

# Action resource worksheet 5

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## The learning environment<sup>1</sup>

This worksheet is based on implementing a wealth model approach to adult literacy and numeracy tuition as set out in the **Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work** (NALA, 2012).

## The wealth model approach

The wealth model is the simple idea that adult learners bring many different experiences and strengths into the class with them. A good tutor will use these experiences and strengths as a resource. They will respect the learner for what they have already done and achieved in their lives to date and regard their experience as a very good starting point for meeting new challenges.

Learning about a learner's experiences and knowledge helps to show where their strengths, goals and interests lie. Knowing their goals and interests means that the tutor can make tasks relevant and useful. This moves adult education away from 'merely useful knowledge' to giving and getting 'really useful knowledge' – the knowledge that learners need to change their lives for the better.

## The wealth model in practice

Transformative learning is a way of making it possible for learners to take action and develop new perspectives on themselves, their families and wider society. Slowly, the tutors build evidence of the learner's ability. This ability is evident in the learner's portfolios and their increasing confidence. These contradict negative self-belief, and replace it with a positive and realistic one.

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1 To accompany the report 'The wealth model in adult literacy: transformative learning in action'

## Guidelines for good adult literacy work: Guideline 5

Adults learn best when the decision to return to education is their own and the environment is supportive, relaxed and friendly.

This guideline draws attention to how a good, safe environment is necessary to provide the best possible conditions for adult learning. Building trusting relationships with learners is how it all starts. Relationships are not just about the relationship between the learner and the tutor, but are also between the learners themselves.

### Top tips

- **Get to know the learner and the group.**  
This involves not just the tutor getting to know the members of the group, but allowing the group to get to know each other and the tutor, in a more relaxed and friendly manner. A relaxed learner is more open to learning and emotional barriers to learning are reduced.
- **Normalise thoughts and feelings.**  
All learners have some reaction to being in a strange space. It can make learners feel anxious until they realise that this is a normal part of being in a new and perhaps challenging situation. Interacting with their peers will also be part of the process.
- **Normalise strengths and gaps.**  
People's profiles tend to be 'spikey'. This means that they can be very good at one thing, but have a difficulty with another, which can interfere with overall performance. A great advantage of a group is that the learners can quickly see the strengths of their peers, which can make them more open to recognising their own strengths.
- **Use opportunities for group interactions.**  
Tutors will use as many opportunities as possible to foster a safe environment and respectful relations between the learners. They believe it is their role to provide a safe and positive learning environment where learners feel valued and their opinions are heard. Tutors know the importance of providing a safe space and relaxed environment to help the learner overcome initial anxiety, build relationships and encourage the social aspects of learning. Important discussions take place during 'break time' between peers and between learner and tutor. Good group dynamics and being able to interact with peers can lead to a sense of having achieved something through enjoyable relationships.

**My three top tips on how I provide a good and relaxed learning environment:**

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## The 'Not Like School' checklist

Ways my classroom is 'Not Like School'	Check
It is an informal, relaxed learning environment	
We agree ground rules and everyone understands the reason for a ground rule.	
There is peer teaching and learning	
There is mutual respect	
I see learners as adults with prior experience, knowledge and skills to draw on	
The prior skills and experience of the learner can be relevant	
I learn from the group	
The advantages of going for certification are identified	
I see myself as a facilitator of learning	
I create collaborative classrooms	
I know how the curriculum is negotiated	
I provide critical literacy and numeracy skills so people can read the word to read the world	



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