

7. Concluding issues and future work

The fact that we secured extra funding through the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme means that we are now able to extend the project both in terms of time (turning it into a five-year longitudinal study with a projected end-date of September 2008) and, importantly, in terms of scope. More than half of the expanded activity now envisaged will be funded from ESRC funds. Our initial sample size of approximately 500 employee participants has been increased to 750 (anticipating an attrition rate of 50 per cent, which is realistic given the characteristics of our population and the longitudinal nature of the study). We are also able to extend the scope of the project in order to investigate teaching and learning variables in more depth, and to assess their impact on the effectiveness of the programmes.

As a result of our scoping work, we have also amended our strategy for identifying the sample of workplaces to be involved in the main study. As explained earlier, our efforts have so far concentrated on building a network of contacts with representatives from the provider organisations, mainly colleges. This was partly because many of our initial contacts came through the Workplace Basic Skills Network, which is a network of providers in the field. On the whole, our initial requests for help with the project were met positively, but there was increasing resistance as our requests for simple meetings and discussions became requests to make informal class observations or to conduct interviews with employees participating in the programmes. We sometimes had to compromise in order to move the project forward: for example, at our second pilot site the programme coordinator would not allow us direct access to participants for face-to-face interviewing and only agreed to administer the questionnaires herself or via her tutors.

Undoubtedly, our requests for help and collaboration place extra demands on the provider professionals' time and resources and it is natural that some of them will be wary of such a commitment. However, some of the unwillingness may also be due to a perception that it is a form of assessment or evaluation of their work, despite our firm reassurances that our research is on those receiving the training and the impact it has on their work and family lives.

In view of this, we are now concentrating our efforts on gaining access to participants directly through employers; some initial contacts in the food processing sector have yielded positive outcomes and firm promises for collaboration in the future. Other avenues include contacts with UNISON; CITB; the Trades Union Congress; the Council for Industry and Higher Education; the Goodison Group; several major transport companies; several local authorities; and the NHS University.

Even so, there is still some concern about achieving access to enough participants and subsequently obtaining their consent and agreement to collaborate with the project. Part of the problem lies in the fact that many of these programmes run with a very small number of participants – a group size of four or five seems to be the norm, particularly if courses for low-level ESOL employees are not taken into account. This means that we will have to negotiate access with a fairly large number of different employer sites (possibly more than a hundred) in order to achieve the required sample size.

It is impossible to carry out any systematic sampling of individuals or companies/organisations involved in workplace basic skills training because of the difficulties of gaining

access to participants (as discussed above). Nor is there any systematic inventory or database of the full range of provision across the country, or even in any given region (as discussed in section 4.1). However, we will concentrate on the three sectors listed above and will also take into account learning-related variables, such as:

- Total length of instruction.
- Intensity of instruction.
- Degree to which content is work/enterprise-related.
- Whether instruction is qualification-oriented.
- The extent of formal assessment (diagnostic and summative).
- Whether basic skills are integrated with other skills and content (for example, IT, NVQs).

We will also be trying to achieve a reasonable geographic spread of organisations and individuals, although the main variation in our sampling design will be the learning-related variables listed above.

Our budget does not permit intensive observation of teaching interventions in workplace programmes. However, through additional ESRC funding, we now propose to introduce a further teaching-related/pedagogical variable by using the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI). This inventory is currently being used in a project on socio-cultural approaches to learning styles and teaching models in adult literacy programmes, funded by the Canadian Research Council. The administration of this instrument will be combined with semi-structured teacher/tutor interviews (as discussed above), and is designed to obtain information about the perspectives that drive and shape teachers' pedagogical approaches. The instrument has been fully validated and is reliable.

The first sweep of data collection is starting in January 2004. We are also continuing our negotiation with companies involved in basic skills training for possible collaboration with us in the future, as well as collaborating with colleagues at the University of Ottawa in Canada regarding the use of TPI.

The scoping study underlined the problems associated with creating a national register of workplace provision, although this is now being addressed by the relevant agencies. Nevertheless, we were able to establish a network of contacts and are building up numbers of participant schemes with whom full data collection will commence in the near future. The need for new instruments was identified in some areas and these have now been commissioned or adapted from existing materials. Finally, we wish to emphasise that both our literature review and our discussions in the field have underlined the dearth of well-founded research in this area, and the interest in the matter of both employees and providers.

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Appendix 1

Structured questionnaire for employees

WORKPLACE TRAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

Record code

Participant name

Age and sex

Company name

Site

Training Provider

Course title and frequency

Questions about yourself and your job

First of all I would like to ask you a few questions about your current job at XX

Q1. What is your official job title?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q2. Is your job:	permanent	1
	on a fixed-term contract	2
	seasonal, temporary or casual	3
	don't know/not sure	98
	no answer	99

Q3. Do you work:	full-time (37.5 + hours)	1 GO TO Q4
	part-time	2 GO TO Q3a
	don't know/not sure	98 GO TO Q4
	no answer	99 GO TO Q4

Q3a. If part time, how many hours per week?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
---------------------	----

No answer 99

Q4. What times of day do you usually work?

mornings	1
afternoons	2
daytime (am & pm)	3
evenings	4
at night	5
other times of day	6
rotating shifts	7
variable – no usual pattern	8
other (please specify)	9
don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q5. How long have you been working for your current employer?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q6. Do you manage or supervise any colleagues at your current job?

no	0
yes	1
don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q7. What were you doing before this job?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q8. During the last five years, have you been out of work and seeking employment for any period?

Yes	1 GO TO 9
No	0 GO TO 10
Don't know/not sure	98 GO TO 10
No answer	99 GO TO 10

Q9. For how many months in total during the last five years have you been out of work?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q10. What is/was your mother's occupation?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q11. What is/was your father's occupation?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q12. At what age did you leave school?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q13. Did you leave school with any qualifications?

Yes	1 GO TO 14
No	2 GO TO 15
Don't know/not sure	98 GO TO 15
No answer	99 GO TO 15

Q14. What were they?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q15. Have you attended any courses/training since school?

yes	1 GO TO 16
no	0 GO TO 17
don't knoww/not sure	98 GO TO 17
no answer	99 GO TO 17

Q16. Did you gain any further qualifications?

yes	1 GO TO 17
no	0 GO TO 18
don't know/not sure	98 GO TO 18
no answer	99 GO TO 18

Q17. What were they?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q18. Is English your first language?

yes	1 GO TO 23
no	0 GO TO 19
don't know/not sure	98 GO TO 23
no answer	99 GO TO 23

Q19. What is your first language?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q20. Can you read in your first language?

yes	1
no	0
don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q21. Can you write in your first language?

no	0
yes	1
don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q22. Were you educated in your first language?

no	0
yes	1
don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q23. Is English the language you normally speak at home?

no	0 GO TO 24
yes	1 GO TO 25
sometimes	2 GO TO 24
don't know/not sure	98 GO TO 25
no answer	99 GO TO 25

Q24. Which (other) language(s) do you normally speak at home?

WRITE IN

don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q25. How many children do you have?

none	0 GO TO 27
one	1 GO TO 26
two	2 GO TO 26
three	3 GO TO 26
four	4 GO TO 26
five or more	5 GO TO 26
don't know/not sure	98 GO TO 27
no answer	99 GO TO 27

Q26. How old are they?

WRITE IN

1st child

2nd child

3rd child

4th child

5th child

don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q27. How many children other than yours live with you?

none	0 GO TO 29
one	1 GO TO 28
two	2 GO TO 28
three	3 GO TO 28
four	4 GO TO 28
five or more	5 GO TO 28
don't know/not sure	98 GO TO 29
no answer	99 GO TO 29

Q28. How old are they?

WRITE IN

1st child

2nd child

3rd child

4th child

5th child

don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Questions about your attitudes to work, your colleagues and supervisors and your working conditions

Q29. We would like to get your feelings about certain aspects of your job. For each aspect that I am going to read out to you I would like you rate it between 1–7. Ratings towards 1 indicate that you don't like that aspect of your job very much; ratings close to 7 indicate that you like or feel positively about that aspect of your job; ratings around 4 indicate that you are rather indifferent about that aspect of your job.

1	4	7
<i>dislike</i>	<i>indifferent</i>	<i>like a lot</i>

WRITE IN

CODE 98 FOR DON'T KNOW/NOT SURE

99 FOR NO ANSWER

a. The amount of work you have to do

b. Your promotion prospects

c. Your relationship with your line manager or supervisor

d. Your relationship with your colleagues

e. Your job security

f. The chance to use your own initiative

g. The pattern of working hours/shifts

h. Your pay, including any bonuses or overtime

i. The actual work itself

j. The opportunity to use your skills and abilities

k. The training opportunities available

Q30. Using the scale from 1 to 7 again as before, how would you rate your job overall?

WRITE IN

don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q31. How likely are you to leave your current employer in the next year?

not at all likely	1 GO TO 33
not very likely	2 GO TO 33
quite likely	3 GO TO 32
very likely	4 GO TO 32
not sure/don't know	98 GO TO 33
no answer	99 GO TO 33

Q32. Why do you think you will leave? ONE ANSWER ONLY

the firm will close down	1
you will be made redundant	2
you will reach normal retirement age	3
you will take early retirement	4
your contract of employment will expire	5
you will decide to leave and work for another employer	6
you will decide to leave and work for yourself as self-employed	7
you will leave to look after home/children/relative	8
you will decide to be unemployed/take time off for a while	9
you will leave the country	10
other reason	11

WRITE IN

don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Questions about your training at work

I would now like to ask you a few questions about the classes that you have been attending at your workplace recently.

Q33. Is this the first time that you are having training/a course at the workplace with you current employer?

no	0
yes	1
don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q34. How come you got involved in the training? ONE ANSWER ONLY

your line manager/supervisor asked you to do it	1
it was compulsory for all employees	2
you were interested and signed up for it	3
other	4

WRITE IN

don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q35. Using the scale from 1 to 7 again, how happy are you to be going on this course?!

WRITE IN

don't know/not sure	98
no answer	99

Q36. Why do you think you are doing this training? ONE ANSWER ONLY

to increase and/or improve your skills in your current job	1
to prepare you for a job you might do in the future	2
to develop your skills in general (e.g. for leisure)	3
other	4

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q37. What would you would you say are the TWO main benefits of this training?

It makes work more interesting	1
It will help you to earn more money	2
It helps you to do you current job better	3
It improves your chances for promotion	4
It improves your chances of getting a better job	5
It enables you to learn new skills	6
It is good for meeting new people	7
Other	8

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q38. Using again the scale from 1 to 7 we used before, how would you rate your course/training overallⁱⁱⁱ?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q39 Do you hope to gain a qualification at the end of this course?

No	0 GO TO 41
Yes	1 GO TO 40
Don't know	98 GO TO 41
No answer	99 GO TO 41

Q40 What qualification?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q41. Are you more or less likely to come into work on the days that you have a class?

Less likely	1
As likely	2
More likely	3
Don't know/Not sure	98
No answer	99

Q42. Are you following an online course within a LearnDirect centre at all?

No	0
Yes	1
Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q43. Will there be an opportunity to do another course at work, once this is finished?

No	0 GO TO 45
Yes	1 GO TO 44
Don't know/not sure	98 GO TO 45
No answer	99 GO TO 45

Q44. How likely is it that you will be attending such a course?

Not at all likely	1
Not very likely	2
Quite likely	3
Very likely	4
Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q45 What kind of course will that be?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

Q46. How likely is it that you will do another course outside of work (e.g. local college), once this course is finished?

Not at all likely	1 END
Not very likely	2 END
Quite likely	3 GO TO 47
Very likely	4 GO TO 47
Don't know/not sure	98 END
No answer	99 END

Q47. What kind of course?

WRITE IN

Don't know/not sure	98
No answer	99

ⁱ Very high scores by almost everyone on this one – keep or ditch? I can't think of how to amend it and it seems rather important to ask people if they like going on these courses!

ⁱⁱ As in 2 above

Appendix 2

Schedules for semi-structured interviews with employers, employees and tutors

WORKPLACE TRAINING INTERVIEWS: EMPLOYERS OR MANAGERS

Record code

Participant name

Age

Sex

Company name

Training provider

The Organisation

When was the organisation set up?

How many employees are there?

Working patterns? Shifts?

Setting Up

How was this course set up?

Did you approach the provider or did they approach you?

Views on process of engagement?

Smoothly? Problems?

ONA/TNA?

Free?

Why now?

The Course

Is the course 'specific' to employees roles or 'general' in terms of skills development?

How much input did you have in terms of the content of the course?

Views on the length and appropriateness of the course?

How did you approach the idea of further learning with employees?

How did you decide who should go on the course?

Resistance? Eagerness?

Are there any incentives for the employees that attend?

Negative? Positive?

Are the employees attending the course during working hours?
How is this negotiated?

Outcomes

What are you hoping to achieve by running this course for your employees?
Have you noticed any differences in your employees' performance at work?
(Productivity; morale; absenteeism; efficiency; employees making suggestions at work; recorded grievances; team working ability; etc.)
Any changes in group dynamics?
Perhaps between those who are on the course and those who are not?
How do you think the course will affect the business?
What would be different if the training was not taking place?
Do you think that the course is worth the amount of hours lost by employees attending it?
Do you talk to your employees about how they are getting on, on the course?
Outcome?
Do you talk to the tutor/provider about how it is going?
Outcome?
How will going on a course affect the prospects of your employees within this company?
How do you think that going on the course will affect the working lives in general of the learners?
How do you think that going on the course will affect the general lives of employees?
What other training do your employees receive?
Are you thinking of running any other courses in the future?

WORKPLACE TRAINING INTERVIEWS: TUTORS

Record code

Participant name

Age

Sex

Company name

Training provider

How is this course going?
How do you feel the learners are doing?
How is the content of the course determined?
Is the content revised as the course progresses or is it all fixed at the beginning?
What should the learners expect to get from the course in terms of their working lives?
What should the learners expect to get from the course in terms of their personal lives?
Do you feel restricted in any way with regards to making the course more useful for learners?
Why have these learners committed to your course?
What is the attitude of the learners on this course?
What are the reasons behind some learners being successful and others not?

Why has the development of basic skills been so poor in the past for these learners?

How do you cope with classes made up from learners with different employment backgrounds/skills levels/languages?

What kind of feedback is there from:

The tutor to the learners?

The learners to the tutor?

The tutor to the organisation's management?

The organisation's management to the tutor?

Why do you think this organisation has committed to your course?

Talk me through the chain of events that got you here teaching this course.

Did you carry out an ONA/TNA for this company?

If not, who did?

What kind of training and/or qualifications do you have for teaching basic skills/ESOL?

Bearing in mind the nature of our project, is there anything else that you think I should be aware of or that you would like to say?

Other workplace basic skills courses we could gather participants from?

WORKPLACE TRAINING INTERVIEWS: LEARNERS

Record code

Participant name

Age

Sex

Company name

Training provider

Introduction

Hand over a learner briefing.

Discuss whom I am working for and what we hope to get out of the project.

State confidentiality and anonymity clause.

Ask permission to record the interview.

The Course

What is the name of the course you are attending?

When did you start?

How long will it last?

What have you learnt so far on the course?

How do you know that you have learnt these things?

What else do you think you will be learning?

How come you're on this course?

Why did you want to attend?

How did you feel about being asked to go on the course?

Are some people you work with not attending the course?

Why not?

How do you feel about that?

How do you think they feel about that?

Are you enjoying the course?

Why?

Why not?

Do you attend every session?

Why not?

Is there anything that you would change about the course to make it easier for you or more enjoyable?

What do you think about the course tutor?

Did you have any say in the content of the course?

Do you talk to your boss/manager about the course?

What do you say?

What did you not find useful?

Have you been on a course at work before?

Why?

Why not?

Have you been on any courses outside of work?

Why?

Why not?

Do you think you will go on another course when this one is finished?

At work/outside of work?

Why?

Why not?

Who have you told about coming on the course?

What did they think about it?

Effects of the Course

What do you think you will gain from the course?

Promotion? New job? Etc.

Will you get a qualification?

Does the course help you to do your job?

What are you doing differently at work as a result of the course?

[What did you do before in this situation? Avoidance tactics]

Does the course help you in your daily life (outside of work)?

Are you doing anything different outside of work as a result of the course?

Have you changed your mind about anything whilst on this course?

Now you're a student, do you feel differently about yourself in any way?

Have you developed friendships with students on the course that you weren't friends with before?

How is it a friendship?

Are they the sort of people you would normally be friends with?

Work History

What is your job title?

How long have you been doing this job?

Is it permanent, temporary, contract, part-time, etc?

How did you get this job?

What does the job involve?

How do you feel about this job?

What were you doing before this?

And before that...

What do you see yourself doing in five years time?

Education History

What age did you leave school?

(Why did you choose to leave then?)

What qualifications did you get?

Did you enjoy being at school?

Why?

Why not?

In what other environments have you learnt new skills in the past?

Did you get any other qualifications during this time?

What sort of careers advice did you receive at school?

What careers advice have you received since then?

Personal

What do you do when you're not at work?

Do you read anything?

Do you write anything?

Do you use the Internet?

Do you use maths for anything?

Do you belong to any groups or clubs?

Have you belonged to any/others in the past?

Why did you leave them?

Do you belong to a Trade Union?

Do you have a partner?

What did they think about you going on the course?

Do you have children?

What age are they?

What did they think about you going on the course?

What do your friends outside of work think about you going on this course?

What are your dreams or ambitions for yourself?

Appendix 3

Timescale for the development of the literacy assessment tool

March 2003

Preparation of test specifications

April 2003

Text selection and development

Item writing

May 2003

Item writing (cont)

Review by NRDC

Informal trialling

June 2003

Informal trialling (cont)

Design and production

July 2003

Review by NRDC

August 2003

Revision and final production

September 2003

Printing and dispatch for trial

Trials (Sept/Oct)

October 2003

Test return and marking

November 2003

Data entry and analysis

Reporting

Review by NRDC (Nov/Dec)

December 2003

Preparation and production of final instruments

Final instruments delivered

January 2004

Level setting



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