

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

Who we are

RaPAL is an independent national network of learners, practitioners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult literacies and numeracy. 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

- **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
- **emphasise** the importance of social context in literacy
- **encourage** collaborative and reflective research
- **believe** in democratic practices in adult literacy
- **create** networks by organising events (including an annual conference) to contribute to national debate
- **publish** a journal three times a year

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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 information can be found at our website: www.rapal.org.uk

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

The RaPAL Journal has been printed by Image Printing Co., Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire. Matlock, Derbyshire.



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Editorial

As you will see from the articles, photographs and comments throughout this issue, the 2006 RaPAL Conference on Transforming Literacies was regarded as an outstanding success. Conference started earlier, finished later and opened with a challenging and, for some, controversial keynote address by Liam Kane of Glasgow University. A choice from over twenty workshops was available over the 2 days, followed by reflective circles to share feedback. For the first time at Conference we took time to consider what we wanted from RaPAL and the results of this consultation will be available shortly. Also innovative were Jan Nimmo's banner-

making workshop, during which delegates produced a banner to celebrate 21 years of RaPAL, and Graeme Ogilvy's cartoons which highlighted delegates' comments and thoughts as the Conference progressed. And somewhere in this busy schedule we managed to find time for a lovely Conference dinner and a fast-moving ceilidh. The Celtic Conference connection continues this year and we are sure that the 2007 Conference in Belfast in June will be equally successful and enjoyable. We look forward to seeing you there!

**Fiona Macdonald
and Deirdre Parkinson**



RaPAL Journals 2006-2007 Themes and Deadlines

Issue	General Theme	Copy deadline
Spring 2007	Open issue.	Fri 30th March 2007
Summer 2007	International Literacies	Fri 29th April 2007
Autumn 2006	Conference 2007 edition: Learning journeys - voices and identities in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL	Fri 28th Sept 2007



What's in a name: Does it matter whether we use literacy or literacies in RaPAL?

Yvon Appleby and Amy Burgess, Lancaster Literacy Research Centre

Yvon Appleby is a Research Fellow at Lancaster Literacy Research Centre working on various projects around literacies in learning and in everyday life. This is often in collaboration with practitioners, together finding ways of linking current research to practice.

Amy Burgess is a research student at Lancaster Literacy Research Centre, finishing a PhD on writing and identity in adult literacy education. Before this, she spent ten years working as a literacy tutor in and around Bristol.

Introduction

Our workshop at the 2006 Rapal Conference "Transforming Literacies" held at the University of Glasgow explored the different ways that the term literacy has been used, both in the past and more recently. We asked if it mattered whether we use the term literacy or literacies in our individual practices and for RaPAL as an organisation. As a membership organisation we wanted to start a dialogue about whether we should change from literacy to literacies in our name and whether this better reflected our independent position in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. We wanted to ask whether the name is significant in naming our collective work in practice, research and policy forums. Although these debates have been around for a while we asked participants in the workshop to consider these questions in the light of expansion and increased professionalism within the field of literacy, numeracy and ESOL, as well as the proposed changes to the subject specifications. Our question is, which term best reflects what we do and is it time to change literacy to literacies?

Does it matter what term you use?

We wanted to know whether the term literacy or literacies meant different things to the practitioners, managers and trainers in the workshop and if they felt this was significant to other people in their work. As we planned the workshop we became aware that the word literacy has become popularised: literacy is all around us, in the papers, magazines and on the television and radio. It is used to describe many aspects of everyday activities and competency in particular things. In the workshop we came up with quite a few: emotional literacy, financial literacy, political literacy, computer literacy, family literacy, international literacy, visual literacy, artistic literacy, physical literacy, youth literacy, musical literacy as well as "the literacy hour" and non-literacy and illiteracy. There are others too. One of the most obscure was palpatory literacy which is apparently 'skills in body massage'. When the word is used in so many different contexts, there is a danger that

its meaning can become diluted, and this was another reason for reflecting on what it means to us in RaPAL.

To think about some of the ways in which the term has been interpreted in educational contexts we devised a simple quiz. People in the workshop found it fun and very illuminating so we include it here. You might like to have a go. Below are 10 definitions that come from a range of sources in the UK and internationally from books, promotional material and policy documents. They span just over a decade. We asked people to try to identify where they came from, when they were written and what purpose they were used for. The answers can be found at the end.

Literacy Definition Quiz

Definition 1

- A) Literacy means more than understanding how to read, write or calculate. It involves understanding and being able to use the information required to function effectively in the knowledge-based societies that will dominate in the twenty-first century.
- B) B). Literacy is no longer defined merely in terms of a basic threshold of reading ability, mastered by almost all those growing up in developed countries. Rather, literacy is now seen as how adults use written information to function in society.

Definition 2

Literacy involves the ability of individuals to use written information to fulfil their goals, and the consequent ability to use written information to function effectively in complex modern society.

Definition 3

Literacy means different things to different people. It embodies a variety of approaches to learning to read and write, and is measured in a variety of ways. The basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy are the key that unlocks a range of literacies that people need in an increasingly globalised world.



Definition 4

'Because there are many branches of literacy it does not follow that there is no tree. There may be significant overlaps between apparently different literacies or core processes common to many literacy activities, especially in the early stages of learning them.'

Definition 5

Definition of Literacy and Numeracy: The ability to read, write and use numbers, to handle information, express ideas and opinions, make decisions and solve problems, as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners.

Definition 6

Literacy:

- Involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy;
- Encompasses aspects of personal development social, economic, emotional and is concerned with improving self-esteem and building confidence. It goes far beyond mere technical skills of communication;
- Enables people to understand and reflect critically on their life circumstances with a view to exploring new possibilities and initiating constructive change.

Definition 7

Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as text to be analysed.

Definition 8

Literacy: Joining an English class will help you improve your reading, writing and communication skills.

Definition 9

Literacy as a key capability for citizens to understand and influence changes within society becomes a critical feature of a robust, participatory democracy.

Definition 10

More than anything else, literacy is a media superstar if literacy were in a Hollywood movie, it would be played by the imaginary offspring of Jacky Chan and Bill Gates.'

The definitions show the different ways that literacy is used from quite functional and skill based approaches (being able to read and write

adequately in modern society) to a wider vision of democratic participation that is linked to participation in family, work and communities. It left us with the question of whether the term and definition should reflect what we do, what we aspire to do or our collective position in relation to other people's meanings.

Should RaPAL use literacy or literacies?

In answering this many other questions are raised. What are our own uses and meanings of the term? What are the organisational, institutional or policy meanings that we work with? And crucially, how do these uses and meanings relate to the field more generally? Why do some people use literacy and others literacies? Detailed discussion can be found in (Barton, Hamilton, Ivanic 2000; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Lankshear and Knobel 2003; Papen 2006) but in summary:

Literacy: Literacy has historically been used to describe reading and writing as a skill to be learned. This decontextualized skill can be acquired through formal learning and has a functional use in being able to operate in a text based society. Literacy is understood as a measurable skill where lack of literacy is described as 'illiteracy' i.e. as not having any, or not having adequate, literacy.

Literacies: Literacies, developed from the New Literacies Studies in the 1970's, recognises that there are many different literacies that people use in their everyday lives, not all are text based or are learned in formal education. Literacies are part of people's social practices and people use and develop a range of everyday literacies. It also recognises that some literacies are more powerful than others.

Fourteen people who participated in the workshop wrote down their opinions about whether RaPAL should change its name. We summarise their views here. There was a general feeling that RaPAL should use literacies rather than literacy; eight people stated that they were in favour of this, while two said that they felt it didn't matter and no-one argued for keeping the word literacy. As one participant pointed out, the word literacy has strong negative associations for many people. Literacies, on the other hand, was felt to be more inclusive and to signal a challenge to narrow, prescriptive skills-based definitions. One person pointed out that what we actually do is more important than what we call ourselves and another stated that RaPAL members



generally share similar views about what literacy means.

Nine of the participants offered opinions about whether RaPAL's main focus should be on literacy rather than numeracy and/or ESOL. Some practitioners in England and Wales value the focus on literacy because they are expected to specialise and there are separate teaching qualifications for literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Also, there are other organisations, such as NATECLA and ALM which focus on ESOL and numeracy respectively. However, some people suggested that they would like to see more emphasis on numeracy and ESOL within RaPAL and that the word literacies could encompass these things. Some people placed themselves between these two views, suggesting that RaPAL retain its emphasis on literacy whilst recognising possible connections, overlaps and shared issues with other fields.

A number of participants felt that this is a complex issue which we need to consider carefully. In fact, one person suggested that it goes beyond whether we use literacies or literacy and that the acronym RaPAL itself may need to be clarified. One participant raised an important question for us to bear in mind when we decide what name to use: does RaPAL's name and the way it defines itself allow it to address the audiences it wants to reach?

Conclusion

The workshop and this report are part of a consultation process in finding out views about changing literacy to literacies in the title of RaPAL. We did not come to a definitive conclusion in the workshop and think that a wider debate in the pages of the journal is an important continuing part of this process. We hope that people will participate and become part of the dialogue about defining and giving meaning to what we do: in our practice, in our institutions and in policy. RaPAL was part of the advisory group supporting the new subject specifications for teachers of adult literacy numeracy and ESOL organised by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK). We were invited to contribute as an independent membership organisation, taking part in discussions in whether literacy and numeracy should be abandoned in favour of Maths and English in the new specification. This suggests that names and

meanings are always contested, and are always challenged. Names say a lot about where people stand, what they stand for and whether people are able to name things themselves or have meanings imposed externally.

Answers to the quiz

1. A) *IALS* (1994)
B) The second international survey, released in November 1997 *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*
2. *Literacy Skills for the World Tomorrow: Further results from PISA 2000, OECD*
3. *Improving livelihoods for the poor: the role of literacy, DFID Background Briefing 2002.*
4. Hannon P (2000) *Reflecting on Literacy in Education* London: Routledge.
5. ALNIS 2001, The Scottish Executive
6. NALA, National Adult Literacy Agency (Ireland)
7. Barton, D and Hamilton M (1998) *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community* London: Routledge.
8. The Adult College, Lancaster on-line prospectus
9. Lo Bianco J and P Freebody *Australian Literacies: Informing National Policy on Literacy Education* Language Australia 1997
10. Freebody P (2001) 'Theorising New Literacies In and Out of School' *Language and Education* 15 (2-3) p105

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Barton D, Hamilton M and Ivaniè R (2000) Situated Literacies: reading and writing in context, London: Routledge
Lankshear C and Knobel M (2003) New Literacies: changing knowledge and classroom learning Buckingham, Open University Press.
Papen U (2006) Adult Literacy as Social Practice: more than skills, London: Routledge



We would like to hear your views and comments about the issues raised in this article.



Transforming Literacies: a Review of the RaPAL Annual Conference, University of Glasgow, 2006

Kieran Harrington, Adult Literacy Organizer, City of Galway VEC

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in Ireland awarded me a bursary to attend the RaPAL conference in Glasgow in June 2006 and asked me to reflect on my experiences at the conference with respect to adult literacy practice in Ireland and with respect to my own research in sociolinguistics in an article for the winter edition of the NALA Journal. The article is reprinted here below with the replacement of a brief introduction to RaPAL for Irish readers who were who are not acquainted with the project and the journal, with a few words about NALA and Adult Literacy in Ireland for readers of RaPAL.

Literacy provision for adults in Ireland follows a similar pattern to that of the UK model. In the 1970s, at community level, people began to volunteer as tutors for adults who needed help with reading and writing. The volunteers worked on a 1:1 basis and often in the homes of the learners. In the late 1970s RTE, the national broadcasting service, produced a series of programmes entitled 'Helping Adults to Read' as a support for volunteers, some of whom began to operate as 'organizers'. In 1980 NALA was founded as a membership organization and acted as a coordinating body for provision in Ireland. It lobbied for funding, and in 1985, for the first time, the government allocated a grant to NALA and an Adult Literacy and Community Education (ALCE) budget to the Vocational Education Committees (VECs). Between 1990 and 1997 funding grew slowly but surely. The 1995-97 International Adult Literacy Survey claimed that approximately 25% of adults in Ireland performed literacy tasks at or below level 1. This provided the impetus for further lobbying by NALA. The government proceeded to increase the ALCE budgets considerably and most VECs now have a professional literacy service, headed by an Adult Literacy Organizer, and staffed by coordinators in the strands of Family Learning, ESOL and Reading, Writing and Numeracy, resource workers and part-time tutors, whilst the number of volunteers has fallen in the last few years. Since 2000 the adult literacy services have been concerned not only with improving access for learners with literacy difficulties, but also with accountability, assessment and quality assurance. NALA coordinates adult literacy provision on a national basis, providing training for tutors and organizers, developing policy, commissioning

research on topics such as assessment and curriculum. It has recently implemented a quality framework for adult basic education in adult literacy services throughout the country.

The Pre-Conference Seminars

The pre-conference seminars (Thursday, 22nd June) were given by Professor Steve Reder from Portland University, Oregon. The first one on the 'Lab School' especially grabbed my attention. I remembered having read something about the 'Lab' in an article by Fergus Dolan, NALA's ESOL development worker, in the spring edition of the *NALA Journal*, but Steve's video-clips made me wonder about my own struggles with poor recording equipment and the time I had devoted to taking extensive field notes. Students and teachers in the 'Lab's' ESOL classroom are closely monitored by one-way observation windows, video cameras that concentrate on pairs, and radio-microphones. Steve showed us a very revealing clip of two students who adjusted the language they were using and the way they were interacting with each other when the teacher approached. This shows how little ESOL teachers actually know about student interaction and student language and suggests that students may interact intelligibly far more than is thought. I had already come across something similar in my own research, when one day I was called out of a classroom of six recently arrived asylum seekers to answer the phone. The machine continued recording and I found when I played it back that the 'beginner' learners had had a very lively discussion in very intelligible English on the merits of the teaching methods used!

Keynote Speech

The conference proper began with the keynote speech delivered by Liam Kane from Glasgow University. We all sat up in our chairs when we were told that this speaker had shared a stage once with Paulo Freire. Liam spoke about 'Popular Education', clarifying that it is 'popular' in the Spanish sense of 'of the people', supplied some interesting statistics with regard to the minority possession of wealth and then outlined the characteristics of the movement, which will be familiar to literacy tutors who have come across Paulo Freire: the critique of the 'banking' method of education, the promotion of dialogue, the encouragement of people to become 'subjects' of change and the insistence of the



view that education cannot be neutral. Liam wondered if it is too simplistic to view situations as oppressor versus oppressed, and suggested that some of the characteristics are not particular to education in the Third World, such as neutrality in education. I was spurred to reflect on recent adult literacy and ESOL practice in Ireland against this background of popular education and the ideals of Freire which seemed to be the ideals of adult basic education services that started off in the 70s or 80s as charitable organizations. They used to run flag days to survive, now the literacy organizers need to be experts in finance and human resources and perform corporate tasks such as judging the merits of fat-cat information technology enterprise presentations on databases and websites. Adult Basic Education in Ireland has been handsomely funded by the Celtic Tiger's reaction to the IALS 1995-97 survey and there is a danger that those of us who still have ideals will fall into the money trap: we tend to accept external decontextualized deficit statements and statistics without even thinking about asking the people, the learners their opinion, those people, those learners whom we add onto our Departmental returns at the end of the year to convince ourselves (and the Department) that we are spending the money properly. Thus the learners retain the status of 'oppressed', but perhaps we, the tutors who have become managers, have also become oppressors.

The Workshops

It was difficult to choose a workshop as all of them seemed of essential attending. There were workshops by tutors on everyday practice, workshops on policy mainly delivered by researchers, of which Juliet Merrifield's 'Toward a new model of accountability and away from the tyranny of targets' was of special interest to me as a literacy organizer as the increased funding here in Ireland translates into increased necessity for accountability, and most of us do not want to go the way of Skills for Life. I think one of the important things to remember, perhaps, is that accountability is not a synonym of assessment.

One of the workshops I was sorry I hadn't attended was Amy Burgess and Yvon Appleby's "What's in a name: Does it matter whether we use 'literacy' or 'literacies' in RaPAL?" as I was very surprised by the uninhibited use of the word 'literacies' by everybody at the conference. Although in Ireland in the last 15 years practitioners have taken the logical social practice approach, the word 'literacies' is spoken

very rarely and the term 'literacy as a social practice' raises eyebrows. There seems to be a great phobia in Ireland in the field of adult literacy and ESOL of anything that sounds remotely academic. This is understandable perhaps in tutors who have had no academic training and even those who have studied English in university and may have had the misfortune of tolerating lecturers who are loath to call a spade a spade. But it is disheartening when officials from the Department of Education fall back on 'well he/she is an academic, isn't he/she?' when one is trying to back up one's new literacy procedure by making reference to research.

I went to Shirley Howitt's workshop "Is Literacies making an impact on poverty in Glasgow?" wondering exactly what was meant by "poverties". The target groups that were mentioned coincided with those for whom we provide literacy provision in Ireland: migrants, the unemployed, the disabled, people with specific learning difficulties, prisoners, psychiatric patients, alcoholics, drug addicts, people living in disadvantaged areas and people in low-income jobs. The idea that a lack of "literacy" equates to misfortune and literacy equates to income, although very difficult to elude in the practical world, is unfortunate. We seem to forget notions like the recreational or community value of literacy and focus too much on the utilitarian. Further, the greater poverty is the powerlessness associated with the lack of opportunity to influence thought and policy and effect change. Of course, it is easier to quantify progress in terms of economic gain, because you can say things like 'so and so got such and such a job', and I could see by the feedback at this workshop that gains had been made in Glasgow. The real value of this workshop was that it forced me to reflect on the impact of literacy provision in my own area, the impact not only on the quantifiable poverty, but also on the poverty of powerlessness. In Ireland at least, as far as I can see, people make gains in confidence at the community level. But socioeconomic gain is minimal, and power is out of reach.

For those of us who work in the area of adult literacy, whether researchers or practitioners, it is not only difficult to get the balance right between research and practice, but between ideals and realities. It is difficult to teach asylum seekers English for integration, for example, when their 'statelessness' or 'homelessness' is at the back of their minds. It is difficult to teach reading and writing to adults who may have the



next redundancy at the back of their minds. It is difficult for teachers to teach or organizers to organize when the fact that learners are a budgetary-expanding statistic is at the back of our minds. It is difficult to teach English to migrant workers and refugees when at the back of our mind is the suspicion that the type of survival language that is taught will never allow *them* to be full citizens and climb the rungs of Maslow's pyramid.

NALA asked me to talk about my experience principally to find out if it is a good idea to award people bursaries to attend conferences abroad. My experience has been totally positive in that I mixed with academics and practitioners alike and they are all more or less on the same wavelength. The seating arrangements in the main conference hall - all of us sitting at round tables - helped those of us who were at a RaPAL conference for the first time to get to know people, and it was also conducive to a practitioner-researcher mix. The atmosphere was very friendly throughout. I was able to compare adult literacy practice in Ireland with England and Scotland, the latter apparently being closer to the Irish model, although at times I wonder

myself if there is such a thing as the Irish model and if there is, is it a social practice one. I met many people with whom I interchanged e-mail addresses, and hopefully I can go back to them with queries and vice versa. I even came across someone from the Dublin Adult Learning Centre, Fionnaigh Connaughton, who I hadn't met before. We interchanged views on the current debates in Irish Adult Literacy, such as assessment and curriculum (perhaps these are the recurring debates in all countries!) and I found she had been researching for a thesis on a Nigerian learner, which I hope I can read some day and refer to in my own research. Yes, I came back with ideas for both my own research and for adult literacy practice and I hope more Irish organizers and tutors will attend international conferences in the future.

On a lighter note, and to conclude, on the Friday evening we were invited to a civic reception hosted by Bailie Ellen Hurcombe on behalf of the Lord Provost of Glasgow. After dinner there was a *ceilidh*. I can't remember the name of the lady I danced with, but I'm sure she remembers me and hopefully she does not still have the imprints of my boots on her toes. I apologise publicly to



"Good to be reminded about the inter-relationships of accountability - thought provoking"

"Interesting to be critical about policy and start the process of thinking about new, relevant and meaningful ways to be accountable. Global capitalisation should have been in there!"

"This workshop was interesting and interactive. It allowed people the opportunity to contribute to the 'literacy or literacies' debate"

"It's important to keep debates and discussions open, not necessarily to arrive at settled positions."

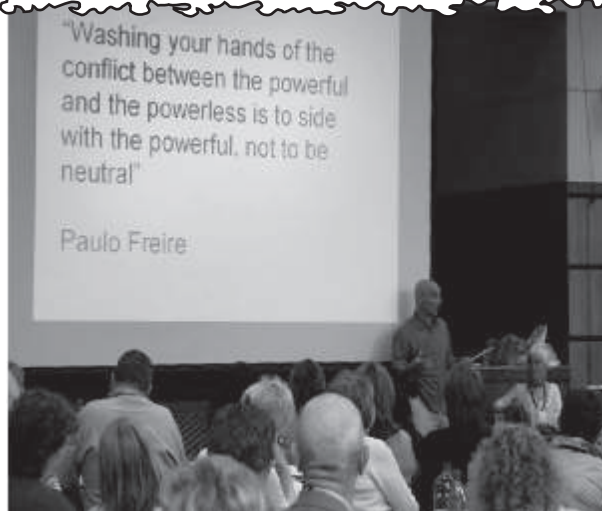
"Liam Kane was inspirational and thought provoking"

"a main point established that there is no such thing as neutral education. Stayed with me thro' the day."

"Interesting and challenging! Lots to think about. Loved the banner and the cartoons."

"Very stimulating, provocative stuff"

"the two of them (Lyn Tett and Steve Reder) captured the essence of the conference"





Motivation in Action: Transforming Practice

Shelley Tracey. Queen's University Belfast

**What kind of learner are you?
What are your learning identities? Are you
an Explorer, a Maker, a Collector, a
Participator, a Butterfly or an Illuminator?
Or are you all of these?**

These were some of the questions raised in this experiential workshop, which focused on motivation through the lenses of learning and learning identities. The workshop was designed to bring together two of the conference themes: transformative methodologies and motivation.

The theme of motivation has emerged as a focus in the adult literacy tutor education programme at Queen's University Belfast. The programme itself, in common with most teacher education programmes, is based on a model of reflective practice. Reflection in this model includes the ability to shift perspectives between different aspects of teaching and learning. This ability can be particularly important for tutors who are working with compulsory learners. While the tutors engaged in the programme are highly motivated and committed to their practice, many of them express their frustration at the lack of motivation of some of their younger learners who are involved in programmes of study in which literacy and numeracy classes are compulsory. An emerging priority for the adult literacy tutor education programme is the provision of opportunities for tutors to develop a range of perspectives on the complex factors which affect motivation, as well as access to methodologies which might enhance it.

The language which tutors use to describe the issues around motivation is rich with metaphors of distance and separation, between tutors and their learners, as well as between learners and the learning process. The challenges for tutors are diverse; one of them is to reduce the distance between learners' perceptions of themselves as failures and their recognition of their abilities and engagement in the learning process. In the tutor education programme, we are currently exploring the use of solution-focused and creative methodologies to enhance learners' identification with authority and power in the learning process.

According to Rhodes and Ajmal (1995: 62):

"It would seem that the issue of motivation must in some way be addressed when working with a

student who is not making progress with literacy. The solution focused framework seems ideally suited to this task by its attention to a person's goals and related beliefs and attitudes. The issue of motivation, goals and emotions are almost inseparable in practice."

While it is beyond the scope of this report to explore solution-focused methods in depth, they have proved effective in therapeutic and learning contexts in reducing the distance between learner or client and their own sense of authority in problem-solving, planning and decision-making. In our programme, we are exploring the enhancement of these aspects of self-awareness through the use of solution-focused methods and creative methodologies.

The purpose of the RaPAL workshop was for practitioners to experience these methods in action. Given the time limit (the workshop was scheduled for an hour; the actual duration was forty five minutes), we focused on one aspect of learning and motivation: our own identities as learners.



The photograph shows the images and quotations about learning which participants were invited to select and comment on. The discussion introduced a range of symbols for and ideas about learning. The adult literacy tutor education programme at Queen's makes use of such discussion to enhance participation in the creation of knowledge and the development of a discourse about learning.



In the next part of the workshop, participants were asked to select their learning identities from a list of about fifty. They were also invited to add those which might be missing. These identities embraced the traditional: the Thinker, The Reflector, the Analyser; metaphors for learning: the Librarian, the Illuminator, the Explorer; and other identities which were less obvious but which might spark off creative ideas, such as the Dancer, the Butterfly and the Shapeshifter.

Most participants chose a minimum of six identities. They were then invited to develop on these identities: to imagine it as a person or

creature or being of some description, considering the following questions: What does this identity look like? How old is it? What is it wearing? Where is it? What kind of voice does it have? Does it make a sound? How does it move?

It is difficult to do justice in this report to the creativity of the responses to these questions. I therefore conclude with a list of some of the identities, and an invitation to you, the reader, to find out about your own learning identities and bring them into existence through the use of your own experiences and imagination.

<i>Dancer</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Concluder</i>
<i>Questioner</i>	<i>Theorizer</i>	<i>Test taker</i>
<i>Risk taker</i>	<i>Detective</i>	<i>Collaborator</i>
<i>Explorer</i>	<i>Definer</i>	<i>Cartographer</i>
<i>Reporter</i>	<i>Quantifier</i>	<i>Teller</i>
<i>Shower</i>	<i>Adventurer</i>	<i>Navigator</i>
<i>Believer</i>	<i>Energiser</i>	<i>Hitchhiker</i>
<i>Dreamer</i>	<i>Gulliver</i>	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>
<i>Perceiver</i>	<i>Illuminator</i>	<i>Sceptic</i>
<i>Spectator</i>	<i>Intervener</i>	<i>Creator</i>
<i>Agent</i>	<i>Servant</i>	<i>Sharer</i>
<i>Bridge</i>	<i>Investigator</i>	<i>Shapeshifter</i>
<i>Interpreter</i>	<i>Time traveller</i>	<i>Translator</i>
<i>Reflector</i>	<i>Philosopher</i>	<i>Mythmaker</i>

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Reading Writing and Resonance: An Experiential Workshop for Practitioners

Ronnie Goodman, Greg Mannion and Angela Brzeski

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Introduction

After reading a newspaper or magazine, you may have commented that some feature of the article 'struck a chord' with you; in this workshop we took this commonsense notion of 'striking a chord' as the starting point for considering teaching and learning through literacy. In particular, we focussed on the concept of musical resonance and the associated qualities of consonance and dissonance. We describe how this RaPAL Conference workshop (2006) used participatory learning techniques to apply the metaphor of resonance to literacy practices. In particular, we show how understandings of acoustic resonance can provide an explanation for how literacy practices in different contexts can inter-relate.

Background

The background to the workshop is a three year literacy research project that seeks to understand how reading and writing in students everyday lives can be mobilised to assist with their learning on formal courses in further education college contexts. This project involving four colleges in England and Scotland was entitled *Literacies for Learning in Further Education (LlLFE)* and comes to an end in spring 2007. In many subject areas, we have found that students' everyday literacy practices were not easily 'transferred' into their coursework but that they were potentially resonant with the literacy practices of their courses. They read fictional books, they read magazines, reviews, they write their own notes, file away lists and keep in touch with others about topics relevant to their coursework. We have found that educators do not always know about this valuable resource base or know how to allow students to draw upon these practices when designing reading and writing activities for students'.

In this paper we describe how participants took part in some sound-based activities that

demonstrated musical resonance in practical ways. While readers of this paper may have had experiences that allow them to understand the concept of resonance, the paper is probably no substitute for the experiences we tried to give participants in the workshop on the day.

Resonance:

a phenomenon in music ... and literacy?

In this workshop we set out to explore how an individual event involving reading or writing, can be experienced as resonant with other literacy events we have had at other times and places in our lives. Taking a social practices view of literacy, we infer that literacy practices are also experienced as resonant across contexts. On a day-to-day basis, the term resonance is gaining some currency. Scientists will tell us that resonance occurs as a natural phenomenon not only in sound waves but radio waves, light and in some chemical reactions. Resonance is a term that is now used in many contexts but perhaps its true home is as a term in the field of music and sound. To explain what we might mean by resonance in literacy we need to take a closer look at the concept of resonance as used in music.

Resonance occurs when a force of suitable frequency is applied to a body and an especially large vibration occurs. This rather simple definition hides some of the complexity around the idea of resonance that has been a focus of attention for scholars and researchers over some time. Pythagoras is credited with the discovery of the harmonic series: the scale of naturally occurring overtones that are produced by all resonating bodies. These 'overtones', as they are called, are present to different degrees along with a given fundamental note. While not always obvious to our ears, many overtones are produced when a note is sounded, say, on an instrument. The first overtone on the string will have a frequency that is twice the pitch of the fundamental i.e. one octave above. Higher



resonances correspond to frequencies that are ratios of this fundamental pitch.

When two notes are sounded together the story gets even more interesting. Here, the difference between two notes (the interval between them) and the overtones produced by each will come into play creating a degree of consonance or harmony (sounding together) and dissonance (sounding apart). Consonance comes from the coincidence of the harmonic overtones while dissonance comes from the fact that they do not all coincide. This is an important phenomenon. In music the resonant character of a note or chord (two or more notes played together) depends on the degree of *both consonant and dissonant* overtones that are inherent. In fact, without utilising resonance musical instruments simply would not have the rich timbre, colour, projection and tuning we are accustomed to and the sound would appear dull to our ears. It appears that all music, even music that we hear as harmonious, incorporates some degree of dissonance. Interestingly, how we experience music is affected by how our ears are culturally 'trained'. What people find harmonious and musically interesting differs within countries and around the world. In the same way, it has convincingly been argued that literacy practices are culturally situated too (see links via the LfLFE website). But this is not the only link we made between the fields of music and literacy in the workshop. The four workshop activities were structured to give those present an experience of resonance both aurally and physically and to explore the relationship of resonance to reading and writing practices. We describe these activities next.

Workshop Process

In the first phase of the workshop, participants took part in a small number of sound-based activities that demonstrated resonance in practical ways. Thereafter, we requested that participants take part in four literacy activities designed to foreground how aspects of literacy, like music can be experienced as resonant with other experiences we have had in our lives. Lastly, we used examples from the LfLFE research project to explore further how different aspects of reading and writing can be experienced as resonant to various degrees across the different contexts of home, work and leisure. We finished with a consideration of how we might work to embed these ideas on literacy into learning, teaching and assessment in our own contexts.

Part One - Sound based experiences of musical resonance

This phase of the workshop involved a series of listening events designed and enacted by Ronnie Goodman. These were accompanied by verbal explanations of the resonant phenomena. The room was arranged so that everyone (some 30 participants) could sit in a circle. The musical instruments consisting of three bowl gongs and a set of temple bells were placed in the centre. After taking time to introduce ourselves to each other, the sounds of the gongs and bells were introduced gradually to illustrate examples of resonance.

Examples of 'Listening to Resonant Sounds' Activities:

1. For an experience of consonance, three Japanese bowl gongs of varying diameters were stroked to each produce a pure musical tone of different pitch. The term stroking is used here in the same manner as one would run a finger around the rim of a wine glass. To produce resonance in the bowl gongs, wooden sticks of different sizes were used to run around the rims of the gongs. This action created a highly resonant 'singing tone' with the fundamental harmonics mostly audible.
2. For an experience of dissonance we employed the higher harmonics; a pair of high-pitched temple bells were sounded together.

After each of the soundings of the gongs or bells, feedback from the participants' experiences was actively sought and made note of. Some spoke of how they could 'not sense where the sound was coming from' and that it 'filled the whole room'. Another noted that the sound had affected her in her chest and that she 'could feel it'. Different participants experienced different affective responses to the experience too. One or two appeared to find it very powerful in an embodied and emotional way.

During this phase we distributed sets of 12 cards to the participants to share containing 'Words of Wisdom from the World of Music'. These cards had a two-fold purpose: they were intended to give participants a novel way of focussing on some of the theoretical and conceptual work we did while the workshop progressed and as 'something to take away' at the end as reminders.

We provide an example of a selection of these as follows:



Words of Wisdom from the World of Music:

A single tone from a resonant body will often create sympathetic resonance in other sounding bodies

All tones produced by resonance incorporate not just their fundamental note but also many frequencies (overtones) above this note. This is known as the Harmonic Series

Resonance incorporates overtones that are both consonant and dissonant

Music is culturally differentiated- what we hear is affected by our musical heritage

Part Two - A writing task - literacy events in four groups

During this phase we switched gear considerably, moving straight from listening to writing. Each group was given a different literacy task:

- Group A was invited to send a text using their mobile phones to 'a loved one'. The participants were asked specifically to send a message about how they thought the conference had gone so far. Group members compared texts and any replies.
- Group B was asked to draw an image on one side and write a sentence on the back of an imaginary A1 sized 'post-card' addressed to the fictional addressee: Teachers Everywhere, Classroom X, Block Anon, PO Box LP1. They were to write a sentence about how they thought the conference had gone so far.
- Group C was asked to write a formal evaluation of the experience using a prescribed evaluation document. By answering prescribed questions, they were instructed to write about how they thought the conference had gone so far.
- Group D members were asked to pretend they are lecturers in the field of music in a university. Individuals were asked to prepare an e-mail to a colleague about how they thought the conference had gone so far.

Part 3 - Plenary session

In this phase, the experiences of writing for each of the four groups (A, B, C & D) were compared in the light of the concepts and experiences of resonance drawn from the facilitator and participants in part 1.

Group A: texting 'a loved one'. This group

seemed to have had a lot of fun. They particularly enjoyed the sense of mischievous fun associated with actually using one's phone while sitting 'in class' and actually having permission to receive replies. They laughed a lot and shared the replies.

Group B: drawing an image and writing a sentence on A1 sized 'post-card' addressed to the fictional addressee: Teachers Everywhere. This group had the shared complex task of having to communicate multimodally - drawing and writing. They completed the task but we found they worked in a quieter and more intense way with each other.

Group C: writing a formal evaluation using a standardised evaluation form. This group did not all complete the task. They appeared to struggle with the task and some voiced opinions about the constraints of the document they had to use and their feelings about 'having to do this sort of thing'. The meaningfulness of the task was brought into question. There was obvious resistance!

Group D: pretending they are lecturers in the field of music in a university and preparing an e-mail to a colleague. In this group, one participant, a part-time fiction writer herself, found the task enjoyable. She had experience in her life where writing from the perspective of another was familiar to her. Others found the task very difficult saying that they had no idea how these fictionalised others might e-mail each other.

The comparison of experience demonstrated that, like music, shared literacy events - even for people in the same group - can be experienced differently depending on one's past experience of 'writing like this' and the structure of the activity before them. The possible parallels with music were drawn out. When listening to music, one's disposition and exposure to different kinds of music in the past can lead one to enjoy or detest different kinds of sounds. In the same way, writing as an experience is dependent on one's disposition to the activity which in turn is dependent on the person's or group's past experiences of writing something similar or in a similar context. Music and writing are culturally situated and not homogeneously experienced by people.

There were even more stark differences *between* the experiences of the different groups. While the task was in some ways the same, the ways



different groups had the task structured for them resulted in different group effects. All groups were asked to broadly communicate a *similar content* in their messages: "about how they thought the conference had gone so far", but this did not mean that the task was experienced the same way. By changing the media, genre, or context in terms of audience or positioning as author, we suggest we altered the nature of the task considerably and affected how the groups got on with each other and with the tasks set. The writing tasks also related to how power relations evolved within groups (working together or not) and between groups and us as facilitators (some resisted and hated having to write an 'evaluation').

Clearly, there were big differences between the communicative acts requested from each group. This idea led us to offer the view that reading and writing in different ways and in different contexts can be experienced as resonant (dissonant or consonant to different degrees) along some critical dimensions such as genre, audience and medium. We offered the following link between literacy and music. We suggested that literacy practices, like musical experiences can be 'felt' as resonant in different ways by different people depending on the socio-cultural setting. We also reminded participants that musical resonance is comprised of degrees of consonance and dissonance arising from the interaction of the overtones or harmonics. In music, different frequencies from the harmonic series are understood to be present in all musical notes. In the same way, we offered the view that literacy is experienced as resonant along the following dimensions or aspects or 'harmonics of literacy' which are seen to be present in all literacy events and literacy practices:

- (a) Media
- (b) Purpose
- (c) Audience
- (d) Genre
- (e) Authorship
- (f) Identity
- (g) Values / Power (1)

Like music, it is the ways in which the harmonics of different literacy events (past, current) interact that render them resonant for people along dimensions suggested in a-g above. As in music, some degree of consonance and dissonance is always present and it is this interplay that gives reading and writing its timbre, or resonance.

Part 4 - Workshop Discussion and Close

Our discussant Angela Brzeski reflected on the process and posed some questions and offered some comments. Despite being somewhat squeezed for time, we closed by making further links between the LfLFE project and the workshop experience.

In LfLFE, to frame our understanding of the relationship between the literacy practices of the everyday and those of college life we have used the metaphor of resonance. This is taken from the realm of music. In fact, the idea emerged from our engagement with music as one of the subject areas we examined in one of the colleges. In effect, what we are asking is: if literacy practices are like music, how would we engender harmony between the practices of learners' everyday lives and those of more formal contexts, which, for LfLFE, is the further education college?

In our literacy research project, we have found examples in all of our 12 different subject areas across the four colleges where students' everyday literacy practices can be said to be resonant with the literacy practices of their courses and vice versa. Chords are being struck but they are struck in many different ways. We have met music students who read biographies of famous artists, childcare students who read magazines about health and welfare issues, and catering students who file away recipes they have tried out at home. In the innovations phase of the project, lecturers also rendered courses differently resonant with students' daily lives by changing the literacy demands on students. In one case, the lecturer usefully altered the genre of an assessment from the classic 'curriculum vitae' to web-friendly 'biography' for music students. Space here does not allow for in-depth stories about each of these but clearly chords can get struck all the time if the harmonics of literacy are appropriate.

We are not suggesting that there is a magic recipe for rendering all literacy practices resonant or that resonance in literacy will make learning possible in all circumstances. For one student it may be that the topic is what is important - in other words what is being read or written about is what makes it resonant. So if the topic of a book being read at home is similar to the topic of a course, we can say there is topic resonance across these contexts. For another student it may be critical that the medium being used to assist with reading and writing is the



same in the different contexts. For another student, it can be critical that the audience of the texts they produce have relevance for who they want to be or who they want to become. Clearly, there are diverse ways in which resonance can be experienced. As we have seen, even for the same task, the degree of resonance will be different for different students. But what the idea of resonance and the harmonics of literacy offer us is a way of understanding how reading and writing connect students across their contexts dynamically.

The 'harmonics' or aspects of literacy we describe is a potentially useful list for practitioners to consider in their efforts to render teaching and learning more resonant with learners' everyday lives. We have identified a number of harmonic wavelengths along which resonance is experienced and by implication, these wavelengths can be 'tuned-into' by educators and responded to or resisted by students. As our workshop literacy events exposed, changing aspects such as the audience,

medium, and the power relations can dramatically alter the way the same sort of message gets communicated and how students feel about having to do it. This leads us to consider that the *content* of what is being taught may not always be the only sticking point. The same content can be very differently taught and negotiated if these other aspects of literacy are altered. It is through engaging with and sometimes radically altering the different aspects of literacy (the 'harmonics' of literacy) within our particular contexts of teaching and learning that we can begin to develop different and hopefully more worthwhile resonances for students. Then we can say we have truly negotiated literacies for learning with our students.

(1) The list here is not exhaustive and the complete list of aspects were reduced for the purposes of the workshop with its focus on writing. As part of the process of data analysis, the LfLFE project has identified a more comprehensive list of aspects of literacy practices which are seen to be relevant to any literacy practice. These are: Participants, Audience, Purpose, Medium, Genre/Text-type, Mode, Artefact, Activity/Process, Content, Space/Place, Time/Timing, and Values and Identities.



"Literacies' is more inclusive as a term."

"Storybook Mums and Dads was absolutely creative, inspiring and excellent. ... I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

"Really interesting and good to hear from someone who had been actively involved."

"Good to keep challenging everyone to put the theories into practice."

"A realistic overview of where we are in Scotland. Particularly pertinent is that we don't yet all have a solid understanding of what a social practices model is."

"I thoroughly enjoyed this workshop. I learned something about music and a lot more about how ideas affect us and how we think and learn. The use of a practical musical activity and of resonance as a metaphor demonstrated the importance and value of using a variety of ways of knowing/ understanding"

"Fantastic, original presentation"

"Powerful and through provoking. I think the idea of resonance could be take further explore the idea of empathy and writer identities."

"Good to think about poverty and its link to literacy how can we make positive connections, not just any required by policy. Thanks"



Transforming Roles, Transforming Relationships

Sue Bates, Adult Literacies Renfrewshire - Buddies for Learning

This paper will also be published in Literacy Link, which is the newsletter of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy. Their website is www.acal.edu.au

The workshop presented by Adult Literacies Renfrewshire Buddies for Learning at the RaPAL Conference in June, 2006 examined the concept of developing literacies delivery models which function at two levels: at one level to provide a process for delivering effective literacies support, and at another, to transform aspects of the learning environment, and by doing so, transform the learning experiences of adult learners. The following discusses some of these processes.

The delivery models

The Buddies for Learning model is well established in Renfrewshire, providing community-based delivery in a number of locations, where learners are matched one-to-one with a trained volunteer tutor, and then attend (usually) weekly, three hour learning sessions together with two or three other learner/volunteer pairs. These sessions are conducted by Supported Learning Tutors (SLTs) who provide advice and assistance to the volunteer tutors, and at the same time, maximise opportunities for peer learning and group learning for learners and volunteers alike. The SLTs work in conjunction with Community Work Assistants (Outreach) (CWAs) and Community Learning Officers (CLOs) to support learners' involvement in a range of awareness-raising activities, and to ensure that the Buddies for Learning processes are maintained.

CAVSS (Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills) is also being delivered in Renfrewshire at Reid Kerr College. CAVSS is a model for integrating literacies support within vocational training and employs a specific team-teaching methodology. The literacy/numeracy specialist (CAVSS tutor) spends a few hours a week team-teaching alongside the vocational lecturer in theoretical and practical, workshop settings. During that time, the two lecturers take turns to instruct the group. The vocational lecturer teaches the vocational course as usual, and the CAVSS tutor steps in to revise and reteach the literacy and/or numeracy processes that students need to apply, at the actual points at which they are needing to apply them in their vocational course. All students access CAVSS support, and no-one is singled out for help. The CAVSS tutor takes an auxiliary role and only teaches according to the vocational lecturer's

planned activities, course materials and advice.

Ensuring learner-determination

In both the Buddies for Learning and CAVSS models, structures and processes are designed to ensure that the learners' goals are wholly and exclusively addressed in the learning process.

For example, the Buddies for Learning model includes systems for ensuring that each learner identifies their initial goals and determines new and/or different goals throughout their time with Buddies. Learners identify their immediate and long-term learning goals which are recorded in their initial Individual Learning Plan. At the end of each learning session, each learner identifies what they want to work on with their volunteer tutor in the next session. At six-week intervals, every learner meets with a third party (usually a CWA or CLO) to review their experiences in the project, including evaluating goals and determining goals for the next stage of their learning. After twenty-four weeks, each learner meets with a third party to review long term goals, and produce a second, new learning plan.

Learner-determined delivery within the CAVSS model is achieved differently. CAVSS is delivered to students as part of their industry training. Students do not choose to have CAVSS support: at this stage of implementation in Scotland it is delivered where lecturers and college managers have identified that student outcomes would be improved by literacies support.

However, the CAVSS model is designed to ensure that students' learning goals (specifically, to achieve an industry qualification as identified by their enrolment in a particular industry course) are neither disrupted nor increased by learning activities extra to those delivered by the industry lecturer. CAVSS tutors do not deliver learning activities of their own. Instead, they teach literacy and numeracy processes using the industry lecturer's teaching and learning activities as context and content.

Ensuring dialogue

At each stage, Buddies learners are actively engaged in reflecting on their progress, and determining new goals, through dialogue with volunteer tutors, SLTs, other learners and CEWs.



This dialogue is central to opening out the business of goal setting for literacies learners, many of whom have difficulty identifying what they might still see as impossible goals. The dialogue within Buddies sessions provides much more than peer learning opportunities for volunteers and learners. Learners talk about their experiences and the progress they have made over time, and this dialogue supports newer learners to develop confidence in their learning abilities, and look to longer term goals for themselves. Confidence building is central to the Buddies ethos, and the multi-layered dialogue that surrounds procedures for goal determination by learners means that confidence is grounded in the achievements of every learner in the group.

For CAVSS, dialogue is a central strategy for the delivery of literacies support, as well as an important outcome of that support. It is not uncommon for students undertaking industry qualifications to struggle with the literacy and numeracy processes involved in completing and passing their course, no matter how skilled and talented they are with the practical aspects of their training, arguably accounting for the significant withdrawal and failure rates experienced across FE. The common behaviour from these students is to keep quiet, not ask questions, not draw attention to yourself and somehow, try to struggle through.

One of the key strategies for CAVSS delivery is to have the CAVSS tutor and industry lecturer engage in dialogue as an opportunity to demonstrate the selection and application of literacies processes to solve an industry problem. The result is that students who have access to CAVSS literally see this application of processes over and over, and quickly start taking part in, and initiating, the dialogue themselves. CAVSS models collaborative problem solving and importantly, normalises the problem solving process so that it becomes OK to ask questions and OK to not know.

Social practices: fertile ground for transforming adult literacies

The social practices perspective offers significant insights into what have proved to be effective teaching and learning practices for adult literacies learners. The term 'social practices' is used widely and probably not consistently, but arguably a common denominator of meaning for applying the term to teaching/learning practices is that each learner has input into choosing what they want to learn and/or that the learning

activities they undertake are related to their real-life literacies use.

From a broader perspective, a social practices approach is one in which the connections between language, ideology and power are acknowledged and explored. The challenge for all literacies tutors is to recognise that within any community, there are many literacies, and that in many cases, their own language and literacies practices will be foreign: not necessarily relevant, not necessarily valued, and not necessarily respected. Some literacies tutors find it difficult to resist trying to 'correct' and/or 'improve' the literacy and numeracy practices of the adults they tutor. To do so is not only a highly political act, but one that will close down dialogue, prevent learner-determination and make literacies support unacceptable to the learner. It will also prevent the tutor from accessing information and advice from their primary source, the learner.

By definition, adult literacy learners' experience of school is largely negative: a place where they, and/or their skills, knowledge and language practices failed to make the grade. From a social practices perspective, it could be argued that people who leave school lacking adequate literacy or numeracy skills have, in fact, been ill-served by a system which is incapable of recognising, much less valuing, language and literacies practices that lie outside the dominant, academic practices.

It could be argued that the ideological narrowness of dominant literacies practices underpins the failure of significant numbers of people to achieve during initial schooling, including the widely-accepted, rarely-articulated myths that literacies reflect intelligence. The injustice, and the outrage, is that almost by definition, adult literacies learners will have been allowed, if not encouraged, by the schools system to take the blame for their individual failure.

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Don't Panic! The practitioner's guide to teaching reading

Maxine Burton

Maxine has worked as an adult literacy tutor and linguistics lecturer, and is currently working on two new NRDC projects at the University of Sheffield, one of which is the Practitioner Guide to effective practice in teaching adults to read, as described below.

Introduction

From September 2003 until March 2006, I worked as one of the Research Fellows on the University of Sheffield/NRDC ESF-funded study of effective practice in the teaching of reading to adult learners. Extensive fieldwork was carried out for the project, using a range of providers throughout England, and involving classroom observations, teacher interviews, learner assessments and questionnaires. Full data was obtained on 298 learners in 2 cohorts and 236 class observations (mainly of 2 hours' duration) were carried out. Following on from the Interim and Final Reports, the writing of a 'Practitioner Guide' is under way, specifically aimed at adult literacy teachers and teacher-trainers. This is intended to be an accessible publication, distilling some helpful guidelines from what we have found; and thanks to the huge amount and variety of data collected the largest of its kind ever undertaken in England - we would also hope it would be relevant to practitioners working in a wide range of settings.

The search for effective practice in the teaching of reading to adult learners

Before describing how such a Guide might be written, I will briefly outline the project's main findings:

- A statistically significant gain in reading progress was made by learners in the 2004-05 cohort
- A small but significant increase in self-confidence in both cohorts
- The most frequent patterns of classroom activity were (a) whole-class opening section followed by individual practice; (b) all individual work. Both entailed learners working alone for substantial amounts of time
- Silent reading was the most frequent specific teaching strategy. Other frequent strategies included giving appraisal/feedback immediately, discussion of vocabulary during a reading, other word study (e.g. word lists, puzzles, word searches) and using a dictionary to find word meanings.

Factors that were found to be significantly related to change in reading included:

- Gender (women made slightly better progress than men)
- Occupational status (employed people made better progress than the unemployed)
- Possession of FE/NVQ qualification
- Regular attendance
- Learners who spent more time working in pairs made better progress
- Learners who spent less time working alone in class made better progress
- Learners who reported more self-study between classes made better progress

Insights from practitioners

The task ahead is to transform the official findings and the few positive correlations with factors over which teachers actually had control, into a Practitioner Guide that will be helpful to the profession. This is the point at which the collaborative process becomes vital. The outline specification for the Guide suggests that as well as drawing on the Effective Practice Study and the messages that can be derived from that, it can also draw on 'other materials and guidance where research suggests that this is appropriate'.

Before we had completed the full analysis of the data, back in February 2006 I asked some of our fieldworkers and observed teachers for ideas about the sorts of things that practitioners might be looking for in a Guide. The suggestions they made seemed to group into four subheadings:

1. Rules/guidelines for teaching

This may seem an obvious point - what to do, what not to do - but this is the aspect that will be hardest to derive from the report. But it also raises the issue of the extent to which teachers actually want to be told what to do.

2. Current classroom practice: what is actually going on in classes

We learnt that one of the key things that our practitioner-researchers took from working on the project and conducting class observations was the opportunity to see what was going on and compare it with their own practice, to take away some good ideas to try out or maybe



identify things to avoid. Also since so many adult literacy tutors feel quite isolated they may derive some comfort from noting what was going on in other tutors' classes.

3. Classroom management and the learners

When the observed teachers attended our meetings, their paramount preoccupation came over as concern for their learners and their wellbeing. Indeed how satisfied they were with their teaching and how well they thought a particular session had gone seemed dependent on how happy they thought their learners were. The importance of raising levels of confidence and self-esteem came up time and again. Linked with this, for instance, is how you balance whole group and individual work and how you deal with learner dependence in 1-to-1 teaching situations.

4. Practitioners as researchers

Although the Guide is not to be primarily aimed at researchers, we do think it very important to find ways of enabling teachers to reflect on their own practice. One of our fieldworkers, Jan Wainwright, made this observation:

'My professional development has been considerably enhanced by being a practitioner-researcher, and I hope the project has also gained because although research should inform practice, practice can inform research. The practitioner-researchers embody this symbiosis.'

The workshop participants were then invited to form four groups, each to discuss matters arising from the heading of their choice. The groups then wrote down their main comments and suggestions for good practice, and for strategies that are particularly helpful to learners. (Exactly what they wrote is reproduced at the end of this piece.)

Conclusion

This workshop was an exploration of how the transition between a formal Report and a less formal Guide could be effected. For such a guide to be of maximum benefit, decisions on what should be included must be informed by practitioner needs and insights. As a way of illustrating this collaborative process, the workshop participants were invited to draw on their own expertise and share their ideas on effective practice in teaching reading. Their contributions have provided valuable insights

which will be further built on by a series of consultation meetings with practitioners and teacher-trainers. In their recent book, Mary Hamilton and Yvonne Hillier discuss the long-standing tensions regarding practitioners' influence, and note 'We can see that practitioners do have agency, which is stronger or weaker at particular times and which we can see through their networking and activities to foster good practice..' (Hamilton & Hillier, 2006: 73). It is to be hoped that our Practitioner Guide will provide opportunities to demonstrate practitioner agency as well as illustrate the research-practice symbiosis.

Written comments from workshop participants, Glasgow, 23/6/06:

1) **Rules/guidelines for teaching**

('Rules' was crossed out and replaced with 'approaches'!)

- *Making the purpose and approach explicit*
- *Brainstorming as a pre-reading exercise*
- *Critical reading authentic texts*
- *Modelling listening to proficient readers*
- *A variety of approaches*

2) **Classroom practice**

- *Peer observation across range of contexts*
- *More staffing*
- *Teaching strategies learning to learn and independent study*
- *More explicit links between the 4 skills*
- *Creative use of Core curriculum*
- *More CPD on using text and sentence level strategies linked to CC*
- *sharing results of research with learners*

3) **Classroom management/learners**

- *learners' personal preferences*
- *learning styles*
- *time - it takes to engage the learner before learning or reading actually begins (stages of reading and the types of reading)*
- *approaches of learning 'readings'*
 - *which suit individual learning*
 - *which suit groups*
 - *how to promote self-study*
 - *dos and don't s of peer learning*

Important:

*Clarifying for practitioners the circumstance/benefits/processes of different approaches to learning (individual/group) *pitfalls of dependency*



4) **Practitioners/researchers**

- *project didn't actually showcase good/best practice should have opportunity to do this and to test out their ideas (with a mentor) about it e.g. lots of reading aloud, reciprocal teaching*
- *so isolated that don't know if doing it right*
- *permission from above*
- *time to think and plan and read and consult and meet colleagues - paid time for it*
- *learners should be told about research that backs the approach being used with them*

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" Two workshops on poverties - Cambodia and Glasgow - very different contexts but both very thought provoking about what poverty is."

"Has given me encouragement to become involved in action research."

"So easy to lose the literacy and the ideas - and also "remember" things as better than they were. Important to keep this in front of us."

"Very valuable, absolutely packed with information and not enough time to take it all on."

"A fascinating look at research with teaching adults reading skills we need more opportunities to discuss these issues."

"Certainly ended the conference with a smile...perhaps it was the lively vibrant presentation...or maybe it was the rum! Very good"

"Lively, interesting workshop which was informal and made a lot of comparisons and encouraged ideas."

"Student involvement in these conferences is often awkward and a bit artificial. This was better than most"





The Literacy for Learning FE research project - a workshop

James Carmichael

James Carmichael is a lecturer in the social sciences at Anniesland College in Glasgow. For the last two years he has been a participant-researcher in the Literacies for Learning FE project, funded by the TLRP initiative.

Some background

This research project, which has now entered the last phase of its life, began three years ago. The aim of the project was to look at the practice of both students and lecturers in FE to see if some of the theoretical perspectives brought to the learning process from the body of work on literacies as social practices, could illuminate that process and give new insights. It also drew upon the perspective that 'instead of assuming that our students are not engaging with literacy outside school, we bring students' literacy practices into the classroom.' (Pahl and Rowsell 2005). Now in the last year of the project, this workshop aimed at airing some of the issues around understanding literacy as social practice for teaching practitioners in Further Education.

Practitioner-researchers from the four Colleges of Further Education involved, worked with researchers from the two HE institutions leading the project, with the aim of identifying where and how taking a social practices approach to literacies might change established perspectives on learning and teaching in a direct and practical way. The first year of the project focused upon gathering ethnographic data about the institutions involved. Year two was about gathering data about actual and specific courses, the practices of tutors involved in the delivery of those courses and the variety of literacy practices that students used and experienced. The aim was simply to try to discover what the real literacy demands of courses amounted to for students, and what the day-to-day and actual literacy practices of students were. This, it was thought, might identify areas where the literacy practices of students and the literacy demands of courses either worked together, or possibly worked against each other.

In the last phase of the research the aim was to take a step further by looking at ways in which the practice of tutors involved in the project might be changed in response to the issues discovered in the second phase. We were not so ambitious as to imagine that these changes would necessarily be a 'solution' to problems, but it was felt that by taking this further step we might further illustrate the importance of understanding literacy as social practice, and who knows we might at the same time begin to develop strategies that might take this

perspective into account in teaching practice.

The workshop

The workshop, which was co-presented with Joyce Gaechter of Perth College, replicated this process to a degree in that the aim was to present conference delegates with a set of vignettes or scenarios not necessarily directly drawn from actual events, but which to some extent captured something of the real situations and difficulties identified during the research. The delegates would then have the opportunity to debate the issues thrown up by these scenarios with a view to first of all identifying what the problems were (and it was by no means certain that we would all agree on the nature of the difficulties involved!) and having done this in small groups, we then planned to move on to looking at what might be considered to be 'traditional' ways of dealing with the issues, and non-traditional social practices approaches.

What we meant by the 'traditional' approach, is that view of literacy, the dominant paradigm within which literacy is viewed as a 'skill', as a value-free neutral capability to "decode print and/or to encode speech into written symbols." (Bennet in Mitchell and Weiler 1991). Taking such a perspective on literacy leads to a set of 'tactics' within the classroom that aim to deal with the perceived 'problem' of literacy i.e. that students lack sufficient skills and therefore cannot effectively decode. This is and was during the course of the research articulated as the view that 'students don't read'.

An alternative, social practices approach is very different. It begins by understanding "reading and writing: not just as skills, but as social practices that are always embedded in particular cultural contexts and that are shaped by the purposes they serve and the activities they are part of." (Papen 2005). This was very much the perspective adopted from the outset within the LfLFE research project, although it has to be said that many of the practitioner-researchers involved in the project, who were lecturers in FE, did not share this view at least initially.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to simply assume that tactics adopted by teaching staff to deal with issues in learning have no value



because of a rather mechanistic view of literacy. Instead in the workshop we wanted to pursue the idea that whilst the perspective of both the traditional approach to learning issues and the alternative, social practices approach might be very different, perhaps the tactics adopted by staff need not be very different, although their nature and purpose would be.

Our aim in the workshop then was to bring these groups together to go through the scenarios, discuss the issues raised and see what tactics might be identified as 'traditional' and which might be raised as alternative approaches in a way that would clarify for us all what the similarities and differences might amount to.

Last but not least we also aimed to talk about the changes in practice that were actually initiated in the last phase of the research project, and the ways in which they worked. We felt that this would give delegates a clear sense of what the project had been about, and the concrete ways in which taking a social practices approach to literacy could impact upon classroom practice.

The Scenarios

The scenarios produced for the workshop are too long to reproduce here, but here is an example of one of that was used in the course of the workshop.

Scenario 5

In the course of a construction exercise, a group of students was presented with a detailed set of instructions and drawings to work from. The instructions were given in fairly dense blocks of text in a technical and formal language with which some of them were not too familiar. Almost immediately one student commented on the fact that the instructions were presented in a manner that was 'boring' and which demanded too much reading. However the tutor explained that the text was really there to help them with a later assessment, the task before them was better explained in the drawings.

After some time, the students worked through the drawings, and the task, and completed what they had to do relatively successfully. The tutor had to step in from time to time, to explain aspects of the task and help translate some of the technical terminology on the drawings that the students did not understand. The tutor reminded all the students that they had been given a glossary of terms at the beginning of the course that gave them a full list of all the terms

they had to become familiar with, and asked them to go back after the class, look at the glossary and make sure they fully understood all the terms that were listed. One student complained that at the placement he worked in, the proper terms were rarely used, but the tutor pointed out that although the practice might be different in different places, knowing the proper terms would 'keep them right'.

At the end of the class the tutor reminded all the students that they would have to sit a written test within a few weeks and that it was important that they kept good notes about what they were doing in the class, and that they read over the handouts and referred to the glossary when they came across terms they were not used to. However after the students left the class, the tutor found that more than half the handouts he had distributed were left behind, some of them damaged or defaced or just cast aside by the students. He was left feeling that the students were not taking their studies seriously and expecting to have real difficulties in getting them through their assessments.

The discussion

This scenario was based upon an example of what could happen during a course on construction which well illustrates some of the real difficulties faced by tutors in dealing with their subjects and with their students.

Here we have a tutor doing his best to support and assist students, and they seem disinterested, lacking in motivation and irresponsible. The net result is that the tutor feels that he is getting nowhere and that the students are at fault for not taking their studies seriously enough. Such a situation is destructive on a number of levels. Students feel inadequate and learn, or have reinforced, feelings of failure, low self-esteem and confidence. At the same time the tutor perceives the students negatively, as uncaring or contemptuous of his efforts to help and support them. The tutor and the students come away from the class feeling negative and deflated in ways that demoralise.

Was there anything 'wrong' with the approach taken by the tutor? Could things have been done differently and have led to a different and more positive outcome?

The conference delegates present raised a number of issues with this and the other scenarios, such as:



Lack of relevance of the literacy practices used to the actual situation of students, to their experience and to the real situations in which they found themselves

Terminology used in teaching materials lacked context and therefore meaning

The purposes of texts used were not clear

The enthusiasm of students was not drawn upon or brought into classroom practice

A need to identify the audience was raised, who was material being produced for?

Certain lack of awareness of where students were in the learning process.

At least some, if not all, of these points might be made by someone who did not take a social practices approach. Tutors in FE constantly stress the need, for example, to 'start from where the students are', a point made in the course of our discussions when delegates raised the importance of tutors recognising where students were in their learning, and of trying to build upon practices that were familiar to them. It would be wrong to assume for example that tutors are unaware of the importance of changes to learning media: "people's efforts to attract, sustain, and build attention under new media conditions can be seen already to have spawned a range of new social practices and new forms of literacy associated with them." (Lankshear and Knobel 2003). Most tutors might not conceive of the use of different media as being about 'literatecies' but many would certainly recognise the importance of visual stimulation or of taking a mixed-media approach in order to retain students' interest.

We went on to tell delegates about efforts that had been made in Colleges during the final phase of the research to come up with innovative approaches to problems we had identified during the research, approaches that took into account a situated view of literacies. What we found in the course of developing these interventions was that often tutors were adopting tactics that were very familiar and might well have been adopted by tutors without taking on a situated understanding of literacies. However what was different was the way in which these interventions were understood, discussed with students and viewed by tutors.

One example drawn from experiences at Perth

College, involved the use of mind-maps as a way of developing the note-taking skills of students. If that was all that was involved, it might have been a tactic adopted by any tutor with a standard and traditional approach to literacy. What was different and novel was the extent to which this device was offered to students in a variety of forms, leaving it up to the student to decide which was best, and the way in which the technique was introduced as a practice they might adopt to assist their understanding of one form of literacy (not a 'better' or 'the right' form of literacy) that would help their personal development. The tutor concerned took a view that was genuinely empowering and student-centred in that it gave the students real choice and control over how they used (or did not use) the technique. It allowed them to translate the technique into forms that made sense in the context of their own practices and learning. Importantly this approach began with the tutor valuing the existing practices of students.

In other words, it has become clear to us that fairly standard techniques used in the classroom based upon the traditional deficit model of literacy can also be used by tutors taking a situated view of literacy. What matters is shifting the understanding and approach of the tutor away from the traditional view to that of a social practices approach. Many of the FE tutors involved in the LfLFE project began by taking the standard view but during the course of the research project began to appreciate the importance and meaning of a social practices approach and as a result found that the relationship between them and their students did change radically and their understanding of the role of literacies in learning was transformed. That transformation led to a similar change in how tasks and materials and classroom work were undertaken and understood.

Some reflections

Of course at a RaPAL conference delegates have an informed perspective, they understand what it is to speak of literacy as social practice. For many of the tutors involved in the LfLFE project this was their first encounter with this different perspective and that presented real challenges for all those involved. It took some time for the significance of that change to really be appreciated.

Perhaps, if we are to shift the understanding of literacy from the traditional deficit model, in which literacy is understood as a 'problem' and



the literacy levels of students is regarded as an issue to a social practices approach which recognises and values the literacy practices of students, then one way forward might be to build some bridges between existing classroom practice and this different perspective. It might be that a variety of existing teaching techniques (like the Mind Map above) can still be used even if a social practices approach is taken because it is not about the mechanics of particular methods, but rather about the context within which teaching takes place.

Here lies the nub of the matter, taking a social practices approach to literacy transforms the way in which the pedagogical process works and that transformation takes place at the level of the context for student-teacher interactions. If the tutor begins by recognising and valuing the practices that already belong to the student then no matter what teaching method is adopted that will colour and transform the nature of the learning experience.

This workshop was a very illuminating exercise for those of us involved in presenting it, in that it afforded us the luxury of discussing ideas about

changes in practice with others who are already taking a social practices perspective. The next step for us is to try to communicate these arguments to a wider audience in the FE sector in Scotland, and this workshop has taken us one step further to doing that more effectively.

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"Very interesting and informative. I learnt a lot of useful things and the presentation technique was good as well. It was great that learners were able to come along."

"Wonderful way to finish. Reflected on our identities as learners. Visually exciting after all the words!"

"Stimulated a lot of discussion about language, history, identity, learning in prisons."

"An interesting session on the process of researching with some helpful insights on the role of referrers"



"Let's just do a quick initial assessment" - a conflict of funding v. best practice?

Sandie Stratford

Sandie has taught Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL since 1978, and has mentored many new tutors. She has participated in NRDC and practitioner-led research, and is currently Lincolnshire and Rutland CPD training co-ordinator.

Context: The English Skills for Life classroom (literacy, numeracy or language). Incoming learners are expected to undergo a screening process followed by initial and then subsequently diagnostic assessment.

The value of initial assessment lies in giving the learner guidance as a starting point from which to develop their literacy, language or numeracy skills. It 'identifies a learner's skills against a level or levels within the national standards' (DfES 2006). But can this process be 'quick'? Learners are frequently returning to education after a long gap, and in many cases, after a bad previous experience. They are often entering a foreign environment. Many are known to underestimate their abilities. Speakers of other languages vary greatly in their competence in expressing themselves, and might indeed need the facility of an interpreter.

The Department for Education and Skills' advice on initial assessment seems to be based on sound evidence and good practice and estimates that each 'skill' (I take this to mean literacy and numeracy) needs about 40 minutes for an initial assessment, and perhaps longer, depending on individual need. Anecdotal evidence suggests that corners are being cut in initial assessments as teachers are given insufficient time to carry out careful confidential initial assessments. It is my contention that students have a less than good learning experience as a result.

What options are there, and why do the best options take time?

Brooks et al have undertaken a thorough and comprehensive review of the assessment instruments available, and it is not my purpose to evaluate them here (Brooks et al 2005). I would however like to mention the use of one IT based initial assessment instrument, which is sometimes adopted to save time, and contrast it with a more traditional paper-based tool. This is Targetskills (CTAD 2001).

Targetskills offers a range of tasks, beginning with 'simple' letter or sound recognition and getting progressively more difficult. It does not cover writing, and tests reading by means of

multiple-choice questions, cloze and re-ordering of words in a sentence.

Some students, both young and older, find the relative anonymity of the computer assessment advantageous; my experience is that the face to face interview takes much longer when I have not had the chance to look at HOW the student does the assessment, and to interact with them during the process.

My preferred way is to begin with a chat to gain an understanding of the feelings of the student on arrival, and some background information about their previous learning. Then I would use a paper test (the original ALBSU (1992) and subsequently the BSA (1997) tools were most familiar though not perfect), ensuring that the student is at ease and able to attempt the first couple of tasks, before allowing them to work in peace and quiet.

I would then give immediate feedback, the student reading out the answers as I marked the test. Immediately old teacher/pupil attitudes begin to crumble! We could immediately discuss both their strengths (very important) and their needs. The value of watching a student take this assessment lies in observing how they go about, for example, the spelling tasks: their preferred learning style can often be observed, as they either jot the attempted words down, mouth the sounds or gaze into space. Ivanic and Tseng (2005 p23) refer to the pre-eminence of learning over teaching; in observing and talking to the learner in an initial assessment, the teacher can begin the process of understanding how they learn.

This process is at the same time diagnostic, and the ILP can be developed whilst the feedback is being given. The result is both oral feedback (supportive) and a relevant written ILP to be revisited after a term or so. The student now feels positive: they are not 'thick', and their immediate needs are capable of being addressed. The ILP is meaningful and owned by the student. The learner's 're-constructed identity' as a student is nurtured (Ivanic & Tseng 2005 p27).



This is thus a formal assessment, but carried out in an informal and supportive one-to-one environment. It is formative in that it judges where a learner has got up to, bearing in mind that the learner is a person with a rich background of experience (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Giving the opportunity to share their literacy practices, what they feel good about, as well as what they perceive to be their literacy needs, offers a learner dignity and acknowledges their strengths. The learner is not 'a blank slate' (Ivanic & Tseng 2005 p12) but brings a range of experience to the teaching context.

The government's Skills for Life model is sometimes criticised for being a deficit model, blaming the individual for their lack of achievements. What learners need is to build on their strengths and gain support (from tutors and peers) in developing their existing literacy practices to the best advantage.

In addition, since the BSA test is very spelling focussed, I would ask the learner to write a few sentences about themselves, and if specific help with reading is requested, a further miscue analysis would be completed. These might take place on different occasions depending on the resilience of the student!

How long has this process taken? At least 40 minutes.

The above suggests a methodology for carrying out termly reviews of the student's progress, giving plenty of opportunity to self-assess both individually and as a group. I would design an assessment based on the work the group had covered, tailored to individual need where possible, and (if appropriate) similar in format to the national test or whatever accreditation they were working towards. The learner, having ownership of the ILP from the initial assessment onwards, will now hopefully be in a position to judge whether progress has been made. Any assessment would also refer to ways in which the learners' own literacy practices were affected, and hopefully developed, by the learning.

What is the result of reducing the time given to initial assessment?

This question warrants research. It might be possible to postulate some outcomes of a reduced initial assessment time:

- Learners feel de-personalised, affecting retention
- Their negative view of the learning environment is reinforced
- Needs for development of oral skills can be overlooked
- Teachers feel frustrated in not being able to prepare adequately for the individual needs of the learners
- The ILP becomes merely a paper exercise

In any case, the high ideals of the Skills for Life agenda will not be realised if priority time is not given for initial assessments to be carried out thoroughly.

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Negotiating Interest: the role of healthcare staff in the initial engagement of literacy learners

Catriona Carson

Catriona is responsible for developing a strategic approach to literacy and numeracy services within NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Introduction

As part of a commitment to evidence-based practice, I undertook research to evaluate the role of referrers (those who facilitate initial engagement with learning) in the health sector in Glasgow. I used the NHS Learning on Prescription project as the basis for this work.

The evaluation:

- Explored the role of the referrer.
- Described how referrers in primary care and community health settings negotiate the topic of literacies support in conversation with patients.
- Assessed implications for the development of awareness raising strategies for healthcare staff.

The research was undertaken as part of the recent Practitioner-Led Action Research in Adult Literacies on the theme of 'New Ways to Engage New Learners', which was funded via Learning Connections at Communities Scotland. The information on how referrers work may be of interest to practitioners hoping to work with health staff and other potential referrers.

"I've probably got out of a case load of twenty-two maybe four or five people who have numeracy or literacy problems"

Occupational Therapist

Context

Learning on Prescription is an NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde project. It is part of an overall strategy to support NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde develop its potential to engage with learners through staff who are in contact with patients and by piloting workplace learning that supports ALN learning for NHS employees. Staff employed on the Learning on Prescription project work with healthcare staff, mainly in primary care, to support patients in accessing local adult literacy and numeracy provision by providing a referral and guidance route. The Learning on Prescription project was developed from a model outlined by Kathryn James (2004). The "James" model equips adult educators to work in partnership with health professionals on a referral basis to support patients engage with learning in order to improve their health.

The project has been developed within the context of the Scottish model of adult literacy and numeracy as outlined in the Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland (ALNIS) (2001) report and the good practice framework (in the *Literacies in the Community: Resources for Practitioners and Managers Pack*, 2000). These set out a social practices model of literacies, characterised by learning planned according to each individual learner's interests and goals, and situated within the context of their lives and literacies practices. Self-determination is a guiding principle, indicating that the identification of potential interest is more relevant than identifying need.

"It's a bit more different identifying those who come in and they're chatting away and sometimes you don't know a lot of the times you know there's probably a lot of people out there you don't know about"

Practice Nurse

Health and Literacy

Within the social model of health, education is one of a number of conditions determining health (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991). This model emphasises the inter-relationship between factors, providing a good reason for health staff to collaborate with learning providers. Kickbusch (2004) has suggested that "literacy is the pathway between education and health".

Health literacy is an issue for health staff in managing patient's care where the patient has limited health literacy. According to Nutbeam (2000), functional health literacy, the passive level of the health literacy framework, is possessing the basic literacy skills required to function effectively with regards to health and knowledge.

Looking specifically at the links between health staff and learning providers, baseline research by a Scottish national pathfinder on literacy and health (Aberdeen City Council, The Health and Literacy Project, 2004) identified the following barriers for health staff making referrals:

- Low awareness of literacy provision
- Uncertainty about remit to facilitate learning
- Lack of awareness of having dealt with people with low literacy skills.



"...I've probably identified are people who either are young sort of very young teenagers with babies who you want them to have a future."

Health Visitor

Literacy and Referrers

The referrer occupies a key role in the successful development of the Learning on Prescription project. This role is also found in texts associated with ALN policy in Scotland. The ALNIS report (p.2), for example, supports "a major effort to engage a broad range of people in workplaces and communities as 'spotters', 'referrers' and 'supporters'".

Referrers are also highlighted in an evaluation of the Scottish Executive's adult literacy and numeracy strategy. Tett et al (2004) interviewed 569 learners on a range of issues relating to ALN provision. Looking at pathways to ALN, they refer to a "third trigger to participation" (after personal motivation and encouragement from friends and family) "was because of professional advice and applied to both community and institutional settings" They suggest that the third largest source of encouraging participation were "people holding some position (doctors, social workers, job centre, youth club, employer)".

There are difficulties associated with a referring role within a social practices model of literacy. The ALNIS report, for example, defines potential learners in terms of need: expressed, latent and invisible. This deficit-based approach seems at odds with the wealth-based social practices model. This gives potential referrers a complex task. They must be wary of exploiting any imbalance of power in the relationship between themselves and the patient. While identifying ("spotting") potential learners and facilitating their access to learning ("referring") are documented activities, the crucial stage of assessing whether someone is actually interested in participating in learning is not well documented.

Despite these inherent difficulties, there is support within the literature for public sector professionals to collaborate on social issues. Tett et al. (2003) researched the literature for evidence of why public sector organisations should collaborate. Suggestions included tackling "complex social issues: some problems have such wide ramifications for so many sections of society.... That they are impossible for one organization to tackle on its own". Literacy is one such complex social issue. Tett lists among the factors for successful collaboration "an agreed

legitimate basis for collaboration" and partnerships that are "fit for purpose".

A legitimate basis for collaboration between referrers and learning providers can be found when exploring how social inequalities affect access to adult learning.

"Adult learning surveys have repeatedly shown a persisting socio-economic and socio-cultural divide between those who engage in education and training programmes and those who do not (NIACE, 2001). ... by placing the emphasis on the learner to manage their own learning, only those already motivated to engage in learning will take up the opportunity unless strong links are made between formal and informal educational providers, careers services and industry who through partnership can engage the potential learner, guide them to the right learning opportunities and support them whilst they are learning."

SPICE (2002)

The support of agencies can be crucial in helping potential learners to overcome socio-economic and socio-cultural factors affecting motivational triggers and continue to engage in learning.

"I've already mentioned the service to her before in the past and she's never been happy to take it up and so this time because she realises her daughter's learning to read and her reading skills are not great she thought it might be a good idea"

Health Visitor

Research Methods

Eight referrers to the project were tape-recorded individually. For this, they were asked to describe the processes from identifying a literacy issue through to making a referral to the Learning on Prescription project. The interviews were semi-structured and were analysed as narratives. This approach was adopted in order to capture referrers' experiences and attitudes and, in doing so, gather information which will be relevant to the practices and values of other health staff who are potential referrers.

"if you get to know the patient you realise that it's an issue for a lot of people out there"

Psychiatrist

Findings

Three situations emerged during which the issue of interest in accessing literacy support was negotiated:



- Through completion of a literacy task such as form filling
- During the assessment of a new patient
- Through knowledge gained of the patient over regular contact and development of professional relationship between referrer and patient.

An analysis of the transcripts revealed the following steps in the process of negotiation:

- Disclosure of the issue: There were two levels of disclosure: self-disclosure and inferences from triggers and responses. Few referrers described cases of self-disclosure and none reported unprompted self-disclosure. One referrer assumed that not all patients were confident with their literacies skills. This gave her a starting point for offering support and thus a space for self-disclosure. A number of the referrers suggested that disclosure of the issue had to be made in the context of the patient's life. It is not clear whether referrers seek to identify all patients who may be interested in accessing tuition or whether they are looking more specifically at the lower end of the skills spectrum.

"I do what's called the interest checklist and although I come in with the interest checklist with the full intention of talking the person through it the minute they see the form they panic and that's usually when it comes up because they perceive I'm gonna ask them to fill something in"

Occupational Therapist

- Offering support for literacy tasks: Offers of support were not always accepted but they were a part of the process
- Interest in accessing tuition: Achieved primarily in terms of reaching agreement with the patient. Learning readiness was an issue identified by one referrer: The ongoing relationship between referrer and patient was significant to identifying this learning readiness.

Offering reassurance to patient. It is during offers of reassurance to patients about literacy that referrers' working definitions of literacy emerge most clearly e.g.

"I always say it's not about not being able to write or read it's just about y'know if your kids are back at school and they're starting to do their homework and if you don't use it you lose it"

A majority of the referrers offered reassurance to the patient as part of the process of negotiating a referral e.g. about the nature or type of provision; that the patient isn't "stupid"; and about the scale of literacies issues in the population.

As the chart below shows, not all of these steps were described by each interviewee but all used at least two and the sequential order of the process varied between interviewees. Interest in accessing tuition and disclosure of the issue emerge as key to the process.

	Disclosure of the issue	Support for literacy tasks	Interest in accessing tuition	Offering reassurance to patient
Practice manager	□	□	□	□
Practice nurse		□	□	
Health visitor 1	□	□	□	
Health visitor 2	□		□	
Lit. Support worker	□	□	□	□
Guidance worker	□		□	□
Psychiatrist	□		□	□
Occupational therapist	□		□	□



Referrers also made comments on the following issues:

- Identifying literacy issues
- Broaching the subject
- Explaining barriers to participation where the patient has not engaged in learning
- Discussion on the scale of literacies issues
- Assessment of the patient's skills and level of confidence in literacies
- Impact of literacies issues on patient's life and coping strategies
- Comments on provision

Questions from Referrers

Some referrers took the opportunity to ask questions about the project:

- What constitutes a literacy issue? There was interest in who qualifies as having a literacies issue e.g. do people who have experienced a loss in their skills due to, say, addictions qualify?
- Type of provision available: do literacies providers have the skills and capacity to work with patients who have a range of issues such as learning disabilities or schizophrenia?

These questions provide evidence of how referrers seek to define literacy in practical terms which are meaningful to their patients' health and well-being.

Implications

Referring is a complex task which must be grounded within the social practices model of literacy. In order to develop awareness of literacies issues, including the referral role, among health care staff, a number of approaches should be developed:

- a) A practical, working definition of literacy which is relevant to health staff should be developed in order to recognise it as an issue in their patients. This should include advice on local and national target groups.
- b) A systematic approach to embedding literacy support into the health service should take account of the three situations emerged during which the issue of interest in accessing literacy support was negotiated:
 - Offering support for undertaking literacy tasks
 - Assessment of a patient's health and well-being should include screening for interest in learning.

- Health staff with an ongoing relationship with a patient could use this to broach the subject over a period of time. Advice on referring could highlight that some referrals take place after a series of two or more conversations and to be aware of the times when a patient may show learning readiness.
- c) For healthcare staff, accessing tuition is part of a package of support. Awareness raising activities could usefully draw attention to the specialist nature of the provision available and how this can be integrated into other relevant support for patients.
- d) Awareness of literacies issues within the health sector could include signposting to good practice in working with patients with literacies issues as well as referring them to tuition.

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Literacy & Equality in Irish Society (LEIS) August 2004-March 2006 Evaluation Report and the LEIS Literacy and Equality and Creativity - Resource Guide for Adult Learners (including CD)

The Literacy and Equality in Irish Society (LEIS) project states two aims in its evaluation report. The first is to research, design and develop a resource guide that includes a number of text free methodologies, the purpose of which are to explore issues around equality with adult literacy learners. The five non-text based methods are image theatre, storytelling, gamelan, drama and visual arts. The resource guide and CD explain how to use these creative methodologies when facilitating groups to explore issues of equality.

The second aim is to develop new insights into the cause and consequences of inequalities and the possibilities for change.

I read the material (both the evaluation report and the resource guide) as an adult education practitioner, keen to get some ideas on alternative methodologies, particularly text free ones. As any literacy practitioner knows, getting to the task of discussing and exploring issues with texts can be laborious as often learners are focussed on the skill of decoding words when reading. At first, I found it hard to resolve the link between the three strands of the project literacy, equality and creativity. Initially, it was unclear if the methods were used to explore issues of equality, or if the methodologies were employed as a tool for teaching literacy. However, the report soon made clear that the resources have little to do with literacy as such, but more to do with exploring equality issues with adult literacy learners. I believe that exploring equality (and other) issues is part of what we as adult literacy tutors do, but it is not our primary aim.

The CD certainly provided a greater insight into how the methodologies are practised, although it did not make entirely clear how these methodologies can be used in a variety of situations and how they might relate to inequality in the learners' lives. I think it could have benefited from more examples and follow on exercises and questions after using some of the methodologies with learners. In other words, that the aims behind the methodologies were more transparent.

Personally, I found it difficult to make the link between equality and a number of the exercises. While the practice of gamelan is in itself egalitarian, linking it to the causes and consequences of inequality in learners' lives is purely metaphorical. While it is fair to say that a great many literacy learners return to education because they want to participate more fully in society and be more empowered, some do not have a sense of inequality. In fact, a great many of our literacy learners do not want to explicitly address issue based education.

I believe that this kind of resource would be more appropriate to a community development setting whereby literacy is not the primary aim of the group but a part of their overall scope. Also, I feel that these kinds of methodologies can only really be used with groups that meet regularly and over longer periods of time rather than groups who meet for two or three hours per week to work specifically on literacy goals. However, some of the methodologies and exercises are useful as an extra resource to be added to the practitioner's toolkit, or to be adapted for specific purposes, such as icebreakers. They are also useful in exploring different ways of learning, again by asking the appropriate follow-up or evaluation questions.

A note about design - there is little purpose in reproducing pages on the CD that are already included in the resources guide. Also, some of the photographs that were given on the resources could have benefited from supplementary information on what exercises they specially related to, in particular, the photographs on the Image Theatre section. However, the CD does supply some useful video clips on drama and storytelling.

I believe that learners would find some of the exercises stimulating and fun, as long as the tutor/facilitator is clear about the aim behind these exercises. However, I do not necessarily believe that just by creating something will learners be any closer to exploring causes and consequences of inequality, for example, the sculptures in the exercise on Visual Arts section. Firstly, it assumes that adults with literacy difficulties are unable to verbalise the inequalities in their lives. Secondly, the task may be very abstract for some as it is based on metaphorically expressing issues, rather than expressing in a concrete way.



In conclusion, I found it refreshing to at least be exposed to alternative ways of working with adults. Often, we can reach a stalemate, whereby we can follow the same worn path of methodologies in ABE. My advice as an adult basic education tutor is to perhaps use the resource guide to initiate further ideas for in-house tutor training in literacy centres. I personally would benefit from further training in these kinds of methodologies, as I really don't believe that a resource book and CD can replace the dynamic of group work and practising the methods with colleagues and with learners. In

addition, some adult literacy tutors may shy away from new methodologies and therefore may benefit from special training in using some of these new ones, especially in methodologies that explore issues with groups.

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"This conference has been extremely enjoyable."

"I liked participating in the banner making and viewing the 'Flying Colours' exhibition."

"Banners and illustrations wonderful"

"Great conference! Enjoyed the ceilidh. Really good company and atmosphere. Stimulating lots of thinking."

"Very thought provoking and a source of solidarity and inspiration. Very enabling and inclusive atmosphere created. Thank you!!"

"I enjoyed the atmosphere very collegiate. First class opportunity for networking and exchange."

"Banner making was a good reflective space"

"Haven't been to a bad RaPAL yet, it's always good to meet the regulars again. This was one of the best"

"A brilliant conference with top quality speakers, workshops"

"Thought the community artist and conference illustration made a fantastic novel yet important contribution. Brilliant!"



Changing the Way We Teach Math

The Instructor's Manual

What do the experts say about how to teach basic math to adult students? Most people who teach math have heard about most of their recommendations. Yet putting those recommendations into practice is harder than it seems. Kate Nonesuch consulted with more than 100 people who teach basic math to adults in British Columbia. She presented some findings from the literature about teaching basic math, and got their reactions. Instructors talked about what changes they would like to make in their teaching practice, and what barriers got in the way of making change. She wrote the manual in response to their

Emotions and Math

Student Resistance

**Putting Students in
Charge of Their Learning**

Hands-on Learning

Group Work

Real Life Problems

And, it's not just for math teachers.

Anyone who teaches adult literacy or ABE students will find food for thought here.

Changing the Way We Teach Math: A Manual for Teaching Basic Math to Adults

<http://www.nald.ca/library/learning/mathman/mathman.pdf>

The Literature Review

The literature review outlines Kate's journey through the literature about teaching math to adults, as she tried to figure out what makes it more complicated than it seems on the surface.

More Complicated Than It Seems: A Review of Literature about Teaching Math to Adults

<http://www.nald.ca/library/research/morecomp/morecomp.pdf>

For More Information

Nonesuch@mala.bc.ca

The project was funded by the National Office of Literacy and Learning (NOLL), Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

**There will be more about this project in the
Summer issue of the RaPAL Journal!**

Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

We invite contributions from anyone involved in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL education to write and share ideas, practice and research with RaPAL readers. This can be writing from learners, ideas linking research and practice, comments about teaching, training or observations about policy. We welcome articles, reviews, reports, commentaries or cartoons that will stimulate interest and discussion.

The journal is published three times a year and represents an independent space, which allows critical reflection and comment linking research with practice in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL nationally and internationally.

The RaPAL network includes learners, managers, practitioners, researchers, tutors, teacher trainers, and librarians in adult, further and higher education in the UK. It also has an international membership that covers Canada, USA, New Zealand, Australia, South America, Europe and Africa.

Guidelines for Contributors

All contributions should be written in an accessible way for a wide and international readership.

- Writing should be readable avoiding jargon. Where acronyms are used these should be clearly explained.
- Ethical guidelines should be followed particularly when writing about individuals or groups. Permission must be gained from those being represented and they should be represented fairly.
- We are interested in linking research and practice; you may have something you wish to contribute but are not sure it will fit. If this is the case please contact the editors to discuss this.
- Writing should encourage debate and reflection, challenging dominant and taken for granted assumption about literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

Journal Structure

We want to encourage new writers as well as those with experience and to cover a range of topics, to do this the journal is divided into three main sections and a review section. Each section is slightly different in length and focus. We welcome illustrations and graphics for any of the sections. The journal has a different theme for each edition but welcomes general contributions

particularly for Section 1 and Section 2 and for reviews.

Section 1. Ideas for teaching

This section is for descriptive and reflective pieces on teaching and learning. It is a good place to have a first go at writing for publication and can be based on experiences of learners and teachers in a range of settings. Pieces can be up to 1,000 words long.

Section 2. Developing Research and Practice

This section covers a range of contributions from research and practice. In terms of research this could be experience of practitioner research, of taking part in research projects, commenting on research findings or of trying out ideas from research in practice. In terms of practice this could be about trying out new ideas and pushing back boundaries. Contributions should include reflection and critique. Pieces for this section should be between 1,000 2,000 words long including references.

Section 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives

This section is for more sustained analytical pieces about research, practice or policy. The pieces will be up to 4,000 words long including references and will have refereed journal status. Although articles in this section are more theoretically and analytically developed they should nevertheless be clearly written for a general readership. Both empirical work and theoretical perspectives should be accessible and clearly explained. Writing for this section should:

- **Relate to the practices** of learning and teaching adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL.
- **Link to research** by describing and analysing new research findings relating this and any critical discussion to existing research studies.
- **Provide critical informed analysis** of the topic including reference to theoretical underpinning.
- **Write coherently and accessibly avoiding impenetrable language and assumed meanings.** The piece should have a clear structure and layout using the Harvard referencing system and notes where applicable. All Terminology should be explained, particularly for an international readership.



Review Section

Reviews and reports of books, articles, and materials including CD should be between 50 800 words long. They should clearly state the name of the piece being reviewed, the author, year of publication, name and location of publisher and cost. You should also include your name, a short 2-3 line biography and your contact details. You can write the review based upon your experience of using the book, article of materials in your role as a practitioner, teacher trainer, and researcher or as a student.

Submitting your work

1. Check the deadline dates and themes which are available in the journal and on the website.
2. All contributions should have the name of the author/s, a title and contact details which include postal address, email address and phone number. We would also like a short 2-3-line biography to accompany your piece. Sections, subsections, graphs or diagrams should be clearly indicated or labelled.
3. Send a copy either in electronic form or in hard copy to the journal co-ordinator
Deirdre Parkinson at: [deirdre@dp-](mailto:deirdre@dp-associates.org.uk)

associates.org.uk or to 20 Alnwick Drive, Glasgow G76 OAZ

4. Your contribution should be word processed, in Arial size 12 font, double spaced on A4 paper with numbered pages.

What happens next

1. Editors and members of the Editorial Group review contributions for Section 1 and Section 2. Contributions for Section 3 are peer reviewed by a mixture of experienced academic, research and practice referees.
2. Feedback is provided by the editor/s within eight weeks of submission. This will include constructive comment and any suggestions for developing the piece if necessary.
3. You will be informed whether you piece has been accepted, subject to alterations, and if so the editor/s will work on a final editing process. Any final copy will be sent to authors prior to publishing.
4. Where work is not accepted the editor/s may suggest more relevant or alternative places for publication.

Please contact us if you want to discuss any ideas you have for contributing to the journal.

FORTHCOMING VACANCIES ON THE RAPAL MANAGEMENT GROUP

Elections will be held at the AGM in Belfast in June for several positions which will become vacant as the current post-holders will have served the maximum time in those positions. Please consider whether you can help to maintain and develop RaPAL's progress by being nominated for the posts below:

Chair

The Chair oversees RaPAL's strategic development and is crucial to developing RaPAL over the next 2-3 years. The post involves:

- overseeing the representation of RaPAL in national and international settings;
- overseeing the main activities of postholders;
- chairing management group meetings;
- co-ordinating policy comments/proposals made by the RaPAL network;
- taking a lead in keeping communications flowing;
- ensuring that an annual report is given to the AGM each year;
- organising elections of postholders;
- making final decisions after consultation.

Ordinary Member

Being elected as an ordinary member of the RaPAL Management Group team is a very good way of introducing yourself to how the organisation

works. The post, which lasts for one year, enables you to help out with various projects and is also good grounding if you are considering standing for an Officer's post at later date.

Journal Co-ordinator

The Journal Co-ordinator organises the Annual Editorial Meeting, which, amongst other things, reviews the previous year's journals, selects new themes and editors for the coming year and sets copy deadlines. S/he works closely with the editors of each issue, co-ordinates the layout of the journal prior to its proof-reading and printing and reports regularly to the Management Group and annually to the RaPAL AGM.

Production Editor

The role of production editor involves seeing each issue of the journal through the final stages of editing and production before despatching it to members. When the editors have put the journal together, the production editor is responsible for detailed proof reading of the final version, agreeing amendments with the printer and liaising with the printer while it's being produced. At this stage you receive address labels from the membership secretary so that you can send the journals out as soon as they arrive from the printer.

RaPAL Membership form

RaPAL Membership Fees for 2006-2007

	UK & Eire	Other EU	Outside EU
Individual Membership*			
Full-time	£35	£50	£50
Low-waged, unwaged, student	£20	£30	£30
* includes 1 copy of the RaPAL Journal			
Institutional Membership			
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 2006-2007!

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 _____

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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 2006-07)

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
Lancaster LA1 4YD

Learning Journeys in Literacy

The themes of the conference are:

Learning Identities
Learners' Voices
Diversities and Learning
Action Research

We invite you to participate in these themes by offering workshops or presentations, taking part in panel discussions, contributing to practice-based workshops or presenting posters. Your contribution should respond to one or more of the following topics:

- The learning journeys of practitioners, researcher, learners and teacher educators
- Factors affecting learner identities such as age, gender, ethnicity and context
- The needs and experiences of ESOL learners
- The identities and voices of numeracy learners
- The relationship between learning identities and educational sectors: formal, non-formal or informal
- Challenges and opportunities offered by ICT
- Writing identities
- How policy interacts with learning identities
- Practical strategies for meeting the needs of a diverse range of literacy learners
- Learning and motivation
- The development of self-confidence in the course of the learning journey

Interested?

Please let us know. The **Closing Date** for the submission of proposal for workshops, presentation, papers and posters is **28th March 2007**. Please email Shelley Tracey at s.tracey@qub.ac.uk

Please let us know if you are considering attending the conference so that we can send you further information.

Please email Shelley Tracey at s.tracey@qub.ac.uk



RaPAL Conference 2007

Learning journeys voices and identities in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL

**Friday 15th June 2007 from 10.00 a.m.
to Saturday 16th June 4.00 p.m.**

The conference will take place at Queen's University Belfast, which is situated in the vibrant area of Botanic Avenue, beside the Botanic Gardens, close to the city centre, and accessible from the George Best Belfast City Airport and the Aldergrove International Airport.

If you are a first-time visitor to the city, we hope that you will give yourself the time to explore Belfast and beyond and have a wonderful Northern Ireland experience. We can offer information about touring and local events while you are here.

Pre-conference event 14th June

There will be an optional pre-conference event from 3.00 pm. On 14th June. The theme is *Local Voices*. A reception will be organised in the evening to welcome travellers.

Friday 15th June

Keynote address by Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland, on

"Identity, Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Programmes"

At lunch-time, local literacy learners will be involved in presentations on the theme of **Learners' Voices**.

You are most welcome to attend the conference dinner in the evening. This event offers storytelling and traditional music. Accommodation will be available at the halls of residence. You will also be directed to information about B&B and hotel accommodation.

Further information and details about registration will be available on the Queen's University Belfast School of Education website:
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/>