

Practitioners Write Effective Practice

Thinking in your head is difficult because ideas leak away. Writing is a way of pinning your thoughts down and holding them still in order to examine them. (Clark and Ivanic 1997, p113)

To Fiona MacDonald of the Adult Literacies Team of Communities Scotland, this book inspired her to think about how practitioner writing could document and support effective practice. She says,

For me, this quote beautifully summed up the importance of recording in order to effect positive changes to practice.

I wanted to encourage practitioners to record some of the excellent work that I know they are carrying out. However, I also wanted to locate this type of reflection in a research context, to show how action research methods can have an impact not only on our practice, but in our ability to be considered as professional in our approach to the delivery of adult literacies. Furthermore, the results of this type of inquiry can be useful in other contexts too and can be helpful as supporting evidence, for example, when drawing down funding.

She developed an action-research project in which practitioners reflected on their experiences while delivering a course, Introductory Training in Adult Literacies Learning (ITALL). The aims of the project were to explore how practitioners could use reflective diaries as staff development, to evaluate ITALL using material from the diaries, and to provide a tool that practitioners in the future could use to explore their own learning.

Literacy work in Scotland is guided by seven principles that were outlined in the 2000 National Development Project. The principles, and how they apply to tutoring learners, are outlined in the chart.

These principles are meant to be applicable in general, but some practitioners felt unclear about how they might be put into practice. The researchers hoped that, through reflective writing, practitioners could develop a framework for good practice. This framework would be based on their perceptions and expressed as closely as possible in their words.

Practitioners discussed their best experiences as tutors and as learners. Best experiences were taken as examples of good practice. The practitioners then decided what indicators, or examples, could be used

PRINCIPLES	TUTORING
1. Promoting self-determination	Ensuring learners work with as much self-direction and independence as possible and take risks in tackling new tasks
2. Developing an understanding of literacies	Developing learners' awareness of literacy or numeracy uses in context, their critical awareness of literacy and numeracy, and of learning itself
3. Recognizing and respecting difference and diversity	Developing learners' awareness of social and cultural differences in literacy or numeracy practices
4. Developing informed practice	Acquiring the experience and expertise to offer learners the most effective and efficient pathways to achieve their learning goals
5. Developing equitable & anti-discriminatory practice	Offering a curriculum that is inclusive and anti-discriminatory in its content and process
6. Promoting participation	Involving learners individually and collectively in evaluation of learning and teaching to inform the design of learning options
7. Drawing on partnerships	Working collaboratively with other agencies to deliver joint courses and projects

to recognize good practice. The chart on this page includes their conclusions.

Fiona says,

The participants within this project worked extremely hard and will be very pleased that their work might be of use to others. It is worth saying that the whole process culminated in a presentation to adult literacies practitioners in the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow, delivered by three of the participants. Each of them had used different models for recording their reflections and they discussed the positive and negative aspects of their own particular recording methods. They also discussed their own anxieties of putting pen to paper and the real benefits for both learners and practitioners of writing

down their reflections as soon after the event as possible.

The full report of this project, *New Practice, Good Practice: The role of reflection in adult literacies tutor training*, by Ann Finlay with Moira Hamilton and Fiona Macdonald was published by Literacies Scotland in September 2003. It is available online at: www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/Web/Site/cl/al_research.asp. ■

SOURCES:

Ivanic, Roz and Romy Clark (1997). *The Politics of Writing*. London: Routledge 1997

Literacies in the Community: Resources for practitioners and managers. National Development Project—Adult Literacies in Scotland. City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Executive (2000).

Introductory Training in Adult Literacies Learning, National Training Project for Adult Literacies and Communities Scotland (2003).

GOOD PRACTICE	INDICATORS
Have clear aims and objectives	Aims and objectives are clearly stated/displayed at beginning of sessions and checked through evaluations at end of sessions. Participants are able to ask questions on aims and objectives and to ensure understanding of them through discussion.
Content and delivery must be stimulating	Content generates discussion, dialogue, questions and positive evaluations. The drop out rate is low. Trainees interact. Activities work well.
Content and delivery must be at appropriate level	Trainees appear satisfied, interested, and discussion is relevant. Discussion and questions relate content to practice and personal situations. Trainer checks/measures if level is appropriate and learners are learning. Trainers' actions include noting body language, levels of participation and listening to trainees.
Appropriate resources available	Resources are flexible and trainers make good use of what is available. They plan ahead when resources need to be shared. Resources contribute to a comfortable atmosphere and layout is conducive to participation. Trainees show interest in resources, do not refer to missing anything and discussion shows reference to resources.
Prepare well	Any adaptations to ITALL are the result of active decision and extras such as inserts are provided. Sessions run smoothly. No adverse comments, no crises due to lack of preparation. Trainees have appropriate expectations.
Be responsive to learners and be prepared to adapt	Trainers allocate time for activities and breaks and make changes according to participants' needs. Trainees are comfortable asking questions and their questions are answered. Trainees seem interested and are encouraged to participate in the curriculum. Classroom layout is conducive to participation. Opportunity is provided for trainees to make responses and give feedback.
Respect trainees and build up morale	Trainees' own experiences are used and their input is responded to. Positive experiences are highlighted. Trainees' responses are observed and they are listened to. Everyone is given time and encouragement. Humour is used. Challenges are courteous.
Group dynamics and issues of equality	The trainer notes if anyone dominates discussions or challenges aggressively. Individuals' levels of participation and group dynamics are monitored. Experience and skills of the trainees are acknowledged. People show each other respect.