An exploration of workplace literacy as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing workplace literacy practices.

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Declaration

This dissertation is entirely my own work, except where explicit reference to the work of others is made.

It has not been submitted to any other university or higher education institution, or for any other academic award in Waterford Institute of Technology.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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Abstract

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By Hester Mackey

The changing workplace requires employees to engage with new ways of working that rely increasingly on a variety of literacy skills. This study used action research to answer the research question whether a workplace literacy initiative could act as a catalyst to support employees to manage these new literacy practices in the workplace with confidence. A multi-national high-tech manufacturing plant in Ireland which is in a process of continuous change was selected as research site.

A 45 hour workplace literacy course was designed in consultation with the stakeholders involved: government, employer, training provider and employees. The researcher acted as mediator between them. This collaboratively designed contextualised course was delivered to one group of eight employees on-site. Literacy terminology throughout the initiative was exchanged for more workplace friendly terminology.

An approach viewing literacy as a social practice acquired in a constructivist manner was used during curriculum design and facilitation of the training. Topical workplace related content like managing change, problem solving, teamwork and effective communication, was used to explore individual needs and literacy practices. Much of this work was undertaken through dialogue and often assisted by computers. This resulted in each participant presenting three portfolios for accreditation by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

Outcomes for the participants were an increase in confidence in reading, writing, speaking as well as increased computer skills. Participants also expressed a better understanding of and capacity to deal with changing workplace literacy practices. Stakeholders stated that their perceptions of workplace literacy had been challenged. The researcher-mediator identified that expectations for the workplace literacy course were not mutually exclusive. By creating a space for consultation with collaboration as a desired outcome, areas of resonance were established. The workplace literacy initiative resulted in benefits for all stakeholders with outcomes matching most of their desired expectations.

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List of Abbreviations

DETE	**Department of Trade and Employment**
DVD	**Digital Visual Display**
FÁS	**Foras Áiseanna Saothair** (Training and Employment Authority)
FETAC	**Further Education and Training Awards Council**
GDP	**Gross Domestic Product**
HR	**Human Resources**
HRM	**Human Resource Management**
IALS	**International Adult Literacy Survey**
NALA	**National Adult Literacy Agency**
NFQ	**National Framework of Qualifications**
NIACE	**National Institute for Adult Continuing Education**
NLS	**New Literacy Studies**
NRDC	**National Research and Development Centre**
NRT	**National Register of Trainers**
NSS	**National Skills Strategy**
OECD	**Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development**
PTL	**Production Team Leader**
STB	**Services to Business**
VEC	**Vocational Education Committee**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The central theme of this research is Literacy. While this may seem like an abstract concept, in reality it is about people and how they convey and interpret messages. This research is situated in the workplace, but as one of the participants commented, people are too complex to be boxed in and it therefore ripples out to other areas of people's lives as well.

1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Research

Workplace literacy is a relatively new area of practice in Ireland. The linguistic term "workplace literacy" has different connotations for the various stakeholders comprising the workplace, but in general it refers to how and why literacy is used in the workplace. The first implementation guidelines were published by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) as recently as 2002. The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of workplace literacy in a changing working environment, how workplace literacy practices are changing as a result and how employees can be supported in managing these changing practices. This is explored through interviews, group discussions and through engagement with employees in a training course.

The workplace literacy landscape usually includes state policy, the union, the employer, the practitioner and the employee with one (or more) of these being the funder. There is a certain inter-dependency required between these stakeholders, but balancing the power relationships and agreeing objectives are challenging. The researcher intentionally chose the term 'employees' rather than 'workers' in pursuit of equality; 'employees' generally having more middle class linguistic associations in comparison with the working class overtones of 'worker'.

The research site selected for the inquiry is a multi-national manufacturing company interacting with the various local stakeholders. The identity of the company and participants in the research cannot be disclosed for the sake of confidentiality in relation to a sensitive issue like adult literacy and therefore to uphold research ethics.

In order to gain insight into whether workplace literacy can act as a catalyst to support employees dealing with changing literacy practices at work, it seemed relevant to explore perceptions of what it means to be 'literate' in the workplace and to determine whether perceptions of the employer and employees correlate on this. It was also regarded as important to consider the types of literacies that employees encounter in the workplace and how they interact with these. The literature review suggests that the world of work is changing. Therefore perspectives of the employer and employees about change at work and particularly about changing literacy practices at work were explored.

The inquiry also intended to look at the various stakeholder roles as it relates to workplace literacy and to consider appropriate ways of collaboration between them. It was hoped that this might create a situation where everyone's requirements for meeting targets or receiving support is met as far as possible. The question about what constitutes appropriate course content, effective pedagogy and support was part of the inquiry. Furthermore, the outcomes of both the process of cooperation between the stakeholders and of the training in terms of competence, identity, power and confidence were investigated.

1.2 Personal & Professional context

I started my professional journey as a secondary school teacher, found my way into adult literacy and have been working in literacy in Ireland for more than 10 years. I have been involved in workplace literacy specifically ever since it started in my local county in 2002. I worked both for the statutory vocational education provider (VEC) and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) as well as for the Training and Employment Authority (FÁS) in the workplace literacy field at different stages. My previous roles incorporated those of coordinator and also of tutor. This background positioned me well to conduct the research and facilitate the training.

Previous personal and professional experience has shaped my current perspectives and practice. Engagement with this research was as much a personal as a professional journey. I gained insights into my own literacy as well as into the

dynamics of literacy in the workplace and into my engagement with literacy as a practitioner.

I was affiliated with the Literacy Development Centre of Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) for the duration of the research. The research was sponsored through a bursary provided by NALA and WIT.

Previous experience made me aware of the complexity of workplace literacy as an area of practice in adult education. It also alerted me to the multiple stakeholders and agendas present in this area of work and to my own perspectives, and often biases, in relation to these. I have grown in awareness regarding the tremendous scope of workplace literacy, but at times felt overwhelmed by the tensions inherent in it too.

1.2.1 Identified biases

I had a complexity of roles during the fieldwork; I acted as private training providing organisation, as tutor, as mediator for the training and also as researcher. I chose the term research-practitioner to reflect these different roles when referring to myself in the Methodology, Findings and Discussion chapters.

It was important that I examined my own biases in relation to these various roles. Participation in the research encouraged reflective practice and I kept track of my reflections and the biases exposed.

I had to be alert to the bias towards favouring the participant position and the danger existed of being dogmatic rather than pragmatic about what would work best within the given situation. I felt justified to have this bias, because the employees often have a less powerful voice than the other stakeholders. Another reason for feeling that this bias was justified relates to good practice in adult literacy work, where the needs of the students are central. I experienced this bias as problematic and decided to be, as stated in the learning journal, 'alert to it, to let the circumstance determine whether it will be ignored or taken into account, but to be upfront about it'.

My natural inclination would be to work towards democratic cooperation and minimum conflict. In the role of mediator therefore I had to be particularly aware of this inclination towards wanting cooperation and perhaps sacrificing a better agreement for the sake of evading conflict.

I experienced a predicament regarding terminology for the initiative, as it involves elements of learning, education and training. This tension between learning as an ideological exploration and the market-related nature of learning at work is inherent in workplace literacy. There is no English linguistic term that combines the characteristics of these three words and each of them in isolation does not convey the meaning I wanted to attach to the classroom engagement stage with the employees. This also proved problematic for the human resource manager in the company and for the representative of the state training agency (FÁS). It was decided to use the term 'training', because it is a word with resonance in the workplace and it fits the social practices of the workplace. For this research therefore, the word training is used not in its purely marketised and skills-based meaning, but rather as an inclusive term which incorporates the meanings of 'learning' and 'education'.

1.3 Originality and Scope

Publication (1997) of the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey, in which Ireland participated, raised awareness about adult literacy in general. It also indicated that it is an area for attention, as 1 in 6 of the Irish workforce was identified as not being at a literacy level to cope comfortably at work (OECD).

Reports have been published evaluating responses that aimed at improving this situation in the Public and in the Small to Medium Enterprise sector in Ireland. The research undertaken for this dissertation is the first formal research into a suitable workplace literacy response for a multi-national company employing more than 500 staff in Ireland. This research therefore is original in its scope.

The social nature of the research influenced the decision to pursue depth rather than breadth of data. This produced very rich data, but can also be viewed as a limitation of the research as one company and a relatively small number of employees was the subject of the inquiry.

Choices also had to be made about a suitable model of literacy to use during the research, how to engage with the various stakeholders and which methodology to pursue to gain greatest insight into such a multifaceted situation. Examining the research question in the light of available options, it was decided to pursue an Action Research methodology to allow for planning, action, observation and reflection during the research process.

Surveying the different models of literacy, the social practice model of literacy seemed the most appropriate model to use for the research to explore a phenomenon such as workplace literacy which is used by people to code and to decode a multitude of messages. The social practice model of literacy also provided the framework for the curriculum that was used during the training phase of the research.

Even though the inquiry focussed on workplace literacy practices, participants often related their gains in personal and private terms. It is occasionally referred to in this research, but investigating the extent to which it happened is outside the scope of this inquiry.

It was further decided to look for common ground between the different stakeholders rather than to focus on controversial elements. I sought to pursue collaboration rather than conflict in exploring whether workplace literacy can be a catalyst for supporting employees. This pursuit of cooperation implies that certain compromises had to be made. I was aware of this and tried to identify these and to understand why they were necessary (or not) in attempting to best answer the research question.

1.4 Outline of the Dissertation

The main themes that were explored during the research relate to: the modern workplace, literacy, change in both the workplace and literacies in use, the curriculum and the pedagogical approach used in the research, the expectations and experience of participating stakeholders, and the outcomes of involvement in the workplace literacy initiative.

In order to explore whether workplace literacy can act as a catalyst and can support employees in the changing workplace, it seems relevant to explore perceptions of what it means to be 'literate' in the workplace and to determine whether perceptions of the employer and employees correlate on this. It will also be important to consider the types of literacies that employees encounter in the workplace and how they interact with these.

The inquiry also intends to explore the various stakeholder roles as it relates to Workplace Literacy and consider appropriate ways of collaboration between them to create a situation where everyone's requirements for meeting targets or receiving support is met as far as possible. The question about what constitutes appropriate course content, effective pedagogy and support will be part of the inquiry. The outcomes of both the process of cooperation between the stakeholders and of the training in terms of competence, identity, power and confidence will also be investigated.

Chapter two of the dissertation will present an overview of literature relevant to the research. It will investigate various models of literacy, look at the modern workplace and examine the changes that have taken place in workplace literacy practices. It will examine stakeholder perceptions of workplace literacy and the available literacy statistics, especially in relation to Ireland. It will also look at workplace literacy initiatives in Ireland to date.

The Methodology chapter will then take a closer look at the research question and the methodology chosen to explore it. It will also highlight the precautions that were

taken to ensure that the research is valid, reliable, ethically sound and conducted with due rigour.

The findings of what occurred during the action phase of the inquiry will subsequently be examined to determine whether there are any relevant insights to be gained from the research. These findings will then be discussed and compared in the Discussion chapter with the available academic literature on the topics.

Finally, conclusions will be drawn from the findings and the discussion. Recommendations will be made for good practice as well as for possible further topics of inquiry.

1.5 Value of the research

The body of research available about low-skilled workers in Ireland is limited. This research intends to build on what has already been done and to alert future researchers to further areas of potential research.

The research has direct benefits for me, such as accreditation, gaining an insight into my professional practice and improving my practice, but there are also many other stakeholders involved in the inquiry. Action research refers to the 'me (researcher), us (stakeholders) and them (wider community)' involved in research (Reason and Torbert, 2001).

The stakeholders will initially gain from a heightened awareness of workplace literacy, but as the action research spiral evolves, it is expected that more benefits and insights will become apparent. It is also anticipated that the research will have an indirect impact wider than the 'me' and the 'us' to the 'them'. The originality of the research is likely to broaden the research base of workplace literacy in Ireland to include an academic study of a multi-national company. It is further hoped that this inquiry will be of relevance and use in the ongoing development of a strategy for workplace literacy in Ireland.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The relationship between language, literacy and society is complex. Even though the nature of the relationship is difficult to define, an understanding of it is crucial for how adults are assisted in improving literacy skills. This research focuses primarily on the workplace as a context for using and improving literacy capacity.

The literature review will explore different models of literacy and critique their relevance for the workplace, where many stakeholders interact. The Autonomous, Ideological, Functional, Critical and New Literacy Studies models will be examined.

The context for this research is the workplace. An overview of the workplace literacy situation, with special reference to Ireland, and the changes in the workplace that have taken place here are given. The dominant perceptions of the various stakeholders within this context are also explored.

Reviewing the existing literature provides the background information for framing an initiative that will explore whether workplace literacy can be a catalyst for assisting low-skilled employees in dealing with changing literacy practices encountered in the workplace in Ireland.

2.1 Models of Literacy

Different models of literacy view literacy differently. Street distinguishes between the autonomous and ideological model of literacy (2003). Autonomous literacy views literacy as a technical skill that is neutral in its application. The ideological model of literacy looks beyond the technical element of literacy at how and why it is used in context.

2.1.1   Literacy as Autonomous Practice

Street (ibid.) argues that the autonomous view of literacy sees it as the acquisition of a set of skills. These skills refer to the application of rules, principles and norms to

text. It works from the assumption that literacy in itself, autonomously, will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. It presupposes that literacy is neutral. It does not take into account that it is used by individuals that inherited it in some format and that it was shaped for the purpose and environment in which it is used. It does not acknowledge that people continue to influence and to be influenced by how literacy is used in society.

The autonomous model assumes that as people acquire literacy their general cognitive ability will improve. People will become better citizens when they acquire literacy skills, because they will automatically be able to think critically and transfer knowledge between different aspects of their lives. This further implies that gaining technical literacy skills will enable people to think abstractly (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). This model distinguishes between those who have literacy, the "literates", and those who do not have literacy, the "illiterates" (Street, 1995, p.21). It implies that the "illiterates" are somehow lesser citizens who are cognitively disadvantaged.

Research by Street in Iran and more recently by Breier and Prinsloo in South Africa suggests that the autonomous perspective imposes western and very often middle class conceptions of literacy. This model does not examine who it is that determines what it means to be literate. This is a crucial question to answer. Very often it is a dominant group within a society that is responsible for spreading literacy to other members of that society and to subcultures within it.   This is also the case when literacy is transferred from one culture to another.   The literacy introduced will have been shaped by the culture introducing it and will carry with it "a whole cultural outlook, an ideology, rather than simply a change in technical processes" (Street, 1995, p.31). Literacy programmes by missionary endeavours, for example, very often brought a Christian middle class ideology and conception of what it means to be literate with it (Masumbe and Coetzer, 2001; Street, 2001). The autonomous view does not acknowledge this.

The autonomous model then disguises cultural and ideological assumptions and presents literacy as if it were unbiased and impartial (Street, in Prinsloo and Breier, 1996).

2.1.2 Ideological Literacy

Ideological literacy looks beyond the technical and neutral. It acknowledges that literacy does not exist in a vacuum, but is used and shaped by people for different purposes, for example in their jobs, for bureaucratic purposes, for education, for leisure. It acknowledges that it is always embedded in society. This model of literacy recognises that literacy in essence is about knowledge and how it is perceived and used by people.

> The ways in which people approach reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being (Street, 2003, p.78).

Literacy is dependent on the context, environment and social situations in which it is used and on how knowledge is viewed in these environments. The world view and perception of self will influence the way in which literacy is used by individuals. Not only is the use of literacy shaped by ideological perceptions and the world view in which it operates, it also perpetuates these perceptions if they are not acknowledged and questioned.

How people view themselves in relation to society and their status and role in it, will also influence how and for which purpose they will use literacy and be comfortable with it. Therefore it is "ideological" in that it is "always rooted in a particular worldview and in a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and to marginalise others" according to Gee (Street, 2003, p.78).

The ideological model of literacy takes into account that different people, cultures and situations use (and are influenced by) literacy in different ways. An example of this is when Maori leaders had to sign an official document about land ownership in 1840. They felt that a mark of "particular significance" was required for the occasion. Some of the leaders chose European style signatures, but many preferred the

authority of their own mark derived from each chief's particular facial tattoo
(Hailstone, 1993 in Crowther et al., 2001, p.51).

> This facial signature had a depth of meaning which those of us who are illiterate in Maori
> symbolic and cultural life can only guess at (ibid.).

Ideological literacy acknowledges that literacy does not operate in isolation. Literacy
is a social phenomenon and therefore needs to be explored taking account of its
functional, epistemological and social characteristics.

Holme distinguishes between three strands in ideological literacy. These are:
Functional Literacy, Critical Literacy and Literacy as Social Practice (Holme, 2004).
Even though these three strands are distinct and will be discussed separately, they
share some common characteristics, with each new strand introduced bringing a
richer dimension to the understanding of literacy.

2.1.2.1 Functional literacy

The functional perspective on literacy works from the "premise that literacy is a set of
skills that enables an individual to function better in a socio-economic arena" (Holme,
2004, p. 21). Different socio-economic situations will need different types of texts,
and learners will need to learn the rules regulating the required texts in order to
apply them correctly in the various contexts. This then fulfils the purpose for which
the text was required to be read or constructed. The degree to which a person is able
to complete such a task is viewed as his/her literacy ability. Functional literacy
assumes that if somebody's literacy ability improves, the person's ability to perform
these functions effectively improves and the person is therefore better able to make
a social and economic contribution. It also assumes that literacy can be measured
according to what an individual is able to do and therefore should inform educational
goals and make them functional.

This perception is in contrast with the humanist view that sees education as a process
of learning and questioning as well as personal growth. It also creates problems for
identification of appropriate skills sets for different situations and the acquisition of
these. A further problem with functional literacy is that by focussing purely on the

functional, the affective side of the person is not sufficiently taken into account. The prospect of emotional engagement in education is therefore negated when focussing purely on socio-economic functionality (Holme, 2004).

Sticht speaks about "multiliteracies" and "situated practice" (1997, p.56), but defines context narrowly as "functional contexts". Sticht highlights that workers need to be able to perform tasks efficiently, because that is primarily why they are employed in a specific job. It therefore is important that workplace literacy takes the content of the required job and the context of the specific industry sector into account in order to assist the workers to be competent. Sticht's emphasis on including the content relevant to the context needs to be situated in a broader socio-cultural framework though.

Focussing on functionality alone, is referred to as teaching according to a deficiency model (Freire, 1996). Paulo Freire described this approach as seeing "knowledge as a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable" and therefore this approach "negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry" (ibid, p.53). The rules which determine "correct" usages in specific situations and for specific tasks inform the pedagogy. Teachers "bank" this knowledge in the learners to enable them to perform their socio-economic functions more efficiently. Functionality does not give scope to students to explore issues beyond the text. There is no place for critical reflection on reasons for performing these functions or the ways in which they are to be performed.

Many of the governmental literacy tests and league tables, for example the International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD, 1997), subscribe to this view of literacy. It takes into account the functions that need to be performed, the skill requirements in relation to economic and (or) social needs and then designs tests that will measure how well a person is able to perform in these tests (Darville, 1999).

In this model the gap between skills levels and skills requirement is identified and a curriculum designed and taught that will fill the gap, rather than assist the person

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with information processing. This approach fails to take into account that people do not only use literacy to perform functions. It does not consider who decides which functions are relevant, or that these functions are not neutral but have inherent power relationships. It tends to view knowledge, and literacy, as a means to a functional and economic end.   It does not take account of the person critically reflecting on the task and its purpose or creatively and subjectively interacting with knowledge.

The workplace by its very nature is task orientated. The temptation to apply the functional model to the workplace is therefore understandable. It is important that workplace literacy learning is relevant to the employer and employee and thus needs to be job and task related. Sticht coined the phrase: Functional Context Education (Sticht, 1997). His research emphasises the importance of functionality and context, but defines context too narrowly and does not sufficiently acknowledge the ideological nature of the context. His study also showed that literacy skills are acquired and improved faster if the content is relevant and familiar to the learner. These are important elements to keep in mind when engaging in workplace literacy and for acquiring the competencies required.

2.1.2.2 Critical Literacy

Critical Literacy looks beyond the functional and aims to identify and challenge the social inequalities that may be responsible for the uneven distribution of literacy within a given situation (Holme, 2004). It sees literacy as a tool for empowerment and an agent of transformation (Freire, 1996). This model of literacy is built on the premise that how literacy is taught as well as the content of the literacy material used in the class room are fundamental to suitable, accessible and successful literacy programmes for adults. It highlights the need for literacy pedagogy to expose power relations and to use dialogue to engage learners (Holme, 2004; Freire, 1996). It builds on the philosophy and political thought of Brazilian educational philosopher, Freire. Critical Literacy has its roots in the revolutionary movement in Brazil. Here Freire realised the important role that literacy and the way it is taught has to play in helping

people examine their own situation and circumstances critically. This is achieved by using the knowledge of adults and treating them in a non-authoritarian manner. It focuses on the experiences and views of learners as an important part of the literacy learning process. It uses materials that create a forum for discussion of the issues that they encounter, and thus has the potential to raise the consciousness of the learners regarding their issues (Freire, 1996).

Critical literacy stimulates reflection and getting beyond gaining factual knowledge and technical skills. In Freire's view it is vitally important that individuals see themselves as part of the process of empowerment. If literacy becomes a tool for guiding an individual or community to reflect critically on their circumstances and the barriers of their reality, their perspectives are challenged and their consciousness raised. Then transformative learning becomes a real possibility. A problem with the Freirean perspective is finding ways to foster dialogue that are free from the facilitator's ideological control (Gee, 1988; Holme, 2004; Elias, 1994; Leach, 1982). Another danger is that critical literacy can be seen as patronising by implying that there is a hierarchy of consciousness into which a more conscious person should guide a less conscious person rather than a mutual exploratory journey (Zachariah, 1986; Berger, 1974). It can also become an act of cultural resistance viewing culture as negative, as an "oppressive conspiracy" rather than an interactive and dynamic coming together of values that could be questioned and adapted in line with societal change (Holme, 2004, p. 60). As Woock (1972) highlights, it is difficult to determine who the oppressed and the oppressors are in the broader application of Freire's thinking. This opens the possibility that any regime or situation, even delegated authority and structures, can be perceived as oppressive and it may lead to people involved in that situation to feel that (revolutionary) opposition to it is legitimate. By Freire not defining the contexts and boundaries for his terminology, critical literacy can potentially be used as a subversive tool in contexts where collaboration might be a better solution (Pitt, 1972).

The workplace of the 21st century needs workers who are able to think critically, act as teams and manage in a textualised workplace (Scheeres, 2004). Using the Critical

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Literacy model in its Freirean form in the workplace will encourage workers to question the status quo and to work towards liberation from any perceived oppressing forces, which are likely to be the employer and/or the government. Workplace literacy is more likely to be effective if the various stakeholders interact successfully and feel that they are working towards a common goal (Jurmo, 2004) within structures that streamline operations. Workplace literacy is likely to benefit from questioning perceived inequalities and disparity of power and an awareness of the perspectives of all stakeholders in a particular workplace situation with the objective of better cooperation rather than subversion.

2.1.2.3 Literacy as Social Practice (New Literacy Studies)

A relatively new model of literacy called New Literacy Studies (NLS) aims to express this larger dynamic which our concept of culture implies. It proposes that workers can be guided to critical thinking, personal awareness and technical skills development through creative interaction with their social context. NLS is also called the model of literacy as social practice. It recognises that literacy never operates in isolation and is shaped by institutions, cultures, language, genres and registers of use in daily living.

This literacy model that sees literacy as a social practice recognises that literacy is ideological in nature. It acknowledges that literacy is situated in power relations and embedded in specific social and cultural meanings and practices (Street, 1995). It also realises the importance of context in how literacy is used and researched. It has coined new terminologies to attempt clearer definition of what literacy is. These are 'literacies', 'literacy practices' and 'literacy events'. New Literacy Studies was strongly influenced by ethnographic studies. It found that different cultural groups and sub-groups use literacy differently and therefore literacy presents itself in different, very unique ways in different contexts; the term 'literacies' tries to capture this characteristic (ibid.).

According to NLS, literacy is best understood as a set of social practices. These practices contain events in which written texts are used. An example of a social practice is taking up employment. As part of this practice, the literacy event of signing the employment contract takes place. The meaning of this event is that society accepts the norm that signing the contract makes the practice legally binding. In 2000, Street noted that individuals bring their own concepts, understandings and social expectations regarding what the nature of an event is, what makes it work and what gives it meaning.   Literacy practices are shaped by the social institutions and power relations existing in these.   Therefore some literacies are more dominant, evident and assert more influence than others. Literacy practices are not only embedded in social goals and cultural practices, but are historically situated too. Literacy practices can also change and new ones are frequently acquired through informal learning and sense making as well as through formal education and training (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). A clear example of this is how the use of the telephone has changed from an aural medium to an aural and textual technological medium. The skills associated with this change often are acquired informally, but can also form part of a formal training course.

Critics of NLS comment that the promotion of vernacular literacies will continue to exclude learners from using dominant middle-class literacies (Webb, 2007). Supporters, on the other hand, argue that it does not deny people access to the powerful literacies of workplace and public institutions, but imply that all practices need to be examined (ibid.). Luke (Prinsloo and Breier,1996, p.5) argues that there are no "genres of power" as such, only culturally embedded ways of knowing and sharing information that have gained advantage in relation to others.

New Literacy Studies draws attention to the unequal and hierarchical nature of literacy in practice. Its starting point is not to instinctively counter the inherent power, but rather to recognise and value how a person is already using literacy within their cultural and social contexts (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). This creates a platform for literacy students to value their own literacy capacity and to explore how they can

extend it. It assists them in understanding the inherent power interplay and prepares them for informed choices about their own use of literacy as a social practice.

Extending existing skills to new and changing contexts which people encounter and need to interact with will therefore be a better starting point for literacy pedagogy than working from a deficit perspective. By examining how literacy is used within a social context, NLS also recognises that people do not use literacy in isolation and as individuals, but that literacy is used as part of a social network. Individuals rely on and use this social network to extend their literacy capacity for social interaction (Fowler and Mace, 2005).

2.1.2.3.1 New Literacy Studies and the Workplace

New Literacy Studies takes into account that society changes and that these changes influence the literacy practices in which people engage. It refers to "New Orders" to conceptualise these changes, specifically the "New Work Order", "New Communicative Order" and "New Epistemological Order" (Street, 2001, p.13-21; Bailey, 2007, p.25 – 28). All of these orders resonate with workplace literacy. The New Epistemological Order refers to the commercialisation of knowledge and how knowledge is perceived in different terms by economists and educationalists. As Lynch puts it, "A Market Citizen only needs education for market participation" and this can lead to a situation where non-market forms of education are trivialised, especially if they are not accredited (Lynch, 2007).

The New Work Order is called by many other names, e.g. new capitalism (Lankshear, 1997), high performance workplace (Jackson, 2004), post-modern workplace (Lonsdale and McCurry, 2004). It refers to the shift from mass production to mass differentiation and is strongly influenced by globalisation and the use of technology. A distinction between old and new work order is made by Gee in 1996:

> There is now a shift towards forms of production which employs new ways of making goods and commodities, serving more differentiated markets, or niches, through segmented retailing strategies. There is now a great deal more attention paid to the selling environment at every level of production, from design to distribution. So while the old work order stressed issues of costs and revenue, the new work order emphasises asset building and market share (Gee et al, 1996, vii-viii in Street, 2001, p.14).

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The New Communicative Order relates closely to the New Work Order in that it refers to the change in literacy practices required in the workplace with people needing to be able to work in teams and be familiar with computer related language. The workplace of the 21st century is becoming more and more textualised through the introduction of new quality systems, technologies, participatory processes and problem solving requirements (Scheeres, 2004; Farrell, 2001; Jackson, 2000).

It is important to point out the relevance of these orders for workplace literacy, as all of them underscore the changes in society. The social practice model of literacy highlights the fact that ideologically there are big differences and inherent tensions within each of these orders. Workers need to manage these changes. The NLS model acknowledges both the changes and the existing literacies of workers.

The work of Fowler and Mace (2005), with tutors and students, explore how the theory of NLS is implemented in practice. It shows that implementing this social practice perspective helps basic education students to gain a better understanding of their own perception and use of literacy, their social networks and their literacy environment. It helps them to view their own capacity positively and then to build on this to be able to participate in society (and the workplace) more meaningfully.

The literacy student therefore approaches learning with a positive attitude rather than the "deficit" perception. It also enables the student to reflect critically on how to use literacy for the purposes required in society and especially for his/her own social interactions. This empowers the learner to identify the domains and practices where, and the reasons why, codes are still not accessible and to incorporate this in the learning. This creates a positive exploratory platform for educators to engage with students (ibid.).

The theories of psychological development and education proposed by Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner resonate with this approach and thus with the social practice model of New Literacy Studies. Vygotsky reasons that social interaction is necessary for

cognitive development and that if a task is within a person's cultural and social experience, the person will more readily acquire the related skills (Riddle and Dabbagh, 1999). He uses the metaphor of scaffolding to explain how new learning is built on previous experience and also stresses the relevance of tutor and peer support in learning as part of the socialisation process (Hogan, Pressley, et al., 1997). This perspective is known as social constructivism.

Bronfenbrenner similarly refers to human development as socio-cultural and depicts this visually as concentric circles. He reasons that an individual's development is determined by the interaction between individuals and interactions in their immediate environment. This immediate environment is also influenced by the wider environment including cultural values and traditions (1979)

The model which views literacy as a social practice recognises that the workplace is one of the social domains in which a person needs to participate effectively (Street, 2001). Sticht in his explanation of functional context education also recognises this (1997). The social practice model incorporates functionality and adds to this a critical awareness of the inherent tensions between people's own literacy and that of the dominant literacy. The social practice model of literacy enables students to value their own skills and to critically determine how and why they want to extend their literacy capacity.

Castleton underlines the importance of dynamic interaction with our environment and suggests that we are not literate; we are constantly "becoming" literate, primarily because we live in an ever changing and evolving society (Castleton, 2002b, p.3).

From reviewing the literature, it appears that the social practice model affords workplace literacy a framework which allows the various stakeholders to explore changes in literacy practices in the workplace. It also appears to provide a contextualised and socially sensitive basis for examining current literacy use and skills

of employees and for extending these to incorporate the changing workplace literacy practices.

This research will examine how workers with literacy needs can be supported to manage the demands of current changing workplace practices. It will examine how best to assist them in becoming literate as an ongoing process within the social networks in which they operate. Taking the different models of literacy into account, New Literacy Studies seems to offer the most comprehensive model for engaging in workplace literacy. This perspective is supported by the theories of developmental psychologists and educational researchers.

2.2 Workplace Literacy: International overview

2.2.1 Dominant perceptions among workplace literacy stakeholders: Economic & Functional

There are different stakeholders involved in the workplace and these stakeholders perceive workplace literacy in different ways. Research about workplace literacy programmes in America highlights two perceptions that guide workplace literacy. These two perceptions are:

1. There is a direct relationship between inadequate basic skills and a nation's ability to compete economically in a global market place;

2. The most effective way to improve workers' basic skills is to teach these skills in a functional and contextualised manner. (Imel, 2003, p.4)

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) publication, *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Economy*, highlights the strong link between economic growth and labour force skill. Its findings suggest that industrial sectors experiencing growth tend to have a highly literate and highly skilled workforce (OECD, 1997, p.11). A key finding is that there are significant literacy skills gaps in every participating country (ibid, p.3). The workforce is seen as human capital and the better skilled the workforce, the more economically competitive the country is perceived to be. Therefore the conclusion of these surveys is that programmes need to be put in place to raise the

literacy levels of the workforce, particularly those at the lowest levels. These programmes should aim to enable the workforce to perform the functions of their jobs in line with quality assurance standards and according to new workplace practices.

The main stakeholders in workplace literacy are governments, employers, education providers, unions and employees.   Stakeholders would position themselves somewhere between strong agreement and strong disagreement with the perceptions of functionality and economic achievement.

2.2.2 Positioning of Workplace Literacy stakeholders in relation to economic and functional perceptions

2.2.2.1 Government: competitiveness and social inclusion

Governments aim to be seen to work towards economic competitiveness and social inclusion. Outputs that are measurable tend to be taken seriously. The International Adult Literacy Survey and subsequent report therefore suit the government position as it gives statistical data and highlights where the skills deficits are that need to be improved.

Darville and Castleton criticises the IALS for its conception of levels of ability and difficulty, because it uses a model of literacy which sees it as information processing from within the ruling relations. Darville explains how this perspective of literacy sees it as mainly functional in purpose. The IALS presents literacy as holistic and situated in society, but on closer examination of the motivation for the study and the type of tests performed, it becomes apparent that its conceptual practices are economic and statistical (Darville, 1999).   Castleton in addition highlights that this perspective advocates a certain moral order in which workers, through their lack of literacy skills, are morally responsible for a country's inability to compete economically (Castleton, 2000). It does not take into account the complexity of other variables such as poor management. The key findings of the IALS report (OECD, 1997) relate overwhelmingly to economic outcomes such as workforce skill, economic competitiveness and wages.

Government reports from across the OECD region strongly support the view that this identified "skills gap" should be addressed in order to stay competitive, thus operating from a functional and deficit model in relation to literacy. Governments are therefore increasingly willing to fund workplace literacy programmes that are functional and measurable.

The Moser report released by the British Government early in 1999 noted that country's high numbers of adults who are not functionally literate as "one of the reasons for relatively low productivity in our economy" (Moser, 1999, p.8). This is echoed by the Leitch Review of Skills of 2006, which states:

> We also have very considerable weaknesses. Today, more than one third of adults do not hold the equivalent of a basic school-leaving qualification. Almost one half of adults (17 million) have difficulty with numbers and one seventh (5 million) are not functionally literate. This is worse than our principal comparators (2006, p.1).

This report recommends challenging new economic aspirations and sets stretching targets for improving basic skills in the UK. These are seen as fundamental requirements for competiveness and economic status (NRDC, 2007).

This links with the concept of Lifelong Learning which has gained significant support in recent years. The Irish Government's Report, *White Paper on Adult Education – Learning for Life,* states that the government has "now elevated lifelong learning to a pivotal role in labour market policy"(DES, 2000, p.17).

At European level, the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 set the European Union the strategic goal, reaffirmed at the Stockholm European Council in March 2001, "of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world" (CEC, 2001, p.6).

Policy and good practice in workplace literacy will benefit from looking beyond the purely functional and economic perspective. A review of the implementation of the Lisbon Agenda in the EU by social NGO's (Social Platform) in 2004 found that:

... it is worrying that education and training now appear almost entirely as employment factors within EU policies, despite some rare references to "personal fulfilment" and "active citizenship". The Lisbon process has therefore encouraged an instrumentalisation of people, leading to a lack of independence and responsiveness to new challenges (on-line).

2.2.2.2 Employer: competitiveness, profit, lack of awareness

A strong link exists between government and employers as they are interdependent to keep the economy viable. Employers share the government call for competitiveness and productivity, and they are focussed to ensure that their business stays profitable. They require employees who are able to do their jobs well and who can adapt to changes in the workplace. The development of the knowledge society, as mentioned in the Lisbon Agenda, highlights the new demands being put on employers to upskill their workforce in order to stay competitive in a changing global economy.

Two key processes influence the increased requirement for literacy and numeracy in the workplace. These are the "flattening" of management structures resulting in lower-level employees having to take on more responsibility, for example in report writing, as well as the increased importance of regulations and targets (NRDC, 2007). The new orders, as identified by New Literacy Studies, underscore this trend (Street, 2001).

The Leitch Review of Skills (UK, 2006), reported that an annual net benefit of 0.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) would be gained by upskilling 3.5 million workers with low or no qualifications. It also highlighted that these returns on upskilling at basic levels compare well with investment in people with a higher-level qualification.

Coulombe et al., in Canada, also shows a clear and noteworthy link between investment in basic education and subsequent growth and labour productivity. A two and a half per cent relative rise in labour productivity and a one and a half per cent rise in GDP per head are associated with a rise of one per cent in literacy scores relative to the international average (2004). International evidence about benefits of the workplace literacy to employers is limited however. Available studies reviewed

by Ananiadou et al. (2003, by NRDC, 2007) suggest that employer-provided literacy and numeracy courses can increase productivity, improve the use of new technology in the workplace, save time and reduce costs. Employers who have sponsored courses have generally found it to be a positive experience and there is no evidence to suggest that it was seen as either burdensome or an unnecessary expense.

Smit et al. (2005) in the Netherlands identifies some of the reasons why employers are slow to engage in workplace literacy initiatives. These refer to a lack of awareness of the problem, because employees hide their difficulties. Employers are also uncertain about its benefits, have a perception that education is pointless for lower-trained employees and/or fear that employees will move to competing companies

While most employers are cognisant of the many changes in society and the world of work, not all employers are committed to upskilling their employees and prefer a reactive approach to training (Mawer and Jackson, 2005).

The question also arises whether a workplace literacy programme is used as a tool for domestication (encouraging participation in existing social structures) rather than emancipation which would involve critical reflection and action in relation to the status quo (Lankshear, 1987; Sandlin, 2000). A reactive or purely functional outcomes based approach impoverishes the potential benefits that an employee (and therefore by implication the employer, funder and government) can gain from a social practice approach to literacy development. Alternatively, domestication might be the unvoiced desired outcome of some of the stakeholders.

2.2.2.3 Education provider: personal development and active citizenship

Brookfield (1986) raises some of the inherent tensions that appear when education and the workplace meet. He shows that the perspective of the adult educator and the human resource (HR) developer differs in many ways.

New Literacy Studies highlights the new epistemological order which refers to how knowledge has been "marketised" as a commodity and is no longer seen as a process of learning, questioning and engagement (Street, 2001). This view of knowledge should caution workplace literacy practitioners to clarify what they understand workplace literacy to be. If it is merely perceived to be a functional contextualised skill that employees can be trained in, they unwittingly subscribe to viewing knowledge as a commodity. This leaves little room for the ideological perspective of education and literacy as an embedded social practice.

The European Commission's document entitled "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality" refers to the need for "innovative pedagogy to address the shift in emphasis from knowledge acquisition to competence development, and the new roles for teachers and learners that this implies" (CEC, 2001, p.5). This document acknowledges the shift from knowledge to competence and proposes ways to manage this shift through European programmes and national policy. It also highlights the importance of "partnership working" and striving for excellence through supporting trainers and educators in dealing with the changes.

This seems to call for collaboration between adult educators and Human Resource departments. For educators, this means ensuring that the "partnership working" does not simply become a case of educators working with employers and governments to uphold an economic agenda. It is thus a prerequisite for adult educators to have a clear understanding of the issues, a code of professional good practice, coherence in efforts and a considered response when dealing with the world of business. This will go a long way toward creating an environment where politicians, purse holders and business people are likely to take the educational perspective seriously. This hopefully will result in safeguarding a more holistic learning experience for participants (Brookfield, 1986).

2.2.2.4 Employee: a need for sensitive empowering support

Barton identifies some of the perceptions inherent in workplace literacy discourse and its implications for workers in a background paper prepared for the "Changing literacies in the knowledge-based economy" workshop held in Lancaster (May 2006):

> … a high-skills knowledge-based economy, and that many workers do not have the necessary skills to remain competitive and productive in this context … implying that workers who refuse to or are unable to 'upskill' themselves are directly responsible for damaging productivity or competitiveness.

The perceived link between the skill of employees and a competitive economy leaves them open to be blamed for a country's poor economic performance. Cruikshank (2002, p.140) calls this "scapegoating the worker". This alleged link unfairly places blame on one aspect of the economy without a comprehensive analysis of market forces and change. Employees who often are disempowered by these forces are then also implicitly held responsible when a country's economy does not perform as expected.

Workplace Literacy cannot be seen as neutral, because it is situated and used in a context where people with different agendas and different levels of power interact. Barton (2006, p.1) states:

> The changing demands associated with new management practices have been shown to be disempowering for many workers, for instance where already overworked front-line workers were expected to engage with ever-increasing numbers of new texts, or where formal training with little relation to people's job was imposed (Black, 2004; Gee et al., 1996). These sorts of changing literacy practices can reinforce, rather than challenge existing hierarchies.

Hull in an article entitled "What's in a label?" argues that a labelling mistake in an electronics manufacturing plant at face value looked like an error by a worker reading an instruction, but involved many layers of power and perception in the plant, "a complex web of contextual factors combined to create the conditions under which such a mistake could happen". She concluded that arguably the most formidable challenge for workers is not developing a literate identity, but "being perceived as capable of doing so" (Hull, 1999, p.27, p.204). Decision making powers and understanding the relevance of tasks are often not shared with workers on the manufacturing floor. The reason for this is that they are not perceived as being

capable to handle this kind of information (ibid.). As a result, workers internalise this perception and see themselves as incapable too. This potential perception existing in workplace culture is an important one for workplace literacy practitioners to be aware of.

The Return to Learning and the SMART projects in Ireland showed that it is extremely important that (potential) participants on workplace literacy courses are treated with sensitivity and that trust is built from the outset. Participants are scared of being laughed at, or fearful of exposing themselves. At the same time they are cautiously hopeful that they might be able to improve their confidence, capacity and job prospects (Hegarty, 2006; Rooney & O'Byrne, 2005).

A model of literacy that not only improves functional ability, but will also transform this perception through the pedagogy used, will ultimately benefit the employee and the employer.

2.2.3   Implications of these perceptions for Workplace Literacy

The perspective that views literacy as a socially embedded practice provides the workplace literacy practitioner with a framework to reflect on the discourse around literacy in the workplace. The mere fact that a variety of stakeholders are involved highlights the socially embedded nature of workplace literacy.

The guiding perception of a functional approach to solve an economically perceived deficit is reductionist in perspective. It fails to consider the complexity of literacy acquisition, the politically loaded interactions within the workplace, intricacies of workplace change, the identity of the worker or the socio-cultural nature of literacy practices.

As discussed, information-processing capacities that serve an economic agenda will benefit by being balanced with the ideological perspectives of critical reflection and socially embedded literacy practice. This balanced approach is more likely to support learners in becoming independent and confident in literacy practices and to achieve

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the ideals of active citizenship, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and economic well-being identified by the Lisbon Agenda (2000).

The Leitch Review of Skills, despite looking from an economic perspective, recognises that if the UK wants to achieve its ambitions, responsibility for attainment of skills need to be shared by government, employers and individuals (2006). This perspective is echoed by the European Commission in its policy document on Lifelong Learning:

> A partnership approach is stipulated as the first building block. All relevant actors, in and outside the formal systems, must collaborate for strategies to work 'on the ground' (CEC, 2001, p.4).

Jurmo (2004) calls this approach a collaborative approach. Jurmo highlights the importance of a decision making process that is inclusive, provides for equal input from all stakeholders and that informs the logistics of the course and the curriculum. Key players are more likely to cooperate if they have a say, and this approach also validates the prior knowledge of participants as they are consulted about the programme. Disadvantages relate to the complexity and time consuming nature of negotiations and an underlying assumption that many of these stakeholder relationships are "inherently adversarial" (Jurmo, 2004, p.26).

2.3 Irish workplace and literacy statistics

In the Irish context, little research has been done into how literacy practices operate in the world of work and how capable workers are to meet the literacy challenges of the workplace.

The National Adult Literacy Agency conducted a short research project among employers into general awareness of literacy in the workplace which resulted in guidelines as to how a programme for employees can be developed (2002). Three pilot workplace literacy programmes have also been run which provide some experiential information (Hegarty, 2006; Rooney & O'Byrne, 2005; FÁS, 2008a).

2.3.1 Literacy levels, education and age of the Irish population

According to the IALS survey and subsequent OECD report, 25% of Irish adults are at literacy level one and a further 23% at level two. Level three is generally regarded as the level to cope comfortably with literacy demands of everyday life (IALS, p.3). In the IALS study, close to half of Irish workers surveyed were involved in four kinds of literacy activities on a weekly basis. These included: letters/memos, forms/bills/invoices, reports/articles, estimates/technical specifications.

Total employment in Ireland was 1.97 million at the end of March 2009 (Quarterly National Household Survey). The IALS showed that one sixth of those in employment scored at level one in 1995. The National Skills Strategy (2007) further shows that 522,100 employees have lower than a leaving certificate qualification.

The National Skills Bulletin 2008 documenting employment and workforce related trends in Ireland (FÁS, p.11 & 18) shows the education distribution of the workforce and subsequently breaks it down into broad occupational groups. A close correlation exists between employees with lower secondary level education and employees who according to the IALS are at levels one and two.

From a purely functional perspective, it therefore seems that more than half a million of the Irish workforce is likely to encounter tasks at work which they will find difficult to complete. This constitutes a problem for the government, economists and employers because from their perspective this translates into error, loss of time, wastage and lower productivity.

Even though educational attainment and literacy ability are often linked, it would be short sighted to assume that this is the only influence on the capacity of people to participate in literacy practices. In this case, the fact that the IALS tests were functional would strengthen the perceived link. Darville points out that this correlation is likely, because the tests and "literacy rates" are influenced by "school-based conceptual frameworks" (Darville, 1999, p.276). Therefore, the longer you

were in school, the more able you would be to complete the IALS tasks. This does not necessarily mean that the ability can be transferred to everyday socio-cultural and interpersonal situations.

The occupations with employees having low education attainment are to a large extent also the occupations with a higher age profile. Research for the 2006 PISA report showed that 16.4% of Irish 15 year olds scored at level one or below for mathematical literacy and 12% scored at level one or below in reading literacy. A further 22% average scored at level two. While this compares favourable with other OECD countries, it highlights the fact that young people entering the workforce will need continued literacy supports (Eivers et.al., 2007).

The IALS shows that participation in adult education and training increases with the level of education initially received: the higher the level, the more likely a person is to participate (p.94). It also shows that in most countries the participation rate declines steadily with an increase in age (p.96). In Ireland about 35% of 16-25 year olds participated in adult education and training, compared to less than 10 % in the 56-65 age group (p.97).

2.3.2 Relevance of statistics for the Irish workplace

The above data has a profound relevance for the workplace literacy debate in Ireland. It shows that there is a considerable percentage of workers who need literacy and numeracy support. It also highlights that older employees are harder to reach with education and training, while at the same time being the cohort with lower levels of educational attainment than younger employees.

In its assessment of the current workplace, the *Forum on the Workplace of the Future* (2005) recognises that employers, unions and employees are all aware of the need for workplace change and innovation. Areas for improvement are identified; including uneven investment in workplace training and lifelong learning. The Forum highlights the basic skill needs and the low provision of training particularly in smaller

organisations. Uneven access to training opportunities is also an issue, particularly for women, less skilled employees and older people. The Irish government commissioned the Expert group on Future Skills Needs to conduct research to underpin the development of a National Skills Strategy. Their report titled "Tomorrow's Skills – Towards a National Skills Strategy" (2007) looks at current employment trends and on the strength of that creates a vision for 2020 as well as setting targets for achieving the vision.

The report acknowledges that in a rapidly changing environment, the changing skills needs of the economy and society are difficult to predict with a high degree of certainty, but that it is possible to identify trends. These trends point to increasing demand for those with high skills and a relative decline in demand for those with low level skills. It also highlights the increasing emphasis on generic skills including basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and using technology (Forfás, 2007).

In the absence of policy change, a significant proportion of Ireland's workforce will remain low-skilled in 2020, with their highest level of educational attainment below upper secondary levels (ibid., p.2). This is a situation for the government to address if it wants to meet the identified upskilling targets and the requirements of the workplace, both economically and in terms of education and training.

The Irish Government's White Paper on Adult Education places emphasis on lifelong learning and the learning organisation without exploring the difference between education, learning and training (2000). As Field states, "Lifelong learning is one of several policy areas where there is a new balance of responsibilities between individual and state" (Field, 2002, p.206)

It is therefore important that the challenges and changes of workplace literacy are articulated to ensure a model of practice that balances the needs of all stakeholders as effectively as possible. The perspectives of the stakeholders are not mutually exclusive and all will potentially benefit from exploring the areas of shared views, identifying differences and negotiating areas of compromise. Doing so is likely to

align provision with the EU's directive and in line with what Jurmo terms the "collaborative" approach. Dialogue, consultation and a "systematic, inclusive decision-making process" seem to be important building blocks to create this kind of collaboration (Jurmo, 2004, p.25).

2.3.3 Workplace Literacy projects in Ireland

Workplace literacy in Ireland is relatively young. The main projects have been the Return to Learning Projects in Local Authorities (Rooney & O'Byrne, 2005), the SMART (Skills Management and Relevant Training) initiative in small and medium-sized enterprises in Co. Monaghan (Hegarty, 2006) and the Skills for Work project in the private sector (FÁS, 2008a).

Rooney and O'Byrne in 2005 confirm that an approach of literacy as social practice is being implemented by the Return to Learning Initiative. Participants have the opportunity to give input into course design and tutors have flexibility to incorporate expressed needs into the programme.

According to the research it was evident that:

> ... the initiative and the way that the individuals were treated facilitated the growth of their confidence and latent abilities. Most of the participants had left school early but did possess some reading and writing skills and when nurtured by the Return to Learning process they have blossomed, and in some cases have created an insatiable desire for reading and writing (p.21).

Other important elements responsible for the success of this initiative are that it embraces a partnership approach between the stakeholders both nationally and locally and that a neutral partnership facilitator within the local authorities acts as the link person with the training organisation (ibid.).

The SMART evaluation report (Hegarty, 2006) shows that individuals, families, companies and the wider community reaped positive gains from the initiative. Overall the report stresses the importance of processes and relationship building and particularly of establishing a learning culture in the workplace. It also mentions the

difficulty that exists in getting employers interested in a training initiative that is broader than economic gains (Hegarty, 2006).

The pilot period of the Skills for Work project ended in 2007 and it is currently in a process of mainstreaming. This project strongly experienced the tensions between the different stakeholders. The model established in this project involved active collaboration between organisations working across the education/training divide and involved a "process mediated by brokers that straddle the vocational training/education divide" (FÁS. 2008, p.37).

All of these projects highlighted the importance of nurturing the learner and the stakeholder relationships and also that workplace literacy is better understood if seen as a series of collaborative processes involving all stakeholders.

2. 4 Change in the Irish workplace

The National Workplace Strategy (2005) highlights the multiple and rapid changes affecting the workplace and concludes that there is an urgent need to develop radically new workplace models. In addition to meeting quality assurance criteria and legal requirements with complex literacy and numeracy demands, employees are required to use a much wider set of skills such as team work, customer care, personal effectiveness, problem solving and technology. This was echoed by the Expert Group on Future Skills needs:

> Generic, transferable skills, such as literacy, numeracy, IT and people skills, will be increasingly valued; employees will be required to demonstrate flexibility and an ability to continually acquire new knowledge and skills. Employees will be required to have a greater breadth of knowledge, and the demand for higher qualifications will increase (2007, p.6).

New Literacy Studies highlight that literacy practitioners will do well to take heed of the identified New Orders with its focus on changes in literacy practices and perceptions.

Workplace Basic Education is recognised by the Irish government as a way of improving literacy and numeracy skills whilst an adult is in the workplace. Financial

provision is made for this through the Workplace Basic Education Fund and the partnership agreement, 'Towards 2016'.

2.5 Conclusion

A review of the literature to date suggests that New Literature Studies provides a situation sensitive model for approaching workplace literacy. The literature furthermore seems to indicate that an approach which encourages collaboration between stakeholders is beneficial when engaging with workplace literacy. This research intends to explore whether a workplace literacy initiative can act as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing workplace literacy practices. It intends to test a workplace literacy initiative designed using the theoretical framework of New Literacy Studies together with a collaborative approach. It will identify an appropriate methodology for accessing reliable data and locate the inquiry within a multi-national manufacturing facility in Ireland.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter identifies which methodology was selected and why this was regarded as most appropriate for accessing authoritative data to answer the research question. The selection of investigative methods used to access data will be identified, explained and justified as the most relevant ones in the context and for the identified conceptual framework of literacy as a socially constructed phenomenon.

This section will explain how the data was accessed to provide valid and reliable results. It will also highlight the difficulties and limitations encountered in accessing the information and validating it.

It is important to understand the context of the research in order to relate to the methodology and the various methods employed. Therefore context, location and the chronology of events of the research will also be described in this section.

3.1 Questions to be answered

This inquiry focuses on Workplace Literacy and intends to explore and answer the research question as to whether a workplace literacy initiative can act as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing literacy practices at work.

In order to attempt an answer to that question, it seems relevant to explore various sub-questions. These sub-questions relate to perceptions of what it means to be 'literate' in the workplace and to determine whether perceptions of the employer and employees correlate on this. It will also be important to consider the types of literacies that employees encounter in the workplace and how they interact with these. The literature review suggests that the world of work is changing. Therefore perspectives of the employer and employees about change at work and particularly about changing literacy practices at work will be explored - especially as this has direct relevance to the research question.

The inquiry also intends to explore the various stakeholder roles as it relates to Workplace Literacy and consider appropriate ways of collaboration between them to create a situation where everyone's requirements for meeting targets or receiving support is met as far as possible. The question about what constitutes appropriate course content, effective pedagogy and support will be part of the inquiry. The outcomes of both the process of cooperation between the stakeholders and of the training in terms of competence, identity, power and confidence will also be investigated.

A multi-national manufacturing company was selected to be the site of the research. The stakeholders identified were: funder/government, trade union, employer, training provider and employees. A forty-five hour workplace literacy training initiative delivered to a group of eight employees was used as the vehicle for exploring perceptions and pedagogy.

3.2 Context

3.2.1 The Company

This research initially was intended to be situated within the private security industry in Ireland, because it experienced substantial changes since 2004 when the Private Security Services Act was introduced. Gaining access to the private security industry proved very problematic. It was therefore decided to focus on a different industry. Another sector that has been subjected to enormous change is the manufacturing sector.

Two factors that have had a significant impact on the manufacturing sector in Ireland are the increasing attractiveness of developing countries like China and India and of the accession states of the European Union (Forfás, 2004) for foreign investors. This is borne out by the findings of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs when commenting on trends in Ireland in 2006. They found that the manufacturing sector will continue to experience a decline in overall employment share with the rate turning negative in the future. The number of operatives employed declined by

nearly 40,000 between 2001 and 2006. According to the Group, the educational profile of operatives tends to be towards the lower end, with an average of 39% at lower secondary or less (Behan et. al., 2007). Research for the Group's publication, 'Towards Tomorrow's Skills', identified that one of the manufacturing areas with potential for growth is the area of medical devices (Heraty et al., 2007).

Buchanan et al. (1988) stress that,

> ... the contest between what is theoretically desirable and practically possible must be won by the practical (in Robson, 1993, p.296).

Critically reflecting on the manufacturing situation in Ireland, combined with previous experience of work in that sector, led the research-practitioner to consider this as an option rather than spending more time pursuing access to the security sector. It was especially felt that the sub-section of medical devices would be a relevant location for undertaking fieldwork. Access to this sector was therefore pursued and was granted.

The company that was accessed has a culture of innovation, research and striving for excellence thus they were open to discussions. They wanted to know what the benefits for themselves would be and how the outcomes would be measured. While the research had specific questions it intended to answer, it was at the same time emergent in design as it was a customised initiative being shaped by input from the relevant stakeholders as it proceeded. This ongoing consultative process with stakeholders presented the research-practitioner with a dilemma when dealing with the employer, because there was an element of what Robson calls "asking them to sign a 'blank cheque'" (1993, p.295) in that the initiative was emerging and the outcomes expected, but not ensured. The fact that the company and employees would have input in the design of the initiative satisfied the company's concerns.

The company employs approximately 950 people in their Irish sites. Many employees are with the company for many years and have shown great loyalty. Changes over the years have affected the company, especially its long serving employees. Changes correspond with the ones identified by the Expert Group of Future Skills Needs: increasing breadth of knowledge, increased share of knowledge work as opposed to

routine work, rising qualification and technical skill requirements, importance of continuing learning, significance of regulation, skills for dealing with others, deskilling leading to a need for upskilling, dependability (Heraty, et.al., 2007).

The company was willing to be identified for research purposes, but ethically this is not viable because of the importance of confidentiality for the participants and the assurance given to them that their identity will be guarded. Participants in most cases do not view themselves as in need of literacy support in the way that literacy is often perceived by the broader population. Rather, they have identified a need for upskilling and therefore chosen to participate in the training and research. Identification of the company will create the possibility of identification of the participants; therefore the research-practitioner is constrained in how much detail in relation to the research location is revealed.

Even though the company has a Human Resources department, a dedicated training officer role, and is very supportive of training, they are still exposed to the realities of the workplace. This was evident in that the date for training was delayed twice and paid release of participants (which initially was an option) did not materialise because of production pressures. They adapted shift schedules in order to facilitate participation in the training and a training room as well as refreshments were supplied.

3.2.2 Profile of participating employees

It is regarded as useful to present a profile of the participating employees in order to frame the research findings and to assist in understanding why a certain methodology was chosen. The research-practitioner realised that background information was required for determining a suitable training course and therefore conducted an entry interview with each participant. This interview started with a pen sketch during which each person was asked about themselves. The following table summarises this information:

Table 1: Profile of participating employees

Name	Age	Ed. Level	Reason for wanting to participate in the training
Speedy	40	Junior Cert	*Wants more skills, manage recent promotion*
Keano	58	Inter Cert	*Better myself* *Learn about computers*
George	57	Inter Cert	*Take an opportunity*
Han Solo	32	Leaving Cert	*To better myself*
Leon	31	~ Applied Leaving Cert	*To up my skills*
Maria	43	Leaving Cert	*I don't want to be worried when I write things down, like mixing up the numbers and spellings. I want to have the confidence ... more confidence about these things.*
Smiley	47	Leaving Cert	*Because of changes on the job*
Toby	45	Junior Cert	*Computers*

Nicknames were used.

3.3 Methodology

The conceptual framework that informed this research is viewing literacy as a social practice from a constructivist perspective as identified in the Literature Review. It was therefore important to identify a research methodology which would allow for exploring workplace literacy as a socially situated and constructed phenomenon.

3.3.1 Action research as chosen research strategy

The research explored social interaction within a particular context and is thus in the field of social research. Action Research was chosen as the most appropriate strategy for conducting the research required to answer the research question, because it is situated within the field of social research and lends itself well to small scale practical projects with active involvement of the research-practitioner and participants. It is often used in relation with organisational development and by professionals interested in improving practice (Denscombe, 2005). All of these are elements of the proposed research and therefore Action Research seemed the most appropriate strategy for this inquiry.

Within the field of social research it is important to try to fathom the depth of experience, type of interactions and changes that people encounter. Action Research

as a specific type of inquiry focuses on people and their discourse in a reflective manner (McNiff, 2008; Whitehead, 1989). This research strategy was chosen because it enables the research-practitioner to explore workplace literacy from various perspectives in a reflective manner in line with the chosen conceptual framework.

Denscombe (2005) identifies the four defining characteristics of Action Research as its focus on practical issues, its concern with changing matters, a cycle of analysis-implementation-evaluation and its actively participatory nature. These characteristics represent important aspects of the inquiry that the research-practitioner intended to conduct. Workplace literacy concerns itself with practical issues, how literacy is used at work, and has to contend with many stakeholders.

As mentioned in the Literature Review, the workplace in the 21st century is undergoing change in a profound way which requires educational practitioners to stay tuned in to these changes and consider how to support both employers and employees effectively. Consultation with the stakeholders in a participatory manner is therefore important for the research together with analysis, implementation and evaluation of good practice.

By choosing Action Research the research-practitioner wanted to explore, evaluate and participate in a changing situation with a view to bringing about a tested improvement option to the situation. The intention of using Action Research is to bring about improvement in practice, as Somekh identifies the purpose of Action Research to be:

> It directly addresses the knotty problem of the persistent failure of research in the social science to make a difference in terms of bringing about actual improvement in practice (Somekh: 1995, p.340).

3.3.2 Action Research and Literacy as Social Practice

The principles of Action Research resonate with many of the elements of the social practice theory of literacy as described in the Literature Review (2.1.2.3), especially identity, power and its focus on practice. It also relates to the world of work in a dual way: the work and practice of the research-practitioner as well as that of the employees participating in the research. Another similarity between the social practice model of literacy and Action Research is the emphasis on dialogue and reflection in both. According to McNiff (2002, p.10), "(action research) ... creates contexts for critical conversations in which all participants can learn as equals." Similarly, these communicative and reflective elements within literacy as social practice are also expressed by Hamilton (1999):

> A social practice approach to literacy argues for the importance of self-consciously researching local culture and perspectives on literacy and building this knowledge into learning programmes, using it as a basis for discussion and investigation of literacy issues with learners (p. 411).

These similarities highlight the suitability of Action Research to a project about workplace literacy that embraces the social practice model of literacy. Reason and Torbert (2001) builds on this when they suggest that "the very purpose of knowledge is effective action in the world" and that inquiry is not primarily about "contributing to the field of knowledge", but rather contributing to the "flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the ecosystems of which they are part" (Reason and Torbert, 2001, p.5 & 6).

This perception links well with the social practice model of literacy as well as with the "ecological systems" of Bronfenbenner which recognise that people exist in relationships in a social network. The participatory paradigm required for accessing the information that will inform this inquiry is highlighted by Denscombe (2005). He identifies democratic processes, dialogue, communities and stakeholders as central to Action Research. In this regard, 'action' becomes 'interaction' as it is socially situated. Research 'on' people therefore is not really possible, because of this relational connection. This suggests that in social research, a participatory approach requires

research 'with' people in order to make sense of the personal and interpersonal networks in which we interact (ibid. p.7).

As a consequence, data is not "collected", but rather "generated" as part of an interactive process of engagement with people in their various social settings. According to Brannick and Coghlan,

> ... every action, even the very intention and presence of research is an intervention and has political implications across the system. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to speak of data generation than data collection (in Harte, 2008, p.42).

3.3.3 Action Research, collaboration and stakeholders

This research project employed a collaborative approach and thus relies strongly on interaction between the various stakeholders involved. Action research is thus an appropriate methodology, because it allows for dialogue and identifies democratic processes as important. Stakeholders usually do not have equality of power in a workplace situation; this presents a challenge in terms of pursuing democratic processes. It will benefit the research to take note of the possible political undercurrents and to make them explicit as far as possible.

The main stakeholders involved in a workplace literacy initiative usually are: government, union, employer, training provider and employee. Sometimes one stakeholder can represent more than one role, e.g. the employer can also be the funder. As explored in section three of the Literature Review, these different stakeholders have different motivations for participation in a workplace literacy initiative. These motivations are not always easily compatible.

Guidelines published by the National Adult Literacy Agency (2002) recommended that all stakeholders meet regularly to discuss the best way of implementing a workplace literacy initiative. Some of the early projects used this approach, but in later Irish workplace literacy projects, e.g. Return to Learning, SMART and Skills for Work, one person usually acted as go-between for logistics and negotiations. (In the Return to Learning it is the Partnership Facilitator, in the SMART project it was the project co-ordinator and in Skills for Work it is the regional coordinator.). The research-practitioner realised that regular meetings with all stakeholders present will be time

consuming, difficult to arrange and potentially volatile because of the differing motivations and perceptions. She looked at the established Irish models where a negotiator acts as mediator between the stakeholders. The mediator tries to negotiate a deal which satisfies as many of each stakeholder's requirements as possible through consultation. This approach was employed in this inquiry as it had the potential for people to voice their requirements and expectations freely and in confidence. A meeting situation with others present that could be perceived as potential threats is likely to be seen as intimidating by the less powerful stakeholders, e.g. the employees. The establishment of a relationship of trust and collaboration relied heavily on the communication skills of the mediator (the research-practitioner acted as mediator in this project) and the willingness of stakeholders to participate. This proved very difficult in the security industry, but happened more readily in the chosen manufacturing setting.

3.3.4 Cyclical nature of Action Research

Action Research was first formally recognised in the publication of a paper by Lewin in 1946. Lewin identified a cyclical process in this type of research consisting of four stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. This cycle forms the core of how action research is conducted. This basic cycle has been adapted into a spiral, since this more accurately reflects the likelihood that the research-practitioner would be in a different position when the cycle has been completed than when it was started (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). This perspective is echoed by Zuber-Skerrit who perceives the spiralling format as "indicating a continuous improvement of practice and an extension of personal and professional knowledge" (1995, p.13).

The following graphic representation of the action research spiral reflects this:

Graph 1: Action Research Spiral [on-line]

Using the action research spiral as framework for the research enabled the research-practitioner to stay true to the constructivist perspective of literacy acquisition, as identified in the Literature Review, in which knowledge is built on and supported by prior learning. It furthermore provided a structure for engaging in focussed and reflective dialogue with those involved in the research process.

3.3.5 Scope of Action Research

Marshal and Reason (in Reason and Torbert, 2001, p.11) suggested that good research should incorporate "me, us and them". They argued that this perspective is required for transformational social research that recognises the complexity of human relationships. This first, second and third person perspective was built on by Torbert in the Action Research context in the late nineties.

First person research refers to the I (research-practitioner) who needs to be aware of his/her own subjectivity and that all 'knowing' is from a perspective influenced by the person's life-experience. This awareness and position should be made clear in the research-practitioner's self-reflection and in interaction with others who cooperate in the research as well as in the framing of the research (ibid., 2001). This research report will show the systematic process employed and reflected upon in order to reach an improved understanding of the self in relation to practice (McNiff, 2002). This will be done through a weekly written reflection logging regular self-reflection on practice and perceptions. It will be triangulated and documented, during classroom reflection time by participant views on the research-practitioner's "me" perspective. A Validation Group of peer-practitioners also assisted the research-practitioner to be alert to suspected blind spots. This will be further discussed in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 5).

In addition, this inquiry involves workplace stakeholders as well as an academic institution. It is therefore broader than only the research-practitioner and employs cooperative inquiry with the stakeholders and academic institution. Involving other people in the research potentially enriches the inquiry and introduces "second-person" research. The insights and experiences of other people inform the decision-

making processes, the design and management of the research as well as the conclusions elicited from the research. This element of the research was achieved through interviews and focus groups with the employees, HR Manager, Production Team Leaders (PTL's), as well as regular reflective space being created during the training sessions.

A meeting with an Academic Expert Group in Waterford Institute of Technology further aided in this process. Data generated in this manner aims to make explicit the tacit perceptions that the stakeholders have and this will be explored in the Findings and Discussion chapter. It is hoped that a clearer understanding of how the "us" thinks about workplace literacy will challenge perceptions, lead to change, improve practice and eventually be of benefit to the stakeholders comprising the "us".

 The various local stakeholders in this inquiry form part of bigger organisations, both nationally and internationally. Exploring problems, perceptions and practice at local level in first and second person research therefore is situated in a broader context. Insights and changes in perception and practice at local level may thus influence a wider audience who were not directly involved in the inquiry, but might experience the ripple effect of its outcomes or be in a position to implement some of the findings of the research. Other companies, academic practitioners and policy makers also would potentially benefit from findings of the research. Trying to capture this broader applicability is referred to as third-person research. Insights discerned from third-person research may not be immediately apparent, but an alertness by the research-practitioner for data that indicates that a wider audience is taking notice of what is happening in a small scale research project needs to be documented as it has the potential to enrich the research, create a forum for dissemination and act as a motivator for persistence in quality (ibid.).

3.3.6 Action Research and knowledge

As mentioned earlier, Action Research is not primarily about the creation of knowledge. It is about improving practice through a methodical approach and then to disseminate the knowledge gained in these interactions to fellow-practitioners. A

greater understanding of the interactions and networks in which these interactions take place becomes a way of knowing and of honing that knowing. Reason (in a paper delivered at a workshop in Dhaka, 2004) alerts practitioners to the many ways of knowing and refers specifically to the four ways identified by Heron in 1996. Reason quotes from an earlier publication by him and Bradbury and argues that these "ways of knowing":

> …assert the importance of sensitivity and attunement in the moment of relationship, and of knowing not just as an academic pursuit but also as the everyday practices of acting in relationship and creating meaning in our lives. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.9)

Heron distinguishes between four ways of knowing that in his perspective interact and help a person to make sense of the world.

Table 2: Ways of Knowing

Way of knowing	Explanation
Experiential Knowing	through direct encounter and aided by empathy and resonance
Presentational Knowing	expressing through forms of imagery the understanding gained through experiential knowing
Propositional Knowing	through ideas and theories expressed in abstract terms
Practical Knowing	knowing how to do something, how to apply the knowing in a practical way through a skill or a competence

Practical Knowing is proposed as the culmination of the other three as it is informed by them and leads towards improved quality and excellence in practice as a result (Reason and Torbert, 2001).

Reason argues that

> Knowing will be more valid—richer, deeper, more true to life and more useful—if these four ways of knowing are congruent with each other: if our knowing is grounded in our experience, expressed through our stories and images, understood through theories which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives (Reason, 2001, p.9).

The practical knowing relies heavily on experiential knowing, presentational knowing and propositional knowing.

This epistemological basis for Action Research is echoed by McNiff in her suggestion that Action Research has at its core a concern with a challenging issue and possible

solutions to address it effectively. It then envisages the best solution, tries it out, evaluates it and subsequently adapts practice informed by the evaluation (McNiff, 2000, p.7). This is not a once off process, but rather a cyclical one where information gathered and reflection inform the continuation of the process and the practice.

The research-practitioner is aware that practice in this case does not only refer to what happens in the classroom, it also refers to the whole process from initial contact with the workplace, all the negotiations with all relevant stakeholders, the training phase and the final evaluation stage. As such the whole process becomes an ongoing collaborative action, evaluation and reflection spiral trying to understand how different elements influence each other and how this influence can be optimised for the benefit of all. The research is designed in such a manner that it tries to capture the various ways of "knowing" through dialogue, reflection and finding ways to represent this creatively, by linking it to theory and potentially extending the theory. Employing an action research spiral and an emergent research design allow for capturing "new knowing", exploring its relevance and potentially extending it in a new research spiral.

3.3.7 Advantages and Disadvantages of Action Research

When reflecting about the most appropriate methodology to employ for the proposed research, the benefits of Action Research identified by Denscombe (2005) seemed to fit best with the intended project. These advantages relate to the fact that it engages with practical issues in a positive manner exploring improvement options. It also has benefits for the practitioner in that it assists in professional self-development and has the potential to create a greater appreciation for practitioner knowledge. Furthermore, it encourages democratic relationships of equality through dialogue, reflection and agreed action which is pivotal for the collaborative social practice theoretical perspective adopted by this research.

Disadvantages associated with Action Research refer to its small-scale and localised nature which, to a certain extent, limits the ability to make generalisations on foot of the findings. The localised and personal nature of the research constrains what is

acceptable and ethical within the context as well (ibid.). Even though there are benefits to be gained from the direct involvement of the research-practitioner in the practice, it also is impossible for the research-practitioner to be without agenda or bias. These disadvantages also seemed relevant to the proposed research and alerted the research-practitioner to the importance of transparency about underlying prejudices and to build triangulation into the research by exploring as many points of view on the same issue as possible.

3.4 Research Design and Data Gathering

Using an action research paradigm that implements an action research spiral, would seem to preclude a rigid predetermined research design. An "emergent research design" (Denscombe, 2005, p. 234) is more likely to give the research-practitioner scope to explore and incorporate new insights during the research process. As Maykut and Morehouse point out, this is about "discovery" not "proof" and often important leads are identified during data collection and in the early stage of data analysis. These indicators should be followed up by asking new questions, observing new incidents or reading documents previously regarded as irrelevant (1994, p.44). Elliot refers to the "theory of the situation" where theory is allowed to emerge in the action situation to help in shaping the continuation of the spiral and eventually the findings (2003, p.26). By allowing this developmental process, the various stakeholders got the opportunity to gain a more personal and holistic understanding of change and the changing situation through their involvement in the action and reflection (ibid.).

Various methods were employed from the outset to allow for this. Information gathered during recruitment informed the questions asked during interviews. Data and insights gained during interviews clarified the role of observation within the research design as well as shaped the curriculum used during the fieldwork. It was decided not to use a prescriptive 'off the shelf' curriculum, but rather to allow the curriculum be emergent to ensure that it was contextualised and collaboratively designed through consultation. The curriculum itself therefore was in a continuous

process of revision and was emerging up to approximately two weeks before the training ended.

3.4.1 Research Action Plan and Data Gathering Tools

Activity during this research seems to have gone through 5 stages, with these stages representing an action research spiral of planning, action, observation and reflection (see Table 3 overleaf). The third stage consisted of 15 training session with reflection built into each session. This phase acted as fifteen mini-spirals, because action during each session was observed and reflected upon by the tutor and the participants. The reflection then informed the planning for and subsequent action during the next session. The table below outlines the five stages and highlights that it took nearly a year to gain access to a suitable research site - this only happened after the decision was made to move from the security sector to manufacturing. The activities identified further highlight the implementation of the action research spirals in the inquiry.

Table 3: Research Action Plan

Stages	Timeframe	Activity	Outcome
1. Desk research & Access	May '07 – May '08	Desk research and contacting employers to access a suitable research site for fieldwork	Literature Review and access to fieldwork site
2. Recruitment, Consultation & Curriculum design	May '08 – Oct. '08	Recruitment of training participants, Consultation with all stakeholders, Designing a Draft Curriculum	Training needs identification, Perspective formulation by participants, Collaboratively designed contextualised draft curriculum
3. Reflective Training sessions	Oct. '08 – Feb. '09	Fifteen reflective training sessions	A tested curriculum that implemented action research spirals
4. Consultative appraisal of initiative	Feb. '09 – April '09	Consultation with stakeholders about how they experienced the training initiative	Research data for analysis
5. Desk research and analysis of findings	March '09 – June '09	Analysis of findings and comparing this with existing body of academic knowledge	Insights gained from research

These stages were implemented to explore whether participation in a workplace literacy initiative would act as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing workplace literacy practices. Different tools were used to generate the data that would assist the research-practitioner in this quest. These were:

Table 4: Data gathering Tools

Stage	Stakeholder	Tool	Outcome
1 – Desk research (Planning)	I	Overview of Academic literature	Literature Review
2 - Consultation (Planning)	Employer	Entry interview Site visit & Observation	Training needs identification, Perspective formulation by participants, Collaboratively designed contextualised draft curriculum
	Employees	Individual entry interviews	
	State (FÁS)	Interview	
	Training Provider	Learning Journal	
	PTL's	Focus group discussion	
3 – Training (Action & Observation)	Employees	Collaborative reflections; Learning logs	A tested curriculum that implemented action research spirals
	Trainer	Collaborative reflections; Learning log	
	Validation Group	Focus Group discussion	
4 - Consultative appraisal (Reflection)	Employees	Questionnaire; Focus group; Exit interview after 2 months	Research data for analysis
	Training provider	Learning Journal	
	Employer	Exit interview after 2 months	
	PTL's	Focus group after 2 months	
	Academic Review Group	Presentation and analytic discussion	
5 – Analysis of Findings (Reflection)	I	Analysing and comparing data with existing body of knowledge	Reflective summary of insights gained

* Production Team Leader (PTL)

The research encompassed a number of stakeholders, different stages of inquiry and an in-depth study of a specific workplace literacy initiative with the aim of exploring answers to the research question. The need for rich data, triangulation, validity and reliability of data influenced the research-practitioner's selection and variety of tools at each stage.

3.4.2 Research Methods used

A multi-method approach was used in the research to strengthen its validity (see sub-section 3.5 of Methodology). These methods included interviews, observation, focus groups, a questionnaire, weekly reflections, a learning journal, learning logs and two kinds of peer review.

3.4.2.1 Interviews

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews form part of both the formative and summative evaluation of the research. It is used to identify needs and thus in gathering information to inform the curriculum, as well as acting as benchmarks before and after the training, to measure outcomes.

Interview questions for the initial interviews were designed to deduct information for determining literacy practices at home and at work, perceptions and management of change as well as determining how participants regard their own skills and confidence. They were also asked why they were interested in training.

Even though the interviews followed the same pattern (See Appendix), they were not structured in a formal manner, but left scope for probing further when an interesting observation was made by the respondent.

Previous experience by the research-practitioner of interviewing literacy students both in community and workplace settings was of great benefit in putting both interviewer and respondent at ease, even though the interviews were recorded. Permission was asked prior to the recording of interviews on the dictaphone for transcription. The semi-structured option was chosen, because the research-practitioner sought to establish a balance of control with the respondent, setting the tone for the training and allowing the interviewees to feel free to take control. Even though interviewees did not take control of the initial interviews, they gave more elaborate responses as the interviews progressed. This is evident in both the employee and employer interviews and demonstrated in the transcripts of the interviews.

Kane & O'Reilly-de Bruin's suggestions were used when structuring the interviews. This meant asking "for neutral facts first, eventually moving on to the interviewee's opinions and to any sensitive issues" (2001, p.206). The interviews were started by a 'cloze' pen sketch of each participant, which asked for single answers which were non-intrusive and general. This then moved toward more exploratory questions with the intention to explore the "full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent" (Denscombe, 2005, p.156).

The same approach was followed at the summative stage. During the exit interviews the employees seemed more relaxed, more than likely because they were more familiar with the research-practitioner, with the reflection process and with the use of the dictaphone. They were more forthcoming with information and did take control from time to time.

Authorisation for the interviews were requested and granted by the respective organisations, managements and participants. The fact that the research-practitioner was with a recognised academic institution and was known to both the company and the funding body assisted in permission being granted. These factors helped to persuade relevant decision makers that "the research-practitioner was both trustworthy and capable" (Denscombe, 2005, p.173).

The training provider and the research-practitioner is the same person. A learning journal documented this perspective.

Potential problems with interviews were eliminated as far as possible through using an appropriate dress-code and a familiar, yet sufficiently confidential setting, to ensure that the benefits were optimised. A depth of information was revealed and this was possible through the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews that allows for silences and for probing as required. It also made it possible for the research-practitioner to check for accuracy of understanding and perception during the interviews.

Data generated during the initial interviews proved valuable for designing the curriculum and it gave a rounded perspective about expectations as it involved the stakeholders. The interviews assisted in what Jurmo termed as the "collaborative approach" to workplace literacy (2004, p.25) in that it created an opportunity for the research-practitioner to establish the perceptions of the different stakeholders and allowed them to voice their positions. The research-practitioner was thus in a position to establish common ground for negotiating a win-win deal s far as possible for all involved. This was important for the research-practitioner in her role as mediator and also assisted in data generation for the research. The final interviews played a role in strengthening relationships and in debriefing people in relation to their involvement.

3.4.2.2 Observation

Initially the research-practitioner considered observation as a substantial part of the research. The intention was to observe first hand the type of literacy tasks and practices that employees use in their working life and how they cope with these. In discussion with employers, it soon became evident that observation poses difficulties for them on particularly two fronts: staff might feel that they are spied on, and the presence of the research-practitioner is likely to hamper productivity.

The research-practitioner subsequently reviewed the gains of observation against its disadvantages. Observer objectivity as well as the effect that an observer will have on the naturalness of situations concerned the research-practitioner.

In a manufacturing context the presence of the observer is likely to have an impact on productivity. To implement observation as a method effectively across the various areas of manufacturing in the plant would also have been very time consuming. The research-practitioner considered not doing the observation element, but was faced with a dilemma: knowledge of operations was only deduced from interviews and to design an effective curriculum she would need more understanding of the operations and practices that employees participate in as part of their jobs.

This concern was voiced in discussion with the HR Manager and the request for a guided tour of the facility was granted. The site tour included all the processes that the company employs from design through to packaging and dispatch. The tour was conducted by the HR Manager and the research-practitioner was allowed to record it digitally. This exposure to the running of the facility and the environment in which staff work as well as some of the literacy practices in which they participate was very useful in giving the research-practitioner an understanding of the mentioned and potential needs. It also provided a framework for ways to link the training with the real working life of the participants.

Observation in this instance was used as Robson states:

> ... as a supportive or supplementary technique to collect data that may complement or set in perspective data obtained by other means (1993, p.192).

3.4.2.3 Focus groups

A focus group discussion was used with three groups of respondents during this research. This method is generally used to "explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic" (Denscombe, 2005, p.169) and was used for this purpose in each of its applications in this research too. One instance was with the participants at the end of the training to determine their perceptions and feelings about the training; the other with Production Team Leaders (PTL's) early on in the training to determine expectations and two months after the training to determine if they perceived outcomes of the training and how it affected the workplace; the third was with the Validation Group in establishing and evaluating best practice. A focus group discussion was not used at the beginning of the training with the employees, because the group dynamics had not been established yet and it was felt that individual interviews would be more appropriate for establishing rapport with the research-practitioner and would be less intimidating and more confidential. The PTL's had a briefing session as first point of contact, but because they knew each other quite well and were willing to interact with the research-practitioner, it did become a consultative discussion similar to a focus group. The purpose of the focus

group interviews was to validate data collected in other ways and to build triangulation into the research.

How focus groups are facilitated plays an important role in how effective they are and how practical data gathered in this manner would be. It is important that the interviewer asks questions in an appropriate manner. Not too many questions; open-ended and gently probing questions that range from the general to the specific and ending with general questions are regarded as good practice (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Scott states that the interviewer has the difficult task of:

> ... dealing with dynamics that constantly evolve...must handle the problems by constantly checking behaviour against attitudes, challenging and drawing out respondents with opposite views and looking for the emotional component of the responses (1987, in Stewart and Shamdasani 1990, p.70).

Research-practitioner awareness of the complexity and of best practice informed the facilitation of the focus group discussions. They were recorded and transcribed, thus enabling the research-practitioner to analyse the raw data more easily.

3.4.2.4 Questionnaires

The use of questionnaires within the research is limited to the summative evaluation stage. The purpose is to get quantifiable data at the end of the training and to allow for another data collection method to validate (or not?!) data gathered through other methods. This is to strengthen the rigour of the research, by correlating what was discovered through other methods.

The questionnaires formed part of the final on-site evaluation process, therefore it will not have the usual constraints of posting, non-responses and large numbers having to be surveyed. The only people receiving the questionnaires were the training participants.

The questionnaire design and completion needed careful planning. Pitfalls to prevent were 'happy bunny syndrome' at the end of the training as well as the potential barrier and difficulty that some participants may experience with the written word

and forms. This was done by asking the participants to tick boxes or give only short answers and also by creating other avenues to add to and to balance the findings of the questionnaire, e.g. a focus group discussion and individual interviews with the participants two months after completion of the training.

The questionnaire was mainly looking for qualitative judgements from the participants in relation to the training, but also provided an opportunity for participants to rate their own levels of confidence in relation to reading, writing and speaking on a ten point Likert scale. The even number of ten was chosen to allow for a relatively wide range and to prevent choosing a convenient mid-point. Data generated in this way could then be compared with the application of the same scale at the beginning of the training to see if a change occurred during the 4 month period of the training. This added a quantitative element to the questionnaires. (See Appendix 6 for Questionnaire)

3.4.2.5 Peer Review

Two peer review opportunities were built into the research design to ensure that the role of the research-practitioner was monitored and reflected upon in relation to the research situation. Two different groups were established to look out for validity from two different angles. These were a Validation Group, made up of workplace literacy practitioners (e.g. Adult Literacy Organiser, VEC Workplace Coordinator, Workplace Tutor, etc.) as well as an Academic Expert Group (consisting of academic and research staff from Waterford Institute of Technology). The roles of these two groups were in identifying good and/or bad practice, to identify opportunities for enhancing the research, to look out for weaknesses in the methodology of the research and for assisting with analysing the findings.

The research-practitioner met with the validation group during the training in order for them to assist with formative evaluation and to feed into the action research spiral. Their practitioner expertise also was required to validate the process and alert the research-practitioner to potential assumptions and oversights in her approach and reflections.

The academic expert group met with the research-practitioner at the end of the data generation phase to discuss data and suggest recurring trends that needed to be followed up, as well as to give advice on further reading to improve the framing of the findings.

The purpose of employing this method was to have outside perspective from within the education field on the research and practice of the research-practitioner.

Together with the other methods used, peer review served the purpose of triangulation and strengthening the rigour of the research.

3.4.3 Design of the Workplace Literacy Initiative

The design of the training initiative was shaped by the consultation with stakeholders. Action research suited this process well as it formed part of the planning stage for the training.   The main characteristics that will be discussed here are the presence of evaluation throughout the recruitment process, the emerging curriculum design, the training phase and the final reflective process.

3.4.3.1 Evaluation

Reflection forms an integral part of the study at both macro and micro level. On the macro level, the whole study is an action-reflection spiral relying on consultation and exploration with the various stakeholders throughout. On the micro level, each training session includes a reflection of the previous week's action and is thus a mini-appraisal creating an opportunity for improvement.

Evaluation is important, because the stakeholders need to determine whether outcomes are worth the investment of resources and time. Measuring the outcomes is a challenge though, because many of the outcomes are in terms of personal growth and capacity and therefore hard to measure in quantitative terms. The rigour of

qualitative data collection and analysis is harder to establish, because it tends to be subjectively influenced. This research attempts to get as close to a 360° view of the

data as possible in order to verify findings and will use both quantitative (e.g. Likert scale) and qualitative (e.g. interviews) methods.

Mikulecky and Lloyd (1995) found that very few workplace literacy programmes have strong evaluation methods built into them to measure effectiveness and success. For a 1991 review of workplace literacy programmes in America, the criteria for success was attendance.

The three main workplace literacy initiatives that were run in Ireland were evaluated and two of these evaluation reports were published. Methods used for evaluation included interviews with stakeholders, focus groups with participant employees and questionnaires (See 2.3.5).

It was felt that action research as a social research methodology is suited to attempt to gauge increases in qualitative areas like self-confidence. The embedded presence of reflection and appraisal in action research lends it well to on-going evaluation in the process.

Mikulecky and Lloyd identified two stages of evaluation of workplace programmes: formative and summative. Formative evaluation takes place at the initial and middle stages of a program when initial information gathering happens and when the opportunity for correcting what does not work still exists. Summative evaluation takes place at the end of the program and its purpose is to see how successful the program was (1995).

Both formative and summative evaluation took place during this research and the data collection and inquiry process involved the relevant stakeholders at both stages.

3.4.3.1.1 Formative Evaluation

The formative evaluation stage included a needs analysis that involved the employer and the employee-participants. The needs analysis started at the recruitment stage when the research-practitioner informally enquired about possible supports that might be required. Information gathered during these conversations, with both prospective employee participants and the employer, partly informed questions included in the initial interviews (see Appendix 1). It was anticipated that participants might find it difficult to formulate their needs at the initial interview stage and explained to them that they would get more opportunities during the reflection time in the training to voice their needs and identify possible topics for inclusion in the training.

The needs analysis therefore continued, albeit on a smaller scale, throughout the training phase with participants being consulted about course content and teaching methods, in this way giving them the opportunity to enhance the training according to their needs.

This approach was also followed with the employer. The HR Manager acted as main point of contact as well as the decision maker on behalf of the company. Initial meetings with the HR Manager highlighted areas that the employer deemed necessary to be included in the training. A formal initial interview further informed the design and highlighted expectations of the employer. No clear outcomes were identified by the company, except for a general expectation that the needs of staff would be met and that they would feel more confident in their skills. Nevertheless, the HR Manager on two occasions stressed the importance that there should be measurable outcomes for the company. Despite being a bit daunted by this expectation, the research-practitioner shared this anticipation and felt reasonably confident that it was achievable, especially as 'the company' comprises of people and was not only a mechanistic environment. In fact, the expressed expectation acted as a motivator to ensure optimum good practice.

The research-practitioner drafted an initial curriculum informed by the information gathered from the employees and employer. This was submitted to the HR Manager for overview and suggestions (see Appendix 2). It was also made clear at this point that it is a draft; flexible to include information identified in the ongoing consultation process. The HR Manager was pleased with both the approach and the opportunity this gave her of getting an idea of training content. The services and opportunities offered for participation and the likely outcomes became clearer to her. At this stage she requested that PTL's of the participants be invited to be briefed about the training. The research-practitioner welcomed this suggestion as it created an opportunity for further consultation and also prospective triangulatory feedback. A meeting with the PTL's in the format of a focus group took place three weeks into the training and again at the end of the training.

The initial and ongoing needs analysis enhanced the formative evaluation process. It also fits well with the Action Research spiral as it incorporates action, reflection and evaluation.

Each training session started with a reflection on and evaluation of the previous session. Information generated during these discussions continued the action research spiral in the planning and action that followed it for the next session. During the training, two evaluation visits also took place with stakeholders not directly involved in the classroom situations: the FÁS monitor and the HR manager. These visits were informal discussions with the participants as to how they find the training and possible changes or improvements that they would like to build into it (see Appendix 4).

The meeting with the Validation Group (consisting mainly of practitioners) also assisted with formative evaluation of the project and best practice in the training. The draft curriculum and typed reflections up to week 10 (out of 15 training weeks) were circulated to the group beforehand and a short overview of the research progression was given to the group at the meeting. This informed them sufficiently

to appraise the practice, ask assessing questions, offer guidance and suggestions for improvement and thus provide formative evaluation.

3.4.3.1.2 Summative Evaluation

Towards the end of the project, summative evaluation became an important element of the inquiry as it tried to identify outcomes and determine the success of the training. In order to get as rounded a perspective as possible, perceptions of all the stakeholders at this stage were sought. This was done through a questionnaire, a focus group discussion during the final session as well as an exit interview with each of the participants two months after completion of the training. The perspective of the HR Manager was explored through an exit interview and that of the PTL's through a focus group after completion of the training.

Three FETAC modules were identified as certification options and elements were built into the curriculum to create opportunities for evidence generation to satisfy the FETAC modules. Certification provided a quality assured summative evaluation option.

Outcomes of the evaluation process were mostly qualitative, but included two pieces of quantitative data. Participants were asked to rate their confidence and skills on a Likert scale during the initial interview and again at the end of the training initiative. These scores provide quantitative data to form a comparison. Successful completion of certification and achievement of accreditation through a quality assured provider and accredited by a national statutory awards council further provides a quantitative outcome.

Evaluation, as an ongoing process throughout the research, was used as a tool in attempting to answer the research sub-questions and the overall research question in line with the protocols of Action Research.

3.4.3.2 Recruitment

Once a year the company invites organisations of potential benefit to their
employees, e.g. pension schemes, health care insurance providers, training
organisations, etc. to a Staff Benefit Day where employees then get the opportunity
to explore options for themselves. The research-practitioner was allowed to attend
such an event for promotion of and to determine interest in a workplace literacy
initiative.

It was decided not to use the word 'literacy' during recruitment, because of the
stigma that still pervades the use of the word. The word literacy still carries
overtones of the association with 'illiteracy' and with a narrow concept of literacy as
an autonomous skill which can be acquired to make people 'better' (Street, 1995).
This perception is not helpful and the research-practitioner sought to prevent this
from being perpetuated and attached to the training.

Exploring the types of activities and paperwork which employees engage in showed
that topics like Quality Assurance, Problem solving, Teamwork, Communications are
more acceptable and more readily understood as relevant to the workplace.

A poster with these topics was designed and used on the Staff Benefit Day as a latch
for discussion (See appendix 3). Another helpful element was that this course was
promoted as part of a menu of courses available through the national training
organisation, FÁS. This meant that employees were less suspicious about it, as they
know FÁS and some in the organisation had been involved with FÁS training in the
past. It also allowed this training to be viewed as part of a broad list of opportunities
and not necessarily at a basic level. It was decided to do it this way to protect
potential participants from being stigmatised as well as to attract staff that might
have latent literacy difficulties, but do not view themselves as people with a literacy
need.

The Staff Benefit Day created the opportunity for the research-practitioner to have
direct contact and personal conversations with staff members and to explain the

proposed training as well as gently enquire about their capacity for dealing with the changes and associated need for different modes of communication.

Sixteen employees were interested in doing this kind of training. It was made clear to them that this provides a flexible training option in which input about their own requirements will be sought and incorporated as far as possible. The company subsequently arranged half an hour slots for the sixteen people to meet individually with the research-practitioner for gaining permission for the research, registering for the training and for an interview about the supports they would like. Nine of the sixteen came to these individual meetings and all of them were keen to do the training and were willing to participate in the research. One of these nine had holiday commitments during the training and decided not to participate.

During the meetings, the social practice perspective of literacy as well as the understanding that we are ever "becoming" (Castleton, 2002b) literate was explained to the participants. It was made clear that the course is about assisting participants with changes in the workplace and this process of "becoming" and adapting to new literacy practices. Data generated during these interviews will be presented and discussed in the Research Findings and Discussion of Data chapters of the research.

3.4.3.3 Curriculum design

In order to explore how a training course looks like that would meet requirements of the various stakeholders, the research-practitioner positioned herself as a training provider within the current Irish context of Workplace Literacy provision. This was also done because the company was only willing to pursue the training, given that it would be externally funded. This meant that the research-practitioner had to be on the National Register of Trainers (NRT) and also quality assured by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). This helped to ensure quality assurance and educational credibility of the training provider when interacting with the other stakeholders.

The HR Manager, research-practitioner and potential participants agreed that the training should be customised to meet identified needs of the company and its employees. Information for designing the course was gathered from the very first contact with the company and built upon until the research-practitioner felt prepared to design a draft curriculum. The HR Manager and the participants were consulted about the draft and it was explained that it was a working document open to change as the training progressed. This is in line with good practice in action research (Denscombe, 2005) and implementation of the action research spiral.

The HR Manager suggested that the workplace documentation to be used during the training should be identified by the participants and she gave permission for them to bring copies to class for analysis and use as required. This demonstrated that the company also recognised the participatory nature of the training.

All participants were eager to get certification for participation in the training. This created both a dilemma and an opportunity. A dilemma, because the danger existed that the training would focus less on their needs and more on the curriculum pursued; an opportunity, because the outcomes of a set quality assured programme provide measurable outcomes and a feel-good factor when achieved. This predicament was addressed by first determining the needs through consultation and then examining certification options. Modules were chosen to support the needs identified and the social practice approach.

Two safeguards were built into the training to ensure that the action research spiral was implemented and that the training stayed a truly consultative process with the participants. The first one relates to a weekly written reflection by the trainer and the second relates to this reflection then being extended and used with participants for consultation, evaluation and possible amendment during the subsequent session.

As part of the FETAC Personal and Interpersonal Skills modules, participants were required to keep a learning log. This, together with the research-practitioner's own learning journal and self-reflection, further informed the curriculum to ensure that it

met the needs of the participants as far as possible. It also acted as another reflective angle to assist in as rounded a perspective on the learning journey as practically achievable and to strengthen the action-research spiral. Two points of caution had to be kept in mind in relation to the logs. These were that not all participants might be comfortable or capable of keeping a learning log, even though expression rather than spelling and grammar was the focus and their learning log was for accreditation purposes so could therefore be biased towards achieving that goal rather than an honest account of their experience.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

It is important that the data collected is reliable; this means that data generated would be consistent if the same methods of measurement were used across similar situations as the one used for the research. Research data furthermore needs to be valid. Validity refers to the suitability of the method of data generation and analysis to the concept that is being explored in order to give a true reflection of the phenomenon. This means that the methods need to be accurate, honest and appropriate in order to elicit the same data each time it is used in the manner described (Denscombe, 2005, p.300 - 301) in order to be regarded both reliable and valid.

3.5.1 Validity

Despite the narrow focus on a localised situation, Action Research has the advantage of reflecting on the richness of the interactions and experiences within the situation. This research strategy fits well with exploring workplace literacy from a social practice stance, as it allows for exploring, reflecting on and evaluating the way in which people gain new skills, perception and personal competences within a changing social setting; in this case, the workplace. This is the reason why Action Research was regarded as most appropriate for exploring the research question.

Action research into a topic such as workplace literacy, poses potential difficulties for the research-practitioner in ensuring the validity of findings though. These difficulties refer especially to the multiple stakeholders involved, the small number of

participants engaged in the research, the sensitivity of the topic and the direct involvement (and potential subjectivity) of the research-practitioner.

The research-practitioner attempted to counter the potential dangers in a number of ways. These relate particularly to building triangulation into the research design and using a multi-method approach. Using multi-methods demands more from the research-practitioner as it requires the ability to implement the methods effectively and it also requires a high time commitment. Its benefits in a social research project which uses action research as methodology is invaluable though, as it produces different kinds of data on the same topic. This does not only mean more data, but also allows the research-practitioner to look at the same situation from different perspectives. It furthermore allows for findings from one method to be compared with findings from the use of another method. This in turn enhances the validity of the findings by ensuring that the possible bias of one perspective is identified or balanced through other perspectives.

Stakeholders within the workplace literacy context were involved in the research and were interviewed during the research to ensure an inclusive approach. This was to determine their perspectives in general as well as on the specific situation. Part of the research was to determine how best to allow for cooperation between stakeholders and therefore their perspectives were valuable. Involving the stakeholders also created the opportunity for gaining a rounded perspective on the situation and its benefits, particularly in relation to the effectiveness of the training. As the methods employed demonstrate, interviews were held before and after the training with the employer, participants and PTL's and questions were framed to determine the effectiveness of the training from a variety of view points. Information captured during interviews was augmented by written reflections, questionnaires, focus groups, peer review, consultations, a site visit and learning logs.

The research-practitioner was aware of the subjective nature of social research and the need for reflexivity to be built into the research. She had to be aware of her own culturally shaped perceptions and influences in order to be as objective as possible

during interviews and training. The research-practitioner kept a learning journal in order to reflect on her personal learning and what had shaped her perspectives. This included not only thinking about practice, but also thinking about thinking, as McNiff (2006, p.2) puts it:

> ... moving beyond the form of thinking to question the form of thinking, involving a kind of mental acrobatics of distancing yourself from yourself, adopting a meta-meta-cognitive position of standing outside yourself in order to reflect critically on the self that is observed.

Interviewing the various stakeholders and including their reflection about practitioner effectiveness as well as the establishment of the Validation and Academic Expert Review Group further strengthened the rigour of the research in this regard. Data collected and analysed should not only be valid, but also impartial. As mentioned, safeguards, e.g. triangulation, were put in place to prevent subjectivity of the research-practitioner as far as possible. Where this was not possible because of the nature of the research, it is mentioned and explained in the dissertation.

Anderson and Herr (in Harte, 2008, p.34-35) reasons that the same validity criteria used for traditional research methodologies are not necessarily the ones that should be used for Action Research. They agree that there will be some overlap, but propose the following validity criteria as more appropriate for Action Research:

Table 5: Validity Criteria for Action Research

Goals of Action Research	Quality / Validity Criteria
1. Generation of new knowledge	Dialogic/Process validity
2. Achievement of action-oriented outcomes	Outcome validity
3. Education of both research-practitioner and participants	Catalytic validity
4. Results that are relevant to local setting	Democratic validity
5. A sound and appropriate research methodology	Process validity

These five goals identified by Anderson and Herr seem to fit well with the proposed research which intends to explore a potentially catalytic process in a social setting

through dialogic and democratic processes. The research is therefore likely to meet these criteria. This will be done through the application of multiple methods. Achieving these goals will ensure that the validity criteria identified are adhered to and will thus strengthen the thoroughness of the research and validity of the outcomes. For further discussion see Chapter five.

3.5.2 Ethical considerations

The topic of the research, workplace literacy, is a sensitive one and methods used needed careful consideration in order to ensure that participants in the research were treated in an ethically sound manner. The research-practitioner has worked in the literacy field for more than ten years and has a good understanding and appreciation for the importance of this, particularly for participants. She is aware of the ethos governing this sphere of work and the difficulties that are likely to present themselves. This meant that issues of confidentiality and data protection needed to be addressed in such a way that research ethics is upheld. Research data was handled with anonymity where required, with consent from participants and with professional conduct from the research-practitioner. Language that was used, the sequencing of questions, requesting of permission before taking action and careful consideration of what information to reveal to stakeholders in order to balance the need for confidentiality and research reliability were important in this regard. Discussions with the research supervisor and Validation Group ensured that this was managed in an ethical and valid manner.

The Ethics Committee of Waterford Institute of Technology requested that the research-practitioner presented her proposed research to them. Preconditions for the research were agreed. These include safekeeping of hard copies of data and using passwords on soft copies of data as well as on the computer used for the research. The research-practitioner was also requested to submit consent forms and a detailed information sheet regarding the research to the Ethics Committee.

3.5.3 Reliability

Even though the research employs an action research methodology which generates mostly qualitative data, an element of quantitative data gathering was built into the participant interviews to attempt gathering some measurable data. A Likert Scale was used during the initial interview with each participant to determine their own view on their confidence in general and in relation to their literacy capacity. The same questions were again asked and marked on the same scale at the end of participating in the training and again two months after completion of the training. This was an attempt to measure whether they felt that their confidence and literacy capacity improved as a result of participation. The two month time delay was built in to allow for objectivity and some consolidation of the training but a longer period would have been more helpful. Meeting the specific learning outcomes of the modules that were chosen and accreditation of these modules by a national accrediting body (FETAC) through a quality assured training provider presents a further quantitative outcome.

Safeguards such as generating qualitative and quantitative data by using multiple methods and taking multiple perspectives into account were built into the research to ensure its trustworthiness.

3.6 Limitations

Having only one company (narrow focus) and fewer than ten employees (small scale) participating is both an advantage and a disadvantage: an advantage, because it gives the opportunity for rich data and in-depth analysis; a disadvantage, because it limits the scope and scale of the research as well as the extent to which generalisations can be made.

The semantic term 'literacy' carries a perceived stigma with it and therefore exploring workplace literacy in an inappropriate way could infringe the rights and dignity of those participating in the research. This could be regarded as a limitation. To safeguard the ethical position of the research, confidentiality and identity protection for those participating in it had to be built into the research.

A further limitation refers to the fact that the union was not directly involved as stakeholder in the research. There was initially no need for involving the union, but because a collaborative approach was pursued, including the union directly, potentially would have enriched the findings.

The timeframe of the research did not allow for stakeholders to be interviewed after sufficient time has elapsed in order to measure the durability and consolidation of the workplace literacy training. Fullan (1982, in Robson 1986, p.443) states that effective change is a developmental process which takes at least two years. That kind of timeframe was not feasible within the constraints of this research project, but was attempted by allowing for a two month lapse of time before the exit interviews were conducted.

It would also have been useful to determine the extent to which learning on a workplace literacy programme is transferable to the home and community domains of the individuals. While two questions relating to this were included in the interviews and some of the participants referred to application outside of the workplace, this was not the focus of the research. It is a limitation, but would also have proved a distraction if the focus was too broad. This is also the reason why numeracy was not specifically included in the research, even though it was touched on during, for example, the session on spreadsheets as a computer application. Employees did not specifically express a numeracy need; therefore it was not included.

The issue of reflexivity and subjectivity has been discussed in the reliability section. It will be unlikely that the action research-practitioner will be completely objective to the research to the extent that a research-practitioner in natural sciences could be:

> ... It (action research) is clearly geared to resolving problems which confront people in their routine, everyday (work) activity, and these people therefore have a vested interest in the findings. They cannot be entirely detached or impartial in accord with the classic image of science. (Susman and Evered: 1978, in Denscombe: 2005, p.82)

Therefore safeguards like triangulation involving various stakeholders, an academic expert review and a validation group were built into the research design to provide for a more objective and rounded perspective.

The rigour, reliability and validity of the research as well as appropriateness of the choice of methodology and methods used were carefully considered by the research-practitioner. In decisions about methodology, the advice of Buchanan et al. (1988) was followed in that when considering "what is theoretically desirable and practically possible, the practical must prevail" (Robson, 1993, p.296). In most instances, fortunately, it was possible to pursue a balance between "what was theoretically desirable and practically possible".

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter presents the findings deduced from the data generated. It brings the insights of the different stakeholders together and sets the scene for discussing the findings as these relate to current academic research.

The findings relate directly to the research question which explores whether workplace literacy participation could be a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing workplace literacy practices. The question points the way to themes which were explored during the research and will be presented in the findings. These relate to the workplace, literacy, change, design of the initiative, the expectations and experience of participating stakeholders and the outcomes of involvement in the workplace literacy initiative (see 3.1).

The above research question relates mainly to the experience of the employees. Their learning experience in this case is influenced by the various stakeholders: indirectly by government policies and provisions available and the union perspective on training; directly by the employer and training provider. In the scenario being investigated, the union and government perspective had a relatively static position, while the employees, employer and training provider participated in the action research spiral. This will be highlighted in the research findings.

4.1 The Fieldwork site

4.1.1 Profile of the Workforce

The chosen fieldwork site was a multi-national, high-performance healthcare product manufacturing facility. The interactions of the research-practitioner with the company were through the HR Manager who acted on behalf of the company and answered to the HR Director and the Leadership Team. The HR Manager had the power to make decisions in relation to training delivered in the company.

The initial interview with the HR Manager gave important information about the company and employee profile of the company. This helps to situate the findings in context. The business was established in its current location in 1976 and has a fully Irish workforce of about 520 employees with approximately 350 of these at operative level. Average service time per employee is 21 years with the average age of operatives being 43 years. The company also has another smaller and younger facility in Ireland, but the workplace literacy initiative is not required in that setting, mainly because the workforce there is younger and does not have the same percentage of older employees with relatively low educational attainment. See Table 2 and Table 3 for an outline of the timeframe and the format of contact with the company.

The HR Manager has been in the company for more than 20 years and therefore is very familiar with it. When asked about her reason for getting involved in the research and training, she referred to this. Being immersed for so long is the reason why she understands the difficulties that operatives experience as well as the potential she feels that they have:

> ... I'm here about 20 odd years ... I've always worked at operational level, and I've found that people came in here as young people and they would not have had very good experiences of education at the time ... very good operatives, alright ... I've always had an interest in it. I've seen that they've mastered the art of surviving, but I've always felt we can get more out of them if we could bring them along in a way and give them the confidence...

The HR Manager took the research-practitioner on a guided tour of the facility. It was evident that literacy forms an integral part of the everyday experience of employees. There is a large amount of environmental print around the plant relating to health and safety, performance graphs, gauges on machines, etc. and operatives use information and recording sheets as well as specific operating procedures, diagrams and scanners. The use of technology was quite visible and during interviews with operatives it was evident that they wanted to become more comfortable with technology.

4.1.2. Physical environment

During the site visit, the research-practitioner commented on how clean and tidy the facility was. From the HR Manager's response it seems evident that they want to

have their working environment bright and positive, reflecting those same qualities as part of their ethos. The HR Manager mentioned that up to about five years ago, it was a "military green, and it was very depressing, very masculine". She told the research-practitioner that it was "... a very positive change, perks things up with the light blue and it gives you an idea of what we're about here".

4.1.3 Remuneration and related expectations of performance

All participants spoke highly of the company and felt proud of having secured a job there, but were not blind to the high expectations that this implies for them in terms of productivity and compliance. Employees told the research-practitioner that the company has a very good reputation and does not have to advertise to recruit staff. This was confirmed by the HR Manager.

Both the HR Manager and the employees referred to the fact that the company pays well. For the HR Manager this means that they "can attract the best talent", but it also means that they expect a lot from their employees:

> ... we go after the best talent and ... you have new blood (young employees) coming into it and they don't understand why people (established staff) can't do things and you're paying them such a good rate of pay, you know.

They seem to be reasonable and aware of the needs of their employees. This is evident from a number of responses from the HR Manager and is also confirmed by the employees:

> ... if somebody is 61 years of age, there is no way we're going to move them into an area that they just won't be able to achieve what we want them to achieve ... We would never expose those individuals, we would very discreetly manage them ...

In the initial interview, Toby mentioned that he works in this company because 'it pays well and is a good job'. This perspective was echoed by Keano who took special pride in working there:

> ... I won't go elsewhere; many people on the floor will tell you that. Because it is established, it has a good name ... it's a lifetime I gave them. Like, my youngest is 25. I reared 4 children out of here and they looked after me well...

This comment from Keano acknowledged that for him his employment in the company was a relationship of mutual benefit. Han Solo also felt that there "is a

more dynamic company environment" than other places he had worked in, but he experienced some conflict between encouraging initiative and using control. He also felt that operatives are not "heard until something has gone wrong, then they'll listen and make the change".

The other employees seem to differ in their perspectives from Han Solo. Speedy felt that the company "wouldn't expect you to do something that they don't think you'd be able to do":

> ... When they employ you, they know what you are capable of doing and then you adapt as the changes come.

Keano also felt that "they have a good attitude" and that they prepare people for changes. He felt that he couldn't "fault them; they work at it the whole time".

4.1.4 Compliance with company expectations

A culture of openness to learning from experience, rather than blind enforcement of compliance seem to emerge. This was highlighted by the example of a new productivity system which was being introduced into the company. Some of the participants were not happy with this. They felt that the benchmark was tested (and subsequently set) using only one type of product instead of the variety of products that were manufactured and that needed to be processed in the packaging hall. The benchmark therefore was not a true reflection of reality. It was felt that the benchmark did not take into consideration the greater range of products and greater amount and variety of reading actually required to complete the task on a day to day basis. Employees therefore felt that the rate of productivity was set too high in this case. This was recorded in the reflective review of Session 12:

> ... a new system of productivity that is being introduced seems to be expecting too high an output from them, because it was tested under conditions that required the same products and less reading and sorting than what it reality means for them. They have various products with various specifications that need to be labelled and packaged for different clients. This is more time consuming and will make the set targets unrealistic.

When asked how they would deal with this, the response was that they tried to explain on a few occasions, but that they felt not listened to. This seems to echo Han Solo's perspective. :

> ... at the interview they say it is 'good if you can think for yourself', but that is cancelled after the interview, you just have to do things the way the company tells you to.

They felt that they were powerless to change the situation, but that the PTL's would soon enough find out experientially that the benchmark was not realistic and would have to adapt the expectations and related paperwork. It was interesting how what could seem as powerlessness, actually might result in them being in the position of power because, through their actions, they could still achieve what verbal communication could not do. This potentially could be a dangerous situation in a company where union agreements do not protect people.

The research-practitioner asked a Production Team Leader and the HR Manager about this observation from the operatives, because she wanted to determine whether it is indicative of how the company works. The HR Manager acknowledged some resistance to the changes being introduced – these changes are in line with 'lean manufacturing principles'. She felt that it possibly was "a typical answer of somebody being managed", while at the same time it was management taking control because they are responsible for outputs. She added that she "would be concerned if the process is not sustainable" and also if the operatives felt they were not being heard. The HR Manager seemed to be pondering and interpreting this information against experiences they recently had where "actually one or two things did get out that should not have and we are looking at how to manage it better". The nature of this part of the interview was enquiring rather than defensive and she was not simply dismissing this information which could have been perceived as criticism.

From this scenario and the HR Manager's responses, the research-practitioner deduced that running a successful enterprise, being competitive and introducing relevant changes are situated within the reality of relationships of power as well as the pursuit of 'continuous improvement'. It was obvious from the responses that the HR Manager was aware of this and acknowledged that it was important to get the process right, on the operational and human level.

The relevant Production Team Leader also did not become defensive or dismiss the question about the described scenario (even though the research-practitioner's bias had instinctively expected him to). He referred to the realities of dealing with people who come up with suggestions that are not always thought through and then may experience this as not being listened to, but he also acknowledged that:

> ... the other side of it is that I get things thrown at me day in, day out, and I don't get round to doing them ... I suppose, from my own point of view, I do know it's (listening) something I need to work on personally ...

From these answers the research-practitioner deduced that yes, sometimes operatives can justifiably feel not listened to and that the company is likely to benefit if managers were open to suggestions made by operatives, but that managers themselves are under pressure. The managers that were interviewed were not necessarily disregarding the voice of the operatives, because they were operatives, but that the reality of the work situation sometimes focuses them too narrowly. When alerted to this, they acknowledged it voluntarily.

4.1.5 Redundancy rather than retraining?

This is potentially a sensitive area, but in reality, it often is cheaper to replace somebody than continually having to train and support that person. Statutory redundancy in Ireland according to the Redundancy Payments Acts (1967 to 2007) relates to when 'the job no longer exists', which in a low-skilled situation where the job is phased out will be relevant. An eligible employee is entitled to two weeks statutory redundancy payment for every year of service, plus a bonus week. Part of this redundancy payment is reclaimable by the company from the government.

The research company has a union agreement in place which makes provision for paying six weeks redundancy for every year worked, which would make paying out long-serving employees quite expensive. They also have an agreement of last-in-first-out. These union agreements act as a safeguard for employees, but the HR Manager responded with a pensive question '... would an organisation go there?' in relation to redundancy rather than retraining.

Redundancy for long serving employees whose jobs have become obsolete is not an option for the company because of the presence of union agreements. The HR Manager said that, "we would not be like that" referring to taking the option of redundancy rather than retraining, but it remains a viable option for industry in general.

From the interview with the HR Manager it is evident that retraining is a necessity in their context where older long-serving staff work in relatively low-skilled jobs that are becoming obsolete.

4.2 Stakeholders

The term 'stakeholder' is often used in the research to refer to different parties that influence or are involved in a workplace literacy initiative. Even though all stakeholders' roles were recognised in the research, the ones that were more directly involved with it were the employer, employee and the training provider. To ensure a validity check on outcomes, it was decided to not only take the perspective of the HR Manager as representative of the employer view, but also to consult with the Production Team Leaders [PTL's] of the employees participating in the research.

The union and the government were also involved, but more indirectly. Workplace Literacy in Ireland is currently funded by the Workplace Basic Education Fund (WBEF) established in the December 2004 budget. The budget for Workplace Basic Education (WBE) during the research period was 3 million Euros per annum. It is administered through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and channelled through the state training agency, FÁS. Certain criteria relating to educational attainment apply in relation to who can avail of the fund. Training Providers delivering the training also have to meet established quality criteria before they can apply for funding. These criteria were adhered to by the research and FÁS funded the training element of the initiative.

The research-practitioner had no direct contact with the union. After two unsuccessful approaches, the decision was made not to pursue it further as, at that

stage, the company was engaging with the workplace literacy initiative and no obvious gains were apparent from making contact with the union.   It was again considered when paid release was no longer an option, but the research-practitioner acted on intuition and did not pursue it. During the exit interview with the HR Manager, the research-practitioner asked whether an approach to the union about release of employees would have been able to change management's decision in favour of release. The HR Manager's response was a rather adamant, "It (the training) would not have happened at all then." This response confirmed awareness by the research-practitioner that direct contact with the union could have jeopardised the training.

4.3 Perceptions of Literacy

4.3.1 Training Provider

The training provider in this instance was the research-practitioner and her perception of literacy was integral to how the initiative was designed and delivered. The literature review concludes with a summary of the research-practitioner's perception of literacy as the capacity of individuals to participate effectively in society. This is influenced by the individual's ability to interact with the codes of society and therefore the research-practitioner sides with the social practice view of literacy as described by the theories of New Literacy Studies, especially as it relates to the New Work Order and the New Communicative Order. She recognises that workplace literacy does not operate in isolation and therefore strongly aligns her views with the socially embedded nature of literacy, the socio-cognitive acquisition of constructing literacy capacity and the understanding that becoming literate is an ongoing process.

The research-practitioner experienced this on a personal level when her research supervisor remarked that her academic literacy skills had improved considerably. On closer examination of this remark, it became apparent that the supervisor felt that the research-practitioner was grasping the codes of academic writing as

predetermined by academic institutions and was able to apply this in the writing and research undertaken.

The research-practitioner was also aware that this ideological view may not be the dominant perception in the workplace and explored perceptions with the other stakeholders.

4.3.2 Employer

The HR Manager described her understanding of literacy in an experiential way by referring to a training experience she had with two employees some years back. They had left school at primary level, but despite being very good operatives, were relatively challenged by training and by "going back to a classroom based environment". She was aware of the potential of embarrassment if somebody is exposed as not able to deal with training. She mentioned the responsibility that this placed on her, but also the possibilities of achievement that it created if managed well. The HR Manager was thus aware of the emotional impact that a low level of literacy could have on an employee and understood the importance of managing this carefully to achieve the desired outcomes:

> I remember having a conversation with them and I asked them just to trust us, that we were not going to compromise or embarrass them ... and I remember at the end of it, the sense of achievement for them was brilliant...

She was also aware that people hide their difficulties and her concern was especially for their older employees and the changes that have come with the technological age. This suggests that she also saw the dealing with technology as part of the literacy skills of their workforce:

> ... when we moved into a more technical age where we now use scanning and bar coding, people felt very challenged by will they or won't they be able to use it ... I was very cognisant of the fact that there were people there who had spent years mastering the fact that nobody knew that they could not read nor write ...

Furthermore she is aware that there is the potential for embarrassment, the perceived stigma and related need for hiding difficulties. Interestingly, she did not confine the technology capacity only to the workplace, but saw it wider as "not being

able to access things and even remote controls at home". Again she was aware of the emotional impact that this can have on their employees:

> ... it can become very uncomfortable coming to work and worry about it, about those things...

The research-practitioner approached the HR Manager about participation in a promotional DVD that the National Adult Literacy Agency was making about integrating literacy into the workplace and training. The manager was hesitant about it and discussed it with the company leadership team. The company eventually was not willing to participate, because they felt that they could not be associated with literacy:

> ... y'know, I can't present the company as having a problem because I don't think it would be right to do that...

This highlights the perceived stigma that exists around literacy and the importance of confidentiality for both the company and the participants. Confidentiality is a precondition of the company and the participants for partaking in this research.

Even though the HR Manager has a more holistic perspective of literacy, including the emotional and technology with reading and writing, she is still aware that this might not be the case for the staff who she deals with or the perceptions of the wider public.

The research-practitioner was very aware of the diplomacy required for the discussion with the Production Team Leaders and the danger of perpetuating the stereotype of literacy.

They felt that training with the purpose of improving communications is good. They also felt it was good that the training was regarded as communications rather than literacy, as that would only refer to reading and writing in their perspective. They felt that including interpersonal skills was a good thing too. Even though they disagreed among themselves about the relevance of computers, on reflection they realised that computers were becoming more visible in the facility. They mentioned that a new computer system, 'Windchill', was being rolled out with which operatives eventually

also would have to interact and concluded that including computers would therefore be relevant. This was recorded in the minutes of the PTL briefing (24/11/08):

> ... it is hoped that staff will become confident enough through training like this to eventually print off drawings rather than access drawings from files. PTL's also mentioned the new "Windchill" system which will make computers much more visible and staff will increasingly need to interact with these ...

4.3.3 Employees

It was explained to employees during the entry interviews that the term literacy fits the theoretical framework of literacy as a social practice and that everybody is on a literacy journey. This was done to maintain research ethics in clarifying what they were giving consent for getting involved in.

Evidence gathered during the reflective sessions, exit interviews and the focus group discussion at the end of the training suggests that the stereotypical perception of literacy and the associated stigma is still in existence among the employees. This seems to be the case for those who participated and for the broader workforce. Participants did not see themselves as in need of that type of literacy. They feel more comfortable with the broader inclusive label of 'Communications'.

In the initial interviews, their perceptions seemed to focus on a narrow and functional view:

> Oh, straight away, it would be read and write.

Another comment made, referred to a deficit perspective on literacy:

> I would see it as you couldn't read or write; illiterate would be a lack of something.

This was taken even further by another person who questioned the ability of somebody with a literacy difficulty to write or even learn:

> That's people that, em, that are illiterate, not able to write, is it? Or, learn, is it?

One interviewee seemed to have a broader perception and referred to the ability to read and write in terms of the person being at ease with it; therefore adding an emotional element to it:

It's your ability to read and write, and by my definition I believe it's not a case of just being able to read and write, but be able to read well, be comfortable reading and be comfortable writing.

These responses were confirmed in the focus group discussion at the end of the training. The research-practitioner asked participants if anybody would be interested in doing this training if it was marketed as a literacy course. They responded in this way:

Maria: Well, I would not.
Speedy: No, straight away, I'd think read and write. No. That's what I would see.
Research-practitioner: OK, I find that an interesting comment, do you think that's still people's perception?
Smiley & others together: Yea, definitely.

Toby said that he was "more comfortable with Communications" and they all agreed with him. This term seems to carry less of a stigma and to be more acceptable also among their colleagues. During the reflective sessions built into the training, Smiley said that some of her peers had asked her why she was doing the course as she is perceived to be a good communicator. She explained to them that it was not only about talking, but about how you present yourself and deal with difficult situations and how you write and use computers.

After the training, a short article and a photo of the current group appeared in the company magazine promoting the training. The group agreed to this. This is not only significant because it shows future commitment from the company, but also because participants were willing to be associated with the programme and to appear in their magazine in this regard. In the focus group, they stated that they would not have been willing to be associated with something that related to literacy, but they were comfortable with it because the training was promoted as communications, computers and personal development.

From the data generated from the employer and employees, it is evident that the stereotype of literacy as a deficit relating to reading and writing still exists and that they sense a related fear that an unfair label will be attached to their involvement in an initiative called literacy.

4.4 Changing Workplace Practices

Changes in workplace literacy practices are central to the research question. The presence of change in the workplace was indirectly referred to by the production team leaders in their discussion about the relevance of computer training in the proposed training.   It was explored in greater depth with the employer and the employees as well as with the regional Services to Business (STB) Manager in the state training agency, FÁS.

4.4.1 State training agency: higher expectations

The STB Manager (FÁS) framed his responses in relation to the higher skills and education expectations of industry and pressures on the employer and the need for the state agency to support employers and employees in this regard. He felt that the expectations of employers have changed considerably over the past decade. They now expect a lot more of their employees, while at the same time responding to outside pressures of competitiveness:

> ... the employer, and I think really industry to survive looks at it in a way that individuals must fill a broader role ... there is a far greater need for a wider range of skills on behalf of the individuals to be able to contribute and succeed ... the need for innovation ... it is becoming a more basic requirement rather than an add-on, you know ... it is constant improvement.

He also referred to the enormity of the challenge that this poses for the state training agency. The FÁS response to support literacy and numeracy in the workplace is as recent as 2005 when the first programme was piloted. He sees this as recognition of the need for more and more people to be skilled to ever higher levels in line with the demand for an ever higher skills base. He also reflected on the changing economic climate and that the lower skilled are the ones who are most vulnerable to job losses and at the same time the ones less likely to get back into employment.

A further point made by the STB Manager is that the standard of education is rising all the time:

> ... and even those individuals who left school in the past with a Leaving Certificate don't necessarily have the skills today compared to the ones coming into the workplace now with a Leaving Cert ... because they have fewer fears, particularly in relation to technology ...

Together with a need for higher education to meet the challenge of change, his comment further identifies the changes in the skills that education should give people to be able to cope in the changing workplace.

4.4.2 Employer: higher expectations

The HR Manager echoes the sentiments of the STB Manager in terms of higher expectations of industry and the need for a higher standard of education in the workforce. From interviewing the HR Manager and observing the operations of the facility, it became clear that change is a reality for the company and that they also have to make changes in how they manage their workforce to keep abreast of the changes as a company. These introduced changes need to be most effective, make business sense as well as be in accordance with local union agreements. This has resulted in changes in deployment of staff, of training and of recruitment.

According to the HR Manager, the job of a general operative at their facility has changed dramatically over the past decade or more and they experience higher demands on their skills. These changes relate not only to changed procedures, but also to communication processes and the need for understanding the tasks and the exposure to new information:

> ... we are moving very much from the old manual skills now to new technology. We're expecting people to issue in and out of goods and stores which in the past they never had to do. They never had to understand what types of materials meant or why we did certain things ... now we're constantly bombarding them with an awful lot of information which believe it or not, people internalise without even realising it.

She is aware that some employees can feel challenged by this, but also expressed the desire that staff would credit themselves with how much they actually have adapted. As a company they need to stay competitive and this by default means change and improvement. She mentioned that they are very aggressive in pursuit of progress with a target of 20% year on year improvement in productivity and performance.

4.4.2.1 Implications and management of changed expectations

This has implications for the human resources of the company even though the HR Manager sees change mostly as exciting. Their changing business environment is largely managed in three ways in terms of human resources: deployment of staff, training and recruitment.

She is aware of the tension between older employees experiencing difficulties with new work practices and new recruits with good qualifications but less experience:

> Sometimes when I notice how people resist change I can understand where they're coming from ... we go after the best talent ... there's a lot really going on in an organisation when you have new blood coming into it and they don't understand why people (older staff) can't do things ...

She grasps the lack of understanding of both sides, while also realising that her role is to respond to this in the most effective way.

The company is aware that because they have an ageing workforce, they are dealing with education and physical capability issues and are managing this in such a way that the task and the employee are compatible as far as possible. This does create challenges, but they feel it makes best business sense:

> We would never expose ... very discreetly manage them in such a way that we keep them in a certain area or we can have a certain work group of similar type activities. However, the challenge is coming very very fast to us is that those types of activities are dwindling ... that's the way industry is going...

The facility is unionised and this creates its own scenario regarding local agreements between employer and union. It protects employees, but presents a challenge for the employer. The HR Manager acknowledged that redundancy could be a lucrative option for companies, especially as part of the redundancy payment is tax deductable for the companies. The research-practitioner did sense a genuine commitment from the company side to their employees and a culture that would not easily pursue that avenue, but the union agreements do provide additional protection to employees against such a scenario:

> Because we are a unionised plant then, and because we have local agreements – last in, first out ... we do manage it as best we can, but I suppose, the challenge is, you find yourself corralling a person or a group of employees to an area where you won't always have the work to support them.

One way of managing then, is matching employees with tasks they would be able to manage successfully but, as seen, this presents its own problems.

Another way is to provide training. Sometimes they need to put in extensive time in training to show the union, and even demonstrate to themselves, that some of the ideas won't work and subsequently a more suitable solution can be pursued. The HR Manager's openness to undertake approaches and the willingness to take people on a learning journey, despite cost and effort, is evident from the following response:

> ... we have now realised, twelve months down the road, that some of the individuals will never be capable of doing that task, but we had to give them a fair shot at it, even though we had to put in extensive time in training, etc ... my approach has been to have taken people on a journey ....

Participation in the research and related training also links with how the company manages its staff and is willing to test opportunities in relation to training. She explained what she would like to get out of the literacy training: employees being ready for training, valuing themselves and being ready to take on the journey of self-development:

> ... I think I'd put structure around self-awareness and an understanding of how they can ... the consciousness piece of themselves, their ability to training piece...

In addition to strategic deployment of staff and training support, the recruitment process and criteria present another way of managing the changing human resource needs of the company. Increased expectation of the company and industry means that new recruits need to meet an educational benchmark of a good Leaving Certificate or equivalent:

> ... our expectations have increased ... even down to our recruitment. There was a time here when we would not even look for qualifications, now we are looking for basic Leaving Certs ... we are continuously challenging ourselves ... bringing in the best talent possible ... my benchmark would be ... students who would be capable of good understanding of maths, decent understanding of English, being able to write an English letter, being able to access ... a good basic Leaving Cert. now, I'd say.

They have also realised that training has limitations and are in the process of designing an evaluation tool to use during recruitment, but are aware of the cost and industrial relations implications:

> ... we'll use an evaluation tool, because we would be looking for somebody of the calibre that would potentially be machine operators, tool makers; we would need to check their numeracy ... all that stuff ... that's a huge shift for us, to be able to get through to our local union. And that coupled with how much it will cost us ... We have to face up to the fact that not everybody can do this work.

When asked about including literacy and numeracy in the screening process, she said that it is not specifically done at the moment, but "we will be going there, that is the next stage ...".

When asked why the benchmark for general operative staff has changed, the HR Manager responded that their workplace practices have changed and that these changes mean that they need different skills. The section on literacies in use in the facility (4.5) will draw attention to these changes.

4.4.3 Employees: accountability, automation and ways of managing these

In exploring changing workplace practices, the employees were consulted too. All of the participants interviewed felt that their jobs have changed with responses ranging from "Yea, it has, but not all that much," to "Immensely!" and "Dramatically". Responses from the employees were categorised in terms of what the changes were which they experienced, how they felt about the changes and how it affected them. The following table summarises their responses. Their responses echo many of the points made by the HR Manager in terms of what the changes are, about an element of resistance to change in the facility, of the reality of being an older worker, of the presence of recruitment screening as well as changes in supervision, automation, accountability and paperwork.

Table 6: Employees and change

Name	Identified changes	Feelings about changes	Ways in which affected by changes
Smiley	Changed quality system	*Good. I go with the changes, 'cause it's easier to go with the changes than go against them.* *And any changes have always been practiced. The company prepares you. They wouldn't expect you to do something that they don't think you'd be able to do, you know. When they employ you, they know what you are capable of doing and then you adapt as the changes come.*	*The only way it affects me, is it gives me a wider, a broad ... I can do more things, like.*
Name	**Identified changes**	**Feelings about changes**	**Ways in which affected by changes**
Keano	When we came in here first, it was actually all hand work. If you got a knee, or a hip, or whatever, you were measuring and everything by hand, but it's now done by machines.	*Yea, they don't just give it to you, they talk to you. They have a good attitude. Then I take it on board, like. But as I said, I couldn't, you can't fault them, they work at it the whole time, I wouldn't fault them much, no.*	*The company helps us to do the new things.*
George	Different ways of supervision	*I haven't a problem. I just come in, do my work and that's it then.*	*It is different for me as an older person to adapt, some things, not all the things now.*
Han Solo	... they are more reactive rather than pro-active. They wait for something to go wrong before they fix it.	*The changes are good, they seem to improve things, but the company does not instil them enough. You're not heard until something has gone wrong, then they'll listen and make the change.*	*Things become harder to do and slower. There is a lot of paper work. Like for the audit, and that then causes them to make changes. People do not really like this. And it is not only me, it is cell-wide. It is almost like a low grumble going on all the time.*
Leon	I do notching and I left the company for a while and then came back. It now is done very differently than before. I had to be retrained on the same job ... it now has lots more measurements.	*I'm OK with them, really.*	*... like the retraining ...*
Maria	Like I'm here 7 years now and since then they have brought in an aptitude test. I would not have	*I suppose we do things that go into people's bodies so it has to be right. A lot of the things are for regulations and legal stuff I suppose.*	Question was accidentally skipped by interviewer.

	had a hope ... We do a lot more paper work now.		
Speedy	We're much more conscious of things like the quality standards and things. It is brought home to us much more, the regulations on signing and things, they are much tighter.	*Grand, change is for the better.*	*I'm Team Leader now so I have to kind of accept them and roll with them. But really, the company isn't out to make the job harder, but safer. But not every one thinks so. There is a kind of a battle going on. There is the old school who are not willing to change, who want to keep doing things the same way and then there are those willing to change. And there is this battle going on, it's unseen and unspoken, but going on all the same ... I suppose some people just don't like change.*
Toby	We do a lot more paper work than what we did at the start, a lot more procedures.	*If it has to be done, it has to be done.*	*No.*

Participants were generally positive about the changes or resigned to them. They felt that the changes give broader skills and a safer working environment. They also referred to the fact that quality is important, especially when it relates to human life, as is the case in their facility. Some feel that the company supports them well with training, while some of them are more critical of how the changes are managed by the company and experienced by their colleagues.

A validity issue that was not clarified with participants relates to whether they said what they felt they should say, because of the slight chance that they might be identified, or alternatively, whether they have unconsciously accepted the status quo of the organisation. The research-practitioner experienced their answers to be truthful and would regard the presence of both positive and negative responses to the changes in their workplace as representative of their real feelings.

From the data generated in relation to changing workplace practices, it is evident that the state training agency, the employer and the employees agree that many changes have taken place and that these relate to higher expectations of the workforce. This in turn leads to more change as it requires a response from the training agency, the

human resource department and employees. Both the HR Manager and the STB Manager used the word 'challenge' in terms of dealing with the changes and adopting effective responses. Employees seem to be either accepting of the changes or resigned to them even though it might be reluctant resignation in some cases. The HR Manager also refers to an awareness of the difficulty that some employees have with adapting to change and that this in itself presents them with a problem. The research-practitioner did not explore the level of power or control which stakeholders have over change, but from the responses it seems to emerge that while they have a level of control over how they respond to the changes, they do not have control over the reality and existence of change in the workplace.

4.5 Literacies in use

As shown, many of the changes in workplace practices relate to 'paperwork' and 'procedures', 'cross-functional teams' and 'dealing with information'. In order to explore answers to the research question, it was regarded as important to determine what the literacies are that employees need to use in the workplace. The data seems to indicate that the use of literacies has not only increased in complexity, but also broadened in range. Teamwork and technology for example are mentioned as recent developments while the use of the more traditional literacies like document literacy now has new applications, for example for quality control and continuous improvement measurement.

From the data sets it emerges that employees use different literacies in the workplace, most of the time in an integrated manner as the following quotation which includes document literacy, quantitative literacy and the use of technology highlights:

> ... you get your batch of products in – SJ38B – you check your pieces against the sheet: there's 8 in the batch, there's 8 on the sheet. So you fill that in. Then you grind it and you clean it ... and you just scan them out then ... 8 finished ... when you are setting up a batch – measurements can change...

The main literacies evident from the data are technical job-related terminology, document literacy, quantitative literacy, non-verbal and iconic literacy, technology related literacy and teamwork literacy.

4.5.1 Technical job-related terminology

Employees used the technical job-related terminology almost matter-of-factly during the initial interviews and the research-practitioner on a number of occasions had to ask them to explain what they meant. The site visit of the facility further highlighted the presence of this type of literacy; even the names of the different departments in the facility is technical, e.g. Semtex, Triathlon, etc. Many of the job-related terms refer to quality control documents like Quality Standard References and Standard Operating Procedures. It was interesting to note that employees are so familiar with these that they use acronyms or abbreviated forms when referring to them, e.g. QSR's, SOP's, job specs. One of the employees commented on this and regarded the fact that they are a multi-national and also that the company has legal obligations as part of the reason for the use of this type of terminology:

> ... it would be better if they were written in lay-men terms. The company shares these with other places around the world and they are written in an American way. It would be better if it was in European English and there is a lot of legal jargon as well.

When this research took place, the company had just completed an intense audit by the American Food and Drug Administration. The HR Manager and employees frequently referred to this audit.

From a company perspective, compliance is a requirement, but with facilities around the world; France, Canada, Japan, India, Ireland and more, it is a challenge too. One of the employees (in the initial interview before the audit took place) mentioned that the company had passed this standard before, but that it had gone up and that they needed to pass the higher standard:

> ... the Food and Drug Association, they set the standard. We passed it before, but it has gone up again and there's a big shove on.

The HR Manager referred to the importance of understanding the procedures, and thus by implication the terminology, during the initial interview with her and on the site visit;

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> Everything will have an SOP, Standard Operating Procedure as you know, and we'll have an expectation of their understanding - it's not just for quality, but it is for safety also. Over time we would expect people to have an understanding of the communications of their area, the wording and terminology.

For employees, the challenge is therefore to be familiar with and to understand the technical and quality related literacy of a global company subject to rising industry standards. For the employer, the challenge is to meet the standards and to support its employees in understanding and applying the terminology and the procedures.

4.5.2 Document literacy

Employees identified a number of documents that they need to read, sign off on, date and write comments on if required. The documents mentioned during interviews and reflective sessions were Root sheets, Quality Standard References, Reconciliation sheets, Job specifications, Production sheets and Specific Operating Procedures.

The research-practitioner observed employees using these documents during the site visit. They are complex documents using terminology as outlined in the previous section. Therefore, it is evident that employees do not only need to be familiar with the terminology, but also with the purpose, usage and layout of the different documents:

> However, because the industry standard is so tight we have an extra control in ... it relies on paperwork ... even though people think it is hardship, it is important because if something comes back, we'd need to be able to trace it back to the chart and actual time of manufacture.

From this remark made by the HR Manager it becomes evident that the use of documentation is closely linked with quality and industry standards.

4.5.3 Quantitative literacy

In the previous quotation, the HR manager also identifies another type of literacy that is used in this workplace, quantitative literacy; for example, recording the "time of manufacture". They seem to use it frequently and referred to the use of numbers, measurements, clocking in and clocking out as well as dating documents before releasing them.

The HR Manager specifically referred to the capacity to use mathematics when talking about the benchmark that the company uses for recruitment:

> In my mind's eye my benchmark would be ... capable of good to decent understanding of maths ... a good basic Leaving Cert. I think that's the basic requirement.

A comment from one of the employees also referred to how the use of quantitative literacy has changed and increased:

> ... I do notching and I left the company for a while and then came back. It now is done very differently than before. I had to be retrained on the same job ... it now has lots more measurements.

From this, it is evident that employees use quantitative literacy and that the demand on their skills has increased to Leaving Certificate standard from a position where they were not screened for academic qualifications at all. Further evidence for the higher demand on quantitative literacy capacity in employees is that an employee had to be retrained on a job he was familiar with, partly because of this higher demand.

4.5.4 Visual and iconic literacy

From the site visit and from interviews with employees, it became clear that some of the quantitative information is presented in diagrammatic or graph format. Employees also need to use prints and drawings.

During the site visit, the research-practitioner observed that there were information boards around the facility with many different types of information on it. The HR Manager explained that the graphs showed "how business objectives are met to help employees see how their contributions contribute to the overall business performance". There were also graphs showing 'key performance indicators' that indicated whether the company was giving its customers what they wanted within a time efficient manner.

Other visual information related to practices in use, e.g. 'The 5 Pillars Program' with associated colour coded information and explanations. Employees use these codes in their jobs.

In the initial interviews, employees referred to the non-verbal information that they use. Han Solo has to "check measurements and diagrams" while Keano explained that he did a course through the company "about reading drawings".

Computers are becoming more visible on the production floor, like the computer system called 'Windchill' which was being rolled out in the company. Computers make use of icons to represent verbal messages. In order to understand and use the computer systems, an employee needs to understand the iconic symbols and related messages.

This need for understanding technology and the associated iconic representation of information was echoed by a participant when talking about the drawings he uses in his job:

> ... we have to have more skills, like computers. Before we'd get a sketch from the drawer to work with, now we print it. It's because the drawings get updated all the time and we need to have the most up to date one. It's on the computer.

These observations and remarks show that employees use non-verbal literacy in terms of graphs, colour codes, diagrams and drawings. Having to access information from a computer also means that they will increasingly need to understand the icons associated with the computer packages in use.

It also seems that the HR manager is aware of the need for training in this regard as shown by the employee who was offered training about reading drawings and the intention to train the people that need to access the computer system:

> ...we'll train up some people and they can get access to PC's and we'll show them how to access their piece.

4.5.5 Technology related literacy

From the examples given in the section about iconic literacy, it is evident that the use of computers is increasing in the company. This is one type of technology related literacy that employees increasingly will need to master and use.

The HR Manager also remarked that as a company they "are moving very much from the old manual skills now to new technology" and explained that they are expecting people to do things that in "the past they never had to do".

The HR Manager is aware of how this increased use of technology may affect staff and also gave some examples of the new type of language and literacy that they have to deal with:

> ... we moved from a production and control environment where people just literally ticked boxes and somebody did their booking, into a more technical age where we now use scanning and bar coding, people felt very challenged by will they or won't they be able to use it.

Her observation shows that she realises that the changes in technology usage does not only affect employees on a functional level, but also has an emotional impact on them.

4.5.6 Teamwork literacy

Terminology used in the company to refer to people who manage or support staff is indicative of the culture of teamwork that the company wants to encourage. They have Team Leaders and Production Team Leaders. This perception of team is also reiterated in the company president's message at the beginning of 2008, where he uses words like 'teamwork' and 'we join together' and at the end of 2008 he congratulated the 'Irish team for their performance in the Food and Drug audit' and encourages all employees to 'work together to face the challenges of 2009'.

As part of this focus on teamwork, many practices have changed with employees expected to participate in meetings and encouraged to give suggestions. As quoted before, the HR Manager mentioned that employees participate in cross-function teams. This by implication means that they need to know how to participate and on

another level to understand the literacies in use in order to understand the power-interplay present in such encounters.

When asked about teamwork and participating in workplace meetings during the initial interviews, many of the employees referred to wanting to "speak up a bit more". When asked during the focus group about what the skills are that they feel an employee in today's workplace should have, they mentioned "initiative", "assertiveness", "teamwork" and good "communications skills". This seems to imply that they recognise the presence as well as the importance and value of being able to participate effectively in teamwork situations. They also seem to realise that there is a skill involved in doing this and they would like to develop that skill.

An example provided by Smiley illustrates how speaking up in a situation like the audit was daunting for her, even though she would regard herself as a good communicator. Her example shows how personally important this was for her in that she did not want to be the one to let the team down:

> I'd find myself good at communicating, but even though you know what you are doing, and you can tell your workmate ... when you have a group of people around you that are auditing you ... the way you express yourself in a group would be a problem ... when you know this major thing depends on how you feed back to the auditor, because he gets it from you. I think it is the stigma of it...

The focus group with the Production Team Leaders also showed that employees get the opportunity to give suggestions for improving the systems in place, but that it is important from the PTL's perspective how this is done, again seeming to refer to the skill involved in doing it appropriately:

> ... people would come up with suggestions to improve something but they're not even doing it the way it's currently designed ... or that they should think the idea through a bit more...

These examples show that the company values and uses the skills and literacies associated with teamwork. Different layers in the organisation (the President, HR Manager, Production Team Leaders and Operatives) all regarded it as important.

Data generated is reliable because it is triangulated by feedback from different stakeholders; it is also valid as different tools like interviews, observation, focus group

discussions and quotationss from company publications were used to extrapolate the data.

Thematic identification and analysis was used to examine the generated data to identify common themes and to substantiate findings.

4.6 Design of the Initiative

A consultation preceded the drafting of the curriculum. This process was valuable as it grounded the research-practitioner in the context, identified expectations and alerted her to the different literacies in use. The curriculum forms an integral part of the research and its format is central in the exploration of whether participation in a workplace literacy initiative acts as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing workplace practices.

The trainer realised that 45 hours was a relatively short time to achieve all the desired outcomes and decided to aim for achieving as many as possible. The initial consultation process with participants meant that the initiative was customised to meet their expressed needs and was supportive of their literacy levels. It was clear from the outset that the workplace literacy initiative was to be tested as a catalyst and not a solution. It therefore meant that if the initiative brought about changes in the employees in relation to confidence and willingness to engage in further learning, it would be regarded as a success. Increasing literacy capacity is an ongoing process and by participants continuing to engage with education, that process will be continued too. In this way the framing of the research question eased the tension of the expectations that the research-practitioner experienced.

A monitor from the state training agency visited on two occasions and the HR Manager also visited the group after 10 weeks. These visits acted as a control for the training and an opportunity for participants to voice dissatisfaction. Feedback from these visits was included in the reflections (See Appendix 4).

4.6.1 Accreditation

Accreditation created a challenge for the tutor: a course that intended to meet the identified expectations of FÁS, participants and the employer, also had to meet the required criteria of the accrediting body, FETAC. It furthermore meant that the research-practitioner in her role as training provider had to register with and meet criteria set both by FÁS and FETAC. This enhanced the research as it provided the option for a quality assured measurable outcome.

From the information generated, it becomes evident that accreditation has many advantages, such as being a benchmark and quality check and by creating opportunities for engaging in lifelong learning. It is a challenge too that has to be handled carefully because it could create barriers of fear. Good practice in adult education could potentially be jeopardised if the needs of individuals are not considered as paramount to the requirements of accreditation.

Participants identified accreditation as one of their expectations during the first training session. From the weekly reflection of that session it is clear that this was on the premise that their needs were also met. At the end of the training, two of the participants said that they did not feel very strongly about getting a certificate for the training, while two others regarded it as vey important. Speedy wanted it for recognition of training done in terms of future jobs and Smiley felt that she "wanted to get back into the education system and enjoy myself 'cause I offered up a lot in rearing a family and working, the whole lot, so, it's my time now". The two participants who regarded the accreditation as important seems to have done so for different reasons; one for a vocational reason and the other primarily for personal enrichment.

An integrated approach was followed in aiming to achieve three FETAC modules. This involved setting tasks which covered a range of outcomes across the different modules. An example of such a task is the project that they had to complete for the Personal and Interpersonal skills module. This project required participants to make a short presentation on the topic of 'Change' using the Microsoft PowerPoint

application. This task covered elements of the Interpersonal Skills module as it both summarised much of the learning done in that module as well as served as the required project. It also covered one full unit of Computer Literacy as participants had to access, use, save and print their work as well as exit the application. It furthermore satisfied some of the writing, editing and redrafting, the speaking and listening and creation of a visual aid sections of the Communications module.

Participants were successful in the modules submitted to FETAC, but the research-practitioner expressed reservations in her learning journal about the suitability of doing 3 modules in 45 hours, she felt that 60 hours would have been better:

> The Communications module was so integrated into the other two modules that it did not get enough attention in its own right. I started realising it towards the end of the training... there was not enough time left to rectify it ... 60 hours rather than 45 hours. While the outcomes were achieved, I feel that they are not as solidly grounded as they could and should have been.

The research-practitioner used the focus group as a tool to determine how they felt about the extra effort that they had to put in for completing the portfolios for accreditation. From their responses, it seemed that they did not mind once they were actively participating in the training, but that they were daunted by it on the first night.

> Speedy: I don't know if we felt we were putting in extra, if you know what I mean.
>   We were just working away and enjoying it...
> Smiley & Maria: [laughing] Yea, that's true.
> Research-practitioner: OK? That's brilliant!
> Smiley: But when you were talking about it, it sounded, like Oh, my God!
> Toby: It was a bit daunting the first day, definitely.

George stopped attending after the first session even though the tutor spoke to him after the session and offered additional support. The research-practitioner was concerned about this as she felt he was put off by the decision to pursue accreditation. At the exit interviews it became clear that it was not so much the accreditation, but rather his perception of the skills of others and a fear of embarrassment or holding them back that stopped his attendance:

> I thought it would be kinda embarrassing for me, 'cause some people ... one guy there that was way ahead of us ...I thought there that [giving me extra time] would be leaving others down ... I thought that the course was a bit more advanced than I had actually anticipated ...

The discussion with George caused the research-practitioner to question her own practice of giving and discussing the agreed course outline with participants on the first night of training. Assuring them that their needs and expectations would be met as far as possible would have been sufficient on the first night. In this case it would have been better to ease participants into the training first and then to give them the information at a pace that they could handle. This was an insight gained and recorded in the learning journal.

4.6.2 Role of the research-practitioner

The success of the training initiative depended to a great extent on the ability of the tutor to establish rapport with the participants, to design a curriculum which was contextualised and met the requirements of stakeholders, and to use teaching methods which were appropriate and effective.

Despite her previous experience, the research-practitioner was daunted by the complexity of the expectations and the importance of delivering a quality service. This dissipated somewhat after the first four sessions when a training rhythm had been established, attendance had settled down and it was becoming clear that the participants responded well to the course content. This initial 'uncertainty' is evident from the weekly reflections and the learning log. An entry in the learning log refers to being "fearful of failing the stakeholders, especially the participants".

4.6.2.1 How the research-practitioner was perceived by the employer and employees

The research-practitioner regarded it as important to get the employees and the employer perception of her across the different roles that she fulfilled. Research tools used to generate data from the employees were the questionnaire and exit interviews (April 2009) conducted two months after completion of the training (February 2009). The perspective of the employer was gained through the exit interview and an unexpected thank you card and gift on completion of the training. Gaining two perspectives and using different tools for generating the data helps to ensure the validity and the reliability of the data.

Participants were asked to rate elements of tutoring on a scale of 1=poor to 5=excellent. The identified elements on the questionnaire were: Helpful, Friendly, Prepared, Knowledge about Subject, Patient, Adult Approach, Professional, and Teaching Methods.   All participants rated the tutor as excellent in all the areas listed on the questionnaire. The final part of the questionnaire had space for 'Any other comments'. Maria commented in this section that she thought the tutor was a very patient teacher, because sometimes "I can be a bit slow learning, but have to work hard at it".

Participants were again asked to comment on the tutor and her way of teaching during the exit interviews. They mentioned that the material that was included in the course was interesting and that they enjoyed the discussion and the variation in the "way things were done," referring to the variety of teaching methods and materials used. They reiterated that they enjoyed the training and that the time went very fast. Speedy gave quite a lengthy answer to the question about the tutor which referred to the use of discussion, the importance of the group dynamics and of encouraging individual attempts as well as tutor and peer support:

> ... as a group, we forgot it was teaching and we'd be talking ... your way of teaching I felt was very open, y'know, direct with us as well ... you showed us what to do, let us go in and do it on our own, and if we made a mistake, you were there. I couldn't point out anything bad. Not 'cause you're here, but 'cause there isn't anything to say bad. We wouldn't have learnt it if it hadn't been taught correctly, y'know, that kinda way. So, I was quite happy with everything. I thought it was a comfortable group, and the fact we'd go over and help one another...

The research-practitioner specifically asked the HR Manager to comment on practitioner effectiveness leaving it open for her to comment on any or all of the roles of the practitioner. From her response, it seems that the approach of the research-practitioner to the workplace in general and to the participants specifically plays an important role in engaging with the employer and employees. The HR Manager identified some of the qualities that she valued in the research-practitioner and by implication in the person who delivers the training and links with the company; these refer to patience, being encouraging and non-threatening and having the ability to motivate people to develop their potential:

> I think your style, and your presence ... people were very impressed by you, that you were very non-threatening, yet you were very coaching, you have a very nice way with you... you bring people along ... I've seen it, I've seen you in action and it's very positive ... we'd have absolutely no hesitation in asking you back, because I think you have a talent for dealing with people that may have a barrier to learning or to self development and that's a great thing to have, and you've great patience. I could see it from the few interactions I had with the group when I went in, there was just ... they were just very engaged with you and they were very comfortable with you...

From her response it seems that she felt that the identified qualities helped the participants to be relaxed and to engage in the training situation. These responses seem to suggest that, for a workplace literacy initiative to be successful, there is more than information transfer and functional skills development necessary. In linking with the employer and the employees, an approach which engages on a personal and affective level was highly valued.

The evidence suggests that the approach and strategies used by the research-practitioner played a significant role in the way that the initiative was perceived.

This information can be regarded as reliable and valid, as it was gathered using various research tools and triangulated by different stakeholder perspectives.

4.6.3 The curriculum

Stakeholders expected the curriculum to be a vehicle which would result in outcomes relating to functional applications such as documents and computers, but also to personal development, confidence and effective interaction with people. (See Appendix 2 for an outline of the curriculum.)

The training provider and the participants were the ones who had first hand experience of the curriculum and especially the perspective of the participants are important in this regard, as the research question relates to whether the workplace literacy initiative acted as a catalyst to support them in dealing with changing workplace practices.

From responses given at different times to different people (tutor, FÁS monitor, HR Manager) and in different modes, e.g. discussion, weekly reflections and questionnaire, it can be deducted that the curriculum was relevant, pitched at the right level and beneficial. It also is evident that tutor and group support was part of why it was perceived well and not experienced as too difficult.

The weekly reflections were built in as a check on the effectiveness of the training and thus by default of the curriculum, and to act as action research so that improvements could be built in as the course progressed in accordance with the plan-act-observe-reflect spiral (Zuber-Skerrit, 1995).

The level of difficulty was questioned by the FÁS monitor during session 7 and the group responded that the training was good and that "the tutor gives us the opportunity to help each other and that this ensures nobody either falls behind or gets too far ahead. In this way we support each other." The group reiterated this to the HR Manager at the end of session 10. The HR Manager specifically asked the group whether they felt that they were gaining personal benefits from the training. Their response, as written in the weekly reflection and checked with them the following week, was:

> All said that they are gaining new skills and learning a lot from the discussions. An important thing that they discovered is that they are not the only ones feeling or thinking in a certain way. It validates their experiences and creates a safe space to discuss issues that there otherwise is no time for.

The dialogical approach was specifically mentioned as something that the participants experienced positively. Dialogue is integral to both the methodological framework (action research) and to theoretical framework (literacy as a social constructed phenomenon) chosen for the research. From the feedback given by the participants, it seems that these frameworks are appropriate for the curriculum and that the participants responded well to the approach taken. The fact that they felt their experiences were validated seems to strengthen the evidence that a 'scaffolded' (see 2.1.2.3.1) approach was taken.

4.6.4 Pedagogy & Learning

Validity of the findings in this section is safeguarded through the use of various research tools and discussions with the Academic Expert Group and the Validation Group. Referring to various data sources provide for different points of view and thus for triangulation.

4.6.4.1 Principles of Adult Education

The principles of adult education (Knowles, 1990) are used to frame the experiences of stakeholders, as the data is rich and varied and these principles are regarded as good practice by practitioners, therefore presenting the research-practitioner with a benchmark. These principles incorporate the theories of psychological development and education that support literacy as a social practice model.

4.6.4.1.1 Negotiated

The curriculum was designed through a process of consultation with the various stakeholders. The action research spirals implemented during the training sessions allowed for reflection, consultation and planning thus creating the space for an emergent curriculum.

At the end of session 5, for example, participants were specifically asked about the curriculum and had the opportunity for input. This is recorded in the reflective review as:

> I asked about topics that they would like to include and they felt that what was done this far was interesting and relevant, so I should keep going this way.

Participants responded positively in the final interview about being consulted regarding the course. Toby commented on the fact that having the training too structured might have pre-empted him from getting what he wanted:

> Well, I suppose it was better, because you knew what you were getting and what you tried to get, but if it was more structured you mightn't do what you wanted.

This response does highlight that it was important for the participant to get what he anticipated and felt he wanted. This view was echoed by Smiley who said that,

> ... if you don't meet even part of that you're obviously disappointed that you started the course and you would tend to drop out.

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It can therefore be deduced that the curriculum was negotiated and that this consultation was regarded as important by the participants as they needed to know what to expect, felt they had needs to be met and might have dropped out if that was not the case.

4.6.4.1.2 Facilitated & Learner-centred

Agreeing the curriculum with participants on an ongoing basis shows that the learner perspective was regarded as very important for the training. Designing the curriculum around the needs of the learner does not only look at what they want or need to learn, but also at how they learn best. Teaching methods took the learning styles and intelligences of participants into account and were designed to optimise the learning experience for the participants. This resulted in the intentional use of a variety of methods to which participants responded well.

An overview of the draft curriculum (see Appendix 6) shows that discussion formed an integral part of the teaching methods that were used. It also shows that a wide variety of teaching methods were used.

Participants were asked in the evaluation to rate the teaching methods employed by the tutor and all of them rated this element of the course as 'excellent'. Doing a computer scan of the written reflections showed that the words 'discussion', 'discussing', 'discuss' or 'discussed' were used 80 times to reflect on the sessions. This highlights the facilitated nature of the training. Examples of this are:

- ✓ We discussed how adults learned and the things that helped them and hindered them in previous learning experiences as adults. This created the opportunity for discussing fears and expectations of the current training.
- ✓ ... we had to think ... we asked questions, we listened to people's questions, we listened for the answers ...

The group commented that they had never known about learning styles and multiple intelligences and two of the group specifically could relate well to this, as they are very hands-on practical learners and find sitting still and absorbing knowledge difficult.

Participants were asked in the reflections about the use of a variety of methods and commented on the value and fun that this brought to the training. They also commented on the value of learning in a group and with their peers. At the end of the first week, Maria reflected on this and the research-practitioner subsequently recorded it in the written reflection of that week:

> At the end of the session Maria highlighted the piece of learning that meant most to her was that there are different intelligences and that it is much broader than merely academic and that it gives value to other skills that she has.

Recognising the different learning styles and intelligences in the group also helped the research-practitioner in preparing relevant material and keeping their needs central. A quote from her learning journal highlights this:

> I find the internet a very useful tool when looking for interesting ways, like games or images or problem scenarios, to present material or stimulate discussion. Especially YouTube and Google Images are really useful – the group responds well when I use an image as a starting point for discussion.

Practical learning was included through games with learning outcomes and role plays. Using the computer added another visual and practical element to the training and when participants worked on the PowerPoint and Excel package, the graph function was added to facilitate the visual dimension. The aural angle was included through the use of discussion of topics and problem solving scenarios as well as through the presentations that they prepared for their group members. During the exit interview, Speedy referred to the varied methods used when she said "we did so many different things, like".

Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism is evident in how classroom socialisation was used to aid learning. Classroom socialisation helps to take the learning experience to an affective rather than merely functional level. Participants responded very well to this and rated the interaction with the research-practitioner and their peers highly.

4.6.4.1.3 Peer-supported

Two data sources, the exit interviews and reflective reviews, show that the group dynamic was an important element of the learning for the participants and that they

felt comfortable with each other. It also indicates that becoming comfortable with each other was a process. This was expressed in an exit interview:

> I think everyone was very comfortable in that class, y'know, I felt comfortable. Not the first time, you would be daunted the first time ... as time went on and we got to know one another, we got more comfortable with one another.

And by Smiley in the focus group discussion:

> I liked the group as well. We were all individuals coming in, but now we are turned out to be a group, we worked with each other as a group.

The research-practitioner encouraged participants to help each other when appropriate and the data shows that they experienced this positively. This was expressed by Speedy in her exit interview:

> ... I thought it was a comfortable group, and the fact we'd go over and help one another ... everyone got on grand, y'know ... for the e-mail, we e-mailed one another while sitting beside one another.

They expressed this to the FÁS monitor during session 7 and this is recorded in the weekly reflections:

> They felt that the training was good and that they work well together as a group. They highlighted the fact that I give them the opportunity to help each other. That ensures that nobody either falls behind or gets too far ahead. In this way they support each other.

Another positive element for them was the fact that they were a small number. They expressed this and their sense of peer support to the HR Manager during her visit at the end of session 10. This was recorded in the weekly reflections:

> The group mentioned that they have bonded well as a group and that being a small group is good. They got to know their colleagues better and are now comfortable discussing with and helping each other in the classroom.

An unexpected and unplanned outcome is suggested in this response to the HR Manager: this relates to the fact that they got to know their colleagues better and became comfortable with them. This is likely to contribute to good in-company relationships.

The positive response of participants to classroom socialisation underscores the importance of the interpersonal and affective elements of the learning process.

4.6.4.1.4 Prior experience valued & used

The research-practitioner recognised that participants would have useful knowledge in relation to their jobs and the operation of the facility and during the first session it was highlighted that adults, and by definition each participant, brings a whole world with them into the classroom. The tutor made it clear that this is a useful resource for learning.

Participants got many opportunities to express their opinions and share from their life experience. An example of this relates to the topic of change which was first discussed in terms of general examples, then the modern workplace and then in relation to personal life situations where they had to manage changes. The shared wisdom was then used to deduce how change makes us feel, ways to deal with those feelings and tools for effective change management. This example illustrates how prior experiential knowledge was built upon to deduce and transfer the principles and make their tacit knowledge visible.

Another example of using prior knowledge and building on it related to the use of formal letters: the session started with looking at different envelopes and the clues they present. This was followed by selecting the most appropriate format of a formal letter from various versions. Only then were participants asked to attempt writing a formal letter. The research-practitioner reflected on this in the weekly reflective review,

> ... the discussion about formal letters provided participants with a template as to how they should go about it. If they got the instructions without that scaffolded introduction, I suspect they would have found the task much harder ... I need to check with participants if they found the introductory exercises a help.

The tutor did check this with participants and they agreed that they were better able to do the task because they were prepared for it.

Knowledge gained on the course was "tested" by seeing if a participant could use this relatively new knowledge as prior knowledge and could transfer it to a new situation. An excerpt from the research-practitioner's learning journal refers to this,

> ... I asked a participant how she would go about printing work she had done (in Excel). I had taught this skill in Word, but not yet in Excel. I was curious about how and if she would be able to transfer knowledge. She looked at me and asked, "I go to File and then to Print?" This response confirmed to me that she had grasped the concepts.

From these examples, from both the participants and research-practitioner's perspective, it is evident that prior knowledge was valued and used to prepare participants for new learning. New learning was then built on prior experiences and knowledge. It seems that this approach was experienced positively by both parties and that it aided the learning process.

4.6.4.1.5 Problem or purpose centred & Immediate application

This principle of adult education correlates well with Sticht's functional context education (see 2.1.2.3.1). Evidence from the weekly reflections and feedback from participants suggest that they were encouraged to solve problem scenarios. Various examples of immediate application further supports the finding that the training was relevant, purpose centred and applied by the participants.

A computer scan of the weekly reflections shows that the word scenario(s) appears nine times. It is used in different contexts to refer to analysis of problem or conflict scenarios at work or in their personal lives.

In the section on the evaluation questionnaire regarding course content, participants responded that the content was "relevant to their job", especially as it helped them "dealing with change, using computers and it gave them more confidence". From these responses, it seems that they experienced the initiative as relevant for immediate application.

The Validation Group suggested asking participants if there were things that they would do differently as a result of participation. This proved very good advice as it helped participants identify how they applied the learning.

Examples mentioned in the focus group were for instance: now reading an email through before sending it off, personally going to speak to the boss instead of sending somebody else to do it, negotiating a win-win situation in a personal relationship.

Examples mentioned in the exit interviews were for instance: ability to send an email from her workstation rather than asking 'one of the lads' to do it for her, preparing for a meeting and giving considered responses rather than going about it in a haphazard way, using the computer at home more often and for more varied applications.

4.6.4.2 Good practice in Adult Literacy

In addition to adherence to the identified principles of good practice in adult education, the research-practitioner realised the importance of adhering to good practice in relation to adult literacy. This mainly relates to the need for confidentiality and managing the perceived stigma attached to literacy.

Even though participants had mentioned their concern about their own writing skills, they did not see themselves as literacy students. Speedy mentioned that if recruitment was done for "literacy", she "straight away would have thought it was reading and writing" and would not have come forward. Care thus had to be taken in how literacy was dealt with in the classroom. The research-practitioner therefore used the computer as both a diagnostic and remedial tool and also encouraged participants initially not to focus on using grammar and spelling perfectly, but rather to get the information on paper and capture the flow of their thoughts. The grammar and writing protocols could be focussed on afterwards as part of editing. This is evident from the reflective review of Session 2:

> Everybody was asked to think of a big change that happened in his/her life and write a few lines about this. They were told not to worry about how it comes out on the paper, as long as it comes out – the rest can be attended to later.

This worked well as it eased the fear of failure of not producing perfect writing or of exposure in front of peers.

The computer generally is perceived as a sophisticated skill and it helped to deflect the perception that could have existed among their peers that the training was basic. The computer was viewed as an ally in helping to identify mistakes through red or green underlining. The computer also sometimes was made to be a scapegoat and mistakes could be camouflaged as typing errors rather than grammar or spelling, yet used as a springboard for discussion of grammar or spelling. This was done to help participants to save face and to grow in confidence using writing and editing their work.

Using the computer in this manner was checked with the Validation Group. They felt that it was valid and good practice to integrate functional skills in this way, because it is in line with the social practice perspective on literacy that does not teach skills in isolation but in how they are used in everyday life.

4.7 Release and Attendance

Although cautious about the training and concerned that the outcomes will be in line with company objectives, the HR Manager was very supportive of the initiative and initially hoped it could be arranged that employees do the training during work time, or otherwise half on their own and half on company time. This eventually was not passed at a Leadership Team meeting, because the company was "under tremendous pressure for productivity" (email, 17/09/08).

The fact that participants in this workplace initiative did not get paid release directly impacted on the training in that two of the participants withdrew from the training as a result. Han Solo withdrew because he had childcare responsibilities after work. He stated this in his exit interview and it was also mentioned by Toby during the participant focus group:

> ... that is the main reason why Han Solo pulled out ... because he didn't want, he couldn't make up the time, the three hours. He could not come in early, because he has children to take to school and come home from school...

Leon withdrew because he had started a basic computer course that was run after hours and he had to work in three hours per week for that. He could not manage to work in a further three hours to enable him to participate in this training.

The participants never complained or begrudged having to come in for the training. They were realistic nevertheless, and did say that they sometimes found it hard. Two of them commented in their evaluation questionnaire on the difficulty of combining the training with shift work.

They felt that the fact that they had to do the training on their own time is a drawback when it comes to encouraging colleagues to participate. They voiced this to the HR Manager during her evaluation visit before Christmas when she asked if they would promote it. In the focus group, they also referred to it being a difficulty when they try to promote it:

> Smiley: ... when you have a discussion about it, if you try to advertise it ... first reaction that you get is about working up the time...

Even though the research-practitioner stressed the fact that the company facilitated and arranged the training and that it is sponsored for them by the government, they still felt that colleagues see it in terms of time that they could have worked over-time or having to work in hours that might be difficult to fit in around their schedule:

> Smiley: I found it hard to work up the time and to put it in perspective right, I'm not talking about me, but if they want other people to do the course, it is the time and the money. That might be why they won't come in and do the course.

The group referred to this in terms of their own experience too when asked about what was not good about the course:

> Speedy: ... it was not the class, I find the Mondays very hard to take. Up since seven o'clock ... I know I won't get home until after 7 o'clock, so time wise ... Then, when I come down here ... and the weeks just flew! I'd come here and go aaah ... it's seven o'clock ... where did the time go? Once here, I didn't find it that hard.

While no commitment has been given about future programmes or paid release, it seems evident from the entry interview with the HR Manager that they would consider future paid release,

> ... in fact, as an outcome of this, what I would say to you, depending on what the findings are and if we think that there are specific modules or learning pieces that we could roll out, we would actually do it on company time, if we see that there was a measurable outcome of it.

The HR Manager mentioned in the exit interview with her that she learned from this programme and would be inclined to 'expect' people to participate in this kind of training in future if she felt they would benefit from it. While employees might not necessarily respond well to having that expectation placed on them, it might have positive repercussions for paid release as there would thus be an expectation from the company on the individual to participate:

> I think if I was faced with it again ... with individuals who I know would be challenged with whether it's technology or whatever, I think because of what I've learned about the whole programme and, I've learned about the systems that are in place that enable people to develop themselves, my approach would be slightly different, I would be expecting people to take on something like this in future...

Relationships between the research-practitioner and the company were positive and supportive and there was no need to involve the union in discussions about rolling out the training, except perhaps to negotiate paid release. The exit interview indicated that this would possibly have jeopardised the training. More benefits will potentially ensue for employees by identifying outcomes in line with company objectives, than from opposing the company by involving the union.

The research-practitioner also asked the state training agency about where they feel the responsibility for upskilling people with low educational qualifications lies. The local STB manager felt that the state is responsible for providing this kind of training – which they are currently doing through funding the training element. Probing further, in terms of the responsibility for contributing towards the release of employees, he felt that the best option is a collaborative approach where every stakeholder makes a contribution:

> ... a joint approach there ... it is like anything that you get for nothing – it is not always appreciated ... if the individual contributes in some way, no matter how small, it gives a greater appreciation and incentive to the individual to seek value for money as well.

From the perspectives explored during the research, it becomes clear that there is no easy answer to the issue of paid release. It seems that involving the union might jeopardise the training in some situations, that there should be some onus on the

participant and that authentic research with relevant outcomes has the potential for changing the perspective of the employer in this regard.

4.8 Expectations and Outcomes of participation

In the initial interviews the research-practitioner explored what the stakeholders expected from the workplace literacy initiative. This informed the curriculum, highlighted correlation between expectations and outcomes, and, in addition, gave the research-practitioner an understanding of what the different stakeholders regarded as measurements of success.

4.8.1 Employees

4.8.1.1 Employee Expectations of Participation in workplace literacy initiative

Participating employees were asked during the initial interviews what their reason(s) for participation were. Reasons for participation by implication gives an idea of what they would like to gain from the training. The following table summarises their reasons:

Table 7: Employees' Reasons for participation in Workplace Training

Name	Reason for participation in training
Speedy	*Want more skills, manage recent promotion*
Keano	*Better myself; Learn about computers; like interpersonal skills and managing at a meeting, I would like that kind of stuff. I do go to meetings, but don't say anything, because I don't feel confident enough.*
George	*Take an opportunity*
Han Solo	*To better myself*
Leon	*To up my skills*
Maria	*I don't want to be worried when I write things down, like I said about mixing up the numbers and spellings. I want to have the confidence ... more confidence about these things.*
Smiley	*Because of changes on the job*
Toby	*Computers*

Part of the first training session was also used to determine expectations of the participants as a group. Expectations were recorded on a flipchart and related to increased knowledge about the computer, improving personal interaction skills, increased confidence in and outside of their jobs, improved capacity to solve

problems, being able to format their writing, more confidence in dealing with difficult people and getting a certificate for the training that they do.

The area of confidence especially seemed to have high importance for participants. Quotations represented in Table 7 support this awareness that they lack confidence. One man also said:

> I'm not confident. I come across, but I'm not confident. If I go to a darts competition tonight, I have myself beaten before I go out the door, without throwing a dart! That's what's wrong with me. And then I'll go and just won't take part.

One of the older interviewees referred particularly to his age and the feeling that his skills were inferior to the younger people at the facility. It seemed to have influenced his confidence in terms of going for promotion:

> George: Slim chance for promotion ... There's a lot of younger people with more sense than I have, more skills, more up to date stuff, like computers and so on, so ... no, that would not happen now.
> Research-practitioner: If skills were not a consideration, would you ... did you consider it in the past?
> George: I did consider it in the past.

It is noteworthy that reasons for participation and the expectations identified by the group do not purely focus on the workplace, but also on more general and personal outcomes. Participants were asked about that during the exit focus group and Toby said that "it is your life ... it is you as a person that experienced it", referring to the broader application of the training.

4.8.1.2 Outcomes identified by Employees

The various data sources and triangulated perspectives on outcomes for the employees refer to new skills that they gained, growth in confidence, valuing the opportunity to exchange ideas, peer support, a greater awareness of themselves and other people and the ability to speak up and handle people better.

They furthermore referred to a sense of achievement and 'feeling good about themselves'. They enjoyed the training and want to continue on the learning journey. The fact that the training was funded by FÁS meant that they got the benefit of free training as well as two or in some cases three certificates from FETAC. Two of the

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participants specifically referred to not having to ask colleagues to help them with things anymore, suggesting a saving on time and human resources.

4.8.1.2.1 Recognising Learning as a Process

A discussion about progression options that are available to them took place after the FÁS monitor broached it during her visit. This was recorded in the reflective review. From this excerpt (checked with participants) it is evident that their enjoyment of the current training is a contributory factor to their desire to continue on the journey of learning:

> We had quite a long discussion about progression. Participants are enjoying the current training and are interested in continuing their training through different options. I explained some avenues available to them.

The sense of enjoyment and of settling into a process is evident in the learning logs of the participants too, as this quotation from Smiley's learning log shows:

> This turned out to be good fun as we were learning skills and enjoying it at the same time. This exercise was called problem solving. Another class that went very well. Really enjoying it to the max. At this part of the course we were really getting settled and participating more without us realising it.

Participants again asked about their options for progression during the focus group. It was also evident from the evaluation questionnaire that they wanted to continue on their learning journey as all participants said that they would like to participate in further training. They particularly would like more computer training.

Expressing the desire to continue participating in this learning process and the wish to explore options, hints at the emergence of the participants taking ownership of their own learning and of becoming self-directed in the future. This indicates a shift in perception of themselves and their identity now as seeing themselves not merely as having low educational attainment, but rather as learners on a lifelong learning journey; more ready for and less fearful of future training.

Maria, who was most impressed by the discovery of multiple intelligences, remarked at her exit interview that she thinks she'd like to do an art course next, as it is something she'd always wanted to do. Even though this appears to have little to do

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with upskilling for the workplace or workplace literacy, it suggests an engagement with learning and becoming self-directed in this process.

The workplace literacy initiative was to be tested as a catalyst. From the above information it seems that engagement with the literacy initiative was instrumental in creating the desire for continuing on the learning journey.

During the focus group discussion, one of the participants identified "initiative" as a key skill for the employee in the modern workplace. Over the Christmas period, Maria and Smiley used initiative and tried their skills to send the tutor an email with good wishes from their respective homes. Smiley also spent a lot of time during the weekend before the final session to design a PowerPoint presentation summarising her learning on the course and highlighting some of the humorous moments that the group experienced (See Appendix 9). The research-practitioner interpreted these seemingly small spontaneous gestures as indicators of them engaging with their own learning process and starting to use the skills for their own purposes and enjoyment, rather than as simply learning that is situated in the classroom.

These outcomes confirm that the quality and validity criteria identified by Herr and Anderson (see Table 5) were adhered to, particularly the dialogic, process, catalytic and democratic validity.

4.8.1.2.2 Confidence and Identity

The data generated seems to indicate that participants experienced increased confidence, improved their personal and interpersonal awareness as well as gained a more positive perception of themselves and their skills. This is in line with the expectations expressed at the beginning of the training by the employer and the employees.

Even though they mentioned during the initial interviews their difficulty especially with spelling, and despite encouraging them on various occasions to bring in relevant documentation, participants did not do this.

Reflection with the group revealed that they coped with the current reading and writing of their job and they preferred course content relating to confidence building in general skills, expansion of literacy applications, e.g. through editing accident reports in soft copy and sending emails, problem solving, interpersonal skills and teamwork rather than focussing on documentation and functional skills only. It seems reasonable to deduce from this that what they wanted was literacy support according to the social practice conceptual framework, not according to their own perception which was still a deficit and functional conceptualisation.

Speedy wrote that she "gained more confidence in working with computers, dealing with people and difficult situations". She continued by saying that she now "faces work situations with a different outlook".

A scale was used in an attempt to gain quantitative evidence about increase of confidence (See Table 8.1 – 8.7). Participants were measured on a scale of 1-10 before and after the training in terms of a selection of application areas. The computer element was only included in the last measurement as the research-practitioner did not want the complete beginners having to rate themselves as a 0 before the training commenced. Most participants made significant gains. They were again measured in the exit interviews 2 months after the training to allow for consolidation of skills, to check the validity of their responses and to counter the 'happy bunny' effect that could have influenced them on the last session when questionnaires were completed. These same questions were asked of the employees that did not complete the training.

Initially eight employees were to do the course. Two of these dropped out because of difficulties around release and one because he felt daunted after the first session. These were again interviewed at the end and provide an interesting corollary for the four that completed the training. (The eighth person participated until session 11, but then became very sick and unfortunately passed away.)

Table 8.1 – 8.7: Comparison tables of confidence before and after training

Participants who completed the training:

Table 8.1 Toby
(gained 7 points)

Confidence	Before	After	+2 months
General	7	8	8.5
Public speaking	5	8	7
Participate in w/p meetings	7	9	8.5
Writing	7	8	7
Reading	7	9	9
ICT		10	9

Table 8.2 Smiley
(gained 2 points)

Confidence	Before	After	+2 months
General	8	8	8
Public speaking	7	8	8
Participate in w/p meetings	8	9	8
Writing	6	9	7
Reading	9	9	9
ICT	*1	8	8

*She was asked to rate her ICT in retrospect in the exit interview, because the research-practitioner wanted to indicate the level at which she started to highlight the significance of the self-motivated PowerPoint presentation that she prepared.

Table 8.3 Maria
(gained 9 points)

Confidence	Before	After	+2 months
General	5	6	7
Public speaking	4	7	7
Participate in w/p meetings	5	7	7
Writing	4	5	6
Reading	7	7	7
ICT		6	7

Table 8.4 Speedy
(gained 11 points)

Confidence	Before	After	+2 months
General	6	8	7
Public speaking	4	5	4
Participate in w/p meetings	5	5	7.5
Writing	3	7	8.5
Reading	7	9	10
ICT		9	5?

Participants who did not complete the training:

Table 8.5 Han Solo
(dropped 2 points)

Confidence	Before	After
General	6	4
Public speaking	4	4
Participate in w/p meetings	6	6
Writing	5	5
Reading	10	8
ICT		8

Table 8.6 George
(dropped 1 point)

Confidence	Before	After
General	7	5
Public speaking	5	3
Participate in w/p meetings	8	7
Writing	3	5.5
Reading	8	8.5
ICT		0

* George recounted an experience he had in the interim between interviews during which he felt he let a friend down quite publicly. This might have had an impact on how he rated himself.

Table 8.7 Leon
(gained 6 points)

Confidence	Before	After
General	5	6
Public speaking	5	5
Participate in w/p meetings	8/10	10
Writing	7	8
Reading	6	10
ICT		7

*Leon participated in a basic computer course during the same time as the researched initiative. He also mentioned during the initial interview that his participation in workplace meetings is determined by whether he is temporary (8) or permanent (10). It is not clear whether he was made permanent during the interim between the two interviews.

These measurements are subjective and do not take into account events beyond the training that could have influenced people. This was not part of the scope of the research, but warrants further investigation in future, especially because some of the outcomes are unexpected.

Adding the points of the three who did not participate in this initiative, it shows a gain of 3 points. Totalling the gains (after 2 months) made by the four who participated, shows a gain of 29 points. The difference in total (26 points) is substantive enough to indicate significant gains experienced by the four employees who completed the training. It is also important to keep in mind that it was not a skills test, but rather a perception of confidence level that was reported on. The computer element was not included in this calculation.

The research-practitioner did not only rely on the evidence from the scale to determine change in confidence. The focus group discussion also indicated growth in confidence that manifested in actions. For example, Toby spoke about going to speak to his boss:

> Toby: It gives you confidence to go into the office and talk to your boss, you know, if you have a problem. I've always got somebody else to do it.
> Research-practitioner: OK, and would you do it yourself now?
> Toby: I would, yes.

Two months later, during the exit interview, Toby told the research-practitioner that an occasion did arise in which he had to speak to his boss and that he prepared for this. He managed to make his point well and could answer the objections. The outcome of the conversation was in Toby's favour. This seems to suggest that he gained both the confidence and the skills to do something he would not have had the courage to do before.

Maria referred to having more confidence with using the home computer:
> ... we have a computer at home and I really don't use it, but I've started using it more, and I'm more confident with it now. It doesn't bother me to hit a wrong key or anything. I have more confidence; you know what you're doing.

Speedy reflected on her getting the new job and that she was petrified in the beginning, but "I'm flying it now and getting on fine". This perception of hers is confirmed by her PTL who said that "she definitely has developed, and more than likely it's because of this course".

4.8.1.2.3 Personal and Interpersonal Awareness

Quotations from participants seem to indicate that they are more self-aware and aware of people around them. Speedy articulated it particularly in relation to work:
> I feel I'm learning the difference in behaviour and can identify the different types, especially in the every day to day life in work.

Smiley commented on being more aware of the two sides in communication, that she'd listen as well as give her opinion and she referred this awareness back to a session on problem solving and teamwork that they did on the course:
> When we were working in the groups, the day we had the pictures, we had to think, we had to put forward, the sequencing. We asked questions, we listened to people's questions; we listened for the answers, that's my point now. I'd listen and I'd give an opinion – the giving and the taking.

Maria also referred to being more tuned into other people's behaviour and emotions:
> I'd be looking at people now when they talk – how are they moving or doing things, like the body language, sometimes even to try and know whether they're in good or bad form, like.

Participants commented on feeling good about themselves for having taken on the challenge of a new learning experience. Toby and Smiley referred to this:

> Toby: ... that you have done a course ... it gives you that bit more ... of a
> lift, I don't know how to explain it, but ... feel good about yourself and
> feel good that you did it.
> Research-practitioner: Achievement?
> Smiley: That's it!
> Toby: Yes, I think so.

When referring to making the presentation, Maria said,

> Maria: Well, I would never have spoke like that before, I would never have gone up like that,
> Never mind a show with slides ...
> Research-practitioner: Was it OK for you?
> Maria: It was great yea, it was better than I thought!

One of the participants showed a marked increase in self awareness and a development of a more positive perspective of herself through the course. This is recorded in her learning log. After the first session, she wrote, "I have to stop putting myself down." In a subsequent reflection she said that, "Before I started this course I had so many negative feelings about myself, now I am starting to think I was very hard on myself. I have learnt that you have to build on your good points".

She also realised that she needed to believe in herself and this growth in self-belief is apparent in another entry in her Learning Log, "This evening I learnt how to send attachments to an e-mail, it will take a few more times before I remember how to do it but I am quietly confident I will master it". After a few weeks she wrote that "This week I flew through the email and I was very proud of myself". She commented on her evaluation questionnaire that, "I feel more relaxed about learning now and do not feel that I am unteachable".

In the exit interview, Speedy mentioned a number of ways in which she had done things at home with the computer that she would not have been able to do before. She mentioned that her sister needed some letters typed and that she did them for her. She laughingly told the research-practitioner that her sister told her, "I'm very impressed with you!" This example suggests that the work-related training was

transferred to her home experience and that she felt good about the positive feedback she received as a result.

Toby and the meeting with his boss, Speedy not having to rely on 'the lads' anymore for sending her emails, or Maria not being scared of pressing a wrong key on the keyboard anymore are just some examples of how they have become empowered through participating in the training. They seem to feel good about themselves, more capable in their interactions and skills and appear to be more confident. All of these gains are closely linked to personal development and being positive about their identity.

The evidence that supports these observations comes from a variety of data sources, e.g. initial and exit interviews, learning logs, participant focus group discussion, the Likert scale and the PTL Focus group. Therefore it can be regarded as trustworthy.

During the exit interview with the HR Manager, she confirmed these observations from her own perspective and by retelling something that a PTL told her:

> ... what I sensed from the participants was that they got a lot out of it ... this morning I was talking to one of the team leaders and he himself saw a change in one of the participants in an element of confidence and being able to use different components that he would have learned ... and that was very positive - we were actually having a completely different conversation when he said he saw a change in the individual, confidence wise and that...

This comment aids in triangulating the information gathered through the use of the various research methods with the employees.

4.8.2 Government training agency (FÁS)

4.8.2.1 Expectations of returns for funding the workplace literacy initiative

The state training agency currently funds workplace literacy initiatives in Ireland, so it was important to establish what they would like to get as a return for their investment. In an interview with the regional Services to Business (STB) Manager of the region, he identifies the purpose of the initiative to support people to "acquire the skills which enable them to fully participate, be that reading skills, writing skills and broader skills as well for normal day to day interaction". He felt that

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accreditation was important because it "demonstrates somebody has attained a particular level ..." and that getting accreditation is "confidence building in its own right". He also felt that gaining accreditation contributes to a person being happy and willing to embark on lifelong learning.

It needs to be stressed that this is the view of the STB manager in the region where the research was conducted and not necessarily the perspective of all STB managers in FÁS.

4.8.2.2 Outcomes of the initiative for FÁS

The four participants who completed the training gained ten certificates at FETAC L3 between them. Skills and confidence gains were also evident from various data sources and triangulated by the HR Manager and Production Team Leaders. As seen in the previous section, participants expressed the desire to participate in more training and commented on improved skills. This suggests that the outcomes desired by FÁS, match the outcomes achieved.

4.8.3 Employer

4.8.3.1 Expectations of the Employer for supporting the workplace literacy initiative

From the site visit and the initial interview with the HR Manager, the research-practitioner concluded that the company anticipated the workplace literacy initiative to have two main outcomes; the one was linked to functional job-related skills and the other to a change in their perception of themselves. The changed perception seemed to encompass a positive engagement with learning, valuing their personal learning and fostering a desire to embark on a learning journey.

The HR Manager raised a question about wanting to gain an understanding of the difficulties that employees experienced, the user-friendliness of the company forms and whether they appropriately equip and train employees to use the forms. She asked the trainer to encourage the participants to bring in the forms that presented them with difficulty, instead of her presuming which ones they are.

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Other functional outcomes that she identified related to their:

> ... communication and their ability to read the Standard Operation Procedures, use the systems, the clock ... not to be so dependent on others ...

More ideological expectations related to learning, personal development and increased confidence. She felt that she had expectations around putting:

> ... structure around self-awareness and understanding... the consciousness piece of themselves, their ability to training piece, their ability to value where they're at ... if we could bring them along ... and give them the confidence ... I know it is a minority group ... but I'm very conscious of it and I'd like to give them an opportunity.

She is aware of the emotional baggage that some people carry in relation to education and saw this training as a way of guiding people from a negative perception of their educational capacity to a decision to engage with learning in a more positive way because they recognise their own worth:

> ... some of them devalue themselves because they see themselves as not having a formal qualification or that they had a negative experience of education and because those two have played in their minds for so long, they feel that 'I'm not really as valuable as those that come in with their scholarships ...' I think anywhere we can give people that moment, that Eureka moment of thinking, 'Yes, I really want to do something to make myself better, and I know I'm worth it, and I know I can do it, and I will really enjoy this journey and I will feel ...'

She often used the word 'journey' when referring to training people who come from a relatively low educational base. She again used it when she spoke about the way that she would like the initiative to interact with employees, interestingly not only for the job, but also for their personal lives outside the job:

> ... small little steps and giving them action learning ... giving them a bit of a challenge, you know. Outside of the job as well as inside of the job and giving them feedback and helping them – giving them an appetite to do something more every time they come back in.

It seems that she feels a challenge that is suitably supported is likely to create a desire for further engagement with the learning journey, which is an outcome she values.

The research-practitioner expected that increased productivity and profit would be high on the employer's agenda, but this was never mentioned as a desired outcome. This is a question that is worth probing further; it would be merely an assumption that the HR Manager saw the link between increased productivity and profit that the expected outcomes like readiness for training, increased skills and improved confidence would bring, as it was never explicitly stated.

Production Team Leaders did not have clear expectations beyond a general consensus that training aimed at improving communication skills is good. From the discussion with them, it seems as if they had never before considered training that was not functionally job-related for their teams. The discussion concluded with them endorsing an initiative that intended to assist team members to gain not only functional skills, but also to support personal development. The change in perspective is reflected in their inquiry about whether non-participating staff would also get the opportunity to take part as they felt other employees would benefit too.

4.8.3.2 Outcomes of potential benefit to the Employer

The participants did not want to focus on job documentation. They said they were able to manage and found other elements of the training more relevant. This seems to indicate that the training provided by the company supported them sufficiently or that they rated the extension of their broader literacy capacity as more important than targeted document literacy.

Except for the unexpected outcome in relation to company documentation, outcomes all seem positive and constitute benefits to the employer. These benefits are in line with the expectations and thus with company objectives for the training. They relate to increased confidence, desire to continue learning, a better understanding of interpersonal relations and also to gaining computer and reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. An added benefit was the fact that the training was funded by FÁS.

From the exit interview it appears that the HR Manager recognised that it was beneficial to the company. She said that:

> because of what I've learned about the whole program and, I've learned about the systems that are in place that enable people to develop themselves, my approach would be slightly different, I would be expecting people to take on something like this in future ...

When asked about any negatives that the company experienced in terms of the workplace literacy initiative, she mentioned that there were no negatives, but that she was disappointed that more people did not take up the opportunity.

Another unexpected outcome relates to the strong group cohesion that developed among the participants who hardly knew each other at the beginning of the training (see 4.7.4.1.3 about peer supported learning). Participation in the training might also assists the company to honour its union agreements in that it supports challenged employees to manage training and difficult situations with increased competence. Lower dependency on colleagues furthermore is likely to improve productivity as the example of Toby speaking to his boss himself and this example of Speedy in relation to sending an email highlights:

> When I got the job first I hadn't a clue ... so I got one of the lads over to do it for me, but now I'm able to do it no bother ...

It therefore seems that the initiative can be seen as a catalyst in not only supporting the employees, but also in helping the company to deal with the complex demands of the modern workplace.

During the exit debriefing discussion, the things which were picked up by the PTL's as positive outcomes of the training related to understanding of roles as well as confidence and dealing with people. Speedy's PTL said that:

> ... she's developed a lot in her people skills ... she has gained a greater understanding of my role and that something that appears quite simple to change, may not be so because of regulations ...

These outcomes do not relate to purely reading and writing, but to development of the person and of understanding rather than mechanistically performing actions. Understanding was one of the qualities mentioned by the HR Manager during the site visit as a requirement of their operatives.

An email received from the HR Manager 4 months after completion of the training, invited the research-practitioner to contact the company, because they consider running the programme again. This is further confirmation that they recognise the value and potential of the initiative.

4.8.4 Training Provider

Though the process was challenging at times, the research-practitioner is now set up as a registered training provider and quality assured with FETAC and is also on the FÁS National Register of Trainers. These professional development opportunities would not have been pursued if these were not requirements for delivering the training and for submitting portfolios for accreditation.

In addition, the research-practitioner gained experience in delivering a stakeholder negotiated contextualised workplace literacy initiative that simultaneously satisfied FETAC specific learning outcomes.

Because the whole approach and initiative form part of a research project, the research-practitioner had the benefit of a supervisor and an academic institution that supported her professional and research development.

The training provider had the additional benefit that the training was funded.

4.8.5 Areas of Resonance and Discord

From the data generated regarding stakeholder expectations, it seems to emerge that the expectations correspond in many areas. These areas especially relate to accreditation, skills development, improving confidence and in the case of the FÁS and the employer the aspiration that this would be the first step in embarking on a lifelong learning journey. It also became evident that the expectations the stakeholders had of the workplace literacy initiative did not only relate to functional applications such as grammar or computers, but also to personal development, confidence and interaction with other people. The evidence suggests that there is significant comparability between outcomes and expectations.

Accreditation seems to be important to the employer and the state, but not important to all the participants. The employer wanted feedback and attention given to the company documentation and, while this was a need expressed by the

participants during the entry interviews, once they were participating in the training it seemed to be of lesser importance than in the initial stages.

This shift is something that could be further explored, as it would be interesting to know whether increase in confidence and embedding document literacy in the training helped them to gain the apparent higher level of comfort with the documents.

The only area of dissonance identified related to paid release of participants. Participants themselves found it difficult at times to fit the training around their jobs and personal commitments and this resulted in two people withdrawing from the training. Participants did not complain about it, but did mention that it makes it harder to convince colleagues to join in this type of training if it is on their own time.

The employer feels that people should take the initiative and take some responsibility for their own learning by taking up an opportunity like this. This was an initial exploratory initiative for the company though and it was said at the entry interview that, depending on the outcomes, they will reconsider the release situation.

The FÁS STB manager felt that joint release between the participants and the employer might be an option, because then there is commitment from all parties, either through a time or funding contribution.

4.9 Findings relevant to the Research Question

The research question indicates the main elements that were explored during the research. These relate to literacy in the workplace, change, the design and delivery of the training programme, the expectations and experience of participating stakeholders and the outcomes of involvement in the workplace literacy initiative. The Discussion chapter will consider these findings as they relate to existing academic literature.

From the findings, it seems that the workplace where the research was situated has to contend with the pressures of industry, such as productivity, quality control and continuous improvement as well as unionisation. It has to manage its workforce in a way which helps them to contend with the changing expectations of industry. Some of these changes relate to literacy practices and the research showed that employees engage with different literacies that have emerged or changed in recent times.

The research also recognised that there are different stakeholders involved in workplace literacy and explored their perspectives and how these correspond or disagree with each other. It seems to emerge that there are more resonance than disagreement and that consultation and cooperation between stakeholders will enhance the outcomes for all. The research also seems to indicate the importance of having somebody act in a consultation and mediation role between the stakeholders.

The findings further suggest that there are certain practices and characteristics of the training initiative that are important for it to act as a catalyst. These relate especially to the principles of adult education and to an awareness of the sensitivities that relate to adult literacy. It also suggests that the theoretical framework of workplace literacy as a constructivist social practice situates the training in a relevant manner for stakeholders.

The research question explores whether workplace literacy participation can be a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing workplace practices. From the findings extrapolated from the data generated, it seems fair to answer the question with a conditional 'Yes'. Workplace literacy can act as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing literacy practices at work, but it seems that there are certain practices that need to be implemented in order to reach that affirmative answer and support employees in the optimum way.

These practices refer to the negotiated and contextualised content and format of the curriculum, the ethos and teaching methods used by the training provider as well as to the positive collaboration between the stakeholders.

If these things are in place, the benefits that employees experience do show that they experienced a catalyst that enables them to deal with changing workplace literacy practices and to continue on a journey of personal and skills development in line with the social practice framework of literacy.

The findings from the research also suggest that participation in the research was not only a catalyst for the employees, but also brought about benefits and insights for the employer, training provider and the government.

Chapter 5: Discussion

While the previous chapter identified the findings from the oral and written data generated, this chapter discusses its significance in relation to existing research and explores the significance of the findings for workplace literacy in Ireland, particularly in relation to a multi-national manufacturing facility.

This inquiry focused on exploring whether a workplace literacy initiative could act as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing literacy practices at work.

It explored perceptions of what it means to be 'literate' in the workplace and tried to determine whether perceptions of the employer and employees correlate on this. It also considered the types of literacies which employees encounter in the workplace and how they interact with these. The literature review suggests that the world of work is changing. Therefore, perspectives of the employer and employees about change at work and particularly about changing literacy practices at work were explored.

The inquiry furthermore explored whether collaboration between the various stakeholders was possible to create a situation where everyone's requirements for meeting targets or receiving support were met as far as possible. The question about what constituted appropriate course content, effective pedagogy and support was part of the inquiry. The outcomes of both the process of cooperation between the stakeholders and of the training in terms of competence, identity, power and confidence were also investigated.

A multi-national manufacturing company was selected to be the site of the research. The stakeholders identified were: Government, Employer, Trade Union, Employees and Training Provider. A forty-five hour workplace literacy training initiative delivered to a group of eight employees was used as the vehicle for exploring perceptions and pedagogy.

5.1 Workplace Literacy as a Catalyst

For this research, the understanding of the word catalyst refers to a phenomenon that both causes and aids the process of change. Change in the research has a dual meaning. It refers to broad economic, national and organisational change on a macro level, but also to individual change that is experienced as the result of an event or a process of engagement with something. The inquiry focuses on the employee in the workplace and suggests that they have to contend with change on the macro level. It then looks at workplace literacy as a possible catalyst that can support them in dealing with the workplace literacy element of these changes.

Each of the needs and expectations of the stakeholders in terms of workplace literacy refers to a change required in order to achieve an outcome. Reason and Torbert (2001) argued that transformational social research that recognises the complexity of human relationships should include first, second and third person perspectives. These perspectives will now be applied to examine if workplace literacy did indeed act as a catalyst to bring about transformation. It was clear from the outset that the workplace literacy initiative was to be tested as a catalyst and not a solution. It therefore meant that if the initiative brought about changes that enabled employees to embark on a learning journey, it would be regarded as a success, because increasing literacy capacity is an ongoing process (Castleton, 2002b) and by continued engagement with education, that process will be continued too.

5.1.1 First person perspective ("Me")

In Action Research, the research-practitioner ("me") is central to the research. This by default means that subjectivity of perception and interpretation is a pitfall to be aware of. Therefore, building in reflexivity for ensuring validity of claims was viewed as being crucial to the research. The research-practitioner had to be aware of her culturally shaped perceptions and influences, as well as her own expectations, in order to be as objective as possible during interviews and training.

The research-practitioner made some interesting discoveries about her practice. These relate particularly to concerns about accreditation and related implications for

learner-led learning, becoming more comfortable with participatory teaching methods, awareness of bias towards cooperation at all cost and the value of silence in order to give others reflective space. Three months after the completion of the fieldwork, the research-practitioner also recorded in her Learning Journal that she felt more confident in speaking about workplace literacy. She felt this was as a result of having been involved in the research process and having experienced working in a multi-national setting integrating modules and working with socially embedded workplace topics like change at work. A surprising discovery was a feeling of being confirmed in some of the existing practices that she was using purely because it "felt right", e.g. framing recruitment, and not only delivery, in the social practice theoretical framework. By having participants and the HR Manager commenting positively on these and noting them as part of why the outcomes were good, means that those feelings are now validated.

The research-practitioner also became aware of the fact that her own perception of literacy is still tinged with a deficit mentality when her supervisor observed that her academic literacy is developing. Initially, the research-practitioner did not understand the comment as she viewed herself as literate. It became apparent that she had not really embedded the "becoming literate" perception (Castleton, 2002b) into her own thinking, because that was exactly what she was experiencing: becoming literate in academic reading and writing. This realisation has since been a useful comparison for explaining the concept of "becoming" to various stakeholders and practitioners. Especially the fact that "becoming literate" is not necessarily at a basic level, but that it has become a need for her to be able to use this domain of literacy, helps to convey the insight.

The research-practitioner experienced personal and professional change through implementing the action-research spiral and NLS theoretic framework. This resulted in changes in practice and increased knowledge and understanding of workplace and academic literacy. It also acted as a catalyst in the practice of the practitioner as she had to engage with FETAC modules in a way that she hadn't done before and gained a more enhanced appreciation for the value of certification. On another level, being

involved in the research was like a workplace literacy initiative for the practitioner too. In fact, her supervisor commented on the research-practitioner's increased academic literacy capacity.

It can therefore be said that the first person perspective of action research was significant and valuable in that through action and reflection, the "me" gained new personal and professional insights and knowledge.

5.1.2 Second person perspective ("Us")

This inquiry is broader than only the research-practitioner and employs collaboration with workplace stakeholders as well as an academic institution. Involving other people in the research potentially enriches the inquiry and introduces 'second-person' research. The insights and experiences of other people inform the decision-making processes, the design and management of the research, as well as the conclusions elicited from the research.

Included in the "us" are the employee-participants, employer, government, training provider and Waterford Institute of Technology as the academic institution supporting the research.

The inquiry with the stakeholders suggests that there is a shift in the workplace literacy landscape. This shift relates to the changing literacy practices in the workplaces and also to changes in perceptions around literacy, but suggests that the deficit stereotype of literacy still seems to be the dominant perception.

5.1.2.1 Changing Workplace Literacy Practices

The findings show that changes in the fieldwork site refer to higher expectations in terms of accountability, quality control, globalised work practices, workplace participation and the use of technology. Holland and Frank (2001) draw attention to the danger of spotlighting workers' needs in isolation, because this ignores the way in which organisational issues impact on workplace literacy practices. It became apparent that a higher expectation placed on employees in the fieldwork site was the

reason for a workplace literacy initiative being tested as a means of supporting the low-skilled workers.

The New Literacy Studies (Street, 2001) theoretical framework used for the research was chosen because it situates literacy practices in the reality of how, by whom and for which purpose these are used. Furthermore, it incorporates vocabulary that assists in conceptualising these changes. NLS provides the practitioner a springboard and the linguistics to discuss and explore issues like power, identity, interpersonal relationships and literacy practices in the workplace.

The research found that employees feel challenged by the changes and find themselves in situations where they need to manage the changes, but they require support to do it effectively. In interviews with the employer, it became evident that they are also challenged by their own situation in relation to the changes and how to manage their workforce within the perimeters of industry and local union agreements.

5.1.2.1.1 Changes relating to The New Work Order

The STB Manager and the HR Manager echoed each other with regards to the higher expectations on employees:

STB Manager: ... the major change I think is that there is greater expectation of the employer that the employee would be willing to contribute more ... at operator level ... really industry to survive looks at it in a way that individuals must fill a broader role, no matter how basic or junior their role is. To that extent, I think there is a far greater need for a wider range of skills on behalf of the individuals to be able to contribute and succeed.

HR Manager: ... our expectations have increased as well along the way even down to our recruitment. There was a time here when we would not even look for qualifications, now we are looking for basic Leaving Certs ... its a sign of how we are continuously challenging ourselves from an academic and performance point and bringing in the best talent possible. Yea, the demands of the workplace has changed drastically ... we are moving very much from the old manual skills now to new technology.

It is evident from these two quotations that both the state training agency and the employer have accepted the reality of new expectations and they frame these in terms of the demands of the workplace and the survival of industry. The implication thus is that the employee in the workplace needs to keep pace with the changing

demands to survive too. This higher expectation being placed on employees is highlighted in the Irish National Workplace Strategy (2005) and reiterated by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2007) which mentions that "employees will be required to have a greater breadth of knowledge" and that "the demand for higher qualifications will increase" (p.6).

Table 6 lists the main changes identified by employees. These changes echo elements like economic globalisation, quality control and continuous improvement that Street (2001) and Farrell (2001) identify with the New Work Order. The company's operations are underpinned by 'kaizen' principles which relate to continuous improvement. A quotation from an employee alludes to the global network that employees belong to and the need to comply with operating procedures and quality control protocols written for application across a global network:

> ... it would be better if they were written in lay-men terms ... in European English and there is a lot of legal jargon as well. The company shares these with other places around the world and they are written in an American way.

Jackson (2004) highlights that continuous improvement and related quality assurance "fundamentally depend on literacies, including a wide range of print, graphs and symbols" (p.9). This resonates with the changes identified by the employees.

The HR Manager explained that the company is "aggressive in pursuit of improvement" and has a target of 20% year on year improvement in performance. A quotation from the company's president in its quarterly publication for employees for the first quarter of 2008 further stresses the importance of quality and achieving goals:

> The ambitious goals and rigorous standards set for ourselves require dedication and teamwork ... I know I can expect a high level of dedication from all of you as we join together in Embracing Quality First. Every surgeon, patient and healthcare professional we serve depends on it.

Barton, Tusting, Hodge and Appleby showed that where people experienced (literacy) difficulties at work, this was often in relation to change in workplace practices, such as increasing accountability" (2008, p.37).   The initial interviews suggested that this was the case in the fieldwork site. The training initiative and discussions afterwards

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indicated that it was not so much the functional document-related workplace practices that employees wanted to develop, but that the associated communication and interpersonal skills were even more important for them in meeting the demands of the New Work Order.

5.1.2.1.2 Changes relating to The New Communicative Order

The quotation from the company president refers to the new way of working within the new workplace where instructions no longer are passed down a hierarchical structure, but where teamwork and new communicative practices are important.

NLS calls this the New Communicative Order (Street, 2001). The HR Manager spoke about this when referring to the changes that they have experienced in the company.

> I would say, take the clock back only 10 years, an organisation such as ours would have resisted allowing some of their members even to go to a meeting, let alone participate. We have moved considerably in the last ten years. We have people involved in all sorts of cross-functional teams...

Changes relating to information technology also fit in under this 'order'. All participants interviewed wanted to become more familiar with computers when asked about what they wanted included in the training. The findings identify that they felt the computer element helped them to be more prepared for what is expected of them at work, for example the new "Windchill" system which was being introduced.

The HR Manager linked the changed demands of the workplace and the move towards technology during her interview:

> Yea, the demands of the workplace has changed drastically ... we are moving very much from the old manual skills now to new technology ... we're expecting people to issue in and out of goods and stores which in the past they never had to do. They never had to understand what types of materials meant or why we did certain things, right. And we're constantly bombarding them with an awful lot of information...

During the site visit she was even clearer about not only the new forms of communication, but also the understanding of what they are doing and the demands that this place on their skills:

> ... over time his skills will be developed to understand all the procedures and understanding them step by step. Levels of literacy would need to be good enough ... more visual documents

around, also working on more complicated equipment so their levels of skill need to be higher.

The different literacies that employees engage with in the research site were identified as technical job-related terminology, document literacy, quantitative literacy, non-verbal and iconic literacy, technology related literacy and the literacy of teamwork. Hence it is evident that the New Work Order and the New Communicative Order are observable in the facility researched. The implication that employees are expected to interact effectively with these new ways of working is borne out by the findings in relation to change.

Castleton (2003) highlights that "contemporary discourses on work, labelled as a 'new work order' mark an important shift from the traditional industry-based economy to the knowledge-based service and information economies of the present day".   She reasons that "these discourses privilege a particular account of work that creates new social realities and identities in workplaces, delineating new ways of being a worker" (p.11).

Looking at the findings, it becomes evident that this shift is very present in the fieldwork site too and that both the employer and employees are challenged by how to adapt to this new social reality in the workplace.

5.1.2.1.3 Changes relating to The Epistemological Order
The references to "understanding" in the HR Manager's quotation highlight the third order identified in NLS, the New Epistemological Order, as present in the facility. Employees do not only work in new ways and use new ways of communication, the company also has moved away from a Fordist conveyor belt mentality to a need for employees to understand procedures and reasons for applications. The PTL's regarded as positive the outcome that employees gained a better "understanding" of roles and the constraints associated with regulations. This, together with the HR Manager's comment, seems to indicate that the type of knowledge that is valued by the company has changed.

The scenario about the new productivity benchmark set for some of the operatives (see 4.1.4), is an example of how the new orders impact on employees and on the employer. Despite being encouraged to show initiative, the pressures of the workplace and of compliance with targets and regulations, in this case seemed to have stifled observations about unrealistic work practices.

Team working seems to be encouraged in the facility, the implication is that employees need to gain the capacity to use the new communicative order and that management need to be willing to perceive employees as being able to do so. This resonates with Hull's experience in relation to a labelling mistake made in another manufacturing facility. There a worker was implicated for a mistake, but in fact it was the complexity of the workplace situation and relations rather than the individual that was the cause (Hull, 1999). An example in this research where a participant gained the capacity to manage the new communicative order successfully seems to be where Toby went to his boss himself instead of sending somebody else, prepared for the meeting and possible objections and got a positive outcome.

The inquiry suggests that employees use many literacies at work and that these have emerged as a result of and are closely linked to change in the workplace. It further suggests that it is not the employees who are to blame for the support required to deal with these changing practices, but that globalisation and the need for compliance with quality assurance regulations necessitates it. The Moser and Leitch reports produced in the United Kingdom, seem to say that because employees are not functionally literate, productivity is lower than what it could be (Moser, 1999; Leitch, 2006). From the scenario examined in the fieldwork, it seems to emerge that the changes in industry have caused people to need more and different literacies to cope with the literacy demands of the workplace. Productivity is thus affected not because people are not literate, but because the demands have changed and they have to adapt to new literacies, new ways of working and "new ways of being a worker" (Castleton, 2003, p.11).

5.1.2.2 Stakeholder Perceptions of Literacy

The research findings suggest that stakeholders experience tension between viewing literacy as functional from a deficit perspective and viewing it as a capacity that is socially situated and thus in a constant state of flux. Both the FÁS Services to Business Manager and the HR Manager had a relatively broad understanding of literacy and referred to it as skills in use in life situations, be it reading or writing or using technology. They also used phrases like "participate fully in the workplace" and "access normal day to day requirements" which indicate an understanding that literacy is socially situated. They also framed their desired outcomes for a workplace literacy initiative in terms broader than the functional to include personal development and access to technology and everyday information and application. The company seems to be aware that their perception is not necessarily the general one. This became apparent when the company did not want to be associated with literacy in a public way. They are aware of a deficit stereotype and the associated stigma and could not risk being labelled that way.

Initial interviews revealed that participants felt a need for upskilling and personal development, and even though some of them mentioned being wary of the written element of the training and of their job, they did not see themselves as literacy students. Further discussion revealed that they view literacy as one person said, "straight away I would have thought reading and writing". They felt that their reading and writing was sufficient for their needs, but they had an awareness that things are changing and they saw the course and the computer element as a way of helping them move with the changes. This seems to indicate that the social practice view of literacy is relevant to their experience and desire to extend their capacity, but that they still view literacy from the functional and deficit perspective and that they do not regard that kind of literacy as relevant to them. A conception of literacy as socially situated and ever in process was evident from interviews with the HR Manager and by the end of the training the participants also perceived it like that. They were still very aware of the misconceptions that exist, also among their peers, and the stigma that links "literacy difficulties with ignorance, mental backwardness

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and social incapacity" (Street, 1995) and therefore were not willing to risk being associated with it.

The International Adult Literacy Survey highlighted that:

> Adults with low literacy skills do not usually consider that their lack of skills presents them with difficulties. When asked if their reading skills were sufficient to meet everyday needs, respondents replied overwhelmingly that they were, regardless of tested skills levels. This may reflect the fact that many respondents are in jobs that do not require them to use literacy, a situation that is likely to change as the knowledge society matures (1997).

Even though this quotation seems to perpetuate a deficit perspective ("lack of skills"), it acknowledges that if employees can cope with the literacy and numeracy demands of their jobs, they usually do not regard themselves as in need of literacy support. It also acknowledges that the changing workplace and associated higher expectations is likely to require familiarity with new and varied literacies. This seems to be in line with the findings of the research.

The research-practitioner found what seems to be an ambiguity in terms of Imel's (2003) guiding perceptions regarding the state and the employer in the researched situation (see 2.3.1). While inadequate basic skills is the reason for participation, there also seems to be an awareness that it is not necessarily the employee who is to blame for this, but rather changes in industry. A further ambiguity relates to the findings that the employer and the STB Manager do not solely focus on functional and contextualised skills, but also include the personal development of the person. The following quotation of the HR Manager demonstrates this inherent duality of wanting more from their employees, but through personal development rather than in a mechanistic way:

> ... I've always felt we can get more out of them if we could bring them along in a way and give them the confidence...

The research-practitioner was aware of the tension between deficit and holistic in relation to literacy, the importance of protecting participants and of not perpetuating stereotypes. This influenced her initial contacts with the employees and recruitment was done not for a literacy course, but for an opportunity to upskill in relation to Communications, using technology and dealing with change. In interviews with

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participants, this was viewed as an effective way to do it. It also fits the conceptual framework of literacy in use in society.

Holland and Frank (2001) comment on how deficit and functional approaches to recruitment reinforce the stigma attached to literacy and numeracy. They argue that during promotion and negotiations with employers, workplace literacy can be effectively linked with organisational change and the resultant changes in the needs of the workforce. The research found this to be the case.

This finding is further echoed by the findings of a workplace training programme carried out in the fast food chain, McDonalds. They became involved in workplace literacy training in 2006 and were struck by how people felt a stigma, or were embarrassed by having poor literacy or numeracy skills, but not by other areas of training, e.g. personal development. They concluded that if they framed their literacy and numeracy training in a broader personal development context, they might go some way to overcoming this stigma (Fairhurst, 2007).

The narrow perception of literacy that still exists in society has implications for how workplace literacy is discussed with the various stakeholders. If it is perceived as a social practice, the language that is used in marketing and recruitment as well as during training should match the conception of literacy that is being put forward. By implication then, the likely social situations that would present problems, the likely applied skills that are changing and the personal capacities required to deal with the changing social practices should be the focus rather than literacy as a term in isolation, as the word is still viewed in terms of traditional deficit stereotypes.

An interesting outcome from the research is that stakeholder perspectives are usually perceived as opposing or threatening to each other. The research showed that while expectations and perspectives differ, they are not irreconcilable within an initiative that is consultative and designed to meet as many of the desired outcomes as possible. It found that many of the expectations actually resonate with each other, e.g. accreditation, continued engagement with learning, increased personal capacity.

The research indicates that implementing a mediation role helps to create a "communicative space" (Reason, 2004, p.30) between the constituents of the "us" and enhances the initiative as well as works towards transparency and equality.

It is hoped that release of staff and increased participation can be arranged in the second round of engagement on the strength of the outcomes of the research, rather than by conflict that could result in aborting the initiative, as was stated by the HR Manager. This wider and stronger future engagement has already been mentioned as a likely preferred way forward by the HR Manager.

From the second-person voices in the findings, it becomes evident that they all experienced multiple and rich benefits from engagement with the workplace literacy initiative. It also emerged that the initiative acted as a catalyst for change and for achieving valued outcomes and meeting expectations for all. Implementing a consultative and collaborative action research spiral as part of the research ensured that the second-person voices were heard during the initiative and this has been identified as one of the characteristics which made it effective and that should be part of good practice in workplace literacy work. This approach encourages important elements of action research: democratic relationships of equality through dialogue, reflection and agreed action as identified by Denscombe (2005).

The findings suggest that the initiative did act as a catalyst that brought about positive change, not only for the employees, but for all the stakeholders. This strengthens the case for viewing workplace literacy as a catalyst and as a tool that can be used for achieving desired outcomes for the stakeholders, thus for the "second-person" perspective of the inquiry.

5.1.2.3 Outcomes of engagement with the workplace literacy initiative

All of the participants reported growth across various areas of their lives and all of them expressed a desire to participate in further training. They also reported on their increased capacity for engaging in new workplace literacy practices with confidence. It can thus be said that the workplace literacy initiative did act as a catalyst to support

employees with changing workplace literacy practices.   The expressed desire of participants to continue their learning experience also hints at the initiative being a catalyst for employees engaging with the ongoing process of 'becoming literate" (Castleton 2002b, p.3).

The workplace literacy initiative acted as a catalyst in other areas too. It brought about changes in the perceptions of the employer in that initial hesitancy in relation to participation has become a strong endorsement of the initiative and recognition of its outcomes.

For the employer the primary expectation is an employee better able to contribute to the company, to improved performance and acquiring the desire to continue learning. The employees, employer and PTL's stated that this did happen. An employee with increased confidence and improved generic skills, who is more competent to participate in rapidly changing workplace practices, will potentially increase the human resources and productivity of a business. This is likely to improve the profitability of the business as it will reduce error and supports required from co-workers. This potentially will help the government to achieve its upskilling, economic and social inclusion targets too.

This is in line with research done by Coulombe et al. (2004) in Canada and while the benefit was not quantitatively measured in this study, it can be deduced that the gains would also translate into financial benefits. It also resonates with NRDC (2007) findings that identified increased productivity and improved use of technology as outcomes of workplace literacy courses. Furthermore this outcome shows that the initiative facilitated change to enable employees to meet the higher expectations of employers and government as mentioned by both the researched company and government representative and echoed by the Expert Group on future Skills needs (2007).

For the government (and funder in this case) the initiative should prove value for money as well as enabling people to become lifelong learners in order to achieve the targets of the National Skills Strategy and the Lisbon Agenda. From the findings, it is

evident that certification (10 FETAC modules) was achieved within a 45 hour training course and that the participants expressed the desire to progress their learning. In this regard the workplace literacy initiative acted as a change agent which helps the government to achieve its targets in a cost-effective way.

The outcomes of increased confidence, accreditation for their learning and improved skills were achieved as confirmed not only by the participants, but also by the employer and PTL's and recorded in different ways, e.g. through interviews, focus groups and evaluation. Involvement in the initiative was catalytic as employees now perceive themselves more positively in these areas. This strengthens the conceptualisation of literacy as ideological. According to Street (2003, p.78) "the ways in which people approach reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being", therefore it can be deduced that change towards a more positive conception of themselves will positively influence how reading and writing is approached. Maria's observation of not seeing herself as "unteachable" anymore is an example of this.

Professor Colm Harmon (University College Dublin) in his address to the Irish National Adult Literacy Agency conference entitled "Toward a knowledge-based economy: Basic skills in the workplace", February 2008, highlighted the fact that outcomes need focus and that greater return may come from increase in self-confidence rather than an improved literacy score. It is evident from the findings that Prof. Harmon's observation rings true on the count of increased self-confidence, but that participants also commented on improved literacy capacity. Furthermore, the evaluations of this research highlighted the elements of the initiative that made it effective. It also shows that benefits (like readiness for continuing on lifelong learning journey, increased confidence, improved ability to participate in workplace literacy practices, better understanding of roles, less reliance on colleagues, and more) were not only experienced by employees across a range of outcomes, but also by the stakeholders: the government meeting training targets and the employer have better equipped and more confident employees.

This research used formative and summative evaluation and the research-practitioner would suggest that the finished thesis is a snapshot at the end of an action research cycle. Participants have indicated that they would like to continue their learning; the employer has indicated that they would like to continue to be involved with workplace literacy and the government has committed to funding into the future (FÁS, 2008). Therefore, the action research spiral is likely to continue and to build on the reflection, findings and outcomes of the research, thus reengaging with the catalytic process.

It can therefore be deduced that workplace literacy can act as a catalyst for supporting employees in dealing with changing workplace literacy practice. In addition, it also seems valid to say that not only can it be a catalyst for employees, but it can also act as a change agent for achieving the desired goals of other stakeholders. The prerequisite for achieving these outcomes is that all the elements of the initiative should be implemented in a participatory, consultatively mediated manner framed by literacy as a social practice and applied in a constructivist manner following sound adult education principles as outlined in the Findings chapter. This research implemented the initiative in this manner and the outcomes show that it did indeed act as a catalyst supporting employees to deal with changing literacy practices at work as well as having benefits for the other stakeholders.

5.1.3 Third-person perspective ("Them")

The "them" refer to people or organisations that were not directly involved in the research, but will potentially gain from the insights garnered through the research. This will be an ongoing process after the research, but the inquiry and findings provide a springboard for engaging in discussion and consultation with the third-person perspective in action research.

The various local stakeholders in this inquiry form part of bigger organisations, both nationally and internationally e.g. as training provider, the research-practitioner is affiliated with FÁS nationally, and the local fieldwork site is part of a multi-national company. Exploring problems, perceptions and practice at local level in first and

second person research therefore is situated in a wider context. It will impoverish the potential of the research if the "them" is not alerted to the outcomes. The "me" thus has a responsibility towards the "them" to disseminate the information in accessible format.

It will be done through publishing the thesis in both paper and digital format and alerting the "them" through participation in disseminating events. One such event occurred in the final stages of completing the thesis: in conjunction with the research supervisor, a workshop was delivered at the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy conference in Wales (2009). Further dissemination is planned through publishing curriculum guidelines for practitioners, an article in an academic journal as well as organising a conference for policy makers in the workplace literacy field.

Implications of a small-scale workplace literacy research project in a multi-national company have particular significance for the "them" because a similar inquiry has not been conducted in Ireland before. By disseminating the outcomes of the inquiry it is anticipated that the catalytic effect of the research will reach the third person perspective and also result in changed perspectives and potentially changed practice that takes the recommendations into consideration.

5.1.4 Characteristics of a workplace literacy initiative with catalytic potential

An important implication of viewing workplace literacy as a catalyst is to establish what it was in the catalyst that made it effective. From the findings, a few characteristics can be deduced. It is evident that the role of the workplace literacy practitioner is complex, yet vital to the success of the initiative. Holland and Frank refer to the practitioner as a "consultant-practitioner" (2001, p.2). This was borne out by the research as in this case the practitioner also acted as mediator for the training and linked with the different stakeholders. The consultant role also links with determining what the different stakeholders want and how best that can be achieved within the accepted code of good practice of workplace literacy. The resultant collaborative approach that this created helped to make the initiative successful.

From this, it becomes evident that good communication skills are an important quality that the practitioner should possess. This was further commented on by both the employer and the employees in their comments on the practitioner. Both stakeholders referred to her being approachable and easy to communicate with as well as able to create a relaxed and cooperative learning atmosphere. So, whether the mediator and consultative role is combined with the tutoring role or separated from it, it is important that practitioners engage in both consultation and tutoring in such a way that effective communication between stakeholders is the outcome.

5.1.4.1 Pedagogy

The consultant role also fits well with this research as it used an action research methodology. From this experience, the research-practitioner feels that building action research into a workplace literacy initiative should not only be done when undertaking specific academic research, but should be part of the consultant role and good practice. By approaching workplace literacy as an action-reflection spiral, the practitioner is able to identify, reflect upon with other stakeholders and address issues as they become apparent. The spiralling format "indicating a continuous improvement of practice and an extension of personal and professional knowledge" (Zuber-Skerritt, 1995, p.13) lends itself to linguistics like 'continuous improvement' that resonates with the world of work. Because each workplace situation is different, and because it has been shown that a social practice approach is a valid framework for implementing a workplace literacy initiative, implementing an action research approach will assist in making the initiative truly fit the social and organisational situation in which it is implemented. In terms of the catalyst, it is the action-research methodology that stays unchanged, while the outcomes are evolving in ever improved format thus being catalytic to the optimum for the participants and other stakeholders.

McNiff (2002, p.10) refers to the "contexts for critical conversations" in terms of action research, and Hamilton (1999, p.411) mentions the importance of using "local perspectives on literacy and building this into learning programmes, using it as a basis for discussion and investigation" in terms of literacy as social practice. Both of these

quotations highlight the importance of reflective engagement with stakeholders in order to improve practice. 'Critical conversations', 'discussion' and 'investigation' creates a basis for a mediator to be consultative and to pursue equality and transparency within the power relations. This was found to be the case in this research as reflection and discussion were important constituent elements.

Reason and Torbert (2001) suggest that the "the very purpose of knowledge is effective action in the world" and that inquiry should contribute to the "flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the ecosystems of which they are part" (p.5 & 6). Because workplace literacy is such a complex field with many stakeholders, it was shown that using an action research approach did result in the personal development of participants as the comparative results of the Likert scales show, skills development in participants as quantified by accreditation achieved and a wider gain encompassing other stakeholders (e.g. government and employer), thus rippling out to the ecosystems of the participants.

An important element of the training initiative that all the participants commented on in various data collection situations and which was also commented on by the HR Manager, was the peer support and cooperation within the classroom. Vygotsky (see 2.2.1) links peer learning with the zone of proximal learning and a study by Taylor, King, Pinsent-Johnson and Lothian (2003) discovered that (once in a programme and actively participating) a learner was influenced by the classroom socialisation process, the tutor's role and teaching style and more importantly the collaboration of peers. These elements assisted in providing the scaffolding that the learner required. The curriculum used a constructivist approach and knowledge was introduced and progressively built upon.   Various data collection situations identify that participants found the pace of the learning and the peer support conducive to learning. Implementing the other elements of good practice in adult education that were explored in the Findings chapter also seemed to be important in ensuring that workplace literacy is effective as a catalyst.

5.1.4.2 Curriculum

Using New Literacy Studies as theoretical framework directly influenced the curriculum. The curriculum was designed in consultation with the funder, employer, production team leaders and employees. The state training agency put a high value on accreditation and the employees and employer also felt that they would like to get accreditation for the learning. This meant that not only did the curriculum have to meet the identified contents of the stakeholders; it also had to meet specific learning outcomes as prescribed in FETAC module descriptors, while at the same time implementing a social practice approach to literacy. By choosing modules like Personal and Interpersonal Skills, Communications and Computer literacy, the training provider attempted to achieve that.

The curriculum topics were broad and incorporated workplace practices like team work, change management, problem solving and workplace communications. Literacy events like sending an email was then explored dialogically to determine the uses and audiences involved and the protocols which pertain to each. This was, for example, compared to the event of sending a mobile phone text. The various protocols were explored by encouraging critical thinking as to when, where, why and how these events are used.

An interesting outcome of the consultation was that the employer did not demand a set of skills that needed to be acquired, but rather wanted an increase in confidence and a willingness and readiness for learning as an outcome. Curriculum content that dealt with problem solving, teamwork, technology and learning to ask the right questions, were much more relevant to employees than focussing on purely functional content like completing workplace documents. These broader conceptualisations were then used to extend their functional applications too. This approach towards literacy did improve literacy skills, but also had benefits that are broader and therefore suggests that Sticht's Functional Context Education (1997) is more effective if 'context' is defined in a broader sense than the functional.

Participants responded well to the use of a creative element too. For example, the poem "Digging" by Seamus Heaney was used as the starting point for a discussion about decision making. This, together with the findings that indicated the importance of rapport with the tutor and bonding as a group, suggest that including the affective side of the person aided the learning process.

The tutor was very aware of the danger of becoming an "agent of economic globalisation" (Farrell, 1999) and constantly encouraged critical reflection and interrogative engagement with both the text and the practices in place. The presence of a research element and the weekly reflections as well as the Learning Logs aided this ongoing exploration of the power relations and dominant discourses at work. An example of this is the analysis of the employees of the new productivity system introduced by the company. By recognising the complexity of a scenario like this and having insight into this, it seems that their literacy capacity helped them to be critically aware and to understand the power interplay in the situation. This analysis show heightened awareness and that workplace literacy was not merely a tool for "domestication" (Lankshear, 1987), but enabled them to voice their perception and potentially to work in an appropriate way towards a position of greater power.

Castleton (2003) reasons that the field of workplace literacy training "has emerged from the coupling of new discourses about work and workers' skills with the functional literacy discourse" (p.13). Research by the NRDC and by Jurmo show that there are different approaches that offer a more integrated solution. Both Southwood (NRDC, 2007) and Jurmo (2004) refer to collaborative approaches. For Southwood this means learners working together, learning from each other and supporting each other. For Jurmo the term is broader than learners working together. It incorporates that and also a view of contextualising the learning that focuses not on functionality alone, but rather to an:

> alternative version of contextualized learning ... an approach that emphasized involvement of a broader range of stakeholders (including participating workers) in the setting of program goals, balancing the need to improve job performance with the goal of employee development, and integrating traditional literacy and language skills with problem-posing and problem-solving and other aspects of team-based, high-performance organizational models.

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The fieldwork carried out for this research found that the approach put forward by Jurmo provides a much more inclusive alternative than functionality alone and that participants respond very positively to this pedagogy and approach. Functionality then is not the focus, but rather a by-product that develops as employees engage critically and dialogically with each other and with the literacy practices in their workplace. The research further found that many of the outcomes of such an approach transferred into the personal lives of participants. This resonates with the European commission recommendation that a partnership approach and collaboration are important building blocks for effective implementation of Lifelong Learning strategies and active citizenship (CEC, 2001, p.4).

A curriculum that is therefore collaborative in both the way that Southwood explains and Jurmo's broader conceptualisation is more likely to be effective and act as a catalyst than one that merely follows a traditional functional school based approach.

5.1.4.3 Stakeholder collaboration

Making power relations visible and aiming for equality and transparency are important aims of NLS. These underpinning principles were pursued in the research, but the research-practitioner discovered that there were imbalances of power and that transparency cannot be taken for granted.

The research found that the whole process of negotiation and implementation is highly socialised. It therefore is important to be aware in each instance of both the interpersonal and inter-organisational relationships and to work on creating strong social networks to support workplace literacy effectively. It was found that there is a need for a mediator to link with the stakeholders and to ensure that all the views and needs, especially those of employees, are represented during the negotiation process to work towards parity. Castleton (2002a, p.559) highlights that the dominant discourse of literacy at work does not include the voice of employees and she calls this a "significant silence". This research specifically focuses on the employee and attempts to have their voices heard.

The research-practitioner had prior contact with both the company and the local state training organisation which meant that a certain level of rapport had been established which made it easier to find common ground and steer clear from potential tensions that could jeopardise the implementation of a training programme.

The research-practitioner had no prior contact with the union, but was aware through the HR Manager that agreements with the union regulate many of the actions of the company. The situation that arose when paid release was no longer an option, and the subsequent realisation that involving the union, more than likely would have jeopardised the training is an example of how a collaborative approach needs to balance the power relations to ensure the best outcome for all.

Action research embraces a participatory worldview and therefore suits an approach which is collaborative and which takes account of the socially situated realities of stakeholders. As Kemmis puts it:

> The first step in action research turns out to be central: the formation of a communicative space…and to do so in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do, in the knowledge that the legitimacy of any conclusions and decisions reached by participants will be proportional to the degree of authentic engagement of those concerned (in Reason, 2004, p.3)

The "communicative space" referred to fits well with a social practice approach that involves stakeholders with differing perspectives and realities. The presence of a mediator between them enhanced the flow of communication. Reason and Torbert (2001) recognise the importance of communication within social groupings. They refer to Ford and Ford (1995) and state that groups, organisations and wider society is a social construction which is primarily established and maintained by conversation (p.8). It was found that NLS as a framework helps to work towards collaboration and shared understanding between stakeholders: it allows for the "authentic engagement" as mentioned by Kemmis.

Collaboration between stakeholders was found to be important for the success of the initiative as it situates it within the social reality of the workplace. This idea agrees with the theory of Bronfenbrenner which proposes that harmony between the different "systems" which influences an individual's development will enhance the

process (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). It can thus be deduced that if stakeholders cooperate optimally and the curriculum connects with the needs expressed by employees, the outcomes and likelihood of sustainability of an initiative will be enhanced.

5.2 Sustainability

From the findings highlighted in this chapter, it seems evident that there are numerous benefits for each of the stakeholders with only one apparent area of some dissonance. It is also evident that employees want to continue learning and that the employer perspective has moved from tentatively testing an initiative, to now feeling that they would be 'expecting' people, that they deem will benefit from the learning, to go on it. The Workplace Education Fund is currently only secure for the year 2009. Employer and employee feedback indicate that they would like to continue being involved with workplace literacy. The sustainability will thus, to a large extent, be relying on the availability of funding to pay for the initiative.

Government criteria are becoming stricter for employees accessing the funding. This seems to be influenced by the National Skills Strategy and the intention of bringing employees 'one step up'. The current funding only allows courses at FETAC Level 3, which corresponds with Junior Certificate level. In reality, this means that anybody with a Junior Certificate or higher as educational attainment, does not therefore make a step up in terms of accreditation.

As this research shows, employees with Leaving Certificates benefited and extended their literacy capacity through engagement with a workplace literacy initiative. The findings thus indicate that using educational attainment as criterion for participation and being eligible for funding, potentially exclude employees needing support. This becomes an issue in relation to equality and sustainability and warrants further research.

5.3 Validity check

Having returned to the fieldwork site two months after completion of the training initiative to determine the validity of findings during and at the end of the initiative, it became clear that initial perceptions were valid. From the findings, it therefore seems evident that the four ways of knowing identified by Heron are present in the research. Reason argues that:

> Knowing will be more valid—richer, deeper, more true to life and more useful—if these four ways of knowing are congruent with each other: if our knowing is grounded in our experience, expressed through our stories and images, understood through theories which make sense to us, and expressed in worthwhile action in our lives (Reason, 2001, p.9).

The findings seem to reflect that the 'knowing' that became evident through the research is grounded in experience, expressed through stories, understood through theories and expressed in worthwhile action beyond the timeframe of the initiative.

The research-practitioner examined the research and checked validity against the criteria identified by Anderson and Herr (in Harte, 2008, p.34-35) for doing action research. This process of scrutiny suggests that there is resonance between the goals and the quality criteria in each case. The goals of new knowledge being created, action oriented outcomes achieved, both research-practitioner and participants being educated in the process, achieving results relevant to the local setting and using a sound and appropriate methodology were achieved. Evidence suggesting this is summarised in Table 9.

Table 9: Practical application of validity criteria for Action Research

Goals of Action Research	Quality / Validity Criteria	Presence in research
1. Generation of new knowledge	Dialogic/Process validity	Insights gained through consultation and training processes
2. Achievement of action-oriented outcomes	Outcome validity	Certification, curriculum, skills gains

3. Education of both research-practitioner and participants	Catalytic validity	Insights gained through consultation and training processes resulting in changed practices of stakeholders
4. Results that are relevant to local setting	Democratic validity	Continued consultation throughout process resulting in situation specific outcomes
5. A sound and appropriate research methodology	Process validity	Continued consultation and application of action-research spiral throughout process

These goals outlined in the Anderson and Herr's table (Table 5 and Table 9) were achieved as part of a process that was dialogic, democratic, has clearly identified outcomes and was catalytic for stakeholders. It can thus be said that quality and validity criteria for the research were effectively met.

5.4 Conclusion

From the findings and subsequent discussion, it seems evident that the research question can be answered in the affirmative: Yes, workplace literacy participation does act as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing workplace literacy practices. It also has become clear through the fieldwork that the affirmative answer is conditional. This means that a positive outcome will only be achieved if certain conditions are met in relation to the workplace literacy initiative. These conditions relate to a constructivist social practice (NLS) theoretical framework used, the implementation of a participatory process and action research being built into the design of the initiative.

If these elements are built into the workplace literacy initiative, the outcomes are broader than merely answering the research question; then benefits of the initiative reach all the stakeholders and acts as a catalyst towards achieving the goals and agendas that they regard as important.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This inquiry sets out to explore whether participation in a workplace literacy initiative can act as a catalyst to support employees in dealing with changing workplace literacy practices.

The Literature Review investigated various models of literacy, looked at the modern workplace and examined the changes which have taken place in workplace literacy practices. It examined stakeholder perceptions of workplace literacy and the literacy statistics, especially in relation to Ireland. It then looked at workplace literacy initiatives in Ireland to date and found that it had not been tested in a multi-national setting before. It was thus decided to situate the fieldwork in a multi-national manufacturing facility.

Information from the literature review assisted the research-practitioner's decision to use an ideological model of literacy: the social practice approach, in a constructivist manner as conceptual framework for the research. It was also decided to attempt a collaborative approach in dealing with the various stakeholders.

Action Research was chosen as methodology, because its elements of planning, action and reflection lend themselves well to exploring a situation involving people and organisations in flux. It was felt that the 'spiral' rather than the 'cycle' was appropriate for the fieldwork, especially because the changes that were anticipated to take place could be observed and reflected upon in an evolving manner.   The research-practitioner was aware of the importance of maintaining research ethics and ensuring rigour in the application of research methods and adhered to these as far as possible throughout.

A curriculum was agreed through consultation and negotiation, and according to the chosen conception of literacy. Best practice in adult education and literacy facilitation was applied as pedagogy for implementing the initiative.

The outcomes of the initiative were then compared with the expectations of the stakeholders. Particular attention was given to the perspective of the employees as they are central to the research question. It was found that they gained in multiple ways both in their working lives and personal lives.

The initiative was tested as a catalyst and not as a solution and from the evidence generated, it seems clear that changes took place in participants. These changes relate to increased confidence, desire for ongoing engagement with learning, less reliance on colleagues, extended workplace literacy capacity, gaining accreditation and a more positive perception of themselves.

It was further found that these outcomes have benefits for the other stakeholders too, in line with expectations voiced in the initial stages. The research-practitioner acted as mediator between the stakeholders and found that there was general agreement on the outcomes to be achieved, even though these were not always prioritised in the same way. This made for a creative tension which the mediator attempted to manoeuvre into a win-win situation with transparency and equality as objective.

This resonates with a question asked by Burgess et al. (2008/2009) about the role of practitioners in terms of the recent emphasis on functional literacy in England, "Will they (practitioners) be placed in the position of mediators between the interests of their learners and the less desirable aspects of policy?" In the inquiry carried out, it was found that the mediator could absorb and shield stakeholders from the "less desirable" aspects of their counterparts and reach a compromise rather than a breakdown of communication and by implication of the initiative. There are elements that were compromised, e.g. paid release of employees, but it was felt that collaboration was more important than conflict or jeopardising the initiative.

Jackson (2004, p.7-8) stated that she and her fellow researchers have come to believe that "all parties stand to gain from a more complex and comprehensive view" of workplace literacy:

> This includes managers and human resource officers who are under enormous pressure to be more effective in making change happen in a brutally competitive environment. It includes educators and trainers for whom juggling competing interests and conflicting realities is a basic survival skill, although little acknowledged and explored ... benefits extend to workers themselves ... It includes unionists who have long been calling for more worker-centred approaches to education and training ... much to gain by policy-makers faced with the perennial challenge of trying to show results that will please these other masters.

By pursuing a collaborative approach as put forward by Jurmo (2004), it was found that common ground with positive outcomes for all is possible, or as Jackson put it "all parties stand to gain" (2004, p.7). This approach together with the social practice model of literacy proved realistic in answering the research question in the affirmative.

6.1 Recommendations

As previously mentioned, this thesis is intended as a reflection at the end of an action research cycle and lessons learned from it are important for the next cycle. The research-practitioner would therefore make the following recommendations:

1. It can be argued that New Literacy Studies suits a workplace Literacy initiative, because it situates the practices in the life experiences of employees and provides the linguistics for discussing workplace literacy in its complexity. It is thus recommended as theoretic framework for workplace literacy. This has relevance not only for how the training is designed, but also for how the whole initiative is promoted.

2. Incorporating action research into workplace literacy assisted the practitioner to explore personal practice and created reflective space for course participants primarily, but also for other stakeholders. The use of the reflective spiral encourages all stakeholders to continually contest and agree upon the implementation and value of workplace literacy.

3. The mediator role was an important element in initiating the workplace literacy initiative and in managing potentially debilitating tensions into a process of collaboration. Having filled that role in the inquiry convinced the research-practitioner of its value and it is thus recommended that workplace literacy initiatives

should incorporate a mediator role. This person needs to have excellent communication and negotiation skills as well as an understanding of all the stakeholder positions and yet aim to be transparent and facilitate balanced compromise.

4. It was found that 45 hours was too short to achieve the desired stakeholder outcomes, including the three FETAC modules, to the optimum. In this particular situation, 60 hours would have been more appropriate. It is recommended that no more than two modules should be attempted within a 45 hour initiative. This is dependent however on the capacity of the participants.

5. Government targets are closely linked to improve educational attainment in accordance with the National Skills Strategy (Forfás 2007) and the aim to move employees "one step up" (Forfás, 2004). Currently, only modules up to FETAC level three are funded by the Workplace Basic Education Fund, thus meaning that anybody participating with a Junior Certificate will not be going 'one step up' on the National Qualifications Framework. While this approach does focus on the lowest skills, it excludes many with higher qualifications than primary certificate who have literacy difficulties. Maria and Smiley had Leaving Certificates, while Toby and Speedy had Junior Certificate equivalents, yet the workplace literacy initiative acted as a catalyst in their literacy and learning journey. This research therefore recommends that educational attainment alone is not a valid criterion for accessing funding for participation.

6.2 Areas for Further Research

1. Despite mentioning the trade union as stakeholder and indirectly referring to it in the research, the union was not directly involved as stakeholder in this inquiry. The role of the trade union in a workplace literacy initiative needs further exploration.

2. It is recommended that the company researched and the participants who were involved should be considered as a site for continued research. This will create the opportunity to follow and record the journey of a multi-national company in Ireland

that took the initiative to engage with workplace literacy at the early stages of its development in Ireland.

3. An employee with increased confidence and improved generic skills, who is more competent to participate in rapidly changing workplace practices, will potentially increase the human resources and productivity of a business. This is likely to improve the profitability of the business as it will reduce error and supports required from co-workers. More research is required in the Irish context to quantify these perceived links between improved confidence and generic skills on the one hand and productivity and profitability on the other.

4. Employees reported numerous examples of where the gains made as a result of participating in the workplace literacy initiative transferred to their home /private lives. This aspect of capacity development was outside the scope of the research, but warrants further investigation.

The research question focuses attention on the catalytic potential of workplace literacy for employees. This research looked at the broad influences that have an effect on workplace literacy practices and how to support employees in managing these. Insights gained from the inquiry seem to point towards the importance of finding approaches that connect with the realities of the employees and their life situations, with special focus on the workplace, in a manner that does not perpetuate deficit stereotypes of literacy.

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Appendix 1: Initial Interview Questions

Appendix 1.1

FÁS questionnaire:

The interview questions are a guide only and instead of following them rigorously, they will be used as pointers for exploration.

1. What do you understand under the term "literacy" personally? Do you think that this represents the national perspective in FÁS? Explain.

2. Do you regard literacy as an important skill? Explain why.

3. Do you regard literacy as an important job skill? Explain why.

4. What do you think a literacy training course should do (outcomes)?

5. What is your/FÁS perspective on accreditation?

6. Perception of changing job market in Ireland over the past 10 years.
   Explain how, if answer is yes.

7. Implication of changes for state training agency. Do they affect you in some ways?
   Explain how, if answer is yes.

8. What is FÁS currently doing to assist the workforce in relation to literacy?

9. What is your region currently doing to assist the workforce in relation to literacy?

10. Who are the stakeholders with whom you cooperate?   Why these ones?

11. Who do you think should fund these courses? Is this a personal or FÁS view?

12. What is the response of employers to the options available to them? Why do you think this is the case?

13. Any nuggets of wisdom/questions?

Thank you very much for your willingness to do the interview.

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<u>**Appendix 1.2**</u>

<u>**Employer questionnaire: Entry**</u>

<u>**Before:**</u>
1. Start interview with a short synopsis of why the research is being conducted, the confidentiality agreement and the freedom that the interviewee has not to answer questions if not desired.

2. Ask interviewee to choose a pseudonym for his/her company.

3. Ask interviewee to complete the "who I am" cloze questions verbally.

   This business was established _____ years ago.

   It has ~ _____ employees of which _____ are general operatives.

   The average time of employment per staff member is _____ years.

   The average age of general operatives staff is ~ _____ .

   About _____% of staff is not Irish.

   I am willing to participate in the research, because _____ .

4. Do you think the job of a general operative in Xxxxxx has changed during the past few years?
   Explain how, if answer is yes.

5. How do you feel about these changes?

6. Do these changes impact on Xxxxxx's operations in some ways?
   Explain how, if answer is yes.

7. Do general operatives have to do any reading on the job?
   Please give me as many examples as possible as it would ensure the training is relevant to the job requirements.

8. Do general operatives have to do any writing on the job?
   Please give me as many examples as possible as it would ensure the training is relevant to the job requirements.

9. How do they manage the reading and writing tasks?

Explore feelings around and perception of staff's ability. Also try to find out what the reaction would be if it is discovered that they are not comfortable doing literacy tasks. How does the company deal with staff challenged by the changing workplace.

10. What are company expectations of staff/general operatives?
Especially in relation to literacy.
What does it mean to be 'workplace literate'?
Is there a minimum or basic set of skills/understandings that a person needs in order to be considered 'workplace literate'?
How do you cope with staff who have difficulties?
Also ask about staff with other job titles and how they manage.

11. Are there multiple literacies in the workplace? If so, what are these? How transferable are the skills associated with 'workplace literacy'?

12. If you could design your own training, what would you like to be included?

13. Do you think there is a difference between learning, training and education? Which one is most relevant to your business? Explain why you think so.

14. If you could design your own training, how would you have it be delivered?

15. When interviewing for potential new staff, what are the qualities and skills that you look for? What is the purpose and general content of the competency test? (Is there a basic set of skills/understandings that a person needs in order to be considered "workplace literate" here?

16. Which literacy skills related to the workplace are currently most highly valued by the employer? Why?

17. Which supports do employers feel they need in order to support their employees with changing workplace literacy practices? Outcomes?

18. If they were top level workers would they have gotten release?

19. Any other questions?

Thank you very much for your willingness to do the interview.

****

Employee questionnaire: Entry

The interview questions are a guide only and instead of following them rigorously, they will be used as pointers for exploration.

1. Start interview with a short synopsis of why the research is being conducted, the confidentiality agreement and the freedom that the interviewee does not have to answer questions if not desired.

2. Ask interviewee to choose a pseudonym for him/herself.
   _____

3. Ask interviewee to complete the "who I am" cloze questions verbally.

   a. *I am _____. I was born in _____ on*

      _____.

   b. *I have lived in _____ for the past*

      _____ years.

   c. *I have _____ children. They are in / finished with*

      school.

   d. *I like to _____.*

   e. *I work in XXXXX, because _____.*

   f. *I have worked here for the past _____ years.*

   g. *I went to school until I was _____ years old. I liked/disliked it. I*

      would like to do more training, because _____.

   h. *When it comes to reading and writing I feel _____.*

4. Do you think your job has changed during the past few years?
   a. Explain how, if answer is yes.

5. How do you feel about these changes?

6. Do they affect you in some ways?

a. Explain how, if answer is yes.

7. Do you have to do any reading on the job?
    a. Please give me as many examples as possible as it would ensure the training is relevant to the job requirements.

8. How do you manage these reading tasks?
    a. Explore feelings around and perception of own ability.

9. How do you use reading outside of the job?

10. Do you have to do any writing on the job?
    a. Please give me as many examples as possible as it would ensure the training is relevant to the job requirements.

11. How do you manage these writing tasks?
    a. Explore feelings around and perception of own ability.

12. How do you use writing outside of the job?

13. If you could design your own training, what would you like to be included?

14. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) please rate:
    Your general confidence _____
    Your confidence in public speaking _____
    Your confidence in participating in workplace meetings _____
    Your confidence in writing _____
    Your confidence in reading_____

15. Any other questions?

16. Thank you very much for your willingness to do the interview.

Give practical arrangements for the training.

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Appendix 1.4

Project Team Leader Briefing

17 November 2008

Content
1. Background – FÁS Skills for Work, Waterford research, purpose
2. Course design - how
3. Course Overview – examples & personal effectiveness & interpersonal skills
4. Time frame
5. Evaluation for FÁS & research – informed consent
6. Consultation with supervisors
7. Feedback from supervisors at end of training
8. Questions

Appendix 2: Draft Curriculum

(Curriculum is for 11 weeks of 4 hours per week, because that was the original agreement, but this was changed to 15 weeks of 3 hours per week at the employees' request)

Draft Curriculum

Date & Time	Learning Outcome	Contents	Methodology	Materials
Week 1	Orientation to course Have an understanding of: *Adult learning vs. earlier learning *Own strengths and learning styles *Purpose of lifelong learning * Basics of computers	Introductions & overview Adult Learning Identify own strengths Identify own learning style and goals Lifelong learning – what ? & why? Introduction to PC	Discussion Group work Presentation Quiz Practical Appl. Sheets (PAS)	Folders, pens, notepad PowerPoint Practical Appl. Sheets (PAS) Computers
Week 2	Have a good understanding of: *Nature & purpose of change * Effective change management *Supports needed for effective personal change management *Computer application at individual Level	Explore nature and purpose of change Effective change management Identification of supports needed to keep pace with change at work & in life PC work: level appropriate Request: bring in relevant documentation	Walking debate Discussion Group work Presentation PAS	PowerPoint Flipchart Computers PAS
Week 3	Have an understanding of: *Importance of Communication *Modes of Communication *Non-verbal communication *Characteristics of effective comm. *Internet as mode of comm. – practical application	Explore term "communication" Explore its importance in life and at work Explore modes of communication When is it effective? What makes it effective? Internet searches: level appropriate tasks	Body language quiz, logo quiz Discussion Role play Presentation Analysis of article PC teaching	Quiz x 2 PowerPoint Role play outlines Article Computers

Week 4	Have a good understanding of: *Communication strategies at work *Purpose of strategies *Role of documentation *What makes an effective document *Use & application of email	Communication at work Paperwork as communication Explore documentation and identify problem areas – suggestions for improvement of forms/skills/procedures? Email: level appropriate	Discussion Documentation analysis Needs analysis PC teaching	Flipchart Relevant documentation Computers
Week 5	Have a good understanding of: *Importance, purpose need for accuracy in relation to quality, procedures & operations *Importance of & strategies for continuous improvement *Communication through visual documents PC: Design a visual document	Documentation continued: Quality, Operations, Procedures, Continuous improvement Reading visual documents, e.g. graphs & drawings, tables PC: Excel & graph, etc. applications	Discussion Analysis of documents Needs analysis Supports as appropriate Teaching of Excel as PC application	Relevant documentation Flipchart Computers
Week 6	Have a good understanding of: *Different types of behaviour *How to manage these * How to listen effectively * How to negotiate successfully *Decision making styles, barriers, * Helpful strategies for decisions	Types of behaviour (aggressive, assertive, passive) Management of different behaviour types Negotiation skills Listening skills Decision making Start preparing for speech	Role play Discussion Group work Comparative graph Presentation	Role play outline Comparative graph PAS PowerPoint

Week 7	Have a good understanding of: *Value of team work *Difficulties of team work *Strategies to enhance team work *Application of previous session's information to team work	Team work: what? & why? Examples from life of good & bad Trouble shooting: when does it not work well – lessons from examples Communication as cornerstone Team exercise on PC + analysis of same	Discussion Role play Team exercise Presentation Group work	Role play outline PAS PowerPoint Computers Flipchart
Week 8	Have a good understanding of: *Meeting protocols *Documentation used at meetings *How to make a point/argument confidently, appropriately & effectively *PC: Word processing appropriate to a meeting	Meeting procedures and documentation Layout of documentation Drafting documentation: minutes, agendas, short speech Word processing	Discussion Scenario analysis Group work Presentation PC teaching of word processing	Flipchart PowerPoint Computers
Week 9	Have a good understanding of: *Strategies for reading in public *Strategies for public speaking *Difference between a fact and an opinion *When to use facts and when opinion PC: practical application – PowerPoint	Reading in public – strategies for confidence Public speaking – strategies for confidence Fact vs. Opinion – making a plausible argument PC: PowerPoint	Discussion Practice (if comfortable) Speech, article & report analysis PC teaching of PowerPoint	Flip chart Articles & reports Computers

Week 10	Have a good understanding of: *Importance & Purpose of H&S *Relevant Health & Safety procedures as per statement & Handbook *Using reference works correctly *Difference and interplay between right and responsibility, esp. at work PC: level appropriate H & S web searches; finalising presentations	Quality procedures revisited Heath & Safety: statement, employee handbook, right vs. responsibility, accident reports PC work: level appropriate & preparation for public speaking	Discussion Group work Presentation Document familiarisation & analysis Practice filling in Accident Reports	PowerPoint H&S statement Staff handbook Reference works Report forms Computers
Week 11	*Have confidence to present a short presentation to group *Overview of course work *Evaluation learning experience *Understanding of certification options *Exploring further training options	Delivery of short presentation Collation of course work Evaluation Personal Training options	Discussion Questionnaire Focus group Sequencing of course work	Presentations Folders Computers Questionnaire Flip chart

Appendix 3: Recruitment Poster

Skills for Work
Basic education for working and living

Workplace Communications

- ❖ Written & Verbal & Interpersonal
- ❖ Quality Assurance
- ❖ Teamwork
- ❖ Dealing with change
- ❖ Basic Computers

FÁS ☘ One Step Up
IMPROVING WORKPLACE SKILLS

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Appendix 4: Examples of Weekly Reflective Reviews

Appendix 4.1

Session 7 Review: 24 November 2008

Present: **Xxxxxxx, Xxxxxxx, Xxxxxxx, Xxxxxxx, Xxxxxxx**

1. Overview & review of last week's class

2. Learning journals

3. Edit the Tesco Accident Report in hard copy.

4. Computer work:

    -   Give participants the typed up computer notes requested last week.

    -   Participants to access emails, open attachment, save it and edit it. Discussion of what was edited and why.

    -   Protocols for writing/responding to emails

    -   Respond appropriately to email and attach edited version.

5. Communications element: Recap Decision Making Skills by handing out the PowerPoint notes. Ask them how they feel about PowerPoint inclusion in class.

6. Look at elevator scenario again. Discuss and complete the Problem Solving worksheet for that scenario.

7. Look at Conflict Resolution Scenarios. Discuss 2 personal ones in the big group. Then divide group into 2 smaller groups and let them discuss the option for those scenarios. Also talk about how personalities of people involved will influence the outcomes.

8. As a group, write a formal letter to your team leader to alert him/her to the situation and the need for an effective solution.

9. End of session evaluation.

<u>Reflection</u>

❖ We continued the routine of reflecting on and signing off the previous week's class. The FÁS coordinator/monitor for the training came to monitor the training during this session. I gave her the evaluation summary done at the end of session 5. She also asked participants how they felt about the training and if they found it too easy or difficult. They felt that the training was good and that they work well together as a group. They also highlighted the fact that I give them the opportunity to help each other. That ensures that nobody either falls behind or gets too far ahead. In this way they support each other.

❖ Another interesting observation by the group was the fact that they are a small number and that this enables the tutor to give individual attention and support. The monitor asked the group about progression after this training. They were interested in it, but felt that the summer would not be a good time. I highlighted that in my experience with the company this far, they might be open to facilitate more training during the autumn/winter of 2009. This seemed like a good proposition to the participants. I had not asked about progression as yet, as I wanted us to get fully focussed and immersed in the current programme and did not want to overpower the participants with the expectation of further training. It was good though that Anne raised the option, as it will give participants the opportunity to consider it.

❖ I have not given enough attention to the Learning Journals. Again, it is partly because I do not want it to be a burden and me acting like a "teacher checking homework". On reflection, I should check with participants what approach they prefer me to take in this regard.

❖ The typed up computer notes was a good idea. It helped participants to access the operations more independently following the notes.

❖ Initially they were cautious of editing the accident Report, but realised that it was quite doable. They then did the editing on the computer, but found it a bit confusing, as not all the computers displayed the red and green lines for spelling and grammatical errors in the same way. This highlighted the importance of not relying too heavily on the computer for these elements.

❖ We also discussed the protocols around layout, choice of language and audience when sending an email. This together with the editing done on the Accident Report highlighted the relative importance of spelling and grammar in certain situations. We discussed the possibility that judgements may be made on a person in certain situations on how a piece of writing is presented, e.g. when applying for a job. I gave them the NALA Support book that has

guidelines for some of the protocols we often use, e.g. 24h clock, writing a formal letter, etc.

❖ The training room is quite small. This sometimes is a bit restrictive. The roof mounted projector and the tutor's computer are not compatible. This meant that the tutor used her own projector when showing e.g. a training video or PowerPoint presentation. As tutor I found it difficult with all the wires and technology cramped in between two participants and having to switch on and off quite often, because the display partly fell on participants. For the last 2 sessions I did not use the projector, but rather handouts of the slides. I asked participants how they felt about this. They did not mind either way, but did sympathise with me and the wires. I am not sure whether they actually prefer the presentations and are just being polite/nice saying that it does not really matter whether I use the projector or not – I need to clarify this.

❖ We discussed the elevator scenario (from last week's class) again and concluded that the solution reached in the print-out is not the one we would have chosen. It highlighted the fact hat how a problem is defined, has a lot of bearing on the solution chosen. We discussed the implications for a real life situation and how people's perspective on a problem situation could differ. The example of the hotel housekeeping situation was the same. It is therefore important to agree the problem, before attempting to solve it.

❖ We then looked at some potential conflict scenarios and discussed the 2 personal ones in the big group. It was highlighted that one needs as much information as possible before making a decision. We referred back to the importance of asking the right questions. We also talked about how different personalities and types of behaviour could influence how these situations are resolved (or not). Participants were then divided into 2 small groups with each group getting a complicated workplace scenario to analyse. Each of these scenarios is a potential conflict situation. The conclusions from both groups showed that communication and willingness to negotiate and be flexible are very important in resolving conflicts/potential conflict situations.

❖ Two participants (the males) stayed behind class to enquire about progression options. I found this interesting and will explore options and interest with the class in the next session.

Signatures:

Date:

Appendix 4.2

Session 10 Review: 15 December 2008

Present: **XXXXX, XXXXX, XXXXXX, XXXXXX, XXXXXX**

1. Overview & review of last 2 weeks' sessions

2. Learning journals: arranging for participants to catch up with ones not done, 2 of participants need to do 2 each.

3. Excel exercise 2:
    - Type information provided to relating sales staff and their units of sale for half a year.
    - Auto sum individual staff member sales for the half a year
    - Auto sum sales per month
    - Insert a pie graph showing the sales of the staff for the full period
    - Print the sheet

4. Email application
    - Open emails
    - Access Stress Management e-mail.
    - Go to web link and print information: 2 pages to a sheet
    - Complete discussion of previous week referring to the printed notes
    - Divide group into two small groups and let them analyse the graph/diagram about stress on the worksheet.
    - Get feedback
    - Complete worksheet that relates to information and application shared

5. Link with stress and non-verbal communication

6. Body language: discussion & presentation with examples for analysis

7. Happy Christmas!

    Evaluation with HR manager at some stage during the session.

<u>Reflection</u>

❖ I am glad that I check my own perceptions again those of the participants as they add valuable insights to my own understanding, e.g. Xxxxxx saying that "write" and "type" for her was interchangeable in the Formal letter exercise. The others agreed with her and I realised that actually it is the same for me. If somebody asked me to write a report, I'd type it.

❖ They were much more at ease with Excel during this session. Highlighting specific pieces of information and telling the computer which information to use for a graph is still a problem. This will be solved with practice. I'll revise this with a specific Excel exercise next session, e.g. number of units checked/packed per day by each participant.

❖ Participants are quite good now with using their emails. I need to work focus on typing in passwords and user names accurately. I am partly to blame for this, because I sometimes offer help too soon and therefore do not give participants enough time to become comfortable with doing this task. I do not want them to fall behind with a set task just because they struggle with inserting a password, so I do it for them. I need to alert them to this tendency in me and to stop me when I do it.

❖ The session moved well from graphs in Excel to analysing a stress related graph and writing about it. I still have a vague sense that I need to do more about stress management. Perhaps it is only me because they did a good bit of the research themselves and I am not sure if they are satisfied that they covered the topic sufficiently. I also expected them to read and use the summary article independently for completing the worksheet. Again, I am not sure if they have now received all the information that they might feel they need on the subject – will check next session.

❖ I made the connection between stress and body language/non-verbal communication. We talked about the pictures of Bill and Hillary Clinton and revisited some of the things discussed about "perception". We then analysed a series of communication situation depicted on slides and discussed what the body language in each scenario tells us about the situation/people involved. Participants responded well to this and did good analysis of each situation. I feel I gave too much information and did not invite sufficient discussion of each scenario. This was due mostly to the fact that time was running out on us.

- ❖ Xxxxxx, the HR manager came in about halfway through the session to hear how participants are getting on (See evaluation summary at end). One thing that was very evident from the participants is how the time flies during the sessions. A good sign, but sometimes I feel I try to pack too much into the sessions.

- ❖ I also realised that this type of training without a computer element is not likely to work. It is really not appropriate to do a workplace communications course without a computer element, because technology has become such a vital part of the workplace.

- ❖ I will spend more time on non-verbal communication in relation to interview skills and making a presentation during the next session. It might also be an option to encourage one of the participants to make his/her presentation about stress management to ensure further coverage of the subject.

- ❖ Participants took their folders home to ensure everything is up to date. They suggested this during and earlier session, because they feel that they will have some time during the Christmas break. The facility closes between 23/12/08 and 5/01/09.

- ❖ I will then take in the portfolios to see what each person is missing, as we'll only have 5 sessions after Christmas. I looked at the module descriptors and we are on track to complete PIPS L3, Communications L4 and Computer Literacy L3. It will mean close monitoring by me to ensure every person has everything they need for submission to FETAC, as it will be difficult/near to impossible to get access to participants once the training is completed.

Interim Evaluation with HR Manager
Ten weeks of the training is completed now and the HR manager asked if she could meet with participants to hear how they feel about the training. This was a natural way and a natural point after 10 of the 15 weeks and just before the Christmas break to do this informal evaluation. The previous informal evaluation was held on week 5 and informed the monitoring session with Xxxxxx, the FÁS coordinator. Talking to the HR manager also provided feedback about the training to another stakeholder (employer) with a different interest in the training.
- ❖ General feedback to Xxxxxx was very positive. Participants said that they really enjoy the training.

- ❖ One participant mentioned that initially she felt hat she was not getting enough computer input. This was rectified after week 4.

- The group mentioned that they have bonded well as a group and that being a small group is good. They also got to know their colleagues better and are now comfortable discussing with and helping each other in the class room.

- Participants mentioned that the time doing the training flies. They could not believe that we were at the half-way mark about 2 weeks ago, because the weeks and each session just go really quickly. Xxxxxx commented that it is a good sign.

- Xxxxxx asked how they would feel about promoting the training, e.g. in the company newsletter or through word of mouth. Participants say that they will be very willing and that some of their peers already are asking about the course. Their feedback is positive and they hope it will motivate others to participate in future training.

- One participant said that some of her peers asked her why she is doing the course as she is perceived to be a good communicator. She explained to them that it is not only about talking, but also about how you present yourself and deal with difficult situations and how you write and use computers.

- This prompted one of the participants to ask if access to the computer room during lunch would be an option. His reason for asking is that some of his peers are frightened of computers and by a friend informally showing them around the computer will help to break down barriers. He said that his first time going to the training room was quite daunting for him and some of his peers feel the same, especially about computers. The group and Xxxxxx then discussed the pros and cons of this and also of the location of he 2 computers in the canteen. An answer to this could be to provide short taster sessions before a course to let staff see if they would like it and would feel able for it.

- One participant asked if there could be a printer installed in the room, as we had a "stressful" situation with the HR printer last week. We started telling the humorous story and eventually the question was not answered. We did not realise it at the time, but the participant asked me about it later on again. I said that we should remember to mention it in our final recommendations, as it will make a positive change form having to leave the room to collect printed copies.

- Xxxxxx asked if they feel that they are gaining personal benefits from the training. All said that they are gaining new skills and learn a lot from the discussions. An important thing that they discovered is that they are not

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the only ones feeling or thinking in a certain way. It validates their experiences and creates a safe space to discuss issues that there otherwise is no time for.

- ❖ Participants also referred to their apprehension on the first night. When asked about their expectations on that night they said that they wanted certificates, but the reality of the work required was daunting. Now they look at their folders and realise how much they have done and that it was not nearly as difficult as they had feared.

- ❖ Xxxxxx asked them about the level of difficulty and all felt that it was not too difficult or too easy.

- ❖ They mentioned that working back the hours used for training is difficult. They also mentioned that they think that some of the initial people dropped out as a result of this. Xxxxxx explained that the company supports them in having made the training available and on-site. Their contribution is time. While participants felt that it would be easier if they could get release from work to do the training, they could also see her point. They did say that after a few weeks they fell into the rhythm of attending and working in the hours.

- ❖ Xxxxxx commended the group for doing the training and encouraged them to spread the word. She mentioned that she and Ester met ~ 3 years ago and that since then has run successful computer training for 2 years and now this training as well. She is particularly pleased that this training is going well as she did not initially think it was possible.

- ❖ Ester thanked the group for their positive attitude and for their valuable insights that help to shape the training and as a result of the research element will also have a broader impact.

Signatures:

Date:

Appendix 5: Informed Consent Example Sheet

(Consent Form was slightly adapted to suit each stakeholder)

WATERFORD INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
RESEARCH - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(To be read out by researcher before the participant decides to participate in the research. One copy of the form will be left with the participant. One copy will be signed by the participant. This copy will be kept by the researcher.)

I.   Project Title:

Workplace Basic Education as a catalyst in empowering the workforce to deal with new literacy practices.

II.   Introduction to this study:

Industry is changing in an attempt to stay competitive. The workforce need to keep pace with the changes and the new work practices like teamwork, regular meetings, implementation of legislation and quality control, which have become part of everyday working life. Many of the changes involve new literacy practices and changes in behaviour and attitudes of employees.

III.   You are being asked to participate in this research study. The study has the following purposes:

To explore how employees, who would potentially benefit from basic education support, experience the changing workplace.

To explore how these employees cope at present.

To design a customised Workplace Basic Education course in consultation with the employer and employees.

To explore how basic education can potentially be a tool for managing the changing literacy practices effectively for both the employee and the employer.

IV.   This research study will take place at your place of work

V.   This is what will happen during the research study:

1.   The researcher will familiarise herself with the jobs performed by participants on the training.

2.   The researcher will talk to the employer to find out what is expected of employees.

3.   The researcher will choose a group of ~ eight (8) employees from those who volunteer to go on the workplace basic education training course. If viable a control group will be put in place too.

4.   The researcher will interview employees to try and find out what literacy practices are needed on the job, and how they cope with these practices at the moment.

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Their views on the changes relating to their jobs will also be sought. The researcher will also ask employees what they hope to get from the training course.

5. The volunteers will then attend the training course. The perspectives of participants will be consulted throughout the training and this will inform the development of the curriculum.

6. At the end of the training course the participants will be interviewed again to determine their perspective on the training course and to comment on its relevance to their needs and workplace.

VI. You might not want to come forward, as you are scared that you might not have the qualifications or skills required of you. This is an understandable fear which will be handled with sensitivity throughout the research. This is your chance to say which training supports you need in order to assist you in carrying out required literacy practices on the job and to obtain relevant qualifications.

VIII. <u>Your confidentiality will be guarded:</u>
Waterford Institute of Technology will protect all the information about you and your part in this study. Your identity or personal information will not be revealed, published or used in future studies. Excerpts from the interview may be part of the research document, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in the report.

IX. <u>If you have questions about the research project, feel free to call Ms. Ester Mackey at 087-9222777.</u>

X. <u>Taking part in this study is your decision and is entirely voluntarily</u>.

If you do agree to take part in the study, you may withdraw at any point prior to completion of the study. You may also request not to answer certain questions if you do not wish to answer them.

XI. <u>Signature:</u>

The above information has been read to me and I understand the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project entitled:

"Workplace Basic Education as a catalyst in empowering the workforce to deal with new literacy practices."

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____

Appendix 6: Exit Evaluation Questionnaire

Evaluation Form: February 2009
Communications & Personal Effectiveness: October '08 – February '09

1. Location

1.1   Was the location convenient for you?   Yes ☐   No ☐
       If not, please indicate why not.

       _____

1.3   Was the location appropriate for you? Yes ☐   No ☐
       If not, please indicate why not.

       _____

1.4   Did the time suit you?   Yes ☐   No ☐
       If not, please indicate why not.

       _____

2. Tutor
       On a scale of 1=poor and 5=excellent, would you please rate your
       satisfaction with the tutors who delivered your course:

       Helpful   1 2 3 4 5
       Friendly   1 2 3 4 5
       Prepared   1 2 3 4 5
       Knowledge about subject   1 2 3 4 5
       Patient   1 2 3 4 5
       Adult Approach   1 2 3 4 5
       Professional   1 2 3 4 5
       Teaching methods   1 2 3 4 5
       Any comment

       _____

       _____

3. Course Content

3.1 Has the course content covered the subjects that were advertised at the outset?   Yes ☐   No ☐
   If not, please indicate why you feel this way.

   _____

3.2   Have you been consulted about what you'd like to be included in the course?
      Yes ☐   No ☐

3.3   Has it been too easy or too difficult? Yes ☐   No ☐
      Explain why you feel this way.

   _____

3.3   Has it met with your expectations? Yes ☐   No ☐
      If not, please indicate why not.

   _____

3.4   How could it be improved?

   _____

   What was not good and should be excluded?

   _____

Did you find the course to be relevant to your job?   Yes ☐   No ☐
      Please explain why/why not.

   _____

4. Benefits
 4.1 List some of the personal and work related benefits that you experience as a result of participating in this course.
   _____

   _____

4.2 On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) please rate yourself after having done the course:

- ❖ **Your general confidence:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- ❖ **Your confidence in public speaking:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- ❖ **Your confidence in participating in workplace meetings**: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- ❖ **Your confidence in writing:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- ❖ **Your confidence in reading:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- ❖ **Your confidence in using the computer:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4.3 Has this training helped you to communicate in the workplace? Yes ☐ No ☐ Please explain.

_____

_____

5. <u>Progression</u>

5.1 Would you like a continuation of this kind of training? Yes ☐ No ☐

5.2 Would you like a different kind of training? Yes ☐ No ☐
If yes, please give suggestions.

_____

_____

5. <u>Any further comments?</u>

_____

_____

Thank you for your co-operation in filling out this form.

Appendix 7: Exit Interview Questions

Appendix 7.1: Exit Interview Questions – HR Manager

1. How was participation in the initiative for you as a company?
2. Any outcomes that you have identified?
3. Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Tensions / Training?
4. Practitioner effectiveness?
5. Evaluation Report & Problem of release (Monday shift patterns)
6. Ask Xxxxxxx to put a "number" on the operational level staff that would potentially benefit from a course like this. (See previous interview)
7. What "swang" her initially? Has this strengthened/dissuaded her to stay involved?
8. Her own position in the organisation – mentioned as "employer perspective" all the time – need to clarify that.
9. Union usually is a strong stakeholder – never came into play here. Would their involvement have added or taken from what we did?
10. Understanding of new productivity system – check this against perspectives of others. See Toyota quote "Executive management (senior employees) goes to the source (actual work sites) to find the facts and to listen directly to the voice of employees."
11. Is there a language/linguistic "code" in-company? (e.g. challenged, talent development, etc)
12. Check about magazine. Why & when & how perceived.
13. You have gone to extraordinary lengths to bring employees on a journey – what if the union arrangement was not in place? What about the temptation of redundancy? I read up on it, but am not fully sure, is it "two weeks pay for every year of service, together with a bonus week - weekly pay is subject to a ceiling of €600? How much of this is tax deductable? The reason why I am asking is to show what is best option and position of employer and employee and union on this and in relation to training.
14. PMDS – is it getting done? Who does it? Criteria for accessing training – has this not been included because it was tacit?

Thank you very much for your willingness to do the interview.

****

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Appendix 7.2: Exit Interview Questions - Employees

The interview questions are a guide only and instead of following them rigorously, they will be used as pointers for exploration.

1. How do you feel about the fact that you had the opportunity to give input from the beginning into the training – comfortable with it/not?

2. What were the outcomes for you personally do you think – now that some time has elapsed – both in general and at work?

3. What does the word literacy mean to you?

4. What in the tutor's way of teaching did you find good/not good?

5. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) please rate:

   ❖ Your general confidence _____
   ❖ Your confidence in public speaking _____
   ❖ Your confidence in participating in workplace meetings

   _____
   ❖ Your confidence in writing _____
   ❖ Your confidence in reading_____
   ❖ Your in using the computer _____

6. Any other questions?

   Thank you very much for your willingness to do the interview.

****

Appendix 8: Exit Focus Group Questions

Appendix 8.1: Focus Group – Project Team Leaders

<u>**30 March 2009**</u>

<u>**Guiding questions**</u>

Thanking them for cooperation
How do they feel about consultation re training & having input (also after research is over, do they feel that if something like this is run in a similar company it will be useful to include the PTL's?)?

Interesting observations from training:
1. Discussion around computers during briefing/consultation – differing perceptions.
2. Magazines: international & local
3. Check perception of productivity arrangements.
4. Check how sincerely their input is valued. (Perhaps refer it to PTL's themselves too)

As discussed at our previous meeting, it would be valuable to discussion whether you observed any subtle shifts in participants that you work with. Please consider the following indicators:
* Has the person been more/less approachable?
* Has the person shown more/less initiative?
* Has the person been more willing to participate in team meetings?
* Has the person been more willing to take on small responsibilities?
* Has the person been more willing to ask questions, share information, participate in general communications-related tasks?
* Have you noticed any indication of a growth in confidence?
* Has the person been more open/positive towards change?
* Any other shifts in attitude/skill that you might have observed that could be related to participating in the training?
* (If you were to do PMDS with them what would you put in?)

Additional questions:
* Has "windchill" been introduced – reception? Participants response – different than what they expected, or were their expectations different because they know that they were on the training?
* What is your own understanding of being literate? And in Xxxxxxx what do you regard it to be?
* Did Xxxxxx speak to Xxxxxxx after the briefing or since – response?

Overview of outcomes identified
- ✓ Skills growth: computer, speaking, problem solving,
- ✓ Confidence growth, personal & interpersonal skills
- ✓ Perception of self
- ✓ Trainability
- ✓ Certification
- ✓ Any outcomes you might have perceived?
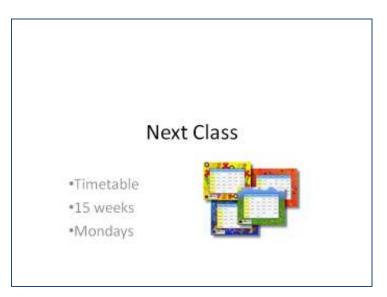
Appendix 8.2: Focus Group – Participants

The focus group questions are a guide only and instead of following them rigorously, they will be used as pointers for exploration.
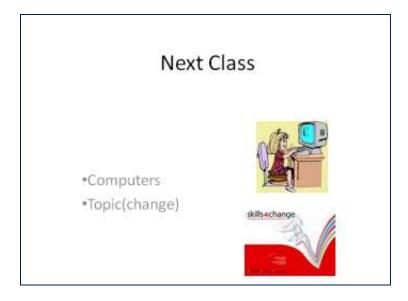
1. One comment about what was good.
   Any other benefits?

2. One comment on what was not good.
   Anything else that was not good?

3. Do you think that what was in the course was relevant, interesting, of use to you?
   Why/why not?

4. Would the training without the option of accreditation be good? Did it scare you at the beginning though?

5. Do you think that this type of training helps employees to deal with the changes in the workplace? If yes, how? (Pen, paper and pigeon hole)

6. What are the skills that an employee needs?
   Which of these relate to literacy? Ask about "literacies" at work – try to define?
   (e.g. Research literacy) Functional, critical, social practice

7. Would this training work if marketed as "literacy"?
   Why/why not?

8. How did you find the methods used for teaching?
   Did you like the use of discussion and dialogue?
   Did the class room socialisation and peer support help you to learn?

9. Did the course help you to grow in confidence? How and with whom/what and how do you know it? Does it influence how you perceive yourself?

10. Is there anything that you do now that you either would not have done before or that you do differently now?

11. How do you think do the other staff members perceive the course?
    Would they consider doing something like this/
    What has y own feedback to them been?
12. The training is workplace and work-based, but because we are social creatures, we cannot put our lives in boxes. Do you think that participating in this kind of training also might have an influence on your life outside of work?
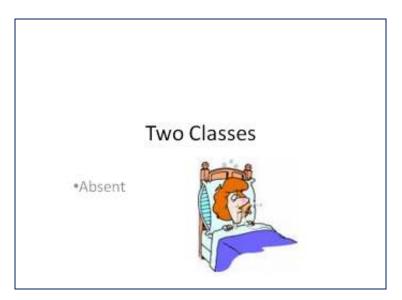   Do anything differently now at home?

13. How did you feel about the learning Log? Would more intense project work have been a threat? How do feel about assignments/projects now? Ready for FETAC Level 4?

14. Any nuggets of wisdom/questions?

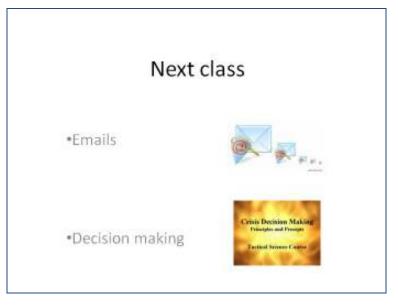Thank you very much for your participation in the training and the research and especially for all the nuggets of wisdom and the laughs!

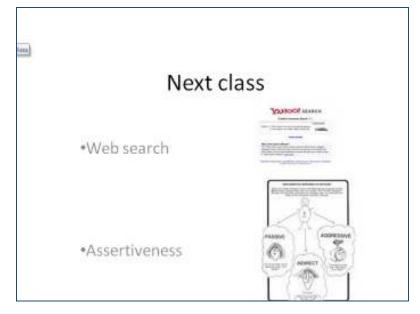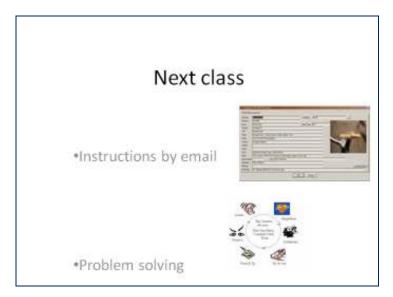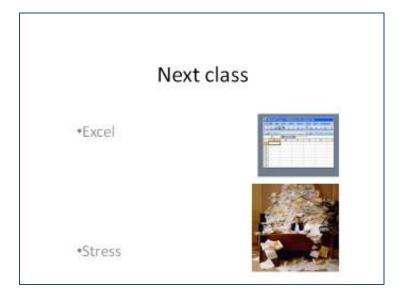**********

Appendix 9: Smiley's PowerPoint Presentation

Two Classes

•Absent

Next class

•Emails

•Decision making

Next class

•Web search

•Assertiveness

Next class

•Instructions by email

•Problem solving

Next class

•Excel

•Stress

Next Class

•Spreadsheets

•CVs

Next Class

•Data protection

•Types of behaviour

Next Class

•Slide show

•Topic (change in the workplace)

SETH GODIN

Second last class

Preparation of slide show
And
Summary