

Session Plan:

A Social Practices Approach to Embedding and Functional Skills

Aim

For participants to:

- Explore and develop a social practices approach to embedded and functional skills provision

Outcomes

By the end of the session participants should have:

- Discussed and identified social practices
- Recognised issues around a 'skills' view of learning.
- Explored, and tried applying, a framework for the analysis and teaching of social practices
- Explored issues around assessment and course content
- Discussed teacher roles in a social practices approach

Time (in mins)	Content Activity	Resources		
		No	Style	Title
10m	Welcome and introduction, objectives <i>Purpose: To share the objectives with the participants and find out a little about their motivations for attending and their teaching context</i> Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainers introduce themselves. Go over housekeeping and plan for the session. • Participants introduce themselves: what they teach and what they hope to achieve by attending the session. 	1.1	Powerpoint	Slide 2
		1.2	Trainer Notes	Introductory notes
15m	Background - Embedded LLN <i>Purpose: To briefly highlight the NRDC research on Embedded LLN</i> Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 3, and ask participants if they have read/know of this research report – give brief background as necessary • Show slide 4, and ask participants 	2.1	Powerpoint	Slides 3-5
		2.2	Trainer Notes	The NRDC

	<p>to work in pairs/threes to discuss/predict/ remember research findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show slide 5 and talk through the findings. Invite comments from participants as appropriate 			report
15m	<p>Background - Functional Skills <i>Purpose:</i> To highlight issues around the concept of 'functionality'</p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask participants working in small groups to critically discuss the quotation and the question below Facilitate whole group feedback, and draw out issues highlighted in trainer notes 	3.1 3.2	Powerpoint Trainer Notes	Slide 6 Functionality
20m	<p>Contexts and Practices <i>Purpose:</i> To highlight embeddedness of LLN practices in social contexts they occur in.</p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show slide 7 and give out Activity 4.1 Point out that each situation /context involves doing the same maths (30 divided by 4), but that each gives a different answer. Ask participants to match the answers with the contexts When they have done this, show the answers (slide 8) and invite comments, discussion. Now ask participants to decide how, in a real-life situation, these 'problems' would actually be solved Take/give feedback (see trainer notes) 	4.1 4.2 4.3	Activity Powerpoint Trainer Notes	Contexts and Practices Slide 7 - 8 Contexts and Practices
20m	<p>LLN Practices in real contexts <i>Purpose:</i> To analyse some real contexts to identify LLN practices</p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show slide 9 Ask participants, working in pairs or 	5.1 5.2	Powerpoint Trainer Notes	Slide 9 LLN Practices

	<p>groups, to describe the general scenarios of the contexts on the slide (where it is /who is doing what/what props are involved etc) and identify the specific uses of text, language and number.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can ask participants to work on all three scenarios, or set one per group You can adapt these scenarios to be more appropriate to the group you are teaching Take/give feedback (see trainer notes) 			
10m	<p>'Skills' and Social Practices <i>Purpose:</i> To highlight the problematic nature of 'skills'</p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show the quotations on slides 10 and 11 These both illustrate a social practices approach to LLN, emphasising the contextual nature of LLN. Show slide 12 – this sums up the the divide between 'skills' and practices Invite comments from participants 	6.1 6.2	Powerpoint Trainer Notes	Slides 10-12 'Skills' and Social Practices
15m	Break			
30m	<p>Social Practices: a framework for teaching <i>Purpose:</i> To explore the implications of a social practices approach, and to introduce a framework for the analysis and teaching of practices.</p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show slide 13, and gloss the central problem; 'how can we turn from a skills focus to a systematic way of analysing and teaching practices' Show slide 14 and introduce the LfL framework (see trainer notes) Show DVD excerpt(s)OR 	7.1 7.2 7.3 7.4	Powerpoint Resource Trainer Notes DVD <i>Literacies for Learning in Further</i>	Slide 13 -14 Framework PDF Social Practices – a Framework for Teaching Not supplied – see trainer notes for avalaibility

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give out Resource 7.2, gloss framework • Then, ask participants to identify a social/work practice from a vocational/subject area that has a focus on text, number or particular language. • Give each group flipchart paper and pens • Ask them to use the framework to analyse the practice and to record this on the flipchart paper • Display the finished analyses and take/share feedback 		<i>Education</i>	Flipchart paper and pens
10m	<p>Resonances <i>Purpose: To raise awareness of how a range of contexts can be related to each other</i></p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 15 and give brief input (see trainer notes) • Ask participants to look back at the flipchart diagrams they produced and comment on any ‘resonances’ across them • Point out or elicit that this is a useful concept to bridge the gap between contextualized practices and functional skills 	8.1 8.2	Powerpoint Trainer notes	Slide 15 Resonances
15m	<p>Assessment and Content <i>Purpose: To highlight the issue of assessment.</i></p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 16 and give brief input (see trainer notes) • Ask participants to discuss if/how this is true of their own courses • Take feedback – suggest that a in practices approach assessment needs to reflect the actual purposes of the course 	9.1 9.2	Powerpoint Trainer notes	Slide 16 Assessment and Content

15m	<p>Teacher roles</p> <p><i>Purpose: To explore vocational/LLN teacher roles in a practices approach</i></p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 17, and ask participants to discuss what they think vocational/LLN teacher roles should be in a practices approach. (If possible, set up mixed discussion groups of vocational/LLN tuors) • Give each group a copy of 10.3 to complete • Take feedback and show the suggested answers on slide 18 • Emphasise the importance of a Whole Organisational Approach – e.g. buy in of senior management / timetabling that allows vocational and LLN teachers to liaise and work together. • Refer participants to the LSIS Embedding Starter Kit for more on this. 	10.1 10.2 10.3	Powerpoint Trainer notes Activity	Slide 17-18 Teacher Roles Teacher Roles
5m	<p>Summary of session</p> <p><i>Purpose: Trainer summarises what has been covered</i></p> <p>Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 19 and give out 11.2 Handout • Refer back to objectives to check if participants feel they have been met. • Participants ask questions and complete evaluations. 	11.1 11.2	Powerpoint Handout	Slide 19 References

1.2 Trainer notes - Introductory notes

This CPD session builds an argument for a ‘social practices’ approach to teaching practice in embedded and functional skills provision. It draws on current theory and research to suggest that a view of literacy, language and numeracy (referred to below as ‘LLN’) as a set of decontextualised ‘skills’ that can be taught outside of the contexts they occur in is inadequate and ineffective.

Instead, the uses of literacy, language and numeracy should be seen as ‘practices’ - i.e. inextricably bound up in the contexts they occur in. People *do* things with text, language and number in certain ways for certain purposes according to the context – the social practice –they are taking part in. Learning to do a literacy practice, for example, involves learning how to use text - perhaps reading and/or writing – in certain highly context-specific ways.

Such a view of literacy, language and numeracy suggests that it should be no surprise that embedded provision might be more successful than discrete LLN (see the NRDC report referred to in the session); learners are more likely to see the ‘point’ of LLN instruction where it is intimately linked to and part of the context they are trying to master. (For example, the ‘point’ of literacy teaching in a construction context would be for learners to engage with how a builder or electrician actually uses text, reading and writing in the real working world; the literacy practices seen as part of the working practices in the construction industry).

One problem for functional skills provision therefore, is the extent to which LLN practices can be stripped down to, and analysed as a set of ‘skills’ that can be transferred from one context to another. Social practice views of learning suggest that this would be far from straightforward, but this session puts forward the notion of ‘resonances’ (similarities between contexts in terms of topics/modes/ intentions) as one way that functional skills tutors may be able to help learners.

The session also highlights issues around assessment: learners are often assessed in ways which have little relation in terms of method or



mode to the real LLN practices they are trying to learn for their vocational/subject specialism. In addition, functional skills assessment, whilst contextualised, will very likely be in a context alien to the learners, (and rests on the whole idea of transferable 'skills').

Taken as a whole, a social practices approach to LLN suggests that LLN teachers need to work closely with vocational/subject teachers to analyse and bring to learners' attention the 'practices' – LLN and otherwise – that occur in the contexts they are studying in and for. In particular, it suggests that vocational/subject tutors will be able to draw on their knowledge and experience of their specialist area to explain to LLN colleagues *how* text, language and number are used in context, so that LLN teachers can apply their own expertise to the teaching of these practices.

The session goes on to put forward a framework for analysing and teaching LLN practices in context, drawn from the 'Literacies for Learning' project (see below)

The session draws on several key sources:

Casey, H., Cara, O., Eldred, J., Grief, S., Hodge, R., Ivanic, .R, Jupp, T., Lopez, D. and McNeil, B. (2006) "You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering ..." Embedding literacy, language and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes – the impact on learning and achievement, London, NRDC.

Available at: http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=73

This study looked at embedded provision in a variety of contexts – a key finding was the higher achievement and retention rates that fully embedded provision demonstrated. This finding chimes very well with a social practices approach, which argues that learners' understanding of LLN practices benefit from learning these in context.

Pardoe S & Ivanic R, (2007) *Literacies for Learning in Further Education* Booklet and DVD

Project website: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/lilfe/>



This important study of the literacy practices vocational learners in several colleges (referred to as 'LFL' below) takes a social practices view of learning. It provides the framework for analysis and teaching used in this presentation, and raises important issues around a 'skills' based view of teaching and learning.

It is crucial to realize that although the LfL research was focused on *literacy* practices, the framework can easily be adapted to work equally well with numeracy, language and other (social, work) practices.

Gee, J.P. (2011) *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* Routledge

This seminal book focuses on the study of language, learning and literacy (and by implication, numeracy) in their social, cultural and political contexts. It argues for a social practices approach to LLN, suggesting that LLN 'skills' cannot be meaningfully isolated from the contexts they occur in.

The LSIS Embedded LLN Starter Kit:

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=292649>



2.2 Trainer notes - The NRDC report

The report's findings are clearly impressive, although it is important to acknowledge – as the researchers themselves do – that the sample sizes were not large enough to be able to claim them as quantitative, scientific 'proof' of the effectiveness of embedding.

However, when viewed as qualitative data – and the biggest study of embedded provision yet undertaken – it is significant that the findings are in line with what a 'social practices' view of LLN would predict; that LLN are best taught in context, and that they are seen as an integral part of the vocational/subject area.

There is also a link here to the LSIS *Embedded LLN Starter Kit* which has more on the research report, and on the *Whole Organisational Approach to Embedding LLN*.

3.2 Trainer notes – ‘Functionality’

The quotation is interesting for a number of reasons:

- It implies ‘literacy’ is a thing which a person can ‘have’ ‘more’ or ‘less’ of, rather than a type of activity people take part in.
- It suggests that finding a plumber would involve using the index of Yellow Pages, though many people, if they needed a plumber, would not need to use the index (given the alphabetical listings), or even use Yellow Pages at all.
- It presents a context as if it were a decontextualised ‘skill’ (‘using an index’)
- The report does not say how the seven million /‘one in five’ adults was arrived at, or refer to such a large quantitative study.

The notion of ‘functionality’ is highly problematic, resting as it does on the idea that ‘skills’ are unproblematically transferable from one context to another. It seems to suggest that a ‘literate’ or ‘numerate’ adult could operate ‘functionally’ in any context – but social views of LLN would question this, suggesting that LLN practices are deeply context specific: e.g. knowing how a business accountant estimates profit and loss may not mean you would be able to carry out a builder’s estimate for materials.

This is explored further in the next activity.

4.1 Activity – Contexts and Practices

<p>A nursery worker wants to take a group of 30 staff and children on an outing. If each car can seat 4 people, how many cars will be needed?</p>	
<p>Sharmin baked 30 muffins and wants to share them equally between 4 children. How many do they each get?</p>	
<p>Adé wants to cut up a 30cm length of ribbon into 4 equal lengths. How many cm would each length be?</p>	
<p>Four planks of wood are needed to make a shelf. How many shelves can be made from 30 planks of wood?</p>	
<p>Ola has 30 sweets and shares them between 4 children. How many do they each get?</p>	

7 8 7½ 7 with 2 left over 7.5

4.3 Trainer notes – Contexts and Practices

The point of this activity is to show that whilst the same maths or calculation *may* occur in many different contexts, (as per functional skills tests) it is far from obvious that in a real-life situation this is the actual maths that would be required or enacted.

For instance, in the case of the first situation (the nursery worker), many other factors might determine how this ‘problem’ was solved:

- Staff availability / driving skills
- Number of seats per car (many cars take more than 4 people)
- Health and safety / safeguarding regulations (e.g. ratio of staff to children required)
- Availability of other forms of transport and cost (e.g. coach hire/ public transport)

To understand how this ‘problem’ would be worked out in real life (and therefore what LLN might be involved) one would have to draw on the experience and knowledge of nursery workers / teachers. For instance, the first step might be to start with not the number of children who want to go on the outing, but the number of places available in the transport selected, which might itself depend on available/eligible drivers.

The other situations exhibit similar characteristics when analysed. They also illustrate how important a role is played by real world knowledge of the context (and sometimes cultural knowledge). One needs to know, for instance, that muffins can easily be cut in half (unlike sweets) to arrive at the answers ‘7 and a half’ and ‘7 with two left over’ respectively. (Though it is hard to think of a situation where children would be given 7 muffins each at one time).

5.2 Trainer notes - LLN Practices in Real Contexts

This activity should help make clear what is really meant by a 'practice'.

Here is an example of the feedback you may wish to highlight /draw out from the first scenario:

The 'bedtime story' is well established as an example of a 'literacy practice'. It can also be referred to as a 'social practice' – the difference in terminology merely highlights the importance of the use of text (although in fact, a bedtime story may also involve a considerable element of numeracy – see below).

What we think of as a 'mainstream' 'bedtime story' in many UK households:

- will probably take place in a warm or cosy setting (e.g. child's bedroom / sofa in living room)
- will probably feature a certain type of textbook (often a narrative, with lots of pictures, possibly with larger than normal print, designed to be read in a relatively short time)
- will probably involve an adult reading out loud, with the child taking over the reading as they get older / more able to read
- will probably involve a particular 'style' of reading aloud (e.g. rising and falling intonation, interspersed with comments and questions to the child - *What can you see in the picture /oh dear, what do you think Cinderella's going to do now?*)
- may involve some numeracy – many bedtime stories involve counting games (e.g. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*)
- will probably involve reassuring or amusing narratives that won't alarm the child and prevent them sleeping (though many bedtime stories contain an enjoyable *frisson* of excitement, e.g. *Where The Wild Things Are*)
- may be accompanied by a bedtime drink (e.g. milk)



Of course, not all bedtime stories will follow this pattern. In some cultures, a bedtime story might be exclusively oral and not involve the use of a written text, and some parents like to make up or invent stories of their own to tell their children.

The literacies of bedtime stories have been explored in a seminal work by Shirley Brice Heath (1982), “What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school” *Language in Society*, 11, 49-76.

This can be downloaded from:

www.lerc.educ.ubc.ca/LERC/students/5652006/19.pdf

6.2 Trainer Notes - 'Skills' and Social Practices

The point here is to bring out the clear divergence in 'skills' and practices views of learning:

Functional Skills rests on the assumption that there are such things as transferable skills that can be taken from one context and applied to another unproblematically. Research such as the LfL project very much questions this (stressing 'the contextual nature of expertise').

As the LfL researchers point out, singular 'skill' is a useful concept. Many musicians, for example, though highly skilled in their favoured genre of music, would probably struggle to play as expertly in an unfamiliar genre – witness for instance a classically trained musician attempting to improvise modern jazz. Similarly, learners who are highly skilled in one context may struggle in another: although they may be able to draw on some aspects of their skill, it is not a matter of direct, unproblematic transfer.



7.2 Trainer Notes - Social Practices: a framework for teaching

Slide 13 poses the (rhetorical) question of how LLN practitioners can move from a 'skills' approach to a 'practices' one, given that the curricula we currently work with are very much couched in terms of 'skills'.

The framework suggested on slide 14 is taken from the LfL project: there are two ways to introduce this:

If you have the DVD, you can show section 3 'actions for change + framework' which begins at 19 mins 16 secs on the DVD, and is a very clear explanation of the framework. This is followed by two examples of vocational lecturers (Joanne and Ian) applying the framework to a particular element of their course. It would be useful for participants to watch these - Ian's example of design for a commercial kitchen is particularly revealing.

If you do not have access to the DVD, you can give out and refer to Resource 7.2 the Framework pdf, (in the DVD booklet) downloadable from the LfL website at:

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/lflfe/publications/pubsdocs/LfLFE%20Framework%20from%20booklet.pdf>

We would suggest giving out page 2 of the pdf during the session to support your explanation of the framework, and page 1 at the end of the session as follow-up reading. It is a good idea to use an example of a 'practice' relevant to the participants as you do this; for instance, as you gloss through the nine boxes of the framework, you could refer to a single numeracy, literacy or language practice, eliciting the *topic*, *audience*, *actions* and *processes* etc.

The activity that follows gives participants the opportunity to try out the framework for themselves.

As mentioned above, it is crucial that participants realise that although the LfL research was focused on *literacy* practices, the framework can easily be adapted to work equally well with numeracy, language and other (social, work) practices.



8.2 Trainer Notes - Resonances

The concept of 'resonances' offers one way for teachers to make links between different practices, and is therefore very useful in terms of the Functional Skills agenda. Whilst a practices view of learning doesn't fit well with the notion of decontextualised, transferable skills (which is central to Functional Skills), there is no reason why teachers should not be able to make links between (often very different) practices, in terms of *topic, audience, action and process* or any other elements of the framework.

The activity that follows gives participants the opportunity to try to find such 'resonances'.

9.2 Trainer Notes - Assessment and Content

One finding of the LfL research was that learners' reading and writing in college was often for assessment purposes only, and not very well linked to the 'real' reading or writing they might have to do in their chosen vocation or subject (or the reading and writing the learners actually did in their own lives).

Equally, the assessment practices often don't match the LLN practices required in the 'real world' (an extreme example might be when a very practically based vocational course is assessed by means of an academic essay).

One implication of a practices approach is that assessment practices should themselves be as close as possible to the practices that learners are trying to acquire for their future work/life.



10.2 Trainer Notes - Teacher Roles

A practices approach, with its emphasis on contextualised expertise and the interwoven nature of LLN and social practices, means that vocational/subject teachers and LLN teachers have a real opportunity to share their differing knowledge and expertise.

Vocational/subject teachers will have expert knowledge and awareness of the social and work practices in their field – *how things are done* in a vocational/ work setting out in the real world. LLN teachers will be able to unpick and analyse the literacy, numeracy and language elements of these practices to highlight potential difficulties/opportunities for learners, and identify ways to teach them meaningfully in context.

A practices approach would not ask vocational teachers to teach LLN – this requires a different sort of expertise to their own – but it would ask them to be cognisant of the literacy, language and numeracy elements that form part of the wider vocational/work/social practices they teach.

It is crucial to set the discussion around teacher roles in the context of a Whole Organisational Approach: for vocational/subject and LLN teachers to be able to work together effectively, management buy-in, and sensitive timetabling, for example, are absolutely vital.

The LSIS Embedded LLN Starter Pack (available at <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=292649>) contains more information and resources.

10.3 Activity - Teacher Roles

The vocational teacher could...	The LLN teacher could....

11.2 Handout - References

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