3	3	23
Self	1			3	1			1		1					7
<b>Task type</b>															
Exercise	6		2			2		1		1	1		1	2	16
Creative			1	1			3		1	1					7
Informational	1	1		1	1					1					5
Description		1										2	2		5
Diary				1	1	1			1						4
Form completion							3					1			4
Poetry				1			1							2	4
Game				2	1						1				4
Letter	1	1													2
Assessment			2												2
<b>Task focus</b>															
Frag word	3		2	2	2	1				3	2		4	5	24
Frag sentence	2		1			2	1				1		5	2	14
Integ word	1	1			1		3	5	1	2		3	1	1	19
Integ sentence	1						2					2	1		6
Integ text	2	3	1	3	2	1	3		2	1		1			19
<b>Grouping</b>															
Independent	7	9	10	6	5	5	8	10	7	17	3	7		1	95
1 on 1	14	6	11	6		1	9	1	10	18	1	5	7	4	93
Whole class	2		1	3	12	8	7	8	9	1	6	9	6	11	83
Small group	4	6			4	1	2	3	3	1		3		5	32
Pairs								3				4	1	1	5



## Appendix I. Review of practice: feedback from consultation meetings

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### **Observations on the themes identified in the three reviews, arising in discussions at consultation events**

Arising from the discussion of writing as a process in the first review the following points were made.

- Encouraging learners to think aloud while writing can help them to reflect on the process and can also help learners become aware of their own obstacles to writing and to overcome these.
- Modelling the thinking process that a writer goes through when writing can also help learners.
- Collaborative writing activities can facilitate the verbalisation of the thinking process.

In relation to the importance placed on the uses of writing outside the classroom (Purcell Gates et al., 2002) and the empowerment learners may gain through writing, it was noted that the relationship between classroom learning and becoming a writer outside the class is not always a simple one. It was argued that:

- Some learners do not welcome change in their lives outside the class and prefer to contain the development of their skills to writing within the classroom.
- Others gain confidence as writers in everyday life but may not always improve greatly in aspects of writing such as spelling.

The tendency of adult learners to be very self critical about their writing was suggested as one reason why the learners placed greater emphasis on correct spelling and punctuation than the teachers. Adults can be acutely aware of the potential for negative judgements made on the basis of errors in their writing. Learners are also aware of the need to practise their skills and are therefore happy to undertake exercises that provide this.

On the relationship between writing and reading it was noted that it is not necessarily the case that the more one reads the better one is able to write

Regarding the publishing of learners' work, the use of well-presented books, written by learners, such as the Gatehouse readers, could inspire learners to try writing themselves.

Moving from writing at Level 1 in the adult literacy core curriculum and Level 2 was considered to be very difficult. The reasons for this do not emerge from the research so far but could usefully be explored. Teachers may need support in terms of training and resources to help learners make this move.











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