

Re-defining Post-Literacy in a Changing World - Education Research Paper No. 29, 1999, 148 p.



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EDUCATION RESEARCH

RE-DEFINING POST-LITERACY IN A CHANGING WORLD

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[RE-DEFINING POST-LITERACY IN A CHANGING WORLD](#)

**Alan Rogers, Bryan Maddox, Juliet Millican, Katy Newell Jones,
Uta Papen, Anna Robinson-Pant**

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Executive Summary

RE-DEFINING POST-LITERACY IN A CHANGING WORLD

1. This report is a follow-up to the report on post-literacy materials which Education for ***Development*** presented to ODA in 1993, a

shortened version of which was published by ODA as Research Report 10 *Using Literacy: a new approach to post-literacy materials* 1994.

This report has been prepared by a team constituted from members of Education for ***Development***.

2. The report concentrates on the specific stage in adult literacy programmes (usually a short-term stage) which immediately succeeds the initial literacy teaching (here called ILT) and which leads on to some other activity such as income-generation, group development programme, employment, or continuing basic education for adults. It does not consider continuing education or other post-basic education adult development activities.

3. The report reviews **current practice in post-literacy (PL)** as a bridge stage.

3.1 All PL programmes are agreed that the starting point of PL is the end of initial literacy teaching (ILT). But there is both uncertainty and conflict over the end stage of the process. The goal to which PL aims can be independent reading, continuing education (formal or non-formal), income-generation activities, development group activities etc.

3.2 Because of this lack of agreement over the end goal of the stage, the activities inside PL are very diverse and often contested. All PL programmes are seen as programmes of further learning. Some PL programmes concentrate on developing literacy skills further; others concentrate on skill training, group formation, or further education using a non-formal curriculum.

3.2 The target group of current PL programmes is usually the graduates from adult literacy classes, but some others (especially younger persons) are often admitted.

3.3 The main provision for PL is in the form of the development of PL materials - reading materials of an improving nature intended to promote central visions of development. These are developed mainly from the top-down, especially in writing workshops, and they are made available through local PL centres or libraries.

3.4 The staffing of PL is usually the same as for ILT; and there is virtually no specific training for PL.

4. The report examines some of **the pressures for change** with this model.

4.1 It points out that there are many expressions of concern about PL from practitioners and planners - about its separation in some countries from a planned basic education programme; about the lack of commitment to PL on the part of policy-makers and donors, and its lack of institutional capacity; about the gap between ILT and PL, and between PL and Continuing Education (CE); about its failure to reach the right or enough participants (only about one in ten participants in ILT join in PL activities); about the inappropriateness of the PL materials, their inadequate distribution and utilisation; about the weaknesses of local library and PL centres; about its failure to achieve its own goals, and its failure to promote gender-sensitised literacies.

4.2 The report examines a number of innovatory approaches to adult literacy such as the social uses of literacy, work-based literacy, the 'literacy comes second' model, community literacy approaches, 'real literacies' approaches, bi-lingual literacies, non-structural literacy, REFLECT, literacy drop-in centres, local libraries, visual literacies etc, all of which challenge many of the traditional concepts about literacy and especially call into question the issue of adults learning literacy in stages, including a post-literacy stage. The report notes in particular 'learner-generated material' development (LGM), which it sees as valuable, in part for the impact it has on the participants' confidence and

skill development, and in part for its ability to create texts which are culturally relevant to the participant group - although it notes that LGM is not often sustainable for long.

4.3 The report next examines several key areas of **changing understanding**, including

- *adult learning theory*, which suggests that adults do not learn best in a classroom situation, even when the textbooks have been adapted to their interests, but that they learn best from experiential learning when engaged in the real tasks of everyday living
- *the New Literacy Studies*, which propose that literacy should be seen as a set of social practices which vary from context to context; recent research into local literacies in several countries has demonstrated very clearly how different these literacy practices are (for example, the literacy practices of a taxi driver are very different from those of a poultry farmer), so that no one literacy learning programme can encompass all the different literacy needs which exist in any society

- *language and access* - modern understandings of language see it in terms of power and inclusion/exclusion, and decisions on language issues need to be made by the participants, not by policy-makers
- *development theory and practice*, where the modern understandings have moved away from a deficit model and instead concentrate through participatory practices on assisting with the very different intentions of the participant groups
- *educational changes*, including the paradox of increased centralisation and decentralisation
- *the new technologies* which not only will affect the cost-effectiveness of printing materials for new readers but have also led and will continue to lead to increased demand for access to up-to-date information and a sharing of views across wide distances.

All of these suggest that a single ILT and a single PL programme can no longer be seen to be able to meet the many varied identified literacy

needs.

5. The report examines **why the traditional model of PL is so strong**: and suggests this is partly because of the lack of clarity about new approaches to PL, the existing investment (including emotional investment) in the current model, the lack of funds for experiments, the strength of the existing discourse on literacy as schooling, the lack of real evidence that the new approaches can bring about literacy development in terms of statistical data relating to the reduction of percentages of illiterates which governments and donors look for, the localised nature of the new literacies which make it appear to be unable to deal with a large-scale national problem, and the fact that such a change would need a public admission that existing programmes are failing.

6. But the report concludes that the **traditional model of PL is failing**, not only in the light of the concerns expressed by PL practitioners and policy-makers but also in the light of the changes in modern understandings. It fails to determine exactly what it is for, and has become an arena for contests over whether PL is for literacy learning or developmental tasks; whether it is for the promotion of group or individual competencies; whether it is to help adults to conform to

prescribed notions of development or to encourage the participants to determine their own goals. Many PL programmes adopt a universal approach to their activities (all PL groups doing much the same kind of activity) rather than encouraging participant control. Traditional PL programmes reach very few persons, certainly not all who need help with literacy practices. They ignore the real literacy tasks and the real literacy materials which go with those tasks, preferring instead to develop improving reading materials to be sent out to local groups. They see the role of literacy skills as enabling central messages to reach the people. The staff engaged in PL are almost without exception not trained effectively for their roles. There are very few evaluations of PL, and those which exist universally judge it to be one of the weakest areas of adult literacy learning. The greatest cause of failure is that so few participants are able to transfer their literacy skills from the classroom or PL centre into daily use in their lives for their own purposes.

7. The report does not set out to promote a new programme for PL, but in order to encourage on-going debate, it builds its new approach to PL on **a number of principles:**

- that economic and social development will come about, not

through the people *learning* literacy skills but through them *using* literacy skills

- that adult learning theory suggests that adults do not learn literacy skills first and then practise using them afterwards but that they learn through that process of *using* literacy in their own lives
- that there are in every community a series of real literacy practices and tasks which the people wish to engage in, and these are supported by real literacy materials (i.e. texts which have been produced for use, not for learning literacy, such as government forms, magazines, information leaflets and election posters, etc, all of which are best described as 'found texts') which exist in the social environment (some real literacy materials will need to be fetched into the community and some will be created by the tasks which the people engage in)
- that non-literate adults are able to engage in development projects of their own choosing, that they do not need to learn literacy skills first

- that non-literate adults do engage in literacy practices in various ways, and that they will learn literacy skills best through these practices, not through a classroom textbook
- that most adults learn not in sequential and linear terms like school children but through undertaking their own often complicated tasks

8. In the light of these understandings, the report re-iterates the **new definition of post-literacy** which the earlier team proposed in the earlier report: instead of PL being the provision of further specially prepared learning programmes and learning materials for that small group who have completed an ILT programme, PL should be seen as *the provision of assistance to all those who feel that they are having difficulties with the practice of literacy in real situations*. This assistance should be outside the classroom (at the time and point of need) as well as inside it. PL then would

- a) reach out to all those who will never go to classes to help them with their literacy practices in their daily lives
- b) help those who do come to classes to transfer their newly

learned literacy skills into use in their daily lives

c) help those who produce real literacy materials to ensure that these are accessible to those with limited literacy skills and confidence. Such texts can be adapted, distributed and mediated to those who feel inadequate in terms of their ability to cope with them.

9. The primary element in any PL programme then is **helping adults of all kinds to practise literacy in real situations using found texts**, rather than helping a small group to learn further literacy skills using specially prepared texts for that learning. The report does not set out in any detail ways in which this goal can be achieved, for it believes that these ways must be locally determined in order to be culturally appropriate.

10. Such an approach **will also affect ILT**; for the report argues that, if adult literacy is to adopt adult learning theory and practices, participant engagement in the practice of real literacy tasks should be made part of every literacy learning programme for adults. It therefore proposes two things:

- that every literacy learning programme (especially PL) needs to be based on surveys of the existing local literacy practices of the participants, not on generalised needs assessments;
- and secondly, that these real literacy tasks of the literacy learners should be brought into the literacy centres and form part of the work of every ILT class. An overlapping process should be developed, by which the number of real literacy tasks inside the class will gradually increase as textbook learning decreases, thus helping the transfer of literacy activities from the classroom into daily life.

11. The best way to achieve this kind of PL programme is for a **'PL service'** (similar to an agricultural and health extension service) to be developed. Rather than one-off literacy campaigns and courses, adults need on-going help with their real literacy practices.

12. The report looks at and tries to answer **a number of problems** identified in relation to this new model of PL

- that there are few real literacy materials in some communities (especially those where the language of power is

different from the local language) - to which the answer is that real literacy *tasks* certainly exist; if they do not exist, then there is no point in helping people to develop literacy skills

- that the use of existing literacy practices will not bring about socio-economic change. But socio-economic change needs to be brought about by the participants, not by the providers of literacy learning programmes; and secondly, the development of *critical* approaches to real literacy tasks and materials will encourage the participants to challenge the existing power structures which underlie all literacy practices
- that this process will be too difficult for the facilitators and participants, or that the real literacy materials (like the literacy primer) may become boring to the participants - but dealing with real literacy tasks *chosen by the participants* can hardly be too difficult or become boring
- that this approach cannot provide the government or donor with statistics relating to the literacy levels of the learners - but new ways of developing measures by which the contribution of local developmental activities to the achievement of formalised

goals are already being developed in areas such as poverty and these can be adapted to adult literacy practices as well

- that it is not easy to build a national programme on many different local literacies - but the creation of a bottom-up diversified development programme meeting agreed criteria and directed towards achieving agreed goals in different ways in the light of different local circumstances are being developed in other developmental areas such as poverty, and these can be adapted to adult literacy.

13. The report concludes by examining the **implications of this approach** for policy-makers and donors, especially indicating certain areas which might attract favourable attention from funders. These include support for LGM, for localised surveys of literacy practices in order to develop appropriate learning programmes, for the creation of new measurable indicators of the use of literacy skills in everyday life, for a literacy support service, and for training for post-literacy.

14. Further **research** is needed - into local literacies, participant motivations, how to adapt real literacy materials for new reader groups, literacy-based income-generation, new ways of assessing literacy

usage in statistical format, the new technologies in relation to literacy skill development, and into language and numeracy, accreditation and the training of facilitators.

15. The report sets out **an action plan**

- an international debate on the issues which it raises,
- a workshop on relevant donor funding,
- and a number of pilot projects in PL based on this new approach.



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Abbreviations

ABET – Adult basic education and training

ABE I	Adult basic education and training
ACCU	Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (Japan)
APPEAL	Asia/Pacific Programme for Education for All
BNLP	Botswana National Literacy Programme
BOBP	Bay of Bengal Programme (FAO: Madras, India)
BPEP	Basic Primary Education Programme (Nepal)
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CE	Continuing Education
CECs	Continuing Education Centres
CEDPA	Center for Development and Population Activities, Kathmandu, Nepal
CLPN	Community Literacy Project, Nepal
corresp	correspondence
CSTCs	Community Skills Training Centres (Ethiopia)
DFID	Department for International Development, London
DSE	German Foundation for International Development, Bonn
ELP	English Language Programme (South Africa)
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organisation
FIVDB	Friends in Village Development, Bangladesh

FL	Functional Literacy
GTZ	German Technical Co-operation, Bonn
HAI	Help Age International
HEAL	Health Education and Adult Literacy Project, Nepal (World Education)
IEB	Independent Examination Board
IGPs	Income Generation Programmes/Projects
ILT	Initial Literacy Training
KALA	Kenya Adult Learners Association
KPLP	Kenya Post-Literacy Programme
LEA	Language Experience Approach
LGM	Local/Learner Generated Materials
NFE	Non-formal education
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
MACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester
NIAE	National Institute of Adult Education, New Delhi
NLM	National Literacy Mission (India)
ODA	Overseas Development Administration, London (now DFID)

PL	Post-Literacy
PLC	Post Literacy Campaign (India)
PLM	Post literacy materials
PLP	Post-Literacy Programme
PMD	Participatory Materials Development
PRA	Participatory Rural/Rapid Appraisal
PROAP	Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO)
RGF	Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (India)
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SC	Save the Children (US), Nepal
TLC	Total Literacy Campaign (India)
UIE	UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg
UMN	United Mission to Nepal
VET	Vocational education and training

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Introduction

This report is a follow up to the report which Education for ***Development*** produced for ODA (now DFID) in 1994, a shortened version of which was published under the title *Using Literacy: a new approach to post-literacy materials* (ODA 1994).

The first report was aimed primarily at literacy practitioners in developing societies, and was intended to be practical, suggesting some of the ways in which post-literacy programmes (and initial literacy teaching programmes) could become more effective. It drew upon the insights into literacy as social practice which are being developed under the title of the New Literacy Studies (Street 1993 pp. 4-12).

The aim of this second report is to conceptualise the field of post-literacy. It provides an examination of the most common current approaches in a number of developing countries, looking at the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. This is followed by an outline of some of the emerging new approaches to literacy teaching and an analysis of a number of problems which have arisen in the course of attempts to implement them. The report ends with a discussion of some of the policy implications of this analysis, an action plan, and suggestions for further research.

This report thus does not replace the earlier report. Indeed, it draws upon and refers to material contained in that report. It does not for instance include examples of materials for post-literacy programmes, since they are adequately represented and illustrated in that publication. Rather, it extends and expands on it, providing the underpinning logic-frame which justifies the programme of action which that report advocated.

The nature of post-literacy: The origin of this research project helps to dictate its parameters. It commenced as an examination of those programmes which follow immediately after the teaching of adult basic literacy skills, and which seek to produce special reading materials for

'neo-literates', for which funding is often requested from donors.

But the term 'post-literacy' is currently used in developing countries in two main senses -

a) to refer to a short-term and distinct stage of literacy provision which follows more or less immediately after the adult basic literacy teaching;

b) to refer to all those longer-term educational programmes (usually called 'continuing education') or those other activities (such as income generating groups) which follow after the teaching of literacy skills has been completed, i.e. everything that follows the adult literacy teaching programme.

Namibia is an example of this ambiguity. The National Guidelines of 1997 outline three years of study in the basic adult literacy programme, each with their own primers. Post-literacy is seen to commence *after* Stage 3 of the literacy programme, and it consists of a planned curriculum equivalent to Grades 5 to 7 of formal primary school, open to the graduates from the first three stages of the adult literacy programme and to those who have completed Grade 4 of primary

school - in other words, what elsewhere is called 'continuing education' (Namibia 1997 pp27-28). But more recently, Stage 3 of the basic literacy course is spoken of as 'post-literacy', and the next stage is now being called 'Adult Upper Primary Education Programme' (field notes, 1998).

What we are seeking to address here when we talk about 'post-literacy' is the first of these two definitions of post-literacy - that short-term programme of literacy teaching which immediately follows after the teaching of basic literacy skills and aimed at those adults who have developed some literacy skills and confidence but need further help. We are not discussing the wider field of lifelong continuing education, for this needs its own detailed examination which would be too wide to address here. Most countries in the developing world have a stage of literacy provision at the end of the basic programme, and this is the subject of this report.

A new approach to post-literacy: Our survey did not confine itself to post-literacy materials, although much of our time was spent looking at the special reading materials produced in post-literacy programmes. For such an examination provoked the questions as to whom these materials are intended for, what their purpose is, how appropriate they

are for their intended readership, and what their relationship is to the initial literacy teaching programme. Our discussion therefore ranges widely over the whole field of post-literacy - what it is, what purposes it serves, and how those purposes may best be fulfilled.

Both of our reports seek to promote a new approach to post-literacy (which will also affect initial literacy teaching). However, we are anxious not to promote any new orthodoxy but to invite those involved in the field to engage in a new debate. What we outline here is a set of principles which each country, and each provider within each country, can use to build a post-literacy programme appropriate to their own situation. We seek to promote situated post-literacy, responsive to local conditions, rather than a uniform approach or methodology used universally.

Method of working: As with the earlier report, Education for *Development* proceeded by setting up a research team consisting of Professor Alan Rogers as convenor, Deryn Holland, Bryan Maddox, Juliet Millican, Dr Katy Newell Jones, Uta Papen, Dr Anna Robinson-Pant (who participated by e-mail from Nepal) and Professor Brian Street. We re-surveyed the literature on post-literacy with particular reference to material published since 1993. We commissioned a series

of papers relating to post-literacy in Asia, Botswana, Kenya, Latin America, Nepal and Nigeria (see *Appendix*; these papers are available for consultation and most of them will be published in some form). We were able to draw upon experience gained from visits made by members of the team to Bangladesh, Kenya, Botswana, South Africa and Namibia. A study visit to India specifically to examine post-literacy in relation to the Total Literacy Campaign was made. The team met on seven occasions (including a two-day session). The report has been drafted from these discussions and reviewed by all team members.

We are conscious that the range of material available to us comes mainly from policy-makers and literacy training providers and reflects their discourse. The aims of these agencies and the discourses in which these aims are set out are often very different from those of field workers and of participants in literacy training programmes (Hobart 1993 p12). We have included some comments from a small number of field workers and participants, but we have not been able to survey these in any depth within the time and resources available for this study. We recommend that a more thorough survey be undertaken to ensure that the voices of field workers and literacy learners in different countries are heard in this debate.

We ourselves have employed the discourse of the planners and policy makers, for it was they who commissioned and who will receive this report. It is then directed primarily at policy-makers. But we are aware that a wide range of readers, including practitioners, will read it. We hope that all those who wish to inform themselves more deeply and prepare for a post-literacy programme which is fully integrated within a thoroughly planned literacy and basic education programme will find it useful. We have sought to reflect and to some extent address the concerns of those many people we met who see problems with current practices and are struggling to develop new approaches which have the promise of being more effective. We are clear that what we propose has important implications for initial literacy teaching programmes, and we examine some of these implications during our discussions.

It remains for us to thank all those who have assisted with the preparation and production of this report. We particularly wish to thank Deryn Holland and Brian Street, members of the research team who commented on drafts throughout the project and offered continuing assistance, but who because of other commitments were unable to join in the final stage of writing the report. In addition, Professor Michael Omolewa, J.D. Thompson, Rosa Maria Torres, Dr Avik Ghosh, Dr A Mathew, Dr Anita Dighe, Dr Tonic Maruatona, Mrs Marty Legwaila, and

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Alan Rogers (on behalf of the drafting team)
July 1998



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PART I. Current Approaches to Post-Literacy

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Village library Bangladesh

1. General Understandings of Post-Literacy

- [Post-Literacy, Initial Literacy Teaching \(ILT\) and Continuing Education \(CE\)](#)
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-

The interest in post-literacy (PL) both in the field and among academic circles which we noted in our survey undertaken in 1992-4 has continued but apparently at a reduced level. Some form of post-literacy is still seen to be essential, and plans for and reports on adult literacy training programmes almost always include statements about the need for some kind of provision beyond the initial stage of teaching basic literacy skills. National workshops on post-literacy continue to be held (e.g. Botswana 1991; Kenya 1998).

But these statements appear to exist in intention more than in practice. Nationally planned PL programmes do not always exist. In Kenya, for example, until very recently there has been no nationally planned strategy for post-literacy; provision has been ad hoc (Newell-Jones 1998 p4), although now a new national programme is being planned. Donor support to PL has not grown and probably has declined somewhat. Only two of the larger donor bodies (GTZ in Kenya and UNESCO-ACCU in Asia and more recently in East Africa) include any substantial element of PL in their programmes, and this is heavily focused on materials production. Considerable concern is expressed in most countries about the effectiveness of PL programmes (see below pages 39-42), but despite this, since the end of the UIE research programme into post-literacy, there has been virtually no discussion of

the nature of PL and its functions and goals in general terms (the report by Edwin Townsend Coles written in 1994 for Sida is the only notable exception, but this deals with 'continuing education' as well as 'post-literacy'). Where discussion has taken place, it has been under the label of 'non-formal education' or 'continuing education'. Most studies that have been made tend to be descriptive; the field has by and large not been conceptualised. South Africa would appear to be the exception, although here again the concept of 'post-literacy' is not widely used so much as 'adult basic education and training' (ABET) (Williams 1998).

Unlike the initial literacy teaching programmes (which we refer to in this report as ILT), the term 'post-literacy' is used to refer to a very wide range of different kinds of programme. These vary from place to place and from agency to agency; there is no common agreement as to the meaning of the term or about the end point, contents or formats of post-literacy. The only common element is that **all such programmes are seen to be 'post-initial' provision¹**, sometimes called 'post-basic literacy teaching' (the term 'post-primer' which has occasionally been used to describe these programmes is a misnomer, since many PL programmes continue to use primers appropriate to PL).

1. The term 'post-initial' is used in the West to refer to all forms of adult education and training for persons who have completed their initial (compulsory and post-compulsory) education: see for example, K Percy et al *Post-Initial Education in the North West of England: a survey of provision* Leicester ACACE 1983

Post-Literacy, Initial Literacy Teaching (ILT) and Continuing Education (CE)

The starting point of PL then is universally taken as being the end of ILT (this varies greatly from country to country and from programme to programme). Because of this, most programmes of PL are closely related to the initial literacy teaching programme.

There is a widespread view that ILT is failing to be very effective in the long term development of sustainable literacy skills. Two main strategies have been developed to try to remedy the failings of traditional ILT - to reform ILT or to develop PL as a remedial exercise. Some agencies attempt both strategies.

In most cases, the **reform of ILT** takes the form of making it longer in

duration and wider in scope. ILT is now more normally done through a series of staged literacy primer-textbooks, not just one primer; and in several cases ILT lasts for up to one year or even longer. Since initial literacy primers now often come in three or more stages (as in Kenya, India and Egypt; Tanzania has four stages, Botswana five primers), they now include much subject matter that was formerly included in PL.

Elsewhere, a different strategy to remedy the failures of ILT is followed. A programme of **PL is planned to cover the deficiencies of ILT**, to do the work which ILT should have done. In Nepal, there have been suggestions that the national ILT could be reduced from six months to three and PL increased from three months to six months, with the intention of leading to 'self-instruction' (Robinson-Pant corresp). In Bangladesh, some ILT programmes are being reduced in length with the expectation that PL will pick up the remaining work to be done (Maddox corresp).

PL is thus usually closely linked in format and contents with ILT (Torres 1998 p3). PL is seen to be "a next, longer and more complex stage [after ILT]... enabling them [the participants] to continue with their studies" (Townsend Coles 1994 p10). It is often seen as "a multi-faceted solution to complex issues and divergent interests and

intentions" (Newell-Jones 1998 p3).

PL planning: One feature of PL programmes is the way many have been designed **after** the ILT programme has been planned and implemented. Most have been 'bolted on' to the ILT programme rather than integrally planned with it from the start. Maruatona and Legwaila note that "at inception the BNLDP [Botswana National Literacy Programme] did not have a provision for post-literacy"; it was not until 1992 that a clear PL policy was created (Botswana 1998 pp2-3). In India, the Post-Literacy Campaign (PLC) was only created when the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) had been completed in several Districts. Initially, the Districts were encouraged to devise their own forms of PL (India p5); it was not until 1995 that *Guidelines for Post-Literacy* were finally issued (NLM 1995). This is common to many other programmes. In India, the weakness of this approach has been recognised: the National Literacy Mission of India now requires all Districts, when planning for a new TLC, to devise a complete programme consisting of TLC, PLC and Continuing Education.

In some cases, there is demand for some form of PL from below. It has been noted in several reports that ILT participants ask at the end of their initial learning programme, "Now what? What do we do next?".

Demands for more classes, more meetings, for a different language (mainly languages of power such as Spanish, French and especially English) or for developmental activities have been recorded from many countries. Sometimes such demands come from the start of ILT: 'What will we do after the classes have finished?' NGOs (especially community-based organisations) with their longer-term engagement with local communities on occasion respond with follow-up activities of different kinds according to the resources available to them.

In the majority of cases, however, a PL programme is provided 'from above' by governments or NGOs and reflects their ideologies. These agencies assume that they know what the participants' literacy and developmental needs are, usually on the basis of needs assessments which they or others have conducted. There may be some forms of follow-up provided 'from below' by community-based organisations, but these are hard to find, perhaps because they do not exist in large numbers or because they are inadequately documented (Kaufman 1997).

In many cases, PL programmes differ from ILT programmes in the fact that they are "not the responsibility of one Ministry but of several" (Townsend Coles 1994 p11). Whereas the ILT programme may be

under the Ministry of Education or a national agency associated with that Department, PL may be influenced by Ministries dealing with Health, Agriculture or Development. In Tanzania, the Folk Development Colleges which were funded as part of the national PL strategy are now with the Ministry of Community Development, Women and Children. In Brazil, PL is shared between the Education Office and the Technology Office (Magalhaes corresp). International NGOs are often also involved in developing different parts of PL programmes.

PL formats: PL then has an enormous diversity of formats and activities. The discourse used to cover these activities also varies widely. What in one country is included in PL is included in ILT in another; and what is called 'continuing education' (CE) in one national programme may be included in the PL programme of another. The planned Kenyan programme includes much that in other countries is called CE. In Tanzania, PL "was divided into three levels that are levels five, six and seven of the total literacy and post-literacy programme" (Mayoka 1996 p13).

Stage: All PL programmes consulted agree that PL is a 'stage'. Although the formulation of this idea may vary, most literacy commentators and planners see the progression from 'illiterate' to

'literate' as being linear, a series of steps similar to primary school. It is difficult to conceive of 'progress' without invoking a concept of stages. The word 'post' in 'post-literacy' strengthens the idea of successive stages in literacy learning. Some prefer to talk about a continuum from adult basic to continuing education, suggesting that there should be no sharp breaks between the various stages. Thus the new Kenya plan speaks of PL as "a segment of the continuum of lifelong learning" (Newell-Jones 1998 p3). In Nigeria, "there seems to be no demarcation between basic literacy ... and post-literacy which follows after. Basic literacy and post-literacy overlap, culminating in continuing education for literacy permanence. In the Nigerian context, functional literacy and post literacy are viewed as a continuum because the strategies used in the basic literacy stage are carried over to the post-literacy level" (Omolewa 1998 p2). Almost all writers on PL see literacy in terms of several (sometimes over-lapping, sometimes distinct) phases (Bhola 1980; UIE 1985; PROAP 1993). It has become normal to take

"a comprehensive view which considers literacy [i.e. ILT], post-literacy and continuing education as parts of a lifelong learning continuum .. comprising literacy \Rightarrow post-literacy \Rightarrow basic level education \Rightarrow beyond" (Ouane 1990 pp14, 16).

The PL stage/phase may be shorter or longer, but it is always a distinct stage after ILT and is thought to be at a different 'level'.

The end of the PL 'stage': Although PL has a clear starting point (the end of the ILT primer stage, wherever that is set), the end point of PL is much more uncertain. A few programmes are thought to be unending, but most PL programmes are timebound and terminal in character - they lead to some further stage or phase in the continuum. There is either a limited time given for the PL stage or a goal is set to be achieved. The nature of this goal or end of PL is often obscure and contested; but in almost every case some goal exists to be achieved within a given timeframe (see below, **Objectives**). We noticed in our earlier report a tendency for PL programmes to 'grab a bit more of the shoreline', as the concept of PL has in some countries become equated with basic education and beyond; but elsewhere, it would seem that recently the field of the strictly post-literacy phase has become more restricted. As we have seen (above, page iii), some agencies do not distinguish between PL and CE; thus various PL programmes include large curricula, although other programmes exclude these. Other agencies however see PL as leading into CE and thus as separate from CE. Where such a distinction is drawn, CE would seem to refer to those learning programmes designed to obtain for the participants

access into the formal or non-formal education systems and/or to cover the same curriculum as the schools (including certification), while PL refers to the development of the foundation skills needed to enter these CE programmes.

The essential nature of PL then - from which all other aspects spring - is the fact that it is seen as a **stage bridging from ILT to some** (sometimes clearly expressed, sometimes very uncertain) **future** (see below pages 9, 13).

Participants

In almost all cases, because of this link between PL and ILT, the intended 'target group' for PL are the graduates from ILT classes, usually called 'neo-literates'. There is however a tendency for additional groups to be included. In Nigeria, the clientele for PL is described as "those who graduate from the basic literacy so that they do not relapse into illiteracy; those who left the formal school system prematurely; youths who .. become non-completers in the formal education system ... women who participate in various spheres of life; and disabled persons.." (Omolewa 1998 pp3-4). In Kenya, the new plans for PL speak of the participant groups as being "new adult readers, young

school leavers, those who wish to gain access to higher education" and others who wish to join vocational and entrepreneur training; but in this case, entry to the PL Programme is through standardised tests (it is clear that the Kenya plan is speaking here of what others would call 'continuing education') (Newell-Jones 1998 p3). In Vietnam, PL "is for the people who already have finished literacy or people who finished Grade 3 in primary school who now want to continue education" (Dao 1998 p1). In the Philippines, the ANTEP functional literacy programme is aimed at "women and men aged 13 to 40 who ... have completed literacy stage 1 or can study independently and who are willing to use books and other resources in search of new knowledge. It is at this stage where socio-economic projects will be integrated" (Cruz 1998 p2).

Despite this tendency, in almost every country the number of participants in PL is only a fraction of those engaged in ILT programmes. In India as elsewhere, this is recognised in that PL centres are established in relation to clusters of adult literacy centres (classes) so as to make the PL groups viable - usually one to ten ILT centres (India 1998). In some Bangladesh PL programmes, a village study circle is set up for about one in nine ILT completers; Proshika (a major NGO) has established some 950 'village study circles' to follow

up the graduates from 8200 adult literacy centres (BangEval p42). In Nepal, the BPEP programme also runs PL centres in clusters (Robinson-Pant 1998a).

Some agencies report that women are more likely than men to wish to continue their literacy learning programmes, but others report the opposite. This is an area which needs more research to establish the trends and the reasons for these variations.

Unlike ILT, where the needs of the target group ('illiterate adults') are thought to be uniform and met through a uniform curriculum, there is in some PL programmes a growing recognition that the groups involved in PL activities will be diverse. "The needs of the learners .. are varied .. there is a need for different or perhaps linked curricula for different target groups" (Newell-Jones 1998 p6). But such insights do not seem to have influenced the planning of PL in practice.

What is clear is that in country after country, in practice the participants in PL are increasingly younger children. We quote one survey (Nepal) which typifies many other more informal surveys: "It was evident in all the sites .. [that] the participants were young children and where there was no village school, the .. post literacy classes were viewed as a

substitute for primary schools. Girls in particular could learn to read and write free of charge and in an accessible location. Several non-participants were sending their daughters in their own place, saying that the girls could then start the local primary school at class 3 level, thus saving on two years' fees". As one parent said of her daughter who was participating in a PL class, "After finishing this class, she is going to join in class 3. In my opinion, I will send her to study in the school until class 5. Education is most important, so I have to send her to school. I will manage money to buy copy, pencil, books and clothes and give the fees from selling goats and chickens" (Robinson-Pant 1998b). This can be replicated in other instances.

Aims, goals and objectives of post-literacy

Replies to enquiries about objectives, whether from participants or from providers, do not always indicate real desires or intentions. Participants in particular have often internalised the objectives of the providers and repeat them through the 'echo effect'. They may not always articulate their true purposes, either because they are unaware of the full range of opportunities or because lack of confidence will sometimes lead them to rule out certain possibilities which may be appropriate. Equally, the value-laden approaches of providers encourage them to emphasise

some objectives and to exclude others. We have noted studies which have indicated that the agendas of planners and policy-makers are different from those of field workers which again may be different from the participants (Robinson-Pant 1997; above pages iv-v).

Views of the participants: While these are divergent and on occasion contradictory, often echoing the aims of the providers, nevertheless, there is in many cases a strong voice from the field: "what do we do next?". Participants in adult literacy learning programmes have been led to believe that ILT is the start to a process and that literacy is something from which they will gain directly. But what lies beyond ILT is not always clearly expressed. The rhetoric of the providers has raised expectations which often cannot be met, particularly that the new literacy skills will somehow magically help the participants to overcome their poverty. In Ghana, the literacy learners have been told, "You will be literate", carrying with it many kinds of expectations, in particular that "you will be able to learn English" [Yates 1994].

How far the demand is for further literacy skill learning is not clear. In one survey in Nepal (CEDPA 1998), some of the participants in a joint PL and health programme (HEAL) said they had come to the classes primarily to learn reading, writing and numeracy skills, while others said

they had come to learn health and family welfare knowledge. An important issue here is revealed by the finding that in one class, "the group ranked 'knowledge about family planning and vaccination' as their most important reason for coming when discussing in a group, but individually said that their main motivation was to improve literacy skills" (it needs to be noted in this particular case that the participants did not see these classes as post-literacy in part because of the long gap (in one case two years) between the ILT provision and these new classes, and in part because "discussion of health issues was given more emphasis by .. facilitators than the teaching and learning of literacy skills"). "Many women said they wanted to learn maths better so that they would not be cheated and they wanted to learn literacy in order to get a job in an office or as a class facilitator. Only a few women stated specific reasons for wanting to read and write: to read the religious book *Bhagavadgita*, to help their children with homework, to write to husbands in Bombay" (Robinson-Pant 1998b p2). Some participants expressed the wish for more literacy classes at successive levels; "three months is not enough to get a job" (Robinson-Pant 1998b p4). In response to another enquiry, one group of literacy learners said they would wish to have literacy classes for the rest of their lives, indicating that the thing which they valued most was not the literacy learning but the opportunity which literacy classes gave to them to get out of their

homes, to meet with others, discuss matters of common concern and share issues and problems.

The symbolic value of literacy learning is clearly a motivation for many adults:

"Some of those who do participate in the literacy circles .. never had the intention to use their skills .. the functionality of literacy never was their main motive for joining the circles. .. People have no inhibitions to admit that they are not using literacy skills. Their answers do not resemble admissions of shame or guilt at all. Some even think the thought of actually using reading and writing a funny notion; to them the mere fact of 'going to school' was more important than what they achieved in educational terms. The prestige factor is undeniable (even among those who do apply their skills for other purposes).. To want to become 'educated' is in itself a sign of wanting to advance in one's life and, regardless of what knowledge gains are being achieved, can boost one's self-esteem and lead to activities in various spheres... It cannot be denied that those who want to become literate are understandably motivated by the thought of freeing themselves

from a stigma via conforming to dominant expectations"
(Fiedrich 1996 pp9-10).

It is in part because of this that some PL participants have requested further and wider courses of instruction and other forms of activity. Languages feature prominently in participants' demands for post-literacy, especially the national or regional languages of power. Others have requested vocational skill training and income-generation groups.

The providers' aims: Despite the demands from below, the majority of PL programmes are designed to achieve goals which are set by the planners and funders, not by the participants. There is in many cases a gap between the providers and users, especially among government agencies. However, some reaction against this top-down imposition of goals on PL participants can be seen, especially among some local NGOs who are often more responsive to local and diverse demands.

Many of those who plan and provide PL programmes claim that they know the goals of the participants, that their planning is based on an appreciation of the needs of the literacy learners gained sometimes with and sometimes without a 'needs assessment'. But the fact that PL is often seen as providing access into formal or non-formal education,

bridging the gap between the levels of study skills achieved by the end of the ILT programme and the standards needed to enter school, reveals that on occasion there may be less appreciation among the planners and providers of the real desires of the participants. Field studies suggest that only a very small minority of adult learners in ILT classes have any intention of proceeding into formal or non-formal education - and these are almost always young people. The bulk of those who learn literacy skills as *adults* apparently intend it to be of immediate use in their existing way of life rather than of future use in some changed way of life.

Needs assessments conducted by planners and providers then often appear to miss the point. There may well be less appreciation of the real literacy needs and understandings of the participant learners. Existing literacy practices and perceptions are rarely considered in depth when planning literacy programmes except at a very general level ("all villagers" or "all women" need this or that). In one particular project in Nepal, the NGO providing the literacy learning programme indicated that they thought the next step for the group should be a bridging course into formal schooling, although the participants said they wanted a sewing class (Robinson-Pant corresp). Such a gap between providers and participants is particularly evident in the area of the

purposes of PL. Thus Bholá (1980) summarises the goals of PL as the retention of literacy [skills], second-chance formal education, the systematic integration of literacy and (government) developmental goals, and socialisation for the ideal society. It is clear that these are goals of the providers, not necessarily those of the participants which are normally more immediately and personally instrumental (for example, a literacy learner in Botswana who wanted to achieve his literacy test certificate so that he could obtain a driving licence: field visit, Botswana 1998). Local surveys of existing literacy practices and purposes conducted in South Africa (Prinsloo and Breier 1996), Nepal (Hodge 1997) and Sierra Leone (Pemagbi 1995) suggest a different set of agendas. Reviews of local literacy practices and perceptions are needed in order to set PL objectives realistically.

A wide range of objectives: Objectives are often set by the providers in comprehensive terms to cover all kinds of aims. For example, one PL programme in Egypt set as its objectives "to prevent relapses into illiteracy, to convey new ideas and messages, to change attitudes, to increase literacy skills (mainly reading) and to promote participation in community development" (Matta 1997 p1). A single programme of activities was being planned to achieve all these different objectives. Namibia again sees three main components in its PL programme:

"continuation of adult basic education (ABE) classes [up to Grade 10].., supported self-learning opportunities through reading materials or study circles.., skills training or project activities in collaboration with other ministries, development agencies, voluntary or community-based organisations" (Namibia 1997 pp27-28).

The objectives set for PL depend on the relationship which PL is seen to have to the ILT which precedes it and on the perceived nature of the end or goal to which PL is aimed. Inevitably, this leads to a very wide range of differing aims and objectives:

1) Some PL programmes are primarily **backward-looking**, relating more to the technical literacy skill acquisition elements of ILT, using PL to reinforce the literacy skills and preventing what is often called a 'relapse into illiteracy' (an unfortunate medical metaphor). Others are primarily **forward-looking**, relating to the next stage or phase in the education or development continuum, however that may be defined. One national programme highlights this uncertainty: "for the majority of agencies, [PL] means a .. future-oriented package... [while other providers suggest that] there is no real difference between basic and post literacy..." (Robinson-Pant

1998a p5). Many PL programmes seek to do both, however contradictory this may become.

2a) Some PL programmes (perhaps the majority) are characterised by **nationally imposed uniform goals for PL** more than by **locally determined goals** - for although some PL planners indicate their willingness to entertain goals set by the participants, they also at the same time attempt to fulfil more general goals set by the providers or by the government.

2b) Some PL programmes seek **to promote individualism** (in independent learning or employment) while others **encourage group activity** (either in learning classes or self-help groups). Many seek to try to do both.

3) Some PL programmes lead to **further learning** in classes (continuing education in some form or other), or in independent learning through local libraries and reading centres. Some seek to develop **income-generation or social action** group activities, others to promote individual employment in the formal sector or some other form of activity.

Links to ILT	Programme	End product
strong (literacy skills)	individuals or groups	continued learning
weak (development)	uniform or diversified programme	development activities

Learning and using literacy skills: The aims set for PL are thus very diversified, but in general, two main sets of aims can be identified. These are

- further literacy skill learning and
- the application of literacy skills.

To give but one example: "post-literacy [in Kenya] is seen as a crucial stage of *reinforcement and application* of the technical skills acquired but not embedded .. through the [ILT]" (*our italics*: Newell-Jones 1998 pp2-3). The emphasis on the application of literacy skills is based on the assumption that "what you do not use, you lose" (Holland 1990). Such application of literacy skills may be through participation in community development programmes (usually in groups), independent learning, participation in some form of further educational programmes,

and/or employment. Often, all or several of these varying aims are adopted at the same time, with some resultant confusion. "By post-literacy, we understand all measures taken to enable the neo-literates *to put into practice* the skills acquired ... during the previous stage [ILT]." (*our italics*: Mayoka 1996 p10).

Through Post-Literacy To Different Goals

Universalist and diversified approaches: Before looking in more detail at the various sets of objectives proposed for PL, we would point to one general feature of most PL programmes. On the whole, the literacy skill enhancement goal is being achieved through a universalised teaching programme, using teaching-learning materials similar to those used in ILT and common to all the learning groups. This too is true of the continuing education goal at the end of some PL programmes; the same curriculum is offered to all participants. On the other hand, the independent learning goals and the various developmental tasks of PL are varied from group to group. In these latter activities, there is no commonality between the various parts of the PL programme. The distinction between the more or less **universal and directive** approaches to the further learning of literacy skills and continuing education on the one hand and the more **participatory and**

diverse forms of using literacy skills to accomplish different locally determined tasks on the other hand can be seen in many PL programmes.

The Different Goals Of Post-Literacy

1. Literacy skill development: Frequently the main aim of PL is expressed in terms of teaching more literacy skills - retaining, consolidating and developing literacy skills in order to prevent relapse into illiteracy, to achieve the level of permanent literacy. The term 'post-literacy' itself stresses the view that literacy learning lies at the heart of PL. "The retention/improvement of literacy skills seems to be the main aim of all PL activities, because both governments and NGOs need to make sure that the gains from the [initial] literacy programmes do not get lost" (Papen 1998 p1). "The concept of post-literacy is based on the assumption that newly-literates quickly relapse into illiteracy if they do not have any meaningful ways of using their skills. Even though the empirical evidence on the phenomenon of relapse is at best incomplete, the position that post-literacy is crucial to the success of a literacy programme has become common place among literacy practitioners" (Fiedrich 1996 p7).

At a national level, PL is often required to ensure that the learning promoted by national literacy campaigns is permanent and to prevent "a gradual decline of literacy" as in Ecuador (Bwatwa 1977 p15). " The relatively successful campaigns are in fact normally distinguishable from the failures by the emphasis they place on post-literacy" (Cairns 1989 cited in McCaffrey and Williams 1991 p15). At a local level, it is acknowledged that the levels of literacy skills acquired through ILT are often not enough to enable the participants to use these skills in any meaningful way, and a PL stage of further literacy learning is required to ensure the learning gains are sustainable. (We do however need to note that in one or two PL programmes, there is very little or no literacy skill learning; these programmes concentrate on other training activities.)

But there remain considerable uncertainties even in this area of PL - as to whether the aim of the further literacy teaching programme is to build up literacy skills further by the use of specially prepared PL teaching-learning materials, or to broaden and deepen the existing skills by using a wider range of literacy materials, or to help develop the confidence of the participants to use these skills - or indeed, whether PL is intended to do all of these in the same programme. Such issues are rarely defined closely, so that the achievements of PL in this area are

obscured by the lack of clarity in the objectives and the lack of rigorous processes of assessment and evaluation.

2. Functional literacy (FL): In PL programmes with a substantial FL component, the aim is to help the participants to learn new skills alongside their literacy skills.

FL comes in at least four main forms.

a) literacy for economic benefits (income generation)

b) literacy for social benefits (health, housing, community development and communal harmony, peace etc). This is usually 'directive change': i.e. it consists of uni-directional change largely controlled by the providers through messages. It is rarely transformational in structural terms, although the language of transformation is often used for it.

c) literacy for social change (radical, participatory and transformational)

d) literacy for liberal and welfare reasons - compensation, remedial education, personal development and access into

formal education (Verhoeven 1994).

In most PL programmes, FL is seen in terms of economic development - helping the individual to obtain employment in some capacity, or encouraging self-generated income-raising activities, either individually, on a family basis, or in groups. In other cases, FL is more socially directed, with the support of self-help groups which aim at taking direct action to achieve socially oriented goals. The purpose in each case is individual or group self-reliance.

Some PL programmes using FL approaches aim at the **learning** of vocational skills alone; others provide opportunities for the **use** of such skills. Some PL programmes include no literacy learning activities, assuming that the participants possess enough already to undertake the tasks set for them, or that they will learn more advanced skills through the economic or social agenda activity. Some seek to link the learning of literacy skills with the learning of income-generation skills, while yet other PL programmes keep the two components parallel and separate (Rogers 1994).

3. Independent learning: Others see the main aim of PL as providing an opportunity to convey new ideas or developmental messages to the

participants, the distribution of central (often scientific) instructions, usually through extension procedures. The communication of government and aid agency messages relating to health (especially AIDS), family welfare, productivity, citizenship and national harmony all form part of the goals of PL. The people are exhorted to participate actively in political or social life as 'a critical citizen, alert customer or aware voter' (ODA 1994 p3).

To this end, the aim of PL is to help the participants to become independent learners (i.e. independent readers). "The attainment of autonomy is the aim of [PL]" (Ouane 1990 p14). PL "constitutes a launching pad from which further study can be undertaken leading eventually to a position where autonomous learning is a realistic possibility" (Townsend Coles 1994 p31). "Literacy creates and post-literacy reinforces the possibility for new literates to have access to information, to decisions and responsibilities concerning their own development" (Kessi 1979 p5). The development of autonomous learning, especially through the ability to use local libraries, and the building of a culture of reading form the main goals of many PL programmes. The fact that such a reading environment is often strictly controlled to 'desirable' materials rather than materials of choice by the participants is part of the value system of the providers of PL. They

select (and often write) the materials which the 'independent' readers will read (see below, pages 74-75). The agenda is a socio-cultural one chosen by the providers. Mayoka points out how in Africa gender issues, peace education, nation-building, productivity and health issues predominate in ILT and PL programmes through a variety of media (Mayoka 1996 p11). LGM (that is, locally generated materials or learner-generated materials) is one form in which a reaction against this top-down approach to 'autonomous learning' is being expressed.

Independent reading is then a key element in many PL programmes. But at the same time, we note from our field studies that many PL programmes are becoming more prescriptive and more like formal education, and are thus discouraging rather than encouraging real independence among the participants.

4. Continuing Education: For some programmes which see PL as distinct from CE and not incorporating CE, the end product of post-literacy is to lead into continuing education in learning groups (classes) of various kinds. For these providers, PL is a form of access into CE, a bridge course which will prepare the participants to enter further forms of educational provision which may be

- a) non-formal (defined as a life-related curriculum which has no or little equivalency to the formal primary school curriculum),
- b) continuing education (an alternative basic education curriculum which has direct equivalency value with the formal system of primary education)
- c) or the formal primary education system itself

Some agencies are beginning to experiment with open learning forms of CE.

Post-literacy class in house, Nepal

The alternative objectives currently identified for PL regarded as a stage in adult literacy skill learning may be set out as follows:

Literacy skill enhancement:

Functional literacy:

Independent learning:

Continuing education:

Advocacy: We also need to note that PL programmes often contain an element of advocacy - motivating individuals to increase their literacy skills and to use village libraries, motivating community leaders and other developmental agencies to use PL for their own developmental activities, and encouraging policy makers and planners to resource and support PL activities.

Learning objectives

The learning objectives built on these goals will equally vary. The learning of advanced literacy skills; the development of the ability to read and understand extension literature/messages and elementary 'how-to-do' manuals; the writing of job applications; the filling-in of forms; the learning of basic education/foundation skills such as maths or English; the acquisition of vocational skills including entrepreneurial skills; the development of group formation skills etc - these all form part of the differing agendas for PL. Torres catalogues the learning goals of Latin American PL programmes as including "the amplification of initial literacy, learning to read and write with meaning, learning to read real texts, the development of capabilities for work and production,

preparation for entry into school-based education or adult education, etc" (Torres 1998 p3). Such a set of learning objectives designed to achieve the aims of PL has usually been prepared by 'experts'.

[Agricultural training for neo-literates](#)

2. Post-Literacy activities

[Programmes](#)

[Income-generation programmes \(IGP\)](#)

[Staffing of post-literacy](#)

[Monitoring and evaluation](#)

Programmes

The curriculum which PL programmes have devised to fulfil these aims and learning objectives is equally broad. The activities planned and implemented in PL programmes are usually wider than in ILT. Although some PL programmes have only literacy learning programmes, most have a significant range of learning activities. In Tanzania, for example, the PL provision encompassed not just evening classes but also urban

and rural libraries, liberal and vocational education and training in Folk Development Colleges, radio programmes, films, correspondence studies and zonal newspapers (ODA 1994 p8). In some cases, PL activities are more informal, less structured and sometimes more self-organised by the participants than in ILT.

Uniform activities: Most programmes however have identical activities throughout the country. It is reported that in Nigeria "although the heterogeneous nature of the country with its system of government .. the different types of illiterate populations in each state, the intensity of literacy and post-literacy [which] vary from one state to another [should] prevent uniformity in literacy activities, nevertheless there is similarity in the mode of implementation of the activities engaged in. The UNESCO initiatives, the UNICEF interventions and the UNDP innovations have all been uniformly executed in the various states" (Omolewa 1998 pp2-3).

Kinds of activities: Three groups of PL activities can be identified:

a) those which look backwards to the ILT learning programmes. These activities take three main forms:

i) more literacy classes using further PL primers or supplementary readers. Some PL programmes seem to consist of this activity and nothing else. Teaching literacy skills is the main or only activity in some areas. In Bangladesh, one major literacy NGO seeks to teach the PL learners a further number of words to add to those they have already learned during the ILT stage (Jennings 1984). We need to note here that a PL programme may on occasion include some forms of *initial* literacy teaching. In India, the PL stage of the Total Literacy Campaign includes some ILT, using the first levels of primers, for those who did not attend the initial classes when they were run, or those who did not complete the three primers or those who wish to repeat some parts of the ILT learning programme. In other words, this 'mopping up' (as it is called) is ILT paid for out of the PL budget. This is common to several PL programmes.

ii) local libraries: Most PL programmes provide local libraries (often called 'village' libraries but also run in

some urban communities) or study circles or reading centres.

The intention of many of these is not only to make some appropriate literature available to the ILT graduates but also to promote discussion groups and sometimes other forms of PL activities. On occasion, a set curriculum for these discussion groups has been formulated, but more often the activities seem to have been left to the discretion of the local implementing bodies or staff, and they do not always take place with any regularity. Much is left to the initiative of the local facilitator, unlike ILT.

These libraries/centres are usually managed by a local person acting as caretaker with little or no training for the many and varied tasks which they are called upon to undertake. On the other hand, some programmes have developed libraries as learning centres with a trained and paid facilitator who may actively promote PL activities such as discussion groups, training courses or income-generation

activities. Sometimes participants pay for the use of the materials in these libraries: in one case in Nepal, for example, the PL participants from six villages paid a six-month subscription for the use of their tin trunk library which was situated in a shop and run by a local (male) shopkeeper. Out of the 346 users, almost half were women, some walking for two hours to reach the library. The librarian reported that "the women preferred books on health and women's law books and have demanded more advanced books in these subject areas. They are particularly keen to read women's law books to know more about their rights in society" (Robinson-Pant 1998b p2).

But in practice, most of these library centres consist of no more than a box or tin trunk with a limited supply of books (frequently with no further additions to the stock after the initial supply). Many are either rarely used or are used by younger persons or school teachers for school-related studies. In Thailand, where the Department of Non-Formal Education has established and maintained some 32,

000 'village reading centres' (apart from the more than 3000 temple reading centres established under religious auspices), it is reported that some of these have become the base for community-based organisations (CBOs) (Laso), but this is relatively rare. In Botswana, space is provided in many primary schools to house books for local reading supported by the national library service (Botswana 1998). However, almost all the evaluations of local library centres (and there are very few formal evaluations) and the comments of the staff of many providing agencies reveal the failure of most of these centres to develop a long-term sustainable reading programme, let alone any other activity.

A recent and widespread development in relation to local libraries found in different countries in both Africa and Asia is the desire to turn them into local learning resource centres on a larger scale, well equipped and well staffed. Namibia is currently planning such centres. India is planning its Continuing Education Centres which will be used for PL as well

as for CE. A report for the Commonwealth Secretariat on Community Resource Centres (Giggey 1985) recommended that such centres when established should contain special materials for non-literate persons and those with limited reading skills. Financial constraints, not only to the setting up of these centres but also to maintaining them, prevent these plans from being fully implemented, but the widespread nature of this trend is an indication of a recognition of the failure of these libraries as they stand at present to meet local needs.

iii) provision of special literacy enhancement materials: The main element in most PL programmes is the provision of specially written texts for helping the participants to enhance their literacy skills and to practise their reading (and in a few cases their writing). (This aspect of PL is discussed in greater detail below).

b) The second set of activities comprise what may be called **intermediate activities: those which are self-contained in**

their own right. They are not looking backwards or forwards. Again three main kinds of activity can be seen in current PL programmes:

i) **vocational skill development:** Many adult literacy programmes include substantial amounts of vocational training in their PL programmes. These are both informal (located in the village using any kind of location which may be available) and also more formal, in special training centres such as the Folk Development Colleges of Tanzania or the Community Skills Training Centres (CSTCs) in Ethiopia or the Village Polytechnics in Kenya or the Lifelong Learning Centres in Niger.

Apart from the training for income generation, many PL programmes also run groups which engage in income-generating activities directly. Such groups linked to the Botswana adult literacy programme are a major part of its national PL programme, and there are many other examples of this. These are often associated with credit and savings groups, largely for

women but also on occasion for male or mixed gender groups.

ii) **other development activities:** Some PL programmes seek to develop closer links with other governmental and NGO developmental activities such as health, family planning or welfare, environmental, agricultural and housing programmes etc. Training packages and programmes have been developed, particularly in health, such as the World Education HEAL programme in Nepal for graduates from the national adult literacy programme.

The range of such programmes in PL is legion. Environmental, agricultural, gender (usually meaning women's) programmes, legal literacy etc, all feature. Literacy training bodies sometimes seek to mobilise the resources of other agencies to work in and through the PL centres and groups, pointing out that these agencies have staff, money and materials which PL usually lacks. The CSTCs in Ethiopia are intended for use by extension staff as a base from

which to work in the locality and at which to conduct programmes - "instead of each [government and development] agency having its own depot, the CSTCs can be used by all [such agencies]" (Townsend Coles 1994 p50). Giggey (1985) recommended that the proposed Community Resource Centres should be used by all agencies.

Further, some local NGOs help residents in both rural and urban environments to form action groups and to implement their own programmes of social development, helping them to gain access to the regional or national resources available for such development (India 1998). PL in some contexts takes a radical form.

iii) **advocacy and motivational activities:** Some PL programmes such as those in the Indian Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) provide an advocacy element, campaigning for adult literacy, seeking to mobilise support and commitment from other agencies and political centres for literacy, motivating

the participants to demand from the providing services appropriate actions to help their own locality. In India, the PL participants are invited to write postcards as part of the PL programme to the District Collector demanding some developmental project chosen locally by the community, and many of these demands have been met in full (ODA 1994 pp9, 16-18).

c) The third group of PL activities are aimed at **learning for the future**. Two main groups of activities can be seen to be future-oriented rather for immediate application:

i) **group formation training** to prepare for the establishment of self-help groups of different kinds, leading to income generation or social action. In Nepal for example, courses are being run to train women in establishing women's savings groups (Robinson-Pant 1998a p2). The PL programme is seen to end at the point at which these groups establish themselves.

ii) **access and basic education training**, foundation studies for entry into further forms of education and training. For example, in Nepal again, an NFE course is planned for girls to pass the school-leaving examination. The UNESCO PROAP project called APPEAL has identified five main areas, of which one is labelled 'post-literacy' - defined as "activities designed to fill the gap which often occurs between the completion of conventional literacy programmes for adults and those which demand for admission a higher level of learning" (Townsend Coles 1994 p29). In South Africa, what are called 'equivalency programmes' enable adults to enter primary school at a certain stage alongside children.

SUMMARY OF PL ACTIVITIES

Literacy enhancement activities	Intermediate activities	Future-oriented activities
1.	1. Skill development and	1. Group formation

Reinforcement/mopping up/catching up programmes	income generation	
2. Independent reading: local libraries	2. Integrated development with other development programmes	2. Wider curriculum (CE) access/bridge courses
3. 'Materials' production	3. Campaign activities	

Conclusion

The range of PL activities is as wide as the range of aims and objectives set for this post-initial stage in the literacy teaching continuum. No programme has all of these activities; but almost every PL programme has more than one of them. The balance between the different sets of activities too will vary, again reflecting the uncertainties and sometimes the conflicts in this area.

CURRICULUM IN POST-LITERACY

In all of these activities, **teaching** forms a major element. In Nigeria, PL is defined as "the *education* received by the literate adult after basic literacy has been attained" (Omolewa 1998 p1, our emphasis). In Kenya, the new Post-Literacy Programme (PLP) being developed with support from a German-based donor agency is based on "the implementation of a national PL curriculum .. [with] participatory teaching and learning approaches, placing a high priority on the training of trainers, teachers and supervisors of the scheme" (Newell-Jones 1998 p4). Where new curricula have been developed for PL, the assertion is often made that these are more life-related than the formal primary school curriculum (Robinson-Pant 1998a p3).

Ouane in his international survey distinguishes between several main elements in the curriculum of PL (often seen as alternatives rather than inclusive). He first draws a distinction between those PL curricula which are more geared to *individual personal* growth and those which are more *society or community* oriented. The former pursue personal growth and personal development learning goals which in turn are expected to have an impact on the family and social environment. The latter are seen as "an instrument for economic and social change within the community as a whole". He further elaborates the PL curriculum as being three-fold - literacy and foundation learning skills; vocational

education and training (VET); and social education designed to "provide functional knowledge and foster values in fields such as health and sanitation, food and nutrition, population education, environmental education and citizenship education" (Ouane 1990 p12).

This distinction made by Ouane is not made on the ground. National examples indicate relatively few cases of programmes aimed at personal growth as distinct from community or national development. And in practice in many countries, the only model available for literacy skill learning is that of primary school. In Kenya, the new PLP will have a curriculum based on literacy, numeracy, VET, entrepreneurial skills and access into continuing education (Thompson 1998). In South Africa, the ABET curriculum is based on four elements, literacy/numeracy, equivalency programmes, technical/vocational, and 'lifestyle'. Other PL programmes are more elaborate. In Ethiopia, PL includes environmental education, arithmetic, agriculture, health, nutrition, technology, home science, family life education, co-operative education and political education, all in four months and supported by radio programmes. Zimbabwe developed both an Adult Basic Education programme in the English language (English, mathematics, an African language, and development studies), and a parallel functional literacy programme mainly in the 'mother tongue' like the ILT; the subjects

include a peasant culture, the environment, co-operatives, primary health, workers' education, political and civic themes, family life and population, women, basic English (Townsend Coles 1994 pp30-35). In 1987, Tanzania revised its earlier PL curriculum as being too academic, and reduced it to agriculture and animal husbandry, home economics, health and handicrafts; in practice, it became largely tailoring for female students and carpentry for male students (Sida 1998). In Vietnam, PL is at two levels, equivalent to Grades 4 and 5 of primary school - "we are following and adopting exactly the curricula regulated by the Government" (Dao 1998 p3).

This trend parallels the trend in other countries towards a wider and more formal approach to PL. In the UK and USA, an evolution can be seen from adult literacy (1970s) to adult literacy and basic skills (1980s - including numeracy and vocational skills), and then to adult basic skills (1990s - encompassing access, accreditation and more formal links with the school system), and in the late 1990s to basic skills, recognising few age differences and including school-age drop outs, thus becoming increasingly tied to the formal system of education in curricula and didactic teaching approaches (Street 1997). This movement is seen by some as an expression of the socio-political and economic drives of each decade and of the factors that are valued at

the time as leading to employment and income generation. How far it is demand-led is less certain.

Two particular elements need to be taken for further examination.

a) **Language learning:** There appears to be a large demand in PL for the learning of one or more major languages (especially English, seen not only as a language of political power but of international communication). This demand can be heard even during the ILT stages, but it is very strong during PL.

The languages used in many ILT programmes are often the first languages of the participants, although this is not always the case (Barton 1994). Where the ILT language does not coincide with the national language of power or with an international *lingua franca* such as Spanish or French or English, there is very often a request for provision in this field. In Ghana, for example, not only does English dominate the literate environment, thus having a high instrumental value, but it also has a high symbolic value, for being educated is synonymous with being able to understand English; it gives status to those who master it (Yates 1995), and this led to substantial demand for English from adult literacy learners, although the work of some NGOs in the

north of the country is based on local languages. In the Caribbean (such as St Lucia), although attempts are made by government and NGO agencies to promote literacy in Kweyol, there is a major demand from the participants for literacy learning in English (CAETA 1988). In some countries where ILT is only taught in a vernacular language, the PL stage may thus include the learning of a second language, usually a standardised form of a national, regional or international language. In Nepal, some agencies include English in the 'advanced' (i.e. PL) programme (Robinson-Pant 1997). In South Africa, the English Language Programme (ELP) comprises a subsequent programme of classes after ILT. On the other hand, some respondents (for example in Botswana) claim that when new language teaching is left to PL, the participants have often lost their interest (Botswana 1998).

b) **Numeracy:** The use of numeracy which is very muted at the ILT stage becomes particularly important at the PL stage. It not only forms a major part of any formal or non-formal curriculum at the PL stage. It also occurs in activities such as credit and savings groups, income generation activities and community development projects. Numeracy, including people's traditional numerical processes, is being increasingly studied (Saraswathi 1998, Kumar 1998, Doronila 1996 etc). The distinction which has been drawn between 'formal numeracy'

('mathematics'), which consists of decontextualised approaches to learning numerical transactions, and 'informal numeracy practices' which are self-generated numeracy activities which people do in non-mathematical contexts (Baker and Street 1996 p86) is particularly useful in PL, for both kinds of activities are on occasion engaged in without making any relationship between the two. But in practice, many PL programmes find it difficult to help the participants through this learning experience (Robinson-Pant 1997 p145).

Much more research is needed in both of these difficult areas.

Accreditation

The consideration of more or less formal curricula leads to a discussion of accreditation. Despite the search for immediate relevance and life-related learning programmes, there are signs of increasing formalisation in PL. There is a demand from government and international agencies for statistics by which to measure literacy achievement, calling for standardised forms of testing in PL. At the same time, there is demand from participants in PL programmes for accreditation. In several countries such as Kenya and Nepal, participants have been seen to take the literacy training courses leading

to school-based examinations more than once because there is no alternative.

This issue is probably not in question in programmes aimed primarily at access or equivalency, although in South Africa, the Independent Examination Board (IEB) has been exploring alternative and more appropriate ways of assessing the learning achievements of adult learners using an outcomes-based or competency model of assessment rather than the more conventional content-based testing used in the school sector; and the ASECA programme of the Sached Trust has developed a model of continuous assessment (Williams 1998). But apart from these areas, the assessment and evaluation of enhanced literacy skills with adults are matters which have rarely been addressed (Charnley and Jones 1979). In general, tests have been derived from or based on similar premises to those of formal primary schools for children. For example, in Nepal, many adult literacy reading materials are related to levels 1 to 3 of primary education. Egypt uses Primary Standard 3 and Standard 5 tests for adult literacy programmes, and beyond this, literacy participants are encouraged to take other examinations from the school system. Thailand regards its PL programme as the equivalent of lower secondary education.

The issues of the relevance of different forms of accreditation for adult learners in PL programmes, their availability (to whom and for what purpose), standardisation and equivalency, and their worth in a rapidly changing society with particular reference to the needs and expectations of employers need considerable further study.

Recent Changes In Post-Literacy Curricula and Organisation

These changes in curriculum and accreditation in PL reflect the general globalisation of adult education which has been noted elsewhere (Walters 1997). Since our last survey of PL in 1993, we have noticed a number of significant changes:

1. In some countries, **PL has moved closer to CE**, becoming more formal and prescriptive, more like formal education and thus discouraging rather than encouraging real independence. Although in some instances, there is a trend towards facilitator-less PL programmes, most see an increased role for the facilitator-teacher. "The term post-literacy is defined in Nigeria as the education received by the literate adult after basic literacy has been attained... This is assumed to be at the primary education or first school leaving certificate level. ..

The arrogance of the instructors is .. displayed by the classroom arrangement where the traditional teachers face the traditional classroom setting with the chalkboard" (Omolewa 1998 p1). The Botswana National Commission on Education in 1992 spoke of the "post-literacy progression ladder that could be parallel to formal school resulting in a basic education certificate ... qualifications equivalent to formal school through the non-formal strand" (Botswana 1998 p4). In a number of countries, the major component of PL is a taught course. The formal system of education is influencing PL as it is other sectors of non-formal and adult education.

2. In some cases, **a more fully developed curriculum for PL** is being created. Sometimes this is for a bridge course offered to the participants to help them to enter into a more formal kind of educational programme. At other times, it is for an alternative, more life-related, learning programme without the traditional subject divisions of the formal primary and secondary schools. In these cases, there is a move away from a materials-led programme towards a curriculum-led programme.

3. There is in PL, as in other educational sectors, **an increase in the availability of certification**. We note that internationally there seems to be a movement towards a greater standardisation of formal accreditation and away from the more general empowerment agendas of the 1970s and 1980s. This may in part be because of the need for greater accountability; in part, it may be demand-led. Botswana, for example, is planning a whole new system with Adult Basic Education Certificates (ABEC) at three levels, Level 1 being at Standard 4, Level 2 being at Stds 5-6, and Level 3 being at Std 7 of primary education. South Africa's adult education programme is largely dominated by the search for certification for adults, and Zimbabwe is following suit. In Namibia, Stage 3 of the ILT programme (which the Ministry of Basic Education has come to recognise as 'post-literacy', despite its earlier Guidelines) is equivalent to Grade 4 (ages 12-13) of primary school, with a curriculum of English, basic mathematics, civics and health.

4. On the other hand, there is **an apparent increase in decentralisation** both in ILT and in PL. Certainly there is a demand for such decentralisation, and in some cases this is

beginning to happen (for example, in the Indian TLC). But there seems to be a reluctance for managers to allow field workers to use that decentralisation to experiment, and most field workers lack the space or encouragement to undertake such experiments. Nevertheless, several experimental programmes have been identified in PL, mostly by NGOs.

Income-generation programmes (IGP)

In every country, income-generation activities and training programmes accompany some PL programmes. These are intended to bring economic benefits and independence to the participants. A survey of such activities conducted in 1993 indicates that most of the IGPs are kept separate from the literacy instruction, that the income-generation activities are often chosen by the providing agency on the grounds that the particular activities selected do *not* require literacy for the completion of the tasks involved, and that they frequently contain little or no literacy practices in them. In Kenya, for example, participants in a goat-rearing project attached to a literacy class had not learned to read the word 'goat' - "because it is not in the primer". On the other hand, there are some instances of such activities using and enhancing the literacy skills of the participants: in Delhi, one women's literacy group

was making advertisement banners to hang across the roads, using their newly developed skills directly for earning income (Rogers 1994). Much more work needs to be done in this area of our studies.

Staffing of post-literacy

A key element in many PL programmes is the encouragement of the participants to become 'independent readers'. We note in Nepal and Kenya that, partly in response to this objective and partly because of lack of funds to pay facilitators in PL, there is a tendency to develop PL programmes which rely less on facilitators than the ILT programmes, and to develop materials which can be used by individuals or groups on their own. But most PL programmes have some staff attached to them at supervisor and field levels.

In many cases, the **facilitators** are the same as those for ILT. However, in some countries, new facilitators are recruited and trained to fulfil a PL function. In Mali, some of the persons labelled as 'neo-literates' have been trained to become 'community instructors' (Ouane 1990 pp166-8). In Tanzania, the policy was that "only those teachers with 12 years of education and who have undertaken a teaching course would teach in post-literacy classes" (although this was difficult to fulfil

completely) (Townsend Coles 1994 p31). In Kenya again, the new PLP will have newly selected and carefully trained facilitators and 'resource co-ordinators' (Newell-Jones 1998 pp7-8).

Those PL programmes which aim to help the participants to become 'independent learners' often do not apparently appreciate that the role of the facilitator in PL is very different from that of the facilitator in ILT. The main function of the PL facilitator would be to help the participants to move away from dependent learning to self-directed practices. Primer-based literacy instruction in ILT tends to encourage dependency of the literacy learner on the teacher and on the text. A different process is needed to discourage such dependency and to promote independence in the use of literacy skills.

Local **librarians** are in most cases different from the ILT facilitators. They have, by virtue of their work, to be very local, usually living in the same village or urban area. Some are paid, but many are volunteers.

There are two characteristics of PL (shared also with ILT) which make the role of facilitator and grass roots worker particularly difficult. The first is that most of these field staff work in isolation. They do not have the support which even a rural school teacher possesses as part of a

state-wide service with hierarchic structures and channels of communication. The PL facilitator and local librarian are particularly isolated, without colleagues and without an infrastructure and systematised programme or timetable of events and activities. Secondly, they do not have any career path before them. There are few if any prospects of progression in their work. Adequate and sympathetic support systems are sometimes provided, especially by NGOs, but more often they are subjected to monitoring and supervision which is of a critical nature rather than supportive.

Supervisors of PL programmes are in most cases the same as the middle management level for government and NGO ILT programmes. In Kenya however, where the PLP is starting again from scratch, new supervisors will be identified and trained, although even here the scale of the new programme makes it likely that existing ILT staff will continue to be used (Thompson 1998; Newell-Jones 1998).

Training: Those who work in PL programmes have often had little or no training for this activity. We found very little in the way of training specifically directed at the *different* experiences of PL. There is virtually no discussion of PL in the initial training of literacy facilitators. Usually PL training (where it exists) is second stage training. When the same

persons are used to proceed to the PL stage, there is a minimum of additional top-up training which usually repeats the initial training rather than looks at the differences between ILT and PL. In Vietnam, PL facilitators are provided with a one-day re-orientation course and two 15-day workshops specifically for PL, but this appears to be unusual (Truong 1993). With new facilitators, there is often some form of training, although in Tanzania, it was recorded that "most of the post-literacy teachers .. had not undergone any teacher training course except for occasional seminars" (Townsend Coles 1994 p31).

Discussion with the agencies providing literacy training revealed that where training for PL is provided, after all the rhetoric has been cut away, in practice it amounts to a few days or even a few hours of orientation or updating on the new teaching-learning materials which have been prepared for PL. It is generally assumed that the process of instruction is the same in the PL stage as in ILT. It is significant that the only handbook which specifically sets out to deal with this issue, *Handbook on Training for Post-Literacy and Basic Education* (Ouane 1990), deals throughout its length with the training of *initial literacy* facilitators; there are only four short references to the specific training needs for PL in it. Other training in health or vocational skills may be included to help these staff to cope with the 'functional' parts of the

programme.

There is a good deal more training for local librarians. Much of this consists of technical training on managing and organising a library and its contents rather than the development of appropriate forms of PL activities. Specialist training is available sometimes on income-generation activities and the formation of IG groups and health and other subjects felt to be appropriate to grass roots workers in PL (Ouane 1990 p136).

Training is of course available for middle level management staff, both at pre-service and in-service level. These programmes sometimes refer to PL, but once again the field has not been conceptualised, and the specific needs of the workers in this area of activity have not been addressed in their training programmes. PL is in most cases comprised under the general heading of 'literacy'.

There are several training programmes and manuals on the production and use of PL materials, such as the *Guide for Utilization of Post-Literacy Materials for Neo-Literates* (ACCU 1996b; Bhola 1980; see also Ouane 1990 pp100-1, 148-9). In Latin America, manuals on the preparation of reading materials for neo-literates, and on the planning

and administration of literacy and adult education programmes have been prepared (Torres 1998; Magalhaes corresp). But these rarely if ever discuss what is specific about PL. Specialist workshops addressed to literacy practitioners, educationalists and others involved in the writing of PL materials have been run in many parts of the world; surveys of the needs of 'neo-literates' and papers on the levels of language felt to be appropriate to their stage of skill development have been undertaken and prepared, and a plethora of reports has been published. This is the only area of PL which is over-populated.

Monitoring and evaluation

There are notably fewer attempts to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of PL activities and materials than of ILT programmes, whether seen in terms of the enhancement of literacy skills, increased economic benefits or the achievement of development goals. Tanzania has probably done most in this field, and its published reports form a resource for further study (Tanzania), but this work now seems to have ceased. UIE has been encouraging more rigorous forms of evaluation of PL and CE. Some newspapers have been evaluated (Ghosh 1997a; Rao 1996). Evidence of substantial and on occasion unexpected enrichments in the quality of life of those who have used these

programmes and materials does exist, mainly in anecdotal form. More work is needed on this area.

The increasing demand by donor agencies for measurable indicators is pushing agencies running PL programmes towards standardised testing of results, particularly in CE (see above page 21; below pages 56 and 60-61). So far as we can see, where PL consists of further literacy skill teaching, the same evaluation methods and criteria are being used in PL as in ILT - formal tests sometimes related to the equivalence of school-based tests and the achievement of accreditation. The other forms of PL activities are monitored in the same way as the ILT programmes, by middle level managers (for example, by regular or irregular visits from district co-ordinators and supervisors). On the whole, evaluations of PL programmes are exceptional or form part of a larger evaluation. Most of them are summative rather than formative evaluation.

[Post-literacy class, Peru](#)

3. Post-Literacy materials (PLM)

The key element of almost all current PL programmes is the

preparation and production of 'post-literacy materials'.

This is based on the frequently repeated but largely unsubstantiated assumption that "there is very little or no material available in the local community". The Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe has written "that many of the men and women it has trained have become illiterate again because there is very little stimulating material for them to read once they have acquired the necessary skills" (Townsend Coles 1994 p44); this is glossed as "literature that would enable them to reflect on and observe their own situation". Avik Ghosh cites the Expert Group of the National Literacy Mission in India in September 1994 talking about "the lack of appropriate reading materials in rural areas .. normally in rural areas there is not sufficient demand on the neo-literate persons to apply their skills" (Ghosh 1997a pp1-2). In Kenya, it is suggested that "many learners are unable to apply their skills to everyday situations outside the class .. there is a shortage of teaching/learning resources, especially post-initial materials" (Newell-Jones 1998 p2). A report on PL in Nigeria speaks of "problems of available materials for post-literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Omolewa 1998 p6). Improving the literacy environment is a favourite slogan of most PL plans, and many government agencies and NGOs are providing their own PL materials.

Donor support for materials production: Most PL materials production is dependent on outside funding and infrastructure. It is therefore vulnerable to economic and political change. Although on occasion it is possible for a second donor agency to step in to support a PLM production programme when an initial donor pulls out, it remains a fact that such programmes rely on donor funding and expertise, and without these will come to an end. It is interesting that in recent years a good deal of donor support (especially in Africa) has moved into the support of book production through largely commercial publishers in different countries. The promotion of a commercial publishing and retailing sector in a healthy economy seems to be a major element in local capacity building which is being supported (APNET 1993; Walter 1993; CODE; *Partners in African Publishing* newsletter; Donors to African Education newsletters; *Bellagio* newsletter, etc).

Range of materials produced: The main kind of materials being produced are special PL teaching-learning materials (PL primers) and supplementary readers. 'Easy reading materials' or 'follow-up materials' are titles under which most of these texts appear. In some cases, systematised learning material has been produced for independent use without a facilitator (for example, for savings groups in Nepal, Robinson-Pant 1998a). ACCU continues to run its training workshops in

the production of PL materials in Asia, and a similar programme has been launched by UNESCO Regional Office for Africa (Nairobi 1998). Materials are intended to meet the need for 'appropriate' or 'stimulating' or 'relevant' teaching/learning materials. Such materials must be 'improving' - "to attract the learners, materials as well as classes need to contain an additional message that literacy is useful in daily life. Thus materials combine reading and writing while explaining topics which will benefit the learners' everyday life: for example, agricultural techniques, facts about nutrition, and supplementary income generation skills (handicraft, animal husbandry etc). Through such practical content, learners can realize that literacy brings a better lifestyle" (ACCU 1998 p1).

The subjects vary, from 'useful material', such as income-generating information (beehives, mushroom growing, vegetables, chicken or goat rearing, etc) and what ACCU calls 'quality of life improvement', to stories and fantasies. Some of this material is produced in series form (for example, in Botswana and Nepal etc), in part apparently to encourage reading at different levels as with primary schools (one agency in Nepal produces closely related materials at easy, medium and advanced levels) and in part to build up interest in the characters, similar to soap operas on radio or television. Comic books are a key

feature, being common in India and South Africa among other countries; but they are costly to produce and normally rely on substantial donor support (ODA 1994 pp31-38).

Most PL materials concentrate on reading. Increasing (but still small) attention is being paid to PL materials for writing. Examples are 'write-on books' such as the village and family surveys produced in Nepal and India, the continuing small-scale interest in learner-generated materials (LGM) including competitions among learner groups as in Bangladesh and Jamaica, and writing in local newspapers. Self-help groups are also developing texts from their own activities written often by members of the PL groups (though also sometimes by the facilitator or NGO service staff); this material has never been surveyed. But these are in general small-scale and local; it is still true that the large majority of the special PL materials are for reading rather than writing.

Formats: Most of this material takes the form of books and booklets, but other formats are also produced such as posters, comic books, graphic novels etc. After special booklets, the most common forms of PL materials production are probably magazines, newspapers and newspaper supplements for 'neo-literates'. Several agencies produce their own regular (monthly or bi-monthly) PL magazine for their own

groups. Newspapers take a variety of formats: easy reading comers or columns (Jamaica), newspaper inserts or supplements (Namibia), and a few whole sheet newspapers written specially for and sometimes in part by the participants in the PL programmes (India, Botswana). They occur throughout both Africa and Asia (for Tanzania, see Kater et al 1992 pp71-72), and in Latin America magazines along similar lines have been found. They are often produced centrally or regionally, printed in large numbers and circulated to the PL centres, usually on demand (ODA 1994 pp16, 25). But there is recognition of the difficulty of keeping up the flow of newspapers: "The newsletter makes heavy demands on the time of staff so that only two issues were published so far" (Fiedrich 1996 p8).

Most are supplied free of charge; almost all the rest are heavily subsidised. There is a growing debate about the value of charging for materials, on the grounds that participants value the material more than they would if it were given away free - an argument sometimes extended to paying for adult literacy classes and membership of libraries (Robinson-Pant 1998b p2). This is perhaps reflected in the increasing pricing of PL newspapers and magazines at what is regarded locally as being an appropriate cost level. It is argued that the provision of free newspapers may have undermined willingness in many

communities to pay for the regular provision of reading materials. On the other hand, it has been argued that "the people who are most in need of something to read are usually those with the least resources. With barely enough money for the essentials of life, it is unrealistic to hope that money will be spent on reading material. Perhaps this is why the Department of Non-formal Education in Thailand has ceased producing newspapers, believing that people prefer to hear the news on the radio. However wall newspapers are encouraged and so too are blackboard papers whereby people are invited to write messages and also receive them. This device has also been used in Mozambique" (Townsend Coles 1994 p46) and in India, Bangladesh and many other countries.

Other media than print is sometimes used to support PL work - radio, film, audiovisual materials, posters, games, puppet plays, street theatre etc. "Recent years have seen an increase in variety, especially in audiovisual materials: slides, cassettes, videotapes" (ACCU 1998 p2). For some, these media serve to reinforce and stimulate flagging literacy campaigns; for others, they are a way of getting messages over more directly. "Reading material of all kinds, educational texts, newspapers, magazines and books, reinforced by an intelligent and purposeful use of mass media, is the real key to success in [PL]" (Townsend Coles 1994

p30). Equally, radio programmes (and where available television) become more effective if they are supported by print material used to provoke thought and discussion.

Using existing materials: Many PL agencies are increasingly drawing on other resources which already exist, especially the resources of governmental and NGO **extension services**. This kind of material, produced by developmental bodies for their own purposes and using their own budgets, is aimed at specific target groups or the general reading public. Many government and other service departments issue informative leaflets and posters in the fields of health (especially AIDS), agriculture, gender, the environment, and poverty relief and other developmental sectors. Bodies such as UNICEF, national NGOs such as KWAHO (the Kenya Water and Health Organisation) in Kenya, specialist agencies such as the Madras-based FAO Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP) for fisherfolk or the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Nepal and even some local NGOs produce a great deal of this kind of material. For example, the Commonwealth Secretariat held a training workshop in Nairobi in 1987 on the production of *Community Health Education Materials*, the report of which (ComSec 1988) reveals an interest in how this kind of material can be created in formats designed to reach the widest possible audiences. However,

most extension material is produced without any thought for the levels of literacy skill or confidence on the part of the readers. And there is very little to encourage the users to practise their writing skills.

Materials production

Much of this material is sponsored by government departments, NGOs and donors, and is written by experts, journalists, educationalists or literacy practitioners. One of the largest literacy NGOs in Nepal reported that it employed a professional from the Nepal Royal Academy to write literacy materials "so that it will be in good Nepali"; not even their central staff were participating in writing materials. (Robinson-Pant 1998c p3).

The training and writing workshops identified in the earlier report as a main focus for materials production for PL work (ODA 1994 pp6-7, 20-24) continue to produce, field test and distribute such materials, but on a smaller scale. Although a number of agencies such as UNICEF (UNICEF 1993) and others use writing workshops for the production of literacy learning materials, UNESCO is the biggest player in this field. The PROAP/ACCU Regional and National Workshop model, which works in Asia on a by now well-tested formula as set out in the various

training manuals produced by ACCU and centred around key themes such as quality of life or women's empowerment etc, continues to be the major example of this approach (ACCU 1996). Although the DSE Action Training Model (ATM) programme in East Africa has now ceased, it has been succeeded by the UNESCO Regional Office for Africa commencing a workshop programme similar to the PROAP/ACCU. 15 participants from six African nations met in May 1998 in Nairobi to consider the appropriateness of existing texts on PL for the elimination of poverty and to prepare a model text in the form of stories and drama which UNESCO has undertaken to publish (Nairobi 1998). This new project builds on a series of national and regional workshops which have already been held locally, for example, in Jos (60 participants from all parts of Nigeria examined available PL materials) and Ibadan (50 delegates from five countries came together to visit rural areas and to prepare PL texts) in 1997-8 (Omolewa corresp). In Egypt, "UNESCO are funding the production of nine booklets for neo-literates on specific topics of concern" (Williams corresp). On occasion, training manuals on materials production encapsulate the experience for others to use (e.g. ACCU 1992).

Although these materials workshops build in some evaluation and feedback from potential users, the materials are almost always

prepared without detailed consideration of what is already available in the local community. The rhetoric of participation conceals the fact that these workshops' procedures are mostly top-down in the sense that the materials are produced **for** the literacy learners. The subjects are chosen by the writing group on the basis of what they believe to be the main interests and concerns of the potential readers. When taken from the workshops to be locally produced, these materials are context-adjusted rather than context-dependant; the attention they pay to the readers is largely lip-service.

Languages of materials production: Most PL materials appear to be in one of the national, regional or official languages of the area rather than local languages. Kenya for example uses local languages in ILT primers, whereas the current PL materials are primarily in KiSwahili. Materials for the new PL curriculum will be written in English, KiSwahili and mother tongue where appropriate (Thompson 1998; Newell-Jones 1998 p8). Some have attempted to use bi-lingual PL texts. World Education, Nepal, for example, has produced some material such as its booklet *Diyalo, a book for neo-literates* in parallel Nepali and English, with comic pictures and blank spaces for writing; its contents are similar to those of school textbooks. Vanuatu has also experimented with bi-lingual materials (Teaero 1993).

This is not just a question of minority languages (Clinton Robinson 1990, 1994). Rather the main problem lies in those regions where the vernacular language is one in which there is little or no reading or writing materials. In these cases, the ability to use literacy skills in everyday life and to read materials in the first language literacy does not arise. Consequently, the expectations of the participants around greater participation in civic and community life, economic advancement or access to power or to further forms of education have been found to be associated with the dominant rather than the local language. Different participants come to different conclusions about the value of learning in either their first language or in nationally recognised or international languages (Aikman 1995). It is however alleged by some literacy training agencies that participants rarely appreciate the amount of time and effort that both first language literacy acquisition and second language learning require. This, coupled with an apparently fruitless task of learning to read things they will never use and to write things which no-one but the teacher will read, frequently demotivates literacy learners (Botswana 1998).

Language issues occupy a good deal of attention in PL, especially in relation to curriculum and materials production. It is clear that PL (and ILT) cannot be provided without making implicit or explicit decisions

about language. It is important that such matters should always be explored overtly before PL (and ILT) programmes are launched (Education for *Development* 1994).

Low-Cost Materials Production: The tendency towards low-cost materials production, while still being advocated, appears to have declined in recent years (ODA 1994 pp28-30, 52). In Uganda, it is still being urged that

"silk-screen printing is a most promising technique to provide community based printing facilities. It is a simple technique which requires little outside input. Its promotion is likely to be successful since it links in well with the current literacy practices of learners ... Community printing, apart from saving staff time, also has the advantage that it is likely to be very popular with villagers and would allow them to control the speed and frequency of publication" (Fiedrich 1996 p9).

But experience in other countries in Africa and Asia (notably Kenya) suggests that local and low-cost printing processes are not sustainable. Most of the materials produced in this way (using silk screen printers or duplicators etc) were of very low standard and even more limited

usefulness in literacy training classes. UNESCO, commenting on a project in West Africa in 1991, noted that

"the provision of low-cost type-setting facilities constitutes an acute problem. .. The provision of these .. facilities was delayed due mainly to the fact that all West African languages are not yet harmonized. .. The manuals were produced with virtually makeshift facilities and this has contributed .. to limiting their distribution. A modernization of teaching materials production facilities would be a prime necessity.." (UNESCO 1991 p13).

The equation of 'low cost = low technology' now seems to have been overtaken by 'low cost = high technology', for new methods of reproduction mean that runs of materials can be printed very cheaply and to a high standard of design and production. Although such technology is not universally available, it is spreading fast. The growing interest of donors in strengthening the commercial market in developing countries extends to commercial publishing, and it may be that this is a more effective way of assisting with the production of PL materials than to seek low-cost processes controlled and run by local communities and/or literacy agencies. Low cost must be assessed in local terms.

The use by literacy agencies of local commercial presses at low rates on grounds of voluntary assistance to charitable purposes has been demonstrated in various locations to be very cost effective (e.g. Chittoor, India, ODA 1994 pp16-18). The equipment, facilities (including distribution) and staffing already exist and are being supported by commercially viable activities; their surplus use by literacy agencies results in low cost or even free PL materials (Ghosh 1997a).

Dissemination: The dissemination of PL materials, once produced, remains a bottleneck. Many producers continue to indicate that although much material is being generated, it is not getting out into the field. The mechanics of distribution including vehicles remain problematic. However, this may indicate a lack of willingness and commitment more than a real lack of resources, for we note other instances where locally produced newspapers appear to reach the PL centres regularly and on time (e.g. Chittoor, India).

When the material does reach the local communities, it is normally located in special PL centres (classes or local libraries, reading rooms etc) and only rarely more widely distributed around the communities (as with Sharenet in South Africa, ODA 1994 pp36-40). Although we note an increasing number of libraries who are making a small charge to the

members who borrow materials from them, in most cases such materials are made available without cost. However, booklets given free to members of PL groups are on occasion being demanded by others in the community who cannot see any justice in the discrimination implied in this distribution: as one (male) farmer in India put it: "Why is she being given that booklet [on chicken rearing] when she has no chickens and I have [chickens] and I need it? Why do I have to pay for it when she gets it free?" (India 1998 p5). But it is very rare for such material to be sold to other members of the community. We found very few cases where the local library has become a point of distribution of printed materials for members of the community. In some cases, it would be possible for a local (village) library or reading room, with its existing infrastructure and staffing, to become a small stationery and book shop for the area, buying and selling newspapers and magazines and books and other materials (including school note books and pencils etc). This appears to happen relatively rarely, although one NGO in Bangladesh provides stamped envelopes in its library boxes to sell to the participants, while at the same time helping them with writing letters (field notes, Bangladesh August 1998).

Utilisation: Once in the rural or urban centres, there are signs that much of this material is under-utilised. There are cases where a good

deal of it is read and used in other ways; but without a more thorough evaluation of different projects, it is not clear what makes for a successful local library or how such success should be judged.

Reactions against top down approaches

We have already noted that reaction to this top-down approach of centrally produced and often inappropriate materials production is growing, especially at grass roots levels. At field level, there is increasing discussion of cultural issues, including whether all kinds of medium can be used for PL (especially, in recent years, video), and whether media proposed by international and national agencies will lead to local rejection. The welfare approach to literacy is coming under closer scrutiny. Discussion centres around ways of increasing local involvement in the planning and design of such materials, especially newspapers, as an antidote to top-down and demeaning views of local culture. Field groups (something approaching focus groups) are consulted and materials are piloted; competitions are run to encourage participant writing; and other approaches are being explored to encourage participatory materials development (PMD).

LGM

The main form of PMD is locally or learner-generated materials (LGM) production. The term 'LGM' is occasionally used to refer to the written exercises which a number of literacy learning programmes require the participants to write during class and which are then marked by the literacy facilitator, similar to the exercises which school children do in class or as homework. But this is not what is usually meant by LGM (Meyer 1996).

In LGM, individual or groups of literacy learners and other members of the community are encouraged to write their own texts in various formats - news-sheets, newspaper articles, booklets and stories, postcards etc. Life histories have been written by new readers in India, fables in Bangladesh, songs and stories in Sierra Leone and Nepal. The Language Experience Approach in South Africa is a pioneering example of LGM. In Egypt, the literacy programme is "trying to introduce some low-cost self-help strategies", and there are plans "to establish a series of newsletters written by neo-literates to increase the amount of appropriate reading material available" (Williams corresp).

We note that most LGM activities emerge in relation to literacy or development programmes rather than as a journalistic venture. LGM have limited circulation, largely because of the cost of the methods of

production used and therefore the very limited print runs normally applied, distribution problems, and the feeling that they are culturally appropriate only in very localised areas. The programme is usually sponsored by a development agency, government department or local NGO/CBO, and often depends on subsidies.

We note that in several PL programmes, the majority of the written responses to the LGM projects come from facilitators, not from literacy learners. In the Zimbabwe Community Writing Project run by the Women's Book Production Collective, for example, the bulk of the material was written by community leaders and grass roots development workers rather than by literacy learners. In Bangladesh, a competition for writing run by FIVDB was mainly responded to by facilitators. We do not see this as a drawback of the schemes, for to encourage facilitators and other development workers to write about and reflect on their experiences must be one of the greatest values of participatory materials development. We do however regard it as important that these writing schemes should be transparent in what they seek to achieve and what they do in fact achieve.

On the other hand, in some cases it has proved possible to build literacy learners into the processes of LGM production. In Tanzania, in

Nepal and in Kenya (where the Kenya Adult Learners' Association (KALA) started a movement for the creation of other national adult learners' associations in Africa, taking as one of the focuses of its activities the production of materials for and by its members), such schemes appear to have produced substantial amounts of material. But it is not clear how this material, once prepared, is being produced, distributed and used. There is some evidence that even though people enjoy LGM materials, these have a different status from 'expert' written texts.

The process of preparing LGM takes many forms (Meyer 1996). Most forms of LGM only provide opportunities for literacy learners to assist with shaping the materials in terms of contents and design. Participants are invited to suggest subjects for writing about, and to react to the pilot testing of materials prepared elsewhere. Only occasionally are texts entirely written by individual literacy learners or groups, and even more rarely written and produced through all their stages (Banda 1994). But evidence gathered from several places indicates that local groups are competent and with encouragement willing to build the story line, determine the language and scripts to be used, write the contents, undertake the editorial work, design and prepare the layout, prepare the visuals and control the processes of printing, publication and

distribution - in short, that they can exercise all the functions which the literacy agencies usually undertake on behalf of the literacy learners (Mace 1995). It would seem that this kind of activity is not more widely practised because many agencies do not believe that their local groups are capable of doing these things.

The main value of LGM lies not in its cost effectiveness but in two features:

- a) the **process**: its educational value for the participants; and
- b) the **product**: its ability to produce materials which are felt to be culturally appropriate and based on direct local experience and which are therefore immediately appealing to local readers.

Learning processes: Those who use LGM approaches in both the West and in developing country contexts (O'Rourke and Mace 1992; Mace 1995; Meyer 1996) stress as part of the value of this activity the fact that the processes of LGM contribute greatly to the motivation of the participants, that they promote further learning in the process of writing and designing the materials, and that they lead to significant

increases in self-assurance and feelings of empowerment. In particular, they demystify the process of book production, thus removing a major barrier which some people experience in using books. It is reported that when participants are involved in the production of texts, they read other texts in a different way. The learning accomplished during the process; the sense of ownership and commitment to the project; the sense of achievement at the end; the practice of literacy skills; the process of peer learning; the opportunity to engage in creativity (even when using well-known stories) - all these have been mentioned in the discussions of LGM (see Meyer 1996; Banda 1994). The increased confidence developed through the successful completion of an LGM project leads to further self-chosen tasks being undertaken and completed. The educational value of encouraging individuals or groups to engage in the preparation, production and publication of their own materials is enough to justify these projects, even though they may not last long or be cheap.

Culturally appropriate products: The importance of the local context in every aspect of literacy instruction is clear. PL, even more than ILT, will be highly context-dependent. The evidence from Nepal, north-east India and several central African countries, as elsewhere, reveals the need to pursue the production of locally generated materials, not least

in those areas where language groups are small. Without the provision of such materials, these areas will be increasingly dependent on outside providers of materials using national or official (outside) languages, and there is a great danger that such materials will be culturally insensitive. But even in areas where language is more standardised, the need to prepare reading and writing materials which are culturally appropriate to local contexts has been demonstrated many times (for example, in the townships in South Africa). And there is some evidence that because texts produced by LGM approaches contain a greater measure of relevance in their contents, they are more acceptable to local readers.

Sustainability: Most LGM activities take the form of occasional, even one-off, productions, although in the cases of the Zimbabwe Community Book Project and the Songs and Stories project in Sierra Leone, a series of publications resulted from LGM before they came to an end. Even newspapers, the most common form of LGM, have rarely lasted long without outside support; in Mali, the long-running rural newspaper in which LGM plays a part has been supported by government (ODA 1994 p25). The problem with LGM (as the Zimbabwe Community Writing Project revealed) is that of sustainability. LGM writing projects are very vulnerable; once the initial inspiration has declined (it is hard to

maintain enthusiasm after the first generation of participants have completed their work), the outside funding and support have been withdrawn, and the key figure(s) who first motivated the participants has left, the programme ceases or withers away. There is also the fact that much LGM is seen to be 'literacy materials', that is, written products of a particular genre, designed to be used in a specific way and thus often of a serious nature with an agenda of social and community change. This is not true of all such LGM; regular magazines and newspapers frequently contain material without any such prior agenda. But where LGM is seen to be the production of 'learning' materials, it does not appear to have as wide an acceptance as in those instances where it is produced more for personal and group interest.

4. Conclusion

We would draw a number of conclusions from this overview of current approaches to PL.

First, that since both language and practice vary so much from place to place, it is impractical to seek for **common terminology and concepts** in the field of PL. Those who deal with literacy teaching and

PL need to be aware of the use of varying definitions, and to seek carefully for what is implied by the use of any particular term such as 'follow up' or 'supplementary' or 'LGM' etc.

Secondly, that PL will always be **context-dependent**. There can be no single appropriate form of PL provision which is universally applicable.

Thirdly, that we cannot assume that **the goals** of the providing agencies and donors will always coincide with the goals of the participants which will vary according to region, gender, status and occupation etc. An analysis of the relationship between the aims and activities of these agencies on the one hand, and the aims and literacy practices of the participants on the other hand, should form one of the primary focuses in the design and funding of any PL programme.

[Post-literacy sewing training Bangladesh](#)



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PART II. Pressures for Change

- [1. Contemporary concerns about post-literacy](#)
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-

Bay of Bengal comic book Tamil Nadu, India

1. Contemporary concerns about post-literacy

Throughout our studies, we constantly met persons engaged in PL at all levels - donor, funders and aid agencies; government and middle level management; field workers and grass roots workers; participants - who expressed concerns about PL. These anxieties are to be found in all the countries we visited or reviewed. These voices are rarely heard, and this section of our report seeks to give space to their concerns. These views do not represent our own critique of contemporary PL

programmes but rather they articulate the concerns we heard abroad.

Positive achievements: It is important to preface these concerns with an acknowledgement of the achievements of PL. As one of our respondents in India put it:

"There are one hundred ways one can take a negative view of the adult literacy effort in India, but with all the cultural, political and financial problems of India today, we can still say that there is some concern for literacy learning.....PL Centres are functioning and some people are interested; this shows that the providers and the people are working together"
(Mathew 1998).

The same is true of the other countries we visited. Both the ILT and PL programmes have had some significant achievements in many different contexts. It is possible everywhere to find individual literacy learners who are reading booklets and writing letters and feeling considerably more confident, and PL groups which are earning money from their own activities and pressing others to provide their local communities with developmental services.

Recognition of difficulties: But equally most practitioners (including the respondent mentioned above) are keenly aware that the impact of these programmes has been well below expectations and the achievements have often not been long-lasting. It is to look at these issues that this section has been written.

It is also important to stress that these concerns are not universal. Some of them are expressed very widely; others are the concerns of a minority of PL practitioners. But everything here has been said to one or other member of the research team, often to more than one by more than one PL practitioner or planner.

Different voices: We need to note once again the different concerns of the various parties involved in PL.

We give one example. In Nepal, a survey of a specific PL programme revealed that

- the implementing NGO staff were concerned that PL was donor-driven, that there was no space to innovate because of the need for quantifiable results and the pressure for the production of packages which could be used nation-wide.

- the staff at district level (including the facilitators) were concerned at the lack of incentive to run PL classes regularly given the low salaries of facilitators and supervisors. They thought PL was more useful for politicians who gain support by 'giving' classes to certain areas. They said that it was difficult to recruit genuine class participants, that materials never reached the groups on time, that there was a gap between ILT and PL, sometimes of two years, because of political factors or central bureaucracies.
- the PL participants were concerned about the value of the programme, that it was too short, led to no job, that it was boring ('I'd rather watch TV or finish domestic work'); that they felt too old, that it was better to send their daughters to the classes; that the facilitator did not know them; that they did not learn what they felt they needed in everyday life such as keeping group accounts.

Different groups spoke with different voices about the same programme (Robinson-Pant 1998a).

Expressed concerns

Nevertheless, some general issues have been raised more widely.

Isolation of literacy from basic education: A primary, though not perhaps dominant, concern is the view that ILT and PL, because they are viewed as relatively short sequential stages in a linear process, are isolated from other educational practices and will therefore always be ineffective. The failures of the current approaches to literacy skill development are (it is argued) only too plain for all to see. They spring from the view of literacy as a single injection of training which will solve all problems. Such failures cannot be remedied simply by reforming the system or methods or materials. Literacy teaching, it is argued, will only be effective if it is located within a firm framework of basic education for adults in which literacy skills may not be the first component (Torres 1998).

Audiences for post-literacy: Other concerns concentrate on the audiences reached by PL. Are they the right persons? Why do so few participants enrol for PL programmes? A report from Egypt states that "it is not reaching enough people or necessarily the right people" (Williams corresp). In many countries like Bangladesh, only one in ten graduates from ILT programmes are enrolled in PL programmes, although a few countries record figures as high as 25%. In most programmes, one PL centre is arranged to cover a cluster of ILT centres (see above, page 5). Again, although some countries record

lower drop-out rates from PL than from ILT programmes (Robinson-Pant 1998a p5), nevertheless the fall-off rate in participation of those who enrol for PL concerns many practitioners and providers. Irregular attendance at activities is frequently reported. "There is not a big demand for libraries" (BangEval p42); indeed, many of those local libraries which are being used record that they are used more by children or those who have been well educated than by adult literacy learners (Botswana 1998 p5).

Materials: Another cluster of concerns relates to the materials being produced for PL. Some people feel that these are at the wrong level for the 'neo-literates'. Many practitioners are convinced from feedback they have received that these materials are often seen to be irrelevant to the interests of the PL participants and independent readers at whom they are aimed. The content is "too complicated for the intended audience .. and the material .. not sufficiently motivating to the learners" (Botswana 1998 p6); the "materials are irrelevant, uninteresting and hardly posing new challenges" (Omolewa 1998 p1). One donor has suggested that, because the producers of PL materials associate 'illiteracy' or 'barely literate' with being ignorant, the texts they produce may overlook the people's rich experience and local knowledge and their desire for specific information, and therefore may be patronising:

"Over the last decades, a lot has been invested into literacy programmes, but without at the same time producing interesting materials, both fictional and non-fictional, for the neo-literates. The need to keep the level of language quite low and uncomplicated was often interpreted in the wrong sense, so that texts were produced which are of little interest because of their contents. The fact that people's reading skills may not be very well developed was often seen as an expression of their general ignorance. As a consequence, reading materials and extension materials contain information which is of very little interest to the rather specific needs and questions of e.g. farmers (who have a very specialized knowledge and lots of experience in their fields)" (DSE 1995 p1).

The kind of instructions on sanitation, for example, offered in so many PL texts are felt to be simplistic, treating the adult participants like very young children. Some materials are accused of being gender biased (Townsend Coles 1994 p32), and it has been suggested that they reflect a view of development which sees the poor as being to blame for their own poverty, which ignores the structural element in poverty, and which informs the readers that development will come about when

the poor and illiterate learn new things and change (Dighe 1995). The quality of production of many of the materials is thought to be inferior (although we need also to note that in many places the standard of production of many PL texts is very high indeed). The fear that the dependency of materials production on foreign aid agencies may lead to the collapse of the programme has been expressed on several occasions.

4. But the majority of the concerns are felt about the programmes in general, especially their **delivery**. Although there is greater awareness of the term 'post-literacy', and although it is generally accepted that some form of PL needs to be provided, nevertheless many problems are seen to exist in this area. The objectives of PL are often unclear: many policy makers are uncertain what PL is, how far it is the same as ILT and how far it is different. A recent survey of PL in Botswana for example records that "There is a lack of clarity on the policy on post-literacy in the various Government documents which are supposed to guide their activities and initiatives in the field" (Botswana 1998 p6). "In Brazil, there is a lot of confusion around this issue [PL]" (Magalhaes corresp). "The key weaknesses of the current situation with regard to post-literacy [in Kenya] are seen as a lack of conceptual framework or national policy together with a serious shortage of appropriate teaching

and learning materials" (Newell-Jones 1998 p3).

Many complain that **commitment** by government and donors has fallen off in recent years, especially in relation to funds and other kinds of resources. The Botswana survey reported that "The Commission [the National Commission on Education in 1993] observed correctly that post-literacy has hitherto not been treated as a priority undertaking in the Department [of Non-Formal Education] in spite of the persistent concern by the learners on the question 'After literacy, what?'... In spite of the growing media influence in Botswana, limited attention has been paid to post-literacy" (Botswana 1998 pp3, 5). Torres describes PL in Latin America as a 'no-man's land' (Torres 1998).

There is a shortage of funds and other kinds of resources in almost all countries for PL. The high costs of materials production and publishing in some regions militate against the production of large print runs. Many agencies say that they have prepared appropriate materials but cannot afford to publish and distribute them. Both government and donor support for PL is often alleged to be lacking, although in India, there has been a good deal of provision and government support for PL without donor support. In Nigeria, "Facilities on the ground with respect to the quality of instructors, programme managers, materials, and the

provision of resources are grossly inadequate" (Omolewa 1998 pp5-6). In Egypt, the whole programme "is hampered by a lack of funds and pressures from the Government to reduce the number of 'illiterates'" (Williams corresp). In Nepal, "every literacy worker interviewed stressed the lack of donor support for post literacy initiatives and a failure to ensure political commitment to the concept." One key official reported that "their [the National Planning Commission] first goal is to achieve universal literacy; there is no concept of post literacy, though I try to convince them that we need side-by-side programmes to sustain literacy rates" Others suggest that "There are no resources in post literacy. The Government will never pick it up. The only way in which it can be followed up is if it is dirt cheap" (Robinson-Pant 1998a pp3-4). Where donors exist, they may restrict the kind of initiatives which the field agencies may wish to take.

On the other hand, some see the main problems as lying in weak **institutional capacity**, especially the failure to indicate clear lines of responsibility, rather than lack of resources. "The [PL] programme is very ambitious", reports a respondent from Botswana, and Professor Youngman "concludes that the problem is not lack of policy or resources but it is the lack of institutional capacity and monitoring structures.." (Botswana 1998 p6). In particular, the scaling up from

experimental pilot PL projects to larger programmes presents a major problem in many countries. In Nepal, where many small-scale experimental approaches to PL have been developed, "the problems of scaling up post literacy are foremost in planners' minds and influence the kind of programmes undertaken" (Robinson-Pant 1998a p4). The Indian PLC encouraged the Districts to experiment with different kinds and lengths of PL programme, but the eventual national *Guidelines for PL* reverted to a standard format of programme (NLM 1995).

Time and again, the distribution of PL materials carefully prepared in writing workshops is seen as a key weakness: "A great difficulty faced in most countries is how to get supplies out to where they are needed, .. as near to where the learners are coming together for instruction" (Townsend Coles 1994 p52). "It has become clear that the rural newspapers hardly reach villagers in the rural areas... Lack of transport facilities is given as the main reason. But lack of motivation on the side of those who are responsible for the distribution and of those who are responsible for the transport facilities is also mentioned" (Kater et al 1992 p71). Even in India, "the distribution of such materials among neo-literates has been very limited ... the problem of reaching the materials to the neo-literates on a sustained basis has not been very successful" (Ghosh 1997a pp2, 4).

A further issue which seems to arise from this institutional weakness is the **'gap'** between ILT and PL - both in terms of timing and level. "It is often the case that between the conclusion of the conventional or primer stage and the possibility of commencing further study is a dangerous gap; a chasm which for many is so deep as to frustrate their motivation and cause them to abandon [literacy] learning altogether" (Townsend Coles 1994 p11). In India, there is often a gap of between 18 months and two and a half years between the end of the primer-based literacy teaching programme and the start of the PL programme - a gap caused by both local failures (to design an appropriate PL project, a task for which the local staff have received no training) and central failures (to provide the bureaucratic 'go-ahead' for the PL project). Other countries list the same problem. This is true even of NGO programmes (Robinson-Pant 1998a p3).

Even where there is a clear policy and effective institutional capacity, "the **practice of post literacy** in most cases is out of harmony with the broad principles outlined in policies and documents" (Omolewa 1998 p5). Poor teaching ("ineffective and dull teaching methods", Omolewa 1998 p1) is reported from a number of quarters. The problems of locating and selecting appropriate facilitators in the light of inadequate financial resources, and the difficulties of providing effective training for

the new roles of the facilitators or for the functions of local librarians, all feature among common concerns.

Regularly, there are complaints about the **failure of local libraries** (see above, pages 16, 32), although they continue to be provided on a large scale. Even when the specially prepared 'neo-literate texts' reach the local centres, "most of the materials .. were put in storerooms and not distributed to the neo-literates" (Botswana 1998 p6). Cupboards and trunks containing collections of books and booklets chosen centrally by the literacy agencies remain locked (with keys often lost). Library books remain unread, or are borrowed (by staff as much as by participants) and not returned. In Nepal, there were complaints about PL materials being kept in glass cupboards and not being made available to local readers (Robinson-Pant 1998b).

Even when they are made available, the utilisation of these materials is reported by many bodies as being a problem after their production and distribution have been effected (e.g. ACCU 1998). The texts are found to be used very rarely, whether because they appear to have little direct local relevance or cultural appropriateness or because they are simply borrowed, read and returned without having impact on the lives of the readers or the community. Even when these books and booklets

are read by the participants, there are signs of a lack of mediation of much of this material.

These concerns are expressed by both literacy teaching practitioners and the participants themselves. The causes of this failure are often seen to be different. The comment of a library keeper in Nepal that "women don't want books. They know nothing about the library", must be balanced against the comment of the women themselves: "If a male occupies the library or it is under his permission, we women never dare to ask him for books". "As all the books are in Nepali, the [Maithili-reading] women find difficulty using it. The books are usually taken by school teachers and some books are taken by them out of station for months" (Robinson-Pant 1998b p2). A report from Thailand reflects part of the problem clearly: "The principle of the series of booklets produced ... is to serve .. for further self-learning... But in reality, most of the learners are ... familiar with formal schooling which emphasizes didactic teaching. So the method of self-learning in the programme is not so effective in practice" (Thailand 1993 pp9-10). In Tanzania, "the utilization of rural libraries is minimal. Sometimes villagers do not even know that there is a library in the village.... Books had been borrowed and never brought back. No new books had been received for a long time" (Kater et al 1992 pp72-3).

Many take this failure of local libraries to work adequately to be an indication of the **irrelevance** of most of their PL materials produced by the different agencies for the 'neo-literates'. This irrelevance is seen to characterise the whole PL programme. In Sri Lanka, "the skills taught and the training given, particularly in the government sponsored programmes..., are too narrow and gender biased. Moreover they are thought to be far removed from the advancements that are being made in private industry... Because the [PL] programmes operate in isolation from private industry, the skills imparted are often out of date" (cited in Townsend Coles 1994 p32). Several commentators speak about the participation of the 'neo-literates' in developing their own programme as being rhetorical and not existing in practice.

While a large number of PL practitioners and planners attribute the weaknesses of PL to the lack of interest of the participants, there is growing recognition that such alleged lack of interest is really a failure on the part of providers to meet the real needs of the participant group. Often the PL facilitators (where they exist) are blamed for such problems. The difficulty of finding enough facilitators of the 'right kind' (educated, committed, innovative and creative, and knowledgeable) when they are paid so little (or even nothing), the problem of keeping them motivated over what is often a longer period than the ILT stage,

the problem of facilitator drop-out - all these are thought to contribute to the weakness of much PL. And the training of all the personnel for PL (field worker, supervisor and manager alike) is frequently recognised as being inadequate. Even the training of the local librarians is felt to be inadequate. "The librarians are poorly equipped with material and equipment to work with and have not received any training. There are no written manuals or guides on what libraries are supposed to do and how to do it" (Tanzania: Kater et al 1992 p73).

5. A further group of concerns which have been expressed in several countries relates to the **achievements** of PL. The difficulty of developing proper indicators of success for PL (see above, page 25) relates of course to uncertainty about what its goals are. "There is a danger in current efforts on post-literacy [in Brazil] to fall back into the skills/functional literacy trap. .. Most government effort can be thought of in terms of figures, that is the kind of initiative that can win voters" (Magalhaes corresp). There is a lack of formal monitoring and evaluation, even by those who run the programmes. Informal evaluations reveal that both LGM and income-generating programmes lack sustainability; and the difficulty of both making and sustaining change in any local community forms part of the concerns of many PL practitioners.

6. Finally, we need to note a group of concerns which relate to **gender**. There is an alleged gender bias in the organisation and staffing (and often in training) of many programmes, with men supervising women facilitators. In Kenya, "the lack of women involved in the policy making and management of adult education" has been commented on (Newell-Jones 1998). Several practitioners feel that the programmes and the PL material are often gender biased; certainly evaluations have revealed a feeling that they are often not gender sensitive. The shift of interest from barriers to women's literacy to a deeper analysis of the basic ideological issues related to women and gender, which has been noticed in research into literacy (Mace 1992 p7), is not reflected in most PL materials when discussing women's development. Where materials address 'women's concerns', these concentrate mainly on what Moser calls the practical gender needs rather than the strategic gender needs (Moser 1993 p56). This is sometimes called the 'efficiency' approach, by which PL materials seek to help women to work more efficiently but do nothing to address the structural issues relating to gender inequalities. "The current reading materials .. portray girls and women only in their 'traditional' roles as child-minders, domestic workers, fetchers of wood, listeners to instructions from men teachers". It is suggested that newspaper inserts in some contexts may not reach women as easily as men (in other contexts, the reverse may

be true). Women's use of libraries is an area of concern in some regions: where men control the library facilities, some women may feel excluded. In parts of Nepal, Muslim women prefer the *madrassa* school to the PL centre (Robinson-Pant 1998b). In Tanzania, concern about the compartmentalisation of the curricula of the Folk Development Colleges into tailoring for women and carpentry for men led to deliberate action to try to persuade women to take up carpentry and men tailoring, with some success (Sida 1998).

Such are the main concerns which have been expressed by many practitioners.

2. Innovative Programmes

In several areas of the developing world, developments in literacy teaching have begun to take place outside of the traditional paradigm. Most of these can be described as **non-course** approaches to literacy skill development. Some are part of a search for a wider audience for PL programmes than simply those who are or who have been in adult literacy classes. Some are part of attempts to use local literacy practices as the basis for their literacy activities. Most of these experiments relate as much to ILT as to PL.

Some of these new approaches have been developed to challenge the traditional paradigm of adult literacy teaching. Others have arisen from quite different premises, often without any demand being heard for literacy training. We list below one or two which seem to us to be telling case studies, making particular points about new approaches to PL. They have not been chosen because we wish to commend them or criticise them, but because they point to issues which need to be addressed. There are many others which could have been included but space does not allow.

SoUL: In South Africa, the project known as SoUL (the Social Uses of Literacy) was set up to review critically current literacy policies in that country. Its central thrust was to uncover the role of literacy in the lives of those who are generally assumed to be 'illiterate'. The results of the project were intended to contribute to the current debate among educators and policy-makers centred around the construction of a national system of adult literacy.

The project consisted of a series of ethnographic studies of reading, writing and numeracy in different settings and among different communities from displacement sites to the taxi industry in Cape Town. The project explored the ways in which people with little schooling use

reading and writing. These social uses of literacy were found to be highly contextualised and often different from schooled literacy practices. The case studies demonstrate how these 'illiterates' engage with various forms of literacy, make use of their informally acquired skills, and draw upon their social networks in order to deal with the literacy-related tasks of their everyday lives.

Some of the findings indicate that instead of literacy being an individualised activity, it is a highly collaborative activity. Literacy is part of communicative practices. The project found a demand for a kind of literacy learning programme which supports and advises the clientele on **their** literacy-related tasks of everyday life. This points to the fact that such a programme needs to be based on localised surveys of the existing literacy practices if it is to build on the real interests and concerns of the participants and is to lead to direct changes in their literacy practices. The participants themselves felt that a class and a set curriculum was not appropriate. Rather, an informal 'service and advice' type of activity was sought which made use of the people's own learning strategies. The project highlighted the need for contextualised localised literacy learning programmes; the logic of this would seem to be the inappropriateness of national uniform literacy learning programmes. The distinction between ILT and PL did not exist for these

groups; all that existed were participants with different levels of literacy skills and different literacy-related needs (Prinsloo and Breier 1996).

Work-based literacies: In many countries, there is a growing movement to provide literacy learning programmes in specific workplaces. In Botswana, from the start, many of the adult literacy teaching programmes have been located in mining companies, meat firms, motor engineering concerns, and public bodies such as Botswana Power, to meet the need for the workers to acquire the literacy skills they require for their work. In Namibia, a request has recently been received from the transport firm TransNamib for literacy learning provision for its drivers. In these and other cases, it is felt to be inappropriate to expect the participants to enter the normal literacy class programme or to use the standard national literacy primer. Specific teaching-learning materials closely related to the particular workplace is seen to be more appropriate. As with SoUL, this points to the fact that in many cases there is little or no demand for 'literacy' per se but for literacy skills as part of a range of skill development to fulfil tasks which the participant groups have identified for themselves. Once again, there is no place here for the distinction between ILT and PL; the goal of the learning programme is the range of literacy skills needed to do different tasks within the work of the firm.

'Literacy comes second': A number of new programmes have been built on a 'literacy comes second' model in which the participant group does not consist of a group made up solely of 'illiterate' or 'neo-literate' learners but is a mixed group of people with some or no literacy skills who are engaged in a common task (Rogers 1999a). Such participant groups start their programmes with a developmental activity and work *subsequently* towards the literacy tasks related to that activity, using the texts of that activity as the basis for the development of the particular literacy skills needed. In Ahmedabad, India, a women's income-generation group started to learn literacy skills through developing basic book-keeping. In Kenya, a group of women growing tea asked for help to read leaflets on pruning which they got from a local agricultural extension training event (Newell-Jones 1998). Some women's credit and savings groups work on this principle. Most of the work of literacy skill learning is done through peer teaching and assistance in a collaborative way. There are no stages and hence no PL.

In Nepal, women developed their literacy skills through a sewing class, using the patterns as their 'literacy learning texts'.

"For an example, one group of women wanted to learn sewing in a

village in Nepal. These women were not literate, so that they could not read the manual that was developed for sewing. When told that they could learn to read and write so they could sew with the manual, they responded that by the time they recognized all the letters of the alphabet and learned to read that manual, their interest would wither. In this case, there is a group of people who are eager to learn a skill. They are in an environment where written materials and opportunities are available to them. But they are faced with a manual that expects them to be literate. Therefore they are afraid to take action on their goal of learning to sew, because they think the process of learning to read will be too slow.

The problem here is the gap in people's assumptions about the way reading skills have to be taught *before* other things can be learned. ... Why should these women wait to learn sewing after reading? Why can't the sewing manual be adapted for use as a literacy text? It can, if we open our minds to new ways of teaching reading and writing.." (Dixon and Tuladhar 1994 p4).

The Nepal Community Literacy Project: this is only at the planning stage; but its intention is to provide assistance to all those who have difficulty with their literacy practices in their daily lives - whether that is

at work, in the home or in the community. Many of the activities of this project will take place outside of adult literacy classrooms, although one part of the programme will be to bring the real literacy tasks of the participants into the traditional ILT classes, so that the literacy skills learned in the classroom can be taken out again into the community life of the participants. The focus is on providing learning through the literacy practices of the people in their communities; and once again, there is no sense that ILT and PL are stages which succeed each other (CLPN).

The 'Real Literacies' Training Programme: As the result of a series of training courses run by Education for *Development* in the UK and overseas since 1993 (Education for *Development* 1997-8), in several countries, most notably Bangladesh, Ghana, Sierra Leone (despite the recent problems in that country) (Pemagbi and Rogers 1996), Nigeria (Omolewa 1997) and Botswana, literacy practitioners have developed a programme by which a search is made by the facilitators and participants alike to uncover the existing literacy practices of the participants in the communities from which they come. The aim is to introduce into the ILT programmes 'real literacy practices' and the written or printed materials which are used in these practices and to help the literacy participants to engage critically with these 'real

materials'. The assumption is that this process will help the participants more easily to transfer what they learn in their literacy classes into use in their daily interactions in the community, in that the literacy practices engaged in during the classes come closer to the literacy practices found outside in the community. At the same time, the participants are being encouraged to challenge the different assumptions which lie behind the production of these real materials (Rogers 1999b).

In an urban slum in Jaipur, India, participants in a traditional literacy class were asked to bring items which they wished to read. Many brought cinema notices. Using these advertisements, literacy learning was fast, for the participants knew all the words on these notices and the ideas they expressed were close to the immediate concerns of the literacy learners. Further, they could use the material immediately outside of the class in their own communities with pride. The contents were also suitable for relevant calculations (prices of seats, dates etc). The interest aroused in learning through this material was considerable, and other women came to the classes, saying that "we did not think literacy classes were like this". This programme led to critical analysis, for there were discussions of how women were portrayed in the films and in the songs from the films. The participants were encouraged to write their own critique of the films they saw

(Rogers 1983). Such an approach may not be relevant to other groups: this is not intended to be a plea to use this kind of material everywhere. But it demonstrates that a literacy learning programme based on real literacy tasks which the participants wish to undertake can lead to significant results.

Other examples can be cited. In Bangladesh, the BRAC adult literacy programme uses 'real materials' extensively (Mazhar 1998; field notes Bangladesh August 1998). Other programmes with tea pickers in the Sylhet area use different real literacy materials.

Help Age International (South Africa): Working with older persons to develop literacy skills, a group traditionally ignored by most providing agencies, Help Age International is pioneering an approach to literacy which is divorced from any pretension of access into more formal education. In particular, it addresses the language issue. Rather than teach first language literacy and then moving to English, the project plans to deal with dual language literacy. The people are encouraged to write what they need to write in the language they need to write it in. In this context, the scripts are the same, and the people use the local and English languages interchangeably. For example, the addresses of letters are in English even if the text inside the letter is in KwaZulu: it is

argued that there is no point in helping the participants to learn to write in KwaZulu alone, since this will prevent them from reading or writing the addresses on letters. Once again, the immediate needs of the particular situation are the factors which dictate the kind of programme to be offered, not the need for some national uniform literacy learning programme (Millican 1998).

United Mission to Nepal 'Non-structural Approach': UMN has developed an approach to literacy learning which has no courses. Rather, it seeks to encourage and to facilitate reading wherever the participants are. It is perhaps best described in their own words: "The [traditional] structural approach [to learning literacy skills] means you go two hours a day, have a class, a facilitator, certificate. The 'non-structural approach' means books, but that work and reading can go together - women can do self-learning in their free time. We are developing small books that can fit in a pocket, also a calendar that they will see every time they go inside on a doorway or kitchen wall" (Robinson-Pant 1998a p3). Here the aim is that learning will take place at the level appropriate to the individual literacy learner and in a location and at a time and in a sequence chosen by the learner. UMN provide the materials; the 'learners' do all the rest for themselves.

The Nirantar/Banda NFE Project: This project grew out of the handpump project in India described in the earlier report (Banda 1994; ODA 1994 pp26-28). A group of women, with mixed levels of literacy skills and experience, were engaged on a handpump maintenance project. They decided to start a literacy enhancement programme as part of the project. In this case, the learning of literacy skills came after the primary task of learning about handpumps, and the group was not selected to consist entirely of non-literate persons. There was certainly here no question of initial literacy learning followed by PL. The project led to the development of a new non-formal curriculum prepared in a participatory way for some of the younger women in the group (Nirantar 1997). The learning within this project is not seen to be linear but multi-directional.

REFLECT is an approach to literacy teaching developed by Action Aid and linking PRA and literacy teaching. The practice of REFLECT varies from one location to another, but in general it can be said that the primary activity of REFLECT is a PRA survey of the local community and the development of a social action development project by the group itself. In most cases, the initial group is intended for non-literates alone, but sometimes others with some literacy skills join. The learning of literacy skills comes later in the project, if the participant group feels

it is both desirable and achievable. The literacy learning programme "does not rely on an initial packaged course ... they [the participants] are generating their own texts in the literacy circles which can then be Xeroxed and these are taking the place of printed texts". "Rather than start with a primer, with the REFLECT approach, each literacy circle produces their own learning materials" (Archer and Cottingham 1996 p12). PL will only be provided if a course in literacy learning is provided during the REFLECT project. And PL is defined as "not just giving out reading materials but involves seeing literacy from the larger perspective of various communicative skills in the community" (Robinson-Pant 1998a p3).

"REFLECT rightly rejects the notion of splitting literacy programmes into a basic component, designed to acquire the technical skill of reading and writing, and a post-literacy component which aims to promote its application. If the learners have not found any use for their skills once they have acquired them, there are only two possibilities: 1. There is no use for their skills; or 2. The programme has failed to link up to or to create meaningful uses".

The aim of REFLECT is empowerment: and while the organisers see

literacy skill development as a part of the process of empowerment, they are keen not to impose their own values in relation to the significance of literacy skills on the participant groups which determine the direction and pace of the development project:

"the first group of learners, who are now nominally in the 'post-literacy' stage, are no longer using their meetings for extensive practice of reading and writing. It could be argued that BAP [the Uganda REFLECT programme] has nothing to worry about since many learners are actively seeking opportunities to apply their skills regardless of BAP's efforts" (Fiedrich 1996 p8).

Nigeria Literacy Shop: The University Village Association of Ibadan in association with Education for *Development* has opened two literacy shops in Bodija Market. These offer help to all those who feel they need it with their own specific literacy tasks. There are no classes, no collecting of illiterates into special groups. There are no primers or other 'materials' in the sense of teaching-learning materials. The project assistants (who are two local shopkeepers) draw no distinction between 'illiterates', 'semi-literates' and 'literate' as the traditional adult literacy discourse does. Rather, there are people with differing literacy

skills, tasks and confidence. The shops act in part as drop-in centres. The staff do not seek to do the literacy task 'for' the clientele; rather they set out to help the clients to do it for themselves and thus (in appropriate adult education fashion) to learn through doing. During the first year of the experiment, no charges will be made for providing this assistance but the situation will be reviewed before the end of the first year to see if a sustainable form of literacy assistance can be developed (Education for *Development* Nigeria 1998).

Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF) Library Project, India: The RGF in association with New Age International (publishers) has established as a pilot experiment some 550 village libraries in eight states of India as far apart as Rajasthan, Assam and Tamil Nadu. These libraries have a stock of about 400 books and two daily newspapers. They are open every day (2-3 hours) unlike the TLC village libraries which tend to open once a week. And they are available to all the villagers, not just the graduates of the TLC classes; every household in the village is asked to appoint one member of the household as a member of the library. Library member families pay a small fee per annum towards the cost of the library. There is no talk about post-literacy as a learning programme, although the project is spoken of by RGF as "a novel effort in post literacy". The project seeks to promote reading as a culture

among all those who wish to pursue it. Informal evaluations have been positive so far but a formal evaluation has not yet been conducted, and the problem of long term sustainability needs to be addressed (RGF).

Visual literacy: Such projects, outside the traditional paradigm, suggest that we may need to look at ILT and PL in a new light. We also note the increasing interest in visual literacy - the ability to decode and interpret drawings or pictorial symbols or colour codes rather than letters and words and sentences. Visual literacy relates in part to interpreting the signs and symbols in the social environment (e.g. signs on toilet doors, house styles on transport, political symbols etc). Another form of visual literacy is making meaning out of forms such as medical cards and passport applications, in which texts, boxes and spaces are arranged in a specific way; understanding of how to fill them in needs to be developed. But the main use of such material is probably the use of drawings to communicate messages in ILT and PL and extension programmes (e.g. *Storyteller* in South Africa; BOBP in Asia etc: see ODA 1994 pp31-38). In particular, the use of so-called 'comic books' appears to be growing to engage the attention of the users and to get messages across, especially in health. And in Thailand, some innovative projects in post-literacy using radio and video have been commenced (World Education corresp).

It is assumed that people can interpret such visual literacy materials without mediation. Tentative assessments suggest that where the users of such material are familiar with visual messages (e.g. through television), the readers can more easily access the style than in cases where the approach is imported. Few of these materials are mediated to the users (except again in health), and therefore there appear to be few if any training programmes in how to help readers to engage with this material. Once again in developing such formats, the distinction between 'illiterate' and 'neo-literate' becomes less important. Rather these materials are seen as a form of contextualised communicative practices - that is, within a particular context, they form part of a process of communication between the agency issuing the text and the users in their own groups or individually.

[Wall literacy, Katatura, Namibia](#)

3. The Changing Context of Adult Literacy

[3.1. Adult learning theory](#)

[3.2. Understanding of literacy as social practice](#)

[3.3. Language and access](#)

[3.4. Development theory and practice](#)

[3.5. Education, centralisation and decentralisation](#)

[3.6. Changing technologies](#)

The context within which PL is set is changing. New insights are being developed, and these need to be applied to literacy learning programmes. We set out here some of the key elements in these changes.

3.1. Adult learning theory

Most of those involved in adult education, whether they hold constructivist approaches to learning or more traditional views, agree on two main differences between adult learning and learning programmes for younger persons (children or college students). Despite the danger of over-generalisation, the following principles are of value for the development of PL programmes.

a) **the importance of 'starting where they are'**: Adult learning is in most cases voluntary. Adults learn when such learning meets their immediate or longer-term intentions. Thus modern approaches to adult

learning programmes start with the current motivations of the participants rather than attempting to motivate the intended participants to learn things which they do not wish to learn. Adult education regards the participants as adult persons who know their own mind and are normally accustomed to make decisions about their own lives (including their own learning), not like younger persons who need to be told what they should learn.

Since adult learning programmes are built on the principle that it is important to start where the participants are, they need to reflect the divergent desires and concerns of the varied adult participants, their differing expectations which have been formed by their different experiences, the different preferred learning styles which adults have developed over the years, and their own chosen finishing point (Rogers 1996 pp94-116). Much adult learning is not linear; it is not based on a common starting point, but multi-dimensional, following paths through the material which suit the interests and concerns of the learners.

In terms of literacy, many adult literacy teaching programmes assume, because all the participants are 'illiterates', that they are all at the same starting point. But this is not true. The participants bring with them differing experiences of literacy practices and different perceptions and

agendas. Non-literate adults are already engaging in literacy practices (Barton and Hamilton 1998): they are adopting many different strategies for dealing with the various literacy events and the various texts which they encounter, using their own networks (Fingeret 1983, Levine 1986, Prinsloo and Breier 1996). They have their own agenda in relation to these experiences. We need to start where they are, with **their** motivations, rather than try to motivate them to be interested in **an agency** approach to literacy.

b) **the importance of learning by doing:** Unlike most of the teaching-learning programmes devised for younger learners, adult learning programmes do not proceed by learning first and practising afterwards. This is of course well known. As long ago as 1973, the UNESCO report *Learning to Be* contrasted adult (lifelong) learning ('learning to be' what you are) with the formal education of younger persons which it characterised as 'learning to become' something which you are not yet.

The process of lifelong learning which many reports have identified as a key element in today's thinking about adult education implies that adults tend to learn 'on the job' - by doing what they need to do during the course of their life-related activities, and by critical reflection on these actions. One learns parenting by parenting with real children in real

situations. One learns farming by farming and cooking by cooking, how to shop by shopping and how to build by building. If it were not possible to learn from experience but only from specially created learning programmes, many persons (probably in most countries, the majority) would never learn anything, for most adults do not enter such learning programmes.

Experiential learning again implies that a linear approach to learning, which may or may not be appropriate for children, is clearly not appropriate for adults. Adults learn best through their daily life experiences, however haphazardly those experiences may occur. There are many routes through learning, and much learning is episodic rather than systematic. Learning (for adults in particular) can be described as a 'messy process' (Rogers 1996 chaps 4 and 5).

Current understandings of lifelong learning are thus challenging the view that underlies many literacy learning programmes, that 'independent learning' can only start once an adult has completed the first stages of learning literacy. The concepts of lifelong learning reveal that learning is not dependent on literacy. Non-literate persons are already autonomous learners, are already engaged in experiential lifelong learning (Rogers 1992 pp9-17). Those who talk about a person

achieving the status of 'independent learner' only towards the end of the process of literacy learning and continuing education are talking about a particular form of learning, i.e. book learning, which they usually see as superior to experiential learning.

Building literacy programmes on adult learning principles: Literacy programmes then which take adult learning principles seriously will seek to start where the participants really are and not where the providing agencies assume they are. These programmes will build on what the participants already know and seek to enhance what they are already doing, that is, using different strategies (some of them non-literate strategies) to engage in literacy practices with the texts they find around them, before moving on to help them to develop these strategies further and to explore new uses of literacy, new literacy practices. As we have noted, most existing adult literacy learning programmes start from the assumption that the 'illiterates' know nothing and are unable to do anything, although a great deal of research indicates that this is not true. Non-literate persons *do* have experience of engaging in literacy and from this experience have built up perceptions of, and attitudes towards, literacy (for example, Barton and Hamilton 1998; Doronila 1996; Prinsloo and Breier 1996).

And literacy learning programmes which apply adult learning principles will help the participants to learn through their own literacy experience, to learn by doing in reality. Just as it is impossible to learn to swim without swimming in real water, or to learn chicken rearing or rice growing without actually rearing chickens or growing rice, so it is impossible to learn reading or writing or calculating without engaging in real reading, writing or calculating in real situations - wherever possible with the assistance of a facilitator. Such programmes will use the real literacy tasks of the participants as the basis for their learning rather than (or as well as) the school-room based exercises using a prescribed textbook which most adult literacy learning programmes currently employ.

A number of contemporary approaches to adult education are concentrating on opening out and adapting the formal education system to meet the educational and training needs of non-traditional students, especially older persons. Those who are engaged in developing new and more relevant literacy learning programmes for adults are equally seeking ways of developing approaches to literacy skill teaching adapted to the needs of adults, rather than treat them in the same way as children are treated. Thus the adult education programmes designed to help people with their own literacy learning will be customised

learning programmes for individuals or specific groups of adults based on their existing literacy practices rather than standardised and formalised programmes using only a set primer.

3.2. Understanding of literacy as social practice

Today there is growing awareness of literacy as social practice rather than as a set of skills which a person has or has not. In this approach, literacy is what people do, not what they learn. "Literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script, but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use" (Barton 1994 p24). Literacy is part of a wider set of 'communicative practices' which embraces oral, written and visual communication - and communication is always for a purpose which lies outside of itself. Studies in the socio-cultural approach to literacy reveal once again that non-literate persons engage in literacy practices in their own communities, just as persons with advanced literacy skills engage in non-literate practices.

And literacy in this sense is a social activity. The idea that literacy is a discrete individualised activity is part of what has come to be called 'the literacy myth' (Graff 1979), People using literacy practices form part of

social networks which serve as learning resources with the exchange of knowledge and skills, networks in which people are treated as equals and not as 'illiterates' and 'literates'. The categorisation of persons into 'literate' and 'illiterate' just does not work on the ground; we are all in different respects both literate and illiterate.

This is not to take a romantic view of people's local literacy practices but a realistic view. Literacy practices are always embedded in social relations of power and inequality. What counts as literacy and what is helpful or useful literacy practice depends on the specific situation. We are of course not arguing that people should be left with their existing strategies for dealing with literacy tasks. The provision of help to people to enable them to change these strategies (and thus to change the power structures on which the existing literacy practices are based) is the aim of literacy teaching programmes based on the new approaches to literacy as a social practice.

These new approaches to literacy then suggest that literacy is always contextualised, situated within a particular socio-cultural setting. There is a growing awareness that there is no one universally applicable form of literacy. Rather, there are different literacies and literacy practices for different groups (occupational groupings, for example) and for

different kinds of activities (religion, education, commercial activities etc) and for different social and institutional contexts (bureaucracies, informal meetings etc). Literacy teaching programmes for adults, then, which are based on the new literacy studies would seek to help the participants with very specific types of reading and writing. And if, as we have seen, literacy skills need to be learned by engaging in literacy tasks within the context of the particular activity to which they relate, then for example, religious literacy will be based within a religious practices context, work-based literacies within the context of the performance tasks of the workplace, etc, each of these using the 'materials' which are needed to fulfil these tasks.

In this context, the term 'literacy materials' is not confined to texts which have been specially created or are used for the learning of literacy skills. Rather the term refers to all those texts found or created within literacy practices (these have been referred to in earlier writing as 'real literacy materials', but this term has problems in the sense that it suggests that other texts are not 'real'). All literacy materials (including literacy primers and other learning texts) need to be seen within their contexts to derive their meaning. A land document or a set of accounts make sense only when considered within their specific setting. Learning to engage with these texts depends on the kind of document being

learned and the context within which it is used.

'Literacy' then is what people do with reading and writing - and this of course includes learning, even learning to read and write. The idea of literacy as social practice does not exclude teaching-learning literacy skills or the learning of new literacy practices. It also includes the learning of school-based literacy practices where there is a demand for that. What is done in an adult literacy class is a social activity or communicative process which includes particular kinds of literacy practices (reading and writing of specially prepared texts).

Literacy primers then are a specific kind of created text for a special set of literacy practices. They are created to help participants to develop a particular set of literacy practices, what may be called 'school-based literacies'. The aim of the learning programme is to help the participants to read pages of the primer in a classroom setting and to fill in spaces on a primer page etc. Like all other texts, they are contextualised, situated within a 'learning centre' environment rather than a community environment; and they only make sense within that context. Without some form of additional mediation, they will not assist the participants with the use of the other kinds of literacy practice which go on (for example) in the Post Office, bank, clinic or anywhere else in

the community. If they are seen in this light and if we can help the participants to engage with them in this context, they will help the participants to develop classroom skills; but the transfer of these skills from the classroom to community use will rarely take place without some specific kind of help. And in adult education, it is (as we have seen) more effective to help the participants to learn in and from their own environment (in other words in and from the Post Office, bank, clinic etc) rather than in and from a more specialised literacy learning classroom or centre environment.

The most important implication of seeing literacy as social practice, and of seeing literacy teaching programmes as assisting people with their current literacy practices, is that such programmes will be built on careful localised research into the literacy practices of the participants, and the found and created texts which support these practices. This view of literacy suggests that literacy teaching programmes need to be situated in real contexts rather than be generalised (on localised research).

And this view of literacy as social practice also means that the evaluation of literacy learning achievements will be set in terms of how the participants use their literacy skills. If they only read a page at the

end of the primer and do nothing more than this, the programme may have achieved what it set out to do, but in terms of helping the participants to *use* their literacy skills in real life, it has clearly failed. The key question which literacy practitioners face is *how does each participant use their newly acquired primer-based literacy skills?*

Performance indicators, rooted in particular situations, have been proposed as a more effective measure of achievement in literacy than standard tests (Powell 1991), but there is a danger here too that such indicators can themselves become decontextualised. Some of the surveys of retention of literacy skills (Roy et al 1975; Ramaswamy 1994; Comings 1995), although limited and tentative at this stage, suggest that literacy skills are best retained when they are used in real situations to accomplish real literacy tasks with 'real' literacy texts, not artificial tasks set by educators with specially prepared texts.

Evaluations have shown that, despite some difficulties, the use of existing literacy practices as the basis of learning literacy skills (as in the Language Experience Approach of ELP and Storyteller in South Africa, where the authentic language transactions of the participants are used as the basis of the literacy learning programme) is more effective in developing sustainable literacy skills than more formal primer-based methods, even in countries where the written form of the

language is significantly different from that which is spoken.

3.3. Language and access

Much contemporary discussion concerning adult literacy concentrates on seeing literacy learning within the context of language (e.g. UNESCO 1993). Learning literacy skills on their own, detached from their linguistic context, is seen to be problematic.

There are two aspects to this discussion, which are sometimes distinguished by the use of the terms tongue and register (language constructs). 'Tongue' relates to the language spoken or written such as KiSwahili or Hindi or minority languages like Gurung in Nepal (Robinson-Pant) or Arakmbut in Peru (Aikman 1995). 'Register' relates to the form of the language used by different social groups or in different social contexts. While there is much debate in literacy circles about tongue, there is relatively less about register, but this too provides or restricts access to different kinds of literacy practices and to the power contexts in which those practices take place.

In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion about first language (vernacular) as against national or regional languages and the

power relationships involved in these tongues (Barton 1994b), not only in educational terms but in terms of social constructs. Issues of bi-lingual and multi-lingual education create a key thread in contemporary debates about schooling (Clinton Robinson 1990, 1994; *IJED* 1998).

Such issues affect adult literacy programmes (including PL) acutely. "Literacy is about language and education as well as the specific skills of reading and writing" (Rockhill 1993 p345). It is therefore not surprising that language concerns (mother tongue or standardised languages) are regularly reflected in current debates about adult literacy. Issues surrounding minority languages and the rights of different groups to use them; the question of disappearing languages; the power relationships involved in language - these are factors which will also affect any literacy teaching programme, particularly at the PL stage (Education for ***Development*** 1994). Nor are these matters for planners and policy-makers alone, especially in participatory adult learning programmes; for it is clear that the demands of the participants vary from place to place (Aikman 1995). It has been suggested that there is a hunger for the creation of new reading material in minority languages (Clinton Robinson 1990), but very little funding is available for this purpose. But it is equally arguable that many people are hesitant to learn literacy skills in their local languages when they are

aware that they cannot use such skills to achieve any purposeful change in their own lives.

Equally, there is the question of register - who uses which kind of language for what kind of purpose? Issues of culture and modality are raised by these discussions - what kinds of language are used in public life, in government contexts, in religious contexts, in formal education, in social gatherings etc? Questions of 'high' and 'low' forms of language are raised here, of standardised and non-standardised language. Equally, what kinds of language have the participants learned their literacy skills in? - for this will help to determine what they can do and what they cannot do with the literacy skills they have learned in the classroom. The nature of the literacy skills developed through PL primers, while it may open some doors, may also prevent the participants from accessing other kinds of written texts which are in their own environment. A major question for the development of PL is, what can the literacy skills being learned be used for?

We cannot enter fully into these important and wide-ranging debates here. For they concern the structure of society and the nature of local power relationships:

"Literacy is not only useful, it is also violent, as Stuckney (1991) provocatively points out with reference to the segregation often undertaken with the help of literacy standards. Those who are literate are seen as capable, intelligent and modern, while those who are not make up the rest of the world's population - to be pitied at best" (Fiedrich 1996 p10).

The key issue for all adult literacy programmes which lies behind this discussion is that of inclusion and exclusion. Both language as tongue and language as register (the kind of language being taught to the participants in both ILT and PL) will themselves both include some persons and some literacy practices and exclude others.

This is not an abstract or academic issue. For the implications are that both the tongue and the register need to be of immediate concern for the planners and the participants in literacy learning programmes if these programmes are to be effective. To force adults to learn what they do not wish to learn or what they cannot (or do not wish to) use is to deny their adulthood. For example, the language policy of the Ghana Functional Literacy Programme which used 15 local languages was contested by the literacy learners' demand for English (Yates 1995).

Literacy teaching is part of language teaching; and any language and literacy teaching which does not help the participants to examine the ways in which read texts and written texts are constructed will be of little use to the learners.

3.4. Development theory and practice

The context of most adult literacy teaching programmes in third world countries is as much one of development as of adult education and of language learning. This is particularly true of PL. Changes in the theory and practice of development will thus affect the way in which PL is provided.

It is impossible to summarise the major changes in development theory and approaches in this context. But the earlier **deficit** approach with its emphasis on meeting needs by inputs, which was challenged by the **disadvantaged** approach of more radical groups calling for structural changes and its emphasis on the inclusion of excluded groups, is now again being challenged by a more ethnographic 'third way' or 'alternative development' approach which may be called the **difference** approach, in which the different intentions of the participant groups are taken as the basis for development interventions and partnerships with

local development groups and agencies as the key to sustainability (Rogers 1992).

Participation: Probably the most important recent influence helping to build up the insights of the 'difference' approach to development is that of participatory approaches to development which emerged during the 1980s. These have laid stress on people's purposeful and direct involvement in their own self-development (Rahman 1993; Sachs 1993). Recent writings have spoken of 'people first' (Burkey 1993) and of 'putting the last first' (Chambers 1983). The challenge of 'Whose Reality Counts?' (Chambers 1997; Holland J 1998) faces all development workers who take participation seriously. Much of this is of course rhetoric: in many cases, control is retained by the aid agencies. Development practice has changed relatively little, despite the language of participation. But the challenges of the rhetoric remain, to be fulfilled if possible.

Participatory approaches to development have led directly to the contemporary emphasis on the promotion of partnerships between donor and aid agencies (both governmental and NGO) on the one hand and development implementing agencies in the South on the other. Decision-making about the programme is (either in part or wholly) to be

shared between the participant groups and the aid agencies. There are of course practical limits: it is difficult to promote participatory approaches within organisations that are not themselves participatory. But partnerships are being increasingly sought.

The implications of a fully participatory approach (rather than the partial approach which still predominates) are that the goals of the development programme will be set by the participants, not by the aid agencies. Externally assessed surveys of 'needs' are being replaced by PRA analyses and surveys of local *intentions* (Rogers 1992 pp146-158), and in some cases, participant groups are being encouraged to set their own developmental objectives.

And this means that beyond the rhetoric, the **goals** agreed for development programmes will vary widely according to the various groups involved rather than being pre-set by the external development agencies on a uniform basis for all the participant groups. And such goals may well change locally over time as the development programme continues, so that once again uniform goals cannot be imposed on all groups from the centre. Further, the **agenda** for development will also be local and diverse. The socio-political realities will of course in many cases limit participation, but there are a number

of examples on both a small scale and on a larger scale where participatory approaches have resulted less in the importation of externally determined procedures which the participants need to learn to accept but rather in the strengthening of indigenous practices and the fulfilment of locally determined solutions to locally identified concerns. That at least is the ideal towards which participatory development seeks to move (Kaufman et al 1997; UNRISD 1994; Holland J 1998).

Participatory literacy: Participation in adult literacy programmes has tended to be very limited. The literacy learners are encouraged to help to determine the timing and the location of the courses, but participatory decision-making does not extend to the choice of material for learning, to the length of the training programme, to the sequencing of the material, or to the setting of the final goals of the learning programme. These are matters which are reserved for the providing agencies to decide.

Fuller participation in adult literacy would lead to encouraging the literacy learners in initial and post-literacy learning programmes to set the goals of the programme for themselves and to decide when they have had enough, rather than the donors/providers setting pre-determined levels of achievement. Participatory post-literacy in

particular would be open-ended, a programme designed to help the participants - individually or in groups - to achieve *their* purposes and aimed at *their* desired levels of achievement. Some of the participants in participatory adult literacy programmes would opt for standardised school-based achievement levels, in which case the provision of classes with textbooks would be appropriate. In other cases, where the participants requested assistance with their own particularised local literacy practices (again, individual or group tasks), the adult literacy learning programmes would be based on their indigenous literacy practices and on the found and created texts used in these practices, so as to achieve locally determined goals. Some of these may not be seen to be fulfilling the developmental expectations of the agencies and funders, such as reading cinema notices in India or fashion magazines in Brazil, but they will be development in terms of the participants. Such a programme arising from the view of literacy as social practice is possible, and is likely to be more effective in bringing about sustainable enhanced literacy skills.

Measurable indicators: However, the use of log frames in developing project proposals in development has increased the emphasis on uniformly applicable and measurable indicators of achievement. The recognition of the importance of assessing and evaluating the impact of

development activities also suggests the need for pre-determined outcomes. Both of these trends are understandable in view of the call for increased transparency and accountability in development programmes.

These trends have been exacerbated by the poverty-focused development agenda of much current aid and development administration. New ways of assessing progress in the reduction of poverty are being sought (Goyder et al 1998). The kind of question being asked is how the contribution which (for example) a chicken-rearing project is making to the relief of poverty can be measured.

These debates impact on adult literacy teaching provision. The search for indicators of poverty reduction has led to the inclusion of national, sectoral and gendered literacy statistics among the relevant data. Such statistics call for literacy achievement to be measured by standardised tests, and standardised tests call for uniform teaching-learning programmes. The difficulty of comparing the literacy skills used by a woman vendor in an Indian fishing community and those used by an Egyptian urban street trader, of measuring the literacy achievements of South African taxi drivers and those of Bangladeshi tea pickers, or even of taxi drivers and hospital porters in the same city, is encouraging

literacy training agencies to fall back onto universal educational standards.

One answer to the desire to retain locally relevant and participant-determined measures of achievement has been the development of literacy performance indicators. In work-based literacy programmes, for example, the search is on to determine the "levels of literacy that are actually required for individuals to function effectively in different (work) contexts", for it has been recognised that "there is little evidence that grade attainment was an accurate indicator of literacy skills"; "performance tasks [may better serve] as indicators of literacy competence" (Benton 1996 p95). Another approach which holds some promise is the Progress Profile which is being used in some European countries to help the participants to engage in self-assessment of their own literacy progress (Holland and Street 1994). Elsewhere, ethnographic ways of evaluating achievements are being experimented with (Craig and Porter 1997).

There is then something of a contradiction within current trends in development approaches. On the one hand, there is a trend towards 'difference' as the key parameter of development, towards diversified and localised decision-making, participatory development towards

goals which are not pre-determined by the aid and development agencies but are set locally by the participants. On the other hand, there is a trend towards the donors/providers pre-setting measurable goals for the development activity - social transformation pre-determined by the providers (often as much in terms of good government, democracy, transparency and accountability as in terms of health and productivity etc). In terms of adult literacy, this contradiction expresses itself, on the one hand, in the provision of formalised and universal literacy learning programmes with pre-set materials and standardised testing of achievements by educational criteria, and on the other hand, in the challenge of meeting the demand for literacy learning programmes directed towards localised literacy usages chosen by the participants. The need to develop new ways of measuring literacy progress in these situations and presenting these in statistical format is being addressed, but there is a long way to go yet.

3.5. Education, centralisation and decentralisation

Literacy teaching also stands within an educational world and will be affected by changes in theory and practice among educationalists. The two trends which appear to be of most relevance to our survey of PL are the increasing centralisation of some parts of education, notably the

curricula and assessment, and the decentralisation of other parts of education, notably management and decision-taking.

Centralisation: In most countries, there is increasing central control over the curriculum taught in schools and colleges. Educational institutions are losing the ability to determine what they teach, at what level and in what sequence. Such issues are not always being determined on educational grounds. Much of the impetus towards the development of a national curriculum comes from politicians and administrators rather than from educators, and it is often aimed at fulfilling social agendas such as industrial and economic growth, social development and environmental goals, gender and other forms of equality, and communal harmony and peace.

Closely linked with the national curriculum is central control over accreditation. National levels of qualifications are being developed in every country, and increasing pressure is being felt in every educational establishment to conform to these qualifications. Formal modes of recognition of achievement through education and training are gaining momentum. Students as well as employers and educational providers are using them as a means of measuring and valuing outcomes. Access into subsequent levels of educational provision relies increasingly on

some form of recognised certificates. In order for accreditation to be used as criteria for the measurement of success, it is often asserted that it needs to be nationally standardised, accessible and accountable. The difficulties around producing equivalent but contextualised tests for different groups of learners, like those which surround measurable indicators of development impacts, are considerable.

Decentralisation: On the other hand, in contrast, recent years have seen an increase in the pressure to devolve decision-making and accountability to a more local level. Schools are being made cost centres, with senior staff being required to accept increasing responsibilities for staffing and resource management. The responsibilities of the local educational centres, if not their powers of self-determination, are being increased. In many development contexts, community involvement in the provision of education, cost-sharing, and the responsibility for the maintenance of educational premises and sometimes for the payment of teachers are being built into educational programmes.

Literacy as Education. Such trends are apparent in educational programmes in developing countries. Donors are increasingly having more say in terms of curricular content and management, as national

educational budgets are cut back and governments become more dependent on outside aid. And they are also affecting adult basic education provision including PL, although clearly to different extents in different contexts. The increased central control comes about through the provision of centrally produced teaching-learning texts and through the demand for statistics of achievement based on centrally prepared tests.

The advantages of this for PL can be seen in some contexts. Being locked into a national framework can result in PL achieving a higher profile nationally with increased and more secure resourcing, together with a coherent strategy for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the programmes. As part of a national provision (as the TLC in India suggests), there could be greater coordination between different providers, both governmental and non-governmental, leading to a reduction in duplication and an increase in the sharing of good practice. It calls for the development of some institutional framework for PL, without which many PL programmes appear to be vulnerable. As we have seen, there is everywhere in PL a shortage of staffing, of accommodation and (in some cases) of appropriate teaching-learning materials. A higher national profile and greater security of funding could provide the incentive to overcome these shortages. A national PL

curriculum and comprehensive assessment programme linked to recognised progression routes can also be in the interest of some of the participants. They might provide these persons with a wider access into formal education or vocational training, or with nationally recognised accreditation leading to increased employment opportunities.

On the other hand, a national PL curriculum with standardised pre-set learning outcomes brings with it some disadvantages. Inevitably it will be less flexible than a locally developed scheme negotiated specifically with the literacy learners. Although efforts are often made to include the assessed needs of the literacy learners when devising such a national curriculum and the teaching-learning materials to go with it (especially in the use of distance or open learning methodologies), they cannot incorporate the specific local requirements of all the participants. Similarly, a system of imposed national qualifications has disadvantages. It is clear from the drop-out rates that not all the literacy learners want formal nationally recognised qualifications; few seek access into the formal system of education. The development of a generic competency-based scheme of assessment for adult literacy also has major implications for the training of facilitators and assessors.

The same is true for decentralisation of management and accountability. The diversity of the life-experiences, intentions and expectations of the participants in literacy teaching programmes is acknowledged. In those programmes where local decision-making is actively supported and responsibility at a local level is encouraged, the result has been the establishment of different models for different situations. Unfortunately, the tendency is for these differences to be reduced in the scaling up of a pilot project to a larger-scale programme.

3.6. Changing technologies

Adult literacy teaching (including PL) in the 1990s is located within a context of fast changing information and communication technologies (ICT) and rapidly changing attitudes to those technologies. We cannot do more here than draw attention to some of the implications of these changes for PL, for this is a field which will require a great deal more research, including action research.

The use of distance and open learning methodologies is now well established, and has been extended to adult basic education programmes. We note for example the use of distance learning for

basic education in countries like Uganda and Pakistan. There is experimentation with some of the newer forms of ICT, but the main format is still printed material backed up with radio and TV cassettes where possible.

It is however the newer technologies which are now commanding attention (ICT). We note for instance the apparently high levels of motivation and achievement of previously demotivated adult literacy learners when using computer-assisted literacy programmes in countries like the USA. We note the increase in creative writing on the internet through which large amounts of material can be disseminated very widely and used at will in many different ways and at times of convenience to the users - all at marginal costs. We note the spontaneous development of international study circles using ICT, to which the participants in PL programmes could contribute - and the feeling that they are sharing experiences which others value rather than simply receiving other people's wisdoms. We notice the spread of relatively advanced printing facilities into many of the smaller towns and villages throughout the Third World, through NGOs as well as commercial agencies. We note the economy of printing using the new printing technologies, such as desk-top publishing; several local PL newspapers such as the newspaper in Chittoor in India (ODA 1994

pp16-19) have been produced on existing technical equipment which has surplus capacity at very low costs.

However, access to these new technologies is not universal, although increasingly such access no longer relies on elaborate infrastructure such as on-line electricity supply. In particular, much ICT relies on international languages, access to which is still a weak point of most PL programmes despite demand from the participants. But it needs to be remembered that all the communicative technologies such as printing, the telephone, video and television were initially narrow in their field of influence. ICT brings with it challenges around access and power which require consideration.

And access to ICT can be increased. For example, modem developments such as computer mirroring can help local sources to use large amounts of material without elaborate or costly hardware and at greatly reduced on-line costs. In fact, the main problems seem to be different from questions of access. One important issue is how to handle the diversity of information available which is no longer controlled by print runs. There is already some indication that farmers in some areas in developing countries are no longer content with extension booklets which they feel go out-of-date quickly, but prefer to

access more up-to-date and constantly renewed agricultural information on the internet. A second issue is how to contextualise the material. The problem appears to centre around ways of creating a collage, out of which the participants can draw the information they feel they need.

There are a number of ways in which ICT can assist literacy development programmes, including post-literacy. There is no need to provide every person with internet access. It is possible to leverage ICT services through centres to which, in the first instance, only facilitators and support staff would have access. The cost of high telephone bills for internet access can also now be circumvented using other media. This makes possible a number of services and opportunities such as

- interactive support for the facilitators which can be provided by e-mail from a bank of training support staff situated at some central location.
- the provision of materials, from specific training materials to a wide range of interesting resources on a variety of media which require computers but which do not need telephone access or even access to electricity supplies.

- networks of materials-generating individuals and groups, linked to support personnel, again situated centrally.

These and other opportunities provided by new developments in ICT need to be explored. They are intended in the first instance to support and enhance learning and facilitation, not to replace them. But they can demonstrate substantial economies of scale and provide access to further opportunities that are in themselves not new but which have for the most part been inaccessible and/or too costly. They can also be used to help to draw people from remote and isolated areas into new learning networks, not as consumers but as active participants. Relocation of tasks and services can take advantage of the virtual network in which physical isolation can become relative, if not irrelevant.

Clearly PL will need over the next few years to explore ways of utilising these new technologies, to develop guidance services through the maze for the PL participants, to provide mediation to help the users to situate this material in their own context, and to create appropriate training programmes for those engaged in both ILT and PL. Traditional reading skills such as 'skimming and scanning' will need to be supplemented with 'searching and sifting' skills.

We are convinced that this is not utopian. We believe that the PL groups which we saw, with appropriate help, can utilise such new technologies, contribute to them and learn from them through interacting with them. The opportunities which lie ahead are not only exciting; they are very challenging.

7. CONCLUSION

These changing contexts provide a challenge, not just to the traditional ILT and PL programmes but also to all those who seek to develop new approaches to literacy teaching programmes. They provide us with a basis for our own critique of the traditional paradigm of post-literacy.

[Egyptian bakery workers, Alexandria, during work break](#)



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PART III. Developing new approaches

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Women's income-generating group Kenya

1. Commentary on the traditional paradigm

The traditional mode of PL: We are conscious of those changes which have been and continue to be introduced into adult literacy learning programmes in developing countries, especially within the last few years. Nevertheless, in many places very little has changed. On the basis of the field visits and the literature review conducted during the research project, it would seem that the large majority of ILT and PL programmes are built upon a traditional approach to literacy. 'Literacy' is seen as a process by which a set of technical skills of reading, writing and numeracy are acquired through a classroom-kind

experience, working with a teacher (facilitator) and a textbook or other 'learning' materials. Once grasped, it is assumed that these skills can be applied in all kinds of contexts to cope with many different forms of print-based learning - they form what may be described as a 'portable toolbox'. The approach is similar to that of primary school: it asserts that one needs to learn literacy first and apply it in practice afterwards. Literacy is seen as a pre-requisite for further learning and development programmes. Without literacy, the participant groups are felt to be severely disadvantaged.

This '**literacy comes first**' model rests on a number of assumptions that are questionable. It is founded for example on a deficit view of illiteracy. It accepts without questioning the idea that autonomous learning and development activities can only start after the acquisition of literacy skills. It is based on the view that 'illiterates' are excluded from most of the worth-while activities which other members of their own communities engage in. It assumes that literacy skills are required by all individuals, and that the acquisition of such skills will be of benefit to all who acquire them. It is based on the view that literacy skills are developed in a sequential process, and assumes that the acquisition of such skills brings with them clear advantages in thinking and reasoning and learning abilities and in relating to the outside world.

And literacy acquisition is closely associated with schooling. The process of learning literacy skills associated with these assumptions is based upon a limited and specially prepared group of learning texts (usually primers) which are received by those who attend the literacy classes. It is concerned with 'learning' but not with the use of these skills.

The implications of this view for post-literacy are that PL

- consists of a further programme of learning,
- is aimed at those who have completed the initial literacy teaching programme
- uses materials prepared specifically for this group of learners,
- and leads in the end to the independent use of the technical skills so acquired in a wide range of different contexts and for a wide range of different purposes.

The same programmes then are being offered in much the same way

with much the same kind of materials (up-dated, of course, but along the same lines) as have been offered for the past twenty or more years. In the absence of any clear and proven alternative, ILT-providing agencies continue with few exceptions to offer the same menu. Although the pace of change is increasing, the traditional paradigm is still dominant.

The strength of the traditional paradigm of literacy

The strength which the traditional paradigm continues to have on existing ILT and PL programmes needs to be explained. We are forced to ask, when there are so many innovatory approaches to PL and so many challenges calling for new approaches, why it is that there appears to be so little change in both ILT and PL.

We would suggest that a number of factors come together to restrict change.

1. Policy: First, there is a **lack of clarity** among many of the major decision-makers in relation to PL. The fact that the practitioners are engaged in controversies about the goals and objectives of PL prevents the development of clear objectives. The responsibilities and agendas

of the different parties involved are frequently divided. Policy-makers and funders are reluctant to commit resources to making changes in an area of work where the aims, the measures of achievement, and even the demand from the participants are either obscure or disputed. There is no clear vision; the messages relating to PL are mixed.

2. Resources: In any case, there has been **significant investment in the traditional paradigm** - both structural and emotional investment. Major changes to PL would call for alterations in ways of operating, even job losses (as well as job creation), and for an admission that some of the actions taken so far have not yielded the fruit which was promised. It is hard for some administrators to make such admissions and changes. There has also been substantial investment in some countries in printed texts which need to be used. The pressure to use the existing systems is strong.

Such investment is however in most cases informal rather than formal. For in most countries, PL **lacks an institutional form**, both at central and local levels, which would enable it to make quick changes of direction or develop pilot experimental projects. In India, the TLC established for a short time an infrastructure for PL, but this was strictly time-bound, and in most areas no longer exists - which is why the

National Literacy Mission is seeking to establish a network of Community Education Centres throughout the whole country and to graft them onto the existing state adult education agencies. However, the experience of Tanzania, with its highly developed PL programme and its network of Folk Development Colleges, shows that something more than an infrastructure is needed for the development of a sustainable PL programme with innovative and locally relevant activities.

For, almost universally, PL programmes and activities are **under-funded**. In some countries, there is no budget at all for PL; it has to draw on the resources of other bodies such as various Ministries or government agencies which provide development services or on donor support alone. In other countries where provision is made for it, it has to compete against other priorities. The current concern for children's primary schooling militates against adult literacy and PL in particular. The follow up to the Education for All Programme launched in 1990 is almost entirely towards the education of children and young people in school or out-of-school programmes, so that 'Education for All' has now become 'Education for All Youth'; adults are being increasingly neglected. Botswana is not the only country where the Department of Non-Formal Education which concentrated on adult literacy programmes is now being asked to develop non-formal schooling

programmes for out-of-school youth. Further, structural adjustment makes PL a prime target for cuts. When it is felt that a sector of development is not necessary or that it exists primarily to remedy the failures of other programmes (in this case, it has been argued that PL exists to prevent relapse into illiteracy which shows that ILT has not done its work properly), then it does not augur well for its survival at the hands of Treasury officials. Lack of funding and constant fights within the bureaucracies prevent those responsible for PL from moving forward, however much they would wish to do so. There are very real constraints on existing PL programmes (Torres 1998).

3. Discourse: Equally the **current discourse** is so strong. Literacy is seen as 'education' (rather than social practice), and PL therefore as 'more education' (Omolewa 1998 p1). The rhetorical language of the old paradigm is still dominant among donor agencies and is therefore repeated among those bodies seeking funding and other resources. Even when the discourse changed (for example, to include Freirean rhetoric), the new discourse was quickly incorporated into the old discourse, for example, that 'literacy (*per se*) empowers'. In particular, staff training programmes, where they exist, have reinforced the old discourses among the field workers. UNESCO has not helped by the slowness with which it has come to terms with the New Literacy

Studies. We note that although PROAP/ACCU criticises the older paradigm of PL, it still produces didactic texts which it intends to be universally applicable through context adjustment rather than being context produced (ACCU 1996, 1998). So that policy-makers, looking to those international agencies which are thought to specialise in these fields, have not received the guidance which they need and deserve from such bodies.

4. Lack of evidence: Fourthly, policy-makers, conscious of accountability, are asking for the **evidence** that new approaches to PL will produce greater levels of achievement: 'will it work?', particularly in the sense in which they measure achievements, the increase of literacy statistics.

It is difficult to point to many examples of new approaches to PL making notable achievements. The general conclusion is that which Benton has expressed: "Although it is possible to point to some particularly compelling experiments, no single strategy has gained a solid reputation for effectiveness" (Benton 1996 p95). We have indicated above some of the significant but relatively small-scale innovatory approaches, and we are conscious that more exist. But there are few means for publicising such activities. There is currently no

journal devoted to the practice of adult literacy in developing countries, although several countries and regions have developed their own newsletters such as *RaPAL* in the UK, *The Spider* in East Africa, the *Indian Journal of Adult Education*, etc, which may promote some exchange of practical information on ILT and PL. There is no international outlet to help busy administrators to access evaluations of these pilot schemes.

And most new approaches appear to be so **localised** as to be threatening to national administrators, and so **small-scale** that they are felt to be unlikely to help with a problem which is seen to be so large-scale. There is frankly little to convince policy-makers that any new paradigm may be more effective. The REFLECT programme and the Nepal Community Literacy Project will be two of the major influences in this respect. While the first of these shows signs of yielding considerable results, although not perhaps the spectacular results which have been claimed for it (Dyer and Choksi 1997), the second of these has hardly begun, and it will be some time before its effectiveness can be assessed and measured in non-traditional terms.

What is more, many of these experimental approaches come from **younger or more junior staff** within the adult literacy hierarchy,

largely because they are closer to the field and are more conscious of the weaknesses of the traditional paradigm. However, this tends to mean that they have less power to bring about changes on any significant scale within their own organisations. And the pressure they exert on their supervising staff does not commend their new approaches to those who have the power and resources to bring about effective change.

Again, because many of the experiments are young, they have not yet been able to demonstrate that - even when they can bring about change - they are **capable of maintaining that change**. A longer period is often required to convince policy-makers that some desired change is both feasible and sustainable.

Nor has it been proven beyond shadow of doubt that the existing paradigm has in fact failed. Its problems can be (and often are) represented as being practical rather than structural, which a programme of amendment will solve. To lose so much when with adjustments the programme could perhaps be made to work is a major motivation to keeping the existing approaches to PL going. It is apparently felt that the ship can be repaired rather than scrapped.

But even if any of these new approaches can be shown to be more effective in terms of local literacies, such approaches are felt not to be able to contribute to the main agenda of governments and most of the international agencies, **the assessment of national literacy levels by statistics for comparative purposes**. Most countries feel the need to reduce their national and gendered figures for illiteracy, however unreliable those figures may be acknowledged to be. And it is not clear that any of the new paradigms will contribute to that goal, either in fact or in registering the fact.

Above all, the alternatives are difficult to accept. They call for a **shift in mind-set**, creative thinking, non-stereotyped approaches, for initiative among field workers and supervisors who culturally in many cases have been socialised to follow rather than to lead, to implement rather than to plan. The training implications are large, reflecting the uncertain nature of adult learning programmes. Clear structures and printed texts reassure both practitioners and donor/funders. The challenge of new thinking in this area is very large, and those called upon to develop these new approaches need careful support.

These are some of the reasons it seems to us that the traditional paradigm of PL remains strong - a programme designed to assist a

relatively small number of graduates from ILT classes to consolidate their newly acquired but yet tentative literacy skills, and to use these skills to move forward into diverse and more self-directed forms of development activities or further education and training. In practice, however, it is a programme which exists more on paper than in the field, which is contested and in large part ineffective, and which rarely achieves its goal of helping people in the towns and villages of developing countries to become fluent and comprehending independent readers and writers engaged in their own enhanced literacy practices.

Critiquing the traditional paradigm

We therefore set out here our own commentary on the traditional paradigm and what seem to us to be the growing pressures for change.

Discourses: Before we do this, however, we need to address the issue of discourse. As with ILT, there are in PL many rhetorical slogans. They are not always understood, and their implications are not fully followed through in practice. In particular, the so-called 'plight' of the 'illiterate' and the direct benefits of learning literacy skills are exaggerated in order to try to increase motivation for non-literate

persons to join classes. And the value of single-injection modes of literacy learning underlies much of the discourse in which ILT and PL are couched - what we would call the 'If-you-study-this-primer-for-the-next-nine-months, you-won't-be-cheated' syndrome. Short-termism and simplistic linear progression rather than sustained assistance with varied literacy practices lie at the foundation of almost all ILT and PL programmes.

This is of course largely because ILT and especially PL form part of that development discourse which suggests that if the participants change, then society will be more developed - that if they learn literacy, then they will be less ignorant; that if they are less ignorant, they will make more socially concerned decisions; and that if they make more socially concerned decisions, the whole of society will benefit. This linear development discourse is of course not justified in practice (for example, when people learn literacy skills, they are not necessarily more knowledgeable), and it omits any mention of the need for structural changes in society as a whole for development to occur. But it remains very strong.

One area in which this discrepancy is most obvious lies in the language of participation. There is frequently a contradiction between the

discourse which is used about participation and the practice on the ground which, despite the discourse, is often non-participatory.

We are aware, as we have indicated above, that the discourse of the providing agencies, the field workers and the participants frequently differ. The term 'post-literacy' for example forms part of the vocabulary of the funders and providers more than of the participants, except in those cases where the participants 'echo' the words of the providers in their conversations. Field workers and participants have frequently internalised the meanings of those at the top and repeat them, often with great conviction. Many of the cases of disillusion with the eventual outcomes of ILT and PL which can be found in most countries and which we have heard continually throughout our research arise from the failure of the discourse to reflect reality.

1. Planning and implementation: uncertainty and conflict:

In part, of course, this springs from the inherent problems which exist in adult literacy education. We have noted that there is among some literacy planners and providers (government, NGOs and even some CBOs) much **uncertainty** both about the aims and approaches of the literacy learning programmes. There is often an absence of clarity

about goals, and about methodologies to achieve those goals. On the other hand, it is not always true that there is a lack of clarity; sometimes there are differing and strongly held views which may be expressed vehemently. Several literacy training agencies and practitioners (again among governments, NGOs and CBOs) are very clear about their goals and objectives and about the ways in which they hope to help the participant groups to achieve those goals and objectives, and they show considerable **hostility** to those who differ from them.

Some practitioners engaged in literacy learning programmes then are uncertain, while others are very certain but hostile to each other. Both groups share the same basic commitment to a uniform approach to literacy education. A third group however denies this: it holds the view that **diversity** is not undesirable. They argue that different approaches will suit different situations, that literacy learning will always mean different things to different people. For these agencies, any methodology which claims universal validity is suspect. This is not uncertainty, but a reaction against dogmatism.

In all of this, we are reminded of the "long-standing struggles over the purposes and control of education and basic literacy" which others have

noted in literacy learning (Hamilton 1996 p142; see Gowen 1992; Street 1997).

These tensions reveal themselves particularly acutely in the field of post-literacy. There is no common agreement about what PL is. Indeed, PL (in some contexts at least) has become a battleground in which different approaches conflict with each other. The twin issues of uncertainty and conflict reveal themselves in PL in many ways (India 1998).

a) First, the **purposes** of PL are often debated and disputed:

i) **Is PL primarily for literacy skill enhancement or for socio-economic development purposes?** PL programmes swing hesitantly between being 'backward' looking (back to ILT activities with an emphasis on relatively narrow literacy skills learning) and 'forward' looking (looking ahead to employment or non-formal education or self-directed learning or (general or specific) developmental activities - to a wider social agenda). The tension which exists in ILT between literacy learning and social agendas becomes much more acute in PL. This is in part because of the growing

independence of the participants, and in part because participants and agencies alike now seek to implement their literacy skills in a range of activities, both personal and developmental. But this tension is increased also because there are more agencies involved, both government and NGO, especially other Ministries with strong agendas of their own.

ii) Is PL aimed at the promotion of individualism or groupism? Does the programme seek on the one hand to develop self-determined reading and/or self-directed individual projects, or is its aim on the other hand to promote collaborative community development projects? Is the immediate objective the personal growth of the individual members or group formation?

iii) Is PL intended to be conformist or transformational? Despite the rhetoric of most programmes, the main element in the large majority of PL programmes is to get messages across to which the participants must learn to adjust - for example, that all the participants should learn to wash their hands when they prepare food or adopt family planning methods or increase their productivity in specified ways etc.

Although these PL programmes would call themselves 'transformative' through their messages, this is a very limited and directive form of transformation. In fact, the main aim is to assist the participants to conform to the norms of the rest of society. Only a few PL programmes in practice really set out to transform local society at the behest of the participants themselves.

iv) Again, PL programmes are divided between those which possess **pre-set goals** (determined by the providers) and those which seek to assist with **learner-set goals**. PL-providing agencies often feel uncomfortable without having some form of specified outcomes for their programmes (often in the form of accreditation schemes).

b) Secondly, the **content** of PL varies greatly, in accordance with the different goals and objectives set for the programme. Sometimes it consists of literacy skills learning activities, sometimes it does not include any literacy training. Sometimes it is much the same as CE, sometimes it is different from (perhaps leading to) CE. Sometimes it is broad and empowering, sometimes it is narrow and takes the form of specific training to achieve specific tasks. There is a lack of coherence

about the PL programme.

c) Thirdly, the **approach** to PL is unclear. Many programmes feel a tension between on the one hand a **universalist approach** with directive curricula and centrally provided teaching-learning materials, a national and agreed programme in which all PL groups will be doing much the same thing, and, on the other hand, a **diversified/localised approach** (different income-generation activities, self-help groups taking their own decisions, and/or assistance with individual or local groups' agendas etc).

d) Fourthly, the emphasis on **facilitated learning** in many PL programmes on the one hand and the desire to promote **self-directed learning** which most PL programmes set before themselves as a major goal on the other hand create major problems for planners and those facilitators who are being used (facilitators are not universally used in PL as they are in ILT) and perhaps for participants as well.

All of these areas are confused or contested in PL. In large part, these debates (which in countries like India can cripple the effectiveness of PL) spring from the wider tension between central planning and large-scale programmes on the one hand, and the willingness on the other

hand to tolerate and indeed encourage the diversity which local conditions call for. The Indian TLC has tried to tackle this issue of localisation of both ILT and especially PL, but with limited success. The Tanzania PL programme suggested "that in order to improve the quality of the post-literacy programmes the process of programme design should be decentralised at local levels. This would make the programmes more responsive to local needs" (Townsend Coles 1994 pp33-34); but the Ministry concerned is resisting such decentralisation (Sida 1998).

2. Participants: limited view of participant groups for PL

PL in most cases is aimed at a limited group. Most PL programmes are confined to ILT graduates or the group which has been labelled as 'neo-literates' (new readers etc). In practice, only a small minority of even that group is involved. ILT and PL programmes deal with progressively dwindling sectors of local society. Out of the large number of 'illiterates', some come to ILT classes, and a smaller number complete these courses; out of those who complete these classes, relatively few come to PL programmes. The rest (often the poorest of the poor) remain unaffected.

We recognise that increasingly PL programmes are seeking to reach out beyond this traditional 'target group'. Out-of-school youth and adolescent groups are being invited to participate, as are those who left primary school with limited educational skills. The new Kenya PL programme describes its 'beneficiaries' as "adults with basic education, participants in adult literacy programmes and classes, primary school drop-outs and out-of-school youths, participants in non-formal education and community leaders" (Thompson 1998). In one PL programme in Nepal, out of the required 15 participants to form the group, nine came from ILT classes; the remainder were drawn from primary or secondary school graduates and others who had taught themselves literacy skills (Robinson Pant 1997 p83). This last group is a newly recognised section of the literacy community: other surveys have revealed significant numbers of persons who have learned the skills which underlie their literacy practices without going to school or adult literacy class (Doronila 1996, Stromquist 1997, Pemagbi 1995 etc).

But this new recognition leads to another: that there is a wider call for assistance with their literacy from other members of the local community who cannot or will not, for many reasons, come to classes or activities. This call has not always been recognised by the literacy agencies, and ways have not often been found to help these. We

recognise and support the great value which attending literacy groups brings with it to many people (benefits which are largely non-literacy, such as a sense of solidarity, increasing confidence, open discussion and debate, and an opportunity to get out of the house, to gossip and to learn about and contribute to community affairs etc), but we also point to the expectations and requests of those who do not join such classes or groups to help them where they are.

This widening of the 'target group' indicates that PL participants are very diversified. They are not homogenous, and therefore cannot all be taught the same things if they are to use their literacy skills in their own very varied lives. For example, 'women' as a category have very few common concerns: younger or unmarried women will have different concerns from those who have small children, and these again from those whose families may be grown up, and yet again these from those who are widowed; just as those women with outside occupations differ in their concerns from those who work mainly in the home (Rogers 1994 pp9-18). Those participants whose health is good will have very different interests and concerns from those who suffer ill-health. Those whose family members live close by will normally be less interested in letter writing than those whose family members are scattered far afield. As recent research has shown, fisherfolk differ in their interests (and

literacy practices) from shoemakers, hill farmers from plains farmers, dairy farmers from rice growers and tea planters (Doronila 1996). And so we could go on.

We are very concerned about the tendency of literacy and other development agencies to put labels onto people. The term 'illiterate' brings with it many often unjustified connotations (ignorance, an inability to think or conceptualise or analyse etc), just as the term 'literate' brings with it triumphalist resonances (Bernardo 1998). Many of the participants have come to accept and use these labels and to bring with them similar expectations: a recent publication of material written by PL participants in Nigeria bears the triumphal title *Now We Are Literate* (Omolewa and Oulette 1995). 'Neo-literate' is an artificial term devised by literacy agencies for their own purposes; it does not reflect any form of reality. We even have hesitations about the term 'participant' (although we use it here for want of a better term). Recent research shows that it too brings with it expectations of attitudinal and behavioural patterns which are imposed on those who come to classes. In some cases, it is likely that 'drop-outs' (another label) are caused by the decision of some people not to conform to the expected pattern of behaviour of a 'participant' rather than from lack of interest (Robinson-Pant 1997 p186). Behind all such labels lies a great variety of human

beings, each with their different concerns and intentions.

3. Materials: limited view of materials

A third area of comment is that most programmes take a limited view of the 'materials' to be used in PL. The printed or written texts on which most PL programmes are based do not derive from the everyday activities in the neighbourhood but come from outside experts or from materials development workshops or (in the case of LGM) from special local activities which do not form part of everyday living. Indeed, the very term 'literacy materials' in PL contexts means 'printed or written texts which are devised for or can be used for learning literacy skills'. And the literacy skills they promote are of a limited kind, 'school-based literacy'.

The literacy skills which some PL programmes teach are taught in isolation from the real daily experiences of the participants. They are of course in many cases taught on the basis of an identified and *typical* (often idealised) daily life scene built up by 'needs analysis'. But all the evidence we have reviewed, with the constant complaints that primers and PL support materials are (despite needs surveys) 'irrelevant', shows that such PL programmes and materials do not match the

existing literacy practices in which the participants are engaged or wish to be engaged, whether as a group or as individuals.

We therefore find in most PL programmes **specially written texts**, whether for learning together in a class or group (PL primers and support texts) or for individual reading in local libraries (supplementary readers, easy reading texts or follow-up 'materials'). We also find an increasing use of **extension literature**. Many of the texts found in the PL classes or libraries consist of books, booklets, posters and other materials such as comic books which extension agencies and others produce to get messages across to people in villages or urban communities - messages on health (especially AIDS), agricultural production, gender issues, civic duties, family planning, environmental issues or legal awareness etc.

This practice of using PL to get messages over to which the participants need to conform has its own dangers. For example, it may ignore the question of **reading for pleasure**. Increasingly, PL agencies are coming to recognise that many participants wish to read for pleasure, and they thus provide story books (especially based on local oral traditions).

One of many examples will illustrate this: ARED, a small NGO in Senegal, discovered that, contrary to what the development agencies and government institutions assumed, the adults in their area wanted to read not only about 'useful matters' but also 'for pleasure'. ARED addressed this demand (which did not come only from the well educated) by producing on a small scale fictional texts which they sold with some success (*Bellagio* 1995).

But equally the desire to use reading materials for 'developmental purposes' may lead to a further danger. A number of PL agencies believe that these stories should contain a relevant social message, or at least that they must not contain negative images or undesirable attitudes. Thus certain kinds of texts found in the community at large are not felt to be acceptable. At least one major provider of PL materials in southern India informed us that they would

"not allow film magazines in our village libraries because of the damage they do because of their role models. Illiterates do not have role models except from the cinema. We want to create new role models through books etc. We do not encourage cinema songs. This was my personal decision. Of course we should be critical. We did experiment. We asked

the people what they liked and they said 'stories' (especially myths) and relevant subjects. We studied the stories parents told to their children. But they gave the wrong signals because of the values they contained. Therefore we rewrote these stories and the people liked it. We pushed our own values" (India field notes, March 1998).

While this may be an extreme example of such control, it nevertheless represents an approach to PL materials which is widespread. Expressions of what it is desirable for people to read and write are often to be found, not least in the selection of the materials offered to the participants for them to choose to put into the local libraries. Only 'improving' literature (i.e. 'improving' in a developmental sense; for sometimes religious 'improving' literature is excluded from the texts provided to some women, Robinson-Pant corresp) is on offer. Film and sporting magazines rarely appear, although there is much evidence that this is the kind of material which many villagers and urban dwellers want to be able to read. The materials specifically produced for PL reflect the pre-occupations, values and ideologies of the donors and providers more than those of the participants.

The desire to ensure that the materials used in PL should be 'improving'

leads to an under-valuing of other **texts which are to be found in the communities** from which the participants come. We have discussed this in the earlier report and we shall address it in more detail below, but here we would wish to indicate that there are in every community some found texts (sometimes called 'real materials') with which the participants will from time to time be called upon to engage. In addition, there are texts which already exist in other contexts and which could be 'fetched' into the community for particular purposes (Smith 1984, 1985). All these existing texts are regularly ignored in PL.

In a rural PL class, a visiting trainer, when informed by the facilitator that "there are no real materials in this village", pointed to an election poster on the wall behind the PL class. The facilitator dismissed this with the claim that "they can't read that". In fact, the group engaged with that poster most effectively as a group, discussing its meaning and purpose as well as its content, and recreating it in different formats during the succeeding hour, agreeing at the end that they had learned more from that experience than from an hour spent on the PL primer. Recent research in Bangladesh found that some literacy class participants were working out for themselves strategies to read and learn from material such as political posters; one woman had wall-

papered her house with them and read them because of her interest in local politics (Maddox 1998).

4. Literacy and learning

The main reason for this control over PL materials exercised by many providing agencies is that 'literacy' is seen more as a vehicle for 'further learning' than as a set of activities to be engaged in non-learning situations in every-day life. Most PL agencies make a close identification between literacy and learning/education: "post-literacy is part of a whole education plan" (Omolewa 1998 p6). They speak of adults who engage in ILT and PL programmes as 'starting' on their learning journey which they need to continue in lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is thought to start with literacy learning; the aim of literacy learning programmes is to bring about further learning. The emphasis is thus laid on the 'new' or 'potential uses' of literacy skills, learning new things, developing new literacy practices. While clearly this is an important part of literacy learning, it runs the risk of ignoring the 'existing uses' of literacy, undertaking more effectively those immediate tasks in the community which already exist. Many of the participants have come to talk about themselves in the same terms: 'we can now start to learn'. As one of our respondents put it, "PL is more learning-

focused than learner-focused" (Robinson-Pant 1998a p7)

The greatest danger of this approach is that it fails to appreciate that learning takes place outwith literacy. The view that literacy *starts* the learning process not only leaves out of consideration all that learning which these same adults have been engaged in during the earlier (non-literate) parts of their lives. It also ignores all that social, community, family and reflexive learning without which none of us can survive. And it demeans this situated learning, suggesting that it is not important.

'Learning' in the sense used in most discourses about PL assumes that it is a linear process like formal schooling: 'if you learn this first, you can then progress to that; but if you do not learn this, you can never learn that'. And it is heavily value laden: 'this kind of learning is important; that kind of learning is not'. In a recent evaluation of a literacy programme in Brazil, the evaluator decried the fact that the women were engaged in reading fashion magazines and writing Christmas cards "rather than using their literacy for learning", as if the knowledge, skills and confidence these women were learning through the fashion magazines and greetings cards were not as important as the kinds of learning the evaluator felt they should have been engaged in (Stromquist 1997 p151). Such normative approaches to literacy and development may well form a hindrance to the motivation which the participants bring to

their PL programmes.

This too accounts for the fact that most PL consists of reading rather than writing. In many cases, the aim of PL is thought to be for the participants to receive messages, not to create texts for themselves. There are some forms of participant writing. In Nepal, for example, PL participants are being encouraged to write a diary, an activity which most of them would never engage in for themselves. Here again, the 'improving' approach can lead to a gap between provider and participants. In another instance from Nepal, an NGO which set up its own printing press found the women in its programmes using it to print songs which they had written for themselves rather than the more improving material which the NGO intended (Robinson-Pant corresp). Elsewhere, writing in PL is seen as a special 'literacy' activity: the participants are asked to use write-on books very similar to those of school children, fill in gaps on pages in textbooks supplied to them from the outside, produce written exercises which the PL facilitator then 'marks' like a school test, write postcards which are given to them by the facilitator, or draft official or personal letters etc. Such activities are seen mainly as classroom (i.e. decontextualised) exercises in which literacy skills are being practised so that they might be reinforced. Writing for pleasure or for *real* uses rarely occurs.

5. Training: limited view of training for PL

We noted above that one of the concerns among many practitioners relates to the inadequate training of PL staff. In practice, many agencies appear to concentrate on training local persons to become simply literacy 'instructors' (although that term is usually denied). They are thought to have a limited role, confined to literacy learning, and therefore the training is limited to technical matters relating to how to teach literacy skills, sometimes with elements on additional materials production and income-generating activities.

In some cases, however, the facilitators are seen to be **agents** of change in a rather wider sense, and they have a training programme which brings in a range of developmental activities which they are urged to undertake within their own local communities. However, this focus on their roles as instructors and as change agent often means that they are rarely themselves seen as a **beneficiary group**. A fuller training of all those concerned with the provision of PL activities would pay great dividends in many different ways. Not only would a more effective and wider training programme with literacy facilitators and other practitioners make PL programmes more effective. Such training would become a development programme in its own right, treating the

facilitators as participants in their own development programme.

A change of this kind can be made within existing resources. Where such training for PL does exist, the effects which this is having on the grassroots literacy teachers, on those involved in the local libraries and reading centres, and on the community leaders, are considerable (e.g. *Training for Transformation* 1984).

6. Monitoring and evaluation of PL

One of the major weaknesses of traditional PL lies in the field of monitoring and evaluation. There is a major tension here which it is not easy to resolve. On the one hand, governments and funding agencies call for clear outcomes and statistical evidence. PL is thus under pressure from funders and governments to produce the results (the reduction in the percentages of 'illiterates') which ILT only partially achieved. PL agencies therefore feel the need to use similar universal monitoring and evaluation methodologies as in ILT. And they want quick results which are not easy to achieve.

On the other hand, PL poses acutely a different problem. The question is how to measure **use** of literacy skills rather than **levels** of

competences acquired. For example, since one of the outcomes of PL is intended to be independent learning, the results of the PL programme will be different for each of the participants. This will make these results very difficult to assess on a comparative basis. How, for instance, does one compare the different reading of booklets on vegetable growing and stories? How does one measure filling in a driving licence application form or a health card? And above all, how does one measure the 'sustainability' of these activities?

There are anthropological approaches to measuring changes in attitudes and practice, which can be converted into statistical data. A number of different qualitative approaches are being developed to counterbalance the more normal quantitative approach (e.g. Vulliamy 1990). We note some attempts to adapt these to ILT and to PL. Some experiments have been made in this area (for example, counting the increased number of signatures compared with thumbprints). In the ANTEP programme in the Philippines,

"Informal tools are used to evaluate the functionality and awareness components of the literacy training program. The design of the tools is made simple, non-threatening, informal, interesting and situation specific. Since learner evaluation

involves measurement of change in the learner, the facilitator keeps a simple record that would help in knowing the progress in learning. The qualitative changes in the learners, because of their participation in the program, are assessed using in-depth interviews and the record of the facilitator" (Cruz 1998 p3).

But the difficulties of assessing the precise changes and the causes of these changes make this subject problematic. We understand the reason why PL agencies continue to use standard literacy tests for their evaluations. Nevertheless, the fact that different approaches to measuring literacy practices are not easy to use does not deny their validity; and training will be needed to the managers and supervisors in these techniques.

7. Failure to transfer

In our view, the fundamental weakness of most PL programmes is their failure to help the participants to transfer the learning which they have acquired in the classroom or literacy centre into daily use in their lives for their own purposes.

For many participants, 'literacy' is seen to be an activity which is

undertaken in special centres, outside of their homes: "I am going out to literacy". It is thought to be a special value-laden activity imported into the village or urban area rather than a normal everyday activity taking place within the local community. The kind of literacy learned in such centres can be termed 'school-based literacy' as contrasted with the literacy practices which take place within the community, home or workplace.

We accept that it is much harder to develop a literacy practice than to teach a literacy skill. But we would argue that if literacy is taught as a decontextualised skill and not introduced as a practice, based on the existing practices of the participants, it will never find a useful place in people's lives.

The key question then is how to convert the literacy activities undertaken in the literacy centre, such as reading primer pages or writing primer exercises etc, into literacy practices at work, in the home and in the community, which may be headline reading, deciphering money or writing shorthand notes for oneself etc. Without such a transfer, the provision of literacy learning programmes will be a waste of time. Such transfer rarely appears among the objectives of PL programmes.

The problem is that all current PL activities are special activities, arranged to bring about learning of some kind. They do not relate to the existing literacy practices of the participants. We note the comment of one commentator on a specific PL activity in Africa:

"The idea of introducing an inter-village pen pal system [for PL participants] does not link in with the people's present use of reading and writing. Lack of social contact is not a common problem in the villages, and people mainly use their skills in a fairly pragmatic fashion, rarely writing for the pure pleasure of communication. It is difficult to envisage what kind of interest they could develop in writing to people they don't even know" (Fiedrich 1996 p9).

Such artificial activities, designed (as in a school classroom) to bring about learning goals, are unlikely to help the participants to transfer their new skills into daily use in their own specific lives.

We do not say this simply because of the question of the *sustainability of literacy skills* - although this is important. It would certainly seem to be true that literacy skills taught in isolation from real daily life, even if based on someone else's view of the participants' lifestyle, are in

practice unsustainable without some support (which is why PL is seen to be so important to prevent 'relapse'). Rather we would argue this because such PL activities are outside activities, and the skills they will help to develop will remain in the sphere of an outside activity; their relationship to and use in the participants' own particular daily lives will be problematic.

And we say this because of our fundamental belief that, although some participants may seek to use their newly acquired literacy skills for non-literacy purposes (to gain promotion or to obtain some facility which is open only to 'literate persons', for example), in general **it is not the learning of literacy skills which brings about economic and social development but the use of literacy skills in real situations using real texts to achieve their own goals which will bring whatever benefit literacy can bring to the participants and their communities.** Unless they use their new skills to accomplish real tasks, there will be little benefit to the participants. Literacy skills on their own are not causal to development; they need individual and group decisions to employ them to achieve certain goals before they can make their most powerful contribution to life changes. The aim of all adult literacy teaching programmes, ILT, PL and ABE/CE programmes,

is thus *not the learning* of literacy skills but *the use* of such skills, and it is by this that the success of all PL programmes needs to be judged.

2. Re-defining post-literacy

There are, as we have seen, some signs that this traditional view of literacy is beginning to change. We have seen a number of innovative approaches to the teaching of literacy skills which suggest that there are other paradigms than one of linear growth from illiteracy to ILT to PL to CE to independent learners in a more or less formal learning programme which is isolated from or parallel to developmental activities.

Development before literacy: There are programmes which show clearly that literacy is **not** a pre-requisite for engaging in developmental activities. Development activities are often commenced by non-literate groups or by groups with a mixed range of literacy skills. The need to master literacy skills, when this arises during these programmes, arises primarily and most effectively from the particular developmental tasks and not from an externally introduced set of requirements. Literacy is only one of a number of different sets of skills and practices which such a group feels it needs to master in order to complete its chosen task,

and in many cases it is not essential to the completion of that task.

The evidence we have received suggests that programmes of literacy teaching built on the assumption that the acquisition of literacy skills has to come first, and that these skills will subsequently be used for development, are less effective than those built on a '**literacy comes second**' model. Adults learn literacy skills best when they feel that they need to engage in literacy practices *for a particular purpose*. Those who work on this model suggest that it is impossible to separate the learning of literacy skills from the purpose which the learners have set for themselves, and from the context of the communicative practices in which that literacy purpose is set.

Using literacy skills

This fundamental principle, which is derived from learning theory - that *adults learn literacy skills best when learning for a purpose and that this purpose needs to be built into the learning programme* - is reinforced by the view expressed earlier that the benefits of literacy, whether seen in terms of socio-economic development or in terms of personal growth in interests and confidence, only accrue when literacy skills are *used*.

We are not talking here about adults using their literacy skills in classroom exercises which facilitators set for their learners. Rather, we are talking about adults deciding for themselves why they need enhanced literacy skills and using these skills in their own 'real' contexts to accomplish a task which they have set for themselves. In so doing, they will work with the texts which are related to that task, either those which already exist or those which they create for the task. For example, the literacy tasks associated with a chicken-rearing project can form the basis for literacy skill learning through booklets on chicken rearing and through the records which the group will create for themselves. Literacy teaching cannot be divorced from the literacy practices which these skills are meant to fulfil.

For, as we have seen, the primary aim of all literacy teaching programmes, both ILT and PL, is not so much to encourage the **learning** of literacy skills as to encourage the **use** of literacy skills - partly to bring about socio-economic benefits and partly to help the participants to learn through using their skills rather than through a learning programme which is independent from the use. Learning literacy skills without using literacy skills is unproductive.

One implication of the view that the primary aim is to encourage the use

of literacy skills to achieve real purposes is that literacy teaching programmes cannot be confined to those persons who are called 'illiterate', nor can PL programmes be confined to 'neo-literates'. In this model, literacy teaching programmes will be aimed at helping all members of the community to **use** their literacy skills, at whatever levels these may exist, for their own purposes, and in so doing they will develop those skills further through that use. We reject the deficit approach to literacy - that some adults can do very little because they lack literacy skills which they need to receive from some outside source. We reject the exclusion approach - that adults who cannot read and write are thereby excluded from the worth-while activities of their own local communities. Rather, we see all members of the local community (including the non-literate) as engaging with literacy practices and with found texts to the extent that they are able, using different strategies for this purpose (Bernardo 1998). The aim of literacy skills teaching is to assist all members of the community with their own literacy practices at their own request.

Different groups will set for themselves different literacy tasks. And the fact that there are different uses of literacy means that different approaches to literacy teaching need to be developed. The concept of sequential stages which is implied in the term '**post-literacy**', even when

seen within a continuum, is no longer acceptable. The idea of a PL programme aimed at a limited group of literacy learners and based on a limited range of specially prepared PL materials needs to be rejected.

A new definition: Instead of PL being seen as a stage following on from initial adult literacy classes, a more appropriate definition might be **the provision of assistance to all those who feel that they are having difficulties with the practice of literacy in real situations.**

This is a much wider concept than the traditional approach which reaches a small clientele and has a relatively limited range of activities offered by a small range of literacy agencies. PL includes all those forms of assistance with literacy use which literacy and other agencies can provide to all those who feel that they need assistance - those who feel that their experience and confidence of reading and writing and written calculation are too limited for them to be able to use all or some of the texts they find in their own socio-cultural setting or to complete their own tasks within the context of their own lives and achieve their own goals, those who feel they need to develop their literacy skills further.

It follows that such support, to be most effective, will need to be provided **at the time and point of use** rather than only in special classes or reading centres, and by other helpers as well as by literacy practitioners. This wider definition of PL seeks to promote more effective literacy practices in the community, not just more effective teaching-learning programmes.

Individuals and groups: Such assistance will best be offered to those who need it where they are, whether they are on their own or in some form of existing task-oriented group. Sometimes this may be a literacy class or discussion group; but PL cannot be confined to such centres. Rather than seeking how best to motivate people to join PL activities or debating whether PL exists in order to develop independent learners or group formation, PL in the new paradigm would seek to respond to requests for assistance with literacy practices from wherever they arise - whether from individuals, families, groups or whole communities.

And this assistance will continue up to the point which the participants ask for, up to the level which *they* feel they need to complete their immediate task. Individual or group forms of PL assistance will stop when the participants conclude that they have reached the point where they no longer need assistance, not when the literacy providing agency

feels that a required level of achievement has been reached.

And these tasks will be of many different kinds and at many different levels. Adult motivations need to be taken seriously in all forms of PL. Those who want a teacher and those who only wish to learn to sign their names need to be catered for, just as much as those who want help with the literacy tasks involved in running a credit and savings group or a social action group, or more individual requests relating to the filling in of a passport application or the writing of a note to the schoolteacher.

Participants in PL

It follows that PL provision should extend, not simply to the graduates from ILT classes and out-of-school youth, but to all others who seek help in developing further their literacy competencies in different contexts. The need for some form of continuing assistance for people in both rural and urban communities to encourage and help them to practise literacy in real situations has been identified in almost every country, both developing and industrialised. There are growing numbers of adults in every society who have attended part or all of primary school or an adult literacy programme and who therefore possess a

limited range of basic skills, but who are now outside of the formal and non-formal systems of education. There are those who, we have seen, have learned their elementary literacy skills 'on the job' without attending either primary school or adult literacy classes. There are in every country immigrants who find themselves illiterate within their new context. All of these are increasingly being called upon to practise literacy for real, and they will often need assistance with this activity, individually or in their own groups.

The 'target group' for PL then is very wide and very diverse. And the literacy situations which face them are many and are socio-culturally dependent, even group dependent. Thus the support provided will need to be context-dependent. General PL classes using PL primer texts or specially prepared PL reading materials which are intended to be used in many different environments may not be the most appropriate way to help adults *with their literacy tasks* in the community, and they should certainly not be the only form of PL programme. The provision of community-based facilities and services are likely to be more effective and longer lasting than PL classes and similar activities.

Assisting literacy tasks

One implication of this approach, then, is that the promotion of more effective literacy practices in the community will best be achieved not so much through classes or groups using specially designed PL materials in a specified set of PL activities as through a range of assistance provided both inside and outside of special PL centres (classes or libraries), using the ordinary printed and written texts which are found in the real situation or which are created during the activities themselves. The 'materials' used for this programme of assistance will be the 'real' materials arising from the particular tasks in which the participants are engaged rather than specially prepared 'learning materials'.

Post-literacy then will consist of activities designed to help people with their literacy tasks rather than the preparation and distribution of special PL materials. It is possible to envisage what such a programme might look like, although how far it can be fully implemented remains to be tested. PL assistance to a wide range of possible participants who feel that they need help can be provided in a number of ways:

a) by assisting those who will never go to classes: The main strand of such a programme would be the provision of assistance to those who, for a variety of reasons, do not and never will go to literacy

classes. The objective of PL in this situation is not to try to encourage and motivate these people to go to the literacy centres, to learn literacy formally through a specially prepared learning text. Rather, PL practitioners will seek to assist people in the community, individually or in groups, with their literacy practices, in much the same way that extension staff help people with their farming or health practices or with community development activities. There is of course no literacy extension service; but like the extension staff, a PL programme can make provision for helping people in their homes, at their places of work, or in their community interactions - in other words, on-the-spot assistance with their existing literacy tasks, rather than trying to persuade them to leave these locations and to come into a special 'learning location' to learn new practices. We note the existence in most villages and towns of focal points where several kinds of literacy activities are taking place (for example, hospitals, shops, post offices, police stations, local council or community centre etc). It is at these focal points that some forms of assistance can best be provided.

b) by promoting the transfer of newly learned literacy skills out of the literacy learning centre into the community: A second possible strand in such an approach would be to help all those who are going to ILT and PL centres to find ways in which the literacy skills they are

developing can be taken out from the learning centre into their everyday lives. The transference of literacy skills from the context and discourse of the classroom into the context and discourse of the home or work or the community is not easy. Moving from learning to implementing needs assistance. It is part of the task of literacy facilitators to encourage and help the participants to use their new skills in their daily lives for their own purposes. The literacy learners will at the same time strengthen and extend their skills through that use. The implications of this for the role of the facilitators and the training programmes provided for them need to be worked out (see page 91 below)

c) by working with producers of real texts: A third possible element in a PL programme designed to help people to 'do their own literacies' more effectively is to work with those who are producing the texts which are to be found in rural and urban communities in developing countries.

One part of this strand would be the **adaptation** of these texts to the needs of those persons who have limited literacy skills and confidence. There is widespread evidence that even very experienced persons sometimes feel that they 'cannot cope' with some forms of texts - insurance or legal documents, for example, or some religious texts etc.

The normal approach of those who produce this material is that the users need to adapt themselves to the texts rather than the texts be adapted to the users. Part of a PL programme aimed at developing more effective uses of literacy skills in the community might be directed towards helping the producers of texts for the community - whether they are NGOs, government agencies, or commercial publishers - to adapt their materials so that they are more available to a wider audience. This might involve helping to rewrite them in simpler language or in a different register, or to redesign them so that they become more accessible. Providing feedback to the producers on how these texts are being used, and what impact they are having, would be a major service to the producers.

We note one example from the BRAC adult literacy programme in Bangladesh, where a group of women at their own request tried to engage with the marriage registration form, only to find that the print was too small and the words used too difficult. The supervisor of this programme is now encouraging the group to rewrite the form in simpler words and larger print size and will assist them to engage with the local officials to make their protest known (Bangladesh field notes 1998).

A second part of this strand might be to help with the **dissemination** of these texts into areas where they are more rarely found. Building up a literacy environment at the community hall, church or temple or mosque, at the school or primary health centre, at the youth centre etc has long been a goal of many literacy teaching programmes. The provision of outlets for government forms such as passport applications or driving licence forms etc would also be part of this service. Translating some of the found texts into different languages would also be useful (for example, in many countries, official notices are often in national languages or even in English rather than in the local tongue).

A third element in this strand would be the **mediation** of these texts; for there is considerable evidence that at each stage of further learning some form of mediation is an effective way of helping adult literacy learners to make progress - to build up their confidence, to engage with a text to discover its meaning within its context, to help to relate the new material or format of text to their own experience and to develop into new potentialities for new uses of literacy. One major element of this which has been demonstrated is the development of critical approaches to found texts: the questioning of the socio-cultural and power relationships which lie behind all texts, whether these are 'literacy learning' texts or 'real' texts. The development of critical

language awareness is needed if people are not to be bound into their existing literacy practices but are to emerge into new potentialities to use their enhanced skills for their own purposes (Fairclough 1992).

There will of course be other ways in which a PL programme aimed at helping people with limited skills and confidence to engage with their literacy practices in the community more effectively can be created. We do not set out this programme outline as one which should be followed. Rather, we would encourage all kinds of agencies to experiment with forms of literacy assistance appropriate to their own situation, to reflect on these programmes, and to disseminate their experiences to others within their own region.

Materials for PL

We have described above the various ways in which **special texts** are being produced in many different formats and at many different levels specifically for the participants in PL programmes. We have also noted the existence and importance of large amounts of **extension texts**, especially in health and agriculture, many of which are now being used in PL programmes. Not all of this material is in a format appropriate to persons whose literacy skills are limited and whose confidence to read

such texts is weak. But these are matters which can be remedied through a mediation process with such materials. And we have noticed the willingness of many extension agencies to revise the format and even the contents of their materials, with the assistance of experienced literacy workers, so that they may reach a wider audience (including those with limited literacy skills and confidence) more effectively and more interactively.

Found and fetched texts: But beyond that, we would wish to draw attention to the range of texts which already exist and which can be found in every local community or can be brought into the local community, not just in urban contexts but also in rural environments. These have been called on occasion 'ordinary' materials (to distinguish them from the 'special' texts designed and used for literacy skill learning such as primers and 'follow up materials', 'easy readers' and LGM etc) or 'authentic materials'. These are texts in the social environment, produced by various bodies to fulfil various communicative and other functions. Some are commercial in origin, aimed at providing news (e.g. newspapers or magazines) or meeting interests or giving pleasure (e.g. reading books) or providing useful items (e.g. notebooks). Some are sales information (e.g. mail order catalogues as in South Africa) or advertisements (e.g. cinema notices as in India). Into this category fall

the various materials produced by government - for example, driving licence forms or ration cards. Banks, police stations, hospitals, post offices and other bodies issue notices and forms etc which often reach into the rural as well as the urban communities. Religious and political groups produce large amounts of written and printed materials, and in many countries, local residents are not backwards in creating graffiti. Some are solely for 'fun' (e.g. T-shirts).

It is impossible to list all that is available even in our case studies (and this will vary for every local community), but the evidence which exists is that the amount of such found texts is very substantial. Surveys of such material have been made for communities in Bangladesh, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria (Pemagbi 1995; Omolewa 1997), and it is clear that the range of these materials is very wide indeed, from number plates and slogans on vehicles to signs in front of schools, from calendars to school textbooks. Each of these texts forms the centre of a set of literacy practices.

Created texts: We also need to note that most development activities will themselves develop new literacy practices and with them, new 'real' literacy materials, such as PRA materials, accounts for women's groups, minutes of group meetings, record sheets of attendance or of

loans, etc. The materials which development agency and community groups create can become the basis for further literacy skill enhancement. The move from community analysis (by PRA or other methods) to community management in which the community takes control of the implementation of their own development projects will call for new texts to be used and created.

Using found texts for learning literacy skills: Since the aim of literacy teaching, especially at PL, is to help local people with their local literacy practices, it follows that the texts to be used for this assistance will need to be the texts found in their own locality. Not all of these texts are in a form appropriate to persons with limited literacy experience and confidence. Nevertheless, they form part of the literacy material with which these persons engage in their daily lives. Assistance with the use of this material, suitably adapted and mediated to meet the needs of these people, would, we argue, be the most effective way of developing usable and sustainable literacy and numeracy skills within a particular context.

But the link between these 'real materials' and the literacy needs of the people is very rarely made. We found no development agency using any of their instruction leaflets or extension publications to enhance the

literacy skills of their participant groups (although a number of agencies do give some attention to the level of literacy skills of their users when preparing these materials). Most of those who produce or promote the distribution of these texts (extension and 'real' materials) assume that those who receive them need no assistance in order to use them.

Some of these materials are of course used in a context of interaction, in which direct and immediate help with the interpretation and use of the texts can be and sometimes is given. But there is a good deal, such as technical leaflets, which is printed and issued without any steps being taken to ensure it reaches the right hands or is interpreted accurately by those who read it. Like newspapers, these texts are distributed freely, to be used in any way which those who receive them choose - which on occasion may not be for literacy practices (for example, newspapers are often used for wrapping things up or for padding etc). Books and booklets are circulated generally throughout the community. Brochures and leaflets and notices and tracts are passed from hand to hand or sent to groups without any attempt being made to ensure that they are adequately discussed. These real materials are seen as independent materials, and those who use them are deemed to be independent users. The effect that this has on the confidence of the early literacy practitioner can be imagined - many will find that they

cannot cope with such texts and may therefore be deterred from trying again with other texts they may come across. The importance of mediation of these materials with literacy users outside of the classroom is clear.

At the same time, very few literacy agencies use these found texts, even when they are available, in their ILT or PL classes, although extension texts form a key element in the material supplied to many of the PL libraries. But even in these library centres, these texts are rarely mediated to the new readers. Discussions are sometimes held round certain books and booklets, but since these are rarely supplied in large enough numbers for all the participants to have read them before the discussion, the effectiveness of this form of mediation is doubtful.

It is however important that these real materials (found texts) should not simply be regarded as alternatives to the literacy primers, to be identified and brought into the literacy classes by the facilitators and used by them to help the participants to learn literacy skills. Access to texts is not enough; it is the engagement with the texts which will bring about change. Talking of the Tanzanian village libraries, one report has pointed out that

"such an approach to post-literacy is doomed for failure since it operates on the assumption that mere access to the written word inspires and transforms the lives of people. But literacy is not an autonomous tool with the power to act on people. Literacy for the sake of literacy is not only fruitless, it is impossible. To direct a pen or decipher a letter involves the mastering of a technical skill, but any meaning derived from this activity stems from elsewhere, namely from the context in which literacy is practised and by which it is shaped" (Fiedrich 1996 p8).

Literacy is not simply decoding words; it is an active search for meaning through engaging with the text in its context.

Such engagement will only take place effectively with adults if the texts are found and selected by the participants rather than identified by the facilitator and imposed on the literacy learners. In practice, of course, it may be necessary for the facilitator to introduce these newer approaches by bringing in examples of such materials. But in the end, to be participatory in adult literacy classes, the participants will need to choose what they want to read and write and make meaningful.

Assessing found texts for literacy teaching: Nevertheless, even when they have been found and chosen by the participants, they still need to be used for the purposes of learning through use. It is clear that some will need to be simplified and adapted for use with the class members.

All these found texts are at the centre of literacy practices - they are intended to be used in some way or other in the community. Any learning which is undertaken through these texts needs to be built on these literacy practices, on the way these texts are used in what has been called their 'domain' (Gee 1990; Barton 1994; Barton and Hamilton 1998). It is not appropriate to decontextualise them and to use them simply as classroom texts. It is better to talk about bringing **literacy tasks** from the community into the learning situation rather than bringing **literacy texts** which can so easily become similar to the PL primers, teaching-learning materials which the facilitators control.

The use of this kind of material for the practice of literacy teaching raises a major issue. These materials cannot easily be assessed in terms of their usefulness for promoting literacy skills, nor is it clear how they may be adapted to the needs of the new literacy practitioners. Judging them by criteria imported from the formal school system such

as the vocabulary used, the length of sentences or the complexity of ideas, which have been used in some cases, is now felt to be inappropriate to adult learning programmes. Even at school level, 'levels of readability' have to a large extent been discredited and replaced with more careful gradings of 'learner difficulty'. But 'learner difficulty' is a problematic concept to implement, because it will vary with different learner groups or even individuals. It is clear, for example, that lack of experience will be a greater barrier than the vocabulary used (Moon 1993). Readers cope with the words and sentences and concepts in these found texts more easily when they relate closely to their own experience. A text which may appear to be very difficult to one reader may be easy to another because of the different experiences which they bring to the reading. This is of course already well known among those who prepare special PL materials; farmers for example cope more easily with farming-related materials than with fishing-related materials. The same is true of 'real materials': universal assessments of appropriateness cannot be made with found texts. The key element here is that users of found texts do not just read them; they engage with them. And different users will engage with texts in different ways according to their differing experiences and purposes.

This is also true of vocabularies (Rao 1996b; Jennings 1984). Modern

understandings of adult learning indicate that adults do not normally learn in a linear progression from simple words to more complex words (except perhaps in the sense in which the concept of 'more complex words' is used in those languages where the script is built up with complex forms of letters). Indeed, 'simple' words like 'there' and 'their' without any context in which to locate their use are frequently found to be more confusing than a sentence with a mix of simple and complicated words.

The more normal progression for adults is to move from the concrete which lies within their own experience to more abstract ideas built from these concrete experiences. Adult learners cope effectively with elaborate vocabularies and concepts if these are felt to be immediately relevant to them, as for example in carpentry or tailoring or in relation to well known films. Some simplification of language is however sometimes necessary. Industrialised countries have appreciated this for many of their texts such as government forms, insurance certificates, legal documents etc. The Plain English Campaign is an example of this. Some adaptation in layout in terms of the size of print and line length will also often need to be made. Most people read newspaper headlines more easily than the smaller text underneath. Devices designed to help readers to cope with difficult or complicated texts such

as headlines, sub-headings, key words etc will make this material more accessible to a wider range of readers. This is a field calling for practical experimental studies into the best ways to assist with the adaptation of these found texts to the needs of those who have limited literacy skills.

Surveys of local literacies: If the main aim of PL is to help those who "cannot perform the literacy-related tasks needed to function fully at home, at work, and in civic life" with their own literacy tasks, using the texts related to those tasks (Benton 1996 p95), it follows that the first requirement for the preparation of all PL programmes is to find out what those tasks are and what those texts are. This of course does not need to be elaborate 'research', although in some cases this would be highly desirable. Rather it will mean that planners, supervisors and particularly facilitators need to acquaint themselves with the different literacy tasks which the participants already do and those which they may wish to perform. The use of PRA techniques could help with this, identifying who does what kind of literacy activities with whom on what occasions, using what kinds of texts for this purpose. We would suggest that, as well as surveying what kind of real materials are or could be made available within any community, these investigations should concentrate on literacy tasks and literacy practices - in other

words, how these texts are constructed and used and how they are regarded in the community.

It is important that this subject of 'research' should not deter literacy practitioners. We are not referring so much to outsider, top-down, expert and usually individualised research. Rather we would emphasise the development of local knowledge from the bottom up through participative and collective investigations into literacy use and perceptions. Clearly there is a place for external and academic researches (Hodge 1997), although these will be limited in number, and their use to draw broad generalisations may need to be examined carefully. But that is not what we would urge here. Rather we are talking about the multitude of surveys of local literacy practices and the found texts already available in any community which some facilitators already do and which all need to do at their own level in order to help their participants to complete these tasks for their own purposes. This is not reinventing the wheel. It is building a firm foundation for each and every literacy class.

What is more, it is important that the participants themselves should discuss and debate, discover and deconstruct the literacy practices and texts which are all around them (see below page 97 for examples). The

need to build on the use of real literacy tasks a critical element is the distinguishing element in a transformative literacy learning programme rather than a conformist one. Freire's 'conscientization' through investigation applies to the community and classroom literacies of any local group as well as to other forms of social action.

Relations between the new PL and ILT:

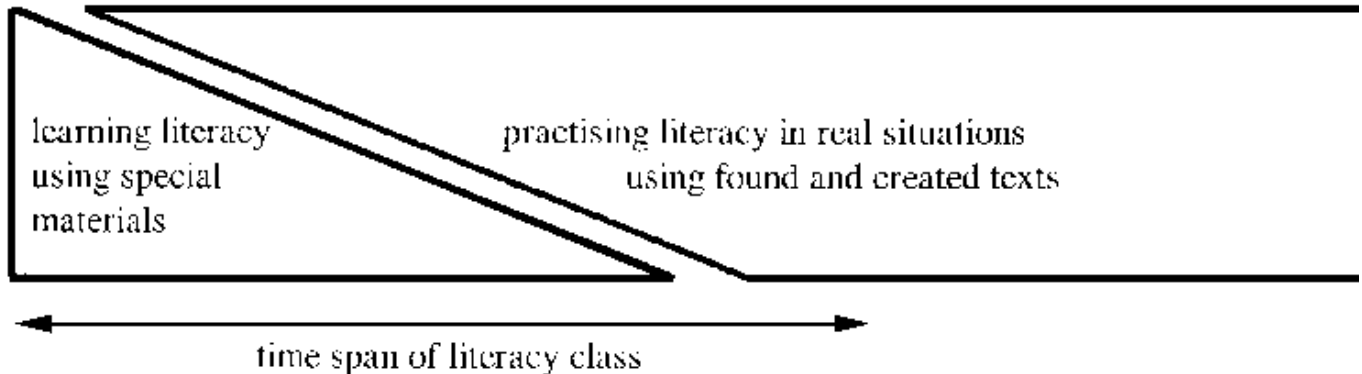
Many literacy agencies speak of PL materials as 'over-lapping' with primer literacy in terms of language level and subject matter. Although PL activities are designed to follow on after the end of ILT, the specially produced materials are often carefully prepared to "go back to below the level" achieved at the end of the initial course so as to "bring them [the participants] back to the level they were once at" and to provide reinforcement to learning (SRC Madras).

This approach to PL is however based upon the assumption that a literacy learner needs to learn in a specially sequenced order. But as we have seen, modern understandings of learning, especially as applied to adults, based on considerable research, indicate that the division between learning first and practising afterwards, even with such an overlap, is not always helpful (Rogers 1996; Brookfield 1986). Adult

learning is best undertaken by 'doing for real' irrespective of the 'level'.

We do not therefore see PL as following *after* ILT. Rather we would argue that PL activities in the form of *assisting with the use of literacy skills in real situations* should overlap with instructional activities right from the start of the ILT programme. The practice of literacy, based on the real literacy tasks which the participants wish to engage in, should increase progressively as the learning of literacy skills develops.

In place of a sequential model of primer literacy teaching followed by a PL programme, we have already proposed (ODA 1994) that the overlap should be as follows:



Rather than acquiring technical skills first and applying them later, this approach involves the participants learning through practising, increasingly using real materials in class as apprentice readers or writers with gradually diminishing support from the facilitator-instructor. In this way, the practice of literacy will be sustainable after the end of programme, for the participants will have learned to engage more and more with the found texts in their own environment and to create texts to meet their own needs in different situations.

We know that many literacy agencies do not believe that adult 'illiterates' are capable of using real materials while they are learning the basics of literacy skills. But we would reiterate our view that these adults are already engaging with the found texts in the community; and the examples we have given show that adults learn best when they engage actively with materials chosen by themselves and with which they wish to engage, rather than with materials chosen by the facilitator or literacy providing agencies - and when they apply their learning immediately rather after a delay.

Role of the facilitator: Such an approach - that PL is about assisting literacy learners to develop their own literacy practices using relevant tasks identified by the participants - has important implications for the

role of the traditional literacy facilitator. The role of the facilitator as teacher, someone who controls the learning, follows the primer, selects the activities and instructs the learners on what they are to learn, will be reduced. The role of the PL facilitator will now be to discover with the participants their existing literacy practices, to explore with them the ways in which they want to develop their literacy skills, to encourage the participants to identify the kinds of tasks they want to fulfil, to provide structured opportunities and a supportive environment for the participants to engage with the texts they have identified, and of course to monitor and evaluate the progress of the participants. This kind of role of facilitator will be new to most people's experience of education, both from the point of view of being a teacher or being taught, and will require considerable training and support to develop and maintain the required attitudes and skills.

Training for PL: It has been urged that the facilitators in literacy training programmes are not capable of engaging in such a new role. This points to the weakness, not of the facilitators but of the training programmes and support systems for PL. The weakness of the resource base for PL affects the training of PL facilitators more than most other areas of PL activities.

The implication of this approach then is the need for more and different forms of training of literacy practitioners to help them to develop the range of skills and attitudes needed to help the participants to engage in their own literacy tasks, using the texts appropriate to those tasks as the basis of learning, and to help the facilitators to see their literacy teaching in a wider context, not simply of developing literacy skills but also of encouraging the participants to engage with texts through critical language awareness.

There have been a number of examples of training programmes with middle level management (supervisors) and with facilitators which show that it is possible for such training to be both effective and motivating (Rogers 1999b); and the establishment of the Real (or New) Literacies Forum in Bangladesh shows that commitment to these approaches can also be built (Education for **Development** 1997-8). The obstacles come mainly from established systems and interests rather than from the facilitators and supervisors.

Relations between PL and Continuing Education (CE):

As we have seen above, a distinction is sometimes drawn between 'post-literacy' and what is often called 'continuing education'. Some

have argued that CE is that part of PL activities which is more or less directly related to the formal education system - either in terms of covering the same curriculum as primary or secondary school or of assisting those participants who wish to gain entry into the formal system at an appropriate point. The kind of help advocated here for those who need assistance with their reading and writing and numeracy will include for some persons help with learning things which they would have learned in primary school or the building up of formal learning skills which will be required if they were to enter (or re-enter) school. But for others, continuing education will not be relevant, not their goal. For them, the uses of literacy will mean more informal help with writing letters, filling in forms, responding to state and other formal documents (e.g. health cards), etc. A fully developed PL programme will seek to provide informal help to these people on a specific task basis without recourse to schooling or formal educational provision.

A Post-Literacy Service:

It follows that PL as at present designed in most countries is unlikely to reach all those who need such assistance, or to provide the range of literacy formats needed by diverse participant groups and individuals. What is needed is increased provision for guidance and counselling for

those with limited reading and writing skills *outside* of PL centres, to help them to deal more effectively with the real literacies which they encounter or need in their personal situation. A **post-literacy service** is, we believe, needed if PL is to provide appropriate forms of help where and when they are most needed.

The form this service will take will of course vary greatly from country to country. Nevertheless, we can make some suggestions about the general shape its work might take. Apart from the basic function of providing direct assistance to those with limited literacy experience and confidence, it might well include some or all of the following:

- training literacy practitioners in the identification and mediation of existing real texts
- bridging the gap between the producers of real materials and the users, working with the producers of these texts to adapt them to the needs of those with literacy difficulties and disseminating them more widely
- supporting local groups in the development of new literacy agendas and in experimental projects designed to test new

approaches

- training other professionals such as agricultural and health workers to assist the participants in their programmes with their literacy activities
- researching into local literacy practices and perceptions with different groups and localities
- helping local groups in monitoring and evaluating the use of these new approaches

Building an infra-structure: Such a 'service' cannot however be left simply to become an agenda for literacy providing agencies to provide. It will need some institutional framework. We have seen above that there are those who feel that one of the weaknesses of the current approach to PL in some countries is that it lacks an institutional framework which would give it the basis from which it can not only become sustainable but can also develop and grow. The creation of such a framework - which we believe would be better built on the consolidation, systematisation and institutionalisation of current community literacy resources such as community letter readers and

writers rather than on a more or less formal system of special learning centres - will be a major concern of those responsible for PL seen as using literacy practices rather than learning literacy techniques.

We wish to make clear that this kind of PL programme does not rely for its implementation on outside (Northern) expertise or on donor funding. All it calls for is a change of approach on behalf of the existing PL-providing agencies using existing resources - seeking to promote literacy practices, helping the participants and others to complete their own literacy tasks, making links with other producers of texts.

Nevertheless, should donors wish to support PL in different country contexts, we would suggest that resourcing this framework and the service programme which it will promote,

- using and building on existing literacy practices and the found texts related to these practices,
- adapting and mediating real materials as necessary to the different needs of those who have some, but relatively limited, literacy experience and confidence

- this will be the key element in an effective PL aid programme.

Ivory Coast reading during work

3. Critiquing the new approaches

We are conscious that the approaches advocated here (and proposed in our earlier report) are not without their problems; and we would wish to face these as far as we are able to identify them. We list here some of the issues which we have experienced and which others have raised with us in the implementation of a number of initiatives based on these pre-suppositions. They are not listed here in any order of priority.

Lack of availability of 'real materials': It has been asserted that there are not many 'real literacy materials' in some areas, especially rural areas. We would agree that the distribution of found texts is very variable.

On the other hand, we feel that such a verdict - that there no or very few found texts in the social environment which are useful for literacy learning - is not solidly founded. First, the decision as to what is, and what is not, valuable reflects the value systems of the researchers. It is

not securely based in ethnographic research methodologies. Secondly, it seeks once again to detach 'real literacy materials' from their context, to treat found texts as learning materials. Perhaps a better question to ask is, are there any existing or potential **literacy tasks** in the immediate environment, for which 'materials' can be found in, 'fetched' into or created for the immediate situation in order to respond to the participants' real and expressed interests? And to get a truer answer to that question, it will be necessary to ask the participants (perhaps through PRA) rather than to survey the situation from the outside.

Nevertheless, we agree that in some contexts, especially in some regions of minority languages, there are few real literacy materials. And in a number of areas, there may be little or no first language literacy texts. The choice arises in such a situation as to whether to introduce material which has little contextual relevance and important power implications in that it further marginalises the less written language of the community (this can often be done quickly and cheaply), or whether to help the community to embark on the long, arduous and often costly (but always fascinating) process of developing material in their own language and mapping out their own literacy interests. Although decisions relating to this will inevitably vary from context to context, the desires and intentions of the local community members will always be

an important factor in that decision. Thus in some communities, the participants may express their desire to read materials which exist in other languages (religious books like the Bible or the Koran, for example; or fashion magazines in the national language etc), and such requests should always be taken seriously.

In all such cases, texts will have to be created or else be brought into the community from outside. It can therefore be argued that in certain cases *it may be necessary to start the literacy teaching programme with post-literacy, building up the literacy environment before launching an initial literacy teaching programme.*

However, where there are no 'real literacy tasks' to be performed, no materials which the people can use except the literacy learning texts brought into the community by the literacy teaching agencies, and if the community has no interests which potentially would involve writing or reading texts of some kind (e.g. Doronila 1996 pp37-40), then we would question the purpose of an initial literacy teaching programme. While we recognise that there will always be those who wish to learn literacy skills for symbolic reasons or to achieve some non-literacy goal such as promotion rather than to use their newly acquired skills, we would question whether there is much point in offering assistance to

people to develop their literacy skills in situations where there is no chance for the participants to use those skills and therefore no chance of them gaining any benefits from literacy. *The criteria for judging whether to start a development programme in any community by the provision of a literacy teaching programme must consist of the existence of opportunities to **use** literacy skills, not the opportunities for the people to **learn** literacy skills.* We would suggest that it will be preferable to start with the particular goal which the group wants to achieve, and if literacy tasks are involved and literacy skills are needed for them to meet that goal, then literacy support can be given where and when they need it.

Failure to bring about transformation: It has been suggested that this 'real literacy tasks' approach may not lead to any significant change in the socio-political structures, that the use of found texts may in fact reinforce existing inequalities within the community, that the concentration on the existing uses of literacy more than on the new uses of literacy will not encourage 'development'.

We accept that there may be some truth in this, depending on how the programme is implemented. But we must point out two things.

a) **Starting where they are:** First, there is growing consensus among those involved in education and training programmes with adults in a wide range of areas (especially vocational training) that the main goals of such programmes are twofold: first, to help the participants to do better, more professionally, *what they are already engaged in*, and then secondly, to help the participants *to move on to new kinds of activities*. The kind of PL programmes we are proposing are aimed first at helping the participants to engage with their *existing* literacy practices more effectively, gaining confidence through this enhancement of their literacy skills and experience. After that, the participants can decide for themselves whether they wish to move forward, to engage in transformational activities, and in what direction that transformation will proceed. We do not believe that any PL programme should seek to dictate transformational change; nor do we expect such a programme to avoid it because the participants are unaware of the options. Rather, we expect that PL programmes will create an environment through which the participant groups can become more knowledgeable about options, and more autonomous, confident and venturesome in their decision-making. We would argue that in many cases transformation should be promoted by the participants, not by the outside agencies; and that it should be in the direction and go as far as the participants

wish, not be pre-determined by the literacy providing agencies. We feel it is in many circumstances more appropriate to wait until the participants themselves propose change and the direction in which that change should go rather than for this to come from the agencies, facilitators or the literature available to them.

This is an important point which deserves fuller treatment than we can give it here. The process of negotiating any project activity (including literacy learning) with local groups is one fraught with difficulties. We have noted above the absence of evidence of bottom-up PL programmes, learning programmes in which the goals are set by the literacy learners. This may be because such programmes do not leave much evidence; but equally it may reflect the problems surrounding such a process. It is much easier to develop PL programmes where the goals have already been set by governments, donor agencies or NGO change agents rather than to develop programmes based on goals set by the participants. In particular, there will often be the need to build up the confidence of the participants before they will be able to articulate their intentions and aspirations. Building such confidence through helping the participants to develop further their existing literacy practices would seem to be preferable to embarking immediately on new literacy tasks which may well appear to be daunting. The ultimate

goal is a literacy project in which the goals of both participants and providers become shared on equal terms.

b) Developing critical literacy: Secondly, one or two experimental projects have demonstrated clearly that it is possible to help the participants to engage critically with the existing found texts, using their own experience of literacy. We can give three examples.

a) During a training workshop in Ghana, the sign written on many walls in the town (in English) 'Don't urinate here' was taken for analysis. It was discussed in depth. Who wrote it? Who was it intended for? Why was it in English and not in the local language(s)? Why was it in a 'high' form of language rather than in a 'low' form of the language if it was meant for the poorer people? The participants wrote several different variations of the text and debated their relative merits. The debate centred round this found text raised many issues relating to power structures and processes in that community.

b) In Nigeria, another group made a survey of shop signs in a market. This again raised many questions. Who were they for? Why did so many include extreme words such as 'Glorious' (the Glorious Drug Store) or 'Supreme' (the Supreme Butchers)? Which ones were in

local languages, and why were so few shop signs in those languages (most were in English)? How did the written language of these signs relate to the spoken languages in the market (many of the traders who had English signs could not speak English)? Why were some in small scripts and others very large? Why did some include the names (and even the addresses) of the stall-holders?

c) A third example comes from Botswana where a collection of materials collected from a Coca Cola shop (including two ties, a hat and a plastic cup, all bearing words) gave rise to an extended debate about imported commerce, culture and value systems.

We would argue that there is nothing inherently in any of these found texts which will lead to the reinforcement of inequalities. It will depend on how the facilitator uses them in the learning group, how the participants engage with these texts. It is not a matter of decoding the words or learning literacy skills from these texts: it is a matter of the participants engaging with these texts in their own ways. As we noted above, the development of critical language awareness (Fairclough 1992) through found texts should be a key element of any ILT and PL programme. For example, we note that one aim of most PL programmes is to encourage the participants to read local newspapers;

the development of critical approaches to newspaper reporting would form a key component of a PL programme aimed at transforming society. The aim is not just to support existing practices but if necessary to change them as the participants wish.

There is a further implication of this: that the participants can in certain suitable contexts be encouraged to engage critically with the literacy primer - for that too is a found text, devised for a certain set of literacy practices. Hill and Parry have pointed to the necessity that the participants should "not treat the text (i.e. primer) as object but as action" (Hill and Parry 1994 p18). Some literacy teaching agencies will find such a proposal threatening. It would however be very valuable if a discussion of the nature of the teaching-learning materials were to be included in the training programme for literacy facilitators and instructors, for they often have to try to answer questions about the primer raised by the participants. "Language sensitivity training" would be a valuable addition to the training of PL facilitators. This of course raises major issues which need to be debated in literacy circles.

However, we agree that there is a place within any PL programme for the providing agency (largely through the facilitator) suggesting new opportunities for community development, widening the debate beyond

the found texts. As we have suggested above, we do not see the change agent in PL as simply being a self-effacing facilitator but a person with an agenda and (literacy) resources of his/her own, to be shared with the participants. PL - like all forms of adult education - will best consist of two-way learning, 'learning on equal terms', with all the parties treating the others as adult equals (Rogers 1992 pp239-240).

We would raise here a comment that this 'real literacies approach' might itself reinforce gender disparities in literacy practices; or that it will help only with women's practical needs, increasing their efficiency rather than addressing some of the systemic gender (and other racial, or ethnic or religious) inequalities. Again, this depends on how the issues are raised. We see the literacy practices as the key issue here, for any discussion of and changes in literacy practices will always involve discussion of and changes in power within the community.

We would also raise here the danger of using real literacy materials (found and fetched texts) simply as teaching-learning materials, an alternative primer, with their words being decontextualised and therefore stripped of any meaning. One of our correspondents from Africa wrote: "When I pointed out to some of the teachers I spoke with that some of the posters on the walls in the classrooms could be used

as materials, they expressed their inability to meaningfully exploit these" (Ihebuzor 1995 p6). The key word here is 'meaningfully'. As we have noted above, reading is the search for *meaning* in written texts, not just decoding words. The use of real materials will call for discussion of the context of those texts, not just the use of individual words for learning reading skills. For we are always (even with a primer) dealing with situated literacies. Words are used differently according to their particular setting, and understanding that use is part of literacy learning.

Too difficult: A third group of criticisms which has been raised is that this procedure (helping the participants to learn from and especially to engage critically with these found texts) is too difficult for the facilitators to perform.

We accept this in some cases - but this is a failure of the providing agencies, not of the facilitators (Rogers 1989). Many of the facilitators for PL are not adequately trained or supported. It can be argued that a prior development programme needs to be undertaken with this group, to help them to examine their own literacy practices, to help them to develop critical language awareness in relation to the found texts which they themselves use. Unless the facilitators are encouraged and helped to become aware of their own literacy practices, they are unlikely to be

able to help others to grow in literacy skills and confidence. It would be of clear advantage if the pre-service and in-service training and the support systems of adult literacy facilitators were to be taken as seriously as the training and support of agricultural and health extension workers, although of course the resource base for adult literacy is not as strong as for these other services. This will mean changing the training and support systems substantially; the existing systems are inadequate. Some action research here might demonstrate how far the effectiveness of literacy teaching programmes depends on the careful selection and training of the facilitators.

Again, some feel that such materials are too difficult for the participants to engage with. But this is precisely the point: if the participants have chosen the literacy tasks they wish to undertake, then the work of the facilitator is to help them to engage with those tasks and the materials needed for them. We believe that many literacy agencies underestimate the literacy learners: "the radical point that most programmes cannot cope with is that local people can know and make choices over their learning" (Maddox 1998).

Other criticisms and queries have been raised: for example, **that some of the participants may not feel able to identify any 'real materials'**

for themselves, and may not wish to read 'real literacy materials' identified by the facilitator. There are many recorded instances of the participants preferring a textbook to the more informal kinds of learning materials. Some feel more at home within a literacy classroom with something which looks like a textbook, something which has been written by an expert specially for them as literacy learners, something which comes into the community from outside.

We agree that this is an issue which arises regularly in some contexts. We note the case of a participant in a Botswana literacy class who openly said he did not wish to read or write anything after the class but simply to get the certificate at the end of the course so that he could obtain a driving licence. This is why we have tried to insist that the texts used in this kind of learning programme should be those used *in literacy tasks which the participants themselves have selected*, texts with which they wish to engage. It may help if we were to get away from the idea of 'texts' (real or otherwise) which need to be 'read' as objects, and concentrate instead on literacy 'tasks' which the participants wish to perform. If that task is one of formally learning literacy skills (as in the Botswana case), then a textbook primer may be an appropriate form of text to use for this task. We would however point to what has been said above about the value of analysing the primers as 'texts-in-

action' rather than decontextualising them.

This suggests an answer to another comment: **that the participants in literacy classes will soon become bored with 'real material'**. Again we agree - if these materials are decontextualised and treated like classroom texts. And we would also point to many clear signs of the same literacy learners being bored with primers. But we are not suggesting that the facilitators should use real materials as alternative primers. Rather, we feel that they need to seek to help persons with those specific literacy *tasks* which they have chosen, so that they learn in an adult education way, through doing for real.

There is perhaps a greater danger **that such a PL programme may be taken over** by persons or groups within the local community who are already relatively well educated and who wish to use the help available to advance their own careers or businesses since they can see literacy as useful to themselves; that this approach may advantage some at the expense of others (particularly the very poor). We see this as a significant issue for all PL programmes, one which needs to be addressed throughout such a programme. For it confirms the key argument of this report - that literacy practices are always an issue of power; and that any literacy teaching programme will inevitably alter the

power structure and systems in any community. And we would point out that the very poor too have literacy tasks which they wish to accomplish, often of a very different nature from those of the more middle classes. A PL programme would need to attempt to help these people with their own tasks.

Again, it has been suggested **that the new approach does not take seriously enough the agencies' desires and the government's need for statistics**. It is argued that it takes the different desires of the participants too seriously, that it does not maintain a balance between the various stakeholders in the programme.

We have examined above the issue of the evaluation of PL programmes under the new model. Here we accept that, at the moment, this approach is unlikely to yield firm statistical evidence of the reduction of the percentages of illiterates. However, the anthropological approach that real literacies practices involve can be matched to the variety of established anthropological ways of reporting, including systematised self-reporting. Pilot projects are needed on the various ways of generating reports of the use of literacy skills in real situations, developing from these generalised statements, and extrapolating from them statistical data. A programme of induction for agencies to help

them to convert these statistics into data which they can use for international comparisons will be needed. It is possible (although not easy) to develop ways of measuring progress with literacy which does not depend on standardised educational tests.

Further, there is the argument that even with this approach of using literacy, **there will still be the need for teaching literacy skills**. The implication of this is that a literacy training programme will need to be incorporated inside this proposed new kind of programme.

While we agree that teaching of literacy skills is necessary, we would wish to insist that this should not consist of a traditional teaching programme brought over as a whole and inserted into a programme designed to encourage the use of literacy skills. It is not possible simply to 'drag' the old model over and 'drop it into' the new model. For this will mean that the learning programme will be largely unchanged - and therefore as ineffective as it has been in the past in promoting the use of literacy skills. Nor can we simply drop the new model into or append it onto the end of the old model. That too will not work.

We would suggest that to speak of 'teaching' is perhaps not the most helpful language to use in this context. We would prefer to talk about

'helping people with their literacy practices' rather than 'teaching them some subject (knowledge or skill)'. We would wish to see PL (and indeed ILT) as 'targeted assistance and advice' with literacy tasks.

But even if the language of teaching is so strong that it is necessary for any programme to use it in their planning and implementation, we would point out that we have argued throughout this report that literacy learning with adults should always be located within a context of using texts which the literacy learners have themselves chosen. If it is to be true to adult learning principles and not simply follow educational dogma, it will be situated learning working with situated texts.

This means that any formal teaching-learning programme needs to be set within a wider programme of the development of communicative practices, helping the participants to learn through different literacy practices at different times, rather than be compartmentalised into one block within the larger programme. And because it will be based on the *use* of literacy skills rather than on the *learning* of literacy skills, it will include a variety of literacy and language skills - journalistic, commercial, legal, religious, etc, all within real contexts and designed to fulfil and learn from real literacy tasks chosen by the participants rather than the literacy teacher. The training implications of this again need to

be examined in detail.

Finally, we are aware of the danger that **such a programme may become normative, that it may be singly prescriptive**. We have watched other initially innovative programmes being implemented mechanically; we have noted the criticisms made by many evaluators that in many so-called Freirean approaches to literacy teaching, the rhetoric may be used while the traditional model continues to be applied (Archer and Costello 1990). We do not see this model of PL (and ILT) as being a new kind of universal truth. Rather, we see a new set of approaches based on new understandings; we see these approaches as growing, developing; we see local programmes being built on the basis of these principles, and as the experiences of the effectiveness of these approaches emerge, we see the basic principles themselves as being open to further adaptation and elaboration. It is not that we are not convinced of the validity of the conclusions we have drawn from these basic principles. Rather it is that we see all literacy (and therefore all literacy learning) as situated in particular contexts. We recognise that people are different, even within the existing literacy classes, with very different literacy experiences, expectations and intentions, just as those within the local communities are different and often in contention, one with another (see especially Doronila 1996;

Bernardo 1998). We suggest that the main task of all those who devise ILT and PL programmes is to develop helpful learning assistance to different individuals and groups appropriate to their own circumstances. We expect the donors and funders and supporters of such programmes to be concerned for the local variety rather than the commonality of literacy learning programmes.

A national programme?: And this raises the issue as to whether it is possible to build a nationally valid PL programme on the basis of the micro-literacies approaches we have been advocating, to scale up while retaining sensitivity to local literacies (Street 1997; Robinson-Pant 1997 p126).

We propose that this is possible, even within existing resources. The funding and support of local literacy activities provided by many different government and NGO agencies, and based on locally determined demands in a variety of contexts (women's groups, work-based locations, religious groupings, health programmes, farming or fishing co-operatives, trade unions, community centres, local government bodies etc) and following nationally agreed guidelines, would create a diversified but nevertheless a national literacy programme.

The development of such guidelines is a matter which needs to be agreed in each country. But some common features can be outlined. We would suggest that there are no generally applicable *methodologies*, because the literacies and the needs and interests of adult students are too diverse. Nevertheless, there are some general *approaches, attitudes and principles* which could be applied to all adult literacy programmes. These are not theoretical but very practical: for example,

- that literacy learning programmes put into the context of existing projects/programmes/activities (provided they use the materials of these activities) are likely to be more effective than literacy on its own (i.e. 'literacy comes second' rather than 'literacy comes first'). This is not the same as literacy classes having a 'functional element'. Rather, it is encouraging the natural process of learning literacy skills during existing developmental projects rather than starting new projects
- that there is no use in trying to motivate adults to learn to read and write; instead we can offer help to adults with their own literacy tasks where they are and when they need it through a variety of activities.

- that the aim of all literacy activities in a national programme is to encourage the **use** of literacy skills **outside** the classroom, so that every literacy class should try to find ways of assisting the class members to transfer the newly acquired skills into the community on a daily basis
- that homogenous groups of non-literates all learning from the same materials are probably less effective than mixed groups of literates and non-literates, enabling peer learning and sharing
- that to ask an adult group formed to learn to read and write to be the same group which keeps chickens may be unreasonable; a chicken-rearing group may need to be very different from an adult literacy class
- that all literacy classes (not just programmes) should begin by exploring what reading and writing activities the specific group wants to do and help them to do those tasks - not generalised needs assessments but particularised and contextualised.

The core of all adult education is to help adults to learn *what* they want to learn *when* they want to learn it and in their own way and for their own purpose. Many existing national literacy campaigns set out to persuade adults to abandon their adulthood and to learn what they don't want to learn (the 'how-do-I-motivate-my-learners?' syndrome). But a national literacy programme and even a campaign can be built by offering support to agencies (government or NGO) to provide locally responsive literacy help programmes using local literacy materials. For years, many countries have supported locally determined adult learning programmes in other developmental sectors. It may be possible to build a national literacy programme on the same basis, by offering national support to locally determined activities. Of course, the key to success is (here as elsewhere) the selection of appropriate persons and their training and support to become facilitators/animators using adult education methods.

CONCLUSION

The views expressed in this report have been developed over a lengthy period of time through an extensive review of the literature and consultation with leading practitioners in the field and through a number of visits made to case studies over a period of four years. They have

been elaborated in the course of two sets of research team debates. The view has been expressed to us by several of those who work in the field that the traditional 'literacy first' approach has been expensive, largely ineffective in developing usable literacy skills, and - even where the initial response has been positive - rarely sustainable in the longer term.

The review conducted in the earlier report and in this follow-up report has given some positive evidence of the potential of an approach to learning literacy skills through undertaking real literacy tasks within real settings to create a cost-effective programme, using the found, fetched and created texts within the local community rather than specially prepared post-literacy materials, to achieve greater, more relevant and more lasting results - using adult learning rather than school-based approaches. What is still needed is a number of trials to be conducted in different contexts on the basis of the approach outlined in this report, and the evaluations of these trials to be made available on a comparative basis so that it can be tested and if useful extended more widely.

4. Policy implications and action

[4.1. Implications for donors and implementing agencies](#)

[4.2. A possible research agenda](#)

[4.3. Action plan](#)

4.1. Implications for donors and implementing agencies

We would draw the following policy implications from the above discussions:

Terminology: Although we do not like the term 'post-literacy' because it emphasises a staged approach to literacy learning which we find inappropriate for adult learning, we recognise that the language of PL is likely to remain. We would urge that donors and aid agencies should always enquire as to the exact parameters of the PL programme as planned and particularly the objectives it seeks to achieve; and with that, the ways in which these achievements can be measured.

Support for PL materials: The main finding of this report is that support for the practice of literacy in real situations using the real texts associated with these practices is likely to be more effective than support for further literacy instruction using special 'post-literacy'

materials. Therefore, we do not feel that there is normally a case to be made for the funding of the preparation and production of further standardised PL learning materials, since these, used on their own, do not always promote the use of literacy skills in real situations to complete literacy tasks.

Where such specially prepared PL texts are supported, we would suggest three things:

- a) that the *general* needs of participants in PL programmes are probably best served through the production of regular magazines which can meet many of the very varied interests of such a wide target group;
- b) that the production of specific texts should be carefully targeted at particular groups, and that strategies should be developed for ensuring that these texts reach and are mediated to these groups rather than that they be distributed wholesale to local libraries for the 'general reading public'; and
- c) that (on educational grounds) special support might be provided to PL projects where the literacy learners are

themselves included as active participants in the writing and production processes of these materials (LGM) rather than having the materials prepared by experts, even when there is a major process of field testing. Donors need however to be aware that such projects are unlikely to be sustainable for long, although their learning value will be high.

Discovering local literacies: We believe that it is essential that action research be conducted into the practice of literacy in different circumstances and into the best ways of promoting the use of literacy skills to achieve participant-determined objectives. We have set out below a possible research agenda. In addition, we would urge that experimental programmes should be funded and then reviewed, and that the lessons (both positive and negative) gained from these should be widely disseminated through meetings and publications.

Real literacy tasks in ILT and PL: In particular, we would urge funders and planners to encourage the use within the initial literacy teaching programmes of real literacy tasks chosen by the participants rather than by the planners or facilitators, and built upon the found and created texts (real materials) needed for these tasks. Again, we believe this will encourage the transfer of literacy practices from the

classroom into daily life. The active involvement of the participants in the planning and evaluation of the PL programmes is likely to increase their commitment and enthusiasm. In addition, this will encourage the development of potential uses of literacy skills.

Measuring literacy practices: Support for the search for new ways to create measurable indicators which can register the progress made with the *use* of literacy skills as opposed to the ability to pass a test at a given point in time should be provided in different locations, and their findings reviewed and compared.

Literacy support service: Funding and other kinds of support should be given to those organisations and projects which seek to provide a literacy support service - for example, through the appointment and support of 'literacy support personnel' and literacy resource centres such as 'drop-in centres' as well as centres which might more appropriately be called 'community learning centres' (CLCs) rather than 'continuing education centres' (CECs), a title which might limit their activities to 'educational' programmes.

Infrastructure: Concern should be felt for the kind of infrastructure which will support such localised activities. The development of a locally

appropriate institutional framework might form a suitable project to support in some circumstances. Without such an infrastructure, a PL programme is unlikely to be sustainable.

Training for PL: A key element must be the funding and support of training in the concepts and practices of post-literacy in different contexts. The effectiveness of what is done in PL will depend not only on the resources and the commitment of the practitioners but also on the clarity with which they understand the nature of the task. Planners, managers, supervisors as well as facilitators all need opportunities to develop their understandings, skills and attitudes in working in more flexible and creative ways with the participants. Without this training programme, much of the other support provided is likely to be wasted. A programme designed to test out whether increased training yields increased effectiveness in PL programmes would pay dividends.

Scale of support: Our approach to PL suggests that funding should be on an appropriate scale. We note the trend towards larger aid programmes over longer periods; but we would also suggest there is a place for the support of some projects which are localised and which do not lend themselves to scaling up. For we see all PL programmes as being based on situated literacies, so that PL-providing agencies

should seek to localise their programmes. The building up of a national/regional network of contextualised learning and activities rather than a single standardised national programme may well be the key to the effective development of the use of literacy skills to bring about development. Nevertheless, the issue of scaling up does need to be addressed.

4.2. A possible research agenda

We do not see this report as having closed further debate on PL but as taking the discussions further. Such debate will however need to be based on firm foundations. The report has identified several areas where further research is needed so that the discussion can be more effective. This research should be in the form of action projects with careful evaluations and widely disseminated conclusions.

Local literacies: First, we need to know more about the actual literacy practices of different groups in different areas. The findings of the research of Professor Doronila and her team in different communities in the Philippines (Doronila 1996), of Prinsloo and his group in South Africa (Prinsloo and Breier 1996), of Rachel Hodge in Nepal (Hodge 1997), and of David Barton and his team in the UK (Barton and

Hamilton 1998) have shown that such research is not only feasible but also very productive in terms of the identification of possible teaching-learning strategies and materials. We would also wish to include in this some research into the existing systems of literacy assistance such as 'community readers of letters' etc in which communities adopt strategies to deploy different literacy skills throughout the community.

Participant motivations: Again, we need to know more about the interests and intentions of the different groups of participants as against the perceptions of these interests (usually described as 'needs') which the providing agencies often put into their mouths. We have noted above the gap which sometimes exists between what the participants in PL want and what the providing agencies feel these participants want or need. The views of the participants and of the field workers need to be explored more fully. Some research into contrasting agendas would be valuable. We note that some participants in existing literacy learning programmes come for apparently symbolic reasons (wanting to become 'educated') and others for more instrumental reasons; and there is some evidence that those who come for symbolic reasons may drop out more often and earlier than the others. But this needs to be researched thoroughly.

Adapting real materials: Some experimental programmes on different ways of adapting real materials (especially extension texts) and monitoring their use with different groups would yield fruit which could be used widely in many different arenas and countries.

Literacy-based income-generation activities: The effectiveness of the income-generation activities which often complement adult literacy programmes at both ILT and PL stages has never been reviewed. Education for *Development* began such a survey (Rogers 1994), but this whole area needs to be researched in more detail.

Measurable indicators: Action research into the application of tried ethnographic approaches to qualitative evaluation to adult literacy, especially the development of new ways to measure progress in literacy practices, and how these can be converted into relevant and appropriate statistical evidence for government and international purposes needs to be conducted in several different areas.

Value of and issues relating to the use of ICT for adult literacy: The implications of ICT for adult literacy teaching should form a major area of investigation, both its usefulness in helping adults to learn literacy skills and its effect on literacy practices. Experiments with

different ways of using ICT should be conducted in a variety of contexts, and the conclusions reviewed. One area of direct investigation is using such approaches with those who are unemployed or under-employed in developing new skills which will help them into new forms of employment.

Other areas of possible research can be identified as follows:

Language teaching, including dual language teaching, needs to be reviewed in different contexts and key lessons drawn from this for local literacies.

Numeracy teaching is a largely under-studied area in developing country contexts. Action research using ethnographic approaches would yield valuable information for policy decisions.

Accreditation in relation to PL needs to be surveyed in the light of the desires and needs of the participants and the opportunities before them to use such certificates meaningfully.

The training of facilitators is an area where action research is urgently needed, if ILT and PL programmes are to become more effective.

We would wish to stress that this list is no more than an indicative list. The absence of any research project from this list should not be taken as implying that it might not be valuable.

4.3. Action plan

The research team sees this report as the basis for immediate action as follows:

- We would wish to see **an international consultation** taking place (outside of the UK, if possible) in which the views of those working directly in the field of PL in developing countries about the major themes of this report can be expanded. It is important that this report should itself be tested and used to build yet further understandings of PL and further programmes of PL activities.
- We would suggest that **a meeting with donors** should be

held, at which their attitudes towards the support to be given to PL seen as the promotion of literacy use rather than the promotion of further literacy learning should be explored. We would see this as a separate event from the international consultation of practitioners, in which case it should come very soon after the international consultation.

- We suggest that support should be given to two or three southern agencies (government or NGO) for them to conduct **pilot projects** in this new approach to PL and the training programmes which will be needed for them to be effective. Among the countries in which agencies have expressed interest are Bangladesh, Botswana, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Tanzania; and regionally ASPBAE has indicated in a regional conference in Dhaka in August 1998 its keenness to engage in such innovatory activities. These would be projects run by local bodies on their own or in association with northern supporting agencies rather than projects run directly by northern agencies. The selection of the projects should come out of the international consultation.

