

# Language development through work

Sprachentwicklung durch Arbeit

Alexander Braddell

Workplace basic skills practitioner-researcher

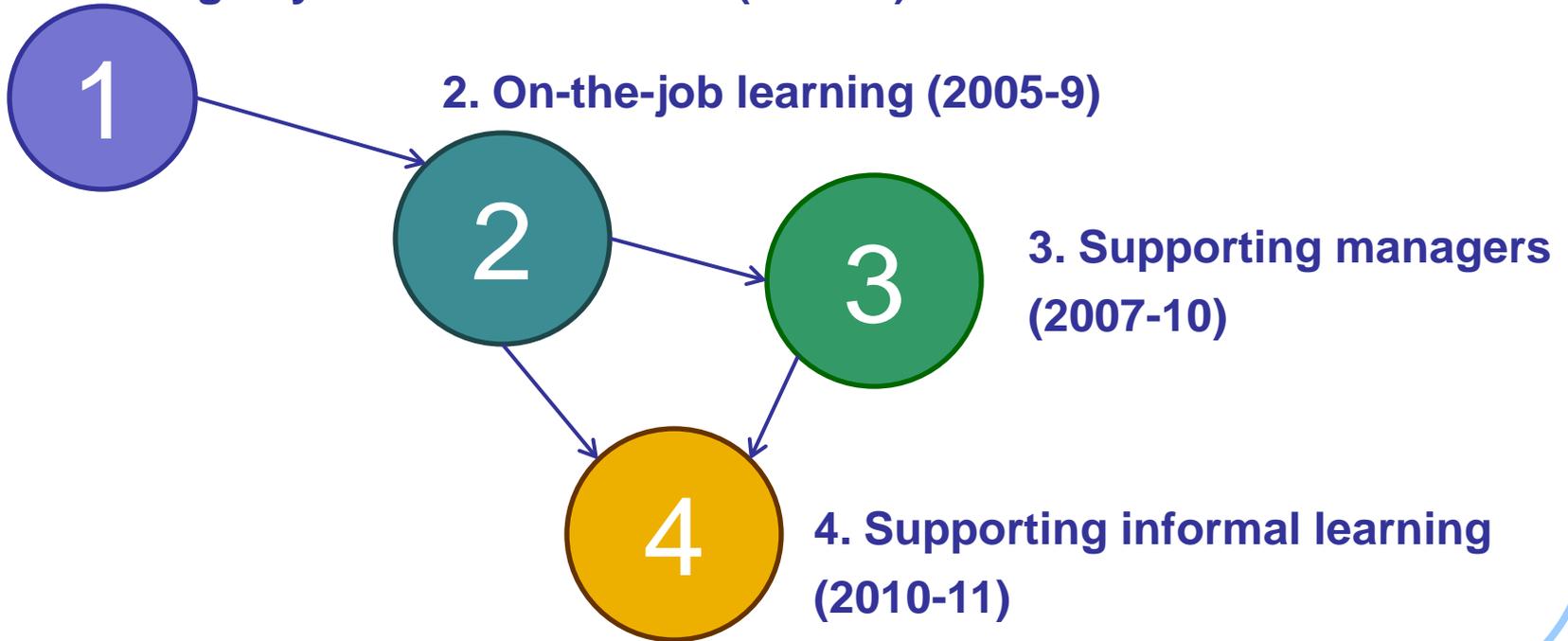
Oxfordshire Skills Escalator Centre CIC Ltd

Oxford, United Kingdom

# Practitioner-led action research

Practical ways to support learning in low skill, low pay workplaces

## 1. Going beyond the classroom (2003-4)



# Basic skills

**1999** One in five UK adults lack basic skills → many in employment

**2001** National strategy to improve adult literacy, **language**, numeracy

**Goal** 'Eliminate the problem'

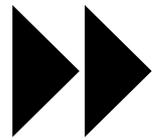
Awareness raising, curriculum, teacher training, qualifications

- Learner = **individual** adult
- Learning = **classroom instruction** by adult basic education **teacher**
- Success = test → **qualification** → national qualification targets

## Results

Community

Workplace



## 2008: Policy not practical

London University research

Longitudinal study 2003-2008

50 workplace programmes

### Findings

Limited impact on skills, no impact on productivity

Programmes not sustainable

Govt approach inefficient, impractical

'At odds with workplace environment'



Rewind to 2002...

## Putting policy into practice: 2002



**Snapshot: Language programme for hospital ancillary staff**

Private contractor: food preparation, cleaning

Typical workplace: diverse workforce, fire-fighting managers

Staff release = big problem

1hr class per week (in hospital restaurant)

? Curriculum, continuity, progress, outcomes

Minimal impact on learners, organisation

**Demotivating** for learners, teachers, employer

# What would a new approach look like?

Work = language acquisition opportunity

Support workers to learn from work

Workplace activity = curriculum

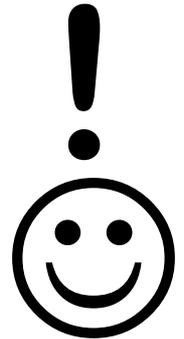
Workers don't have whole hours free

Plenty of five, ten, 15 minute lulls – at predictable times

Send teacher into work areas (with portable learning materials)

Mini sessions, 1:1, two or three times a week

Structure for dip-in, dip-out learning, driven by learner concerns



# Bitesize curriculum

Interactions around task + role

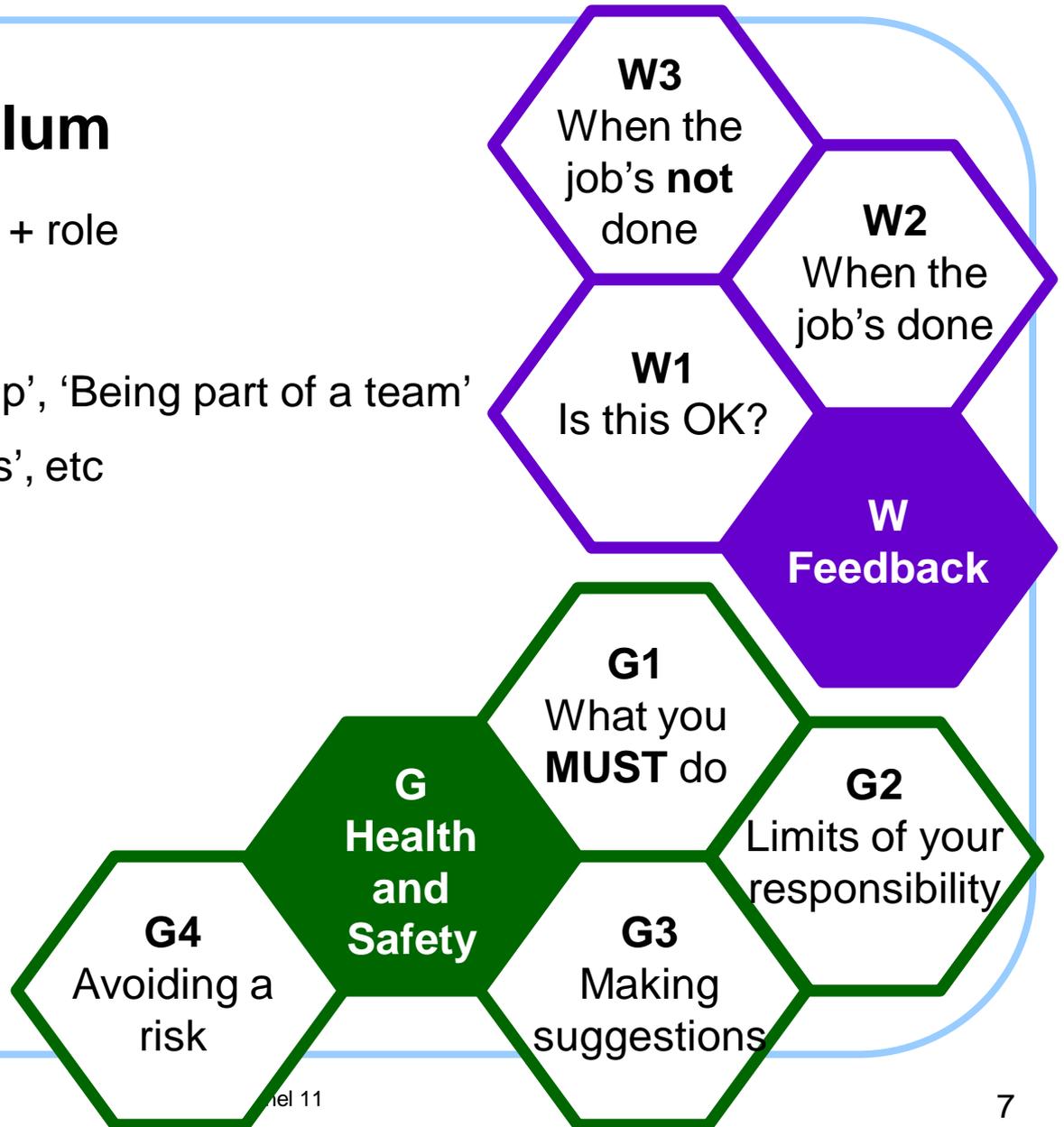
Nine topic areas

e.g. 'When you need help', 'Being part of a team'  
'Dealing with instructions', etc

60 learning 'bites'

Non-linear

Expandable



# Portable materials

Teacher → learner

? Learner → colleague ? Manager → learner

## Cultural knowledge

*Read and respond*  
*Compare with your own culture etc*

## Exponents

*Learn + repeat*  
*Practice intonation*  
*Listen + respond etc*

## Scenarios to illustrate use

*Listen, repeat + learn*  
*Make up your own dialogues etc*

Front

**Helpful Tips**

It is often common to shake hands with people when you meet them for the very first time, whether they are a man or a woman.

After that, when you see someone you know, you smile, say hello and make eye contact.

Hello, are you Rose?  
I'm Ahmed.  
Are you Fatima?  
My name is José.  
excuse me  
I didn't catch your name.  
Pleased to meet you.  
Nice to meet you.  
I'll show you round.  
Let me introduce you to the others.

**A1**  
Getting Started

**Introducing yourself**

Oxfordshire Skills for Health  
Towards a workplace learning culture

© 2004  
Arweilan

Back

**In the office**

Ahmed: Hello, are you Rose?  
Rose: Yes - I am.  
Ahmed: Hi. My name is Ahmed. John asked me to show you round.  
Rose: Oh - that's great. Thank you.

**On the ward**

Rose: Hello are you Mrs Brown?  
Patient: Yes - that's right. And you are?  
Rose: My name's Rose. I was just wondering if we could have your menu?  
Patient: Oh yes - of course you can. What was your name again?  
Rose: I'm new here. I've just started. This is my first day.

## Life beyond the classroom

Positive evaluation from workers, teachers, managers

'More English spoken, staff more confident, less absenteeism'

Access to learners

Learner progress

Peer learning

Manager involvement

Teacher's understanding of workplace

Programme visibility

**But...** Teacher-time

Material difficult for managers to use

# Pause for reflection

Workplace constraints → education approach **impractical**

Communication skills relevant to workers, organisation

- Work flexibly (perform range of tasks)
- Work well with others (teamwork / customer service)
- Adapt to change (role + task)

Workers, managers welcome support

? Workplace learning approach

Organisational systems, supervision, coaching, informal peer learning

? For basic skills

# Hypothesis

Skills that matter = skills that workers **use**

Using skill = opportunity to practise

Opportunity to practise = opportunity to learn

? Work activity = learning opportunity

Work activity = task + role

Task + role supported by people & performance management

? On-the-job learning linked to people & performance management  
= practical, sustainable, inclusive approach

# Investigations

**1. Going beyond the classroom** (2003-4): very small, local project

Workplace scoping → curriculum, methodology → trial

Practitioners = investigators, developers, trial facilitators

+ academic researchers, govt agencies

**2. On-the-job learning** (2005-9): large, regional project

Research reviews → workplace audit → on-the-job learning trials

**3. Supporting managers** (2007-10): large, national project

Workplace audit → web-based tools for managers

**4. Supporting informal learning** (2010-11): small, national project

Workplace scoping → methodology, resource → trial

## Research findings

Skills required, **but** invisible, unsupported

Employer focus = task + collective performance

Communication problems → negative impact on performance

Employers, managers, workers welcome support

**Support must be within existing constraints – no extra demands**

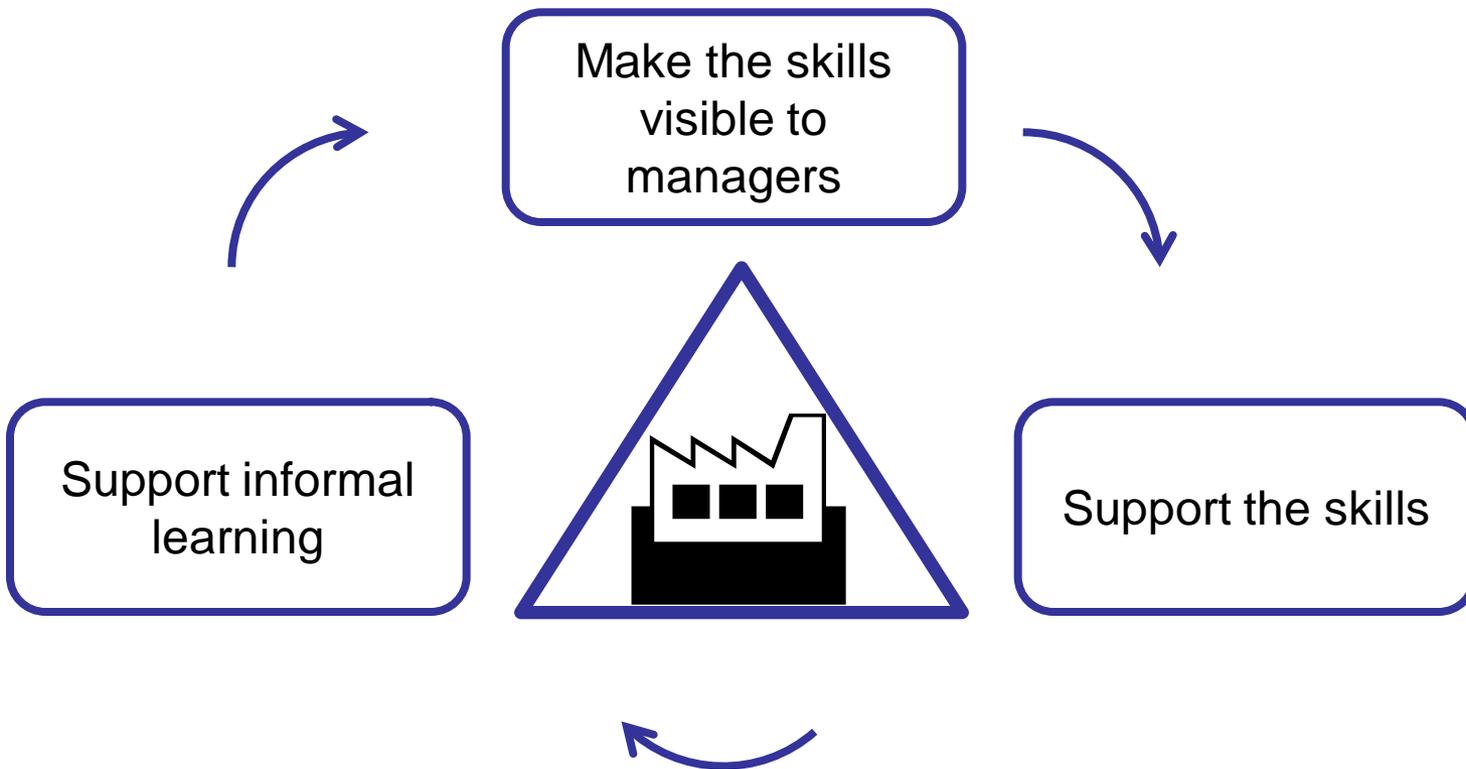
Managers: motivated by quality + compliance - **not** worker development

Basic skills = problem area: 'We lack the confidence, expertise, resources to address problems.' (basic skills = education specialism, not job skill)

Opportunities for **on-the-job learning** linked to management systems

Support for **managers**, support for **informal learning**

# Workplace learning approach



# Practical examples

## **Skills checks – make the skills visible to organisations**

Resources to support safe conversations between managers and workers about the communication skills jobs require **[Project 3]**

## **Guided learning – support the skills**

Support for organisations to identify, specify and communicate the job to workers: materials + mentoring **[Project 2]**

## **Informal learning – inform the interactions staff have around the job**

Resources to develop workers' understanding of the job **[Project 4]**

# Learning points

1. Significant need for support in the low skill, low pay workplace
2. Education-based approach problematic
3. Workplace learning approach practical

Work = **collective** activity

Management of work activity = **collective** process

(Collective) management of work activity = teaching + learning opportunity

Support for learning = support for performance

Support for performance = impact (motivating to employers)

Systematic, collective learning = learning for **all**

Why don't employers do it? → Awareness, expertise, resources (cost)

Why don't govt + providers do it? → ???

# Links

**Bitesize** [http://www.deutsch-am-arbeitsplatz.de/beyond\\_the\\_classroom.html#c828](http://www.deutsch-am-arbeitsplatz.de/beyond_the_classroom.html#c828)

## **Learning through Work**

<http://www.niace.org.uk/research/workplacelearning/Learning-through-work.htm>

**Care Skillsbase** <http://www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk/>

## **Informal learning resource**

[http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/publications/Learning\\_through\\_Work\\_guides.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/publications/Learning_through_Work_guides.aspx)

## **UK context**

*Adult Learning in the Workplace: Creating formal provision with impact* Teaching and Learning Research Briefing 59 (2008) <http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/wolfRB59final.pdf>

*Is Workplace 'Skills for Life' Provision Sustainable in the UK?* Edmund Waite, Karen Evans and Natasha Kersh (2011) LLAKES Research Paper 23

<http://www.llakes.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/23-Waite-Evans-Kersh-compressed.pdf>