RaPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy

Journal

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

Who we are

RaPAL is an independent national network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult literacies and numeracy. Our support is generated by membership subscription only, and we are therefore completely independent in our views. RaPAL is the only national organisation focusing on the role of literacies in adult life.

What we do

- Campaign for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives
- Critique current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill
- Emphasise the importance of social context in literacy
- Encourage collaborative and reflective research
- Believe in democratic practices in adult literacy
- Create networks by organising events (including an annual conference) to contribute to national debate
- Publish a journal three times a year

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

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

Contents

Editorial

Welcome to the 2009 Summer edition of RaPAL. This is a double open issue edited by a group of colleagues from the Post Compulsory Education Department at the School of Education at the University of Wolverhampton. Fuelled by pre-Christmas optimism we felt the opportunity to work together on an editorial project would provide an opportunity to extend the collaborative work we've been engaged in, with our colleague Margaret Herrington, through our readers and writers group.

We were impressed by the variety, quality and range of submissions (although the numeracy folk in our midst would have welcomed more attention to numeracy) we considered and have thoroughly enjoyed the process of reading, reviewing and engaging in discussion with contributors and indeed we felt rather privileged to be able to facilitate the editorial process. This was fortunate because it was much harder work than we'd expected to sustain our collaboration efficiently in the midst of our busy (teacher education) workloads and we are very grateful to the efforts of our administrator Natalie McKerrigan to co-ordinate and track our progress with each section. Without this central anchor we would no doubt have floundered and get a good administrator to co-ordinate the process from the outset would be our advice to others wishing to follow suit. Having said this, we had varying levels of experience of editing at the outset and have all learned something of great use from the experience, not least the challenge of weaving this kind of activity betwixt and between the demands of the day job!

Our selection of articles for this edition reflects our interest in both the important insights that emerge from practitioner led enquiry and more creative approaches to LNE education. We also are pleased to be able to showcase the work of some of our existing and former students.

Section one explores some exciting ideas for teaching. Nuala Barr describes using found poetry with a group of women in a community setting, involving them in explicitly making sense of their learning. Sara Freeman advocates the use of life stories with literacy students, encouraging exploration of personal experiences. Chris Birkett describes her experiments with developing focused speaking and listening activities in ESOL, using photographs of local venues with great success to stimulate

meaningful talk. Finally, Zoë Tuckley's challenging poem takes us into the possible world-view of a student. Very thought provoking.

In Section Two Ambika Bellary describes and reflects on an effective speaking and listening activity used with a group of ESOL learners. Cath Jackson explores the idea of literacy teachers sharing their stories through formal networks or informal communities of practice to discuss common themes and experiences and consider ways that reflective practice can inform their teaching. Shelley Tracey puts the case forward for how the writing of poems can benefit the literacy development of adult learners. Jori Kowszun and Coleen Molloy look at the relationship between ESOL and numeracy in adult education. And, finally Jane Mace makes the argument for student publishing as a pedagogical exercise and in so doing offers a potential next step from the other ideas explored in this section.

Section three includes three articles by Sue Bell, Ann O'Grady and Chris Atkin and Peggy Warren that draw on the findings of research by practitioner researchers to explore pertinent issues relating to literacy education in community and workbased contexts. Sue Bell's article investigates the personal experience of dyslexic adults and the extent to which sharing an understanding of this experience with other dyslexic adults represents a powerful model of mutual support. Drawing on evidence from a practitioner led research project O'Grady and Atkin explore the concept of choice in relation to the implementation of the Skills for Life strategy and question whether the strategy has influenced the choice of learning programmes available for adult learners in rural England. Peggy Warren draws on the biographical narratives of women healthcare assistants from BME communities employed by an inner city NHS trust to explore the impact of Skills for Life policy on the individual learning trajectories.

We would like to thank everyone, authors, referees, reviewers and most especially our administrator Natalie, who have helped to put together this thought provoking read. Reader we hope you enjoy our efforts.

Editorial Group
Alex Kendall, Cathie Lacey, Matt O'Leary, Rob Smith and Chris Winter

Empowering Learners Through Research – Found Poetry as a Methodology

Nuala Barr

Nuala Barr has been a literacy and numeracy tutor since 1997. She has worked with adults and young people in a variety of community-based projects across Belfast.

I really don't know where to start with this.
I want to come here and I want to learn,
I've moved house and I
come down here on my own.
At first I felt very insecure
and very stupid at times,
Now I realise that everybody's
their own person and at their own level.
I've become more outgoing
- listening and communicating,
I'd be more talkative with people.
I take feelings into consideration –
I'm probably more considerate
and thoughtful of other people,
Everybody does encourage everybody else –
"I tried this, why don't you try that?"
I'm able to communicate better with people,
I've probably talked more
in the class than anybody.
I just think it has changed me totally,
Now I'm quite proud of coming to the classes,
I'm proud of everybody in the class.

Lorna - literacy learner

Introduction

By exploring our learning processes and reflecting upon how we have learned successfully, we develop an understanding of our personal abilities and knowledge and how to apply these in learning situations (Paris and Parecki, 1993, p7). This development allows us to manage current learning and enables us to approach future learning with increased confidence. Just as practitioners need to make sense of their practice, so too learners have to make sense of their learning. The poem above was created by a learner as part of a process attempting to accomplish just that.

This article describes a methodology adopted in a research project carried out in a women-only, community-based literacy and numeracy project in East Belfast.

Found Poetry as a Research Methodology

Many learners have an ambivalent relationship with poetry in its formal sense (Speedy, 2005, p294). To address this ambivalence (to some extent), poetry was created by the women using excerpts chosen by them from their interview transcripts (in-depth, individual interviews were the primary method of data collection for this study). Their reactions to this suggestion were initially cautious. However, while this process seemed daunting, it was made easier by the fact that the normal challenges presented by writing, that is planning, spelling, punctuation and grammar are not an issue in found poetry. Once they realised this, the women became more enthusiastic about the process.

Throughout the interviews and subsequent poetry creation, the women were encouraged to reflect upon their engagement in learning with the aim of discovering how they had learned to learn, thereby deepening their understanding of what they require in order for learning to be effective. The study also aimed to unravel some of the questions surrounding the transfer of learning beyond the classroom. Importantly, it examined how cognitive skills (reading and writing) and personal skills (for example, self-confidence) might be transferred with the aim that research participants would identify success in both academic and non-academic learning.

Speedy describes how the development of poetic documents can add dimensions to the stories that shape people's lives: '*…people can remind themselves about the ways in which their stories change over time…*' and she believes that recording stories in such a way: '*…gives them some permanency…it may also lend more authority to the stories being told.*' (2005, pp283 & 286) This is an important aspect of the research process since often, the spoken word is lost or forgotten if not recorded in some way. In order for this process to be an empowering one for the women, they analysed their own words through their poems. Through the process of developing poetry it may be possible to witness people: '*…stepping into a space that exoticises the domestic, the everyday, the taken for granted and the unquestioned in their lives.*' (Speedy 2005 p287)

Analysis

The opening line of Lorna's poem refers to feelings of uncertainty when asked to record her learning goals at the beginning of the year. Her closing line is extremely strong and not at all tentative when referring to the learning group. This last line also demonstrates how she has grown as a person. In between, she describes the steps involved in the

process of this growth – words like 'insecure' and 'stupid' are replaced by 'considerate' and 'proud'.

On completion of their poetry, participants reflected upon the research process and recorded these reflections in writing. Therefore while the poems are composed from verbal reflections, the subsequent comments are written reflections. Fingeret *et al.* comment: '*Writing is a way for students to speak to themselves as well as to others.*' For this reason: '….*the process of writing is valued, rather than only the product.*' (1994, p3) These written reflections represent the culmination of a research process through which participants explored their engagement in learning. Cahnmann points out that by utilising a variety of media in data collection, we open up the possibility of saying what may otherwise have gone unsaid (2003, p31).

Lorna appears to have gained something tangible from the research process – encouragement and a sense of achievement. Interestingly, she attributes this achievement to others rather than to her own efforts.

These are Lorna's written reflections, the final stage of data collection:

I felt very strange doing this interview but thought it was an interesting way to discover what people want from learning and think is important. Reading what I had said in the interview was very encouraging. A lot of the things that helped my learning were the people around me in the centre and the class.

I found picking out relevant sentences for the poem quite hard. Reading over it now, it makes a lot of sense to me. It makes me realise just how far I have come since joining the English class.

I hope to keep going with the classes.

Conclusion
The process of interview, developing poetry and finally, written reflections had the effect of sharpening the focus of those who participated in the study by identifying what they had achieved in their learning to date. As a tutor I identified a prevailing sense of confidence in the women's writing that will hopefully encourage them to continue along their learning journeys. As a researcher, I see how the research process has encouraged the women to reflect upon their learning processes and successes to date. I believe this has resulted in their fuller understanding of how they have learned.

Throughout the research process, learners were encouraged to explore all aspects of their learning lives in order that both researcher and participant gained a deeper understanding of what successful learning engagement looked like. Pacino explains: '*As co-inquirers and co-collectors of data, we also become co-reflectors and co-analysts, and ultimately, co-constructors of knowledge.*' (2000, p9)

Mace makes reference to being a scribe to one's own voice (2002, p170) and in a way, when developing their poems, participants were being just that. Because the source of material was words and phrases initially spoken by them and transcribed by the researcher, the women were free to speak (or write) in their own language. As a result, each poem developed holds the identity of its composer - they truly 'own' their writing.

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Burton Talk
Christine Birkett

Chris began her career as a school science teacher in 1970 and, after a long break bringing up children and running a parent and toddler group, she explored family learning and then re-trained as an ESOL tutor. She now work as an outreach worker and tutor for Staffordshire County Council. She is passionate about involving the whole family in the process of learning.

Introduction
These ideas arose from my desire to create an activity which could be used to stimulate unscripted conversation in a very tentative class of Chinese students. I wanted to produce something that the learners could readily identify and would want to respond to without the stylised question and answer which had been the norm for this beginner group.
I also wanted to devise exercises for speaking and listening which involved no reading and a way of recording specific errors of grammar.

Town Images
Since most of the students lived and worked near the Burton town centre, I began by walking around the town and taking photographs of street scenes and specific buildings, some of which would be very familiar and some less familiar to them. Next, I made a base 1 metre square, painted it grey and used coloured insulating tape to represent street markings. I created model buildings by opening small cardboard food packets, turning them inside out and painting them. Some models were embellished to make them distinctive, for example as a church or a mosque while others had Velcro patches to which could be attached different pictures representing, say, a launderette or a corner shop.

Using the images and the model
I created a slide-show of the pictures of Burton which I played as a starter activity on an interactive whiteboard. I deliberately allowed plenty of time for spontaneous comment. There were cries of recognition, laughter and, for once in this reticent group, a hubbub of conversation in both English and Cantonese. The students competed with each other to name what they saw in English and surprised me by saying words I had never heard them use before ("bookies" being a memorable example!).

The reaction to the slide show was very gratifying- I had never before heard so much conversation from this group of learners. There were cries of recognition and comment about each picture. The fact that the pictures represented places known to them provoked much more response than would have been the case if they had been pictures from a text-book of an anonymous town. The relevance of the scenes just made them want to talk. Each student wanted the others to know which of the places he or she knew. I had made a decision to allow conversation in either English or Cantonese (the learners' first language) because my first priority for this group was to create an environment in which they would feel uninhibited about talking and I did not want to put any restrictions on that talking while the pictures made their first impact. It was interesting that, although Cantonese was used, every single student also said something in English (knowing, of course, that this was a normal expectation of mine during a lesson.) There was a very good mood at the end of the slideshow, full of humour and a sense of expectation which is a very desirable state for learning.

When the excitement had died down, I put selected still pictures on the interactive whiteboard and asked previously prepared questions.

The learning support assistant had a "Student Response Sheet" with a grid: all the students' names written down the side and the specific grammar points to look out for across the top. As each student answered the question intended for them, the LSA recorded the accuracy of response with a pre-arranged symbol.

While the heightened mood continued, I rehearsed terms for giving directions and then blindfolded volunteers. First, I gave directions to the volunteer to, for example, "take one step forward, then turn left and take four steps". Four or five volunteers tried to follow the instructions, some of which were given by fellow students. The fun element of giving a blindfolded person instructions sustained the very good mood of the group and also ensured there was a kinaesthetic element to the learning.
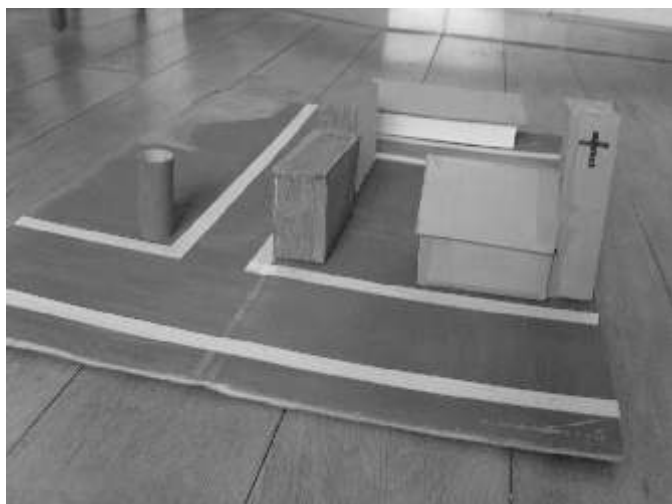
Later in the same lesson, the town model was used to re-enforce the names of buildings and also to practise following directions, e.g. "Put the shop between the mosque and the park" and "Give Mrs. Lee directions to go from her house to the bank." I differentiated the questions according to the ability of the student to whom I was directing the question, giving simpler and more complex questions in random order. This ensured the students were all alert and listening to all the interchanges. The learning support assistant had previously discussed with me the point of grammar which was being examined in each question and she was clear about the symbols to be used if the student made a correct or incorrect answer.

Moving the pieces around the model town created interest and was another kinaesthetic way of teaching and re-enforcing concepts of giving and receiving directions and using positional prepositions.One drawback of the model was that some of the pieces looked ambiguous and there was debate, for instance, about whether a certain model should be called a shop or a supermarket- although this uncertainty in itself sometimes created an interesting conversation.

Overall, the experiment was worthwhile although obviously very time consuming in preparation. The slide show was particularly useful in stimulating spontaneous conversation; the model less so. The Student Response Sheets proved to be a valuable way of tracking the students' use of specific vocabulary and grammatical constructs and I am in the process of developing these further. The photographs have been used on many other occasions with groups of different abilities as stimuli for conversation and for writing.

Life Stories
Sara Freeman

Sara has been working with adult literacy (and language) learners since the mid 1970s, in Leeds, Hackney, Islington, Croydon, Redhill, Gatwick and, most recently, Sutton.

The majority of RaPAL readers are aware of the New Literacies Studies' theories which advocate a holistic linguistic approach. Readers may then agree with me that encouraging the telling of their own stories has been a very successful means of enabling learners to firstly love to read and write and secondly, to read and write. The other way in - doing a course or taking up a hobby in something that you are interested or passionate about - is also a powerful and effective form of language experience that facilitates the improvement of reading and writing skills; but recently I have focussed a little bit more on the process of reading, writing or *telling* your own story.

I want to explain why life story telling is a powerful tool both for a literacy student and for the person who has facilitated this telling. I also want to put this craft into the context of the rapidly increasing 'accredited', skills-building approach to adult literacy provision that has taken place over the past twelve years, and I would like to speculate on what the future may be for adult life story tellers.

I was first ever paired up as a volunteer teacher with a Ghanaian learner in an old fashioned classroom in the centre of Leeds. I was trained to use a purely phonics approach (an approach favoured in primary schools before the '*Look, Say'*, whole word technique took over in the 1950s) where it was believed possible to establish a grounding in reading and writing by sounding words out. Although I had a go at making the visual aids and trying out the activities with John I found it difficult to take it seriously because it left no room for applying literacy to anything that touched on his or my real lives.

I began to ask him about Ghana and what he learned at school there. I found out he didn't remember much apart from the fact that it was fun to skip class, go into the outback and camp away from home for the day. He knew a great deal more about Leeds Football Club and he took me to the only game I have ever been to. He wanted me to observe the crowd behaviour and understand how thrilling it was.

Then I found a large illustrated book on Ghana in the library and his memories were stirred a bit. He began to recall his birth country better and literacy work began around the subjects of his own life experiences.Both John and I passed through fascinating learning processes – I discovered the pleasure of unlocking someone else's memories, not to mention that unique undulating sound wave that resonates around a crowded stadium as masses begin to cheer. John benefited too – he learnt that his life story was valuable and was respected by his listener.

Shortly after that I became aware that the method of language experience was being tried out in many adult literacy groups. This was the case whether it was with beginners where their words were transcribed to paper to become their personal 'reader' or with more fluent writers who could get their own words down. In Islington AEI (Adult Education Institute) an ILEA centre (Inner London Education Authority) I was drawn into reading evenings, reading weekends, magazine production and publishing schemes. My colleagues and I were swept along by the sheer joy and energy of those new story tellers and writers. As their confidence grew so their life circumstances also changed.

Veronica McGivney (Principal Research Officer at NIACE) recalled the same period of learner-centredness as 'the key to widening participation…to focus on the interests and well-being of learners rather than those of providers' (2001, p 82). In an earlier work she identified provision that attracted those who hadn't been involved in post-school education before, including activities that were:

- negotiated with learners and tailored to group or individual interests
- sufficiently flexible in delivery and content to cater for emerging interests and changing circumstances of learners (McGivney,1990)

I liken that period of adult literacy provision to a Lave and Wenger (2002) 'community of practice'. New writers, new users of language, were learning, alongside the more experienced writers, how to become more articulate both in spoken and written English as well as to how to look at what had brought them to this point in their lives.

In addition, the social capital that was generated

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through sharing reading and writing activities endorsed, for me, the fact that learning is not just a fact-accumulating agenda. It is not even only a period of rapid personal development; it is recognition of how one relates to the bigger picture. Mary Hamilton in her New Literacy Studies key works identified informal 'communities of practice' through all 'literacy events'. But she acknowledged too that this was not a new revelation. She says that her research is 'just one part of a growing recognition that "knowing" is not simply the product of individualised skills and understandings but a relational, social process.'(p183, 2002).

Technique – grammar, spelling and punctuation - played less of an important part in this kind of facilitation than confidence building. I have to admit that I was thankful when the early forms of accreditation began to appear because long-term students were achieving but with no qualifications to show for it. I wasn't really unhappy about the first wave of *Skills for Life* training either. For some of our learners there had to be the option of detailed study of textual conventions.

But have we moved unerringly on to a condition of prioritising the skills over all other benefits of literacy development? Looked at from the point of view of an agent of the *Skills for Life* programme, a programme soon to be subsumed by '*Functional Skills*' as the emphasis falls more distinctly than ever on upgrading the skills of the workforce, it is clear that this is the case. Even the crisp and demure look and tone of QCA's *Functional Skills* website warns a visitor that this is business. Our concept of success is once again diminished by the paucity of imagination that such a qualification-oriented, linear, progression route is likely to generate.

Recently I have worked with many dyslexic adults in south London on extracts from their life stories. In one case we are on the point of bringing one learner's experiences to print after several years of waiting for him to make the decision for himself that this is what he wanted. Doug, 80 plus, through his ingenuity and resourcefulness, can now afford to pay for his book to be produced. Doug has come a long way starting from a hard childhood in extreme poverty, with constant punishment for being unable to read at school and untimely deaths and despair in his immediate family.

There has become an informal sub-agenda to the 'Skills for Life' programme. Other learners

in my classes, inspired by Doug's story and poetry writing, have looked first to express themselves and explain their lives. Through my initiation 'Reading Evenings' have been taking place over the last seven years for students to share their work. And gradually groups have begun to open up more on how to cope with their various problems at work, discuss the difficulties that they have to deal with and give advice to each other. They have introduced each other to helpful software, evaluated their studies through focus groups and some have formed editorial groups to compile anthologies of student writing.

Their ability to become more articulate and more confident arises from firstly having an audience and secondly being able to reflect that their opinions matter enough for others, not only kindly teachers, to take note.

I, in turn, was inspired by Lynne Tett (Professor of Community Education and Lifelong Learning, The Moray House School of Education, Edinburgh) describing the necessity for learning to become dynamic and stir people into new action. She sees learning as a powerful catalyst for personal change and her vision evokes a political dimension to this change as well.

> The personal and social damage inflicted by inequality, social exclusion and restricted opportunity is immense. An important component of social inclusion is learning that should represent a resource for people to help them identify inequalities, probe their origins and begin to challenge them, using skills, information and knowledge in order to achieve and stimulate change.
> (Tett et al, 2006; p50)

However in 2006 I was involved in research for my dissertation, 'What might be the benefits of a 'Social Practices' approach in the planning of a learning programme for students of adult literacies?' as part of MA studies in ALLN (Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy), Institute of Education, London. I heard Lynne Tett addressing both the 'Researching Literacies: Embedding in Policy and Practice' conference (Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning) in March and the RaPAL 'Transforming Literacies' conference in June that year. Tett had been instrumental in launching the fledgling Scottish 'Social Practices' adult literacy/numeracy strategy where the emphasis is in delivering a situated learning approach, ensuring the individual learner's own 'literacies' agenda takes precedence. But it was apparent within only a

few years that the Scottish government had seriously under-funded this scheme, de-motivating teachers and not providing learners sufficient time to develop the ability to develop in a holistic sense. At the June event Lynn Tett explained why she felt that the 'grand claims' about social practices were proving misleading. In the evaluation of the project, authors pointed to the positive feedback from learners but also to dissatisfaction with levels of staffing, pay for part-time staff and the staff development provided for part-time and volunteer staff. "In some cases teaching accommodation was *severely restricted and the learning environment was bleak and uncomfortable*'. Tutors had some concerns about having satisfactory levels of staff to respond to perceived 'need' and to having sufficient staff to provide for a range of learning contexts. The area of *guidance and support* was also proving a less than satisfactory quality experience for learners. Learners were not being able to reflect on their learning, make informed decisions and plan for progression." (Tett et al, 2006: pp 78-9).

The English system, meanwhile, governed by the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curricula, allows precious little room for creativity at all. It is very hard to create a broad platform for confidence building when the teachers' chief roles become switching on the computers and asking people to pass tests, meet criteria and satisfy outside funders through accumulating technical achievements.

In the past few years there has been a persistent and growing discourse among lifelong learning reviewers deprecating the Labour Party's hard-line, market-governed attitude to vocational training that has developed into a highly restrictive further education programme, let alone adult education provision. Take a very recent edition of 'Adults Learning' (January 2009) where Alison Wolf, Beatrice Karol Burks, Richard Reeves, Tom Schuller, Lucy de Groot and others all point out that the adult learner is disadvantaged by having heavily restricted funding, no social input, no community roots in their education, no time to change their initial choice of vocation and fewer learning opportunities when they have lower basic skills. Is it possible that the power of the narrative teller could nevertheless counteract these very dominant forces in adult education policy?
The closest in adult education that I have seen of the 'relational, social process' at work is in the activity of story telling. The telling, sharing and reading to one another, the reading for one another when someone doesn't want to read

their own, the word-processing and the publishing and editing processes are universally successful. Jane Mace (p.76; 1992), quoting from Sue Gardener, wrote that any writer needs 'a firm grip on the expressive before tackling other types of writing'. If it is understood that the 'expressive' is the ability to articulate how you feel I would suggest that the same 'firm grip on the expressive' is needed in telling as well and in due course in how a group can be empowered, jointly, to put forward their views.

In fact I haven't seen these particular forums, usually anything between two and eight in number, reach the point of taking possession of their ideas about their locality and express powerful views on how they are living. The mainstream contemporary emphasis on the individual success story usually overrides the possibility of that point of view being reached. But I believe that where there are story tellers the potential for expression is always there and where there are groups of story tellers it is even stronger.

I sense that to keep the master craft of 'Life Stories' alive there may come a point when the story tellers have to find new, independent venues for their work. I also sense that it is up to experienced adult education workers like myself to help set up such groups. We have experience and training in knowing how to facilitate expressive writing. Newer colleagues are sometimes unaware of that historical function of adult literacy. But ultimately, I think the learners themselves will find the resources they need. Doug's decision to pay for the printing of his life story, mentioned above, was reached when he had earned enough cash through regular car boot sales and recycling of household appliances. The learners will, inevitably as birdsong, carry on the work of meeting, sharing stories, writing stories, publishing and hopefully challenging the straitjacket thinking that we are governed by now.

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Frank
Zoë Tuckely

Zoë is currently studying on a PGCE PCE course at Wolverhampton University, which she describes as "challenging, fulfilling, and the best possible preparation for teaching in the lifelong learning sector". Having had some poems published in magazines and more recently in an anthology, she is currently working on a collection.

This poem was inspired by some of the learners at the adult and family learning centre where Zoë is currently on placement; she describes it as a celebration of the continuing efforts by the centre to provide a different, positive learning experience, helping people to achieve, progress, and realise that they can, however long they have believed that they can't.

Zoë can be contacted at zoevt76@yahoo.co.uk and welcomes enquiries about her poems.

The words run into each other, scuttling
like ants all over the page. Frank stares, itches,
wishes for the corner where they don't ask you
to keep on and on trying.
He's tired. He can only half hear her
for the sound of their feet tip tap, tip tap.
She has short hair, wears trousers, smells
like soap. Her short hair, her smile
shock Frank. She smiles and says that he can
when he can't. Just a kid. She must be a little
bit mad. Maybe that's why she smiles so much
and they cut her hair so short.
Clitter clatter, tip tap. Little crow-words
with spiky feet and spiteful beaks.
Noisy little buggers.
He can just see her mouth moving and the
others nod-nodding, chit-chatting. Frank's quiet
but those words are noisy enough. Last week
he tried to tell her that they were doing a job of
work, the teachers, and they took those who
could, and left those who couldn't. He doesn't
blame them. He knew where he was in that
corner, even if it was nowhere. They all did. He
doesn't blame them for doing a job of work.
She just smiles her crazy, crazy smile.
"I do, Frank. I do."

Can You Describe It?
Ambika Bellary

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Introduction
The following article is a narration of my own experience of an effective speaking and listening activity carried out in an ESOL (English for the speakers of other languages) classroom, with an evaluation of the learners' response and feedback.

The task
I was recently posed with a challenge in the first semester of my ESOL Subject Specialism course where I had to design an exclusive Speaking and listening activity for my group of ESOL learners. The task had to be either an original or adapted activity from another source, with minimal or no reading involved. It urged me to think and explore various ways of achieving the brief. At first, the thought of coming up with an equally interesting and effective idea that would only make use of speaking and listening, was daunting. I had already used ice-breaker activities with my group where the learners worked in pairs, spent 5 minutes talking and then introduced each other to the whole group and I wanted to try something different and something that challenged the group. All other activities I knew and had previously tried with my group involved some element of reading or writing.

It was nearly New Year's time and I was planning a few party games and activities to play at home with my family. I was considering various games such as Charades, Pictionary. Both of these games involved exclusive miming or drawing and it occurred to me that it should also be possible to think of a game that involved speaking and listening exclusively. I then remembered seeing advertisements of a board game, called "Articulate" on television, where the players had to describe words quickly, to the opponent. I thought it would be a brilliant idea that I could use with my learners. But firstly, I had to adapt it to suit my ESOL learners. With this brief in mind, I set about adapting the activity.

Locating appropriate resources
This activity has been adapted from the original board game, called "Articulate", by Drumond

Park Ltd. This Speaking and Listening task is designed to reflect the everyday experience of the ESOL learner, and involve the candidates in familiar vocabulary connected with health, work and education, social roles and home life.

It is a descriptive speaking and listening activity that I've named "Describe It". The activity is equally fun to engage in as it is useful in encouraging the ESOL learners to speak in English and listen carefully.

Adapting the activity to suit the particular group
The original 'Articulate' Game is a fast-talking, fast-thinking game, using 6 categories: Object, Nature, Action, World, Person and Random. The aim of the 'Articulate' game is to split into teams and describe as many words as possible to the team-mates within 30 seconds, without the phrases 'Rhymes with' or 'Sounds like'.

 "Describe It" which is an adaptation of the original game is a specially designed Speaking and Listening activity helping the learners to think in words and express themselves in as many words as they can, within a given time, thus avoiding long pauses and uncomfortable silences. There is always the flexibility of varying the time lengths according to learner needs, but timing the activity adds to the excitement, challenge and motivation. In this activity, all the learners get to participate in listening carefully for clues, and apply them to their knowledge, to get to the key word/term, as well as get an opportunity to speak in English, using their knowledge of the language, without worrying about being judged about their grammar or pronunciation.

This is a simple and ESOL specific activity, catering to the lower English literacy levels of the learners, with scope for differentiation according to learner capabilities. The key words and categories are derived from ESOL Skills for Life Curriculum, and hence valid and relevant to help them learn the specific vocabulary and meanings.

The class is divided in two or three groups, who

compete against each other to score points. The object of the activity is for the learners to try and describe as many words from a pile of cards as they can to their team mates within a minute, without mentioning the actual word itself. In order to be more reasonable to ESOL learners, I increased the time limit to one minute for the activity. The words are divided into six categories with each category consisting of ten key words or terms. The categories are:

1. Our country, our lives
2. Getting to know the UK
3. Local Communities
4. Health, sport & exercise
5. Technology
6. Work & Lifelong learning

Since I teach an Entry 3 mixed class presently, all the terms are derived from the Entry 3 ESOL Skills for Life Core Curriculum to suit the class. The game/activity can however be adapted to suit any level and varying capabilities.

A list of all the required components of the activity has been provided in the appendix (No.1).

Evaluation:
I recently tried this speaking and listening activity in class with my ESOL Entry 3 learners. The activity evoked a very positive response from the learners, who participated in it hesitantly towards the beginning, only to get more confident and comfortable as the activity progressed. A couple of learners started off slowly with long silences, struggling to describe a word. But as they observed the others get on well, I could see that they understood how to go about describing the word, using phrases and sentences. They also realised that they could pass a difficult word and get onto the next one in the pile. When they successfully managed to describe a word to their team mates, they were triumphant and it increased their confidence and improved their performance in the next round. By the end of the activity, learners were managing to describe 2 or 3 words in a minute, which was very encouraging to see.

All the learners got to participate in the activity by taking turns, while supporting each other in their own teams. The activity was completely learner-led, thereby encouraging independence in the learners, training them to take charge of the situation and work towards success as a team. It was good practice listening as well as communicating through oral description. There was also a fun element in the activity, as it was exciting, and competitive.

At the end of the activity, an oral feedback was conducted, by questioning the learners about the effectiveness and enjoyment of the activity, any difficulties experienced, and suggestions for improvement. The learners in the class unanimously voiced their approval of the activity as a means to practise their speaking and listening skills. They also expressed their enjoyment in playing the game, as it was exciting and competitive.

Linking theory to practice
Oral communication is a complex and multifaceted language process (Murphy, 1991). Instruction in English alone does not offer learners the opportunity to speak and converse in English. Many learners are able to read and write English, but find it quite challenging to hold a conversation or to get a message across orally (Articlesbase.com, 2008).

The characteristics of oral language are quite different from written language, both in process and product. Fragmented language, use of pre-fabricated phrases, repetition of words and phrases within the same extract of discourse, self-correction of a message, changing the message or its formulation before expression, and hesitation to slow down output and create planning time, are all processes that occur in spoken language (Carter and Nunan, 2001). The activity discussed incorporates all of the above mentioned factors, providing an opportunity for putting all these characteristics of speech to good practice.

Along with speaking, listening is also a challenging skill for learners to develop and yet also one of the most important. By developing their ability to listen well we could develop learners' ability to become more independent learners, as by hearing accurately they are much more likely to be able to reproduce accurately, refine their understanding of grammar and develop their own vocabulary. (Peachey 2002). Regular practice in listening and speaking gives learners the confidence to speak easily and more fluently. As in learning any new language, it is quite important to listen, copy and practise English as a second language. Practising saying words and phrases numerous times helps the learners to understand what they mean and understand their use in the appropriate context.

This game is an excellent way of oral communication between the learners. Oral presentations and expressions can be a very

effective way for learners to practise their English skills. The extra pressure of knowing they're going to be in front of the classroom provides students with some great extrinsic motivation for staying on task. The minimal use of reading (as in reading the words/terms given on the cards), and absence of any writing makes it an exclusive speaking and listening activity that motivates the learners to focus and develop just these two skills.

It is well known that research in ESOL advocates engaging students in speaking activities such as rehearsing dialogues, completing information-gap activities, playing interactive games, discussing topical issues, problem solving, role playing, and completing speaking tasks.

ESOL speakers at lower levels of proficiency feel more comfortable and less intimidated when they are provided with opportunities for expressing themselves in small groups than speaking in front of a large class. Nevertheless, learners at higher levels of proficiency, in addition to working in small groups, need to gain experience in expressing themselves in front of a whole class. More proficient second language speakers benefit from generating and developing their own topics to present in class (Dale & Wolf, 1988; Meloni & Thompson, 1980; Murphy, in press). Thus putting them in groups where they could support each other is an effective means of encouraging interaction.

Room for variation and differentiation:
Most classroom activities are proficiency-level specific. For instance, public speaking activities may be appropriate for high-intermediate, advanced, or superior-level second language speakers but they are inappropriate for novice or low-intermediate level learners. On the other hand, activities such as role playing, collaborating with peers during interactive games, or singing popular songs may be adapted for classroom use across several proficiency levels. In a second language classroom, speaking activities can be planned to include everything from dyadic, to small-group, to whole-class interaction patterns. (Murphy,1991). Thus, classroom instruction could be enriched by interweaving activities that practise speaking, listening and pronunciation.

In order to achieve differentiation, teachers need to use their discretion and base the speaking and listening activities upon the knowledge of the learners' proficiency levels in the language and educational needs. Differentiation could be

achieved by introducing 'taboo' words to advanced learners, suggesting that they are not allowed to mention those words while describing the key word, making it more challenging for them to think of substitute words, rephrasing and finding different ways of interpreting something. Differentiation could also be practised by grouping higher level learners along with lower level learners to encourage collaboration and communication.

The activity could be made less challenging where necessary, by eliminating the timing aspect, as in beginner ESOL learners, where they can take as much time as they need to describe or convey the meaning of a word to their team mates.

The "Describe it" activity discussed could be designed or adapted to incorporate any kind of words and phrases for any level of learners, to practise listening and describing skills, to clarify utterances by using synonyms or rephrasing, to aid in the introduction and remembering of new vocabulary, to train to speak in complete sentences where needed and to understand that it is alright to sometimes use only phrases to communicate and convey meanings.

The minimal reading element in the activity could also be eliminated by pre-recording the key words from the cards onto an audio storage medium and then playing it to the describers only, through headphones, one at a time, making this an exclusive speaking and listening activity. Thus, this method would also expose learners to using ICT resources.

Incorporating ICT into the activity
I have made use of ICT resources in terms of computer word processed texts in large print, printed onto coloured cards, to form the various cards of the six different categories, making it clear and easy for learners to read and understand, before they begin to describe it to their team mates.

This activity could also incorporate the use of ICT resources by recording the voices of the describers in the activity and played back to them afterwards, to expose them to the kind of sentences and phrases they form, their pronunciations and utterances, thus facilitating understanding of corrections or suggestions made about them, thereon.

Conclusion
Better English speaking skills could be developed by learners by practising where they can, when

they can. It's also important to build their confidence. Wherever possible, simple English sentence structure should be used, so that they could concentrate on getting their message across. Trying to experiment with the English they know and using words and phrases in new situations is an effective means of improving their speaking skills. Experimenting with vocabulary is also a really good way of getting feedback.

It is quite interesting to note that task repetition has effects on subsequent performance, as suggested by Carter and Nunan (2001). They claim that it provides the basis for learners to integrate their fluency, accuracy and complexity of formulation around a familiar conceptual base.

As teachers, it is up to us to be open to learners' needs and accommodate their preferences that aid in the acquisition of the language. Since speaking and listening are two very important skills that they use in everyday life, it is essential to have plenty of opportunity for practice.

APPENDIX
Requirements for "Describe It"
Speaking & Listening Activity
1a. 12 A4 sheets with cards of **6 categories**, with **10 cards** in each category**,** with **key words**. Each category to be printed on a different coloured card.

1b. Score Card

1c. The activity uses a die with six coloured sides (Not provided in the appendix)

*(**Tip:** Take an ordinary die, cut out little squares of six different coloured paper or card, used for printing out the 6 different categories of key words. Place each little coloured square on a side of the die and secure with sticky tape. The die with 6 different coloured sides is ready to use.)*

How to play "Describe It" game:
The object of the game is to be the team to score the maximum points, at the end of a set number of rounds. (e.g., five to ten rounds, depending on the availability of time). Progress is made by the learners by correctly guessing what their team mates are describing.
A die with six coloured sides is used. There are 6 categories in total, with 10 cards each, with words/and or/terms on them. Players divide into teams of two or more. By common consent it is

decided which team will start. In each turn, a team member is nominated 'describer' and the others assume the role of 'guessers'. All players take their turn at being describers, in each round.

Play begins when the first team rolls the die to choose a colour. Then the category with the same colour is picked up. The timer set to 1 minute. The describers pick a card from the top of the pack and describe the word/term on the card to their team mates, as quickly and as effectively as they can, without actually mentioning the word/s on the card.

When a team member shouts out the correct answer the describer quickly goes on to the next card from the pile and repeats the process, using the same category.

When the timer runs out, the turn is finished. The describers count the number of cards that were correctly guessed and score 10 points for each word correctly guessed. Play then passes on to the next team.

When describing the learners *may NOT*:

- Say what letter the word starts with, or how many letters it has.

- Say the word or any derivative eg. if the word is "post" they may not say "postage" or "postman"; for "swim" they may not say "swimmer", "swimming" etc.

- Use "rhymes with" or "sounds like" type clues.

- Gesticulate, act, mime or mouth the word.

When describing the learners *may*:

- Choose to PASS and not play a card - but only once each turn.

- Describe the word/term on the card, using words, phrases or sentences, describing it using synonyms or related words. For example, one of the words under the 'Health and Fitness' category, is *exercise*. They can describe the word, by giving clues like: *"it is something we do to keep fit, something that you do to lose weight, you go to a gym to do this"*…etc.

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Stories of Identity and Experience: Teachers' Reflections on Becoming Literate in the 20th and 21st Centuries

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Introduction

In the wake of the Moser Report (DfEE1999) came new professional qualifications for teachers of literacy to adults. Having learned to be literate themselves in the mid to late 20th century, how ready are these teachers to take on the challenges of preparing their learners for the literacies of the new millennium? This short paper comes out of my doctoral research into adult literacy teachers' 'Stories of Identity and Experience'. Drawing on stories of literacy learning completed by one group of 21 teachers at the start of a subject specialist Level 5 Diploma course for Teachers of Literacy to Adults (LLUK 2007), I explore how encouraging practitioners to reflect on their own experiences of becoming literate might in turn inform their practices as teachers of literacy to adults. I tentatively identify opportunities for developing reflective practices in teacher education programmes in adult literacy, with a view to confronting and addressing the conflict between reflexivity and the seemingly relentless pace of change in the Skills for Life arena.

Why research teachers' stories?

"What avail is it…to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses his ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur?" (Dewey, 1938/1997: 49)

John Dewey believed that good education should have a purpose both for society and for the individual; that teachers and educators are responsible for providing valuable learning experiences which will enable their students to contribute to society. Dewey argued that, in order to do this, educators must understand the nature of human experience. However, experience is highly subjective – what may have been a positive learning experience for some may have been extremely negative for others.

For me, the experience of learning to read and write seemed effortless; the joys of literacy, of being 'lost' in a book for example, have been with me all my life. By contrast, for many students I have encountered, early experiences of literacy were ones of struggle, of confusion and perceived failure, not just to acquire functional literacy, but within the compulsory education system as a whole.

The practitioners' own reflections on literacy fears they had as children could be a powerful bridge to empathising with the fears of their learners; equally potent are the opportunities to reflect on adult fears to do with the 'new literacies' of the 21st century. While highly literate in 'traditional' literacies, a number of the practitioners appear vulnerable and insecure with, and critical of, electronic literacies.

The research participants

The participants were approached in October 2007 and invited to take part in the research. Their written 'Learning Journeys', an autobiographical account of their experiences of becoming literate from childhood to the present, had already been produced as an initial written task on entry to the Diploma course. I copied these (with permission) and, reading through them closely, I was able to identify a number of common themes emerging from the stories.

These themes include pleasure in being read to and in reading with others, activities which arguably do not feature prominently enough in approaches to teaching literacy to adults. Fears associated with the processes of becoming literate include shame and anxiety associated with exposure to or criticism by others for perceived literacy deficits. Concerns about the impact of new technology feature strongly in the stories, including a sense of loss for 'traditional' literacy skills such as handwriting, and "crisis narratives" (Ivanič et al 2007) associated with the impact of electronic forms of communication.

Literacy Pleasures

Experiences of collaborative learning feature significantly in the accounts. Literacy learning emerges as part of the process of becoming a member of a community, whether it is school, home, work or the wider community. The theme of pleasure in being read to came through strongly in many of the accounts:

"the excitement of these books, the anxious anticipation for the next instalment and finally, not being able to contain myself any more led to weekly visits to the local lending library where I would borrow the current story and have it read long before Mrs A reached the thrilling climax" Alex (on Enid Blyton's *Famous Five)*

What I find so striking about the accounts is how evocative they are of the moment, how they convey the pleasure in and emotional responses to those literacy situations. They are also rich in terms of opportunities for exploration and analysis by practitioners. We might want to stop to consider why 'being read to' should only happen in childhood? Why not to adults or with adults? It would be interesting to find out whether or how often teachers read to or with their students, and for what purpose. Could reading aloud, or using talking books, so readily available through libraries, be a way into literacy pleasures, to stimulate demand perhaps as a precursor to making the leap to printed text?

Equally evocative were accounts of being read to, and reading with, family members. One teacher describes:

"the very positive and quite glowing memory of my grandmother, "Nana", reading to me. To be fair, the reading is a whisper behind the memory of being cuddled, sitting on her knee, and feeling very special…she had a very special and undulating reading voice…and obviously knew which special character voices three-year-olds would like." Nat

Much of the activity described involves "shared activity around written texts, opportunities for give and take between people with different attributes, supporting different kinds of identities." (Hamilton 2006). There is a large amount of intergenerational learning, with children learning from parents, grandparents and siblings as well as teachers. The social, multi-faceted and intergenerational nature of literacy learning needs to be strongly stressed and explored among teachers – given constraints of timetabling and curriculum, what goes on in the classroom can never be enough on its own.

Literacy Fears

Vivid emotional responses emerged to literacy fears. Some of these concerned reading out loud; a very common fear to emerge was to do with spelling. The fear was not so much of the ability to spell, but of the consequences and recriminations that might follow:

"Learning to spell at infant school was a traumatic experience. I hated Monday morning spelling tests with a passion that has rarely been matched, even though I loved school I was quite capable of faking illness just to get out of going on a Monday morning." Edie

The practitioners writing such accounts are literate and educated; they have succeeded in the education system despite such fears and setbacks. How powerful could it be, to reflect upon their own experiences, and then to consider how damaging it could be to literacy development, where these fears and setbacks have not been overcome. In the context of teacher education these moments could provide points of reflection; opportunities for exploration of and empathy with teachers' and learners' literacy and learning fears.

Perhaps most striking in these stories of literacy learning are the attitudes to contemporary literacies, in particular the impact of ICT in the 21st century. Feelings range from something akin to regret, to condemnation, with the pejorative 'lazy' featuring commonly:

"The advent of emails and texting has made so many people lazy in the way they communicate…When I started teaching literacy I realised how much English was getting lost in a maze of abbreviations.". Dee

The literacy landscape is changing rapidly, and fears and "crisis narratives" require opportunities be recognised, confronted and openly addressed. This has considerable implications for teacher education, well beyond the fundamentals of preparing teachers to embed ICT into learning. Hannon (2004) describes the dramatic changes affecting literacy in the early 21st century. He argues that while change is inevitable and unstoppable, some constants remain:

"All our literacy students will end up using written language tomorrow in ways very different from those we can teach them today…What matters in this context is that we teach what is important about written language…the ideas that the value of written language depends on what you want to do with

it, that all texts can be read critically, that there are many genres, that literacy has a potential for liberation, that writing can aid thinking, that reading can be enjoyable…" (Hannon, 2004: 30)

For teachers of adult literacy in the 21st century, fears need to be addressed and new contexts confronted. Concerns about correct spelling in hybrid speech/writing genres such as emails and texts need to be recognised as a distraction from the bigger picture – the notion of fitness for purpose needs to be explored, and unhelpfully prescriptive notions of literacy exploded.

Conclusion and recommendations
I would make four tentative recommendations, not just for developing reflective practices in teacher education programmes in adult literacy, but also to support the continued professional development of adult literacy teachers.

1. Share literacy 'Learning Journeys'
I would recommend that teachers be encouraged to share their stories, to explore common themes and experiences and consider ways in which such reflective practices can inform their literacy teaching.

2. Promote Communities of Practice
In a very practical sense, a community of practice of adult literacy teachers could develop various resources such as personal histories and stories, teaching tools, ideas, pedagogical approaches, documents, routines, vocabulary and philosophies that carry the accumulated knowledge of the community.

3. Promote reading to and with students
One approach could be for teachers to read to students as a way of engaging them in literacy and discussion. Another approach could be to use talking books – it would be interesting for example to see talking books promoted alongside initiatives such as 'Quick Reads' as a way into literacy pleasures.

4. Confront literacy fears
Through their stories, teachers tell of fears addressed and different contexts confronted. These moments could provide points of reflection and growth; opportunities for exploration of and empathy with teachers' and learners' literacy and learning fears. Reflecting on experiences might help new fears and "crisis narratives" to be recognised, confronted, openly addressed and resolved.

In conclusion, I would hope that such recommendations might indeed go some way to resolving conflict between reflexivity and the relentless pace of change, not just in the Skills for Life arena but in the diverse and dynamic range of practices known as 'literacy'.

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Words, wheelchairs and poetry writing frames: enhancing confidence in writing in adult literacy

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M miserable
Y yelling

W wheelchair
H horrible
E embarrassment
E exhibition
L legless
C clamped
H horrid
A annoying
I irritating
R raging

Introduction and background

This paper explores the benefits of writing for adult literacy learners. The process of writing is complex, and can be disempowering to adults who are not confident writers. A writing experience can be positive and transformative if it is relevant and important to the beginner writer, allows for the articulation of feelings and self-expression, and if the task itself is manageable. The requirement to write a long piece of text on a subject with which the learner is unable to identify can be both stressful and counterproductive. This paper suggests that the use of writing frames can reduce this stress, and that poetry writing frames offer particularly affirmative opportunities for engagement with writing.

The poem above was written in 2007 by a young woman in a literacy class in Northern Ireland in response to the invitation to use the writing frame of acrostic poetry to express her wishes for the future. Writing frames are structured supports for learner writers; acrostic poetry is a simple writing frame in which each of the first letters of a word or phrase is written on a separate line and becomes the first letter of the particular line of poetry. In this case, the result of the acrostic format was this twelve-word poem which expresses simply and powerfully the writer's feelings about her disability. It should be noted that prior to the Wheelchair poem, the learner had never expressed in class a desire to write or any opinions about her wheelchair-use.

The setting for this exploration is an adult literacy tutor education programme at Queen's University Belfast. This programme was established in 2002 as a result of the Northern Ireland Essential Skills for Living Strategy, which aimed to address the low levels of literacy and numeracy amongst adults aged sixteen years and older. The voices of learners and tutors involved in the programme at Queen's University are included in this paper. These tutors teach literacy in a variety of sectors, including further education, community and voluntary organisations, vocational programmes and statutory organisations such as the prison services. The literacy programmes follow the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (Basic Skills Agency, 2001), which is a set of standards for supporting the development of the communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The Core Curriculum defines the writing frame as "a structured prompt to support writing. A writing frame may take the form of opening phrases of paragraphs, and may include suggested vocabulary. It often provides a template for a particular text type" (op cit, 143). The use of writing frames is commonplace in the development of literacy in primary education; a typical definition of these frames is "valuable scaffolding to support children's writing" (Halton, 11/02/08)**.** In the context of adult literacy, writing frames support both functional aspects of writing such as form-filling, and expressive aspects such as story writing and poetry.

Writing frames have a dual role in developing both writing skills and confidence in writing. The issue of confidence is significant in adult literacy, as many adults bring previous negative learning experiences to their classes. These experiences tend to impact on self-confidence and self-esteem (Lawrence, 2000). Writing poses a particular challenge for literacy learners, as it is in itself a complex skill and the process of acquiring this skill may be complex. Elbow (2000, xiv) points out that "Most people have had bad experiences with writing. They have

come to dislike it or fear it and usually they avoid it". Mace corroborates this, asserting: "Writing often makes people feel ill. The purpose of literacy education of any kind is to enable student writers to learn to associate writing for different purposes and in different contexts with a feeling of well-being. Instead of a feeling of powerlessness, they are encouraged to develop a sense of themselves as potentially powerful." (1996,180)

Both Mace's and Elbow's comments suggest the significance of the tutor in supporting learner writers. Their statements also contain assumptions about the relationship between writing and the development of learners' sense of efficacy and self-confidence. "Voices on the Page" is an example of an initiative in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for developing the self-confidence of new writers by providing online spaces for them to share their stories and poetry (NRDC, 14/05/09). This paper explores the provision of spaces for beginner writers, focusing on the ways in which writing frames might structure these spaces.

Writing frames are important because they offer concrete ways of including inexperienced writers in the community of practice of writing. By their very nature they legitimise the writing practices of new writers, enabling learners to develop their identities as writers.

The nature of writing and the benefits of writing
The literature about writing suggests that it is a complex process and that it has both cognitive and affective benefits. Cameron (1999) suggests that the expressive function of writing is fundamental to the realisation of human potential. This paper acknowledges the benefits of writing as well as the need to support learner writers in dealing with its complexities. Supported writing might help adult literacy learners to express the feelings that are arising from their new and potentially challenging learning experiences.

Baker and Mazza (2004, 144-145) conclude after examining the research on writing that it "makes events and emotions more manageable when put into words; it provides an element of control to the writer (Mazza, 1979, 2003)." Examples of learners' poems in this paper will demonstrate how the use of poetry writing frames supports this control.

Poetry writing frames: some examples from practice
Poetry writing frames provide contained spaces for self-expression and for playing with language. This part of the paper presents and discusses three poems written by learners using three different poetry writing frames. This section will focus on an exploration of the spaces which each of these frames offers for the representation of feelings and the discourses of autobiography and self-confidence. The role of the tutor as facilitator of the writing process and the emotions will be explored.

The first poem, *My Wheelchair*, appears at the start of this paper. The key discourse of this poem is that of the expression of feelings; all of the words are nouns and adjectives referring to emotions. Behind the frustration and anger of the poem there is a sense of the writer's biography, shaped, as it were, by the disability and the confinement of the wheelchair. The writing frame in this case appears to have been a vehicle for the outpouring of emotions and perhaps the realisation as to how intense these are. This use of the poetic form as opportunity for catharsis is in direct contrast with the classical notion of poetry as coined by the poet Wordsworth in the nineteenth century as "emotion recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth, 1976, 22). In the "Wheelchair" poem, the emotion is immediate and unreconstructed. It is perhaps the immediacy and intensity of the poem which makes it so powerful.

The tutor of the learner who wrote the poem was overwhelmed by the writing, interpreting the express ion of intense feelings as "a cry for help". Realising that the poem raised ethical issues, the tutor discussed the poem with the learner and obtained her permission to take the issues further with a support worker in the organisation. The tutor reports that subsequent to the writing of this poem, the learner's engagement in the learning process and her willingness to write have increased substantially. The poem seems to be a complex communication about the writer's autobiography, a connection with her tutor, and her engagement in learning.

The "Wheelchair" poem had a powerful impact on other tutors. One wrote: "This poem had such an impact on me; I found it disturbing, moving and poignant all at once. … Looking back, I can see that it was at this moment I became conscious of the power acrostic poetry can have. The beginning of a thought began to formulate in my mind – was this a way I could

introduce poetry to my learners?"
(Excerpt from reflective learning journal, 2007)

In the Wheelchair poem, the impact of the poem appears to be in direct proportion to the intensity of the feelings expressed. The second poem, printed below, is also highly emotional. This poem makes use of a writing frame based on the repetition of the words "I am an adult learner", in which the writer was required to use these words as a refrain.

I AM AN ADULT LEARNER

I am an adult learner.
I wonder what classes I will do next.
I hear my soul cry out when I want to learn.
I see myself no longer stupid.
I want to learn as much as I can.
I am an adult learner.

I pretend that I am a teacher and this I do
with my children each day.
I feel more confident and more able.
I touch my soul with all I have learnt.
I worry less than I used to because I made
a life changing choice.
I should reach out and encourage more adult
learners.
I cry when I see people who think they are not
good enough.
I am an adult learner.

I say get involved in essential skills.
I dream of gaining as much education as
possible, in order to help my kids.
I try, no matter what I do.
I hope for peace and understanding.
I Am An Adult Learner.
Rhonda Weir

This poem combines three discourses: those of the expression of emotions, autobiography and growing self-confidence. A range of powerful emotions is referred to, including hope, desire and longing. The intensity of the emotions is conveyed by the declamatory tone and the repetition of "I" at the start of most of the lines. The use of capital letters at the start of all of the words in the final refrain suggests that that the process of articulating what it means to be an adult learner has culminated in a sense of self-confidence. The references to past experiences serve as an autobiography of the poet's learning history. There is evidence of self-awareness ("I worry less than I used to"). The interplay between the different discourses in this poem supports Wright's notion (1980: 28) that "if writing is an instrument of thought, then it is a

way for us to understand self as well as make sense of the world."

Bolton (1999) suggests that poetry has the potential to record and describe emotions which have not been articulated or even recognised previously. "The process of writing required of the poet takes the writer into hitherto unexpressed and unexplored areas of experience, in a way only very skilled psychotherapy/analysis or the other arts therapies can" (op cit, 119). Both of the first two poems discussed above demonstrate that the process of using the writing frames has given the writers access to areas of experience which they previously did not recognise as relevant to their identities as learners.

In contrast to the self-revelatory mode of the first two poems, the third one is more self-contained and reflective. The writing frame is that of a recipe, with the words provided by the tutor in bold.

A RECIPE FOR HAPPINESS

An ounce of sunshine in bed
A slice of rapture
Mix up well
With a squeeze of excitement on my face
Half a cup of relaxing in the park
And a large tablespoon of vitality.
Add a freshly picked bunch of party goers.
Stir in a splash of chilling with friends
Add the best dance music,
Covering the room like a techno cave.
Bake slowly with lounging in Hampshire
Add a pinch of good meal
Sprinkle with homely spirit
Pour in humour and satire
Serve with dignity to absorb away the
negativity
And there you are, the recipe's done.
Dennis Cheevers

Unlike the first two poems, this poem is a reflection on emotion rather than an outpouring of feelings. The emotional intensity is mediated by the underlying structure, the recipe analogy; the task of the writer was to find suitable words and ideas to bring the recipe theme and that of happiness together. The recipe frame is an effective one because it supports a logical progression from the identification of the ingredients of happiness to the synthesis of these ingredients. The last line of the poem reinforces this synthesis: "And there you are, the recipe's done." The word "done" emphasises the completeness. The tone of the poem is less

declamatory than the other two, and more self-confident. The autobiographical aspect of the poem is evident in the examples of activities and scenes included; the overall impression created is that of a lively, sociable young man.

The purpose of the comparison between the three poems has not been to rank them, but to suggest that the three writing frames offer differing spaces for engagement with the expression of emotions, writing, autobiography and self-confidence. The implications of this comparison for the role of the tutor and for tutor education will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

Writing frames and implications for tutor education

Engaging learners in writing
The three writing frames discussed above offer writers different levels of containment and opportunity to explore and express their emotions. The focused *Recipe for Happiness* frame provides an effective space for exploring an emotion within the containing structure of the recipe. The prescribed theme and format of the poem should not be seen as limitations; the choice of topic is affirming in its acknowledgement that learners' engagement with their emotions is a valid subject for exploration in the learning process. The question arises as to whether it would be appropriate for this writing frame to be used for the exploration of negative emotions such as anger or fear. Tutors' awareness of the boundaries of their role and the limitations of their expertise should inform the decision as to whether this is an option. The tutor education programme at Queen's University is underpinned by the recognition of the importance of an ethic of care (Noddings, 2003), and tutors would be urged to reflect on their ethical responsibilities and the purposes of the writing process before engaging learners in an exploration of negative feelings.

The other two poems are the result of more open-ended writing frames. The acrostic form and the refrain "I am an adult learner" are starting points rather than containers. The nature of the writer's response to these frames cannot therefore be anticipated. The purpose of the use of these frames was to offer spaces in which learners might develop their confidence as writers; this purpose appears to have been realised. It should also be noted that it is essential for the development of their self-confidence for learners to have the choice whether to write at all and what to write about when they choose to do so.

The use of the writing frames also raises questions as to how learners are prepared for writing. In the case of the recipe poem, the writing of the poem was preceded by a discussion on the topic of happiness, generating relevant vocabulary, support with spelling and opportunities for learners to share ideas. This was followed by a drafting process. The use of discussion to create ideas for writing and the drafting of initial responses reduce learners' fears about filling a blank page; these strategies are in keeping with good practice in teaching writing (Sharples, 1999; Grief, 2007; Brookes and Grundy, 1998; Tribble, 1996). However, there is still a place for writing without prior discussion; writing frames such as acrostic poetry and the use of refrains offer learners the opportunity to experience and work through emotions in the process of putting the words on the page. In this case, discussion after the writing event is important. Reflection on the process of writing offers the opportunity for feedback, the articulation of insights, and for the management of problems which might have been identified in the course of writing.

Reflection and emotions in tutor education
The models of reflective practice which are commonplace in teacher education support tutors in reflecting on their learning and on developing strategies for engaging their learners in the process of reflection. However, this reflection does not usually include an exploration of emotional awareness. Day and Leitch (2001) reveal in their study the impact which teachers' emotions' have on their practice, and emphasise the importance of engaging teachers in exploring their emotions and the extent to which these impact on their practice. The adult literacy tutor qualifications programme at Queen's University includes this exploration in its own model of reflective practice. This model is based on Brookfield's notion (2002) of four lenses through which teachers reflect on their practice: educational literature, their colleagues' perceptions, their learners' eyes, and their own autobiographies as learners. The Queen's programme elaborates the autobiographical model to offer spaces for teachers to develop awareness of their emotions.

Morris et al suggest that "Emotion awareness involves at least two dimensions. One of the most significant dimensions is attentiveness, the recognition of and attention to the sensations and experiences that trigger one's emotions (Brown, 2003). A second key factor in emotion

awareness is the ability to articulate correct terms for these sensations, essentially the degree to which one can learn to speak the language of feeling." (Morris et al 2005: 890).

The "language of feeling" is developed through tutors' explorations of their own experiences as learners through the use of autobiographical writing, storytelling and poetry writing. While tutors engage willingly in autobiography and storytelling, they are less enthusiastic about poetry, as this comment testifies:

"I was taught by a passionate but traditional school teacher. For her poetry was only truly poetry if it contained the right number of syllables, the right rhythm and the occasional decent rhyming couplet. My valiant attempts at poetry were always met with the full force of her thick red pen!"
(Extract from reflective learning journal 2007)

Over half of the adult literacy tutors involved in the Queen's University programme since 2002 have revealed their reluctance to write poetry themselves or to support learners in writing it. Their lack of willingness to engage has a direct impact on their learners, who may well have shared some of their negative experiences. The use of poetry writing frames in the tutor education programme has helped to address this, and to ensure that tutors are aware of what is involved in using poetry writing frames before they expect learners to employ them. This engagement in poetry writing has led both tutors and learners to engage in writing poetry. One of the tutors comments:

"My initial attitude towards poetry as a teaching tool was a very definite NO! However, that was before I discovered shape and acrostic poems. Poetry suddenly seemed more accessible and I wrote my first poem! If I could do it then so could my learners. It gives them the freedom to play with language, to ignore the conventions of grammar and to express their thoughts and emotions in original and very personal ways."
(Excerpt from reflective learning journal, 2007)

The poems created by learners and their tutors on the Queen's University programme are shared, with the poets' permission, with colleagues and learners on websites, collections printed in-house, and more recently, some have been included in a publication celebrating learners' work (RaPAL, 2007). In 2006, a group of tutors used the acrostic format to express their feelings about poetry in the poem below. The emotional intensity of this poem and the

effectiveness of the acrostic format suggest the tutors' engagement in the writing process, and potentially, that of their learners as well.

Playful
Oh dear!
Enjoyable
Tons of ideas
Relaxed now
YES!

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The relationship between ESOL and Numeracy in Adult Education

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Background

This is a report on a practitioner research project that involved a productive collaboration between ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and Numeracy tutors. The project took place in the context of a Local Authority adult learning service in a part of the country that has a large number of people whose first language is not English. Tutors on adult Numeracy and Mathematics courses were finding that they had significant numbers of learners with language difficulties and turned to their ESOL colleagues for help. This led to a collaborative effort in which it was decided that a way would be found to enable ESOL and Numeracy tutors to teach together in order to explore the underlying issues.

This kind of adult learning is not generously funded and as things stood it would have been very difficult to pay for such a collaboration. However, a bidding opportunity arose for a grant from the National Centre of Excellence for the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM). The teaching team put in a hasty application and received the promise of a grant of £1,000 to support an action research project. This would be enough to pay for additional teaching hours and for meeting time.

The practitioners involved in the project explored what work had already been done in this field. They lacked the time and academic access to do a full literature survey. Instead, they looked for courses and searched the literature to which they had relatively easy access. Very quickly they formed the impression that this was an under-researched area. There

was only one publication they found that appeared to be relevant: an NRDC report of case studies in ESOL (Roberts *et al*, 2004). However, this report had little, if anything, to offer to the project.

The project group did find a course offered by a university department of Education on strategies to support the development of Numeracy-specific language that included references to ESOL. However, this turned out to be quite a disappointment (and a waste of limited funds). When those who attended asked the presenters about the proposed project they were amazed to be told that this was not an area that needed any research. Their "expert" view was that Numeracy in the ESOL context should be treated in the same way as any other disability-related learning. It was just a matter of identifying specific needs and putting in place appropriate support.

The practitioners involved had sufficient experience of the nature of the difficulties experienced by second-language speakers of English in learning Numeracy to recognise that this was a naïve view. They had already identified some common themes that suggested it should be possible to develop a more general theory of Numeracy teaching to ESOL students that would be of use to practitioners. This unhelpful encounter with academics did not deter them from pursuing the project further.

The Project as Action Research

This project was a piece of action research that could best be understood as a form of *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) in the sense

described, for example, in Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). In particular, it involved collaborative activity that exposed individual practitioners to the critical examination of their practice:

> "the approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realise that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988 p. 5)

Although the process was not fully intentional, nevertheless it followed naturally the pattern of the four "moments" of PAR:

- an initial period of **reflection** on the situation and what is known about it;
- a **plan** of action was agreed;
- the plan of **action** was implemented and
- the activities were **observed.**

The cycle of four moments was then repeated in the light of initial outcomes.

As described above, the participants in the project had first reflected on the problematic nature of teaching Numeracy and Mathematics to second-language speakers of English. They had then pooled what was already known by them and searched for additional knowledge outside the group.

The specific plan in the first cycle involved a specialist tutor of Numeracy and Mathematics teaching a Numeracy class with a specialist ESOL tutor supporting. The observations made were informal and interpreted by negotiation between the two tutors. The full group of practitioners then reflected together on these observations. In the second cycle, further joint teaching took place together with some application of lessons learned from the first cycle.

A third cycle has since been entered into that involves developing a Numeracy course specifically for ESOL learners. The curriculum of the course needed careful designing to ensure its fundability. Currently Numeracy courses are fully funded by the Learning and Skills Council whilst ESOL learners need to make a contribution to the cost of their courses.

The strength of the action research lay in bringing together two very different pedagogical perspectives. Both sets of specialists brought to their teaching a good deal of tacit knowledge about what does and does not work with learners. They had to describe what they knew to each other without assumptions about shared knowledge – beyond the common educational task – and this enabled them to make some of that tacit knowledge explicit. Michael Eraut (2000) has observed that this kind of intense explanation to others with partial shared knowledge is one of the very few effective ways of bringing tacit knowledge to the fore.

Outcomes

Given the limited nature of the project it would be surprising if it were possible to make more than a few preliminary observations. However, the great value of the project was that it enabled practitioners to identify some issues that were specific to ESOL in the context of Numeracy and to separate those out from issues that belong more naturally in different domains.
Five areas, in particular were identified.

Mathematical processes and the language used to describe them

There are some mathematical processes for which the language used to describe them – at least in English – does not match the underlying processes in a helpful way and it appears in some cases to carry over from one language to another. A particularly strong example of this is furnished by percentages. In English and, it would appear, in other languages encountered by the project, increasing and decreasing by a percentage is described in terms of "adding" and "subtracting". This creates the apparent paradox that adding 10% to a price and then taking 10% away again does not bring us back exactly to the same price.[1]

Is this solely a Numeracy issue? It depends, of course, on whether examples can be found of languages that use multiplicative words for adding percentages. The implications for practitioners, however, are that certain mathematical processes are unhelpfully described by common linguistic (English) usage and *all* learners, not just second-language speakers, need to be alerted to this,
This is an area in which it would be useful to know whether any research has been done by Mathematics Education specialists and whether there are subtler examples than those of percentages that need to be brought to the attention of teachers of Numeracy and Mathematics.

1. For example, add 10% to £100: that gives £110. Now take 10% off £110 and that gives £99

Pragmatic issues

Languages develop specialised pragmatic usages for specific contexts and the English language of Mathematics is rich in such contextualised usages.

A simple example is provided by words that express the concept of "zero". There are a significant number of words in common usage such as "nothing", "nil" and "zilch" that express this idea. There are also some highly specialised words for zero. For example, in the context of the game of cricket, the words "maiden", "dot" and "duck" all express a particular understanding of zero.

Second-language speakers are likely to have difficulties with the variety of different expressions and with specialised usages both because of the need to recognise the vocabulary and a lack of familiarity with the context, often for cultural reasons.

Cultural issues

Second-language speakers of English think with a different language. This conditions the way they see the world and encodes their cultural values in a way that is unlikely to match directly with corresponding concepts expressed in English. They will also often have very different cultural backgrounds that make what are common and familiar contexts to a first-language speaker of English uncommon and unfamiliar.

For example, for learners from a culture in which one or other gender is not usually involved in everyday shopping, the use of Numeracy examples based on shopping could be all but meaningless. Similarly, references to particular unfamiliar sports or recreational activities as a source of examples could be equally problematic.

One of the practitioners in the project group is also a part-time teacher of Mathematics in a school. She observed that, in her experience, Key Stage 3 tests in Mathematics were particularly prone to using contexts for questions that were culturally challenging for second-language learners. However, she also observed that GCSE examinations were much less prone to these difficulties.

A surprising cultural issue arose with new pedagogical approaches to teaching Numeracy and Mathematics. Where these involve matching and sorting exercise with cards, care needs to be taken with activities such as Pelmanism[2] and

2. Turning over cards to find matching pairs

dice-throwing. For some learners their religious beliefs include a strong injunction against gambling in any form and they can feel very uncomfortable if they interpret these activities as a form of gambling.

Syntactical issues

There are some important differences in the ways in which some languages write and read mathematical expressions. For example, Bangladeshi is written and read from right-to-left, but fractions are written from left-to-right. The effect is that a fraction such as "3/10" is read, effectively, as "10 over 3". Speakers of languages that work this way can experience considerable difficulties with fractions until they realise what is going on. The implication for practitioners is the need to look out for this possible explanation of a learner's difficulties. This is an area in which the results of any research into these kinds of syntactic issues would be very useful to practitioners.

The sounds of the English language can also be problematic to some learners. Sounds that first-language speakers sometimes confuse, such as "sixteen" and "sixty" can sound indistinguishable to some second-language speakers and they need to be enabled to develop strategies for ensuring they know precisely which number is meant.

Pedagogical issues

When teachers of Numeracy and Mathematics are told by their learners that they do not understand it is common practice to look for an alternative explanation. It would be very unusual for the teacher simply to repeat what was last said. However, in the ESOL context this may be exactly what is needed. The learner may still be processing what was said and needs repetition to fill in bits that were missed or only partly understood. Indeed, to offer an alternative explanation can compound the learner's difficulties.

It is important to recognise that a non-fluent second-language speaker of English is engaging in a good deal more processing than a first-language speaker. Typically, they are hearing English, decoding what they hear, translating into their first language, processing the message, translating it into English and then making a response. If this is combined with a cognitively demanding activity such as solving a mathematical problem, it can result in the kind of "cognitive overload" described by Clark *et al* (2006). Effectively, the brain runs out of processing capacity and resorts to heuristics

that can short-cut the reasoning process. Unfortunately, the heuristics used can take the form of mathematical short-cuts that are based on misconceptions.

The implication for practitioners is that second language speakers need to be given much more time to process questions and formulate responses. It is well known that teachers of Numeracy and Mathematics generally allow learners very short waiting times before providing a cue or turning to another learner (e.g. Black and Wiliam, 1998). Research by Black and Wiliam (1998) has also shown that understanding can be significantly improved if the teacher allows a gap of at least three seconds between the learner's response and providing confirmation. These observations are presumably particularly significant when teaching second-language speakers.

A particular problem with ESOL learners of Numeracy is that it can be difficult to discern where a difficulty with learning lies. Is it a linguistic issue or does the learner lack the necessary mathematical background knowledge? Indeed, it could be a combination of the two.

Tensions
This action research project revealed a number of tensions. The tension between academic knowledge and what a practitioner might reasonably be expected to know is particularly significant. Despite the huge research effort that takes place in Education there appears to be very little "trickle down" from the academy to the chalk-face. This is an issue that has been seen as one that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency by the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM). It has devoted a section of its web portal (http://www.ncetm.org.uk/research) to the dissemination of research findings to teachers. Getting teachers to use the portal and find out about research relevant to their everyday teaching is, however, a slow process. This project also revealed a tension between what academics consider to be important and what practitioners want to know. In particular, there was a belief amongst the practitioners that it should be possible to assemble a body of knowledge about teaching Numeracy and Mathematics to second-language speakers of English that was specific to that domain and said more than an application of general principles either of ESOL teaching or of the teaching of Numeracy and Mathematics. Certainly, the outcomes listed above suggest that this belief is reasonable and, furthermore, that it should be

possible to develop diagnostic instruments that seek to disentangle causative factors for learners' difficulties.

A further tension is revealed between tacit and explicit knowledge, especially as it applies to practitioners who are specialists in different domains. One very useful outcome of this research was the realisation that there are things that ESOL teachers "know" that Numeracy and Mathematics are not aware of and *vice-versa*. This is in practice a very positive tension and teachers can become very excited about the discoveries made in this way. It has the additional benefit of enabling practitioners in different subject areas to value their colleagues' knowledge and skills in a way that builds up the collegiality of the larger teaching team.

Professional development
The relatively modest funding for this project was, nevertheless, just what was needed to make it possible. However, the process of obtaining the funding involved making some very hasty commitments. NCETM did provide an Associate to support the project who was able to allow the project team to feel that those commitments should be seen as the very broadest of guidelines. However, as conscientious practitioners, they found themselves feeling uncomfortable about committing to things that they may not be able to deliver.

This is, unfortunately, the nature of these kinds of bidding processes and they can feel very unsatisfactory to those who use them. Indeed, many are deterred from making bids because they feel unable to operate at the level of formality and accountability that the bidding documentation often implies.

As an example of professional development, taking part in such a project is of far more value than any number of courses and contributes significantly to the Institute for Learning's thirty-hour requirement. This raises some issues for the Adult Learning sector about how practitioners might be enabled to take part in such projects, about how bidding processes might be "lightened up" and how they might be supported in a way that provides some kind of mediated access to academic support.

Conclusion
The true value of this kind of practitioner research is that it has a direct benefit for teachers and learners because it is rooted in an identified need. One of the problems with

academic research in Education is that even when practitioners are aware of it there is still a journey to be made from appreciating to applying such knowledge. Even when research addresses a real need, there can be an assumption that because it is "academic" it is unlikely to be useful. It is only when practitioners engage in their own research, motivated by needs they have identified themselves that the true potential value of academic research emerges. The practitioners participating in this study began to realise that there may well be research that impacts on their area of interest but were frustrated by their inability to access it.

There are, of course, significant methodological weaknesses in practitioner research if one is seeking to make useful generalisations that others can use with some confidence. The action research paradigm is much more about personal and group reflection than making verifiable knowledge claims that have some kind of validity outside the group. However, it does provide a vehicle for discovering what the group does not know and what it needs to know and this is the natural potential point of contact between the chalk-face and the academy.

More than anything else, this project has highlighted the need to create effective lines of communication between academic departments of Education and practitioners in the field.

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Writing and Publishing: What's the Learning?
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What is the argument for student publishing? Nearly ten years ago, Sue Gardener asked for its learning gains to be 'mapped and cross-referenced' to the developing new standards in British adult literacy learning. (Gardener 2000: 9) Since then, the exercise of identifying learning outcomes for their teaching has become more routine for practitioners, who have become all too familiar with having to map learning to core curriculum standards.   At the same time, important findings from the major NRDC research study, *Effective teaching and learning - writing* have been published. (Grief, Meyer and Burgess 2007). It seems a good time to revisit the relationship between student publishing and learning.

The NRDC study gathered data from adult students in a sample of twenty-five organisations on what kinds of teaching approaches produce progress and development in writing knowledge and skills. In this article, I relate findings from the study to two main activities involved in the work of student publishing, and identify some of the outcomes - or curriculum elements – that this work has to offer.

Research findings (1): process and context
From their research, Sue Grief and the practitioner-researcher team working on the NRDC study found that there are two clusters of elements that make for effective teaching of writing development**:**

- *an emphasis on writing as a process*: careful setting up of writing tasks, use of talk; drafting, revising and proof-reading shown as stages; and

- *writing tasks that relate to contexts outside the classroom*: the use of authentic materials and activities which emphasising for students that writing is communication, not just a class exercise. (ibid: 10.)

The classes in which students made most progress in their writing, the study found, were those in which a high percentage of class time was spent in talk; where they had examples to work from or a 'writing frame' to give a structure for a piece of writing; and where they were encouraged to work in small groups on a piece of writing - sharing strengths, comparing notes on ideas, and developing the habit of collaborative work.

Encouraging students to rough draft, too, enabled students to tackle the complex work of *composition*: too often neglected in the concern for matters of handwriting, spelling and punctuation - the skills of *transcription*. (Grief and Chatterton 2007: 10-15)

As others have noted, much more material exists in teaching those skills – particularly in the area of spelling (Lindsay and Gawn 2005:41*)* than on those of composition.

Research findings (2): collaborating
Writing has often been seen as a solitary matter; yet in everyday life situations, the business of getting writing done can often involve two or more people asking each other for help, offering feedback or talking things over. The research had suggested that students benefit from working together. But there was a lack of detail on what this involved. After the main study was completed, Sue Grief undertook a development project to explore this further. A team of seven tutors – four in South Yorkshire, three in London – worked with her to introduce collaborative activities into their existing classes and set about identifying what might be helpful to student learning about these.

An important finding was that working collaboratively encouraged students to be willing to take risks with their writing. They were also more open than usual to:

- take on the process of planning and drafting;
- think carefully about vocabulary and grammar; and to
- take more account of the reader.

As for tutors, the collaborative work entailed them in being ready to talk explicitly with learners about working together, setting some simple ground rules (about turn-taking, and so

on); and to take a step back and leave learners to work on their own.

Developing practice (1): teaching to compose

In writing for publication, two main activities are involved: getting writing started, and bringing it to a finished state. We will look at these now and see how they relate to the observations from the NRDC research.

The stage of generating ideas - sometimes known as 'prewriting' for short - is the stage when the tutor invites students to talk about a topic: asking, listening and prompting. There is a transition from discussion to rough notes. In adult literacy teaching practice, this is often achieved through the strategy known as 'language experience' and involves the tutor – or sometimes, another student - taking the role of scribe. Her or his job is to write down an extract of what the student tells them: read it back to them so they can check it; and, in consultation with the student-author, produce a text that satisfies them. Tutor Freda Berridge's account of this process provides a useful picture:

> I would begin with a friendly chat. I would say, 'What have you been doing?' and tell her a bit about what I had been up to. I would then scribe some of what she told me. It would be three or four sentences. I would read it to her and sometimes she would add or change something…..I would read it again and get her to join in with the words she could read, and let her take over if she sounded confident. I would make a note of the difficult words to work on later. Much depended on the words she had used. This activity could take up to half an hour.

> Christine would then copy-write the text while I worked with someone else. She liked to use an exercise book for this writing. It retained the flavour of a diary. (Mace 2002: 188)

A common perception of language experience is that it can only be done, as in this picture, with one student at a time working with a tutor, on their own. Both the following examples come from responses to an email research call which Jill Ross and I made in 2004 on using language experience with groups. Without using the term 'language experience', we learned that many tutors use the same approach quite regularly with groups, as Liz Beevers reports:

> We call it Group Writing and develop it a bit further than the direct scribing I might do

with an individual. One of our IT-confident tutors does it all with a data projector. The rest of us use flipcharts.

The tutor may take suggestions from a group in their own words and write them up until contributions about the topic have ceased. We read them aloud. Then we talk about editing it. What 'goes with' what? What's the best order? Is it saying what we want it to say? Do we need to change any of the wording? It needs sensitivity to the feeling of the group and individuals, so no-one feels misrepresented, ignored or deleted and everyone has a chance to contribute.

Nor does the scribe always have to be the teacher, as Linda Pearce suggests:

> I have used this method with a Family Literacy group who were writing nonsense rhymes for their children. The more 'writing confident' group members acted as scribes for the less 'writing confident' members. Interestingly, the more 'speaking confident' students were the less 'writing confident', so the sharing of skills was an encouraging exercise for all.

There is one well-known concern in all this: how faithful should the scribe be to the spoken word? It can be tempting for tutors to 'correct' any language variety that is not standard English.

However, if authenticity is the aim, the expression must remain that of the speaker. As Liz Beevers suggests, tutor and students can then explore editorial matters together. Wendy Moss's research offered a key principle for practice:

> It is important that the tutor acts as a 'facilitator' not as a 'corrector'. The tutor's aim is to ensure that the writer controls the process of composition and is the true author of the final text (Moss 1995: 147).

Developing practice (2): teaching to edit

A good way move towards a 'final text' is to get students to offer each other constructive feedback: both affirming the strength of the work and asking questions or making suggestions as to how it might grow. Through this approach, as Stella Fitzpatrick reports, students stand to gain insights into their own writing skills - taking the role of editors and offering a response to the work-in-progress of their peers (Fitzpatrick 1995:13). When invited to respond to a piece of writing by another student, they learn what it takes to develop the

kind of critical stance which is both constructive and encouraging. In the words of one participant:

> I can look at a piece of work now and perhaps think, 'Well, it could be improved if….' Where before I used to think, 'somebody's work, this is sacred. I can't be cruel to this person'. But now I'm thinking to myself, 'Well, I've got to be. If they've got to improve we need to say what needs to be done. So, I've got a bit harder really (Duffin 1995: 91).

One of the case study teachers in the NRDC research, Kath Swinney, had a helpful approach to encouraging students to apply this analysis (whether to their own work or that of their peers). Instead of starting at 'word level', she invited them to begin from 'text level' – looking first at the big picture. She offers this idea in the form of this triangle:

PRESENTATION
Does it look like a letter, a memo, a haiku, a story, an email?

CONTENT
Does it say what you want it to say?

STYLE
Does it have the right tone?

STRUCTURE
Has it got paragraphs?
Are they in the right order?

GRAMMAR
Does each sentence make sense?

PUNCTUATION
Has it got full stops,
capital letters, question marks?

SPELLING

At each step, she invited the student to address an issue, with spelling last. As the NRDC researchers suggest, this triangle could be used as a scheme of work: addressing one issue a week in the skills part of the session, while working on creative projects in the free writing part (Grief and Chatterton 2007:32).

Learning outcomes

'Publishing' does not have to mean a book, with a print run of a thousand copies or more. As soon as there are several copies of a text – or as soon as it is posted up on a classroom wall or website - it is a published piece of writing. If a

tutor and a group opt for publishing writing, it is good to be able to say that often, students seem to gain a sense of confidence from such work. However (remembering Sue Gardener's invitation) it also seems important to be able to describe to students what kind of learning they have done to produce this feeling.

Let's suppose, for example, that a tutor writes a five-session scheme of work, taking students through from agreeing a topic through to proof-reading and completion of a text. She or he might express **the aim** as being:

> to provide students with an experience of the process of producing a ready-to-publish collection of writing and photographs (either as a short print-run or as an exhibition) and to produce this collection as a collaborative project.

There are already some **learning objectives** implied in this. For example, the tutor could suggest that the experience would enable students to:

* gain experience and skills in writing for a readership;
* develop their ability to read draft writing by peers with the eye of an editor;
* identify features of writing that make it interesting to read;
* acquire and apply techniques of proof-reading; and
* exercise their skills in decision-making in a group.

Remember those two clusters of features which the NRDC found to be central to learning (those which emphasise writing as a process, and those which relate to the contexts outside the classroom)? We can give more details to these learning objectives by relating them to all sorts of curriculum references which show the process not only of writing, but also of reading, speaking and listening which may be noticed once this project is under way. What is more, far from assuming this kind of writing development has to wait for fairly confident writing skills (at level L1), we can show that this work is able to support learning at 'entry' or beginning levels. Elements addressed include, among others:

> ***Speaking and listening: listen to and respond appropriately to other points of view (SLlr/E3.5)***
> ***Reading: recognise the different purposes of texts at this level (RtE1.2, E2.2 and E3.2)***

Writing: plan and draft writing (WtE3.1)

Through the course of the project, students will also be capable of showing achievement at L1: as in – 'use language suitable for purpose and audience' (WtL1.4).

By way of example, a group of seven students with learning difficulties worked with their tutor Jack McQuail to produce a recipe book. (This account came from an informal conversation Jack and I had in July 2008) The project took some six sessions. First, the students discussed their favourite recipes and decided which one to search for. Next, each researched and found a dish of their choice from online sources - together with ingredients, instructions and illustration. They then cut, copied and pasted their recipe and sent it across the classroom by email to the tutor. The following week, they each cooked the dish and took pictures of each other in their aprons, holding the dish up for the camera. The tutor used language experience to enable them to compose a caption. The results included: '*I like this and I have it at home sometimes*' (Valerie, vegetable crumble pie) and: '*I chose this on a winter's day because it is a warm and substantial dish*' (John, steak and mushroom pie). In the last session, they reflected together on the experience and produced an introduction for the reader (using the same scribal approach):

> Welcome to our cookbook.
> We have been learning how to
> cook many different dishes and
> improving our English, maths and IT skills.
> We each chose a dish to go into
> the cookbook. It was winter then
> and this is reflected in our
> choices as most of them are big,
> filling affairs. We hope you enjoy them!

Language experience's founding principle is empowerment and authenticity its hallmark. In using this teaching method, the tutor enabled students to go beyond an interesting activity of search-and-find on the computer. They made choices and used the reading for a purpose. They undertook research and reported on it to a readership - moving outside their own experience of doing the project to imagine what a reader would want to know about it. In so doing, they recognised their work as interesting to other people and addressed the reader as an equal.

The value of student publishing projects like this one is that they enable students to develop a sense of an authentic authorship. The confidence to be gained from it, we know, is too complicated a matter to capture in a tick-box. But we can at least articulate some of the outcomes to be achieved by participants - and in so doing, give recognition to the teaching and learning that student publishing entails.

National Research and Development Centre Both these accounts come from responses to an email research call which Jill Ross and I made in 2004 for a conference workshop on using language experience in groups

The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum for England (DfES 2001)

See also: SLlr/E2.5, SLd/E3.2, SLd/E3.3
See also: Rt/E3.4, Rt/E3.6, Rs/E2.3 and E3.2
See also: Wt/E.1 and WtE2.1, WtE3.4, Ws/E2.2, WsE3.1 account contributed by interview, July 2008

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Age is a Beautiful Thing. How do adults with dyslexia navigate the non-dyslexic world? An investigation into the coping strategies used by dyslexic adults from a community education centre.

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Overview

For ten years I worked in a small charitable organisation in a large inner-city environment, supporting adults who struggled with their literacy skills. Over the years it became clear to me that the majority of our learners were in reality dyslexic; most were undiagnosed until they came to our centre, or had a late diagnosis as an adult. Many learners brought with them a startling amount of anxiety in relation to education, borne of years of perceiving themselves to be 'thick' or 'stupid'. One discussion topic which we all kept returning to was the daily stresses learners encountered in navigating the non-dyslexic world with this hidden disability. I also noticed that some individuals appeared to manage this navigation more effectively than others and that the levels of literacy skills a learner had told only some of the story. Why did some individuals appear to have transformed themselves into dyslexic adults who could function relatively successfully, while others floundered desperately? How had these transformations happened? What might help them to happen? Do individuals have particular coping approaches which guide their actions?

These questions led to a piece of research towards an M.A. in Special Educational Needs with six participants who I perceived to be at the more successful end of the coping spectrum in navigating the non-dyslexic world. These participants were holding down jobs successfully and portrayed an inner confidence which was absent in other learners. It was my intention with this research to explore the possible reasons behind or conditions necessary for success, rather than the reasons behind failure. If the research helped to unearth some answers, then these might offer support or advice to struggling learners. The participants were three females and three males, all white and spanning in age between thirty-two and seventy-three. Five of the six were engaged in the world of work and one had retired.

I was interested in discovering the unique, personalised perceptions and insights of these adults, therefore I took an ethnographic approach which recognised these participants as a 'cultural group'. Initially each person was given in advance seven laminated question cards showing the questions to be asked in a semi-structured interview. The questions asked were, broadly speaking, about their personal support networks, their approach to life in relation to their dyslexia and any examples of when they handled a difficult situation well.

I also gave each participant a disposable camera and asked them to make a visual record of images which represented their own experience of dyslexia. Dyslexic people are often described as 'picture thinkers' and visually literate, so my hope was that the use of another 'language' might prompt new insights into the experience of being dyslexic. Pink (2001) argues for a move away from the perception of the written word as the superior medium in ethnographic research. She suggests that although images should not replace words as the main mode of research, they should be viewed as 'equally meaningful' and incorporated when it appears enlightening to do so. I also hoped that the photographic task would help to create a more participatory approach to the production of the knowledge.

What links were found between the literature and the findings?

Despite the vast number of books and articles that have been written about dyslexia, there is an apparent lack of research and knowledge around what it feels like to be dyslexic, from the perspective of the person experiencing the dyslexia. My search through the literature explored theories around how our individual selves develop and the possible impact that the presence of dyslexia might have on the development of the self, an examination of theories around how we interpret life experiences, the exploration of a broader look at intelligence to include 'emotional intelligence', the relevance of peer support and specialist

versus mainstream provision and the possible significance of social networks and literacy viewed as a 'social practice'. The following sections will provide a flavour of theories within the literature, some of the findings which echoed these theories and also any themes emerging from the data which were not present within the literature.

'It all comes back to confidence and belief in yourself.'

Theoretical models around how we manage to navigate the world effectively include Bandura's (1997) theory of 'self-efficacy', which maintains that what we achieve in life is not simply down to our skills ability but to the agency with which we apply these skills. The agency with which skills are applied relates to our belief in our selves and our ability to succeed at any given task. A dyslexic person will also inevitably have experienced higher levels of failure than non-dyslexic individuals throughout their schooling. Their interpretation of these experiences appears to be significant within 'attribution theory', which maintains that those who attribute their success to internal factors such as ability and effort achieve greater academic success than those who attribute their success to external factors such as luck or task difficulty. Seligman's (1990) concept of 'explanatory style' echoes attribution theory in that your explanatory style is the way in which you generally explain to yourself why events happen. It is the habit of thinking which you learned in childhood and adolescence and has three dimensions; permanence, pervasiveness and personalisation. The third dimension, personalisation, describes whether we put the events that happen in our life down to internal or external factors. Negative explanatory styles can be combated with a cognitive behavioural approach termed 'learned optimism', which focuses on what you are thinking when you fail, to change the negative voices within. This approach is similar in intention to a therapeutic process called 'reframing', where individual concepts or viewpoints are placed in another 'frame' and thus given a different or better meaning. Gerber (1996) argues that reframing can mean the difference between success and failure for adults with learning disabilities and cites his own ethnographic studies of adults with learning disabilities, Gerber & Reiff (1991), as evidence that adults in the highly and moderately successful categories were those who had reframed their disabilities.

Research participants conveyed a strong sense of self-belief to persevere, despite describing lives in which they had experienced high levels of stress and anxiety. Chris explained that she recently took on a supervisor's post because she knew she had the inner confidence to deal with any difficulties,

The will to better myself has always been stronger than keeping myself back because of my dyslexia. I've always been very ambitious.

Participants showed signs of positively embracing the opportunities inherent within their occasional failures. Alan's description of the spelling programme delivered in our centre conveyed a powerful understanding of the nature of learning, his own dyslexia and a positive explanatory style,

You won't get it right every time, and I think as a dyslexic you're not gonna get it first time and you've got to learn to accept your mistakes. I think the struggle is the biggest part of the thing cos if you don't struggle and get everything given to you, what do you learn in life?

'It's the struggle that gives you the wisdom.'

Over recent years the concepts of being literate in emotional terms, or possessing emotional intelligence, have become prevalent theories in any discussion around how we live our lives effectively. Sharp (2001) calls for an emotionally literate education system which considers the holistic development of both learners and educators. He does however recognise that to change our attitudes requires a major shift in a personal or family 'script' and a change in our inner dialogue. Interestingly, he sees adversity as an experience which can potentially turn problems into opportunities. Goleman's (1996) concept of 'Emotional Intelligence' also argues that our emotions play a major role in our thought-processes, decision-making and individual success and that school grades and IQ scores are poor predictors of who will succeed in life. The key characteristics of Emotional Intelligence include being able to motivate oneself, being persistent in the face of frustrations, being socially perceptive and having the ability to empathise.

All participants expressed a sense that it was the struggles or adversity in their lives which had brought them a good deal of wisdom and emotional literacy. Patrick explains,

Age is a beautiful thing. As long as you're not too young and you're not too old, age and

experience tells you that you'll get out. … You learn so much by being knocked down, you learn the ability to get back up.

Bill recognises that he is a determined character because of his life experiences,

I think you have to fight a bit harder, you have to stick it out more.

'My support's gone wider now, so I can take on bigger tasks in my life.'

Ecclestone (2004) raises a voice of dissent against this growing trend amongst educators to label their learners as having low self-esteem and a preoccupation with emotional intelligence. She cites Furedi's (2003) concept of 'the diminished self' as a turn in popular culture, politics and the media towards,

Prurient interest in and empathy with public expressions of damage, fragility, vulnerability and feelings of being unable to cope with life's events.

Ecclestone (2004) argues that this preoccupation with 'the diminished self' has lead to a disempowering and patronizing culture which represents a shift away from the belief in people's potential for autonomy and their capacity to be resilient and stoical. She maintains that this leads in turn to the legitimization of professional intervention and that this may lead to a culture of low educational horizons and negative views of people. This implication that people need professional help and institutional recognition, rather than looking to the other forms of support around them such as family, friends and community brings us to the concept of 'social capital'. James & Nightingale (2004) argue that a key factor in the way we deal with events in our life can depend on the resources available to us. These resources can include the 'social capital' of,

Good support networks, friends and a place in the family, friendship groups and community networks.

Fingeret's (1983) study into the social structures of what she describes as 'illiterate' adults discovered complex social networks which operate on the basis of mutual exchange. Fingeret's (1983) participants have social networks which always include 'readers', but choices are made as to the most suitable helper dependent on the level of personal information revealed by the literacy task. She gives an example of the dynamics between a participant, Roger, and the few readers in his network. Roger states,

There's a lot of people who can't read and write, but they can do a lot of things that some people who can read can't do. …My boss doesn't know anything about repairs. … At home, my wife she has to help the kids with their schoolwork, but I'm the one fixes the leaks in the pipes. (P140.)

Her participants vary in their level of dependence within society. At one end of a continuum are 'cosmopolitans', who have driver's licences, know their children's teacher and interact with college-educated adults. At the other end, 'locals' are defined by their inability to engage with the social world and a narrow network of support. Therefore, 'illiterate' adults are not in themselves dependent by virtue of their lack of literacy, but due to their inability to engage with the community which surrounds them.

Participants in my research describe transformations experienced since coming to their learning centre. Irene explains,

My support's gone wider now, so I can take on bigger tasks in my life. I can take on the big topics in life. I'm passionate about politics.

While Alan's words seem to describe a recognition of the power of social capital and the reciprocity inherent in his experience of education,

Being able to speak to somebody, to empathise, to offer advice, to offer support, there's so many different ways that education works, rather than just having the ticket (exams).

Irene's images of greetings cards (see fig. 1) represent a recognition of how marginalised dyslexic people can feel because, without networks of support, they may be unable to express themselves in writing at key moments of the year such as friends and family birthdays or Christmas time.

In society it's not allowing you to mix in the way that we do, express our happiness or caring or whatever.

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Fig. 1.
Individuals can be perceived as anti-social or 'a misery', but this may be down to a lack of family or friends to support them with a coping strategy.

Then they won't mix with people, they won't be happy. They won't send Christmas cards, they're outside society.

Which brings us to Barton and Hamilton's (1998) model of literacy as 'social practice' and their view of literacy as essentially a social activity, located in the interactions between people, social institutions and power relationships

'It's a personality. It's who you are.'

If we consider Barton and Hamilton's (1998) model of literacy as 'social practice' and their view that literacy is essentially a social activity, located in the interactions between people, social institutions and power relationships, then these dyslexic participants' sense of personal identity may well have been shaped by this social practice. Participants described seeing their dyslexia as a personality, bound up with who they are. Alan identified his dyslexia as giving him a sense of his self,

My dyslexia has made me who I am, because I've had to learn for myself and I've had to teach myself. I've had to take it where I can get it. I've had to fight for everything I've wanted.

While Patrick recognised that although in the past he has felt unhappy about his dyslexia,

Now it's not the end of the world any more, that's just me.

'It's like a private club.'

The search for identity may have relevance to the ongoing debate around specialist versus mainstream provision within SEN research literature. Burden and Burdett's (2005) findings from a study of pupils' attitudes to learning and sense of personal identity within a high-achieving independent school for boys with dyslexia showed individuals with a strong sense of self-belief and feelings of depression having halved since entering the school. They argue that the results of this research 'fly in the face' of an overwhelming current push towards inclusion in schooling, suggesting that special education may have a great deal more to offer dyslexic children than is currently acknowledged. In adult terms, the DfEE report *Freedom to Learn* (2000) states that adult dyslexic learners believe that,

Only classes exclusively for dyslexic adults are worthwhile. (p23)

The report cites the many negative learning experiences which adults have had in non-specialist basic skills provision. Humphrey (2003) further suggests that the significant influence of peers might be utilised by creating peer tutoring and peer mentoring opportunities within the classroom.

Participants echoed the value of peer support and being together with people who are all dyslexic. Irene enjoys the sharing of stories,

There's no pain there now. It's a shared understanding because we have a coping thing now … it's like a private club.

Patrick explains that they will often share anecdotes about their confusion over language and see this as humorous because it is shared. The group will often say to each other,

We're all a band of idiots!

Alan describes the inherent therapeutic nature of sharing experiences with peers,

Talking to other students makes a vast difference in how you learn.

'Graceful on the surface, but paddling like hell underneath!'

Goatly (1997) describes metaphor as *an indispensable basis of language and thought.(*p1)and maintains that one of the major functions of metaphor is to express emotion. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors exist in a person's conceptual system and that human thought processes are, in the main, metaphorical. Metaphors make sense of

innate human experience, it was interesting to note the number of metaphors which emerged within the photographic task. One example is Irene's image of a toy hamster in a revolving bubble; a metaphor for her prior life as a dyslexic person who wasn't coping with her dyslexia. (see fig.2)

Fig.2

That's what you feel like when you haven't got a coping strategy. You are going round and round in your own trapped world.

Metaphors involving movement, or lack of it, included Patrick's description of feeling like a swan,

Graceful on the surface, but paddling like hell underneath!'

as you try to keep up with everyone around you, whilst appearing to be in control. Bill also conveys a lack of forward movement in explaining that his dyslexia has been like an invisible brick wall he was unable to get past,

It's been like a brick wall all my life. An invisible brick wall I didn't know was there. When I eventually did find out, it was in my late forties. Although the brick wall was still there, it made it easier to climb. The trouble is other people don't know that the wall's there.

Fig. 3

Patrick presented a photo of Lee Evans's DVD covers and explained that his on-stage persona seems to represent the way you feel you appear as a dyslexic person, (see fig. 3)

Sometimes when talking to people you feel like Norman Wisdom or Lee Evans 'cos you do the freaky arm movements and you sweat and you talk fast. My brain only works when my mouth's talking rubbish, so I talk quicker, quicker, quicker cos I'm waiting for me brain to get a good idea so I try to fill the time … As a dyslexic person in a stressful situation you think you are dripping in sweat, even though you're not. Your perception of how you look is greasy and horrid and you just want a shower, so Lee Evans is ideal.

'I can see people that are struggling to get in.'
One striking and unexpected theme not present within the literature but emerging from the data was that although these individuals may not be expert readers of text, they are expert readers of people! Many felt they had developed a strong sense of empathy and described this as a 'sixth sense'.This capacity to be empathetic also meant they were better at their jobs. Irene explains,

I can feel how people are distressed or happy more than somebody else. I know in my job I do, in frontline work, I can speak slowly to anybody travelling and I can feel whether they are lying or anxious, whether they're just anxious because they're just a traveller and have been stopped by somebody in authority or whether it's, oh I've done something wrong and they're not telling the truth. I just go slow and I feel extra things and I think that's because of my dyslexia.

Alan feels better at his job because of his dyslexia,

I have that empathy, because I understand what it feels like to be on the outside looking in. I can see people that are struggling to get in.

He describes being given more complex and challenging clients to manage in work, who are sometimes otherwise left out,

I've got to take that time to listen. I know how it feels to be fobbed off because you're not getting it the way they want you to get it.

Chris recognises the unique qualities in her dyslexic peers and offers an explanation for these qualities,

The people I've met with dyslexia have been far more experienced, giving people, because they've had to find the other qualities that they've got.

Eight key points
Although the participants were six individuals with their own unique personalities, there were strong similarities in the way they chose to deal with their dyslexia. The following eight points are a distillation of the advice and wisdom found within all of the data:

- Learn about your own dyslexia and the best way for you to learn information.
- Concentrate on and develop your strengths.
- Be with your adult dyslexic peers, either in a learning centre or support group.
- Ensure that your literacy class or group has a transparent focus on adult dyslexia.
- Share your stories with your peers.
- Recognise the knowledge gained from your years of struggle and use these skills to your advantage i.e. determination, empathy, social perception.
- Build personal networks of support within your community.
- Learn to take a different viewpoint and 'reframe' your experiences.

Limitations and Implications for practice
The limitations of this research lie in the fact that my small group of six participants cannot realistically represent all successful people with dyslexia, but they can give us a flavour of the coping strategies necessary to survive in a non-dyslexic world. The use of a visual methodology seemed a particularly effective way to elicit complex reflections from participants and the photos helped people to tell their stories, as well as acting as a bridge over to the more formal interview questions. The interviews also shifted something within those involved. Irene's feedback on the process of the research conveys something of this shift,

This has been like therapy for me.

When I pointed out the many positive strategies she has in place, she explained,

It's only doing this that's made me think about it. I feel really good. I felt really happy doing this.

Is it possible that being given 'a good listening to' has promoted personal transformation? Five of the participants went on to form a new adult dyslexia organisation which, two years on, is still going strong. I presented the findings to this new group and we are keen to source funding to create a comic book from the powerful stories and valuable advice we've gathered. I also feel that my prolonged engagement as their tutor has, on balance, led to deeper insights possibly not available to an outside researcher. Burden (2005) maintains that there has been comparatively little written around asking dyslexic people how they think and feel about their dyslexia. I would urge all tutors out there – ask your students to tell you how they think and feel and the results may be illuminating for everyone.

Poole (2003) argues for a shift of values in dyslexia education, where we move away from a narrow focus on lack of literacy skills and see an adult's whole life, including the skills they have gained along the way. While Fingeret (1983) urges us to create literacy programmes which learn to respond to adults in networks. I would extend this argument further and urge those delivering literacy programmes to encourage the development of *new* networks of support for learners, which build upon and recognise their existing social capital.

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Skills for Life and issues of choice: a study in rural England

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Introduction

Choice has long been considered the distinguishing feature when contrasting school based and post-school education; hence the term 'post-compulsory'. This term implies that at a particular age [currently 16 in England but set to rise over the coming years to 17 by 2013 and 18 by 2015 (DCSF, 2008)] the population has the freedom to choose how, or if, they wish to engage in further education or training programmes. This is considered to be the case whether you live in rural or urban environments; whether you are in employment or not.

In this paper we consider this concept, particularly in relation to the implementation of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001) and question whether the strategy has influenced the choice of learning programmes available for adult learners of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) in rural England. We initially provide some background information on the *Skills for Life* strategy, and go on to outline the concept of choice. Drawing on evidence from a practitioner-led research project, undertaken in a rural county of the East Midlands region in England, we demonstrate how practice has responded to recent national LLN policy initiatives.

We present evidence to support the argument that the *Skills for Life* strategy has resulted in the limitation, and in some instances, negation of choice for adult learners of language, literacy and numeracy. Nonetheless, we will highlight the responsive determination of practitioners working within this field to continue to provide the space for choice for their learners, despite

obstacles being put in their way, such as accountability systems, curricula requirements and target expectations.

The *Skills for Life* strategy

Skills for Life: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills was published in March 2001 with the aspiration:

> … to give all adults in England the opportunity to acquire the skills for active participation in twenty-first-century society.
> (DfEE, 2001: Forward)

The rationale underpinning the strategy was to tackle and eradicate what is perceived by policy makers as the 'burden' of adults who are economically limited or inactive due to their low levels of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN), preventing them from obtaining sustainable employment. The strategy highlighted groups who would become the priority targets, where needs were considered to be greatest and where most potential influence could be made. The strategy outlines how the government planned to tackle the issue of low LLN capability within the adult population through the introduction of a suite of interventions, including:

> Initiating radical changes to the education and training system for those learning literacy and numeracy skills in order to raise standards and boost levels of achievement. New national standards, new materials and a common core curriculum leading to national tests will make sure that the same approach to teaching and learning, based on the most effective practice, is adopted across the country. We

[government] are introducing new, more effective ways of assessing need and better teacher training and setting up a new research centre and rigorous national inspections to monitor standards.
(D*f*EE, 2001: 7)

A central aim of the strategy was to raise teaching standards amongst adult literacy and numeracy teachers who had previously had little scope or opportunity to acquire accredited qualifications in the teaching of their subject. In reality LLN teaching had historically been a largely part-time, sessional or casual activity (Cara, et al., 2008). Since September 2002 a new professional programme has been put in place to enable teachers specialising in teaching adult literacy and numeracy to meet the requirements of the national standards by undertaking a subject specialist qualification.

Prior to the implementation of the strategy, the provision of adult LLN programmes was considered largely a 'Cinderella' service. Provision was generally geared towards the individual's interests and needs. There were few qualifications and those that were available provided little value in the employment market. Teaching was often undertaken by volunteers, or non-qualified professionals. The quality of provision varied dramatically across the country. The *Skills for Life* strategy aimed, and succeeded, in providing a standard of provision for adults that was of a consistently high quality with agreed standards and qualification outcomes. The strategy has ensured that adult LLN teaching and learning has become a core component of many learning opportunities in the further education sector. However, it has also streamlined services in such a way that any choices of LLN learning opportunities have now become linked to qualifications. The results in limiting the choice of learning programmes to only those that have a qualification outcome attached to them.

In summary, since its launch, the *Skills for Life* strategy (D*f*EE, 2001) has become the biggest overarching policy drive that has ever taken place in post-compulsory education in England.

It is supported by significant investment from government (Crawley, 2005) and has changed the landscape in which LLN is conceptually understood and provided. There is evidence of LLN teaching and learning across a range of adult 'spaces', including further education colleges, adult and community settings, prison and probation services, as well as a significant range of work placed learning opportunities, and provision through the voluntary and community sector.

What has become of increasing interest since the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy is how it is being represented at the interface of teaching and learning.

We now consider how 'choice' has influenced models of LLN delivery within rural locations where relatively small numbers of providers, learners and employment opportunities have always limited choice (Atkin, et al., 2005).

Choice
In this section of the paper we examine the literature that considers choice, particularly in relation to the range of *Skills for Life* training programmes available to adult LLN learners; exploring whether government policies have been assembled in such a way they detrimentally influence both choice and decision making. Implicit in this discussion is the perception that adults are in a position where they have a degree of 'freedom' to choose.

Choice suggests the selection of an item or action out of a number of possible options. It can be reasoned that, as individuals, we are the products of the choices we make. However, many choices and decisions that inform our lives are not always in our control; even choice patterns that appear to be open are influenced by notions of culture and legitimacy (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977); it is this area that is explored in more detail in relation to adult LLN learners.

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) describe choice as a social and political battleground in which tensions exist. These can be identified as on the one hand, the rights of individuals to make choices and define their own existence and on the other the need for the individual to balance their choices between their personal rights and obligations and the rights and obligations of the communities and societies within which they live (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001: 1).

Theories of choice are commonly constructed through models of economics (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001) with choice identified as a central process for an individual, requiring them to engage in decision-making processes that involve initially the construction and consideration of a range of options and then choosing between them.   Such decision–making

processes can be described as incremental with choice preferences changing over time in response to external factors, such as changing circumstances.   This is particularly relevant to an adult LLN learner whose reasons for engaging in LLN learning are often associated with changing circumstances, whether that is moving from employment to unemployment, bereavement, divorce, children leaving home or entering school, re-entering the employment market or imprisonment. This view of choice is based on four key elements:

1   That individuals will seek to maximise the benefits they will gain from the choices they make; so-called, utility maximisation
2   That individuals will make choices that are entirely based on self interest
3   That choices will be made after a process of vigilant information collection
4   That the process of considering alternatives and making choices will be entirely rational (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001: 29).

The model of choice and decision-making presented by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown is a very dynamic one in which individuals are perceived to hold all the knowledge and skills necessary to make considered choices.   For many adult LLN learners, however, such a dynamic approach to choice and decision-making is unrealistic and unreasonable, with many requiring supported and detailed information, advice and guidance to navigate the material that enables informed decision-making and choice.

In exploring the choices of potential adult LLN learners it is important to recognise who makes the choices in this field: when, how and why these choices are being made; what influences these choice processes and what impact such choices have on the individual, other participants and on the outcomes of training programmes.

Bourdieu provides an alternative framework for thinking about choice. He suggests that choice is the outcome of a process that brings together emotional and personal history, values and ideology: the implicit assumptions and aspirations of an individual's *habitus* (an individual's dispositions) (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). He asserts that if an individual does not self-identify the existence of a problem (in this case, a limited LLN capability) they are unlikely to consider participation in a *Skills for Life* training programme. Therefore, there is no decision to be made about whether to

participate in a training programme, or choice about which training programme might be most effective or appropriate for them because they have not identified or recognised a problem (Atkin and Merchant, 2004).

Many adults who may, but by no means always, accept that they have limited LLN skills, do not necessarily consider such limitations as problematic (Ekinsmyth and Bynner, 1994). Additionally, their existence within their social network also informs their values and beliefs regarding LLN skills, training programmes, decision-making and employment. Many adult learners have established strong social networks encompassing families, friends and key agencies to support them in undertaking day-to-day tasks, such as household budgeting, reading letters and responding to correspondence. Such adults do not see such dependence on others as an indicator or reason to develop their own LLN skills as it is likely that many of their friends have developed, and are part of, similar social networks.

The ability to choose a training programme is not only closely associated with an individual's capacity for decision-making but their motivation, or desire, to undertake such a programme and the programmes' perceived legitimacy. By legitimacy, we mean that the programme can demonstrate value to the potential participant by being able to satisfy their need(s) and demand(s), although this may lie outside the framework identified by policy makers organising LLN provision.

When Comings, et al., (1999) set out to explore engagement and persistence amongst adult LLN learners in America, they started their study by stating that:

A key difference between adult and child learners is that adults choose to participate in educational programmes, whilst children participate because of legal mandates and strong social and cultural forces that identify schooling as the proper "work" of "childhood". (Comings, et al., 1999: 1)

This view of choice is in line with prominent writers in the field of adult learning such as Knowles (1975) and Mezirow (1991). They popularised the view that adult education is usually a voluntary activity undertaken for self-development and personal interest.   This view has received a great deal of critical review, however, with other writers claiming this utopian view of choice being at best a misrepresentation

of reality (Illeris, 2003). In presenting this opposing viewpoint Illeris (2003) directs his attention to the key assumption underpinning Comings work - that adults choose to participate in training programmes - suggesting instead that:

> Most adult learners approach education in very ambivalent ways. The majority of participants enter the programmes because they are more or less forced to do so, and not because of an inner drive or interest. In practice, they typically develop a variety of psychological defence strategies to avoid learning that challenges their identity and personal ways of thinking, reacting and behaving. (Illeris, 2003: 13)

Illeris suggests instead that the majority of adults attending training programmes are largely doing so because they have to, they are forced to or they have been persuaded to attend, either by employers or authorities, or because the alternative to attendance may result in social and economic marginalisation; their capacity for choice has been compromised (Illeris, 2003).

Whilst Illeris, discussing the fundamental differences of learning in relation to age (Illeris, 2004), agrees that adults want to take personal responsibility to decide whether they do and do not want to learn (in line with Comings, et al., 1999; Knowles, 1975 and Mezirow, 1991) he states that, in fact, most adults entering educational institutions have not freely chosen to do so (see O'Grady & Atkin, 2006a).

The main concluding finding of Illeris's research was:

> The main result of our investigating adult education from the perspective of ordinary learners who are alien to such concepts as lifelong learning and lifelong education is that if it is given to or forced upon participants who have not mentally accepted and internalized a wish or need to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes or qualities in question, it will tend to be a waste of human and financial resources. (Illeris, 2003: 22)

It is clear that notions of choice and decision-making are shrouded in the assumption that an adult has all the necessary knowledge and skills to make an independent and free choice, or the capacity to collect such knowledge externally through a framework of information, advice and guidance.

We can show, through our research undertaken in the East Midlands that, in fact, this assumption is flawed and present these findings below:

Adult learning in Lincolnshire and Rutland: voices from practice

During 2006 officers of Lincolnshire and Rutland Learning and Skills Council (LSC) invited members of the Unesco Centre for Comparative Education and Research (UCCER), School of Education, University of Nottingham to work with a wide range of adult educators to explore how national policies were 'playing out' in the local context. Of particular interest to the project was the influence of policies on a largely rural region of England.

The aim of the project was to support the LSC in developing local policy responses to the learning needs of the local population; issues facing both practitioners and learners drove the project. Practitioners were invited to construct and submit a research proposal in which they identified the context and aims of their project and the proposed methodological approach, including data collection and analysis. The projects accepted and undertaken covered a broad range of topics and included:

1. A case study looking at career paths for potential new Skills for Life tutors in rural Lincolnshire.
2. A consideration of the retention of ESOL students working in the food industry in South Lincolnshire.
3. A consideration of the role of community venues in adult learning opportunities.
4. The learning journey of adult learners who had engaged in adult learning through the Next Step process.

These projects highlight a range of concerns for those engaged in a variety of post-compulsory education and training programmes across rural Lincolnshire and Rutland. The topics demonstrate the changing nature of rural communities, reflecting employment opportunities and the diversity of the workforce.

The focus for much of the research was the impact of the *Skills for Life* strategy (D*f*EE, 2001) to raises standards of adult LLN by policy makers. Rural learners, whilst recognised within the strategy, are arguably disadvantaged by it because the small population numbers tend to mask or obscure the levels of need. This, in turn, makes urban areas appear more 'deprived'

in raw score measurements of deprivation indices:

> People with literacy and numeracy difficulties are geographically spread across the country. Ours is therefore a national strategy, recognising that potential learners may live in rural areas as well as in inner-city estates. But we also know that people with poor literacy and numeracy are particularly concentrated in deprived areas. There are around 1.7 million adults with literacy deficiencies living in the 10% most deprived wards. Our national strategy must therefore include clearly targeted, area-based measures for tackling poor literacy and numeracy skills among these communities. (DfEE, 2001:31)

Rurality

Those delivering LLN programmes in rural areas face many of the same issues as those in urban areas, but certain factors exacerbate these challenges. Whilst 'rurality' was clearly a consideration for those forming and implementing policy locally it was also an integral part of their delivery. Rurality was taken as a given factor that policy makers were constantly trying to accommodate.

The main challenges to the provision of training programmes in rural locations include viable numbers, transport, accessibility, the availability of qualified tutors, working patterns and childcare (Atkin, et al., 2005). These challenges manifest themselves in a variety of ways including problems caused by a lack of rural infrastructure (e.g. little public transport making access to classes problematic for many learners) and problems of rural outreach where the administrative hub may be many miles away from classes and tutors making the management of delivery difficult to organise and fund. All of these factors influence the range and choice of learning opportunities available to learners. This is a further challenge for those who are either seeking learning opportunities, or who are seeking to provide learning opportunities in a range of delivery models, either discrete or embedded, to combine them with other learning programmes, or to link them with employment. In addition, rural outreach is identified as difficult to maintain without the guarantee of a minimum number of learners. A consistent and overarching finding from the research projects was a clear message that a lack of core-funding resulted in a great deal of time and resources being expended in seeking alternative funding. The short-term nature of funding also made it difficult for providers to

plan for the future and, in some cases, to provide a consistent, quality service to the learner. This also impacts on a providers' ability to build and sustain long term relationships between themselves and service users (both learners and businesses); social capital.

The geography of rural areas certainly impacts on provision in the ways identified above but we suggest that the social construction of rural areas also influences adult education provision and LLN provision in particular. The link between LLN and rural identity is an important issue to consider as rural areas of England are expanding in terms of their population size, and, their ethnic and cultural diversity (Commission of Integration and Cohesion, 2007). Atkin and Merchant (2004), caricatured and challenged the public perception of rural labour demands - as being largely linked to resources based industry such as farming, forestry and fishery – in their work as new technology becomes the norm in traditional rural industries. New high-technology industries are now locating to many rural areas of England, encouraged by increasingly developed communication systems, and a perception of a safer, cleaner environment for the workforce (Murdock, 2006). The evolution of industries within rural areas that necessitates higher skill levels breaks through traditional expectations of, and demands for, skills. The need for a wide curriculum to meet these new demands is evident, and the role of supporting the development of LLN skills underpins these advances,

Supporting the Practitioner-Researchers

The research team supported practitioner-researchers through workshops to discuss their research plans. Particularly the team constructed a writing template as a guide for practitioner-researchers and also an annotated reference list of literature that may help them with their particular projects. The practitioner-researchers utilised a wide range of research methodologies in conducting their research projects, both qualitative and quantitative. Practitioners were encouraged to develop project proposals that would either lead to developments in their teaching and learning, or enable them the opportunity to reflect on the influence of national policies on local practices, and particularly, rural practices. The practitioners were not asked to work within the conceptual framework of choice.

Analyses from the practitioner-researchers, presented below, identified several significant points for policy makers, tutors and learners, which can be framed in part as a reflection of

rurality and in part on choice and decision-making activities within this field of practice for adult LLN learners. The concept of choice is used as an overarching framework for analysis of each of the separate research projects and was introduced as a tool for meta-analysis of the wider project, rather than for each individual project.

Key Findings from the research

Research Project 1: A case study looking at career paths for potential new Skills for Life tutors in rural Lincolnshire;

LLN tutors recognised and supported the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001)– that it is striving to professionalise the workforce through a new suite of qualifications. However, living and working in a rural context problematises the practicalities of attending weekly teaching sessions and accessing teaching practice opportunities is extremely difficult. Whilst trainee tutors do not want to be treated differently in terms of standards and expectations, they are keen to see the development of different models for accessing and obtaining these qualifications: choice. A blended learning approach was identified as a particularly good model because the construction of a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998) was considered to be an extremely important and valuable element of undertaking such qualifications, particularly in rural areas. It is clear from this research that there is a need for policy makers to consider the range of employment choices available to *Skills for Life* staff in rural areas; many opportunities are casual or sessional, resulting in limiting the opportunities for them to develop career pathways.

Research Project 2 : A consideration of the retention of ESOL students working in the food industry in South Lincolnshire

A significant finding from the research project exploring retention amongst ESOL work-based learners, was the particularly high drop-out rates, with a 55% drop-out rate amongst those who commenced provision within five weeks of starting their training programme. A major reason given for this was the variable work patterns undertaken by learners and the fluid nature of their employment; an outcome that confirms the findings of Atkin, et al., (2005). Additional findings published by researchers at the National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NSCALL) also found that

traditional patterns of attendance for adult literacy learners resulted in lower achievement rates (Comings, et al., 1999). High drop-out rates in this study were attributed to a lack of flexibility, or choice, which did not allow learners to take breaks from their learning in response to family or work commitments. A recommendation for policy makers is to consider more flexible models of learning programme over an extended period of time, and more choice of delivery models. This could provide a framework that supports learner retention; or persistence..

This project also identified a link between ongoing attendance at work-based ESOL provision and remittance offered by the employer. Where an employer offered remittance through 'time-off' work or through financial incentives to attend, there was a 72% retention rate on programmes; when there was no remittance offered by employers, the retention rate of learners on programme was as low as 39%.

Research Project 3 : A consideration of the role of community venues in adult learning opportunities

A further project interrogated a national decision which resulted in the withdrawal of Learndirect contracts from small rural providers, limiting the choice of learning opportunities for communities. This resulted in a significant reduction in adult learners continuing with their learning programmes. This is a good example of how national policy decisions affected learners undertaking provision within a rural adult and community setting where numbers were inevitably low and where local context is considered to be critical to motivation and persistence.

Research Project 4 : The learning journey of adult learners who had engaged in adult learning through the Next Step process

This project reviewed an intervention to support people into training and obtain employment, through focused information, advice and guidance (IAG) sessions. The research considered the progression of individuals who had accessed such sessions over a four-month period. Progression for this project was a movement up a literacy or numeracy level by the learner, or a movement from unemployment into employment. Analysis of the findings identified once again that policy makers should consider the value of establishing flexible

training provision using a range of delivery models, over extended periods of time, allowing learners a choice of learning opportunities

Practitioners, through their various research projects, present a range of illuminatory findings for both policy-makers and practitioners which can be seen to demonstrate the need for choice and flexibility in the provision of teaching and learning opportunities to rural communities. Policy makers should ensure there is a focus on a wider range of learning provision which has built-in flexibilities to allow long term engagement and progression.

The choice of environment and location in which learning opportunities take place has a real influence on the ability of learners to engage, and to continue to engage. This is closely linked to the ability of policy makers to develop a workforce to meet the learning demands of potential adult LLN learners. A choice of teacher training programmes should be made available to meet the needs of participants, i.e. blending learning models of teacher training delivery which necessitate less classroom contact and therefore travel - a significant cost - and hence a further barrier in rural areas.

Conclusions

In this paper we have highlighted how the ideological view of adult learning within a philosophical framework of choice has been limited and compromised by the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfEE, 2001). An adult who has limited LLN capability is more likely to be directed, or coerced, to attend training provision that has pre-determined curriculum, syllabus and assessments activities. (We would stress at this point that 'attend' is not necessarily the same as 'participate'; with its inferred engagement with the process.)

Choice, for adult LLN learners, is often limited to developing skills directly linked to employability. The andragogic concept that adult learners are self-directed, self-motivated and attending training programmes through informed decision-making processes is no longer in evidence within the framework of the *Skills for Life* strategy. Illeris exemplifies this point through his work (Illeris, 2003) as have others; see, for example (Atkin and O'Grady, 2006a, Atkin and O'Grady, 2006b).

The *Skills for Life* strategy has dramatically transformed the landscape of adult LLN teaching and learning in England. This is set to continue as a result of recent publications, such as the Leitch Review (2006) which calls for more employer-demand led training, focussing on upskilling adults LLN skills for employability, and the recently refreshed *Skills for Life strategy*: Skills for Life: Changing Lives (DIUS, 2009).

The work of the practitioners in the Lincolnshire and Rutland project (Atkin and O'Grady, 2007) acts to highlight the diverse nature of adults engaging in this type of training as well as the diversity of environments in which such training can be made available. This reflects the views of Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001), discussed earlier in this paper, who identify choice being situated within a social and political battleground and the tensions that are perpetuated when making choices.

Choice for adult LLN learners should be provided within an organised framework of information, advice and guidance. There should be transparency in a system that enables adults to consider engagement in such activity, allowing for an innovative range of delivery models and pedagogic activities.

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Top-right masthead logo reading "RaPAL"

Workbased Skills for Life proven to be inspirational!

Peggy Warren

Peggy Warren currently works as a Skills for Life / ESOL trainer within an inner City NHS Hospital, supporting members of staff accessing vocational work-based courses, as well as those preparing to access Higher Education. Peggy has an interest in Black Minority women and their educational issues and has recently completed an MA exploring some aspects of the learning trajectories of BME women working in low skilled, low paid roles.

Introduction

The paper presents biographical accounts of a group of healthcare assistants employed by an inner City NHS Trust in the Midlands, setting them alongside research literature on low skilled, low paid minority ethnic women and the impact of the Skills for Life (SfL) education policy and experience on their individual learning trajectories.

Sixteen Black Minority Ethnic (BME) women, thirteen Afro-Caribbean and three Asian women were interviewed. All the women interviewed had failed to gain qualifications during their secondary education and as a result of a range of employment roles which required them to take on shift work, as well as negative college experiences, were unable or unwilling to access traditional educational establishments. In this study I explored their perspective of barriers to accessing work-based courses, motivations for staying on the courses and the impact of successfully completing their course on their individual learning trajectory.

The findings suggest that although all these women, during their working lives fitted into the stereotype of 'black women's work'. They used the Skills for Life opportunity to embark on strategic and clear learning trajectories, with the knowledge that their journey towards their personal educational goal and economic liberation would be a long one. For these workers, acknowledging that they were aware of what worked for them in a learning environment, and that the confidence of each qualification gained was a step on the ladder to achieving their long held aspirations of gaining professional career status, or in some cases, professional respect and recognition was of vital importance. The work-based Skills for life programmes were the primary steps to their development in confidence and the force that gently propelled them in their belief that they can and will achieve educational success.

Rationale for undertaking this study

When the Labour party came into power in 1997 one of the memorable mantras of our then Prime Minister Tony Blair was, education,

education, education. The governmental primary aim of Skills for Life provision is to ensure that England has one of the best adult literacy and numeracy rates in the world. The government's policy has been influenced by their determination to increase the country's economic competitiveness in a globalised economy and to address concerns around social exclusions.

Keep (2007) suggests that the case for greater employer and /or state investment in whole qualifications and minimum Level 2 entitlements for large chunks of the adult workforce is extremely weak. He also argues that the knowledge driven economy will not be arriving any time soon, as many of the beliefs set out in governmental policies were not well founded.

Gorand & Rees (2002) in Sabates (2007) support this view. They state that in terms of policy, the government needs to think wider, as the main focus on barriers to accessing education should be on paying particular attention to attitudinal barriers affecting adults rather than just being concerned with removing economic and social constraints, as these will only have limited impact.

Leathwood (2006) suggested that a less scrutinised aspect of the policy is the way the themes are gendered, classed and racialised. She argues that despite the social inclusion and social justice in contemporary UK lifelong learning policy:

> The dominance of an economic rationality within these policy formulations suggests that persistent inequalities in the labour market and society as a whole will be reinforced and reconstituted.

Osler (1997) states, that in the New Labour educational policy, the government has addressed something that has previously been left unexplored; the notion that the problem may lie within the education system, rather than within family cultures. This point, I felt was one worth further exploration and aspects of this study may inform this.

Black feminist educators, such as Hooks argue that the black experience is treated as peripheral or marginal rather than central to educational discourses. They further assert that the supposedly seamless web of economy, polity and ideology function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep black women in an assigned subordinate space.

The new Labour social policies proactively encouraged women to find work. Heath and McMahon (1997) in Tomlinson (2005) inform us that there were significant differences in the kinds of work available to ethnic minorities who incurred an 'ethnic penalty' which means they fare less well in the labour market than similarly qualified whites and are more likely to live in cities. Researchers, including Tomlinson (2005), suggest that for decades no government had been willing to admit that the poor were largely poor because when working, they were grossly underpaid.

Research literature suggests that minority ethnic women's educational trajectory differs from most of their white compatriots. On the surface it is often understood that black people generally do not do well in schools. However, it has also been identified in studies, Osler (1997) and Mirza (2006) that African Caribbean girls generally fair well in secondary education and are quite ambitious. Yet, it could be argued that a dichotomy appears when minority ethnic women and work is explored. In the NHS, there is still a significantly high proportion of black minority ethnic women who find themselves in low paid physically challenging manual roles with little or no development prospects. It needs to be highlighted however that within this working group the majority did not gain qualifications whilst at school, and this left me questioning if the respondents I encountered held on to their ambitions identified at school, but had to create their own non-traditional route to achieving them.

The government's education policy, in the context of work based learning has benefited women within this study group Most of these women are intelligent and driven but to date have lacked opportunities to proactively engage in their own personal educational development as they have found themselves 'trapped' in low paid, low skilled, shift pattern jobs which have impeded their access to traditional educational settings.

The government's funding for work based education provision has offered a much-welcomed prospect to this group. The

interviewees appeared to have identified that the timing was right and that there were always means of overcoming barriers to grasp the educational opportunity and launch themselves into gaining better skills, qualifications, confidence and in some cases to fulfil their long awaited ambition to access higher education and become women with careers.

Methodology and questions explored
For this paper, I would like to highlight two of the areas explored from the learners' perspectives. The key sections I will focus on are:

1. What educational legacy did learners bring to the work based Skills for Life programmes and what in this case motivated retention?
2. What impact had the Skills for Life course on the individual's future educational aspirations?

It is the view of Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) that the interpretative ethnographic model of social research and its methodological tradition is the most suitable basis for research conducted by teachers in their own and immediate practice. From my very limited exposure to research, I would agree with their view as I feel that this approach, although not without limitations and challenges provided me with a wealth of insightful information.

My chosen research method was semi-structured interviews. I did not write the interviews questions for my study. The questions used had previously formed part of a large evaluative Governmental report entitled: *Making second chances work*, from which research report 439 was produced in 2003.

All sixteen interviews were taped and transcribed. As the researcher I was aware of the effect I could have on the interviewees. I knew all the interviewees through their attendance on a SfL programme, furthermore these were women from the Black Minority Ethnic community, where I am also ethnically positioned. Therefore, I had to seriously consider how I would be presented in my role as interviewer. I chose to position myself as researcher. I did not choose to draw attention to my gender or ethnicity as I related to the interviewees. However, it very soon became apparent in interview after interview that the interviewees' positioning of me in the role was most certainly explicitly black woman to black woman. They proactively sought some social or relational connection and this made detachment

challenging. Nevertheless I strove to avoid being drawn in, using the probes listed in the schedule when required in order not to bias the information collected.

Findings
As this was part of a work-based study, it was essential to ensure participant anonymity. This was done through obtaining the consent of the interviewees to use pseudonyms.

Interestingly the interviewees had been exposed to secondary school education in the UK and Jamaica, Montserrat or Bangladesh. The dominant group in this study was that from the Jamaican Diaspora. Within this group, two distinct groups were represented, those who were born in Jamaica and emigrated to the UK, where they entered the education system, usually in secondary school and those who were born in the UK to Jamaican parents who returned to Jamaica, enrolling them into the Jamaican education system. It would be fair to say that both groups found the transition in their educational journey somewhat challenging.

All sixteen interviewees left school at or before the age of sixteen, which was the official school leaving age in the UK and their country of origin. Those who left the Jamaican education system to join the UK educational system shared a plethora of barriers for not gaining qualifications during the compulsory phase of their education. These ranged from not fitting in as a result of a move to another country to being bullied.

Alice, 42 reported: "School in Jamaica was like a prison, I started late, unable to read or write in joint up letters, just scribbling and I was caned on my first day because I couldn't write. My teacher then threw a book in my face because I couldn't read. It was awful. As I was the eldest child, I then volunteered to stay at home and care for my siblings whilst my mother went out to work."

Cicely and Janet, who had left Jamaica to join their parents in the UK, found settling into school in the UK 'took some time'. Cicely reported that she was teased for not been able to 'speak English properly' and this she felt hindered her reaching her potential in school. Others shared that teachers' low expectation of them left them disillusioned and unmotivated.

Socio economic factors also presented as barriers for the native Jamaican not gaining qualifications in their compulsory education. Interviewees shared how they either chose not to attend school to assist their parent or

grandparents with childcare or could not afford to go to school because of their households' low economic status. Gorand & Rees (2002) in Sabates (2007) discussed the need for a change of focus in adult education from economic and social constraints to that of attitudinal barriers affecting adults. The interviewees in this study had clearly identified that attitudes of parents, carers and staff within education had significant impact on them as learners.

A very obvious theme also ran through the secondary educational journey of the Asian interviewees, who were all UK born and educated. Madhur 45 and Meera 36 both stated that although they both spoke English at home, it was found that they required additional help at school. They felt that this created a sense of isolation for them. Madhur said: "I was put down in class when I got things wrong, which made me not want to join in", she concluded her response with the phrase she often heard from teachers who believed that as English was her second language she got as much as she could out of school.

Overcoming some of the cultural and attitudinal stereotypes, which tainted their experience, proved quite challenging for some of the interviewees, some of whom had post school educational experiences which were also quite negative and these created further barriers and the erosion of confidence. Alice 42, following her extremely negative exposure to education in Jamaica had hoped to develop her reading and writing skills when she entered the UK. She mentioned that she approached colleges in the Midlands area, only to have one tutor in a college tell her that she would never succeed academically and in another FE provision, a tutor 'laughed in her face' when she shared her aspirations. She asserted: "Everywhere you go, there is a door that keeps slamming in your face, because you won't understand their dialogue… you will always feel stupid, like you are in a world of your own, where you don't know what's going on."

Cora Lee, 51 shared her experience of the transition from secondary school to college. "In Jamaica, the schools were strict, there was a consequence for not doing work, but in the UK when I went to college there was no consequence. Teachers weren't bothered so I didn't bother. I attended college more for the social contact than for learning".

Conversely, Eva, 41 asserted her reflective view. "I failed to admit that I was not coping with the work in college and none of my tutors noticed,

which is why I failed". Others mentioned that on previous college attempts, timing was an issue as they probably tried to return to learning when they already had a range of pressing demands on their time, such as children and shift work.

NRDC research in 2006 highlighted barriers that exist specifically within the NHS context. Amongst the recurring identified barriers were: time off for training at work and this was true especially for staff at the lower end of the pay scales. Earlier NRDC research in 2003 found that within the NHS, managers perceived tensions between their operational and training roles, as time allocated for training could affect their ability to meet targets.

The dichotomy between the working practice and the timing of the SfL programmes affected more than half of the group studied, and it was found that even those whose managers had agreed study leave still faced staff related challenges which resulted in them missing educational sessions. This concurs with the findings of the NRDC research which identified that healthcare assistants were particularly vulnerable to organisational cultural conditions, although they were often positive benefactors of the learning at work practice.

The government's ambition as outlined by the DfES (2006) stated that it is their hope that funding will particularly help minority ethnic groups and women in low paid employment who are under represented in work based training. In the context of the NHS Trust, this group appears to be significantly represented in the work based learning programmes, but this raises the questions, is this as a result of the significantly high proportion of BME women employed in these low skilled, low paid positions or is it the result of a positive drive for equality of provision and dissemination?

The interviewees found accessing the work based SfL courses straightforward, but it was the historical aspects of their learning experience that many found re-surfaced as personal barriers once they decided to embark on a course.

Although a number of those interviewed had agreed study leave with their managers, they found that when shifts were short staffed, they were denied the opportunity to attend their SfL sessions. Out of a sense of frustration and to present a solution to missing sessions on a course they had come to enjoy, nine of the sixteen interviewees then chose to request the day of their course as their rest day, rather than accept the study day previously approved.

Unita, 36 said: "In the beginning, it was very difficult for me, due to my work time… I was having problems getting the time from work and that really frustrated me." Ellen, 45 stated: "Sometimes it was very hard for me to get to the classes, as I had to work. I did not have the time off work as a study day to go to classes. I had the afternoons off and some days it was a little bit rough for me to get to my class". For Coretta, 50, the issue of staffing, had an even greater impact. She said:"I had to re-sit the whole course as I missed so many sessions the first time round as a result of been short staffed in the department. I enjoyed the course both times, so it wasn't as negative as it could have been."

Within this study, there were only two interviewees who discussed financial barriers; one explaining that she relied on working additional shifts via the bank system to supplement her salary and accessing training meant that she had to refuse shifts offered on the day of the training programme. The other interviewee worked permanent nights and said that as she lived three bus journeys away from work, once she had completed a night shift and a two and a half hours training session, she then took a taxi home which proved to be quite costly.

Positive retentive motivators
The aspiration of the government in the SfL policy is that learners should succeed and that the first step on the ladder of academic success will equip learners with the keys to liberate themselves from poverty. Yet, it is discussed amongst researchers that education can be both liberatory and oppressive. Leathwood and Francis (2006) are amongst those who believe that the focus should not only be on access to education but for the kinds of education that can support emancipatory goals. Mirza (2006) asks critical questions about processes, relationships and power in education from the standpoint of women who are 'rarely seen and heard'.

In investigating the benefits of the course, the study explored the students' pre-induction feelings about training and the factors that contributed to the alleviation of the fears they experienced or anticipated. On a continuum their pre-course feelings ranged from enthusiastic to very scared, the dominant median being fear. This included fear of having their weaknesses exposed to others and fears of

failing again following previous negative adult educational experiences. One of the overwhelmingly consistent realisations which concurs with the findings of Finlay *et al.* (2007) that brought consolation to those interviewed was identifying that all those on the programme were 'in the same boat'.

Following that, the group dynamics played an important part in interviewees' retention. This was coupled with the fact that interviewees felt that because they shared the issues they found difficult in a 'safe setting' they enjoyed the programmes. This study demonstrated that this group did not feel they could gain most from the experience if they were placed in a group with youngsters of their children's age. Cora Lee, 51 stated: "It helped me to gain confidence, working with a group of older women, one of the biggest factors for me was that we were all adults… That the sessions were conducted in a nice friendly atmosphere and we all felt comfortable… it was important to feel comfortable at my age." Beah, 44 shared: "At first, I was frightened, scared, thinking that my weaknesses would come up and everyone would know, so I was panicking about it, until I came to the class and realised that you weren't looked down on and you were supported in the weak areas. That encouraged me and built me and I certainly received strength from my tutor."

Eleven of the sixteen interviewees suggested that the approach of the tutor directly contributed to making the experience a positive one and a catalyst to the alleviation of their pre-induction fears and their retention on the course.

Janet, 56 stated: "The style of the tutor made a world of difference". Others echoed this view Alice, 42 commented: "I felt comfortable in the group and my tutor seemed to have more patience with me, she never made me feel stupid…" Bertha, 54 added: "The tutor was friendly and approachable; she made the course "relaxing and enjoyable". Iffat, 39 said: "one to one with my tutor was helpful. I felt more comfortable that way. I understood things better" *(sic)* Beah, 44 shared: "The positive feedback from my tutors has motivated me; I now know that I am clever."

Alice shared that she had moved on from her tutor's opinion of her skills to developing her own belief. She shared: "I can read. The tutor used to say, you can do it, you can do it, but I couldn't see myself doing it. That was probably why I just couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel. It made me frustrated and vulnerable…

Now I can see for myself that I can do it. It has given me confidence and I can say, look there is hope, I can succeed".

Other factors that contributed to retention included: grasping specific areas within the literacy curriculum such as reading strategies, grammar and punctuation, which they had never previously understood, as well as enjoying the sessions.

For most, the greatest motivation was to achieve, whilst for others, it was gaining new realisations about their skills and abilities and for others still, it was what Leathwood and Francis (2006) described as a challenging or liberating experience.

Was the Skills for Life programme influential in accessing other courses?
Here, the enormity of the question was understood, but the interviewees in the study shared with passion clear positive influences the SfL course had on their future learning aspirations. This question required a level of reflection and there were a range of commonalities in the responses produced.

All the interviewees said that the acquisition of their SfL Literacy and numeracy qualifications had motivated them to proceed onto other educational programmes. Interviewees indicated that the courses had either broadened their scope or created in them a desire to widen their prospects. Ellen shared, "The whole experience has widened my horizon, it has made me want to go on to further education. I now read and write more as part of my preparation for further study." Beah and Bertha were united in their view. They felt that each success motivated them to pursue the next educational challenge, with Beah adding, "I want to keep studying, I don't want to stop now." Coretta said passionately, "The course has developed in me a hunger for learning. I am excited about going on to further study." Cicely believed the course, "Motivated me to take up my nurse training as I have accepted that I can't go any further as a HCA and I should be capable of coping with Uni as I now feel ready." Iffat recalled, "This course has opened my mind, yes I want to continue to improve, to even go back to courses I previously failed."

All the interviewees echoed that confidence was the principal external outcome. It was what others, family, friends and colleagues often commented on, with each interviewee carefully identifying specific areas where they had recognised this confidence development. On an

individual level, some of the significant non work related gains identified included:

"I speak up more at home, I no longer feel scared to talk things through with my husband. I have learnt more about me." (Iffat, 39).

"I read at home (practise) with my husband, I have now finished reading my first book in 42 years, and I am on my second book and loving it. Try stop me reading now." Alice, 42.

Conclusion

The SfL work based programme has provided a positive opportunity for those who for a range of reasons, some beyond their control, did not achieve in secondary education. Neither were they equipped for professions, which required formal qualifications. Their secondary school and in some cases, F.E. educational experiences provided a range of interesting outcomes which would warrant further exploration as I feel that this is an area that has not really been studied and could possibly unearth some interesting recommendations for meeting the need of post-colonial adult learners.

The literature by black feminists has intrigued me and challenged me to look beyond the obvious findings, to seek deeper for what was really happening. These women were not merely stagnant low paid, low skilled workers. Trapped they were, but they were aware that in order to liberate themselves from the trap, they had to plan. However the success of their plan and educational progression was heavily reliant on the educational provider.

Many of these women, I would conclude, have in effect strategically and cooperatively employed a back door entry to further and higher education, self-empowerment and economic liberation. Gaining Skills for Life qualifications was the primary phase of a rather long but hopefully positive and rewarding educational journey. These women not only embarked on the long journey, they also displayed a remarkable sense of discipline, commitment and determination. Utilising the support mechanisms available to them, these women successfully completed SfL courses and just as importantly gained the confidence to believe in themselves.

The interviewees valued being taught by tutors who inspired and motivated them, tutors who demonstrated a genuine concern for the development of their learners and a passion for their subject area.

There were some limitations worth highlighting

at this stage. My initial issue is the inability to estimate the authentic underlying factors that promote positive learning trajectories. Here I need to acknowledge that there are differing motivations for retention on a course, therefore it is difficult to prove categorically whether learners stayed on a course as a result of an underlying predisposition to learn, or did they remain because they had a good experience of learning which created in them a hunger for learning that had to be fulfilled. Secondly, this was an ethnographic case study and for the question on impact the interviewees reported that one of the most positive retentive support factors was the approach of the tutor. Although this could be considered bias, the questions were formulated to ensure that the interviewees were guided towards reflecting on their educational experience. As the finding on this aspect is consistent with other studies, which were conducted by independent researchers, Finlay, *et al.(2007)* I opted to include these as valid in this study.

Recommendations:
Tutors

This case study presented realistic expectations of learners accessing a SfL work based programme. These included:

- Creative methods of teaching / resources.
- Space to share their insecurities doubts and long held 'demons'.
- Flexibility in the approach to programmes.
- To be taught by tutors who inspired and motivated them, tutors who demonstrated a genuine concern for the development of their learners and a passion for their subject area.

Organisations

- As part of the Continuing Professional Development of adult education tutors, work-based programmes should be evaluated in consultation with the learners to ensure that the needs of ethnic minority groups are met.
- Interactive and regular study skills / support sessions should be incorporated into schemes of work in work based SfL programmes, as mature learners often present with under-developed study skills to meet academic standards and sometimes initially lack the confidence to articulate this. They also initially find it reassuring to work with one tutor as this, they found, gave them confidence.
- Further study should be conducted on attitudes and reproduction of learning for B.M.E. women.

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Build up your resources for free by reviewing something for RaPAL
Welcome to our new reviews editor Maxine Burton and thanks to Ellayne Fowler who has just stepped down from this role.

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.

Photos/images wanted for the new cover
Our new cover will have changing images and photographs that represent Rapal, our work and our view of literacies. We need members to send in good quality photographs or images with permission to Bex Ferriday who will manage our journal image library. We will credit any material used.

The Spelling Pack: 21st Century edition: A CPD Resource
The Basic Skills Agency
Leicester: NIACE (2008)
ISBN: 978-1-86201-813-6
£40

Reviewed by Esther Sandercock

Esther Sandercock is an experienced Skills for Life lecturer from the South West, specialising in Literacy. She has recently joined the Learning Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly as the Skills for Life CPD Co-ordinator for projects with LSC ESF Convergence funding.

Having never used the original version of this resource, published in 1988 when I was at school learning how to spell lasagne, I cannot comment on how it has been updated for the 21st Century. However, the inclusion of a CD-ROM must be a modern addition!

The introduction sets out the aim of the pack: to support adults with spelling. As a teacher at an FE college, this is most welcome. Too often spelling resources are inappropriate for adult learners and can bring back memories of stressful times in the classroom at school. The need to teach spelling in vocational contexts is also acknowledged and, although this is a general resource, some vocational spelling lists are provided and further sources of information are signposted.

Professional development starts right at the beginning of the pack with sections on 'Spelling and the Individual' and 'What teachers need to know about spelling'. These sections are useful both for Literacy specialists and other staff. How can we be expected to support learning if we don't know how to talk about spelling or why English is so troublesome? I'm sure we've all been struck dumb at some point in the classroom by one of those frustrated exclamations of: "But why?!"

There are tasks designed to start a dialogue about spelling, both alone and with colleagues. These sections could be used as group CPD activity for tutors of other subjects who need to support their learners with spelling. There is a table at the end of every section of the pack which provides a practical and focused structure for reflection. As anyone on a teaching training course will know, reflection is the key to professional development!

The subsequent sections of the Spelling Pack cover writing and error correction, spelling strategies and the use of other resources such as dictionaries and ICT. Each section is clearly written and has useful colour coding to show activities, links to the CD-ROM and further resources. As with the introduction and the first two sections, practical advice is included about how to work with learners and improve your own spelling teaching skills.

I particularly liked the writing section as this can be a sticking point for learners with low confidence. Tasks are suggested which gradually build up the writing process through planning to proofreading.

Differentiation is also covered in the Spelling Pack. An overview of the activities in the pack is given in the Introduction with references to the corresponding sections of the Adult Literacy Curriculum. This enables planning of tasks to build skills from Entry Level to Level 2. Lots of different spelling strategies are given which caters for the fact that we all learn in different ways and 'look, say, cover, write, check' doesn't work for everyone.

The CD-ROM is easy to use and has a main menu that can be easily returned to at any point. Printable versions of the tasks in the Spelling Pack are given, along with a glossary of terms and links to further information. The handy disk has some added extras: Toolkits for teachers and learners with additional spelling related tasks. For those with learners who do like the 'look, say, cover, write, check' method, the tool on the CD-ROM could be very useful. You can set the skill level, write your own spelling lists and chose particular letter blends to work on. This tool can be used on screen, useful for one to one learning, and the printable versions are more practical for larger groups.

To sum up, I would recommend the Spelling Pack for anyone who is supporting learners with their spelling for the first time or embedded within their own subject. There are lots of developmental tasks for teachers and learners alike. As a Literacy subject specialist, I also enjoyed using this resource. It made me address my own attitudes to spelling and their impact on my learners. It also proved a good source of inspiration when planning new ways to build spelling skills with my adult learners.

■■ Writing Guidelines ■■■■■■■ RaPAL

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.
4. Where work is not accepted the editor/s may suggest more relevant or alternative places for publication.

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

RaPAL Journal 2009/2010

Editors, themes and deadlines

Edition	Theme	Deadline	Editors
Summer	Changing landscapes of literacy and language learning	End of July	Shelley Tracey and Nora Hughes
Winter	Conference edition	End of September	Amy Burgess, Rachel Stubbley and Gaye Houghton

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