Overcoming Barriers: Towards Active Learners

May 2013

Emily Barrell

"teachers, ..They are craftsmen in their concern with the material under their hand. They are cognisant of the variety and the uniqueness of their charges and aware of the personal and social processes by which modifications can be wrought...."

Fleming 1958

Abstract

How can we as teachers be prepared for each learner's individual needs and motivators to enable the success of the individual, and thence the cohort? To explore this question this paper concentrates on adult community education within communication technology courses at level 1 and 2 and seeks to address three issues; how to identify learners at risk, how to identify adjustments which can be made, and how to enable learners to become active and purposeful learners.

Introduction

Teachers are under ever increasing pressure to perform, to meet targets and to propel learners through an achievement cycle as quickly as possible to meet funding requirements.   This market driven pressure on the classroom means that the pressures for learners to achieve place great strain on teachers to cover the curriculum and process learners like so many jars of pickles. (James & Biesta 2007, Hodkinson 2008 Coffield 2010). It would be all too easy to surrender the classroom to this concept of a manufacturing process; however the greatest obstacle to this is the learners themselves. There is no one size fits all shoe horn we can use, no single magic recipe which works for each and every 'one' within the whole. In fact, education is not a business with a standardised raw material at one end and a uniform product at the other.

Adult learners bring a wealth of existing explicit and implied knowledge gained from experiences both positive and negative which create dispositional ways in which each adult sees the world.   This 'individualness' creates great variety and constant challenge in the classroom. Instead of manufacturers of successful learners, we should think of teachers as akin to craftsmen who can recognise the qualities of the materials they work with and therefore respond to the needs of learners on an individual basis. By doing this, the teacher craftsman will achieve the aims for the learner as well as the course.

So, our question is, what are the barriers our learners experience and what should we be doing? Can we identify and plan for common barriers to learning?   The teacher-craftsman aiming to support every learner within the classroom needs to be adept at recognising the particular strengths and needs of learners within a highly complex backdrop and it behooves them therefore to identify the strategies which can have the most impact for the most learners.

This paper explores those barriers in relation to a sample of computers and technology courses within a provider of community education. It investigates some of the current available research on barriers in adult education, and draws parallels with research based locally in the classroom. It then explores the impact of introducing specific strategies on the retention and achievement of learners identified as at risk of withdrawal, and whether it is possible to teach learners who have historically experienced barriers to the skills needed to become more purposeful independent learners.

More research is needed in the specific milieu of adult community education to understand the highly complex barriers which adults experience in this specific sector, but on an organisational and classroom level greater attention to each specific learner and less emphasis on teaching to the general cohort has the greatest potential to overcome barriers and therefore enable success and achievement. This is true on two levels; that of building a relationship of trust with the learner, and that of knowing the learner well.

Literature review: Barriers.

In undertaking this research project it was imperative that a broader perspective was obtained to understand our own findings.   We focussed on literature reviews primarily from adult education, though the vast majority of research is either aimed at entry from compulsory education into secondary or tertiary education. This therefore meant that the focus of the research reviewed was at times less applicable to the locus of our own research. However, a few parallels could nevertheless be drawn between adult community education and other forms of post-19 education.

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) National Adult Learner Survey (NALS) found that the four most significant predictors of a person's non-vocational learning status were reported as: socio-economic group; whether or not a qualification had been obtained on leaving continuous full-time education; sex; and current activity status. McGivney (1993, 1996) linked these with Cross's 'barriers for learning' (1979) drawing a connection between previous experience of learning (continuous full time education and current education status) and likelihood to persist in education.   Of those who dropped out, 42% said that nothing would have prevented them from dropping out. (BIS 2012)

Theories around barriers to learning have been expressed in different models, (for instance McGivney in 1993, 1996) but for our own purposes we will use the categories by Cross (1979) of *institutional, situational* and *dispositional* barriers.

The area of interest to us in Cross's work were dispositional barriers and are perhaps the most pertinent to what the teacher-craftsmen may be able to address in seeking to support learners. Unlike institutional barriers around the design or access arrangements for the course itself, these barriers are the beliefs about learning and about themselves as students that can inhibit their progress and achievement in the class. As Kennedy put it, 'many adults have experienced so much criticism, failure and discouragement in their youth, and that their self-confidence and sense of worth

are damaged. In a new learning environment, adults are often anxious, fear failure and dread rejections by their peer group.' (Kennedy 2003)   The National Adult Learning Survey 2010 (NALS 2012) found that being fearful of failure (11%) being too old to learn (8%) and seeing no value in learning (7 %) were some reasons given not to continue with education. These draw directly on dispositional barriers to learning. The teacher-craftsman is uniquely placed to address these fears and beliefs, and by their actions will either confirm or undo the harm already in place.

Cross notes that dispositional barriers can also be related to the activities of learning as well as the self-perception of the student in that learners do not appreciate the activities or find enjoyment in the process of education which leads them to value learning less.   Dispositional barriers are the more ambiguous and difficult to pin down, but they are also the barrier which may be most in the teacher's control.

(Quigley 1998)
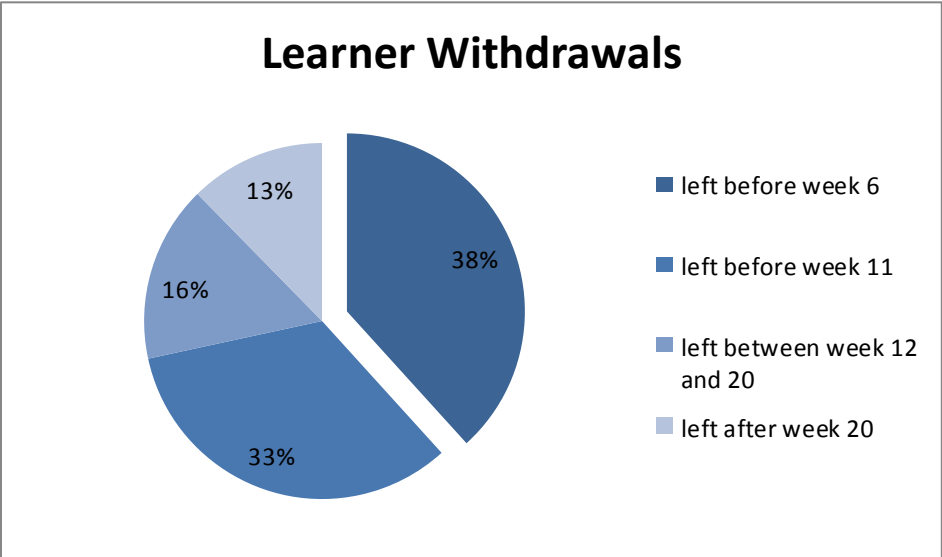
Comparative Data Analysis

As part of our research into learner barriers an anonymous survey was undertaken amongst the tutors working for a largely rural adult community education centre with a county wide demographic. As previously stated this provision is a 'first rung' provision provider targeting support for learners without level 2 qualifications or those who are on benefits. The tutor survey was well received with 100% response rate. Within the survey we investigated several questions.

When asked to give their opinion on why learners enrolled on a qualification course but then would leave without attainment, 64% linked the difficulties the learners found with the self-directed nature of the learning on the qualification course; followed by 36% linking to the use of a limited workbook based learning method. A range of other reasons were also noted such as poor course signposting, situational conflicts with carer or work responsibilities, and gaining employment. (See appendix 1)

Also within that question 18% noted reading comprehension difficulties as a reason for withdrawal. When asked which learners were most at risk of not achieving or

retaining, it was thought that those with the lowest literacy levels at Entry 1 were at highest risk of not achieving (54%) dropping to 18% for those with Entry 3 reading comprehension. In addition, tutors identified learners at risk of non-achievement as those with mild to moderate learning difficulties such as dyslexia (45%) memory retention problems (63%) learners with limited learning strategies (63%) and learners with emotional difficulties (63%).

In reviewing the 2011-2012 year, there were 319 learners enrolled on qualification courses, of which a raw figure of 108 withdrew and did not achieve. This equates to 33.86% withdrawal rate. When adjusted for learners who did not attend more than 1 session (21) and for learners who enrolled too late in the summer term to realistically achieve (6) this left 84 learners or 25.39% who did not achieved and withdrew early.

Learner Withdrawals

- 38% left before week 6
- 33% left before week 11
- 16% left between week 12 and 20
- 13% left after week 20

Of these 82 learners, 31 left before week six, a further 27 left before week eleven, and rest (24) leaving between week twelve and thirty.

Demographically the average age of our learners is 44 years old, with a high percentage (97%) receiving fee remittance. Over half had qualifications below level 2 and three quarters were unemployed. However this reflects the demographic of all the enrolled learners at this provider so is not statistically relevant.

An analysis of these figures reflects the data found in the NALS survey, and can be linked to Cross's barriers to learning. Specifically, it can be assumed that learners who do not continue with a course after the first session (21%) were not correctly signposted to the course in the first place thus experiencing institutional barriers to learning. Those who attended more than 2 weeks but left before 6 weeks account for 38% of withdrawals. 33% of learners who did not achieve left between 6 weeks and before 11 weeks of learning. That equates to 71% of withdrawals occurring before learners had experienced a term or a third of a planned learning program.

Of these learners there was no statistically significant level of declared learning needs or significant cohort in terms of age or economic status. It is therefore important to explore the barriers these learners may have experienced which led them to try to achieve and then fail to persist. It may be pertinent to consider McKluskey's theory of margins in relation to Cross' barriers to learning, in light of the tutor survey. According to McCluskey's 'Theory of Margins', (1974) 'power should equal or exceed load'. This means that a learner's motivators both intrinsic and extrinsic and support available (or 'margin') need to be greater than the barriers they are experiencing for them to persist in learning. Research shows that learners can experience more than one barrier to learning which puts them at ever increasing risk of failure, with learners only publicly citing one, perhaps the most recent or least embarrassing barrier as the reason for leaving a course (McGivney 2004, Cullen 1994). Therefore where learners have identified a barrier, it must be assumed that this may not be the only obstacle or 'load' which the learner is under and therefore consideration should be given to quickly helping learners balance the barriers with their personal motivators.

The last group of learners (29%) are those who stayed with the course for more than 11 weeks, some up to 30 weeks, but then still did not achieve. It begets the questions of why they persisted for such a length of time without achievement. Again a consideration of the barriers against achievement and the 'margin or the

supportive factors which are helping them to continue despite lack of achievement should be examined.   Also, for many of these learners, they may be enjoying the social nature of working alongside other adults or 'getting out of the house'. For some, they may not have the same definition of achievement; it is well known that older adults may not value the actual qualification once they are past the age of needing to prove their abilities for work prospects, and yet this is the definition of 'achievement' for this accredited provision.

When discussing barriers, the Tutor Survey highlighted the lack of choice in learning methods, the dominance of the use of workbooks and the expectation of independent guided study which were all seen as barriers to some learners, particularly those with undeclared learning needs or lower reading comprehension. For both those who failed to stay after a term and those who persisted but did not ultimately achieve, it is important for the teacher-craftsman to recognise his materials and use the most appropriate tools and strategies to enable learner progression not only academically and in skills, but in building resilience against barriers for future learning.

Accordingly a consideration of a few more theories will help us to fully examine the dispositional barriers our 'at risk' learners are experiencing, and therefore help us to identify a strategy to support them more fully.

Dispositional barriers in the widest sense related to learning are learner's own perceptions to learning, how they see themselves as learners, their previous experience of learning, time elapsed since last learning experience, and skills needed to learn including reading and comprehension, memory, and reflection. (MacKeracher et al 2006, Cross,1981, McGivney 2004)   The average age of our learners is in the mid-forties and clearly each learner will bring experience of being in education to our course. This may be a good thing, allowing learners to utilise already developed strategies and beliefs in themselves to push their learning on, or it may be detrimental if prior experience leads learners to believe that learning is difficult. It is even more of a barrier if learners believe that their potential is fixed by birth or social class or other factor. (Dweck 2012) Learners can create barriers for

themselves by also subscribing to the 'too' beliefs; that of being too old, or too busy or sick etc. which are self-created barriers learners may either genuinely believe or on some level subconsciously use as an 'acceptable' excuse rather than risk failure due to less socially accepted excuses.

In the tutor survey, tutors overwhelmingly list a fundamental inability to be a purposeful learner as a barrier to new IT qualification learners (55%). 36% noted learning independently from workbooks were a barrier to new learners. For learners who stayed on but made poor progress, the inability to be purposeful learners continued to be a barrier to achievement (45%) with 27% continuing to struggle with learning from workbooks. In addition 36% of learners identified as making poor progress also were identified as lacking basic functional skills in English and maths.

Successful Learning

The results from the Tutor Survey showed that in the opinion of tutors, the most successful learners from the IT qualifications classes are those who are driven by a motivation to achieve qualifications, normally to improve job prospects or because work requires them to so do (65%). This is closely followed by those who have recognised a need within their own personal life such as personal accounting or for accessing higher education (34%). This links to Knowles principles of adult being motivated by life experiences (Knowles ^^). Successful learners who achieve the most have higher literacy levels (45%), are less likely to have additional learning support needs (65%), and are able to use a variety of learning methods (34%). These learners are also more likely to be able to utilise strategies to find out information that they want. (34%) This links to the NALS survey which indicated that higher achieving learners are more likely to continue in learning. The also show more resilience or persistence to learn (MacKeracher et al 2006, McGivney 2004)

Strategies for learning

Having isolated potential barriers for our learners, we then held learner forums inviting the views of existing learners on the design and experience of the qualification course. In total three forums were held attended by a total of 25 learners. On analysing the responses, it became clear we had neglected to consider

two things; the first was that as we were already into week 9 of the course a high proportion of learners who were going to withdraw without achievement will already have done so (keeping in mind that 36% who start but drop out do so in the first 6 weeks). Secondly the learners who had remained were going to be the ones who were already successful in the current system and methods, or were persistently dogged in their attempt to make it work. We discussed this as a team as we considered which strategies we would change, and decided that we could only use the information we had to direct our efforts to support existing learners who were persisting in their learning but were not making progress, thus ensuring the learner forum comments were relevant to our study.

As an adjunct to reporting learner comments it is necessary to outline that on qualification courses learners are afforded choices in which units they wish to pursue and therefore learners work independently on units at different speeds. Learners may also join the course at any point. Overall learner responses were that this status quo within the course design was not a barrier to their learning, but additional comments were made around how the course design had not been clear when they first started and this impacted on their confidence. There were mixed views on the primary use of workbooks for learning with some learners very satisfied with the structure this provided. Other learners did find that the workbooks slowed down their progress and were not very clear in their instructions, and this became a contentious issue in discussion. Specific comments were made at how the language was 'obtuse'

particularly at level 2, 'there was too much reading to take in', and learners with ESOL needs found the workbooks particularly slow to work with.

Strategies to enhance learning particularly for those identified as having barriers which might lead to withdrawal were discussed based on the Tutor Survey, the results from the Learning Forums and informed by the literature review into barriers, and adult learning theory. This lead us to research further into the most efficient means of supporting a range of learners.

As first asserted in the introduction, there is no one strategy which would be the magic recipe for the diversity experienced within our adult community education

classrooms. The youngest learners in our setting are 19 the oldest 82. They range from not in education, employment or training (NEETS) to full time employment and from having no qualifications to level 5 and above. They come from deprived postcodes and from some of the most expensive communities.   They bring a range of cultures and faiths to our catchment. We therefore focused on addressing the dispositional barriers we knew affected a range of our learners most; namely, the limited learning choices, the unrealistic expectation that all our students knew how to be learners, and the confidence of learners that they could learn something new.

Research indicates that adult learners have strengths and can use their greater and more complex experience base to help them become better learners if engaged properly. Mature learners prefer to learn for a purpose and in a meaningful way. They prefer to learn in less formal settings. They value social opportunities as well as learning opportunities.   Mature learners want clear and explicit instructions and learning material which guides learning, and will learn best when tutors give them experiences which help them to build their ability to learn into practice, and develop strategies to overcome barriers for themselves. Mature learners generally feel more comfortable learning with others of the same life stage. (for instance Taylor et al 2004, James and Pollard 2006, Coffield 2010, Knowles 1980, Bradley and Graham 2000).

Of particular interest to our project was a review of thinking around quality formative feedback coupled with good target setting.   This linked to the development of the electronic individual learning plan we had already begun and we suspected that a better use of it as a form of communication would support our learners with quality feedback, and engage with our adult learners more effectively as a private record of progress.

A review of Hattie (2012) indicates that feedback is in the top 10 influences on achievement, with an effect size of 0.79. This therefore seemed an appropriate strategy to develop to ensure greatest impact in our project.   However, whilst this is amongst the 'most powerful moderators of learning, its effects are also amongst the most variable'. To make feedback effective, teachers need to know where a learner

is starting from and where they are meant to be. The more transparent they make this status for the students the more students can help themselves to 'close the gap' (Sadler 1989, Clarke %%) Feedback can serve various purposes; to focus the learner's attention to succeed on the task, it can direct attention towards what needs to be done to succeed, it can inform, and it can be motivational. (see also Hattie and Timperley 2006)

Hattie looks at feedback in 4 levels related to the where I am, how I am going, where to next? set of questions. He looks at it in light of 'tasks', 'process', 'self-regulation' and 'self' .(2012 p116) He defines task based feedback as correctional feedback which is more about surface learning and 'closed' evidence e.g. whether an answer was right or wrong. Process level feedback is about the strategies used to achieve the results. Self-regulation is about the learners becoming more focused on their own learning processes and self-evaluation.   All of these in combination can provide powerful feedback which moves learning forward. However, the last category of 'self' is feedback which is based on praise.   Praise is often used to 'comfort and support' but it can also draw attention away from the other levels of feedback.(Hattie 2012) We were also conscious that feedback, or that which sometimes passes for feedback can in fact be detrimental to learners because it causes confusion, can obscure the learning point, and demotivate rather than concentrate learning. Crucially we also noted and planned for feedback to be given as close to the assessment as possible as this created the greatest motivation in learners. (Clarke 2005) This links with Wiliams and the impact of short cycle assessments. These increase student engagement and motivation because feedback can be focused on moving learning on and planning for next steps rather than as a focus on deficiency.

Secondly we looked to a strategy of increasing learner choice in assessment and learning.   Watkins explored how when learners are in control, it leads to greater engagement, setting of higher targets, problem solving skill and learners self-evaluating. (Watkins 2009) Learners feel engagement with purpose when they feel

they have made a choice. However encouraging the learner to take control needs clarity in the direction they want to go and an agreement with the course objectives. Weimer says "the more structured we make the environment, the more structure the students need. The more we decide for students, the more they expect us to decide...." (2002)

Lastly we considered the concept of enabling our learners to become more purposeful learners.   Metacognition is broadly defined as 'thinking about thinking' and in our context it is about learners learning to learn.   Hattie (2012) terms this 'self regulation', the ability to think about how you do something to improve the process and therefore the learning experience. Claxton talk about the 4 R's of learning power (resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity 2002).   We believe that this is an area highly neglected in the push for covering curriculum in shorter and short time frames to achieve funding figures in education today. Part of this strategy is ensuring learners think about their learning ability as something they can develop (Dweck, Hattie) and that developing strategies to think about their learning will help them to develop problem solving skills. This includes setting goals and planning how to achieve them and considering how to see challenges not as impossible but as a puzzle with a solution. Lovett (2008) suggests using activity 'wrappers' or routines which scaffold for learners the sorts of productive thinking they can undertake to improve learning.

Application- Case Studies

From analysis of the responses and in conjunction with the literary reviews, we developed these three strategies to apply with a sample of learners identified as having one or more barriers to learning.   Case studies were developed to investigate the impact of these strategies. Exit review interviews were conducted with this sample by someone other than their tutor.

Our strategies were

1) To look at how to engage learners with extensive explicit feedback Using Hattie's 4 levels of feedback.
    a) Examine best practice use of e-ILP and minimal use of e-ILP and assess impact of written feedback on learners level of ownership of learning
2) To enable learner choice in how they met their learning targets and to widen resources available to learners which met a broader spectrum of learning styles and preferences for learning
    a) Resources using visual and kinaesthetic learning were created for qualification classes when were identified as required.
    b) Resources such as screencasts were developed. Diagrams to supplement work books, additional worksheets,
3) To explicitly teach strategies for finding solutions for learning
    a) To start to compile strategies and sources of information for learners

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained by all who participated in the tutor surveys, learner focus groups and case studies, which included the right to withdraw permission at any point. Learners and tutors were encouraged to ask questions about the project and no covert observations or experiments were carried out which would put any learner or tutor at a disadvantage.   This is in accordance to BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2011.

A Sample of Case Studies of learners

Case Study 1

Strategies used: feedback to move learning forward, choice in learning materials

AB came to the course having already completed level 1. He said that he had not found any difficulty with going through Word, Excel and Databases, but the tutors had doubts of this.

He manifested symptoms of anger management problems from the start and said he lost his job because of a nervous breakdown.

In September AB started a level 2 word processing unit and immediately experienced comprehension problems. As soon as AB started reading a chapter that was not immediately comprehensible to him, or asked to apply formatting in an exercise which he could not find quickly, he would get up in a rage, red in the face and storm out. AB manifested frustration and even anger at the way the workbook was worded. There were sequences of actions that AB could carry out as long as he was following instructions closely and using the data supplied with the workbook. He had great difficulty in applying the same skills in a different context. AB was extremely frustrated and began to come to class already stressed with the thought of the experience. He indicated he was not sure he would return after half term.

After a lengthy support session in class the tutor and learner came to an agreement that AB would call the tutor over as soon as he began to feel frustrated. The tutor continued to use specific feedback to support AB both verbally at given points as he worked through the unit and in his e-ILP to encourage him and direct his learning.

Case study 1 continued.

In addition, the tutor and learner together identified difficult parts of the unit and developed some alterative resources to support AB. Whilst the use of a learning scaffolding sheet giving step by step instructions did not seem to help AB, the use of some easy step videos on YouTube helped AB very well. This tied in with AB's comments who found it much easier to watch something and repeating it than to try and understand it from writing. This was repeated at other sticking points. The use of giving choices on learning materials gave AB more confidence and he began to see that there are alternative strategies he can use to find solutions when he was stuck.

In addition, the tutor used written feedback in the learner's eILP to reinforce the work within class and to clearly set targets which helped the learner to see that he was making progress, even if it was slower than he would have liked. Feedback improved AB's chances of success in completing his 1st assignment, by focusing on how to overcome the barriers he felt, and by offering alternative means to achieve results.

Feedback in general is reliable if followed up by action to address the cause of the problem: difficulty, mental block, anxiety and phobias. These must be understood and analysed by interviewing the person concerned, and a trusting relationship between a tutor and learner is essential to allow this to happen.

Case Study 2

Strategies used: feedback to support learning, target setting

LL was frustrated by not 'getting on' with the books. She 'couldn't learn' from them and often skipped pages and sections. She often left early saying she was too stressed to continue and missed several sessions periodically due to childcare problems which also set back her progress as often she would have forgotten what she had worked on previously and therefore had to review her exercises.   She threatened to leave after half term as she 'didn't get it'.

The tutor used the eILP to structure LL's session with concrete targets which were tailored to stretch LL just enough to make progress without causing her to feel stressed by what she was expected to do. The tutor set specific tasks to do, and gave specific feedback in the E-ILP between sessions. The tutor also ensured that when work was marked that progress made was recognised, that the learner was encouraged to self-identify how they could improve their work and that feedback was focused on next steps rather than a deficit model.

LL not only retained on the course but began to make progress in learning the essentials for the unit. She attributed remaining on the course to the support which the tutor had given in the e-ilps and in person. She has achieved the unit she was working on.

__Case Study 3__

__Strategies used: feedback for learning, choices in materials,__

Learner MM Period of study 12 weeks

MM started her course having experienced a series of transfers from previous tutors due to 'falling out' with them. She felt that they didn't help her learn and were impatient with her. MM was a learner with a complex background which included lengthy association with social services. Her attendance patterns were good, but in class she exhibited some extreme emotions which required a support plan to be put in place. Her tutor estimated that one in every three sessions she would need to invoke the support plan to stabilise MM as she often because so frustrated or emotionally charged that she would either burst into tears or start shouting. MM did not like reading. Whilst she could read to a literacy level 1, her comprehension and application of what she was reading was poor and she would normally 'skim' sections of the workbooks then become frustrated that she didn't know how to complete the tasks. The highly experienced tutor was able to manage her behavior in class and to enable some social relationship building between learners which meant the other learners were not negatively impacted by MM's impatience, and emotional outbursts.

 The tutor recognising the barriers which MM had already experienced in learning previously tailored the methods of learning to MM's attention span and ensured a practical outcome for every section of learning.

The tutor arranged additional materials using other methods besides reading, for instance a collection of videos relevant to the units the learner was doing with practical tasks after each one.

She also turned the learning materials around and started from the point of identifying what MM didn't know, rather than building up knowledge as this helped MM to make connections with existing knowledge and therefore boosted her confidence.

MM responded well to 1:1 work particularly with limited but focused feedback. She did not respond well to criticism so feedback had to be delivered in a way which was not negative.

The tutor used a mixture of sympathy and firm boundaries to help MM to make choices about how she attended the class, helping MM to choose to remain in the lesson and overcome social anxieties regardless of whether it was a 'teary day'.

MM achieved three units whilst on the course but never became a resilient learner nor extended the range of her learning styles.   MM left the course to then take up a different social learning activity so this was still a positive step for MM.

Discussion

In the three case studies above each of these learners were experiencing barriers to continuing with their learning. Some were situational barriers, like childcare issues, but largely, the barriers they faced were dispositional in nature and therefore individual to the learner and brought by the learner and therefore essential for the tutors to address to allow the learner to progress. MM's barriers in particular could be looked at in this way. She approached learning as a frustrating and necessary evil. It puzzled the tutor initially why MM returned week after week when she was so frustrated and emotional. However, MM attended so that she could improve her job prospects. Her overwhelming motivator was to get a job so that she could provide a stable environment for her daughter to come back to live with her. Thinking back to

McKluskey (1970) it is clear that despite a high 'load' of de-motivators or barriers, MM was highly motivated to achieve if given an opportunity to do so.

This learner was particularly challenging for the tutor but they used very carefully thought out feedback to engage with the learner and move learning on, Feedback which was given on different levels from the surface level of 'task' to the 'process' level of how MM tackled a task. Interestingly, the use of the level of 'self' had to be regulated carefully as MM was highly suspicious of praise. This learner was highly resistant to self-evaluation and would not engage with feedback which asked for her own judgement. This ties in with her unwillingness to develop strategies to find answers for herself. She never got to a point that she could accept she may not know the answer but could find it for herself and any instance of not knowing created a flash point for this learner. The tutor regretfully acknowledged that MM as simply not at a point of maturity or in a stable enough place emotionally in learning to do this.

The other two case studies demonstrate how the personal relationship which was strengthened between the learner and the tutor with the transparent, honest and targeted feedback was essential in engaging the learner to persist and succeed. Learners on exit interviews wholeheartedly voiced this independently in every case, along with how much they valued the different ways of learning the choices in learning materials allowed them.

Lastly, we listed, perhaps optimistically, as a strategy the concept of building learning about learning into our courses. This we were least successful in overtly doing not least due to the time and course requirement constraints, but we maintain that this may be as powerful in the long term as good feedback for learning is. We did use the eILPS explicitly to structure learning and to engage learners in target setting and in thinking or reflecting on their learning. Both tutors and learners commented on how this helped to keep progress towards goals clear, but we were not able to clearly study its impact at this time with proper control groups. Therefore we

recommend that the study of this be pursued, with the consideration of developing a scaffold for learners to use in the same light as Lovetts 'learning wrappers' (2008).

Recommendations:

- *To widen participation by reducing the amount of reading from workbooks involved in completing ITQ units. Create a variety of resources and widen assessment methods to enable a wider range of learners to succeed*

- *Setting up discussion groups and engage peer working to deconstruct tasks making them easier to manage in small steps, using a more holistic approach to different tasks; starting with final result and working out how to get there.*

- *Use ILP as a core document which both outlines learning targets available and tracks not only progress towards those targets but also provides a place for reflection on the learning process- enabling a process of becoming more active owners of their learning.*

- *Develop the concept of learning to learn or metacognition as a core principle rather than an afterthought to the design of courses to build resilience in learners.*

- *Address institutional barriers in design of course, and greater flexibility in delivery formats to support learner's journey in becoming curious learners.*

- *Create a 'moodle space' for learners to access and choose learning which suits their needs and their learning styles.*

"Do my learners see themselves as able learners who are successful and do they leave my care with a positive attitude to continued learning?" (Hargreaves from Coffield 2010) The recommendations from this report should go some way in allowing teachers in adult community education to say yes to this question, and it should be this question or ones like it which occupy the mind of any teacher-craftsmen worthy of the name.

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What are the Barriers for new ITQ Learners?

Bar chart showing:
- limited learning style: 36%
- comittment to learning: 9%
- social issues: 18%
- material issues: 27%
- health and emotional barriers: 9%
- childcare: 9%
- unclear direction of course: 9%
- ability to learn: 55%

Why do Learner make poor progress?

Bar chart showing:
- basic functional skills: 36%
- lack of ability regulate own learning: 45%
- retaining information: 18%
- failure to practice independantly: 18%
- resources limit learning method: 27%
- lack of coherency between coruse and...: 9%

Learners most at risk of not achieving

Bar chart showing percentages for categories:
- learners with E1 literacy: 54.50%
- learners with E2 literacy: 27.30%
- learners with E3 literacy: 18.20%
- learners with E1 numeracy: 18.20%
- learners with E3 numeracy: 9.10%
- Learners with dyslexia: 45.50%
- Learners with memory / retention problems.: 63.60%
- learners with emotional issues: 63.60%
- learners who are on skills conditionality: 18.20%
- learners who are rigid in their thinking / learning styles: 63.60%
- mothers with young children: 27.30%
- adult males: 9.10%
- pensioners: 54.50%

What are the Barriers for new ITQ Learners?

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Opinion on new eILP

Category	Percentage
Improved learner retention	27.30%
engaged learners with their progress	45.50%
allowed learners to see their learning pathway	45.50%
confused learners	36.40%
are a waste of time and the paper ILP was more useful	18.20%
made no difference to learners	9.10%
Other	72.70%

Narrative for 'Other'
the targets enable the learners to see achievement in smaller chunks. So helps to give a sense of early achievement.
There is/has been a huge learning curve for both tutors and learners. You have to continuously guide learners to fill it in. E-ILPs are very time consuming (which doesn't mean they are not worth it).
some learners don't always see the importance of ILPs therefore probably not fussed whether they are paper or electronically based
provide a means for learners to tell me of problems and get encouragement from me which is written and therefore more 'permanent' for the learner.
Those learners that are comfortable & benefit most from taking notes & writing their reflections on lessons do so in paper-based notebooks that they can take home & refer to when applying or practising what they have learned later - having electronic notes they cannot take away so easily is counter-productive. Those learners that are not used to taking notes find it very difficult to get into the habit & and a very frustrating exercise and thus counter-productive to those that are not naturally reflective practitioners.
The are too long winded if it was a simple why are you doing this and then what they have learnt each session may not confuse some learners
They are seen as useful but in a two hour session they take up more time. Much better for tutor as progress is clear.
I think on the whole the new ILP have been a good tool - but we do need a way of seeing at a quick glance when/if a learner has completed the form. Unfortunately you can't have the document open by 2 people - so the tutor cannot see in the session if it has been completed. It would be beneficial if you could see it during the session.''