

Notes from Workshop Session 1
Case Studies from the US & England
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US Case Study

John Benseman and John Comings, authors of the US case study, presented their findings

General Information

- In the US, there is a great disparity between high and low performing learners; this gap is growing
- The case sites observed for the study were in three states: Massachusetts, California and Maryland
- The case sites provided three kinds of programmes: Adult Base Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE) which usually aims at helping learners to pass the General Educational Development Test (GED), and programmes providing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) .

Observations from the Case Sites

- Most of the programmes have waiting lists
- Instructors avoided using work books, preferring to personalise instruction as much as possible
- There was a strong use of programme coordinators and counsellors to guide learners
- The learners were encouraged to set their own learning goals: personal and educational
- The researchers found that instructors paid careful attention to questioning methods. The following were important:
 - It makes a difference how the questions are pitched
 - Instructors have to wait after answering a question and give learners time to respond. They have to overcome their tendency to 'rescue' the learners by giving them the answer.
 - The learners need to do the work, not the instructors
 - There needs to be a safe environment for learners to ask questions
 - The questions need to be tuned in response to learners responses
 - There was a lot of learner interaction, where learners were asking each other questions
 - Instructors were allowing a diversity of answers
- There was a lot of testing
- Computers were used as a way to provide direct and personalised feedback
- The states ensure quality through (1) the development of materials for the General Educational Degree (GED), and (2) strengthening requirements for instructor certification

English Case Study

John Vorhaus and John Comings, the authors of the English case study, presented their findings

General Information

- The International Adults Literacy Survey (IALS) showed that the literacy levels of adults in England were very low

- The results brought the prevalence of adults with low foundation skills to the attention of government policy makers, and led to increases in funding for adult learning
- The ‘Skills for Life’ Strategy was launched in 2001

Information on Formative Assessment

- The Moser Report, which addressed the low basic skills of adults in England, supported the use of formative assessment
- RARPA [*Recognizing and recording progress and achievement in non –accredited learning*], a project undertaken by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, has provided a framework for formative assessment
- Strengths of formative assessment
 - Focus on small steps in learning progress [that is, scaffolding]
 - Dialogue between instructor and learner, among learners
- Weaknesses of formative assessment
 - It takes a lot of time to record the process
- RARPA researchers observed that formative assessment were being incorporated into regular teaching practice

Discussion

- A workshop participant commented that in both in the US and in England, formative assessment is still very structured and ‘classroom like’
- One participant asked about the typical motivation of learners attending programmes, and wanted to know how high the “drop out rates” were.

US:

- For the US, it is difficult to respond to the question on drop out rates, since there are fifty states and the rates are different in every state
- However, 7 to 10 states with very good funding level were found to have lower drop-out rates
- Many drop-outs occur in the first 15 hours of programme attendance.
- The quality of service affects the motivation of the learners to attend programmes
- In general, there are two groups of learners with two different motivations: One group consists of immigrants who want to learn English, the other one are US-born adults who attend the programmes for economic reasons (e.g., to improve employment prospects).

England:

- Programmes in England may have significant drop-out rates. The use of mentors and a transition period to the community have helped to lower drop-out rates.
- The workshop participants turned to the subject of ICT- that is, whether there is a future for greater use of ICT in adult learning, and how that might come about.

US:

- Since there are a great many adult foundation skill learners (about as much as in compulsory education), classroom teaching cannot be provided for everybody. For this reason, ICT-based provision is being explored as a way to supplement (or take the place of) more formal learning
- There are new ICT programmes coming out that “act like a teacher”, e.g. for fluent reading, providing feedback, and so on.
- It is hoped that ICT programmes can improve learner persistence and at the same time lower the costs for adult education

An expert from Germany noted that there is an e-learning programme for basic education in Germany, which is very effective for low skill learners. It is used in classrooms and with a mentor.

An programme for individuals learning English as a Second language in Spain can detect the patterns in mistakes learners make. It looks very promising

- Workshop participants then discussed partnership between different institutions involved in adult learning.

Ireland:

In Ireland, the partnership between research institutes, learners, governments and providers was essential for success of programs.

England:

Partnership between institutions is very important but also very difficult; the institutions do not always cooperate effectively.

- Many workshop participants were concerned with the question of how to motivate learners to begin a programme.
 - The most difficult question is how to attract learners, who may not be aware of their low skills, to learning programmes. If adults are made aware that their skills are lower than needed to fully function in daily life, they often become more motivated to participate in learning opportunities.
 - Some adult learners have bad memories from school and don't want return to classroom learning
 - Providers are sometimes afraid to advertise too much, and to then not be able to serve all those who want to enrol.
- The comment was made that people with low skills often design their lives to avoid situations where they will have to use specific skills.

Netherlands:

- In the Netherlands, a large number of immigrants are engaged in adult learning, as they are obliged to go to Dutch language classes
- Adult learners who start a new job while still participating in a programme may lose their motivation to keep attending. One approach might be to create more flexible provision (e.g. evening classes)
- A lot of instructors are unemployed themselves (e.g., volunteers)!
- In the Netherlands, there are campaigns for adult learning on TV, providing a central phone number viewers may call to locate nearby classes and to sign up.

Australia

- The motivation to attend adult learning programs is different in Australia, because attendance is often required (e.g. for financial assistance programmes) (this may also be the case in other countries).