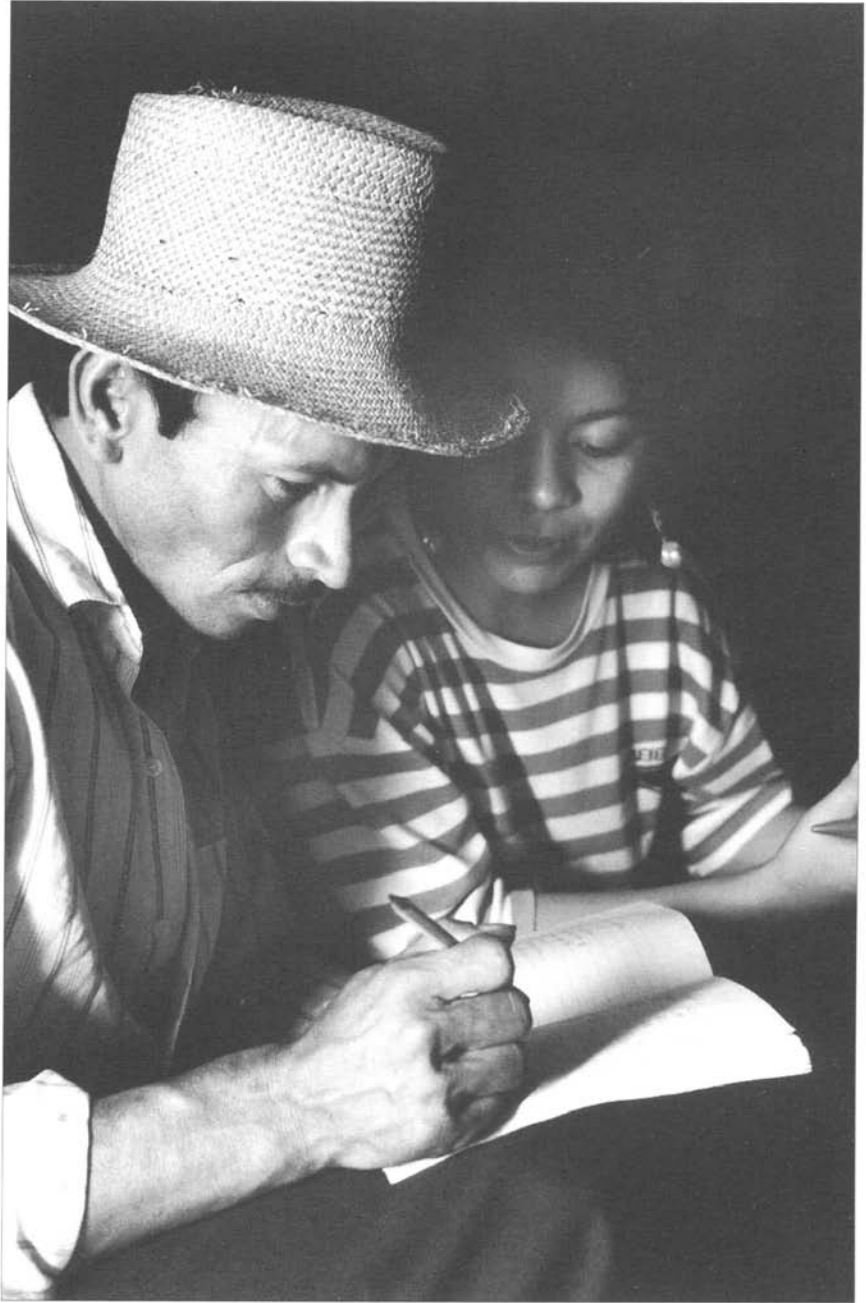


PART THREE

Exploring Teaching and Learning



An evening class for resettled refugees in El Salvador
Photo: Jenny Matthews

Some methods for teaching literacy

Working with adults

This book is concerned with the teaching of adults. Much research has been done on how adults learn and on appropriate ways of working with them. In some respects, methods of teaching adults differ from ways of working with children. What do we now know about how adults learn?

Some facts about adults' learning styles

- Adults are thought to learn more quickly than children; they already have a system for 'making sense' of things, and fitting their learning into what they already know.
- Children in most areas of the world see 'experience' as something that happens to them; they expect to be told what to do. Adults, in most cases, need to play a part in shaping their own experience; they prefer not to be told what to do.
- Children generally depend on someone else for their safety and livelihood. Adults generally have learnt to fend for themselves.
- Children have a limited experience of life. Much that they come across is new or strange to them. Adults have had a lifetime's experience of dealing with the new and the strange; they have already developed strategies for dealing with such things. But these strategies can also slow down the process of learning: adults may have developed set ideas about things, which will take time to change. They may need to unlearn habits built up over a lifetime, in order to adapt to new situations.
- In teaching children new things, it is helpful to base lessons on things they already know. Similarly, in helping adults to learn new things, their existing experience should not be ignored.
- Adults learn more successfully when the learning is relevant to their lives: when they can see the need for it and recognise how they will use it.

When working with adults, try to focus on learning rather than teaching. A literacy programme should be concerned with setting up a situation in which adults can learn.

Three ways in which adults learn

Adults who have not been to school will have learnt life skills in a variety of ways: by *listening and then doing*; by *trying for themselves* — by discovering how to do something; by *watching and imitating*. Different individuals learn best in different ways, and most people will have a preference for one of these three learning styles. Teachers can help to cater for individual preferences by varying the approaches to learning used on a literacy programme.

All three approaches to learning are useful learning strategies, but they should all be accompanied by discussion. Adults need to understand *why* they are doing something, and how it will be useful. They need to be given some responsibility for the learning process if they are to become confident and independent learners.

Discussing and challenging new information are important activities in the process of building confidence and independence. A good literacy worker will encourage a group to question rather than accept what they are told, and to judge its relevance in terms of their own experience. Handling a discussion is not easy; some skill is required on the part of the leader:

- to allow the group to take over the direction of the class;
- to stand back while people talk;
- to encourage everyone to say something;
- to stop any one person from dominating the group;
- to summarise the main points of what has been said;
- to get the group back together and move on.

Cultural constraints on adults' learning

People's expectations of learning and teaching are culturally determined, and affected by their previous experience. For example, some Koranic schools use repetition and rote learning as a way of memorising information. Children in such a school will be taught to repeat lines of the Koran aloud. This habit of chanting and repeating has its place, but is often transferred into literacy classes, where students may be asked to say a letter over and over again. As a method, it has little value when learning to read or to write.

Most formal schooling requires children to sit in rows at desks in front of the teacher, although chairs and tables may not be common in the households in the area. Students in a literacy class may be more comfortable sitting on the ground, as they would do if reading or writing at home; others may expect to use desks, if they use similar tables and chairs at home. Whatever the initial expectations of students, experience



Rows of desks are not usually the best arrangement for adult learners. Many will feel more comfortable sitting on the ground or — as here, in Tigray, Ethiopia — sitting round a table.
Photo: Neil Cooper

shows that rows of desks are not the best arrangement for adults. A suggested seating arrangement is given in Chapter 4.

Formal education in schools generally presents teachers as more powerful and more important than students. Students are in most cases required to accept rather than to question the information they are given. Anything written in a book may be seen as 'true', and students may be reluctant to challenge this assumption.

Adults who have had previous experience of organised learning (for example if they have completed one or two years of primary school, or if their children have attended school) may find the teaching methods used in a literacy class very different. The literacy worker may need to challenge their expectations and encourage them to think about how they actually learn, as distinct from how they expect to be taught.

Why do these learners need literacy?

The learning activities that take place in a literacy class will be determined partly by the purposes for which literacy will be used. As far as possible, learning activities should be based on the practice of literacy in real situations, using real examples.

For instance, students who need to learn how to keep accounts should be introduced to them as soon as possible. Activities can be based on filling in a range of real or invented details on account sheets. It is easier to see the relevance of learning numbers when they are placed in the context of the learners' lives.

Students who want to learn to write letters should try writing them as soon as possible. They can begin with activities which involve them in dictating and copying, adding characters they know, and looking over

their own letters written for them by someone else. A 'real' activity, or a simulated activity that has a real aim, is almost always better than an invented exercise. Remember that adults learn best by doing something, rather than just hearing about doing it.

What kind of literacy do they need?

The various types of learning that take place in a literacy class will include skills of reading, writing, and calculating. Students will be presented with themes or information about certain topics, such as information about bee-keeping, or book-keeping, or using a public library. They will acquire self-confidence in using literacy activities in everyday life, for instance when using a post office or a bank.

The various skills and the themes chosen by the group will probably be taught alongside each other. But, whatever skills and themes are developed within a class or learning programme, they should be closely related to the use of those techniques and topics in a real-life situation. Skills are not automatically transferable. Literacy workers, concentrating on teaching the material they have prepared, too often forget to relate that material to what people see in the village, or in their homes.

Between classes or meetings, learners should be encouraged to look for street notices, signboards, political posters, sweet wrappings, etc. The worker should begin with the expectation that the group will use their literacy skills outside the classroom. They may begin their programme by learning letters or words, but they can still be encouraged, from the first session, to try to identify a similar letter or word, in a different type-face or size, somewhere outside the class.

Most important of all, students should be encouraged from the beginning to question and debate what they read, and to analyse, question, and cross-check the results of their number work. For some students, a literacy class may be an end in itself. For others it will be the first step in a continuing learning programme. In either case, it is important to avoid dependency on the literacy worker. As far as possible, students should be encouraged to think and to decide for themselves, and to set their own standards. The aim of a good tutor is to become dispensable!

What methods should the programme use?

There is no one 'correct' method. Every time a method is chosen, it carries with it a number of assumptions. Any choice of method will depend on how planners and tutors perceive students, how they conceive of knowledge, and how far they want to retain or share power.

A large number of literacy programmes throughout the world are based on a primer — that is, a book planned and printed in advance of the local programme, containing a new lesson on every page. Students generally work through it from beginning to end.

Using a primer has several advantages.

- Students can see their progress.
- It makes things easier for tutors, who can base their sessions on the structure of the book.
- Literacy workers who may have had little training in teaching can be shown how to work to a set formula.

On the other hand, using a primer has its disadvantages.

- It will have been planned by trainers, rather than by the users of a programme.
- It may have little relevance to what students in the group want or feel they need to learn.
- The focus is on progressing through the book, rather than on guiding the group to learn things that they can use.
- Information comes to be seen as something fixed and pre-determined, rather than something that students discover for themselves.

Methods for teaching literacy will be discussed in full below. Planners and tutors will be encouraged to work without a primer, or, where a primer is already available, to use it selectively, questioning with students the value of its contents.

Approaches to literacy

Any decision about which learning method or methods to use in a literacy programme will need to take into account the structure of the language, and how writing relates to speech. Many early languages used images or small pictures, like Egyptian hieroglyphics, which gave a visual indication of the object being referred to. The classical Chinese script is derived from such an ideographic system of writing, and contains many pictorial elements. However, modern Chinese characters now relate partly to sounds and not entirely to concepts or things. Individual Chinese characters represent parts of words as well as whole words, and a teaching approach that focused on individual words, rather than meaning, could not be sustained. Basic literacy in present-day Chinese entails learning about 2,000 individual characters.

Alphabetic writing systems, such as Arabic, Roman, and Hindi scripts, use symbols or letters to determine a spoken sound. Most alphabets contain between 20 and 30 symbols; the exact numbers vary according to the degree of complexity in the sound system of the language in question. Some languages have a direct relationship between the letter and the sound representing it: Spanish, for example, is a strongly phonetic language, while English is not. Languages which were traditionally oral and have been written down only recently — such as Pulaar, Kiswahili, and Wolof — use a writing system that is almost directly representative. Unlike, say, French, these languages have not

been subject to complex changes of pronunciation over a long period of time; unlike, say, English, they have not been exposed to long periods of contact with other written languages. English, because of its complex history, has a very indirect relationship between letter and sound. Becoming literate in English presents problems with spelling that are not experienced in more directly phonetic languages.

Some alphabetic languages, like Hebrew and Arabic, represent only the consonant sounds in writing: the marking of vowels is optional. Others, such as Hindi, do indicate vowel sounds — but only as small marks, not as separate letters.

Literacy programmes in alphabetic languages need to take into account several crucial factors:

- *The relationship between the name of the letter and its sound.* In English, the name of the letter A is different from the way in which it sounds in some words: consider, for example, the sounds in *apple*, *arm*, and *bead*. In cases like this, students can become confused if required to learn the alphabet (the names of the letters) first.
- *Whether letters change when used in combination with other letters.* For example, *g*, when used before *h*, as in *high*, represents hardly any sound at all.
- *The relationship between individual words and meanings.* Most languages add endings (suffixes) or beginnings (prefixes) to words, to indicate such things as plurality, tense, and size.
- *The ease with which words break down into individual syllables.* English, for example, does not always differentiate clearly between syllables, largely because some syllables in multi-syllabic words carry a very weak stress. Spanish, and other more regularly phonetic languages, tend to have a much more regular stress pattern. For example:
English: *el-e-ment* (the middle syllable is barely sounded)
Spanish: *el-e-ment-o* (all syllables carry equal weight).
- *Where a word begins and ends.* Many languages, particularly the Germanic ones, form compound words by joining together two or more individual words. A good example of this is the German expression *fußballweltmeisterschaftsmannschaftsauswahl*, which means ‘football world championship team selection’. A teaching method which begins with the learning of individual words will need to make this tendency explicit.
- *The use of capital letters.* The Roman alphabet uses capital letters which, in many cases, look different from the small letters which they relate to: *a A, b B, d D*, etc. A letter-based approach to literacy should consider which letter-forms to start with, or whether to teach both alongside each other.

Reading, writing, and calculating

Reading, writing, and calculating involve different skills. The skills involved in reading are mainly those of recognising, decoding, and understanding what has been written by someone else. They also involve reacting to the information that has been read, and making use of it. This is generally the case, regardless of which writing system is being used.

The skills involved in writing are more demanding: most people learn to read sooner and more easily than they learn to write. Learning to write involves mastering manual manipulation of a pen or pencil; remembering the exact form of a letter or character and recreating it; and transferring thoughts into signs, in order to write something down.

The skills involved in numeracy are different again. Although they include recognising and reproducing signs and symbols, the symbols represent quantity and have no relationship to their spoken form. In this sense they are like Chinese characters. Being numerate means not only recognising and recording numbers, but manipulating them to create other numbers that represent other amounts, i.e. 'doing sums'. Many adults can do mental arithmetic, even though they may not be able to write numbers down. Before deciding what to teach, it is important to discover what learners already know and how they currently deal with number concepts.

Generally, but not necessarily, adults use skills of reading, writing, and calculating in combination with each other. The combination of skills needed by the learners will help to determine which methods should be used to acquire which skills, and in what order. Most programmes work with a combination of methods.

Whichever methods are used, it is important to start with what students already know. All students will know something of either reading, writing, counting, or encoding. They will all have some idea of the uses and value of recording, of who does it, where, and why. They will all be able to recognise some form of sign. In an urban society, where written communication is part of the environment, students will be familiar with many images, words, letters, or signs, even though they may not know what they stand for. (The signs for Coca Cola, Toyota, and Singer are almost universal.)

Billboards in Santo Domingo: in an urban society, written communication is part of the environment.

Photo: Richard English



Taking time to find out what students already know, feel, think, recognise, and understand is the best way to start. Any future learning, using any method, can begin here.

Try to analyse how different skills are used in different circumstances. Reading a telephone directory is not the same as reading a newspaper, and a different skill again is required in reading a personal letter. Writing a letter or recording personal thoughts or events are different from copying something or filling in a form. Writing down numbers or recording amounts is a far simpler process than adding, subtracting, or dividing large quantities, working out percentages, or calculating areas.

But becoming literate involves more than learning a set of skills. Understanding how and when those skills are used, and by whom, what is done with them, and the conclusions that can be drawn from them is part of a continuous learning process.

Being literate is not just knowing how to read and write and calculate, but knowing how to incorporate these skills into the common practice of everyday life. For people who have grown up in a family or an environment where this has not been the case, taking on literacy practices is a much bigger task.

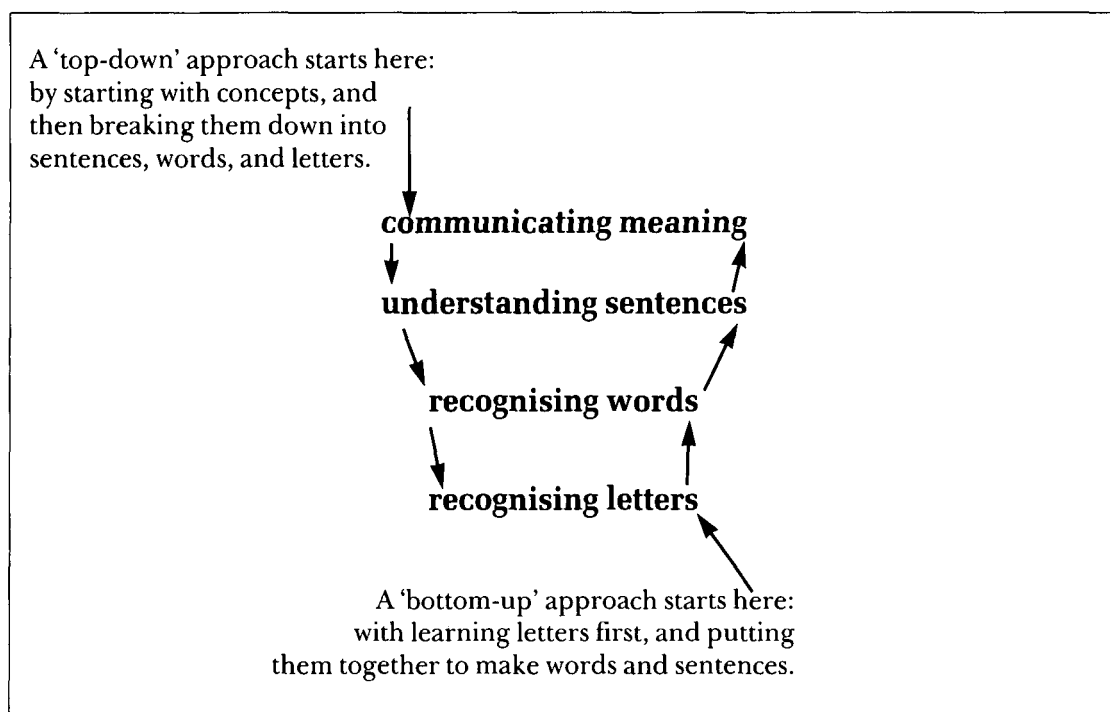
Approaches to teaching reading and writing

Approaches to teaching reading and writing can be divided into two broad categories:

- **‘bottom-up’ approaches:** those that start with learning a single unit, such as a letter, character, or syllable, which is later combined with others, to build up words or sentences; the main focus is on recognising and ‘decoding’ elements of text;
- **‘top-down’ approaches:** those that start with learning a unit of meaning, such as a word or a sentence, which is later broken down into individual letters or characters; the main focus is on meaning.

These two approaches are illustrated in Figure 5.1. People who support a ‘bottom-up’ approach to learning claim that learners need to be familiar with the elements of reading and writing (individual letters and characters) before they start to write or read text that is meaningful. It is not unusual for learners to start with pen-strokes (for example, horizontal and vertical strokes for languages using a Roman alphabet, joined-up strokes moving from right to left for those using Arabic script), before learning how they form letters. While this approach may mean that it is easier to master individual letters initially, it has been criticised for slowing readers down in the long term. People who have been taught to pay attention to individual letters and sound out each one may always see letters individually, and never become fast and fluent readers.

People who support a ‘top-down’ approach to literacy stress that it is easier to recognise or remember things that have meaning. Fluent



readers and writers do not focus on individual letters, and do not remember individual pen strokes. Readers recognise words and groups of words, and are more likely to remember and understand those that are grouped in a way that actually says and means something, i.e. those that are arranged into a sentence, and those that deal with information which the learners are concerned about.

In practice, most people approaching literacy for the first time will use a combination of methods, moving between them to find what works best for them at different times. But regardless of the structure of the language, the alternatives presented in Figure 5.1 can be a useful starting point for considering the best approach. It helps to ascertain whether learners would find it easier to start with the smallest unit in a language and build up from there, or to start with letters or characters that carry a specific meaning and communicate something to the reader.

Figure 5.1:
*Two approaches to
reading and writing"*

'Bottom-up' approaches

Learning letters

Literacy programmes that start with the teaching of letters form part of the 'bottom-up' approach. Classes in languages such as Chinese or Nepali would begin with the strokes that make up a character. Classes in languages like English, which use an alphabet, can begin with the *names* of letters (the alphabetic approach) or the *sounds* of the letters (the phonic approach). As the name and the sound are rarely the same, the value in stressing the names of letters has been questioned.

apple : /a/

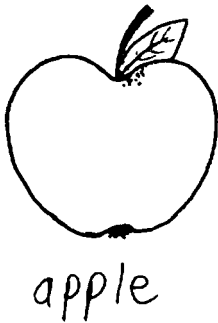


Figure 5.2

It may not be uncommon to hear groups chanting the alphabet, and some learners may expect to have to do this. But merely knowing the alphabet is of little practical use. As an arrangement of letters, it bears no relationship to either their sounds or the frequency with which they are used. Workers who use it in their classes may be imitating the way in which they themselves were taught at school. A better approach to teaching letters is generally to begin with letter *sounds*.

A VSO volunteer in Nepal writes:

The alphabetic method for teaching reading is common in Nepali schools. Children learning to read in English first learn the names of the 26 letters. They then learn to read and spell a word by naming and memorising the letters which compose it. The phonic method has become more acceptable elsewhere ... In trying to understand why Nepali teachers are so hooked on the alphabetic method, (we) questioned (them) ... they said they themselves were confused about the phonics and felt unconfident about using letter sounds, so they felt happier using the letter names and chanting.

Learning sounds

The phonic approach is still one of the most commonly used methods throughout the world. It generally begins by presenting the shape of a letter, and indicating the sound it makes. Sometimes picture alphabets are used as reminders. These present either a letter alongside a picture of something beginning with that letter (Figure 5.2), or a letter form written on top of something that shares its shape (as in figure 5.3). The purpose of combining letters and objects in this way is to attach a meaning to a letter shape and therefore make it easier to remember. While this sometimes happens, the effort to find a meaningful shape for every letter may mean that the links are very artificial. A literacy worker, trying to teach the meaning of the image and the way in which it relates to the letter, as well as the letter itself, is likely to leave learners feeling very confused. If the link is not obvious as an aid to memory, it might be better to avoid stressing it. Primers using this method should be used selectively.

Another danger in this method is that, when learning different letters in pairs, learners will continue to associate them together and will confuse them with each other.

Another method is to group letters according to their sound and their function on a letter chart. This can be done only with a phonetic

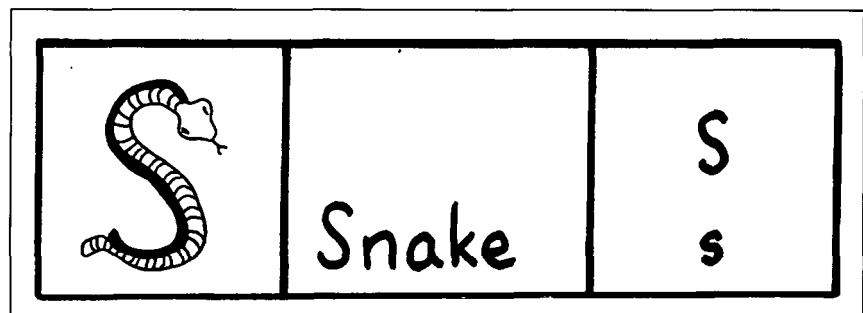


Figure 5.3:
Part of a picture
alphabet

i:	I	U	u:	Iə	eI	!	X
e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔI	əʊ	
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	eə	aI	aʊ	
P	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	K	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

Figure 5.4:
International
Phonetic Alphabet,
arranged according to
letter sounds and letter
functions¹⁵

language, i.e. one in which a single letter represents a single sound. Figure 5.4 uses the international phonetic alphabet. Here the letters have been arranged according to the sounds they represent. The lower half of the chart represents consonant sounds. These have been paired, with similar sounds (such as /p/ and /b/, which are called ‘unvoiced’ and ‘voiced’) arranged next to each other.

The symbols on the top left-hand side of the chart represent vowel sounds. These have also been paired, with long and short vowel sounds (i and i:) arranged next to each other. The symbols on the top right-hand side of the chart represent diphthongs, or ‘double vowel’ sounds. The symbols in the far right-hand square are used to represent stress and intonation. This chart was devised for teaching English to non-native speakers, and is used mainly to correct pronunciation, where stress and intonation are very important.

The chart in Figure 5.5, showing the Pulaar alphabet, has been arranged differently, and is based on columns. The first two columns contain pairs of letters (unvoiced and voiced), and indicate consonant sounds. The third, single column contains the ‘hooked’ letters (pronounced at the back of the throat). The fourth, single column contains the double consonant sounds. The last, paired columns contain letters which represent long and short vowel sounds.

P	b	c	j	ɓ	nd	i	ii
t	d	r	y	ɗ	mb	u	uu
k	g	m	n	ɲ	nj	a	aa
f	w	s		ɠ	gg	o	oo
h	l	ʼ	?	q	ñ	e	ee

Figure 5.5:
A letter chart for the
Pulaar alphabet

The lowest squares of the second column are used for a full stop, a comma, and a question mark. As this chart was devised for teaching writing to native speakers, these were added to show some of the most commonly used punctuation marks. A similar chart could be created, showing capital letters, to enable learners to indicate when and where they might use them; or the blank square could be used to denote 'capitalisation'.

The exact organisation of letters in a chart will vary according to the sounds they represent, and the relationship between sound, letter, and meaning in the language as a whole.

A chart such as Figure 5.5, displayed in a learning room, can serve as a continual reminder of the sounds and shapes of letters. It can be used when presenting new letters or correcting a learner's work. By pointing to the characters on the chart, learners can be encouraged to sound out and spell out new words.

Some programmes begin by teaching vowels (a, e, i, o, u, in a Roman alphabet) and then move on to consonants (b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z). These are then put together in pairs to make sounds, which students are often asked to repeat: ba/be/bi/bo/bu. While this exercise shows how individual letter sounds can be combined to make new sounds, the endless repetition of meaningless sounds is of little value. Many literacy groups spend time chanting together such sequences as

ba/ba/ba/
be/be/be/
bo/bo/bo/ ...

but it is questionable whether anything useful is being learned. In English, where the written language is not phonetic and /bo/ can represent a long sound as in *boot*, a short sound as in *book*, or an open sound as in *boat*, this exercise is worse than useless. In a language such as this, an approach that begins with learning sentences or words may be more effective.

In learning to write letters first, learners need to appreciate the *process* of writing as well as the end product. In writing with a pen or a pencil, letters will eventually be written in groups, and each language has its own common combination of groups. Writing fluently involves joining letters up, and therefore making the individual strokes of a letter in a certain order. Letters are sometimes taught with this in mind, by indicating the direction of pen strokes. (See Figure 5.6.)

Learners will also eventually need to recognise a series of different letter forms (within the Roman alphabet this includes capital and lower-case letters, A and a) and the different appearance of letters in different type faces: a and a. Most writing and reading tasks involve both capital and lower-case letters. It may be easier to introduce capital and lower-case letters at the same time, and not as two separate alphabets.

Although all learners will need to learn individual letters or characters eventually, a programme that begins by teaching letters may take some time to introduce real words or sentences. It can be hard for learners to stay motivated, unless learning is linked in some way to reality.

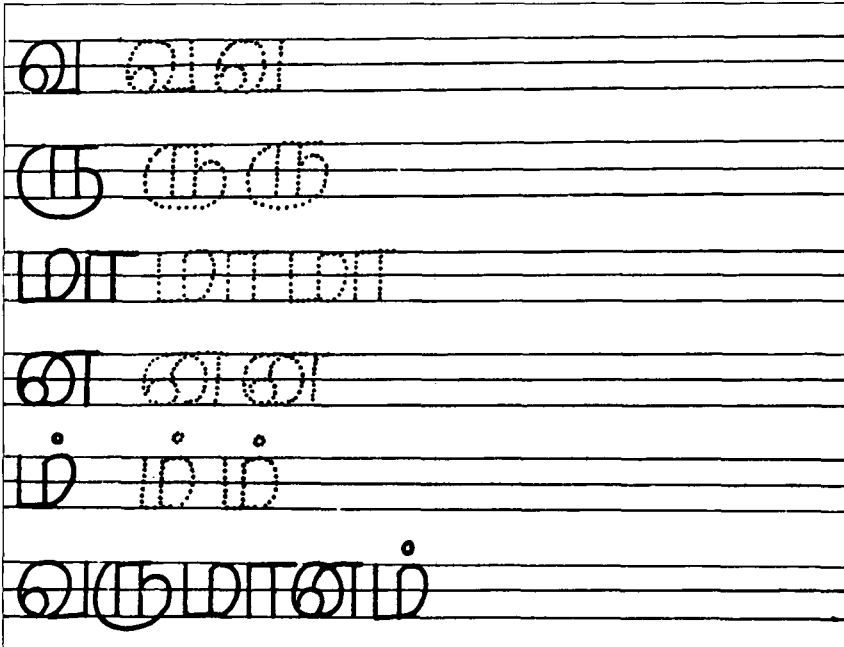


Figure 5.6:
A page from a primer
used in Tamil Nadu,
India

One main reason for using a letter-based approach is its tight and logical structure. Literacy workers can be trained to use it in a relatively short time, and it does not involve a lot of creativity or pre-planned work.

Learning syllables

It is less common for tutors to begin with teaching syllables, though this can work well with languages that have a very definite phonetic and/or syllabic structure, i.e. languages that are written exactly as they sound. Teaching syllables means breaking down languages into the smallest element that can be heard; for example

ra/re/ri/ro/ru.

Once learners become familiar with a number of syllables, they can put them together and use them to create words; for example

re + lay = relay.

This method cannot be used effectively with English, or with languages like Chinese where characters represent the meaning rather than the sound of a word. It can work with traditionally oral languages that have been written down with an orthography which matches the sound. It can also be used with some long-established phonetic languages, such as Spanish, where the spelling of a word is accurately based on its sound:

ten-go que a-pren-der a es-cri-bir.

However, there is a danger that people learning in this way will get stuck in the habit of sounding out every syllable as they read, and not see words and sentences as whole units. This method sets up an association

between writing and speech (i.e. sound), rather than between writing and meaning.

As a relatively simple, tightly structured approach, teaching syllables is generally more popular with tutors and literacy workers than with learners. It is often used in connection with other methods, particularly with the teaching of key words (see below).

‘Top-down’ approaches

Learning words

An approach that begins with individual words can focus either on ‘decoding’ (or recognising) written word patterns, or on reading for meaning. The first is closer to the ‘bottom-up’ way of looking at language. The second tends to see words as the smallest meaningful unit in written language, and then works downwards. Both can be used with ideographic and phonetic languages.

As a method, learning whole words is often part of a highly controlled approach to literacy, and generally begins with reading rather than writing. In almost every language, about 80 per cent of almost everything that is written consists of a vocabulary of around 100 to 150 words. Some reading schemes introduce students to these most common words first. The schemes are based on the belief that new readers will feel more confident when they can understand a large proportion of a written text. But learners who are taught to approach text in this way are still generally ‘decoding’ what they see in front of them, and not reading for meaning. The common words in a language (words like *a*, *and*, *but*, *the*, *if*, *not*, etc. in English) carry very little meaning in isolation. It is the new or individual words (such as nouns and verbs) that give the most useful clues to what the text is about. Learners who begin with ‘common word’ patterns will not easily develop strategies to decipher the new words.

Some schemes are based on a set vocabulary, which is introduced at predetermined intervals: for example, five words in the first lesson, and 15 per lesson after that. They may use a lot of repetition to reinforce the new words, and ‘look and say’ activities such as seeing and naming words. Words are often written out on individual cards (called ‘flash cards’ in English), to be flashed in front of learners in an attempt to establish familiar visual patterns which they will then remember. It is a highly structured approach, emphasising repetition and familiarity, rather than treating written language as something which is meaningful.

An alternative to this is the ‘key word’ approach. It still begins with individual words, but it uses words that have a particular significance for the people learning them, rather than words that are common or easy to learn. Research has shown that adults and children can and do learn to recognise long and complex words without difficulty, if they want or need to read or write them.

The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, developed the use of what he called ‘generative words’ for literacy learning. These were words which he felt had a particular cultural or social significance for the group, such



*Paulo Freire
(second from right) at
a literacy workshop in
Brazil.*

Photo: Oxfam

as 'poverty', 'homelessness', or 'fear'. The words were used as a springboard for discussion at the beginning of each teaching session, and often in connection with an image depicting an aspect of the learners' life.

A picture is shown to the group, who are encouraged to discuss it and to question the concepts which are 'codified' or embedded within it. Sometimes the key word is presented to the group by the teacher; sometimes it arises out of the group's discussion of the picture. But the word is eventually written up, repeated, and broken down into syllables and then letters. The syllables can be used to create other words, in which learners might be encouraged to identify individual letters — and the letters are used to write new words.

Freire stressed that reading is more than understanding written language. It entails gaining an understanding of the social, economic, and political situation in which the learners find themselves, and the causes behind that situation. By using 'generative words', he encouraged his groups to question not only written information, but the potential for change within their lives. By starting with words that were emotive and meaningful, he aimed to ensure that reading and writing could be more closely associated with central issues in people's lives.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner, who taught Maori children in New Zealand, used a different word-based approach to literacy. She asked individual children to choose the words they wanted to learn. Each chosen word was then written on a card and given to the child to 'keep'. If the child misbehaved, the words were taken away as a punishment, and later returned as rewards. Each child built up a store of his or her own words which, because they were personally meaningful, were seldom forgotten. They were used as a basis for creative writing, where the children were encouraged to develop their thoughts and ideas around

the words they had chosen. The '100 most common words' in a language were therefore taught incidentally, as children put their 'significant words' into sentences.

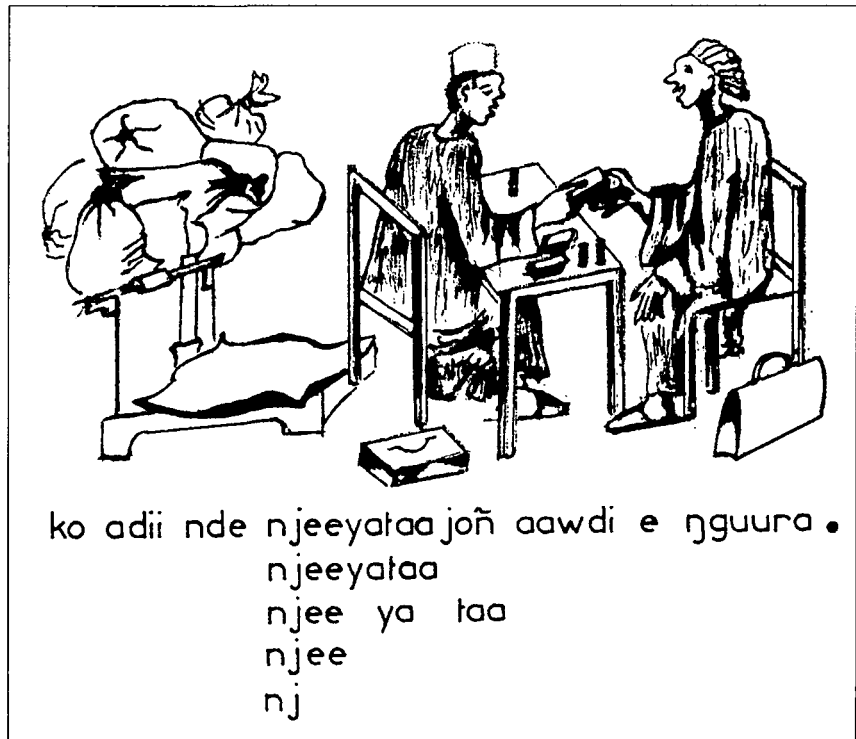
Learning sentences

An approach that starts with learning sentences is often known as a 'global method'. It is based on the idea that a sentence is the smallest 'whole thought', and therefore the most meaningful and easiest to remember. While this may be true, and the approach aims to work with 'meaningful material', learners may still find themselves memorising and repeating sentences, rather than actually reading them, for quite a long time.

Tutors working in a less structured way often begin with a picture or image, as in the 'key word' approach. The discussion of this image may take up a large part of the learning session. From this the group formulates its own key sentence, to sum up what has been said. Where this method is based on the work of Freire, which was originally designed for use in Portuguese — a syllabic language — the key sentence is then often broken down into words, syllables, and eventually letters. In this way, students are introduced to the different units which make up written language.

It is more common to find this method used with images and key sentences prepared in advance and published as a primer, with a number of learning exercises. The images can still be used in discussion in a

Figure 5.7:
'Before selling grain,
keep back enough for
seed and for food': a
page from a Pulaar
primer, showing a key
sentence, a key word,
a key syllable, and
today's key letter



similar way, but the key sentence may have been designed to introduce specific new letters, and the various exercises already worked out. The sentences therefore give a predetermined interpretation of the image. (See Figure 5.7.)

As a teaching method, the 'key sentence' approach has been widely and successfully used. Tutors working with it are generally taught to plan each lesson round a set image, a sentence, and a subsequent exercise. It is relatively easy to introduce to new tutors with the minimum amount of training. Literacy workers are able to lead their groups through the primer, and need few other materials. However, such pre-structured sessions do less to encourage independence or involvement on the part of the learners, and do not leave space for them to consider what they want to learn. Instead, this approach prepackages the views of the planners about what and how much can be covered in one time.

The REFLECT methodology

In 1993, ACTIONAID began an action research project to explore the possible uses of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) within adult literacy programmes. This has led to the development of the REFLECT methodology: Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques. REFLECT seeks to build on Freirean theory, but provides a structured methodology to help learners to achieve their goals.

In a REFLECT programme there are no primers, and no pre-printed materials, apart from the facilitator's guide. Each literacy class develops its own learning materials, by constructing maps, matrices, calendars, and diagrams, representing different aspects of community experience. In Uganda, for example, these range from a gender-workload calendar to a *crop-ranking matrix, constructed on the ground by the whole group, using local materials (sticks, flowers, stones, etc.)*.

This process pools and organises learners' existing knowledge, promoting detailed analysis of local issues. It helps the literacy worker to structure the dialogue, by handing over the process to the participants, and not being forced to lead the group to a prescribed conclusion. It is, in addition, an enjoyable activity for adult learners.

After the calendar or diagram has been constructed, the literacy worker replaces the sticks and stones with visual cards; this is the first stage of literacy. The diagram is then transferred to a large piece of paper, using the visual symbols already agreed by the class. At this stage the literacy and numeracy activities formally begin.

Learners label and number the diagram, use words and phrases from their discussion for practice in reading and writing, and are soon able to write independently, experimenting with various combinations of the syllables and words covered. The course is planned so that basic syllables (in the language chosen by the learners for literacy) can be taught in a logical order, but everything comes from the vocabulary universe of the learners themselves. People who advocate the method claim that the vocabulary is easy to retain, because it occurs in a meaningful context.

*A work-load exercise
in Uganda:
participatory rural
appraisal in action.*

Photo: Sam Gonda



Supplementary 'real' reading materials are also introduced on the themes covered in the discussions, so that learners can practise at home. In Uganda, low-cost printing of learner-generated materials has already begun, and this is seen as a major contribution to sustaining literacy. In addition, every literacy class and every individual has a detailed record of their discussions, in both visual and written forms.

The REFLECT project has been run initially as a two-year pilot in very different contexts. In Uganda, it is operating in a multilingual area where neither of the two main local languages was previously written down. In Bangladesh, it is being used in women's savings and credit groups in a conservative Islamic area. In El Salvador it has been piloted with a grassroots NGO led by former guerrillas.

Learning what you need (the Language Experience Approach)

Another way of working from the language of learners, which has been used over a longer period of time in industrialised countries, is the 'Language Experience Approach'. In this system, a learner says what she or he wants to see written down. It might be a short phrase, a sentence, or even several sentences. The learner often goes on to dictate it, while the tutor copies it, and then uses the text as the basis for a variety of learning exercises. The learner can be encouraged to 'read' individual words in sequence. The words can then be cut up and identified separately. Words can be copied, analysed into letters or sounds, or used in other combinations to make different sentences.

The Language Experience Approach can be used with two people working together, or by a literacy worker with a group (in which case, individuals take turns to dictate the material that will form the basis of the learning).

This approach has considerable advantages. It gives the learners some power: from the beginning they are the ‘creators’ as well as the ‘decoders’ of the written word. It takes some of the mystique out of writing. It makes strong connections between written and spoken language. But this approach presents its own difficulties. Working with language generated by the students requires a lot more skill and creativity on the part of the tutor. Literacy workers cannot prepare their lessons in advance in the same way as they can when using a primer. They need to be creative and inventive in order to turn any fragments of language into learning exercises, and to break them down and build them up in a way that the class can manage.

In most languages, the way people write is different from the way people speak. Taking a Language Experience approach means that literacy workers have to be aware of, and ready to explain, these differences. They need the confidence to abandon any formal approaches to teaching which they may have remembered from school, and to work with what the learners need.

In the same way, learners need more confidence in themselves, and their own ability to tackle the literacy tasks relevant to their needs. Without a primer to read between classes, they have to be encouraged to practise their literacy on the written words, signs, notices, and leaflets which they find around them. They will have to bring in with them material which they can recognise, or want to read, rather than take out with them material that development workers feel they ought to read.

Using the Language Experience Approach is certainly a risk. It puts fewer demands on material resources, and higher demands on human resources. Literacy workers will need longer and more thorough training courses. They will need the time and support to experiment, and the opportunity to be creative.

But while the risks are higher, the rewards are also higher. Learners are involved in creating materials from the beginning. Some of this can be copied and used by others (see the section on learner-generated materials in Chapter 10). The learning of literacy is linked, from the beginning, to the practice of literacy in real situations in people’s lives. The repetition and rote learning that often accompanies primers is replaced by breaking down and building up the things that people really need to write or read.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an outline of some of the methods used for teaching literacy. It will be clear that the writers of this book tend to favour those methods where students are given as much choice as possible in determining what and how they will learn. In this way, their motivation is likely to be greater than cases where they simply follow what they are told to do, or where they repeat letters, sounds, or syllables by rote. However, given the great complexity of the world’s languages

and cultures, any choice must take the local language and cultural practices into account. Without this, it is not possible to make a choice at all. Even then, the choice of literacy method is often controversial, and it may be best to experiment with a combination of methods according to circumstances.

Learning numbers and reading images

Traditional and indigenous concepts of number

Approaches to teaching numeracy are usually based on the traditional conception of maths in the Western world. They generally start by representing quantity:

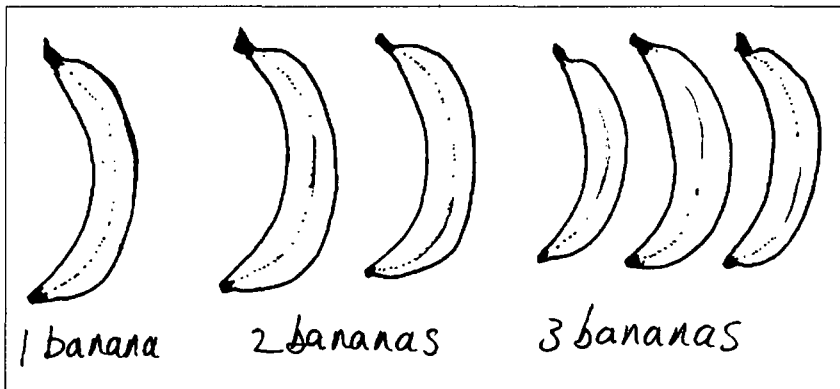


Figure 6.1

and move on to addition and subtraction:

$$1 \text{ banana} + 2 \text{ bananas} = 3 \text{ bananas}$$

These are presented as traditional 'sums':

$$1 + 2 = 3$$

or as problem-solving activities:

You are given four bananas; your brother eats one; how many have you got left?

Approaches of this kind start by assuming either that learners know nothing, or that what they know is based on a Western conception of number. The truth is, of course, that systems of 'indigenous mathematics' have served people well for thousands of years in their daily lives: every culture has evolved ways of dealing with quantitative problems, such as calculating time, distance, weight, number, and value.

Exploring Teaching and Learning

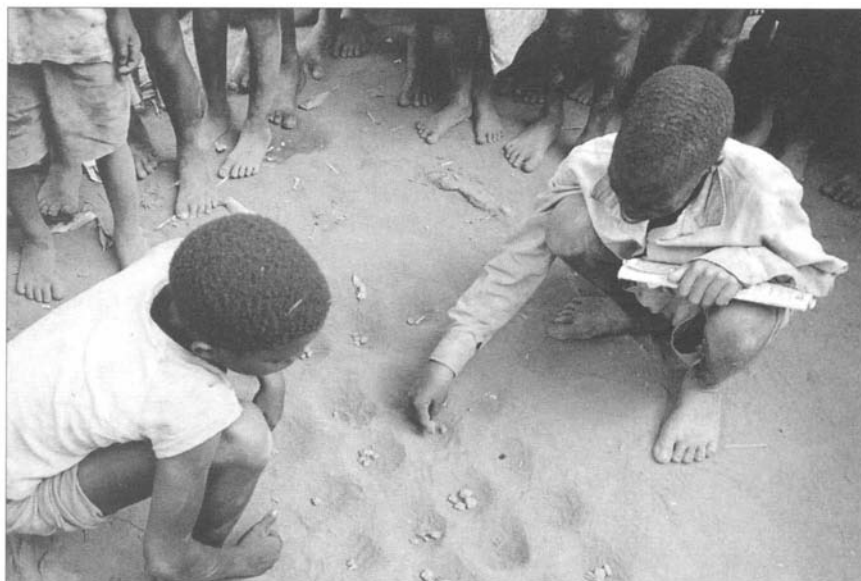
A recognition that people everywhere have to deal with quantitative problems in some way provides a different starting point to the teaching of formal numeracy.

When starting to plan a survey to assess numeracy needs, it will be useful to look at any research that might have been done into local methods of calculating. This can be explored further by taking a problem-solving approach.

L.S. Saraswathi did some research in India, investigating how adults without literacy skills solved daily quantitative problems. She looked at riddles, stories, songs, and games for evidence of localised modes of learning. Children's rhymes, clapping games, or jumping games often show how they learn to mark time or deal with turn-taking. Riddles give some insight into local approaches to problem-solving. Saraswathi asked how people perceive time, and how they measure time. She began by asking which of a series of events takes most time (to drink a glass of water, to pass something to someone in front of you, to walk to the next village) and how people described the amount of time which each event took. She asked people when they were born, when their children were born, and how they determined age. She looked at how people recorded events in the past, how they kept records of money and accounts, and how they calculated profit and loss in the market place.

A children's counting game in Mozambique. Every culture has evolved ways of dealing with the quantitative problems of daily life.

Photo: Susie Smith



Problem-solving approaches to teaching numeracy

A good way to access local knowledge is to begin a class with an everyday problem and ask the group to solve it.

- How do you decide on the amount of seed needed to sow a field?
- If you had to sow your brother's field also, how much seed would you need?
- If you had to sow the fields of everyone in this room, how much seed would you need?

The group may want to work with an abacus, or beads, shells, or stones to show how they would deal with their problem. Numeracy and number work are about relationship and representation, the representation of a quantity with a figure, and the relationship of one number to another. Each culture will have its own way of representing quantity. Many will have developed their own system of representation, by cutting notches in wood or collecting beads in jars. Learners will be familiar with the convention of representing one thing with another. They can be encouraged to discuss their indigenous codes and compare them with numerical representation.

Beginning with problems provides some insight into what knowledge local people already have, and what knowledge they might want. Encouraging learners to solve problems aloud, by talking through the various steps used in solving a numerical problem, reveals the strategies they currently use, and where they might be going wrong.

Learners should be encouraged to work with real problems, or those that simulate real situations. It is generally preferable to use examples which learners themselves have suggested, or situations they will actually need to deal with in their lives. It may be difficult for them to see the point in tackling unfamiliar problems, such as the following:

I buy a jacket costing £25.00. If I find a similar one in another shop that is £5.00 cheaper, how much does the second jacket cost?

Though questions like these may be familiar to people who have been through formal schooling, they are of little value in rural contexts. Even if learners are in a position to buy an expensive jacket and deal with fixed-price goods, it is unlikely that they will need to work out this problem in this way.

Estimating

Adults without formal numeracy skills may be used to calculating by instinct, touch, or feel. They may know the amount of water and time needed to irrigate a field, or when meat is cooked, without being able to attach a numerical quantity to it. Estimating is an important skill in itself, when checking whether or not the answer to a mathematical sum is correct. It is useful to make a connection between the informal

estimations which people make naturally, by eye, and the more formal processes of measuring amount, quantity, size, time, or value.

For example, when introducing concepts of distance, ask learners to estimate how far it is in yards/miles/metres/kilometres between where they are sitting and the chalk board, between their house and the literacy building, between the literacy building and the hospital, between the village and the capital, between one country and another.

When introducing formal concepts of capacity, show the learners a number of containers. Ask them to lay these out in order of size, from the smallest to the largest. Ask them to estimate the capacity (in pints, millilitres, or litres) of each container.

Giving the learners actual examples helps to make use of their natural ability to estimate, while at the same time making the concept of numbers real.

Number functions

Recognising numbers

After the literacy worker has identified a real problem that learners need to solve, the task should be broken down into the various skills or actual number tasks that are involved. One of the first of these is recognising, understanding, and writing the number shapes themselves.

Common problems

Initially learners may have problems with similar numbers, such as 6 and 9, 3 and 8 — especially if they have a tendency to write numbers back to front or upside down. In writing two-, three-, or four-digit numbers, learners need to understand the importance of number order; for example, 27 is different from 72.

Many learners have problems with the concept of nought or zero. The use of 0 in large numbers (730/2016/500, etc.) needs to be carefully explained and linked to real-life examples (such as the difference between 5, 50, and 500 people).

In order to understand large numbers, learners need to be familiar with the number-base used. In the formal system of the majority of countries and cultures, the base is 10; but this may not be the case with indigenous counting. A simple abacus, either made of wood or marked out with stones on the sand, is useful in explaining this.

When dealing with time (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years), and with money in some cultures, units of ten no longer apply. For example:

$$20 \text{ hours} + 35 \text{ hours} + 7 \text{ hours} = 62 \text{ hours (not 6 days and 2 hours)}$$

$$25 \text{ days} + 10 \text{ days} + 23 \text{ hours} + 5 \text{ hours} + 1 \text{ day} = 36 \text{ days and 28 hours} = 37 \text{ days, 4 hours}$$

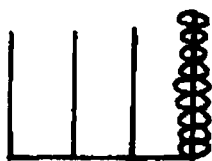


Figure 6.2:
An abacus. If space is allowed for only nine beads or stones in each section, it can be demonstrated that ten can be represented by just one bead in the next section.

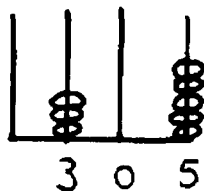


Figure 6.3:
An abacus is also useful for demonstrating the concept of 0 in large numbers.

Once learners are able to recognise and understand number concepts, they need to begin to manipulate the four basic number functions, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and to appreciate the connections between them:

$$4 + 3 = 7, 7 - 3 = 4$$

$$3 + 3 + 3 + 3 = 4 \times 3$$

$$4 \times 3 = 12, 12/3 = 4$$

But these should be demonstrated by using examples and within the context of real problems.

- Can you estimate how much material you need to make a dress?
- Can you measure how much?
- How much does it cost per metre?
- How much will it cost for the number of metres you need?
- How much will it cost to make two dresses, one for your sister?
- Your sister is smaller, and will need one metre less material. How much money can you take off?
- Do you need to buy anything else, such as cotton or buttons? How much will it cost?
- Divide the cost equally between you and your sister.

It is important to work out problems in advance, before presenting them to learners, and to anticipate the obstacles they might encounter. These may be cultural as well as numerical; for example, is it acceptable to charge a sister for the materials for her dress? Do traders in the marketplace measure in yards, metres, or arm's length?

Language

People who have been through formal schooling often adopt the special language used to describe number functions and the various steps involved in working out number problems. Some of the familiar phrases used in English schools include formulas like:

'Five into three won't go.'

'Put down the one and carry five.'

'Two plus seven makes nine.'

'Five times two is ten.'

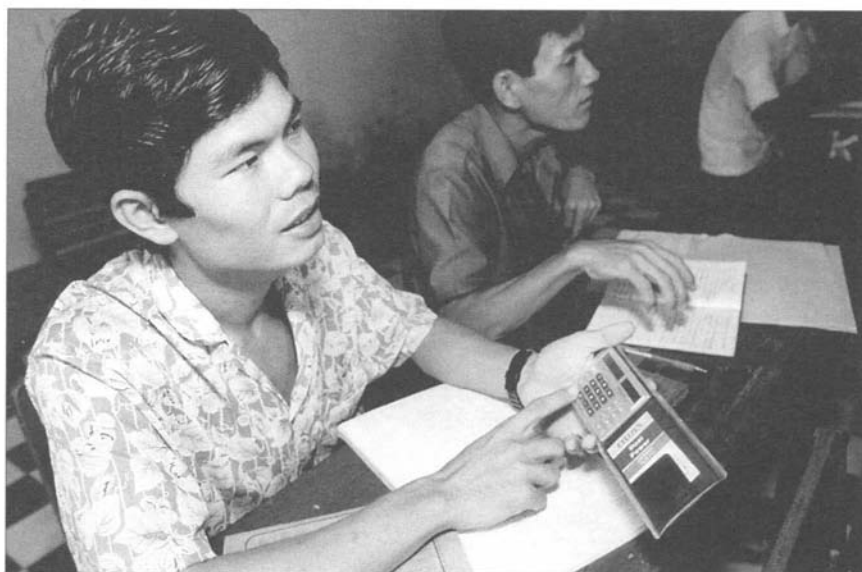
This language can be confusing to learners who are unfamiliar with it. In itself it doesn't mean anything and needs to be explained. Similarly, when solving problems with learners, literacy workers need to take care to explain the steps they are working through. The unconscious use of mental arithmetic or multiplication tables can seem like magic and cause confusion when a learner is trying to get to grips with a problem.

Using calculators

Calculators are now in use almost everywhere in the world, and they are likely to form part of any numeracy programme. However, before being taught to use one, learners need to be familiar with what numbers are and what they can do. If learners are encouraged to use calculators in a merely mechanical way, they may fail to grasp the relationship between the numbers and the things which they represent.

Using a calculator does not remove the need for mental arithmetic.

Photo: Mike Goldwater



When using a calculator, learners need to understand several more or less sophisticated procedures:

- how to turn a calculator on and off;
- how to enter numbers (0-9, 10-100, etc.);
- how to enter sums of money, especially money not based on units of 10;
- how to cancel or change something that has been wrongly entered;
- how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide two numbers;
- how to add or multiply three or more numbers;
- the largest number that a calculator can show;
- what the numbers mean in real life.

Learners will also need to perform some mental arithmetic, in order to estimate whether the answer given by their calculator is a realistic one (since it is easy to tap in a wrong number or a wrong command). They need to know how to extract the actual number-functions from a problem, and how to convert numbers back into real concepts. For example:

A group of 75 people have decided to contribute towards a loan fund. They will make contributions every month, and every month one member can apply to use the money for something they need. If they contribute three shillings each a month, how much can each person borrow? If everyone needs to take turns to borrow money, how often can one person borrow?

$75 \times 3 =$ money available each month.

$75/12 =$ years before one person is able to use the fund a second time.

Keeping accounts

Throughout history, literacy has been associated with trade and the need to keep records of produce sold. In many cultures, writing systems were developed initially as a system of accounting. In areas where co-operatives and credit groups are operating, members will need either to understand an existing system of book-keeping or to establish one for themselves.

Farmers involved in cultivating will need to keep records of:

- the supply of inputs
- the means of production
- costs involved in the management of water (fuel for a motor pump, a depreciation fund for a pump or sprinkler, etc.)
- weight of produce stored
- weight of produce sold
- value of produce stored and sold.

Savers involved in a credit group will need to keep records of:

- subscriptions from members
- interest paid on subscriptions (if any)
- withdrawals made by members
- the balance of the fund.

Any co-operative or group will have a treasurer responsible for the keeping of accounts, but in an equitable system all members will want to understand what is being done with their money.

Learners new to accounting need to understand the function of accounts, as well as learning how to keep them. Using them effectively entails dealing with addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and decimals; it can involve quantities of time, weight, money, liquid measure, size, distance — in fact, most quantitative measures and most number functions. It means understanding the significance of recording information vertically, in columns, instead of horizontally, and learning the language and concepts of credit, debit, and deficit. Learners may need significant practice in different forms of accounting, book-keeping, or stock-taking before working on the real thing.

Farmers in Senegal were introduced to the value of book-keeping by working first on personal account sheets. These were record sheets kept by individuals, listing hours worked in their field and any money spent on their crop. The number of sacks harvested and any money gained from selling produce were recorded on the same sheet. Learners were introduced to the idea over a season, and had weekly practice in filling in the sheet. By the end of the season, they had sufficient skills to calculate their profits and their losses.

The results of the end-of-year calculations showed the amount of time and the costs incurred in cultivating different crops. They also showed the relative profits and yields involved. Comparisons could be made between different agricultural practices used by different group members. Farmers could see for themselves whether the inputs involved in, for example, irrigated agriculture were justified by the yield, and estimate the risks they had taken when investing money in fertiliser or pesticide. Recording the amount of money spent on the cultivation of a particular crop helped them to make decisions about what to cultivate the following year, and what and when to sell. The fluctuating price of grain indicated whether investing money in storing produce and selling later made good economic sense. The exercise gave the learners not only practice in the number skills used in accounting, but greater insight into the uses and value of book-keeping. By calculating actual and possible profits and losses, they were able to make more informed choices about how much to spend on inputs, and assess the need for paying into an insurance fund.

Figure 6.4:
A basic accounts sheet
used by farmers in
Senegal (translated
from Pulaar)

Individual record sheet					
Name _____			Crop _____		
Date	Hours of work	Expenses	Sacks harvested	Sacks sold	Income

Reading images

It is often wrongly assumed that people without literacy skills will understand pictures or photographs. While this may be true for those who have grown up in an urban environment, where advertising boards and magazines are common, it is not always true for the villager. But using literacy will generally mean encountering images, pictures, or ideograms at some stage. Newspapers, catalogues, information leaflets, and advertising material all use pictures and written text alternately. Some literacy primers are based on using words to accompany pictures; but it is a mistake to assume that the pictures will be understood automatically: it may be necessary to introduce the reading of pictures first. This skill includes understanding several crucial facts:

- that the marks made on the page represent something which is probably much larger than the image;
- that pictures tend to translate an outline shape into two dimensions;
- that, while writing is read in a pre-defined direction (left to right, right to left, or top to bottom), pictures are read by looking at the whole image at once.

Village people gain their knowledge through handling, creating, or looking at actual objects or events. When they see a picture, they expect it to contain what they know about the object and not only what they see of the object. A photograph or drawing of a man in which only one leg and one arm is visible will not necessarily be recognised as a man. A drawing of a truck in which only two wheels can be seen will not correspond to what people know about trucks. In an image which shows perspective, two objects of the same size, one farther away than the other, may be perceived as two objects of different sizes. (See Figure 6.5.)

Artists preparing pictures for new learners need to bear such problems of perception in mind, and take care to represent what the learners expect to see. It should be remembered that pictures which contain shading and foreshortening may be read literally: the person may be seen to have a scarred face or a short limb, or lack the limbs which are not visible. (See Figure 6.6.)

Learners need to be introduced to images and taught to read and interpret them, just as they are introduced to words. Pictures should be discussed, comparing what the learner sees with what the image-maker might have intended. Even a simplified drawing, such as Figure 6.7, may rely on conventions which a skilled reader would take for granted — in this case, the use of an arrow to indicate direction.

Advertising campaigns often use non-realistic images, enlarging areas of the picture for effect. This is often the case in anti-malarial health campaigns, where mosquitoes are enlarged to make them more easily recognised. New learners are more likely to interpret such an image literally and fail to recognise a giant mosquito as anything they are likely to come into contact with. In the case of the pesticide advertisement in

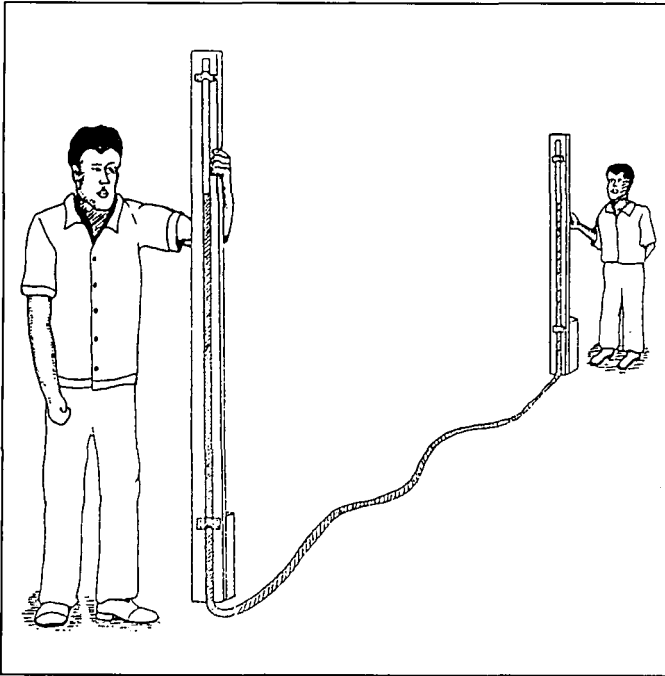


Figure 6.5: Measuring contour-lines: will the exaggerated perspective distract attention from the technique?

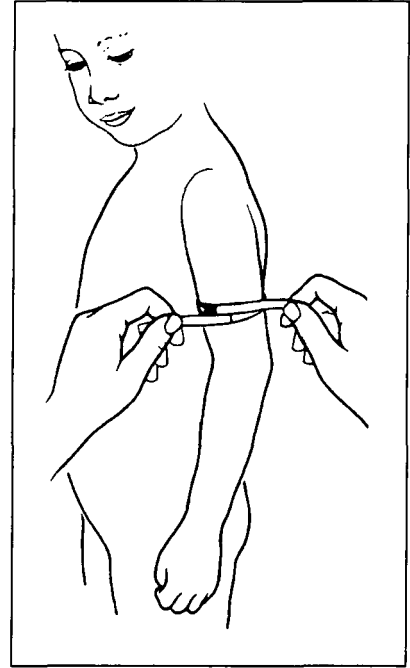


Figure 6.6: Measuring mid-upper arm circumference: will the child be seen as having only one arm?

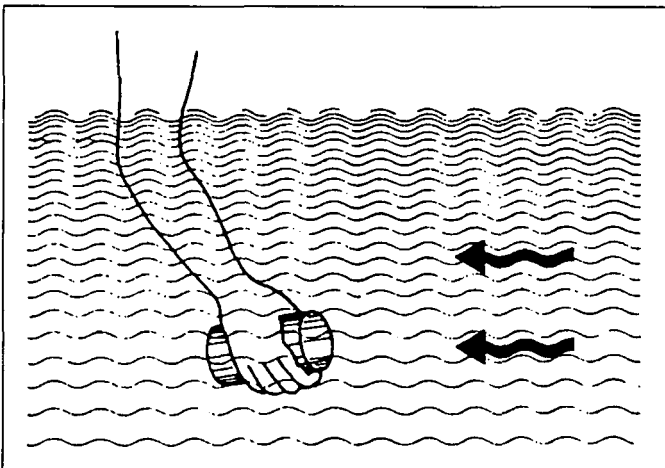


Figure 6.7: Taking a water sample against the flow of the current: will the arrows be read literally by learners unfamiliar with this convention?

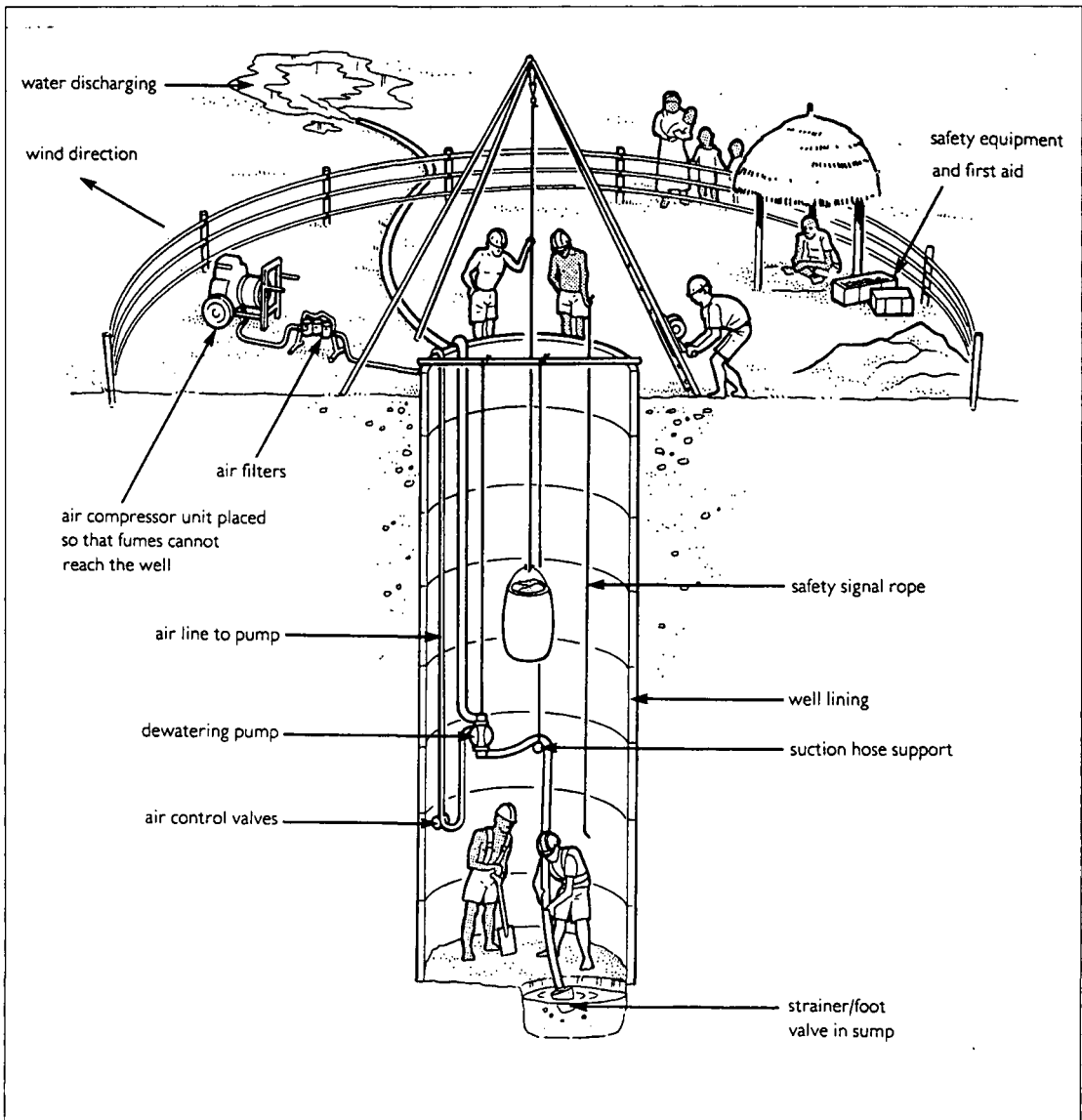


Figure 6.8: Pesticide advertisement: will farmers identify the giant beetle as a real threat?

Figure 6.8, it is open to question whether farmers will identify the giant insect as a real threat, or even identify themselves with the stylised depiction of a farmer.

Technical advisers such as agricultural engineers may make use of cross-sectional diagrams in drawing irrigation canals or construction diagrams. Mechanics may need to understand a diagram of a tractor engine or a motor pump. If learners are introduced to the conventions used in these diagrams, and taught to interpret them, the drawings can be a useful tool in future learning. (See Figure 6.9.)

Figure 6.9:
Cross-section of a well, carrying vital information, but requiring sophisticated skills of interpretation



Learners will already have their own way of representing objects that are familiar to them. In helping them to interpret unfamiliar pictures, it is useful to start with their own pictures. Every culture has its own way of representing concrete things in two dimensions. Learners should be encouraged to bring examples from their own local culture to share with the literacy group. It would be even more interesting to encourage them to draw their own: this will mean that the group will have to work out together how to represent such features as distance and perspective.

Reading maps

Development workers, beginning to work in an area for the first time, often ask community members to draw a map of their village. This process helps to give the worker an 'insider's' view of a community, and an indication of the relative importance of individual people, buildings, or places within the village. When asked to present a picture of their village, people will generally draw in the important places largest, or first. But remember that the concept of translating a large area into a small, two-dimensional representation of that area may be new in some cultures, and handled differently in others.

The exercise of asking people to map their village is valuable on many levels. It challenges them to think about how to make visual representations. It begins to introduce the idea of two-dimensional drawing and of scale. It is a useful first step from which to move on to maps of an area, region, country, or continent.

When introducing people to maps, it is helpful to bear in mind the following guidelines:

- Start small: begin with their own representation of their village, or part of a village.
- Introduce new roads or buildings gradually, relating them to what people already know.
- Build up from this, by adding on adjoining villages, and then showing a whole region.
- Whatever maps are introduced, always start by putting in the places which people know, and relating other places to the named locations.

Remember that a map is a complex visual picture, and reading it requires a lot of skill.

Planning a session

Setting goals

While the general aims of a literacy programme will be decided on by the learners at the beginning (see Chapter 3), a plan and specific goals also need to be set for each session. This involves thinking in advance about the best way to spend the time together, and having some idea of what should be achieved by the end of it.

Some literacy workers follow a tightly structured plan with clear goals. The danger of this is that what they intend to teach may become more important than what is actually learned. They may stick rigidly to their plans, regardless of whether or not the learners are interested, involved, or clear about what is happening. Working in this way may make the literacy worker feel good, but it is of less value to the learners.

Other literacy workers completely disregard the need for a session plan, and wait for the learners to decide how to spend the time. While this may be effective when working with individuals, it is much more difficult with a group. Discussions can move without purpose between unrelated bits of information, and the learners may be left wondering what they have learned. Having invested a lot of effort in making time for the session, they will soon lose motivation or their confidence in the authority of the literacy worker.

It is generally helpful to decide in advance on goals for a session. This means thinking about what would be useful for the learners and what could be realistically achieved in the time available. Once goals are set, literacy workers can outline the various steps and activities that will enable learners to reach them. They can also ensure that they have the tools and materials necessary to cover these steps. A good session plan consists of

- clear goals;
- an outline of the steps and activities to reach them;
- the approximate time the activities will take;
- a list of necessary materials.

A good plan will also leave time to review things learned in the previous session, to discuss areas of particular importance to the learners, and to look forward to what might be achieved during the following session.

Some examples of **goals** set in advance might include

- understanding the headlines and main information from a newspaper story;
- recognising and writing the most important place names from the story, and finding them on a map of the town.

Steps to achieve them might include

- recognising letters/words/syllables from the headlines;
- predicting the content of the story;
- discussing with the group their knowledge of the event;
- working in small groups to find familiar words in the story;
- following the text, while the literacy worker reads the story;
- choosing the place names that are useful and writing them;
- identifying familiar places on a map;
- locating new place names on the map.

Materials needed will include

- newspaper headlines written large enough for everyone to see, perhaps on a chalk board;
- one copy of the newspaper story for each small group;
- pencil and paper for each learner;
- a large map;
- possibly smaller copies of the map for each group to work on.

Setting goals and outlining a session plan generally help to give a literacy worker confidence. But a plan should never be so rigid that it cannot be changed if it seems not to be working, or if something more important arises. Learners will have their own goals, which will change regularly; things will come up which they may prefer to discuss; activities may need to be abandoned, if time runs out.

Learners are always more important than session plans, but a session with no goals may not get anywhere at all.

Writing a session plan

People learn best when they are active rather than passive. A range of learning activities should help learners to exercise and build on the understanding they already have, in order to discover new things, and to practise and improve upon their skills. But it is difficult for people to concentrate for long periods of time on one thing. A session plan should try to change the activity about every twenty minutes, and to shift the focus from activities which are led by the literacy worker to those which entail people working alone or with each other.

A plan for the session just described might look like this:

Goals: Understanding a story; identifying individual words; copying words; using a map.

Steps: Reading headlines; predicting story; understanding story; finding individual words; writing place names; locating these on a map.

Materials: A copy of the story for each group; a large map; a small map; cards with place names written on them.

Time	Activity	Notes
18.00	Present headlines to group. Group identify familiar letters/syllables/words. Read headlines.	Write on board in advance.
18.15	Small-group discussion of the story. Relate back to whole group.	In groups of 3?
18.35	Read story, learners follow text.	Give out copies. Trace in the air and then copy in books.
18.45	Discussion as whole group of events in text.	
19.00	In pairs, finding place names in texts.	
19.15	Write up place names; learners copy.	
19.35	Introduce group to map. Individuals identify places.	Put up large map.
19.45	Give out copy of maps; in pairs: how many places can each pair read/recognise?	
20.00	Add new place names to map.	Learners write without copying.

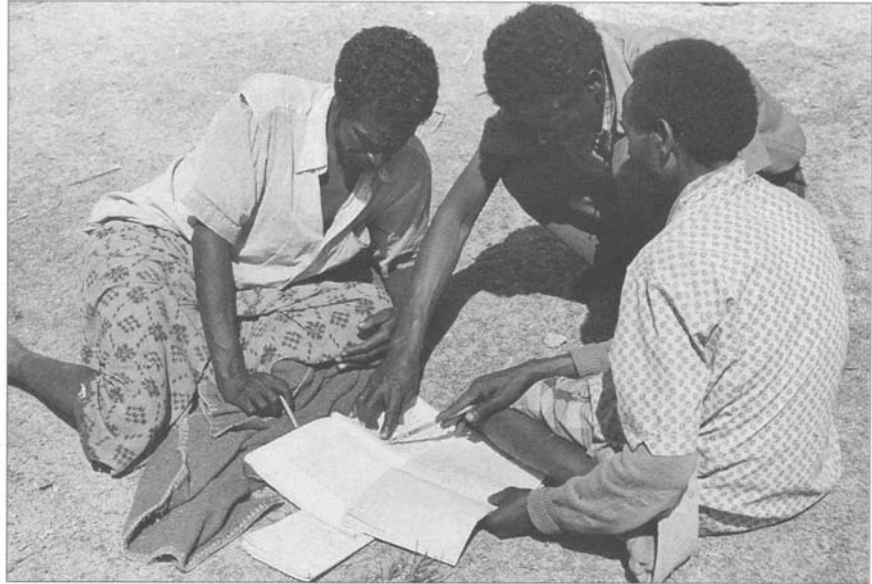
Working in small groups

Certain learning activities are designed to be carried out in small groups and without a literacy worker. Besides providing a change of activity and a shift of focus, they encourage independence in the learners and give them an opportunity to work out something for themselves. Generally it means learners doing things at their own pace, rather than listening to the literacy worker or moving at the pace of the whole group.

Groups become autonomous: people working in pairs, or in threes or fours, have the chance to reflect on their experience, to listen to that of others, and to use that experience to make decisions. Working like this, without a leader, presents the learners with a challenge. If the challenge is demanding or exciting, the learners are more likely to be fully involved and active in solving it. Such a task demands that they use their creativity to find the answer to a series of problems. They are required to think for

People generally learn best when they are solving problems in small groups — like these men, teaching themselves English in a refugee camp in Somalia.

Photo: Jeremy Hartley



themselves, to discuss and to work together. Most people learn best in this way. When they are fully involved, they are working at their hardest, and more learning is taking place.

The literacy worker may need to intervene to form or change the groups and encourage members to work together. If groups are working on a problem, then everyone in the group needs to be involved. If decisions are made by the group, then every member needs to understand what is happening. If everyone is to learn, then it is important for all group members to listen to each other and respect each other's ideas, regardless of their value, and regardless of the differences of class, caste, or age which may operate outside the learning situation.

While the groups are working on the set task, it is the responsibility of the literacy worker to keep track of the time. When the tasks have been completed, the literacy worker should bring the whole group together again, to check their results against each other's. It is important to value everyone's contribution. A worker who merely provides the 'correct' answer, without discussion, devalues the work which learners have put into the task. Time should be spent analysing and discussing, and discovering how different groups arrived at different solutions. *It is the process of learning, rather than the result, which has the most value.*

Some guidelines for small-group work

- Respect the learners; try to see things from their point of view.
- Encourage a friendly, relaxed working environment.
- Don't give explanations: ask questions.
- Try to ask open questions; for example: *What do you think about ... How did you ... How would you ...?* These are better than questions that need

- one-word answers, such as *Would you ... Did you ...?*
- Give clear instructions to the learners. Make sure they know what they are doing and why they are doing it.
 - Give learners an idea of how long they will have to complete the task.
 - Try to vary the composition of the groups and encourage people to work with everyone at some time; this will help to prevent the same people dominating each small group.
 - Small-group work is a time for the literacy worker to take a back seat. Give clear instructions and then move away from the centre of the room.
 - Keep in touch with the progress of each group; listen in to discussions; be available to clarify the task if the groups need it.

Some basic learning activities

Reading in pairs

This is a reading exercise which uses stronger readers to help less fluent readers. It can also be done by a literacy worker and a learner. It involves reading aloud, but in a way which gives expression to the *meaning* of a text, rather than encouraging straight repetition. It helps learners to read fluently and increase their reading speeds.

- 1 The stronger reader reads the text aloud, with expression, at a normal speed.
- 2 The stronger reader reads the text again, more slowly, giving the learner a chance to follow the words in the text as they are read. This is repeated as many times as necessary.
- 3 The learner reads the text, with the stronger reader following the words. The learner should read as slowly as she or he needs to at first.
- 4 By following the learners as they read, it is possible to notice the words they stumble over, and those they read fluently. It will also show the strategies they use for reading: whether they approach a difficult word by sounding it out, or by guessing according to the context. It will show whether or not the learners understand the meaning of the text as they read, and whether they are able to read it in a way that makes 'sense'.

The stronger reader is able to help the other learner with difficult words. By occasionally joining in, the stronger reader can gradually speed up the other's pace, and help him or her to read with expression and confidence. However, it may take many readings of the text before they are able to do this.

Reading in pairs follows some cultural conventions of reading aloud, but encourages the learners to give meaning to what they read. This technique should be used with care in areas where people are reluctant to read in front of others.

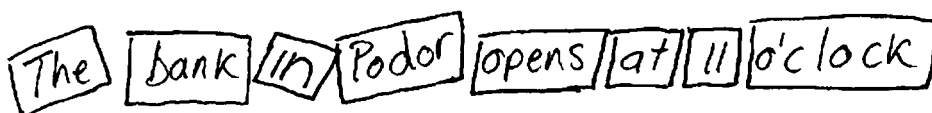
Sentence/word matching

This is a good activity for new learners. It encourages them to look carefully at the shapes made by letters.

- 1 Write down a sentence in letters several centimetres high on a blank sheet of paper.

The bank in Podor opens at 11 o'clock

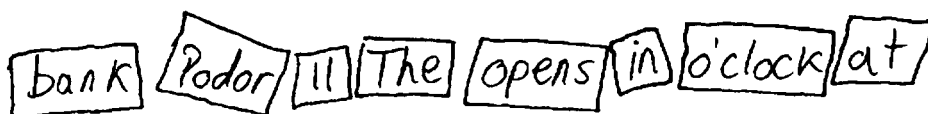
- 2 Write the same sentence again, this time using a small piece of card for each new word.



- 3 Read the sentence aloud to the learners several times, then give each of them one of the individual word-cards.
- 4 Ask them to place 'their' words on top of the same words in the complete sentence; this requires learners to recognise what the word looks like and match it up.
- 5 When all the word-cards have been placed on top of the sentence, read it aloud again, pointing to the individual words as they are read.
- 6 Ask the learners to find a certain word. If this is difficult for them, read the sentence aloud again, pointing to the words as they are read. Continue to do this until the learners are able to identify a word when it is said on its own.
- 7 Later, when the learners are more confident, they can be asked to find individual words from the cards, without using the complete sentence to match them against.

This activity can be done with individuals or groups. If you use sentences suggested by the learners, it helps to ensure that the words which are learned are useful. Once sentences have been learned, they should be kept and used again later for revision.

As the learners become more experienced, they can use individual words from different sentences to make new sentences. Similarly, they can be given a sentence with words written on individual cards, but in the wrong order, and asked to sort it out.



This activity can be converted into a writing exercise by asking learners to choose one of the words and identify the different letters in it. Letters too can be placed in the wrong order for the learners to sort out. Sorting letters is a much more difficult exercise, and should be attempted only with words with a small number of letters.

When learners have become confident in recognising an individual word and some of the letters in it, they can begin to try writing it. They may need to do this first by copying or tracing (see below).

Sentences with beads or sticks

A similar exercise, for more experienced readers, can be carried out using beads to represent individual words. Learners suggest sentences, which the literacy worker represents by using beads or sticks of an appropriate length for individual words. The learners then try to write the words alone or in groups. It is a more meaningful exercise than a spelling test given from a list of words. Representing words in this way encourages learners to focus on one word at a time, and to leave a space for those they cannot spell.

- 1 Suggest a sentence and say it aloud, or ask one of the learners to choose a sentence which they would like to be able to write.
- 2 Say it aloud a couple of times, and then repeat each word in order individually, placing a new bead down in front of the learners for each new word (a small bead for a short word, larger ones for longer words). This will serve to remind learners of the breaks between words, and the number of words in a given sentence.
- 3 Ask the learners to repeat the sentence aloud, pointing to the individual beads as they go.
- 4 Now ask them to write as many of the words as they are able, and to leave gaps for the ones they cannot write.

This exercise can be done with individuals, with a group, or in pairs. If a number of pairs are competing against each other, it can become a game. Once the learners have written as many words as they are able, they can check the answers with each other and correct them; then new words can be taught. The exercise can also be used by the literacy worker to see how much the learners have remembered from earlier classes.

Finding the important words

This exercise encourages learners to listen for meaning and then to find certain words in a written text.

- 1 Read a text aloud to the learners.
- 2 Ask them what the text was about.
- 3 Ask them to suggest the words which they think are important in the text which they have heard.
- 4 Give them the text to look through, and ask them to find the words they have suggested. This can be made easier by telling them the line on which they can find each word.
- 5 When they have found the word, they can try to write it, first by copying and later from memory.

Asking learners to look for certain words in a text introduces them to skim reading: to the idea that they need not read every word in order to find the one they are looking for. Much reading takes place in this way. Looking for information (in a telephone directory, for example) or looking through a longer text to find a specific piece of information (such as the name of the politician involved in a newspaper story) are examples of skimming through a text. Learners should be introduced to the value of this early on, and not feel it is always necessary to read every single word.

This exercise can be used with texts in different type-sizes and different lay-outs, such as lists, continuous writing, and tables. As learners progress, they may need to recognise and use different ways of presenting similar information themselves.

Tracing letters and words

New readers sometimes find it easier to trace a letter or word before trying to write it. Individual letters can be traced in the air, as well as on paper. It has been suggested that making the letter large and tracing it with wide arm movements helps to fix the shape of it in a learner's mind. When working on paper, it is important to start with the letter or word written large enough for learners to trace it, first with their fingers on top of the written word; they can then build up to writing it, by tracing first in pencil on top of the written word, and then copying it underneath, before writing it independently.

As with all these exercises, different learners will progress through them at different speeds. Some learners will need to repeat each stage a number of times before they have the confidence to move on. Other learners may move quickly and then need to go back over the earlier steps on another occasion. People learn in different ways and at different speeds, and their learning styles should be respected.

Searching for answers

This is an exercise for more experienced learners. It encourages them to read for meaning and to do something with the information they read. Students are presented with a written text, and with a number of questions

about that text. The exercise can be done with individuals or with groups, using a text that has been written by one of the learners, or by one from outside. However, the information which learners are asked to look for needs to be relevant and useful to them. It could, for example, be a way of dealing with health information or agricultural extension material.

Presenting learners with written information, and asking them to search for answers to specific questions, alone or in groups, begins to introduce them to the practical value of the skills they are learning. For some learners it may be the first time they have tried to solve problems by using written information, rather than by asking someone or by trying it out for themselves. However, it is important to encourage learners to question and debate the information that is written down, rather than to accept it unquestioningly. In many cultures, the written word is thought to carry great power. A literacy worker needs to be aware of the status which learners accord to written information; this would be a fruitful subject for group discussion.

Problem-solving in pyramids

Problem-solving is an important approach to learning literacy and numeracy skills and encouraging learners to deal with new information co-operatively, without the help of a literacy worker. By breaking up the problem into different steps, it can become a group activity in which learners are able to check their answers with each other as they go.

A 'pyramid' approach starts small and expands: at each stage of the activity, the group of problem-solvers gets bigger. This is often a good way to generate ideas. It gives individuals a chance to reflect on their own, share their ideas with someone else, and then debate them with another group who have followed the same process. As the group grows, so does the issue which they are discussing. This encourages people to report the decisions they have made, justify them, and reach agreement in order to tackle the next question.

- 1 Ask the group to think about the first stage of a problem on their own:
The members of an agricultural co-operative are paying money into a sinking fund, to replace a motor pump. Where could they keep the money while they are saving?
- 2 Ask them then to discuss this with one other person and agree on a realistic answer. Then give them the second set of questions to sort out together:
A savings account at a bank would earn interest at five per cent a year. If the ten members of the co-operative contributed 300 francs each in the first year, how much interest would they get? How much money would they have in total?
- 3 When the pair have had time to discuss this, ask them to work with another pair to compare answers among the four of them. They should try to agree on a realistic plan. Give them the next part of the problem:
How long would it take the group to save the 25,000 francs needed for a new pump? How much interest would be earned over this time?

- 4 Finally they can join together as a whole group and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a bank account, and compare it with other ways of saving money.

Groups may not be able to reach agreement. It is important for the literacy worker to be aware of what is happening, and if necessary move them on. The whole activity can collapse if individuals are in conflict with each other.

Filling the gaps

Providing learners with a story or piece of writing in which certain words have been left out is a good exercise in the skills of reading, understanding, writing, and spelling. It provides practice in all these skills, and can also be used as a testing device. Gap-fill exercises can be based on a learner's own writing, or a specially written story, or an article that learners have already read. The words which are blanked out can be either those that need particular practice, or words which occur at regular intervals (every ninth word, for example). The latter is called a 'Cloze' exercise (although this word is often incorrectly used for any gap-fill exercise). It involves learners in practising a range of different words and encourages them to read fluently and anticipate the missing words.

The easiest way to prepare a gap-fill exercise is to use a copy of the complete text and to cut out or white out the words, leaving a space. Using dashes to indicate the number of letters in the missing word makes the exercise slightly easier:

The women gathered together for a meeting in the ---- centre.

Story-telling

Most oral cultures record history and communicate events through story-telling, and teach moral and cultural values through riddles and proverbs. Story-tellers are often professional in their craft, and stories and legends that have been passed down between generations form part of the common knowledge of a community.

Stories can be used in a literacy class in a number of ways:

- Tell a story and ask learners to write the ending.
- Tell a story first and then read it together.
- Encourage learners to tell a story using beads or stones to represent the main events, and then ask the group to write it down.
- Tell a story to generate discussion about a particular topic or event.
- Tell a story to illustrate a point about teaching or learning, particularly to groups of trainee literacy workers.
- Use a tape recorder to record village story-tellers; transcribe some of the stories over time to contribute to a village library.

Recognising large numbers

Recognising large numbers is always difficult, but particularly so for new learners. Short bursts of regular practice in reading large numbers aloud will help. One way to do this is to build up the number, naming it as each new digit is added.

- 1 Write up a single-figure number and ask the learners to say it aloud: 7.
- 2 Add another figure to the left of the number and ask the learners to say it aloud: 27.
- 3 Add another figure to the left of the number: 327.
- 4 Go on adding numbers to make the whole number grow: 4,327, 64,327, 564,327, 8,564,327, 98,564,327 ... up to the largest number that learners can confidently deal with.

This game can be extended by adding numbers after a decimal point.

Bingo

This is another game which practises number recognition. Give out cards with different numbers written on them in a series of boxes. One person selects numbers at random from another pack of cards which have a single number on each card, and calls them out. Players who can find the number on their card mark it off or cover it over. The first player with all numbers covered is the winner, and should shout out something to claim the victory. The winning player's numbers then need to be checked against those that have actually been called.

Arranging the numbers on cards with spaces in between makes them easier to read. Placing them out of numerical order makes recognition more difficult and the game more challenging. (See Figure 7.1.)

1	9	X	5	4	X
6	X	19	3	X	2
21	X	8	X	11	10

Figure 7.1:
A bingo card

Board games

Board games in which learners throw a dice and move a counter across a board also provide good practice in number recognition and addition: each time a new number is thrown, it is added to the player's existing score.

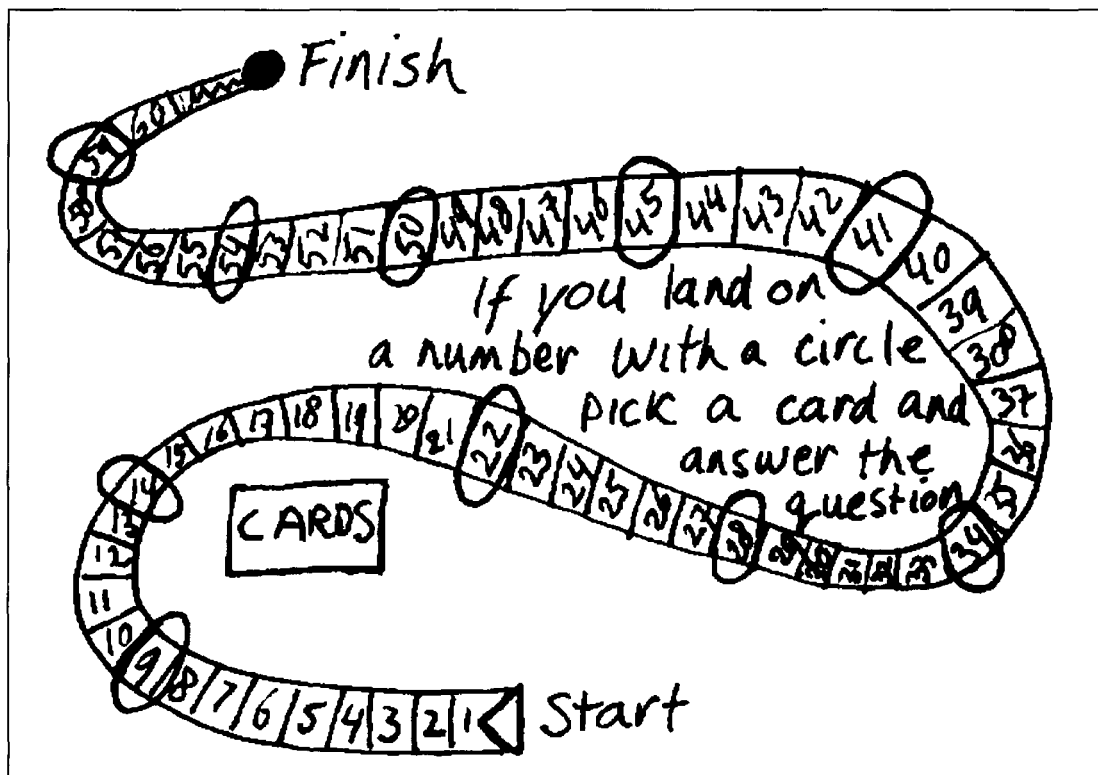
Board games can be made more interesting by building in penalties and advantages. This can be easily done by marking out certain squares where, if players fall on them, they have to pick up a card and answer a question. This adds practice in literacy skills and local knowledge or technical information to the game. If the answer is correct, the player can progress; if it is wrong, he or she goes back to the beginning or misses a turn. Questions will need to be changed regularly; but, once a board has been drawn up, it can be used with many different question packs.

A board game can become a competition if a group of learners is divided into two teams. When one team falls on the question square, the other team asks the question.

Some dice use a series of dots to indicate the numbers on each of the six faces. A dice that uses figures instead of dots is more useful for practising number recognition. Board games can be played with two dice, instead of the usual one. Learners can add, multiply, or subtract the numbers on the dice, to arrive at the number of squares which they should move.

Board games can be used to practise more than one skill at a time, if the literacy worker is inventive enough. Are there any existing local games that might be adapted or used for practising number or letter skills?

Figure 7.2:
A simple board game



Selecting and training literacy workers

Choosing people to be trained as literacy workers is never an easy task. It generally involves weighing up factors such as popularity; an ability to deal with people; fluency in reading and writing in the language of literacy; and a person's commitment, motivation, and availability. Remember that people can be trained to teach things like grammar or multiplication, but the ability to deal sensitively with people takes much longer to acquire.

The role of a literacy worker

The task of a literacy worker is not to hand out knowledge to people who will absorb it without question. Nor are they in any sense superior to those who are learning. They are adults working with other adults, who have already learned many things in their lives. Literacy workers may have different experiences and different knowledge from the other people in their groups. About some things they will know more; about others, less. Their task is to help the group to discover and discuss the things they want to know about, and to practise the skills they want to acquire. Their role is very different from that of the traditional school teacher.

A traditional teacher

- Gives information to a class.
- Expects the group to be passive.
- Asks for obedience.
- Sees students as people needing help.
- Talks down to students.
- Passes on recognised knowledge.
- Views the world from his/her own perspective.
- Makes decisions and tells the group.

A good literacy worker

- Helps the group to discover what they want to know.
- Expects the group to be active.
- Asks for trust.
- Sees students as equals.
- Encourages students to share information with each other.
- Challenges recognised knowledge.
- Tries to see things from the students' perspective.
- Makes decisions with the group.

Selecting literacy workers for training

Here are some guidelines to bear in mind when considering whom to train for literacy work.

- Do they have experience as well as knowledge of literacy and numeracy skills? Consider not only whether they *can* read, but whether they *do* read. Find out not only whether they *can* keep accounts, but whether they *do* keep accounts, or have done so recently. It is experience rather than knowledge alone that enables someone to talk about something with confidence, and share the reality of how to do it with others.
- Can they communicate their experience? Do they share the same first language as their group, or can they speak it fluently? Do they have experience of a similar cultural background? Can they relate easily to group members?

It has often been found that people from a nearby area, rather than the immediate area where the learners live, make better leaders. It may be hard for a community to accept someone they have known since childhood; but a complete outsider will not have the advantage of sharing a similar cultural background and common understanding of the world, and will not be able to use real-life examples convincingly.

- Are they acceptable to the group? Will the person in question be seen by the group as someone they can identify with and respect? (Factors of age and sex may be particularly important in certain groups.)
- Are they likely to stay in the area? A learning programme may be interrupted or ended if literacy workers move away from the area,

Literacy class for tree-nursery workers, Tigray, Ethiopia. In some cultures, men may not be accustomed to seeing women in the role of teacher.

Photo: Jenny Matthews



even for short periods. Investment in training group leaders may be wasted if they are unable to continue with their work.

- Are they open to learning new ways of doing things? A good literacy worker will need to hold regular reviews of the group's progress, and respond to comments from group members and colleagues. Initial training in running groups before a worker undertakes this role, and supportive training while the programme is running, are both very important.

It is often easier to train someone who has never done any teaching before than to re-train a primary-school teacher. Primary-school teachers will already have fixed ways of working with groups that are more appropriate to children than adults. Many find it difficult to change.

- Are they committed and enthusiastic? Formal educational qualifications are not necessarily the mark of a good literacy worker. Someone who has a high level of formal education may find it difficult to understand the needs and realities of someone wanting to learn literacy skills. They may also see themselves as superior.

It has been found that people trained as literacy workers to work in a non-formal way still slip back into teaching others in the way that they were taught. Someone who has spent a lot of time in formal schooling may find themselves taking on the role of a traditional school teacher almost unconsciously. This is generally inappropriate to an adult literacy class. Someone who is committed to the people in the group and enthusiastic about learning to work with them will probably make a far better group leader.

Selecting visiting tutors

The group may decide to invite visitors to come in from time to time and work with them on specific topics. Visiting tutors may be selected more for their specialist areas of knowledge than for their personal qualities.

- Beware of people who will overload the group with unnecessary information, or speak in technical or abstract language that they will find difficult to understand. This is a waste of time, and can harm the confidence of group members who are beginning to learn new skills. They may be discouraged or made to feel stupid.
- Try to select people who will be sympathetic to the needs of the group. Look for people who will be open to answering questions from group members and exploring the areas that they are interested in.
- Beware of people who are more interested in showing what they know than in finding out what the group wants to know.
- Offer advice to help the visitor plan how much information to cover in the time available, and how to apportion the time.

- Ask the group in advance to give suggestions about the sort of information they would find useful, and pass this on to the visiting tutor.

Learning on site

Arranging for the group to visit specialist informants in their work-places may be more useful than inviting specialists to visit the group. It enables the students to see people working in their own environments and to get a more realistic picture of what they do. It may also give students the chance to try out some of their new skills in a real context, instead of the rather artificial situations created within the class.

For example, groups learning to maintain and repair a motor pump and to keep accounts for it might meet a mechanic in a workshop or in the field. Here they would be able to get some hands-on experience of taking a pump apart and putting it together again. Even those who would not be directly responsible for maintenance would get useful insights into why and how a pump used the fuel which they were accounting for. It would make accounting seem less abstract and more related to real things. People find it easier to learn things that are real and meaningful to them than to remember abstract and unrelated ideas.

Groups learning about how a bank functions might visit a cashier in the bank. This would give them the chance to see and use the various forms available, and to learn some of the social conventions associated with using a bank. Many of them may never have been inside a bank before. It would enable them to find out where it was, and would help to break down barriers to an unfamiliar environment.

Specialist informants and group visits are likely to be most useful once there has been some basic literacy learning, and the group are ready to move on to new things.

Training literacy workers

Much has been written about preparing adults to work with other adults as learners. Development workers themselves will have been trained to communicate with adults from their own culture and from other cultures and to work with individuals and with groups. Many of these strategies can be adapted for work in literacy. This book aims to give only some general guidelines on how training for literacy workers might be organised, and ideas about what has happened in other small programmes.

Training can be organised at different stages:

- 1 Initial training**, before the literacy programme starts: to give workers confidence and help to prepare them to plan a session and manage a group.

- 2 **In-service training**, while they are acting as literacy workers: to offer support and to give them the chance to discuss how things are going, to look at what is working well, and to analyse problems.
- 3 **Reflection**, after a period of acting as a literacy worker: to give a chance to reflect on how things have gone, to question whether the aims set by the group have been met, and to learn from the experience; to plan where to go from here.

If the training is to involve a number of literacy workers, the opportunity to exchange fears, ideas, and experiences among themselves has as much value as any suggestions offered by outsiders. Time should be made available for this.

The training programme itself can be a valuable example of alternative ways of working with adults. It can provide a different model from the one which students experienced at school, and offer one which literacy workers might use as a basis for their own classes. Time should be made available to reflect on the *process* as well as the content of initial training.

In order for group leaders to develop confidence in running groups, the programme should provide a 'practice time' in which new leaders try out their skills by teaching each other. Watching other people teaching, and giving and receiving comments on how someone leads a class, is a very effective way in which to develop skills.

It is important that the values and principles which are to be introduced into a literacy programme are present in the training programme for group leaders. Both programmes should value the contributions of participants, and should encourage active learning, self-discovery, and reflection. The group leaders themselves should play an active part in deciding what would be good practice when working with their own groups in the future.

The programme outlined below suggests questions which can be used to begin each session. They are designed to encourage the literacy workers to reflect on their own past experience and to discuss it together. Their discussions will form the basis for new learning.

Further information on some of the areas covered in the training programme can be found in other parts of this chapter and in the next one.

In Senegal, initial training of literacy workers was offered in two five-day workshops. This was felt to be the maximum amount of time that people could spend away from their families. After this, the group leaders met for two days every other month (one weekend every eight weeks). When their first year as group leaders was over, they met for a further five days together, to review progress and plan for the following year.

In a Nepali literacy programme where VSO volunteers have worked, literacy tutors were mainly young, unmarried girls, and the training course was an intensive 35-day residential period. However, a part of this involved working through the content of literacy primers with trainee tutors, and refreshing and upgrading their own literacy skills.

An example of a training programme for group leaders

(supplied by a VSO volunteer from Nepal)

Initial Training Programme: Part 1 (5/6 days)

Day 1 (arrival)

Session 1: evening session (2 hours)

What is learning? How do adults learn? How do children learn? What are the differences? Participants think about good and bad learning experiences in their own lives, from childhood to adulthood, and discuss these in small groups. What conclusions can be drawn from this about how adults learn best? How generalised are these conclusions? Can they be applied to literacy groups? *[See Part One of this book.]*

Day 2

Session 2: morning session (3 hours)

What is literacy and why do students want it? How do people perceive literacy locally? Is there a difference between numeracy and literacy? Do they always go together? What do students want to learn? Why do they want to learn it? How can group leaders find out? How can they check that they have got it right? *[See Part Two of this book.]*

Session 3: afternoon session (3 hours)

How did you learn to read? Participants reflect on their own experience of learning to read, and try to identify the different strategies used. Which of these strategies might be appropriate to adults, and why? How much will students be able to read already? How can you find this out?

Further approaches to teaching reading. *[See Chapter 5 of this book.]*

Session 4: evening session (2 hours)

Practical session: assessing a range of reading materials, and considering how to use them in a literacy programme.

Day 3

Session 5: morning session (3 hours)

How did you learn to write? Did you learn to write and to read at the same time? Are reading and writing two separate activities? Do you need to learn one first? If so, which one? Should they be learned together? Which approaches to teaching writing might be most appropriate to adults in

your area? Can students write anything already? How can you find this out? What should your starting point be in your classes?

Further approaches to teaching writing. [*See Chapter 5 of this book.*]

Session 6: afternoon session (3 hours)

Working with numbers. What records do people keep in the area where the literacy programme will be held? How is this information recorded? How do people calculate? How familiar are they with the concept of numbers? What number system will you introduce them to in the context of the literacy class? How can this be related to what they know already? How can you establish what they know already? How much do they need to know, and in what order should they learn it? Which learning activities can be used for introducing and working with numbers? [*See Chapter 6 of this book.*]

Session 7: evening session (2 hours)

Practical/social session, meeting development workers from other programmes. How can literacy contribute to other fields of development work?

Day 4

Session 8: morning session (3 hours)

Planning a session, establishing aims and goals, and writing a session plan. [*See Chapter 7 of this book.*]

Session 9: afternoon session (3 hours)

Bringing it all together to work on real tasks. Identifying the tasks for which people will need literacy in the area where the programme will be held. Working with words, numbers, images to deal with some of these situations.

Session 10: evening session (2 hours)

Setting up practice-teaching session for the following day. Giving individuals a subject or a topic to work with and practical help during planning time.

Day 5

Session 11: morning session (3 hours)

Practice-teaching sessions

Session 12: afternoon session (3 hours)

Practice-teaching sessions

Session 13: evening session (2 hours)

Social event; ways of staying in touch and supporting each other in the months ahead.

Day 6

Session 14: morning session (3 hours)

Discussing and evaluating strategies used during this training

programme. Thinking about the importance of evaluation, and when and how to evaluate. [See Chapter 9 of this book.]

Afternoon: Planning second training session.

Departure

Initial Training Programme: Part 2 (5 days)

To include:

Revision of areas covered in Part 1.

Using materials already available for literacy. [See Chapter 11 of this book.]

Developing new materials for literacy. [See Chapter 10 of this book.]

Assessing learning.

Practice-teaching sessions.

Practice sessions

During practice sessions, each trainee will have the opportunity to try leading a group, while the others act as literacy students. This allows everyone to try out different ways of setting up a discussion or presenting information, and also to experience these as a student. Comments given after the session can draw attention to things that should be developed and those which should be changed. The practice sessions need to be a positive experience, which builds confidence and offers constructive lessons to everyone.

Guidelines for practice sessions

- The first practice sessions should not be too long (10–20 minutes). Trainees can gradually build up to leading longer sessions.
- The aims of each practice session should be made clear in advance to the person leading it; for example: *introduce the group to simple addition and give a few examples.*
- The person preparing the session should be allowed time and support in deciding, for example, in what sequence to introduce things, and what to 'tell' the group and what to let them try out for themselves.
- Before hearing comments from the group, leaders should be given a chance to comment on their session themselves. ('I don't think I started off very well: I was quite nervous at the beginning and thought I was talking too fast.')
- Comments from the group should, as far as possible, begin and end on a positive note, with constructive criticism in between. ('I liked the way you smiled when you started, and looked at everyone. I got a bit confused when you were talking about numbers: you were writing on

the board and I couldn't hear you properly. Your work on the board was very clear, though.')

- Comments should be as specific as possible, and concerned with aspects of teaching practice that might actually be changed. ('The session dragged a bit when you were explaining addition, and you could have done that part more quickly'; not 'I found it boring'!)
- Comments could be organised around a checklist of 'things to look for'; for example:

Blackboard: Is the writing large enough for everyone to see? Are the words used on the board readable by the class? Is the information on the board well organised?

Voice: Can the group hear everything that is said? Does the worker face the group when he or she is talking? Does the worker look at the people in the group? Does he or she speak too fast or too slowly?

Questions: Did the worker ask questions of everyone in the group? Were students given a chance to talk through their own ideas?

Information: Was the information given clear? Did the worker stay with the aim set for the class?

Conclusion

Throughout this book, we have stressed the key role of the literacy worker in forming good working relationships with learners. We have encouraged workers to be innovative and creative. We have suggested that programmes should be designed with and for the target groups, rather than by professionals working outside the community, standardising programmes for a whole country. We have indicated that, if primers are used, they might be better used critically and selectively, rather than followed as a set format for every class.

All this gives literacy workers more control, and therefore more responsibility. So it is vital they understand and support the philosophy behind participatory work. To succeed, they will need the confidence to experiment and to take risks, to think on their feet and respond spontaneously to learners' questions. They must be able to take control when appropriate, but also feel comfortable about sitting back and letting learners work independently.

Some of these skills are acquired with experience, but new workers will need courage and self-confidence not to be defeated when things get tough. Training programmes should help them to explore their attitudes towards learners and ways of learning, as well as giving them practice sessions and supportive feedback. They will need initial training in practical skills, but just as important are regular meetings to review progress and deal with individual problems.

Assessing progress and evaluating impact

Assessment should not be a very complicated matter. Assessing learning and teaching involves planning activities which will help us to find out what has been happening. What is being achieved? What changes are occurring? Are good things happening? Are there aspects that need to be improved?

In Chapter 4, we suggested that some time and thought should be given to planning for assessment. What is its purpose? Who is it for? Who will do it? and so on. In this chapter we will look at approaches to assessment in more detail. Many of the ideas offered in Chapter 5, on teaching methods, can also be used for assessment. Using some of the same methods for teaching and assessment will help to make assessment an integral part of the learning process.

Participative assessment

Adults learn best when they actively participate in the learning programme; similarly, the best way to assess their progress is to involve them in the process. Participative assessment does not exclude formal testing methods, but asks the literacy worker to consider the learners as adults. If learners are to be encouraged to think about how they learn and their preferred way of learning, then it is important that assessment should follow this up. Learners can be encouraged to review their learning styles and see how effective they have been over time.

Real activities for teaching and learning are generally more meaningful for adults than text-book exercises. The same is true for assessment. Wherever possible, the assessment activity should be a real one, examining, for example, the way in which learners actually keep accounts; or how frequently and for what purposes they use the post office. There are many occasions when literacy skills can be demonstrated and assessed in learners' daily lives, rather than in exercises in the classroom.

Assessing literacy is a process of identifying, recognising, and describing progress and change. If we are concerned only with measuring progress, we tend to look only for evidence that can be

quantified, such as statistics, grades, and percentages. If, however, we ask learners to describe their own progress, we get qualitative responses, such as *'I can now read the signs in the clinic'* or *'I read the lesson in church on Easter Sunday'*. If learning is assessed in both qualitative and quantitative ways, the information produced is more complete and more useful.

In Chapter 4, we suggested that assessment procedures should be discussed with all the relevant parties. The process of assessment provides excellent opportunities to encourage adult learners to take some responsibility for their own learning. This happens in a variety of ways.

- Discussing assessment with learners and involving them in the process will encourage them to be analytical about their own work and that of others. It will help them to understand why they are doing things and how the programme is intended to work.
- Assessment and evaluation activities involve learners in literacy and numeracy tasks, and offer real reasons for reading and writing. They can actually be used to promote literacy. For example, learners should be encouraged to keep written records of their work — a good reason for writing; and then, after some period of time, they will need to read their records in order to identify change and progress — a good reason for reading. Similarly, keeping attendance records offers real opportunities for working with numbers.

Assessing weaknesses as well as strengths

Recognising failure and difficulty is an important part of learning. Learners are often all too aware of their weaknesses, but are sometimes afraid of exposing them to scrutiny. Past experiences can block present progress. Some teachers punish children for their weaknesses! Glenys Kinnock, a British teacher and now a Member of the European Parliament, recalls a maths teacher from her childhood:

*When she saw that I couldn't do it, she'd come over and slap the backs of my hands really hard. I was smacked and smacked, and the more she did it, the less likely it became that I'd ever be able to do any maths. She froze my brain.*¹⁶

Sharing a problem

For some learners it is a great relief to be able to talk about a problem; they find that another learner or the literacy worker can help them work out ways of dealing with it. If assessment is promoted as a means of identifying both strengths and weaknesses, in order to provide support, then it should have a positive and encouraging outcome for the learner. Assessment in this formative context is about *supporting* learners, rather than merely judging them. Succeeding in assessments is a wonderful motivating tonic for learners. To see evidence of one's successes and achievements and to have others recognise them is a very strong motivator and gives great pleasure. Praise works wonders!

Methods of assessment

As with methods of teaching and learning, there is no single correct method for assessment. Whatever methods are chosen will reflect the ideas of those who plan the assessment. The decision is as much a political one as an educational one, and will need careful consideration. It is important to ensure that the methods of assessment reflect those that are being adopted for teaching and learning.

In the early days of literacy campaigns, formal test methods, including standardised tests of reading, comprehension, and spelling, were used to assess adult learners. These tests, designed and normed for children, were soon found to be unhelpful and inappropriate when used with adults. A person of 45, told that he or she has a reading age of 7, is most likely to feel foolish and inadequate. To examine adults on tests designed for children is a nonsense. Now, however, times are changing and a wider range of methods, formal and informal, quantitative and qualitative, is increasingly being recognised as valuable.

Assessment is a form of research, and, as in any research, it is good practice to use more than one method for collecting data. It is a good idea to choose two or three methods that complement each other, give variety, and will provide the most complete picture possible.

Monitor and record how the learners are progressing at regular intervals and note down times when either of you feels that a specific breakthrough has been made, or when there seems to be a blockage or difficulty.

There are some general approaches that are worth considering. We will look at four of them.

Group review/class meeting

The group review is one of the simplest and most effective ways of obtaining a wealth of information and encouraging learners to share their ideas, to analyse problems, and to think about their own learning styles. It can de-personalise difficulties and set the scene for individual interviews.

Here is a list of possible questions. They should be adapted according to the particular cultural and linguistic context of the group.

- Are you enjoying the programme?
- Are you benefiting as you expected to?
- Have you found it too slow? Too fast?
- What have you most enjoyed?
- What have you most disliked?
- What changes or additions would you like to suggest?
- Are there any questions you'd like to ask?
- Are you expected to do too much homework?
- Are the sessions too long? Too short?
- Some learners have left the programme. Do you have any idea why?

Large groups can be divided into smaller groups of three–five learners. It is sometimes helpful to leave the groups to work on their own. They can then come back together again to discuss conclusions and recommendations.

Individual interviews

Personal interviews are valuable all through (and beyond) the programme. Literacy workers usually interview each learner, but, alternatively, learners could interview each other in pairs and report the information orally, as pictures, or in written or tape-recorded form.

Learners must be comfortable and happy about being interviewed on their own. Some cultures and religions may object to individual interviews (for example, if a woman is interviewed by a man).

Even though interviews can follow a range of directions, it is useful to think out and write down questions in advance. Open-ended questions are better than closed questions which can be answered merely by ‘yes’ or ‘no’. *What, why, how, where, and when* are useful words for beginning open-ended questions. ‘What did you do in the class last week?’ ‘How is being able to read a little helping at home?’ ‘What have you needed to write recently?’ ‘What would you like to be able to read?’ This is the time to refer to the records which learners and literacy workers have been keeping: they will be a useful source of information for discussion and comparison. Here are a few tips.

- Prepare for the interview: have a preliminary meeting with the learner and discuss what will happen in the interview, its purpose, and how you will each prepare for it.
- Make sure that you both feel comfortable. The setting can be very informal, but the meeting should be free from interruptions.
- Prepare the questions carefully.
- Don’t start asking questions immediately. Talk generally until the learner relaxes a little.
- Be sensitive to the feelings of the individual.
- Be willing to spend more time; don’t be in a hurry.
- Listen to what is being said. Ask questions to clarify your understanding. Show that you are listening, by repeating some of what the learner has said. Summarise what he or she has said, using your own words.
- Encourage the learner to ask questions too, and be prepared to answer them as fully as possible.
- Take only brief notes, or tape-record the session.
- Show your notes to the learner.

Observation of classes

Literacy workers often find it uncomfortable to have someone watching them teach, and will argue that it makes the lesson artificial. This barrier is worth overcoming. Observation is an extremely useful method of assessment and evaluation. All those involved — the observer, the literacy worker, and the learners — need to recognise that the purpose is *support*, not judgement. Before an observer comes into a session, there should be some discussion about what he or she is being asked to observe. Feedback is almost always useful to the literacy worker; observers are in a good position to notice how learners are responding and coping. The purpose is not to set a test, but to obtain accurate information about everyday practices which can later be discussed, leading to a better programme.

One can also learn much to improve one's own teaching from being an observer of other workers' classes.

Casual conversations and observations

It is worth the effort to be alert to information and impressions exchanged during tea-breaks, before and after class, and in other chance meetings with learners. Non-verbal behaviour, like gestures and facial expressions, can also be very revealing. Observations like these are rarely called methods, but they are likely to provide excellent information, which can be usefully followed up later.

The whole or the parts?

Literacy and numeracy involve reading, writing, listening, speaking, calculating, and having the confidence to *use* these skills at will. Often a literacy or numeracy task involves more than one skill; sometimes it can be assessed as a complete task, sometimes it is more appropriate to focus on just one skill, or a component of that skill.

Assessing reading

In the early stages of learning to read and write, it is sometimes easier to look at the parts that go to make up the whole. Each part can be split into even smaller parts — such as reading for speed, or fluency, or understanding — and progress in each can be assessed, if it is felt to be useful.

Checking on reading can be done in many different ways. Here are some ideas to get started.

- Talk with learners about their progress in reading. What are they coping with in class? What can they cope with outside the classroom? What words or phrases are they recognising in their local community, for example at the shop or the clinic?

- Reading aloud is often used for assessment, but we should remember that it is a very different activity from reading silently. Some readers may be shy about reading out loud to others. Few adults need to read to an audience in their everyday lives. But reading to groups of children (in school, or at home) provides a chance for adults to practise their reading skills. There might be an opportunity here for assessment. Learners could report on how they are doing, and the children might also offer their comments.
- Fluency in reading to others can be assessed by a simple but effective procedure known as *mis-cue analysis*. The learner reads aloud, while the assessor marks a copy of what is being read, noting mistakes, hesitations, and alterations to the text, which are then analysed and discussed. This is one way to assess fluency and to discover what strategies a reader is using for tackling a new word or deriving meaning from a text. But it is not a test of any other form of reading skill.
- It is possible to check fluency and speed in silent reading (or ‘sub-vocalised’ reading, in which readers say the words quietly to themselves), by checking how far the reader gets in a given time, or how long it takes him or her to read a passage. But it is important to check that they are also reading for understanding. We need to think about why we might decide to use this form of assessment — or decide against it. What will it achieve? What will it tell us? What will it tell the learner?
- Learners can be asked to set questions about a passage they have read. They will find this difficult if they have not understood the passage. This exercise could be done in pairs and tried out orally with other learners.
- Filling in the gaps (or *Cloze procedure*), as described in Chapter 7, can also be used to check on understanding. If the reader does not comprehend the passage, he or she will have difficulty in filling in the gaps in ways that make sense. When using this style of exercise, we should remember that a gap can often be filled by more than one word: for example, in the sentence *The sky was before the rain came*, the gap could be filled by a number of alternatives, such as *dark/angry/heavy/cloudy*. The main value of gap-filling exercises lies in talking with learners about why they responded as they did. This will provide insights into how they are approaching the reading task, and how it relates to their own experiences.
- Paired reading can be used for assessment purposes, by noting and observing the improvement which the learner is making over time.
- Real-life situations are more meaningful than text-book tests. Can the learner identify words in a different context — for example, words like DANGER or OPEN or CLINIC? Learners could be asked to report other uses of such words outside the classroom. Finding a

familiar word used in a new context gives learners a real sense of satisfaction. Such instances should be recorded and, where possible, learners should be encouraged to record their own observations.

- Learners' Reading Diets can be analysed. This involves the learner and the literacy worker in keeping a note of all the learner's reading activities during a particular period. It could be done for a week early on in the programme and then a further week some time later, and at regular intervals. Is the list expanding? What is on it? Why isn't it changing? Are there things the learner would like to read, but doesn't have access to? Keep a note of the discussion and the learner's feelings.
- Marking or proof-reading someone else's work can provide an opportunity for assessing reading skills. How easily and how accurately do learners manage the task? Can they identify mistakes? Can they correct them?
- Have they been able to read something which they couldn't have coped with previously? What have they read? What did they feel about it?
- Do they dare to try reading something now that they would have avoided before?
- Ask learners to read a passage and answer questions. The questions and responses can be given orally. If they are new readers, writing answers may be beyond their skills, and we should remember that we are assessing reading, not writing, in this instance. If we discuss learners' answers with them straight away, we may find out more about how they are working and thinking.
- Can they read a map, find the railway lines, point to the north/south/east/west, etc.?

The passage for testing comprehension should be chosen carefully, considering whether it is too easy or too difficult for the learners. Difficulty depends not only on the complexity of language and style in which it is written, and on its lay-out and print style, but also on the reader's experience.

Setting questions needs planning, too: how they are phrased and how they are ordered affect how difficult they are. We should make sure that the reading and writing levels required of learners are commensurate with their skills. If test questions are written in a form that is beyond the skill of the readers, then they won't be able to answer the question, although they may know the answer.

Assessing writing

- Keeping examples of learners' writing offers an easy way of measuring progress. Has there been an improvement over time? It is useful to collect bits and pieces of writing in a folder. In this way, learners can

begin to build up a portfolio of their work. These will enable a comparison between what it was like a few weeks or months ago and what it is like now. Without the early examples to refer to, it is unlikely that either the learner or the literacy worker will remember what it was really like in the beginning. The learner can sort out the folder once in a while, using the opportunity for self-assessment.

- When assessing writing, it is important to be clear what particular aspects are being considered. Is it the handwriting, the ideas, the spelling, or grammar? Formal or informal styles?
- Learners' Writing Diets can be discussed, individually and as a group. They can be kept in the folder or portfolio. These 'diets' will provide the literacy worker with ideas for materials and lessons too.
- Learners could be asked to bring in a copy of something they have written at home.
- Learners could be asked how they feel about different aspects of writing and different sorts of writing. How confident are they now? What kind of writing do they most enjoy? Why? What do they find most difficult? Why? Exploring such questions will encourage the learners to think about how they work and will give the literacy worker an insight into their strengths and weaknesses, providing clues for future work.
- What were their aims as regards writing? Have these been met? If not, why not? Have their aims changed? Keeping a record of aims and noting how they might have changed over time provides evidence of progress.
- How much help do they need now in correcting their own work? How does this compare with earlier efforts?
- Very often, fellow learners will have noted how someone's confidence is improving. A comment like 'You wouldn't have tried that a month ago' can do wonders to boost morale. Encourage discussion about progress and achievements.

Assessing spelling

- Spelling is usually best assessed in the context of a piece of writing. Spelling words in isolation is only part of the process of enabling learners to use them whenever they are needed. But it can occasionally be useful to give a list of spellings to be learned, if only to boost confidence. The list should be created from the vocabulary that the learners are using, and the learners could help to create the test, by identifying words with which they have difficulty. But the list should also include some that they are certain to get right. It is a good idea to teach them to spell a long word and then put it in the test. Long

words are often easier to get right than short words which are similar to other words — but it feels good to get a long word right. Words that are similar should not be put close together in a test. The words being tested should be used in a sentence rather than in isolation.

- Proof-reading is another way to assess spelling. Learners can mark their own work, starting by putting a mark next to any word that they think is wrong. If they can, they should correct the errors themselves. Can they suggest what to change in order to correct the spelling? If they can identify that something is wrong, even if they cannot correct it, they are part-way to correcting or proof-reading their work. They may need to be assured that recognising errors and having an idea about how to correct them, or being able to make the correction themselves, indicates learning and progress. The exercise should be treated as proof-reading, rather than a test. It can also be done as a group exercise, if handled sensitively.
- There are ‘good’ or ‘positive’ mistakes and ‘poor’ or ‘negative’ mistakes. ‘Good’ mistakes are those which enable the reader to recognise the intended word. If the mistake is a logical one (if the writer’s strategy can be identified), then it is a ‘good’ mistake. For example, the learner may write, ‘Miriam was asked to reed a book.’ It is clear from the rest of the sentence that ‘reed’ should be ‘read’. That the writer used ‘ee’ is understandable: ‘ee’ can represent the same sound as ‘ea’. A ‘good’ mistake can be used to illustrate improvement; helping learners to identify why it is wrong will help them to get it right next time.
‘Negative’ mistakes are those where it is difficult to see any strategy, and the correct word cannot be worked out. These are more difficult to correct and will need special attention. The learner should be asked why he or she has spelt the word that way. Finding out what strategies a learner adopts will help the literacy worker to think of ways to help them.

Assessing numeracy

Many of the strategies for assessing reading, writing, and spelling described above can be used for numeracy too. Try to be aware at all times of the numeracy activities in which learners are engaged, at home and in the community. Collect examples of daily tasks that involve numeracy and observe how the learners tackle them. Ensure that the levels of difficulty are not beyond them. (This applies to the numeracy element, and may also apply to the reading and writing involved.) Here are some other strategies which you may find useful.

- Play number games and have quizzes.
- Observe learners working on their own and in pairs or small groups. Who does what?
- Ask the learners to devise questions for each other. Let them mark their own work and each other’s work.

- Talk about difficulties as a group.
- Hold individual interviews with learners.
- Is their speed improving?
- Is accuracy improving?
- Can they identify areas of numeracy where they have difficulty?
- Can learners help or teach each other?
- Can they do the calculation orally?
- Are they daring to try tasks more readily than they were?
- Short informal tests, given in a friendly setting, could be organised. You could use a variety of tools, such as a box of matches, a basket of fruit, or a roll of sweets, to check learners' progress in addition, subtraction, and division.

Progress profiles


Figure 9.1 (overleaf) shows part of a progress review sheet, taken from *The Progress Profile*, an assessment approach which was developed for ALBSU (the Adult Literacy Basic Skills Unit in the UK).¹⁷

The Progress Profile enables a learner and a literacy worker to record the learner's aims, break them down into smaller parts, and return to them after a period of time and discuss progress. Sometimes learners' aims alter over time, or parts of the original aim become irrelevant. The original aims should not be forgotten, but it may be necessary to review them regularly. Looking at the differences between the learner's original aims and current aims will provide useful evidence of progress. It is rather like noting how a child has grown: unless someone previously marked the child's height on the wall, it is hard to know how much he or she has grown.

Standards

Not all literacy and numeracy tasks need to be done perfectly or meet formal standards. Shopping lists and other notes that we write for ourselves need not be written very neatly or spelt flawlessly. If it works as a reminder for the person who wrote it, it is doing its job. Often we don't need to know exactly how much our shopping bill adds up to, but we may want to estimate the cost, to make sure we have enough money to pay for it. Rounding up and rounding down the actual prices may give us a close enough figure.

Similarly, not all reading tasks require 100 per cent comprehension. For example, a reader may glance through a newspaper quickly, to pick up on the main headlines (skim reading) or look for a particular piece of information in a book (scanning), such as the name of a particular fertiliser or where the nearest health clinic is. In such instances it is not necessary to read and understand the rest of the text. However, there will be times when it is crucial to comprehend all of the information

PROGRESS REVIEW		READING · WRITING · LISTENING · SPEAKING · CONFIDENCE			
Aims		Elements			
To read Samuel's letters	To practise reading his writing	To practise reading other letters and notes	To learn to spell his name and address so that I can write back		
Look at the Elements and shade in the amount you have achieved					
To write a note for my mother that she can read	To spell my mother's name and address	To practise my writing so that it will look neat	To find my spelling mistakes for myself		
Look at the Elements and shade in the amount you have achieved					
I want to add up what I must pay at the shop	To add up the different things I want to buy	To check if I have enough money to pay for them	To check if the shop gives me the right money back (change)		
Look at the Elements and shade in the amount you have achieved					
 <p>How have you used what you have learned?</p>		<p>I can read my son's letter on my own. I wrote a note to my mother. I checked my money at the shop - I was right.</p>			



(reading in depth), such as reading instructions for mixing up feed for a baby. Mathematical accuracy may be critical, for example in measuring a patient's medication or in sowing seed.

Literacy workers should be careful not to assess tasks beyond the levels of understanding, accuracy, and presentation that are required in their real application in everyday life. This is pointless. A good test is to apply the 'ABC' technique:

- A is for Accurate
- B is for Brief
- C is for Clear.

Of any piece of work, we can ask *How accurate is it? How brief is it? How clear is it?* But we should also ask: *How accurate/brief/clear does it need to be?* The assessment should be clearly related to the purpose of the task. We are trying to help learners to function more effectively in their daily lives. This is known as the 'good enough' principle. If we are clear about the purpose of the task, we will be able to identify the standards required.

This realistic attitude will encourage learners to try their learning in situations outside the classroom, to talk through their successes and failures with the literacy worker, and to have realistic expectations of themselves. Helping them to use their literacy and numeracy independently and in collaboration with others is what we should be aiming for.

Assessing teaching

Like learners, literacy workers value the comments of others — and take more kindly to positive feedback than to negative criticism. Feedback is likely to come unexpectedly and sometimes from unusual places.

The following checklist is designed to help literacy workers to monitor their own teaching: to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the funding or providing organisation. It might be productive for a group of colleagues to go through the list together. (It is not intended to be complete: feel free to add to it.)

Learning environment

- How suitable and comfortable is the place where I teach?
- Is there enough light?
- Is it warm enough or cool enough?
- Is it clean?
- Can it be made more welcoming?
- What aids are available (a board, pencils, paper, a collection of reading material, etc.)?

Class/group management

- Do I always address the whole group when I am teaching?
- Can I create variety by asking them to work in pairs, and in smaller groups?

- How can different groups be given different parts of a task?
- How can one person help another?

Presentation, development, organisation

- How well do I present new ideas to learners?
- Do the learners and I have a clear idea of what we are trying to achieve, and how we might get there?
- Do we go back over what we did the week before?
- How do I help learners to build on what we have already done?

Motivating learners

- How do I try to motivate the learners?
- How do I praise their work?
- How do I encourage them?
- Do I help them when they need it?
- Do they ask for help?
- Do I recognise the times when they need support?

Attention to individuals

- Does everyone in the group receive attention from me?
- Do I give much more attention to some people than others?
- Does anyone feel left out?

Assessment and record keeping

- What records do I keep?
- What use are they to me?
- Do I involve the learners in keeping records?
- How could we work on this together?
- How do we use the records (monitoring and planning; assessment and evaluation)?

Teaching aids and materials

- What teaching aids do I use?
- Can I create some variety by using some different resources?
- Can I or the learners make some teaching aids or materials?
- How are the learners involved in developing materials?

Variety of teaching methods

- Do I always teach the same topic in the same way?
- What other methods could I use?

lectures	group work
drama	role play
discussion	making materials
worksheets	creating a newsletter
brainstorming	visits
problem-solving	inviting a colleague to teach with me
etc.	etc.

Involving the learners

- How much do I involve the learners in
- identifying their needs
- planning how we will meet those needs
- choosing and developing materials
- keeping records
- assessing their own work
- assessing my teaching?

Literacy workers should also ask themselves if they are enjoying the experience, and what kind of support they would like. Remember that it is not always necessary to have sophisticated, expensive equipment. If the literacy worker and the learners are enthusiastic, if they respect each other and agree on their aims, they are well on the way to success.

Assessing learning and teaching should help the literacy worker and the learners to identify what has been achieved, to plan confidently for the next phase, and to build stronger relationships, so that they can all enjoy the learning experience still more.

Evaluating impact: literacy in action

Impact evaluation is concerned with the effects of learning and the programme on participants' lives and those of their communities. Some of these outcomes may be anticipated, some not. The following examples, quoted from VSO and Oxfam reports, provide an insight into the benefits that learning literacy can bring to people's lives. The outcomes may sometimes be unexpected, but are valuable and worth recording.

... As we spoke in the yard of the Centre, someone called over the fence to give Miriam a letter that had just arrived from her daughter. She opened it and beamed. 'Now I am very happy, because I can read it on my own.' ...

... The impact of the CNTC programme on the co-operative has been substantial. The co-op meetings are now attended by almost all members, whereas in the past an attendance of half was considered good. Those who do not turn up usually send written apologies. People arrive punctually and work through a clear agenda ...

... Now most of us in the Co-op can read and write, so we can do things that were unimaginable before ...

... The level of participation in discussions has increased beyond recognition. If someone thinks something, they know when and how to say it. In the past we were mostly silent ...

Impact evaluation is concerned with evaluating what is happening in the everyday world of the learners. The evaluation situations are not contrived, unlike classroom exercises. Evaluating the impact of a

programme is the clearest way of identifying its successes and failures. The programme has been successful if the participants are using their learning to do things in their lives more easily and more confidently than they did before; or if the experience has motivated them to 'have a go' or risk trying to do something new or in a different way. If, however, learners feel discouraged and are reluctant to use their improved literacy skills in their lives outside the classroom, then development workers, organisers, funders, and learners themselves may have reason to be disappointed or to feel that something is lacking in the programme.

Measures of success

Using literacy and numeracy in daily life

One way to measure success is to ask how the learners apply their new or improved literacy and numeracy skills in their daily lives.

- Do they read instructions, or try to read them?
- Are they confident enough to write a note or letter?
- Will they risk making some mistakes in a piece of writing?
- Can they work out costs?
- Do they do appropriate calculations?
- Do they check the calculations of others and dare to challenge them?
- Do they still require as much help to read and write as they did at the start of the programme?

Being able to spell words in a classroom test is one thing, but getting them correct in a piece of writing that someone else is going to read is a different matter. Knowing which arithmetical procedures to apply to solve a problem in the workplace shows that the person has real understanding and is confident to apply his or her knowledge.

Confidence

The key aim of all literacy programmes is to enable learners to use literacy to benefit their lives. This means that, besides learning the skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and numeracy, they also need to gain enough confidence to put these skills into practice in any situation they want to. Many programmes aim to help learners to become independent and not require anyone else's help in carrying out a literacy or numeracy task. Will they have the confidence and independence to check the shopkeeper's addition in front of him, or write a letter without asking anyone to check the spelling? Using literacy skills in real situations is the aim of the programme, and therefore it should be the aim of evaluation to check whether or not it is happening, and to what extent.

To evaluate the effects of the programme outside the classroom is to evaluate at a level that is different from testing skills within the classroom. The two approaches should complement each other; they explore

slightly different things. Classroom assessments can help to boost confidence and motivate the learners to persevere and practise. Getting feedback from impact evaluation outside the classroom can expand the learners' ideas about their skills and confidence. The process can lead to wider applications and sustained learning; for example, reading a letter successfully may lead to reading other materials, or writing a reply, and so on.

Literacy for living

Literacy programmes often refer to 'literacy for independence', apparently implying that an individual should be able to perform all literacy and numeracy tasks alone and unaided. While such independence is important, we need also to recognise that many literacy tasks are achieved with the support of other people. Perhaps programmes should refer also to 'literacy for interdependence', and perhaps this aspect of literacy should be assessed and evaluated. Having the confidence to work with other people is not to be dismissed lightly, and may be a significant measure of learners' progress and achievement. Collecting information of this nature will help to provide a truer picture of the impact of the literacy programme.

Think about a piece of writing, such as a report, that you have recently produced. Did you talk over the ideas or format with someone? Did you ask a friend or colleague to read it through or check it? Many literacy tasks involve more than one person, and we all involve others in literacy and numeracy tasks when we think it would be helpful. When did you last ask someone how to spell a word or check a calculation, rather than use a dictionary or re-do the calculation yourself?

Impact evaluation is about identifying literacy in action. Evaluation methods should therefore allow for the collaborative nature of many literacy tasks, collecting information and recording how learners work with other people, as well as how they cope independently.

Motivation

Evaluation is a means to an end, as well as being an end in itself. It is a way of demonstrating to the learners that they do have the confidence to use their literacy, that they can dare to try things. It is a means of empowering learners. Recognising that they have tried and achieved things that they would not have done previously boosts morale and self-esteem. Most of us, not just learners, need someone else to notice our achievements. Self-evaluation is a skill that is often not very well developed and needs to be encouraged. However, feedback from literacy workers, fellow learners, family members, and the wider community can be supportive and instructive, providing great encouragement and motivation.

Sustainability

Literacy and numeracy skills need to be *used* if they are to be maintained and further developed. Research shows that, unless the skills are practised, they are mostly lost. All the hard work of the learners and the development workers is in danger of being wasted, if the learning does not become part of the learners' lives. Literacy is best acquired by using it, and therefore data should be collected to show how this is happening, and this information should be used to support learning. Monitoring, or keeping diaries of reading, writing, and numeracy, will also help to establish the practice of using literacy and numeracy at home, at work, and in community life, while simultaneously avoiding the loss of skills and promoting further development.

Who will evaluate?

The evaluation may involve independent individuals from outside the programme. Local health workers or agricultural extension staff may be encouraged to review how the literacy programme is contributing to their training and other programmes. Common aims may be agreed and complementary approaches sought. Funders often insist on such external evaluation.

Evaluation should take evidence from all categories of participants: learners, development workers, planners, and the wider community. The primary aim of such internal evaluation may be to improve future practice, learn from mistakes, and contribute to strategic planning. Some training may be necessary for potential evaluators. It could include sessions on giving and receiving feedback; observation techniques; questioning techniques; agreeing an observation checklist; and keeping records.

Self-evaluation is also to be encouraged. Learners need to develop the confidence to rely on their own judgements, rather than always depending on other people; but this is not an easy task! Most of us have always experienced evaluation as something which other people did to us: the examiner was all-important and all-powerful.

Establishing trust

Learning how to evaluate one's own progress and to trust one's own judgement are important aspects of empowerment. They should be part of a participatory curriculum. Since what we are trying to establish in a participatory approach to learning is open communication and the confidence to take risks, there needs to be a degree of trust between learner and literacy worker. Similarly, to evaluate how learning is affecting behaviour and attitudes outside the classroom requires openness and trust. These ways of assessing and evaluating may be quite new for the learners. They may be new for literacy workers too, and will need careful introduction and discussion.

As trust grows, motivation and responsibility increase, and the gap between literacy worker and learner closes. A partnership is created. If we want to be trusted, we must be honest and sincere; we must respect learners' confidences; we must keep our agreements; we should always communicate directly, and resist the temptation to try to manipulate others.

How to evaluate?

Impact evaluation is frequently done informally, and is often based on the anecdotes and observations reported by learners, development workers, and others. Comments by the elders in a community can provide evidence of progress and achievement. For example:

In discussion with a group of learners in a fishing village on the outskirts of Madras, the interviewer noticed an old lady sitting quietly by. With a little encouragement, she talked of her observations and how the confidence and attitudes of the women had changed as a result of attending the literacy classes. They now challenged the men about various issues. They made demands for their children. They insisted on continuing with the classes. The women were surprised. They had not noticed the changes themselves.¹⁸

Evidence like this is worth considering, but we cannot rely on such informal methods alone. We need to create a more structured approach, based on methods that are appropriate, including the following:

- observation
- interviews
- keeping diaries
- keeping portfolios
- comparing reading and writing diaries — then and now
- class review meetings.

All these approaches are considered in some detail in the section on Assessment earlier in this chapter.

Clearly the methods and indicators chosen must be relevant to the particular programme. Contexts will determine what is appropriate, but it is often helpful to have some ideas to start with. Here are some indicators of progress, suggested during a recent workshop in Bangladesh.¹⁹

- Increases in the level of income.
- Degree of record keeping by groups/learners (such as handling group accounts or taking minutes).
- Levels of participation in community organisations.
- Knowledge of key health issues and how to do certain productive activities.
- Impact on children's education (attendance and achievement at school).

- Impact on gender relations/household decision-making.
- Mobility from the home.
- Attitudes to the local languages.
- Levels of self-confidence (e.g. people's willingness to speak in meetings).
- Analytical abilities (answers to questions like: *why do prices change?*).
- Case studies of literacy learners (randomly selected, semi-structured interviews).
- Case-studies of classes/villages (including interviews with other members of the community).
- Case-studies of facilitators (literacy workers), to determine the impact on their own lives and any emergence as role models/community activists.

Conclusion

Assessment and evaluation are genuinely integral to learning and teaching. They can help learners and development workers to understand what they are doing and why, and to work collaboratively towards making the whole experience more relevant and worthwhile. The practices of collecting information, keeping records, monitoring progress, analysing, and discussing are all ways of encouraging learners to use their literacy skills, at the same time as helping them to become more responsible adult learners, capable and confident of playing their role in the wider community. There are no losers: everyone wins. The skills needed for impact evaluation are skills of observation and reflection. They are not new, but they will need to be practised — by learners, literacy workers, and all the other evaluators. Evaluation does happen informally all the time, but it will be more effective if we structure it and consciously improve our skills.