

# RAPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy

## OUT OF THE THORNBUSH

A poem that emerges from a thornbush  
comes out spitting blood,  
hoarse from calling for help  
and not being heard.

A poem that emerges from a thornbush  
lies gasping right beside it,  
still hooked into the past,  
half-dying, half about to be born.

Please notice.  
Don't look. This poem is naked  
and exposed, waiting  
for the pain to end, to begin, to go on.

Don't expect mellowness  
or connected images.  
Don't notice that it's tattered,  
ends unfinished.

*Shelley Tracey*

Journal

# The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

## Who we are

RaPAL (established 1985) is a national network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult literacy and basic education. Our support is generated by membership subscription only, and we are therefore completely independent in our views. RaPAL is the only national organisation focusing on the role of literacies in adult life.

## What we do

### We ...

- **campaign** for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives.
- **critique** current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill.
- **support** the theories of language and learning, which emphasise the importance of social context in literacy acquisition.
- **encourage** collaborative and reflective research between all participants in literacy work and maintain that research and practice are inextricably linked.
- **believe** in democratic practices in adult literacy which can only be achieved if learning, teaching and research remain connected and stay responsive to changing social contexts and practices in society.
- **recognise** that learners are central to a learning democracy and their participation in the decision- making processes of practice and research is essential.
- **foster** collaborative participation between all educational sectors including FE, HE, AE, workplace education, community education and prison education.

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Members are involved in the compilation of the journal as reviewers/referees and editors.

We are a friendly group - open to new members and new ideas. Please contact us with any contributions (views, comments, reports and articles) and do not be put off if you are new to the field or if you have not written for a publication before. This Journal is written by and for all learners, tutors and researchers who want to ask questions about this field of work. It does not matter if the questions have been asked before. We want to reflect the many voices within adult literacy and numeracy work and to encourage debate. Why not join in?

**Further info can be found at our website: <http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/>**


The RaPAL Journal expresses a variety of views which do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Group.

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# Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn 2005 issue of the RaPAL Journal, which has its basis in RaPAL's Conference, 'Creativity in Adult Literacies Learning', held in July in Sheffield. Due to this issue's theme and the nature of the submissions, the journal's usual three-section structure is changed to two sections.

The first section is organized into three groupings of articles that: address the meaning and nature of creativity and creative adult literacy practice; continue discussion of creativity through descriptions of the RaPAL 2005 Conference workshops and ongoing research; and provide an in-depth look at the use of poetry in adult literacy education.

The second section has been designated to accommodate more sustained pieces of writing, which have refereed journal status. Both papers in Section 2 are based on workshops given at the 2005 conference and offer very different interpretations of the creativity theme.

The production of this issue has been the result of marvellous international and virtual co-operation, with co-editors based in England, Northern Ireland and Canada and contributions from further afield. Maxine Burton has many years' experience as an adult literacy tutor and is currently working at Sheffield University as Research Fellow on the NRDC study of adult learners' progress in reading. She can be contacted at [M.Burton@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:M.Burton@sheffield.ac.uk). Bonnie Soroke is working in Belfast on the LEIS project ([www.leis.ac.uk](http://www.leis.ac.uk)) until February 2006. She is based in Canada, where she works and plays as an arts & literacy consultant, and has developed zipper sculpturing workshops ([www.soroke.com](http://www.soroke.com)). She is associated with RiPAL-BC to support and encourage adult literacy research in practice ([www.nald.ca/ripal/](http://www.nald.ca/ripal/)). Sheila Stewart is based at the Festival of Literacies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the

University of Toronto. Her first book of poetry *A Hat to Stop a Train* (Wolsak and Wynn) was published in 2003. Sheila worked for many years in a community-based literacy program and has particular interest in learner writing and the place of story in literacy work. She can be contacted at [stewart@oise.utoronto.ca](mailto:stewart@oise.utoronto.ca) and further information about the Festival of Literacies can be found at [www.literaciesoise.ca](http://www.literaciesoise.ca).

Practitioners and tutors are invited to find out what is happening at the convergence of practice and research in Canada. Some of you may know Canada's journal *Literacies: researching practice, practicing research*. A relatively young journal compared to *RaPAL*, *Literacies'* first issue came out in the spring of 2003. Canadian literacy workers, activists and advocates have looked at the work of *RaPAL* to see the possibilities when practice, research, and critical thinking converge. *Literacies*, like the Festival of Literacies and Research in Practice in Adult Literacy, are part of a movement which is developing a research practice dialogue in the Canadian context. *Literacies* has a wonderful on-line presence with pictures, articles, discussion forums. Have a look at [www.literacyjournal.ca](http://www.literacyjournal.ca)

Also have a look at the end of this issue (in the section: *Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?*) for an introduction to the writing workshops of Tannis Atkinson, editor of *Literacies*.

For my part, I am currently researching prisoner literacies in Scotland. This is the first time I have been involved as Journal Co-ordinator and I would welcome your comments on this issue of the Journal - its content and design - and suggestions for improvements and possible themes for future issues.

**Deirdre Parkinson**  
Journal Co-ordinator

**Copy Deadlines for the RAPAL Journal 2005-06**

Please see below for details of themes, deadlines and editors for the 2005-2006 RaPAL Journals. Please send your articles, comments, suggestions etc to Deirdre Parkinson ([deirdre@dp-associates.org.uk](mailto:deirdre@dp-associates.org.uk)) by the deadline dates shown, although the earlier you can send your submission the better if you want to guarantee consideration for any particular issue.

Don't worry if your chosen piece does not seem to fit with the themes selected as there will be 'open' space within the themed editions for work-in-progress or commentary in general.

Please note: these dates are **final** deadlines.

Issue	Copy Deadline	General Theme	Editors
Spring	Fri 27 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2006	Numeracy	Alison Gorf; Linda Eastwood; Barbara Hately-Broad
Summer	Fri 14 <sup>th</sup> April 2006	Appraisal of policy in England, Wales, Scotland & Ireland	Yvon Appleby; Sarah Rennie; Jim Crowther
Autumn	Fri 29 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2006	Conference 2006 edition: Transforming Literacies	Fiona Macdonald; Deirdre Parkinson

## Section 1. Creativity, RaPAL Conference 2005, Poetry

### Editorial

We invite you to have a look through this wide range of reflections about notions of creativity that stem from people's work in adult literacy, a field that necessitates and elicits ongoing inventiveness and resourcefulness through tutors' responsiveness to learners. The uniqueness of adult literacy education stems from this need to find and create alternative ways of doing things, ranging from tutoring learners to maintaining funding. This creativity is essential to the field, yet not something we explicitly acknowledge. This issue highlights what is happening in the field from writers in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Canada and New Zealand.

What are these writers saying about creativity?

- Creative practice challenges assumptions about literacy learning and teaching.
- Creativity is exciting.
- Creative methods can be non-text based explorations.

- Creativity offers opportunity to bring our whole selves into teaching, learning and knowing.
- The use of creative methods within adult literacy education is seen as a way to promote equality and to redress power imbalances within the classroom and the research space.

We have several articles that display how poetry works to open up safe, fearless spaces where learners and tutors can speak the unspoken in evocative ways; writers who show how poetry can create a dialogue between student and tutor. The sprinkling of poems within articles and throughout this issue gives us moments of pause and lets us hear the voices of those involved in adult literacy. The authentic communication brings us face-to-face with our learning selves.

Literacy is about how we communicate, how we listen to others and what we tell of ourselves. Literacy itself is about how we create ourselves and the world.

*Sheila Stewart & Bonnie Soroke, Co-editors*

## Why creativity in adult literacy?

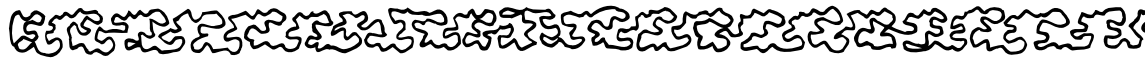
*Kate Pahl* - on behalf of the RaPAL 2005 Conference Management Committee, Sheffield  
*Kate is a lecturer in education at the University of Sheffield and can be contacted on k.pahl@sheffield.ac.uk*

When the RaPAL organising committee came up with this title for the RaPAL 2005 conference in Sheffield, it felt perfect. Perfect for many reasons. One was that adult literacy practitioners and researchers had been told many times that their focus should be on functional literacy skills and this had become something of a tyranny. *Skills for Life* didn't mention learners' enjoyment and creativity in literacy. Adult literacy students use literacy in their lives to express meanings and identities, and creativity is embedded within that meaning-making in both ordinary and extraordinary ways.

We were delighted by the extremely positive responses we had to our call for papers. The RaPAL 2005 conference workshops ranged from a presentation of the tile making and poetry of a group of men in a homeless hostel, many exciting accounts of creative practice in classrooms (such as, 'We did it with a Pritt Stick'), inspiring accounts from Scotland of the new Scottish framework and its ability to listen to learners, and international contributions which opened our eyes to the wider world of

language and literacy across the globe. Therefore, we knew it was a good choice. At the same time, we were aware that the NRDC has asked for practitioner research which addresses creativity, the Arts Council were developing their Creative Partnerships initiative, and the role of creativity in schools was assuming a wider role. RaPAL has always been an organisation which ties together research and practice in order to listen to the voice of the learner, and challenge assumptions about literacy learning in the most exciting way. Creativity is at the heart of that process, and we were pleased to celebrate it.





## Welcoming spirit in adult literacy work

Mary Norton

Mary Norton is a co-coordinator and facilitator at The Learning Centre, a community based literacy and adult education program in Edmonton, Canada

In 2004, I enjoyed a sabbatical from my work at The Learning Centre, an adult literacy and education program in Edmonton, Canada. The sabbatical provided me with time and opportunity to explore arts-based approaches for holistic learning, including spiritual learning. While preparing for my sabbatical, I happened upon an article by Leona English (2003) who described spirituality as including:

*a strong sense of who one is; care, concern and outreach to the other; and the continuous construction of meaning and knowledge.*

Reading Leona's description was a "lights on" moment for me as I thought about the importance of community and meaning making at The Learning Centre and in other adult literacy programs. As I read more theory and research on the topic and looked back on my own and others' practices, I began to understand spirit-full learning in relation to the themes of creativity and wholeness, connection, meaning, and change.

### Creativity and wholeness

A few years ago, Moon Joyce, a singer, adult educator and artist, facilitated a two day residential *Getaway* for participants of The Learning Centre. On the first day of the *Getaway*, Moon drew thirty people together in song. The next day, during a creative writing workshop, people readily wrote and rose to share their writing. I became curious about how singing seemed to have prepared people for writing and sharing and began to explore the possible connections between singing and learning.

In a *Drawing out the self* project, Judy Murphy and I (2001) explored how music, movement and art-making invite women into learning. During the project, participants joined in singing, reluctantly at first, but gradually with more and more comfort and joy. In interviews about the process of singing, they commented that:

*I enjoyed the singing. It seemed so free. .... There seemed to be no boundaries on what a person could do. ...*

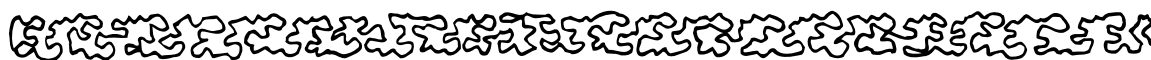
*I felt more relaxed and eased in my mind and soul.*

*It makes me feel good. It lifts my spirits.*

I have observed that singing and music making brings people together, lifts spirits, moves us into our emotions, and opens us to making connections with ourselves and others. In this way, music making and singing invite us to bring our whole selves - our spiritual, physical, emotional, mental, social and aesthetic selves - into teaching, learning and knowing. Bringing our whole selves is not something that has been widely encouraged in education, as cognitive or intellectual learning continues to have priority over other ways of knowing. Hundreds of years ago in European history - which is my ancestry - knowing was more emotional, more internal and more connected to the natural world. A person knew something by being deeply and intimately connected to it.

Aboriginal people in Canada and indigenous people around the world have more recent memories and practices of these ways of knowing, and aboriginal literacy workers in Canada have done much in recent years to reclaim and integrate cultural holistic practices in aboriginal education. In non-aboriginal contexts, the literature on adult education suggests an emerging interest in spirituality and learning, perhaps in reflection of the growing interest in spirituality in general.

In an overview of adult learning theory in the last 100 years, Sharon Merriam (2004) describes how early research on adult learning focused on intelligence, information processing, memory and cognitive development in adults. In the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus shifted to the concepts of androgyny (adult learning, compared to child learning), self-directed learning and learning that changes our perspectives. She says that the most recent additions to adult learning theory focus on the role of emotions in learning, the body as a site of learning, and the relationship between spirituality and learning. She suggests that these developments can help to expand our understanding of the holistic and complex nature of adult learning.



## Connection

In the literature on learning and spirituality, "connection" has to do with connecting with people, connecting with nature, and / or connecting with a transcendent force. One of the cornerstones of literacy work, particularly in community based settings, is building community and creating ways for people to connect with each other.

In the early days of contemporary literacy work in Canada, Elaine Gaber Katz and Gladys Watson (1991) undertook research and wrote a report about community based literacy in Toronto. In interviews and conversations with teachers, tutors and learners in three programs, they found that community building is one of three key elements of community-based programs.

In her research with women in literacy programs, Jenny Horsman (1990) found that

*Women spoke over and over again about how important the social aspect of the program was....Some interacted only with the tutor who came to their house. Others, in groups, spoke of the group becoming like one big family (p. 217).*

Perhaps such references to "family" reflect desires to be in a supporting, caring community. Learning programs often provide needed community and places for connection. Building community means creating ways for people to connect with each other and to start having a say in how things go. But in what ways do our programs promote connection that makes room for spirit? I think that much of this has to do with who and how we are and how we relate with each other.

In a peer tutoring project at The Learning Centre (Norton 1997), tutoring partners developed what Carl Rogers (1980) would call "person-centred" relationships in which people were genuinely themselves, non-judgmentally accepted the other person in the relationship, and exercised empathetic understanding. One of the peer tutors talked about how she felt that it helped students to know that she had been through similar experiences: "When I have a problem I talk to them and it seems like they listen and they understand" (p. 15).

As I looked back at those observations, it seemed to me that the peer tutors were practicing compassion. When this word came up for me as a prompt while writing with some women at the Centre, I wrote:

*Working at The Learning Centre inspires compassion. Many people who come to the Centre offer their love and themselves. They are role models. At the same time, there are others who for all kinds of reasons, have shut themselves off from others. Who knows what hurts have caused the walls to go up? But, by being around others who show compassion, those who live in walls sometimes find the walls going down too.*

I think that as we practice compassion, we learn to look behind some of the ways of being that get in the way of connection, and we create space for learning about ourselves and our purposes in relation with others.

## Meaning

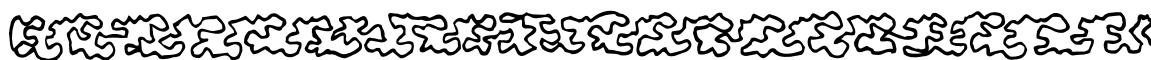
It is common practice in literacy programs to focus on learners' goals or purposes for learning when they start the programs, and to assess progress in relation to individual goals. However, learners often start to find their purpose as they engage in literacy programs and learn more about themselves. In their research, Elaine and Gladys found that:

*learners discover more about themselves more about how they learn, what they want to do, and who they are as people...(p. 42).*

Katharine Childs (2003) describes how the Language Arts program in her adult education agency revolves around the questions: "Who am I?" and "What do I value?" She says these questions were chosen because many learners in the program have never been asked either of those questions before, nor had they had to answer them. Katherine maintains that once we can answer those questions, we can get down to the real business of education, getting ourselves ready and fit to lead our own productive lives.

The literature on spirituality and learning suggests that answering the question, "Who am I" is part of, rather than a prerequisite for, the real business of education. Answering the question is a process that can go on, whether the question is asked directly or not. Journalling, story writing and story telling are familiar ways that we can write and re-write our lives, whether we write the stories *for* ourselves, dictate them to understanding scribes, read them aloud to fellow writers, or publish them for known or unknown others to read.

Frank Kazemek (2003) suggests that stories and poetry, in all their forms, oral, written and sung



belong at the heart of literacy programs because they “help us develop both a particular kind of emotional and spiritual sensitivity and depth and openness to our fellow human beings” (p. 69).

Weibel (1996, in Kazemek 2003) says that poetry offers “words that...change the ways we look at our lives”(p. 4). The following is from a poem by Jim Crowell (2003), a participant at The Learning Centre who has published three collections of stories and poems based on his life experiences:

Old man sitting on the steps  
you smile and speak to passersby as they  
pause to chat.  
There comes a soft, warm glow from down  
inside you.

Pleased with yourself  
that you can still find an excuse just to be  
happy  
Well be darned!  
If you don't just catch yourself.  
Seems as if you thought that you were just  
not that mellow. (p. 7)

Beautiful, nurturing environments for learning also invite spirit and support meaning making. Research and practice about addressing the impacts of violence on learning have explored ways that such environments support learning for all (Morrish, Horsman and Hofer, 2002; Violence and learning: Taking action, 2004). Too often literacy programs find themselves in sterile spaces, but we can bring in beauty that welcomes people and affirms their value.

Drawing and other arts-based approaches also support meaning making, as they enable us to go inside and access other ways of knowing. Art-making can support self-understanding, a search for meaning, personal growth, self-empowerment and healing. As one participant in the *Drawing out the self* (2001) project said: “I like drawing pictures. It became clear in my heart.”

In the *Drawing out the self* project, Judy and I used art as one way to explore themes that came up in each session. On one occasion, a woman told a story about a doll with two faces that she had had as a child. Her story prompted a discussion about the faces we show to the world and the faces we have inside. This in turn led to a mask making activity, in which we explored our inside and outside faces.

The various sets of masks tended to show smiling, happy faces presented to the outside world, with other faces on the inside. Through this art making, related story sharing, and connecting, some women began to shift in their understanding of themselves.

## Change

For as long as I can remember, the topic of change has been an ongoing debate in adult literacy education: is the work about individual change or social change? When I started in the field, I was very much at the social change end of the continuum. Along the way, I've come to believe that the two can go hand-in-hand, and that personal change and social action can come out of and weave back into connecting and meaning making as people share stories.

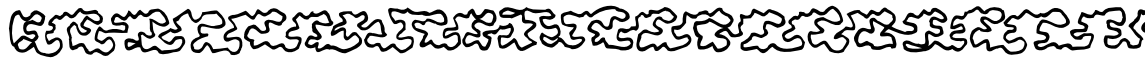
In a recent project at the Centre, a group of women were researching resources and services for people in literacy programs. As they identified resources, some women told about leaving abusive relationships and one woman's story led to another. The group posed questions such as “Why do women stay in an abusive relationship?” and pooled their knowledge to come up with answers. They talked with counselors and visited shelters to find out about available resources for women living with experiences of violence. Eventually the women developed a script, which they presented at a conference, in workshops and with staff in some social services agencies.

For some of the women, working on the script was a way to make sense of their experiences; presenting the script was a way to break silences about violence and to tell other women they did not have to live with violence, that there were resources available. And in making the presentations, some women began to re-see themselves as strong, capable women.

For some, a desire to reach out, to be connected with others in a larger context, to make a difference, has to do with spirit. Recent writing in the adult education field has pointed to how spirituality was one motivation for the work of adult educators like Paulo Freire, Miles Horton and Moses Coady (Groen 2003). All of these men saw education as a way to work towards more just societies.

In literacy and adult education, we have a legacy of working towards social change, and as we work in that direction we may find ourselves in the margins between the realities of what is and the hope of what could be. Working in the





margins poses challenges but also holds possibilities. One of the possibilities is to create environments for teaching and learning that support wholeness, connection, meaning and

change. In doing so, we may find possibilities for spiritual learning, and for teaching and learning from the heart as well as from the mind.

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### Quickly

Quickly and without a pause  
Quickly I recognised the clause.  
Quickly and with compunction  
Quickly I spotted the conjunction

Quickly and totally unperturbed  
Quickly I noticed the verb.  
Quickly while on a mission  
Quickly I saw the preposition

Quickly and without a splash  
Quickly I knew I had to dash  
Quickly I got the siphon  
Quickly I omitted the hyphen.

Geraldine Reid  
*Teaching and Management of Literacy and Essential Skills class at Queen's University Belfast*

### Warily

Warily I go to class  
Do I speak out and sound like an ass?  
Warily I sit behind  
A sticky label soon changes my mind.  
Warily I listen and think  
My head filling up like the kitchen sink.  
Warily I join the crowd,  
Is that my voice I hear out loud?  
Warily wondering, where will this lead?  
At the end of it all, will I succeed?

Eleanor McAlister  
*Teaching and Management of Literacy and Essential Skills class at East Tyrone College, Northern Ireland*

# Creative Practice in Integrated Literacies. Pilot Programme by John Wheatley College/ Routes Out Partnership and Glasgow YWCA

## Catherine Watt and Marion O'Neill

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### Introduction

Over the past six months we, Catherine Watt and Marion O'Neill, have been working on a variety of integrated literacies programmes within our respective projects. These programmes are firmly rooted within the concept of the social practice model of literacies promoted in Scotland, and utilise a range of creative methodologies that promote participation and equal access. We are however aware that the model practiced in Scotland is very different from that followed in the rest of the UK. As such we will describe in detail one of the programmes we have been developing, but will first discuss some aspects of the social and theoretical background to our work.

### Where we work

The organisations we work for in Glasgow tackle issues of social inclusion, in particular issues relating to: equal access to education, employment and quality child-care; difference and diversity; community development and regeneration; gender inequality and gender based violence.

The Routes Out of Prostitution Social Inclusion Partnership was established in 1999, with the aim of preventing women from becoming involved in prostitution and of supporting women to exit prostitution. It raises awareness of the abuse and harm associated with prostitution and the gender inequality which is one of its root causes.

### Theoretical Background

In his chapter in *Powerful Literacies*, Brian Street discusses two different models of literacy, an autonomous model and an ideological model. The autonomous model works on the premise of literacies as 'a universal, technical skill, the same everywhere' (Street, 2001: 18). This is the model promoted in The Moser Report (DfEE, 1999) and followed throughout the rest of the UK. The ideological model, by contrast, 'refers to the nature of literacy as social practice' (Ibid). Street talks about literacies as always taking place within a social context, referring to the student's own social sphere. The 'new' studies and practice are based on the student's own

knowledge and skills, and a curriculum is drawn up by the tutor and student based on the experience and interests of the student.

There are many issues with this model as it can be difficult to determine if the social context in which literacies work evolves is really the student's or that *permitted* by the practitioner and service provider. In an attempt to protect practitioners from difficult situations and traumatic stories of violence, etc. providers often overlook the student's social context, concentrating instead on a new, ideal context that might arise from the student's participation in learning. This may appear to be a positive step focusing on the possibilities of what a person might become through their experience of learning, but when practitioners are always advised to refer students to other parties such as counsellors when they talk about 'difficult' issues, this practice becomes more about avoidance than support. This works on two levels. First of all, the emphasis is on avoiding the subject matter because it will 'open a can of worms' that practitioners are not trained to deal with. Second it lets organisations 'off the hook' in terms of providing proper support and training for practitioners who want to tackle difficult issues.

In order to practice an ideological model of literacies it is important to create a space where students can name issues that relate to their own experience, allowing them to draw upon their skills and knowledge of the circumstances in which they live. The students we work with exist in a social context that includes physical, sexual and emotional violence experienced through child abuse, domestic violence and prostitution; drugs and alcohol issues; circumstantial health issues related to drug use and violence; complex post-traumatic stress disorders, dissociative disorders and other mental health issues; as well as homelessness and displacement. These factors have to be acknowledged by providers and practitioners prior to the learning event, taking account of the effect such a context has on the learning experience.



Jenny Horsman, a Canadian literacies researcher and practitioner, has carried out a number of studies in relation to the impact of violence on learning. She discusses the notion of the 'severed head' and describes the dominant practice of education as not inviting the whole person to participate in the learning process, in effect decontextualising the learning from the person's life (Horsman, 2001). Horsman goes on to talk about this in terms of what does or does not belong in education. She acknowledges that talking about violence is difficult but states that 'the clarity that the issue is huge, contributes to the silence about the entire area' (Horsman, 2001: 15). By avoiding the subject, practitioners and providers collude in the silence that surrounds issues of violence. This theory relates strongly to the issues we are working with in our pilot project.

Literacy practices are based in power relations and issues of equality. As Street explains, 'if literacy is seen as simply a universal, technical skill, the same everywhere, then the particular form being taught in schools gets to be treated as the only kind, as the universal standard that naturalises its socially specific features and disguises their real history and ideological justifications' (Street, 2001: 18). This has particular implications for the students we work with as they have a wide range of needs that cannot be met by an academic system of decontextualised learning. Being involved with literacies as a social practice offers students a chance to address their experiences through and alongside learning. If space is provided to acknowledge and explore the social context in which students live then the process of fragmentation created by decontextualised learning can be reversed and ownership of the learning experience returned to learners. There is an attempt to categorise people into those who can and those who cannot, ignoring the diversity of students' motivations, goals and aspirations. This pushes literacies toward what Mary Hamilton in her chapter in *A History of Modern British Adult Education* describes as literacies for social control (Hamilton, 1996).

Hamilton also talks about literacies for empowerment involving the development of critical thinking in relation to issues of power, the state and culture focusing on the development of a critique of dominant ideology (Hamilton, 1996). Literacy can mean redressing the power imbalance and tackling the issues experienced by people in their social contexts. New ways of looking at and talking about literacies need to be explored. Looking at literacies through the lens

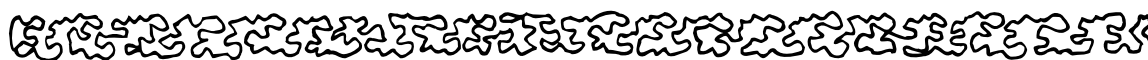
of otherness opens doors to debate on what literacy is and who it is for.

### **'Talk About...' at The Wayside Day Centre**

With the issue of who and what literacy is for at the forefront of our thinking, we collaborated on a pilot project based at the Wayside Day Centre in Glasgow called 'Talk About...'. This centre works with people who have current/prior experience of homelessness and also offers information and advice to those with additional issues including health, addictions, prostitution, etc. The centre has traditionally been male dominated; however over the past year (with financial support from *Routes Out* Partnership) the centre has created a women only space and employed a sessional worker to coordinate a women's support group. This has proven popular with the women who use the centre as they often felt intimidated by large numbers of male patrons.

Building on the success of this women's group and working in partnership we decided to offer a learning group for the women. This would also offer women a further women only group at the centre and provide access to learning opportunities. Encouraged and inspired by the RaPAL workshop conducted by Bonnie Soroke and Toni Lambe (see pp 15-19) from the cross border project Literacies and Equality in Irish Society (LEIS) at the RaPAL conference in July of this year, we began developing a programme of integrated literacies activities using interactive and creative methodologies to promote equality and redress the power imbalance experienced by the women using the centre.

The programme we developed is discussion-based, and focuses on issues identified as important to the women using the centre. These issues include homelessness, addictions, self-harm, prostitution, gender, violence, family, disability, literacy and numeracy as well as physical, sexual and mental health. Drawing on a range of everyday media such as television, magazines, newspapers and visual images, we constructed workshops and activities around the identified issues and used these as the basis for our programme. Integrating literacies into a discussion-based group was challenging; however we were able to construct sessions that allowed the women to explore the issues, regardless of their text based literacies abilities, using mixed media. This supports the literacies model practiced in Scotland helping the women to develop their critical thinking abilities, their verbal communication and vocabulary, their self expression, their ability to work with others and



their self perception.

We have developed and piloted a number of sessions through this programme that have incorporated new ways of dealing with the issues identified by women. We will now present an example of this practice outlining the methodology involved and how the session relates to the issue under discussion, and ultimately how these sessions relate to the literacies goals identified by women coming to the group.

Session One focused on the subject of physical attraction, encouraging the group to question their perceptions about themselves and others. For many women the internal image they have of themselves is often negative due to their experience of systematic violence and abuse and can lead to self-loathing and self-harm. This group discussed myths relating to physical attraction and used popular media such as magazines and newspapers to highlight some of these myths and to question critically the rationale behind a range of adverts, visual images and stories. Although the group is predominantly discussion-based, these discussions are often recorded on audio with prior consent from participants. This provides the group with an opportunity to analyse and reflect on their own discussion and views and supports participants with memory and concentration issues to participate fully in the group.

The group first of all looked at physical attraction in a partner, discussing areas they would find either attractive or unattractive. Participants were asked to write down a few notes describing what they find attractive in a person. Interestingly those taking part mentioned features such as 'sense of humour' as being important even though this is not a physical attribute. They also highlighted a person's eyes as being an important physical indicator of a personality and often described their ideal partner as muscular though not overtly so. This led to discussions about issues around security and protection, as they related physical strength with emotional strength. This part of the session enabled women to develop their descriptive abilities and focused on the use of adjectives. Without prompting, the women supported each other when trying to find suitable descriptive words and this had an impact on their collective and individual vocabularies. This supports the theory of literacies as a social practice highlighted by Street and Hamilton.

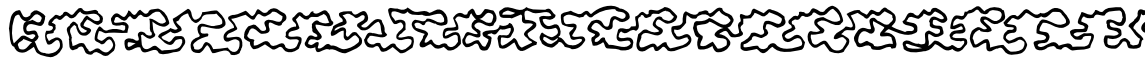
The group were then asked a set of questions relating to particular physical attributes they would find either attractive, unattractive or would not influence them. These included attributes based on hygiene such as dandruff and body odour, but also included physical disabilities such as missing limbs and scars. The women were asked to rate each area between one and ten. The rationale behind this section was to enable women to use their numeracy skills as the results were then collated and turned into a graph demonstrating collective views on physical attributes. The women were surprised by their findings and this provided the opportunity to discuss these in more detail as they had a tangible source on which to focus.

Using images from magazines and newspapers the group then created a photomontage/ collage of what they felt were physically attractive attributes. We undertook this part to enable women to explore likes and dislikes but also to demonstrate that even with their selection of the most attractive physical attributes, the composite images they produced were not attractive. This prompted analysis of their perceptions of attraction and promoted discussion of their own physical attractiveness.

At the end of the session women were asked to write a short reflection on the topic. They reported that the session encouraged them to question quite strongly held views about physical attraction. We focused on demonstrating that attraction is more emotional than physical, and highlighted the positive attributes that group members possess. Promoting the use of discussion and media, and limiting text-based elements to simple note taking and reflection enabled women who have differing levels of abilities to take part and explore important issues.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, these pilot sessions have re-affirmed our shared belief that an ideological model of literacies is vital to achieve the goals of the Scottish Executive. In other words to ensure that a literate person is someone who is 'able to read, write and use numbers and numerical information in private, family, community and working life in order to handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions, solve problems, and continue to learn in a rapidly changing world (City of Edinburgh ABE team, 2000: vi).



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### "The Future"

Could be, fighting will never cease  
Should be, everlasting peace

Could be, poisoning pollution  
Should be, recycling solution

Could be, endless meaningless medication  
Should be, disease eradication

Could be, precarious poverty unending  
Should be, impoverishment mending

Could be, community isolation  
Should be, global communication

Could be, environmental devastation  
Should be, international reforestation

Could be, several species extinction  
Should be, survival distinction

Could be, continuing child prostitution  
Should be, child protection revolution

Could be, repulsive rampant racism  
Should be, joy for a population prism

Could be, the world needs a suture  
Should be, a spectacular future

Geraldine Reid  
*Teaching and Management of Literacy and Essential Skills class at Queen's University Belfast*

At the beginning of the day,  
I steal a look to see if they have arrived.  
My inspiration, my home, my sense of belonging.  
How wonderful they are to me.  
Magnificent, majestic, meandering,  
Mesmerising, memorable, mine.  
Their shape and form move my heart.  
I am lost away from their shadow.  
Wherever I go I take them with me in my mind's eye.  
A beacon to call me home.  
What can compare to them?  
Wherever I go nothing equals their beauty, their hypnotic presence.  
I may never be able to leave this place if I cannot carry them with me. Pocketed away.  
Each day, a new shape, a new colour, a new mood.  
Lifting my soul and allowing me to offer up thanks to their creator.  
How blessed I am to witness such wonder.  
Of what is it I speak?  
My mystical, melancholy Mournes.

Kim McAnespie  
*Teaching and Management of Literacy and Essential Skills class at Queen's University Belfast*

# RaPAL Conference 2005 RaPAL

## Symbolising Reflective Practice: a creativity workshop for practitioners

Shelley Tracey

*Shelley Tracey develops and coordinates tutor qualification programmes for literacy tutors at Queen's University Belfast. She is currently exploring creative approaches to engaging tutors in reflection, practitioner research and poetry.*

This paper describes the process of designing and delivering an arts-based workshop for practitioners at the RaPAL Conference. As an autoethnographic account, it shares my explorations of creativity and reflective practice.

The workshop came to life as a response to the title of the 2005 conference, Creativity in Adult Literacies Learning. These words inspired me to think about the nature of creativity involved in learning, describing and teaching literacies. What intrigued me as an educator of practitioners and as a practitioner myself was the creative way in which we tend to respond to the challenges in our field of practice. We open ourselves to possibility, we question orthodoxies, we devise new methods and strategies, we engage in research which stretches the boundaries; we make much out of few resources. In Blake's words, we see "a world in a grain of sand."

These reflections made me wonder about two questions: what makes us so creative, and how might our creativity be defined and developed?

I explored these questions in the literature, and, as I usually do when something intrigues me, in my journal. In my own writing, I reflected on the ways in which practice requires us to be constantly creative, to be productive and active, to be making and shaping meaning. An extract from an entry written at the beginning of 2005 acknowledges this:

*It's so easy to get caught up in the frenetic day-to-day urgencies of practice. I feel as if I'm on the back of a runaway horse riding at full tilt into strange lands, my arms clutching its mane, never getting the opportunity to wonder at the strange lands we're passing through so quickly. I need to make space to look back at where I have come from, climb down and explore these territories.*

When I turned to the literature on creativity, I identified a diversity of approaches to, and notions of, creativity. Here are just a few of them:

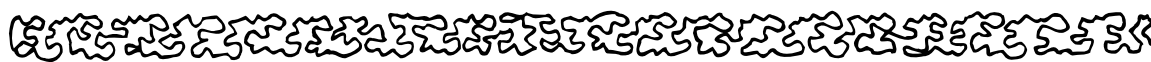
- creativity is divinely inspired
- creativity is evidenced by innovative products and ideas
- the origins of these innovations are not always easy to determine
- in the Freudian sense, creativity is a form of neurosis (Storr, 1976)
- creativity is part of our essence as human beings and needs nothing more than appropriate support for it to manifest itself (Carl Rogers, Maslow)
- creativity may emerge as a response to adversity (the notion of the phoenix rising from the ashes; Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, 1969)
- some people are more creative than others.

In the last statement, I am referring to people such as Mozart, Keats and Rilke, whose letters about their work have always aroused a good deal of interest from lesser mortals.

But what of the creativity of these lesser mortals? What about the everyday creative being, such as the literacy practitioner who goes endlessly about the business of making and remaking meaning in the development of her practice? Craft (2001, p48) refers to Gardner's (1997) three characteristics of 'extraordinary' creators, namely: *reflection* - making time to reflect, in a variety of ways, *leveraging* - picking out what they are really good at and pushing that, and *framing* - the spin put on things which do not work out. Craft notes (ibid.):

*These three qualities (Gardner, 1997) may also be appropriate and relevant to the creativity of ordinary people. Certainly some of the characteristics of high creators (childlike qualities, feeling under siege, being on the edge, high energy and productivity) which Gardner identifies in Creating Minds (1993), also emerged as a characteristic of 'ordinary' educators in one of my research projects (Craft, 1996a; Craft and Lyons, 1996).*

As one of these 'ordinary educators', I recognise the importance of the processes of reflection, leveraging and framing for the development of my practice. However, while I know that I need



to be able to set time aside to reflect in order to sustain my creativity as a practitioner, the demands of practice seldom allow me the opportunity to do so. While I may not be an 'extraordinary creator', I do experience feelings of being under siege, and the requirements of my work mean that I need to be highly productive. The urgency of the needs of practice may be detrimental to my creativity; on the other hand, the tension between the need to reflect and the need to act might be a creative one. In Rollo May's words (1975, p75):

*Creativity arises out of the tension between spontaneity and limitations, the latter (like the river banks) forcing the spontaneity into the various forms which are essential to the work of art or poem. (or practice?)*

My workshop for the RaPAL conference was designed to give practitioners opportunities to reflect on the creative aspects of their practice, to play with ideas and to explore the dynamic between reflection and practice. The workshop was described as follows in the conference material:

### **Symbolising Creative Practice**

As reflective practitioners, we create a rich synthesis. We bring together our thoughts, observations, feelings, actions, ideas, literacy and numeracy practices and experiences as tutors. This workshop recognises the creativity inherent in reflective practice and provides opportunities for tutors to explore this creativity. In this hands-on workshop, we will use a range of creative methods to develop our understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. Through art, creative writing and the use of props, we will explore our own understanding of reflective practice and the ways in which we enact our roles as reflective practitioners. Do we perceive reflective practice as a journey, as a way of seeing, or as a synthesis of different aspects of our selves? We will respond creatively to all of these possibilities. No artistic skills are required, merely openness, willingness and a desire to share ideas and gain some fresh insights. Fun guaranteed!

The creative methods and tools included art materials, props, images and quotations about learning, teaching, creativity and self-actualisation. The variety of materials acknowledges the diverse ways in which we express ourselves.

The aims of the workshop were ambitious, given the limitations. The first of these was the

duration of the workshop, which was only one hour. Another practicality was the fact that my choice of materials had to be limited to those which were portable enough to accompany me on my journey by plane and train to Sheffield from Belfast. In the past, I have delivered similar workshops closer to home; these are usually three hours long, and offer participants the opportunity to try out a range of creative methods, with 3D art materials available. My response to these limitations was to bring along a range of images in the form of posters and postcards, which might engage participants visually and offer them a quicker entry into the realm of the symbolic than that which they would obtain by the more time-consuming process of creating their own symbols.

The space in which the workshop was to take place was a key factor in facilitating the creative process. I acknowledged this by transforming the room from a classroom into a creative space. I covered the tables with images, coloured scarves and props, and arranged the chairs in a horseshoe. The horseshoe shape and the fact that the group was relatively small (fifteen participants) enhanced the intimacy of the space.

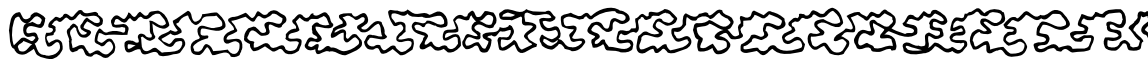
The workshop was structured around three activities which were designed to generate reflection and engagement with creativity.

### **Activity one**

I asked participants to choose one or two items from the room which represented their strengths as reflective practitioners. I suggested that they use their intuition to selecting those items which attracted them without trying too hard to articulate why they were making these choices. Participants were then invited to introduce themselves and to share something about the process. This period of sharing, albeit brief, was important because it brought a range of symbols and ideas into the room, generating a rich creative space.

### **Activity two**

This took the form of a reflective meditation in which I asked participants to imagine that they were sitting on a hill, looking down on the region in which they worked as practitioners. In the course of the meditation, I took them down into the valley so that they were shifting from observing from a distance to focusing on close-ups views, such as on their learners or different aspects of their practice. I also asked them to imagine that they were observing themselves in the course of their work.



The aims of this mediation were to engage the imagination and to offer a range of perspectives from which one's practice might be viewed. At the end of the meditation, participants discussed the experience briefly with a partner. The purpose of this activity was to articulate at least one aspect of the experience and to establish commonalities. At the end of this process, each pair of participants was asked to find another to work with.

### Activity three

This activity required the small groups which had been formed by the previous activity to create a representation of the world of reflective practice, using the props, art materials, quotations and images they had already chosen, as well as any others available in the room.

When the 'worlds' had been created, each group was invited to take the others on a tour of their constructs.

The session ended with each participant sharing briefly something they were taking away with them; the responses varied from the thought provoking images or quotations which they had selected to a recognition of how engaged and creative they were as reflective practitioners.

### Feedback and reflections

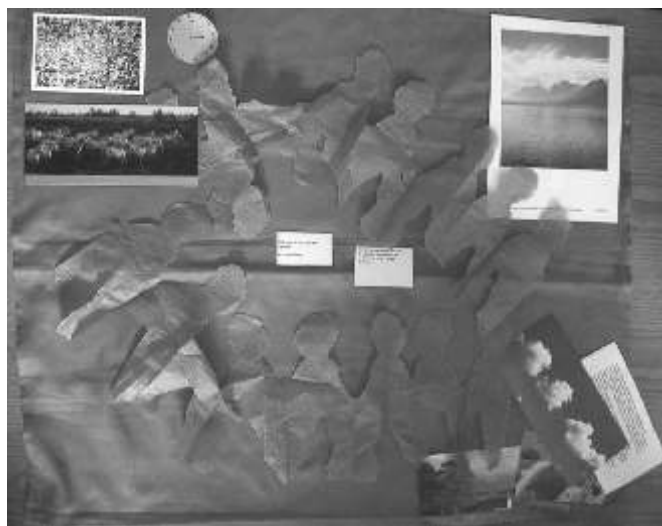
I observed that most of the participants appeared to fluctuate between periods of sitting in silence, and engaging actively with the other participants. This reinforced for me the importance for practitioners of having opportunities to sit back and reflect.

The atmosphere in the workshop was relaxed, and practitioners appeared to be appreciative of each other's contributions. The feedback suggested that group members welcomed the opportunity and the space to reflect and explore their feelings and ideas about themselves as reflective practitioners. A particularly valuable piece of feedback from one participant was that the phrase "fun guaranteed" in the publicity material trivialised the nature of the workshop for her, and had almost prevented her from attending. My reflections on this response suggest that offering practitioners the space to engage in creative reflection is sufficient, without trying to offer additional incentives.

The third activity seemed to generate some uncertainty at first; the topic seemed so broad that participants said at first that they were unsure about what I wanted them to do. I had kept the theme deliberately vague because I did

not want to influence the participants; the topic was broad because it was important for participants to feel that they had the freedom to explore and to engage with possibility.

In the course of the third activity, I noticed that while three of the groups began to work together quickly, the individuals in the fourth one seemed to spend more time on their own and the group process only happened towards the end of the activity. The world of reflective practice created by this group was a collage of ideas rather than a coherent whole, such as the image created by one of the other groups and depicted with this article. The circle of people in the picture, created by tearing tissue paper, is a powerful symbol of collective endeavour and unifies the image.



On a personal note, my journal entries following the workshop indicate my enjoyment of the process, the importance of having creative spaces in which to reflect, and my willingness to keep offering opportunities for creative reflection to other practitioners.

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# RaPAL Conference 2005 RaPAL

## Exploring Creative Methodologies with the LEIS Project (Literacy and Equality in Irish Society)

*Toni Lambe and Bonnie Soroke*

*Toni Lambe, adult literacy researcher and tutor, is based in Dublin (Ireland). She has been working in the literacy service for the past eleven years. Bonnie Soroke is working in Belfast until Feb 2006. She is based in Canada, where she works and plays as an arts & literacy consultant, and is associated with RiPAL-BC to support and encourage adult literacy research in practice.*

### Introduction

The theme of Creativity in Adult Literacies Learning has been a fundamental element of the Literacy and Equality in Irish Society project for the past ten months, and will continue to dominate our thinking for the remainder of this action research project. Presenting at the RaPAL conference in Sheffield in July 2005 was opportune since we had been working on the use of creative methodologies in adult literacy. We have developed a course for adult literacy practitioners on Literacy and Equality through Alternative Methodologies that we have been piloting through the Institute of Lifelong Learning, Queen's University Belfast. We were ideally poised to bring our methodologies and theory to a wider audience.

This paper will give a general description of the LEIS project and our involvement at the RaPAL 2005 conference. This will be followed by a discussion of some issues that have emerged through our work with adult literacy tutors in using creative methodologies.

### About the LEIS project

LEIS is a joint North/South initiative between Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and the Equality Studies Centre at University College Dublin (UCD). The 16-month project is funded by Peace II, the European Union (EU) Program for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland 2000-2004. LEIS is an action-research project that has involved learners, tutors and tutor trainers in using non-text approaches in adult literacy education.

One of the aims of our project is to produce a resource handbook of non-text methodologies that can be used by adult literacy practitioners to enhance the delivery of their programs. We believe that the use of alternative methodologies can help facilitate adult literacy learners in the exploration and understanding of the way in which inequalities in society have impacted on their lives. It is also envisaged that this handbook will be of use with other marginalised groups in the wider educational and community arenas.

### Contextual Framework

Toni Lambe and Bonnie Soroke, the LEIS development workers, have situated the project within the contextual framework of equality as developed by UCD Equality Studies Centre. Data collected is being analysed through four key dimensions of the equality theory outlined in the publication of Baker et al. *Equality: From theory to action* (2004):

- Respect and Recognition (cultural inequality)
- Love, Care and Solidarity (affective inequality)
- Resources (economic inequality)
- Power relations (political inequality)

Maggie Feeley (2004), one of the originators of the LEIS project, explains that these four dimensions work to focus on contexts in which privilege and lack of privilege become apparent, and where "each context is organised and maintained around a series of existing social systems whose current hierarchical structures make meaningful change difficult to achieve"(2). The initial impetus of the LEIS project was to open up space for learners to question previously held assumptions in the area of politics, economics, religion, and culture, with the goal of empowering them to challenge and question the deep structural inequalities existing in our society.

We are finding that space is needed for adult literacy tutors/practitioners to grow in awareness and confidence to do this as well. The main themes of our project emerging to date include the structural institutional inequities that undermine and create barriers to the use of creative approaches, the oppression of competency-based curriculum, and the privilege of text-based work.

### LEIS Workshop at RaPAL Conference 2005

We were keen to present a LEIS workshop at conferences in order to further explore and reflect upon issues related to adult literacy and equality, and to examine and critique ways to make spaces for exploration of equality issues within adult literacy education using creative methodologies. The methodologies used in the RaPAL session were Visual Arts (collage and

zipper sculpturing) and Drama. Other methodologies being piloted by the project are Storytelling, Image Theatre and Music (using the Gamelan).

At RaPAL we presented to a group of fourteen literacy tutors, tutor trainers and researchers in a large room with appropriate furniture. Appropriate space is highly significant. It can, and has often been, the first area where the advantages accruing to text-based work become apparent. In our workshops we need open space where participants have access to all materials and can move among them freely, giving room and scope to examine and work with materials in small and large groups. It has been our experience during this project, that despite our best efforts to express our needs and explain the room set-up required to facilitate our methods, we are often confronted with a classroom-type arrangement that is totally inappropriate. Literacy tutors have shared their stories of similar difficulties related to spaces where they work.

At a workshop we delivered in Belfast we were given a room housing fifty heavy chairs with desk attachments that we had to dismantle and stack in a corner, plus find and set up trestle tables on which to arrange our materials. We were amused to see the posted room-sign stating: *"Please leave this room as you would like to find it"*. Oh, we would like to find this room without furniture, full of wide and free empty spaces. The hegemonic perspective that one-size-fits-all is one that needs to be confronted within our educative environments, but listening ears and responsive decision-makers are not always forthcoming. During the LEIS project, we have had many opportunities to challenge or simply point out how these apparently small details can accumulate to become huge barriers.

At RaPAL, Toni and Bonnie provided a brief introduction to LEIS using photographs and artefacts, explaining that we are on a 16-month action research project focusing on the issues of literacy, equality and creative methodologies. This project maintains that adult literacy education is in itself an issue of inequality; low literacy skills are a manifestation of various inequalities within people's lives and equality issues for people within adult literacy education are linked with the broader social and political problems of society. Our work is based on the premise that literacy is far more than a set of basic skills, but rather, literacy is a set of social practices. We talked of the milestones of the

project to date and some of the challenges encountered.

### **Workshop Process**

Participants were asked to look at and choose from an array of laminated cards (photographs and graphics that related to the four contexts, representing equality and inequality within people's lives). They were asked to choose a visual that resonated with them or represented an issue within their own practice. Participants then gathered in small groups to talk together about the issues. Each group was asked to categorize their issues within the four contexts of equality to help summarize and focus their discussion. Then participants were given the option to create a sculpture, collage, or short drama piece that reflected the group's discussion of issues within their practice. The materials and techniques of the three methodologies were demonstrated. Regrettably, no group took the opportunity to use the drama props. In our experience, drama is the area most participants shy away from in the belief that it needs a level of expertise not required by the other methods. However, it can be a most powerful medium as demonstrated in our workshop at the 2005 Reflective Practitioner Conference in Belfast where one group chose to act out a short skit using the props provided. They were able to make a very effective point about the provision of funding for literacy education without adequate planning and pre-thought.

### **Conclusion**

Feedback from this workshop echoes and affirms many of the same issues from LEIS workshops, courses and pilots, thus strengthening our resolve about the importance of this work. In this short article, we focus on one recurring theme that arises in most of our courses and workshops, and one that we have confronted ourselves during our research process. This is the privileging of text-based work and the constant struggle to acknowledge and accept creative methods as having validity in themselves as opposed to acting as a support or lead in to text-based work. Tutors struggle with translating their knowing and experience of the value of alternative methodologies into a language and format that can convince the sceptical manager. Creative or alternative methods are often treated as an amusing light hearted add-on and not considered to have validity within themselves. Thus, we continue to work with tutors building resources and confidence to embed creative methodologies within their practice.

We are seeing that the use of alternative methods is in itself an issue of equality in the unquestioned acceptance and reliance of text-based teaching and learning. As development workers in a project that is all about innovative methodologies, we continually struggle to practice what we preach. The power and authority of the academic institution can so easily undermine and squelch, and such has been our experience when reporting on our research process through a series of photos, or when proposing a participatory workshop at an arts-based educational research conference and being required to deliver a paper. A clear, strong stance has been required, along with an acute awareness of the prevalence and deeply ingrained belief in the superiority of text-based work.

As well as equality theory, we are drawing on adult learning theories and the process and nature of creativity to help tutors build confidence to convince both themselves and their authorities of the value and validity of embedding storytelling, drama and visual arts within their practice. The use of creative methodologies can serve as an effective resistance to and disruption of the text-based privileged forms of knowing, being and doing. It is our contention that creative non-text methods be an integral part of literacy tutors' repertoire, serving not as a one-off brightener of a dull day, but as an embedded approach or attitude woven into the fabric of adult literacy education.

See participants' stories and creations at the LEIS website, as well as more information about the project: [www.leis.ac.uk](http://www.leis.ac.uk)

**References**

Baker, John, Kathleen Lynch, Sara Cantillon and Judy Walsh (2004) *Equality: From Theory to Action*. PALGRAVE MACMILLAN: Hampshire

Feeley, M. (July 2005) *Planning for equality: equality of what?* Unpublished Paper

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*B Soroake Tree Reflection*

# RaPAL Conference 2005 **Listening to Learners, Recognising Literacies and Generating Creative Practices.**

*Pam Cole and Linda Pearce*

*Pam Cole is a research fellow in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. She has spent all her working life in education as teacher, manager and researcher and has worked with learners from anything between three and 80. Linda Pearce is a Research Associate of the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University. She has spent the last 15 years working in education firstly in Primary Special Educational Needs support and then in Family Learning and Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy before moving into research. Like Pam she has worked with learners from three to 80.*

## **Introduction**

Lancaster University, in partnership with other NRDC members, the University of Sheffield and the Institute of Education, is part way through an evaluation of the impact of Skills for Life on learners. The workshop we gave at RaPAL was based around some of the emerging insights gained from the ongoing qualitative strand of this study, which is now into its second year. The research team have interviewed almost 300 learners across six case study sites, which were selected from 18 Learning and Skills Council areas already identified by a parallel teachers' study being carried out by the Institute of Education. These interviews were carried out during the first stage of the study and the team will be conducting follow up interviews with a significant sample of learners after approximately a year to gain a longitudinal perspective of their learning experiences. An interim report can be downloaded from the NRDC web site\* or ordered in hard copy.

Our approach has been ethnographic and narrative in orientation. Ethnographic in that, as far as an evaluation allows, we have sought to work collaboratively with our partners in the case study sites so that interviews with learners could take place in their own learning contexts using a flexible approach. We have endeavoured to encourage learners to talk about how their learning experiences within the Skills for Life infrastructure have related to their everyday lives using a variety of interview methods: small group interviews, whole group evaluation exercises or individual interviews. The type of interview used has been dependent on the preferred approach negotiated between tutors, learners and interviewers. This flexibility has facilitated learners being able to give some insight into the impact of the learning infrastructure on their lives. The emerging stories collected from people's experiences are providing the narrative orientation of our approach; a narrative that we hope to expand when those learners who have agreed to follow up interviews are re-visited during this second year of the study.

Given the constraints of working within an evaluative research approach and the need for breadth, we are aware that the insights we are gaining are a snapshot into these learners' lives compared with the depth of insight gained through using a smaller sample of detailed ethnographic case studies such as that used in the 'Adult Learners' Lives' project. (NRDC Publication)\*\* What is important to recognise here is that the breadth of the evaluative approach is able to identify emerging themes, trends and tendencies across a broad spectrum of learners. In a sense, because of the sample size the snapshots gained build into a significant 'album' thus providing a large collection of learner stories, albeit in short diary form compared with an autobiography. These different approaches therefore complement each other providing both breadth and depth to the emerging picture.

## **What we did**

During the workshop, delegates formed small groups and were encouraged to place themselves in the position of particular groups of learners in specific contexts. The context examples used were an Army Education Centre, a work based programme at a wholesaler and a Further Education college. Delegates were then asked to respond to the interview questions we'd been using with actual learners in those same contexts. At the end of this exercise each group of delegate responses was compared with those of the learners in the same contexts, the aim of the exercise being to stimulate thought around learning experiences in different contexts as a catalyst to creativity in practice.

## **What the learners said**

At the RaPAL workshop when we gave feedback on the views of the learners some of the people present felt that these views were more positive than they would have expected. However, so far our findings are that the majority of our learners are very, very positive about their experiences of Skills for Life. [An overview of the emerging themes has recently been summarised in 'NRDC,

Three years on: what the research is saying' (2005: 38-40).]\*\*\* The least enthusiastic learners were found on courses where people felt they had to attend e.g. a few on Job Centre Plus courses, or where the mix of levels within a group had been too great to give the higher level learners adequate stimuli.

This positive feeling from the majority of learners applied across all aspects of the infrastructure. For instance in the RaPAL workshop we were asked:

*Is the prospect of the test and gaining a qualification motivating or demotivating for learners?*

The increased emphasis on learners taking tests and gaining qualifications is something that we asked learners about. Most learners were strongly in favour of tests, even ones who are not looking for work. For instance, women in ESOL classes who wanted to learn English to help their children were generally in favour. So too were some of the older learners even though they would not need the qualification for work reasons. This extract of an interview with a retired man in his sixties shows that he was asking to do the test and certainly not being pushed into doing it by his tutor.

Interviewer: *So do you hope to take the tests?*

Learner: *Hopefully yes, I enquired last week but they (tutors) don't think I'm ready yet.*

Interviewer: *But would you like to do the tests?*

Learner: *Definitely.*

Interviewer: *Why is that?*

Learner: *Well I'm just; you know it's something (English and maths) I never got any education in.*

Another learner, a 35 year old woman who was on a probation service drugs rehabilitation programme, saw gaining a qualification as particularly important:

Interviewer: *Is gaining a qualification from it (course) important to you?*

Learner: *It is yes, to show I can do it. It makes you feel proud. When you fill in an application form and it asks for qualifications there's nowt worse than putting 'none'.*

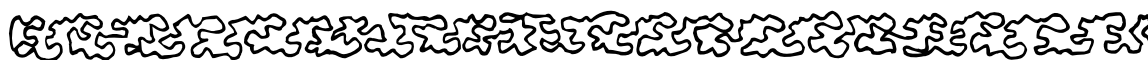
When the national curriculum was introduced

with the national tests, some tutors thought that their learners would not be confident enough to do them and it might put some learners off. No learner we interviewed was strongly anti tests. Further probing revealed that they felt confident that their teachers would not enter them for the tests till they were ready. Maybe the changed economic climate (funding linked to national test targets) has meant that tutors have been pushed by their managers to get the learners to take the tests so that they could get the funding. The tutors therefore have introduced the idea of the tests to the learners as a normal part of what they do. Learners on some courses spoke of being able to do the test when their tutors thought they were ready, which was not necessarily on one day at the end of the course. If they failed, they could of course re-sit the test as soon as their tutor thought they were ready.

### **Issues when presenting the views of learners**

The views of the learners in our interviews raise some interesting questions for consideration. Firstly, as practitioners and/or researchers we need to recognise that any voice, including that of the learner is neither as straightforward nor neutral an entity as it sounds. So whilst we have presented what people have actually said, there are always underlying influences on why people say what they say, to whom and in what context. Issues of power relations come into play; relations that are complex and varied and influence what might be perceived as an appropriate response to a question dependant on who's asking and answering. Such issues relating to conversation analysis are discussed helpfully by Deborah Cameron in her book 'Working with Spoken Discourse' (2001:145-160). \*\*\*

We were struck by the response of many of the interviewees to our interviews. Even though we adapted our language when we explained what the research is about, 'evaluating the infrastructure of the Skills for Life programme' does not sound like a riveting topic to talk about with a stranger in a taped interview. Yet the interviewees we approached usually not only agreed to be interviewed but some even said they found the experience helpful! When we go out to interview anybody, we are aware that the person is very busy and that it is very good of them to give up their time. This has been especially true with the learners on this study as quite a few of them spoke of the difficulty finding the time to come to the class and wishing they could attend for more hours. For example, a



male learner in his fifties wanted to improve both his Maths and his English, or as he said 'straighten it all out' i.e. be competent at an acceptable level, and thought his current two days a week were insufficient.

*Learner: I do Maths on a Monday morning and English on a Tuesday afternoon. But it's trying to fit it all in. To be honest I really need to come about 3 days a week to have any real impact and to straighten it all out. I won't be able to this term but hopefully next term I will be in a position to straighten it all out.*

*Interviewer: What hours do you work?*

*Learner: I work nights.*

*Interviewer: You do well to come here in the day as well.*

*Learner: It's the only way I can get through really, there's no other way.*

Our guilt at taking up the time of the learners, particularly the very busy ones, was partially assuaged by some learners who at the end said how valuable they had found the interview. Several said that they had found the questions

## References

\* 'Study of the impact of the Skills for Life infrastructure on learners Interim Report'.

Available free from:

[http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc\\_630.pdf](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_630.pdf)

or by post:

Publications, NRDC,  
Institute of Education,  
20 Bedford Way,  
London, WC1H 0AL.

\*\*'Adult Learners' Lives project: setting the scene'. Available free from:

[http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc\\_167.pdf](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_167.pdf)

or by post: from the address above

\*\*\* An overview of the emerging themes has recently been summarised in, 'NRDC, Three years on: what the research is saying'. (2005: 38-40)

had given them an opportunity to take stock of why they were learning and what they were doing. This seemed to apply especially to those who come from difficult backgrounds where it might have been thought that some of our questions might be intrusive. One learner, who had been in prison, talked about the effect of his criminal activity on his family. At the end of the interview we ask the learners if they are willing to be contacted again for another interview. This learner's response surprised us as it was not just 'yes' but:

*Yes I would be glad to.*

One of the most interesting points for us is not something that we did, or even could ask the learners: why have learner responses not changed significantly over the last 15-20 years? Could it be that whatever the initiative, those who return to learning by free choice, for whatever reason are ready to do so and therefore the experience is invariably positive? This is only one of many questions raised that merit further exploration.

Available free from:

[http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc\\_831.pdf](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_831.pdf) or by post: from the address above

\*\*\*\* Cameron, D (2001) 'Working with Spoken Discourse' London: SAGE Publications.

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## The Place of Poetry

### Shelley Tracey

To avoid embarrassment,  
poetry should keep itself to itself.  
It should be private, not shout out loud  
or pretend that it can sing.  
There's virtue in the repetitive detail  
of a daisy, or the simplicity of a tulip;  
you must agree that orchids are utterly tasteless  
and profane.

Poetry should sit quietly in a corner, knees to its  
chest, fiddling with its hair. It should make no  
jerky movements, or appear too suddenly. It  
should be obedient, perform decorously when  
requested, and be silent and calm.  
It should never ever strut about proudly,  
or dare to overwhelm you;  
it's just a lesser trickle and never a wave.  
Poetry should know it's finite,  
limit itself to the specific, the particular:  
the edges of a shell, one single white rose-petal,  
the winking blue eye at the core of a snail,  
a smearing of silver across a fish's back.

I knew a tree once that leaned itself back against  
a riverbank, growing wide and flat and shameless  
where some grasses used to grow. But there's no  
poetry in that: we all must adapt ourselves, never  
making statements about miracles or art.

Don't let poetry confuse you.  
You know it's not momentous.  
Be on your guard; deny it access,  
and keep it in its place.



Tree Poem by S.Tracey's Diploma Class



Greg Brooks, Glyn Cooke

## Poetry as a communication tool between the tutor and student within the prison environment

### Jolene Hamill

*Jolene has worked in Maghaberry HMP Maghaberry in Lisburn, Co Armagh, Northern Ireland for almost three years teaching ESOL and Literacy on a full-time basis. She is studying for her Masters at Queen's University Belfast. She completed the diploma course on the teaching and management of literacy last year. She says, "Teaching is my life and I would love to be able to do more research into different teaching methods in different prisons in the world."*

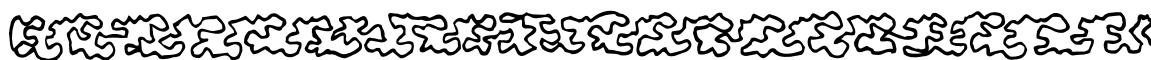
### Philosophy

*"Most people ignore poetry because most poetry ignores most people"*

Adrian Mitchell

I think that this quote is very true and refers to the fact that poetry can be inaccessible to those who have not had the opportunity to study the medium in depth. The philosophy of

making writing accessible to all and regardless of audience is something that I will keep in mind throughout this research. Although this paper is primarily written for Essential Skills educators I would also like my students to be able to read it and not be totally baffled by a lot of academic jargon. After all they will be proud of the fact that their poems have been included in this research as their voices are often ignored.



## **Rationale**

Poetry in prison is a vital part of many prisoners' lives. When faced with the isolation of just four walls to look at with lock-up lasting for hours, students find themselves reaching for some form of escape and an outlet for their emotions, be they anger, frustration, fear or loneliness. It is difficult for us to imagine what a life in prison is like. Many of us go about our daily lives not sparing a thought for those who have been excluded from society.

Before I started working in HMP Maghaberry I would have been apprehensive about being in a room with a criminal, but it is amazing how your views change when you are no longer ignorant to the fact that these people are human beings with needs, ideas and opinions. They share the same need to have a voice and to be listened to.

## **Aims**

In this piece of research I intend to examine the power of poetry as a communication tool, specifically between the tutor and the student. I will explain the creative process of poetry writing and how it can be used as a subtle form of communication. This is primarily a discussion paper and it is not intended to prove or disprove any theories. We will explore a number of poems from prisoners and poems which I have written myself and we will see how they relate to one another and act as a medium of expression between the teacher and the student.

## **Participants**

The study will look at three students, two being separated prisoners (paramilitary) and the other, a remand prisoner, and will examine the subtle flow of communication between the teacher and student.

## **Methodology**

Textual analysis of students' poems and my poems is based on advice from Prof John Lye and discussions with students.

## **Where did the idea come from?**

My idea for this research stemmed from an experimental lesson I did on National Poetry Day. The aim of this lesson was to get students to produce a few poems on the subject of food. I carried out the same lesson with a number of the classes and to my surprise I got a great response. By the end of the week I had lots of poems for the Essential Skills website.

The response surprised me, but the most interesting thing was what happened when I shared a little bit about my own work at

Queen's. When I showed the poems to Shelley Tracey at Queen's, she decided that it would be an idea to write a paper for the Certificate students. I was a little apprehensive about that one day so I decided that I would share my fears with my students. They began to empathise with me and we discussed formats for different pieces of writing. After about 20 minutes we decided that the best format would be to use a poem- a poem about poetry in prison. I started writing the poem and the students watched as I wrote the following:

## **Hunger Pains**

I asked my students to write a poem. And slowly together we stepped into the unknown. We talked about food and got lost in debate. I didn't realise how important food is to an inmate

The quality of the poems was second to none  
The students though reluctant did have fun  
A few emerged as talented poets  
The others are too but they still don't know it

We on the outside can eat what we please  
Chips, fried bread, eggs and mushy peas  
We don't have to eat boiled cabbage at all  
If our food isn't perfect a waiter is called

So to you tutors involved in the certificate training. Don't lose heart if interest is waning. For you students hoping to educate and do some good. My tip to you is when in prison don't mention the food

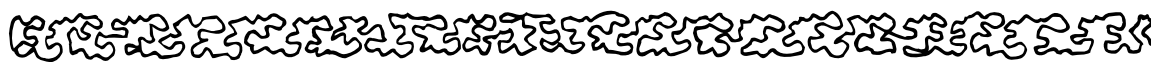
## **Textual Analysis of my poem**

I think that I chose this title because of the fact that it was about food and also the fact that I do not see myself as a poet in an expert kind of way. Poetry to me is about a process, about feelings and about recording events. To over analyse too much is to destroy in my opinion and I just like to write a poem in full flow, without premeditation. For me, it is about recording a situation which may not occur again and that to me is the beauty of writing. The meaning of the poem is obvious. It just conveys my experience of the process of asking students to write a poem. The audience are the certificate students and the destination arrived at is the fact that poetry is a useful tool to use in the classroom.

## **The wow factor**

When I had completed this poem I decided to read it out loud to the students. I found this a daunting experience because previous to this, poetry had been a very private thing for me. It was something that I did in private when I was





feeling low. This was a very different experience for me and I felt a little uneasy. When I had completed the reading, the students looked at me. One of them started to write furiously and within about ten minutes had produced a piece of paper which read:

Today as I sat in the class I had to stifle a laugh  
Instead of me writing poetry it was the turn of  
the staff

Eventually our teacher finished writing and  
looked so proud. She then asked the class if she  
could read it aloud

The poem the teacher composed was all about  
food. It greatly surprised the class as it was  
rather good

I must say as her pupil over the last three  
months. She has proved to be competent not  
like the usual teacher dunces

Will she become another of HMP Maghaberry  
teacher clones?

Who merely come to class to give us their moans  
and groans?

This is something we must all wait and see  
One thing is for sure, she's a better poet than  
me!

### **Textual Analysis of P's poem**

I think that it is important to keep this poem in its original form. The poem does not have a title because the student was writing this very quickly in response to what I had written, so the rules of the conventional poem were broken already. It is not just a poem but a note to the teacher. The language is slangy and the tone is playfully disparaging of other teachers, but the student who wrote this poem only added this for comic effect and it is not meant to be offensive to other members of staff. I think one of the most significant lines in the poem is the final line where the student identifies himself as a poet. He has engaged himself in the process of poetry writing and he has found a new identity setting him apart from his prison identity. The poem was a great boost to me as a teacher because it is quite complimentary and the very fact that the student responded and acknowledged the poem I had written in such a way that it should be recorded is quite extraordinary. The poem is organised in catchy groups of two lines which means that the pace of it is fast. I find the reference to clones fascinating and although it

refers to the prisoner's view on the surface of some teachers, it is a word which may be symptomatic of the context in which the poem was written. The prison environment is about discipline and routine and every day is the same. The poem was a break from the norm and a chance to get the feeling of sameness down on paper.

While all of this was going on another student decided that it would be a good idea to write a poem about what poetry means to them in prison. One student produced the following:

### **Poetry in Prison**

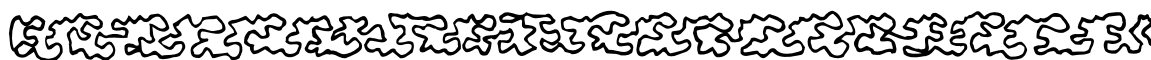
Poetry in prison is good for the heart  
When a prisoner and loved ones are torn apart  
Poetry in prison is good for the soul  
Waking each morning in this terrible hole

Poetry in prison is good for the brain  
It helps to relieve the awful strain  
Poetry in prison is good for the gut  
I can get a prisoner out of a terrible rut

Poetry in prison is good for the poet  
It does him good and he doesn't know it  
Poetry in prison is good for the mind  
It delivers us out of the daily grind

### **Textual analysis of G's poem**

I think that this is a very emotive poem and it gives the outsider an insight into the mind of a prisoner. Words such as 'soul' and 'heart' break the stereotypical view of the prisoner as a ruthless, heartless criminal. Again this prisoner sees himself as a poet (line 9) which is a breakthrough for him and me as a teacher. The destination of this poem is the comfort it provides. It is an escape from the gut-wrenching life sentence ahead. I think that the fact that the student refers to the strain of being in prison also indicates the fact that it is a punishment and that it is a 'terrible hole.' I am interested in G's phrase, "getting out of a rut" I don't want to be too naïve, but I am wondering if there is indication that the student is taking responsibility for his crimes and that he will turn away from the rut of crime. The way it is organised is in the conventional manner with four lines and each line rhyming with the line immediately after it. This is reflective of the student's personality. He is very to the point and hates the unnecessary use of flowery language. The tone is quite sombre, but if you look at the original handwritten version, you will see that there is a smiley face so there is still hope there. Another fascinating observation is



the wording of line 9 and 10 where the use of the word 'poet' and 'know it' are used. This directly mirrors my piece of work if you look at lines 8 and 9 of Hunger Pains

**Conclusions of the three meetings of minds**

So, what happened from the initial discussion about poetry and then the production of the three poems? My poem was created first, then P's poem and finally G's poem. This happened involuntarily and was not forced which I found extraordinary. The first student responded to my verbal rendition in writing and then the second student. G mirrored my writing so we were communicating and responding to one another in a non verbal manner. Ideas were being transferred through writing.

As Phythian points out on Pg 14 of Considering Poetry, "A poet's aim is to communicate, and what he seeks to communicate is the insight that he has into people and the world." In these three poems we have an insight into the world of prison and the interaction between the student and the tutor. I was touched by the poems because of the inventiveness of them. They just recount what happened in the class, a record of the process, a record of the flow of energy and inspiration. I think two years ago when I arrived at Maghaberry I would never have believed that I could develop a rapport with my students to the extent that they would produce such powerful pieces of work. For a while I thought that it was a fluke or a one off.

**The remand prisoner example**

This proved not to be a one off experience and the example I choose now is the process of writing which occurred in a remand class. I asked one of the guys (S) to write about what poetry means to him in prison. He wrote as follows:

Seven thirty the wake up bell blasts  
Another day begins  
Wake up wash up clean your cell  
Empty all your bins

Walking around the exercise yard  
With all the usual lags  
Some old talk of crime and drugs  
And their latest unsuccessful blags

Prison officers, CCTV all eyes on me  
The screws love winding up the boys  
See they'd be bored to death without us  
We prisoners are just their daily toys

The cell door slams shut at eight o'clock

The day has come to an end  
But not before I clear my mind  
So I take out a book and a pen

My poems contain the prettier words  
Soft and calming to the mind  
I escape into meadows with flowers and trees  
And leave all the madness behind

I write about loved ones, birds and stars  
Things that wash away the day's dirt  
And forget I'm trapped behind these bars  
Until the bell rings again at 7.30

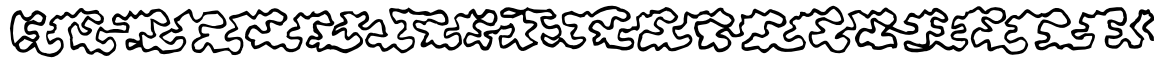
The prisoner after completing the poem asked me immediately to write a poem about what prisoners mean to me. He did not know me very well and perhaps he was curious to know what my views of prisoners are. Here is what I wrote:

I've been asked to write a poem about what prisoners mean to me So I'll do my best and sit and think and we'll wait and see I arrived here two years ago and did not know what to think Now I go to class talk to prisoners and don't even blink Prisoners are human beings just like us lest we forget They need respect not be told the crimes they should regret They write with eloquence and talk with poise, talent often wasted I'm just lucky to know the truth about prisoners, a luxury most have never tasted.

This was written within about 15 minutes and was greeted with a nod of approval. This promoted a discussion about the stereotypes we have in life. We started to talk about how people are judged for their actions and not for who they really are. The students explained how their esteem has been affected because of being in prison. They suffer in a silent world where no one really cares about them as human beings. Poetry acted here as a stimulus for a discussion about mistakes and judgement. It is possible to make mistakes, but it is about taking responsibility and moving through the blame to get to the other side. The poetry functions as a means of self reflection and I certainly use it as a means of expressing myself and coming to terms with the trials and tribulations of life. The prisoner is often the unforgotten person in this world condemned for doing wrong but sometimes they can show us the way it should be done and their insight should not be ignored. After all as Percy Bysche Shelley points out: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" and prisoners have a right to be part of it.

**Conclusion**

This paper set out to examine the power of



poetry as a communication tool through the study of writing as a process. Through examples we have seen that communication can come in many forms and that a poem records thoughts and feelings about particular events and situations. Poetry is a method of escape for prisoners and can be an intensely private experience. I think that in my teaching I have brought poetry in to a more public forum where it has taken on new dimensions. The students have been able to produce poems in one sitting despite being surrounded by peers and potential critics. At no stage did any of the prisoners look upon the exercise of poetry writing as a futile one and everyone got involved. Clare Maloney (2000) in her MED thesis on poetry points out that it is a "struggle for identity" and I think that it is true in the case of prisoners. They have lost

some of their identity and see themselves as numbers because each of them is given one when they arrive. Poetry takes away from this demoralising effect and the prisoner suddenly becomes a person again. This is something which is vast and cannot be underestimated in terms of long term value. Poetry is definitely the deepest form of education there is and also one of the deepest forms of communication.

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## Literacy and Creativity

### Carmel Flaherty

*Carmel is the lead co-ordinator in Skills for Life at HMP Lancaster Castle and is responsible for curriculum development, a small number of staff, and for cajoling students into working for 2.5 hours a session, usually without them realising it. She is employed by Lancaster and Morecambe College and can be contacted on Carmel.Flaherty@hmps.gsi.gov.uk*

I teach Literacy at HMP Lancaster Castle. It's a Category C prison with approximately 240 male inhabitants. The learners' experience of education has usually been one where they have thought differently from the norm. Quite often they have been creative thinkers in environments that haven't nurtured this kind of thinking. The challenge I face is to channel this creativity, whilst still ticking the boxes required by formal education. The mechanics of literacy and the more coltish attributes of creativity don't necessarily go together like... strawberries and cream. So how do I do it?

October 6<sup>th</sup> was National Poetry Day. This is a perfect opportunity to combine the workmanship of literacy and the creativity of poetry. The appreciation and the writing of poetry are mentioned in the Adult Core Curriculum, the English literacy specialist's Bible. What better vehicle then, than poetry, to get across the finer points of spelling, punctuation and grammar? But where do I start - do I bring in my favourite poems, or get them to share ideas about their own?

Well, who was it who said necessity was the mother of invention? I begin with a rap poem Eminem put to music - very loud music. I

already have the reputation as a bit of an eccentric, so listening to 'Stan' whilst dancing won't harm a reputation already in shreds. Not for us the names of different poems and their rhyming schemes. Not for us iambic pentameters and the monotony of AB,AB,AB. I've decided to mainline directly into the creative vein - and music, when the option of wandering as lonely as a cloud isn't open - is the quickest way to it.

How do they react to the poetry of rap? Immediately one or two men offer poems that they have composed themselves or traditional poems they have committed to memory. Quite often art is born out of despair. A man in the seg\* or rattling\* may get some consolation from words. I was assured that one of their ditties was too rude to print, but the other offering, 'Prison Boy', was a touching ballad about the eponymous hero who can't or won't - stay out of trouble. I got the author to note down his masterpiece (see below) whilst the others set to their tasks. Whether in pairs or alone, using pictures or music for stimuli, all begin to compose their stuff. The results are funny, brave, crude and sad... I'm able to impress the rest of the staff by making a booklet out of what they've created. The reality however, is that I'm



the one impressed with what the men are capable of.

Prison is one of the few places where the oral tradition is still strong. This is a necessity in a population that harbours a large minority who are illiterate or who don't have English as a first language. Power comes from knowledge, and whatever can be created and hidden from the officers is highly prized. This oral tradition means that with just a little persuasion the prisoners can be cajoled into sharing their own and others' stories. Most of them haven't heard of Oscar Wilde, but most of them would identify with the lyrical desperation of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

\***Seg** - the segregation wing, where the men are put if they misbehave or are in danger from other prisoners.

\***Rattling** suffering withdrawal symptoms from heroine.

### **Prison Boy (traditional)**

Prison Boy came home one day  
To find his true love had gone away  
When he asked the reason why  
This was her reply  
If you chose an honest life  
Then one day I'd be your wife  
But you chose a life of crime  
So prison boy do your time  
Prison Boy went out that night  
Prison Boy got in a fight  
He pulled out a knife  
The judge gave him 20 to life.  
Prison Boy was in his cell  
Prison Boy got on the bell  
When the screw came to the door  
Prison Boy lay on the floor.  
In his hand lay a note  
This is what he had wrote:(sic)  
Dig my grave, dig it deep  
Plant red roses at my feet  
All you ladies bare in mind  
Us prison boys are hard to find,  
For I have died for true love  
Now I fly as high as a dove.



## **Literacy Through Soundscaping: Creativity in Adult Literacies Learning**

*Suzanne Ledwith*

*Suzanne Ledwith is a musician and a singer songwriter, and has been working as a literacy tutor since 2002. She recently completed a Higher Diploma in Adult and Community Education and is currently undertaking a Masters in Community Music in Limerick, Ireland. She hopes that this course will further development on Literacy through Soundscaping and Music as a creative methodology.*

### **Introduction**

In this paper I will look at how we can use soundscaping to teach literacy or to give people a deeper understanding of words and how they relate to each other. Soundscaping allows a different way of thinking about words and a different way of engaging with words. This may involve participants making sounds using a range of instruments, the voice, or objects within the workshop space. People do not have to be 'musical' to partake in this. Many people have the idea that if music is involved, then the reaction will be "I am not musical" or "I cannot play an instrument". The sound exercise that I have devised does not require people to be able to play instruments, although it is perfectly acceptable but not a prerequisite if participants can play an instrument. Part of my workshop includes a demonstration of how to play the

basic percussion instruments that I make available. I have used with great success a range of instruments, including percussion instruments, with people with literacy difficulties.

### **Soundscaping as a literacy tool**

Can music be used as a literacy tool? In my work with people who have literacy challenges, my experience of working with them through music/sound and word confirms that it can. For the last year I have been developing methods of teaching literacy through sound. There are a few reasons for this. I felt that using mainly paper-based exercises with people with literacy issues was not working as well as expected. This is true especially for people who find it difficult to express themselves on paper, and also this is only one of the many ways we have of relating to the world. People who find writing difficult

because of literacy issues are often hindered in their expression because they may not be able to spell or find the right words to express what they feel. At the same time I recognise that most of our learning in school takes place using pen and paper, but as a musician I had a need to look beyond this as the only way to teach.

When people with literacy problems come into the literacy service where I work, they expect to learn how to fill in forms and write letters etc. It is understandable that they would expect me to deal with the things that they feel are important to learn, so this is what I do since we are a needs centred service. But as a tutor, I found using only text based methods very frustrating, and recognised that some of the participants were not responding as well as others to this approach. So while undertaking my Higher Diploma in Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland when I was required to facilitate the Higher Diploma class, I took the opportunity to do something with music. I devised a workshop with a facilitator who teaches poetry and English. She picked out a poem, which I then examined to decide whether it would be suitable for soundscaping. I did not want a poem that was too obscure, vague or abstract since it could make it more difficult to know how to represent in sound the words, or images the words suggested. The chosen poem had many words that suggested sounds. I think music and sound can help people to think about words more deeply.

The following is the exercise that participants are asked to do in the class. I give it as a handout in workshops. The sound exercise is part of a larger workshop I do around spelling methods. It has been the central part of some workshops and sessions with learners and with tutors, and at other times a section of a larger workshop.

### **Sound Exercise: 2005**

The objective is to represent images and words from the poem in and through sound. I go through step by step what I want the participants to do and I ask them to read the following poem and we discuss it.

#### **A Tray Of Eggs**

*It's not the hens that matter, scratching among the nettle roots at the orchard's edge, though much might be made of their red foppish cockscombs, their speckled feathers overlapping and the stutter of their daft, deft pecking.*

*Nor is it the road pedalled by heart to the farm,*

*the known fields never the same, turning from a greenness to grain, revolving, resolving into rows of straight seedlings, stubble burnt or interred under furrows.*

*Not even the ride shared with my two-year-old child, astride the crossbar, breathing the blown scents he's making his own unknowingly, being alive to vibrations of place this admired Ford tractor amplifies.*

*But what counts more than these small pleasures are the eggs we bring home in boxes and softly transpose into the bevelled holes in the cardboard tray, the domes of these thirty shells that will break like the days to come.*

*Michael Laskey*

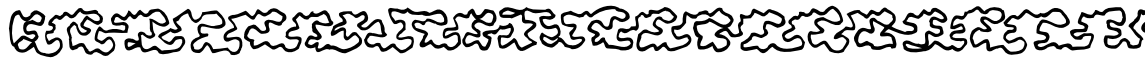
*(from the poetry book 'Being Alive')*

I usually divide participants into similar sized groups. If there are only two people they may choose to work alone. Then the groups are given the choice to pick one verse of the poem given out or they can soundscape the whole poem if they wish. Participants are asked to create a soundscape or in other words, to interpret the poem through sound. I tell them: "You can use your voice, or your body, such as clicking your fingers. You may find something in the room to use to make a sound. The possibilities are endless. Experiment with using the instruments to create a picture of sound to accompany the images, words and the story of the poem and how it speaks to you."

As a starting point I say to participants: "What sound do the words, images, and phrases in the poem suggest? How can they be given a voice? The soundscape can be as sparse or busy as you wish. The poem can be narrated or just soundscaped, do what you are comfortable with. If you have any questions, please ask."

To put them at ease, I explain that part of the process of expressing the self through sound involves exploring and experimenting with instruments and that this may lead to questioning and can involve feelings of confusion, which is okay, just trust yourself. There is no right or wrong way to do this.

I ask participants to take around ten minutes in the group to sound out the poem and then, if they wish, they will be asked to perform it when ready. I make sure that they are comfortable with the idea of performing and that they know they have a choice not to take part, if they wish.



I say to them "Have fun!"

I am very pleased the way the participants respond to the exercise. They are very open to my suggestions. I am amazed by their creativity - no one group or individual has interpreted the exercise in the same way. There is an overall sense that they really have to think about the words, what the words mean and how they can make the words come alive through sound.

### Conclusion

This approach draws on a wide range of intelligences such as linguistic, musical and kinaesthetic. It allows the students and tutors to think differently. They have the opportunity to reflect upon their soundscaping experience during our discussions and through the evaluation I give out at the end, where we also look at how they might use what they have learned in the future. I hope to continue to improve and develop this approach within literacy learning.

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RaPAL Conference 2005

### A Recipe for Happiness

An ounce of early October's rain  
 A slice of leaves of all colours and  
 shapes drifting to the ground  
 Mix up well  
 With a squeeze of waking in the  
 morning  
 Half a cup of gentle breeze swirling the  
 leaves  
 And a large tablespoon of birds singing  
 and flying across the sky  
 Add a freshly picked stroll around the  
 mall  
 Stir in a splash of getting home to relax  
 Add the mess of a disco dancing on a  
 Saturday night  
 Bake slowly with dancing to all the  
 different sounds of music  
 Add a pinch of going to work on an  
 autumn morning  
 Sprinkle with a tasty portion of Chinese  
 food  
 Pour in a glass of wine  
 Serve with a lot of flavoured nibbles  
 And there you are the recipe's done.

Paula Mallon  
 Armagh College, Northern Ireland

### The Future!!

I can see the future.  
 I don't know what I've seen,  
 I want to turn the clock back  
 And walk through fields of green.

There are none left you know,  
 Just buildings of brick and stone.  
 They ripped up all the earth you know,  
 Stripped her to the bone.

We can't go out in the daylight now,  
 The sunrays melt the skin,  
 We only venture out at night,  
 When dawn breaks, go back in.

We have books that show us how it  
 was,  
 Pictures of a world we lost.  
 A perfect race of health humans,  
 But was it worth the cost,

I wish I could swim in the sea again,  
 Or feel sunlight on my face.  
 I wish we'd seen the warning signs,  
 And not ended up in this place!

Anonymous  
 County Armagh, Northern Ireland

# Using Poetry to teach Adult Basic Skills Literacy

Alison Earey

Alison Earey is a Lecturer in Dewsbury College's Skills for Life Department. She started teaching in Basic Skills two years ago at the age of 37 after advice from a careers adviser.

## Introduction

After using poetry on four occasions over the last two teaching years I have been inspired to consider the beneficial impact upon students in more depth; this paper is a summary of my findings.

When I first used poetry in a teaching environment, it was for an observed lesson as part of a series of lessons on writing: writing session 3 - planning, drafting & editing. The aim of the lesson was not to learn to write poetry, but to consider the stages in writing that had already been discussed in previous weeks - audience and purpose, format and style - and to add to them planning, drafting and editing. After employing this process, the students should then have produced a piece of poetry at the end of the session.

The result was that the students did employ the process and produced some wonderful pieces of text, which I was then able to display in the classroom. At the time I did not realise the impact that the session would have upon my teaching. One student in particular stands out: an eighteen year old male student who I had been struggling to inspire and interest. He set out his planning, took on the idea with energy and produced an inspiring poem on the topic of winter.

I asked myself, how was it that a young man, who I wouldn't have thought would be interested in poetry, took to the task with such enthusiasm and achieved so well? This question motivated me to use poetry again, at a later date, when the group were to produce a piece of collaborative work for presentation at Adult Learners' Week. On this occasion, I spent more time discussing examples of poetry and the emotions that they evoked before starting the group work process of writing the poem. Once again the result was very successful and we were able to proudly display the group's work at an event that adult learners attended from all over the Dewsbury area. This caused a lot of pride among the group and enhanced the sense of teamwork, which benefited the individuals in the group for the rest of the academic year. Once again, I was pleased with the success of this lesson and amazed that poetry seemed to inspire students in a way that other pieces of text did not.

So, this last academic year, I repeated the first session on planning, drafting and editing and devised a new session, the aim of which was to integrate all of the writing skills. During this session, I gave the students the choice of writing a descriptive piece on shells, or writing a poem based on a picture by Kandinsky entitled, 'Colour study: Squares with concentric circles', which I displayed on the board. The results of both were beneficial, but the poems that were based on the painting were stunning. The grammar, spelling and punctuation were far from perfect, nevertheless the flavour and essence of each student's creative thoughts were clearly displayed on the page.

Here is an example of the work produced, used with permission:

### **My Inner Child**

*There is a task, I must fulfil.*

*Must close my eyes so my inner child comes to life.*

*I open my eyes there he is with so much colour. Must have fun lose control like that child with his entire colour.*

*Run rings round and round painting rainbows on the walls.*

*Playing games of hurt and anger in the playground with the other.*

*Must stay calm, in order, with this colour.*

*Must have style and grace with all this colour.*

*Must section all this off like my inner child with all this colour.*

*Horizontal and vertical lines are lines for the future with this colour.*

*Fulfil my task with my inner.*

Arfeen Rehman

### **Why does poetry work?**

So, with this experience of teaching and the beneficial results, I decided to look more deeply into the issue of teaching using poetry. As Sedgwick (2001) puts it:

*My real passion is the capacity that the writing of poetry has to teach us about ourselves, our language and our relationship with the world around us. This mysterious process enables approaches to two kinds of truth - the truth that is the end of an intended search, and the truth that surprises the writer. (p.41)*

Sedgwick also argues that in order to write good poetry, you need to read it. For the purposes of the adult students' learning from writing, I am not sure that they necessarily needed to read it in depth in order to write. One of the benefits for adults who are developing their writing ability, is that writing poetry can enable them to explore feelings and emotions and express them without constant nagging concern about errors. Having the freedom to write in paragraphs, diagonal lines, acrostic pattern, or any other form that they may choose, releases them from the teacher's constant expectation which exists in all other forms of writing. If I asked a student to write a letter, whether formal or informal, I would expect them to follow a predetermined layout. If I asked them to write a note it would still follow a particular structure, albeit loosely. When it comes to writing a poem the teacher is free to say, 'let it take any form that you choose'. Spiro (2004) says that:

*It became clear to me that the messages generated by the communicative classroom were worthy, but simply not enough. The learner had more to communicate, and the structures we were teaching had more messages to yield than we had yet explored. (p.5)*

### **Incorporating Poetry into the Curriculum**

This ability to explore feelings and emotions, in the words of Sedgwick (2001), "enables writers to communicate in the most subtle ways, both with themselves and with each other".(p.47) Communication is a key part of the adult curriculum, indeed in the introduction to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum DfES (2001) it states that: "Literacy covers the ability to: speak, listen and respond; read and comprehend; write to communicate".(p.3) At every level in the curriculum (E1 - L2) students are expected to write to communicate. Obviously the detail and depth varies greatly between levels, but the fact is that all students, of whatever writing ability, have opinions and can learn to express those opinions in a written form.

If we can capture and foster that knowledge so that the students can learn to express themselves, we have the beginning of effective writers; what can be more satisfying than realising, for possibly the first time, that you have a voice? These students have often missed large parts of their schooling, for whatever reason, and very often feel that they are useless both to themselves and society; giving them a voice to express themselves could give them the

impetus to pursue their learning when they are facing a tough challenge. As Kazemek & Rigg (1995) put it: "Poetry helps us to understand ourselves and our world; it helps us to see ourselves and our world in new ways" (p.4).

An article in *Basic Skills* magazine, March 2003, by adult basic skills tutor Anne Ryland, about integrating poetry into adult literacy teaching, states that:

*The reading and writing of poetry can be an excellent complement to literacy courses, especially when interwoven to consolidate existing skills. Students can only benefit from discovering that poetry is uplifting, enriching and above all, open to them.(p.31)*

My experience is that poetry enables students the creativity and freedom to write; something about the nature of writing poetry enables them to engage more of themselves than when writing for functional purposes. Wormser & Cappella (2000) argue this so strongly that they say:

*Poetry is above all a physical experience. It is the stuff of sound and rhythm and speech, of muscle voice box and vision and breath and pulse. It affects us physically when we speak it and listen to it. Without that physical basis there is no poetry. (p. xviii)*

They argue that it encompasses the whole of the human form - in a sense, a holistic form of writing.

### **Possible Problems**

Of course, there are possible pitfalls with writing poetry without clear boundaries: it may be that a student is left floundering out of a sense of uncertainty that arises from the freedom; it may be that there is so little form to the completed work that it hardly stands as a poem; the grammar, punctuation and spelling may be so badly constructed that there is little sense to the poem. In my experience, I may have spent many hours trying to teach the rudimentary essentials of literacy, and yet it is only when students take control over editing their own work that these essentials are digested and usefully employed by the student.

In addition to this Kazemek & Rigg (1995) argue that students are so obsessed with the detail of pleasing the teacher and doing what they are 'supposed to do' that they fail to appreciate the benefits of writing; they can get bogged down in



the minutiae and lose the sense of purpose:

*For many years we have studied, researched, and written about adult literacy, and we have worked with adult literacy students. Whether they are reading or writing, most of our students have been quite concerned about "getting it right"... Our study, research, and work with these students have convinced us that this over-attention to tiny fragments of language and this over concern with correctness holds these students back. (p. 88)*

### **In the Future**

In the future, I intend to continue to use poetry as a way of engaging students in the writing process. I am also keen to try out some of the suggestions that I have located, using poetry to develop and extend students' reading ability.

I am keen to encourage students who write poetry by helping them to enter their work into adult literacy competitions and by combining

students' written work (including poetry) in an anthology at the end of each academic year.

I would welcome any insights and information on this subject. Contact details:

Alison Earey - aearey@dewsbury.ac.uk.

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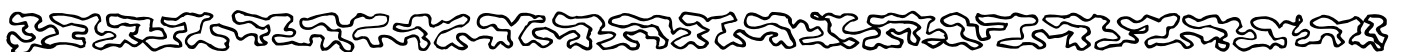
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## **Creativity: a luxury we can no longer afford?**

*Sandie Stratford*

*Sandie Stratford has worked as an Adult Literacy tutor in the London Borough of Brent, and in Louth, a market town in rural Lincolnshire.*

*She is currently Skills for Life CPD Training Co-ordinator for Lincolnshire and Rutland.*

In recent times, pressure of tests and targets has squeezed poetry and other creative writing off the English Skills for Life curriculum.

I have taught adults in Community and then Further Education College settings for many years. We used to prepare students for the Wordpower qualification, which was based upon a portfolio of evidence that they could use reading, writing and speaking and listening skills in everyday contexts; poetry and stories were legitimate genres for writing tasks, provided of course that the 'performance criteria' were fulfilled. We found that using poetry and stories both motivated and liberated students in many ways; it gave us opportunities to play with words and examine their meaning closely, to juxtapose words in interesting ways and to discuss sounds and their effects.

For example, we used to make lists of nouns followed by present continuous verb forms, relating to the season (leaves fluttering, wind whistling, nights chilling, sun lowering etc). This opens up a great deal of discussion on collocation - why can't you say 'leaves clattering', for example? Spot the doubled

consonants, the dropped -e, you spelling rule enthusiasts! A great deal of teaching came out of it.

One of the spin-offs, in those halcyon days before targets, was the pleasure some students got from collecting their creative writing into a magazine. They drew or selected graphics to go with the poems and writings, and the tutor in her own time, mark you typed, photocopied and put it all together into a 'Student Writings' magazine. This became a useful reading resource for present and future students.

With widespread 'digitisation', and ready access to 'google' images, what might now be possible? Can some of the creative force at large among learners of this generation, expressed by the word 'multimodality' (combining the various media to convey the message) be harnessed into 'traditional' literacy learning? And can it still somehow be married to the notions of correctness required by the English Adult Literacy Core Curriculum?

What has been your experience? What do you think?

## Section 2. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary Perspectives

### Editorial

Section 2 has been designated to accommodate more sustained pieces of writing, which have refereed journal status. Both papers in this section are based on workshops given at the 2005 conference and offer very different interpretations of the creativity theme.

Niki Culligan and Frank Sligo, of Massey University, describe how they have been developing collaborative community-university partnerships in New Zealand. Their project examines the relationship between literacy and employment in an area of North Island where a community-identified need for adult literacy research and practice was notified to the university partner. They take up the challenges inherent in the formation of partnerships which have such diverse participants, and show how a positive attitude to the underlying tensions can actually give rise to creative outcomes and applications for research and practice. Their methodology, which has relevance far beyond New Zealand, demonstrates the creative process of collaboration and the balanced positionality they adopt.

The situation of the 'non-voluntary' learner, described in the final article, would seem to be diametrically opposed to creativity in learning. The contested issue of sanctions and incentives for adult basic skills learners is addressed in the paper by Anne O'Grady and Chris Atkin. The principal aim of their study was to consider the implications of government policy requiring specified groups of adults to attend provision, by comparing a range of *Skills for Life* learners, both voluntary and non-voluntary. They used a life history methodology and verbatim highlights are included from their interviews with learners. On the basis of their findings of a general reluctance to participate in provision when there is compulsion to attend, O'Grady and Atkin argue for a more flexible approach to supporting adults. Their plea for a response to the needs and aspirations of adult learners, 'without the restrictive framework of time and sanction', reminds us yet again of the importance of creativity in adult literacies learning.

*Maxine Burton, Co-editor*

## Developing co-creative community-university research relationships: Experiences within a New Zealand community

*Niki Culligan and Frank Sligo*

*Niki Culligan is the Project Manager and Associate Professor and Frank Sligo is the Project Leader of a NZ study into literacy and employment. Both are based within the Department of Communication and Journalism at Massey University, NZ, and share a strong interest in issues of adult literacy, employment, communication, and community-based research.*

### Introduction

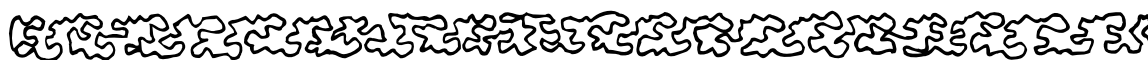
This paper examines the processes behind the collaborative community-university research partnerships that form the Wanganui Literacy and Employment (L&E) Project. Prior discussions of university-community relationships have focused on the tensions and the challenges necessarily inherent within these partnerships (Harper, Bangi, Contreras, Pedraza, Tolliver, & Vess, 2004; Kelly, Azelton, Lardon, Mock, Tandon, & Thomas, 2004; Mohatt, Hazel, Allen, Stachelrodt, Hensel, & Fath, 2004; Arellano, Barcenal, Bilbao, Castellano, Nichols, & Tippins, 2001; Riehl, Larson, Short, & Reitzug, 2000). This paper argues that while these tensions and challenges are inherent within this type of project, they need to be framed positively within a context of future movement, in that, without

these very processes, creative applications for both research and practice would not be forthcoming.

This paper seeks firstly to offer a brief overview of the adult literacy situation in New Zealand (NZ) and a description of the Wanganui Literacy and Employment Project. It then moves on to discuss a definition of creativity and a model of development of co-creative relationships. Finally, it describes how this definition and model fit within the Literacy and Employment (L&E) project, and gives examples of the creative outcomes that have been a product of these co-creative relationships.

### Adult literacy in New Zealand

A focus on adult literacy in NZ was largely born



from participation in the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey. This survey showed that 40% of employed and 70% of unemployed New Zealanders exhibit poor literacy skills (considered to be that of Level 2 or below) (Ministry of Education, 2002). A 2002 Ministry of Education paper stated that while continued growth in job opportunities was expected, this growth would be increasingly constrained by shortages of skilled people. It further stated that functional literacy skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy were essential for coping in today's labour market and provide a foundation on which further learning and training could be achieved (Ministry of Education, 2002).

This led to the argument that a key priority therefore, must be raising the literacy skills of those adults with pressing literacy needs.

### **The Literacy and Employment project**

The Foundation for Research, Science, and Technology (FRST) fund the L&E project, which is based in the Wanganui and Districts region of the North Island. The genesis of the project came from a community identified need for adult literacy research and research-based practice. This was brought to the attention of the university partner through a network of personal relationships.

The L&E project has four objectives:

1. To establish adult literacy needs of both employed and unemployed in the Wanganui and Districts region.
2. To identify the social, attitudinal, and economic barriers to adult literacy, numeracy, and analytical thinking skills of employed and unemployed in Wanganui and Districts.
3. To evaluate how effectively adult literacy programmes secure employment outcomes.
4. To examine adult literacy learning processes and their relationship to employment.

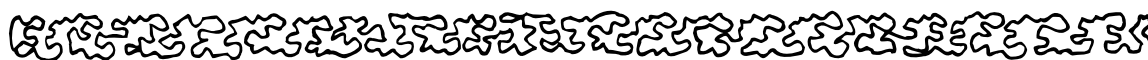
The project takes a multi-method approach to address these four objectives. One of the first methods included a general community telephone survey to determine views on employment issues in the Wanganui area. This was followed by interviews with adult literacy providers, and adult literacy participants and non-participants. The participant and non-participant interviews sought to determine what background factors were influential to the respondents' formal education, their thoughts on their courses (if participants), their thoughts on employment issues, their motivations, and their involvement in their community. Interviews and

focus groups are currently running with employers and stakeholders (those with an interest in the research) to determine their needs with regard to literacy and employment. Case studies and action research programmes are also beginning to be developed. As an example, one case study involves working with people pulled from literacy programmes to form a task force to help rebuild parts of Wanganui after mass flooding in 2004. This group is of particular interest as they were not subjected to the usual processes required when hired for a job, for example, filling out job application forms, or attending interviews. Some of these participants have now moved on to other jobs they would not have obtained before, as they did not have the social networks to find them. The following questions are proposed for this case study: is this type of process a model for future use, for example, a route to employment for long-term unemployed, or those with low literacy skills? Is this a way of breaking down the assumptions inherent around needing literacy to perform in employment? Is this a means of enhancing confidence, images of self-worth, and social capital for the unemployed and those deemed to have low literacy levels?

Funded for three and a half years, beginning in early 2004, Massey University has three major community partners, and one further subcontractor. The differing perspectives of the university and four community partners/subcontractors have necessitated challenges of each others' viewpoints and actions throughout the duration of the project to date. The authors argue, however, that these challenges and associated tensions should not be seen as negative to the research process, but instead as a process of creativity. Also, the challenges addressed in this paper need to be viewed within the context of the developing methods above (as examples of the outputs that can be derived from such a diverse project and team).

### **Creativity and co-creative relationships**

Creativity is defined here as "the process by which ideas are generated, connected and transformed into things that are valued" (Walesh & Henton, 2001). Guzman (1994) describes co-creative relationships as occurring "when leaders and followers work together in a reciprocally responsible relationship based upon a common purpose" (p. 4). Guzman and Earll (1994, cited by Guzman, 1994) go further to state that these relationships are ones in which "participants can create new meanings, connections, influences, changes and purposes through an evolving,



dynamic flow of human energy” (p. 5).

Guzman (1994) proposes a model that she claims is essential for the development of co-creative relationships within a learning community. This model comprises of structural, facilitative, and harmonising agents. Structural elements include participants, structures, processes, experiences, and culture. Facilitative elements include communication, trust, change, ritual, and a common purpose. Balance within each of these factors provides the harmonising element. This paper describes each of these elements and the authors' experiences with them in turn.

## The Guzman Model

### Structural Elements

#### Participants

The project team is characterised by great diversity. Within the university team there is diversity in terms of discipline background and quantitative and qualitative approaches. Within the community team there is diversity within roles (both managers and practitioners), and community sector involvement. Within the project team overall there is also diversity with regard to culture, ethnicity, age, background, and gender. Guzman (1994) states that the greater the diversity of the team, the greater the challenges that will face that team.

#### Structures and Processes

Initially, the project was discussed as a participative endeavour. Participatory research has been defined as an:

*"approach to social change that challenges the way knowledge is produced with conventional social science methods and disseminated by dominant educational institutions. Through alternate methods, it puts the production of knowledge back into the hands of the people where it can infuse their struggles for social equality, and for the elimination of dependency and its symptoms"* (Trent University, n.d., 19).

This approach involves equal partnerships between all the parties involved and a democratic approach to decision making.

Another approach, collaboration, is defined by the New Oxford Dictionary (1998) as to "work jointly on an activity, especially to produce or create something" (cited by Solesbury, 2000, p. 3). Finally, a third approach to inter-agency

research is consultation, where differing groups work in an advisory capacity to the core team of a project, giving guidance in certain areas, but not necessarily having full participation in the development and implementation of that project.

Initially, the community partners/subcontractors constructed their viewpoint of the project as situated within a participative framework, while the university saw the project as situated within a collaborative approach. These differing expectations, emphasised by differences in definition of the terms participatory, partnership, and collaboration, resulted in challenges to the university-community partnership on a number of structural issues.

Primarily, the university was challenged as to the practical long-term outcomes of the research. The objectives were viewed as being largely derived within the university and primarily research-based, as opposed to practically-focused.

From these discussions, four community objectives were developed independently from the university. These add a community-focused long-term approach to the project. These four objectives are:

1. Achieving positive, tangible, and practical outcomes for the Wanganui community, with a well-researched plan of action for medium-long term 2005-2015 to address identified issues relating to literacy.
2. Establishing a database of meaningful, relevant information relating to the links between literacy and employment in Wanganui and identifying links to other social issues e.g. crime, health, and housing; and providing benchmarks to measure future progress.
3. Developing collaboration between agencies within the Wanganui region, to strengthen the community and social infrastructure for future work and projects.
4. Building the research capacity within Wanganui.

Because of the hierarchical structure of the project with the community partners as subcontractors to the university, and the university as the only contract holder with the funding body, the university felt tensions within itself. There were responsibilities to the funding agency in terms of milestone achievement, and there were responsibilities to the community in terms of meeting their needs (one example of which was the time required to engage with consultative practices with the wider community

to ensure integrity (or meaningfulness) of the research).

Prior articles (Sligo & Culligan, 2005; Sligo & Comrie, 2005) have outlined how, at least initially, the university team was primarily focused on outcomes from the research, while the community's focus rested on process. Interestingly, the university team felt that at least initially, there was a reversal of stereotypical roles such as of the university as 'ivory tower'. Some members of the community partners/subcontractors seemed more interested in ideas of process, self-reflection, and theory building than making something happen (which was the university's focus).

While this was initially seen as a tension in the research, and something that needed to be resolved, it can be seen as a co-creative process. The community constantly challenged the university to be self-reflective, to question their practices and ways of doing things, and to discuss the purpose behind their actions. This enforced self-reflection and justification of practices allowed not only the community to understand better where the university was coming from, but also the university to better understand their involvement in the construction of the research process, and the processes that were taken for granted within this.

The university focus on outcomes also meant that the community did not become focused solely on the process at the expense of the outcomes. To address the concern of appropriate collaboration, while also meeting milestones, a Steering Committee and Operational Committee were formed. The Operational Committee involves regular meetings held specifically for those who are involved in the operational tasks of the project (and includes both university and community partner/subcontractor members). This group is vested with the power to make decisions about how best to achieve tasks within the project within the timeframes. These regular meetings allow progress against yearly milestones to be measured, and permit an overview of the requirements of the funding body. They also permit decision-making power at the operational/researcher level of the project, which challenges, to some extent, traditional hierarchical structure.

The Steering Committee contains four community and four university members. This Committee is responsible for the overall strategic direction of the project and for discussing any issues brought to it, if a decision at the

operational level cannot be reached.

These two structures ensure that the entire team works together to generate ideas, and also ensures that these ideas are connected to both research and practical realms (thus being transformed into things of value for both researchers and practitioners).

### **Experiences and Culture**

Many academic papers have been produced on the differing ways of knowing that are evident in community-university relationships (e.g. Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, Beckingham, 2004; Arellano, Barcenal, Bilbao, Castellano, Nichols, & Tippins, 2001; Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Rebovich, Wodarski, Hurley, Rasor-Greenhalgh & Stombaugh, 1994).

Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott, and Trow (2004) suggest that there are two modes to knowledge: Mode 1 where problems are set and solved within a context "that is largely governed by the largely academic interests of a specific community" (p. 3). Mode 1 is characterised by homogeneity, is uni-disciplinary and hierarchical, and tends to preserve its form. Within Mode 2, knowledge is carried out in a context of application. Mode 2 is characterised by heterogeneity, and is transdisciplinary, heterarchical, and transient. Mode 2 is considered to be a more socially accountable and reflexive mode of research, which brings together a wider, more temporary set of practitioners and/or researchers to collaborate on an issue in a specific and localised context. In this view of research, the researcher is not seen as 'objective', but as one whose role necessitates self-reflection on their own biases and views within which they design, implement, and interpret the research.

The L&E project strives to situate itself under the Mode 2 form of research, however, Mode 1 practices are still inherent in the design. The structure of the funding ensured that academically acceptable methodologies and outputs were primary within the project design. These Mode 1 practices were sometimes at odds with the Mode 2 ideal that all knowledge and development of tools for use in the research be a co-constructive process.

One example of this was the development of interview questions. From the university's past experiences of working with community in consultative practices, the university team had drafted a list of questions and sent them out to the community partners/subcontractors for

comment. These questions were met with criticism, at which the university team was perplexed. It was only after several meetings that the university realised that the dissemination of ideas without discussing these with the community partners/subcontractors first did not allow for adequate collaboration and meaningful development that should be part of a co-constructive process.

However, in tension with this, was the admission from the community partners/subcontractors that they did not necessarily have the financial resources afforded to them by their subcontracts to give the time to commit to developing these questions in a joint manner with the university team. Eventually, it was negotiated that the university would follow a template put forward by one of the community partners, that outlined theme areas, key information needed, and the actual questions, and that the team would all come together to discuss these in a half-day session.

This template allowed the university to put forward their ideas and suggestions, and to do so in a way in which the community could then see the purpose and thinking behind each of the questions that had been developed, thus adding their own thoughts to these in the discussion. The authors are, however, aware that even though a process was created within which both the university and the community could work, which resulted in a set of interview questions with which the university and the community agreed, the tensions inherent in creating this process were directly caused by challenges to traditional ways of knowing.

A primary goal of the university and indeed the community is research of international quality which, when viewed from a university perspective, requires rigorous, structured, theory-based methods that will stand up to international scrutiny. From a community and university perspective, this research must also stand up to the scrutiny of the practitioners and stakeholders who are the end-users of such knowledge. To work together to achieve both goals, the community and the university teams had to be very aware of their own biases and assumptions. Within this necessary process of self-reflection, the university has also challenged the community to reflect on its processes of decision making and appropriate research methods.

For example, traditional community ways of

knowing were challenged by the university in initial discussions where the community partners/subcontractors positioned themselves as spokespeople for the community end-users, using such phrases as “the community thinks” or “the community feels”. While the wealth of knowledge that the community partners/subcontractors had about the sectors of the Wanganui community within which they worked was firmly acknowledged, the university team believed that ‘community’ was not a unitary phenomenon. The university in turn, also cannot realistically expect to speak on behalf of all university-educated people. Thus, there is an identified need for each member of the project team, both university and community, to be critically aware of the biases and agendas that influence their representation of issues to others.

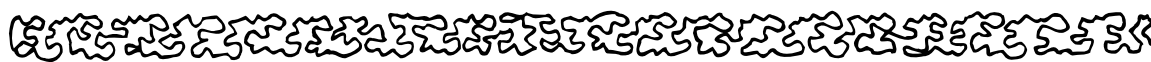
## **Facilitative Elements**

### **Communication**

Within the project team there was the realisation that communication was the key to working through any challenges that would present themselves. However, communication was, at least initially, a challenge in itself. Because of the time constraints on the research introduced by the funding structure, and the geographical constraints (the community and university teams were separated from each other by a two-hour return trip), strong working relationships were slow to form and are still growing. Both the community and the university had to learn to find ways of communicating with one another that minimised misinterpretations. Initially, the university and community tended to take each others' words at face value, assuming a common language and meaning. One example of this misinterpretation was the earlier mention of differing meanings for the terms 'partnership', 'participatory', and 'collaboration'.

### **Trust**

The development of trust is primary in attributions related to communications. As one community partner put it in an initial meeting: “we will be offended or misinterpret what each other is saying in the negative until we begin to attribute higher intentions to what the person is saying” (personal communication, 2004). This higher intention encompassed believing that the person's reasons for challenging others were based on a common commitment to the project's success, rather than the furthering of any individual agendas. Initially, face-to-face communication was very important; however, as



the project has grown, face-to-face communication has become less frequent and most of the communications are now carried out via email and phone, perhaps illustrating the diminishing need to discuss every action face-to-face and therefore, the beginnings of the development of trust.

The development of trust with the wider Wanganui community stakeholders was hampered, in the university team's perception, by the view that the wider community felt that research was arbitrary. In early meetings with a group of stakeholders, the idea that university researchers only asked arbitrary questions, collected their data, and then left with no benefits to the participating community was strongly put across. These challenges to the project team were based on the stakeholders' experiences of high expectations of past research and funding promises which had never come to fruition. The university realized that it needed to rebuild and refocus expectations of research, as well as address the legacy of past research and funding promises that had been carried out in the region. Also, the idea that research can be beneficial and a practical outcome in and of itself needed to be explored and accepted.

To obtain buy-in from the stakeholders and their assistance, it was necessary for them to see the necessity of research before and/or during action. Through community partner support, networks, and continued dialogue through joint community-university presentations, realistic expectations of the research, as well as involvement in developing future methods, has evolved within this same group of stakeholders. The community partners' explicit presence in these interactions gave, and still gives, a credibility to the research process that is invaluable to ensuring wider community involvement. It is through these links that co-creative relationships with stakeholders and those organizations outside the five direct members of the project team have begun to be built.

Some examples of valued outcomes from this process of building trust include developing action research projects with two community tertiary provider agencies, one of which is investigating methods of teaching self-reflection abilities within an adult literacy programme. The other is exploring those individual and environmental factors that are related to or predict motivation to learn, subsequent learning,

and goal achievement outside the course. A third action research project is in development with a local primary school. This primary school has a significant proportion of the children with fathers in the local prison. A proposed family literacy project is to work on ways of allowing the children to travel to the prison on perhaps a weekly basis to read books with their fathers. These projects work against the legacy and stereotypes left by some research of it not having direct benefits or changes for the community within which it is held, and also gives the community control over what they value to explore within the context of research-based practice.

### **Change**

Guzman (1994) states that change in any system is quite threatening and:

*"the fight against change (presumably to maintain a status quo) freezes human resources in time, locks individuals and groups in conflict (and accompanying drama) and prevents the natural flow of the process from continuing"* (p. 14).

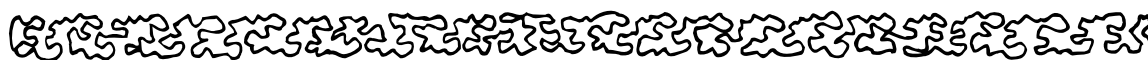
This project is causing change both within the community and the university. Previous ways of approaching issues from both the community and the university angle have had to be re-thought within the processes and assumptions of the respective partners/subcontractors.

### **Common Purpose**

Many of the tensions and challenges that have contributed to the project team's developing co-creative relationships have been able to be overcome through the sharing of a common purpose. This common purpose involves a drive to understand better the needs and barriers that those with low literacy in the community face, and also to learn and use the tools of research to ensure and influence 'exemplary practice'.

### **Achieving Balance**

The university-community relationship possesses both tensions and challenges, but it is argued that these contribute to a form of balance that Guzman (1994) has described as "equilibrium of disequilibrium" (p. 13). It has been argued in this paper that the tensions, challenges, and frustrations experienced are situated within a common commitment to the project's success that all project partners/subcontractors share. Issues of distrust, communication, differing ways of knowing, and differing foci and perspectives can all be worked on due to this common



commitment. It has also been argued that it is only through these tensions, challenges, and frustrations that co-creative relationships are formed, and creative outcomes developed, that are not solely university nor community-based, but are an amalgamation of the two.

In conclusion, it is the authors' belief that these tensions and challenges are necessary in order for differing perspectives to be heard, co-creative relationships to develop, and for creativity to flourish.

## Acknowledgments

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This paper outlines issues from the perceptions and experiences of the university team members only and does not necessarily reflect the perceptions of the community partners/subcontractors.

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# Forced to learn or choosing to learn: challenges and concerns for non-voluntary adult basic skills learners

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## Introduction

It has been estimated that as many as one in five adults in the UK has difficulties with literacy and/or numeracy skills (DfEE, 1999). Raising the standards of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills amongst all adults of working age within the United Kingdom has become one of the government's highest priorities (DfEE, 2001).

*Skills for Life*, a national strategy to tackle the needs of adults in England with minimal LLN skills, was launched by the UK government in March 2001 (DfEE, 2001). The strategy expressed the aspiration to improve the skills of those groups where LLN needs were greatest and where most impact could be made. Two of the key groups identified in the report were the unemployed and benefit claimants (DfEE, 2001:6).

In her work on adults with basic skills needs, Parsons (2002) identified two types of adult learner: motivated learners who recognise the need to improve their skills and seek to do so, and latent learners who, whilst having a basic skills need, are unlikely to seek support to improve their skills. Parsons describes a latent learner as one who has a negative view of the future resulting from a past that was likely to include poor socio-economic conditions with limited schooling and a poor employment history. She suggests that the challenge for the government is to be able to motivate adults with a latent need in order to achieve their aim of increasing the LLN skills of these adults.

It is acknowledged (DfEE, 2001:16) that some unemployed adults have a deep-seated reluctance to address their LLN needs and may not evidence any motivation to develop these skills. As a result, a series of pilot schemes was established throughout the welfare-to-work training programmes provided by the government Department for Work and Pensions, more specifically the section called Job Centre Plus, to test whether training programmes with attached incentives and/or sanctions would result in more individuals commencing and completing training provision. Incentives included additional financial rewards, and sanctions included the possibility of withdrawal

of welfare to work allowances. Following a successful evaluation of the pilot programme the government decided to roll out the incentive/sanction regime for all those participating in welfare-to-work training programmes in England from April 2004 (DfES, 2002).

## Research focus

This paper presents preliminary findings from a doctoral study of 44 learners and 10 practitioners/managers who are participating in *Skills for Life* training programmes. The learner participants are unemployed adults participating in a range of *Skills for Life* training programmes across three different institutions: a large further education college, a large male remand prison, and a large private training provider.

The principal aim of the study was to consider the implications of current government policies requiring specified groups of adults (e.g. long-term unemployed adults) to attend *Skills for Life* provision to increase their social and economic potential. In considering this question, the study explored and compared a range of *Skills for Life* learners accessing such provision on a voluntary and non-voluntary basis and also compared the choices of training provision available to them.

## Research methodology

The researcher employed a life history methodology. Life stories, as a methodological approach, have an inherent validity in that they let the storyteller speak in their own words. Atkinson (1998) makes the case that a life story is a collaborative activity between the researcher and the research participant which uses internal consistency as a primary quality check to clarify and make meaning of the life story.

The research sample of learners and practitioner/managers was selected in line with the criteria of the project: all learner participants were attending *Skills for Life* training programmes and the practitioner/manager participants were either teaching or managing such provision. In order for a comparison of learners' experiences to be effective, the researcher spoke to learners who had been assessed as holding literacy and/or numeracy skills between Entry level 1 and Entry level 3. A

key target group identified by the government as needing *Skills for Life* support are long term unemployed adults with low level skills. The target sample for this project reflects this target group . (Entry level, which has three sub-levels, of which 3 is the highest, is the foundation level of the National Qualifications Framework in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, the next level up being Level 1. Confusingly, British Entry Level and Level 1 are roughly equivalent to Levels 1 and 2 of the International Adult Literacy Survey scale, respectively.)

A total of 54 semi-structured life history interviews were undertaken with learner participants and teacher participants during June 2004 and March 2005. Additionally, classroom observations were undertaken. Classroom observations offered triangulation to the study and allowed space for informal interaction, corroboration and confirmation of the data collected during interview. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. A content analytical approach was undertaken, allowing for cross comparison of the available data to identify emerging themes.

Learners across the three participant institutions for the study were asked the same questions. These questions were largely open and allowed the respondent to develop the discussion so that their own story could emerge. From the various responses some key similarities and differences arose, both amongst the group as a whole and between the institutions.

### **The training programmes**

Whilst all participants were engaged in *Skills for Life* training programmes, the three programmes had very different structures.

#### **Private training provider training programme**

The private training provider involved in the study was contracted to deliver a training programme on behalf of Job Centre Plus. The training programme was entitled Basic Employability Training (BET) and was one of a suite of training programmes that Job Centre Plus offered under the umbrella of Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA). This programme is seen by the government as:

*a vehicle for tackling the basic skills and other barriers to employment faced by people with the most severe basic skills problems ... but the key aim of the provision remains to move people into work.* (Webb, 2003:13)

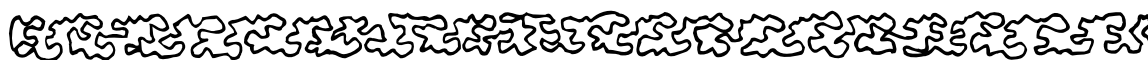
Adults who participate in BET have been in receipt of welfare benefits for 26 weeks and are available for employment. Adults being considered for this programme are required to undertake a skills assessment. If they evidence basic skills below (UK) Level 1 in either literacy or numeracy or both, they are referred to the BET programme. This lasts for a fixed period of 26 weeks and incorporates periods of job search activity, work placement activity, and intensive basic skills support. Adults are required to attend for 30 hours per week. Success on this programme is measured in two ways: by obtaining employment and/or by achieving a *Skills for Life* qualification. Should a participant complete the training programme and remain unemployed they are unable to re-enter the programme unless they evidence a further 26 weeks of unemployment. Once a participant has achieved an Entry 3 qualification, they no longer qualify for entry into the BET programme.

Adults who it is felt may be eligible to attend the BET programme, but who decline to attend either the skills assessment and/or the BET programme itself, can be directed by Job Centre Plus staff to attend. If adults continue to decline to attend either the skills assessment or the BET programme sanctions can be imposed on them by Job Centre Plus staff in the form of loss of welfare benefits. However, based on the data collected at interview, it must be recognised that, in reality, sanctions are rarely imposed on unemployed adults who are eligible for the BET programme. The concern is rather to use the threat of sanctions to ensure clients' compliance with Job Centre Plus procedures.

Adults who are eligible to attend the BET programme and do attend automatically receive a training allowance and partial reimbursement of any travel costs incurred. Adults achieving a *Skills for Life* qualification at Entry 3 or above also received a financial reward.

#### **Further Education training programme**

The further education college involved in this study offered a large suite of programmes which were all designed to support and develop the acquisition of LLN skills. As well as having discrete basic skills classes, it also ran courses in which the LLN component was embedded within the course itself. Examples of such programmes include pottery, digital photography, art, history and IT classes. Learners could access as many of these classes as they chose. The classes ran throughout the week, both during the day and in the evenings. Classes were designed using a scheme of work and differentiated to meet the



learners' needs. Learners did not receive any financial incentive for attending.

### **Prison training programme**

The programme provided by the prison, once again, offered dedicated basic skills classes. Additionally, learners were able to access classes in IT, cookery, art and life skills. At the time of the study these classes were not linked by a basic skills theme but were run as discrete programmes. Learners were able to access between three and five sessions of education per week. Learners who attended education classes were eligible to receive a lower payment than their counterparts undertaking workshops (in this prison the payment was 75 pence per session attended for education compared to approximately £3.00 for workshop activities).

### **Preliminary findings**

#### **Types of learner**

There appeared to be two very different groups of *Skills for Life* learner accessing adult basic skills training provision: learners who were engaging in a programme of training electively (voluntary learners) and learners who were being mandated to engage in a programme of training (non-voluntary learners). This finding supports the findings of Parsons (2002) who describes adult learners who are motivated and adult learners who are latent.

#### **Voluntary learners**

This type of learner was evident in both further education (FE) training programmes and prison training programmes. However, their reasons for attending training were very different. Voluntary learners were much less likely to be found engaging in training programmes being delivered by the private training provider on behalf of Job Centre Plus.

Learners engaged in FE provision generally attended training with a clear idea about why they wanted to be there and what they wanted to achieve, and also had an idea about how long it might take to achieve their goals. For all learners spoken to within this sector in this study, their decision to attend training had coincided with a critical incident for them, or a life change. Examples included being recently separated or divorced, having children who had started compulsory schooling and, interestingly, children who had completed their compulsory education, had moved on and could no longer be relied upon to support the adult in their literacy and/or numeracy needs.

Learners who were attending this training

provision were very likely to recount some periods of truancy from school. They were also likely to have participated in some form of low-skilled employment. Learners engaged in this programme were likely to have been unemployed prior to attending the training programme and, on trying to re-enter the employment market, found their previous employment no longer existed. Alternatively, learners found themselves newly unemployed due to redundancy and were unable to find new employment in the same or a similar sector.

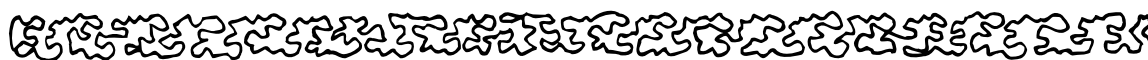
There was also evidence of voluntary learners amongst those engaged in the training provision at the prison. Some of the learners engaged in this training programme also discussed their reasons for attending educational provision. Some attended in order to be better able to write letters home and keep in touch with their family, particularly if they had children with whom they wanted to communicate. Once again, critical incidents featured. Some learners found themselves at the start of a long period of imprisonment and wanted to ensure they used the time effectively to achieve the education which had previously passed them by. They were able to discuss in some detail the ways in which they wanted to use the education system to ensure they had the skills they felt they would need in order to gain employment on re-entry into society and so avoid further periods of imprisonment.

For some repeat offenders, this was an activity they routinely undertook when they found themselves imprisoned but which formed no part of their lifestyle when 'on the outside'.

Voluntary prison learners had also had periods of interrupted compulsory schooling, whether through truancy or expulsion. In addition, some of the participants discussed at some length additional barriers they had faced to acquiring basic skills in their past, including addictions, behavioural difficulties and family difficulties.

*68C Umm. And then I got expelled from school, went to another school, got expelled from that school, went to another school, got expelled from that one, went to another school, and then in the end they just gave up and said no, no we're not, we're not taking him.*

*130C Well, if I hadn't of gone into Care. If, like, the problems with my mum and dad hadn't started up, then, fair enough, I most probably would have been at home,*



*yeah, with a stable, like, I don't know, a stable place to go like kind of thing and get on with my parents and that.*  
(HMP N L 4)

## **Non-voluntary learners**

This type of learner was found to exist both in the prison training programmes and the private training provider's programmes, but not in the further education training programmes.

Learners in the prison attending training programmes on a non-voluntary basis were likely to be doing so for some extrinsic reason. The prison that participated in this study was a large male remand prison and so, whilst inmates had lost their liberty, they could not be mandated to undertake any activities. Therefore, these learners only undertook activities if they wished to. However, some of the reasons given for participating in education would suggest they were extrinsically motivated to attend training provision and could be defined as non-voluntary learners. Some of the reasons learners gave for attending education included gaining extra socialisation time with other inmates or avoiding long periods of 'bang-up', or because attending education was likely to affect their sentencing positively. The following extracts highlight some of the inmates' motivations for attending educational programmes; clearly these include both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations:

*'Cos it gets me out the cell, more than anything.* (HMP N L 3)

*Erm, it was two things one it got me out of the cell, 'cos it's a lot of bang-up in this prison. The second one, I decided that it's about time I learnt and why I can do it without missing out on my children's growth, growing up and as I'm missing out on that in here I might as well do my education, even if it's only for a few years until my appeal comes up, it's something to do, keep me occupied all the time.* (HMP N L 5)

Learners who were attending private training provider training programmes were the most likely of all those in the study to be non-voluntary. When learner participants were asked why they were attending the training programme, the most common reason given was that they had been told they had to by their Job Centre Plus advisor and because of the threat of sanctions and possible loss of benefits, as highlighted below:

*You get sent, don't you, from the dole.*  
(TP L B 009)

*Well, I didn't like the idea but, at end of day you've got to go or no benefits, so ...*  
(TP L B 011)

This type of learner was most likely to have little or no history of employment. A significant number of learners attending the training programme were repeaters, in that they had attended the training programme more than once. Learners described a history of attending a number of government-funded training programmes. Many of the learners also described a history of poor attendance during their compulsory school years or of attendance at special schools for people with identified learning difficulties.

Learners attending this type of training programme were much more likely to be either passive participants in their learning journey or, alternatively, reject it completely. Passive learners, when asked, were unable to discuss why they were attending the training programme, what they planned to learn or had learnt, what they felt they wanted and/or needed to learn, or why they were learning what they were learning. Learners said they did as they were told and what they were told. The following extract demonstrates this attitude towards the training programme:

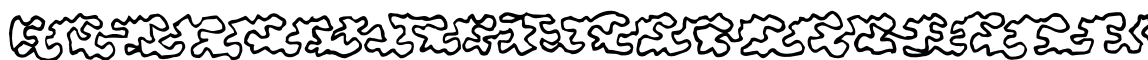
*I didn't want to come. I wanted to stop at home. It were dole what sent me up here.*

*Right. So, why did you come if you didn't want to come?*

*Er, I couldn't tell you. I don't know why they sent me up here. I tried to tell the dole I couldn't read and write. They said 'Oh, give it a try'. I gave it a try and after 26 weeks I still couldn't pick nowt up.*  
(TP L B 008)

Alternatively, learners who were unhappy attending the training programme were happy either not to participate or, alternatively, to disrupt activities in the classroom, and often maximised opportunities for non-attendance without risking being exited from the programme (learners leaving the programme without good reason risk being sanctioned by Job Centre Plus).

Learners who participated in this study stated, without exception, that they preferred the work



experience component of the training programme, even when the work experience bore no relation to any future employment opportunities.

### **Motivation to attend training programmes**

Motivation is described by Rogers (1996) as the keystone of any training programme, suggesting that educators rely on the fact that adults present to a training programme through choice, are interested in the subject and are enthusiastic to learn. Rogers describes motivation taking two forms: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation, according to Rogers, consists of external incentives or pressures, such as attendance requirements or external punishments, and intrinsic factors consist of a series of inner pressures which create a desire for learning changes (Rogers, 1996:87).

As Brooks *et al.* (2001) noted, a major motivator for learners attending basic skills provision is a desire for self-improvement. This finding seems to be supported by those learners who volunteered to participate in *Skills for Life* training programmes.

Non-voluntary participants in *Skills for Life* training programmes, however, were often unable to see why they needed to attend training programmes to improve their basic skills as, often, they did not see themselves as having a basic skills need. They were able to function effectively within the social network in which they lived. As Ekinsmyth and Bynner (1994) observed:

*whether a literacy or numeracy problem is perceived as important probably has more to do with its centrality to individuals in their daily lives than the objective level of performance reached.* (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994:23 quoted in Brooks *et al.*, 2001:9)

Atkin *et al.* (2005) found that learners were often aware of their lack of basic skills but thought they either could not learn or, alternatively, had other priorities. Instead, they developed coping strategies and were only likely to seek help when a need to do so arose. This need often occurred after a change in their circumstances, either personal or professional.

Many of the learners attending Job Centre Plus training provision were unable to see how they could improve their skills by any significant level. To some, the Job Centre Plus training programmes they were attending seemed like a 'return to school' with classroom-based activities

which were dominated by paper exercises. Additionally, many of the participants considered their LLN skills to be adequate.

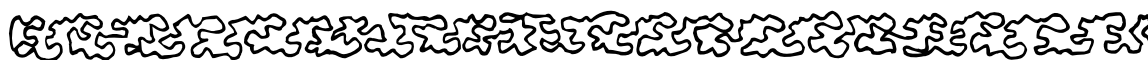
### **Conclusions**

This paper highlights how learners were experiencing the implementation of the strategy when accessing *Skills for Life* training programmes, and argues that making an adult attend a training programme through the use of directions and sanctions does not, for a significant number of attendees, mean full engagement and participation with the programme. In fact, resistance to cooperative participation in such training programmes may be influenced and strengthened by the structural constraints imposed by the programme offered and the subsequent eligibility to rejoin. It is not surprising that learners questioned the value of such training programmes when they rarely lead to better life conditions, in the form of employment. The reality, evidenced by the data, is that they were much more likely to be asked to participate in a further Job Centre Plus training programme following a further period of unemployment, than actually to re-engage with the labour market or take up mainstream further education opportunities.

Interestingly, learners attending BET programmes reported enjoying work-placements more than periods of time within a classroom setting, even if those placements appeared to be of little benefit in terms of achieving sustainable employment. It may prove beneficial for policy makers to consider how training programmes for the unemployed could be structured in such a way to allow learners to decide their place of work and training support needs.

The above findings suggest that there were some similarities amongst adults assessed as having literacy and/or numeracy skills below Level 1, such as prior educational and employment histories. What separated these adults, however, were their reasons for engaging in training programmes to develop these skills. This paper argues that the rigidity of Job Centre Plus training programmes and the lack of a range of training programmes for long-term unemployed adults with low level basic skills to choose from is a major contributing factor to the continuing resistance of this group to engaging in learning to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

It appears that there is a wide range of *Skills for Life* training programmes for those who wish to seek them out. However, for those adults who



are unemployed and claiming benefits the available choice of programmes becomes more limited. What is available is prescriptive, inflexible and general. Training programmes are for a fixed period of weeks and number of hours with a fixed programme of delivery. This allows little or no opportunity to ensure that a programme is designed to meet the individual needs of the learners or that learning will be sustained sufficiently for progress to be made.

Adults who find themselves unemployed for long periods of time do not appear to take an active role in making choices and decisions about the pathway of their lives. When asked to discuss their employment aspirations and what types of work experiences or training experiences they might like to have, they show little or no imagination about what they might like to do or achieve. They appear to be resigned to a constant cycle of being told what training course to attend next, for how long, etc. This type of apathy towards the training programme can lead to a lack of understanding of the value that a training programme could have in terms of supporting the learner to develop their basic skills.

As Atkin *et al.* (2005) point out, for effective delivery the needs and motivations of the adult literacy and/or numeracy learner need to be fully understood. It seems clear that the government would benefit from developing a more flexible approach to the delivery of their welfare-to-work training programmes, which could be targeted towards supporting individual learning needs and focus on personal development which is relevant to the learner's life and experience. The deficit model currently in place actively reinforces the notion of failure (failed to obtain employment, failed to achieve minimum standards of literacy, language or numeracy on assessment, failed to secure employment during the training programme, failed to evidence tangible increase in LLN skills through the acquisition of qualifications, etc). When this is associated with compulsion to attend training programmes through the use of directions and sanctions, it is not surprising that the result is largely a reluctance to participate.

A more flexible approach to supporting adults to develop their LLN skills which embraces the idea of learner persistence (Porter *et al.*, 2005) without continuous attendance may allow for adults to become independent lifelong learners who embrace learning, rather than just 'going through the motions' of attendance without really engaging with the programme. Porter *et al.*

(2005) have demonstrated that, by recognising the chaos of an individual's life, one can plan accordingly. They found that a learner who does not attend class for a couple of weeks because of illness or care requirements but is welcomed back to class without question is more likely to continue to persist in their learning journey.

By considering the needs of adult learners of literacy, language and numeracy, in association with their vocational aspirations and life chaos, without the restrictive framework of time and sanction, those who have experienced long-term unemployment appear to be more able and more willing to re-enter both training and employment

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**Reflections on Enriching Our Lives:  
Poetry Lessons for Adult Literacy  
Teachers and Tutors**

*Francis E. Kazemek and Pat Rigg,  
International Reading Association, 1996*

*Reviewed for RaPAL by Sean Hurl, Literacies  
Tutor, Positive About Literacies, Glasgow.*

Poetry, eh? If you are an irregular reader of poetry, like myself, then it's maybe not something you would consider for a basis of adult literacies work. We may all have our favourites but personally, poetry is not something that I return to often, if at all. However, as this book outlines, there are any number of ways of employing poetry to encourage those beginner or reluctant writers in your literacies learner groups.

After reading through the book, I thought about my own practice and recalled a discussion I've had on many occasions with my learners about using poetry for the concept of scanning. I often choose to recite the following limerick to get across the idea:

*There was a poet from Japan  
Whose poems never did scan.  
When asked why  
He said in reply  
'Cos I try to use as many words in the last  
line as I can.'*

An amusing anecdote perhaps and one that you can use to break the ice with your learners, but after that you may need to look at this book to develop your lesson plans.

In the book the chapters all take the form of lesson plans and give step-by-step detail on how to take forward a lesson based around already prepared texts. The chapters cover topics such as Form Poetry, Oral Performance, Music as Narrative Poetry and Humorous Poetry.

The most illuminating thing for me as a tutor was the everyday experiences that can be seen as poetry, including coffee shop conversations or tales of bravado among young males. These can be used as a stimulus to, or help develop reading and writing.

All of the subjects are presented in a detailed and accessible way. There are specific parts that deal with learner feedback, overcoming

reluctance in learners or how poetry can assist in phonics, grammar and spelling.

As someone who encounters many reluctant writers and readers, some for whom phonics is not necessarily the answer, I feel that everyday poetry, e.g. rap, football chants, or advertising jingles, may lead to more productive avenues of learner study. I welcome this book as a contribution to my practices.

One drawback of the book is the emphasis on the experience of the literacy tutors in the United States. There are references to the black or Hispanic learners and the use of resources that may be more familiar to a North American audience. This, I would hope, should perhaps be seen as a challenge to literacies tutors on 'this side of the pond' and not a reason to ignore the ideas in the book.

By the way pal (to use the Glasgow vernacular) my own favourite poem is Wilfred Owen's '*Dulce e Decorum Est*', and can be found at a poetry website: <http://www.illyria.com/owenpro.html>

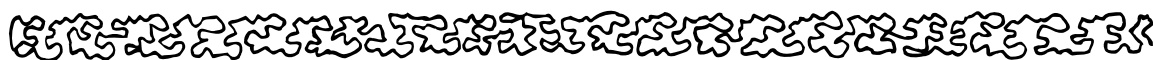
**Hardwired for Hope: Effective  
ABE/Literacy Instructors**

*Evelyn Battell, Leora Gesser, Judy Rose, Jan Sawyer, Diana Twiss. Published by  
Malaspina University College, 2004.  
No ISBN.*

*Copies of the book can be downloaded from  
[www.nald.ca/fulltext/hwired/cover.htm](http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/hwired/cover.htm)*

*Reviewed for RaPAL by Gwynneth  
Whitehouse, a former FE College manager  
and freelance Skills for Life consultant. She  
can be contacted on [gwynneth.w@virgin.net](mailto:gwynneth.w@virgin.net)*

*Hardwired for Hope* contains the results of research which sets out to achieve a deeper understanding of what makes an effective ABE "instructor" in Canada. The authors have engaged in a lengthy process to reach a description of the beliefs, characteristics, styles and strategies of a group of effective practitioners. The process consisted of collaborative research through group meetings, tele-conferencing, autobiographical writing, keeping a journal and interviewing. The themes of the book grew from the autobiographies and journals. It reflects personal views but reaches some global conclusions which appear as recommendations.



I had some concerns that this book, with five authors, three critical friends and contributions from a further seventeen interviewees would lack cohesion but I found the variety of voices stimulating. Whether I was in agreement or not, the messages were powerful. The range of voices means that at times it bounds along and at other times there is a slower more reflective style. The missing component is the voice of the learner. The funding for this part of the collaboration was cut, and I found myself longing to read a learner's perspective on some of the tutors' comments such as

*"I want to share power, but I often don't. Now why is that? I think that choice, when and where to share power, says a lot about my understanding of a "teaching moment" and that there is a time and a place to do some things. This comes from my teaching philosophy. '(p.35)*

The book exposes some of the nagging doubts practitioners have about the effectiveness of the *Skills for Life* strategy. While the Canadian experience is different from ours, there are parallels. There are thought provoking distinctions drawn between such things as the nurturing and the political style or belief of the instructor, or success in the classroom and success in the community. The material does not lend itself to a dispassionate discourse so it raises questions which are not necessarily answered.

I have heard *Skills for Life* practitioners say they are unable to describe adequately for their managers what it is that they do and how it is different from other adult education situations. With a little adaptation to suit the local conditions, the recommendations in the final pages would be valuable to any practitioner who is not happy to see their subject reduced to the achievement of 'levels' or vocational training.

### **Creative Writing. Education, culture and community.**

*Rebecca O'Rourke*

*Leicester: NIACE. ISBN:1862011613.*

*July 2005. £18.95*

*Reviewed for RaPAL by Sarah Rennie, who has taught literacy in a range of settings and now works at Sunderland University in the School of Education.*

Rebecca O'Rourke has been actively involved in creative writing for more than thirty years as student, writer, teacher of writing in both formal and informal settings, organiser of creative writing classes, and as researcher. Her book reflects the breadth and depth of her experience and knowledge. It ranges widely over cultural policy in England (just a couple of references to Scotland and Wales), and the place of literature generally and creative writing in particular within this policy.

It sets out to respond to the broad question:

*Have late twentieth century campaigns for a more democratic and inclusive approach to writing and literature in British cultural policy been successful?*

The very broad conclusion is that, although creative writing has become a central plank of a more inclusive approach to writing, the result has been for it to lose its critical edge within the market led and managerial culture of adult education and cultural policy.

The central part of the book is based on O'Rourke's research into creative writing cultures and practices in Cleveland in the north-east of England (better known as Teesside) since the 1960s. She gives a detailed account of the history of writing groups and classes of different kinds and of the people who participate in them as writers and tutors. The people come alive through their own words as they explain how and why they came to the groups or in some cases didn't because "...I'd feel inferior. That it wasn't for me. I wasn't clever enough. It's a bit above me..."

The book challenges the reader to think about some complex questions:

- What is creative writing?
- Can it be learnt?
- What constitutes pedagogy for creative writing?
- How can progress and value be measured and by whom?
- Are classes a 'comfort blanket' rather than a means of enabling writers to think, challenge and develop a more social and critical position?
- Who can and should teach creative writing?

This is not a handbook with ideas for the literacy teacher; it is an academic book which draws on a wide range of literature on cultural policy,



writing and education. As such it should be of great interest to teachers of literacy who are exploring writing, learning and creativity, possibly within a master's programme. It challenges us to move beyond the sometimes narrow confines of literacy learning and policy and engage with a wider world.

### Invitation to Build Research into Your Practice

Margaret Herrington

*Margaret is an educational consultant and Visiting Professor of Education at the University of Wolverhampton. She can be contacted at mherrington1@aol.com*

For many readers this will seem an unrealistic invitation. Practitioners are often far too busy with their classes to consider 'doing research'. Yet RaPAL has always encouraged the development of links between research and practice and in particular the doing of research in practice.



Several generations of literacy, numeracy and ESOL workers have asked questions about and within their everyday practice, have undertaken research activities and have written up their findings. The NIACE publication, ***Insights from Research in Practice: A Handbook for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Educators***, co-edited by Alex Kendall and myself, and launched this summer at the RaPAL Conference in Sheffield, provides a selection of such work. It details how and why RaPAL members engaged in

research in practice; why they developed their 'living theories' (Whitehead 1989) as well as indicating the knowledge outcomes. It amounts to an invitation to all practitioners to join in.

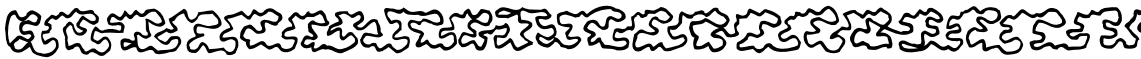
We undertook this task because we felt that all new practitioners should have access to the investigative, creative and democratic traditions within this field. This was not just because we did not want these traditions to be lost as new policy was introduced (i.e. airbrushing such traditions out of the new history of this work) but because they offered the most efficient mechanisms for investigating persistent difficulties with learning literacies.

You only have to think about any students in your groups who are not progressing as they wish, to realise that you have a series of research questions within your practice. As you discuss, hypothesise and try out different approaches, record your results and analyse the findings with your students (part and parcel of good practice), you actually have a research case study in the making. With some additional attention to the strengths and weaknesses of case study approaches in determining the kind of knowledge claim you can make, you will be generating new knowledge. If you think that the knowledge which you can generate does not matter, think about how little there is in the literature about the persistent difficulties you encounter on a daily basis. Think about how little there is on handling the multi-variate analysis with which practitioners have to engage in order to be effective.

We also wanted the book to be an invitation to new teachers to think about their long term professional development in this field. This, too, may be difficult at a time when many training events, activities and courses are being offered, and fitting everything into the short term is at a premium. Even so, we feel that there is need of characterising long term development in this field and the RaPAL collection provides some evidence of this.

In addition, we decided to include a new professional development narrative about dyslexia. In the section entitled *Learning about Dyslexia through Research and Practice*, I wrote a personal narrative which linked past and present by:

- exposing how little I knew at the outset,
- providing examples of learning from systematic discussion with students,
- assessing this 'knowledge' in relation to



- available theories about dyslexia and by integrating the emerging insights with more general theory about literacies and communication, over almost twenty years.

I wanted to demonstrate to new teachers that an important means of professional development is to recognise the research significance of the everyday 'conversations' with students and to continue a connected exploration through a series of projects and posts over time.

This section was consciously written in ways which did not focus heavily on its research status, viz. a demonstration of more critical awareness about the limitations of this kind of reporting as a research method; more explicit connections with bodies of theory about normality/subnormality which underpin so called 'impairments' (e.g. Foucault); more interpretive work on the nature of the dialogues (e.g. Bakhtin) etc. I left them out not because they are not important or very valuable but because practitioners perceive such theorists to be at a

distance from the 'coal face' of practice and I wanted to show that theory generation can begin in practice in ways which are not entirely understood at the outset and without vast knowledge of previous theory. This is an important lesson for practitioners who may still think that research and the development of theory is only for certain groups of professionals in research institutions.

RaPAL continues to argue that research processes are open to all and we hope that this publication will prove a living witness to this.

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## Insights from Research and Practice. A Handbook for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners

*Edited by Margaret Herrington and Alex Kendal*

We would welcome your thoughts and comments about the book and will include a selection of them in the Spring issue. Please email your contribution to [deirdre@dp-associates.org.uk](mailto:deirdre@dp-associates.org.uk) (For further information about the book, or to order a copy please see [www.niace.org.uk/publications](http://www.niace.org.uk/publications))



*Dancers at RaPAL Conference 2005*



# Learning for Living. Developing access to *Skills for Life* for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

*Sophie Whittaker*

*Sophie joined NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) in October 2003, and works as Administration Co-ordinator on the Learning for Living pathfinder project*

NIACE are leading the Learning for Living Consortium working with learners who experience a range of difficulties and barriers in learning literacy, language and numeracy. The aim of the project is to research and develop guidance for teachers, practitioners, carers, support workers and employers. Each set of guidance focuses on a particular development area including: Access to Employment; Pre-Entry and Entry Levels; Bilingual Learners; ESOL and Learning Difficulties; Teacher Training Modules; Family Learning; and training in the use of the Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework for those working in health and social care settings.

July 2005 marked the end of the piloting phase, during which the draft guidance documents were evaluated in over 80 provider sites nationwide. Feedback was received from providers in a variety of contexts such as colleges, prisons and offender institutions, care settings, day centres, work based learning providers and voluntary and community organisations. We have heard how the guidance was used and the challenges that staff working in these contexts are facing. The guidance is now being rewritten to reflect the feedback that these organisations have provided.

Participating organisations also provided profiles on the learners they were working with. The learners' views on their previous learning experiences have been collated to capture their positive experiences and common issues.

Staff case studies have been contributed by participating organisations. Participants reflected on changes made and intended changes to operational and strategic planning within their organisation as a result of their involvement in the project.

## **Workshops - Using multimedia to support person-centred learning**

Following the research and inclusion of ICT and multimedia across the development areas, three regional multimedia workshops will be held in November and December 2005. Participants will share ideas and use hands-on examples of creative practice and useful resources in using IT/multimedia in teaching and learning. Providers taking part in these workshops will

also be able to apply for a small ICT grant to develop capacity within their organisations.

## **Probation Service**

### **- extension of development area**

Additional work is currently being developed to identify the learning difficulty and disability issues for probation staff. A separate publication will be produced to promote coherence and understanding of the guidance documents in the probation service context.

## **Dissemination**

The completed suite of guidance will be launched at seven events during March 2006. Provisional dates are:

6th March - London  
 7th March - London (for those working in the offender context)  
 9th March - Cambridge  
 15th March - Manchester  
 20th March - York  
 24th March - Bristol  
 31st March - Birmingham

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or visit:  
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/learningforliving/>



*RaPAL Music Makers*

## Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

This is an invitation to anyone involved in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL education to write and share their ideas, practice and evidence with RaPAL readers. The RaPAL network includes approximately two hundred managers, practitioner researchers, researchers, tutors, students and librarians in adult, further and higher education in the UK. It also has overseas members in Canada, USA, New Zealand, Australia, South America, Europe and Africa.

The RaPAL network produces a journal three times a year - winter, spring and summer-for contributions linking research and practice. RaPAL welcomes articles, reviews, reports, commentaries, letters and cartoons which reflect the range of activities and interests of those involved in this field. By writing for this network you will have the opportunity to refine your ideas and disseminate to the field. For RaPAL, research involves asking questions, trying to answer them, asking other people, recording what they say, developing ideas, changing them, and writing and sharing ideas in many different ways. We think that these processes should be open to students and tutors as well as to paid researchers. They often underpin the day- to- day reflective and evaluative work of practitioners but are not usually recognised as research activity.

We would like to develop our connections with the vibrant research and practice dialogue happening in Canada. Tannis Atkinson, editor of *Literacies*, hopes to attend the RaPAL 2006 Conference in Glasgow. Tannis is committed to supporting literacy practitioners to write about their work. She conducts workshops across Canada that lead participants through a series of activities where they reflect on literacy work. Using collage and different forms of writing, literacy workers explore some of the excitement, pain, and frustration of their practice. You can check out some of the writing and collages from these workshops at <http://www.literacyjournal.ca/cwpages/nbCALNconf2005.htm>. We hope you will have the chance to meet Tannis in Glasgow in June and experience one of her writing workshops.

### Journal Structure

We have decided to retain the three-section structure introduced in 2002-3, as a means of addressing the emerging needs in this field:

#### 1. Ideas for teaching

Descriptive and reflective pieces on teaching and learning to meet the needs of current teachers in this field. The contributions must demonstrate democratic practice.

#### 2. Developing Research and Practice

An open-ended category for a varied range of contributions. We want to include articles which show people trying out ideas, pushing back boundaries alongside analysis and critique

#### 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives

A section for more sustained pieces of analysis about research, policy and practice which will have refereed journal status.

We welcome contributions for each of these sections and are happy to discuss your ideas and proposals with you. We want the RaPAL Journal to continue its vibrant tradition of publishing views from all parts of the field.

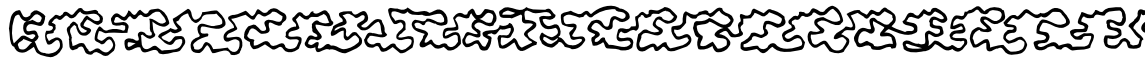
### Guidelines for Contributors

#### General

1. Writing for RaPAL must be in a readable, accessible style aimed at a diverse and international readership.
2. If you are writing about individuals or groups you must follow the usual ethical guidelines, seeking permission whenever possible and in all cases representing people fairly.
3. We are always looking for articles which link research and practice in some way. There are many possibilities and we do not set hard and fast rules about how this should be done.
4. RaPAL articles should encourage readers to question dominant or taken for granted views of literacy, numeracy and ESOL. We would, for example, challenge views which fail to acknowledge the abilities of learners to be actively involved in developing and evaluating practice.

#### Specific Pointers

1. When you submit your work, please indicate the intended section for publication.
2. Articles should have a title with clear headings and subheadings; and must contain a clear introduction, indicating the scope of the piece.



3. If you write for section 3, the article should:
  - **relate to the practice** of learning or teaching adult literacy (in any language)
  - **relate to research**: either by itself being a report of a research study and/or showing links to related research work;
  - **provide 'critical' analysis** of the topic, involving theoretical underpinnings; and
  - **be coherent** with a clear structure, explanation of any terminology, use of examples and the usual referencing conventions ( Use the Harvard referencing system and make sure that all references are in alphabetical order and complete).
4. Length - Articles should be 1,000-2500 words for sections 1 and 2 and not more than 4000 words for section 3. These limits do not include any accompanying references and bibliographies. Reviews and reports should be 50-800 words.
5. Illustrations and graphic material are much appreciated. Please consult the editor about preferred formats.
6. Your article must be submitted both in hard copy and in electronic form. Please send it word processed, double-spaced, on A4 paper and with numbered pages. The electronic versions must be sent as Word files attached to emails. If we do not receive both versions, we cannot consider the paper for publication.

7. Please provide a title page with your name, title, and contact details (postal address, e-mail address and phone number). It is very important that you also provide a short 2-3 line biography to accompany the article. We like to encourage correspondence between readers and writers and if you would like readers to get in touch with you, please provide contact details at the end of the article.

### Editorial Procedures

1. All contributions are peer reviewed by researchers and practitioners in the Editorial Group. The reviewing for section three is done by an experienced researcher and two additional researcher practitioners and focuses on the criteria noted above.
2. Feedback is provided by the editor within eight to ten weeks of receiving your text and constructive comment (and notes to be of use in its development) are made if appropriate.
3. If the article is accepted, once the amendments have been made, the editor will work on a final edit. We may make minor alterations ourselves and the final version will be sent to you for checking before it goes to print.

**Please send an electronic copy to Deirdre Parkinson at:** [deirdre@dp-associates.org.uk](mailto:deirdre@dp-associates.org.uk)

**If this is not possible, then a paper copy can be sent to:**

Deirdre Parkinson  
20 Alnwick Drive, Glasgow G76 0AZ

### Food glorious food?

I still remember at lunchtime each day  
I used to sit back and think 'O God no way!

Mrs Crabbe in the kitchen with her cauldron  
Dishing out food that was anything but scaldin'.  
Lumpy potatoes with lizards' eyes  
Smelly socks in cardboard pies.

She had green teeth and a long pointy nose  
She needed a scrub and then a good power hose  
She picked her warts and threw them in  
And then she added scraps from the bin.

O school dinners, they were a sin!

*Lagan Valley Education Project,  
Northern Ireland*



Shirley Riley-Lake, Jacquie Gillott

# RaPAL Membership form

## RaPAL Membership Fees for 2005-2006

	UK & Eire	Other EU	Outside EU
<b>Individual Membership*</b>			
Full-time	£35	£50	£50
Low-waged, unwaged, student	£20	£30	£30
* includes 1 copy of the RaPAL Journal			
<b>Institutional Membership</b>			
2 copies of Journal	£70	£75	£75
3-5 copies of Journal	£90	£100	£100
6-10 copies of Journal	£135	N/A	N/A

## Help us to DOUBLE RaPAL's Membership in 2005-2006!

We are always keen to attract new individual and institutional members. Please copy or pass this page to friends, colleagues and your workplace library and encourage them to join RaPAL now!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address for correspondence \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Tel No: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If you **DON'T** want us to add your email address to the RaPAL circulation list (RAPALLIST) please tick here

Special interests:

**I wish to join RaPAL.** (Please see table of membership fees for 2005-06)

Please pay by one of the methods below (tick box):

- I enclose a cheque (made payable to RaPAL) for £
- I wish to pay by Standing Order/Direct Debit - please send me further information
- Please invoice me (institutions only)

Please send your completed application form and cheque (if appropriate) to:

**Kathryn James**  
RaPAL Membership Secretary  
Department of Educational Research  
County South  
Lancaster University

**RaPAL Conference 2006  
Pre-Conference Seminars**

**Professor Steve Reder**  
**Portland State University, Oregon**

**We are delighted that Steve Reder,  
discussant and keynote speaker at the  
RaPAL 2006 Conference,  
will present two pre-conference seminars  
in the Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow.**

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2006**

**4.00pm - 5.30pm Seminar One**

**5.30pm - 6.00pm Light Buffet**

**6.00pm - 7.30pm Seminar Two**

**The first seminar will address adult  
literacy and numeracy, ESOL and the 'Lab School'.**

**The second will focus on longitudinal  
research in adult literacy and numeracy learning.**

About Learning Connections  
Learning Connections is part of  
Communities Scotland,  
the Scottish Executive's  
housing and  
regeneration  
agency.



**Jointly hosted by Learning Connections and CRADALL,  
the Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning,  
at the University of Glasgow.**

**Information regarding registration, venues etc will be announced shortly  
please check the RaPAL website <http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/>**

# RaPAL



## **Conference 2006** **Transforming Literacies**

The Conference will examine the impact of literacies practices, critical perspectives and action research on our work.

**Date: Thursday 22nd to Saturday 24th June 2006**

Whether you're a learner, practitioner, researcher whatever your interest in literacies you're invited to come to Glasgow. Workshops will be organised around the following four themes:

### **Literacies and Poverties**

What is the impact of literacies on poverties in their many forms and contexts?

### **Action Research**

How Action Research affects literacies practices, methods, theories and policies?

### **Policy and Practice links**

What are the tensions, challenges and benefits when literacies theory, policy and practice come together?

### **Critical Literacies**

Do critical perspectives help transform everyday literacies?

All workshop themes are intended to promote a diversity of exchange, participation and contribution from different cultures, sectors, disciplines and professions.

If you would like to run a workshop, send an outline of your workshop (no more than 250 words) indicating its fit with these themes to:

Kathy Maclachlan, St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, Glasgow, G3 6NH  
or [k.maclachlan@educ.gla.ac.uk](mailto:k.maclachlan@educ.gla.ac.uk) by 28th February 2006

**Please note:**

**only workshops which are clearly related to one of the four themes will be accepted.**