The Spalding Method: an evaluation for the Baytree Centre, Brixton

**Greg Brooks, PhD
Emeritus Professor of Education,
University of Sheffield**

and

**Dr Maxine Burton
Institute of Education,
University of London**

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The authors

Greg Brooks is Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Sheffield, where he held a personal Chair, 2002-07. He was engaged in virtually full-time educational research for 30 years from 1977, including 20 years at the National Foundation for Educational Research.

Dr Maxine Burton was a senior researcher in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield, 2003-08, where she also obtained her Doctorate of Education. She is now a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London.

While at Sheffield we carried out numerous projects in the field of adult literacy under the auspices of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy, which was led by the Institute of Education, University of London. We have both published widely on adult literacy and other aspects of educational research.

Executive summary

Headline findings: The learners in this study made good progress overall in reading, writing and spelling. Their confidence in themselves as users of English increased, as did the frequency with which they reported engaging in certain literacy activities in English.

A total of 32 women attending classes in literacy in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) at the Baytree Centre in Brixton took part in an evaluation in academic year 2009/10. The scheme in use for these classes was the Spalding Method, in which writing is tackled first and leads on to spelling and then reading.

The learners came from 14 countries, and between them spoke 16 languages other than English. All but a few could already read and write at least one other language, but most had limited command of spoken English; all had limited literacy in English. Most had had little formal education before coming to the UK, and even less since arriving, and most had very basic or no formal qualifications. On average they were older than ESOL learners nationally, and they had specifically chosen Baytree's women-only literacy courses. There appears to be very little provision for learners of this exact demographic.

The learners took reading, writing and spelling tests, and completed an attitudes questionnaire, at both the beginning and the end of their courses, and the researchers each observed two teaching sessions.

Greater attendance was (unsurprisingly) associated with greater progress in reading, writing and spelling and with positive changes in attitudes.

Also, greater progress in reading was associated with greater self-reported frequency and enjoyment of literacy activities.

Our observations showed that the learners accepted and enjoyed the Spalding Method, including its firm structure and didactic approach.

The numbers of learners on whom full data were available were small (24 for background variables, the literacy tests, and attendance; 20 for attitudes); while these numbers were just sufficient for whole-group analyses, they would not have supported sub-group analyses. Also, this was a one-group, and therefore not a comparative, study. On both counts it would be desirable to gather more data in order to confirm the validity of the findings reported here. In particular, the use of tests which yield results which can be compared with national norms should be considered.

However, it is clear that these courses largely achieved their stated aims, and Baytree should continue to use the Spalding Method for as long as it has a teacher trained to do so, and should have others trained to deliver it. Moreover, these courses reach a demographic group which is under-served and under-researched; for both reasons, the courses should continue, and be extended to more adult ESOL learners.

1.   Context and aims

In the summer of 2009 we were approached by colleagues at the Baytree Centre in Brixton and asked to conduct an evaluation of their literacy/ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses for immigrant women. These courses were based on an approach known as *The Writing Road to Reading* (Spalding and North, 2003) or, informally, 'The Spalding Method', after Romalda Spalding, who originally devised it in the United States in the 1950s.

It was agreed that the evaluation would take place in the academic year 2009/10, be both quantitative and qualitative, and aim to

- establish how much progress the participants made in literacy in English
- establish whether and to what extent their self-confidence and use and enjoyment of literacy activities in English increased
- provide an impression of how the Spalding Method worked in the classroom, and
- draw conclusions and make recommendations.

In this report we first describe how the evaluation was carried out (section 2), the Baytree Centre (section 3) and the Spalding Method (section 4); then present the quantitative findings on the learners and their progress (section 5), and some insights from observations of the classes (section 6); and finally draw conclusions and make recommendations (section 7).

2.   How we carried out the evaluation

The staff of the Centre were intending to run two Spalding courses in the academic year 2009/10, starting in the autumn term and ending in the summer term, and these courses were the focus of the evaluation. The women attending them were asked to give their consent in writing to taking part in the research, and all 32 of those recruited onto these courses agreed to do so.

It was routine practice at the Centre to ask learners to take both a reading and a writing test at the end of their courses; the tests used were the EdExcel examination board's literacy tests at Entry levels 1, 2 and 3. Although only one of the learners involved had English as her first language, the literacy tests were chosen in preference to EdExcel's ESOL exams because the learners' main objective was to improve their literacy in English, and the Baytree courses accordingly focused heavily on literacy. In order to estimate the learners' progress, it was also necessary to ask them to take similar tests at the beginning of their courses. EdExcel provide some sample practice tests on their website, and these were used as the pre-tests at the beginning of the courses; 'live' tests were used as post-tests at the end of the year.

Because the Spalding Method is based on phonics (teaching approaches which focus on the relationships between the sounds of spoken English and the letters and letter-combinations of written English), we suggested that it would also be appropriate to estimate the learners' progress in spelling. This was agreed, and we provided a spelling test which we had devised for a previous project (Burton *et al.*, 2010). The 23 words it contains are very basic, and have regular spellings. This too was administered at both the beginning and the end of the courses. Because we wish to keep it 'secure' for possible use in other projects it is not reproduced in this report.

It should be noted that there are in fact no entirely suitable literacy tests for the type of learner involved in this study. In particular, some adults with pre-Entry level literacy can find it difficult to score at all, even on our very simple spelling test and on EdExcel's Entry level 1 reading and writing tests; and there are no tests of pre-Entry level literacy for adults available in this country because they would have to consist of such things as knowledge of the alphabet, where to find the title and author's name in a book, and other concepts of print – in other words, tests for preschoolers or very young children. Moreover, for some adult ESOL learners it would be impossible to distinguish whether low performance was due to low literacy or to poor knowledge of English. The tests actually used were therefore chosen as less inappropriate than other instruments available to the provider at the time.

It was also agreed that we would investigate the learners' attitudes to literacy, and any changes in them between the beginning and end of the courses. In addition to taking the reading, writing and spelling tests, therefore, the learners were asked to complete a questionnaire at both stages. We provided a 21-item questionnaire based on questionnaires we had used before. The version used at the beginning of the courses is reproduced in the Appendix (the questionnaire for the end of the courses was identical except for being labelled 'post' instead of 'pre'). Both versions contained 21 items, in three sections:

- 10 items asking about the learners' confidence in themselves as users of English
- 4 items asking how often they engaged in certain literacy activities in English, and
- 7 items asking about their enjoyment of certain literacy activities in English.

For each item there was a four-point response scale, and the learner had to ring the number opposite each item which corresponded to their preferred response. Baytree staff gave learners support with understanding the items, and discouraged ambiguous answers, but avoided suggesting what the learners' responses should be.

Baytree staff administered all the tests and the questionnaire at both stages, and sent us the data for analysis. In addition to the test data, Baytree staff told us the dates on which each learner took the tests, and how many sessions they had attended between the two occasions. They also gathered a range of background information on the learners, namely age, how long they had been living in the UK, how many years formal education they had received before and since coming here, the level of their highest educational qualification and where that was gained, their occupational status, their (self-declared) ethnicity, their country of origin and mother tongue(s) – up to three – and whether they could read and write those languages, and their command of spoken English. Where necessary we provided classifications and scales for these background variables.

We each carried out observations of two teaching sessions. The learners were asked to agree to our doing this; this was particularly necessary in Greg Brooks's case since all the learners were women and many had expressed a preference for a women-only course. No objections were raised, and the observations proved very useful.

We should emphasise that this evaluation was limited in both scale and design: the number of learners involved was small, and there was no scope for a comparative study – that is, there was no possibility of comparing the progress made by these learners with that of learners exposed to a different approach (for a slight exception concerning the spelling test, see section 6.2). Also, because there are no published norms for any of the tests we used it was not possible to use standardisation data as an 'implicit control group'. The findings therefore stand alone as evidence of what these learners achieved.

3.   The Baytree Centre

This section is mainly based on material accessed from the Centre's website on 13/9/2010: http://www.baytreecentre.org/index.html

The Baytree Centre is a social inclusion project, and its aim is to create supportive pathways towards social inclusion for inner-city families. It offers integrated educational and training programmes for women and girls.

In Brixton and the surrounding areas there are women of many varied ethnic backgrounds and languages who, in spite of living here for many years, have never really mastered English because they have not had the opportunity to attend formal classes. Others, having recently arrived in this country and taken up residence in South London, hardly speak a word of English. Many need to start to learn listening, speaking, reading and writing in English from scratch. The Centre has accordingly been offering English classes for speakers of other languages for almost 20 years, and women from over 100 countries have taken its courses.

For women in this position, the Centre's courses fit a particular niche: there is very little provision specifically for (on average) somewhat older immigrant women with English at pre-Entry or low Entry levels requiring women-only courses. Nor, as far as we know, are there specific materials for this group. The Centre is therefore providing these women with a valuable service.

4.   Phonics and the Spalding Method

The Baytree Centre, or to be more precise one teacher there, has been using the Spalding Method with its adult learners since 2000. This is a distinctive and highly structured version of phonics. In this section we describe the main aspects of the method, setting it first within the context of phonics teaching in general and discussing some issues surrounding the phonics debate.

By phonics we mean an approach to teaching reading and spelling which focuses on the association of phonemes (speech sounds) with particular graphemes (letters or groups of letters) and of graphemes with particular phonemes. The relationships between sounds and letters – grapheme-phoneme and phoneme-grapheme correspondences – are the basis of all phonics schemes.

Some years ago teaching literacy through phonics was less popular than strategies such as 'whole word' teaching, inferring word meanings from context, etc. However, recently there has been renewed interest in phonics for the teaching of initial literacy, with the findings of the Rose Review (Rose, 2006) and the subsequent incorporation of phonics into the National Literacy Strategy (now the Primary National Strategy). There is strong research evidence that systematic phonics instruction, within a broad and rich literacy curriculum, enables children to make better progress in word identification than unsystematic or no phonics instruction (Ehri *et al.*, 2001; Torgerson *et al.*, 2006).

Little attention had been paid to the potential of phonics for adults until the first major research into adult literacy practice in England from 2002 onwards, led by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC). This revealed that phonics was sometimes used in adult literacy classes, but often in an unsystematic, inaccurate and misleading fashion (Besser *et al.*, 2004; Brooks *et al.*, 2007). A follow-on NRDC research project, which involved thorough training of adult literacy teachers in the principles of phonics, and the assessment of accurate and systematic delivery of the strategy in the classroom, showed very encouraging findings (Burton *et al.,* 2008, 2010). The learners involved in the project made significant progress in a very short time in reading comprehension and spelling, their confidence in a range of language and literacy tasks improved, and phonics proved to be a popular strategy with both teachers and learners. Thus phonics is a strategy that should be taken seriously for adult literacy learners, and also seriously in terms of training for adult literacy teachers.

To date, there are no phonics schemes designed specifically for adults; several school-level schemes have been adapted, to a greater or lesser extent, for use in adult literacy classrooms. The Spalding Method is one such scheme, devised in the USA in the 1950s originally for dyslexic children, but subsequently extended to other children and to adults. It is regarded as suitable for adults, as the materials are not particularly childish. The method requires attendance by teachers on a training course, as it is in many ways very different from other phonics schemes in its terminology and progression. The main distinctive features of Spalding are listed below:

- It is very highly structured, with little scope for changing the order of delivery.

- The method has its own specialist terminology and rules. For example, the letters and letter-combinations corresponding to phonemes are known as 'phonograms' rather than the more usual term, 'graphemes'; different pronunciations of the phonograms/graphemes are indicated by superscript numbers, e.g. phonogram <s>, if written s^2, means that <s> is to be pronounced /z/ as in, e.g., 'dogs'; and there is a numbered list of spelling rules.

- The first 26 phonograms taught are the letters of the alphabet; many other schemes, including the government framework, *Letters and Sounds,* start with the correspondences that are the most regular. Thus the first correspondences taught will be one-to-one letter-sound correspondences (commonly,

  <s a t n i p> pronounced /s æ t n ɪ p/ respectively, followed by 2-letter graphemes, e.g. <ck ff ll>).

- The initial focus is on writing rather than reading; students are taught to write individual 'phonograms' first, whereas other schemes will combine the first graphemes into words to be sounded out and read from the start; in the Spalding method, writing actual words from dictation only starts once the 45 most common phonograms have been written and pronounced.

- Dictation is accompanied by hand gestures to indicate the 1-letter or 2-letter 'phonograms' and the number of syllables in a word, e.g. the word 'author' involves 2 hands (2 syllables) and 3 sets of 2 fingers for <u>au</u> th <u>or</u>, and 'her' is indicated as 1 finger followed by 2.

- Great store is set by quality of handwriting from the start; a cursive style is recommended in the Method, but Baytree has chosen to use a simple rounded style as it is closer to what schoolchildren are taught in this country.

- Once learners have mastered the basic phonograms and developed an accurate style of handwriting, instruction in spelling begins. Over the course of spelling, they learn by example 29 second-order rules, such as the five reasons why a 'silent' <e> is attached to the end of a word. Given 70 phonograms and 29 rules, it is claimed they can spell 80% of English words, and a higher percentage of the most frequent ones.

- Once reading officially starts, any unfamiliar words are not prompted by sounding out. The teacher will immediately supply a word to avoid the learner struggling with comprehension.

In addition, the teacher at Baytree has added items of her own to the method as put forward in Spalding and North (2003), especially numbered lists of prefixes and suffixes and extra word formation spelling rules, all contained in folders to which the learners can refer in class

The Spalding Method is therefore highly unusual, especially in its teaching order of writing – spelling – reading. A few distinguished educators have advocated, and practised, teaching writing and reading simultaneously from the start – Montessori is the clearest example – but virtually all other phonics schemes adopt the opposite order, reading – spelling – writing. For this evaluation, therefore, a key question was

whether this approach would in fact enable the learners exposed to it to make good progress.

5. The learners

The number of learners who began the courses and provided initial data was 32 (where the numbers in this section do not total 32, this is due to missing data, except under 'Mother tongues' in Table 1). They were all women, and their ages ranged from 24 to 58, the average being 42. Two were aged between 24 and 29, 11 between 30 and 39, 12 between 40 and 49, and seven between 50 and 58. They were therefore about 10 years older, on average, than ESOL learners nationally: in the NRDC Effective Practice in ESOL study, the average age of the nationally representative sample of 509 learners was about 32 (calculated from Table 4.1 in Baynham *et al.*, 2007a: 22).

They had been resident in the UK for 13.7 years on average, the range being from one year to 37 years (in the NRDC ESOL study, the average was just under 5 years; Baynham *et al.*, 2007a: 23). Ten had been here between one and 10 years, and 16 between 11 and 20 years, with only five having been resident longer than 20 years.

Seven of the women self-declared their ethnicity as White, 21 as Black African, two as Latin American, and one each as 'Black other' (a Jamaican) and Middle Eastern (a woman from Afghanistan) – but that head count conceals the learners' range of national and linguistic backgrounds, which are shown in more detail in Table 1.

Table 1: The learners' countries of origin, ethnicities, and mother tongues

Country of origin	N	Self-declared ethnicity	Mother tongues		
			1st	2nd	3rd
Afghanistan	1	Middle Eastern	Punjabi		
Angola	3	Black African	Portuguese	Lingala 1	
				Spanish 1	
Brazil	1	Latin American	Portuguese		
Colombia	1	Latin American	Spanish		
Eritrea	8	Black African	Amharic 1	Tigrinya	
			Tigrinya 7	Amharic 1	Arabic
				Arabic 3	
				German 1	
				Tigre 1	Arabic
Ethiopia	3	Black African	Amharic	Tigrinya 1	
Jamaica	1	Black other	English	Patois	
Kenya	1	Black African	KiSwahili		
Morocco	2	White	Arabic	French 1	
				Spanish 1	
Niger	1	Black African	Hausa		
Nigeria	2	Black African	Yoruba		
Portugal	4	White	Portuguese	Spanish 2	
Somalia	3	Black African	Somali		
Turkey	1	White	Turkish		
Total	32				

Key: N = number of learners from that country

Note: Under 'Mother tongues', numbers of learners are shown only where they differ from those in a previous column

The range of countries and languages was diverse. The languages mentioned belong to several different language families: Afro-Asiatic, which includes the Semitic group (Amharic, Arabic, Hausa, Somali, Tigre, Tigrinya), Indo-European (English, French, German, Patois, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish), the Bantu branch of Niger-Congo (Lingala, KiSwahili), Sudanic-Atlantic (Yoruba), and Turkic (Turkish). Several countries provided speakers of more than one mother tongue. Several languages were spoken by learners from more than one country, some (Amharic, Tigrinya) because national boundaries cut across language areas, others (Portuguese, Spanish) because of colonial histories, and Arabic for cultural and religious reasons.

Only one learner had English as her mother tongue. Most of these learners could already speak more than one language, and two said they could speak three languages besides the English they were learning.

All the learners had rather low literacy in English; all were considered by Baytree staff to be within Entry levels 1 and 2 in both reading and writing at the beginning of their courses, and this was largely confirmed by their pre-test results – see section 6.2: none achieved above Entry level 2, and some had such low scores on Entry level 1 that they could actually have been classified as within pre-Entry level. Their poor literacy in English was one of the main reasons for their choosing these courses, and many had been referred to Baytree from other providers whose provision was not designed for speakers of other languages with limited literacy in English.

Of particular interest in this context are the numbers of learners who were already literate in another language(s) – see Table 2.

Table 2:   The languages the learners could already read and write

1st language	N	r	w	2nd language	N	r	w
Amharic	4	4	4	Tigrinya	2	2	2
Arabic	2	2	1	French	1		
				Spanish	1		
English	1	1	1	Patois	1	1	1
Hausa	1						
KiSwahili	1	1	1				
Portuguese	7	6	6	Lingala	1	1	1
				Spanish	3	1	
Punjabi	1	1	1				
Somali	3	2	2				
Spanish	1	1	1				
Tigrinya	7	5	5	Amharic	1	1	1
				Arabic	3	2	2
				German	1	1	1
				Tigre	1		
Turkish	1	1	1				
Yoruba	2						
Total	31	24	23		15	9	8

Note: Information on existing literacy was not gathered for the 3rd mother tongue; nor for 1st or 2nd language from one learner from Portugal
Key: N = number of learners with that mother tongue
       r = number of learners who could read the language
       w = number of learners who could write the language

Three quarters of the learners were already literate in one language, and a third in two; only four declared themselves unable to read or write previously in any language (and one of them spoke Tigrinya, Tigre and Arabic in addition to English). It is widely believed that being already literate in one language makes it easier to become literate in another, though this is less certain when the scripts are different (Amharic, Arabic, Punjabi and Tigrinya use non-Roman alphabets); the four learners with no previous literacy may have faced the greatest challenge.

The challenge of becoming literate in English would also be greater for those with less fluent command of spoken English: 14 of these learners were rated by the Baytree staff as beginners in this respect, and 11 as so far having just 'survival' English. Only five were rated as being competent or fluent.

Some of these women may have had limited opportunities to exercise their spoken English: the great majority (27) declared their occupational status as 'looking after home and family', with three employed part-time and two unemployed.

The numbers of learners with varying number of years of formal education received before and since coming to the UK are shown in Table 3.

Table 3:   Numbers of learners with varying numbers of years of formal education

Number of years	Before coming to the UK					
Since coming to the UK	0	1	2-6	7-9	10-12	Total
0	1	0	5	2	2	10
1	3	0	5	1	0	9
2-6	6	0	1	4	1	12
Total	10	0	11	7	3	31

Note: This information was not available for one learner

The average number of years of formal education these learners had received before coming to the UK was 4.2, and since arriving, 1.5. Only a third seem to have gone beyond primary education before migrating, and the average number of years of formal education since arriving was very low. One woman, exceptionally, had received 17 years' education, 11 years before coming here and six since.

Thirteen women said they had no formal qualifications, and 18 said their highest qualification was at Entry level. Only one said she had anything higher, and that was a qualification at the equivalent of Level 1 gained in Eritrea. Even the woman with 17 years' formal education declared her highest qualification as being at Entry level. In the NRDC ESOL study, 12% of the learners had university-level education (Baynham *et al.*, 2007a: 22).

All in all, in terms of their backgrounds, level of education and qualifications, and command of spoken and written English, these women were definitely part of the Baytree Centre's target demographic.

It should also be noted that this is an under-researched topic and group of learners in this country. The NRDC Learner Study (Brooks and Pilling, in press; Rhys Warner *et al.*, 2008; Vorhaus *et al.*, 2009) and Effective Practice in Reading study (Brooks *et al.*, 2007) had sub-samples of ESOL learners, but not at such low starting levels as at Baytree; and both used different reading and writing tests from those used here. The NRDC ESOL study (Baynham *et al.*, 2007a, b) would have been very relevant if literacy had been tested, but in fact only the participants' spoken English was assessed; and, as shown above, the sample in that study was in some respects rather unlike the Baytree learners. To our knowledge, therefore, there is no existing British research precisely on this demographic group.

6. The quantitative results

6.1 Attendance

Information on the number of sessions attended between pre- and post-test was available for 26 learners. The average number of sessions was 47.6 (standard deviation 14.8); the lowest figure was 18 and the highest was 73. The distribution was as shown below.

Number of sessions	Number of learners
below 20	1
20-29	3
30-39	3
40-49	7
50-59	3
60-69	6
70 or more	1

These figures were collected in order to investigate the benefit of regular attendance, even though various factors militated against this: health and family issues, being the primary carer in the family, dependants' illnesses, appointments at Job Centres.

6.2 Progress in literacy

All 32 learners took the spelling test and at least one level of the writing tests at the beginning of the courses, and all but one took at least one level of the reading tests then. However, several did not re-take tests at the end, for whatever reason, with the result that the numbers who took the spelling test, and the same level of the reading and writing tests, at both stages were as shown in Table 4, which also gives the results.

Table 4:   Reading and writing test results, by level, and spelling test results

Test	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Gain
		average	(s.d.)	average	(s.d.)	
Entry level 1 reading	21	54.4	(20.0)	85.9	(13.8)	31.5
Entry level 1 writing	21	51.0	(23.3)	63.0	(19.3)	12.0
Entry level 2 reading	19	60.5	(18.9)	71.6	(18.1)	11.1
Entry level 2 writing	13	42.3	(23.2)	65.7	(16.6)	23.4
Entry level 3 reading	7	46.9	(6.0)	66.9	(8.6)	20.0
Spelling	24	5.4	(2.9)	7.6	(5.1)	2.2

Key: N = sample size; s.d. = standard deviation
Notes: (1) Several learners took more than one level of the reading and writing tests, hence the numbers add up to more than the full sample of 32
(2) Only two learners took the Entry level 3 writing test at both stages, too few to support analysis
(3) The reading and writing scores are percentages; the maximum score for the spelling test is 23, so that the average pre- and post-test scores for spelling represent 23% and 33% of the maximum score respectively

The fact that most learners were given reading and writing tests at Entry levels 1 and 2, and the low average scores on the spelling test, showed that these learners were at very basic levels in literacy in English. This was consistent with the ratings of their command of spoken English by the Baytree staff (see section 5), but also reinforced the fact that they were attending the correct form of provision.

Most importantly, all six of the gains shown were statistically significant (for spelling, at $p<0.003$; for reading and writing, all at $p<0.001$), which shows that **the learners had made good progress, on average, during the courses.**

Burton *et al.* (2010) also used the spelling test used here. Their sample numbered 42, and the average pre- and post-test scores were 12.5 and 13.9, higher than here but with a smaller average gain (1.4). However, almost all the learners in that study were monolingual native speakers of English, and had had the full number of years of formal education in the British system. The comparison with this study is therefore of limited relevance. No other comparisons with other studies were possible.

6.3   Changes in attitudes

Of the 32 learners, 20 completed the questionnaire on both occasions, and this section is based on the responses of those 20 people. The analysis is in three parts, corresponding to the sections of the questionnaire as described in section 5.

The learners' confidence in themselves as users of English

Each item in this section began 'When I …' or 'If I …' followed by a situation in which the learners would need to use English, then by the words 'I feel …', and finally by the numbers 1 to 4 below the response scale 'Not at all confident / Not very confident / Quite confident / Very confident'. The results for the separate items and overall are shown in Table 5.

Table 5:   Learners' confidence in themselves as users of English

Item When/If I … … I feel …	Pre ave.	Post ave.	Gain ave.	Statistical significance
think about speaking English	2.7	2.9	0.2	n.s.
need to use a telephone	2.4	2.9	0.5	*
think about myself as a learner	2.6	3.1	0.5	*
have to do some reading in English	2.2	2.8	0.6	**
have to do some writing in English	1.9	2.7	0.8	**
have to fill in a form in English	1.9	2.8	0.9	***
have to read something out loud in English	2.0	2.9	0.9	***
have to read a set of instructions in English	2.0	2.8	0.8	***
have to take a test in English	2.1	2.8	0.7	***
think about going on another course	2.4	3.1	0.7	**
Total	21.9	28.5	6.6	***

All standard deviations for separate items in range 0.6-0.9 pre & post; for total, 5.2 pre & post
Where item scores do not sum to totals, this is due to rounding errors in the item scores
Key: ave. = average; Pre = score at beginning of course, Post = score at end of course; n.s. = not significant; * = statistically significant at the 5% level ($p<0.05$); ** = statistically significant at the 1% level ($p<0.01$); *** = statistically significant at the 0.1% level ($p<0.001$)

The average responses at the beginning of the course ranged from just below 'Not very confident' (1.9) to two-thirds of the way from 'Not very confident' to 'Quite confident' (2.7); at the end of the course they ranged from two-thirds of the way from 'Not very confident' to 'Quite confident' (2.7) to just over 'Quite confident' (3.1) and were more closely bunched than at the beginning. There was a gain on every item, and the gains were statistically significant overall and on all but one item. The exception was 'When I think about speaking English …', where the learners were already fairly confident at the beginning.

On the whole, therefore, **the learners' confidence in themselves as users of English improved**.

Frequency of literacy activities in English

This section contained only four items, which were nevertheless chosen as the literacy activities the learners were perhaps most likely to need to engage in. For 'read a newspaper in English' and 'read a book / magazine in English' the response scale was 'Never / Occasionally / Once or twice a week / Every day', while for 'borrow a book in English from a library' and 'write a letter or postcard in English' it was 'Never / Occasionally / Once a month / More often', given that the latter activities are necessarily less frequent. The results for the separate items and overall are shown in Table 6. The totals do some violence to the different response scales, but both scales can be seen as measures of increasing frequency.

Table 6:   Frequency of literacy activities in English

Item	Pre ave.	Post ave.	Gain ave.	Statistical significance
I read a newspaper in English	1.7	2.4	0.7	***
I read a book / magazine in English	2.1	2.7	0.6	**
I borrow a book in English from a library	1.8	2.8	1.0	***
I write a letter or postcard in English	1.5	1.8	0.3	n.s.
Total	7.1	9.6	2.5	***

All standard deviations for separate items in range 0.7-0.9 pre & post; for total, 2.2 pre & 2.3 post
Where item scores do not sum to totals, this is due to rounding errors in the item scores
Key: ave. = average; Pre = score at beginning of course, Post = score at end of course; n.s. = not significant; ** = statistically significant at the 1% level (p<0.01); *** = statistically significant at the 0.1% level (p<0.001)

At the beginning of the courses all four activities were fairly infrequent, with only 'read a book / magazine in English' (just) above 'Occasionally' and the others all between that and 'Never'. By the end of the courses all four activities had increased in frequency, but 'write a letter or postcard in English' was on average still below 'Occasionally' and the change on that item was not statistically significant. The increases on the other three items and overall were all highly statistically significant, with the end-of-course averages distinctly above 'Occasionally'.

Again, therefore, **the frequency with which the learners engaged in these literacy activities in English increased, on the whole**.

Learners' enjoyment of literacy activities in English

The final section of the questionnaire contained seven items addressing the learners' enjoyment of a range of literacy activities chosen as being both frequent and representative. The response scale was 'Strongly agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree'. Some items were expressed positively and others (those marked § in Table 7) negatively. This implies opposite meanings for responses to the positive and negative items: an improvement in the learners' attitudes (if present) would show up as an increased average score on the negative items (movement towards 'Disagree'), but as a *decrease* on the positive items (movement towards 'Agree'). The results for the separate items and overall are shown in Table 7. The overall scores are based on reversed scores for the positive items, as explained in the note below the Table.

Table 7:   Learners' enjoyment of literacy activities in English

Item	Pre ave.	Post ave.	Change ave.	Statistical significance
I enjoy reading in English	2.1	1.8	-0.3	n.s.
I seldom see a book in English I want to read §	2.3	3.3	+1.0	***
I like reading non-fiction in English	1.9	1.9	0	n.s.
I prefer watching television to reading in English §	2.3	1.9	-0.4	n.s.
I only read what I have to §	2.5	3.1	+0.6	**
I like reading fiction (stories) in English	1.9	2.0	+0.1	n.s.
I like using the internet / world wide web	2.3	2.4	+0.1	n.s.
Overall (with some scores reversed)	19.0	20.3	+1.3	*

All standard deviations for separate items in range 0.5-1.0 pre, and in range 0.7-1.1 post; overall, 2.1 pre & 2.5 post

N.B. The 'overall' figures do **not** represent the totals of the item scores, because in calculating the overall scores the scores for the positive items have been reversed (by subtracting individual learners' responses from 5) in order to make them comparable to those for the negative items

Key: § = negatively-phrased item; ave. = average; Pre = score at beginning of course, Post = score at end of course; n.s. = not significant; * = statistically significant at the 5% level (p<0.05); ** = statistically significant at the 1% level (p<0.01); *** = statistically significant at the 0.1% level (p<0.001)

Surprisingly, on five of the seven items there was no statistically significant change between the beginning and end of the courses, which explains the weak overall significance. The significant changes on the items 'I seldom see a book in English I want to read' and 'I only read what I have to' imply that the learners were more likely to **reject** these notions by the end of their courses, and were therefore positive. Perhaps the other items would need longer for learners' attitudes to change.

6.4   Correlations between background variables, attendance and progress in literacy

Following the separate analyses of the background, attendance, test and questionnaire data, we investigated correlations among selected variables. The background variables chosen for this purpose were the following:

- Age
- Number of years resident in the UK

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- Number of years of formal education before coming to the UK
- Number of years of formal education since coming to the UK
- Command of spoken English.

The other background variables were not used, either because correlations with them would not have made sense (country of origin, ethnicity, mother tongues) or because there was too little variance for meaningful correlations to emerge (literacy in mother tongues, level of highest formal qualification, occupational status).

The measure of attendance was the number of sessions attended between pre- and post-test.

Gains in literacy were defined as follows:
- for spelling: difference between pre- and post-test scores on the spelling test
- for reading and writing: each learner's largest gain between pre- and post-test.

The last point needs explaining. The EdExcel reading and writing tests used had three levels, Entry level 1, Entry level 2, and Entry level 3. Within the full sample of 32, these levels were taken pre and post by the following numbers of learners:

		Pre	Post
	Entry level 1	27	25
Reading	Entry level 2	23	23
	Entry level 3	11	10
	Entry level 1	30	25
Writing	Entry level 2	17	15
	Entry level 3	4	2

The reason the total numbers exceed 32 is that, if a learner scored well on the first level taken, she was asked to take the next level up. Several learners took two levels, and a few took all three, especially in reading at pre-test. Where a learner had taken only one level we used the difference between her pre- and post-test scores on that level for correlations with other variables, but where learners had taken more than one level we had to decide which scores to use. This would have been simple if there had been a system for converting the scores on the three levels to a common scale, but unfortunately there is no such system. Also, on levels 1 and 2 some learners had such high pre-test scores that there was little scope for them to show improvement on the post-test. We therefore decided it would be fairest to learners who had taken more than one level to use the scores from the level where they had shown the greatest improvement (percentage gain), whichever level that was. This meant that we were treating gain scores from the three levels as comparable; this seemed reasonable because the maximum scores, mark schemes and item types were virtually identical across levels.

We correlated the five background variables listed above and attendance with the three measures of literacy gain. Full data on these nine factors were available for 26 learners. Correlations between the background variables and literacy gains were weak and seemed non-significant. Not too much can be made of weak correlations, but this may mean that differences in age, length of residence, amount of formal education, and command of spoken English were not barriers to progress.

There were stronger correlations between attendance and progress ($r = 0.47$, 0.26 and 0.43 for reading, writing and spelling respectively), an unsurprising finding consistent with many others in educational research.

6.5 Correlations between background variables, attendance, progress in literacy and attitudes to literacy

Each of the 21 separate items on the attitudes questionnaire had a 4-point response scale, so that again there would have been too little variance for meaningful correlations to emerge if individual item scores had been used. We therefore used the pre/post differences in the learners' total scores for the three sections of the questionnaire (self-confidence, frequency of certain literacy activities, enjoyment of literacy), as described in section 6.3.

We therefore correlated the five background variables, attendance, and the three measures of literacy gain with the three overall measures of changes in attitudes. Full data on these 12 factors were available for 20 learners (those who had completed the questionnaire at both stages). Again, most of the correlations (including all those between the background variables and changes in attitudes) were weak and seemed non-significant, but those between attendance on the one hand and changes in attitudes on the other were stronger ($r = 0.43$, 0.47 and 0.33 for confidence, frequency and enjoyment respectively).

It might have been expected that there would be a relationship between gains in literacy and changes in attitudes, but of the nine relevant correlations only those between improvement in reading on the one hand and frequency and enjoyment of literacy activities on the other were at all strong ($r = 0.44$ and 0.67 respectively). While these two positive findings are welcome, the absence of others is not so odd. Although it has often seemed to be an article of faith among adult basic skills teachers that learners' confidence must be improved if they are to make progress, there is increasing evidence that this assumption is not justified (see in particular Brooks, 2010; Burton *et al.*, 2010).

6.6 Summary

The learners on average made significant progress in reading, writing and spelling.

On the whole, the learners' confidence in themselves as users of English improved, and the frequency with which they engaged in literacy activities in English increased, but their enjoyment of literacy activities remained largely unaltered.

Overall, the clearest finding on relationships between possible explanatory variables and progress was that more time on task, as indicated by greater attendance, was the best predictor of progress in literacy.

Also, it seems that progress in reading was associated with greater self-reported frequency and enjoyment of literacy activities, a positive outcome that was by no means entirely predictable.

7.   The qualitative findings: the Spalding Method in action at Baytree

As mentioned in section 2, we each undertook observations of two classes (one morning and one afternoon session each) during the autumn term 2009, on separate occasions, making a total of four observations. The same group of students attended either mornings or afternoons; the duration of the morning class was 2.5 hours (including a break) and the afternoon class lasted 2 hours. The afternoon class was designated as operating at a higher level than the morning class, but actually had a mixture of levels because of constraints on when learners were free to attend.

The learners in both classes were all women, with the same female teacher for both, and their diverse characteristics of origin, ethnicity, education, mother tongue and literacy are described in section 5. Although one of the observers was male, and many of the women had explicitly chosen to attend a women-only class, there did not seem to be a problem with his presence. Only one of the women had English as her mother tongue; thus the composition of the classes might suggest that the classes could be regarded as ESOL rather than literacy. However, we felt that they actually had more in common with classes of adult literacy learners, especially since there is little opportunity provided within the system followed at Baytree for the learners to practise their spoken English, and the learners' main aim was to improve their literacy in English. Furthermore, most adult literacy classes in our experience include a few learners for whom English is not the first language.

The Spalding Method is a highly structured system, using whole class teaching, and the classroom layout used at Baytree was a traditional one of the teacher standing in front of a blackboard, with all the desks in rows facing forward. Previous research has shown that this is the least common arrangement in adult literacy classes, with the most popular layouts being either one main table or several smaller tables, around which the learners sit (Brooks *et al.*, 2007: 42). One advantage of rows of desks is that more learners can be accommodated in a room, although it does make movement within the room harder.

Previous research has shown that the groupings in which it is possible for adult literacy classes to operate are:

A   Whole class with teacher/assistant (plenary)
B   Each learner working alone
C   Individual learners working 1:1 with teacher
D   Individual learners working 1:1 with assistant
E   Learner pair working together with no support from teacher/assistant
F   Small group [two or more] working together with support or small group [three or more] working together without support
(Brooks *et al.*, 2007: 44)

(For the Baytree classes, D was irrelevant as there was no assistant present. When questioned about the desirability of having extra help, the teacher made the point that any volunteer or assistant would have to be carefully trained in the Spalding method.)

In the sessions we observed, well over half the total classroom time was spent in plenary mode. For the rest of the time, the learners worked alone, doing exercises

based on the class teaching, with the teacher usually going round, looking at work and giving the learners 1:1 support. (Although not specifically encouraged, it was observed during the individual time that several learners also formed pairs to discuss work.) This grouping style was close to the 'groupwork plus practice' model which was found to be predominant in adult literacy teaching (Brooks *et al.*, 2007: 45-46) although the proportion of whole class work relative to individual 'practice' was higher at Baytree than the research average.

Such a grouping operates best where the learners are able to remain focused on the lesson and not become distracted. Certainly these learners were notable for their concentration and cooperation, with only occasional reminders from the teacher to be quiet. The structured nature of the Spalding method – 'oral review', 'written review', worksheets, etc., with numbered 'rules' – may have encouraged such discipline, and many learners do find a routine very reassuring. Although the content of the lesson was tightly controlled and not tailored to individual learners (unlike much adult literacy teaching), classroom practice was not totally rigid, as the following vignettes from the observations show:

> A learner arrives late: *'She's not expected as she's missed several weeks' attendance. Lesson stops while she's welcomed back.'*

> On another occasion, a late arrival has been at an appointment with the optician (who'd been visiting the Centre that day). *The learner is asked about it; she and the teacher discuss what happened and when her next appointment is. M (teacher) asks, 'Was the man good? Did you understand him? Did he understand what you were saying?' 'Yes' from the learner. 'Well done', says M.*

Thus account of individual learners was taken when appropriate.

Basing the entire lesson time on a systematic delivery of phonics is in itself unusual in the field of adult literacy. Even when trained and encouraged to use phonics, the teachers in a recent research project (Burton *et al.*, 2008, 2010) were found to use phonics-based teaching on average for rather less than half the class time. Some of the main differences between the Spalding method and other synthetic phonics schemes have already been outlined in section 4. What follows here are some of the features that were noted from the classroom observations as particularly distinctive at the Baytree Centre:

- Individual learners were asked to read aloud in class as a matter of course and did not seem to mind doing so. Often adult literacy teachers are reluctant to put their learners under such 'pressure'. This was demonstrated by research into the strategy of oral reading fluency – which also showed that reading aloud turned out to be less of a problem for many learners than their teachers imagined (Burton, 2007; Burton *et al.,* 2008).

- For eliciting responses to questions, e.g. *Can you give me a suffix to go on the end of 'ask'?*, the teacher employed a mixture of targeting named learners and asking for volunteers. Again, amongst adult literacy teachers there is often a reluctance to put learners 'on the spot' in this way.

- The technique of highlighting individual learners' mistakes in front of the class and using them to reinforce the teaching of particular points was a surprising strategy in the context of adult literacy. It was handled in a way that tried to minimize any negative impact:

> During the 'written review' *M calls out individual phonemes and the learners write them down with marker pens on plastic wallets [so, M tells me afterwards, that she can see from the front what they're writing]….She calls out /s, z/ to elicit the writing of <s>. One learner writes the letter <c> and M asks her permission to tell the class her mistake. She then rewards her by giving her a 'ticket' [a raffle ticket for which there will be a draw at the end of term].*

> Similarly, later in that class when M is calling out words for the learners to spell, *she calls out 'sleep', with her fingers arranged l l ll l (1,1,2,1). One learner writes 'slepe' and M writes this up on the blackboard, after asking the learner's permission. 'You can have a ticket for letting me tell people.'*

- In other instances, mistakes are not 'corrected' but 'reformatted', in Spalding terminology:

> *A learner has her 'free sentences' marked and M suggests changing 'every time' to 'all the time'. M says she's not correcting it but reformatting it – 'it's not wrong, it's more what an English person would say.'*

- The essence of the Spalding method is teaching literacy initially through the medium of writing rather than reading. Emphasis is not just on writing but on perfect handwriting, always using lines as guides, with evenly formed letters and clear rules about what is expected:

> M frequently asked the learners to check their handwriting, asking, *'Are the lines parallel? Are the tall letters equal?'* She wrote up examples of incorrect letter formation, e.g. the <g> in <dog> above the line, <send> as **Send**, etc., and asked them to tell her what was wrong.

- Reading of text does take place in class, but decoding by sounding out is not used, despite the practice of sounding out individual phonograms (graphemes) in the 'oral review'. If a learner gets stuck, the teacher immediately supplies the word, rather than encouraging sounding out. The reason given for this by the teacher is that it wouldn't be appropriate in a comprehension exercise and would interrupt getting the meaning. (This, incidentally, is the same reasoning behind the oral reading fluency technique of supplying any words a learner struggles over so as not to lose 'momentum' (Burton, 2007; Burton *et al*, 2008).)

Thus, in its classroom implementation as in its theoretical underpinnings and approach, the Spalding Method is unusual; indeed, we know of nothing quite like it. But we do not mean this as a criticism - the quantitative results show that the learners were benefiting, and our observations show that the learners accepted and seemed to enjoy its firm structure and explicit rules. These facets can be summed up by saying that the approach is deliberately didactic and transmissive – but its implementation here was humane and warm.

One factor which we noted as contributing to the orderliness and progression we observed is that the learners were highly biddable: they seemed to expect to be sat down and taught rather than be engaged in more active learning or participatory or group learning activities. The approach may well have been familiar to them from their own experience of education in their home countries, or (for those who had not received any then) what they knew of it from others. We suspect that the Method might not be as acceptable to native-born British adult learners, but have no direct evidence on this point.

What we can say is that, for these learners, it was working, and accepted, and we therefore see no reason for Baytree to change to a different system while that is the case – which of course relies on the Centre having a teacher fully trained to deliver the approach.

## 8.	Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

### 8.1	Conclusions

The major conclusion is that the Spalding Method courses at the Baytree Centre in the academic year 2009/10 achieved their stated aims of enabling the learners who participated to improve their reading, writing and spelling, as measured by the tests used.

These courses also brought about improvements in these learners' self-confidence in themselves as users of English, and the frequency with which they engaged in certain literacy activities. However, their enjoyment of literacy activities in English hardly changed, overall.

The only factor clearly found to be associated with greater progress in reading, writing and spelling and with positive changes in attitudes was greater attendance.

There were also few factors clearly associated with improvement in the learners' attitudes to literacy. However, greater progress in reading was associated with greater self-reported frequency and enjoyment of literacy activities.

Our observations showed that the learners accepted and enjoyed the Spalding Method, including its firm structure, rote learning and didactic approach.

### 8.2	Limitations

The sample was already small at the beginning of the courses (N=32), and even smaller by the time of the post-tests: the numbers of learners on whom full data for background variables, the literacy tests, and attendance were available both pre and post was 24, and for the attitudes questionnaire it was 20. While these numbers were sufficient to detect some main effects for the retained samples, they did not permit any sub-group analyses (e.g. by age, amount of formal education).

Also, this was a one-group, and therefore not a comparative, study, either in the sense of having a control or comparison group following an alternative programme, or none; or in having used standardised tests, where the standardisation data would have provided an 'implicit' control group. A comparative study could have provided stronger justification for attributing the learners' progress to the courses – in strict logic, we cannot rule out the possibility (however unlikely in practice) that the learners would have made progress anyway.

On both counts it would be desirable to gather more data in order to confirm the validity of the findings reported here.

8.3 Recommendations

Our findings about the benefits of greater attendance suggest that the measures the Centre has in place to encourage learners to attend (they are called by their tutor or the Course administrator to find out why they did not attend, and are urged to attend the next class or a meeting to discuss any issues that prevented them from attending the class) are paying off and need to be maintained.

We strongly recommend that the Baytree Centre should continue to monitor the programme, and if possible gather more data to bolster our findings. In this context it would be advisable to investigate using tests which can provide impact measures (see Brooks, 2007: 129-31); these would allow comparisons with national levels of attainment and progress. The two forms of impact measure are (1) effect sizes, which require use of a standardised test with nationally-established tables for converting raw scores to standard scores; (2) Ratio Gains, which estimate average monthly progress and can be calculated from tests yielding reading ages (e.g. the Burt Reading Test, 1974 edition) or spelling ages (e.g. the Schonell test).

However, the findings to date provide no reason for the Centre to stop using the Spalding Method, and we therefore recommend that it should be used for as long as the Centre has a teacher trained to do so and, to ensure continuity and increase the numbers of learners who can be recruited onto the Spalding courses, that the Centre should have others trained to deliver it.

To put this more positively, we firmly recommend that these courses should continue because the Baytree Centre's target group is both under-served and under-researched. And since other ESOL learners would also benefit, we further recommend that the courses be extended to them.

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Learner Questionnaire (Pre), p.1

Date .... Identifier ....

Learner's Surname (IN CAPS) ………………..……. Learner's Given Name(s) (IN CAPS) ……………………………………………..

Please circle one number in each row

Not at all confident / Not very confident / Quite confident / Very confident

'When I think about speaking English, I feel …............'	1	2	3	4
'When I need to use a telephone, I feel …………….'	1	2	3	4
'When I think about myself as a learner, I feel ……….'	1	2	3	4
'When I have to do some reading in English, I feel …'	1	2	3	4
'When I have to do some writing in English, I feel …'	1	2	3	4
'When I have to fill in a form in English, I feel ………'	1	2	3	4
'If I have to read something out loud in English, I feel .....'	1	2	3	4
'If I have to read a set of instructions in English, I feel …'	1	2	3	4
'If I have to take a test in English, I feel ………………'	1	2	3	4
'When I think about going on another course, I feel ……'	1	2	3	4

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Baytree, Pre Qre

Learner Questionnaire (Pre), p.2   Date ....   Identifier ………………..

Please circle one number in each row

	Never / Occasionally / Once or twice a week / Every day			
I read a newspaper in English	1	2	3	4
I read a book / magazine in English	1	2	3	4

	Never / Occasionally / Once a month / More often			
I borrow a book in English from a library	1	2	3	4
I write a letter or postcard in English	1	2	3	4

Please circle one number in each row

	Strongly agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree			
I enjoy reading in English	1	2	3	4
I seldom see a book in English I want to read	1	2	3	4
I like reading non-fiction in English	1	2	3	4
I prefer watching television to reading in English	1	2	3	4
I only read what I have to	1	2	3	4
I like reading fiction (stories) in English	1	2	3	4
I like using the internet / world wide web	1	2	3	4

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE