National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

**Adult basic education in Ireland:
towards a curriculum framework**

a report based on consultations
and literature review

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Introduction

To the reader

The draft of this report was circulated in June 06 to some two thousand addresses on the database of the National Adult Literacy Agency in Ireland.

We have kept in, as appendix 8, section 3 of that report which outlined 'Proposals and questions' to be considered as well as the original invitation to readers for feedback . This is so that you can see how this was largely expressed as an invitation to shape the ideas of the curriculum framework to be developed in the second phase of the project.   So please see this appendix as an historical document, not as a current invitation.

By the time you read this, those ideas will have already taken shape and grown – enriched, among other things, by the responses sent in to that invitation by some 48 individuals and organisations, and further influenced and shaped by many the many students and tutors using them and reporting back what might improve them.

Several readers noted what they felt to be some confusion in the report as to the role of the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) in Ireland.   Ireland's thirty-three VECs have long played a crucial role in the provision of and funding for adult and further education as a whole, including adult basic education (as indicated in Appendix 6).

The project's Advisory Board (see Appendix 7) had no uncertainty about this; the authors apologise if the report appears to suggest that we did.

Jane Mace
for the research team
September 2006

The project

The aim of this two-year project is:

> to explore the development of a framework to support learner-centred curriculum development in adult literacy and numeracy in Ireland.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) conceived the idea for work on curriculum following other projects designed to support and strengthen the quality of work in adult literacy and numeracy. They made a successful application to the Dormant Accounts Fund for funds to support the work. The NRDC, in turn, made a successful application to them for carrying it out. The authors of this report are the NRDC team; a summary of 'who we are' at the end of this report, together with a list of members of the Project Advisory Group who are overseeing the project.

Following the brief that NALA has given us, the project is working in two phases.

In Phase 1 (December 2005-July 2006) we have consulted with stakeholders in Ireland; reviewed relevant theory about curriculum development; and researched curriculum frameworks that might be relevant.

In Phase 2 (September 2006-September 2007), we will produce draft curriculum framework material based on the findings from the first Phase; pilot and evaluate this material; and design and deliver a training scheme that would help people in its use.

The report

The report is in three sections. Sections 1 and 2 set out the scope of what we have found in the first phase of the project. In Section 3, we

- summarise the context and findings discussed in previous sections;
- offer a proposal for a process to develop the framework; and
- set out a preliminary outline of what it might contain.

In producing this interim report, we have faced several challenges. First, we needed to take proper account of the rapid changes in the sector and the growing demands these have placed on service providers (for more on this, see Section 3.1). From the start we have been keenly aware that in this context a primary aim of a curriculum framework must be to anchor practice still more firmly in the principles of good practice already developed in the field – principles which are already fully developed and in circulation[1], and principles which we were able to infer from the material we found and discussions we held. (See section 2.1)

Second, we had to clarify what a 'curriculum framework' might be.   From an Australian specialist in curriculum theory, Colin Marsh, we found a useful distinction. In his view, a curriculum framework can be one of two things:

a *grouping of related subjects or themes* or
a guide to curriculum 'decision-making' (Marsh: 2004:19)

In a school setting, an example of the first might be the subject, *science* – which groups together: biology, chemistry, physics and geology. At first sight, such an interpretation does not seem to apply to adult literacy or numeracy. However, get a group of teachers or tutors of these subjects together to talk about their work and we might quickly notice that the teaching they talk about actually includes topics such as: history, politics, geography, linguistics, geometry and psychology to name but a few – even if that is not what they call it. So yes, we could say that 'literacy' and 'numeracy' each form a curriculum framework, within which is to be found a cluster of related subjects or themes.

But for this project, we have chosen to assume the second meaning of the term. Our purpose, therefore, has been to consult on and develop a *guide* to help teachers and students make decisions about learning – and in doing so, to fulfil Marsh's requirements that such a guide should contain:

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[1] The 'Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work 2005' is a thorough document which sets out a full picture of the philosophy, definitions and principles, stages of development, context, quality matters and research in the field. Developed from two earlier editions, this is an essential guidebook for current curriculum practice and will certainly provide core material for the curriculum framework. (Derbyshire et al 2005)

- strong links between theory and practice; and
- up-to-date and relevant information about pedagogy, learning and resources.

According to Marsh, the eventual guide produced should also, if it is to have any impact on teaching practice, be 'evocative and inspiring to teachers' (ibid: 21).

A third challenge has been that of doing justice to complex and interesting discussions.   The liveliness and energy in a room of people can never be fully captured in lines of print.   We have had to leave out much – or rather, trust our experience that tells us: all these conversations have stimulated thinking and will go on.   The analyses in this report can only be part of the story; the ideas we have listened to will continue to inform the project as it develops.

And fourthly, we had the challenge of finding a way to meet with students[2] in as many settings as possible. The solution we adopted was to recruit (with NALA's help) a team of practitioner researchers (tutors and/or organisers of literacy or numeracy) to undertake, each of them, two focus group meetings with learners. To do this work, we provided a half-day training workshop and draft guidelines in February and a feedback meeting in April. An important part of the process was that we went through these guidelines with the practitioner researchers and improved and amended them as a result of that discussion. (See Appendix 3). The list of the focus group meetings they then held are to be found in Appendix 4.

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[2] For some years, the word 'learner' has been the favoured term in Irish adult basic education. In late 2005, learner forums recommended abandoning this in favour of 'student'. That is therefore the term we will be using throughout the rest of this report

Section 1

In this first section, we begin with some associations with the concept of 'curriculum' that we have encountered. We then give some attention to the separate concerns for numeracy curriculum thinking, before going on to review what theorists can tell us about curriculum development in adult basic education. The model we propose as most appropriate to the present study focuses on curriculum as 'praxis': or, as we suggest calling it, *curriculum for change*. With this in mind, we conclude with summaries of four adult basic education curriculum frameworks and the insights they can offer for work in Ireland.

1.1 Curriculum: associations

We began this search with our own working definition of a 'curriculum' as a 'course of learning' - which, we thought, could also be expressed as:

> a description of what someone needs to learn in order to be able to know or do something.

By the end of this first Phase, we have come to see a curriculum something more like this: a way to both plan and do learning – *a way of navigating*. In this Section, we will describe how we came to this view.

Early on in the study, we found that for some people the word 'curriculum' seems to have rather negative associations. Asked what came up for them when they heard the word, tutors said they associated it with 'planning', 'content', 'subject matter',' programme'. For some, however, the word had less positive associations, such as 'rigidity', 'dread, 'panic' – and these were received with nods around the room. (tutor focus group (4) and (5)) From the action research study she led into adult education curriculum development, Ursula Coleman reports a similar association between 'curriculum' and *something fixed* from another group of Irish tutors. Asked to share their understanding of the term,

> most members of the group saw it as something that was 'inflexible', 'designed at the top', involved 'pressure and set texts'… and allowed for little or no choice on the part of the tutor who therefore had to get the students to simply 'fit in'. (Coleman 2001: 28)

Wherever we went, and whatever we read, it was clear that the last thing Irish adult basic education tutors appear to want is a fixed set of rules on what to teach. This comment from a tutor early on in our consultations sums up a common feeling:

> We want people to feel that learning is happening rather than that they are being taught. (tutor meeting, West Cork)

Both, of course, should happen; the speaker's point is that for them, the emphasis for the teacher needs to be on promoting learning that is active, and on a teaching approach which is participatory rather than didactic.

It seemed then, that what is wanted – and what is probably widely practised - is a balance between two extreme views of 'curriculum': on the one hand, as a planned, subject-based course of study; on the other, a free-flowing, improvised experience.   A good summary of the creative tension this suggests was offered by one tutor who said that for her, curriculum meant 'restraint' and 'pressure', while her own practice entailed being prepared at all times with a bag of materials for whatever the next class brought up. She saw herself as always adaptable and the 'curriculum' as immutably fixed (conversation in organiser's office, Cork, Jan. 06). In practice, tutors such as this one may often provide a bridge between the totally pre-planned and the totally free-flowing by presenting students with *a choice* based on the resources they can offer: a choice that connects with the students' skills and context.   As these students put it:

> I tell her my problems and she susses it out – what I need. Seems to see my way of thinking.

> Mine gives me an a la carte menu and I can choose. (student focus group (9a))

As we shall be suggesting, this approach assumes a fairly large amount of resource-making and – searching on the part of tutors.   As to students' part in this preparation, we will come to this shortly.

1.2 Numeracy and literacy

When it comes to numeracy, discussion in Ireland as elsewhere has tended to focus on the connections to be made with literacy. (We return to this in Section 2.) Numeracy specialists, however, have begun to focus their thinking in a different direction.

For some time, there have been discussions going on about the nature of mathematics, about how mathematics develops, and about the role of 'mathematics educators.' [3] In Ireland, connections to this can be seen in three linked lines of work developing ideas about numeracy and adult basic education. There has been the development of an 'applications oriented' maths programme alongside the existing Leaving Certificate mathematics one. There is the work which NALA is doing with FETAC to develop standards; and there are the numeracy tutor-training programmes. These promote the idea that a numerate person draws on a range of skills, including literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving skills as well as mathematics. In this thinking, numeracy *includes* both literacy and mathematics.

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[3] Paul Ernest's work in this is of particular interest. (Ernest 1991: 138-139)

Clearly, the debates in Ireland include several ways of positioning numeracy and literacy and we discuss these in more detail in section 2.15. It seems likely that ideas about connections between numeracy and literacy and between numeracy and mathematics education will be widely debated. For this project, there could hardly be a more interesting time to help practitioners to develop a curriculum framework for both.

1.3 Curriculum: meanings and models

As we have suggested, it seems that many of us take the word 'curriculum' to mean 'things that have to be learned' in a given subject area - the same thing as a *syllabus*: the topics to be covered (for instance, in a school geography course) - the 'what?' of learning. As the introduction to Mapping the Learning Journey stressed, this view of 'a curriculum' is clearly not one that NALA wishes to promote:

> Mapping the Learning Journey is not a curriculum. It does not provide a set of topics or skills that learners must cover or must aim to acquire. The curriculum in adult literacy remains learner-centred and learner-driven. (MLJ 2005: 6)

It clearly felt important to reassure readers that this is not a top-down, fixed *syllabus* coming towards them. At the same time, MLJ does not allow tutors to carry on doing things in the same way. Drawing on more than four years of consultation, it provides 'systematic ways of recording…activity and describing learners' progress' which 'complement the informal, intuitive processes that are always part of adult literacy work'. It is a framework that achieves consistency, without insisting on uniformity. (ibid: 9-10)

It may be that it is the syllabus view of a curriculum, especially when associated with summative assessment or accreditation, that leads to the sense of 'panic' or 'rigidity' which the word curriculum evokes in some people. In practice, it is a lot more about the 'how' than the 'what', as we can see from the following brief look at the literature on curriculum theory. (In Section 2, we will link this to a recent study of the adult literacy curriculum in Ireland.)

In her useful textbook for trainee teachers in British further education, Mary Neary sees the ideas in this literature falling into two groups. On the one hand, there are those who see the curriculum as that which deals with *plans* and/or *intentions* for learning (and containing learning outcomes and/or syllabus content). On the other is the view that it is primarily about *activities* and *effects* of learning (containing accounts of what teachers and learners actually do/should do in the classroom.) We suspect that many ABE teachers or tutors, in Ireland as elsewhere, tend to focus on the second of these: on planning activities ('what shall we do on Tuesday evening?'). It takes a conscious effort to first identify what kind of learning is intended to result from these ('what do I hope/expect they will learn from this?'). As Mary Neary puts it:

the basic dilemma remains – between plans and happenings, between content and method, between intended learning outcome and planned learning experiences. (Neary 2002: 40)

This dilemma has certainly been a theme in our discussions with Irish adult educators, and is one to which we will return.

According to Neary, two main models of curriculum development have been competing in education since the 1960s, both of which have their place. The 'product' model (with behavioural objectives, aimed at improving on vagueness in course design) and the 'process' model (mainly associated with social and life skills, with an emphasis on active discovery). We can see how the first of these relates to the *plan/intention* group of thinking about the curriculum, and the second, to the *activities/effects* group. There have been criticisms of the first, as discouraging of creativity and democracy, but Neary sees both as important and counsel against using the terms 'process' and 'product' as mere slogans. (ibid: 63) And indeed, 'behavioural objectives' do not always have to be restrictive. A teacher who thinks in terms of objectives – or learning outcomes – is often reminding herself that her job is to promote learning, not 'deliver teaching'. Equally, it would be possible for students engaged in a 'process' approach to feel that they are having a good time in the classroom – but that what they go away with has not made much difference to their lives.

The vast majority of research and writing about curriculum theory and practice has been based on school-age learning. When John Dewey and later, Lawrence Stenhouse and Jerome Bruner were proposing more progressive views of learning, they were arguing for a resistance movement against a knowledge-centred or teacher-centred curriculum focussing on subjects towards one in which the learner would be more central, and his or her capacity to learn through thinking and doing given more importance – but in all cases, they were writing about learners who were children.[4] Colin Marsh gives us some idea of the amount of thinking that has gone one in this area when he reports the existence of no less than120 definitions of the word 'curriculum'. (Marsh 2004: 3-7) Taking just two from these, we can see immediately how they raise a central question for adult learning. In one, the curriculum embodies *the elements that make up 'essential knowledge';* a second sees the curriculum as *those subjects most useful for everyday life now.*

To anyone working in adult basic education, the immediate question these raise is: who decides what is 'essential' or 'useful'? We could expect that a tutor or organiser using what Alan Rogers calls the 'philosophical framework' of learner-centredness would say: 'Well, obviously, the student'. Like Neary an adult educator, Rogers sees the curriculum as made up of 'methods and content'. His summary of it as '*all the planned experiences to which a learner may be exposed in order to achieve the learning goals'* seems to echo the

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[4] Dewey (1938), Stenhouse (1975), Bruner (1986)

third of Marsh's definitions, with the addition of 'goals' - planning, learning and goals all brought together in one. (Rogers 1996: 176).

It is from a third source for curriculum theory in adult learning, the work of Mark Smith, (a Research Fellow with the independent YMCA George Williams College in London)[5] that we can find a model for curriculum that could build on this. Smith's website, the Encyclopaedia of Informal Education, is both scholarly and accessible. In his section on curriculum theory and practice (Smith 1996, 2000), he begins with what he sees to be four approaches; in which curriculum has been seen, respectively, as *content (a body of knowledge to be transmitted)*;

> product (an attempt to achieve certain ends in students);
> process (an interaction of teachers, students and knowledge); and
> 'praxis'.

The first of these reminds us of the 'syllabus' association with curriculum: a set of topics to be covered. The second, as Mark Smith sees it, goes like this:

> Objectives are set, a plan drawn up, then applied, and the outcomes (products) are measured. It is a way of thinking about education that has grown in influence in the United Kingdom since the late 1970s with the rise of vocationalism and the concern with competences. (ibid: 3)

The idea of curriculum as *process* is set in contrast to this, seeing learning as an active business which engages participants in critical questioning – again, similar to Neary's definition . This model is certainly attractive – and feels consistent with this project's focus on 'learner-centredness'. However, Smith sees it having three possible problems. First, it means that while two student groups and their teachers may apparently be studying the same thing, there may be nothing in common with how they study it or what they learn from it. Second, whether the quality of such learning is much more dependant on the quality of the teaching than it might be if there was some kind of set subject-matter. And third, the process model may not always pay enough attention to the context – both institutional and cultural – in which such learning is happening. So for example, it risks ignoring the outside pressures on students to get a job, pass a test, or even deal with situations outside the classroom.

1.4 Curriculum for change

A more productive model of curriculum, as Smith sees it, is one which 'makes an explicit commitment to emancipation': a model based on the idea of 'praxis'. 'Praxis', he explains,

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[5] For some years this College has run diploma and degree courses in Informal and Community Education, qualifying students both professionally and academically for the fields of youth and community work

is not simply action based on reflection. It is action which embodies certain qualities. These include a commitment to human wellbeing, the search for truth and respect for others. (Smith 2000b)

In her book on this, Shirley Grundy explains that a curriculum is not just about learning 'things' but is a social act. The view of curriculum as praxis, she argues, regards the learning environment as social, not just physical and regards an exclusively individualised approach to instruction as something to be questioned. 'Curriculum as praxis' means saying:

- knowledge is something which people together construct;
- critical learning is not learning to be negative, but engaging in 'a process of discernment';
- the whole teaching and learning activity is informed by an emancipatory interest: a freeing or liberating - which
- expects both to start with and to transform the learner's experience (Grundy 1987:115)

The Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, is the source most closely associated with ideas about 'praxis': a combination of action and reflection.   His theoretical analyses and learning and teaching methodologies transformed adult literacy in both the "developing" and the "industrialised" world. Freire identified three stages of learning: task related activities, activities concerned with personal relationships and thirdly "concretisation" activities – perceiving the reality of oppression but believing in the possibility of change. He advocated a learning cycle, which starts with experience, leads to action, then to further reflection and action again (Freire 1970:68). Essential to this process is dialogue:

> Dialogue is the encounter between men [sic], mediated by the world, in order to name the world…It must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others….It is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind. (ibid: 69-70)

For many, Freire's work radically altered the concept of adult literacy. From being a technical and neutral process of coding and decoding it became critically analysing and "reading the world". In order to enable those learning literacy to see the reality of their oppression, the realities were "codified" into images, pictures, photographs or key generative words such as "revolution" or "work", which provided the entry points for dialogue and debate. It was a move away from a centralised curriculum to one rooted in the local situation and in some cases determined by the participants themselves (ibid: 76)

This view of literacy and numeracy curricula as learning which intends change to happen is the one that we found most harmonized with the Irish context of policy and practice in this field.   It assumes that the change is for groups and communities as well as for individuals, and recognises literacy and numeracy as means of thinking, co-operating and imagining as well as performing or competing.

With ease of understanding in mind, we suggest replacing 'curriculum as praxis' with the term *curriculum for change.* Within this view, the tutor's role as 'curriculum developer' certainly needs to include the activity of promoting and encouraging *discussion* as integral to the learning. More broadly, in some settings it also requires an explicit responsibility for other things – working out in communities to see where literacy and numeracy development could be linked to community development or starting from other subject areas or interests to see where literacy and numeracy support might be integrated. These matters are already part of tutor training programmes. The might usefully be explored further in the proposed framework for the curriculum.

But is a 'curriculum for change' a more political idea than some students might want? Many people come to adult literacy and numeracy classes with an idea about 'improving' themselves and their skills. The idea that such improvement might also entail any change (let alone 'emancipation'), may not immediately be attractive. However, once we reconnect with the idea of the curriculum as having to do with *thinking*, such an idea may be less surprising. To this we will return in Section 2.

1.5 Models of curriculum frameworks

Of the range of ABE curricula available for study, we have chosen four as exemplars of this approach. Each of these embody some version of the social practice view of literacy and numeracy and each has taken a participatory and even emancipatory view of the curriculum. They come from Scotland, Nigeria, The United States of America and Nepal. Of course, there are major differences in population size, demography, politics and levels of education between these countries and Ireland which are outside the scope of this paper to discuss. What we were looking for were *insights* that these models of curriculum framework might offer us, and these we offer at the end of each summary.

Scotland

Applying a social practice view of literacy and numeracy means, according to its proponents, seeing that reading, writing, and mathematical calculations are activities that take place in social context, entail social relationships, and vary according to the nature of these contexts and relationships. (Street 1993: 12-13, Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 7, Ivanic 1998: 65). This is a very different view from the one many people grew up with, namely that literacy and numeracy are activities you do in school. As Fiona Macdonald noted, this second view is one that lay behind the strategy put together for the English curricula in literacy and numeracy. 'In contrast', she writes,

the Scottish strategy uses research and consultation to ascertain the demand for support and the capacity to respond to these demands. (Macdonald 2005)

Unlike Ireland, Scotland went first for a curriculum and the framework for assessment is still to follow.

The Scottish adult literacy and numeracy curriculum framework is firmly based in the social practice approach to learning, which recognises not only a social context, but also an emotional one. (Tett 2006) Consultation began in 1998 with an action research project in three phases, followed by a national training project, and – between 2002 and 2005 – the development of the curriculum framework itself, published in May 2005 as An adult literacy and numeracy curriculum framework for Scotland. (Edinburgh, Learning Connections, Communities Scotland). The curriculum put forward in this document is represented as a wheel, with the learner as the hub, and four concentric circles around her/him:

- circle 1: family life, community life, working life, private life
- circle 2: skills, knowledge, understanding
- circle 3: communication (writing, reading, speaking, listening) and numeracy (communicating, interpreting, understanding and applying skills for dealing with numerical information)
- circle 4: promoting self-determination, promoting lifelong learning, developing critical awareness

After describing these circles in more detail, the next section of the document discusses thinking about how to teach and learn with this approach, noting the different approaches to individual and group learning and to communication and numeracy curricula which may be either 'dedicated' or 'integrated'. A section on resources for learning urges recognition of human as well as published resources, and a critical approach to what is relevant to learners. Individual learning planning is the topic of the final section.

Insights for Ireland:

- a curriculum framework based on a social practice view of literacy and numeracy is not so much a syllabus or list of topics to be covered, but a particular approach to teaching and learning;
- the structure of such a framework can usefully include a) some theoretical principles and b) a multidimensional picture of the elements it contains.

Nigeria

In Nigeria a two-pronged Community Education Programme including both primary education and adult literacy was funded from 1997 – 2001 in three culturally and geographically very different states and with nomadic Fulani pastoralists. Based on the social model of literacy, this was very much in

contrast to the tradition transmission model of education then current in Nigeria. The approach was community centred, organised from within the community and termed LOCAL (Learner oriented community adult literacy). [6] The education system being resource poor, almost all materials had to be derived from the immediate environment or made by the instructor/facilitator (the descriptor changed during the course of the project). The facilitators had varying levels of education and though they received more than the normal two week training for such projects and were well supported, planning and delivering their literacy and numeracy sessions called for considerable skill. To address this challenge, the two national co-ordinators devised the following 9 Stage Framework:

1. Establish learning aims with participants.
2. Prioritise aims with participants.
3. Conduct a survey of community literacy and numeracy events with participants.
4. Assist participants chart their economic activities and daily routine.
5. Match prioritised aims (2) with related events and activities (3 and 4) and collect real everyday materials relevant to the aims.
6. Identify specific learning points in the materials collected.
7. Identify the teaching task required for each learning point.
8. Develop clear objectives for each session.
9. Develop and deliver practical and participatory teaching activities to engage participants in their own learning.

These nine steps provided the facilitators with a framework in which to develop long and short term goals and structure and plan individual lessons to achieve these. Particularly successful was the practical application of language experience[7] and the resulting publication of seventy small books in five languages, Hausa, Fulfulde, Ibibio, Ibo and English. Stories and life experiences continued to be produced when the project ended. These provided both a rich reading resource and a new visibility for the community.

Insights for Ireland

- the mix of a community and learner- centred approach to provide a learning structure that would meet students' individual and communal needs;
- the strategy of working to enable communities with almost no previous experience of schooling to take control of and make decisions about the literacy programme;
- the local production of interesting material to enrich the community as well as the literacy programme.

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[6] see: McCaffery et al (2005)

[7] For a discussion of the use of language experience, see Mace (2002): p.178-195

The United States of America

Equipped for the Future (EFF) is an initiative for adult basic education developed by the National Institute for Literacy, in response to its mandate from the US Congress to find ways to meet the national education goal for adult literacy and lifelong learning:

> 'Every American adult will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.'

The system has been worked on thoroughly and long, with thousands of adult learners across the states of America over more than twelve years. So it would be impossible here to completely compress its whole contents into this summary. We have therefore picked out that which feels most pertinent for Ireland in this project. *(*For a full picture consult the portal http://eff.cls.utk.edu/default.htm.)

There are three main elements in EFF:

- the content framework,
- the assessment framework (still being completed), and
- the supports for implementation.

The content framework focuses on what adults need to know and do to accomplish complex purposes in their lives. It has four parts:

- Purposes for learning – for
  access: to information and resources in the world;
  voice: for ideas and opinions that will be heard and taken into account;
  action: to solve problems and make decisions, acting independently*,*
  as parents, citizens and workers, for their families, their communities and their nation;
  bridge to the future: to keep on learning in a rapidly changing world.

- Role maps for the main adult roles as citizens, parents/family members and workers –cross-referencing to occupational standards initiatives.

- Common activities that cross the different roles – 12 cross-cutting activities were identified, these appear in all three role maps with different emphases and meanings in each.

- EFF Content Standards – the underpinning knowledge and skills needed to carry out roles effectively and fulfil their four purposes for learning. The 16 standards are grouped into the categories of
  - communication
  - decision-making
  - interpersonal
  - lifelong learning

- using information and communications technology

Ideas developed for the EFF **Assessment Framework** have already influenced the theoretical ideas which formed Mapping the Learning Journey: especially the key concept that what matters is *not just what adults know but how well they can use what they know to accomplish tasks related to their real life purposes* and that what we can do with our literacy and numeracy skills will always vary with the *social context* in which we do it.

The **Supports for implementation** include a Teaching and Learning Tool Kit and ongoing training of practitioners. The toolkit includes a range of materials and approaches to discover student goals and purposes, design a learning plan, weave in an assessment plan, carry out learning activities, and reflect and plan next steps.

Insights for Ireland:

Particularly relevant here (and linked to aims already identified for the Irish curriculum framework) are the connections EFF made between *curriculum assessment* and *accountability* (reporting on how well programmes have performed). Three other matters are of particular interest:

1. Like the Scottish curriculum, EFF does not closely specify content. Instead, it makes an explicit link throughout to application, rather than simple possession of skills and knowledge.
2. EFF has been developed over a long period of time with a great deal of involvement, testing, feedback and validation from the field. Each stage of development has been tested in actual literacy, numeracy and ESOL classrooms and analysis of field data underpins each element of the content framework and assessment framework.
3. Supports for teachers have been created at every step and are now an explicit part of the EFF package. The Toolkit builds on examples, teaching materials and insights from teachers and others who have been involved in the EFF development process.

Nepal

Like Scotland, Nigeria and America, a social practice view of literacy and numeracy also informed the 'Community Literacy Project', which in 1998 set out to work with community groups in Nepal to develop literacy work that would relate to their activities. In his report on six years' experience of the project, Roshan Chitrakar described two stages of work. In the first (three-year) stage, studies were carried out to discover how literacy practices linked into people's daily life. While this report was thorough in its analysis and in highlighting the idea of 'literacy support', Chitrakar regretted the lack of any practical recommendations 'for literacy acquisition or learning for community people' As he saw it, there had been too much emphasis on research and too little on action; too much reliance on oversees academics and too little on

working at local level to help appropriate programmes get under way. (Chitrakar 2005: 35-36)   It was therefore recommended that the project undertook more focused research into the needs and aspirations of groups and organisations.

What followed, then, was a positive change towards 'tailor-made materials' (TMM) which would enable literacy teaching to link to actual tasks – such as that of running savings and credit groups. Again, there was some concern – this time, that the project seemed to have turned from the earlier social mobilisation approach to a 'wholly literacy teaching approach'.(ibid: 37) In the third phase (2002-2004) the project's coverage increased and partner organisations were reported as now integrating literacy activities in their programmes. These included: vegetable production, forestry, local governance. Using this approach, one local organisation recognised and built on the literacy practices involved in writing programme content for an 'audio tower' development. In other districts, women's education and income generating programmes had also integrated the community literacy approach.

Insights for Ireland:

- ensuring a balance between a) careful analyses of contexts and uses for literacy and numeracy and b) production of resources and learning opportunities
- idea of *local resource people* who could identify how and where literacy and numeracy interact with particular social contexts - and in turn help the process both of facilitating group discussion and of producing TMMs.

Section 2: Theory and practice: Ireland

In this section, we first set out some principles for a curriculum that we have identified from published discussions in Irish adult basic education. We then summarise some of the findings we gathered from our meetings with tutors, organisers and learners.   Finally, we suggest where there may be some opportunities for helping all three groups of people to find a common framework within which to see their respective roles in curriculum design and development.

2.1 Principles for a curriculum

From our reading of published thinking and practice in Ireland, together with our visits and meetings, we found a number of persistent themes, which we suggest could be seen as principles for a curriculum which are already being valued. We set out seven of these below.

2.1.1 The curriculum is a not a straight line

Learning rarely happens in a straight line; and in Ireland, a persistent metaphor of curriculum shows it as a curved shape, rather than a line travelling from A to B. Curriculum theory applied in the training of adult education teachers at the Waterford Institute of Technology proposes a cyclical view, in which assessment and evaluation are recurring moments that influence and colour the content and emphasis of the learning experience. (WIT 2003). The careful work on adult literacy curriculum development in Kilbarrack, Dublin led by Ursula Coleman, explored the idea of concentric circles (also favoured, as we have seen, by Scottish adult literacy thinkers.) Participants in the study looked at how the different levels of a person's life may have positive or negative influence on their learning and felt that three concentric circles best expressed how a student (or learner) would interact with – and influence – this learning. (Coleman 2006: 33-34). Others again prefer the idea of the curriculum as a spiral, indicating a movement upwards; they suggest that people can sometimes get trapped in a cycle with no way out.[8]

However, the idea of curriculum as cyclical does seem consistent with that of curriculum as a process for change: something that turns and returns created and recreated in light of experience and reflection, which has the potential to alter the direction of things, and which can offer new perspectives.
One thing is clear: the straight line is not how the curriculum is seen.

There has been a lot of work on the subject of assessment, to which we refer next. We will then return to that of evaluation

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[8] from Anne Looney, NCCA, Advisory group discussion: 16 May 06.

2.1.2 Thinking is at the heart of it

The two big developments in Irish ABE to which our attention in this project has been repeatedly drawn have concerned *assessment* and *accreditation*. As the stakeholders who make up the advisory group for the project have stressed, an effective curriculum framework must take account of both these. Fortunately, as Jenny Derbyshire has shown, a close relationship already exists between the four cornerstones of the Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ) framework of assessment and the four areas of learning described in the FETAC qualifications framework. (Derbyshire: 2004).

These are powerful pillars of learning, now embodied in the thinking both about assessment and about accreditation. They are:

- a knowledge base which is both broad and skilful;
- a competence which can be used in a range of contexts;
- a sense of independence and fluency; and finally,
- insight and a depth of understanding.

As we shall indicate in the next section, we have found considerable attention being given to the first MLJ cornerstone of skills and knowledge in literacy and numeracy. As we shall be suggesting, however, the other three cornerstones would seem to need support from a curriculum framework: the *contexts* in which those skills and that knowledge are being applied, with *independence* and with *critical awareness.*

Meanwhile, an important influence on the development of the assessment framework was the work on 'multiple intelligences' by Howard Gardner in the 1980s. At Harvard Business School, he had led a project called 'teaching for understanding' based on his work. This work had challenged earlier assumptions about inherited or innate intelligence, arguing instead for an understanding of intelligence as a *range* of human capacities. Instead of a single intelligence, he identified eight, which included: linguistic, logical mathematical, interpersonal, bodily-kinaesthetic. (Gardener 1987)

In Ireland, these ideas were taken up in a four-year study led by Aine Hyland at University College Cork, with a team of thirty schoolteachers working as action researchers. Their project was to see how theories developed might help thinking in schools in Ireland, focussing on the (then new) second-level subject of Civic, Social and Political Education. (Hyland 2000)

A subsequent study carried out by the National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and learning (NCSALL) in New England, USA, published a series of papers by practitioner researchers and a sourcebook based on their work. (Viens and Kallenbach 2004) These include findings that MI-inspired approaches lessen students' maths anxiety and promote democratic classroom environment in popular education. (www.ncsall.net?id=53)

As Ursula Coleman argues, such work helps to remind us that at the heart of reading, writing and number work is *the invisible activity of thinking* (Coleman

2006: 15) – and the key to literacy development (on which her project focussed) needs to be a recognition of this.

2.1.3 Good learning is active learning

Active learning means confident, critical learning, when the student recognises their own responsibility for their own learning and the learning environment.   A practical example of how this might be expressed, that we found in at least two centres we visited, was the activity of producing with students a contract or set of ground rules for respectful behaviour and commitment to learning – the result of which was displayed on the wall.

Another example is the activity of evaluation[9] – (in the WIT model of curriculum cycle shown as an integral part of this): the effort to discover the feelings and opinions of a student or group of students about what they have been doing in this course or class. Its purpose can be not only to gain some feedback on the effectiveness of a given 'learning event' but also to encourage students to share responsibility for their own learning.   As a means to do this, one tutor gave a picture which felt inspiring:

> I set them up with coffee, nice tables, conference feeling, one who is confident being a scribe, and leave them to evaluate without me.[10]

A third example of an evident interest in active learning is in NALA's guidelines for good practice. This contains a useful distinction. The authors refer, first, to the widespread commitment in Irish adult basic education to *learner-centredness*, in which the needs, concerns and experience of the learners are the focus of learning, rather than an externally structured and enforced curriculum based on the needs of, for example, the economy. As they see it, this concept entails a curriculum which is 'an ongoing process, formed in consultation with learners'.

So far, so good. A more challenging concept, however, which they see to be also at work in Ireland, is the *learner-directed* approach. With this approach,

> rather than the curriculum and approaches being formed by tutors who take into consideration the needs of learners, it is formed by the learners in discussion with their tutors. Tutors then facilitate the learning which the students wish to pursue. (Derbyshire, O'Riordan and Phillips, 2005: 11)

In this second approach, the learner or group of learners is in the lead. As the teaching-learning relationship develops over time, it is possible that – given the appropriate commitment - the first approach evolves into the second. In both approaches, the 'discussion' must of necessity include some element of evaluation, and recognition by both tutors and students of the active part that students need to play in their own learning.

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[9] For a useful source on evaluation, see Forsyth, Jolliffee and Stevens, 1995: 11-12)
[10] Focus group (4)

2.1.4 Learning is collective as well as individual

The learning of literacy and numeracy should be, as NALA has put it, an 'active and expressive process' and adult education a matter of both 'personal development and social action' (ibid: 16). This twofold purpose is also expressed, in Margaret Murray's report on the subject, as a matter of *empowerment*, understood in two ways: 'power within' (self-confidence and awareness) and 'power with' (people organising with a common purpose or understanding to achieve collective goals. (Murray 2004: 13) This seems to mean that someone seeking to develop their confidence and skill in maths and writing and reading stands to gain a sense of community from their learning. In a group, students often express increased confidence as the result of feeling they are 'in the same boat' as others; no longer on their own. We could see this as a first step towards a sense of solidarity. Making publications of student writing – a frequent activity in the schemes visited in this project – provides a means for this to move towards a sense of common purpose. The idea of empowering learning, which engages participants in 'social action' needs translating into examples to move away from mere rhetoric – and a curriculum framework offers a tool within which this could be done.

An important development in the last two years in Ireland has been the work of Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) in writing and (this year) piloting its new awards for Levels 1 and 2 in Communications and General Learning. As we have already indicated, the basis for these awards meshes carefully with that for the assessment framework: and in this context, it is also noteworthy that the 'multiple purposes' of these specify participation in society and community as well as personal development[11].

This interpretation means that any curriculum framework needs to include some kind of collective perspective, as well as an individual one.

2.1.5 Numeracy is about managing life choices

As suggested in the Section (1), numeracy in Ireland is in a fluid stage of development, in which positions on curriculum and related issues are being worked out. The views and practices of tutors and students are being formed by

- their own background and experiences
- the views of various agencies about the relationship between literacy and numeracy
- and to some extent, by this project itself.

NALA's role in the development of thinking about numeracy is significant; it is developing and promoting positions on a number of issues, and it is doing both in a way which seeks to be particularly inclusive of students and

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[11] www.fetac.ie/standards/intro_levels_1_and_2.htm), p.7 of the pdf document on Levels 1 and 2

practitioners. It has been at pains to involve practitioners (in particular numeracy tutors, and scheme managers in various settings) and students in creating its development strategy for numeracy. Through the recently formed Adult Numeracy Development Initiative, it is likely to continue to encourage tutors to be actively involved in the development of thinking about adult numeracy in Ireland. And through its brief to the researchers on this project, it has signalled again its intention to involve practitioners and students.

However, it would be naïve to suggest that all practitioners or policy makers are completely aware of the views articulated by NALA. As NALA itself recognises, there is

> no unified concept of numeracy among service providers, who are not operating to a generally agreed vision of concept of numeracy (2004:28).

The brief of NALA's Numeracy Development Worker, Terry Maguire, has been to work with others on the development of thinking about numeracy. So it is inevitable that there has been a dynamic relationship between the more codified statements in earlier NALA publications and recent, more exploratory writing growing out of discussions with tutors and providers. It is thus useful, in describing published positions articulated by "NALA", to remember that there might be a fluid relationship between the thinking of NALA staff, its membership and its wider "constituency". In what follows however, these are all referred to as NALA positions.

NALA positions numeracy as part of literacy[12], but also accords it a separate definition[13], and whilst acknowledging that its association with literacy gives it strength, also promotes the view that there is a need to develop numeracy in its own right. In its development plan it also explicitly seeks to learn from prior and ongoing numeracy development in other countries, (in particular Australia, Canada, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and the USA); and in describing these developments, it situates numeracy in relation to debates about literacy (or literacies). In one formulation (NALA 2005: 17) numerate behaviour is seen as requiring a range of skills, including those of literacy. Here we found resonances with views of some tutors we consulted, who saw literacy, along with mathematics, problem-solving and decision-making, as part of numeracy.

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[12] **Definition of Adult Literacy – the core of the adult literacy ethos**. All good adult literacy work starts with the needs of the individual, known as the learner-centred approach. Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. It also encompasses aspects of personal development – social, economic, emotional – and is concerned with improving self-esteem and building confidence. It goes far beyond the mere technical skills of communication. The underlying aim of good literacy practice is to enable people to understand and reflect critically on their life circumstances with a view to exploring new possibilities and initiating constructive change.

13 "**Numeracy** is a lifeskill that involves the competent use of mathematical language, knowledge and skills. Numerate adults have the confidence to manage the mathematical demands of everyday living, work-related settings and in further education, so that effective choices are made in our evolving technological and knowledge-based society." (NALA 2004)

These debates often focus on how mathematical thinking might be used to assist choice and decision-making in society, rather than on pedagogical issues. Sometimes the purposes are focussed rather narrowly on work or "everyday" purposes, but in other contexts the focus is broader and includes the use of numeracy / mathematics to interpret and change social and economic conditions. Whilst the NALA definition of numeracy zooms in on

> the mathematical demands of real life situations such as everyday living, work-related settings and in further education, it also takes a high level view that numeracy should contribute to the making of 'effective choices… in our evolving technological and knowledge-based society' (NALA 2004).

Drawing on ideas from these contexts, NALA has produced a comprehensive statement about what constitutes 'numerate behaviour'. Five statements about numeracy are now being used in professional development exercises and as the basis for NALA's discussions with FETAC about the new standards for numeracy. [14]

In these terms, numerate behaviour is much more than the practical application of procedural mathematics. It is essentially about managing life choices:

> Numerate behaviour involves managing a situation or solving a problem in real context… by responding to… information about mathematical ideas… that is represented in a range of ways… and requires activation of a range of…. [knowledges and skills] (op.cit: 17)

So while NALA has situated numeracy with respect to literacy, it has also made explicit connections between numeracy and mathematics. In a paper written after the Development Plan, NALA draws on a framework in which these connections are made, and challenges itself and tutors to work towards a conceptualisation which,

> recognises the integration of mathematics, communication, cultural, social , emotional and personal aspects of each individual's numeracy in context (Maguire 2006: 11)

At the same time, NALA has also put forward an aspiration to create a numeracy provision which offers both *high use value* and *high exchange value,* building on

> the practices and processes in adults' lives while at the same time meeting the requirements for accreditation or measurable outcomes (Coben 2001: 25-35)

From their own more recent research, Samantha Parsons and John Bynner add a gender dimension to this. They concluded that

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[14] reference to follow

For men, there is no real difference between the effect of poor literacy and poor numeracy together, and poor numeracy alone. *For women*, while the impact of low literacy and low numeracy skills is substantial, *low numeracy has the greater negative effect*, even when it is combined with competent literacy. (Parsons and Bynner 2005: 7) (our italics)

Meanwhile, in this project, the idea that numeracy is an integral part of literacy, did not seem a widely held view. Literacy tutors often said they would only include numeracy in their work with students if students expressly asked for it. This may have been a careful decision not to impose their own ideas on the learning curriculum; or else, a reluctance by the tutor to move into an area where s/he felt a lack of expertise. However, those who had had some training in developing 'mathematical eyes' reported that they had seen and used opportunities to include numeracy in their offer to students – with enjoyable results. It seems, too (see section 2.4) that 'environmental' factors may have had a part to play.

2.1.6 Teachers are facilitators as well as guides

'Empowerment' is an easy idea to agree with and sometimes overused, so such a distinction is helpful in thinking about adult literacy and numeracy learning. The two-part nature of full empowerment suggested by Margaret Murray's definition engages the individual both with their own personal learning and with that of others. This connects us again with Freirean ideas of liberation; and the connection with Paulo Freire is a refrain in more than one context in Ireland.

NALA's debt to Freire is acknowledged both in the Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Practice document (Derbyshire et al 2005: 9-10) and for a short time, an explicitly Freirean project was trialled in Ireland, known as REFLECT[15]. A fusion of Freirean principles with the practice of 'participatory rural appraisal', this offers an interesting model of a curriculum framework. Designed and piloted originally for use in developing countries, it engages participants in creating their own materials:

> In a REFLECT programme there is…. no pre-printed materials except a manual for the literacy practitioners. Each literacy circle develops its own materials through the construction of maps, matrices, calendars and diagrams that represent local reality, systematise the existing knowledge of participants and promote the detailed analysis of local issues. (Archer and Cottingham 1996: 6)[16]

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[15] Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Literacy Techniques

[16] Ten years on, the approach has been used by over 350 organisations in 60 countries, and is now used not only for adult literacy work but as a means to 'strengthen people's capacity for communication through whatever medium is most appropriate to them.' (www.actionaid.org.uk visited 11/4/06)

Between 1997 and 1999, Action Aid Ireland worked to explore the application of REFLECT in Ireland, with the support of various organisations, including NALA. A conference and training of trainer workshops included exploration of participatory methodologies. (Maxwell 1999). One of the workshop participants, Rosamund Phillips, recalled that she used these methodologies with three different groups: students from literacy centres in Dublin City and Dublin North East wishing to set up a national forum for students; women literacy students in a local community in Dun Laoghaire, and a group of adults on a Back to Education Initiative. In each case, she used a map or diagram to explore the issues and discuss what to do. Work with reading, writing and number skills developed with the second and third of her groups but were not the focus of work in the first. As she reflected:

> It is really important that adult literacy learners do not feel they are being treated like children and some of the REFLECT tools and materials could appear childish and/or contrived (making models. maps, drawing, etc) and the reasons for using them need to be real and carefully explained.[17]

Discussions with several tutor groups in this project have referred us to the role that a tutor needs to play as *facilitator* – and Rosamund Phillips' account reminds us of that. The tutor, here, is generating some kind of discussion, actively encouraging exploration. She has to facilitate it: guiding the students in turn-taking and active listening, prompting, summarising and giving space to participants. Such a role, as her account suggests, takes skill and training; the kind of training which reminded her of other thinking, particularly around the work on multiple intelligences.[18]

2.1.7 Students are sources of mutual learning and organisation.

REFLECT was originally intended for use in developing countries; in its application, however, there are lessons for work elsewhere – not least, its focus on 'working in partnership with learners'.(Millican 2005).

Such partnerships are already a striking feature of Irish adult basic education (Murray 2005). It may be that students' organisations would value their own curriculum support: the literacy and numeracy entailed in organising any organisation often being demanding.

There is a potential role for students as peer tutors. In her interesting and carefully theorised research on this, Noelle O'Dwyer reported that the experience of 'peer interaction' tended to add to students' sense of their abilities in relation to their peers (O'Dwyer 2005).

There may also be scope for experienced students to provide support to newcomers as mentors, with the possibility that such support might lessen the

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[17] email correspondence, 15 May 2006
[18] from the same

kind of anxiety about 'being found out' on which much one-to-one provision is founded.

It seems, then, that a curriculum framework for literacy and numeracy could usefully give attention to the literacy and numeracy demands both of sustaining student organisation and promoting mutual support among students. Meetings, any meeting, entails timetabling, organising ideas, communication skills and paperwork. This is material for curriculum development.

2.2 Curriculum approaches: tutors and organisers

Meanwhile, what curriculum practice is happening now? In this phase of the project, our purpose has been to gain a picture of *what is going on now* and also capture something of the various views and ideas as to what could be different – *how things might work in the future*.

Apart from the meetings that had a specific focus on numeracy, to be discussed in Section 2.4, we had informal meetings and interviews altogether with thirty tutors and organisers; we drew on the expertise of stakeholders at three advisory group meetings; and we held discussions with a total of 112 tutors and organisers in fourteen focus group meetings. (see Appendices 1 and 2) The aim was to achieve both a geographical range, in particular a spread of urban and rural locations and an organisational one – fully to appreciate the difference between settings and context (as indicated in Appendix 6). To gain a full range of provision and settings, the project will still need to attend to the work of distance education - which also happens to be among the areas identified by NALA for research (Derbyshire et al, 2005: 41)

We chose the focus group approach with both tutors and students for its potential benefit as a means of reflection for the participants themselves. The approach also provides a research project with a larger number of people involved to help shape its thinking (Greenbaum 1995 and Ginnakaki 2005) and a different (and potentially richer) set of insights than can be achieved through individual meetings alone (Pisarenko 2005).

In the meetings with tutors and organisers, the format of the questions changed as we learned what worked best. In early meetings they were asked to work in pairs and then in the whole group with a warm-up question (what are you proud of in your teaching?[19]) followed by four key questions:

- how do you identify the interests/needs of your learners?
- how do you deal with the challenge of responding to these?

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[19] Experience after the first two focus group meetings led us to revise this questions into an approach that proved more productive. ('Please think back to a good incident or experience that you have seen in your classroom; discuss it with your partner. Now try to identify what it is you did, as teacher, that may have enabled that to happen'.)

- to what extent to you decide on a set pattern of work and to what extent do you improvise and adapt?
- what help would you like in planning your teaching?

The following commentary is based from data gathered from both interviews and group meetings. Most discussion tended to focus on meeting the first three questions; the issue of planning learning was explored more widely with the learner groups. Our view about this is not that tutors we met do not think about planning. On the contrary, a preoccupation with planning is everywhere (and of course some tutors plan for a number of different groups every week) – both for individuals as well as for a group session. In Section 2.3 we report discussions with students and in 2.4 we report findings about how planning for numeracy teaching is influenced by factors both within and outside the classroom.

2.2.1 Adult literacy service tutors and organisers

The main theme emerging from these discussions and focus groups was the importance of retaining a student centred approach, of responding to what the student wanted and needed to learn. ('The success of our service is that it is student centred and needs based.' [20]) This sense of the value of a student-centred approach was combined with a fear that if a "curriculum" was introduced (understood in the narrow sense of a "syllabus") this approach would be lost.

In contrast, no literacy tutors or organisers gave any indication that they felt their teaching was restricted when students were working on FETAC courses. The competencies to be demonstrated were presented through tasks and exercises felt to be appropriate to the students.   Numeracy tutors, as we shall see, painted a different picture (see 2.4)

A second theme was that of a widespread practice of resource production. Whether group tutors or tutors working one to one, tutors spoke of creating and adapting materials to meet students' interests. Tutors mentioned teaching towards the theory of the driving test, teaching around farming issues, working in stores and following dockets, filling in forms or simply to learning to write their name and address - there was a feeling that cooperating with other bodies in some of these areas would be beneficial - for example the forms now required by the EU in the area of farming, the safety and first aid courses required for manual work and construction. One tutor downloaded country and western songs. Another noted that her student found solutions to numerical problems more easily when working on the white board than on paper.

Numeracy tutors also spoke of creating and adapting materials, but several also mentioned published textbooks as useful resources. Several, when

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[20] focus group 14

invited to suggest support they would value, asked for flexible numeracy learning materials.

The focus was on responding to the student rather than planning a course of learning. A few lessons might be planned in advance, but on the whole it was "what comes up" with a pride in being flexible and responsive. (As one student put it, speaking of his tutor, this kind of planning is like a game of snooker: 'You plan a certain number of shots in advance and then assess the situation before you plan the next moves.')

Literacy tutors seemed to be most challenged by beginning students. Some of these, they said, had had specific difficulties such as dyslexia; others mental blocs due to previous experiences, in particular of the industrial schools, but sometimes there was no apparent reason for the very slow progress. By contrast, among the numeracy tutors (and those whose main focus was literacy but who were including numeracy), there was concern rather about how to deal with situations involving more advanced mathematics.

Some felt the need for more knowledge of the student's level and potential difficulties and more comprehensive initial assessments – especially with beginner level students. As one of the organisers put it, it would be good if a curriculum framework could address the needs of "Luas defaulters", - those who don't buy tickets because they can't read the ticket machine. Not all tutors, she felt, had a schema of the process and the competencies required to be learnt in order to do this.

A common request was for more very basic graded material which allowed plenty of practice and also showed progression. ("If I had a book we could work through it"[21]) Another suggestion (for both literacy and numeracy) was the idea of a series of "core files" or a bank of exercises of examples at different levels, so the ideas could be adapted to the student's particular situation. One organiser suggested a manual.[22]

Also mentioned was a set of exercises to complement the MLJ framework. Some thought specific materials relating to the particular economic, social or work context would be helpful. Farming, the tagging of animals and the knowledge needed to pass the "inheritance" criteria is an obvious example. Also suggested were materials on the "safety course", the hotel industry, first aid, health and safety, ATMS machines, driving theory, also the EU and the political system.   All these are useful suggestions; our hunch is that these individuals may not have been aware how much is out already there. We are certainly not claiming that these comments represent a widespread opinion.

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[21] focus group 8

[22] A useful resource that may meet these needs, published in 2000, was produced as a 'beginners' pack' from prison education work, It could be you: basic skills for adults (containing CD, tape, exercises, and readers to support early reading.

2.2.2 Training: Community Training Centres (CTCs) and Youthreach (YR)

Established in the 1980s as a response to youth unemployment in Ireland, we learned that there are now 48 Community Training Centres and 94 Youthreach organisations. The following notes are based on meetings in two CTCs and one YR - in Dundalk, Mullingar and Dublin.

Trainees get an allowance; entry is all year round. There is a wide variety of courses on offer: traditional woodwork and metal work, catering, childcare, cookery, hairdressing, communications skills, maths, life skills, IT, video production and drama. Educational levels vary, here as elsewhere. One centre visited said their target client group was poor educational performers, another said the level of literacy and numeracy of trainees was reasonable with increasingly very few very poor readers. It appeared that many of the youngsters might have passed Junior Cert had they stayed to take it. Trainees do FETAC courses and the success rate is an important part of the funding criteria.

Similarly, the organisation of literacy and numeracy support differs from one place to another. In one centre we found that the literacy tutor was the 'literacy person' and all those with difficulties were sent to her. In another, instructors in catering and woodwork had been on the NALA integrated literacy course and were now integrating literacy into their teaching: getting trainees to make picture dictionaries of the tools or utensils they required and developing units around a particular theme. The literacy tutors used story development, films, photographs, drama; one had developed and produced a set of seven units.

Yet despite all this materials production (or perhaps because of it) ideas for a curriculum framework in these centres were resource-focussed (developing worksheets and the vocabulary relevant to a particular FETAC course or materials for the sequential skills required for reading, writing and calculating) or – for numeracy at least – focussed on finding approaches which made the learning more enjoyable (see also 'bargaining with students' in Section 2.4 below).

2.2.3 Voluntary Sector organisations

Despite their differences in character and ethos, we found similar themes in the voluntary organisations we met with. Again, the greatest challenge seemed to be those students with the most skill difficulties. The topic of homework came up in more than one organisation working on a one-to-one basis. A VEC-funded organisation based in Cork, Altrusa Literacy Scheme is largely staffed by volunteers (their 2004 annual report records 126, meeting their students once a week for an hour every week). An issue that came up in the focus group meeting here was that of homework. Tutors expressed concern at the difficulty for students in making progress with so little time

given to this between meetings. One tutor allowed herself to reveal a little impatience at this: 'It's like going to mass and doing nothing for the rest of the week.' Another, who had had four individual students, described some frustration as well as satisfaction with her teaching experience. After thirty years as a school teacher, she said, she had taken some time to get the hang of not having a programme or structure to follow.[23]

One-to-one teaching features prominently in another literacy scheme, this time spread over the rural area of West Cork. In a discussion with tutors and organiser, we explored a little further the issue of homework:

> I don't give him homework. For a lot of them, nobody at home knows about it. You can't give them homework if they have no family support to go over stuff.[24]

In the Dublin Adult Learning Centre, tutors discussed some further reasons:

> (JM) Do you wish learners would do more between lessons?
> T1   Can really see the ones who do more
> (JM) What stops them?
> T2 Life. Some families don't know they come to class. And people have very chaotic lives.
> T3   A couple of people don't like to write – they enjoy coming, but they don't want to write. I always say it doesn't matter.
> T1   Homework can be making an appointment for an eye test.[25]

The last comment is a suggestive one. Homework does not have to be worksheets – especially when the MLJ cornerstones of 'range of application' and 'fluency and independence' are kept in mind. We expect this to be a key focus for development in the curriculum framework.

2.2.4 Travellers' education

As the oldest minority in Ireland and the one with the lowest levels of educational attainment, Travellers are one of the groups targeted for adult literacy provision. We had discussions with tutors in three centres involved in traveller education.   Two of these were Senior Traveller Centres.

Created in 1974 to provide compensatory education for Travellers and the skills to enter employment and provide the majority of literacy and numeracy provision for travellers, these are funded through the VECs, with support from the European Social Fund   Travellers participating in the courses we visited were predominantly adult women over the age of 20, studying a range of subjects - art, hairdressing, childcare, food, cooking and personal

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[23] focus group 1
[24] focus group 2
[25] focus group 10

development, general English. One tutor explained their different reading and writing levels:

> Twenty per cent can't read much. I have two distinct groups – teenagers of 15 and up. If they have been to school their literacy is pretty good though some have fallen through the net and aren't so good….. The over 50s can't read. The metro is too hard for most of the women – they might be able just to do their name and address.[26]

At the women travellers' scheme we visited in Cork, one tutor referred to her 'roadsiders': six families of travellers whom she would meet in their own home, and who, in her view, had 'the greatest range of needs.'

> I go to them. They join in or they get out the room. If there's a man who doesn't engage, I get them to mind the baby.

As to homework, her comment was simple: 'You impose homework and they're gone.'[27]   As to resources, there was a welcome for NALA's recent publication of Traveller writing and learning materials; a response to the need for material that reflected Traveller experience. (NALA 2006)

There is clearly a debate in Ireland as to what structure will provide adult Travellers with the best and most accessible opportunities for education. What is also clear is that for Travellers, becoming literate and numerate is about change. Whether the curriculum framework adopted is one that seeks adaptation and assimilation or one that increases travellers' ability to control their lives and make choices is of crucial importance to their future.

(We also visited a class for Roma people. The first Roma groups came to Ireland from Eastern Europe in the mid-1990s to build a better life in a new country. They are not a travelling community and their primary need is for English language and an education that will enable them to participate in Irish society. Thus their educational needs should be perhaps be considered within the framework of ESOL and their particular issues catered for within that framework.)

2.2.5 Prisons

We met with tutors in two prisons: but we did not get the chance to discuss our impressions with any head teachers in prisons. (We were aware of a huge volume of policy and development work in the sector and this will need properly acknowledging in Phase 2 of the project.) Some comments by tutors could equally have been made by tutors in other sectors – such as the numeracy tutor, who spoke of the need for Irish materials which would provide metric measurements and Euro currency. As so often with numeracy, as well

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[26] meeting, April 06
[27] meeting, Jan 06

as literacy, she referred to how students often needed to realise how much they already knew:

> A lot of them at school, they fell behind…. If they've been in trades, they've been working out calculations in their heads, when they're laying down fences, for instance. They have their own way of measuring. I show them they have already been doing maths.

Some comments however were specific to the prison context.   This student's interest in numeracy learning, for example, was an interest in preparing for his release – back into a family environment, wanting to be a useful parent:

> One of them now he wants to do long division the way his daughter has taught him to do it at home. He's coming out in two months and he wants to help her. A lot of them learned to do long division in steps. I tell him, she's just got a different method. (Cork prison, Jan 06)

Here, as in other discussions, we were told of an added interest for students wanting to their learning to be accredited:

> In a prison setting, they want accreditation. Up in court they like to have Certificates. It shows they are trying.

It was striking in both prisons visited to see and hear evidence of student publishing. This was an activity mentioned in other settings. In this one, the literacy tutor reported that they produced a magazine every year, making about sixty copies in time for Christmas, having started asking for contributions in September. She was interested in the possibility of engaging students in the process of editing but had not done so before.

2.2.6 Workplace

Some of the tutors in focus groups and visits had experience of workplace course teaching.   In work-based courses for the County Council in West Cork, for instance,(four hours a week for twenty weeks) numeracy was both an anxiety and an interest. Students were worried about their skills in metric measurement. The tutor's response was to address both the skill and the anxiety:

> So I say, well ok we'll make a metric stick. It relaxes the body if they are standing up. Pass the stapler, kind of thing. [28]

In a small town, the stigma of basic skills can cause a deeply felt fear of being found out – the basis for many students' utter rejection of learning opportunities in a group. Not all students feel like this, however. Bray was described to us as having grown in the last ten years to become a commuter town for Dublin so it is hardly a small community any more. This anecdote by

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[28] focus group 2

a tutor of two students' lack of concern in identifying themselves as in public felt striking, however:

> I was walking along the road and there was this trench where some roadworkers were doing their stuff. Suddenly out of this hole a head popped out. This man said, 'I've rewritten that piece for you next week.' He was one of my students on the workplace course.

> It was in the same week that another thing happened. This man was in the road with one of those trolleys where they put all the stuff they've swept up, and in the front, this little pocket. 'Hello!' he said, 'how are you? I've got my research with me' and he pulled out this paper from his pocket. [29]

Other insights about workplace literacy and numeracy came from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (interview, 4 May). The centres in their network are currently working towards FETAC Quality Standards, and the issues which appear to dominate at the moment are 'environmental' (see Section 2.4) rather than directly curricular ones, such as:

- getting buy-in from key players
- funding
- entitlement to learning and to paid educational leave
- identification of need; and
- a rising demand for English language support for migrant workers with strong literacy in their first languages.

We are aware that others, including the workplace development staff in NALA, could certainly offer additional insights in Phase 2 of the project. There are specific connections that a framework for curriculum development could make to the constraints and opportunities of workplace provision.

2.3 Curriculum approaches: students

> This is our chance to put in our tuppence worth. Keeping up is hard (1b)

These are the words of one student, encouraging others in a focus group meeting for the project. A number of the students who participated expressed similar appreciation at the opportunity to play a part in action research. As the list in Appendix 4 indicates, a total of 92 women and 44 men took part in the 17 focus group meetings held in March and April. Each of these meetings were convened and facilitated by a practitioner researcher acting as moderator, together with (in most cases) a colleague acting as scribe; and each began in the same way (based on the guidelines in Appendix 3). Practitioner researchers (PRs) were encouraged to carry out the meetings with learners they did not usually teach. The idea was that this would free

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[29] focus group 11

both *them*, as researchers, to come to the discussion with no preconceptions of the group and the *group*, as participants, from seeing the person facilitating the discussion as their teacher, simply doing another exercise with them. In practice, three researchers opted to work with groups they already knew: Marian O'Reilly, who felt that her group of learners with special needs may not have provided the information to a stranger in the time allowed; Ed du Vivier who had been tutor for his second group (in personal effectiveness, though, not in literacy or numeracy); and Mary O'Sullivan, working with traveller women she already knew through the project.

Practitioner researchers (PRs) first used two initial 'warm-up' questions using pictures to discuss how they saw literacy and numeracy playing a part in everyday life, and how they dealt with this in their own lives. These were intended to free the students from the classroom environment and look again at the various social contexts and roles they might engage in their daily lives. Using the spectacles of a social practice view of literacy and numeracy, these questions were intended not so much as a means to produce a list of the literacy and numeracy activities that any given context or role might entail, but as a catalyst for discussion, on the basis of which the next two questions – focussing on classroom experience – could offer insights for this project.

All PRs took away with them the same set of photographs to be used to start things going in the first question (and several added to these from their own materials). These were:

- family at kitchen table
- horse with dealer or trainer
- food market
- TV presenter Derek Mooney, game show host
- fishing harbour
- woman in church
- playing bowls
- woman machinist in factory
- chemist shop

In their reflection sheets, PRs seemed to find this first question a useful tool:

> 'The pictures helped in prompting a response'
> 'The group worked well together on this question. They seemed to spark off each other and needed little eliciting. It helped them to open up quickly and they began to relax.'
> 'It took some time as the group tended to ramble on… but [they] served as a good ice breaker'
> 'The first two questions warmed them up well and we were surprised at their observations and insights into the photos, especially the more obscure ones.'

Some also commented on an additional benefit. As Barbara Hammond put it in her reflection sheet: 'Many students appeared unaware of the skills they already have and are using every day'.

Students in the meetings were then asked to discuss two key questions – for which we provide here an abbreviated version in brackets:

1. Is there anything you're learning now in your class – or anything in *the way* that you're learning – that you find particularly useful for you in dealing with situations like these? (*learning in class, use outside*)
2. How do you help your teacher decide what to teach? (*decisions about classroom work)*

The second question caught some students by surprise, and facilitators in some cases followed it up with an alternative one, namely: is there anything else you would like to learn?   These are some of the discussions that ensued.

2.3.1 Learning in class, use outside

We had phrased this question carefully, with the aim of enabling participants to see a connection between the social uses of literacy and numeracy and the activities of the classroom. It was interesting how sometimes, students focused on *what helped them learn* rather than the content of the lesson. Examples were: learning the meaning of the word to aid memory, not just how to spell it, ('it sticks with you then') using a dictionary, using rhyming to remember when to use capital letters, using charts and diagrams to aid learning, breaking up words and putting words in order. In this group, situations demanding numeracy and some literacy seemed to arise with more frequency than those involving purely literacy.[30]

Some participants favoured a response which expressed not so much their *use* of literacy and numeracy but their sense of *improvement*: in their reading, handwriting, spelling, and so on – without specifying any particular context. This was clearly pleasing to hear, but to be relevant to this project we have picked out here those responses which identified ways in which the curriculum of their classroom work seemed to relate to particular roles and contexts in the social world outside it.

1. Being able to listen and speak up

   This kind of learning focussed on a different sense of themselves as people who could talk to other people, or ask for what they wanted, illustrated by these two examples from a group (4) of women students:

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[30] focus group 9(a)

I was always kind of hoping that that person wouldn't sit beside me on the bus, cause I didn't want to talk to anyone…. Now I'm more open with people.

At a recent funeral, one student said she spoke in public – reading from the scripture and saying a few words about the deceased…. '[Before], I wouldn't have had the confidence.'

In another group, two students expressed appreciation for a weekly discussion called 'a big think' as providing them with the chance to respect other people's opinions, as well as exercise their capacity to voice their own (1b)

2. Contexts and roles:

Several students (notably in group 5a) mentioned (as tutors had told us they might) the value of studying the literacy and numeracy materials required of them in undertaking the driving test. Women in a travellers scheme (3a) reported the value of studying literacy linked to health and wellbeing. One had felt glad at how the maths and numeracy work she had done in class had helped her 'to understand and do some maths homework with my son'. In a rural scheme, one student saw a link between h is classroom work and his strategies for map reading while going hill walking (7a) while another reported a link with his interest in knowing how to measure a horse properly.

For students in prison (8), what went on in class appeared to related very directly to their immediate context. An increased repertoire of reading as well (as improved skills) that classwork opened up provided a resource for the business simply of passing time in the rest of the hours and days. Practice in writing persuasively had its uses when 'half-sheets' needed to be produced (formal requests to the Governor for temporary or early release) – and indeed these might often be drafted in classroom time.

The interaction of focus group meeting work sometimes enabled a difference to be voiced. In one meeting (6a) one student speaking of their sense of satisfaction in their learning was followed by a second, voicing a completely opposite feeling – a frustration that she was not going anywhere. This student later in the meeting drew support from the rest of the group when she spoke more about this – and encouragement to talk to the coordinator about it.

FETAC modules opened up new areas of interest – and a confidence to talk about them. From participating in the 'current affairs and living in a diverse Society' course one woman (6a) had become a regular viewer of current news programmes (in her words, 'I used to flick by the political parts of the newspaper, now I can't wait to read them') – while another now feels she can 'hold a conversation outside', even at times going further:

'Sometimes I throw a statement in to stir up a debate when I'm with

my friends'.

'I am doing literacy through art/painting and I'm having a great time. We have made up a pack naming the colours and the names of the different paints. I use the pack with my nieces.' (3a)

Measurement useful for construction work (8)

A preoccupation for a group of students with special needs was: knowing how to handle money (1a). One reported his father as helping him with money; another said his mother helped him with the ATM machine; five out of the eight in the group mentioned 'money' as one of the extra things they wanted to know about. As one put it:

'I'd like to know more about paper money. I get mixed up with paper money'

2.3.2 Decisions about classroom work

Evidently some students were accustomed to routines of formative assessment, saying that for them, they already did this via 'end of term review' (2a). Others came to their classes in a centre where they were encouraged to 'ask questions and get answers' ('You can ask anytime here, ask the instructor on the street if you met them', said one. (5b). In another group the scribe recorded:

Two or three times a year, the tutor circulates a checklist of different reading, writing and other skills so that students can indicate their priorities (4)

Students more than once made a contrast between the present experience of being asked for their views and their recollection of schooldays when they were not, In one man's words:

'When asked by our tutors what we were interested in covering we were all able to have our say. At school before, you couldn't ask for anything, but it's different here.' (7a)

Just one meeting indicated there could be a combination of group and individual planning:

As a group we work together with a flipchart and this is put up and we work individually with our tutor to make out a personal plan. (3a)

Comments from another meeting (3b) seemed to suggest a very active culture of participatory planning. Most comments expressed pleasure at this:

I love planning because you end up with a plan in your head
I like being part of putting my programme together

Myself and my tutor would sit together and make out a four/five week learning plan and then we would review it and change some materials that weren't interesting or were not effective.

However, one student in this meeting had a different feeling:

I prefer the tutor to make up a workpack to work from because she knows best.

In a different meeting with travellers (9), one woman was clearer still:

The teacher decides… she knows what level you're at and she helps you to decide what to do.

In another group (7b), the scribe recorded the following sequence of responses to the question:

- Tell them what our weak points are
- Tell them what we're interested in
- You can always say, this isn't very interesting or this is too hard
- You can ask the tutor not to move on to something new if you need more time to 'get it' – e.g. with percentages
- You have to enjoy coming here otherwise you wouldn't stay here for long.

This suggests an interesting mix of a deference to the teacher's expertise (line one) and an assertiveness about what is offered (the next three lines).

Our purpose in putting this question to students was to raise with them the idea of decision-making about their curriculum as a shared thing – an idea linked with the discussions we had had with tutors. What we hope is that this question could go on resonating with them and other students – as we suggest in the next and final section of this report.

We conclude here with a story of a student who was very clear about wanting to bring the outside world into the classroom. A man in his 40s, he had said he wanted practice in writing messages, notes – since in his current work placement for community employment, he had to take messages at a reception. He asked the tutor to 'keep talking' while he wrote. Asked why, he explained that this is the reality of the situation he faced: having to write a note of a message at the same time as people are talking to him, wanting other things. 'I have to get used to the voices', he said. As the tutor told us:

'I just blah on. I know he's not listening, it's just to help him practice the real thing.'[31]

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[31] focus group 10

2.4 Questions about numeracy

We have included points about numeracy already; we gather here the result of consultation where it was the specific focus of our consultations.   In the course of one week in May, Joan O'Hagan interviewed 31 people from 13 different organisations (including six students and18 tutors) on the topic. Most of the contact was face to face; four people were contacted by phone only. About half (apart from the NALA staff interviewed) were based outside Dublin.

As things turned out, the conversations were very much to do with decisions about teaching and learning, and by no means confined to numeracy, although the interviewees knew that would be the focus. The questions explored were:
- how do you decide what to teach / learn and how to teach / learn?
- what factors influence these decisions and choices? and
- what could NALA do, via this project, to help you make these decisions and choices?

- with an emphasis on the first two.

The analysis of these interviews yielded a wide range of factors which influenced these decision-making processes and a range of ideas about how the project could support them. (see Appendix 5). The idea was to draw out the most "significant" factors. In drawing up some analysis, Joan drew broadly on "grounded theory"[32] in that she scanned and re-scanned her interview notes to identify emerging themes, and coded and grouped them in ways which seemed appropriate. (In the time available it was not possible to do a classic 'grounded theory' analysis).

The table shows all the themes that Joan identified with this method, and shows how she 'weighted' them by noting how often each issue was mentioned and what emphasis an individual or a group placed on each. (The introductory note to the Appendix: 'What the ticks in the table mean' tells you more about this.)

For our thinking about curriculum and decision making, this piece of work draws a useful distinction between factors which appear very 'present' to the tutors and students while they are in the classroom, and those which they are aware of but are more background, or 'environmental'. For example, some people mentioned that funding arrangements influenced what provision they could offer and what teaching / learning styles were available, but this did not appear to be a factor in the classroom, in the sense that it *directly* affected what happened in a particular teaching session. On the other hand, a student's desire to pass a test related to a particular job often very directly affected what they did in any teaching session.

Another way of thinking about this 'in the room' and 'environmental' distinction might be in terms of urgency and importance. 'Issues in the room"

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[32] e.g. Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications

may appear urgent but may not be ultimately important, while 'environmental' issues may be very important but not be experienced as urgent by students and tutors in the classroom. We suggest it would be worth exploring such distinctions in the later stages of this project, and supporting tutors and students to explore them as they pilot the curriculum framework.

These were the responses which emerged as most significant. (As you will see, some could be equally applicable to literacy).

- **Asking learners**
  To decide what to teach, tutors and schemes often rely on asking learners fairly directly what numeracy / maths they want to learn and why they want to learn it. There was little evidence of other approaches being used systematically. (Common answers from learners are indicated in the table.)

- **Bargaining with students**
  In schemes working with younger adults, a key issue appeared to be, not what maths to do, but whether to do maths. Tutors described themselves as 'bargaining' with students to persuade them to spend time on numeracy / maths, trading time spent on maths with time spent on other activities seen by learners as more attractive.

- **Making the offer**
  Not all literacy schemes offer numeracy provision. Tutors drew attention to the fact that in some schemes (not interviewed), it was an implicit part of 'literacy' provision but not marketed as such.

- **Being learner-centred is important**
  Tutors felt strongly that it was important to act in a learner -centred way Tutors reported that their schemes had similar aspirations.

- **Being learner-centred is not always simple or easy**
  Other "in the room" and "environmental" factors as having a significant impact on tutors' ability to student-centred were

  - no ready access to a range of suitable resources, making it harder to respond to students' needs.
  - a feeling that external accreditation systems defined the curriculum, and that this restricted their ability to respond very directly to students' needs
  - participation in numeracy tutor training, enabling them to respond creatively to individual students' needs, whether or not they were working to any external standard or curriculum
  - a complication of the 'learner-centred' approach, resulting from students not feeling that maths / numeracy was important to their lives, while tutors felt that mathematical competence could improve their life chances.

- **Making maths fun**
  Tutors felt that it was important to make the learning "fun". Some felt that unless they actively tried to do this, many learners would not have an enjoyable experience.

- **Numeracy is part of literacy…?**
  For some, numeracy was seen as part of literacy; for others it had a rather more separate identify. I almost always[33] said in my introductory remarks that I was particularly interested in numeracy issues. Nevertheless, participants' responses often focussed at least initially on literacy, and sometimes this focus continued even when I prompted for numeracy issues. This confirms the NALA view that numeracy often has a lower profile than literacy. While some tutors saw numeracy as including elements of literacy and mathematics (see 2.15), others were not even sure *whether*, let alone *how* numeracy should be taught.

Finally, asked what would help them make choices and decisions about what to teach and how to teach, these were the responses:

- **Numeracy staff development matters**
  Staff development emerged as a key issue. Some participants emphasised that materials alone – toolkits etc – would not be enough.

- **Materials matter too, but they're not the whole thing**
  Several tutors wanted access to more, and more varied, learning resources which they could use with students, although others also emphasised that "materials alone are not enough, it depends what you do with them".

- **Keep it simple**
  Tutors asked that any materials produced by the project should be accessible, practical, and immediately useful.

- **Be creative**
  The need for a creative approach to numeracy was emphasised; the fear being that unless tutors were (supported to be) creative, they might rely inappropriately on "traditional" teaching methods. There appears to be demand for support to encourage creativity.

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[33] However, in one session with younger adults, I decided that this numeracy-focussed approach might close the session down before it got started.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Visits/meetings with stakeholders: Jan-May 06

6th Dec	Jane, Juliet	Briefing meetings	NALA offices, Dublin
7th Dec	Juliet, Jane	Advisory Group meeting	Temple Bar Hotel, Dublin
8th Dec	Jane	Classroom visit: with Treasa Collins, tutors and students	Pearse College, Dublin
	Juliet	Frances Ward with tutors and students	Ballyfermot, Senior Traveller Centre,
	Jane	Brenda Fitzpatrick, Robbie Robinson, tutors	Wheatfield Prison, Dublin
	Juliet	Brendan Sheehan, Manager	Youthreach, Dublin]
	Jane Juliet	Mary Maher (organiser)	Dublin Adult Learning Centre
23rd and 24th Jan	Jane	Sandra Brett and Mary O Sullivan, organisers, Madeline, tutor, Kathleen, student	Women Travellers Literacy Scheme, Tuckey St, Dublin
25th Jan	Jane	Sinead O'Rourke and Kathleen Melia, tutors	Cork Prison
27th Jan	Jane	Meeting with staff	NALA offices, Dublin
28th Jan	Jane	National Adult Literacy conference	Sheldon Park Hotel, Dublin
3rd Feb	Juliet	Margaret Murray, NALA	Letterkenny
14th Feb	Jane,	Rose Brownen and tutors	KLEAR Community Adult Education Centre, Dublin
14 Feb	Joan	Briefing meeting, Terry Maguire, NALA	Connolly station, Dublin
14 Feb	Joan	Kathleen Cramer and colleagues	Newbridge CTC
15th Feb	Jane Juliet Joan	Advisory Group meeting	Temple Bar Hotel, Dublin
15 Feb	Joan	Rose Bronwen and colleagues	KLEAR Community Adult Education Centre, Dublin
	Juliet	Brendan Sheehan	Pleasant Street Youthreach, Dublin
16th Feb	Jane Juliet	Workshop, practitioner researchers	Cassidys Hotel, Dublin
16th Feb	Juliet	Cora Rafter, literacy teacher, Warren Pherson, personal development tutor	CDVEC Foundations Project, Parnell Adult Education Centre, Dublin
17th Feb	Juliet	Ita Honan, literacy organiser, and instructors, Rosalie and	Dundalk CTC

			Arthur
14th Mar	Jane	Briefing meetings	NALA offices, Dublin
14th Mar	Jane	Meeting, IVEA Adult Literacy Forum	IVEA offices, Ranelagh, Dublin
	Jane	Catherine Dowds, Coordinator	SIPTU. Dublin
4 April	Juliet	Sarah Mangan, tutor, St Basils Training Centre	Tallaght, Dublin, Snr. Travellers
5 April	Juliet	Jane Rooney, Education Officer	Pavee Point, Dublin Snr Travellers
6 April	Juliet	Gerard Griffin, National Co-ordinator for Snr. Traveller Centres, Ennis	In Limerick
6 April	Juliet	Janet Webb, Family Literacy Organiser, Ennis	In Limerick
7 April	Juliet	Roma Voluntary Literacy co-ordinators, George Dancea and Jon Zetreaum and co-ordinator, Alex Cojacariu	Pavee Point, Dublin
7 April	Juliet	Winnie Kerrigan, cultural co-ordinator and Winnie Keegan conflict resolution worker	Pavee Point, Dublin
26 April	Jane Juliet	Workshop, practitioner researchers	Cassidys Hotel, Dublin
3 May	Joan	National Learning Network (NLN)	Cancelled just before my visit because of NLN organiser illness.
3 May	Joan	Lorraine O'Neill, Offaly and Kildare Partnership (OAK)	Telephone interview.
3 May	Joan	Kylemore CTC	Cancelled on the day due to unavailability of Kylemore staff
3 May	Joan	Briefing meeting with John Stewart, Gemma Lynch, Terry Maguire	NALA
3 May	Joan	Tom O'Mara (re numeracy in TV programmes)	NALA
4 May	Joan	Patricia Morrissey and students, Pleasants Street Youthreach Centre	Dublin
4 May	Joan	Mick Corrigan, ICTU	Dublin
4 May	Joan	Helen Ryan (re numeracy in TV / the workplace)	Dublin
4 May	Joan	Numeracy tutors' network meeting	Dublin
5 May	Joan	John O'Donoghue, University of Limerick	Telephone interview
5 May	Joan	Mary Sheehy, Wicklow Region,	Wicklow

		NCVA Support Services	
5 May	Joan	Noel Colleran, North Tipperary VEC	Telephone interview planned, but because of other changes to schedule, this interview has been rescheduled for Friday 12 May

Appendix 2: Focus group meetings with tutors/ organisers: Jan-April 06

24th Jan (1)	Jane	Mary Ryder and 12 tutors	Altrusa Centre College of Commerce, Morrisons Island, Cork
25th Jan (2)	Jane	Eleanor Calnan, Jane Gill, Jennifer Calnan, Maighread O'Leary	Skibbereen, Adult Basic Education, County Cork VEC
26th Jan (3)	Jane	Maeve Tuohy, with 11 tutors/organisers,	Tralee, Literacy and Life Skills, Kerry Education Service
28t Jan (4) and (5)	Jane	National adult literacy conference; group 1 with 6 tutors/organisers, group 2 with 10	Sheldon Park Hotel, Dublin
2nd Feb (6)	Juliet	Dolores McGeady with 6 tutors	Adult Education offices, Gortahork, Co.Donegal VEC
2nd Feb (7)	Juliet	Mary Talbot, Amanda Slevin, Heather Cromie	Adult Education offices, Donegal, Co. Donegal VEC
3rd Feb (8)	Juliet	Joyce Burns, Action Inishowen organiser and 8 volunteers and tutors	Buncrana Hotel, Inishowen Peninsula, Donegal, VEC
3rd Feb (9)	Juliet	Brid McIntyre, AEC Letterkenny organiser, volunteers and tutors	Adult Education offices, VEC
16th Feb (10)	Jane Juliet	Maureen Neville and 7 tutors/organisers	Dublin Adult Learning Centre, Dublin
15th Mar (11)	Jane	Niamh Maguire and 10 tutors/organisers	Wicklow VEC, Wicklow
4 April (12)	Juliet	Ed du Vivier and 3 tutors	An Cosan, Tallaght, Dublin
6 April (13)	Juliet	ALO 20 organisers	Royal Court Hotel, Tullamore
7 April (14)	Juliet	FAS and OAK, 4 tutors/organisers, 2 trainees	Royal Court Hotel, Tullamore

Appendix 3: Guidelines for focus group moderators

Introduction

As part of the NALA Literacy Curriculum Framework project, you will each be holding two focus group meetings with students.

The purpose of these sessions is to gather, from a sample of current students in a variety of settings,
a) their experience of dealing with literacy and numeracy in everyday life;
b) their perception of how useful classroom learning is to this experience; and
c) their ideas for what would be helpful to their learning.

The data from these focus groups will contribute to a report being produced by the project team in September 2006 for circulation by NALA to organisations and individuals with an interest in the development of the curriculum framework.

This guide is for you, to help make sure that we can be as consistent as possible in how we use these meetings to learn from students.

What is a focus group?

A focus group is a group of individuals gathered to share experience on the topic that is the subject of research/evaluation.

The key characteristic that distinguishes focus groups from other data gathering methods is the insight and data produced by the interaction between participants.

A group usually consists of between 6-10 participants, who work with a moderator through a set of pre-determined questions. The moderator works with a scribe to record in writing their responses and comments, catching verbatim phrases and comments where possible.

Focus group sessions usually last from one to two hours. We recommend that your sessions last for 90 minutes.

Who should participate?

Any learners of literacy or numeracy in current classes. It's preferable if you don't already work with them yourself. We are concerned to ensure that we discover learner experience of numeracy, as well as literacy, so please try to include, if possible, at least two people in each of your group sessions who is learning numeracy.

Tasks of moderator

Before the meeting:

- find and invite the participants for the group, fix a room, refreshments and name cards and arrange for a colleague to help with scribing.

At the start of the meeting:

- welcome everyone by name and give yours;
- explain the purpose of the meeting; and that the group will be exploring four questions;
- clarify that you will be giving feedback at the end of the meeting for them to check and add anything.

Once things are under way, you will also need, as necessary, to,

- encourage participation from everyone
- promote debate by asking questions
- challenge participants, to tease out different views
- probe for details
- move things forward when things drift or seem to be stuck
- steer the conversation back on course
- share note-taking work with your scribe

Allow 10 minutes or so for you and scribe to feed back to the group what you have gathered/learned from the discussion and check for any additions, questions or comments from the group.

Tasks of scribe

Eavesdrop while whole group working with moderator and take notes; when working with small group, use question and prompt questions to encourage participants to exchange responses with each other; do what you can to catch these responses, when possible including verbatim wording.

After the meeting: you both

- meet; turn your combined notes into legible text;
- complete reflection sheet
- send to Jenny Wedgbury by 11th April (address at end)

Timing

Remember you have 90 minutes, at least. As a rule of thumb, allow roughly 15 minutes for each of the first two questions, and then 20 minutes for the second two; with 10 minutes for introduction and another 10 minutes The questions at the end to give back to the group something of what they have been saying: a kind of summing up.

The questions

It's helpful to see each of the questions as *a catalyst for discussion*.
We have provided notes to suggest how you put them to the participants.
Explain that the first two questions are about literacy and numeracy situations in everyday life, as a way to help think about the second two, which are about how these situations get thought about and dealt with in class.

Here are the questions:

1. (spread out or give out the pictures: for each – begin with a 'what's going on here?' question and then -)
    Can you think of any reading, writing, maths or numeracy that might crop up for someone in this situation?
    (the categories of the pictures, roughly, are intended to include: working with others; family and friends; free time and interests – and you could add your own)

    For this, you could divide the group into two smaller groups; you and scribe take one each; after a few minutes, share in the whole group. .

2. **Think back to something you have been doing this morning/today/yesterday** (as appropriate).
    Was there any reading, writing, maths or numeracy involved?
    Could you say how you dealt with this?

    Work on this either in whole group or in smaller groups. Use your discretion. Stress that the examples are of situations *outside the classroom.* Maybe give an example of your own to prompt discussion. Record examples they offer as you and your scribe think appropriate – maybe share on flipchart, maybe not. Encourage the idea that any story of the person *getting help from someone else* is absolutely fine.

3. **Is there anything you're learning now in your class – or anything about *the way* that you're learning – that you are finding particularly useful for you in dealing with situations like these?**

    Or: **Is there anything that you're learning in class that is particularly useful for you outside it?**

    Use follow-up prompts to elicit more, such as: "If so what/ how? If not, is there anything you would like to be doing more of?"

4. **How do you help your teacher decide what to teach?**
    Give time for this question to sink in. Some students may see it as an inappropriate thing for them to do – or be unaware that they do it. Prompts and probes useful here. After discussion, you could offer as possible follow-ups: are there any topics you would like to study in your class that you have not yet? or: If you don't help your teacher decide, is there any way you would like to in future?)

Finally, some dos and don'ts of successful moderation:

Do	Avoid
value all contributions	participants addressing their answers to you
be familiar with the questions	making value judgements about contributions
listen carefully to what is said	spending too much time on one question at the expense of the others
promote interaction between participants (getting them to listen, too)	allowing one, or few members to hog the limelight
find a way to capture points made, even if these are not taken any further	taking sides in the debate
be clear about what will be done with the information from this meeting	interrupting participants as they express their views

Notes by:

Jane Mace, Juliet McCaffery, Joan O'Hagan and the practitioner research group, 16th February 2006 (with thanks to Olga Pisarenko)

Please send the notes of your two meetings, by 12th April, to:

Jenny Wedgbury – if possible by e-mail to:
j.wedgbury@bglss.ioe.ac.uk
If not, by post to:
NRDC
Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H OAL

Remember to bring completed expenses claim forms to the feedback meeting on 26th April from you and your scribe for payment.

Student focus group meeting: reflection sheet
– for scribe and moderator to discuss/complete (informal notes are fine)
(please attach this as cover sheet to your notes of comments made for each
of the four questions)

Date, day and time of meeting:

Place meeting held (please give full address):

Moderator: Scribe:

Numbers:(please indicate (w)women or (m)men): (w)………. (m)…….
How did it go? (any surprises? any problems? any moments of special
illumination?)

Appendix 4: Focus group meetings with students

2 March 5th April	Marian O'Reilly *scribe: Anne Scanlon* *scribe: Sheila Heffernan*	4 women 4 men 3 women 4 men	(1a) Dove House, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois (1b) Mountmellick Development Association, Co. Laois
21 March 29 March	Barbara Hammond *Scribe: Joan Fitzpatrick*	6 women 7 women 2 men	(2a) Bray Adult Learning Centre, Co.Wicklow, (2b) Baltinglass Adult L Centre
2 March 3 March	Mary O'Sullivan Scribe:	6 women 8 women	(3a) Tuckey St, Cork City (3b) Tuckey St, Cork City
3 April	Ed du Vivier *(no scribe)*	7 women from 2 groups	(4) An Cosan – The Shanty Ed & Training Project, Tallaght, Dublin
23 March 29 March	Kathleen Kramer scribe: Josephine Cashman	1 woman 5 men 3 women 5 men	(5a) Youth Training & Development Centre, Newbridge, Co. Kildare (5b) same
29 March 31 March	Laureen Leslie *scribe: Valerie Creegan*	5 women 1 man 8 women	(6a) KLEAR, Kilbarrick, Dublin (6b) same
20 March 23 March	Eleanor Calnan *scribe: Jennifer Calnan*	8 men 2 women 4 men	(7a) Workplace course, Sutherland Centre, Skibbereen, Co. Cork (7b) FAS/VEC, same
5 April	Jenny Derbyshire *(no scribe)*	5 men	(8) Dublin Shelton Abbey Open Detention Centre, Arklow, Co Wicklow

4 Feb 4 April	Juliet McCaffery Juliet McCaffery *scribe: Jenny Derbyshire*	12 students 6 women	(9a) Silver Tassle Hotel, Letterkenny Donegal (9b) St Basils Travellers Training Centre Tallaght, Dublin
April	Anna O'Dwyer	12 women 10 women	(10a) Ross (10b) Ross

Appendix 5:   Factors affecting decisions and choices about what to teach and how to teach (numeracy)

What the "ticks in the table" mean (next page):

- If an item is included in the "Mentioned" column, it means that it was mentioned by at least one person, but not by more than 2 people. So, for example, only one person mentioned that her scheme actively marketed numeracy; and two people mentioned that whilst accreditation systems define standards, tutors respond creatively.
- Where an item is ticked in the "Mentioned" column, it was mentioned by at least three individuals. Thus, for example, several people said that they saw numeracy as part of literacy, and several others said that they saw it as separate from, though related to, literacy.
- Sometimes, when an individual mentioned a particular item, others in a group indicated that they agreed strongly. And sometimes an individual was particularly emphatic about a particular point. Where either of these happened, I have ticked the "emphasised" box.
- The right hand column is an attempt to draw out the themes which appear – from listening to these participants - to be the most significant factors affecting decisions and choices about what to teach and how to teach.

ISSUES IN THE ROOM / IN THE HERE AND NOW	Mentioned by interviewees	Seen by interviewees as important	Significance
• **Tutor's main approach is to ask "what do you want to learn today / tomorrow / later?" and to respond directly.**	✔	✔	**high**
• Learner wants help with maths /numeracy in actual or desired job	✔		
• **Tutor's / scheme's aspiration / practice puts learner at centre of each interaction**	✔	✔	**high**
• Learner wants to help children with homework	✔		
• Learner wants help with numeracy / maths arising in other courses	✔		
• Tutor (not teaching numeracy) raises numeracy issue with learner			
• **Learner wants a qualification (often "Junior") to get job**	✔	✔	**High**
• Time pressure on learner – frequency and duration of attendance		✔	
• **Tutor creativity in the classroom**	✔	✔	**high**
• Tutor and learner want to make maths fun		✔	
• **Tutor bargains with learners to make time for numeracy / maths**	✔ [34]	✔ [35]	**High** [36]
• **Variety of resources not readily available**	✔	✔	**High**
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES			
• Scheme / tutor offers menu to learners including numeracy			
• Scheme actively markets numeracy			
• **Scheme asks new learner "What do you want to learn today / tomorrow / later?"**	✔	✔	**High**
• Scheme offers "literacy", understands that to include numeracy but doesn't make this explicit	✔		
• Funding issues permit / constrain learning mode	✔		
• **Funding issues create pressure to accredit formally**	✔	✔	**High**
• **Accreditation system defines curriculum**	✔	✔	**High**
• Accreditation system defines standards and tutors respond creatively			
• QA systems create pressure / professionalise staff / (or do both!)	✔		
• Needs of national economy			
• Numeracy seen as part of literacy	✔		
• Numeracy seen as separate from literacy	✔		
• Extent to which literacy and numeracy are part of wider equality / entitlement agenda			
• Involvement of practitioners in reflective practice / research			
• MLJ – scheme view of and use of			
• Extent to which scheme has system for creating / reviewing / developing Learning Plans			
• Provider policy on fees			
• Learner's peer's attitude to learning			
• **Extent to which tutors have had numeracy staff devt, especially that provided by NALA**	✔	✔	**High**
• **Nature of materials available to tutors, and extent to which they are aware of what's available**	✔	✔	**High**
• Degree of autonomy of tutor			
• **Tutor creativity in planning learning events**	✔	✔	**high**
• Provider and other organisations' policies on migrant workers / ESOL			
• Provider view as to whether ESOL is / should be part of literacy			
• NALA's relationship with / position with respect to other players		✔	
• Tutor's status as volunteer / paid worker			
• **Materials to support curriculum decision-making are effective is they are practical, immediately useful, and concrete**	✔	✔	**high**

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[34] in provision for younger learners

[35] ditto

[36] ditto

Appendix 6: Organisations involved in adult literacy and numeracy tuition and support

Literacy and numeracy support and development is available to adults both as specific provision and as part of training and work-based programmes, as shown below:

Vocational Education Committees (VECs)
● Adult Literacy Services
● Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)
● Youthreach Centres
● Senior Travellers Education and Training Centres
● Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)
● Community Education

FAS
● FAS Community Training Centres
● FAS / VEC Return to Education Programmes (Community Employment participants)
● FAS local training initiatives

Workplace Basic Education
● The Return to Learning Initiative (local authorities and VECs)
● Skills for Work project (FAS Services to Business)

Irish Prison Education Service

Organisations providing for special needs
● National Learning Network
● Enable Ireland
● Central Remedial Clinic
● Rehab Group
● St. Michael's House

Other providers
● Family Resource Centres
● Department of Justice Probation and Training Centres
● Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Congress Network Centres
● Area Development Management (ADM) funded local partnerships and community groups
● Community projects
● Traveller Community projects

Appendix 7: Project advisory group

- Anne Costelloe   Prison Education Service
- Leo Casey   Distance Education
- Karina Curley   OAK Partnership
- Anne Looney   National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- Mary Kett   Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science
- Martina Needham   Adult Literacy Organisers' Association
- Mary Bevan   Basic Education Tutor's Association
- Monica Heynen   Waterford Institute of Technology
- Mick Corrigan   ICTU
- Deirdre Coyle   FÁS
- Andrina Wafer   FETAC
- Rodger Curran   IVEA Representative
- Carol Daultrey   National Learning Network
- Lyn Tett   ABE Curriculum Expert, University of Edinburgh
- Ursula Howard   NRDC Director
- Frances Ward   NALA Executive
- Michael Power   NALA Executive

NALA staff:

- Inez Bailey   Director
- John Stewart   National Adult Literacy Co-ordinator
- Gemma Lynch   Research Officer
- Jenny Derbyshire   Development Worker
- Blathnaid Ni Chinneide   Literacy Integration Co-ordinator
- Terry Maguire   Numeracy Development Worker

Appendix 8: Proposals and questions

The following Section was included in the draft of this report circulated in June 2006 for consultation. It is included here as an historical context piece rather than a current position as the ideas and methodologies are the subject of further research and development in 2007.

Section 3: Proposals and questions

In this final section we bring together insights, principles and current experience in Ireland to identify

- an appropriate process for developing a curriculum framework in Ireland and
- some indicative content that this framework might include
- a questionnaire for readers of this report (please find at the end of the report)

First, we want to restate the context for Phase 2 of the project, and recap the findings from Phase 1 that we have discussed in the previous two sections.

3.1 Context and findings

There are two areas of complexity into which a curriculum framework needs to fit:

a) In Ireland, the term *adult basic education* refers not only adult literacy and numeracy work but also to a wide range of courses at a basic or foundation level which take place in a variety of contexts. [37]

b) Students vary; they may be sixteen or sixty-two years of age; each has their own reasons and purposes for learning (as well as barriers and difficulties in doing so); and each, their own life experiences, skills and insights.

In addition, there has been rapid change and development in the field (particularly since 1997), summarised usefully in the Implementation Plan of the National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme (NALA 2004). Initiatives have been introduced that relate to quality assurance, assessment and accreditation. Three national bodies have played a part in these areas: the Further Education Training and Awards Council (FETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and NALA – as follows:

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[37] See the list of organisations involved in Appendix 6

Quality: NALA's policy document on the ethos and core principles for good quality adult literacy work (Derbyshire et al 2005) has been through two revisions, and reflects both continuity and development in a quest for excellence in ABE provision in all settings. At the same time, FETAC, in its systems for allowing centres to enable their students to achieve awards for learning (see below) requires that they must complete a quality assurance process that shows a high standard of provision for their students.

Assessment: We have already mentioned the work of Mapping the Learning Journey, for which a programme of training is being rolled out during the period of this project. We know that the framework, for students and tutors to find it useful, will need to show close connections with all four of its 'cornerstones'.

Accreditation: In 2004 the NQAI was set up and created a single, internationally recognised structure through which learning achievements could be accredited from Level 1 to Level 10. FETAC's recently published awards for levels 1 and 2 in communications and numeracy will be of particular benefit to students in adult basic education – and as we have noted, their requirements closely match those indicated in MLJ. We very much expect the framework to support and complement the development of programmes that could lead to this accreditation.

3.1.1

The task was to explore the development of a learner-centred curriculum framework. At the heart of the project is the question: ***how can life outside the classroom interact with life inside it?*** Worded this way, the question gives practical expression to the *social practice* view of literacy and numeracy we referred to earlier, which holds that literacy and numeracy are always mixed up in everyday events and purposes. It also conveys something of the dynamic to be exploited between the informal learning that goes on in all kinds of contexts and that which is supported in the classroom or learning centre.

In an 'embedded' or 'integrated' setting, there is another question to link to it. For the tutor working with students whose primary purpose is not literacy and numeracy, it may need to be something like this:

> How can I work with the people who use this centre so that they can achieve their primary learning purpose and at the same time build confidence, motivation and skill in literacy and numeracy?

In the focus group discussions with students, asking questions about uses of maths and literacy in everyday situations raised awareness for them about how they already dealt with these situations and what connection they might have with their classroom life. [38]   In discussions with both students and tutors we explored how both might already engage in planning learning - and recognise the informal learning already

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[38] Using this view of their students' everyday uses of literacy outside the classroom setting, one group of adult literacy teachers in England reported a completely new way of seeing their classroom practice. (Fowler and Mace 2005).

happening outside the classroom. This led us to discussions as to the place of 'homework' – and to ways in which it could be understood as an enhancement of everyday life rather than worksheet practice (important though that can be).   Adapting the exercise we used in our focus group meetings with students, we began to see ways for a similar exercise to be developed by which students might report progress or change in her or his literacy and numeracy life in terms of *contexts* and *roles*.

3.1.2

From our review of curriculum concepts, it appeared that the one most in harmony with the quality principles of work in Ireland was that which sees *curriculum as a means to create change*. Seeing the curriculum framework *a tool for navigating* this process (Section 1.4) suggests a journey. However, it will be a central message of the curriculum that the voyager-student is not alone on their journey, and that the most productive learning will enable them to see themselves travelling both as an individual and as one of a company. Good practice in adult basic education in Ireland starts with the needs of individuals, but it does not stop there. Students learning in a 'curriculum for change' stand to make gains both in personal development and in their communities, using literacy and numeracy to improve the quality of their lives.

3.1.3

Our choice of other curriculum frameworks came from widely different cultural and social contexts.   We chose them as ones which seemed most relevant to the Irish one. Insights identified for (Section 1.5) suggested that an appropriate curriculum framework will need to:

- make plain its theoretical basis;
- indicate ways in which contexts and roles outside the classroom can be made a lively part of learning inside it;
- offer its application in more than one dimension;
- marry a learner-directed approach with a community-focussed one;
- enable participants to make decisions about the learning programme;
- support the local production of interesting and relevant material; and
- provide examples and insights from teachers.

We expect to use these insights to help shape an effective, student-centred curriculum framework in Ireland.

3.1.4

We reviewed (in Section 2.1) current thinking about adult literacy and numeracy curricula in Ireland and identified the following principles as already being highly valued by stakeholders:

1. The curriculum is not a straight line
2. Thinking is at the heart of it
3. Good learning is active learning
4. Learning is collective as well as individual
5. Numeracy is a matter of managing life choices
6. Teachers are facilitators as well as guides
7. Students are sources of mutual learning and organisation.

We see these principles as important foundations on which to build a curriculum framework.

3.1.5

Discussions with tutors, organisers and students revealed a rich mix of experience and reflection.   Tutors expressed a commitment to student-centred approaches to teaching. There were also frequent references to making materials tailored to students' interests and skills. Planning and evaluating took place in various ways, depending on context and experience. Some tutors reported some frustration mixed with sympathy at the difficulties for students in undertaking any study or practice on classroom learning from one week to the next. There was a concern at how well beginner levels of literacy and more advanced levels of maths were supported.

From a range of experience of literacy and numeracy learning going on in various settings, students reported instances of increased confidence, not only in matters of reading, writing but also in speaking up, voicing opinions and asking questions. A number were particularly pleased at the sense of improvement they felt in their strategies for dealing with calculation and measurement in various roles and contexts. Some expressed surprise at the question about how they might guide teachers in deciding what to teach – either because they assumed teachers would know already, or because they had such routines of telling their teachers what they wanted to learn that they could not imagine it being otherwise.

These many discussions felt like the start of longer conversations. In the case of tutors and organisers, NRDC researchers were meeting people once; in the case of student groups, PRs were also only having one opportunity for the discussion. In all cases, research experience tells us that more thinking might have occurred after the meeting was over.   One finding we can claim, however: the people met were hospitable not only to visitor-researchers, but also to sharing experience and to learning.

3.2 Process for creating a framework.

We believe that our best contribution at this point in the Irish scene is not to sit down and write a curriculum framework, but rather to propose a mechanism through which organisers, tutors and students could engage actively in its production with us.   In Phase 1, there has been (quite properly) a fairly

intense input of the NRDC team in consulting and analysing findings, to which the nine practitioner researchers provided an invaluable contribution.

In Phase 2, the proposal would be an increase of practitioner time, no longer as 'practitioner researchers', but this time as 'curriculum developers.' Their task would be threefold: to develop draft framework materials with the research team; to identify and support tutors in their region to pilot and evaluate them; and to write brief case studies of classroom use of the materials. At the time of writing, we cannot be exact as to numbers until accurate budget forecasts have been completed. As a rough estimate, four curriculum developers, would each work with between four and six tutors, who in turn would each be using some part of the materials with up to eight students.

The timeline for the main part of Phase 2, then, begins to look like this:

- early September 2006 -early October 2006:
      NRDC write first rough draft for curriculum developers
- mid-October 2006: residential meeting of CDs and NRDC to develop
      and improve on the ideas in the draft;
- mid-October 2006 to mid-November2006 :
      draft is elaborated and published
- mid-November 2006 to February 07:
      CDs organise and support the piloting of the draft material by
      tutors and students, with support from NRDC team
- mid-February 2007:
      CDs and NRDC team to revise material and (in consultation with
      NALA and stakeholders) design a training module for inclusion
      in national training programmes.
- February-July 2007:
      curriculum framework completed and published; training
      module embedded in national and regional training programme.

There may need to be adjustments; but the general idea is here – with the emphasis being on ownership and development by organisers, tutors and students themselves.

3.3 Indicative content for the framework

Based on the findings we have set out, it seems to us that the curriculum framework, above all, will need to show a firm connection with the guiding principles for good practice in adult literacy and numeracy work that NALA has already identified. It will be important that it does not seem to practitioners that it is primarily driven by the imperatives of funding or accreditation. The framework will need to feel like a support to good practice, not an additional (let alone conflicting) pressure on tutors and providers.

It will need to contain, too, something about what some call the 'hidden curriculum': about how students learn from the way the organisation is structured and how tutors relate to them in the classroom. (A useful connection could be made with existing quality frameworks' stress on translating concepts like 'equality' or 'emancipation' not practice)

Finally, the framework will need to show how the practical techniques and approaches are firmly grounded, on the one hand, in student-directed curriculum ideas, and on the other, in theory and research on literacy and numeracy use in real-life contexts. With all this in mind, we put forward for discussion the following two groups of elements that we think might begin to provide a scaffolding for the framework which is eventually developed:

Group (1): elements for clarification

One group of elements in the framework would need to give a focus to theory and practice.

1. We suggest that at least these four **key concepts** will need clarifying:

   - the concept of '*curriculum for change*': theoretical idea and practical implications;
   - the social practice view of literacy and numeracy: its origins, and examples;
   - the work already developed in Ireland on a curriculum for *thinking;* and
   - on theories about *multiple intelligence*.

2. We think, then that there will need to be at least three **implications for practice:**

   - the use of *informal learning* in a range of contexts outside the classroom;
   - *a reframed idea of 'homework'* to enhance and build on this learning and these contexts; and
   - the central place of *discussion*, whether working with students as individuals or in a group.

For each of these elements, there will need to be some opening definitions, case studies by way of illustration, and links made to quality and assessment frameworks.

Group (2): resource elements

In a second group of elements, the emphasis (we suggest) is more on resources – not for immediate classroom use, but as frames to be developed.

From the work that the Curriculum Developers undertake with their tutors and students, a selection of case studies of the mixed approaches used with

different settings of learning would be included to show how such frames could be used. These elements could form the basis for this group:

1. ideas (including visual ones) for collecting and sharing examples of literacy and numeracy events that occur in everyday life (building on those used in the focus groups with students);

2. strategies to encourage students in independent study and practice of their skills outside the classroom;

3. games (board or card game, or online) for tutors and students to use to manipulate different elements in their learning plans;

4. example programmes for FETAC levels 1 and 2 in literacy and numeracy;

5. materials to support the literacy and numeracy work of student forums

Over to you

Thank you for reading this report. Please remember this is 'work in progress'. Our next step is to develop the framework to support you in your development of learner-centred learning.   We ask you to offer your comments on the proposals, and on the report as a whole, in the questionnaire at the end. These comments will help us to develop a draft framework to be tested by tutors and students from November. We will keep you up-to-date with our progress through the NALA newsletter and Tutors' Bulletin, the NALA journal and the NALA website – www.nala.ie/research

Over to you: questionnaire for readers

Please use the freepost envelopes enclosed to return this when you have completed it, by 31st July 2006.

 1 Your personal details (optional)

What is your name?…………………………………………………………………

Where do you work:…………………………………………………………………

What is your role
there?…………………………………………………………………………………

Work address/email…………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………….

………………………………………………………………………………………..

2   Your reaction

Overall, which of these best summarises your reaction to this report? (tick appropriate word)
- surprised
- confused
- hopeful
- other (please say more)

………………………………………………………………………………………….

………………………………………………………………………………………….

3. Your key issue to make clear

What is the central issue for you that needs to be clear in the curriculum framework as it develops?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

4: Your thoughts on the indicative content of the framework (Section 3)

Group (1) Please note anything you think it would be helpful to add in either of the two sections proposed:

1. Key concepts…………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………..

2. Implications for practice……………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………..

Group (2) Please note anything you think it would be helpful to add to the categories listed:

1. ideas…………………………………………………………………………….

2. strategies……………………………………………………………………….

3. example programmes……………………………………………………………

4. materials…………………………………………………………………………

5: Additions

Some people have suggested the framework should also contain these. Please say if you agree:

a) a specific section on ways to develop work with 'beginner' level students

　　　YES/NO (circle the appropriate word)

b) examples of student(s) being active in 'student-directed learning'

　　　YES/NO (circle the appropriate word)

c) is there anything else you suggest the framework needs to contain?

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………
Thank you for taking the time to share your views with us.

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