

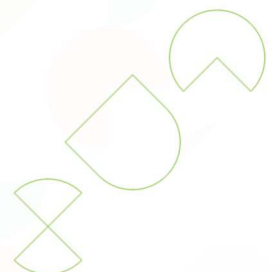


**EBSN**

Professional  
Development  
Series

# **Empowering Adult Learners of Basic Skills - OER**

**EBSN PDS FOR BASIC SKILLS TEACHERS – 2022 SEPTEMBER (V3)**



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## Welcome to Empowering Adults of Basic Skills

### Hello and welcome to Empowering Adults of Basic Skills!

Hello and welcome to Empowering Adults of Basic Skills. This resource has specifically been designed in tandem with the corresponding Empowering Adults of Basic Skills Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to enhance your teaching practices when working with adults of basic skills. It will introduce you to concepts within adult basic skills education and equip you with tools to use in your teaching context. It has been developed as part of the EBSN project in collaboration with South East Technological University (SETU) and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

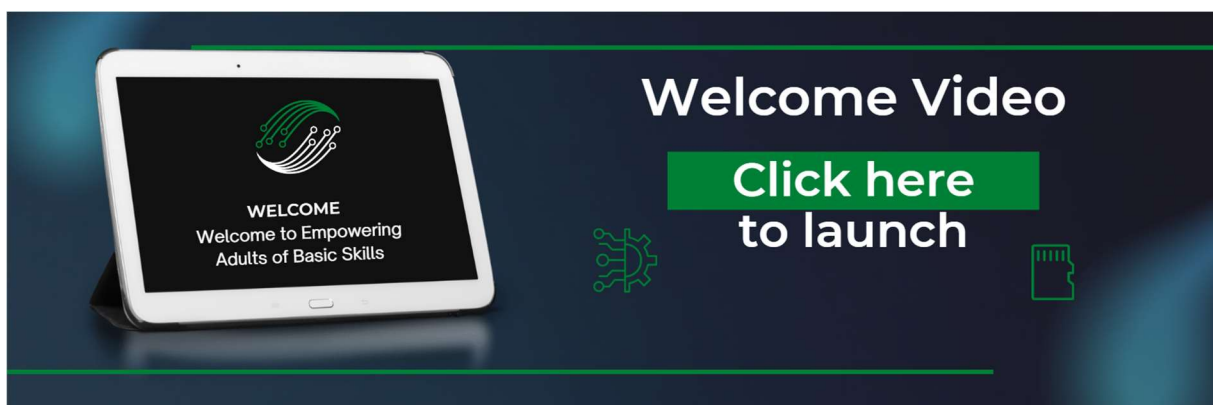
### Learning Objectives

This OER aims to assist you in:

- Demonstrating an understanding of the learning environment
- Identifying the previous knowledge, skills and experience of adult learners
- Identifying guidelines for good adult learning
- Implementing tools and measures that help learners succeed

### Welcome Video:

Take a look at the Welcome Video below from the corresponding Empowering Adults of Basic Skills MOOC :



## Topic 1: The Learning Environment

### *Welcome to The Learning Environment!*

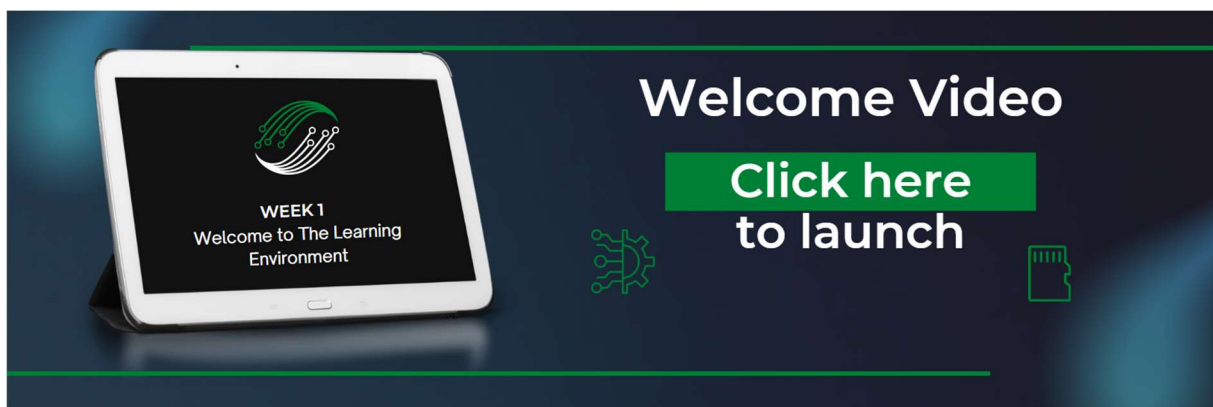


When you complete this Topic you will be able to

1. Get to Know your learner or group
2. Understand how best to work with your learner
3. Assess your learners' strengths and set goals with your learners
4. Understand the learner context

In this topic, you will learn about your learner's context and how to work best with them. You will be introduced to concepts on good adult learning practices in the learning environment. Finally, you will get the opportunity to consider how to empower your learners in your own context.

Take a look at the Welcome Video below from the corresponding Empowering Adult Learners of Basic Skills MOOC:



## Get to Know your Learner or Group

Take a look at the video below on getting to know your learner or group. Click the image to play.



The term 'learner' includes people from many different age groups who are learning in different settings. Adults may decide to look for help with their literacy to help them find a job, to improve their chances of promotion or to move into another job. People often return to learning when they become parents in order to be able to help and support their children's learning. Others attend tuition after their families have left home and they have more time for their own self-development. Some young people leave school early but choose to work on their literacy as part of a training programme. Learners also include adults who work on their literacy through distance learning.

Adults working on their learning may wish to:

- improve and gain confidence in a particular area such as spelling or basic computer skills;
- help their children's learning;
- improve or maintain their skills for personal reasons;
- use technology more effectively in their everyday life;
- gain accreditation in order to move on to further training or education;
- work on literacy and numeracy for employment purposes;
- update skills as a result of changes in work practices;

- gain basic English language communication skills (ESOL);
- overcome specific difficulties which may have been undetected at school;
- enhance their quality of life.

### Contribution of Learners

The contribution of learners has always been central to the development of adult learning. This has ensured that ongoing work and new developments are informed by the students' perspectives and empowers the learner. Students can be empowered and play an important role in many ways including:

- voicing student views at events;
- participating at management or board level;
- advising on initiatives such as policy development, materials and n speaking at conferences, public events and to the media;
- serving as members of student committees;
- participating in literacy awareness-raising programmes;
- recruiting students and tutors;
- selecting and training tutors;
- encouraging and supporting their peers;
- taking part in evaluation;
- organising social events.

Source: National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02/03/2022].

National Adult Literacy Agency, 2018. The Wealth Model in Adult Literacy: transformative learning in action. [Online]. Available at : <https://www.nala.ie/publications/the-wealth-model-in-adultliteracytransformative-learning-in-action/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022 ].

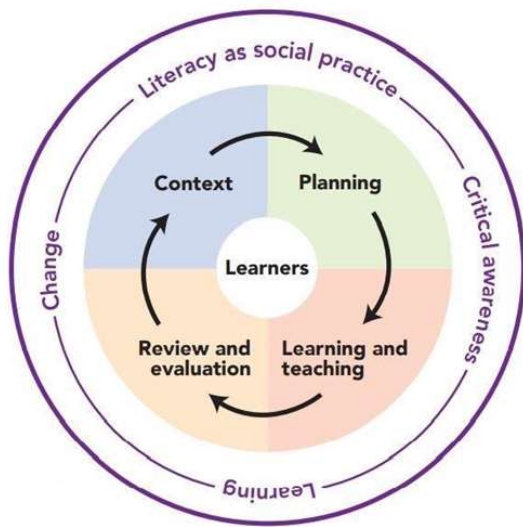
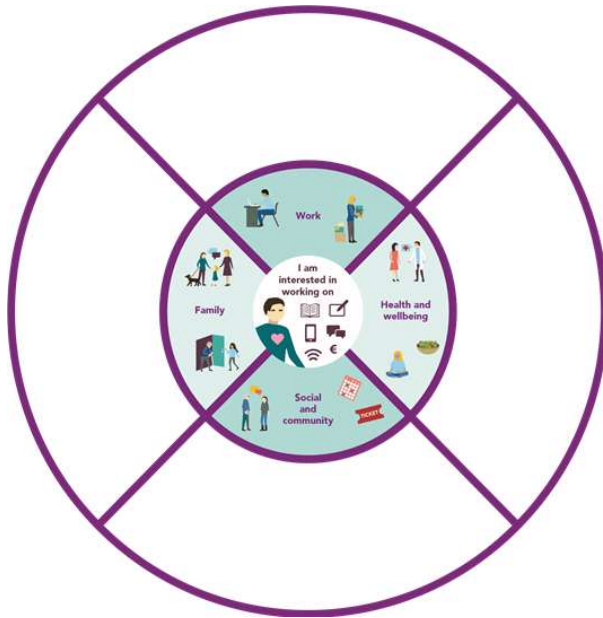
## *Understand How Best to Work with Your Learner*



*Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash is licensed under Creative Commons 0*

When designing a curriculum to empower students, learners are at the centre because the work in hand is theirs and they are the key actors in developing their curriculum for literacy, numeracy and digital learning, supported by the learning partners. Learners and the context in which they live and learn are at the heart of curriculum development in adult literacy work. This is represented by placing learners at the centre-point of the diagram.

What are the students interested in?



This OER can be downloaded [here](#)



Source: National Adult Literacy Agency, 2009. Curriculum Development: An evolving model for adult literacy and numeracy education.

Learners and the context in which they live and learn are at the heart of curriculum development in adult learning work. This is represented by placing learners at the centre-point of the diagram. The curriculum development process is represented as a set of two circles revolving around this centre point. In the outer circle are four key themes that inform our curriculum development practice and help us to engage more creatively with it.

They are: → literacy as social practice, → critical awareness, → change and → learning. These themes are essential parts of the curriculum development process and affect all other aspects of the model.

The middle circle shows a curriculum development process that is learner-directed. It starts with the context of learning. Planning for learning builds on and arises out of our understanding of context. Learning and teaching flow out of context and planning. Review and evaluation are part of teaching and learning and feedback into context and planning. The circles interact with each other in a dynamic model of curriculum development that seeks to empower the learner. All parts of the model influence and change each other.

### Involving Students in the Process

Before you begin, use material that connects to students' lives. So, the first step is encouraging students to identify reading material that matters to them. Students can be involved in simplifying information. You can use immersive text for devices or read the text to the student who can then paraphrase it in their own words.



Simplifying makes tough texts more accessible to students. It involves changing some of the language and layout of a text while keeping its meaning. It allows for a wide variety of materials to be available to students which otherwise might be too difficult to read or understand. By simplifying the materials, we can make the texts readable and accessible and we can provide a text which can be used as the basis of reading practice. Versions of the same text, at different levels of readability, can also provide a scaffold for students as they progress towards being able to read the original text. When judging the difficulty of a text, you need to consider a number of factors. The difficulty of a text depends on the type of language used and how it is laid out, including print size. You also need to consider what the reader brings to the task of reading. Students will often find reading a text more difficult or challenging if they have not come across the subject or ideas before or if they don't find the text interesting or useful. When simplifying texts, you will find it helpful to consider the following questions:

- How can you involve the student in the simplification process?
- Why am I simplifying the material? Is it to make it easier to read or is it to make it shorter? Do you want to highlight particular pieces of information from a more detailed text?
- Do keywords - the vocabulary needed by students in order to gain access to a subject - or key pieces of information need to be kept in the simplified version? If they are taken out will the student be disadvantaged in some way? Could you reduce the amount of new vocabulary by repeating some words where it is appropriate?
- Will changing the order of the piece make it easier to read?

- What about layout? The layout and how the text is organised is often a significant factor in it being difficult to read. Do you need to line-break the text (breaking the text into meaning phrases)? Would headings help? Is there a photo or illustration with the original text that tells something about the text? What about the size of print and line spacing?
- Can longer sentences be simplified by breaking them into shorter ones?

### Self Reflection Checklist Activity

An optional extra resource, think of a course you are running, and fill out this checklist which is an OER provided by NALA <https://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/A-plain-English-checklist-for-documents.pdf>

This checklist offers a quick way for you to review a letter, leaflet, booklet or short report to see if it uses plain English and is easy to follow. Not all questions will apply to every document, but try to answer 'yes' as much as possible to the questions that do apply.

### Using Learning in Everyday Life

Adult literacy work is about how well you are able to use what you have learned in tuition in your everyday life. It is important for the tutor to encourage and check regularly with the student how and where they are using their learning. For example, can the student think of a situation where they have been able to carry out a task outside, on their own, without any hassle? Or when they have completed a task in a more pressurised, public setting such as a post office, bank or at work?

*National Adult Literacy Agency, 2009. Curriculum Development: An evolving model for adult literacy and numeracy education. [Online]*

Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/teaching-guidelines/> [Accessed 02/03/2022].

*National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. [Online]*

Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02 March 2022].

### Basic Skills and Literacy as a Social Practice

We engage with written text and spoken language in different parts of our lives such as work, home, health and communities. Seeing literacy as a social practice recognises that the value given to different literacies varies; that some literacies are more dominant, visible and powerful than others.

When we think of basic skills and literacy as a social practice it influences how we go about developing material. There is a difference between activities based on 'learning to read' as opposed to those 'reading to learn'. When an adult returns to learning and wants to improve basic skills, we use strategies such as the language experience method which uses a person's own words. We also use everyday texts such as flyers from supermarkets or health booklets. As adults, we respond better to material from real-life situations as opposed to for instructional purposes – for example working out a real-world maths problem as opposed to learning maths in school curriculum.

The video below gives an insight into the intersection between basic skills and social practices. Click the image to play.



National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. *NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022].

National Adult Literacy Agency, 2018. *The Wealth Model in Adult Literacy: transformative learning in action*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/the-wealth-model-in-adultliteracytransformative-learning-in-action/>  
[Accessed 02 March, 2022 ].

## Assess Your Learners' Strengths and Goal Setting



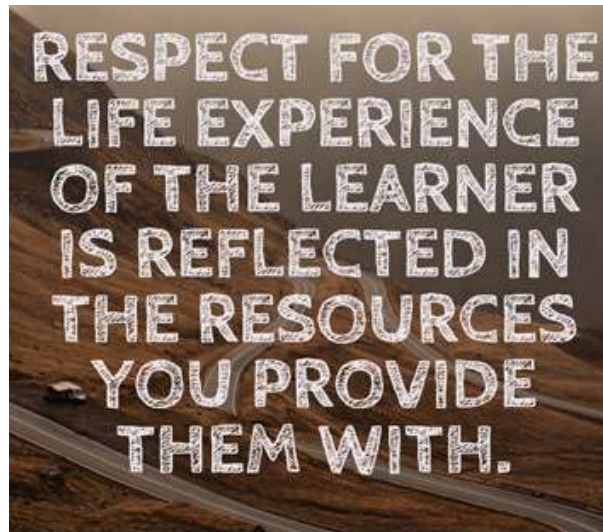
Learning is an active process and is based on prior knowledge, experience, and perspectives. It includes the informal learning involved in everyday life.

Good practice in working with adults is to establish what the learners already know about a subject.

Educators should use appropriate questions to elicit what the learner knows.

Skillful use of questions will help the learner to think about their prior experience and knowledge of a subject. Prior experiences of the group can be used well if the group is safe for learners to say what they know once they are comfortable in the group. Their prior knowledge of a workplace can be relevant when discussing a topic like health and safety awareness.

Educators can incorporate a check of knowledge of the topic when they introduce it and then have a discussion on the topic before they start the session. Respect for the life experience of the learner is reflected in the resources you provide them with.



### **Helping students identify their needs and goals**

Focusing on the ways in which students use literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in their everyday lives, for example in the workplace, home, community or school, can help students identify their current strengths and skills, as well as their needs and goals. It also ensures that we remain sensitive to the changing nature of students' lives and are better placed to support students in the new uses of literacy that might emerge with these changes. For example, these changes might create the need to do things students have never done before such as write a note to a child's school or manage a budget. These changes might also reflect a move towards digital literacy practices such as buying online or creating social media posts.

To help students identify their needs and goals, have you considered:

- What are the students' most relevant or immediate literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs?
- What reading and writing students do now, and for what purpose?
- How do students use written and spoken language in their everyday lives?
- How do students use numeracy in their everyday lives?
- How do students engage with and use technology in their everyday lives?
- If they have a smartphone, what functions do they use? Do they go online?

**Learners should have the right to set their own learning goals and make their own decisions with regard to how, when and where they wish to learn.**



As a rule, adult learners go through an initial assessment when they first come to a literacy service. This assessment can be done in a number of ways, depending on the service and the procedures they have in place. Some services use a 'Skills Checker' to determine the correct entry level, others may call it a 'guided conversation'. The assessment is usually carried out by a resource tutor. The result of the initial assessment is passed to the tutor who will then carry out a more detailed assessment with the learner. Together they decide on an individual learning plan that will identify the learner's long and short term goals. Initially, tutors plan for a new group using generic examples until they meet the group of learners or the individual learner. Tutors base their knowledge of what might work on experience. After the initial meetings and discussions with the learners, the tutor plans learner-centred sessions and they match materials and activities to learning styles, learners' goals, learners' strengths, and the learners' interests. The planning can happen in distinct stages – before the tutor meets the learner and group, as soon as the tutor gets to know the learners and the group, and what is to happen to the learner and group after the programme ends. Each programme comes to life when the tutor meets the learners.

### **Top tips to identify needs and goals**

- Actively involve the learner as much as possible to identify needs and in goal setting
- Adapt to suit different needs, goals, and learning styles
- Develop material for the learner and group
- Negotiated planning in setting goals

### **Learning is worked out between all partners**

The key point is that learning is worked out between all partners - tutors, managers, learners and others involved in the process such as family, friends or work colleagues. As learning progresses, both learners and tutors may need to extend their view of what they are doing and the possibilities for development. Planning takes place through discussion and negotiation. Tutors and learners may find formats such as individual learning plans (ILPs) or learning logs and diaries helpful. These may give a structure for learners, tutors and organisers to record their planning together, at specific stages in the learning journey. Learning plans need to be real and meaningful to learners.

### **Such a record of individual and group plans often includes:**

general learning purposes and goals;

- a summary of initial discussions and assessments (the four MLJ cornerstones (NALA 2005b) are often useful here);

- specific objectives for literacy and numeracy development that learners would like to achieve; and
- a note of when the learner and tutor will review the plan to identify development, issues arising and possible changes to the plan.

Source: National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. *NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022].

National Adult Literacy Agency, 2018. *The Wealth Model in Adult Literacy: transformative learning in action*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/the-wealth-model-in-adultliteracytransformative-learning-in-action/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022 ].

## Understand the Learner Context

Take a look at the short video below before reading about understanding the learner context in more detail. Click the image to play.



The wider society reminds us to keep in mind that the wider social, political, cultural and economic context affects policy and practice in teaching and learning. Some questions to consider about the wider social context include:

- How is basic skills and literacy defined in national policy and strategy?



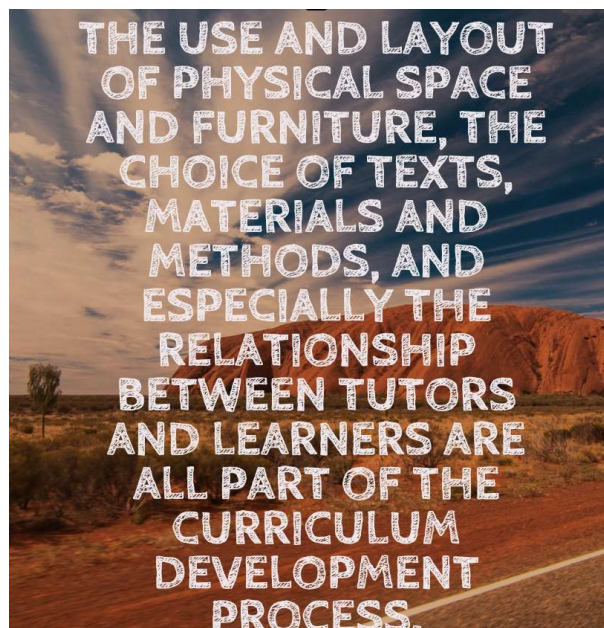
- Are literacy learners seen as people who 'lack' or are 'deficient' in literacy skills, or as people who engage in varied uses of literacy and are developing increased abilities to participate in new and varied literacy practices?
- What purpose is adult literacy provision being asked to serve in the present economic, social and political context?
- What pressures or influences do factors such as these exert on curriculum development in adult literacy?
- How do they affect a learning-centred, learner-directed curriculum development process?

Curriculum in practice: some questions to consider about the institutional context

- Are there any constraining policies or practices?
- Is there a way to negotiate these, to enable a more locally responsive and learner-directed approach to curriculum development?

### **The immediate learning setting**

Adult learning work takes place in a wide range of centres. The main purpose of the centre will affect how we do curriculum development in literacy. For example, the main purpose of an adult literacy centre is different to that of an addictions centre, a vocational training centre or an employment services centre.

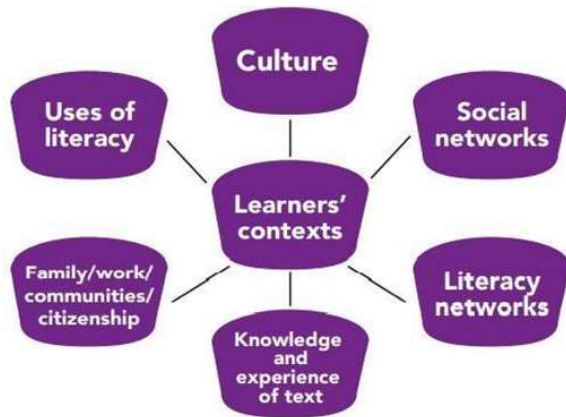


In each context, curriculum development for adult learning should be negotiated with learners and centre management so that it serves the primary purpose of the learner. Sometimes, this will involve adult literacy tutors integrating literacy development into other activities, in cooperation with other staff, as well as providing discrete literacy tuition. In all centres, management and tutors can facilitate and encourage learners to get involved in the life of the centre as a whole. This can be a meaningful context and resource for literacy development. The use and layout of physical space and furniture, the choice of texts, materials and methods, and especially the relationship between tutors and learners are all part of the curriculum development process.

- Curriculum in practice – some questions to consider about the immediate learning context
- What influence will the context or curriculum setting have on the purpose for learning, the learning activity and the participants involved?
- What type of relationship between learners and tutors creates the best context for learning?
- Would learners be interested in taking part in or organising social activities in the centre? How might this relate to literacy and numeracy development?
- How can we facilitate learners in the centre to take a greater role in decision-making and planning?
- How can we build on activities and other aspects of the setting in our literacy and numeracy work?

### **Learners' contexts**

So far, we have considered 'context' in terms of the wider society, the institution and the immediate learning setting. The point is to work effectively with particular learners to discover with them how their various contexts can support their literacy development. The following diagram illustrates some aspects of the learners' contexts that should be considered and drawn on in the curriculum development process. Learners bring to adult literacy sessions a rich resource of prior knowledge and experience, including background knowledge and experience of texts. Good curriculum development values the learners' social, cultural and community contexts, which influence choices of materials and methods. It identifies and builds on learners' existing uses of literacy. It draws on these to help extend learning according to learners' goals.



Learners also have learning networks – people in their lives who assist them from time to time with particular reading and writing tasks. Good curriculum practice affirms these learning networks and encourages their development. It also facilitates the learner to participate in an increasing range of social networks. Learners' contexts provide motivation and resources for literacy development. Learners will assess their progress in terms of the changes they have made in their contexts and their confidence in moving between contexts.

Curriculum in practice – some questions to consider about the learners' contexts

- As learners develop their literacy, are they also developing confidence to act in a range of contexts?
- In our work on literacy development, are we aware of the value of learners' literacy networks?
- Are we aware how feelings about texts affect learning? Are we open to exploring this, if learners wish to?

Source: National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. *NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work*. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022].

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Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/the-wealth-model-in-adultliteracytransformative-learning-in-action/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022 ].



## Topic 2: The Learners' Previous Knowledge, Skills and Experience

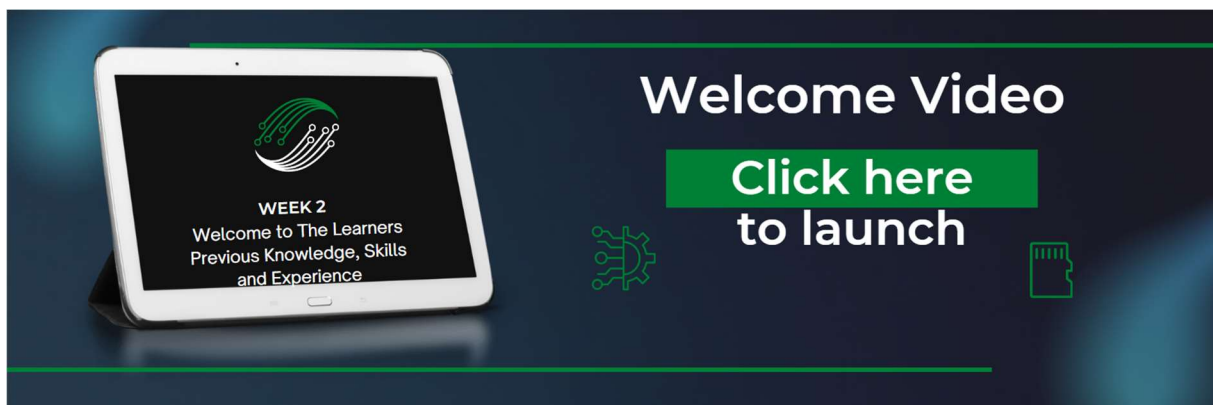
### *Welcome to The Learners' Previous Knowledge, Skills and Experience*



Welcome to The Learners' Previous Knowledge and Skills. By the end of this week you will be able to:

- Understand how to draw on the learners' prior knowledge, experience and skillset
- Understand the importance of 'Recognition of Prior Learning'
- Understand the importance of preparing learning materials

Take a look at the Welcome Video below from the corresponding Empowering Adult Learners of Basic Skills MOOC



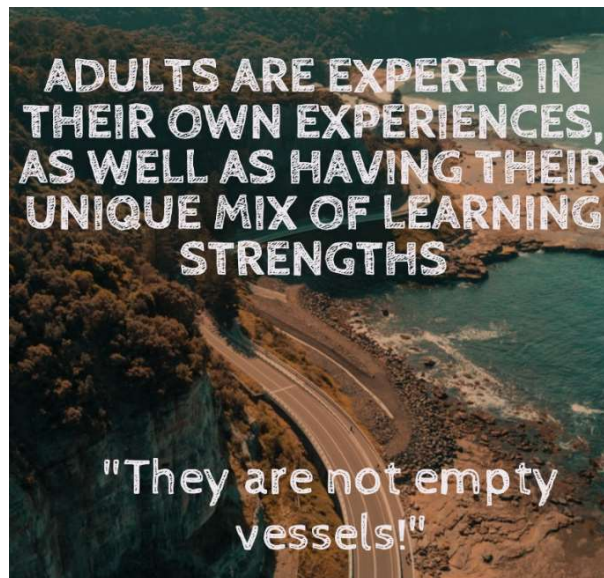


## *The Learners' Prior knowledge, Experience and Skills*



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Students' knowledge and skills are vital for the effective organisation of adult learning work. Students should have the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of provision. Students also have experience and knowledge which are essential for the successful planning, development and evaluation of adult literacy provision. Their views and understanding need to inform the way provision is organised, particularly publicly, course options, student support, resources and social activities. Students should be actively encouraged to become involved in the organisation, for example, to take a seat on the board.



This philosophy asks tutors and organisations to actively encourage learners to become involved in the organisation and in how provision is organised. Adult learners are not empty vessels, to be filled with the knowledge held by the tutor. They already are experts in their own experiences, as well as having their unique mix of learning strengths. While it is in the power of the adult literacy service to involve the learners in all aspects of provision, it is in the power of the tutor to draw on the knowledge and skills of the learner to good effect.

### Top tips

Draw on the learners' prior knowledge and experience appropriately

Work with the interests of the learner

Work with the life circumstances of the learner

Extend the learning outside of the classroom

The Wealth Model, a National Adult Literacy Publication describes how tutors put this into practice.

Draw on learners' prior knowledge and experience Good practice in working with adults is to establish what the learners already know about a subject. Máiréad O'Riordan, tutor, uses appropriate questions to elicit what the learner knows. Skilful use of questions will help the learner to think about their prior experience and knowledge of a subject.

Fiona Kieran, tutor, advises that the prior experiences of the group can be used well if the group is safe for learners to say what they know once they are comfortable in the group. Their prior knowledge of a workplace can be relevant when discussing a topic like health and safety awareness. Everyone has something – someone has worked in textile, someone else has worked in building sites, someone else was in hospitality, someone else is a stonemason – this is a group of men now we're talking about – they are telling me more than I'm telling them!

Clare Hatcher, tutor, incorporates a check of knowledge of the topic when she introduces it and then would have a discussion on the topic "before we would do any reading".

Elaine Clifford, tutor, states that the tutor's respect for the life experience of the learner is reflected in the resources you provide them with: It's not about handouts and reading to them. They're overwhelmed with information and they can get a lot of it online, so this is where we try to enhance ICT skills, to make it relevant to them. Tutors do not ever put learners on the spot and ask the learner to talk about an

aspect of their experience that might make them feel uncomfortable. If a tutor wishes to incorporate the particular experience of a learner in discussion in the class, they should agree with the learner beforehand. Once the tutor gets to know the learner, it is easier to make the topics relevant to what the learner already knows.

Caroline McCabe, tutor, states that the longer you are with a group, the better you can gauge their individual needs. The more time we spend together the more confidence I have that I can cater to everybody's needs. But, the longer you are together and with time, you can gauge. So the first couple of classes are the hardest and once you get a feel for the capabilities of each person, it does get easier.

### Impact

The learner can connect new learning to previous experience, and see how and where new knowledge can be applied. They are guided to transform information into knowledge, and shown how to access relevant information. These examples illustrate tutors' considerations at the outset of a course, during a course, and show how they bring the learners' attention to what they can get at the completion of a course.

*Source: National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. [Online]*

*Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022].*

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## *Recognition of Prior Learning*



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Take a look at the below video<sup>1</sup> on RPL and then read the information on Recognising Prior Learning and check out the Aontas blog before answering the knowledge check on the next page.

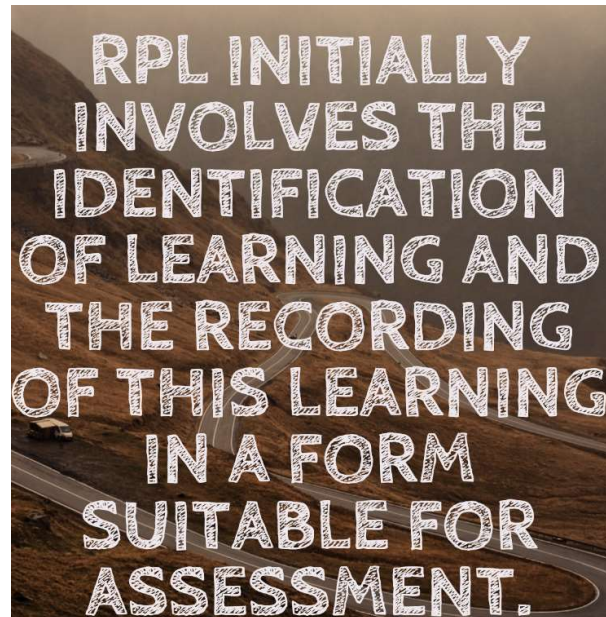
### Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process which seeks to acknowledge all forms of learning, and to give them a value in the context of a destination award (European Commission, 2008; National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2005; OECD, 2004).

'RPL incorporates prior formal, informal and non-formal learning and that which is validated within the context of a specified destination award from level one to ten on the National Framework of Qualifications' (European Commission, CEDEFOP, ICF International; 2014 p. 3, as cited in Murphy, 2019) RPL allows for all forms of learning to contribute to an award (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2005).

RPL provides access to the education system for individuals who through formal acknowledgement of their prior knowledge, skills and competences may complete their studies in a shorter timeframe without having to revisit learning. RPL is also used for the award of credit, or exemptions, for individual modules on programmes. RPL is beneficial in that it allows an individual to demonstrate what they already know. In 2010, the OECD presented the benefits of RPL as they related to the key stakeholders involved).

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeUXAH\\_CW1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeUXAH_CW1s)



RPL initially involves the identification of learning and the recording of this learning in a form suitable for assessment. Most individuals benefit from support with this stage of the process (Leiste and Jensen, 2011; Conrad and Wardrop, 2010 as cited in Murphy, 2019). The second stage is the assessment of the candidate's prior learning. A number of approaches are used including review of documentary evidence, interview, or demonstration. Validation is the third stage and involves the use of particular references points or standards. Validation is followed by certification which is the award of a formal qualification following the identification/documentation and assessment of the learning. Certification normally involves a recognised awarding body (CEDEFOP, 2016a). RPL is important in the context of accessing education and in support of lifelong learning. It provides a mechanism for human capital development and the reskilling and/or upskilling of individuals for the knowledge economy. RPL also provides a mechanism to recognise the skills of immigrants and other sectors of society such as the voluntary sector, and older workers. RPL can be used to support the employability and mobility of older people, women and early school leavers. The standards in vocational qualifications are framed around competency-based assessments. RPL is particularly important for the FET sector, with RPL arrangements reported in vocational education and training (CEDEFOP, 2016a, as cited in Murphy, 2019). The European landscape and the emergence of RPL as a key element in lifelong learning policy will be explored in the following section.

RPL: an international perspective Further education policies are closely linked to the broader socio-economic climate of a region and reflect the requirement for a society to adapt and respond to a highly mobile employment climate. In Europe there has been significant policy development and restructuring of education and lifelong learning over the past twenty years, within which RPL is a key element. As early as 1995 the lifelong learning agenda was put centre stage with the publication of the White paper Towards the Learning Society (Commission of the European Union, 1995, as cited in Murphy, 2019). Globally, there has been similar development with significant organisations publishing guidelines, inventories and reports on the practice of RPL (Harris, 2011; Werquin, 2010, as cited in Murphy, 2019).

Currently, Europe 2020 and the Education and Training 2020 are the key policy initiatives driving national policy developments (Council of the European Union, 2009, as cited in Murphy, 2019). Europe 2020 is the ten-year growth strategy for Europe and Education and Training 2020 is the current framework for cooperation (Council of the European Union, 2009, as cited in Murphy, 2019). This framework has four priority areas, each of which directly relates to RPL and its operation:

1. Making lifelong learning and learner mobility a reality
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training (Council of the European Union, 2009).

Source: Murphy, I. (2019). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Ireland*  
[https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european\\_inventory\\_validation\\_2018\\_Ireland.pdf](https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Ireland.pdf)



## Blog

Check out this short blog by [Aontas](#) on the adult voice and RPL. Aontas is the Irish National Adult Learning Organisation advocating for the right of all adults of Ireland to quality lifelong learning.

## Learning Materials that take Previous Knowledge, Skills and Experience into Account



*Photo by Tamanna Rume on Unsplash is licensed under Creative Commons 0*

How can I build on what a student already knows?

For some students it will be important that the materials you choose will allow them to show progress in their skills outside the classroom setting. These should include tasks and activities that encourage students to use reading, writing, numeracy and communication skills in their daily lives. Aim to build bridges between using the material 'to learn the skills' and using it in a real situation.

Types of learning materials and texts used in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy work can be drawn from a variety of sources relevant to students.

**These include:**

- formal letters – school, doctors, social welfare, tax office, employers;
- official documents – tax forms, home and car insurance, mortgage and rent documents;
- work-related texts – contracts, work rotas, time sheets, wage slips, operating instructions for equipment, health and safety regulations;
- texts related to being a citizen – voting registration forms, election and referendum literature, citizens information publications;
- texts related to community – newspapers, minutes and information from community organisations (the ‘community’ may be based on place, interest, ethnic group, and so on);
- creative and cultural texts – poetry, novels, short stories, songs, drama;
- language experience texts – texts produced by the students themselves;
- visual texts – picture novels, cartoons, webpages, photographs; graphs, diagrams and charts;
- texts related to reading the environment – for example, signs, posters, street names. Many of the sources mentioned above can be found as digital texts online.

**Remember:**

Use material that really connects to students’ lives. Students can be invited to bring in texts they are engaging with.

Students can work individually or collaboratively to create texts.

Information, messages and images in texts can be criticised, rewritten or redrawn by students. We do not have to take them at face value.

At times it can be useful to explore the meaning of particular texts for students.

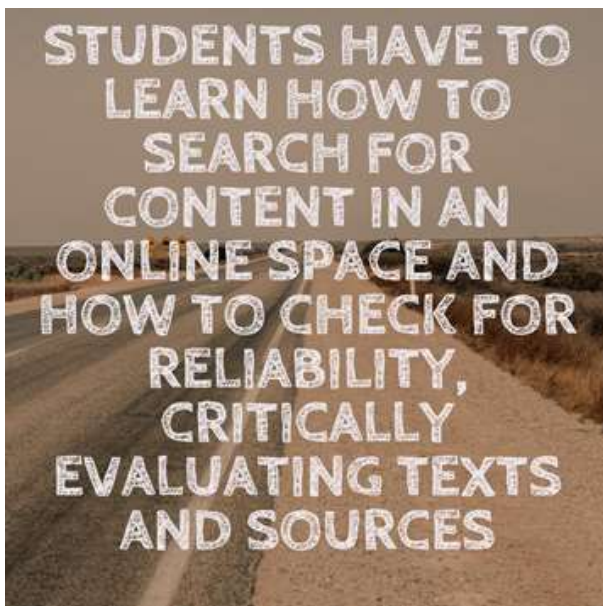
**Online texts**

Many text sources can be online. Indeed this is where many students will come across them. Using digital sources can often reflect the literacy practices students use in their daily lives. It can be empowering for students to reproduce these everyday literacy practices in the learning space. For

example, if students have to fill out a form, we need to think about whether this is on paper, on a phone, tablet or laptop and design our materials with this in mind.<sup>8</sup> If students are accessing citizen information, are they accessing it online or in printed form?

### Reading online texts

Reading texts online requires a host of additional skills. For example, a piece of text viewed on the web may contain hyperlinks, video and audio clips, share buttons and comment sections and pop-up advertisements. These features force the reader to stop and make decisions rather than simply reading from top to bottom. The reader has to decide whether to click on a video or hyperlink for example, whether to share the text with others or how long to stay away from the original text. Digital text is often designed so that no two readers have the same experience. Sourcing material online also can require additional skills. Students have to learn how to search for content in an online space and how to check for reliability, critically evaluating texts and sources.



### Creating content online

WhatsApp message groups (or similar), social media, online job applications and discussion forums are all very much displacing their handwritten equivalent. These digital literacy practices have extra dimensions that we need to consider. Content that is created online is often meant to be shared. This brings with it additional dimensions, for instance safety and privacy which are all worth thinking through



with students. We need to help students to see that while we can use digital tools to create and socially connect, there is responsibility that comes with that. It can also be daunting for students to see their writing on a public forum and it is worth talking through this with students.

### **Guidelines for designing learning materials**

Make sure it is relevant.

Ensure the activity is clearly relevant to the learning objective and topic in hand.

Keep in mind the purpose of the activity. Are you trying to practise something just taught, revise something already learned, assess previous learning, achieve some other educational goal or have fun. Use clear instructions.

Avoid vague activities – for example asking students to ‘Jot down a few ideas about...’ (without giving some guidance and structure or purpose).

Avoid “busy work” – exercises with no clear focus or objective.

Indicate time needed.

Suggest how ‘big’ an answer is appropriate. Ensure variety. For example vary the type of reading activity.

Consider alternatives to writing, typing or keying.

Include digital texts.

Include digital writing activities – for example, writing WhatsApp messages, filling in forms online. Consider language and design

Be consistent throughout – for example, use the same words in instructions.

Use graphics where appropriate.

Don't have too much text on a page – leave some white space.

Give useful feedback, for example: the correct answers if there are any; sample answers; other people's responses; advice as to how the students can assess their own responses; advice about how to get feedback from other people; empathy about difficulties they may have had.

Finally, remember that you will also have an opportunity to discuss the worksheets and texts with the students. You can give reassurance about and guidance on possible errors they may have made and deal with any comments on issues raised by the activities.

Before you begin, use material that connects to students' lives. So the first step is encouraging students to identify reading material that matters to them. Students can be involved in simplifying information. You can read the text to the student who can then paraphrase it in their own words.

## Week 3: Empowerment: The Learner Voice

### *Welcome to Empowerment: The Learner Voice*



At the end of this week you will be able to:

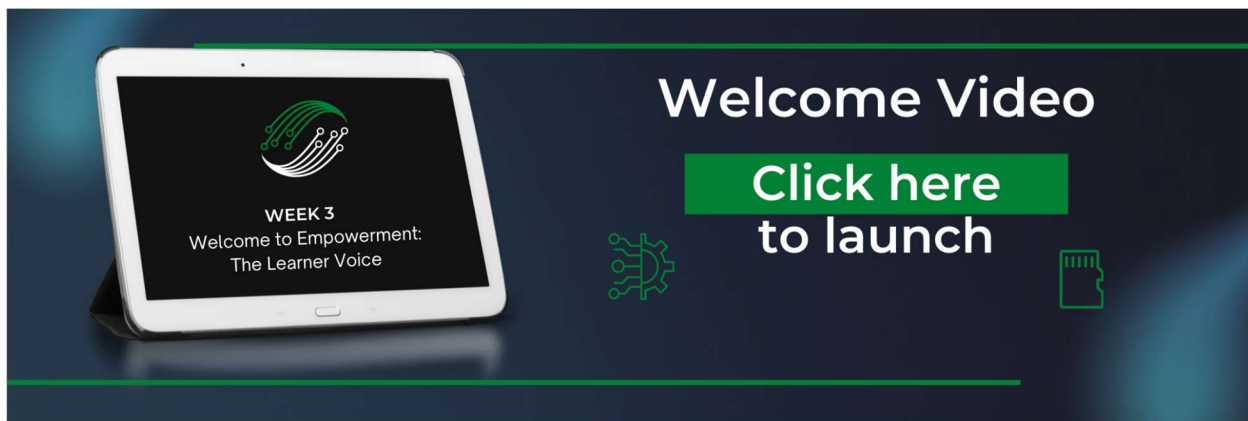
- Understand the principles of learner empowerment
- Implement guidelines for good adult learning
- Know how to help students identify their needs and goals



- Design activities that provide learners with opportunities to express themselves

In this topic, you will learn about the principles of learner empowerment and how it can be utilised in your teaching context. You will be acquainted with guidelines for good adult learning and will see how you can help your students to identify their own needs and goals which is an essential component of learner empowerment! Finally you will get to look at activities that provide your learners with opportunities to express themselves, equipping them with the tools they need to succeed!

Take a look at the welcome video below from the corresponding Empowering Adult Learners of Basic Skills MOOC



## *The Principles of Learner Empowerment*



Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash is licensed under Creative Commons 0

Empowering adult learners involves putting the learner at the centre of a course. This means addressing the learner's own needs and priorities and acknowledges the learner as an active participant.

Principles for good adult learning is based on a philosophy of adult education which is concerned with personal development and social action. Literacy in modern society is a complex issue, adult literacy work must enable students to connect their literacy and numeracy learning with the reality of their daily lives, and with past experience. Therefore, personal development is an integral part of the learning process. In addition, literacy learning may lead individuals and groups to relate their own experiences to wider social issues.



Adult learning is an active and expressive process. Adult literacy learning is most successful when the students are actively involved in the process and are encouraged to express their ideas and draw on their experiences. Students should also be enabled to explore the methods and materials which help them to learn most effectively and to take an active part in defining their goals and planning the learning programme. This has implications for training of tutors, teaching and learning approaches, choosing materials, including use of technology, and the assessment of learning. Some students benefit from the range of flexible options that are available such as blended learning, non-centre based learning, additional technological supports and distance learning.

Adult learning respects different beliefs, cultures and ways of being. An ethical code of trust and confidentiality underpins all aspects of the work. This addresses the central issue of respect for difference and diversity. Adults who return to learning come from many different social and cultural backgrounds. Adult literacy tutors and organisations need to operate from a clear position of respect for different beliefs, languages, cultures and ways of life. This variety should be seen as providing opportunities for learning for all participants in a learning group or programme. Confidentiality and respect must be established from the outset in order for students to feel safe. They can then begin to develop the trust that is needed if meaningful learning is to take place.

Students' knowledge and skills are vital for the effective organisation of adult learning. Students should have the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of provision. Students have experience and knowledge which are essential for the successful planning, development and evaluation of adult literacy provision. Their views and understanding need to inform the way provision is organised, particularly publicity, course options, student support, resources and social activities. Students should be actively encouraged to become involved in the organisation, for example, to take a seat on the board. However, some students choose to attend only for tuition and this choice should be respected.

Adults learn best when the decision to return to learning is their own and the environment is supportive, relaxed and friendly. Adults who decide to work on their literacy have taken an important and often difficult step. Students are more likely to attend regularly and stay in tuition when they see that their needs and concerns are at the heart of the organisation, and that good tutoring and resources provide the best possible conditions for learning. Ideally adult literacy learning should not be linked to welfare benefits or employment. Students based in other settings, such as training workshops, the workplace or in prisons, should have the right to decide whether they wish to work on their literacy skills.

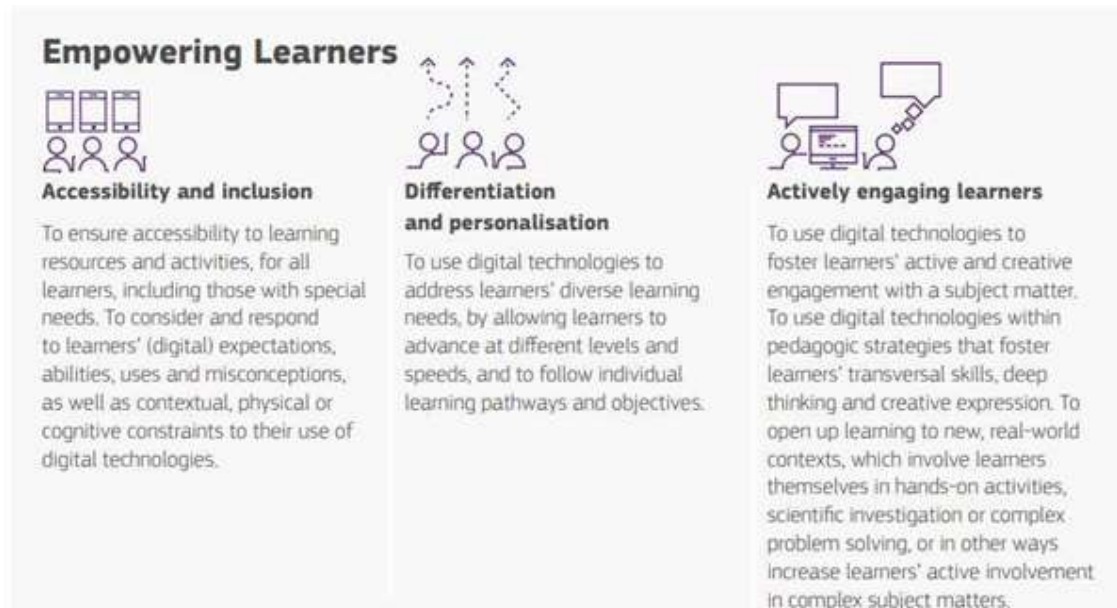
Adults learn best when they enjoy the process. Learning provides opportunities for new social relationships. Adults and young people often find that their learning benefits from the chance to relax informally with other students and tutors. In addition, interaction in a learning group contributes to the learning process, and to the development of both the individual students and the organisation.

*Source: National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. [Online]*

*Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02 March 2022].*

## *The Principles of Learner Empowerment Through Technology*

The Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu) explains that one of the key strengths of digital technologies in education is their potential for supporting learner-centred pedagogic strategies and boosting the active involvement of learners in the learning process and their ownership of it. Thus, digital technologies can be used to facilitate learners' active engagement, e.g. when exploring a topic, experimenting with different options or solutions, understanding connections, coming up with creative solutions or creating an artefact and reflecting on it. Digital technologies can furthermore contribute to supporting classroom differentiation and personalised education by offering learning activities adapted to each individual learner's level of competence, interests and learning needs. At the same time, however, care must be taken not to exacerbate existing inequalities (e.g. in access to digital technologies or digital skills) and to ensure accessibility for all learners, including those with special educational needs.



Source: Redecker, C., 2017. *European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators:*

*DigCompEdu, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.*

Redecker, C., 2017. *European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators:*

*DigCompEdu, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.*

## Implement Guidelines for Good Adult Learning

### Implement Guidelines for Good Adult Learning

**Guidelines for Good Adult Learning Work – principle 1 Adult learning is based on a philosophy of adult education which is concerned with personal development and social action.**

#### Implementation

- Ensure positive outcomes early on
- Respect the questions that the learner asks
- Use discovery learning

- Extend learning in the classroom
- Learn from the learners

**Guidelines for Good Adult Learning Work – principle 2 Adult learning is an active and expressive process. Students have the right to explore their needs and interests, set their own goals and decide how, where and when they wish to learn.**

Implementation

- Build the relationship with the learner and the group
- Actively involve the learner as much as possible
- Adapt to suit different needs, goals, and learning styles
- Develop material for the learner and group

**Guidelines for Good Adult Learning Work – principle 3 Adult literacy work respects different beliefs, cultures and ways of being. An ethical code of trust and confidentiality underpins all aspects of the work.**

Implementation

- Get to know the expectations of the group and clarify them
- Link with the local community

**Guidelines for Good Adult Learning - principle 4 Students' knowledge and skills are vital for the effective organisation of adult literacy work. Students should have the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of provision.**

Implementation

- Draw on the learners' prior knowledge and experience appropriately
- Work with the interests of the learner
- Work with the life circumstances of the learner

- Extend the learning outside of the classroom

**Guidelines for Good Adult Learning Work – principle 5 Adults learn best when the decision to return to education is their own and the environment is supportive, relaxed and friendly.**

Implementation

- Get to know the learner and the group
- Normalise thoughts and feelings
- Normalise strengths and gaps
- Use opportunities for group interactions

*Source: National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. [Online]*

*Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022].*

*National Adult Literacy Agency, 2018. The Wealth Model in Adult Literacy: transformative learning in action. [Online]*

*Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/the-wealth-model-in-adultliteracytransformative-learning-in-action/> [Accessed 02 March, 2022 ].*

## Topic 4: Tools and Measures that Help Learners Succeed

*Welcome to Tools and Measures that Help Learners Succeed*



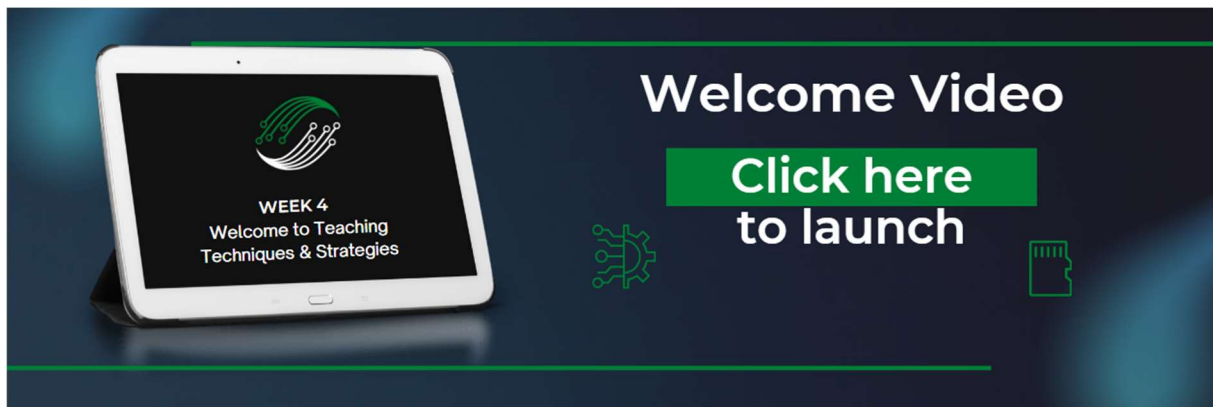


By the end of this week you will:

1. Understand the importance of learner motivation
2. Assist student-centered and student-directed Learning
3. Be able to incorporate teaching strategies that assist empowerment

In this topic, you will learn about the diverse nature and importance of learner motivation and will be introduced to a case study of how a tutor of basic skills motivates her students. You will be acquainted with student centred and student directed learning! Finally you will get to look at and learn to incorporate teaching strategies that assist empowerment.

Take a look at the welcome video below from the corresponding Empowering Adult Learners of Basic Skills MOOC



## *Learner Motivation*



Let's take a look at motivation and how it impacts the empowerment of adult learners! The Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching includes four motivational conditions that instructors can create or enhance.

1. Establishing inclusion – create an atmosphere in which users feel respected and connected to others.
2. Developing attitude – create a favourable disposition toward learning through personal relevance and choice.
3. Enhancing meaning – create a challenging, thoughtful experience that includes learners' perspectives and values.
4. Engendering competence – create an understanding that learners are effective in learning something they value.

The Expectancy-value theory suggests that people are motivated to learn if there is value in the knowledge presented and if there is an optimistic expectation for success. Expectancies for success refer to learners' beliefs of whether they will do well on an upcoming task. The more they expect to succeed at a task, the more motivated they are to engage with it.



Task value refers to the rationale for doing a task. It answers the question: Why should I do this task? There are possible answers to the question: intrinsic value (the enjoyment a learner feels from performing a task), attainment value (the importance of doing well on a task), utility value (the

perception that a task will be useful for meeting future goals) and cost (what an individual has to give up to engage with a task). Several studies have shown that learners' expectancies for success and task values positively influenced achievement behaviors and outcomes.

Strategies for applying expectancy-value theory in practical settings are: define clear, attainable goals; ensure that tasks/activities allow students to be successful in order to raise their expectancy.

Provide learners with positive role models and stress that the achievement of these role models may not have been great from the start but improved as their confidence increased and they gained more knowledge and experience.

*Source: Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2000). Expectancy-value Theory of Achievement Motivation. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25, 68–81. doi:10.1006/ceps.1999.1015.*

*Wlodkowski, R.J. (2008). Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults; Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.*

## Engagement

Engaging in the online classroom, while a little more complex, stems from the same basic principles as engagement in the classroom - utilising learner motivations.

Evidence on learner motivation suggests that neither the desire to acquire qualifications nor the desire to improve labour market position are the primary motivations for adults to engage in literacy and numeracy learning.

Adult motivations to learn are complex; and there is reason to argue that one way to achieve greater participation in and engagement with learning is to more closely align provision to motivation.

Not all learners are motivated by the desire to acquire qualifications; they may be motivated by intrinsic goals (for example, regaining confidence lost at school), or extrinsic goals such as career development, better wages and improved employment. Wolf et al. (2009) found that when learners interviewed were asked about the benefits they expected from their workplace learning, increased earnings was ranked last and increased chance of promotion second last, demonstrating that short-term gains had a low priority. Instead, learners wanted or expected to learn new skills (just over half the sample) and to be more effective in their current job role. In research drawing on data from the same three-year project on

the 'Impact of policy on learning and inclusion in the learning and skills sector' (UK) concurred that for employees participating in basic skills courses, career development was not as prominent a motivator as might have been expected.

Many of the learners simply wanted to 'brush up' on their literacy and numeracy to make up for learning they had missed out on in the past.

*Source: Future of Skills & Lifelong Learning Evidence Review Foresight, Government Office for Science*

### *Student-centered or Student-directed Education Learning*

Student-centred or student-directed education. These ideas have contributed to the development of a student-centred concept of adult education.

The needs, concerns and experience of the students are the focus of learning, rather than an externally structured and enforced curriculum based on the needs of, for example, the economy.

Curriculum for adult basic education is an ongoing process, formed in consultation with students.

A more challenging concept, also at the centre of adult literacy work in Ireland, is the student-directed approach. This means that rather than curriculum and approaches being formed by tutors who take into consideration the needs of students, it is formed by the students in discussion with their tutors. Tutors then facilitate the learning which the students wish to pursue.

It does not mean that tutors give up their role as teachers, but it does mean that their role is to facilitate and to develop materials, approaches and structures which encourage the increasing direction by students of their own learning.

*Source: National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. [Online]*

*Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 02 March 2022].*

### *Self-assessment Tools*

Self-assessment digital tools empower learners to self-assess their skills and understand where they need to upskill. Self-assessment digital tool should be learner-centred. Its design should be based on

the individual's goals and aspirations, knowledge, skills, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills needed in order to achieve their goal.



The tool should help the user see where they are and where they want to go. For adults, learning motivation requires both the initial effort of will required to enrol on a course and the long-term persistence needed to overcome obstacles along the way. Goals have been shown to play a key role in this process. Goal setting is a key motivational process as people will engage in activities that are likely to lead to goal attainment.

Digital assessment tools should be constructive, there should be no pass or fail as the self-assessment is not a test. The tool should help the users identify their strengths as well as the areas they might wish to work on. It should help them see how much they already know and what areas they need to work on to reach their goals. It should provide feedback on their strengths and on areas they need to develop in a constructive rather than critical way.



The CITO Skills Checker is a free, easy-to-use online self-assessment application, which helps adults to explore and reflect on their own learning goals by checking their digital, literacy, and numeracy skills.

<https://citoproject.eu/>

The tool puts the user at the centre of the equation by creating an experience that is relevant and meaningful to their literacy, numeracy and digital needs (for example, the scenarios will enable users to connect their unmet needs with the reality of their daily lives).

### Activity

Exercise: take the CITO Self-assessment Quiz (10 minutes): <https://www.skillschecker.ie/>

Source: Available at: <https://citoproject.eu/> [Accessed 02/03/2022]

National Adult Literacy Agency, 2012. NALA Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work. [Online]

Available at: <https://www.nala.ie/publications/nala-guidelines-for-good-adult-literacy-work/> [Accessed 28th July 2021].

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