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RaPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy

This is a bumper, 'open' issue and includes articles that demonstrate how people use and engage with literacy in a wide variety of social domains such as the army, religion, educational research, literacy education, libraries and prisons to name just a few.

Contents

Editorial

Welcome to the 2008 spring issue of RaPAL. This is a bumper, 'open' issue the content of which will appeal to all of our members in some way. It includes articles that demonstrate how people use and engage with literacy in a wide variety of social domains such as the army, religion, educational research, literacy education, libraries and prisons to name just a few. We know this diversity will generate wide interest and make this issue a compelling read.

Section one contains two articles and the first one is an amusing, personal account by Mike Brown of his experiences of doing research for the first time. Mike's descriptions of the 'bear pits' and 'labyrinths' he encountered on his research journey are honest and revealing. The second article is co-authored by Geoff Saul, the Area Curriculum Manager for ESOL at Leicester College, and Rob Pheasant, the Programme Development Manager for Skills for Life at QIA. Geoff and Rob tell us about the very positive outcomes achieved at Leicester College when they worked together embedding Skills for Life in a number of curriculum areas.

In Section two we have two articles written by Genevieve Clarke and Neelam Hussain respectively. Genevieve describes how in 2008, which is a National Year of Reading, the Reading Agency and the National Literacy Trust are working together to encourage learning providers and library staff to combine their efforts to promote reading for pleasure to existing learners and potential learners. In the second article Neelam describes how she incorporated her PGCE case study research, which was about one learner's language and literacy practices, into her actual literacy teaching. She used it with other learners as part of the education process and had very positive outcomes.

Section three is huge and contains five articles, all of which have been reviewed externally. In order, the five authors are Alex Kendall, Barbara Hately-Broad, Bob Hill, Jane Mace and Yvon Appleby. Alex explores the thoughts and reflections of young adults from the Black Country in the West Midlands about what it means to read and to be a reader. She suggests that new media textualities, in this case gaming, which are not valued in educational spaces, may offer young adults new ways of being as readers. In the next article Barbara gives a socio-

historical account of how literacy became regarded as increasingly important for army recruits throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as European armies became more modernised. Sometimes those in favour of increasing army literacy had to battle with senior officers who feared that encouraging education would also encourage soldiers to question their lot. Article three, by Bob Hill, looks at Skills for Life in relation to prison education. Bob uses headings from the Speaking and Listening section of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum to act as a frame on which to build his critical commentary on policy. The fourth article by Jane Mace reflects on the writings of Mary Baker Eddy the founder of the Christian Science movement. Jane describes how her grandfather's dedicated membership of the Church has stimulated her own interest in how literacy is used in the cause of claiming religious certainty. Lastly, the fifth article, by Yvon Appleby, outlines research using a life history approach to reveal how someone on the margins of social and economic inclusion has difficulty in accessing the literacy and learning they need. Yvon argues that the bureaucratic literacy practices in 'official' texts created by our legal, educational and social services 'systems' can control people's everyday experiences and disempower them as learners.

Two Book Reviews make up the final part of this journal. One is by Sarah Rennie and the other is co-written by Sarah Chu, Fiona Campbell and Sally Enzer.

For my last words, I want to thank all the authors, external referees, reviewers of books and the members of production team who have helped to make this a diverse, interesting and informative issue. We all wish you, the reader, a stimulating and enjoyable time reading it.

Gaye Houghton - Editor
(with some early editorial assistance from
Barbara Hately-Broad)

A Research Journey
Mike Brown

Mike Brown is currently a community tutor, supporting both literacy and maths in various locations in and around Carlisle and West Cumbria. He was previously in Primary Education and taught for twenty years in West Sussex.

Introduction
Many first time research journeys, like mine, probably start rather naively with a single question and a hope, that some form of summary, or at worst, pointer, might be visible by the end that neatly concludes the process. What in practice I experienced were ' answers' that raised as many, if not more, questions and glimpses into other areas that offered temptations and distractions from my central purpose. Indeed, had it not been for the wisdom and strength of my academic supervisor, who figuratively managed to lash me to the research mast, I would not be writing this at all. Instead, in all probability, I would be experiencing my Odyssey on a remote island far from home!

Setting the scene
I had set out to see what had motivated my learners to return to a Literacy class, why they were there and what sustained their interest. However, in order to look beyond and below the superficial, I felt, that I also needed to know how each of them saw literacy and here I took as a model the Barton and Hamilton Lancaster Community Study ' Local Literacies' (1998). This suggested, that I should attempt to unpick what sorts of practices my learners commonly conducted, as well as uncover, what they themselves considered, to be ' proper literacy' in the wider sense. I was also interested to know, how the group had arrived at their present stance, and what experience of learning, school had given them. Furthermore I specifically wanted to know why each had decided to join an adult class as this required, not only a degree of commitment and time management, but for many, considerable personal inconvenience.

On reflection I felt that each of these factors, quite properly, had a bearing on my initial question and were therefore worthy of investigation. However, in my newly adopted role of ' researcher' I had unwittingly allowed my inquisitive instincts to rule, rather than develop the different strands of the original question. This had the potential of opening up a labyrinth of related foci, each worthy of an individual project. As a consequence I was in serious danger of losing sight of my original, somewhat tenuous, thread.

My methods
My initial instinct was to conduct an ethnographical qualitative survey, built around a series of semi-structured conversations. Again, rather naively, I was unprepared for the variety of their responses. Some learners, it emerged, were quite cagey and rather reluctant to do this, whilst others opened up about all manner of things. The fact that some people were keen to talk about themselves had the potential to further develop my labyrinthine system of research passages. Perhaps even more naively I hadn't even considered that it was both ethical and professional to obtain their written consent before starting. Consequently I was obliged to tell each and every one what I was doing, and this changed, albeit only slightly, the class chemistry and my subsequent relationships with the learners.

My management
Reluctantly my 'semi-structured' conversations quickly lost the 'semi' part. This was because time management was quickly becoming an issue for all concerned, and I had no way of recording some of the interesting additional insights. Also, I had no way of comparing them, as many were, by definition, individually personal and the prospect of re-interviewing everyone else to see whether the experiences had been shared or otherwise, was a task that was clearly impractical within the terms of the project. A pointer for the future perhaps, but a veritable bear-pit for the present! Furthermore, it became evident, that there was quite a skill in establishing the right

environment or conditions, where both parties to the conversation felt at ease and of equal status. This was particularly important, as some learners seemed to be reluctant to adopt a research persona, or significantly, afford me one. Instead some continued to see me as 'their teacher', not a researcher and certainly not a student with a learning goal. Indeed, when asked later, few saw me as a learner, essentially because I was already ' educated '. This view was reinforced by the fact that I was not attending a class, or asked to sit an end test. Therefore, what I was doing didn't fit with their experiences, or expectations of learning.

My chosen field and cohort

My small-scale study was by definition just that, and centred on a dozen learners in two Cumbrian urban locations. This cohort, I began to feel, was so small and limited, that it was neither sufficiently reflective, nor potentially representative of the learning community in which I worked. Furthermore, I also began to doubt the wisdom of the chosen locations as they were potentially unrepresentative of the county, with the learners in each subjected to local and individual economic and social pressures.

The fact that I was generating, just from these few people, data and information that needed a well organized indexed storage and retrieval system before I made any attempt to search for any linking or common themes, seemed to totally escape me. My overriding concern centred on finding ways of expanding my cohort and somehow, 'making it more worthwhile'. In addition it seemed that any deductive outcome might at best be viewed as an indicator toward a further and probably larger study in the future. In truth however, I feared that the ultimate outcome would be a tainted reflection of teacher imparted subliminal messages, somehow transmitted by the style and content of my questions and the nature of my overall approach.

By now, as you can probably sense, although deep into the process I was becoming less and less convinced as to any validity, or worth, that might attach to my conclusions, if I dare to draw any! More importantly perhaps, I had lost sight of my focus, the purpose of the task and wanted my research to answer universal questions, rather than my question. Cue a couple of hours of tea and a modicum of sympathy from my wise and patient supervisor, but not before I had convinced myself that I didn't want to complete it, couldn't complete it, or that, if I did, I would take at least another academic year! From that defining conversation I received an essential piece of advice that I would pass to any first time or relatively inexperienced researcher, which was, that I should, ' let the data speak for itself'. She wasn't advocating that I adopt a' grounded theory' approach and adapt my focus to the material, but that I should listen, with a sensitivity and interest, to what was actually being said. In short, the advice was that I should stop imposing my concerns on the process and instead, start responding.

Questions and Answers

What I saw, or more accurately, heard, was that, almost without exception, the learners had come to achieve a piece of paper, some form of certification, that might enhance their job, career or college chances. This provided an answer to one dimension of the question, which was not altogether surprising, given that the class was geared toward a qualification and therefore probably screened out learners who had different agendas. Furthermore, it emerged that each learner prized formal and academic literacy, seeing it as not just useful, but the 'only real form of literacy', a marker of being educated and something that they were keen to achieve. This was not entirely surprising, given the cohort and the learning circumstances. Indeed on reflection, it would have been a major surprise had they said otherwise.

Yet, to what extent, might this truly be said to have been their motivation? A number revealed that they were becoming habitual learners, enjoying not only the challenge and the company, but feeling good about 'just learning something'. Furthermore, being in the learning system, seemed to provide a

comfort and security beyond any declared end goal, with many learners aiming to go on to do something else at the end of the course. Gradually, I began to recognise, that the process of learning, appeared to be inextricably linked to hope, as well as ambition, to personal identity, as well as achievement. Apparently, there was personal benefit to be gained, something beside and on top of that employment goal and something, that as a practitioner researcher, I was interested to know more about. However not this time round, a voice reminded me!

I gradually began to recognize, that almost in every way, the ' people ' dimension, featured very large in all educational experiences, from school right up to, and including, the present. Many spoke of the support and encouragement given by their fellow students and the pivotal role played by the teacher, in creating a sympathetic environment and learning agenda.

Interestingly, learners of all ages, although the young seldom favourably, repeatedly referred back to their school experiences, initially to construct expectations, to monitor the present and ultimately make comparisons. This was another fascinating insight that hinted at very different school experiences for the different age groups. Might there be scope for research into time related patterns of school experience? Not for this study!

Nevertheless, there seemed a clear indication, that a spirit of togetherness might gradually negate any previous 'bad experiences'. This suggests, that given situations and circumstances where more time and care is both afforded and taken without fear of stigma or ridicule, a 'can do attitude' might replace long held attitudes of negativity. Surely as important for success in life, as any government vaunted piece of paper!

It gradually emerged then, that for many of these learners, as it was for me, that I was looking at a journey of self-discovery and self-belief that was as significant as the

pursuit of any life-transforming piece of paper. Was this what my data was trying to say?

Summary
Despite considering myself to be an experienced teacher and educationalist, with considerable academic experience, I discovered that conducting effective research is a high order skill, particularly in terms of framing an effective question. Despite all the frustrations, and the limitations, which I gradually began to recognise and accept, the whole process has whetted my appetite to conduct another research project, as well as made me think much harder about my own practice. There are, after all, still so many unanswered questions, although now, I am not quite so ready to provide neat unqualified answers.

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Building the Bigger Picture with Skills for Life
Geoff Saul and Rob Pheasant

Geoff Saul is the Curriculum Area Manager of ESOL, which is one of the largest of fifteen curriculum areas at Leicester College.

Rob Pheasant is Programme Development Manager for Skills for Life at QIA. Rob manages the Skills for Life Improvement Programme and prior to that he managed the Whole Organisation pathfinder project. Before joining QIA in April 2006 Rob spent 2 years working for DfES in the Skills for Life Strategy Unit as Embedded Teaching and Learning Adviser. He has worked in the sector for over 20 years, managing and delivering Skills for Life and vocational programmes.

Introduction
Embedding Skills for Life into a range of curriculum areas can significantly raise standards in literacy, language and numeracy in adult learners. Geoff Saul, curriculum manager at Leicester College, tells RaPAL Journal how involvement in the Whole Organisation Approach (WOA) pathfinder project and support from the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) helped them integrate Skills for Life and improve learner success rates.

What happened at Leicester
Our first experience of Skills for Life support was in 2004 when we first became involved in QIA's Whole Organisation pathfinder project. Support has continued through the WOA to Skills for Life strand of the QIA's Skills for Life Improvement Programme (SfLIP), geared towards meeting the national strategy for improving adult literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) in England.

At Leicester College we used the WOA to help integrate ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and literacy into vocational areas – aiming to encourage the vocational subject areas to work more formally than they have done in the past with the ESOL area. The WOA ensured this aim was central to the college at all levels – from senior management to delivery practitioners.

To kick start the project and to tap into existing expertise, we set up a Skills for Life steering group that drew on know-how from around the college. This steering group

included the external advisor assigned to support us throughout the programme. Some of the first tangible outcomes included the drawing up of the Leicester College Skills for Life Strategy and the dedication of our December 2005 whole college staff Development Day to raising awareness about Skills for Life.

With over 1,200 members of staff present at the Development Day event, it was used as a vehicle to present our Skills for Life strategy to the whole college and run workshops in which teachers could develop strategies to embed Skills for Life – especially ESOL and literacy - in their own area of work. This really helped to secure buy-in for the programme, leading to the start of the integration of Skills for Life into the curriculum.

One of the first curriculum areas invited to become involved in the programme was Construction. The college plays an important part in the economic health of the region and was working closely with JobCentre Plus and other partners on the issue of regeneration. Construction was selected in order to reflect the growing demands on major local employers for 'ethical' contracts which reflected local demographic diversity.

Step one in the process was to assign a Skills for Life WOA consultant to help facilitate and coordinate the ESOL/ Construction project, and to produce an action plan. We then ran workshops for Construction staff to further increase awareness of Skills for Life and ESOL. ESOL and Construction staff then combined to

develop schemes of work that embedded literacy, language and numeracy into the subject – making it possible for some of our existing ESOL students to progress to construction qualifications, and opening up construction as an option at entry point to learners without basic English language or literacy skills.

Since our involvement in the WOA pathfinder project, we have benefited from a range of support available from the Skills for Life Improvement Programme. We felt it was important to focus on the bigger picture, so developing the skills of our staff has had an important part to play in quality improvement, long-term change and success. Much work has been done with regionally based QIA cluster groups and their QIA consultants, with focus given to the improvement of classroom delivery particularly in relation to Speaking/Listening and ILPs. This year ESOL staff will contribute to another WOA initiative to develop the College's Foundation Learning Tier.

Thanks to the help and support of QIA, 22 teachers are presently completing the Level 4 ESOL Subject Specialist course and 12 members of staff gained the Level 4 qualification last year with support from the Skills for Life Improvement Programme. This focus on ESOL workforce development has really helped keep Skills for Life alive in Leicester College – embedding it deeper in to our organisation and curriculum areas.

But what has all this meant for us at Leicester College? By involving everyone at every level, right from the beginning, we have created strong working relationships between curriculum areas and staff. A focus on Skills for Life has provided learners access to courses previously inaccessible to them because of the need to attain higher literacy, numeracy or language levels. And since 2004/5 there has been a year on year increase in learner participation on to approved Skills for Life qualifications across Leicester College.

In my view, the involvement of the senior leadership team has been critical to this success. We were able to formalise work we were already doing and/or planning to do and put Skills for Life and ESOL on the agenda for everyone at the college. I can now approach other curriculum areas in the college, for example Hair and Beauty or Hospitality and Sport, about embedding Skills for Life and they are receptive to investing the time in a project because the commitment has come from the top down.

I would encourage other colleges and further education providers to find out what QIA Skills for Life support is available for their organisation. It has certainly supported and enhanced the way we approach Skills for Life, and the college – along with our teachers and students - continues to reap the benefits of a joined up, integrated and more formalised strategy.

Comments from the QIA
Rob Pheasant, QIA Skills for Life Programme Development Manager, looks at the positive impact the Leicester College success story has had on teachers, learners and the wider community.

The WOA at Leicester College
The aim of QIA is to champion and facilitate excellence and innovation in the further education system in England, and Leicester College is a shining example of how a Whole Organisation Approach to Skills for Life helps further education providers realise their Skills for Life ambitions.

The WOA is effective precisely because it makes literacy, language and numeracy provision central to the whole organisation at all levels. This includes embedding Skills for Life in teaching and learning programmes which, as Leicester has shown, can make a huge impact on the way a college tackles LLN challenges.

Leicester College is one of the largest further education providers in the country and their work integrating ESOL learners into curriculum areas that haven't traditionally been integrated, such as construction, has provided a blueprint for other organisations. In fact, a recent inspection report highlighted quality improvement on a wide scale across the

college – including improved learner success rates, retention and progression. One of the reasons for this success is activity that provides a way for teachers to learn from each other, as we believe real change comes from empowering teachers – just as Leicester College does through steering groups, workshops and workforce development.

This approach allows teachers to develop and progress their own ideas, leading to ownership and real commitment. However, senior management buy-in from the principal is equally important. At Leicester College, this helped widen participation and encouraged positive engagement of staff. Ensuring the *whole* organisation is committed to improving literacy, language and numeracy should be a goal shared by everyone.

To find out how your organisation can benefit from the QIA Skills for Life Improvement Programme visit www.sflip.org,uk

Another National Year of Reading – More challenges for us all

Genevieve Clarke

Genevieve Clarke is National Coordinator of The Vital Link literacy and library programme.

Background

It's nearly two years on from the last piece I wrote for the RaPAL journal (Bulletin No. 60 summer 2006 – 'A moment not to be missed – Quick Reads, RaW and all that') and here we are at another such 'moment'.

2008 is a National Year of Reading. It may be inspired and led by the newly formed Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) but 'our' Department (for Innovation, Universities and Skills – DIUS) is involved too and adult learners are among the priority audiences.

Like the previous National Year of Reading in 1998-99, the National Literacy Trust, but this time in partnership with The Reading Agency who are coordinating public library involvement, is leading this Year. And these two agencies are heading up a consortium of partners which includes other organisations committed to adult learning – NIACE and the Campaign for Learning.

This latest celebration of the power of reading comes at a good time for the national Vital Link programme. Run by The Reading Agency and the National Literacy Trust, this encourages learning providers and library staff to work together to promote reading for pleasure to existing learners and potential learners. Over the last couple of years, funding from the DfES (now DIUS) has enabled us get this message direct to Skills for Life practitioners alongside high-profile initiatives such as the Quick Reads books for emergent readers and the BBC RaW campaign. We've produced learning resources to support use of the Quick Reads and held events to bring together library staff with Skills for Life practitioners from colleges, community settings, family learning, prisons and workplaces.

Current Activity

We've also just launched a new annual scheme designed to engage learners in some sustained reading, supported by their tutors and local library staff. Called the Six Book Challenge™ this does what it says on the tin – it invites learners to read six books while recording their reading in a diary. There is no prescribed list of books. Instead learners and those who work with them are encouraged to use our unique database of over 600 titles specially selected for readers between Entry Level 3 and Level 2 – www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk

The Challenge is also flexible enough to be used with ESOL learners and with adults with lower levels of literacy – here the extra challenge is finding sufficient appealing material.

Those who complete the Challenge are awarded a certificate. Sponsorship from the Costa Book Awards has provided £2 coffee cards as incentives and a national prize draw offering the chance to win an all-expenses paid trip to London for two. Best-selling novelist Mike Gayle has become patron for the Challenge and will support special award ceremonies in Glasgow, Leeds and Liverpool in the summer where a Costa store is working more closely with the local library.

Over two-thirds of library services across the UK (81% in England) are now offering the scheme in partnership with local colleges, adult community learning, family learning and workplaces. Over 50 prisons are running the Challenge and another 50 learning organisations have signed up including Transport for London, the DVLA and the Army Foundation College. Union learning reps in Yorkshire are also promoting the Challenge in workplaces as diverse as Fletcher's Bakery in Sheffield, Royal Mail depots in Bradford and BT and O2 call centres in Leeds as part of a special Vital Link project.

The Challenge provides the best opportunity yet to assess the impact of reading for pleasure on learners. Participants are being encouraged to complete pre- and post-Challenge questionnaires, the results of which will be analysed in the summer. Most organizations are running the Challenge from

January until May but there's nothing to stop people joining in at any time – please see www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk for how to do this.

In fact the pace at which learners complete the Challenge is likely to vary enormously. We know that several prisoners have already raced through their chosen books and other participants have finished too. Some will take far longer. Amanda, who did the Challenge with Poole Library Service says: 'It has helped me read more and to go into my local library every week. I have also gained quite a lot of knowledge and it has helped my confidence as I talk about the books.'

Research
We also hope that it will give tutors a very tangible way to introduce reading for pleasure into their everyday practice. Practitioner-led research carried out by Essex Adult Community Learning and Essex libraries [1] showed that reading for pleasure

- helps to increase enjoyment, self-confidence, motivation and the acquisition of functional literacy skills and
- is well supported by the expertise and resources of the library service.

Commenting on this finding in an Insights paper for the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) [2], Alix Green and Ursula Howard say: 'The association of enjoyment and pleasure, and of self-motivated literacy practices with successful learning, is a key finding for the future of basic skills strategies, whatever their fundamental policy drivers might be.'

Indeed research carried out by The Vital Link in February this year indicated that 76% of respondents had increased their use of reading for pleasure activities with learners over the last couple of years. Reasons cited included:
- Quick Reads (87%)
- support materials such as the Quick Reads learning resources created by The Vital Link (60%)
- the BBC's RaW campaign (49%)
- the Six Book Challenge (30%) and
- research and guidance published by the NRDC (25%).

But the same survey found that although 94% encourage their learners to read for pleasure, only 55% of them link this activity to the curriculum. In-depth interviews found the same gap between tutors' enthusiasm for reading for pleasure and their confidence in actually introducing it as a teaching method, with fewer than one in ten using it as a main focus in their teaching.

The Vital Link tackled this issue at a national conference in March entitled 'A passion for reading: where does it fit into Skills for Life?' In a National Year of Reading what key interventions can influence tutors' practice so that they use all kinds of reading, printed and online, to the benefit of learners? Clearly, a combination of high-profile initiatives such as Quick Reads and BBC RaW, and the advent of a practical scheme such as the Six Book Challenge, has raised awareness of the tools and resources available. Individual tutors with a passion for reading find it natural to introduce their learners to a love of books. The continuing challenge is to make this a regular part of every Skills for Life learner's experience.

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A passion for reading: where does it fit into Skills for Life?, no. 3 in a series of New Thinking booklets, will be available from The Reading Agency (www.readingagency.org.uk) in May (cost £15.00 plus post & packing). You can find out more about the Six Book Challenge and learning resources to support the Quick Reads at www.vitallink.org.uk or please email genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

■■ Section 2. ■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■

Making Research Part of the Adult Literacy Process
Neelam Hussain

Neelam Hussain is a newly qualified Adult Literacy Tutor. She recently gained her PGCE at Wolverhampton University and has been teaching adult literacy at South Birmingham College.

Introduction

Whilst doing my PGCE I carried out some research at my placement college from December 2006 to February 2007. The research was a case study exploring one student's language and literacy practices. In the research I focused on issues surrounding family background, schooling and educational experiences and how these factors had contributed in shaping and influencing the student's language and literacy practices and inevitably her identity.

On completion of the case study, I decided to take the research one step further by integrating it into my literacy teaching and making it part of the education process. This led me to conduct a 'Your Stories' project with the rest of the adult learners group in March 2007. The project created a context in which the students could share their life histories, their experiences of schooling and education and their motivation for their return to learning. The case study research and subsequent project brought to my attention the value of creating opportunities and suitable contexts in which adult literacy learners can speak about their experiences of life and education.

The case study research

The case study method used to investigate the language and literacy practices of the participant ('Lucy') fits into the category of qualitative and ethnographic research. This method was selected because it enables the researcher to gain detailed information about the research participant's experiences, and provides the researcher with a better understanding of their subject of inquiry. Educationalists such as Barton and Hamilton have reported studies of this kind in the books titled 'Local Literacies' (1998) and 'Situated Literacies' (2000). These serve as examples of how this approach is both effective and appropriate in providing qualitatively rich data whereby participants tell their own stories.

Whilst doing case study research detailed and personal information about the participant is revealed, which places the researcher in a potentially powerful position. (Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 91) An awareness of the power relationships between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' meant that whilst conducting the interviews with Lucy I wanted to ensure that a degree of transparency, openness and honesty was established from the onset. Therefore, I informed Lucy of her right to withdraw from the research at any point and made sure that after each interview I gave Lucy the opportunity to read through the notes and consent to what had been recorded.

The case study method has the potential to enable ordinary individuals to tell their story and in effect name their silent lives. In this sense life history research can be empowering. At the same time researchers need to be aware that the research is likely to touch on personal and possibly painful matters for the participants. I was conscious that the research will inevitably have an effect on Lucy, whose experiences and perceptions were the focus of the study. I feel Lucy found the experience cathartic as she informed me that she had never spoken about herself in this way before, and that by taking part in the research she had been able to put things into perspective and make sense of her life. The case study also gave me the opportunity, as the researcher, to appreciate Lucy's endeavours and achievements, and recognise the difficulties she has had to face which, I think made her experience of taking part in the research a positive one overall.

Key research findings

A number of significant factors had clearly influenced Lucy's language and literacy practices, shaped her identity and self-perception. These surfaced in the research and enabled me to build a picture of Lucy's

circumstances and experiences at home, school and work. This provided a context in which Lucy's underachievement at school, lack of formal qualifications and lack of confidence in her literacy skills could be understood.

At the time of the research Lucy was thirty-six years old, married with two children aged five and ten and worked at a local supermarket. I asked Lucy whether it was important for her to achieve a national qualification in literacy. However, Lucy explained that her motivation for doing the course was not linked to any desire to gain a formal qualification, but was more associated with the aspiration to be able to provide support to her children through their schooling, something she felt her parents were not able to do for her.

As suggested by Parsons and Brynner (1998), in order to comprehend adult basic skills difficulties it is essential to consider family and home circumstances, parental interest/educational support and schooling experiences. Where Lucy was concerned her parents showed very little support when she was at school. In fact, Lucy explained that her 'doing well at school' was not a priority for her parents and they never really encouraged or expected her to do so. Lucy's parents, sister and brother do not have any formal qualifications and her achieving at school was not considered important and there was not any expectation for her to continue with education. Lucy explained that her parents expected her to get a job after completing her schooling and settle down with a 'good man' and start a family.

I also discovered that Lucy had experienced a very disruptive secondary schooling and frequently had to change her school due to her father's work commitments and opportunities. Lucy, therefore, was in low sets for all her subjects and her teachers did not expect her to do very well. She recalled that as a result most of her lessons were a 'doss'. Lucy left school with no formal qualifications and her negative

experiences of secondary school influenced her career opportunities and confidence in learning.

As advocated by Parsons and Brynner (1998) an adult with basic skills needs often attended a school where academic achievement and future aspirations were relatively low. Since leaving school Lucy has managed to remain in employment as a sales assistant and is content with her job, however she did comment that she 'often wonders how different her life could have been had she achieved some qualifications at school.'

Integrating the research in my literacy teaching and making it part of the education process

By disclosing her life history Lucy was able to realise what hardships she has had to contend with and what she had been able to achieve. This increased her confidence and self-esteem, and she was able to recognise her skills and strengths and value herself more as a person. This was a positive experience for Lucy so I wanted the other members of the class to also be given the opportunity to tell their stories. I therefore, decided to do a 'Your Stories' project with the entire group who were all female and from similar backgrounds. The project lasted for four teaching sessions and was based upon the same elements that had structured my case study. Students were asked about their life histories, their experiences of schooling and education, and their motivation for their return to learning. At the onset of the project I made it very clear that whoever did not wish to share their story could opt out however, to my surprise, all students were willing to participate.

The project gave the adult learners the opportunity to tell and share their stories with one another and contributed to some extent to 'consciousness raising' amongst the literacy group. It gave the women the opportunity to discuss their experiences, realise their similarities and differences and recognise the strengths they had developed and triumphs and hardships they had to overcome. The 'Your Stories'

project gave the group a chance to work collaboratively. Karach and Roach (1994) have stated, 'One of the most important aspects of collaboration for us is that we have been able to express, and to value our own and each other's experiences and knowledge…' Therefore, sharing stories can be an empowering experience particularly when they are shared with those who have similar characteristics, backgrounds, experiences and perceptions because it shows adult learners that they are not alone.

Adult literacy learners often have a negative experience of schooling, which can become a cause of low self-esteem and lack of confidence in their skills and abilities. As a literacy tutor, I feel that the 'Your Stories' project enabled the students to reflect on the deficit view of skills that others have imposed on them and take a step back to recognise what they have achieved in their lives. Hooks (1989) has suggested, 'Moving from silence into speech is…a gesture that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible.' By doing the project learners had the opportunity to voice their often silent lives, which gave them confidence and contributed to preparing them mentally and emotionally for their literacy learning in the classroom. There were also huge benefits for me as the teacher because as a result of the project I was able to achieve an increasingly informed and better understanding of the students' position, aspirations and perceptions of themselves, which gave me something solid to work with and develop. Therefore, by making the research part and parcel of the literacy process it provided me with an invaluable insight into the experiences of the adult learners that I taught, and enabled me to effectively design and construct future sessions that were relevant and useful for the students.

Conclusion
By doing the case study research and the 'Your Stories' project many of my own preconceptions of what teaching literacy entails and what the needs of adult learners are were challenged. Literacy cannot be viewed as merely the acquisition of technical

skills, but must incorporate recognition and regard for the development of the learner in many other ways. Literacy involves the integration of reading, writing, speaking and listening, but also encompasses many aspects of personal, social and emotional development. For Lucy and the other students in the class the literacy course played a significant role in defining their sense of 'self' and identity. Adult Literacy classes can play an integral role in promoting social inclusion through the building of confidence by enabling students to understand and reflect on their life experiences and circumstances with a view to bringing about some constructive change. It has been suggested that 'the value we give to ourselves and our talents helps us to make links with people and to operate successfully in the outside world.' (Hamilton et al, 1994: 157)

From my research and the 'Your Stories' project I discovered that despite the learners' own perception of having poor literacy they also had many skills. These were going unrecognised and that they required help in specific areas which were mainly related to the fluency in their reading and writing. The purpose of Lucy attending the class like many of the other students was to check, confirm and consolidate their existing skills and knowledge.

As a practitioner I personally believe that literacy is a social process, which requires the interpreting and categorising of literacy according to one's previous experiences. This implies that the context in which literacy is placed must make sense to the learner in order for it to be of any benefit. Therefore, as a practitioner I feel that it is my responsibility to find out about the learners' intentions, aspirations and experiences, in order to situate literacy in a relatable context which is meaningful for them.

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'Giving up' reading: re-imagining reading with young adult readers

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Background

In this article I explore the thoughts and reflections of young adults from the Black Country in the West Midlands about what it means to read and to be a reader. Beginning with discussions of newspaper reading I suggest that whilst the participants in this study were likely to feel comfortable with their 'technical skills' as readers they were not always so confident in their abilities to 'grasp', as they saw it, the 'correct' meanings of the texts they read, most especially those they encountered in the course of their studies at college. Drawing on data collected in relation to 'reading for pleasure' I begin to consider the ways in which new media textualities, in this case gaming, may offer young adults new ways of *being* as readers that although both pleasurable and motivating find little legitimate expression within educational spaces. I make use of Gee's notions of active and critical learning to suggest that if the reading subject identities constructed through schooled literacy are to be meaningful (valued) and useful (permit learners to exercise power as readers perhaps even in ways that are not predictable or, we *must* dare to say, desirable) to young adult readers then a broader range of theoretical understandings must be brought to bear on practice. These seem pertinent in the environment of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2007) and Media 2.0 (McDougall, 2007; Gauntlett 2008) which seems at once to offer both exciting new possibilities for young people to *enact* reading (and writing) and to further trouble the possibility of a proximal relationship between educational and cultural life world literacy identities. I go on to consider what might usefully be learnt about reading by beginning to theorise the enjoyment young adults find in out of college textual experience. The findings of this article may be of interest to those involved in the teaching of reading as they illustrate compellingly the need for pedagogical approaches to reading and literacy that not only take serious account of the social practices through which readers experience text but which rigorously theorise the making and taking of meaning and in so doing teach learners to "really read" (Gee, 2003: 16).

Introducing the data

This article draws on excerpts of data from a study of the reading habits and identities of sixteen to nineteen year olds studying in further education contexts in the Black Country, West Midlands. Data collected for the study included a large scale reading habits questionnaire, focus group discussions and auto-ethnographic reading histories from individuals. It is from the focus group discussions that the extracts cited here are drawn.

These groups comprised of between three and five participants, twenty-three participants in total, following programmes of study at QCF (Qualifications and Credit Framework, formerly National Qualifications framework) levels one, two or three. Participation was voluntary and participants and groups were self-selecting. The gender make-up of groups was varied, some were all male, some all female and some mixed. However no groups were mixed by level of study. The discussions took place in informal, quiet spaces away from the classroom setting and were semi-structured. Participants were asked to respond to twenty one stimulus questions or statements, related to the findings of the region wide reading habits survey, which they turned over at their own pace 'pack of cards' style. I led the discussions and although I had previously been a teacher at

the college these students did not know me personally. The 'cards' invited them to respond to the statistical findings of the reading habits survey, to discuss the national press responses to them (see Kendall 2007) and to articulate their own ideas and views about their reading practices and identities.

Reading newspapers: more than 'technical'

The participants' discussions of their newspaper reading, their most popular, 'everyday' reading choice (Kendall, 2005), offers a useful route into their discussions of their experience of 'out of classroom' text. Here we see reading 'choice' contextualised by a range of complex social factors which seem to challenge more technicist accounts of reading interactions.

Most participants agreed that newspapers were a popular reading choice although typically they didn't make particularly pro-active choices about the newspaper title they read, "whenever you're on the bus there's a newspaper there to read and every morning I read the Daily Star before I go out". Rather they reported a 'convenience' approach, reading what was readily available so that and picking up a near to hand newspaper seemed to be almost a default position for 'in-between' times. They saw newspaper reading as fulfilling a variety of purposes: information and opinion about the world around them, "I look at what's going on around the country": to follow interests, particularly sport and especially football; and for entertainment:

A: the Sun's funny
B: …it's full of gossip'
AK: you know it's not true?
A: Yeah it's more fun to read
B: Because it's more outrageous and you're wondering whether it's true or not (group 4)

This latter function of newspaper reading was notably marked among the female students who found the horoscopes in particular an interesting focus for individual reflection or collective entertainment and or discussion about a variety of issues in their lives.

Superficially size and physical unmanageability were seen to be obstacles to broadsheet reading,

Like the Guardian that's a big paper that is, you can't sit on a train with alike a big paper what if a girl just like walked past and you just wanna see her? You've got the Sun that's all right (group 1)

I think it's because they look too formal, because they're really big and everyone expects there just to be facts and figures in them. (group 4)

However their discussions of broadsheet readers are perhaps more revelatory,

They're aimed at people company people who are rich and that (group1)

Who're brainy (group 1)

Old people, businessmen (group 4)

More like for rich people (group 6)

Business people, old people, snobs (group 1)

Although the students were put off by the perception that broadsheets are "more complicated to read" (group 2) more often it seemed *not* to be a perception of the technical reading demands broadsheets might make of them that turned them off but a failure to recognise or find spaces for their own sense of themselves within the identities they felt broadsheets made available to readers. Those who do read broadsheets are clearly established as the 'other' more 'sophisticated' to the students' own senses of their 'regular', 'ordinary', 'down to earth' selves:

And the language which doesn't really communicate with us (group 5)

…they're so sophisticated the broadsheets (group 5)

The tabloids are just for regular people just to read because it's just straight in front of them (group 6)

Because they [business people/old people] probably think that tabloids exaggerate everything and they think that broadsheets could be like the proper story (group 4)

At times here the distinction between a perception of technical difficulty and identity is fused connecting the ability to 'decode' efficiently and effectively – competence - directly to particular social identities. Importantly these 'competent' social identities are distinct from the 'regular'ness that the students claim for themselves. It is in these terms that broadsheets might be seen to be rejected as 'irrelevant'. Furthermore notions of 'being a reader' are at times bound up with the identity of the broadsheet consumer:

If there's a really long article and you haven't got time and you're not a reader you just…[*tapers out*]. (group 7)

This speaker couples the broadsheet reader identity with 'being a reader' which by default puts her in the opposite category.

The notional non-'reader', where the negative is meant to express motivation and agency rather than inability or incapacity to read in the technical sense, is more attracted to ways of reading that contrast markedly to the preferences of their 'reader' counterparts:

The tabloids just give you what's going on, what you need to know, condensed so you don't have to think about it you're just told and it gives you an opinion, whereas the broadsheets tell you what's happened so you can make your own opinion (group 2)

Equally there is a perhaps a perception about the perceived broadsheet reader's confidence with meaning-making and taking to which the 'non-reader' is contrasted, as this exchange with a female student in group 5 might suggest:

AK: You say that they [tabloids] might exaggerate but it doesn't stop you reading them?

No

AK: Are you, do you think you are influenced by the exaggeration? Can you see through that?

Not really I tend to believe what I read in there because you think its right but then some of the things that come out you think well that can't be right

AK: is that confusing?

Well yes it is really because you read stuff in the newspaper that says one thing and then you watch the news and it says something else.

Other students perceived it was specifically the content rather than the 'values' of broadsheets that they were rejecting, here for example is a male student in group 6:

I'm just not into politics at all I just think it's pointless and some of these people just don't know what they're doing.

The 'othering' these students engaged in raises some interesting questions about the kinds of metaphors we use to think through 'non-participation' in reading in particular and education more generally. Often a 'barrier' metaphor has been invoked to describe learners being 'locked out' of educational practice, the rationale being that should the barrier be removed participation will be both possible and desirable for the 'non-traditional' or hard to reach' learners. However these discussions perhaps begin to hint at the limitations of this metaphor as a satisfactory account of non-participation. Rather than 'shut out' (subject to) perhaps a different kind of story, one of resistance and rejection (agency) might be begin to be imagined.

Only two participants, both male, reported reading a broadsheet, one of these was an Asian newspaper and the other The Guardian and discussants drew upon a set of shared ideas about both the signification of broadsheet reading and the demographic of the broadsheet reader that permeated all the discussions and perhaps made it difficult to express enjoyment of a broadsheet in this

peer regulated context. The student who read the Guardian for example quickly added a qualifying codicil to his 'admission', "Well I read the sport on the back of the Guardian, 'cos my dad gets the Guardian but it's only because there ain't any other paper to read", which underplayed any intent or agency in his action.

Reading for pleasure

The majority of students didn't feel that they spent much time reading for pleasure. Some expressed this confidently:

> If I have some spare time I'd probably just have a cigarette (group 3)

> Sometimes when there's nothing else to do (group 4)

While the majority deferred direct rejection of leisure reading by suggesting they were too busy or that reading was too time-consuming.

> AK: Why do some people never read for pleasure?

> Time too busy with work (group 2)

> Time or families or something (group 2)

> AK: Do you read for pleasure?

> I can't keep it up for long…I don't know it's just one of those things that don't seem necessary and it just gets in the way sort of thing (group 4)

> Yeah I do when I have time, but sometimes I don't have time and like I'll start a book and whether I think it's good or not doesn't matter cos sometimes I just don't have time to carry it on and by the time I pick it up again I've forgot. (group 5)

This is interesting as it perhaps shows the reluctance on the part of some participants to outright reject what they *recognise* to be the preferred identities and behaviours of their 'schooled' experience (see Kendall 2007) even though they may be choosing

not to *realise* (Bernstein 2000) these as suggested above.

Those students who were more candid about their rejection of book reading offered more developed justifications, here male students in group 3 talk about their preference for computer games:

> A: It [a game] can challenge you, yeah, it's not boring, sometimes you get bored of newspaper reading and reading like, and computer games you've got like more games to do they don't get boring

> B: You've got control over it; whereas the book it just takes you in a straight line from start to finish, whereas a game you can take it your own way.

> C: You can choose your own path in a game.

This short exchange offers a glimmer of the dislocation these students feel between the textual experiences they encounter in different domains. (home/college in this case). The restrictions and limitations they associated with reading books were unlike the freedom they enjoyed in gaming. As readers of books they seemed to feel 'subject to' particular ways of being that encouraged an organised, linear response and deprived them of agency and choice, as players of games they felt licensed to be creative and innovative. As gamers they are perhaps more enabled to "accept risks, and choose possible future actions by anticipating outcomes" (Gauntlett, 2002: 98) behaviours that Gauntlett associates with Giddens (1991) notion of late modernity. As such it is interesting to conjecture as to whether the practice of gaming offers these students a more tentative, provisional reality within which the relationship between reader and text (player/game) is differently mediated so that the 'player as reader' of the 'game as text' is positioned as an agent in knowledge making practice rather than a recipient of 'knowledge'. This resonates with evidence found elsewhere in the data of young women's reading of magazines.

Such a notion of 'risk' and 'play' is crucial argues Gee (2003) to both active and critical learning and asserts that gaming potentially offers the conditions for learning that is both. Gee identifies three key things that are "at stake" when we learn actively:

1. We learn to experience (see, feel and operate on) the world in new ways.
2. Since domains are usually shared by groups of people who carry them on as distinctive social practices, we gain the potential to join this group, to become affiliated with such kinds of people (even though we may never see all of them, or any of them face to face).
3. We gain resources that prepare us for future learning and problem solving in the domain and, perhaps, more important, in related domains.
   (Gee, 2003: 23)

However active learning does not necessarily manifest **critical** learning, for critical learning to occur Gee proposes that an additional feature is needed:

For learning to be critical as well as active, one additional feature is needed. The learner needs to learn not only how to understand and produce meanings in a particular semiotic domain, but, in addition, how to think about the domain at a "meta" level as a complex system of interrelated parts. The learner also needs to learn how to innovate in the domain – how to produce meanings that, while recognizable, are seen as somehow novel or unpredictable. (Gee, 2003:23)

The conditions of criticality Gee further argues are made possible through gaming as the player is 'licensed' within the domain, or social practice of gaming to take up a position as 'expert' and play at the margins of what is already possible or knowable to produce new meanings. The meaning of the game as 'text' becomes shape-able as well as knowable and the reader is re-situated to learn:

…how to think about semiotic domains as design spaces that engage and manipulate people in certain ways and, in turn, help create certain relationships in society among people and groups of people, some of which have important implications for social justice. (Gee, 2003: 46)

Gee's ideas offer possibilities for readers that resonate with Peim's contention of the ways that post-structuralism re-situates the traditional reader:

texts don't stand on their own as bearers of their own self-defining meanings. Any text is always read from a particular point of view, by a subject (or subjects) positioned at a particular point…the 'true' text – is never more than an abstraction, an idea distinct from particularly positioned readings of aspects of the textual object.' (Peim: 1993:73).

And the post-structuralist reader encounters a world within which they are licensed to "accept that all knowledge is provisional, and may be proved wrong in the future… accept risks, and choose possible future actions by anticipating outcomes" (Gauntlett, 2002: 98).

However these are rarely the terms on which literacy curricula open spaces for reading, reading or readers. Thus the curriculum *as is* does not always imagine the conditions within which it is possible to recognise the kinds of reading behaviours, attitudes and identities that readers report as enjoyable, desirable or those which enable the exercising of power in relation to the rule-making of reading and the making and taking of meaning. Thus whilst the curriculum may be understood as promoting active (in Gee's definition) learning, it falls short of **critical** learning. This is illustrated through the discussants reflections on the question '*what happens when you read?*'

Making and taking meaning – "'what happens when you read?"
When tackling this question all groups were less forthcoming with responses than they had been with previous questions. Typical initial responses were:
Err you open a book, you start reading (group 1)

I think it's just processing the words so that you know, I don't know it's really hard because it just happens straightaway, you just can't slow it down you just understand it straightaway. (group 2)

You start from the top and work your way down! (group 7)

Although I acknowledge that this is a difficult, challenging and very open question, it is also possible that this was the first time that some participants had been invited to address such a question, which would perhaps account for the uncharacteristic degree of reticence displayed by most participants at this point in the discussions. I argue elsewhere (Kendall 2005) that syllabus documents specifying the English or literacy curriculum for 16-19 year olds rarely encourage a reflexive exploration of reading practices and processes, tending to prefer mastery of content, personal response and taken for granted ways of knowing about texts, readers and reading. The participants therefore seemed to have no 'learned' discursive resources on which to draw to make sense of this question and they turned instead to the 'common sense' of authoring, mobilising very quickly the ideologically constructed notion of the author identified by Foucault (1991).

The degree of interaction between the participants and me shifts notably in the majority of the transcripts at this point and I felt conscious of the need to continually re-phrase and re-shape the question and to offer additional prompts or sub-questions.

The initial confusion this question caused tended to be followed by a 'pictures in the head' explanation of the reading process:
    A: You're getting pictures from the words
    AK: How does that work?
    A: Erm well like, they describe something, the book will say 'big green overgrown monster' and you just have to get that image in your head of a big green monster, pretty tall…(trails off) (group 1)

You get a picture in your head what's happening (group 4)

It's like it's a film someone starts speaking and you imagine someone speaking. They describe a character and you've got that. (group 5)

…in a book, depending on what kind it is whether it's fiction or science fiction or fantasy when you're reading the book as soon as you open it up, well what some people say is that you're entering another world, when you're reading you're using your imagination to put yourself in that book, in that position so you can see what is going on exactly. (group 6)

You kind of see them in your head like pictures of what's happening (group 7)

The 'pictures in the head' notion identifies a reader ('you'), an author ('they') and an experience, 'the text' which is shared between the two generally with the 'author' or creator of text *acting on* and *directing* 'the reader' to achieve particular responses.

They want you to put yourself in a certain situation like the September 11th bombings: they wanted you to be there; they wanted you to feel the pain of the people who were there. I don't think they're pushing you but they're trying to help you to understand the situation because you could actually take it as it is, they want to help you (group 5)

This constructs the reader (passive) as one who must come to know what it is that the writer (active) knows already. Reading in these terms is an acquisitive experience through which the reader might come to know more, from darkness to enlightenment. In the comment below the inclusion of 'just' serves to minimise the function and purpose of the reader within the processes of making and taking meaning:

You're just scanning for questions of why the writers written it and what's it all about and what's the story about. (group 3)

The author's, in particular the published author's, 'claim' to textual meaning is rarely contested and discussants consistently claimed for themselves a passive role in their own narratives about how reading 'works', understanding themselves to be 'in receipt' of a 'message' which needed to be understood in order to better understand its originator – the originator's right to be understood remained unquestioned. One is minded of Foucault's notion of the author functioning as an ideological product:

…the functional principle by which in our culture one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. If fact, we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual sign of invention… (1991:119)

Issues relating to, sometimes expressed as concern about, 'understanding' and or 'misunderstanding' the 'message' permeate the transcripts, suggesting perhaps an acquiescence to this discursive construction of 'an author'.

Answers to this question tended to be characterised by more frequent use of fillers, "erm, er", "like", and were less fluent and coherent than at other points in the transcripts suggesting a hesitancy and tentativeness that isn't so noticeable in their answers to other questions. Gee's notion of how reading is learned in schools perhaps offers a way of interrogating and interpreting this. Gee argues that the teaching of reading fixates on "reading as silently saying the sounds of letters and words and being able to answer general, factual and dictionary like questions about written texts" (Gee, 2003: 16). This, he contends, engenders readers who can de-code but not *really* read*:*

You do have to silently say the sounds of

letters and words when you read (or, at least, this greatly speeds up reading). You do have to be able to answer general, factual, and dictionary like questions about what you read: This means you know the "literal" meaning of the text. But what so many people – unfortunately so many educators and policymakers – fail to see is that if this is all you can do, then you can't really read. You will fail to be able to read well and appropriately in contexts associated with specific types of texts and specific types of social practice. (Gee, 2003:16)

Whilst readers may then feel comfortable with literal meanings they may be less sure about the other ways in which texts mediate the meaning of social situations that is to say the practices of reading as manifest in the language or literacy *classroom.*

Unlike with other questions a high degree of hegemony was evident across the groups in their answers to this question. This was often explored through comparing 'reading' books with 'watching' films or TV:

If it's on TV there's only one way you can take it because there's only one way to portray it unless it's like a documentary or something. If it's like… a soap then they're telling you a story so it can be told one way. (group 2)

You can picture in your head what's happening [when you read a book] but that's only if you get into it though, if you don't get into it the words start to slip out of your mind, they just go in one side and out the other (group 4)

Because when you're reading you can picture it how you wanna picture it but if you're watching a film the pictures are already there for you (group 4)

With both kinds of text 'meaning' is seen to inhabit a space 'outside' the reader. But unlike making sense of TV or film the meaning of books is seen as less easy to pin down in the sense that the author's meaning is sometimes difficult to 'grasp'. The possibility of multiple meanings was often

explained as a straightforward 'getting it wrong':

> It [a film] actually shows you what happens instead of describing it to you, because some people might misinterpret the writing and get the wrong picture, they might not get the picture the writer was trying to put forward. (group 1)

And respondents were often ready to take responsibility for 'misinterpretations', which they understood to be a product of their own inexperience, immaturity or naivety. Or as the effect of individual subjects encountering sensations, textual experience, to which they might have different responses:

> Everyone has a different imagination, a different view of everything (group 1)
>
> AK: What is it about us that makes us see different things?
> A: good question (laughs)
> B: we are all insane
> C: I guess it's just the imagination (group 6)

Different interpretations are anecdotal and infinite, dependent upon 'imagination'. Imagination is understood as being shaped by:

> experiences, your surroundings, it could just be your college or the people around you so if you had like let's say an area just full of erm one type of race then you might just picture that sort of but if you're in a multi-culture [environment] you might picture things differently (group 7)

Although this comment seems to pick up on what might be described as structural differences between the positioning of individuals to texts, the differences listed are given equal weighting suggesting a randomness of impact or effect. Here the individual is at the centre of her/his naturalistic environment rather than in dialogic relation to the structures within which s/he (always, already) situates and is situated. The curriculum, and the roles and

definitions it embraces and constructs[1] for students as readers (and writers) are by contrast absolutes floating freely beyond the structures within which individuals are seen to be placed. Thus whilst the meaning-making of individuals is contingent, the curriculum contexts within which meaning-making (must) occur are seen as neutral.

Thus whilst participants did express an awareness of different reading practices:

> [What happens when you read?] It probably depends on like what subject you've taken at college sometimes you're just taught to skim read and pick out the important things but in history I'm told you've got to read everything because everything's important. So it depends what you're reading like if you're reading a book you don't skim read it because you've got to pick out the details but if you're reading something like for English for analysis you skim read it to pick out the big words (group 2)

They did not attach a 'politics' to these different choices or demands, neither did they see them as social practices organising power relations between different subject identities within disciplinary groups, rather they saw and accepted them as a simple 'common sense' of varying subject disciplines. Furthermore different reading practices were not understood to impact on possibilities for meaning taking and making.

'Giving up' reading - Raising further questions

The accounts explored here illustrate the complexities of attempting to make sense of the meaning making and taking of reading and raise some interesting and important questions about the ways readers construct, represent, manage and value their own reading identities and practices. What also emerges is that these young adult readers have little experience of the range of theoretical ideas and frameworks they might draw upon to think through their experience of text or, perhaps more significantly, little awareness that this is a contested field. As a result they may be over-reliant on the 'common sense' of methodologies that

would seem to draw heavily upon structuralist orientations that may serve to situate them as deficient readers: inexperienced, naive detectives seeking out, but too often 'failing' to locate, the neutral 'truth' of the texts they encounter. As some of the discussions above signal the effect of this might be to draw unhelpful lines in the sand between 'schooled' and 'non-schooled' literacy practices that create disorientating dislocations for students as they encounter texts in the academic or 'learning' context. The short accounts from the 'gamers' above hint at the pleasures participants associate with new media technologies illustrating something of the identities, values and behaviours that new and emergent technologies may make available to readers. As Web 2.0 technologies open up the possibilities for our learners to *be* as readers and writers I wonder how much more experimental, creative and *risky* our teaching of reading might need to be if we are to better bridge the gap between 'in school' and 'out of school' literacies and offer more fruitful (and honest?) learning experiences that offer genuine opportunities for engagement in the kind of active, critical learning discussed above. In conclusion I argue that it is only through re-thinking the theories that underpin our practice that we can truly 'give up' reading to our students. By 'give up' I mean to surrender to them their right and entitlement to see themselves as both agents (active/situating) and subjects (situated) in the making and taking of meaning.

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'Today we have naming of parts'[2]: The Development of Basic Education in the British Army in the Twentieth Century.

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Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at a time of increased modernisation within European armies, adequate literacy skills came to be regarded as a prerequisite for more effective soldiering. In Germany, Prussian officers had traditionally 'paid scant attention to such things as grammar and spelling' but, by the 1860s, although existing officers could still 'finish out their careers speaking and writing incorrectly', their sons could not expect to be commissioned without being able to prove their skills in these areas (Clemente 1992:14). In the British army the same picture held true with the main object of army education came to be seen as 'the development of the soldier not only as an efficient fighting man' (Mackenzie1992: 5). This article focuses on the work of the Royal Army Education Corps in meeting the army's need to increase literacy amongst conscripts during the Second World War thus ensuring a more effective fighting force. Throughout the period under consideration, the problems associated with low literacy and numeracy levels were twofold: the effect of low literacy levels in relation to the effectiveness of soldiers in being able to read and follow instructions, operate increasingly complex technology and communicate effectively with their peers and the much argued issue of whether or not promotion should be based on experience against academic ability. However, a recognition of the problems associated with low literacy levels in recruits did not begin at the start of the Second World War and it is first necessary to set this work in the context of earlier education initiatives in the British army relating to the literacy levels of servicemen.

By the 18th century, the problems associated with training and administering large bodies of men had led to the conclusion that 'It was important for NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] at least to be able to read, write and add up (Wayper 2001: 11-12) and, in 1767, Capt. R. Simes of the Royal Regiment of Foot, recorded that a sergeant (sic) 'that is capable of teaching writing, reading and arithmetic' was to be employed by the regiment to teach both soldiers and their children. With the modernisation of the army, functional literacy, defined at the time as the ability to 'read easy narratives, write fairly an easy passage dictated from the same work and work in arithmetic the four compound rules and reduction of money '(Hadaway1996), became a requirement for all soldiers above the lowest ranks. Throughout the 19th and the early part of the 20th century, more formalised attempts to address the issue of literacy levels continued (Simes1947: 3) and, even before the Peninsular War, soldiers of the Experimental Corps of Riflemen were offered basic education so that anyone wishing to become a sergeant could master 'reading, writing and the first four rules of arithmetic'. Lord Kitchener, at the time Commander in Chief, India, petitioned the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, for permission to establish a separate educational establishment for soldiers wishing to become officers[3]. Curzon welcomed this proposal, citing Kitchener's own letter as good evidence of need 'since it contained at least a dozen errors in composition and grammar such as split infinitives' (Pafford 1946: 5).

Paul Mackenzie confirms that these developments occurred largely in response

3 - The Corps later became the First Battalion Rifle Brigade.

to the changing nature of the army itself (Mackenzie1992: 3) and, by the First World War, army education had come to be widely regarded by the authorities as a means of developing motivation and ensuring an effective fighting force, whilst for soldiers themselves it was often a necessary prerequisite for securing promotion. In fact, from 1872 onwards, all NCOs were required to obtain a Third Class Certificate demonstrating the functional skills outlined above.

The First World War
Although the outbreak of war in 1914 largely brought education in the army to a halt, by 1916 the poor education levels of young recruits had begun to attract notice as affecting their performance as soldiers[4]. In addition, an increasing war-weariness, anxiety over conditions on the home front and fears about post-war employment had combined to affect morale and the efficiency of troops in France suffered as discontent began to develop. In response, educational initiatives, similar to those already existing in England to combat low morale and prepare soldiers for civilian employment, developed. However, here too the schemes ran into difficulties; in this case largely due to the intervention of the Adjutant-General who feared they would endanger discipline - presumably from a fear that encouraging education would also encourage soldiers to question their lot. Only in the autumn of 1917, when mutinies broke out at Étaples and the Calais training depot, did Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief, sanction the appointment of full-time education officers to develop a programme of classes and lectures with what Paul MacKenzie describes as 'the tacit aim of defusing unrest' (Mackenzie, 1992: 21). By the autumn of 1918, the new Educational Training Scheme had been developed with classes including English and arithmetic[3]. By

1919, Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State for War, felt able to report to the House of Commons that 'education is henceforward to be regarded as an integral part of Army training' (Williams, unpublished manuscript, p1).[5]

In 1917 the Ministry of Reconstruction had appointed a special committee to report on adult education as a whole[6]. This report, published in 1919, recommended that a larger allocation of public funds should be spent on adult education so that it could 'cater for the varied needs and tastes of the people' (Luvaas, 1964: 266) with a programme assisted not only by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), who had helped provide service education during the war, but also by the universities, the Workers Educational Association (WEA), the British Institute for Adult Education and the Educational Settlements Association. In fact, provision expanded so dramatically that, in the year 1929 -1930, local authorities in England and Wales organised 11,142 non-vocational adult classes (Luvaas, 1964: 266). However, as Paul Mackenzie notes, this committee contained no representatives form the Army (Mackenzie, 1992: 46) and, as Mary Hamilton identified, this 'institutional separation' is a probable reason for the experiences gained in the course of army basic education not being transferred to general Adult Education (Hamilton, 1996: 146). As a result, the realisation by army educationalists that 'the demands of literacy move on and what had once been sufficient reading and writing was no longer functional' did not fully reach the public consciousness and, more importantly, the notice of more general adult basic educationalists (Hamilton, 1996: 146).

The Inter-War Period
Following the cessation of hostilities in 1918, British Army education, in common with all government spending, was subject to severe

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4 - By way of comparison, 25% of recruits into the US army in World War One were recorded as being unable to read a newspaper or write a letter home and 35% of recruits into the French army were recorded as having 'had education which was nil or inadequate'. Zeldin, France 1848-1945. pp203-204.

5 - It should be noted that, although men in Young Soldiers' Battalions were required to attend from four to six hours per week of classes, for older men attendance at classes was voluntary although those who did volunteer were required to attend for a minimum of

two hours per week. Mackenzie. Politics & Military Morale, p19.
4 - In the same year, before classes became compulsory, the Staff Duties Department 8 (Army Education) reported that only between 5 to 20% of men were sufficiently interested to attend education lectures.

6 - As Mackenzie notes, although this committee contained representatives from the National Union of Teachers, the adult education movement, the universities, the YMCA and trade unions, there were no representatives from the army.

budgetary restraints although the literacy levels of recruits continued to pose problems. Despite the fact that it is often stated that the Army does not recruit 'illiterates' so there was no need for such education, the truth of the matter remained that when overall levels of recruitment were low, few were turned away. As Major C. Stevenson of the School of Preliminary Education later identified:

…In order to fulfil its many varied commitments, the Army has to accept recruits who are potentially good soldiers but whose educational standards are too low to enable them to benefit fully from normal military training (Stevenson, 1967: 5).

Indeed, in the inter-war period, candidates' literacy levels began to be routinely graded from 'A' – 'E', on the basis of recruiting tests. The following example is from the test paper of a candidate graded at grade 'D':

I was grwom I was delar I soled strawbies I never got no scwooling I had to wotk al the time for my kwep at the age of 14 I got gop in a ridind school in Belfast I got the sick I mead up my ming to jgoned the army I had a gop in form at 5/- a weaf for sest monst I left and jot a nother in a bldr jard at dricer a horse and fan for to jares (White, 1963: 74).

In 1935, 25,000 men joined the army of whom 6,000 were graded at this level with a further 2,300 even lower. In fact, between 1926 and 1938, the percentage of all recruits graded 'D' never fell below 25%. However, despite concerns expressed within the army about literacy levels, the low level of expenditure allotted to education in comparison with other military spending led to the suggestion that 'the soldier's mind and its care were of considerably less importance to the War Office than the care of his pay, his teeth, his horses, his soul' (White, 1963: 79). In this the army was not alone. Mary Hamilton records that, between the wars, literacy education was similarly 'conspicuous by its absence' in the concerns of the wider adult education establishments such as the British Institute of Adult

Education (Hamilton, 1996: 144). However, despite this low profile during the 1920s, education in the army continued to have a dual objective of fostering both efficiency and promotion: 'it is his training which makes a soldier an effective part of an organized army' (Royal Army Education Corps (RAEC), 021.1, 1918-1920).

It is worth noting here that, although direct comparisons with other services are problematic, the Merchant Navy also recognised a problem with recruits who had low literacy and numeracy skills. Alston Kennerley, in an article investigating the education and training of ratings for the British Merchant Navy between 1879 and 1939, acknowledges that, 'many youngsters arrived illiterate and innumerate' (Kennerley: 38). In this sphere of the services, as in the army, the experience of the First World War led to recognition of the importance of adequate and appropriate training including English and 'elementary mathematics'. In the Royal Navy, where personnel were similarly widely dispersed, education tended to be concentrated on technical expertise although all ratings were required to pass or gain exemption from an examination in both maths and English before they became eligible for promotion.

Similarly, the Royal Air Force, where service personnel were often out of reach of local educational facilities, devised their own educational scheme in August 1918 which became a permanent feature of peace-time service. Here, however, the situation was rather different as 'the RAF was dependent on Britain's system of secondary and higher education for most of its personnel.' (Mansell, 1997: 71). Both pilots and technicians were only accepted for service if they already had a School Certificate and university graduates, 'were especially welcome' (Mansell, 1997: 76).

In the Army, however, by 1938 the shortage of recruits had become acute leading to the enlistment of 'a much higher percentage of semi-literates than previously' (Wilson, 1938: 57); a situation not relieved by the advent of mass conscription in 1939. In fact, the problem proved so pervasive that

by the summer of 1943, it was estimated that 10,000 soldiers could neither read nor write (Wayper, 2001: 241) and by the end of the same year, the problem had even been acknowledged by the Financial Secretary at the War Office who, in December, stated that 'just under 1% of the men enlisted into the Army in the last year and a half were illiterate' (Wayper, 2001: 167). Given that, in the twelve months previous to this remark, the strength of the army had increased by somewhere in the region of 120,000, then in that year alone some 1,200 men had been enlisted who were classified as 'illiterate' (Howlett, 1995: 30, Table 3.4).

The Second World War
From 1940 the Army Council openly recognised that education 'contributes directly to the maintenance of morale and military efficiency' (Luvaas, 1963: 324). In April of that year, a War Office Committee under the chairmanship of Lt. General Sir Robert Haining drew up a scheme for army education in 'non-military' subjects taking into consideration the 'greater variety of needs of the war-time as opposed to the peace-time Army'. However, many commanding officers regarded such activities as a waste of valuable time that could be better expended in getting on with the war and, whilst the provision remained only available in their free time, many men resented it as propaganda and interference. But, at the same time, the now Royal Army Education Corps (RAEC) began to arrange 'remedial courses' for those with low literacy levels. All Home Commands were asked to 'make a big effort to combat illiteracy' and, in the Scottish Command, classes were established for small groups of men whose schooling had been interrupted by illness (Preston, RAEC Archive V: 12, p77).

Towards the end of 1943, the introduction of The Winter Scheme of Education for the first time allowed for three hours per week of education to be included during working hours and it was during this period that a focus on Adult Basic Education became clear with Home Commands directed that 'a special effort is to be made in the coming winter to overcome illiteracy in the Army'

(Preston, RAEC Archive V: 12. p8). Such was the success of these first Basic Education courses that, in March 1944, the Army Council directed Home Commands to set up five Basic Education Centres each running six week courses catering for twenty men at a time. Candidates for the centres were identified at the time of enlistment by means of an examination testing their literacy ability. What had started as 'an educational sideshow' was now well on its way to becoming a major educational campaign. As W.E. Williams suggests, in a modern army, 'the capacity to read and write [was] incalculably more important that (sic) it was in the Crimean War or even in the war of 1919-18 (sic)' (Williams, RAEC Archive: 1).

By May 1945, 6,225 men and 75 women had attended the courses and a visitor to one of the centres commented on the 'almost miraculous' results achieved with the military efficiency of these recruits increased so they were now capable of 'reading unit orders and being able to fill out simple documents such as leave forms (Preston, RAEC Archive V: 12: 8). Of the 992 students who attended courses in the first year, 205 went on to become graded tradesmen and a further 68 became NCOs (White, 1963:183). White, in 'The Story of Army Education', presents a useful summary of the way in which the 'illiterate' soldier was viewed and the difficulties he faced in becoming an effective soldier:

> The lot of the fully illiterate soldier was pitiable. Cut off from family news and public news by his inability to read, almost bound to fall into trouble through neglect of orders that he could not decipher, he often shrank from companionship; and the squad of recruits in which he hoped to integrate himself moved away from him as its efficiency grew (White, 1963:113).

Thus, the 'illiterate' soldier failed to achieve the aims set out for army education lacking the skills to become an efficient soldier. In fact, many of the objectives of Basic Education courses were couched in terms of increasing military efficiency such as 'read unit orders and be able to fill out simple

documents such as leave forms' and a letter to Command Education Officers at the time stressed that 'it is necessary that the illiterate should feel that the course should make him a better soldier' (Preston, RAEC Archive V: 12, p 10). To this end, the Anti-Aircraft Command developed its spelling instruction based around a list of two hundred and fifty 'useful army words' (RAEC Archive, VB12). As Mary Hamilton identifies, 'the over-riding motivation was vocational training and efficiency' (Hamilton, 1996:146).

However, within the army hierarchy reluctance remained to accept the evidence of low literacy levels. In 1944, the Director of Army Education sent a memo to all Command Education Officers stating that 'It is thought that the number of illiterates is not very large', although actual figures demonstrated otherwise (Bickersteth, RAEC Archive V; 12). By 1946 a battalion commander in the British Army of the Rhine was reporting that 40% of his men needed help when writing home and that coping with illiteracy had become a 'bread and butter job of the [Royal Army Education] Corps' – a situation which did not improve with the coming of peace (Wayper, 2001: 241). 1947 figures showed that, of the average Army intake, 1% percent was totally illiterate whilst somewhere in the region of 20-30% percent were semi-literate. Although Major General Lloyd, Director of Army Education at the War Office enquired rather plaintively 'Can we assume that these figures may decline now that war-time disturbance to education and family life is at an end?', the truth was that the next generation of army intake would continue to consist of young men whose education had been disrupted by air raids, evacuation and shortages of teachers (RAEC Archive, I12). As a result, the need for Preliminary Education courses continued although levels of need varied widely from Corps to Corps with illiterate recruits being almost unknown in the Royal Armoured Corps and the ATS (Williams, RAEC Archive, p128).

The Post-war Period

Nevertheless, as a result of continued demand at the end of the war, the original Basic Education Centres were replaced by five Preliminary Education Centres (PECs) to which national servicemen could be assigned after an initial two weeks of military training. Even in the late 1940s, however, the numbers accommodated by these Centres was always insufficient. Of the 7,500 men graded at the time as semi-literate, only 2,500 found places at Centres and, in June 1946, in one of the smallest Home Commands 200 men were awaiting places (White, 1963: 241).

Each course focused largely on 'reading and writing', to which 50% of the time was dedicated, with a further 7.5% dedicated to arithmetic[8]. Although of short duration, there can be no doubt as to the success of the courses as 'the PECs saved each year the equivalent of a Brigade, by reclaiming soldiers who otherwise would have been discharged.' (Cummings, 1992:70). Basic education, then, was not only efficient in developing a more effective fighting force but also in reducing overall wastage.

In 1956, in the five smaller centres became merged into one specialist unit, the centralised Royal Army Educational Corps (RAEC) School of Preliminary Education (SPE). Although originally the Army Council had assumed that, with the ending of National Service in the early 1960s, the need for such education would be dramatically reduced as the recruits coming forward would have had an educational history uninterrupted by war, this proved not to be the case. As Lt. Col. Cummings identified in his 1992 report on Preliminary Education:

…the problem … was that the Army had to compete with the attractions of civil employment in order to achieve its annual recruiting targets (Cummins, 1992).

Recommendations for the course were now made by Personnel Selection Officers at the time of enlistment following a series of assessment tests and interviews and in the

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8 - The remaining time was devoted to Citizenship, P.T. & games.

first year somewhere in the region of 1,000 soldiers in total attended the School. The charter of the School emphasised four main tenets showing a combination of educational and military aspirations including an acknowledgement that recruits attending the School[9] must eventually fit into military life and so they should be taught 'the common standards of soldierly behaviour'.

During this period the Centre continued to devise and produce its own materials combining reading skills with the vocabulary required for effective soldiering including, in 1952, 'A Military Course in English'. This workbook, for soldiers of the Empire whose first language was not English, linked text and images with troops of different ethnic backgrounds and explicitly promoted team spirit and loyalty utilising reading exercises which featured ideas such as 'A soldier is never alone in battle because good soldiers are loyal to one another' and 'The RAMC take good care of the sick. They work to keep us strong and fit' (French, 1952, Lesson 46). In addition, a number of 'readers' were also designed around topics linked to military life such as English in Action which contained the story of 'The Battle of Britain', supplemented by maps, plane identification sheets, statistics and plans of RAF stations (RAEC Archive). By identifying specific skills needed by recruits to function effectively in army life, such as filling in forms for the requisition of stores or supplies, carrying out order and even being able to write home, education programmes could be tailored to fulfil the goal of developing more effective soldiers.

The '60s & '70s
In October 1966, the School was inspected by Her Majesty's and received a very positive report. The Inspectors were at pains to point out that 'there is no other school or establishment in the country doing similar work and all inspiration and stimulus have come from within the school itself' (RAEC Archive, 1966). Overall, the Inspectors concluded that:

There will continue to be some men who need preliminary education before they can be effectively trained to meet the increasing demands of specific military training and service. The SPE must continue its work. The students at the school are given an honest, self-respecting military attitude and a sound preparation for basic military training. The School is the only source of expertise and experience of this kind available to the Services and it could not be closed without serious harm to the whole process of preliminary and basic training for an appreciable number of recruits. The School should now be given a degree of permanence and relieved of constant anxieties over accommodation, self-justification and status (RAEC Archive, 1966).

However, the provision remained undervalued within the Army itself. As Major W. Bramley records, 'the story of the SPE throughout the late 1960s was, not unnaturally, affected by the periodical pressures of cost-reduction and the consequent dangers of abolition' (Bramley, 1970: 53). As the post-National Service Army took shape, the numbers of soldiers attending the school decreased and, in 1968, annual intake was reduced to just five hundred. However, at the same time, the role of army education was still recognised in giving soldiers:

…the mental alertness, skill and knowledge which will enable them to play their full part as members of their unit and as members of the community (Lowe, 1970:124).

In fact, in 1970, 5% of all army recruits were still deemed to 'need further training in the basic skills of English and Arithmetic' and all recruits who had not already achieved a GCE qualification were required to attend classes until they achieve a 2nd Class Certificate of Army Education.

To inform the 1972 review of the

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9 - Not all soldiers nominated to attend the School actually attended. Figures for January to October 1966 show that, of 1,043 soldiers nominated as potential attendees, 681 were selected but only 611 actually attended. Of the rest, 47 purchased their discharge, 37 were recorded as RTU (Returned to Unit) including a number who subsequently faced disciplinary charges for being AWOL, 1 was excused on compassionate grounds and 3 were considered 'unsuitable for SPE'. Report by H.M. Inspectors on The Army School of Preliminary Education, RAEC, Corsham, Wilts. October 1966.

Preliminary School, three surveys were carried out by the Department of Adult Education's Chief Inspector in collaboration with Army Record Offices which concluded that recruits who were able to attend the school were able to 'absorb military training more effectively', stayed in the service longer and gained more promotions. The report recommended that 'SPE should therefore be retained on a permanent basis as it was an essential factor in maintaining the number and quality of manpower that the Army required' (Cummings, 1992: 70)[10]. As a result, from April 1974, all recruits identified by the Recruit Selection Centres as having literacy needs were now directed to the SPE before they began their military training and provision was again expanded.

However, many, including the Director of Army Education, believed that illiterate recruits should not be accepted by the Army in the first place and many more commanders were reluctant to accept recruits coming to them by way of the School feeling that the recruits should 'have completed their cap-badge indoctrination [i.e. induction to their regiment] before being got at by the RAEC' (Wayper, 2001: 335). As a result, the flow of intake both into and out of the Selection Centres tended to be unpredictable. As Lieutenant Colonel Cummings identified, 'the tap was only turned on when recruiting targets for a given week or period were not achieved' and any one course could vary in numbers 'from none to twenty' making staffing difficult (Cummings, 1992).

Although in the 1970s a growing realisation began of the fact that compulsory schooling had not resulted the universal basic education hoped for, at the same time, a fall in civilian employment and the economic depression of the late 1970s eased army recruiting difficulties and basic education courses were again reduced, ironically at the same time that adult basic education was developing a national profile and the UK was becoming a role model for adult literacy campaigns in other countries such as

Canada and Australia (Hamilton,1996:192). Finally, despite the results of a survey which concluded that recruits who attended the school were able to 'absorb military training more effectively', the School was closed in 1982, shortly before its Silver Jubilee.

The Closing Decades
However, by the late 1980s, with an upturn in civilian employment, the Army was again experiencing recruitment problems and could not continue to dismiss potential recruits who failed their selection procedures because of low literacy levels. An investigation of how these problems could be tackled recommended that a Preliminary Education Course should be set up, under the auspices of the Director of Recruiting, for potential recruits who failed the Army Entrance Test (Jackson,1989: 9). After ten weeks of concentrated preliminary education these recruits would then be given the opportunity of re-sitting the test. Although this pilot course once again proved successful, with 20 out of its 21 students continuing on to further training, the provision once again proved to be short-lived when recruitment problems eased.

Similarly, in 1990, the extent of the recruiting problem forced the Army into a temporary re-opening of the School of Preliminary Education, on a trial basis. Although it was hoped by the Army Council that a reduction in overall size of the Army in the late 20th century might reduce the need for this provision, some RAEC officers thought otherwise, believing that there would always be a tension between the level of recruits needed and the literacy abilities of those coming forward a viewpoint which has proved to be justified in recent years.

Overall then, this investigation of basic education in the British army indicates that the aims outlined at the start of this paper were never fully realised. Although low literacy levels were a source of concern to the army in that they impaired the effectiveness of recruits, these issues were only addressed in any systematic manner

10 - It should be noted that there is evidence that literacy issues at this time at least were not limited to the British Army. A 1987 study of recruits to the French Army showed that 50% of the 35,000 recruits tested had such a low reading standard that they were 'liable to jeopardise the proper workings of democracy, limit competitiveness and inhibit social advancement'. Girod, R. & Dupont J-B, 'L'éventail des connaissances' quoted in Vélis, J-P, 'Through a Glass, Darkly. Functional illiteracy in industrialised countries.' (Paris, UNESCO, 1990) p79.

during times of national crisis and when recruitment levels proved problematic. As a result, initiatives have remained reactive rather than proactive – each new national crisis resulted in the 'rediscovery' of low literacy levels amongst recruits and the 'reinvention' of short-term methods for alleviating the situation.

Over the last decades of the 20th and now in the 21st century, the role of armies in general is changing so that the skills required for a soldier to function 'effectively' now necessitate a great deal more than nationalism and fighting efficiency and the need for functional skills[11], is even greater in particular in relation to the increasing use of modern technology within the military establishment. However the problem is not a solely British one. A UNESCO study in 1987 showed that, in the French Army, reading standards were so low as to be 'liable to jeopardise the proper workings of democracy, limit competitiveness and inhibit social advancement' (Velis, 1990: 79).

Current Concerns
In 2000, with the publication of Sir Claus Moser's report *A Fresh Start'*, literacy and numeracy levels across the nation as a whole became a matter for governmental concern with particular groups, including the Armed Forces, being given particular mention in the government's initial Skills for life brief. Both the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Army have responded to these challenges setting a target of all Army personnel attaining literacy and numeracy skills sufficient to ensure a 'minimum level of operability' and to ensure their 'future development within the Army' (www.army.mod.uk/servingsoldier). In order to achieve this aim all candidates are now assessed at recruiting offices and those with skills below Entry 2 are deferred and directed to local providers to improve their skills. These deferred candidates may then reapply once their skills are provably at, or above E2. In addition, for candidates above E2 level but still in need of support, the Army now have qualified SfL tutors on some 40 locations across the country. However,

there is recognition that the scale of need is such that in-house provision alone will not suffice to meet demand and collaborative work with other providers has also been established. In the British army today, where 40% of the annual intake still fail basic training through low literacy skills, the Directorate of Education have finally come to the realisation that

> The modern army needs to deploy equipment that is moving ever higher up the complexity scale. The old cannon-fodder days when you could bury illiterates in some corner of the army are long gone (Hoare, 2004:15).

Whether these concerns will result in a sustained programme for addressing the low literacy levels of recruits remains to be seen.

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11 - *Functional skills are currently identified as 'practical skills in English, mathematics and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) that allow individuals to work confidently, effectively and independently in life (www.qca.org.uk).*

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■■ Section 3.■■■■■

Who's Speaking, Who's Listening?
Skills for Life: Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment?

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Introduction

This research is framed by the December 2005 Green Paper, *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment*. This DfES/Home Office consultative document acknowledges the economic and social costs of offending behaviour and proposes that investment in Skills for Life training, qualification achievements and opening up routes into employment must be pursued to reduce re-offending.

I review published research – including Westminster-based evidence (the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report) and Home Office sponsored studies - to investigate the thesis that previous attempts to tackle skills and employment issues by the Prison and Probation service have failed to satisfactorily address literacy and language underachievement by offenders.

The research examines academic research that proposes encouraging speaking and listening skills to a disadvantaged cohort promotes achievement. It reviews the DfES/Home Office Green Paper recommendations – and Learning and Skills Council funding decisions - to analyse whether the 'Offender Learner Campus' will help or hinder the development of language and literacy skills in Skills for Life teaching. It concludes by noting the limited progress made since the Green Paper's consultation period ended and the voicing of concern over the government's administration of justice by past and present Lord Chief Justices.

Speaking and Listening - and the Skills for Life Adult Literacy Core Curriculum

In the introduction to the government's Green Paper, *Reducing Re-offending through Education and Employment*, (2005) the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke stressed: 'We welcome the widest possible discussion'. It is this notion of a debate taking place that dictated my decision to incorporate headings from the 2001 *Adult Literacy Core Curriculum* – to act as a form of commentary. Thus, the italicised sub-headings, corresponding to the description used in the Speaking and Listening section of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum document, act as signage to the underlying narrative. While the sub-headings are usually used to underscore a tutor and learner's Individual Learning Plan's targets, however - to avoid ambiguity - they are used in the context of this research to highlight the government's shortcomings implied in my title, *Who's Speaking, Who's Listening*. Therefore, the sub-heading *'Follow and contribute to discussions on a range of straightforward topics'* (and the sub-headings that follow) – are to be read as deliberately ironic.

'Follow and contribute to discussions on a range of straightforward topics'

The starting point for this research came from an acute observation by the comedian Jimmy Carr (TV sketch, date and channel unknown): 'A wise man once said to me, ''People never really listen; they're just waiting for their turn to talk''. 'At least I think that's what he said...' This anecdote brings together twin issues affecting speaking and listening: the pitfalls awaiting the inattentive listener, and the ever-present danger that no one is listening to the speaker. This dilemma intrigued me and I therefore chose to research a particularly vulnerable group - ex-offenders - focusing on who speaks and who listens (and who does not speak and who does not listen). However, before discussing the present and proposed future support for (ex-offender) learners in the prison and probation service, it is necessary to review the historic context of the sector's Skills for Life provision.

My role at South Devon College covers Skills for Life – working with the Devon & Cornwall Probation Service – providing Literacy and Numeracy support, and latterly undertaking the role of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) advisor. I seek to ensure that IAG provision provides a seamless transition between initial counselling and Skills for Life work for prospective learners quite possibly experiencing negative attitudes regarding the prospects of education.

I therefore noted with a professional interest the censure of (the then) DfES and the Learning and Skills Council by the HOST Policy Research Unit:

> the absence of a recognised practice model or a quality framework for ensuring offenders' learning and IAG needs are assessed at recognised stages of sentence… movements between prisons seriously disrupt[s] access to information and learning, with no mechanism to transfer records or documents that would ensure continuity… concern about the transition from supervision by the Youth Offending Teams to mainstream N[ational] P[robation] S[ervice]... progress was severely disrupted, which led to re-offending… [a] wide disparity in education funding between prisons, resulting in striking variations in curriculum… absence of protocols between NPS and IAG providers, which caused confusion about what IAG is trying to achieve… lack of clear guidance about what is expected of each partner… to demonstrate achievement and potential need… complex systems and target-driven regimes, which may mean that a complete service is not offered to offenders even if the targets are met… changing staff roles, with little initial training in how to deliver effective IAG services : (published 2004, and viewed on an internet search 16 March 2006):

This damning indictment is by no means a unique critique of prison education. For example, the House of Commons' Education and Skills Committee (2005) comments: 'Part of the difficulty… is the separate nature of education, vocational training, and work in prisons. This cannot be allowed to continue'.

The Education and Skills Committee develops its criticism of the Home Office, describing the social, economic and personal costs of educational mismanagement:

> Half of all prisoners are at or below the level expected of an 11 year old in reading, two thirds in numeracy and four-fifths in writing; more than half of male and more than two-thirds of female adult prisoners have no qualifications at all; half of all prisoners do not have the skills required by 96% of jobs; nearly half of male sentenced prisoners were excluded from school and nearly a third of all prisoners were regular truants whilst at school. (2005, pp. 19-20)

On their own the figures would be appalling, but the education and skills committee (2005) stresses the wider picture – the economic burden to society: 'given that 58% of all adult prisoners… were re-convicted within 2 years of release; that the cost of recidivism to the tax payer is an estimated £11 billion a year'. Yet the cost to society can be measured in other than economic terms (2005): 'the number of victims of crime as a result of recidivism is also very high, with released prisoners being responsible for at least 1 million crimes per year'. Thus the stark cost of crime is highlighted, and the importance of reducing recidivism is self-evident.

'Speak clearly to be heard and understood in straightforward exchanges'

Due to the above historical evidence it is unsurprising that the 2005 Green Paper *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment* was promulgated. The consultation paper provides evidence of the economic and social costs of offenders' behaviour and proposes solutions (which are discussed below). Likewise, it proposes a reform strategy highlighting four key areas:

'a strong focus on employment… ensuring that training providers and colleges are better able to provide the skills offenders need to get a job… greater coherence across the system… motivating and engaging offenders' (2005).

This strategy, the Green Paper argues, would be framed by the development of the (metaphoric) Offender Learner Campus which might include: 'An alliance between a range of training providers… new centres of excellence… a strong focus on social inclusion… a focus on jobs… involving staff from mainstream providers in delivering learning and skills to offenders' (2005). Likewise, the government's apparent commitment to the proposals is foregrounded through a financial proposal, namely: 'Offenders being, for the first time, a priority group in the plans of the LSC [Learning and Skills Council] and other bodies, such as the Quality Improvement Agency (which focuses on further education standards'(2005). However, whilst the Green Paper acknowledges Skills for Life support to ex-offenders needs to improve, the document is silent on a speaking and listening issue highlighted by research conducted less than two years ago, and discussed in the following section.

'Follow the main points and make appropriate contributions to the discussion'
Speaking and listening and their links to the Skills for Life Core Curriculum are put to severe test in general offender behaviour programmes run by the National Probation Service. For example, in an evaluation of the literacy demands of behaviour programmes, Karen Davies et al (2004:1) concluded that speaking and listening skills were pitched at at least Level 2 – sometimes even Level 3. Yet 'the speaking and listening levels of some offenders were low – 35% had skills which were probably below Level 1'.

The courses analysed by Karen Davies' research included *Think First* (ensuring clients address anger management issues, strategies to avoid addictive and negative behaviour – including substance abuse), *Enhanced Thinking Skills* and *Reasoning and*

Rehabilitation. Thus as 'offenders had problems with the vocabulary and language structures of the programmes' (ibid), an understanding of and participation in relevant classes were thereby restricted.

While relatively unscathed by the above problems, I have been directly involved in one case cited below. For over a year I supported a learner with dyslexia, on a supervision order with the Devon and Cornwall Probation Service; and, based on appropriate assessments, he would find great difficulties in dealing with programmes or classes requiring verbal or written input. Following my direct intervention, senior probation management agreed (as a precedent) *not* to include him in any of the programmes discussed above. His self-confidence increased following his Skills for Life work, and he did not suffer setbacks that exposure to a large group (incorporating discussions, flip charts and presentation work) might have induced.

Present information and ideas in a logical sequence and provide further detail and development to clarify or confirm understanding'

David Newnham presents a dilemma in the guise of a numeracy challenge: 'If 58 per cent of offenders discharged from British prisons are reconvicted within two years, and the prison population currently stands at 73,000, how well is our penal system performing on a scale of one to 10?' (Newnham 2004) One way to reduce the recidivism rate, it could be argued, would be to encourage policies that took note of the research findings (from the Basic Skills Agency) that suggest: 'finding – and keeping – a job has a positive impact on the rate of re-offending' (BSA 2006). Another way to reduce the recidivism rate, it could be argued, would be to encourage policies that took note of the research findings that suggests, as Crace (2006) does:

'Reconviction rates in the first year after release among ex-prisoners who had begun a general education course between 2001 and 2002 ran at 28% compared with a national average of 44% for all offenders'.

Additionally, in an article extolling the virtues of speaking and listening skills, Maggie Greenwood (2006) describes the positive outcome of offenders supported by teaching such skills: 'Training in oral communication helps [offenders] to develop their ability to express themselves clearly, which helps them to become more tolerant towards others, less frustrated when they can't get their views across, and more flexible'. Yet, this evidence has been overshadowed by the discrediting of this type of speaking and listening activity as: it is now thought (Anon, 2006) that the [anger management] courses ''have the potential to equip the offender with additional control mechanisms and increase his/her capacity to manipulate a situation to their advantage and power'' '. While the 'evidence' is circumstantial and not proven, it is my understanding that the future of such anger management courses is now under threat.

Likewise, it can be argued that opportunities for offenders must be provided to undertake educational courses, and a professional approach by the prison service needed to ensure that learners embark on and complete courses. Yet the Prison Officers Association advises (2006): 'the majority of prison educators are employed part-time or face insecure contracts. […] Speeding up ex-offenders employment will require a solution to this'. Whether the Green Paper addresses this important issue of funding teaching - or is silent – will be discussed towards the conclusion of this essay.

'Make requests and ask questions to obtain information in familiar and unfamiliar contexts'
When making a Skills for Life appointment for an ex-offender to see me, some probation case officers provide a Fast Track' checklist. It is designed, I think, to show that the probation office is listening. However, even the most cursory check of the twenty questions should generate caution with regard to the results. For example, question four ('How often does a friend/member of the family help you with reading newspapers or magazines?') is unlikely to elicit an honest response if the learner is reticent to discus their literacy

skills. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the then Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) (2004) commented: 'the incomplete information available from 'Fast Track' causes inconsistencies in the evaluations made by probation staff… […] What is needed is the use of more comprehensive initial assessment techniques, specifically designed for those who have complex and multiple learning needs.'

The government's response (2004) to ALI was uncompromising: 'we do not anticipate any significant revisions to the screening tools… […] the critical issue is making sure that those who have needs identified go on to a more detailed first assessment'. However, the 'critical issue' of needs is wrongly identified in the Home Office's response. Firstly, I would contend, those clients who cover up any literacy and numeracy needs as a result of an ineffective checklist will not be referred to Skills for Life practitioners. Secondly, the 'Fast Track' approach is less than socially inclusive due to the crass manner of its presentation to prospective learners.

'Express clearly statements of fact and give short explanations, accounts and descriptions'
The comprehensive nature of the Green Paper's consultation response form is impressive. Likewise, a keynote statement (2005) indicates the extent of the government's listening mode: 'Offenders being, for the first time, a priority group in the plans of the LSC [Learning and Skills Council] and other bodies, such as the Quality Improvement Agency (which focuses on further education standards)'. On the face of it this is encouraging, foregrounding the Moser Report comment (2006) that: 'The scale of the [illiteracy] problem is enormous [and] one fact will suffice to illustrate the point: some 60% of people in prison suffer from functional illiteracy and/or innumeracy'. Yet the Learning and Skills Council *Funding Guidance for Further Education in 2006/07* document makes no mention of offenders becoming 'for the first time, a priority group' for the LSC.

There might, however, be an oblique

reference to the cohort in paragraph 367 – the Key Priority paragraph - of the funding document (2006) when the Council acknowledges it is 'charge[d] with [the] task of reaching the most disadvantaged people in our society and placing their interests and concerns at the heart of our provision'. But the laudable sentiments expressed are militated by paragraph 394 of the same document. In respect of Skills for Life three and six guided learning hours courses (normally used to deliver taster sessions and diagnostic assessment programmes), the LSC (2006) advise that, from August 2006, funding was **not** to made available and colleges should provide support: 'through existing pre-course guidance, enrolment and on-course induction processes, and to incorporate diagnostic assessments into longer programmes for learners'.

I would suggest that either the government, in advance of examining the responses to their consultation paper *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment*, or the LSC, were failing to listen to those who want positive action taken to help ex-offenders embark on Skills for Life courses. I propose that this is the case because the above (witting or unwitting) action by the LSC in withdrawing funding for so-called short courses would reduce the take up of Skills for Life provision. I explain why in the concluding section.

'Support opinions and arguments with evidence'
In my role at South Devon College I have traditionally relied on the six hour guided learning hours to 'soft sell' education opportunities – especially encouraging ex-offender learners working towards national qualifications, at Levels 1 and 2 in Literacy and Numeracy. I found that advising the prospective learner that s/he is only committing to two sessions (an Initial Assessment in both subjects and a feedback session) encouraged the ex-offender to start a learning journey. However, if the *minimum* commitment were twelve hours, the prospective learner (often uneasy about committing to an educational journey) would be less inclined to become a learner.

(It should be noted that Skills for Life national qualifications obtained by the prison and probation cohort cannot be underestimated, as *insidetime* (2006) notes: 'around 15 per cent of adults who gain literacy and numeracy qualifications achieve them whilst in prison'.

A second drawback to the withdrawal of funding is that, in effect, South Devon College will finance the teaching of Skills for Life rather than the LSC. This is because diagnostic assessment and feedback sessions need to be undertaken to ensure (quite correctly) compliance with Ofsted demands. Also, if these actions were not carried out it would be impossible to generate a reasonably accurate Individual Learning Plan for the benefit of the learner.

The Green Paper, *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment* also serves a warning note to further education providers who will need to bid to serve the needs of a campus of offender learners, namely:

> [The government] have set our plans to improve the learning and skills service offered to offenders. […] The delivery of education will still take place largely through a set of… contracts with… providers who have chosen to work in the field… [However] for the longer term it may limit the flexibility of the delivery process. […] We want to develop centres of excellence in offender learning, which should, over time, produce a much more effective service (2005, p.29)

Further Education providers are well used to listening to government, and euphemisms; 'a much more effective service' might therefore be interpreted as the government speaking of other, *cheaper*, providers.

As an additional - and ironic comment on the rationale of the government's Green Paper proposals to support education opportunities and employment prospects for ex-offenders, I include an observation from *insidetime* – an on-line information forum. It

commented (2006) that an evaluation of prisoner Skills for Life training published on the Home Office website in 2005 noted: 'Improvements in literacy and numeracy were not significantly related to prisoners' chances of finding employment'. For a government committed to speaking *and* listening, it is surprising that this Home Office research – fundamentally rejecting the premise of the Green Paper, *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment* – was greeted with silence.

In a summer of fast-moving events affecting the Home Office – especially a more punitive approach to law and order – the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, launched a new initiative. Seeking to embrace ideas from 'stakeholders' - under the banner of *Let's Talk* - he announced (2006): 'the criminal justice system is still the public service most distant from what reasonable people want'. More quietly, the Home Office (2006) announced the postponement of a more liberal regime for 60,000 offenders. The so-called 'custody plus' sentence: 'was designed to replace a prison term of up to 12 months with a shorter period in custody combined with a longer period of rehabilitation and supervision in the community'. And, as a final irony, an element of this postponed sentence would have been to increase Skills for Life teaching – the provision and purpose, as the Green Paper notes, being to reduce re-offending through *education* and by creating better opportunities for *employment.*

Conclusion
Following the Green Paper consultation process, submissions by interested parties were made. *Reducing Re-Offending through Skills and Employment: Summary of Consultation Responses* (2006) noted that a total of 95 submissions were received, including comments by trade unions, Jobcentre Plus and education and training providers. The majority fully supported the notion that re-offending rates might be reduced through improving employability skills. Developing this theme the Department for Children, Schools and Families advised (2008) that 'Two English regions selected as pilots will design,

develop and test proposals', aiming to roll the programme out nationally by 2009. However, to date there is no further information on progress made and, while steps forward following the Green Paper consultation appears to be slow moving, the same cannot be said in respect of newspaper reports on the criminal justice system. Barely a week goes by without a further criticism, or revelation. For example, the former Lord Chief Justice, Lord Woolf (2008) has written on the government's criminal justice and prison policy, namely Britain 'now hav[ing] a population of prisoners we can only house in conditions that reduce to a minimum the prospects of turning prisoners away from crime'.

Attempting to reduce re-offending through skills and employment, the government projects itself as a keen listener. Lord Woolf is one influential voice seeking to be heard; his is one voice, I would argue, that the government should listen to if it is serious in its endeavours, especially in view of his comments that:

> Prisons for a number of years have suffered from such severe overcrowding that it has prevented the Prison Service and the other agencies of the criminal justice service being able to take the action which is known to be necessary if there is to be a reduction in re-offending (2008, p. 16)

And his is not a lone voice. The present Lord Chief Justice, Lord Phillips, has added his voice to the debate. At a briefing to coincide with the publication of his first review of the administration of justice, he is cited (2008) as observing: '[Prison] Inmates have been unable to access courses to help them address their offending behaviour and win release because prisons are too crowded to move them to jails where courses are available'.

Whether his voice (and Lord Woolf's) will be heard – and listened to – as the period lengthens following the conclusion of the Green Paper's consultation is open to question. However, what is clear is that while the answer to the question 'Who's

Speaking?' is self-evident, the question of 'Who's Listening?' remains unanswered.

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■■ **Section 3.** ■■■■■

Reading as cure, writing as deliverance: Christian Science and the uses of literacy

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Introduction

> We were always talking about Mrs. Eddy and her book. We said her name slowly and lovingly. We stroked the books, tracing with our fingers The Cross and The Crown embossed on the soft old cloth covers. (Fraser 1999: 6)

This paper offers some reflections on work in progress[1] about the uses of literacy in the cause of claiming religious certainty. The research from which it grew has been, in part, driven by a personal curiosity: what was it that had drawn my grandfather to join the Church of Christian Science and remain a faithful member for nearly forty years?[2] As will be evident, the search for an answer to this continues.

I begin with a note on the use of a social theory of literacy in historical research. After a brief introduction to Christian Science, I then discuss two key literacy practices that characterise its work since its foundation: on the one hand, the use of 'Mrs. Eddy's book', and on the other, that of 'testimonials' to its powers of healing. After a look at other observations on her life and work, I suggest how a social practice view of literacy – through the sources available to us - can help the present-day unconverted both guess at the attractions of Christian Science and be concerned as to its dangers.

The quotation with which I have begun is the recollection of a former Christian Scientist in which she evokes a child's recollection of Eddy's book. I will return to this later.

Inferring literacy practices

A social practice view of literacy broadens our understanding of reading and writing from one focussing on skills and abilities to one in which the emphasis is on uses and relationships. It allows us to see literacy as mixed up in 'practices' (the values and cultural habits of a given time and place) and 'events' (in which these practices can be seen at work). In a summary of the theory, David Barton and Mary Hamilton set out six propositions that hold it together. Of these, the first is particularly helpful for historical research projects - dependent, as these often are, entirely on written texts:

> Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these are observable in events which are mediated by written texts. (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič: 2000 p9)

In a subsequent paper, Mary Hamilton goes on to offer a helpful gloss on this. 'Visible literacy events', she says, 'are just the tip of an iceberg'. Literacy practices lying beneath the surface:

> can only be *inferred* from observable evidence because they include invisible resources, such as knowledge and feelings; they embody social purposes and values; and they are part of a constantly changing context, both spatial and temporal. (ibid: 18)

Later in the same volume, Karen Tusting uses these propositions to examine the literacy practices of a Catholic community

and provides a useful warning of the danger of seeing practices 'in a rigid, structural way'. Instead, she argues for a recognition of the present as made up of past and future to enable us to appreciate how practices and 'the events they pattern' may be both regular and dynamic.' (ibid: 39). In the case of my own study, this appreciation has meant an effort of imagination. It has meant trying to keep in mind, on the one hand, the different spatial and temporal context inhabited by Eddy, her early followers and critics and, on the other, those resources mentioned by Mary Hamilton (feelings, knowledge, purposes, values) which I bring to bear in learning about their literacy practices. My data (apart from two brief conversations with living Christian Scientists) has been entirely textual. Such 'events' as I could glimpse are reported by people no longer here to interview, let alone observe. Since I cannot observe their behaviour, I can 'only infer' the practices from their versions – or other people's accounts - of the literacy events in which they engage. In the absence of empirical evidence, I want to stress the value of gathering a variety of sources to create a picture of both events and practices.

Christian Science
According to Eileen Barker, the term 'new' religions – or, in full, 'new religious movements' (NRM) – is used to refer to a 'disparate collection of organisations' emerging, mostly, in the late 1950s, promising answers to fundamental questions of belief. Many NRMs were deviations from within the Judaeo-Christian tradition; most originated from either North America or the East (frequently India) (the Unification Church, the church of Scientology, the Rajneesh Movement being among the most widely known). As she notes, the dramatic growth of this relatively minority activity in the West has coincided with a period of public dismay at the decline of mainstream religious organisations. (Barker 1992: 9-10).

The Church of Christ, Scientist (as it is formally titled) was founded in 1879 in Boston, Massachusetts, so it is certainly no longer 'new'. However, as Barker also notes:

> It should not, however, be forgotten that all religions have, at their inception, been new, and parallels in history can be found for much that is happening to the new religions (and that the new religions are doing') (1989: 185-6).

In accounts of NRMs, the Church has been variously grouped under the heading of 'movements to do with personal empowerment' (Fisher and Luyster, 1990: 328) and 'occultist' or 'spiritualist' movements (Chryssides 1999). Connections have also been traced from the New Thought movement of the late 1800s to the self-help and New Age movements of today (Fraser 1999:14) – self-healing that claims a basis in science.

Today, the Church's website, www.tfccs.com (*visited 29.12.07)* introduces itself as follows:

• Christian Science, discovered by Mary Baker Eddy, is a universal, practical system of spiritual, prayer-based Christian healing, available and accessible to everyone.

• Christian Science is fully explained in Mary Baker Eddy's primary text on spirituality and healing, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.

• Christian Science has helped many people find better emotional and physical health, answers to life's deepest issues and progress on their spiritual journeys.

What is immediately clear from this is the importance of a particular text, not only as a means to understanding the religion, but also as a source of remedy to emotional and physical disorders. It is the Church's 'primer' – supposedly 'available and accessible to everyone' (a claim which, as we shall see later, I could not support myself). Mary Baker Eddy is the authority who 'fully explains' the religion; and, as the website's publications page reveals, 'Mrs. Eddy's' sayings are quoted with great frequency - in editorials, in feature articles, and on letter pages. It is as if there is an editorial requirement to make sure that her

words appear as often as Biblical quotations. Central, then, to Christian Science's present-day uses of literacy is the continuing study of a text written by an elderly 19th-century American woman.

As is then apparent from other sources, Eddy's work remains alive In the Church's weekly services. Each week, in every Church branch across America and elsewhere, lay members read aloud extracts from her work as often as passages from the scriptures. Alongside this, the Church's regular rituals include the sharing of written and spoken 'testimonials' of the healing which its treatment is claimed to have achieved. These occur in the 'Wednesday meetings'. – and examples of these also appear weekly in The *Christian Science Journal*. (Cookson 2003: 54, Fraser 1999:17).

Within the various manifestations of the Christian Church, a female author for a sacred text is rare. All over the world, right up until the twentieth century, its formal religious practices seem to have been the exclusive domain of men: the disciples, the Church Fathers and the priests and theologians who followed them. Yet in Christian Science, as Caroline Fraser put it, *'We were always talking about Mrs. Eddy and her book'*. As work on this project continues, I hope to explore the relationship between reading, gender and faith, not only in Christianity but also in other faiths, and discover roles that women have played in the creation of texts. At this stage, I can only suggest that, whatever else she achieved, Eddy was a pioneer in claiming an authority of this kind.

'The book'
So what was the 'primary text' which she produced? The book which Fraser and her friends stroked so tenderly, as children? embossed with important emblems, its author's name so frequently on their lips?

Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures was first published in 1875. Divided into fourteen sections, it deals first with the topics of prayer, atonement, and

marriage; then with controversies of the time about Eddy's religion – its difference from spiritualism, the issue of 'animal magnetism' and the relationship with medicine. The main manifesto, as it were, deals with ideas on physiology, on truth, on creation, and on 'the science of being'; and in last part, Eddy answers 'some objections', explains 'Christian Science practice', and sets out principles and rules for teaching its doctrine. The *Key to the scriptures* which follows consists of her commentary (or exegesis) on two parts of the Bible: the books of Genesis and the Apocalypse.

Constantly reworking and revising this over the next few years, Mary Baker Eddy also published countless other articles and papers. In fact it seems that she was fairly permanently engaged in drafting and redrafting all sorts of writing from 1866 until she died in 1910, contributing regularly to the *Christian Science Journal* (which she launched in 1883), producing pamphlets, a memoir-cum-manifesto, and her rule-book for the Church, the *Manual of the Mother Church, the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts* (1895)[3]

During the course of research on this topic, I consulted all sorts of books and articles by others on Eddy, on Christian Science, and on NRMs. Yet I found I had a resistance to reading the work of the main protagonist herself. For weeks, my leather-bound edition of *Science and Health* – grandfather's gift, all those years ago -lay on the table unopened. There seem to have been three possible explanations. It could have been its thin 'Bible paper' with gold edges: material on which Eddy had persuaded her publishers to print it in the 1890s, despite their arguments that this was difficult to obtain and problematic for printing purposes. Having it look like the holy Book, she argued, would be 'an aid to using them together' (cited in Fraser 1999:115). I turned these tissue-thin pages in trepidation. My twenty-first century literacy is more familiar with a screen than this fragile antique. Its physicality had an impact all its own. A modern paperback version (of which there

3 - From an annotated bibliography of 'writings by Mrs. Eddy', in Franden Dakin (1929), p.527-528)

are plenty in print today) would have felt more robust. I could have written pencil notes in the much wider margins; even (risky, this) turned down the corner of a page.

But I think it was more than that. A second possibility was that I reacted against the apocalyptic tone to be found inside, in passages such as these:

> This material world is even now becoming the arena for conflicting forces. On one side there will be dissent and dismay; on the other side there will be Science and peace…(Eddy 1875/1934:96)

During this final conflict, wicked minds will endeavour to find means by which to accomplish more evil; but those who discern Christian Science will hold crime in check. They will aid in the ejection of error. They will maintain law and order, and cheerfully await the certainty of ultimate perfection. (ibid: 96-97)

> Body cannot be saved except through Mind...Beyond the frail premises of human beliefs, above the loosening grasp of creeds, the demonstration of Christian Mind-healing stands a revealed and practical Science. (ibid: 98)

Such utter certainty, in our times, has an uneasy ring to it, and I could not feel sympathetic with the tone or the message. In my twenty-first-century context - of electronic global literacy transmitting news of world conflicts provoked by fundamentalist views– the text read as dogmatic raving.

So I think there was a third reason for my resistance. I had forgotten the social practice approach. Until I brought back this frame to what I was doing, I was staying within the context and circumstances in which I was reading it. Once I tried imagining it read aloud, with others listening beside me; or finding it in a time when I might be desperate for a solution to pain; or, most of all, living in a world where the written word and the idea of 'revealed truth' all had a different physical and social place,

I found a willingness to read on.

At Christian Science meetings, one passage from Eddy's text which is regularly read aloud to this day is 'the scientific statement of being', which goes like this:

> There is no life, truth, intelligence, nor substance in matter. All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestation, for God is All-in-all. Spirit is immortal Truth; matter is mortal error. Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal. Spirit is God, and man is His image and likeness. Therefore man is not material; he is spiritual. (ibid: 468)

Despite my persistent objections to the tone, I could see that there is a confidence and rhythm to these words. Silent on the page, they did not evoke my sympathy. ('Matter is mortal error'? Where is the meaning in this?) Hearing them uttered out loud, however, I could imagine that there may feel to be a comfort in the repetition – not to mention a reassuring completeness in the last sentence. This is the language of an oracle, telling us the answer to all our questions. Thinking about it as the text for hearing, rather than seeing, it felt easier to appreciate its appeal.

The testimonials

Reading Eddy's book was – and still is – usually a silent and individual matter, however. And the literacy practice I want now to discuss is writing about reading: the testimonials of Christian Science devotees to the effects on them of this primary text. Again, when we look at those written in the early period of Christian Science (between 1875 and 1925), we need to bear in mind some of the physical, social and cultural contexts of the time. On the one hand, the fact that few households, either in America or in Britain, would have had electricity; wireless, television, film and telephones had yet to be common property; mass education was still relatively new. On the other, the value given to the spoken word, to public meetings, shared reading, letter writing (Vincent 1993).

Eddy's readers became converts through

reading. The 'evidence' of her message's claims to be scientific depended on their writing about this; and in 1902, Eddy added an additional section to 'Science and Health' entitled 'Fruitage' - a selection of letters received from people who had been healed 'by reading Science and Health'. (the exact wording comes from the Mary Baker Eddy Library's 'timeline' for Eddy's life and works: www.marybakereddylibrary.org/marybakere ddy/timeline.jhtml)   The titles of these pieces (presumably composed by Eddy, rather than the letter-writers) - 'Cataract Quickly Cured', 'Cancer and Consumption Healed', 'Depraved Appetites Overcome' - carry a clear message: reading this book makes you better.

Most pieces end with expressions of gratitude, usually to Mrs. Eddy herself. Writers tell of having given up hope of all other cures, and then discovering health, with 'the truth conveyed to me by this book being the healer' (Eddy 1875/1934: 611). A good neighbour or friend, themselves a Christian Scientist, lend them a copy. Alternatively, they pay for their own. The result is the same:

> 'It is nearly five years since I bought my first copy of Science and Health, the reading of which cured me of chronic constipation, nervous headache, astigmatism, and hernia, in less than four months' (ibid: 601)

Healing may be passed from reader to another. They may be reading it to themselves or out loud. As this parent of a child suffering from 'gastric catarrh' and rickets reports, both have the necessary effect – even if the reader cannot make sense of what they have read:

> I read it *silently and audibly*, day and night, in my home, and although I could not seem to understand it, yet the healing commenced to take place at once. The little mouth which had been twisted by spasms grew natural and the child was soon able to be up, playing and romping about the house as any child would.' (ibid: 613) (my emphasis)

The husband of a woman suffering from 'consumption in its last stages' witnessed her spending a whole day engrossed in a friend's copy of *Science and Health*, as a result of which,

> 'she ate a hearty dinner, the first in about three days, and that same evening she dressed herself, walked into the dining-room, ate a hearty supper and enjoyed it. She slept well that night. She borrowed this lady's copy of Science and Health two hours each day for eight days, and was healed.' (ibid: 624).

These are varied literacy events, in which reading is alternately done alone and silently or read aloud by another; occupies an entire day or is used almost as a prescription (taken in regular sessions, at intervals).   They read and were healed.

And as I read their reports, I wondered: is this what happened to grandfather? Christian Science Reading Rooms exist in towns and cities all over the world. Many of them have bound copies of back issues of the *Sentinel*. In search of a possible testimonial that grandfather might have written, I spent a morning in one such room, scanning the volumes for 1924, finding more images of reading:

On January 5th, 1924, Sydney Hassett, writing from Thorp Bay, Essex, England reports the beneficial effects of *a night at the book*:

> One night, I had influenza, but it was banished by reading Science and Health from midnight until 5 o'clock in the morning.'

Two months later, Abraham H. Bluestein of Buffalo, New York wrote of the benefits of *recitation*:

> In trying to crank my automobile, I broke my arm. I walked to my home, nearly two and a half miles, constantly repeating the Scientific Statement of Being (Science and Health p468) and the 91st psalm. With the help of a CS practitioner, in two days I was able to be back in business.

And in the same issue, (Mrs) Laura May Yoxall, of St. Louis reported the value of *being read to*:

> I was healed… by my mother's reading aloud to me from the textbook Science and Health with a key to the Scriptures by Mary Baker Eddy (19 March 1924):

How do these experiences compare with present-day testimonials? Checking in on the Church's current publications, I found reports of reading choices that seem to be mainly similar. In October 2004, Jonna Patterson, of Sugar Land, Texas, writes of being healed after a series of episodes of semi-paralysis followed by 'never-ending' appointments with doctors and brain scans. The combination which worked for her, it seemed, was a random choice of page or passage from 'Mrs. Eddy's book' read for the first time, together with a one later recalled at a crucial moment:

> I had never read anything out of *Science and Health* before.   I'd never been interested. But now, I took the book into the bathroom, closed the door, and opened it at random. My eyes fell on this passage: 'Which was first, Mind or medicine? Mind was first and self-existent, then Mind, not matter, must have been the first medicine. God being All-in-all, He made medicine; but that medicine was Mind.' (p142) This captured my attention and I felt a stir of hope…. www.tfccs.com/gv/csps/csj/testimony1004.jhtml (visited 07.11.07)

Later, following another of her 'episodes', she reports that 'something I had read in *Science and Health* came to me' (about the 'might of Mind' to banish pain) and 'immediately, the symptoms stopped'.

For others, the combination is of prayer with reading. In the March 2008 issue of the *Christian Science Journal*, Clarence Porter from Michigan, America, for example, recalls how a combination of prayer with regular reading of *Science and Health* over the period of a year healed his cancer (and astonished his doctor).

So it seems that twenty-first century Scientists are continuing to find a 'cure' through their reading, whether random and or sustained, done alone or in company, enabling them to recognise 'false' nature of pain that they experience and so be freed from it (see also: David Barker, Christian practitioner from Barnstaple, in Devon; December 2007). www.spirituality.com (visited 22.3.08)

The discovery and the problem
For Eddy herself, the religion she founded sprang from a 'discovery' of a similar kind: mysterious and unsolved pain, dissipated through reading.

A brief summary of her life goes like this. The youngest of six children growing up in New Hampshire, USA, she had been a sickly child who struggled with ill health as an adult, as well. Like others of her class and culture, she turned to her Bible, and also to various alternative health treatments, from diets to hydropathy and 'mental suggestion' – a kind of hypnosis – offered by a popular healer of the time called Phineas Quimby (inspired in large part by the Austrian Anton Mesmer, the originator of mesmerism). In 1866, in her mid-40s, Mary had a fall, from which she was badly injured and was confined to bed. After reading accounts of Jesus' healing miracles, she effected a kind of self-cure and (to the astonishment of friends and family) got up and walked into the next room. (Chryssides 1999:86)   This, apparently, is what happened next:

> As she earnestly studied the Bible during the next few years, God revealed to her the scientific system of healing which she named Christian Science. In 1875 [she] published her revelation in a book called *Science and Health*. She spent the next three decades revising her book, training converts, and founding a new religion based upon her revelation and teachings. By the time she died in 1910, she was the leader of a religious empire with approximately a hundred thousand members. (Kramer 2000:9)

At the heart of Christian Science – as of other movements - is its belief in spiritual

healing. Its treatment, however, neither asks God to heal nor offers alternative remedies, but consists in nourishing the belief that illness does not exist, and the recognition that pain is an error, a lie, an illusion. Once the patient accepts this, they will be healed. In David Barrett's words:

> The basis of the teachings of the Church is simply: God is Spirit and Truth and Love; anything which is not of spirit and truth and love is therefore not of God, and so is not real. (Barrett 1998: 82)

To achieve this certainty, Mary and her Church required followers to read and believe.

The difficulty with this, however, is that if a Christian Science child or an adult feels pain and it does not go away, they can only conclude that the fault lies with them. Caroline Fraser and Linda Kramer, already cited, are both members of an organisation of former Scientists who oppose the Church's practices. Such members report having undergone, as children, untreated illnesses. One woman, for instance, spoke of her mother telling her that earaches were not real, because God didn't make them; later, after she was going deaf, saying to her: 'If you would be more loving, you would be able to hear' (Fraser 1999: 318). The ex-members' support organisation aims to provide:

> …balance for the claims and promises made by the Christian Science church, by its 'textbook' *Science and Health* and other Church authorised writings, and by its founder, Mary Baker Eddy. www.christianway.org (visited 21.11.07)

Their publications quote much less positive 'testimonials' than those in the 'Fruitage' chapter of *Science and Health*; their view is that Christian Scientists have to live in an almost constant state of denial. 'We remember unexplained deaths… feeling guilty when we were sick… and the constant struggle between what our physical senses told us and how we were supposed to interpret reality', writes Kramer (ibid: 17), who (says the blurb on the back of her book) 'spent years trying to break [the] emotional hold' of an upbringing in the Church.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the struggles of members wanting to leave a religious cult of this kind. In terms of being attracted to join, I have argued that the social practice view of literacy helps us to get some kind of insight; as it does, also, into the nature of Eddy as writer. Convinced as to her role as 'God's scribe' (Kramer 1999:64) she evidently needed no scribe of her own, unlike mystics before her (Mace 2002: 99-106). Some have suggested she would have benefited from some firmer editing; an early biographer, Edwin Franden Dakin, is not the only one to accuse her of plagiarizing other sources and to criticize her style for being laboured and incoherent. Yet he clearly felt some sympathy for her. In this passage, he offers an image of how her writing may have met as much of a need in her as in her readers:

> If the book called *Science and Health* means anything…. then it is a record of deliverance. Indeed, it was the deliverance itself. For Mary Glover [*Eddy's second married name*] it was at once a flight from external reality and from the self within…. Viewed from this vantage point the whole strange career of the woman suddenly becomes luminous. Her book was her release. In writing it she found a new world. Alone in her room on winter nights, huddled in shawls while the wind shook the house until the smoky kerosene lamp flickered, she could bury herself in that self-assigned task of writing, and forget utterly all the cruel trivialities of the day. (Franden Dakin 1929: 81)

There is no documented basis for either the wind shaking the house or of the 'cruel trivialities' of the day. This is poetic licence, not analytical research findings; but what it gives us is a means to consider the literacy uses of this strange woman with a social practice appreciation of context and circumstance.

Sceptics of Christian Science have criticised its claims; former followers have reported its damaging effects. The chain of cause and effect between reading and recovery from injury or illness has been challenged. Awaiting further research is the question of how a text like the one composed by Mary Baker Eddy's still has the power to persuade people today. What seems clear is that text alone cannot explain to us how its message may have struck the spirit of a person like my grandfather. The voices of the past are important; but it is also in the pauses between that we may find some understanding as to what they are saying.

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■ **Section 3.** ■

Literacy matters: violence, literacy and learning
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Introduction

This paper is about the often-invisible relationship between violence, learning and literacy. Using a life history approach it describes Suzanne (her chosen pseudonym) and her attempts to learn and use literacy in her everyday life. Her experiences of adult literacy learning takes place at a time in the UK when the national strategy *Skills for Life* has targeted adults like Suzanne, classed by government policy as a member of a 'priority group' of single parents who are unemployed, to improve their skills. Her story shows some of the difficulties people on the margins, often on the edge of social and economic inclusion, have in accessing the learning they need: learning which recognises the complexity of their lives and the barriers they encounter in being able to fit in with the patterns and content of provision. It also says much about the ways that bureaucratic literacy practices surrounding official texts support legal, educational and social services systems which frequently control people's everyday experiences disempowering them as learners and as people.

Suzanne describes learning as being central to an independent future, but feels that finding literacy learning that acknowledges her experiences of violence, and finding learning about violence that acknowledges her difficulties with reading and writing has been difficult. According to Suzanne, the lack of connection between her experiences of violence and her literacy needs has been a major obstacle to her adult learning. The experiences that she describes tell us much about the constraints and possibilities available to her as a learner, and as a woman with experience of domestic violence; although her experience is individually unique it is also a powerful 'telling case'.

Looking at lives and uncovering experiences of violence

The work with Suzanne was carried out as part of a larger study carried out in England between 2002 and 2005. The Adult Learners' Lives (ALL) project, a three-year ethnographic study, was carried out by Lancaster Literacy Research Centre and funded by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC www.nrdc.org.uk). The study looked at the relationship between people's lives and their involvement in learning opportunities as part of the national strategy. We worked in literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes, as well as in different types of provision in a range of community settings (for more detail see Barton, Ivanič, Appleby, Hodge and Tusting, 2007). We focussed on peoples' everyday lives, looking at their uses and meanings of literacy, numeracy and language.

As we talked to, listened, and engaged with the adult learners in our study we became increasingly aware that many people had experiences of violence and trauma in their lives. Often this was invisible. Some were seeking refuge or asylum in the UK and came with experience of physical violence, torture, imprisonment, loss of family and dislocation from their home countries. Others who were young and homeless had experienced violence within families or relationships, on the streets and in relation to drug or alcohol dependency. Some we talked to had experienced extreme poverty and neighbourhood violence. Many described school as violent or traumatic. Several women had also experienced gendered violence in families and within intimate relationships.

Where writers/activists have looked at violence against women in adult literacy and post-compulsory education (e.g. Horsman 1990, 2000, 2004; Morrish, Horsman and Hofner 2002; Raphel 2000; Mojab and McDonald 2001) they provide compelling evidence to show how violence affects learners' and their learning. Many of these writers make the link with the physical and physiological effects of experiencing violence

with those of post-traumatic stress. This affects the ability to concentrate, to trust others, to interact in social settings, to be able to plan for the future and to have confidence in ones self and the ability to retain information and learn new skills. This understanding has underpinned work, mainly from Canada and Australia, in creating curriculum and a supportive learning environment that acknowledges violence in women's lives (see for example CCLOW 1996; Alderson and Twiss 2003; Isserlis 1996; Gunn and Moore 2002 and www.learningandviolence.net). Much of the literacy learning in this work is organised through various community learning projects, supported by national or federal funds as part of national literacy policies.

In the UK Suzanne is included within the national targets to improve the Basic Skills of adults responding to governmental concerns that up to seven million people have literacy skills below the level required to 'function effectively' and 'productively' as an adult in England (DfEE 2001). Suzanne, in receipt of state benefit and as a sole parent, is one of the adults identified within the priority groups as needing to increase their skills for employability and social cohesion. Suzanne's experience, as for other adults on the edge of social and economic inclusion such as refugee and asylum seekers and older women (Appleby and Bathmaker 2006), shows that this is not always easy to achieve.

Suzanne and I worked together over a period of three years recording her life story and her experiences of literacy and learning. We met at the domestic violence support group, at her home, in a pub and spoke on the phone. We recorded our conversations which I reported back to Suzanne and the themes that were emerging. She enjoyed participating in the research, as she felt it gave her the space to think and talk about things that she didn't otherwise have the opportunity for. We shared many cups of tea and moments of laughter as she shared and we recorded her thoughts, feelings and aspirations. Suzanne's life story which we wrote together is on the domestic violence support group's website – this gave her

enormous satisfaction as she said for the first time she had a voice and was able to speak out and share her experiences with other women.

Suzanne's life story

When we worked together Suzanne described her life in her own words. What follows is a summary of the experiences she related in our research conversations. At the time the research took place she was forty years old and had been living on her own for nearly eighteen months with her three-year-old daughter. Suzanne described how she came from a large family in Liverpool where she experienced physical violence and neglect from an early age. Her family lived in poverty with much ill health and with the children experiencing bullying and violence both inside and outside the home. Suzanne explained how she was sent to a special school from the age of five, with no tuition and no expectations of being able to learn she left school unable to read or write. In her late teens she lived with her father in a one bed roomed flat looking after him. He, reliant on her care, did not allow her out and she was unable to do paid work or have any independence. Suzanne acknowledged that her early marriage was her escape route, soon finding that she had left one place of domestic and financial imprisonment for another. According to Suzanne, her husband was controlling and became increasingly violent with the birth of their two sons; refusing work and staying at home to "keep an eye" on her and monitoring all her movements. Suzanne described being very dependent on him for her day-to-day existence, as she was unable to read household bills or read instructions on food. She said that an attempt at learning to read at a local college led to derision and resentment from him accusing her of "being stupid". Suzanne described becoming increasingly frightened, isolated and lonely "going off her head" as her sons began to adopt their fathers' behaviour and were also violent towards her.

After the birth of her daughter Suzanne said that she feared for their safety and left for a refuge. Her social worker put her in touch with a housing association and local self-run

domestic violence support group. Suzanne described this early time of living independently as terrifying. She talked of being scared of the ever-present threat of her husband's violence towards her and her daughter; and of not being able to manage to run a house, of getting into debt; of not being able to look after her daughter properly, and of giving her food poisoning because she was unable to read the food instructions. Her biggest fear was that she would lose her daughter if the "authorities" deemed her to be an unfit mother. Without being able to read she had to navigate the complex legal system to divorce her husband and establish supervised visiting to their daughter. Suzanne described being depressed and sometimes overwhelmed by the stress not knowing "whether they are going to take my baby" and not being able to read the documentation and reports that were written by various professionals about her. She said that this made her angry, both because she couldn't read what was written about her and also because she felt that her values and experience as a parent were disregarded by the official system. The court, to teach her parenting skills, stipulated her attendance at the Family Matters course. Suzanne wanted to learn to read and write for herself, she wanted to live independently and to be able, for the first time in her life, to get a job.

Reading the world if not the word
Suzanne had many ways of managing. She learned words like 'Pizza' from the flyers that came through the doors; she managed her money by using a card rather than coins and practised words from nursery rhythms in her daughter's books. Her determination, and the literacy practices involved in engaging in a text-based society, is worthy of an article in its own right. However, the purpose here is to explain, from the experiences that she reported, the built-in barriers of the 'systems' she was up against.

Suzanne's aspirations were like many other adults; she wanted to learn to read and write to get paid employment increasing her own and her daughter's opportunities. To do this she tried learning at a domestic

violence support group and at a local Sure Start centre. Both attempts were frustrating as she explains:

> But everyday I'm just waking up and finding all the different things what I've got to cope with, and I'm finding it hard but I'm getting there. Like some days I'm crying and some days I'm really down in the dumps where I don't even want to go out side the house because I just feel ashamed of myself. Not because of the way things are, it's because I can't do nothing, you know, just sitting here day by day and I can't do much for myself because I can't read and write and without reading and writing I don't know how I'm going to do it, because I just can't do it.

She attended a local domestic violence support group which offered advice, provided practical support and ran courses to increase confidence. The group's approach to learning was one of empowerment – where women could be supported to become empowered to take control of their lives. They recognised the importance of learning as many women who came had missed large parts of school, or had done badly because of violence at home, and felt they lacked the confidence and skills they needed to be independent.

A local lifelong learning provider, experienced at delivering community education, provided an assertiveness course for the support group which Suzanne attended. This ran in a local community centre on evening a week for two hours. From the outset there were problems. Childcare arrangements fell through, some women felt unsure about exposing their experience with others they didn't really know and there were tensions in achieving learning goals required by the provider (to finance the accredited course) whilst having a pace of learning everyone felt comfortable with. In the midst of this Suzanne struggled with the reading and writing. The tutor was told of Suzanne's 'learning difficulties', not a term she would use herself, but was unaware of her literacy difficulties. Although it was possible to participate in discussions

it was not possible for her to read materials or write at home. The tutor, experienced and supportive in exploring personal and social experiences of violence, was inexperienced at supporting literacy learning and had little support to do this. The support group were supportive about taking on board 'the issues' about violence but were inexperienced and unable to support Suzanne's literacy learning. The course finished after five weeks leaving Suzanne, as she described, feeling a failure as it exposed her literacy learning needs and reminding her of past failures.

Suzanne also went to a parenting course called Family Matters and a literacy and numeracy class held at the local Sure Start Centre. The court had stipulated she attended the weekly Family Matters course as her daughter had been placed on the Children's Register. She explained that she attended the literacy and numeracy classes to help improve her reading and writing skills for the Family Matters course. She felt she had no choice in attending, as to refuse would have been seen as non-compliance and might weaken her position in maintaining custody of her daughter, rather than this being awarded to her husband which he threatened to pursue. Suzanne felt humiliated by the course as her life and her parenting skills were being scrutinized and judged. The professionals delivering the course, people she collectively called the "authorities", had middle class values focussing on 'good' parenting, whilst refusing to acknowledge domestic violence in women's lives. When she did disclose violence from her own past it prompted a National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) investigation, more court delays and additional reports. Suzanne said that she was upset and depressed by the reports, written by the different professionals in her life, as they were judgmental, inaccurate and ignored the domestic violence that she had experienced in her marriage. The reports scrutinized and made a public record of her private home life. Because of the support she needed with reading and writing, every detail of her life from her finances to the contents of her weekly shopping was under

the official gaze. She felt under constant surveillance. The fact that she could not read the reports further increased her sense of powerless and lack of control.

Her experiences of learning on the parenting course were frustrating; she wasn't learning what she wanted and it wasn't linked to her life. Her experiences of domestic violence, something which had shaped the previous twenty years of her life, was completely ignored whilst at the same time she felt under constant surveillance as a mother. The stakes were high, as she constantly feared losing her daughter if she were judged to be an inadequate parent. She continually made the link, assuming the authorities would, between being judged as someone with 'inadequate literacy skills', and being judged an 'inadequate mother'. Overall, she felt disempowered by the learning process and frustrated that she had not been able to learn to read and write. Suzanne did not experience this as a safe learning environment, responding to her learning needs; instead she felt it was one that responded to the "authorities" needs to monitor her behaviour and progress. In spite of these difficulties Suzanne remained motivated to persist with finding learning to enable her to achieve her gaol of gaining employment and becoming independent.

Violence and learning: literacy matters
Suzanne's experiences of violence impacts upon her learning and literacy practices. We have described this as recognising people's histories, current circumstances, current practices and their imagined future in literacy practices and learning (Barton et al 2007; Appleby and Barton 2008; Appleby 2008). We need to understand what has happened in the past to be able to understand how this shapes both what is happening now and how it may be part of people's futures. In Suzanne's story it is clear to see that where those providing learning opportunities (both formal and informal) failed to see her as a whole person she was unable to succeed with learning.

Suzanne's particular experiences of violence and learning are mediated through her different identities; she described herself as

being poor, white, and from working class background. Her narrative shows how institutional textual mechanisms of power, within the legal, educational and social services systems, also shape these experiences. Texts are powerful (Crowther, Hamilton and Tett 2001) and can produce what Denny Taylor describes as toxic effects in people lives (Taylor 1996). Her ethnographical research shows how official and bureaucratic texts were used to disempower people, particularly those with little formal education, who were black or didn't fit social norms. Drawing upon this, and looking at Suzanne's experiences, institutional power, located within texts, needs to be understood as part of people's histories, current circumstances and images futures in literacy practice and learning

Such an approach, based upon a social practice perspective, provides a way to explore and analyse some of the interconnected aspects of Suzanne's experiences of powerlessness and surveillance. For example being unable to read food labels or read bills enabled her husband a greater degree of power and control over her life whilst she lived with him. Being unable to read and write enabled the legal system's almost total control over what was written about her and what professionals presented as 'evidence' about her in court. Unable to read the documents and paperwork written about her she only had her memory to rely on. This, she acknowledged although pretty good, was affected by the violence and trauma in her life (see Horsman 2000). Horsman's work, discussed below, shows how learners who have experienced violence often develop forgetfulness as a physical response to the trauma of violence.

A view of literacy, rooted in the lives and everyday practices of people, provides the possibility of making explicit the sometimes hidden ways that oppression and inequality play out in people's lives. It challenges the dominant view of literacy, as a functional skill privileging white, western language steeped in power by looking at the uses and meanings of literacy, and of literacy learning, in people's lives and in their communities. This includes the sense, purpose and the ways that people use reading and writing accounting for what people can do in their lives rather than what they can't (Barton, Hamilton, Ivanič 2000; Barton and Hamilton 2000; Mace 2002). As such it can provide a challenge to what can be seen as an externally imposed deficit model that people like Suzanne are measured against, both by the national strategy and the 'authorities' that 'deal' with her.

Suzanne was passionate about learning to read and write: she wanted to be able to run her home and care for her daughter and she also wanted to be able to understand the legal procedures that she was involved in. This was the motivation that led her to the two classes mentioned. In spite of being a highly motivated learner both classes, in different ways, were unable to respond to her needs. The assertiveness class run by the domestic violence support group, whilst acknowledging her experiences of violence, was unable to support her literacy needs making her as she described feel a failure. Rather than being empowered by the process she felt silenced and unable to contribute. The Family Matters course ignored her experiences of violence and increased the scope for surveillance as she was unable to record or document her daily life. Suzanne described feeling that her experiences, and lack of skills, were seen negatively in this environment and provided the "authorities" with an opportunity for official documentation of her life and mothering. Neither learning opportunity provided Suzanne with a way of acquiring literacy skills that related to her life and her experiences of violence. From her story there is a clear need to connect literacy learning with her personal experiences of violence enabling her to feel confidant and progress with learning the skills that she wants. Yet this remained, for her in these two learning environments, unobtainable.

Discussion
This raises some important questions about how to support literacy learning of women who have experienced violence like Suzanne. Can anyone support literacy

learning in adults, for example the workers in the domestic violence support group? And, should adult educators and literacy workers take on board issues of violence in their student's lives? Suzanne is one of many adults who were failed by compulsory schooling and as adults feel they do not have appropriate literacy skills to provide choices in their lives. Many women will experience violence and there are particular populations within society who experience poverty, bad housing, bad health and social or economic marginalisation where the likelihood of both occurring is high (Stanko 2003; Hanmer and Itzin 2000).

One solution to the dilemma of providing adequate and aware support is through networking and working across agencies or groups. This has the potential for combining what can be offered in particular areas of knowledge and teaching strengths. However, as the Australian project 'Redesigning social futures: supporting women from domestic violence situations with literacy needs' found this was less than straightforward. The project, designed between community health agencies and an adult literacy provider, found different value base and methods of working made collaboration very difficult (Gunn and Moore 2002). Finding others with similar values and ways of working is not easy, particularly for small groups. This helps to explain why the domestic violence support group's assertiveness course experienced such difficulties. There was a mismatch of cultures and of learning and teaching styles. Even though everyone involved was working towards a similar purpose and end goal, their approach, language and understandings were different.

Such a mismatch of values, language and literacy practices was further illustrated by Suzanne's experience of having her experiences of domestic violence ignored by those who taught her in the more formal setting at the Family matters course and the Sure Start Centre. Jenny Horsman (2000) argues that in general society deals with violence through silence. She explains that whilst invisible and silent the impact of violence is pervasive in society and in

education. She argues:" Violence is widespread throughout our society. It is not a minority issue experienced by a few women, with impact only on rare educational interaction" (p. 24). Because of the extent of violence it can never be ignored in an educational programme – it is always present, whether it is acknowledged or not. This and her earlier work (1990) show how violence and trauma impacts upon individuals and their learning physically, mentally and emotionally. It affected confidence and the ability to learn as women were unable to concentrate, had gaps and experienced memory loss. Listening to women showed that non-attendance and 'tuning out' were strategies for survival, although they were often mistaken by educators as signs of apathy or lack of motivation. Her later research carried out with Canadian literacy educators, showed that tutors were unaware of violence in their students' lives and were uncertain how to respond in an educational setting (Horsman 2004). Educators felt they were crossing the line from the public concerns of how to teaching reading and writing, to private ones such as acknowledging and dealing with violence. This was experienced as difficult and exposing. Jody Raphael (2000) describes through the life of Bernice how poverty and violence remained invisible in literacy learning, required in the States by the Welfare to Work programme. There are echoes here with the English court's recommendation that Suzanne attend a parenting class, where equally poverty and violence, defining features of her life, were ignored.

New work, based upon earlier models of research informed practice, is exploring the potential of social practice pedagogy which explicitly makes links between people's experiences and their learning visible to literacy tutors (Pahl and Rowsell 2005; Barton et al 2007; Appleby and Barton 2008). In the practitioner guide *Bridges into learning for adults who find provision hard to reach* (Appleby 2008) several key messages emerge for supporting people who find accessing learning difficult. These start from the premise that it is the

provision that is hard to reach not the people who try to attend, although they are frequently labelled as such. The conclusions suggest that teachers needs to take advantage of people's existing skills, that teaching in the community complements existing networks, that teachers can support long term aspiration and can themselves be important bridges helping learners move between different types of provision. Suzanne would have benefited from such a bridge.

It is not enough for literacy practitioners to simply work with a social practices model that only looks at what people 'can do'. This is potentially a Pollyanna approach which does not fully recognise, or challenge, the barriers which account for what people 'can't do'. This work needs to be embedded in teacher training and professional development; as to ignore it colludes in the silence that Jenny Horsman and Suzanne both speak of.

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Fancy Footwork: adult educators thinking on their feet
Editors: Delia Bradshaw, Beverley Campbell, Allie Clemans
Published in Melbourne by the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council, 2007.

This is a book to lift the spirit and gladden the heart! The cover has a wonderful coloured painting entitled 'If the shoe fits' of a woman balanced half seated on a tight rope with shoes of all kinds flying around her. In the introduction the editors explore the image of feet as a metaphor for aspects of the complexities of teaching. 'Teaching is a form of choreography' which can be compared to skilled dancing; like dancing it involves 'the whole self in quick-footed decision making…It demands fancy footwork.'

Fancy Footwork was written by seven women educators in Melbourne, Victoria, who met on Saturday afternoons from April 2005 to January 2007. Between them they had experience of schools, colleges, universities, vocational and community learning. Most have taught literacy, ESOL and access courses; some have been involved in teacher education. All shared a passionate commitment to the power of education to promote the cause of social justice. Some have many years of experience others are relatively new. They were brought together by one of the editors, Delia Bradshaw, who invited twenty-five women to join her in a collaborative writing project which was provisionally called *Women of Spirit.* They met to explore what adult education meant to them and how their professional identities developed and were sustained by a complex weaving together of the public, private and political. Between each meeting each woman undertook to write a piece on the agreed theme and email to the rest of the group. It is these writings which form the core of *Fancy Footwork* linked together by section introductions.

Many RaPAL members will recognise the explorations, questions and reflections which characterise this anthology. Like the Australian educators, we have to negotiate our way among conflicting discourses of what adult learning is for and for whom. Questions they consider include: what are the conceptual maps and reference points that determine our pedagogic choices? What should literacy and ESOL students learn? How can we create the spaces in which real learning can take place? Is adult education still subversive?   What sustains us when things are in danger of falling apart?

The collection will probably not suit everyone; I read it as a woman who shares many of the experiences, thoughts and feelings reflected in the writings. I don't know how these writings will resonate with men. Some people may feel uncomfortable with the concept of spirituality which for some of the contributors is a central one; for Delia Bradshaw 'spirituality is the life-force that impels/compels me to contribute to making our lives and communities more humane, more just, more peaceful …and more harmonious.' I think many of us would be able to agree with this.

I found this an exhilarating collection, which at times made me laugh. There's a wonderful description of dressing up computers in coloured scarves in order to transform a sterile computer room into an inspirational space for learning.
The references are wide-ranging and very different from most educational ones. Above all, it illustrates the power of coming together to share and write; maybe RaPAL could support a similar group here.

By Sarah Rennie
Sarah has taught literacy in many different contexts and is now involved in literacy teacher education.

Contact Delia at deliab@bigpond.com

Supporting self-improvement in teaching literacy, language and numeracy. Tools for staff development
Module 5: Integrating LLN skills in a range of contexts.
Published in October 2007 by the Basic Skills Agency. Cost £40

This is a module in a series of staff development modules produced by The Basic Skills Agency. It is training materials designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning of LLN in other subject teaching. This is aimed at Skills for Life teacher trainers and vocational tutors who are looking to embed to integrate LLN in to their own subject teaching and want to have some training.

The training materials include trainer notes, session plans, activity sheets, handouts and presentations on PowerPoint format (provided as a CD ROM) on a range of sessions. Each module has detailed activities and includes the following:

- Approaches to integrating LLN into other programmes
- Undertaking a LLN audit
- Integrated lesson planning
- Developing speaking and listening/communication skills for learning and personal development.
- Developing writing skills for learning and vocational /community participation
- Developing numeracy skills for learning and vocational /community participation

Each unit is designed to allow for flexible delivery and the sections have been designed in sequence. It is split into sections so trainers can decide whether to deliver in one whole session or to break it down into smaller chunks to fit in with ongoing staff development programmes. It also provides links to additional training and development materials.

- The materials are clearly laid out and the sessions show a good range of activities and resources.
- It is an excellent resource for anybody running or thinking of running any of the embedded CPD modules.
- There are some excellent guide handouts which tutors could use to help with their planning.
- It presents activities and guides per topic across the levels which helps with differentiation.
- The activities are user-friendly and are also levelled.
- The materials also include pre-entry milestones.
- There are a lot of good ideas of activities, ideas and approaches.

But…

It is confusing to know where the terms "integrating" rather than "embedding" should be used.

It is disappointing that references are made in the foreword and throughout the book to *basic skills and integrating* as opposed to *Skills for Life and embedding*. LLN courses using Skills for Life Quality Initiative materials encourage participants to use the latter terms and it therefore seems intuitive to pursue consistency throughout the field.

Overall

We would recommend these materials and a good support tool for anybody who wants to develop integrating LLN into vocational courses. It is an excellent resource for planning a training course.

By Sarah Chu, Fiona Campbell and Sally Enzer.

The three reviewers are all based at Wiltshire College. Sarah Chu is a literacy and ESOL specialist and teacher trainer. Fiona Campbell is a Numeracy specialist and staff development trainer. Sally Enzer is a Literacy and ESOL specialist.

RaPAL Journal 2008 - Editors, themes and deadlines

Edition	Theme	Deadline	Editors
Spring (April)	Open edition	End of February	Barbara Hatley Broad and Gaye Houghton
Summer (September)	The impact and legacy of the NRDC: International and national research and policy initiatives	End of July	Ellayne Fowler, Jackie Sitters, Yvon Appleby, Bex Ferriday
Winter (December)	Conference	End of September	Kieran Harrington, Amy Burgess, Colleen Molloy

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We are looking for members to review materials for the journal particularly practitioners and those involved in training who can make helpful comments to guide others.

We would be pleased to hear from new or experienced writers.

For more information please contact Ellayne Fowler Reviews Editor at ellayne.fowler@btinternet.com

■■ Writing Guidelines ■■■■

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 **Yvon Appleby at: University of Central Lancashire, Preston, PR1 2HE or to YAppleby@uclan.ac.uk**

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

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