



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

Why leadership matters **Putting basic skills at the** **heart of adult learning**

Edited by Ursula Howard and Pip Kings



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

Why leadership matters

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National Research and Development Centre
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Published by the National Research and Development Centre
for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

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Design: www.chapmandesign.net

Print: Elanders Hindson

Cover photo: iStockphoto

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Foreword

Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) have been at the heart of further education (FE) and lifelong learning across the UK for over 10 years. In England, the Skills for Life policy has offered direction and funding to enable millions of adults to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence that many of us take for granted. By establishing NRDC as an independent national research and development centre led by the Institute of Education – building a powerful evidence base and using this to develop professional practice and improve the quality of teaching and learning – Skills for Life has helped to create deep foundations for the future as well as tackling underachievement in the present.

However, huge challenges still remain if we are to reach the majority of those adults with the lowest literacy, numeracy and English language skills and enable them to learn so that they can increase their chances in life and work. Despite the undoubted successes of Skills for Life in helping millions of adults improve their literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills, people living with the lowest skills – at Entry level and below – are precisely those whom the strategy has not sufficiently prioritised. Effective and bold leadership is needed now more than ever, to keep policy and educational organisations focused on who and what matter most.

This book, the outcome of a small exploratory project, comes at a time when the pressures on public funding are heavy and look likely to remain so. There is fierce competition for resources across post-16 learning and skills, from literacy and numeracy to higher education (HE). When the milk and honey flow, it is easy for leaders to ensure adult learning organisations cater generously for those most in need and with the longest learning journeys to travel, as well as those learning at higher levels. So often in education, what Schuller and Watson (2009) have called the ‘Matthew Effect’ prevails: resources are given disproportionately to those who have already benefited from education; those with no or low qualifications and who are disadvantaged socially and economically are increasingly neglected.

As Lynne Sedgmore spells out in this book in Chapter 12, strong and creative leadership is most needed at such times. The ability to uphold values and

principles, take difficult decisions and ensure practical action across organisations becomes paramount if the needs of all learners – including those not yet reached – are to be met. Until now, little research and development has been devoted to the difference good leadership can make to sustaining LLN learning across the curriculum and across organisations. So it is timely that this book looks at the significance of leadership in difficult times for this critical area of learning. The book shows how some leaders in different contexts and types of organisation have made things happen, against as well as with the flow of policy and resources.

This book, jointly sponsored by NRDC, the London Centre for Leadership and Learning at the Institute of Education, and the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, now part of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, will add to the developing body of work on whole organisation approaches to adult learning, which foster inclusiveness and cross-curricular development. The book singles out a key part of the whole organisation agenda: the leadership of people in organisations for further and adult learning; the professionals who manage, teach and support learners; the learners themselves and all the wider stakeholders. I hope the book stimulates more discussion and further research and development on the central importance of leadership in successful, inclusive approaches to learning. We have made a start and hope you will engage with us to help take the work further.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Casey', with a large, stylized flourish underneath.

Helen Casey
Executive Director
NRDC

Reference

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1

Introduction

Ursula Howard and Pip Kings

What is the most effective leadership of organisations in which learning takes place at all levels, and where many learners have literacy, language and numeracy needs? What characterises leaders and modes of leadership that put the most underachieving and often vulnerable learners at the centre of an educational organisation? This book addresses these and other questions by offering insights into existing leadership values and practices from experts on leadership of post-16 learning. It sets out the points of view of leaders of large and small colleges, a residential adult college, voluntary organisations and work-based training providers as well as exploring research evidence and other literature on leadership.

The context is critical. For the past ten years, literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) have been at the centre of post-16 learning and for most of those years, much literacy, numeracy and ESOL education has been more generously funded than ever before. In England, the Skills for Life strategy, launched in 2001, took up and added to the recommendations of the working group chaired by Lord Moser. The 'Moser group' was set up by the government in 1999, following the bleak findings of low levels of literacy and numeracy in the UK's adult population in the 1998 International Survey of Adult Literacy from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland responded with similarly ambitious strategies, although with

different cultural and pedagogical approaches. A 2003 baseline study by the (then) Department for Education and Skills (DfES), *The Skills for Life survey: a national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills*, confirmed the OECD findings; indeed the picture for numeracy, and increasingly the essential skills – for life, work and financial literacy – was even worse (DfES 2003).

Paradoxically, in England the needs of those with the lowest levels of skill and least able to practise literacy and numeracy in their lives, that is pre-Entry and Entry-level learners, have been squeezed by the imperative of meeting the Skills for Life national targets, the thresholds for which were set at a higher level of formally assessed skills and qualifications. Yet NRDC research shows that those with the greatest needs stand to make the greatest strides and break entrenched patterns of disadvantage (Bynner and Parsons 2006). Since the World Class Skills targets recommended by the Leitch Report in 2006 were adopted, literacy and numeracy have remained a priority, but with tighter funding to meet even more ambitious targets. And the policy and funding frameworks for ESOL provision, for which demand has proved intense and buoyant across the country, have recently been reshaped to reduce demand by cutting funding in favour of new policy priorities.

We are now at a critical point in the life of the Skills for Life strategy, which has achieved enormous improvements, bringing literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) from the margins to the centre of post-16 learning. The 2010 targets have been achieved: thousands of LLN teachers have been trained and are now fully qualified; increasing numbers of organisations have achieved good and excellent inspection grades for their LLN provision; there are national standards and assessment regimes; there has been new and creative thinking, encouragement for innovation and improved practices; we have research evidence to inform decision-taking at national and local levels; development tools exist to help improve practice from leadership to teaching and learning; and there is an abundance of high-quality teaching resources.

LLN programmes are no longer seen as peripheral or second-class provision, nor are they perceived as ‘remedial’ or purely as a skills deficit issue. LLN is mainstream and recognised strategically at national level as a long-term, intergenerational social and economic issue; the need for continuing learning

is widespread among the adult population. This is unlikely to change as many young people continue to leave school without maths and English qualifications (Rashid and Brooks forthcoming) and, as research has shown, adults who do not practise their literacy and numeracy lose their proficiency (Parsons and Bynner 1998). However, policy on 'skills' has already moved on from the priority given to LLN at the turn of the century. Employer-led learning and Level 2 vocational provision have become the main drivers to achieving the government's World Class Skills targets set for 2020 (DIUS 2007). Related new policies are taking shape, which introduce the concept of functional skills and offer progression pathways through the Foundation Learning Tier. The government has recently refreshed the Skills for Life strategy, now locating it even more specifically within the frameworks of wider skills and economic strategies with targets until 2020.

In this shifting political landscape, both provision of and demand for LLN have never been greater, while at the same time pressure on resources increases as other priority areas compete for funding. At such a time, when stark choices are inevitable, it becomes even more important to reflect on the crucial role of leadership in post-16 organisations. In this book, we focus on leaders who seek to run organisations that see social justice and equal life chances as core to their mission. This means including all learners and, in particular, prioritising those with literacy and numeracy needs, so that they can succeed in their courses, their career aims and the demands of family and everyday life. This is relatively easy at times when the funding flows. When resources are stretched, difficult choices are created for leaders at all organisational levels. Such choices are best dealt with through a proactive strategy of an educational provider which takes account of local needs and has knowledge of the educational levels of the learner base. The role of senior leaders is therefore critical in making difficult decisions in difficult times. This is particularly true when success rates and qualifications count for so much in assessing a provider's quality and reputation.

The concept and practice of 'whole organisation approaches' have helped to foster socially inclusive practices in recruitment, curriculum and support of learners, and have helped to work towards meeting the needs of all learners in the community. Whole organisation approaches have also had a considerable impact on LLN learners' engagement, achievement and progression. Alongside this approach has been the increasing awareness and growing

practice of ‘embedding’ or ‘integrating’ LLN in other programmes. Research has shown that embedding LLN in vocational programmes can increase success rates significantly, as long as a whole organisation approach is adopted.

Whilst the terms ‘whole organisation approach and ‘embedded’ are widely recognised as key to successful LLN learning, very often the informed and enlightened leadership that realises the implications of these terms for the infrastructure and processes of an organisation have not been closely examined. If LLN teachers and vocational teachers are to work together successfully across subjects and departments, leadership is needed to support them, at least at middle-manager level and on a day-to day basis at first-line managerial level. These leadership practices operate within the overall ethos set by senior leaders.

The practice of embedding LLN in other programmes in a whole organisation approach also recognises the complexity of each and every learner’s motivation and purposes. A learner with LLN needs is likely to be motivated primarily by his or her wider aspirations – whether to help his or her children educationally; or to pursue a career as a plasterer, horticulturist or hairdresser; or to keep moving on in education to higher education (HE) level.

What leadership means in the contexts described above was the driver for this book. The project was co-funded by the NRDC, the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL: now part of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service – LSIS) and the London Centre for Leadership and Learning (LCLL) at the Institute of Education. We have investigated the kinds of leaders and leadership that will need to be in place to take new policies forward and uphold the values that have enabled further and adult education to place disadvantaged learners at the centre.

The project started with a literature review, contained here as Chapter 13. This was followed by the commissioning of papers from practising leaders, mainly but not only, heads of organisations. A one-day seminar was held for a wide range of stakeholders, including providers, the Institute for Learning, CEL, NRDC, LCLL, the Association of Colleges, the Association for College Management, the University and College Union, the Institute of Education

and others (see the seminar report in the Appendix for full details). Monica Turner of CfBT Education Trust made an important contribution to the seminar, reflecting on the added value that the development of a whole organisation approach was bringing to LLN provision through the national Skills for Life Improvement Programme (now sponsored by LSIS). And the Chief Executive of CEL, Lynne Sedgmore, has contributed her personal reflections on leadership of LLN as part of this book.

This book is written by organisational leaders, including further education (FE) college principals and middle managers, and directors of adult learning services in the local-authority and voluntary sectors. It encompasses leadership at all levels and is therefore intended to be of interest to and inform leaders at all levels. A key theme of the book is what some have termed ‘distributed leadership’ or ‘leadership at local level’. Because LLN is one curriculum area among many in most organisations, the temptation is to think that this book is for first-line or middle managers only. But what is clear from the accounts of principals and national leaders is that it is the stance, values and decisions of strategic leaders in senior positions that ensure that leaders throughout organisations have the clarity, confidence and authority needed to fulfil their own leadership roles.

The method of the ‘Leadership of Literacy, Language and Numeracy’ project was to ask institutional leaders as well as leading experts at national level to reflect on their practice and values, produce a paper and present it at a seminar at the Institute of Education in May 2008. These papers were developed to form the backbone of this book. Other pieces were commissioned or contributed by the editorial team. Together they highlight a number of interwoven themes that emerged as critical success factors in strategies that put LLN learning at the heart of the curriculum. The key points from each paper are set out below.

The mission of the Hackney Music Development Trust (HMDT), a voluntary organisation in East London, is to create music education projects for people ‘of all ages and abilities’ (see Chapter 2). In pursuit of their inclusive, community-based purposes, they found ways of integrating ESOL and literacy with the creative arts in adult community learning in Hackney. The main themes for leadership that emerged from this project were the importance of choosing projects that realise the vision of the organisation; the power of the

personal involvement of leaders with learners; the importance of praise, encouragement and celebrating success; and the importance of good communication, not least with the press and media. Finally, especially at a time of diminishing resources, HMDT emphasised the importance of leaders' ability to think laterally and creatively to overcome externally driven restrictions and bring seemingly conflicting priorities together.

Another successful example of embedded LLN with implications for leaders is set out in Stubbing Court Training's account of their practice as a work-based training provider in the equine industry in Chapter 3. Their leadership approach put particular emphasis on providing opportunities for learners and employers to experience professional excellence in an occupational or vocational area. This is an important aspect of LLN leadership for teachers and trainers. It endorses NRDC's research, which shows how vital it is to recognise that learners on embedded programmes look first to their vocational/occupational teachers, seeing LLN teachers in supporting roles for their learning and skills development (Casey et al. 2006).

At City of Sunderland College, the Director of Basic Education, Julie Raine, came to LLN from a different curriculum area to lead the college's drive on basic education (see Chapter 4). Her story is about how LLN professionals can be led by and learn from other cultures and subject areas in the college, can accept external perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their professional practice, and take on the challenge of change. She also explains how strong leadership and senior management commitment helped LLN professionals to move beyond traditional professional assumptions and boundaries and work more strongly in partnerships inside and outside the college, embracing bold and direct interventions with potential learners in the wider local community.

The experience of Dudley College's Principal, Lowell Williams, confirms that attitudes are critical (see Chapter 5). He calls this the organisational 'state of mind' that needs to be nurtured by its leaders. It is essential, he argues, for leaders to recognise openly that people are an organisation's greatest asset; and, further, that leaders can succeed in the toughest educational fields by encouraging innovation, whatever the obstacles, and fluidity in planning: leaving room to manoeuvre in strategies and plans is critical to successful leadership. A whole organisation approach, he argues, will only work if

there is cross-institutional understanding of LLN at all levels of the organisation – something that is not highly developed in many colleges. Leaders must avoid being remote and all staff must be encouraged to be open about their own educational weaknesses and fears – including their own literacy and numeracy competences and practices. Finally, Lowell Williams asks us not to forget that operational issues, practicalities and attention to detail are important – a feature of leadership also emphasised by Lynne Sedgmore in Chapter 12.

Putting literacy and numeracy at the centre of adult learning and vocational education inevitably involves culture change. This has been the experience of all the organisations whose accounts form this book. In some cases that change has been deep and momentous; other organisations already had greater awareness, existing good practices and a sound history to build on. One successful approach is to start with the organisation's values, work closely with the all the people affected and build on what is already good in your own organisation, rather than trying to import the good practice or success of others.

This approach to change raised by Lowell Williams is further explored by Jill Westerman of Northern College in a refreshing account which talks about the importance of leaders acknowledging their errors and being honest about resistance encountered (see Chapter 6). She makes it clear that mistakes are important to the change process. But mistakes and resistance should not derail leaders who need to remain clear and constant about their organisation's values and priorities. It is more about how to engage the organisation positively in change processes, while not compromising visions, goals and strategies. Shining through Jill Westerman's and other accounts are an un-failing determination to put learners first, a love for learning and a fervent commitment to leading successful learning. Holding to the organisation's values even when funding pressures put them at risk is critical to the good leadership promoted in this book.

At Leicester College, good leadership of LLN is about differentiated leadership roles within a whole organisation approach (see Chapter 7). Strategic leaders devolve leadership responsibility and 'ownership' as widely as possible, to build capacity, fully recognise existing expertise and encourage potential. Maggie Galliers, Principal of Leicester College, attributes the 'rapid

and dramatic' improvements to the way people across the college signed up to the vision, and then worked co-operatively to make it a reality. She also emphasises another key aspect of leadership: sticking to a vision, and like the Northern College approach, expanding and stretching what is already good and what the organisation stands for. What has worked well for LLN at Leicester will now be taken to other curriculum areas. The seminal importance of focusing on people is continued in the North Warwickshire and Hinckley story, where a single-minded focus on LLN-related professional development across the whole organisation has raised the profile and importance of literacy and numeracy (see Chapter 8).

Striving to put disadvantaged learners first in uncertain and lean times, not only when the funding flows freely, is a recurrent theme in this book. It is what leaders who have made a success of LLN repeatedly emphasise. Good leaders know they cannot duck choices if they are to stick to their strategies and commitments. In Chapter 12, Lynne Sedgmore makes it clear that at times funding and resources may need to be diverted from other curriculum areas to support LLN and that this may meet resistance. Tackling the needs of learners and communities who are at a social and economic disadvantage is not just about responding to policy. It is about addressing a long-term issue that effective leaders understand is systemic and intergenerational, and so requires strategies that reflect the nature of the challenge. Supporting adult learners at pre-Entry, Entry level and with their ESOL learning, has involved many leaders in tough decisions in recent times as funding priorities have shifted away from them in favour of higher level learning. Many organisations have managed to overcome funding constraints and a key feature of leadership emerges as the ability to juggle resources and find new sources of funding, so that the integrity of an organisation's values and priorities is upheld.

Clear and positive values about learners means understanding the whole context of people's lives as learners, not mere target groups; this informs Darlington Libraries and Community Learning Service's approach (see Chapter 9). To make it work they say that good leadership is about both vision and focus; that planning ahead, professionalism and good organisation of provision are critical; and that leaders need to be unafraid to fail and continually receptive to new thinking and ideas. The basis for innovation and change has to be knowing one's own strengths and weaknesses

as a leader, and combining practical realism with ambition and a grasp of the scale of the challenge. Several chapters in this book emphasise getting the pace and scale of developments right: challenging but supporting the people expected to extend their understanding and practice.

The theme of partnership recurs throughout this book. The willingness and skills to work in co-operation with other organisations emerges as one of the most significant factors in leading LLN successfully. Partnership is mentioned in nearly every chapter in this book. In the story of Birmingham's approach to LLN over the past ten years it is the main plot (see Chapter 10). From 1995, the city approached LLN or 'core skills' problems strategically as a city-wide, intergenerational issue, so it followed that a 'multi-partner, multi-learner, multi-purpose' all-age policy initiative and programme of work was going to be essential to addressing the challenges. Geoff and Beryl Bateson describe a 'relentless' approach to improving learning and cogently set out the implications for leadership. They also set out what they learned about leadership in the process, including, like Leicester College and others, putting in place a culture of 'distributed leadership' enabling everyone involved to understand the issues and take responsibility for what they and their colleagues should do. As with other leaders in the book, the writers highlight the importance of holding to the core purpose and intended outcomes despite inevitable changes in arrangements, both welcome and imposed, internally and externally instigated. Among the many characteristics of good leadership that they draw from their practice, one emerges as the most crucial. Chiming with other viewpoints in this volume, they point to how good leaders create a 'can do/must do/will do' attitude as an overwhelmingly important ingredient of success.

Buckinghamshire Adult Learning also makes strategic support for partnerships the main story for good leadership of LLN (Chapter 11). Leaders of community-based learning need to be prepared for what can be a long and complex route to success if they wish to improve quality and also increase the engagement of groups of people with multiple disadvantages who may be a long way from their first qualification. Patience is a helpful attribute of leaders in this kind of LLN provision. High-level support helps to encourage staff to persist with partnerships that may take a long time to develop, and in which even initial results and rewards remain distant. Senior leaders also understand that not all partnerships will deliver and can steer and intervene

as necessary to help foster the most promising and potentially productive relationships. Successful leadership of co-operative initiatives also involves respect for shared processes, formal protocols and the resolution of practical issues, however small these may seem. This needs to be coupled with the overview that senior leaders can have, and need to communicate, about the different values and constraints partners in an LLN initiative may have. In partnership, leaders lead a complex learning process for all involved. In work-based training, strategic, positive leadership of co-operative working is also valued, and is prominent in Stubbing Court's account of effective leadership. They emphasise that good leadership practice is important not only at a local level with employers, families, other providers and advice and guidance services: working actively with national bodies as partners supports success, whether this is Ofsted, awarding bodies or other stakeholders.

The personal characteristics, qualities and values of effective leaders of LLN feature strongly throughout the book. Among these are determination and persistence; strong values that challenge injustice and emphasise equity; a commitment to 'getting it right'; a willingness to embrace change, which may not be universally popular; valuing people and trusting their staff to lead; and an absolute commitment to LLN and disadvantaged groups of people. Effective leaders know that teaching and learning can always be better than it is and have the energy and drive to improve quality. They are far-sighted professionals, not only able to create a vision but also the focus to realise it. They can see the benefits to learners and the whole organisation that will be reaped from sticking to their values. And they are able to inspire in others the commitment to literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners that they feel themselves.

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2

Hackney Music Development Trust

The art of leadership

Tertia Sefton-Green

Introduction

I think that it all is good. The main thing is to study but the music workshop and going to the opera make me learn English better. Singing the song helps me remember the words.

(Phong)

The benefits of Operation Hackney are that I learn to get ideas from it. I learn to be more creative. I enjoy doing drama – you get things off your mind. We get to travel to different places and we learn about Hackney itself and go to different museums. We get to know the other people in the group. I enjoy everything ... Normally, you don't have English with other activities. Operation Hackney is something different.

(Jacqueline M. Lindsay)

In this paper, I will introduce Operation Hackney, the Hackney Music Development Trust (HMDT) programme for teaching Skills for Life through the arts and show the impact leadership has over the way in which the programme was created, managed and achieved. I will explore how embedding the arts

in learning leads to high achievement and retention levels, and creates an environment of tutor and learner confidence, enjoyment and satisfaction.

Context

Hackney Music Development Trust is a dynamic charity, which creates a variety of music education projects for people of all ages and abilities in Hackney and beyond. In 2003, it was awarded a direct grant from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to develop a two-year basic skills programme in which accredited contextualised literacy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learning was taught through linking work to the creation and production of a new community opera for Hackney. We were lucky enough to be able to persuade the funders to take a leap of faith to support this new and innovative concept. The culmination of the project 'Operation Hackney' included performances of the new piece, *On London Fields*, at the Hackney Empire and was recognised on the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) Excalibur website (now the QIA Excellence Gateway), as well as receiving a prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Education.

As part of the momentum of a move by Hackney Council to develop work in communities, HMDT was able to target a new range of vulnerable and hard-to-reach learners; we seized the opportunity to develop work through community organisations and schools with whom we had relationships, as well as forging new partnerships. Then as now, our learners were those who had been living in isolated ghettos of the borough, some of them for many years. They included, for example, a contingent of the Vietnamese population, who had not found the confidence to go to a centralised organisation such as the community college; parents (particularly mothers) who were happy to learn in their child's school environment which was familiar and unthreatening; and learners with mental health issues who sought a creative outlet for learning. The range of community groups we approached, including Turkish and Vietnamese centres, reflected the rich cultural mix in the borough.

Operation Hackney

The vision of ‘Operation Hackney’ to use the arts as a medium for teaching ESOL and literacy in an attractive and unthreatening way gave me, as Project Director, a unique and powerful starting point for developing a project that had a clear structure and a momentous conclusion. HMDT was very skilful and experienced at commissioning new works, finding ways of embedding the themes and ideas of these pieces (hitherto created in schools) across the curriculum, and producing a high-quality performance experience, but Skills for Life was a new area of learning and so we drew on expertise by bringing into our team experienced tutors and an innovative co-ordinator with a Skills for Life and arts background. The success of our planning was in working collaboratively to create an overarching shared vision and programme of learning, which incorporated exciting learning and social opportunities and led to a satisfying end product.

Using the theme of the opera (the story of a 17th-century prophetess in Hackney) as a groundbreaking means of developing the curriculum, not only gave the project a ‘Hackney-centric’ focus, thus helping create community cohesion across all learners, but also gave a focus and purpose to all learning. Learning outputs did not just include the numbers of accreditations awarded, they involved learners working with artists to develop the words and music of the new piece and visits to local museums and spaces, as well as a group trip to the Royal Opera House to see *Madame Butterfly*, which had a particular resonance for our large group of female Vietnamese learners. Termly newsletters, which included contributions from their work, gave them a pride in and ownership of their participation. The emphasis on celebration and achievement and group integration aided the inclusive feeling, which all learners shared, in the knowledge that their contribution was building towards a climactic conclusion. Many attended an awards ceremony, which included performances by some of the groups with whom they could work in the new opera, and several seized the opportunity to perform the piece they had helped create, alongside 250 performers at the Hackney Empire.

As a leader, my role as a team-builder was to take risks and build on successes or setbacks in the appropriate ways. Successful communication was key to achievement as well as supporting and acknowledging the contributions

of the various teams of tutors, artists, production teams, co-ordinators and community partners. Knowing my limitations in the Skills for Life field, I saw this not as a setback but an opportunity to learn. Trying to show at all times clear direction and creative flair, as well as strong administrative grounding, was key to management, and delegating to empower and trust teams whilst being there to step in when required, was crucial to confidence and good delivery. At times the project forced us to convince or persuade people at the higher levels, such as funders, to jump and take risks, but the clear structure of management and delivery which we developed, built a strong sense of trust in all involved.

Strong communication was crucial as the freelance tutors were operating independently as part of outreach work and so needed to meet regularly to feel part of a team, be listened to and share problems as well as good practice. The emphasis on team making extended into engaging them in social interaction because funding permitted treating them to end-of-term drinks and end-of-course meals, all of which helped to consolidate a happy environment in which they felt appreciated. Communication meant giving them a chance to develop their own relationships without breathing down their necks and to take responsibilities through offering freedom, encouragement and support. Their commitment and passion for the project extended to two of them choosing to take part (unpaid) in the performance, not only to offer support to their learners, but also to enhance their own personal development.

Leadership and management

Communication and personal involvement also included my own interaction with the learners whenever possible to give them a sense of being part of a whole project beyond their classes. The uniqueness of the project was attractive to press and other agencies. Learners were not only interviewed at various intervals for programmes such as *The Learning Curve*, or for our external evaluation; a documentary film and museum exhibition also recorded their progress and feedback, enabling us to assess what was working and what needed changing and adapting, ensuring we were listening to their views and needs.

And there were real success stories. For example, on an individual level, Stan, a mental health learner with very little confidence or social skill, passed his Level 1, performed in the opera and has taken part in all HMDT's performing opportunities since, even taking centre stage where he was once so terrified he had to be persuaded not to pull out. The wider picture gave us an 80 per cent retention and achievement rate, with over 70 per cent of learners progressing to further education (FE) with us or other organisations.

But the real question is how far has HMDT come since the success of 'Operation Hackney' *On London Fields*? Was it a one-off experience or have we been able to progress, further our delivery and continue to offer a high level of personal development, learning and satisfaction?

The legacy is continuing through funding as a provider for local adult and community learning (ACL), but the current restrictions on funds, focus on density of achieved targets and the mound of paperwork required before anyone can begin to start learning, are demotivating and demoralising for tutors and learners. So again, my role as a leader is to get beyond the confines, restrictions and problems and manage the merging of priorities between arts and accredited learning, bureaucracy and flexibility. I need to troubleshoot small and large situations and conflicts as well as sustain and communicate a clear vision that can be shared and is attractive to partners.

Achievements and challenges

Since 2004, our programme has been funded annually and we have again linked learning to a theme where possible, related to larger HMDT projects. This worked very well when we created an international project about the Holocaust because the themes of racism and prejudice are not only current and relevant in the borough (particularly to ESOL learners) but also our teaching resources and materials for developing learning through related arts activities were a comprehensive and powerful motivating tool. Another achievement was the 'Hackney Song Book' project in which classes worked with a writer and composer to each create a song about any element of Hackney they chose. Surprisingly, nearly all were really positive about the borough, and classes were delighted to get a CD of their work. Rewards and recognition of this kind are highly motivating for all participants.

Last year, I handed over the choice to our tutors and gave them the ownership of a project about childhood memories. They rose to the challenge of creating a project and end result – a book of learner contributions of artwork and writings. In developing this work, we set up continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, which included skills-sharing sessions in which individual tutors (many of whom have their own arts skills such as creative writing and drama) led workshops introducing their own methodologies and ideas, as well as bringing in artists to develop visual art activities that could lead to a range of written and oral exercises, and ideas for using song as an aid to sentence construction, pronunciation and vocabulary.

Currently⁴ the programme is linked to HMDT's large project about China (set up in response to schools' request to engage in the Beijing Olympics). However, due partly to the surprising or otherwise lack of local interest and support in the Olympics, as well as the literal 'distance' of the subject, this has been hard for learners and tutors and our lesson is to be flexible about our core principle of engaging learning through cultural motivation. Next year's courses will link with citizenship, which is ripe for using art, music and writing as a thematic springboard.

However, intense paperwork requirements and emphasis on outputs have reduced the proportion of creative time in the lessons and made the learning less attractive. Our team is constantly juggling priorities to manage the emphasis of working in a creative context. Moreover, there is an inevitable conflict of interest with HMDT as a provider being undermined by the expectations of the funders. Both learners and tutors are expected to recognise the financial and administrative contribution of the department (ACL), of the private organisation (The Learning Trust) and of the government (LSC), all of which confuses my goal as a leader to direct a programme according to our vision, expectations and experiences. Our retention figures are therefore not as high as they were when we had control (and more flexible funding) to engage learners in motivated learning and give them a cultural context, which is enjoyable, unthreatening, opens up social opportunities and offers an exciting end product. Moreover, restricted funding, together with lack of logistical support and planning by the above agencies, has resulted in losing committed and motivated tutors.

The future: an agenda for leadership

So what is the future? My role as Project Director is to find the motivation and means to get beyond the current context, which is undermining our work, by revisiting the vision with which we began. Through consultation and teamwork, we need to emphasise, praise and encourage the ethos and success of using the arts as a powerful motivator and learning tool. I need to continue to delegate and trust whilst offering vision and creative coherence, supporting uncertainty and offering ownership and pride. We need to emphasise our original outcomes of confidence, social development and personal interaction alongside government ones of targets for numbers of accreditations and percentages for retention and punctuality, and rise above the confines of eligibility forms, enrolment forms, assessments, diagnostics and individual learning plans (ILPs), particularly with vulnerable ESOL learners who speak little or no English and cannot be expected to achieve a speaking and listening, reading and writing exam in a year of four hours a week. We need to celebrate achievement and continue to enhance learning through the use of music, art and creative writing. I need to continue to fight to pay my tutors above average, continue to recruit the best ones who can contribute to the arts and the team environment, and engage and not let down the learners who need us most, which means fighting to continue in schools which may not have the most perfect adult teaching spaces or best resources. I need to ensure outreach work does not alienate the tutors and learners but continue to communicate so they feel part of the larger picture, of a project which inspires and uplifts their learning, contributing to their personal wellbeing as a person beyond the pass mark on their Skills for Life certificate.

As I write, I'm told that the LSC's funding restrictions now extend to threats to cut my role as Project Director; because of tightening budgets and short-sightedness, funding is only to be offered per learning hour, not to run the whole programme. Management does not run of its own accord and leadership needs to be paid for. It should not be confused with bureaucracy and paper pushing, but it does take real time, hard work and dedication if it is to achieve results and support vision. It is crucial to the processes of consultation, delegation, trust, communication, support, creativity and celebration. How else can the learners be listened to, develop a hunger and passion for learning and be inspired?

Since writing this article, HMDT is no longer offering Skills for Life courses due to cuts in core funding which covered management and monitoring costs for its Adult Learning Courses.

Note

1 At the time of writing

3

Stubbing Court Training Ltd

Literacy, language and numeracy leadership strategies

Belinda Turner

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify the leadership strategies that enable learners to learn, progress and achieve in the development of their literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills, and therefore also their chosen vocational area.

Essentially, the leadership strategies focus on five key aspects of the training provision:

- the culture of the provider organisation
- the infrastructure that the organisation creates, supports and works within
- staff, apprentice and employer training and development
- assessment, accreditation and recognition of progress
- quality assurance and quality improvement processes.

The paper gives examples of the strategies used by Stubbing Court Training Ltd (SCT) to enable learners to achieve both in the vocational area and in their literacy and numeracy. The strategies are not seen as the perfect

solution in any way, and efforts are made continuously to improve. They should also not be seen in isolation, but as a whole organisation approach to address a significant challenge.

Context

SCT was established in 1982 as a specialist provider of work-based learning programmes for young people (16- to 25-year-olds) working in the equine industry, based in Derbyshire. We have contracted with the various government agencies including the Manpower Services Commission, Training and Enterprise Councils and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). We work with employers throughout the equine industry including riding schools, livery yards, and competition yards up to Olympic level in show-jumping and eventing. We now cover the East Midlands and Yorkshire, and have approximately 70 apprentices and a small number of Entry to Employment (e2e) learners.

All apprentices work towards all the qualifications in the framework, including NVQ Level 2 in Horse Care or NVQ Level 3 in Horse Care and Management, First Aid, Health and Safety, Technical Certificate and Key Skills at Level 1 or 2 in Communication, Application of Number, Information and Communication Technology, and Working with Others. Approximately 39 per cent of apprentices have five GCSEs A–C and 54 per cent have been assessed at the start of the programme at Entry level 3 or below in literacy and/or numeracy. SCT's framework achievement rate has exceeded 70 per cent for the last five contract years.

SCT was awarded Beacon status in 2006 and is involved in innovation projects aimed at providing world-class provision. Over a long period we have participated in a variety of Skills for Life Improvement Programmes, worked extensively with other providers in sharing and developing good practice, worked with a wide range of consultants on all aspects of quality improvement and also provided consultancy support to other providers to improve their provision.

Culture and vision

The culture and vision of an organisation are determined by its leadership. The leader must believe in, show and communicate absolute commitment and determination to continuously improve all aspects of the provision.

Key areas include:

- The partnership approach – partners should be seen in the widest sense; for example apprentices, employers, the LSC, parents, schools, Connexions, awarding bodies, staff, other providers, Ofsted.
- The strategic approach – the partners' objectives, targets and aims must be ours; for example, the LSC's 'Statement of Priorities' and the quality criteria in the Common Inspection Framework are directly referred to in the strategic plan.
- The service provided to all partners – this is service seen in the widest sense, not just about the Apprenticeship Programme, but also about the broader needs for employers; for example, provision of other necessary industry qualifications not part of the framework, advice on legislation requirements, professional development for employers, recognition and rewards for being involved in the Apprenticeship Programme.
- Learning, achievement and attainment of world-class standards for apprentices and employers – not just performance to meet national standards but also to the highest level, for those who aspire to this.
- Opportunities and role models – apprentices and employers must have the opportunity to experience and see first-hand world-class standards and values, without which they do not know what to aspire to.
- Systems, procedures and resources – should be efficient, user-friendly, simple and consistent. The provider must see itself as the intermediary between the requirements of an LSC programme, qualifications, legislation and awarding bodies and the job of running a business in the equine industry whilst training staff so that they gain recognition of their skills.

Infrastructure

The leader must provide and support the infrastructure to enable the provision to be delivered, evaluated and continuously improved.

Essential elements of the infrastructure include:

- Contractual elements – these include annual agreements with apprentices and employers regarding commitment to and availability for training and assessment; service-level agreements with staff, including their commitment to the importance of literacy and numeracy development and the culture of the organisation; the provider's funding agreement with the LSC determining the volume of provision and Public Service Agreement targets for framework achievement.
- Curriculum elements – these include scheme of work and action plans with effective targets communicated to all employers, apprentices and staff, so everyone knows what should be covered, where, by who, and when, relating to the NVQ, Core Curriculum and Key Skills standards; regular, structured progress reviews; programme of additional support sessions (NVQ portfolio workshops) for all apprentices assessed as Entry level, delivered in the workplace. Every apprentice participates in an initial assessment and induction day at the start of the programme, following three weeks of work experience and practical initial assessment with the employer. The day includes a specific Key Skills induction explaining the relevance and importance of Key Skills in the context of their job, the training and assessment process, and the place of Key Skills within the apprenticeship framework.
- Resources – these should support all aspects of the provision, available for use and dissemination to employers, apprentices and staff to ensure consistency of approach and also flexible delivery to the individual. For example, SCT has published a booklet – *Guide to Key Skills in Apprenticeships* – with a leading international rider who is also an ex-SCT apprentice who achieved all the Key Skills, explaining the importance of LLN skills in work with horses at world-class level. Resources are also developed on an ongoing basis to support learning, teaching and initial and ongoing assessment and recording progress, for example lesson plans, 'Record of Work Done' and LLN workbooks

written in a vocational context, referenced to the NVQ and Core Curriculum.

- Training and development for staff and employers – this should improve awareness of the aims and purpose of improving LLN skills, teaching skills, techniques to enable achievement and effective support in the workplace.
- Methods for recognising and rewarding achievement – for employers, staff and apprentices; for example, master classes with world-class professionals, bi-monthly newsletters promoting achievement and articles written by apprentices and ongoing certification of the Key Skills units.
- Annual cycle for self-assessment – this will accurately determine the quality of provision and areas for improvement. It must be structured and simple and all parties need to understand the method of quality assurance, when it will happen, by whom, and what will happen as a result. Activities include teaching observations, collection of learner and employer feedback, analysis of achievement rates by different learner groups, comparisons with other providers, external consultancy, and internal and external verification.

Delivery

Delivery takes place within the overall structure of provision, according to planned times and content, guided by national Key Skills standards and the Core Curriculum, in the right place, by the right person. Given that all these factors are organised, staff, employers and leaders can then concentrate on the quality of training and assessment being delivered.

Several key factors are fundamental to high-quality delivery:

- the quality of the trainer – their enthusiasm, motivation, teaching skills, LLN skills, capacity to inspire and improve, and motivate others; their competence in using resources to support their teaching, record and measure progress
- the quality of the leader – their enthusiasm, motivation, capacity to inspire and motivate the trainer and apprentice
- the apprentice – their enthusiasm, motivation and willingness to learn and improve

- the quality assurance methods to enable good practice to be identified, communicated and used to inspire and guide others, so improving training standards throughout the organisation.

All teaching and learning must be focused on the individual, relevant to them and their job, their responsibilities, aspirations, current competence and capability. The ability of the trainer to focus in this way will determine the quality of the session and the extent to which the improvements made are sustainable.

Activities and practices used to support good delivery include:

- Use of initial assessment – the BSA Tests 2002 are completed by every apprentice during the initial assessment process. These tests are used because they are time-bound, easy to administer because paper-based, quick to mark and give reliable and accurate feedback on the apprentice's current level of literacy and numeracy. The results form part of the Key Skills individual learning plan (ILP), with interview notes based on the apprentice's own perception of their ability, enthusiasm and where Key Skills relate to their current job role. A copy of the ILP is given to the apprentice, employer and NVQ portfolio workshop tutor (where LLN training and support are provided).
- Effective lesson planning – so that every session is interesting, challenging, focused, and leads to progress and improvement in skills. Trainers should set themselves targets for the apprentice's learning. These targets should inform the objectives for the session. At the end of every session the trainer and apprentice should evaluate what has been learnt and if the targets have been met, and no apprentice should ever leave a session not clear about what to do next to make further progress. The employer should also understand what has been done, what improvements have been made and what needs to happen before the next session.
- Use of initial and diagnostic assessment to plan LLN training – to ensure teaching is at the appropriate level and targets areas needing improvement. This should inform the lesson plan and resources used.
- Use of the NVQ scheme of work and knowledge of the current NVQ unit being trained and assessed – to ensure teaching is at the appropriate level and targets areas needing improvement. This should inform the lesson plan and resources used.

- Use of the Key Skills scheme of work and knowledge of the Key Skills standards being trained and assessed – to ensure teaching is at the appropriate level and targets areas needing improvement. This should inform the lesson plan and resources used. The content must also include completion of practice tests and test preparation if the apprentice will need to do these.
- Teaching of LLN topics in small sections, related to the skills required by the NVQ, with ongoing assessment of understanding of key techniques and recognition and rewarding of progress made.
- Development of essential skills – so that improvement can be sustained independent of the trainer, for example teaching how to use the dictionary, not just how to spell the word; and conventions of how to present information effectively.

Issues

Improving LLN standards in the context of following an Apprenticeship Programme is extremely challenging in terms of:

- The time available with the apprentice – given that they are employed, being paid by an employer, have responsibilities and competing demands on their time when at work. Time is always limited and often fragmented.
- Logistics – due to lack of time during the job, trainers visit apprentices in their workplace, often one-to-one. The rural nature of the equine industry and poor transport links lead to apprentices being very far apart geographically. Getting to the apprentice's workplace and access to them when they are at work are therefore very difficult and extremely costly for the provider.
- The disparity in skills levels between the NVQ and Key Skills – an apprentice may be employed in a job role working at NVQ Level 3 in terms of work performance, but may be dyslexic, Entry level 3 in literacy and/or numeracy and have poor GCSE results. They are required to pass external tests at Level 2 and despite the highest quality teaching and support lose motivation and commitment to achieving the full framework because they are unable or unwilling to do the test preparation and pass the tests. For some the test is

unachievable and, therefore, the full apprenticeship (this may be only one qualification out of the eight required in the framework).

- Staff competence – highly effective vocational trainers cannot attain the necessary LLN skills to be highly effective LLN tutors, yet without an understanding of the vocational area would be unable to put their teaching in a vocational context. In addition to this, the highly valuable consultancy support available via the Skills for Life Improvement Programmes may not be sustained and are project based rather than part of ongoing development work. It is therefore not possible for the support to be integrated with the provider's overall quality improvement plan.
- Conflicting programmes – Key Skills are a fundamental and essential part of the Apprenticeship Programme but are not required by the Train to Gain programme. Both programmes have the NVQ as the core qualification; both are targeting the same age group and same employers. This disparity of requirements detracts from providers' strategic objectives, vision and culture, which are communicated to all parties, of increasing the levels of LLN through all their activities.

Conclusion

Improvements in any aspect of provision will only be made and sustained through effective leadership. In any sphere, the great leaders display several prominent characteristics: a determination and absolute commitment to getting it right and an awareness that it can always be better; attention to detail in all aspects of work; a determination and ability to keep things simple; a natural capacity to respect and trust team members; a perception that they are a part of the team, not the leader; and an infectious and enduring positive attitude to the goal.

4

City of Sunderland College

Leading Skills for Life from a non-Skills for Life perspective

Julie Raine

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explain how Skills for Life provision at one of the biggest colleges in the country, which is judged to be Grade 1 and the winner of the 2005/06 Beacon award for basic skills, is led by someone without a Skills for Life background. It also shows what non-Skills for Life approaches have contributed to our success.

Context

Sunderland is the largest city in England's North East region, with a population of 280,600. The River Wear runs through the heart of the city and along with Gateshead, Newcastle, and North and South Tyneside, the city forms part of the Tyne and Wear sub-region.

City of Sunderland College (CoSC) is located in an area of considerable disadvantage (all figures below taken from the *Skills for Life Survey* (DfES 2003) and the 2001 Census):

- Sunderland ranks 22nd most deprived out of the 354 authorities in England.
- The 2004 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) indicate that 46.1 per cent of the resident population live in areas ranked among the 20 per cent most deprived in England.
- Two-thirds of CoSC's 16- to 19-year-old full-time learners receive the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).
- ESOL provision is relatively small but CoSC has a black and minority ethnic (BME) population of 4 per cent compared to a city population of 1.9 per cent.
- Over one in four of the city's workforce is not engaged in economic activity.
- Levels of long-term sickness are twice the national average with an Invalidity Benefit rate at 12 per cent.
- Over 80 per cent of those who are not actively in employment do not want a job.
- Approximately a quarter of the city's working-age population is without a Level 2 qualification and the skills gaps in the North East (21 per cent) are more significant than in England (16 per cent).
- In 2006 only 34 per cent of adults in Sunderland had an NVQ Level 3 or equivalent compared with 42.7 per cent in the North East and 45.3 per cent in Great Britain.
- In March 2006, compared with the national average of 7.9 per cent, 10.7 per cent of 16–18 year olds in the region were not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Leadership

On being given the Skills for Life remit within CoSC in 2004, I was presented with the fact that an estimated 89,000 adults in the city have a problem with literacy or numeracy. In Sunderland 21 per cent of local residents have skills lower than Level 1 in literacy compared to 18 per cent nationally and 65 per cent of residents are below Entry level 3 in numeracy compared to 36 per cent nationally.

At this time the college had an established basic skills provision of around 4000 enrolments per year. There was a well-developed department for

learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) and provision for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was small. There were a number of quality issues and student achievement was poor, (although retention was good – in fact some students had been with us for years). Only one head of department was in post and the staffing base was narrow. We needed to increase the throughput of learners greatly to make a dent in the sheer volume of need in Sunderland.

My approach was to tackle the necessary improvements as I would in any other curriculum area, that is, subject to the same constraints and conditions as any other, namely:

- quality of teaching and learning
- success rates
- student satisfaction
- funding.

And why not?

In the early days of my tenure I was told many times and in no uncertain terms that the area of basic skills was ‘different’ and ought to be treated as such, which suggested to me a continuation of:

- long-term students with no expected end date or planned progression route
- students who were not challenged or stretched
- or tested.

I came into a role that was created to tackle an area of recognised need and I came with no prior experience and very little specialist knowledge. However, working with more experienced colleagues I quickly learned that although we have spent 30 years trying to address basic skills, the need continued to grow. It was very clear that a fundamental change in approach was necessary in order to make any real difference to basic skills delivery and take up in Sunderland.

This change of approach hinged around giving learners what *they wanted* as opposed to what other people thought they needed. Our research and

deliberations resulted in the creation of ‘Test the City’; a programme aimed at getting learners prepared for and able to achieve a National Test qualification at a time, speed and location with options for study that suited their needs. We have deliberately avoided having a basic skills feel to the provision and the programme is part of our mainstream offer in all our main centres. Test the City is now in its fourth year and continues to attract in the region of 2,500 Skills for Life enrolments per year, which contributes significantly to regional targets. The programme was the winner of the 2005/06 Beacon award for innovation in basic skills and has also hugely influenced national activity through its links with the Get On campaign.

The following areas underwent significant change.

Curriculum model

- Standard budget and financial constraints apply, although some concessions were made in the early days of Test the City in the form of an agreed reduced contribution to the college overhead. Targets including student numbers, success rates and headline improvements are set and monitored across all areas and are a significant driver in the ‘right student, right course’ ethos of CoSC.
- Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of CoSC provision is National Target Qualification; there is no non-accredited learning. All the courses have a flexible delivery model and there is much effective use of distance and e-learning.
- Extensive initial and diagnostic assessment for all learners results in students receiving the appropriate teaching and learning support necessary to meet their needs.
- Tests and assessment – we are not afraid of formal settings for those for whom it is appropriate, there is much formative assessment and, yes, we use the word test!
- Length of programme is controlled, all learners have expected end dates and an identified progression pathway is detailed on their individual learning plan (ILP) and action plan.
- We do not provide social care.

Staffing

- There were two differing cultures within the college: one of which – ‘anyone can teach basic skills’ – made this provision an all-too-easy repository for displaced or surplus staff; the other was the ‘you have to be a specialist’ approach. My belief is that a compromise position, which brings together specialist skills, experience, new blood and an enthusiasm for the subject and its students, has been paramount in our success.
- The directorate now has three departments with teaching staff who are all very well qualified and a glut of subject specialists – some longstanding, some new but two out of the three heads of department are not Skills for Life specialists, in fact one isn’t even a teacher!

Marketing

- Marketing titles and marketing materials were reviewed and courses such as ‘return to learn’ were renamed and simply called maths and English.
- A strong ‘brand’ was developed and high-profile advertising continues to raise awareness across the city. Promotion happens through the local press, local radio, metro trains and stations, and leaflet distribution through the local free newspaper. In addition, advertising is placed on major bus routes using Adshels at bus stops.
- Perhaps we were lucky as this change in approach coincided with an apparent government realisation that open, obvious marketing was key to accessing the Skills for Life market nationally.

Partnership working

- Partnership work is very much a key strength of our provision; we pride ourselves on strong links with a vast array of partners. We are proactive and influential at local, sub-regional and regional levels. In Tyne and Wear the Skills for Life Strategy Group (a partnership of providers representing all of Tyne and Wear) has successfully bid for and managed more than £4.5 million in joint Skills for Life projects over the past four years.

- Our collaborative links with, for example TUC, Jobcentre Plus and the voluntary and community sector, have put us in a strong position for employer engagement and workforce development initiatives.

Lessons learned

- Our experience has shown that direct interventions with potential learners significantly increase recruitment, participation and achievement rates for literacy and numeracy. It has also been shown that further, continued contact is required to encourage people to follow through on the initial approach. The conversion from initial engagement to participation is as much a challenge as the initial engagement itself. Only 2 per cent of Skills for Life learners in Tyne and Wear are self-referrers.
- We have learned that there is not a standard basic skills curriculum that can be developed once and sustained through routine maintenance. In order to continue to attract new learners it is necessary to have new ideas regularly and to have the resources available to develop them.
- The management structure of the college clearly reflects the priority attached to the Skills for Life agenda and this senior management commitment results in strong strategic planning and direction including challenging targets set at college and city levels.
- I believe that having a passion for what you do and enthusiasm and determination to do the best for your learners is more important than having the right background or credentials.
- The importance and relevance of Skills for Life to CoSC has resulted in a true whole organisation approach, but even wider than that, the strength of our partnerships, and our involvement in city-wide initiatives and formal partnerships such as the Local Strategic Partnership, has given us the makings of a whole city approach, with Skills for Life talked about at the highest levels and recognised within the City Strategy and Local Area Agreements.

Conclusions

- Over the last four years we have met our Skills for Life targets, with 21,197 people developing vital new skills and competencies. This is more than 1,400 above our target. In Sunderland, since 2002, over 33,000 adults have taken positive steps to improve their literacy or numeracy skills.
- Sunderland has achieved significant success in delivering Skills for Life targets, through good partnership working, high standards of delivery, provision of new facilities and successful marketing of courses. The potential for this to be expanded further into the workplace is great.
- Those people who would benefit most from gaining a qualification are often the most reluctant to take part in learning. However, the majority of CoSC learners have found that they have achieved a qualification with greater ease than they might have expected.

Reference

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5

Dudley College

Outstanding is a state of mind: Leadership issues in literacy, language and numeracy provision

Lowell Williams

I've always thought the greatest asset of the further education (FE) sector is the people we employ. Yes, there are one or two difficult and crusty characters in every college, but in the main our teachers and support staff are capable and willing. And within this workforce our literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) teachers are often our strongest practitioners. Dedicated, enthusiastic and passionate about their teaching, they provide remarkable learning opportunities that often transform the lives of the adult and young learners they support.

Given this assertion, it is a little difficult to understand why LLN provision has given us so much anxiety over recent years. The Moser Report (DfEE 1999) was not only a damning indictment of the levels of functional illiteracy in the UK, but more painfully of the quality of provision on offer. At least the report recognised that there could be no quick fix and that a long-term national strategy was necessary, which has now duly influenced much of our provision. Across the sector we have risen to the challenge and substantial progress has been made since Moser's 1999 cry for a 'fresh start'.

Of course, there's still much to be done to assure ourselves that our LLN provision is routinely 'outstanding'. If my assertion that our LLN lecturers are some of our most gifted staff is correct, then the continued journey to outstanding must concern many more college staff than the LLN teaching teams themselves. Whilst individuals and teaching teams can clear some of the lower hurdles to excellence, it's only through a concerted and joined-up institutional approach that the challenges to become outstanding will be met. It is here that college leaders have a key role to play.

Three core challenges

In my experience, when you talk directly to LLN staff they are unequivocal in their demands of college leaders. To achieve outstanding provision, they argue, college leaders must play a meaningful role in addressing a number of significant challenges. Three 'core' challenges are often cited.

The first is depressingly obvious. LLN practitioners point to a lack of cross-institutional understanding of LLN provision, particularly at senior levels. Too often, they assert, senior managers and corporations appear to lack an intrinsic understanding of the nature of LLN provision. (This was certainly true of me as a principal until some of my more vociferous LLN colleagues put me right!) I don't have the data to back this up, but my very strong suspicion is that a disproportionately small number of principals and senior post holders come from an LLN background. This lack of senior understanding can be further complicated by the remoteness of some senior staff. LNN practitioners sometimes complain of a lack of access to senior managers, which diminishes their chance to develop the knowledge of senior staff and to influence high-level strategy. As individual teachers they may be able to deliver excellent teaching but without this senior 'buy-in' it is difficult to see how our LLN practitioners alone can move a college's provision to outstanding.

This lack of senior understanding and buy-in can lead in turn to the second challenge: overcoming the emergence of a silo approach to the delivery and development of LLN provision. Without an integrated approach, they argue, LLN provision can become marginalised or indeed 'ghettoised' in a college. In this scenario the college's LLN provision is predominantly developed

around the needs of students whose primary learning aim is a LLN qualification. Where there are non-LLN students following LLN qualifications in support of their primary vocational learning aim, their LLN learning is decontextualised from their vocational studies. As sorely evidenced by the early roll-out of Key Skills, offering LLN learning out of context from and bolted on to a vocational learning goal is likely to lead to learners disengaging and subsequently withdrawing from this learning. Outstanding outcomes are most unlikely in this scenario.

Across the sector, we are now much more aware that most if not all of our learners, regardless of their core vocational programme or indeed their level of study, need to further develop their LLN skills. Whilst this awareness is not absolutely universal, it is a commonly accepted maxim in most colleges. Yet, despite this, LLN practitioners point to a third challenge: non-LLN specialists, they argue, just aren't willing to 'step up to the plate' and help meet the college-wide LLN challenge. In particular, LLN practitioners describe the difficulty of engaging their non-LLN specialist colleagues in the process of contextualising, or even better embedding, the delivery of LLN learning into the college's core vocational or academic programmes. Non-LLN staff, they argue, are at best cool on developing their own capacity to better support the LLN needs of their learners. Yes, there is lip service towards the LLN maxim, but no real action outside the LLN team.

On the face of it, it seems difficult to explain why vocational lecturers might resist the integration of LLN provision into the programmes they teach. I suspect that this resistance is more of an unintentional response than a thought-through stance. Perhaps it is seated somewhere in LLN's somewhat chequered history in colleges.

Inadvertently or otherwise, colleges have had a tendency to present LLN provision from a deficit point of view. With managers banging on about high success rates, we may have led staff to view students with weak LLN skills as potential liabilities, withdrawals waiting to happen. In turn, the provision itself has sometimes been characterised as remedial learning to address an individual's failings, rather than as an integral component of their primary learning aim. And management practice may well have compounded this. How many times were Key Skills or basic skills added to a teacher's timetable as last resort teaching sessions to bring them up to teaching hours?

(I'm sorry to admit that as a middle manager I am guilty as charged on this count.) How often were Key Skills or basic skills sessions the last to be added to a college's timetable following subserviently behind the options and timetable blocks dedicated to National Diploma and A-level provision?

If this underlying negative view of LLN still exists it might be influencing vocational teaching staff's assessment of the merits of really signing up to LLN as a key component of every learning programme. LLN staff may assert, over and over, that improving a learner's LLN skills will in turn improve their chances of succeeding on their primary learning goal and will make them more receptive, responsive and easier to teach, but unless vocational teaching staff actually believe this, deep down, they will remain unresponsive.

Further, whilst we employ experienced and capable vocational teaching staff with substantive industrial knowledge, a surprising number, I believe, may themselves be anxious about their own skill level in maths and English, certainly at the higher levels. I have been fortunate enough to work in a college where teaching and support staff felt safe to discuss openly anxieties about their own LLN 'gremlins'. Armed with this knowledge, I suspect that in some cases LLN staff may find themselves unexpectedly trying to rally and engage vocational colleagues in the delivery and integration of LLN skills into the core programme, when these colleagues in fact lack confidence in their ability to teach LLN or indeed require support with aspects of their own LLN skills.

Responding to the challenges

There is a danger of becoming prescriptive when outlining best practice responses to challenges. I'm always a little wary of individuals or organisations that claim to have the answers – what works in one college may not work in another. But the challenges detailed above can be addressed in numerous ways.

Practicalities and operational matters count. Most colleges now recognise the need for an institutional LLN (or Skills for Life) strategy and development plan. It's vital to get senior buy-in and endorsement for the plan and to ensure progress is regularly monitored by the corporation and the standards

committee (or its equivalent) and by cross-college management team(s). It's certainly a useful way to focus the attention of the principal and senior staff if objectives related to implementation of the college's LLN strategy appear as their personal objectives and are reported on as part of their annual performance review or appraisal.

The development plan itself should be wide-ranging by nature. It cannot be a strategy for the LLN division or school. Whilst a development plan will inevitably focus on teaching practice and improving teaching and learning, equally important, if not more, are the actions on engaging curriculum teams, providing continuing professional development (CPD), communicating the Skills for Life message, engaging employers, community groups and other partners and improving resources. As with any development plan, it is the rigour with which it is implemented and reviewed that counts. Simply put, all staff need to take the LLN development plan seriously. Senior managers should consider the carrots and sticks that best fit the college's performance management culture to ensure this happens.

The role of CPD is particularly important (and this extends to senior managers). In the initial phases of the development plan there will be a need to prioritise staff development on LLN activities. A particularly effective way is to embed LLN staff development into the teaching development programme. In essence, all staff development activities that relate to teaching and learning should include an element specific to LLN. Managers have the authority to make staff development on LLN mandatory for both teaching and support staff. And we mustn't forget that some of our own staff need LLN support. If the college culture is right, they may be willing to disclose these needs. A supportive response is required.

However, too much top-down direction can be oppressive and counter productive. We should not lose sight of the value of one-to-one personal interactions. In this sense leaders might seek to appoint, formally or otherwise, LLN advocates or 'LLN angels' (as a particularly effective LLN advocate once described herself to me). These advocates are personal and accessible individuals who can champion LLN on a local basis in the college. Leaders by ability, rather than by designation, they will typically be those engaging and persistently stubborn individuals who can make people listen. Managers need to find a delicate balance between allowing these expert LLN

practitioners freedom to work at will across the college, whilst at the same time ensuring the college follows a more detailed and prescriptive LLN development strategy.

For leaders it is worth remembering that the battle to achieve outstanding provision is not solely operational. It is attitudinal. Outstanding is, after all, a state of mind. Beyond the practicalities and operational challenges leaders face, the real underlying leadership challenge is one of engagement and belief. Senior staff must themselves become knowledgeable advocates of LLN and must lead by example, often from the front. Leaders must value, support and passionately champion LLN work in their colleges and they must be highly visible in doing so. Sadly, LLN provision has suffered a series of knockbacks in recent years. Most recently we have witnessed the funding debacle in which LLN funding has deteriorated under the Learning and Skills Council's changeable and incomprehensible funding regimes. In facing these and other challenges leaders must not be fatalistic, rather they must engender innovation, creativity and positivism.

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6

Northern College

Managing, developing and maintaining outstanding provision in Skills for Life

Jill Westerman

Context

Northern College is one of four long-term residential colleges for adults in England and is based near Barnsley in South Yorkshire. Its mission is around widening participation and its target group is adults who have had little opportunity to pursue education in the past – it actively works to recruit those who have few or no qualifications. The antecedents of the college are the working-class education movements of the 19th century, which had the concept of ‘really useful knowledge’ and education for activists.

As well as discrete Skills for Life provision the college offers courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences, ICT, Community Regeneration and for trade union activists. There is one full-time Access to Higher Education course which runs over an academic year and the rest of the provision takes the form of three-to five-day residential courses run during the week and over weekends, some of which are linked so that students attend a number of short courses throughout the year.

The students come from an immensely wide range of backgrounds and have a diverse and impressive range of skills and experience in different fields. However, the majority do not possess a Level 2 qualification in English or maths and many have areas where they could develop literacy and numeracy skills. Broadly speaking, most learners come to the college with skills between Entry level 3 and Level 2, although of course the spiky profiles associated with adult learners mean that it is often difficult to reach absolute definitions of levels. Because of the target group and mission of the college, it has long been concerned with skills development and for many years this has been reflected in the overall strategy of the college.

The college has a successful history of literacy and numeracy work: it opted to have this area inspected in 1993/94 (under the title of core skills) and was graded as 2; received a grade 2 again in 2003 and a grade 1 in 2006. Its Skills for Life strategy was singled out in the last two inspections as being particularly effective.

The challenge of change

I came to the college in 1993 and shortly afterwards took over the co-ordination of the Skills for Life work. What I found was a college that took a holistic view of its learners, placing them at the heart of all activity with a sound recognition of the complex mix of life experiences, skills, understanding, aspirations and desires that each individual brings to the learning process. It sought to value and extend these skills and understanding, and resisted any label that defines an individual in terms of a learning deficit.

This attitude was a prerequisite for the further successful development of literacy and numeracy work. However, alongside this strong ethos of respect for the students was an equally strong belief on the part of some staff that to focus on skills development was to focus on the deficit; that it undervalued the experience and competence of the college's learners. There was some active resistance to the introduction of explicit skills development into the wider curriculum and to the expansion of the discrete skills curriculum offer within the college.

An additional factor was that the college culture was ‘existential’ (Handy 1976) with a talented, or I should say very talented, staff team who tended to operate as individual professionals, with strong notions of autonomy. As Handy (1995) comments: ‘Professionals do not willingly receive orders, fill in forms or compromise on their own plans.’ So, although the then assistant principal of the college was a strong advocate of skills development this was not enough to ensure compliance with any increased focus on literacy and numeracy work.

Changing the culture

My starting point for the management of change was to acknowledge the prevailing college culture and, more importantly, the strengths of the college, in particular the holistic and personalised approach to students. Since that time I have become a great believer in Jim Collins’ view that what moves an institution from good to great is the ‘hedgehog concept’ (Collins 2001); in this case identifying a strength and working from that as opposed to trying to do too much at once.

This is the first key point in this paper: that successful management of Skills for Life provision is best approached by working from what is already good in your provision and extending it, as well as understanding and working to the prevailing organisational culture. Energy is well spent on identifying the small changes that add up to successful organisational change, rather than on attempting to adopt a successful strategy from another organisation that does not fit your own. Don’t fight the current culture, but work with it, even if you want to change it.

In Northern College this involved a variety of different strategies, some of which may be applicable to other providers and some of which may not. These took time to develop and implement, which is the second key point: there are quick fixes, but developing and embedding outstanding provision takes time.

The first strategy was to raise the profile of Skills for Life work by producing papers and draft strategies for discussion at staff meetings and within teams. This fitted the ‘existential’ culture, so that all staff had the opportunity to air

their concerns and views. We had some interesting discussions about the value our society places on certain skills and not others, and the extent to which this contributes to social change or social stratification. I placed emphasis on the notion of skills as a form of power, indeed it was this notion that originally led me into the world of adult education, but that's a different story.

Although having a strong voice in favour of the prioritisation of Skills for Life on the senior management team was not the over-riding factor, nonetheless it was important in that this agenda was not lost in strategic planning. Equally it ensured that, where possible, resources were channelled into this area and we were able to create a strong and creative team of superb tutors. 'Getting the right people on the bus' is another of Jim Collins' precepts and I would say that having good, well-trained and well-resourced tutors is essential.

I would also emphasise the creative aspect. By temperament I am risk averse, but have always encouraged creativity and risk in this area, which can be so bound up with the achievement of targets. The targets are there, they bring in funding and can't be ignored, but they are not what inspires staff or students. My emphasis is on developing imaginative sessions and courses that engage and stimulate students so that they enjoy coming to the college and leave wanting more. We fit the work towards targets around this rather than the other way round.

Involving and listening to learners, and ensuring that sufficient methods are in place not only to do this but to act on both formal and informal feedback is also vital. I could expand on the ways in which we do this, but it may not be helpful. There are many opportunities within a residential environment for getting feedback from students; there will be other different opportunities in different organisations. The key thing is to ensure that it happens and that the loops are closed – we have often been surprised by how much tutor perceptions differ from learner perceptions. Forgetting to involve the learners is a sure route to mediocrity.

Of course, systems need to be in place to support and embed these developments. We offered a variety of training opportunities for all staff, both tutorial and support, and in a variety of different ways which ranged from 15 minutes in a staff meeting on 'How I use writing frames in my class' to three-hour sessions during staff development week.

This training was supported by the production of materials which could be used by all tutors in their sessions to support Skills for Life development. One example was a small booklet *Bite Sized Pieces in Basic and Key Skills*, which identified a series of short 10–30-minute activities that could be used in any session (not specifically a Skills for Life class) to develop skills. This was complemented by short leaflets for students outlining the development and use of specific skills; these were made available in the library as well as in classes.

Staff response

It is often the case that some teams and some individuals are more enthusiastic than others in their desire to take the skills agenda forward. I worked with the more enthusiastic individuals to embed skills development in their teaching, sometimes via paired teaching with a Skills for Life tutor, sometimes via them trying out and refining their own practice which they were then asked to disseminate to other staff members.

There was a particularly successful partnership between the Skills for Life and ICT teams which involved cross-referencing all the Level 1 ICT provision to the literacy and numeracy Core Curricula and developing an associated range of high-quality learning materials to use with students. This work gained project funding and was subsequently disseminated regionally and nationally. Successes like these breed interest and more enthusiasm across the college, and are best if allowed to emerge naturally from good practice that is already in place.

I ensured that Skills for Life was specifically embedded into all college systems. So all annual reports must include a section on Skills for Life. All long course modules and short course programmes must identify which skills are being developed and how they link to the accreditation. Tutor pro formas for feedback to students include a section which specifically focuses on skills development as well as sections for the substantive curriculum. All lesson observations comment on Skills for Life development. All front-line staff are trained in Skills for Life awareness.

These things are important but in my view cannot be the starting point. The starting point must be to identify what works well already, work to extend this and work to involve all staff. Although this paper is considering the successful management of Skills for Life I have focused on the whole organisation because I think that it is unlikely that stand-alone Skills for Life provision can be truly outstanding without a whole organisation commitment.

The Skills for Life strategy is regularly updated and audits of the organisation and its work ensure that we do not become complacent. If 'good is the enemy of great' (Collins 2001) then excellence can be the mother of complacency and signal a drift to good or satisfactory.

Along the way there were things that did not work so well. At one point the college had Skills for Life as a standing item on the agendas of key meetings; this became ritualistic and boring. I made an error in insisting that all academic staff attend Core Curriculum training; this ignored the culture of consensus I have described above and did not have the benefit of being interesting or useful enough to win over reluctant attendees. I had been swept along by the hype surrounding the publication of the Core Curriculum and taken it beyond its proper or appropriate usage.

Summary

I would identify the key aspects of successful management of outstanding Skills for Life provision as firstly to work from what is good in the organisation and to extend it rather than attempting to follow the good practice of others if it does not fit. Listen to learners and act on the feedback they give. Developing and sustaining outstanding provision takes time; by all means use shortcuts, but recognise them as such and continue to work to embed good practice.

A Skills for Life champion at senior management team level helps drive the vision forward; it is further helped by training opportunities and supporting teaching materials. Developing a strong, creative, well-trained and well-resourced Skills for Life team is important, as is harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of others where they exist.

Embedding a consideration of Skills for Life into systems, reports, teaching plans and observations and meetings ensures that there is a continuing focus in the organisation, as does the regular updating of the Skills for Life strategy following institutional audit.

These things can only be successful within a culture that values each individual learner, respects what they bring to the college, and resists any behaviours (which may possibly stem from funding imperatives or targets) that label individuals in terms of a learning deficit. I want students to love coming to the college and to enjoy their time here. If they do, our chances of continuing high success rates and outstanding inspection results are vastly improved.

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7

Leicester College

Leading literacy, language and numeracy Maggie Galliers and Louise Hazel

Literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) have had a high profile at our senior leadership table for several years now.

Around a third of our learners, over 5,000 people, are on literacy and numeracy programmes including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Clearly, with such a large cohort, we have big responsibility for ensuring they have the best chance of success. Equally, however, as an organisation, we are very dependent on these learners and so how we manage literacy and numeracy is a key strategic consideration for us as a senior leadership team.

We have been pursuing our current strategy for LLN since 2005. Then, as now, we were the largest provider of adult literacy and numeracy programmes in Leicestershire. Although we already had a Grade 1 adult education department and a Grade 2 ESOL department, we knew that the scale and type of demand in Leicester would necessitate a radically different approach. Leicester itself had significant LLN need: achievement at 16 was very low, translating into a high adult skills need. It was also a Home Office dispersal centre and still receives a high number of refugees and asylum-seekers, creating considerable demand for ESOL. So we had a good understanding of who our

priority learners were and, broadly, of what we needed to do to reach and support them. We also realised that we did not have the necessary capacity to meet the demand and that the separation of literacy and numeracy from vocational areas was neither sustainable nor in the best interests of learners.

At around this time, changes to the college's structure at senior level presented the opportunity to allocate lead responsibility for LLN to an assistant principal, with supportive strategic steer from a vice principal. These changes, and the realisation that we needed to refresh our strategy, prompted us in early 2005 to become involved in a national pilot looking at a whole organisation approach to Skills for Life. This strategy, which has evolved over time, has had a major impact on how we manage, deliver and develop literacy and numeracy, on our view of leadership across the college, and, of course, on our learners.

The college's strategy has been, essentially, a developmental and multi-stranded one in which leadership and management are blended to support and develop curriculum staff, and in which LLN is embedded within the college's plans and processes. Our approach has been to devolve ownership (leadership) wherever possible and, in parallel, build capacity, raise awareness and utilise existing expertise and enthusiasm to effect change across the organisation. This has all been underpinned by strategic leadership from the senior leadership team and governors and by a vision that sees LLN as an entitlement for learners, rather than as an additional extra.

Our whole college approach started with a steering group, led by an assistant principal and involving staff from adult education and ESOL, learning development and quality. This group's action plan focused on a number of mainly process-driven areas like initial assessment, developing staff and raising awareness within the Core Curriculum. Members of the group took responsibility for developing strands of the plan where they had most expertise. So, for example, learning development led on diagnostic testing; training and development on staff development. Following this, a second wider group of staff was brought together to create an embedding Skills for Life development team. Its focus was developing teaching and learning strategies to promote literacy and numeracy in vocational areas so that the relevance and application in that area were clear.

The success of these groups was due largely to two things. First, they made a conscious effort to draw people together with areas of expertise from across the college. This cross-college collaboration on specific projects was vital in creating a shared understanding of the issues, in building inter- and intra-curriculum relationships and in generating a much stronger appreciation of colleagues' professional expertise. Second, the projects were designed to be flexible and tailored to individual areas in ways that allowed them to make changes in discrete and manageable areas of work. This collaborative style of working gave teachers a much greater sense of ownership, allowing them to shape the developments and develop the relevance for themselves and their learners.

This 'mini project' methodology has proved very successful and is now well embedded across the college. We have had, for example, a project jointly developed between the caring professions and adult literacy and numeracy teams, focused on developing literacy and numeracy skills to Level 2 to enable learners to progress to a Level 3 Access to Nursing course. Another particularly successful project was the embedding of ESOL into construction where there have historically been difficulties in attracting and supporting under-represented groups. This project involved the construction team working closely with specialists from adult education and ESOL to look at the language and numeracy requirements for construction and how to tackle these by embedding LLN within the Core Curriculum. This work seemed to have a revelatory impact on the construction staff and was so successful that some of our carpentry and plumbing lecturers spoke about the project at a national conference.

However, the size and complexity of Leicester College's literacy and numeracy provision has meant that adopting a whole organisation approach has not been straightforward by any means. From the senior team's point of view, LLN is part of the college's overall strategy for teaching and learning and for quality improvement, and while we have a strategic leader for this work, it is not within his gift to achieve the necessary change on his own. Early on, we dedicated a whole staff development day to LLN, involving over 1,000 staff in LLN-related activities. This was a key stepping-off point. Although many people did not immediately see the relevance to them, they were at least starting to ask the right questions, which in many cases provided the impetus for discussion and follow-up work within curriculum areas.

Inevitably, there has been some resistance. One of the biggest issues has been overcoming competing and negative views about the value and relevance of LLN: ‘we don’t need it’, ‘the students don’t want to do it’, ‘it is different and needs to be treated differently’. Much of this could be attributed simply to a lack of understanding, which the collaborative nature of the project work has helped to overcome. And while the projects have focused on how to change things, much of the progress has come from getting the people bits right.

In a sense this has also been about developing a dual professionalism among teachers that enables them, whether LLN or vocational specialists, to look at the needs of students in the round and to have an awareness of the inter-relatedness of need. One of the most challenging areas has been moving the curriculum to become more learner centred, so that it remains inclusive and enables learners who come to us with very low skills levels to gain a qualification and progress. Through instructional leadership, curriculum managers and other ‘agents for change’, like the enthusiasts involved in the project work, advanced practitioners and quality managers, have helped teachers develop their skills in curriculum design and assessment. This has included training vocational staff to deliver LLN and constructing the curriculum to enable this to happen; for example, ensuring classes are available outside normal opening times, developing skills to work with ex-offenders, having shorter, more intensive programmes and working with other partners to develop learning resources.

Other approaches, such as locating LLN and vocational staff together, have also created a much greater sense of shared understanding and collaboration in a relatively short space of time. The imaginative and innovative work by colleagues across the college is particularly encouraging. For example, the fashion department has introduced ‘One Big Friday’ which brings together fashion and footwear students each Friday. Students are grouped according to their ability in different Key Skills and they work together on Key Skills and one core unit. In one year, Key Skills success results have risen by around 30 per cent.

One of our early priorities was ensuring that we had sufficient capacity within our specialist LLN team to enable us to roll out our embedding strategy. To achieve this, we have had to generate our own capacity by developing Levels

4 and 5 literacy and numeracy programmes, including a bridging course for staff wanting to take the Level 5 programmes, and supporting our staff in taking these qualifications. We now provide this training for a range of partners in the local area and are helping to build up capacity in the locality.

In many ways, collaboration has been a central theme. Our involvement in the whole organisation project brought us together with other colleges across the country in a spirit of openness that has enabled us to share difficulties and solutions in a very constructive way. Local partnerships too have created valuable opportunities to develop more responsive types of learning delivery to meet local need. Inevitably there have been challenges in working with other providers but our view is that the development and maintenance of productive working relationships is critical to the successful development of LLN provision. We have tried to show leadership in our local area, working hard to overcome any conflicts through open and transparent working, by supporting partners in developing materials and generally making an extra effort to win friends and make things work. Our size and resources mean we have the capacity to develop and deliver training that is needed by other organisations and we now manage the European Social Fund (ESF) projects for the Local Learning Partnership and deliver training for volunteers working alongside teachers in Skills for Life settings in Leicestershire.

Our strategy has required the college's commitment of staff and other additional resources but we have been careful to maximise external funding to fund different projects. It has also been very important to signal our appreciation of the work that so many people are doing and we have made a point of acknowledging the extra time staff have put into the work in a variety of ways, giving remission for some of the project work and for the higher level teaching qualifications.

The impact on the college and on the staff involved has also been impressive. Crucially, there has been a positive impact on learners. Recruitment has increased and success rates have improved; for example, in ESOL Speaking and Listening, success rates went up an average of 23 per cent. It is always difficult to make a direct correlation between improvement strategies and success rates but we have found that improvements in student achievement have resulted from the sum of a range of separate actions that are linked to a coherent improvement strategy.

We have also had many requests to share our experiences in LLN locally and nationally. Whilst this does Leicester College's reputation no harm at all, it has also provided more opportunities for staff to participate in different working arrangements and build relationships with colleagues in other providers and agencies. It has also been very gratifying that several of the team originally involved in LLN projects have now progressed to more senior roles, some at Leicester College and some with other organisations. Their work on different strands of the literacy and numeracy strategy has enabled them to develop their leadership as well as their subject-specialist skills in ways that have acted as springboards for their careers.

As a college, and particularly as a senior leadership team, we have learnt a huge amount from our approach to LLN, not least that actively taking a whole organisation approach can lead to rapid and dramatic improvements, and that whole organisation really does mean whole organisation. Few areas of the college have been unaffected in some way and our strategy for LLN has also now prompted us to take whole organisation approaches to other areas of work. Our strategy for becoming an outstanding organisation is very much centred on a model of devolved leadership.

It is the devolution of ownership and leadership at a local level that has, in our view, been the key success factor in our approach to LLN. Although much of the work has been focused on process and on changing how and what we deliver, it really has been the people aspect of the work that has had the biggest impact. Across the college, people have signed up to the vision and have coached, supported and worked collaboratively to make improvements for learners. It is this that has made the difference.

8

North Warwickshire and Hinckley College

Professional development in Skills for Life

Sian Whiteley

Introduction

Leadership of Skills for Life encompasses many different skills. One of the most important is the recognition that good-quality continuing professional development (CPD) enhances the skills and knowledge of the teachers of today, enabling them to become the leaders of tomorrow.

The aim of this paper is to share some specific ideas and experiences of CPD in helping teachers across an organisation to embrace the importance of Skills for Life and understand how they can contribute to supporting skills development within their own curriculum areas. For some, there are anxieties over their own personal skills; for others, it is important for them to see they are not being asked to replace specialist teachers; and for existing specialist teachers, recognition that there may be gaps in their own knowledge that need filling.

Different approaches are required. 'One size doesn't fit all', therefore those of us who deliver this training need to be flexible and able to adapt models of delivery to ensure we can engage and hopefully enthuse staff who will then feel confident enough to take up the challenge of looking for opportunities

to integrate Skills for Life across their own programmes and promote this to others in their team.

High-quality literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) provision can only be achieved if staff have access to effective professional development, delivered by enthusiastic, knowledgeable teacher trainers who are experts in their field. Having a specialist Skills for Life teacher training team within an institution ensures this can happen.

This paper discusses examples of different opportunities that exist for professional development in Skills for Life for teachers within a large organisation through general staff development activity; initial teacher training; focused Skills for Life teacher training and subject-specialist training.

Context

North Warwickshire and Hinckley College is a large general further education (FE) college, serving the three boroughs of Nuneaton and Bedworth, North Warwickshire and Hinckley, and Bosworth. There are two main campuses: one in Nuneaton, Warwickshire and one in Hinckley, Leicestershire, plus five smaller learning centres based in local communities.

The college provides academic and vocational education and training with courses offered in all sector subject areas to learners whose ages range from 14 to 90. Skills for Life features significantly within curriculum areas and there is a strong commitment to part-time adult literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) community-based classes.

The captive audience

Inviting staff to attend briefing sessions and training sessions voluntarily does not always generate the best response, for all sorts of reasons. Whole-staff conferences, when there are no classes and all teachers are required to attend, provide good opportunities to arrange short informative sessions with sharp outcomes as part of the menu of activities for staff to undertake across the day. Fun activities with clear messages about what Skills for Life

is, where staff participate in practical tasks, can be difficult to organise but very productive. One of the major hurdles in the whole organisation approach is demystifying the term Skills for Life and helping staff to recognise how they can play a part in supporting their learners, thus helping to consolidate work that the specialists are doing, rather than seeing this as 'something someone else does'.

For example, using ideas from a working group which included a consultant already working with the college, a whole afternoon of a development day was set aside and teachers were divided into groups and allocated to a Skills for Life tutor. The first part of the session provided information on the background to the national agenda and discussed who the learners were, what the national targets were and how these affected the college. In order for participants to understand what Skills for Life really were, in smaller groups a task was set to create cocktails. A range of ingredients was made available in each room and at the end of the task, each group had to have made a cocktail, written down the ingredients and the recipe, and given it a name. The skills used for the activity were then analysed in terms of literacy and numeracy and discussed. Many were surprised that the skills they had taken for granted were in fact Skills for Life, and the very skills their learners often struggled with. The cocktails were eventually judged and a prize was awarded to the one with the most innovative name.

This approach is unthreatening, encourages teamwork, yet helps staff to identify how important good basic skills are in completing even relatively simple tasks. Asking them to think about one task or activity they ask their own learners to undertake and applying the same analysis, quickly made it clear that they were actually covering some of these skills in their own teaching but had not recognised it.

Initial teacher training

Existing teacher training programmes provide huge opportunities for scheduling direct Skills for Life training. Currently, three days are set aside within the new Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector for this at the college. Most of the participants are teachers from within the institution and the activities are planned to relate directly to their own learners.

In these sessions it is important for the teachers to understand not only the importance of having good literacy and numeracy skills nationally and within the college, but also how small changes in their own practice can make a difference; for example, the importance of actively using assessment information to inform planning. It was discovered that, in spite of having the results of literacy and numeracy assessments before the start of a new programme, teachers were not always clear about how to use these to differentiate learning for those who clearly needed more help or, more fundamentally, couldn't relate to the Core Curriculum references and the levels used to identify the areas of weakness, particularly at Entry levels 1, 2 and 3.

It is important to make the sessions as interactive and unthreatening as possible. Imposing Skills for Life strategies is not effective and teachers can quickly become disengaged. We aim for 'Eureka' moments, when suddenly staff can see for themselves that they can play a part in developing literacy and numeracy skills.

At first, there can be some resistance. Some teachers feel this is not in their remit. Their job is to teach their own subject. Others say they don't have time to do any additional teaching or they leave it to the Key Skills or basic skills support teachers. For some, there is a concern about the level of their own skills.

Whilst key government reports, policies and initiatives are discussed and how they relate to the college and impact directly on curriculum areas, there has to be a practical approach to most aspects. Activities such as following origami instructions or completing a team challenge, then identifying the literacy and numeracy skills involved, help with understanding what is meant by Skills for Life. Delivering a 15-minute session through the medium of another language generates discussion on the difficulties faced by those for whom English is not their first language. Once everyone has recovered from the initial shock, racking coded texts leads to discussion on how we read, and an examination of examples of ambiguity followed by the correction of 'howlers' such as 'the teeth in the top are fine, but the ones in my bottom hurt horribly', helps to introduce grammar and semantics in a light-hearted way.

Other strategies include:

- checking the readability levels of course materials against the reading levels of their learners
- practical activities for understanding and using the Core Curricula and Access for All
- simplifying texts
- bringing examples of their own schemes of work and session plans and identifying LLN opportunities
- examining examples of their learners' work to analyse common errors such as incorrect use of decimal points or homophones as in 'their/there' that could be addressed through direct teaching at the start of lessons
- using a range of specific LLN assessment tools.

Examples of the impact the sessions have had on teaching and learning include:

- A GCSE English teacher introduced spelling strategies into her lessons every week based on the errors made by the learners in their written work and quickly saw improvements.
- Some teachers took on board the advice not to write in the corrections on their learners' work, having understood that there is often no value when learners are re-writing work corrected by the teacher. Instead, they indicated that there were errors and provided time for learners to proofread carefully and find and correct errors for themselves. Any real difficulties could then be addressed through taught sessions.
- A motor vehicle teacher checked the readability of his course materials and as a result simplified some of the texts.
- A teacher realised that although the vocational knowledge and understanding of some of her programmes were at Level 4 or 5, the literacy requirements were actually at Level 2 and she identified listening and speaking as key areas to concentrate on within her scheme of work and lesson plans.
- Assessment tools have been introduced by teachers for part-time programmes, where traditionally assessment hasn't been a priority, and by teachers of full-time programmes to provide additional information and confirmation of initial results, supporting better differentiated teaching.

Accredited training in Skills for Life

For those teachers who want to enhance their understanding of Skills for Life, an accredited 30-hour programme is offered. Over 60 teachers have participated in this. Many enrolled because their participation on a teacher training programme left them wanting to gain further knowledge and understanding. Others joined because they were aware that they could be more effective teachers, especially if they were teaching foundation-level learners. For others, joining the course was a result of appraisal or departmental priorities.

This programme covers much of what has already been described, but in more depth. Developing individual learning plans (ILPs) and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound) target-setting for literacy or numeracy skills is discussed and practical activities based on real case studies help teachers to put the skills into use.

A micro-teaching session is planned and delivered to the rest of the group by every participant, based on a literacy or numeracy skill, and all are observed in their own classroom implementing the strategies they have learnt.

Feedback has been very positive and the observations have been heartening. For example, watching an engineer use some scaffolded numeracy tasks he had created so that his mixed-ability learners could work on the same task, but at their own level, was exciting. He had never considered himself to be a numeracy teacher, but had taken on board everything we had covered on the course and found it made a difference, and what I saw was a good, differentiated numeracy session directly linked to the vocational context.

Comments from course evaluations included:

‘I thoroughly enjoyed the session on initial assessment and I now know how to use it effectively to facilitate learning.’

‘The course has given me the confidence to deliver literacy.’

‘The course made me realise I was already supporting basic skills, but hadn’t recognised this.’

Teachers of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities

Part-time programmes in a range of vocational areas are offered for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. It was recognised that although valuable skills were being learned, many of the learners would never be able to become florists or chefs but communication and numeracy skills could be developed by teaching them in the vocational context.

Teachers were brought together for training on how to use the Pre-Entry Curriculum and identify the opportunities for skills development within their own programmes; for example selecting a named colour in art or flower arranging; following single step instructions in cookery; responding appropriately to greetings; recognising shapes in craft; counting three flowers or six paintbrushes; taking turns and sharing musical instruments.

A new ILP was developed to include targets based on milestones, where the learning could be tracked and reviewed and new targets added as existing ones were achieved. The different levels of skills amongst the learners would be recognised through the curriculum referencing and the complexity of the target.

Teachers felt that this approach made writing focused-learning outcomes much easier, and as a result of this the assessment of learning was much clearer.

Subject-specialist teacher training

Training specialist Skills for Life teachers has always been a priority. Working in partnership with Warwick University, we were one of the first colleges to write and deliver the Level 4 FENTO subject-specialist qualifications in ESOL, Literacy and Numeracy, recognising that this was the first opportunity for teachers in this area to gain a qualification within their specialist field. We now offer the Level 5 Diplomas.

Many teachers of LLN entered the profession through the volunteer tutor route, gaining an award via the City & Guilds 928 series. Others have teaching qualifications in other disciplines and some have no qualifications at all.

Applications are accepted from teachers from any institution or training provider, and this mix of organisations enriches the courses, as participants are able to share experiences and ideas. For some teachers, the assessments to gain a place are particularly hard, and there are times when teachers who have been teaching a long time are not offered a place because their own skills are not at a level where they could expect to achieve. These teachers often function well with beginner learners, but would struggle to teach learners at Levels 1 and 2. Clear and sensitive advice and guidance on how they can build up their skills in order to reapply for a place at a later date needs to be given.

Groups of our own staff are accepted onto the three courses every year and always benefit from working with staff from other providers. There is an expectation in the organisation that every Skills for Life teacher will achieve a specialist qualification.

It has always been a surprise to find out how little the majority of teachers know about how language works and even more surprising to find that phonology is usually a complete mystery. Unless participants have a background in primary-school teaching, few know how to teach a non-reader to read. Those who are mathematicians, who usually teach on higher level programmes, often have difficulty in breaking numerical skills down into smaller elements in order to teach Entry-level learners and find themselves having to learn different teaching methods and strategies to work effectively at the lower levels.

Teachers have welcomed the programmes and are always keen to try out the ideas and strategies they have learned. The most common comment is: 'I didn't know what I didn't know'. The key to the success of the programmes is to make the learning relevant and fun, modelling good practice in the delivery and always building in practical activities where teachers can be observed actively using the theories and strategies they have been taught.

Comments from course evaluations include:

'At the beginning I knew the basics in my field. Now I feel I am a specialist.'

'My understanding of the structure of the language has improved. I often knew how to do something, but now I feel more confident with the "why".'

'I feel more confident in assessing learners' skills. The detailed analyses we've undertaken throughout the course have been really useful.'

Conclusions

Teaching and learning have definitely improved but the downside is that good, well-qualified teachers are much sought after and leave to take up promotion opportunities, posts offering more hours or permanent posts if they are part-time. Often it is impossible to recruit fully-qualified replacement staff therefore the need for training is likely to continue for some time.

The major problem with the specialist qualifications is the funding. With fees of up to £1250 this is a real barrier for small training providers or part-time staff and fractional staff who are unable to get full support for the fees. As course fees rise, there could well be a situation where there is a waiting list of prospective candidates, but if some are unable to cover the costs, the courses will not run.

The main consideration when working with teachers from a range of disciplines is to make the learning fun, relevant and practical. Use planning documents, materials and examples of real learners' work, brought to class by the teachers, to inform the teaching. Be sympathetic to resistance and look for innovative ways to demonstrate the value of being able to identify opportunities to support literacy and numeracy and celebrate the 'Eureka' moments.

Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool and if teachers have a good learning experience, delivered by enthusiastic, knowledgeable staff, others will be keen to follow suit.

The championing of Skills for Life CPD is an important leadership quality in ensuring specialist teachers are up to date in their skills and knowledge; in identifying opportunities to support LLN within vocational teams; and

in attracting new teachers who can be effectively supported through good-quality training. Each of these strands directly affects the quality of teaching and learning experienced by full- and part-time learners so good leaders need to ensure their teachers have the right ‘tools for the job’.

9

Darlington Libraries and Community Learning Service

Effective leadership practices and qualities: Inspiring and emerging new styles and values for delivering literacy, language and numeracy skills

Alaine McCartney

The Foundation Programmes Manager leads the literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) provision and is part of the senior management team for the Libraries and Community Learning Service and is proactive at both strategic and operational levels. Family learning has been delegated to the Foundation Programmes Manager because of their experience, knowledge and qualifications. The manager, who also teaches and moderates, is helped by two full-time tutors and one intensive support tutor who provides home tuition. One of their strengths is that they are a small team with diverse expertise. The tutors, who come from different professional backgrounds, are qualified to deliver to both adults and children. The manager can also call upon the support of other staff from within the Service (from adult learning and work-based learning).

The tutors continue to develop skills as well as share good practice at local and regional levels. The team treat all learners as individuals – not as a ‘client group’. The priority, from the beginning of any programme, is for the

tutor to establish trust and mutual respect with all learners to create an invaluable learning experience.

The manager has initiated meetings to establish exceptional partnership working. The developed networking is constructive and partners operate as ambassadors for the service. The manager is attuned to the needs of parents and the agenda affecting children and ensures the team respond rapidly to those needs. Discussion with head teachers, for instance, led to programmes like Healthy Eating, Sexual Health, Drug Awareness, and so on. The manager holds structured meetings and together the team plan all new programmes. All courses start with learners having direct contact with relevant tutors who provide information and advice well before enrolment, and operate an 'open door policy'. All learner inquiries are handled directly by the course tutor who informs them of the course content and the support available before they even come to the centre.

This is clarified and reinforced when learners drop in at a workshop, in one-to-one meetings or at enrolment. Targeting of priority groups is effective. All learners are informed of all activities with some of them accessing additional courses. The Service does not hold enrolment days but encourages candidates to enrol when they feel ready. They are also contacted to confirm when the course is running, adding a personal and constructive touch. By the time learners attend their first session, they have already had their queries answered and decided if the course is for them. A thorough assessment will then determine their ability level and specific needs together with useful 'soft' information. The sum of the knowledge gained gives the tutor an array of reference points, which help them to understand what drives, motivates or differentiates learners.

The Foundation Programmes Manager oversees a variety of programmes. In addition to Wider Family Learning and LLN, the remit now covers further education (FE) courses, Entry to Employment, Skills for Jobs and accreditation, which is extended to partners such as the Youth Service, Youth Offending Team and the Warden Service. The manager is also an active participant in the authority's extended schools agenda.

The core of the provision is, however, LLN, which has defined the team and sometimes the Service over many years. Most of the programmes started as

a request from stakeholders (parents, schools, health visitors, etc.) and have a direct impact on families and children. They are also run at the schools and children's centres where parents are located. The LLN courses are specifically made as practical as possible to ensure learners participate and understand. Visual and physical teaching tools are used with the emphasis on learners discovering their ideal learning style. Sessions allow for frequent but structured interaction and peer support is encouraged early in the programme.

Despite many changes to funding and policy, the team has done very well to safeguard the standards and develop a variety of new programmes, many with partners. In addition to offering comprehensive accredited provision (Entry, Level 1 and Level 2) to LLN learners, the Service continues to respond to an increasing number of partners in Darlington.

LLN is an area where direct advertising and promotion result in mixed outcomes. By their nature, this target group do not publicise their needs or openly seek help, although instances of this happening do exist. However, we find that when the right people speak to potential learners, they are happy to enrol and eager to overcome whatever difficulties they may have experienced in the past.

This is where our partners play a crucial role. We feel that we have gone beyond making our provision known to key players in Darlington. We have offered them the opportunity to influence and shape the programmes we offer. Head teachers, midwives, health visitors and other professionals, who are in contact with many parents and get to assess their needs and those of their children, will turn to us as a matter of choice. They have come to know and trust both the staff and the standards behind the LLN programmes. They do not think of it as some distant provision but an extension of theirs.

Thanks to that and the results in the classroom, we have added an efficient referral system for hard-to-reach learners who require intensive LLN support within the home. Partners associate with the Service to the point where they refer vulnerable people in the knowledge that they will receive a good service. Consistent positive learner feedback and high levels of achievement confirm this view.

The partners have enough confidence and faith in the provision and its standards to invite the Foundation Programmes Manager to their meetings and numerous committees. The association has become both intricate and far-reaching. Many partners feel that they have influence on the provision, which they see as their own. As a service, we welcome their involvement and look forward to serving more learners and sustaining our provision.

We believe that the leadership required for a successful provision in the area of learning, parenting and safeguarding of children and families needs to have certain key characteristics:

- A combination of vision and focus – a vision of what should happen (positive expectations) in one to three years from a standpoint and a focus on what is important, i.e. children and families, but also the delivery of concrete outcomes. Nothing gives more confidence – or more helps to overcome fear – than achievement. Success is therefore crucial for the development of learners and the continuation of the provision.
- The manager espouses and promotes clear and positive values. Staff, learners and partners are in no doubt that we must work together and achieve together. The climate must be free of fear, confusion or confrontation of any kind. Staff and learners know where they stand, feel heard and listened to, and recognise that feedback is important for future planning. Teaching staff are professional, act as ambassadors for their programme and realise that they need learners, as much as learners need them.
- The manager takes the lead to organise the provision with the teaching staff and is receptive to the needs of the learners. Together, they need to be able to negotiate with learners, schools, children’s centres etc., with regards to the content, the venue and the level of all courses. This allows for a high degree of flexibility and responsibility on all sides.
- The manager has a full awareness of their environment and along with staff needs to understand the government agenda, know the strengths and weaknesses of their partners and have realistic expectations of their own organisation. Funding opportunities, for example, are not an issue for just senior managers. LLN managers should realise that new programmes and funding – even outside LLN itself – could help sustain their own provision.

It is key that learners are regarded as individuals – not mere target groups – and that staff appreciate the different circumstances within their personal and peripheral lives. The manager and team ensure that all learners receive programme details before the delivery and negotiate time, day and childcare provision to accommodate individual requirements.

The manager must consider taking risks outside the usual ‘playground’. The manager and team did explore different fields and new approaches to planning and delivery. We took risks and introduced new qualifications, developed new concepts to raise standards and initiated original challenges.

Leading the way with new ventures has established a good position for effective leadership and team collaboration. The manager identified an opportunity to develop accredited parenting courses due to the lack of provision in Darlington and a demand from learners. The success of the provision has been recognised by the Assistant Director of Children’s Services and the manager is now leading on the Quality Assurance Kitemark for Darlington.

The work with partners is going from strength to strength with increased accreditation, delivery and preserving staff employability. The success of our partnerships is recognised throughout Darlington, which reduces the need for extra efforts and marketing. The sum of the initiatives and risks taken has made our provision the destination of choice for key partners.

The manager and team need to be receptive to new ideas, investigate innovative projects and not be afraid to fail. Taking a risk and being self-critical are crucial to inspiring and adding value to the Service.

LLN can offer many opportunities and can lead to accreditation, employment, personal development and parents being better able to support their children.

Planning ahead is paramount for safeguarding the future of LLN for staff and learners. As a family learning provider, we are aware of the uncertain future funding but despite that we strive to put the learner first.

The decreasing funding should not and does not make us any less determined to continue to meet individual needs and offer a good service and high standards.

The focus for managers of LLN is to continue with a positive outlook and to learn from the feedback they get from learners, partners, inspectors, etc. We are determined not to deviate from this approach, as we feel we are making a difference.

10

Leadership of adult literacy, language and numeracy across Birmingham

Beryl and Geoff Bateson

Family literacy, language and numeracy as a case study

Birmingham's motto is 'Forward' and there is a well-established tradition of focusing on the emerging future and what needs to be changed today in order to secure improved outcomes for the people who live in the city. At same time there is always something to be gained from reflecting on the insights from recent experiences.

In 1995, as part of a drive for regeneration of the city (alongside physical regeneration activity) there was a drive to raise core skills levels for the whole city – all ages, all areas, all categories of people – for a range of purposes.

For the first time literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) were moved into a lead position, with huge ambitions for change over a long-term timescale. Bringing all aspects of development into the same framework meant that extra emphasis could be given to transitions across parts of the system, to interactions between agencies and services, and to intergenerational effects.

The whole multi-agency regeneration through raising levels of core skills was carried forward via a formal partnership arrangement, established as

a legal entity of high-level strategic leaders of key education and training bodies in the city. Within the first few years of this drive for development almost all of these key agencies reorganised or closed and were replaced by other equivalent bodies. The City Council underwent a number of internal reorganisations; the local Learning and Skills Council was formed taking over many of the responsibilities of the local Training and Enterprise Council; the area's Jobcentre Plus was reformulated from Employment Services; the city's Voluntary Services Council shifted to a more strategic set of stances; employers were engaged with via a shifting set of representations. Throughout the potential turbulence of ongoing structural changes, there was a need to stay 'above' it all and hold the focus on the functions of improvement, development, delivery and so on.

The intention was to draft a way forward for the city for the next several years as part of a longer 10–20 year set of intentions. A development framework was established around some principles:

- Organisations in the city would push developments forward by acting together rather than independently.
- There would be a relentless focus on development and improvement of main programmes (not lots of 'projects' or 'initiatives').
- Data and professional observations would be used as a basis for decision-making.

And around some aspirations:

- Lift levels of skills for adults and for children in the city to above national averages.
- Enable organisations and individuals to be more self-managing, making intelligent choices, having higher ambitions about their own abilities, and more able to support the development of others.

The development focus was on a joint city-wide commitment to shifting practices within all main delivery services. This involved a vision amongst key leaders outlining where Birmingham needed to move to, the pace of the various developments needed and where all of this fitted with broader city strategies. Within a robust set of leadership commitments at city level it demanded stronger management decisions to focus attention on getting

a much better grip on how best to deliver the skills curriculum needed; pushing forward a much sharper focus on improving quality of services; and freeing up time to spend on securing better bridging across gaps into provision and within provisions. Where there were major gaps the emphasis was on building models from first principles (based on evidence of what worked in practice) and then putting these models 'out there' in sufficient volume to produce the scale of change needed.

Key to the success was a set of infrequent meetings of a few strategic leaders/decision-makers from the learning and skills agencies – giving highest level support for development plans and ensuring that their own managerial teams had processes in place to implement changes as widely and rapidly as possible. There has been a relentless focus on learner achievement and learner experience and on changing delivery mechanisms for the better rather than going for quick fixes to produce one-off results.

The city went with the flow of national and regional developments and was often able to help lead or shape the direction that those wider developments were taking by demonstrating the good professional practices that had been established across the city. Managers and practitioners within the city felt that they had something to say and that they were able to influence developments within an overall set of national directions.

As the Skills for Life strategy was being formulated Birmingham was already under way with a set of LLN developments across providers and was keen to take on an 'early adopter' pathfinder function to get the best fit between emerging national expectations and what was already working well in the city. Similarly, as the role of families and parents was recognised as a key lever, Birmingham took the earliest opportunity to pilot the new family literacy/family numeracy models, to get as many substantial courses up and running as feasible and to familiarise large numbers of teachers with the purposes and approaches of the models. The family LLN programme was aligned with Birmingham's other major developments around parental involvement in their children's learning, and was supported structurally to a stage where it was by far the largest family programme of its kind. Once securely in place across the system there was scope to innovate and to target specific groups, but holding to the researched model as a core.

By 2005, after several years of consolidated development of LLN provision on a whole-city basis, the view was taken that Birmingham was around half-way there in its longer-term aspirations. Skills levels at school key stages had been doubled. The ‘flow’ of young people into the adult ‘stock’ of those with levels of LLN below functional levels was much reduced. Adult skills had increased in all geographical areas – moving fastest in those wards that had furthest to go, with gaps in skills levels being significantly closed between unemployed and employed groups of residents, between various community groups, and so on. The commitment that no ward in the city would remain below specified skills levels by 2005 had been met and new aspirational floor targets had been sketched out for 2010. Although the focus occasionally drifted as priorities changed, and although there were still some relatively minor managerial issues still to be worked on, there was much more of a sense of a unified approach than had been evident with the previous disconnected experiences of fragmentary, short-term, project-based developments.

At the same time it was recognised that more of the same type of developments would not move the city to the next stage of where it wanted to be – to get child and adult literacy and numeracy levels to substantially above the national average. Some of what had been necessary to date was no longer relevant to the new challenges. Some improvements were stalling, some things intended as interventions for change were becoming a little too fixed as ongoing programmes. National development frameworks were specifying increasing numbers of ‘bits’ of activity rather than enabling local progress. New sets of leadership and management arrangements might be needed, mindful of the sensibilities in changing or dismantling aspects that people had grown accustomed to.

Leadership and management expertise is essentially as much about adaptation to such new, emerging shifts in context as about delivering better fixed outputs. Much of the leadership over recent history has been at the level of rhetoric: reminding partners of the tasks; the scale of the issue; the speed of progress needed. Changes in mindsets have been brought about by repetition of recurring messages, by bringing hard-to-solve puzzles to the fore and agreeing that they needed to be addressed if progress was to be made; by focusing on getting maximum leverage out of all of the major programmes (which currently include Train to Gain; work with offenders; employability

programmes; family programmes; discrete and embedded Skills for Life delivery).

Direct and deliberate system-wide leadership from upfront has provided, and continues to provide, a framework approach supporting leadership and management decisions within main providers, leaving providers to determine their own next steps but able to rehearse the bigger picture from time to time, so that each small piece of managed development is seen as 'all part of the same overall job to be done'.

In 2008 the separate focus on core skills has now been distributed across new wider developments such as integrated employment and skills programmes, with a focus on particular target groups (those not in employment, education or training, (NEET), young offenders, Looked After Children, low skill employees, those needing to boost their employability skills, families with complex needs, etc.). Within this network of wider developments there is still a need for programme-level focused leadership – in the sense of contributing to the overall sense of purposefulness and directions of travel; and attempting to match managerial debates with consistency of principles and values – all carried forward in the year-on-year practicalities of managing quality, compliance, information use, resource development, etc.

The context continues to change with an emphasis on place-making, with the Birmingham city strategic partnership articulating a long-term vision integrating skills, education, housing, health, employment, environment, culture, etc. Skills for Life is now expected to be distributed across these broader developments, with any corresponding leadership role being much more about negotiation, influence and joint outcomes.

The direction of travel for the next three years has been identified, in the new context of Birmingham's Local Area Agreement (2008–11) and the city's community strategy to 2026.

These give a multi-layered, complex, evolving system to work within. As the next steps unfold there are going to be continuing axes to be worked around. Much of this can be expressed in terms of getting the right sets of balances so that the whole delivers its best for the people of Birmingham. There is an ongoing set of leadership and management concerns around:

- the balance of activity and developments being universal and the need for sharper targeting based on reliable information; meeting the scale of need and responding to issues of capacity
- the strictness of compliance and the flexibility needed for development – a robust management to meet requirements; holding true to the models that work (even if difficult to do) and having solid, justifiable basis for any deviations from guidance
- decisions based on principles and being pragmatic: reducing bureaucracy; increasing user-friendly practices; more customised, personalised adaptability within model framework; recognising professional skills of teachers and managers; maintaining a clarity of purposes and intentions.

A case example of the wider approaches

Within the wider approaches to leadership and management at whole-city level, described above, the same issues show up when the focus is moved onto one specific service and its developments – in this case Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLNN).

The FLLN model applied across Birmingham and in many other local authorities owes much of its success to effective leadership. There is a clear vision, a clarity of aims and a strong focus on outcomes. There is a strong belief and a passion for the practice. Effective partnerships are at the core of the provision, acknowledging and accommodating, wherever necessary, the different cultures of each. This demands an ethos of flexibility by all stakeholders alongside commitment to essential, agreed elements. Good working relationships ensure success in such joint working and these depend on appropriate communication and involvement throughout the whole process.

The context

FLLN in Birmingham is led by an education adviser within the Children, Young People and Families Directorate, with long-term experience of children's and adults' learning and involving parents in their children's learning. It is based on an essential partnership between services for children

and those for adults, and an awareness and acknowledgement by both, of working in the context of the family, with under-achieving, often vulnerable children and adults. The success lies in understanding the inherent implications and applying this to all aspects of the practice.

The scale of the provision is large. There are 140 primary and secondary schools or early years settings involved, delivering 80 term-long intensive courses and 150 short introductory courses each year in different areas across the city. These engage over 2000 adult learners and 1000 children, all from disadvantaged areas with few qualifications. The Skills for Life providers for the adult teaching are three local further education (FE) colleges and the local authority's Adult Education Service. The teachers for the children are always provided internally by the school or setting, reflecting the essential input of each profession. The central management and advisory team is very small, so it is important that the partnerships are strong and clear, the needs of individual organisations are met as far as possible and appropriate procedures are in place to ensure success. Some partners are city-wide, including the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Central Library, Life Education Centres, Environmental Centre, Childminders Association, Service for Children in Care, school improvement advisers; others are local, e.g. local libraries, arts facilities, sports clubs, storytellers, local Somali associations, extended schools clusters, Education Action Zones, regeneration areas and children's centres. Leadership is thus across a range of different management arrangements, some within different sections of the local authority and some within other agencies. Such leadership has to have a deliberateness and directness but cannot be other than by negotiation, explanation, translation and influence.

Despite this complexity, the service has made robust commitments to fulfilling the intentions of the programme. The demography of the city is very mixed, producing a wide range of needs. There are many different nationalities and cultures – some focused on particular areas, some throughout the city; this includes areas of an almost entirely white British population, generally with low levels of educational attainment and high levels of disadvantage. Over the last five years the provision has engaged an average of 70 per cent black and minority ethnic adult learners and a 15 per cent average of men. All adults have no qualifications or only those below Level 2. Over 50 per cent of participating schools have over 50 per cent of pupils entitled to free school meals.

Leadership in practice

The programmes are multi-partner, multi-learner and multi-purpose. Leadership is therefore not a simple straightforward set of activities but there are identifiable aspects of leadership that make a difference in these programmes to outcomes on the ground.

A strong 'leading' commitment to the work, based on good evidence of effectiveness from rigorous collection of evaluations, contributes greatly to its success. The overall passion for the work connects with the enthusiasm of practitioners and wider partners and builds a positive energy that surrounds and influences the learners. The enthusiasm by the different partners is generated when the agenda of their particular organisation is valued and met.

For schools outcomes include: higher achievement by children, better motivated child learners, better behaviour of children, stronger relationships with parents and extra motivation for staff. For adult learner providers it engages the most disadvantaged learners, develops their commitment to improving their own literacy or numeracy and entering for accreditation for themselves. It gives them the confidence to take up further learning opportunities or participate in other community activity – in the school or beyond. For other partners it provides a contact and engagement point for their provision with non-traditional participants in the community, e.g. drama through the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, health issues through the Life Education Centres and environment issues through the Eco-Centre. In all cases, for the main provider these are an enhancement of the main vehicles for learning literacy and numeracy skills.

A strong, clearly stated vision with a sustained focus on outcomes and consistent core principles ensures a wide take-up and a continuing commitment to the provision. A clear strategic framework for the service supports the implementation in a range of different settings.

Within the framework, however, flexibility and support are needed – particularly while establishing provision in any one setting or dealing with particular issues for that context at that time, e.g. staff illness, timing of SATS tests or other school events, timing of Ramadan – while taking into account the prior experience and local circumstances of partners and learners. New

settings are sometimes encouraged to run short introductory or taster sessions first to familiarise themselves with the approach and the particular logistics of the model. There is an ongoing persistent listening to colleagues and learners and quick responses to their queries and issues. The ability to innovate in response to need adds to a sense of belief in the providers' professionalism and capabilities.

There is a need to know when to be flexible, when to insist on certain actions and when to agree a negotiated solution. This is usually based on knowledge of the settings and the staff, the amount of experience they have, their actual previous positive or negative experiences, their current vulnerability and resilience, and therefore the right time to further challenge or accommodate them.

For the provider organisations, it is important to look forward and to be able to change tack along the route, even when things are going well. The various levels of leadership need to show resilience, be able to bounce back after knockbacks from new obstacles and adjust direction when needed. It is important to ensure that the range of partners keep up with current policy directions and bureaucratic demands of the time. Being part of briefing sessions and getting regular updated information flows helps provision stay ahead, deliver outcomes that are relevant to present needs and maintain a successful position ready for future changes in requirements.

The leadership of the overall programme at all times aims to free up the participants – providers and learners – to deliver and learn without undue stress, with sufficient support to focus on and enjoy the processes of sharing and gaining knowledge. This produces happy teachers and happy learners, leading to positive outcomes.

This is built in as deliberate intentions in a variety of ways:

- Encouraging a variety of interesting activities – all courses include visits to the local library and a bookshop to purchase one book for each child and each adult. All courses go on supportive visits to places of interest. (In one year, visits were planned to the Severn Valley Railway, Birmingham Art Gallery and Museum, Birmingham Think Tank, Nature Centre, Rag Market, and local facilities: Birmingham

Football Club, Centre for the Earth, local supermarkets.) These examples are then shared among staff of the various courses.

- Making appropriate resources easily available – every course is given a resource box of basic materials and stationery gifts for families, including dictionaries and calculators and conference bags for the adult learners.
- Enabling self-management of a certain amount of funds – every course is allocated an amount of money to spend on support activities: visits, visitors' expenses, books.
- Responding to positive ideas and suggestions.
- Helping all to feel part of a successful city-wide movement – by central events every term, sharing at these events city-wide results and particular successes and common challenges.
- Appreciating and celebrating successes by a city-wide celebration for teachers and tutors each year as well as personal feedback to individuals wherever possible, often through their personal mentors.

Leadership across the matrix of provider structures, administrative systems, variety of courses and learner purposes has a dual role to enthuse, motivate and stay positive and to prioritise firmly when necessary, keeping plans on track to achieve common aims and agreed outcomes.

Throughout all of this, communication and establishing well-defined responsibilities are important. There needs to be openness throughout with management, advisory and teaching staff, and learners; a sharing of challenges, of pleasures, of needs, of issues and solutions. Communications, directly to the most relevant person rather than as an institutional circular, need to be good, sharing plans and aspirations, giving notice of changes, involving relevant people in finding solutions.

A final key concern for the programme as a whole centres around issues of quality. Managers, at different levels, are encouraged to take responsibility for maintaining quality of the learning experience and for the constant improvement of the delivery of provision. Success depends on a genuine reputation for quality in every way.

Lessons learnt

- Leadership needs to be located at the right levels – high-level leadership that is able to make strong connections with other strategies and developments; programme-level leadership that can see things in multi-factor ways, balancing robustness with flexibility; and a sense of leadership distributed throughout the system, with everyone understanding the range of issues and purposes and being able to appreciate complexity yet simply getting on with quality delivery.
- Retain the focus on purposes and outcomes expected from programmes and developments, whatever the changing internal institutional arrangements within partners.
- Generate and sustain enthusiasm for what is being planned and delivered across all partner organisations and at different levels within them.
- Having the messages and the rhetoric is important but you need to move beyond that with clear mechanisms for putting them into practice – implementation and monitoring within a well-rehearsed framework.
- Rehearse the bigger picture – seeing things in the wider context and linking to other strategic developments – rather than being narrowly focused on minute detail.
- It is important to have the ability to negotiate, or hold firm, across a system that is multi-partner, multipurpose, multi-layered – based on a credible and trusted track record.
- Focus on the longer-term drives for success in the main programmes – not being distracted by short-term fragmentary activity that does not add to the planned progress.
- Move things forward as quickly as possible – but within the capacity of the system to get there.
- Create linkages across parts of the system: between agencies; between programmes and developments; across adult skills and skills of children, etc.
- Get the basics secure, getting the detail and the communication right, as a platform from which variation and adapting to shifting contexts can be justified.
- Keep the learner experience, teaching and learning, and achievement

as central, whilst holding to the rigour of models that work (even when they become difficult to implement).

- Have good intelligence about what is happening ‘on the ground’ – keep an ear open for mumblings and grumblings as well as for examples of excellence – and be able to act quickly and effectively in response if necessary.
- Recognise the capabilities and professionalisms that exist; offering support to strengthen where needed; and challenging to do more.

Conclusions

Throughout all of this, one significant influence has been the adoption of a ‘can do/must do/will do’ attitude, along the grain of regional and national developments – whether demonstrated by having high-level backing from the key organisations; encapsulated in a common recurring language of ‘getting there’/‘distance still to travel’; or shown by the delicate balancing of intelligent compliance and responsive flexibility.

Keeping a focus on ‘pace’ and ‘scale’ was equally important and was demonstrated by a commitment to shifting the whole system rather than endless small pilots; and expecting changes to permeate the whole system as rapidly as the infrastructure could stand.

Whilst the early emphasis was necessarily on centrally driven Skills for Life as a discrete set of developments, there was a recognition that this was a phase that needed to tip over into a distributed set of leadership influences across many more contexts and programmes – all within longer-term aspirational frameworks of what Birmingham wanted life for its residents to be like in the future rather than collapsing back into fragmentary, individual ‘innovations’. Leadership continued to be seen as a changing, unfolding thing – an early emphasis on leading developments across the system giving way, as appropriate, to enabling larger-scale improved delivery by the system.

Ultimately, whether thinking about the whole-city leadership or the leadership of complex cross-agency FLLN programmes, successful leadership has been linked with keeping an eye on the real purposes of the programmes – both as contributions to wider developments (whatever the particular set

of organisational arrangements in place) and as ways of ensuring enjoyable skills improvements for children and adults (whatever the particular bureaucratic mechanisms in place). This has demanded leadership that is capable of mixing the realism of on-the-ground working with an acknowledgement of the aspirations of bigger-context thinking.

11

Buckinghamshire Adult Learning

Leadership of literacy, language and numeracy in the learning and skills sector

Dorothy Newman

Introduction

The leadership challenges we are facing at the moment are those of balancing the need for continuous improvement in the quality of what is delivered in the literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) classroom with the requirement to deliver to an increasing number of groups who have multiple disadvantages and for whom qualification success may be a long process. We must provide support for the tutors who are instrumental in delivery, motivating them to improve their performance and provide a good experience for the learner. There is also the challenge of reaching the learners who would most benefit from joining a class but for whom the barriers are still there. This is where the development and maintenance of partnerships enable us to offer opportunities to marginalised groups. This paper focuses on some of our work with discrete groups and the skills required for the effective management of the partnerships and networking.

Context

Buckinghamshire Adult Learning is a directly managed local authority service within the Community Services portfolio of Buckinghamshire County Council. It is part of the Culture and Learning service whose purpose is to provide high-quality opportunities that improve skills and life chances, inspire and enrich lives and are accessible and relevant to everyone. We receive Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding to deliver both further education (FE) and personal and community development learning (PCDL) programmes. Almost 50 per cent of our current FE provision is for basic skills, which we deliver in the community, in the workplace and for discrete groups.

Tutors in our service are managed by tutor co-ordinators who are responsible for a number of tutors in specific curriculum and geographical areas, undertaking a programme of classroom observations and feedback to tutors, monitoring and improving achievement and learner satisfaction rates, assisting in staff development and contributing to the development of learning opportunities to widen participation. The observation programme means that the tutor co-ordinators can identify the particular strengths of tutors and they are then in a position to bring together the most appropriate tutor with any group of learners.

The core competencies for the role of tutor co-ordinator are professional expertise, customer focus, flexibility and adaptability, respect for others and valuing diversity, listening and communicating, teamworking and relationship-building; these are supplemented by demonstrating initiative, planning and organising, and developing others. The successful partnership manager can demonstrate all these. Many of our tutor co-ordinators, particularly in LLN, are active practitioners in the classroom and model the performance they would expect to see among their tutors.

In order to work effectively with learners who may not find it easy to approach any educational institution, even one as non-threatening as we would like to think our learning centres are, our tutor co-ordinators are proactive in networking and developing and maintaining partnerships. Senior management within the service fully endorses this approach and provides support if necessary, but it is at the operational level that these partnerships translate into real benefits for learners.

Working in partnership in LLN

Partnerships appear in many different models and the brief outlines below provide examples of some of our current activities. We work in partnership to deliver programmes that may be short or long term and offer enrichment activities for learners through networking, reach difficult or disadvantaged learners with LLN needs and support projects by provide additional funding or expertise for work with specific target groups. It is the attitude of the tutor co-ordinators who approach potential partners in an open-minded and constructive way, willing to learn about their needs and find creative solutions to problems that arise that is a key factor in success. They have empathy with LLN learners, borne of their own experience as tutors, and they understand what can be achieved and do not expect the impossible of either tutors or learners. They provide the guidance and practical advice that enables tutors to cope with the challenges of delivery in a range of contexts, encourage them when there are problems to overcome and join them in celebrating their learners' success. They need communication and influencing skills to operate effectively within the partnership. They are also prepared to improvise and innovate when required and learn lessons from any joint working.

We have a long-standing partnership with Shaw Trust, a charity that aims to get long-term unemployed people into the workforce. Learners may be Job-centre Plus or social services clients. We deliver two literacy classes and one numeracy class at the Shaw Trust centre in High Wycombe. They were originally set up because Shaw Trust did not have the LLN expertise to deliver and was not an accreditation centre. The benefits to learners are that they have qualified and experienced tutors and can achieve qualifications at all levels; the classes are in a familiar environment; they have quality-assured provision and access to good quality resources all year round.

Another delivery model is when we share the delivery with a partner organisation. An example of this would be work with the Buckinghamshire branch of MIND, the National Association for Mental Health. To support clients with mental health issues looking to return to work we have been providing ten-week Prepare for Work courses, covering job applications, CVs, interview skills, disclosure, etc. By having this for a discrete group we are able to structure the course to meet whole group needs. We work with mental health professionals and one of them always accompanies the group, which

is especially helpful for guidance and support in the disclosure session. A mental health professional delivers a session on the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) with special reference to mental health. There is a high level of completion and most learners achieve a Level 1 literacy test thereby gaining current evidence of their literacy skills to add to their CV. Some of the practical issues resolved by the tutor co-ordinator with the health service representative include transport problems, careful selection of a tutor to deliver to this group and an acknowledgement that mental health issues may affect attendance and commitment.

We are currently engaged in an Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) project for Milton Keynes College providing community-based delivery in a three-way model. The college has the funding and we do the delivery by working in partnership with the probation service. A number of practical issues have had to be addressed for this to be effective. Some tutors were wary of the project at the outset and concerned about having offenders in their classes. We believe that familiarity with the project, risk assessments and experience have reassured them. As with other learners we have discussed, attendance and commitment can be an issue with this learner group. Daily returns on attendance have to be made to probation and weekly returns to the project holders. There is no easy way to do this. It requires a daily check on registers, phone calls to offsite tutors, completion of a spreadsheet, the sending of emails, etc. It is complex as learners constantly come and go. Some learners, such as sex offenders and those with violent offences or a poor risk assessment, cannot access provision on our sites. The project is not sufficiently funded to enable more than limited one-to-one provision so an alternative needs to be found. The tutor co-ordinator concerned is working hard to find a solution to this.

Close working partnership with the probation service means that the five-week Prepare for Work courses held on probation premises are attended and supported by Bridge to Employment key workers who take the lead on topics where they have more expertise, e.g. disclosure and the legal implications. Their presence also ensures that tutors are not alone working with offenders. Courses are accredited at Entry level 1, as this is the general level of the learners, but with the option of higher level accreditation and national tests where appropriate. In some cases learners are integrated into community groups and learn in a genuine learning environment. Our response is as

flexible as any restrictions on the client group will allow.

As explained above, adult learning is part of the Culture and Learning service, which includes libraries and heritage. We have been working in partnership with library colleagues for some years, particularly with the Reading Agency Vital Link project. Reading for pleasure has been promoted through the use of Quick reads, library trips, book clubs and notice boards and this project has changed learners' attitudes to reading. They have now experienced the pleasure that a good story can give a reader and are happy to read in class and at home and discuss their reading. It has helped confidence and more learners are now reading to children or grandchildren. More than 100 learners took up the Costa Six Book Challenge that was part of the National Year of Reading 2008. In addition, we have trained library staff on basic skills awareness so that they can offer more support to basic skills learners when they visit the library and some library staff work as volunteers in our literacy classes.

As part of a package of support for a faith-led enterprise in an area of disadvantage in High Wycombe we have provided help and advice to a local community group who are setting up a project to support young people with practical skills. We have offered advice on LLN materials and provided the opportunity for one of the organisers to visit some classes to develop an awareness of LLN issues. In the longer term some of these young people may be referred to us to achieve accreditation. As well as this advisory support, we have used Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) funding to support some of the capital needs of the project and provided tutor training for local community members who plan to deliver the training.

Partnerships are not always straightforward and some need a sustained effort. It is vital to have a key contact who values a partnership and makes the effort to promote it. At times it has been difficult to develop a relationship with the local Jobcentre Plus because of constant changes of personnel. We now have a contact person with whom a system for referral, monitoring of attendance and follow-up has been developed and this synergy is proving effective in engaging new learners. We have delivered awareness-raising training to Jobcentre Plus staff on several occasions and attended stakeholder events. The partnership approach adds value because explicit links

between LLN skills and employment prospects are explained to Jobcentre Plus clients by both partners; Jobcentre Plus can signpost learners more effectively and the applicants benefit from an immediate referral process.

Further challenges arise when working with a charity that supports homeless, troubled or addicted young people in Aylesbury and is keen to encourage these young people to acquire some qualifications. Their attendance can be irregular, or accompanied by friends or children; the environment where they are comfortable is not a standard teaching environment; and teaching sessions can be chaotic. Tutor selection is a key factor for the tutor co-ordinator to take into account when working with this group. There is also the tension between meeting the needs of the learners and the service need to record success.

Issues arising

Strategic support is vital as partnerships take time to develop and the levels of output may be low in relation to the resources put in. Senior managers are aware of the risks, including the time it may take to reach a successful outcome for the learners and the costs, particularly the time that has to be invested by the service to engage a small number of learners. Not all partnerships will deliver, especially if the potential learners are not engaged at an early stage.

There are often different pressures for each partner, whether it is funding, targets or resources, and sometimes partners do not understand each other's priorities initially. Time must be invested at an early stage in agreeing protocols and communication and evaluation processes. Expectations must be clear and realistic and achievement must be monitored. Partners need to respect each other, communicate effectively and be prepared to evaluate honestly. Each partnership will have its own life cycle. At certain times during the life of any partnership you need to weigh up its cost and benefits, and withdraw either temporarily or permanently if it is not meeting its potential. It is important to have committed key people to drive partnerships forward and maintain momentum. A change in personnel can have a major impact.

Building partnerships can be hugely time consuming but if you have shared

values, a full understanding of the roles of the various members, a clear vision of the benefits the partnership can bring and of the anticipated outcomes that is shared by all parties, you can inspire commitment at all levels. The best partnerships achieve much more than would be possible in isolation.

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Centre for Excellence in Leadership

Reflections on the leadership of literacy, language and numeracy in further education

Lynne Sedgmore

Why should leaders put adult literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) at the heart of their organisation? There is a very strong educational argument for placing basic skills at the heart of the curriculum, which has been made in numerous places and for which there is now strong evidence from research. Leaders who do so need to have a pedagogical and intellectual rationale in terms of inclusivity, citizenship and social wellbeing. Their core values will inform their thinking and practice. They will consider how different factors interact and how they work out in practice for everyone involved, above all learners and teachers.

As well as a reasoned intellectual, political and educational conviction, leaders also have to have a ‘heart’ connection to the issue: understanding and empathy with the nature of someone’s life when they are so significantly disadvantaged. A deep insight into people’s lives enables conviction to be translated into practical action. Leaders in further and adult education who have that mix of the head and the heart and want to serve those most disadvantaged in society through educational provision can be termed ‘servant leaders’.

Servant leadership

For me, servant leadership is an enabling concept. The approach of a servant leader is first to identify what it is that most needs to be served. If you are an institutional leader who has over-strong ego needs or, for example, a leader in an academically high-flying institution or a leader of an organisation with a mission that is in some way removed from meeting the needs of all potential learners and issues, there are forces at work that can get in the way of meeting the needs of all learners and potential learners. There are sometimes tensions around the core mission of an institution but I personally believe that high ambition and a dedication to serving the needs of individuals can sit alongside each other perfectly well, not least in a complex, sophisticated, multidimensional college. So even if you are running an academically ambitious college, you don't have to neglect the needs of those who need literacy and numeracy learning. To succeed in organising this level of complexity requires a different focus on different students with different needs and this should be driven by the understanding that ultimately you are there to serve the needs of those who have had the least success in their lives to date: your strongest heart-commitment is to enable positive life changes.

There are often personal stories behind such commitment. My own is that my father left school at the age of 13. He wasn't illiterate but he struggled with his reading and writing and I know what that did to his life. He was a miner originally, which was fine, and he had no problems doing his job. Then he moved into factory work and wanted to become a supervisor. So one of the biggest heartbreaks in my dad's life was he could never become a supervisor because he couldn't pass the supervisory exam because of his numeracy. I saw that and felt it and knew that one day I would use part of my education to help people who have to go through things like that.

Further education (FE) colleges are not, in the main, the places where the sons and daughters of the powerful go, and their leaders are often motivated to help those who have benefited least from initial education. My experience is that the really effective, passionate people in FE have empathy through related experience. They might be middle class, brought up in quite an advantaged group, but somehow they've had exposure to other experiences. Disadvantage and social class issues have touched them in some way, so

that they see how they can help people who in other circumstances might have flourished.

My father could have been a good supervisor. In other aspects of his life he was an able, intelligent, astute man but his literacy and numeracy were big barriers. There was no qualification at the time that suited the needs of someone who would have been good at the job, but who needed basic skills support. I started in FE, teaching Asian women in their homes, but one of the first qualifications programmes I ever wrote was the National Examination Board for Supervisory Management (NEBSM) supervisory managers' course and I know that the time and energy I gave to the people on that programme with their literacy and numeracy were linked to my father's life-history.

Leadership is all about values and your values shape, form and determine the kind of leader you are. If you do have values of inclusiveness and want people of every ability to have access and opportunity, then you will adopt the view that literacy and numeracy should be a basic right in every civil society. From there, your educational commitments, your approach to curriculum organisation and pedagogy, and your actions will follow.

From commitment to practical action: convincing the organisation

When there is plentiful funding and policy support for basic skills, as in Skills for Life, then convincing managers is straightforward. You find the champions, you find the people who understand the issues and are good at organisation and practical action. You put them in key posts, you set up the programmes, you fund them and everything is hunky dory. At a time when the basic skills curriculum is struggling in terms of policy and funding, there are big choices that have to be made. A cross-institutional dialogue has to take place to ascertain exactly where basic skills fit in the college's mission and values and where they sit in the strategic planning of the institution. Staff get most distressed where there is a gap between rhetoric and reality: if leaders espouse a commitment to literacy, numeracy and social justice but don't actually enable the practical action that addresses disadvantaged learners' needs. If this is the case, you have to own up to it, unpack it and get back on course with plans that clearly set out the organisation's commitments.

In these circumstances, a leader's clarity is essential. Most importantly, good leaders will be ahead of the curve, seeing what potential impact changes in policy and funding may have – for example making fewer people eligible or making less funding available. What a leader has to do within the organisation is to make the changes an open part of the planning process through shared discussions. If reductions are unavoidable, hard decisions must be made and clearly explained. By this I mean making and keeping to decisions that support your values, even though you are going to have to make difficult funding choices in other areas to uphold them.

There are all sorts of ways of doing this. One route is to say: we are not going to do this or that because it doesn't fit with our mission or the external climate. The other approach is: we are going to continue to do this, even though it may now mean that we have to subsidise this curriculum area from others. When I was head of an FE college business faculty in the early 1990s we had a shared understanding that we were the 'cash cow' and worked with a will to cross-subsidise underfunded programmes that supported social justice.

Carrying this out necessitates an enterprising culture and a commercially focused income-generation strategy, which is getting harder and harder for colleges held on a tight rein by the demands of policy and regulation. If they are given room to flourish, these strategies release creative energy and generate surpluses for cross-subsidisation – all accounted for, proper and above board. Another strategy is to go into partnership and find sources of funding elsewhere, scanning the environment from every angle for every possibility. That takes time and resources: you are pushing the boundaries of delivery more and more. The key point is to have a transparent plan that makes clear what everybody needs to do.

Allies and advocates have a critical role too: organisations like the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and NRDC need to work with providers to lobby, or to provide critical evidence in support of an inclusive FE agenda, to help shift policy. It is hard work when you are rowing against the tide and need to work subtly because the government may still have the rhetoric to support what you are doing even as their funding decisions are going in the opposite direction.

I think that is the hardest part for college staff, because they are unused to being masters and mistresses of their own fate. Senior FE leaders need to imagine and occupy a sense of a future in which business decisions at board and senior management team level are based on clarity about values as much as a response to external pressures. For this way of running a college to be successful, there must be a dialogue across the college at all levels.

The choice of senior and middle managers is critical to making an approach like this work. When you appoint your staff, you are appointing in relation to the values, the mission, the objectives, the core strands of curriculum delivery and the service ethos of the organisation. Not every college operates in this way. It is a fascinating dilemma from a leadership perspective. Some college leaders who value commercial success and enterprise encourage a business ethos that can be narrow and exclusive. But FE is still a very broad church and the only way to foster both economic development and social inclusion is for the sector to remain that way.

A new environment

In terms of policy, what we need is absolute clarity about the future of Skills for Life and all related subjects and services to learners. We need occasions at national and local level for joint thinking among leaders, for discussion, debate and exchange of evidence and good practice at policy seminars and other events. Together leaders can develop the confidence, the creativity and mutual support to shape their individual institutions. Adult basic skills has become a central curriculum priority in the FE sector over the last decade. Ironically, now, despite the World Class Skills targets, it is no longer a straightforward priority: it is a complex challenge to enable literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision to thrive for all learners, especially those with the lowest skills.

There is no easy answer. The old ways cannot cope with the new environment, so I think the national ‘Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning’ that NIACE is conducting (Schuller and Watson 2009) and the long-term rigorous research and development across all aspects of basic skills policy, quality and professionalism that the NRDC is doing are precisely the kind of initiatives that can craft a new curriculum narrative and a new leadership

narrative. For that, we need to develop more complex, sophisticated leadership models that are visionary but at the same time pragmatic about where we take Skills for Life and our inclusive remit next in the coming era, actively engaging politicians in the process. I believe they will want to. The policy rhetoric is still there and I think the rhetoric is genuine.

I am keen to develop the notion of ‘systems leadership’, in which the whole system shifts to address the difficult issues that we are all facing under increasingly stringent funding regimes for adult learning. We have to discover new possibilities and new ways forward. In my experience, civil servants, college leaders and practitioners in the field ultimately want the same because we are a sector that has very strong servant leadership values: you are there to serve people as good public servants. What we have not done yet – and it is really difficult, if not impossible to do – is to find new ways for the system to ensure that we safeguard learning for everyone.

A sector to be proud of

I’ve been in the FE sector since 1980. I fell in love with it and have never wanted to be anywhere else but the one thing that continues to baffle me is how we can be so innovative and flexible, and deliver strongly and positively, in so many different arenas, often in incredibly difficult circumstances. More than any other education sector we somehow carry on through continuous change, both self-generated and externally imposed. Foster (2005) was astute in seeing that FE somehow doesn’t ever seem to lose that capacity. I don’t pretend that we haven’t got problems to solve, or that we can’t improve, but we are better than we are ever perceived to be.

Perhaps there is something about leadership that is about carrying that pride in the work and voicing it. I’ve often heard FE principals’ special pleading as they reel off all the initiatives that they implement – almost supplicant: ‘please hear us’. It is because they are proud of what they do but it is not an expression of pride that assumes, authoritatively, that others accept and understand that what we are doing is vital to our society, in ways that schools and universities do. Nevertheless, like other leaders in FE, I have no desire to be in a school or in a university. There is something in my sense of FE that is confidently, non-egotistically proud of, and secure in, the value of the

sector's contribution and its success. You take pride but it is not egotistical pride, saying 'hey look at us'; it's confidence, a joy and a celebration of what we do, and a real love of FE. Some people don't like me using the word love in that sense, but I feel love and it feels right to say so.

FE leaders can and should enjoy that sense of pride in having nothing to prove to other sectors. At the Centre for Excellence in Leadership I tried to work with leaders at every level and get them to internalise from the inside out: pride in the best sense. I mean pride that is neither conceited nor complacent about how and what we do. I do not mean never be apologetic, because of course we should admit our faults, of course put them right, of course deal with them, of course be accountable and constantly improve. But that's a different kind of discourse from trying to prove that you are good to others. In my own upbringing, my parents were proud of everything that all three of their children did. You tried your best and that was enough. I'm lucky not to carry a legacy of never being good enough and I feel for those who do, because to be in our sector and have that kind of life-script must be deeply painful.

My psychology and life-history have made me into someone who says: I'm going to make that work, come what may. If I believe in it I'll find a way around it. I see blockages in order to get rid of them, not in order to weigh me down. I've said on several platforms that I'm a pathological optimist but I'm not a Pollyanna. It isn't an unreal optimism but a way of being that helps you just keep doing it until you get through. External circumstances play their part. I believe in cycles. Like flares in clothing, things in education come in and out of fashion, and the thing that you feel is lost is never lost for ever because things change, people get influenced. You are not on your own.

There is much discussion now about blended leadership and about working on the connection between leadership and management. Leadership and management are part of a spectrum, but they are also two separate things and most of us start off as managers. When you start working your way up in an organisation you are often carrying out technical, operational types of activities and tasks, primarily as a manager. Then you start to see that someone else is involved, to recognise that it isn't just you managing the work; then you see that there aren't just two of you, there are five. You soon have a sense of all the people involved in your work and the role of leadership rises to the

surface. You can have many leadership qualities, but if you are an incompetent manager it mars your effectiveness as a leader. Outstanding leaders are also outstanding learners. In fact, the most important qualities of excellent leaders are their capacity to learn and their competence to manage.

There can be formidable challenges. When a new leader starts in an organisation, certain about the changes needed and the shared leadership approach he or she wants to promote, and it is clear that there will be implacable opposition, including from senior managers, what are the strategies most needed? The first thing for me has been not to impose my own kind of rhetoric on an organisation to which I am new. I adopt a very low-key rhetoric and try to work out the individual and shared cultures of the organisation. The most important thing is to listen, listen and listen. A new leader does not need to say very much. You listen, you learn, you understand. You need to constantly check how you have interpreted what you have heard and read, to see if it fits with other people's perceptions and analysis. Then you ask yourself whether it is a shared model and start to explore this. I am not suggesting you sit down and say 'let's share mental models'. That would alienate a lot of people. But you can do it by understanding and adopting the discourse of others. The only thing I will never compromise on is that the discourse has to be truthful, open and honest. If somebody tells me they don't like this practice of sharing, I say 'tough'. I believe very strongly that you should have authentic dialogue to understand what motivates and alienates individuals and what helps them to contribute. If, gradually, you sense that a person who is very resistant in certain areas will work with you well on others, that's the point at which to try to come to an accommodation. That can mean enabling changes of focus and sharing of roles between colleagues. If someone pitches themselves against all the values a new leader is seeking to adopt and their behaviour is antithetical to the development of the organisation, then the difficult task of finding ways for them to exit may be unavoidable and needs to be done with dignity.

Sometimes ethical dilemmas make the situation more complex. Right and wrong are seldom one-sided and the implications of redundancy or dismissal are invariably serious. Such situations are about human relations, human stories and the impact on people's lives of negative change, which involves feelings of rejection. In one such situation, the culture of open dialogue made it possible for a staff member to come to me, decide to leave and

discuss the kind of meaningful support that could be offered. But in another example, six people felt that it was impossible to work in the new culture – they thought it was awful. When they all left, the atmosphere was quite bitter and angry. To some people, the practice of openly sharing values and problems feels dictatorial if it comes from the top. The goal is for 99 per cent of staff to see it as positive.

Clarity is essential, and at the same time being open to people coming to tell a leader where she or he might be going wrong. There needs to be permission to do that: conscious, formal permission as part of the working culture so that teams and individuals can give leaders feedback in case they are not behaving constructively or are making mistakes. I've had lecturers come to me and say they would like to challenge me on an issue, because I had not lived up to the values we'd developed and had not consulted them. I sat there and thought, 'I can't believe this, but you are absolutely right.' I acknowledged it, which is important. Of course, if you are breaking faith with your own values every day, it is time to go!

The first time I experienced this, I went to the staff and said, 'I owe you an apology, I have to take full responsibility'. I had rushed ahead – it's my personality. I thought I was going to lose credibility but it was quite the reverse – it opened a new kind of dialogue. Again there is a difference between being incompetent and being apologetic about a genuine mistake that has happened because you are so busy. We are not perfect, nobody is perfect. But a culture where if somebody has done something inappropriate it is named in an adult manner and acknowledged so that everyone can move on, frees up an organisation to take risks and be human.

That links back to thinking about people who can't read or write well. A leader can create an environment where learners can name what may feel shameful to them or difficult to express in ways that help them to move on. It is about the empowerment of people, whether staff or students. And it is not just through releasing positive attitudes and helping to create confidence; it is also about acknowledging difficult parts of people's experience and characteristics, and dealing with things that they cannot do or are worried about. When issues are dealt with in constructive ways, honourably and respectfully, there can be a new sense of liberation. The best environment is one where people feel that they can say anything as long as it's not intentionally

negative, disrespectful or destructive. Such culture is created by openness, dialogue and learning, and it links staff working at a high level with their most disadvantaged learners.

The future of leadership

Leadership and gender are important areas to explore. Women can have advantages in preparing for the kind of leadership that's needed at the moment. There is almost a sense of gender advantage where there used to be a clear disadvantage when a much more macho environment was dominant. I believe the leadership of the 21st century is more female. As Tom Drucker and Tom Peters were saying in the 1970s, the future of management is female. What they meant by that is that management was becoming more about relationships and networking; multi-tasking and flexible ways of thinking were increasingly core to working practices in modern life and that successful work environments were more based on teamwork and less hierarchical. Now we do see more and more women leaders in FE and they are generating productive learning environments.

Having said that, successful leadership ultimately depends on the state of development, the awareness and the value systems of leaders, regardless of their gender. Somebody who has developed their emotional intelligence and their management competence, who is clear about their own learning needs and is constantly seeking to improve themselves, including by being ready to undertake leadership development programmes, is likely to be effective whether male or female, because their developmental process is directly linked to their effectiveness. I have observed women adopting a style that is more male than the men. This may well be easier than for a man to adopt ways of being and acting associated with women, because we are still living with so much gender stereotyping in our culture and society, including the workplace, and it can take a lot of courage for men to work in ways that come more easily to women.

The best leaders in our sector love what they do and it is their vocation and their intellectual passion to help people learn. In such places, students get very different experiences.

A final point on literacy and numeracy and ESOL learners. Their needs are at the heart of a commitment to diversity and equality of opportunity. We know that disadvantaged groups face daunting barriers and restrictions, which it is our job to help them overcome. It is a straightforward equal opportunity issue and therefore a priority. Literacy and numeracy should never be viewed as in tension with other parts of the curriculum. They are central to the vocation of FE.

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Leadership of literacy, language and numeracy learning in the lifelong learning sector: A literature review

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Purpose of this review

This review has been prepared for a seminar on leadership of literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) learning in the lifelong learning sector jointly run by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, NRDC and the London Centre for Leadership in Learning at the Institute of Education on 19 May 2008. The review provides an outline of the literature available and is intended to inform the debate and provide contextual information for the papers presented at the seminar. In addition, the review is intended to act as the basis for a research agenda to be developed following the identification and discussion of key issues for research during the seminar.

In common with the concept of distributed leadership, identified in this review as an important feature of successful leadership of LLN learning, this paper is aimed at those exercising leadership at varying levels throughout organisations. This includes senior leaders making strategic decisions and middle managers and curriculum leaders taking the day-to-day decisions about the direction of LLN and working to ensure that Skills for Life is central to the operations of colleges and provider organisations.

Introduction

Although the quantity of research on leadership in the lifelong learning sector has increased considerably, largely through the work of the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, and the volume of research on Skills for Life and LLN learning carried out by NRDC has been substantial, there has been comparatively little direct focus on the leadership of LLN learning.

This review considers the effectiveness of leadership of LLN and what leaders need to do to provide effective leadership. It also explores what messages for leadership are emerging from NRDC research in general and examines the literature on national policymaking for LLN. In addition, there is a brief discussion of the emphasis on instructional leadership of LLN in countries such as Australia and Canada. Finally, a short note is included on Ofsted findings relating to the leadership of literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools.

Ofsted identifies a number of key factors essential to leadership of literacy and numeracy in schools, such as the establishment of a shared vision and institutional strategy for raising standards in these areas; clear expectations of how strategy will be implemented; shared commitment among senior staff; effective systems for collating and analysing achievement data; and regular review of plans and targets. These factors are consistent with those identified as essential for leadership of LLN learning in the lifelong learning sector.

The leadership qualities that emerge as critical to the success of LLN learning from this review are those characterised as blended and distributed leadership. This is leadership practice which blends the Ofsted-endorsed qualities of strategy, systems, structure and clarity with collaborative values and concern for empowering staff, thereby enabling them to exercise leadership in varying roles at different levels of the organisation. The exercise of leadership is therefore distributed, but in a coherent manner that is based on an agreed set of values, priorities and practices.

As described later in this review, LLN learning has been the subject of much leadership at national level, involving high-level policymaking, major resource commitment and a variety of intervention practices aimed at

infrastructure development and quality improvement. This has meant that organisational leadership has been faced with major challenges of change as leaders seek to implement widespread reforms in the LLN curriculum area. The strategy development, planning, consultation, training and development and ongoing support of staff this has necessitated are highlighted throughout this review.

The review concludes with a summary of implications for leaders.

Leadership effectiveness

This section considers the literature on the effectiveness of leadership of LLN learning, largely produced by Ofsted. In 2003 the leadership of literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision was characterised by Ofsted as weak. The inspectorate commented that:

Co-ordination and management of the provision are often unsatisfactory, quality assurance systems are generally underdeveloped and there is a lack of reliable data to monitor retention, achievement and progression.

(Ofsted 2003)

In this survey of current practice into post-16 and adult provision, Ofsted justified their criticisms in more detail citing strategic and development planning as in the very early stages of development and observing that few work-based learning providers had a strategy for LLN teaching. Few providers, with the exception of the good colleges (as defined by Ofsted), were monitoring retention, achievement or progression rates and in some sixth-form colleges, where robust quality systems existed elsewhere in the college, these were not applied to literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Further, Ofsted noted that most providers did not promote effectively equality of opportunity to learners who had LLN needs.

In these early years of the formation of the learning and skills sector, with a broad range of providers coming to terms with a new funding and planning regime and a new common inspection framework, it could be expected that the quality of leadership would be inconsistent. However, as the Inspectorate

pointed out, leadership of LLN provision was more variable across different types of provider and was often less effective than other areas of curriculum leadership within the same provider.

In returning to look at Skills for Life in colleges, Ofsted (2005a) found some improvement but still significant weaknesses, remarking that:

Almost all GFE [general further education] colleges have some form of college-wide policy or strategy and most have a senior member of staff with overall responsibility for it. However, weaknesses in leadership and management in around half of GFE colleges have failed to ensure it is implemented effectively.

(Ofsted 2005a)

By this time Ofsted was able to clarify in more detail its definition of effective leadership and management of this curriculum area, characterising effectiveness as:

- development of a college-wide strategic plan with clear, measurable targets
- responsibility assigned to a member of the senior management team for implementation
- rigorous quality assurance
- effective liaison with other providers
- regular meetings of staff
- encouragement of teachers to attend external training events
- the sharing of resources and expertise between teams.

Following earlier comments in the 2003 report, Ofsted also noted that the shortage of teachers with detailed specialist knowledge about the effective teaching of LLN continued to have a substantial impact on the quality of provision.

In a 2007 report on direct learning support in colleges, Ofsted (2007a) confirmed its characterisation of effective leadership of LLN by stating:

In the three colleges with the best provision, the principal and senior managers led a college-wide strategy for improving learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills.

(Ofsted 2007a)

They also identified a clear management structure, good communication and continuing professional development (CPD) as key elements of effective provision.

However, in a subsequent 2007 report on provision and outcomes for young learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities, Ofsted was still able to point to shortcomings:

Eighteen of the 22 colleges lacked understanding about, and expertise in, initial, baseline and diagnostic assessment of learners' needs, how to assess their progress on programmes which were not accredited and how to evaluate their progress against their targets.

(Ofsted 2007b)

Jones (2007) locates the causes of such criticism in lack of training for teachers and lack of focused leadership. She argues that presenting a teacher with a group of learners with learning difficulties and expecting them to design and deliver a curriculum that meets their needs requires proper training. While she sees lots of opportunities for improvements in training with new standards and qualifications and professional development entitlements, she also emphasises that leaders have to articulate a firm sense of purpose.

Practitioners need to know where they are taking their learners, what the progression routes are, what is the most appropriate form of accreditation, and how the curriculum should be adapted. Above all we need to have clear leadership. There is an acute risk of drift as the strategic harness for this kind of provision remains incomplete and unconnected.

Jones (2007)

Whole organisation approaches

In 2004, the ‘Whole Organisation Approaches to delivering Skills for Life Pathfinder’ project (the WOA project) was launched as one of a suite of projects designed to embed Skills for Life across the sector in England in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning and increase the engagement of learners.

The project positioned LLN centrally within an organisation’s strategy and planning agenda, thus linking embedding of the strategy with the leadership of organisations. In particular, the project provided a vision and understanding of what was meant by the whole organisation approach and required the development of leadership and management skills, policies, procedures and quality systems. In taking this approach, the project can be construed as a response to Ofsted’s critique.

The project identified a number of critical success factors as common to all pathfinder organisations in terms of ensuring a successful approach to Skills for Life. These were:

- strong leadership and management
- review of mission, vision and values
- development and implementation of a Skills for Life strategy
- introduction of champions
- establishment of a working group to focus on Skills for Life and drive forward systems, processes and good practice
- adoption of a well-developed and integrated planning approach
- effective implementation of staff development activities
- embedding of Skills for Life into organisational systems and processes
- integrated working between vocational and specialist tutors to embed Skills for Life into teaching and learning methods and resources
- regular and clear communication of progress made, outcomes achieved and sharing of good practice.

(KPMG 2006)

Galliers and Hazel (2008) see the whole organisation approach as an important means of securing wholesale change and improvement in their college.

They comment:

A crucial element of the strategy was engendering a sense of shared responsibility. Although it was important to identify a champion at senior level, much of the early work involved getting cross-college engagement and putting a new vision of Skills for Life at the core of college activity.

(Galliers and Hazel 2008)

In their concluding remarks they return to this point about vision and centrality and emphasise that the whole organisation approach has helped them achieve a step change in how the college delivers Skills for Life because it has:

reaffirmed to us the importance of these vital first skill levels and the need to put them at the heart of our offer.

(Galliers and Hazel 2008)

This echoes the earlier point by Jones (2007) on the need for college leadership to establish a firm sense of purpose in providing for their most vulnerable learners.

Blended leadership

The approach to leadership implied in the recommendations of Ofsted and the WOA project falls firmly into the mainstream perspectives on leadership effectiveness as identified by Collinson and Collinson (2007). These perspectives typically seek to specify a generic list of golden rules of leadership effectiveness and in doing so tend to overlook the interactional and mutually reinforcing nature of leadership and organisational dynamics. The mainstream approaches to leadership run contrary to more contemporary views of leadership, which can be characterised as critical or political perspectives. In these perspectives, effective leadership is viewed as a mutual, collaborative process concerned with empowering followers.

Collinson and Collinson note that:

It is often argued that in the changing 'new world' of 'flatter hierarchies', 'empowered workers', digital technologies and intensified global competition, more flexible leadership forms are not only emerging, but are also more appropriate and effective.

(Collinson and Collinson 2007)

Contemporary commentators on the development of the internet and increased interactivity have observed that 'wikis', web pages that can be edited by anyone with access to them, and other web-based social tools such as MySpace, encourage extreme openness and decentralisation, while also discouraging the exercise of authority. From this perspective the practice of leadership appears increasingly threatened.

Collinson and Collinson, in looking at current leadership practice in colleges and following 120 research interviews with college principals and all levels of staff down to lecturer level, conclude that:

Repeatedly, respondents have expressed a preference for aspects of both traditional, hierarchical leadership (structure, clarity and organisation) and contemporary distributed leadership (teamwork, communication and shared responsibility)

(Collinson and Collinson 2007)

thereby demonstrating that the exercise of leadership is still valued.

They term this type of leadership, blended leadership, a more subtle and sophisticated form of leadership that incorporates and blends the benefits of the traditional, hierarchical model with key elements of a more distributed approach. This is necessary because respondents value clearly-defined job tasks, responsibilities, reporting structures and decision-making processes, but they also recognise that these same structures need to be flexible enough to encourage teamworking, two-way communication and distributed leadership. Whilst distributed leadership may facilitate teamworking, without clear structures grey areas can proliferate which may in turn foster a lack of accountability and unfair practices.

Whilst the view of leadership effectiveness that emerges from Ofsted and the WOA project is one that emphasises the importance of systems and processes, Collinson and Collinson point strongly to an approach that also encompasses valuing people, teamworking, good communication and shared responsibility.

NRDC research: Emerging messages for leaders and leadership

This section considers the broad range of NRDC research and elicits a number of emerging messages for leaders.

Whilst there is no NRDC-sponsored research that directly addresses the issue of leadership of LLN, a number of observations emerge from NRDC research which are significant for leadership. The first of these is that NRDC research has highlighted the importance of LLN learning to society and the economy, thus again drawing to the attention of sector leadership the centrality of this provision in provider organisations. NRDC research has shown that poor levels of LLN skills are strongly correlated with major economic disadvantage, poor psychological wellbeing and lack of civic participation. In addition, evidence has emerged that children in families with poor literacy and numeracy levels are also seriously disadvantaged and likely to fall behind their peers. As Bynner and Parsons (2006) comment:

The main message from the work completed so far is the central significance of Entry Level performance in limiting, for a substantial minority of people, full participation in mainstream adult life. This applies not only to their own disadvantaged statuses in adulthood, but in the extent to which their difficulties are passed on to their children.

(Bynner and Parsons 2006)

NRDC research has examined how best to develop LLN skills in learners and advocates embedded approaches as a critical element of effective practice. This involves embedding or integrating LLN teaching and learning within vocational or recreational study and practice. Roberts et al. (2005) and Casey et al. (2006) have shown how embedding can widen participation and increase learner achievement. Embedding LLN learning in vocational learning has challenges and implications for leaders and managers in that

embedding requires a commitment to different approaches to curriculum and staff planning and the facilitation of teamworking between LLN and vocational teachers. A whole organisation approach complements and reinforces the philosophy of embedding.

The embedded approach emphasises the importance of planning and structures as well as teamwork and shared values, echoing the findings of Collinson and Collinson (2007) in their discussion of leadership as it is currently practiced in colleges.

Whilst valuing staff emerges as an important feature in Collinson and Collinson's work, NRDC has produced some evidence to show that leaders may not have been entirely successful in convincing their LLN staff of their value. NRDC (2006) states:

Thirty-two per cent of non-FE teachers think they are valued less than other subject specialists in post 16 education and training compared to 40 per cent of teachers who work in FE colleges.

If 40 per cent of FE college respondents who work in LLN feel that their work is valued less than other subject specialists, this suggests college leaders face an important challenge to demonstrate more clearly the value of LLN provision to their college.

Also emerging from NRDC research work is a view that LLN teachers are working with a blended approach to their teaching and professional lives that echoes the blended leadership described by Collinson and Collinson.

Tutors new to literacy, numeracy and ESOL teaching value the structure the curriculum gave them initially to be able to deliver successful lessons ... The challenge of working with an evolving strategy whilst also providing a positive experience for learners was accepted as part of their professional work.

(NRDC 2006)

Throughout the range of NRDC research emerges a clear belief that whilst targets and structured curricula provide a context for learning they cannot determine the nature of everyday classroom interaction. Structured and

predictable elements occur alongside the improvised, the creative and the unpredictable. The social identities of adult LLN learners play a crucial part in determining what makes learning meaningful for them and LLN teachers are influenced by their own values and beliefs concerning what and how they teach. The balancing act teachers manage in working with structures and systems, and the relational and interactional aspects of their work, clearly echo the challenge for leaders in constructing and maintaining facilitative systems and making staff feel valued, informed and part of a team.

Teachers' dedication to meeting their learners' needs comes across clearly in many NRDC reports. For the majority of teachers, meeting learners' needs was a priority and extended beyond meeting their immediate needs in terms of literacy and numeracy, to also addressing their wider psycho-social needs. For the teachers this meant adapting their content and delivery to the wide variety of contexts that their learners operate within. This scenario places a premium on teacher flexibility and adaptability, necessitating experienced teachers able to marshal a variety of resources to support their learners and to mediate between the requirements of the curriculum and the needs of their learners.

Also across all NRDC reports, seeing the acquisition of Skills for Life in a social context was considered essential. As comment Ivanic et al. (2006):

Taking a social perspective on LLN involves paying attention first and foremost to the contexts, purposes and practices in which language, written language and numbers play a part.

We always read and write something, for a particular purpose, in a particular way, in a particular time and place.

These themes emphasise the importance of an interactive approach to LLN teaching and learning, which needs to be managed within a context of national curriculum structures, targets and planning and support systems. The parallels between the balancing of approaches in leading and teaching are clear.

Leadership at national policy level: the context for organisational leadership

Whilst leadership is exercised at organisation level, it is also provided at the level of the educational system of which colleges and provider organisations form a part. LLN provision has been the focus of much government interest and policymaking. Because LLN provision has been subject to such high-level interest, supported by major resource commitment, in recent years government has taken a strong lead in LLN infrastructure development and quality improvement. The impact of this leadership is traced in the review of literature from government and national agency sources that follows.

Hamilton and Hillier (2006) identify four phases of policymaking for adult literacy since 1970.

- mid-1970s: campaign led by a coalition of voluntary agencies with a powerful media partner, the BBC
- 1980s: provision supported by local education authority (LEA) services and voluntary organisations, with leadership, training and development funding from a national agency (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, later the Basic Skills Agency)
- 1989–98: demise of much LEA funding; statutory status achieved for adult literacy and numeracy education through the more formalised further education (FE) system, dependent on competitive funding from a national body, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC)
- 1998+: Skills for Life policy steered by a new government strategy unit strongly controlled and regulated by the Cabinet Office. Collaborations through Local Strategic Partnerships replace the competitive approach created through the previous funding regime.

This last phase of policy-making effectively ended a period of policy and leadership ‘blight’ and began a sustained period of systems, organisational and individual development in LLN learning, which for all its shortcomings, has made a major difference to LLN provision.

The Moser Report (DfEE 1999) was influential in shaping this latter period of policymaking. The report emphasised the scale of basic skills problems, noting that up to seven million adults in England were unable to read or

write to the standard expected of an 11-year-old. Even greater numbers were suspected of having difficulties with numeracy. Moser attributed a substantial part of the cause of this problem to the inconsistent level, in terms of both quality and quantity, of basic skills training available throughout the country. He advocated a new basic skills curriculum for adults with clear common standards at different levels.

Within the post-school sector, the report resonated with a number of pronouncements from FEFC on basic skills provision. In 1998, in its Curriculum Area Survey Report, FEFC stated:

Many colleges find difficulty in applying college-wide quality assurance systems to courses in this programme area. Quality assurance of basic education lacks rigour.

(FEFC 1998)

The report also noted that whilst teachers in the programme area were conscientious and committed to their work, they did not all have sufficient expertise and some lacked appropriate teaching qualifications. In order to address the quality of provision colleges needed to improve assessment of learners' needs, arrangements for assuring quality, staff development and management support and teaching quality itself.

The Chief Inspector's Annual Report of 1998/99, (FEFC 1999a) noted that in basic education, the profile of lesson grades was considerably worse than the average profile for all programme areas. Also in 1999, the FEFC's evaluation of Entry and Level 1 awards in literacy, numeracy and ESOL concluded that the number of awards in this area was unnecessarily large and that there was considerable overlap and duplication between them (FEFC 1999b). In addition, some awards had no defined standards and the award of certificates for them had little meaning. There was clear resonance here with Moser's advocacy of a new curriculum with clear standards.

Already in 1997, the FEFC had launched its Inclusive Learning Quality Initiative (ILQI) in response to the Tomlinson Report on inclusive learning (FEFC 1997). The ILQI was divided into two stages. Stage 1 involved colleges working in partnerships to develop staff and organisational development materials. Stage 2 of the ILQI, launched in 1998, was designed to make a significant

contribution to quality improvement, including the improvement of standards of teaching and learning. The main outcomes proposed for stage 2 were:

that all institutions will have improved their organisational capacity to match provision to the individual learning requirements of learners, in particular teaching and learning.

FEFC (1998)

The initiative also proposed the appointment and training of facilitators to work developmentally with colleges. Key elements of the ILQI, for example its use of facilitators and its emphasis on organisational development, were influential in the design of later improvement interventions such as the Skills for Life Quality Initiative and the whole organisation approach.

In November 1999, the FEFC announced the introduction of a Basic Skills Quality Initiative (BSQI) (FEFC 1999c). The BSQI was designed to improve the quality of provision of basic skills and lead to improvements in the standard of basic skills teaching, better learning experiences and improvements in people's capacity to work and progress in education and employment. It involved the production of staff development materials and the use of trained facilitators. The BSQI was central to the FEFC's response to the Moser Report and was similar in conception and purpose to the ILQI. The improvement model, based on facilitators, pioneered in the ILQI was clearly evident in the design of the BSQI.

In 2001 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) took over the funding of the BSQI at a time of increased interest in basic skills following the publication of the Government's Skills for Life national strategy (DfEE 2001). The national strategy pledged £1.5 billion expenditure on basic skills provision over the subsequent three years. Skills for Life proposed a wide-ranging strategy. Adult basic skills education was organised into a new learning infrastructure, which consisted of new national standards, teaching resources and a curriculum. New national targets for LLN were also set. The strategy was successful in making an early impact on provision.

For example, Ofsted (2003) concluded:

The Skills for Life initiative has been highly successful in increasing the number of literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners and in raising the profile of this area of learning, but there needs to be a sharper focus on the quality of the education and training that is available.

When the government published its update on the Skills for Life strategy in 2003 (DfES 2003), which focused on delivery to 2007, it stated:

Over 15,000 teachers have been trained in the literacy and numeracy core curriculum and a further 5,000 ESOL teachers have been introduced to the ESOL curriculum.

The LSC has taken responsibility for the funding and delivery of teacher training and continuing professional development. We estimate that 25,000 teachers will have made use of the programme by 2007.

(DfES 2003)

Other achievements listed included:

- publication of core curricula for literacy, numeracy and ESOL learning
- pre-Entry curriculum framework
- literacy and numeracy materials for screening, initial assessment and diagnostic assessment
- national literacy and numeracy tests at Levels 1 and 2.

The LSC became responsible for funding and co-ordinating the implementation of the DfES Skills for Life strategy in 2003. As part of this strategy, the Skills for Life Quality Initiative was introduced in 2003/04 with a budget of £9 million. The main activities in 2003/04 were training and support for leaders and management, development of a facilitation network and professional development for teachers, trainers and support staff.

The impact of Skills for Life on LLN provision was examined by the National Audit Office (NAO) in 2004. They concluded that:

The Department has led the development of lasting improvements in the quality of literacy, numeracy and language learning. All the elements that support good learning – such as skill standards, curricula, good quality teaching and recognisable qualifications – were either non-existent or underdeveloped in 2001.

The Department has introduced standards, curricula and new teaching materials to raise the quality of learning. It has brought in national tests and associated qualifications so that people know when they have achieved the standards.

(NAO 2004)

However, the NAO also recommended that more teachers with up-to-date training in teaching LLN were needed to provide high quality learning and that some low performance was likely to be due to providers not energetically taking up the fruits of the new learning infrastructure.

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) also noted a positive impact of Skills for Life in their report on Skills for Life at work:

Some providers have clear strategies for improving literacy, numeracy and language training at work. They have made good use of expert consultant support offered through the Skills for Life Quality Initiative.

(ALI 2005)

In examining the impact of policy on learning and inclusion for different groups of disadvantaged learners as part of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), it was found that:

Many unintended, unpredictable and even perverse outcomes were reported. For example, tutors and managers feared that the linkage between funding and targets for achievement at Level 1 and Level 2 in Skills for Life was threatening provision for learners at lower levels. We also saw how provision which combined basic skills with other crafts was slashed in centres where such courses had fostered inclusion and provided hope and progression for deprived communities. Basic skills initiatives in the workplace and community lacked sustainable funding.

(TRLP 2007)

It was also noted that:

the pace of change and the proliferation of initiatives have been intense and changes to targets, funding roles and paperwork within initiatives such as Skills for Life have diverted staff away from the central task of teaching.

(TLRP 2007)

The challenges these policy initiatives provide to sector leaders are twofold. First, how to support practitioners facing too many changes, introduced too quickly, with too much bureaucracy. Second, how can leaders promote a new settlement between national, regional and local decision-making, creating a broad national framework, based on social partnership, involving all the main players, but allowing greater local discretion and innovation?

The initiatives taken in the most recent phase of policymaking at national level have provided the context for leadership of LLN at provider level. Government has led by prioritising and funding LLN provision, professional development and quality improvement. This has led to the changes in organisational arrangements, leadership practices, and teaching and learning strategies explored in earlier sections of this review. It has also provided sector leaders with considerable challenges and in particular led to calls for a new social partnership between policymakers, sector leaders and practitioners.

International work

This section briefly considers the emphasis on instructional leadership employed in Australia and Canada to strengthen leadership of LLN learning.

In a short review such as this it is not possible to explore in detail literature in an international context. The lack of a major research focus on leadership of LLN in the national context is mirrored in the international. Much of the work that has been carried out in other English-speaking countries such as America, Australia and Canada on the leadership of LLN focuses on school leadership and on the development of national or regional strategies for the improvement of literacy and numeracy.

The National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) 2001 report on a trend away from local leadership to a more centrally driven system in many states in America. This is attributed to the need to monitor the quantity and quality of provision more consciously so that more effective links among professional development, practice and programme improvement can be made. Centralised leadership has also developed in response to increased demands for accountability.

Typical of the focus on development of national strategy is: *Literacy through Leadership: Outlining an Adult Literacy Strategy for British Columbians*. This report by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (2006) emphasises the importance of the development of a national strategy and draws on the experience of practice in the UK, USA, Australia and other provinces in Canada.

In relation to the leadership of LLN in schools, the dominant approach is one of instructional leadership. This has long been a feature of North American leadership practice and has also influenced the school improvement movement in the UK. Instructional leadership emphasises the leadership role of head teachers both through their formal role and their expertise. They are required to possess knowledge of teaching, learning and curriculum in order to support staff in improving their own practice and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning that takes place.

Examples of instructional leadership in practice include the Canadian Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's *Annual Operating Plan for 2006/07*, which sets out a range of strategies including one on instructional leadership with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy.

The activities include:

- providing support for school-based professional development in LLN learning based on best practice with a particular emphasis on coaching
- building teacher capacity to collect and analyse literacy and numeracy achievement data to provide direction to improvement efforts
- supporting development of professional learning teams focused on literacy and numeracy improvement

- providing focus and direction on literacy and numeracy
- supporting teachers through the development of literacy and numeracy curricula and assessment practice.

Western Australia's Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes (Council of Australian Governments 2007) contains six priority action areas including one on developing instructional leadership by principals. The actions include:

- participation in a national project to develop a core set of agreed skills, knowledge and attributes on instructional leadership
- development of a suite of instructional leadership programmes for aspirant, new and experienced leaders prioritising approaches to literacy and numeracy
- development of literacy and numeracy assessment capacity in schools.

Sawbridge (2000) comments that the extent to which strong instructional leadership is evident in UK FE is questionable. He states:

In common with a number of other professional occupations (nursing for example) and with teaching generally, there is a tendency for further education teachers to be promoted out of professional practice and into the administrative management of the organisation. As managers assume greater seniority within the organisational hierarchy, their direct involvement in curriculum matters diminishes.

(Sawbridge 2000)

He goes on to add:

Instructional leadership would seem to have most to offer at curriculum management level particularly in terms of embedding new teaching and learning and student support strategies. Those with leadership roles at this level are also likely to have strong curriculum development and delivery responsibilities.

(Sawbridge 2000)

Whilst the nature of leadership of complex organisations in the lifelong learning sector in the UK may make it difficult for senior leaders to adopt

an instructional leadership role, some of the techniques of this approach could be adopted to develop a specific focus on LLN practice as part of an improvement drive in this area of provision.

A note on leadership of literacy and numeracy in schools

Ofsted has reported on the success of the national literacy and numeracy strategies in the primary curriculum, concluding that leadership and management of English and mathematics have improved. Ofsted reports the characteristics of successful leadership teams in these areas as:

- An accurate knowledge of pupil' strengths and weaknesses in English and mathematics, and the attainment profile of pupils
- A knowledgeable subject leader with authority and influence
- Clear expectations and a collective responsibility for raising and maintaining standards
- A range of monitoring and evaluation procedures to improve teaching and learning
- Well-established systems for collecting, analysing and using assessment data
- A shared vision and good collaboration between staff.

(Ofsted 2005b)

In secondary schools, the national strategy for key stage 3 aims to raise standards in the key stage by improving teaching and learning, developing cross-curricular skills, such as literacy and numeracy, and enabling pupils with low attainment to make faster progress. In an evaluation of the third year of the strategy, Ofsted identifies the features of successful strategy management:

- Head teachers have been active in establishing the management of strategy securely at school level, making key appointments and defining clear roles
- Good key stage 3 managers have clear expectations of how the strategy will be implemented. They have strong lines of communication with departments and review and regulate their work regularly. They give effective leadership in areas such as lesson observation and departmental planning.

- The best schools carry out detailed and rigorous audits of strengths and weaknesses and channel their results into appropriate action.
(Ofsted 2004)

These conclusions strongly echo the findings of Ofsted in the college sector and the principles of the whole organisation approach. Factors such as clear institutional-level strategy, senior staff commitment, effective systems for collating and analysing achievement data, and regular review of plans and targets, appear as consistent actions to promote LLN learning across all phases of education.

Conclusion: Key messages for leadership of LLN

The literature suggests that effective leadership of LLN learning can be exercised by:

- possessing a clear vision for and focus on LLN practice
- working towards a new settlement between different levels of decision-making in the sector based on social partnership and allowing greater local discretion and innovation
- development and operation of clear systems of planning, target-setting and quality assurance backed up by regular monitoring and evaluation
- active promotion of collaborative activity between LLN and vocational teachers and with other providers
- strong support of training and development activity and of LLN practitioners facing the rapid pace of change and proliferation of initiatives
- adoption of a whole organisation approach
- an emphasis on equity, valuing teamworking, good communication and shared responsibility, in addition to the deployment of effective structures and systems
- expert balancing of competing requirements to respond to the needs of external organisations, provide functional structures and processes, promote staff flexibility and responsiveness to learners' needs, and engage and motivate staff
- adopting some of the techniques of instructional leadership by actively promoting a focus on the LLN curriculum, assessment and pedagogy.

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Appendix

Seminar report

Leadership of literacy, language and numeracy in the lifelong learning sector – 19 May 2008
CEL/NRDC/LCLL Joint Seminar

Welcome and introduction

Ursula Howard set the scene by reminding us that this is a joint event organised by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, NRDC and the London Centre for Leadership and Learning (LCLL) at the Institute of Education; the purpose of the seminar being to give leadership of literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) the attention it deserves. Ursula noted that Skills for Life set leaders a number of challenges including the adoption of a whole organisation approach involving putting Skills for Life at the centre of organisation visioning and planning. In addition, leaders had to respond to the challenge presented by the need to embed the development of LLN skills in vocational practice.

The starting point for our investigation of leadership and LLN was a literature review that revealed the major contribution from Ofsted in terms of identifying effective structures and systems as key elements in the delivery of high-quality LLN skills to learners. The review also established that whilst structures and systems were important in themselves they were not enough.

Leaders also needed to be effective in developing relationships with colleagues through teamworking, good communication and sharing responsibility. In turn, these qualities should be complemented by a clear focus on LLN assessment, pedagogy and learner experiences.

Jean Kelly from the Institute for Learning reminded the audience that a new professional era for the sector had started in 2007, with a focus on blending teaching and leadership, and pedagogy and subject specialism. Also, the strong emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD) by the Institute for Learning was evidence of a determination to professionalise teaching for the benefit of learners. Professional leaders and teachers, with a sound knowledge of their subject, are the key to making a real difference to the experiences and achievements of learners.

The morning seminar papers

The first of the papers specially commissioned for the seminar was presented by **Jill Westerman**, Principal of the Northern College for Residential Adult Education. Jill's lively and personal presentation included the image of the hedgehog and the fox – an image that was often returned to throughout the day – the hedgehog being a creature which did mainly one thing, but did it very well and the fox being an opportunist who tackled a range of challenges. The hedgehog's *modus operandi* had been adapted by Jill, who advocated that leaders should find the key things that staff are passionate about and work from these in building their enthusiasm for change. By working with the prevailing college culture, identifying the strengths of the staff and getting the right people into the right positions, Jill was able to move the college LLN provision from good to great. Whilst acknowledging the inherent dangers of such achievement – the possibility of complacency and reluctance to modify further a successful strategy – Jill identified the important actions that had worked at Northern College:

- involving all staff in discussions about LLN and training for its improvement
- focusing on creativity in promoting learner achievement rather than targets
- developing high-quality learning materials

- embedding LLN in all college systems
- focusing on success
- listening to learners.

Tertia Sefton-Green, Project Director at Hackney Music Development Trust (HMDT), enthusiastically emphasised the importance of having a vision and following that vision through to reality without being distracted by unnecessary doubts and excessive fear of risks. Tertia also acknowledged the importance of getting the right team together and highlighted the essential contribution of external partnerships to breaking new ground. In describing how HMDT promoted Skills for Life through the arts, and in particular the creation of an opera for Hackney, Tertia drew attention to the negative impact of institutional systems on creativity and the difficulty of sustaining achievement when project funding ends. However, the successes and rewards arising from engaging with people where they are, both geographically and intellectually, and promoting their development through artistic endeavour was a source of great pride and satisfaction.

Belinda Turner, Chief Executive of Stubbing Court Training Ltd, a work-based training provider in the equine industry, followed by describing a very different type of organisation, but with a similar goal, in which her approach to LLN development was driven by the need to remove barriers, such as poor LLN skills, to the achievement of excellent equine skills. Whilst acknowledging the importance of having the correct infrastructure to support learners and employers and clear and simple procedures and systems, Belinda stressed that her key to success was a relentless focus on service and high standards. By creating a culture where the achievement of world-class standards is seen as a realisable goal and providing eminent and respected role models, she has been successful in promoting high levels of learner achievement in LLN. Belinda also credited a partnership approach with assisting her organisation's success; by working closely with employers, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Ofsted and other agencies she has aligned the objectives of her company with those of her stakeholders.

The final paper of the morning was presented by **Julie Raine**, Director of Basic Education at the City of Sunderland College. Julie introduced herself as an outsider in terms of LLN, coming from a background in nursing and IT. This prior experience and initial lack of LLN expertise led her to ask the same questions

of basic education and Skills for Life provision as she would of any curriculum area relating to quality of teaching, learner achievement and progression, and to focus on establishing high aspirations, high expectations and partnerships as the core elements of a strategy to address the skills deficit of the City of Sunderland. Julie was one of the founder members of ‘Test the City’, a strategy for engagement with the community that was based on the premise that the local population possessed skills, but not qualifications. Through a process of testing, individual learning planning and the provision of contextual and stand-alone courses, the strategy was hugely successful in increasing enrolments and achievement, and promoting a city-wide commitment to Skills for Life.

Following this stimulating set of presentations, the seminar attendees worked in table groups to discuss the many issues raised. The thoughts of the groups were gathered through the identification of key points from each table that were summarised at the end of the session. The key points and questions that emerged were:

- A focus on systems, processes *and* people is necessary.
- The need for leaders to articulate their core vision for the organisation and its learners is crucial to the success of LLN provision.
- Articulating the vision within an organisation needs to be complemented by sharing the vision externally and building partnership arrangements based on achievement of a shared vision.
- What is it that drives leaders to be great?
- Are there appropriate financial incentives for organisations to be great?
- How can we engage and develop staff in the milieu of World Class Skills, targets and professionalism?
- Establishing high expectations of our learners is critical to success.
- Knowing our learners, our community and our stakeholders is vital.
- How can leaders best meet learners’ needs at Level 2 and below whilst these are not supported by government funding?
- If we keep our learners at the centre of our attention then targets will look after themselves.
- Is leading LLN any different from leading any other educational endeavour? Participants noted the unique elements of LLN as an area of learning that spreads across all other areas and requires embedding in vocational or leisure interests to achieve the best results with many learners.

Response to the papers

Judith Swift of the TUC was the first respondent and summarised her perception of the main themes of the morning. Judith agreed that effective leaders of LLN had to have a clear vision for their provision and be the type of leaders who always had an eye to improvement. She was struck by the belief that such leaders needed to be able to connect with people and bring them along in their journey to excellence. Judith viewed the tension between creativity and innovation and targets as potentially productive in stimulating ideas and focused on the importance of ensuring meaningful learning as a pathway to achievement. Judith summarised her essential qualities of good leaders as joy and passion.

Judith Hinman of NRDC was the second respondent and enthusiastically welcomed the emphasis on teaching and learning – leaders should be clear about what they are driving to improve. Judith was also struck by Jill Westerman’s remarks about good being the enemy of great. In essence, Judith felt that leadership excellence was founded on focused attention and high expectations. She acknowledged that there would be a diversity of leadership styles and visions throughout the sector, but was convinced that leaders who are visionary could balance social practices against targets and testing, and rise to the challenges presented today by the shake up in staffing and qualifications, embedding and whole organisation approaches. Judith expressed concern that too much Skills for Life provision was being routed through Train to Gain and stressed the need to maintain a diversity of providers to best serve the needs of learners.

Judith introduced the notion that the level of attention focused on LLN learning may have peaked and urged colleagues to carry on fighting for it to remain at the forefront of attention in government, with employers and among providers. As a final thought Judith noted that all of today’s presenters were female, despite invitations being made to achieve a gender balance of presenters, and speculated whether gender had anything to do with effective LLN leadership.

The afternoon presentations

Monica Turner from CfBT began the afternoon with a summary presentation on the whole organisation approach. She characterised this as a systematic approach to change involving supporting senior managers in a critical analysis of their provision, related systems and processes. The whole organisation approach involved introducing an improvement process, using tried-and-tested tools and encouraging peer support for the sharing and transfer of developments. Monica identified a range of critical success factors in high-quality LLN provision; these included:

- clear vision and understanding of potential benefits to learners and to the organisation
- clear strategy and processes for implementing this
- engaging and enthusing staff across the organisation
- valuing teamworking, good communication and shared responsibility
- acknowledging the time needed to bring about measurable and sustainable change.

Professor Kathryn Riley from the London Centre for Leadership and Learning then offered her perspective on leadership within the wider public-sector context. This context was the modernising agenda, and the new dynamic in public-sector leadership involving integration and connection across the public sector and the need for robust systems for the evaluation of impact of leadership development. Kathryn drew attention to the reality that leadership is a social construct shaped by culture, values and beliefs and also the way in which leaders increasingly have to look beyond their organisations to their local system to lead effectively through the forging of partnerships and alliances. Kathryn also noted some of the hazards and dangers of leadership, drawing attention in particular to toxic leadership – the way in which poor leaders can damage the health of their staff and their customers/clients. This led to a consideration of leadership development, and Kathryn left her audience to consider why evaluation of leadership development activity is so simplistic and challenged them to answer the question – how do you know what makes a difference?

The afternoon seminar papers

The second set of seminar papers was led by **Sian Whiteley**, Teaching and Learning Leader at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College. Sian focused on the importance of staff development and the leaders' responsibility to ensure effective opportunities for, and delivery of, staff development. Sian emphasised how training and development are helping teachers to develop as leaders and showed how development opportunities existed with captive audiences, such as those present at whole college staff development days. Here, Skills for Life training could be incorporated in an imaginative manner to spread awareness and develop motivation among all staff, not just LLN specialists. Initial teacher training also presented many opportunities to include Skills for Life skills development, which could be succeeded by more specialist accredited training for teachers of all disciplines. Professional development opportunities also existed via training for teachers of learners with severe learning difficulties and disabilities and subject-specialist teacher training.

The final presentation by **Dorothy Newman**, Learning Services Manager of Buckinghamshire County Council, concentrated on partnerships as a key strategy for promoting learner access and achievement. Partnerships could take different forms, including long-term delivery partnerships, joint delivery partnerships and project delivery. These all required an open-minded, constructive and creative approach on behalf of tutors and organisation leaders and managers. Dorothy stressed the importance of personal relationships and complementary objectives in ensuring the success of partnership relationships and the tensions that could arise over time, costs and changes in partner priorities. Dorothy ended by outlining her key criteria for success with partnerships:

- provide strategic support
- be learner centred
- respect the priorities of partners
- effective partnerships need your own organisation's staff to be motivated (internal motivation) as well as the staff of your partner organisation (external motivation)
- a combination of vision and focus ensures progress.

Following the afternoon's presentations, the table groups again convened to discuss the issues raised and the ideas presented. The following main points and questions emerged from these discussions:

- A group of senior leaders with Skills for Life knowledge and experience is emerging in the sector.
- The leadership challenge of Skills for Life is unique because provision is distributed across all areas of the curriculum and because of the challenges presented by embedding it.
- Further challenges come from the balancing required in focusing on being both target driven and learner driven.
- Is there an effective leadership discourse in Skills for Life and LLN?
- The key elements to making a difference are a focus on impact and communication, the establishment of effective partnerships and the application of sheer energy.

Response to the afternoon papers and presentations

The response this time was provided by **Ceri Williams**, Principal of the Mary Ward Centre in London. Ceri began by picking up on Judith Hinman's earlier point of the end of the morning and wondering whether Skills for Life is yesterday's issue in the eyes of the government. She concluded that it might be, but that it cannot be for this audience and all the other practitioners and learners out there in the sector. We need to keep motivated and to be aware that there is no parallel universe in government with a pool of expertise, commitment and insight – we are it! The disconnect between policy and practice exists and sometimes can be great, for example with Train to Gain and the cuts in non-accredited learning. Our role as leaders is to keep speaking the truth about what is needed and what works. Our support networks are vital to keep us motivated in this task. We know what makes a difference; we need support to keep on advocating what we believe and in communicating it to others. Finally Ceri noted two points: the first, that the concept of toxic leadership resonated with us all, and the second, that whilst partnerships are not always in the interests of individual provider organisations, they are in the interests of our learners.

Closing remarks

Helen Casey, Executive Director of NRDC, and **Pip Kings**, Director of the London Strategic Unit, closed the seminar. Helen referred back to Kathryn's big picture challenges and felt that we did need to address the questions 'how can we know what makes a difference?' and 'how can we become an accepted part of public service provision in the eyes of key stakeholders such as government and the public'? Helen also agreed that Skills for Life is no longer the banner headline with policymakers, making the need to address these questions timely and even more urgent.

Pip summed up by stating that Skills for Life and leadership together are an important focus for attention and that we need to have answers to such questions as 'where is leadership effective?' and 'what aspects of knowledge, awareness and skills do leaders need?' Pip reminded the audience of the next steps:

- a report of the seminar will be produced
- a publication is planned drawing together the papers presented today
- a specification for a research and development programme will be drawn up to explore further the leadership aspects of Skills for Life and LLN provision.

What is the most effective leadership of organisations in which learning takes place at all levels, and where many learners have literacy, language and numeracy needs? What characterises leaders and modes of leadership that put the most underachieving and often vulnerable learners at the centre of an educational organisation? This book addresses these and other questions by offering insights into existing leadership values and practices from experts on leadership of post-16 learning. It sets out the points of view of leaders of large and small colleges, a residential adult college, voluntary organisations and work-based training providers as well as exploring research evidence and other literature on leadership.

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