Volume No. 70   Winter 2009 / 2010

RaPAL

Changing Landscapes of Literacy and Learning

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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The Editorial Group for 2009-2010 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner researchers: Yvon Appleby, Sue Bates, Amy Burgess, Maxine Burton, Ellayne Fowler, Tara Furlong, Mary Hamilton, Kieran Harrington, Gaye Houghton, Fiona Macdonald, Colleen Molloy, Bex Ferriday, Carol Azumah Dennis, Julie Meredith and Sarah Rennie. Overseas members of the Editorial Group include: Jean Searle, Rosie Wickert, Stephen Black, Australia; Mary Norton, Bonnie Soroke, Sheila Stewart, Canada; Janet Isserlis, Elsa Auerbach, Steve Reder, USA; and Cathy Kell, New Zealand

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 this issue of the journal. We come to our role as editors of this issue as literacy practitioners and tutor educators. While we work in different parts of the UK, London and Northern Ireland, many of the issues for our practice and those of our students and colleagues are similar. We hope in this journal to capture a variety of perspectives on the current landscapes for literacy learning, practice and research, and we believe that the responses which are presented in this edition demonstrate the changing contexts for our work, as well as those aspects which never change: the commitment of practitioners and learners to the learning process.

The introductory piece, **Changing Landscapes of Literacy**, represents the views of ten people, nine literacy professionals and one former learner, who sent us personal responses to a short questionnaire in which we asked people to describe and reflect on the way in which the changes had impacted on them directly. These contributions range from brief pithy comments to full personal accounts in poetry and prose.

Apart from this composite piece, the journal is similar to previous ones in style and structure. However, we noticed that there is more of a focus on male learners than usual. While this may be coincidental, we hope it represents to some extent the presence of learners in literacy programmes who have previously not been represented. The theme of inclusion emerges as well in a number of articles by practitioners: in Lorrane Borwick and Nick Shepherd's case study of effective learning for adults with learning disabilities, and, on a similar theme, Sue Cathcart's article on the experiences of two disabled learners in Belfast; in Kathy Martin's paper on young people's perspectives on swearing; in Anne Curran's story about the Northern Ireland Learner of the Year; and in Angela Tobin's article, "Critical reading and the Entry Level learner".

Section 1 has a strong focus on learning and teaching. Johnny Crossan and John Kerr describe their experiences of prison education, their achievements and aspirations. Anne Curran tells the story of an *Adult Learner of the Year* award winner and the strategies and approaches that she and the learner developed together. Sue Cathcart presents the experiences of Alan and Derek, two disabled learners from Belfast, in seeking help with learning to read and write.

Section 2 Angela Tobin explores the development of 'critical reading' skills with inexperienced readers and writers, challenging the notion that critical literacy is only for 'higher' level learners. Lorrane Borwick and Nick Shepherd explain how they applied their learning from an action research project to enhancing their practice. Finally Sue McCulloch and Marie Kerwin with Yvon Appleby discuss current issues concerning

provision and take up of professional qualifications for literacy, language and numeracy teachers

Section 3 begins with a critical investigation by Azumah Dennis of the concept of 'quality', and continues with Kathy Martin's paper on swearing. The final paper in this section is Dorothy McIntyre's autoethnographic exploration of a current area of interest in the landscapes of practice and learning, that of behaviour management.

We are aware that there is very little reference in this journal to one of the most prominent features of the landscape of current learning: the impact of new technologies on learning, practice and research. This theme, however, will be the focus of a future edition.

We end with our observation that although there have been many changes in the landscape of literacy education, the articles in this journal demonstrate that some things never alter: learners remain committed to learning and practitioners to exploring ways of enhancing the experiences through which they achieve this.

Please note that the views expressed by individual contributors to the journal do not necessarily reflect those of RaPAL.

Nora Hughes, Institute of Education, London
Shelley Tracey, Queen's University, Belfast

Note: **Curriculum frameworks in England, Wales and Northern Ireland: some terminology appearing in this issue of RaPAL Journal**

Skills for Life refers to the current UK government strategy for adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) in England and Wales. **Essential Skills for Living** is the equivalent strategy for LLN in Northern Ireland.
England, Wales and Northern Ireland share a common 'core curriculum' for Literacy. [1] In this issue of the journal, a number of contributors make references to 'levels' of the curriculum at which learners are deemed to be operating and which form the basis of referrals, course planning and assessment. Learners are considered to be working at five levels: Entry Levels One to Three, and Levels One and Two. Entry Level One learners might generally be understood as beginners in reading and writing, while Level Two learners are working at a level which is regarded as equivalent to GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education), which school students take in their final year of compulsory education at age 16.

For an overview of the Literacy curriculum levels see pages 16-17 of National Standards for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ICT (DfES 2005).
www.qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/14130_national_standards_for_adult_literacy_numeracy_ict.pdf
(Last accessed 19/01/10)
There is also an Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework for Literacy and Numeracy – see
www.dcsf.gov.uk/curriculum_preentry/level/m1a/
(Last accessed 19/01/10)

[1]: *Scotland has a separate strategy and curriculum framework - see Adult Literacies Online (ALO) www.aloscotland.com/alo/38.html (Last accessed 19/01/10)*

Changing Landscapes of Literacy

This section represents the views of ten people, nine literacy professionals and one former learner, who sent us responses to a questionnaire in which we asked people to describe how changes in the 'landscape' of literacy had impacted on them directly. The contributions range from brief pithy comments to full personal accounts. For most of the contributors, there have been changes in government strategy for Literacy and ESOL which have raised significant issues for them as teachers or learners. The responses capture the impact of the changes on their roles and identities. Some of the contributors refer to the impact of funding mechanisms on the provision of learning and on engagement and progression.

Who we are and our experience in the field

SPENT 10 YEARS AS A TUTOR/CO ORDINATOR. FOR THE PAST 4 YEARS I'VE BEEN A RESEARCHER.

7 YEARS' EXPERIENCE

7 YRS FROM NEW SKILLS FOR LIFE TUTOR TO FAMILY LEARNING CO—ORDINATOR

TUTOR, MANAGER AND TRAINER SINCE 1975

I'VE BEEN A LITERACY TUTOR FOR FOUR YEARS

BEEN INVOLVED FOR 20 YEARS

'Started as a volunteer in Edinburgh, Edinburgh City Council Adult Basic Education - in 1999- worked there for a year as a volunteer, then taught EFL in Moscow for a year before coming to London in 2002 – where I had the amazing good luck to get a job as an adult literacy teacher at City and Islington College - and a place on a Stage 2 Literacy teaching qual. That led to the PGCE at the Institute of Education - which led to some work here on adult literacy teacher training and so now I'm full time at the IOE, partly working on adult literacy teacher education (and part generic), and do one evening a week adult literacy teaching. A lovely life!'

CHANGING LANDSCAPES
OF LITERACY

'Big changes in funding/qualifications/environment from Edinburgh 1999 to London 2002. In Edinburgh I knew I'd found the job I wanted to do, but there were very, very few paid jobs and even fewer full time. When I arrived in London in 2002 there were jobs and courses - a boom time - so it was comparatively easy to fall into a career. But there were other differences- in Edinburgh we did numeracy and literacy in the same class, and worked from the learners- no curriculum or external qualifications or inspections - was a great way to start - that will always stay with me - making it a bit easier to try to ignore or adapt the external things flying at us in England from Skills for Life.'

CHANGING LANDSCAPES
OF LITERACY

'Started in 1981: from volunteering in local adult literacy scheme, to paid teaching in the community, to part-time county staff development training, to editing and training in vocational 'basic skills', to writing adult literacy software, to advising on skills in local, regional, national and European projects, to assessing and verifying adult literacy teacher qualifications, to managing a Skills for Life professional development centre, to training adult literacy teacher-trainers, to operating national CPD research and development projects at NRDC, and now back to volunteering (as Treasurer of RaPAL).'

Careful balancing act. Always the case with activity that should be generously publicly funded but rarely is.
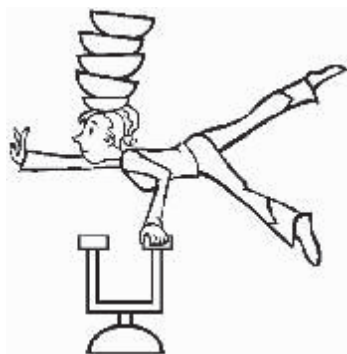
Computer- generated virtual world designed by learners...
We've moved from offering guided walks on a variety of routes to expecting everyone to complete the 110m hurdles (without St John Ambulance in attendance).

Crossing a desert with fewer trusty camels and oases and possibly a mirage now and then.

The Skills for Life strategy may reach its targets but miss the point .

I sometimes feel as if I'm walking in the hills. I know where I want to go and I have a map (my ideas about how literacy policy, practice and research should be, and my plan for my own career), but sometimes the landscape doesn't seem to bear much resemblance to what's on the map. Also, the view keeps changing as the 'mists' of new policy announcements come down and then 'clear' as we work out what they mean and how we will adapt to them.

It feels uncertain and I'm worried that entry level adult literacy work is being more and more forgotten as attention focuses more and more to higher level brushing up or study skills style courses- which of course are important - but what about those who need help in learning to read and write? I'm also worried that more and more areas of life are demanding quite high literacy skills- for example job applications for jobs that don't actually require much literacy - and literacy is being used – even more than before- as a way to keep people out or down.

The changes we have experienced and their impact

Introduction of RARPA and the process by which learners have greater involvement in setting targets and achieving them.

The counting of multiple choice tests as achievement.

I see the biggest change as the compression of time. Undeniably, some students enrol with the aim of getting a specific qualification as quickly as possible. But most don't. Most come to learn, and learning takes time. Sadly, it's time we don't have. The stopwatch is ticking: our goal is to get students in and out of the door within a term. What does this mean for me? Choices: train as a coach or subvert from within. You'll find me at the Job Centre when I don't meet my 'performance' targets!

The main changes since the 1980s are higher level peer-reviewed research on lifelong learning (including literacy learning) and a much deeper level of professional discourse amongst practitioners in various roles. Both continue to have their problems but both will have long term benefits for learners.

Massive changes since the introduction of Skills for Life. I was a tutor when it was introduced and adult literacy seemed to go from the bottom to the top of the political agenda in a very short time.   Since then the pace of change seems to have intensified and it's not always easy to keep up. The introduction of Skills for Life and the NRDC did seem to offer more opportunities for research, but this seems to be changing now. Sadly, but not surprisingly, it seems that policy makers have realised that adult literacy can't be dealt with by 'quick fixes' so their attention has moved on to other things. The future feels quite uncertain: how will the recession affect policy and funding for adult literacy? What will happen after the general election next year?

Short term funding with targets. This impacted on all those involved and made it even harder to reach the 'hard to reach' e.g. working with people who were homeless.

Disappointment
Disappointment is black like a thundery sky
when God is angry.
It tastes like fungus.
It smells like pigs' insides.
It looks like a balloon that blew away into the sky.
It sounds like nagging women arguing.
It feels like I'm fidgety, restless, irritable, lost.

I wrote this poem on the last day
in my Entry 2 English class.
I can't come back because I don't
want to do the test.
I feel disappointed that people don't
understand me.
They don't understand how I feel about tests.
They want to get rid of me.
I'm not good enough.
I'm crying.

By TS (A former learner, London)

How long have you been involved in literacy and in what capacity?
I have been a literacy teacher since 1988, during which time I have worked for Community Education in Lewisham, for a special Literacy / ESOL project in Tower Hamlets (Language 2000) and for Tower Hamlets College Literacy and Teacher Training Departments. I have been hourly-paid, full-time and fractional at various points throughout this period.

For the last ten years I have been a Literacy Teacher Trainer at Tower Hamlets College.

Can you describe one of the changes which you have experienced in terms of policy / practice / learners and how this has impacted on you?
The most significant change for me during this 20-year period was the introduction of the Literacy Core Curriculum and the Skills for Life Strategy which brought with it a standardisation of the curriculum, of teaching strategies and of teacher training together with additional funding to implement the changes.

The pluses have been numerous:

- stronger sense of professionalism in the field

- validation and recognition of an area of teaching and learning that had been low profile and under-valued

- codification and wider understanding of the literacy skills to be learnt and taught

- clearer progression path for learners

- accreditation which recognises achievement and has currency in the wider world

- levels of funding to enable teachers to be trained to the required professional standard and a movement towards more standardisation of teacher training

The minuses have also been evident, however:

- the curriculum can be interpreted rigidly, literacy skills de-contextualised and presented as a set of mechanical functions to be taught and learnt, taking the joy, pleasure, choice and purpose out of reading and writing

- learners seeing themselves and being labelled by others as being at a specific level dictated by the curriculum when in fact the picture is much more complicated and learners should not be restricted to learning certain skills because they are supposedly working at a specific level

- attendance, accreditation and progression as demonstrated by achievement at (and movement through) the levels being linked to funding causing undue pressure on teachers and learners to 'achieve' and suggesting that teaching and learning can only be evaluated by counting. (Many students with learning difficulties may be 'stuck' at a level and may not 'achieve' in these narrow terms – teachers can be criticised (and even threatened with redundancy) for 'lack of success' which may lead to learning opportunities being restricted for these learners in future).

Can you think of a metaphor for the current landscape?
I feel a bit as if I have been taking part a chariot race (think Ben Hur), confidently and energetically heading onwards and upwards, but have recently begun to notice that wheels are beginning to come off all around me (mine included!)

I am an ESOL tutor, and have been particularly involved in working with students in ESOL classes who are beginning readers and writers. I have worked with older women students, younger learners – all learners who didn't have access to formal education when they were young and are developing confidence in their literacy now.

I work in a college where we have had a long tradition of fighting for a culture of student centred learning, vigorously challenging government initiatives which endanger this, and developing alternative activities and strategies. One of these initiatives was the introduction of targets, linked to exams; this has been one of the most negative. Assessment is part of learning; through on-going discussions, self, peer and tutor feedback and formative assessment activities, as learners we can recognise the understanding and skills we have developed, and be inspired to think about where we want to go next and to work towards it. Without these discussions we cannot.

Last year I worked with a group of multilingual adults who were at an early stage of learning of read, write and speak in English. They spent a year working on their stories - about important people in their lives, drawing rivers of their lives and writing about them; talking about why reading and writing is important to them, thinking about what made it hard and the strategies they were going to use to support themselves and each other with it; talking and writing about their homes, drawing pictures; reading newspaper articles about inspiring people in their communities; reading about and discussing the impact of colonialism and the slave trade on their lives; talking about their own journeys. They developed their language and became confident readers and writers, authors of their own stories and critics of others' stories.

However, they then had to take a speaking and listening exam. We practised for the exam – probably not enough but I had to make a choice between preparing for the exam and actually engaging honestly with the students about learning language. The exam questions were 'tricky' and the students were too honest; they did try and play the game but couldn't. The topics didn't relate to their lives and didn't give them scope to show their real strengths, humour, generosity, ideas and skills.

What is really problematic is that the exam labelled some of them as failures, when in fact they are truly inspirational. They have made so much progress and see themselves as successes. In their course review the group used this 'washing line' to depict their learning and reflect on it together, giving and receiving feedback and getting credit for what they had achieved:
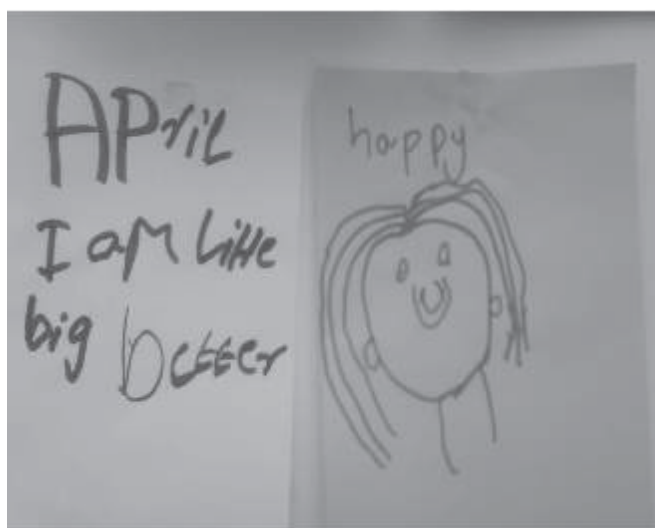
More broadly, the learner centred culture of the college appears to be under threat. 'Quality' is now defined as students passing exams and government targets being met. This shows a profound lack of understanding of what really supports learning. So the battle is now on – for a culture of respect and learning, a view of education as broad and empowering, and courage on the part of adult education providers to question and challenge government initiatives which prevent this.

Learning Inside
John Kerr

The stories of two men who are currently serving sentences in a prison in Northern Ireland

Walking into the prison cell, I thought my life was over. I watched other lifers. How were they getting their time in? I started to take things that made it easier. It just made it harder. I kept getting caught. The solitary confinement wasn't worth it. I bought a Play station and vegetated. Three years passed but I didn't feel fulfilled. Learning Mechanical Engineering didn't help. I started to notice the call for Education every morning. I knew I needed to go there.

A teacher asked me to write an essay about something I liked, to see what level I was working at. I wrote about the history of Liverpool. The teacher told me the essay was of 'A' level class. That little bit of praise lifted me. I didn't feel as worthless anymore. I could achieve something. The teachers told me about the Open University and how the Education Department would cover the costs. I started to think about being released for the first time. If I went home with a degree I might have a future after all. The teachers told me I would have to prove I could study in prison first. Everyone else had had to take a GCSE course to be eligible for OU. Because of my essay it was decided I could take a quick City & Guilds course in English. I passed and I was ready for the OU.

A year later I had my first third-level award, a certificate in Social Sciences. I didn't like the course, though, and I lost my way a little. I had been taking computer classes and had just gained my European Computer Driver Licence. I switched my degree to computer programming. I lost a year. I couldn't get the internet access in prison that I needed. I knew what I had been avoiding, though, and decided then that I had to tackle it head on.

At school, I had been top of my year in English Literature, but by the time the final exams came around, I had discovered alcohol and girls. I let myself down. I just passed. I knew I had regretted my underachievement in a course I had loved ever since and I knew also that I was scared of failing again. I switched to English Literature though, and my grades rose instantly. I also started to help other prisoners with their grammar and writing around this time. A couple of years later I had a diploma. When Creative

Writing was introduced to the curriculum, I discovered a love of story-telling that I had long forgotten. As well as gaining a diploma in Creative Writing, I submitted some of the short stories to the Listowel Writing Festival. I have won in the 'Writing in Prisons' sections for three years in a row.

At the same time as developing my skills as a writer, I have been helping fellow prisoners with their learning. In 2001, I began to act as a peer tutor in a computer class when the instructor was busy or absent from the class. I helped other prisoners who didn't have the computer knowledge that I had. I helped them solve problems with databases and spreadsheets, for example. Since 2003, I have been assisting fellow Open University student prisoners who had problems with grammar or structuring their work. Students would give me their drafts, and I would sit with them, showing them what they needed to work on and how to do it properly. After a while their work needed less and less amending as the students retained what I had shown them. I also helped them understand difficult assignment questions, and where to look in set books for the relevant answers.

In 2007, I began to assist another prisoner with Creative Writing course, as we were taking the course simultaneously. He would give me a draft of his work, a short story or film script and I would help him structure his pieces, present it properly, help with his grammar, and carefully show him how to develop each aspect of his writing. He was able to take the advice on board and by the end of the course was able to amend most of his work himself. In the same year, I tutored a prisoner through his Toe by Toe book (phonics). I helped him begin to read and write and understand sentence structure. This is the most rewarding thing I have ever done.

Now, with a degree, I look forward to the next challenge eagerly. After realising I enjoy tutoring other prisoners, and getting pleasure from their growth, I am hoping to gain teaching qualifications to help other adults achieve what I have. I am also considering a Masters course with the OU, because I now know that I have a future after all.

Johnny Crossan

I first came to prison when I was convicted of murder in 1997. In the beginning I felt worthless and alone. I had ruined the lives of my victim's family as well as my own. Gradually I knuckled down to the harsh reality of 'doing' Life. The years stretched out before me and I knew I needed something to occupy the long hours I spent alone in my prison cell. I had no educational qualifications prior to coming to prison, so I decided to use the time to educate myself.

I enrolled for literacy classes with the Prison Education Department. I had an excellent teacher and with her help I managed to pass English Language Stages 1 and 2. Then I went on to study GCSE English, coincidentally, at the same time as my 14-year-old daughter. Studying the same books gave us something in common to talk about over the phone and on visits. This helped to keep our relationship strong despite our separation. We used to joke about which one of us would get the highest grade. We both got As. After completing a GCSE under prison conditions I was eligible to apply for a foundation course with the Open University, and my daughter went on to study for her A Levels.

I became hooked on studying with the Open University (OU). Around the time I received my first university diploma, my daughter began to study medicine at Queen's University Belfast, and we started to compete to see who'd get the best university grades. The good results I achieved drove me on to achieve more. Education gave me a sense of purpose and self-respect that I had lost since coming to prison, and I found my time melting away. In 2004 I graduated with a first class degree in the Social Sciences from the Open University. The Prison Education Department managed to scrape together the resources to fund my Master's degree and I was able to continue my studies.

Other prisoners in the cellblock began to look to me for advice and help with their education courses. Word spread to other cellblocks and before long I had around a dozen OU students coming to me for help on a regular basis. In turn, these students helped others and soon, without realizing it at the time, we had set up a culture of self-help for prisoners studying at all levels of ability. The Education Department recognized the benefits of this type of peer-to-peer learning and established an OU support group.

Seeing others prisoners with no educational qualifications coming to realize their potential gave me a great deal of personal satisfaction and I knew that I wanted to be a teacher. Various members of the Education Department tried to find me some sort of qualification for the unofficial teaching hours I invested, but it seemed that no such accreditation existed at that time.

In 2008 I achieved a distinction in my Master's degree with the Open University. I am currently conducting doctoral research into the effects of institutionalization on long-term prisoners, as seen from an insider's perspective. My daughter and I still compete over our educational achievements. She recently graduated as a dental surgeon and is quick to point out that I'll only ever be a doctor in theory and not a 'real' doctor like her. She wins. However, I know that my educational qualifications have given her a reason to be proud of me.

I have also worked to develop my creative writing skills with the help of the author, Carlo Gebler, who visits the prison on a weekly basis. I have since won several literary prizes and I've had a number of articles published in books and magazines. The Prison Arts Foundation is also staging one of my short stories as a play, which was performed in the prison late last year. It seems that education has opened up all kinds of possibilities for me and I owe a huge debt to the educators at the prison for giving me the chance to turn my life around.

My first parole hearing is coming up before Christmas 2009, which means I will be eligible for the pre-release scheme some time in 2010. I am anxious about what I will do for a living on the outside. The Head of Essential Skills (adult literacy and numeracy) in the prison is presently trying to find a way to train another prisoner and me as teachers of Essential Skills in prison. I am thrilled about this opportunity to receive some formal teacher training prior to release. I plan to build on this experience and perhaps find a teaching position on the outside, and at the same time finish my doctoral research. I know that life is never easy for ex-prisoners in the outside world, but education has given me hope in the future.

William Stewart, Essential Skills Learner of the Year, Northern Ireland

Anne Curran

Anne Curran is a full-time literacy lecturer at South Eastern Regional College in Northern Ireland. She has a particular interest in Reading difficulty / disability. She is a member of the Reading Reform Foundation, a non-profit-making organisation founded by educators and researchers concerned about low levels of functional literacy rates among children and adults in the English-speaking world.

William Stewart was recently presented with the Country Antrim and Northern Ireland Essential Skills Learner of the Year Award 2009 at the Department for Employment and Learning's Essential Skills Award Ceremony at Hillsborough Castle, Northern Ireland for learning to read and write at the age of 54. Two other members of his adult literacy class, Lorna Jordan and Paul Vahi, were also highly commended for progress in reading. They learned to read using Synthetic Phonics methodology.

When William first began his Essential Skills Literacy class he could not read a single word and frequently misspelled his name. Dyslexia was suspected and William was sent to the college's Educational Psychologist for assessment. To his relief, a diagnosis of dyslexia was confirmed. Until then, William believed his lack of reading skills was somehow his fault. He now knows that is not the case. Initially he saw his inability to read as a consequence of his behaviour (which he described as 'dire … I was a little git') rather than seeing his behaviour as a consequence of his inability to make sense of the learning environment.

When William failed to learn to read at school he began to feel stupid and ashamed. When a child does not learn to read they are faced with that shame every day and it cannot be hidden from the other children in the class. Everyone knows: his/her shame is public. This shame may cause the child to suffer extreme and prolonged emotional damage.

Donald Nathanson (Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behaviour at Jefferson Medical College) uses the term 'cognitive shock' to describe what happens when a child does not learn to read (Nathanson 1994). The child knows that something is wrong. He/she looks around the class. Everyone else is learning to read, so there must be something wrong with him/her and soon everyone in the class will know. This shame causes in the child a 'cognitive shock,' which Nathanson likens to post traumatic stress disorder, and makes it extremely difficult

and unlikely that the child will learn. The child freezes when faced with the written word. More ominously still, he/she is terrified even at the thought.

As Reid Lyon (former director of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development) points out, the ability to read is viewed by other children as a proxy for how clever you are and unfortunately many teachers hold similar beliefs. So the child who doesn't learn to read is often viewed by the teacher and almost always by his peers as a stupid child.

> *'The business of being unable to decipher what is on the printed page has huge consequences for a child's self-esteem. That is the child's general concept of who he or she is and has huge consequences for how we see ourselves relative to our peers and forces us to defend against this bad feeling in a number of ways that I call the Compass of Shame' (Donald Nathanson – Children of the Code interview).*

William's defence mechanism was to misbehave; this is the most common defence used especially by boys. If a child is given the choice between appearing stupid or bad', they will choose 'bad' every time.

William blamed himself for not learning to read but it wasn't his fault. As Reid Lyon puts it 'Learning to read will be the most difficult thing that some children will ever do at school.' (Reid Lyon – Children of the Code interview)

Unfortunately when William was at school there was a belief among educators and teachers that learning to read was a completely natural process and all that the teacher had to do was provide a literacy rich environment for the child to learn to read in much the same way that babies acquire language.

To add to William's woes he had dyslexia which was not diagnosed until 18 months ago when he was 54. As far as this diagnosis of dyslexia is

concerned, William's is not an unusual case. 'Report of the Task Group on Dyslexia' (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2002) acknowledges the massive under diagnosis of children who are dyslexic and slip through the net.

William meanwhile was not managing well at school. When you do not learn to read you are excluded from the educational process and that is what happened to William. William's mother saw what was happening and told him, 'William, you are not doing well at school. If you want to get a job and keep a job you will need to be a really hard worker.' And that is how William got a job and that is how he kept his job. He has never been unemployed in over forty years.

William developed a strong work ethic as compensation for not being able to read. He told me that he was terrified of ever being unemployed as he couldn't read or fill in any of the forms at the unemployment office and then everyone would know that he could not read or write.

Over the years William devised numerous strategies to hide his inability to read. He was never sure which bus to catch so he always checked to see if any of his neighbours were in the queue – and he would follow them onto the bus. He brought a paper to work and pretended to read it. When he was asked to read something, he had always conveniently forgotten his glasses.

William had tried other literacy classes and other methods and had failed to learn to read. This time he was taught using a Synthetic Phonics methodology and is now reading. The Synthetic Phonics programme teaches the 44 sounds (phonemes) of the alphabetic code and the graphemes (letters or groups of letters) that represent these sounds. Learners are taught to blend or synthesize these sounds to make words. Once the learner is taught even a few sound-symbol correspondences, she/he begins to read words and sentences.

This learning is reinforced by the use of decodable texts which include only words made up from the correspondences that the learner has been taught. The learner then progresses to authentic texts. Unfortunately, there has been a widespread belief that phonics is only for children. Anyone who works with adults knows that whatever approach you use the process must be handled with sensitivity and empathy. Synthetic Phonics is a way to teach reading that

can work for all age groups, as some recent research suggests. William Stewart, the winner of the Essential Skills Learner of the Year Award, is an excellent example of the effectiveness of the method.

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Lack of access to literacy provision and its impact on the literacy identities of pre-Entry learners: a case study
Sue Cathcart

Sue Cathcart has been a literacy tutor in Northern Ireland for six years, and is currently working as a literacy and creative arts tutor for the WEA and Belfast Metropolitan College. She is member of the course team on the tutor qualifications programme at Queen's University Belfast. Sue is a member of an arts and crafts collective called Space Craft, and she participates in festivals and runs arts and crafts workshops. Sue's website, Mr. Papers (www.mr-papers.com), features a cartoon rabbit with controversial ideas. This rabbit emerged from an activity with one of her literacy classes.

In October 2008, I became involved in offering literacy support of two hours a week to two disabled men over the age of fifty in a community centre in Belfast. The Centre Manager had tried to access provision from a variety of places, but there was no one-to-one support available. The only funded classes were for groups in an FE setting. The two learners, who are wheelchair users, would have to travel to unfamiliar areas at their own expense and enter large and imposing buildings to sit amongst a group of fellow learners, who would be expected to be at least at Entry Level 1. The manager of the community centre, expressing his frustration at the situation, said, 'these learners need time and space to develop on their own. At their age and with their disabilities, this has to be a necessary pre- requisite to improving their literacy skills.'

As a result of their interrupted and inadequate schooling, Alan and Derek are both well below Entry Level for reading and writing. The national adult literacy core curriculum, used in Further Education institutions in Northern Ireland, is not suitable for pre Entry learners as it assumes that the learner has a basic ability to read and write. As a community tutor for the WEA (Workers' Educational Association), I have had experience of students who are below Entry Level in a literacy class. I have found this to be a near impossible situation as the typical pre-entry Level learner needs a huge amount of help and encouragement. You are torn between their needs and those of the rest of the class. The outcome is never satisfactory, and leads to general disgruntlement and resentment from the rest of the class and frustration and stalling of engagement by the pre-Entry learner.

A requirement for accessing funding from the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland for adult literacy and numeracy classes is that the learner obtains a qualification at the end. As Alan and Derek's low Level of literacy skills would have prevented them from demonstrating progress and completing an exam at the end of the study, the providing body would be unable to claim full funding for them. Alan and Derek would have to take the Entry Level exam, which they would inevitably fail. This failure would technically render them ineligible from enrolling again on a course and they would therefore be excluded.

Motivation for learning
When the local Post Office closed, Alan and Derek lost their literacy support. The staff in this Post Office had always read their letters for them and assisted them with form filling and other requirements. When the Post Office was relocated to a nearby branch of TESCO, the staff there indicated that they were unable to read Alan and Derek's letters because of their policy of confidentiality. The desire to be able to read their own letters was the impetus for the two men to seek a literacy class.

When I first started to work with Alan and Derek, the idea was that I would teach them together for the full two hours; however, after assessment and in consultation with both of them, I decided that the time would be best used for two one hour sessions. Alan and Derek both needed a good deal of support and encouragement and giving them one hour of my undivided attention and totally centring the session on their learning needs seemed to be the best way forward. We occasionally have meetings together to decide on a particular course of action that affects them both, like computer classes or forming an action group, and we also include the centre manager in this.

Learner Profiles

Alan
Alan is in his late 50s, and used to work in a bakery. He lives alone. Alan has mild learning difficulties and uses a manual wheelchair. His hands shake, because of muscle problems and therefore writing is very difficult, Alan's speech

can also be indistinct. Alan went to what he refers to as a 'backward school', where he says he wasted his time and did not learn anything as he was sat at the back because he was not 'up to standard'.

When I first met Alan he seemed quite disillusioned with life. Although he had been awarded an MBE for charity work, he felt that as a disabled person he was a second class citizen. He feels that his voice is not heard or it is heard and is then dismissed. In his own words; 'most people are talk and no action, they say they will do something to help but they never do'. He is frustrated by his lack of power in society and his poor literacy skills make this worse. Alan told me that he buys the newspaper everyday and tries to read it so that he can be like everybody else. In fact Alan's literacy is not as poor as he believes; it is this perception which holds him back and causes his low self-esteem.

I discovered from the assessment that Alan was below Entry Level for reading and did not write at all, apart from his name. He was able to read quite complex words which were familiar to him such as 'disability', but got stuck over simple words and sounds such as 'that' or 'then'. Alan was unfamiliar with the concept of vowels and vowel sounds. Alan is a very able speaker, and he enjoys conversation and can put forward a reasoned argument on a variety of subjects. His vocabulary is wide though he is conscious that sometimes his speech can be indistinct and this makes him dislike speaking on the phone.

Derek
Derek is in his late 40s. He was educated at the Fleming Fulton School for pupils with disabilities; he enjoyed his time at school very much. Derek has some learning difficulties and his health is quite poor due to the fact that he had a kidney transplant some years ago. He uses a motorised wheelchair. Derek is a very social person and enjoys local history and photograph. In some ways, his need to improve his literacy is not as great as Alan's, as he lives at home and is helped out by members of the family.

At assessment, I realised that Derek did not know the alphabet or have any phonic awareness that letters corresponded to sounds. He had very good sight knowledge of street and shop names. Derek can write his name, but that is all. Derek is a most able speaker; he enjoys a chat and is interested in local history.

Reflections on the assessment process for pre-Entry learners
The assessments that are used for literacy such as Skillbuilder are of no use with pre Entry learners because, in line with the national curriculum, they assume that learners can read and write. How can you assess someone's literacy if they cannot write? When assessing Alan and Derek I always read material out and acted as scribe.

The one to one interview is most important as it is an opportunity for the learner to tell you about his own literacy, Alan and Derek were both very clear on their abilities and how they wanted the classes to proceed. After speaking with them and taking notes, I used story boards that I had constructed myself, based on their information, (see fig 1). I would look at the story board with the learner and ask them to identify words and letters and tell me a bit about where they lived and their interests so that I could add to the story. It was very important to ask both men directly about their literacy as this allowed me to find suitable material.

I also used a variety of different types of text such as crosswords, newspapers and poetry, to try and gauge understanding. If you look at Alan's acrostic poem, (see fig 2), this can tell you a lot about his use of literacy. You can see that he has a good vocabulary and is imaginative in his choice of words and there is also a meaning in his poem. He did not know some of the sounds that corresponded with the initial letters but was able to think of words that began with those sounds; however, he was unable to spell any of the words.

I have also used the practice Entry Level one paper as an assessment. It is an attractive booklet about the Giant's Causeway, which is relevant to most learners in Northern Ireland, and it has tasks in it which most people can achieve, such as sign and letter recognition that most people can achieve. The most important thing when carrying out an assessment on a pre Entry Level learner is to make sure that there is plenty for them to actually get right! It is too demoralising for someone to sit through an assessment and be told that they have scored poorly.

Learners and Spiky Profiles
I think it is important to think about what is actually being assessed. The curriculum talks about a 'spiky profile', where learners can have different levels in different areas; for instance, their reading may be better than their writing. Alan and Derek's profiles are very spiky; at the outset, they were able to communicate verbally very effectively and their vocabulary was wide, yet neither of them could write. Both of them

could assess a point of view and make a reasoned argument, yet they did not recognise vowels. I have found in my teaching that this uneven distribution of skill is quite normal; I myself probably have a 'spiky profile', yet where the curriculum is concerned it is seen as unusual to have a large discrepancy between skill areas. This therefore makes it very difficult in the assessment process to get the learner to fit into the proper box, Entry Level 1, 2 or 3 or Level 1 or 2. You inevitably end up marking them down or up in some areas, so it becomes an assessment of where they are in relation to being able to pass the final exam.

Working with Alan and Derek: the importance of developing literacy identities
I have worked as a literacy teacher for the WEA for about 6 years now, so am somewhat institutionalised when it comes to literacy provision. I started working with Alan and Derek with the agenda that their learning would follow a straight route rather like the curriculum, ticking off goals as we went along. Their learning would be dictated by their interests and directly relevant to their requirements but would be very structured. I decided that as Derek had no phonic awareness that we would go down the SATPIN route (an approach to teaching phonics), starting with S. This was a complete disaster, similar to me being taught Chinese by looking at one symbol when I have no knowledge or even need to know that language.

I contacted the Essential Skills office at Queen's University Belfast; the suggestion was that I use the Language Experience approach introduce Derek to literacy by using his own words. I knew that Derek was interested in photography, so I asked him to bring in photographs of the surrounding area that he had taken. We then constructed a story board using familiar words around these photos, (see fig 3). This was a great success, and from this point on it suddenly clicked with me that I would have to completely rethink the way that I taught literacy.

The national curriculum places great emphasis on writing and phonic awareness. This is not suitable for beginner learners who need to have time to experience language. The emphasis should therefore be on discussion and reading and the exploration of personal literacy experiences. If for whatever reason a learner has not acquired early year's language skills, usually delivered by a primary care giver, then this cannot be bypassed. The learner must go back to the beginning and explore how literacy works for them. This of course takes time and cannot be measured by curriculum levels or

markers in the national Adult Literacy Core Curriculum.

Derek found that by combining his photographs with his words he could make booklets on his favourite subjects, (see figs 4 and 5). Derek wished his literacy to be expressed as social; he wanted to read his stories to other people; Derek's literacy identity was as a story teller. This would seem like a mammoth task but this was Derek's personal motivation in learning to read and I had to respect that and negotiate a course of learning that would allow Derek to meet his goal but also allow him to gather skills along the way. This in effect meant that the classes were totally learner- led; Derek dictated what would happen in the classes.

In my other literacy classes, although I obviously try to make the learners' needs paramount, the requirements of the curriculum and assessment mean that to all extents and purposes I am teaching to address these. Teaching Derek and Alan required a degree of flexibility, and recognition that they were totally central to the process. They had to find and develop their own forms of literacy. Derek succeeded in his goal and produced two booklets which he read to a variety of groups in the centre. I sat beside him for moral support and prompting, but he did it himself. It was not perfect and it took time and we would not have met many curriculum requirements, but we have met plenty of other ones.

Alan's learning started off in a similar way to Derek's, until the light came on for me. Alan's motivation in improving his skills was the need to be able to express himself properly and to make things happen. Alan was always complaining about things and I suggested that we start to express these complaints in letter form to the appropriate bodies. We began by writing to the roads department about the state of the kerbs in the area; they are in a very bad state of disrepair and hazardous to wheelchair users. Alan's first letter elicited a totally dismissive reply and this in a way was the catalyst Alan needed. He replied with a heartfelt outpouring of righteous anger (see fig 4). The kerb did get fixed and Alan is now adept at reading letters. We use them as a basis for exercises in syllable breakdown and a myriad of other things. Alan's literacy identity turned out to be as an activist, someone who makes things happen and most importantly Alan's voice is now heard where it was not before.

Alan and Derek both had to discover their personal literacy identities and this took some

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time. It required discussion and an exploration of what literacy meant to them. The outcome has been raised self-esteem, and real power added to their literacy identities. One of the most important aspects of the process was the social aspect of o their literacy. Alan and Derek needed to see how their lives could be changed by their literacy actions and how powerful that would be. Derek, having read his story to people, is now known locally as a storyteller. He has been stopped on the street and asked about local history, and he has gained status and satisfaction from this. Alan learnt that his verbal complaints could be related to the written word and were more powerful because they had a planned purpose and expected outcome and were directed at the right person. Alan has made a government body admit that his complaint was valid, and Alan now feels less frustrated.

The use of the language experience approach does not satisfy the requirements for literacy learning in Northern Ireland as it takes too long – learners are usually entitled to a notional 40 hours to achieve each level of the curriculum. The Language Experience Approach is not one-directional. It can stall sometimes or meander in an organic fashion down different alleyways. It requires flexibility and the need to be able to appreciate soft targets and indicators and to teach for the student, not for the needs of business or work or to pass exams.

In the 2009/2010 academic year, things have moved on for Alan and Derek. The centre has organised computer classes and has found funding for a specially adapted keyboard and mouse. Alan has begun to email people and we hope to join with a group called Access in Lisburn to lobby for better facilities for the disabled. Alan has already joined another group called Adapt, which gives advice to public bodies on disabled access. Derek is writing another story and has joined a local history group and we all hope to visit the Folk and Transport Museum. Alan has emailed them to enquire about facilities for disabled visitors!

I have to say that the Morton Centre has been incredibly supportive of the literacy classes, and I am glad that they were successful in finding additional funding for more classes and for computer tuition. It is an important factor in the whole process that Alan and Derek feel comfortable and at ease in this familiar and supportive environment.

Final thoughts

Working with Alan and Derek using literacy for a purpose, for social inclusion and interaction and promoting positive learning identities, has been fulfilling. This leads me to an important question: why should people like Alan and Derek be excluded from learning, and from one to one provision? If this problem is not addressed by policy makers and funders, there will continue to exist an underclass of individuals who have severe problems with literacy but are unable to get help. Alan and Derek's stories remind us that for these individuals, one hour of one to one provision a week can make all the difference in the world.

Fig. 1
MY NAME IS ALAN.
I LIVE ON THE LISBURN ROAD.
I LIKE MOTORBIKES.
I WOULD LIKE TO GO TO A
MOTORBIKE RACE.
MOTORBIKES ARE FAST.
A MOTORBIKE IS FASTER THAN A CAR.

I DO NOT LIKE RAIN.
I DO LIKE THE SUN.
I LIKE BELFAST.
IT RAINS IN BELFAST.

I GO TO THE SHOPS ON
THE LISBURN ROAD.
I GET MILK AND BREAD FROM THE SHOP.
I LIKE TO LOOK AT THE SHOPS ON
THE LISBURN ROAD.
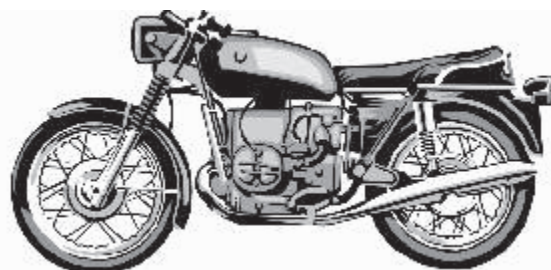
Motorbikes

Motorbikes are made in many different countries.

Japan makes:

Honda

Kawasaki

Suzuki

Yamaha

Canada makes:

Bombardier

Can – Am

Fig 2
Derek, Sue and Alan in front of the
Morton Community Centre, Belfast

Fig. 3
My Story by Derek Thompson

MY NAME IS DEREK.

I LIVE ON THE LISBURN ROAD.
I LIKE TO TAKE PHOTOS OF
THE LISBURN ROAD.
I LOOK FOR A GOOD PICTURE AND
THEN I TAKE THE PHOTO.

B _Whiing igger_
E _xpanding_
L _arge_
F _abulous_
A _great place_
S _afe_
T _errible if you are in a wheelchair._

Be fast in Belfast

Mr Alan Bell MBE
Hydebank   xxxxxxxx xxxx
Xxxxx
Belfast
BTxxxx

Your ref: MT 45738

13 January 2009

Dear Mr xxxx

On the 25th November 2008, I wrote a letter to Hyde Bank Road Services complaining about the kerbs on the Lisburn Road. I said that I felt that the council does not take the issue of pavement access for wheelchair users seriously.

After Christmas, I finally received a reply from a Mr xxx, Network Maintenance Manager, which referred me to you, (a copy of which I enclose).

Mr xxx's reply did nothing to change my view of this matter, he says that there is no problem and that the pavements are regularly inspected and non hazardous. He is therefore in effect saying that I don't know what I am talking about.

I have better things to do with my time than to complain about the pavement. I am a wheelchair user and use this stretch of road everyday and have been stopped again, this week by the police for using the road because I cannot access the pavement. Therefore there is a problem.

I find Mr xxx's letter quite insulting in that it basically dismisses my concerns completely and refuses to admit that there might be something wrong, or does he think I am making it up?

'For your information', I am a key member of the disability charity Cedar Foundation. I have worked hard for good causes for 10 years and received the MBE from Prince Charles in recognition of this work. I am not in the habit of complaining about things that don't exist.

I would therefore like to invite you to meet with myself and Mr xxx, coordinator of the Morton Centre, to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely

Alan Bell MBE

Fig. 4

Critical Reading and the 'Entry Level' Reader
Angela Tobin

I am a Literacy tutor with Haringey Adult Learning Services, a learning provider in Wood Green in North London. I work with adult learners, who range from young people hoping to achieve a literacy qualification in order to advance to further education, training or work, to older learners who want to refresh skills or fill literacy skills gaps caused by disrupted or poor educational experiences. All groups are very diverse in terms of language, ethnicity and skills levels. This article evolved from a set of literacy sessions I ran while exploring critical reading for Entry level learners as part of my Postgraduate Certificate in Adult Literacy Teaching programme at the Institute of Education, London.

Most literacy tutors will recognise the tension between the priority of accreditation and the pursuit of a more individualised approach in current adult learning practices. Many of us would like to develop and encourage reading for pleasure, but there never seems to be enough time to focus on the aspects of literary activity which give us, as practised readers, our greatest joy. *We* like to choose our reading material and we will critically analyse and appreciate the quality, literary value and pleasure of what we read. *We* can participate in the processes between the author and ourselves as readers. *We* can enjoy sharing our reading experience with family, friends and colleagues.

But these are almost totally omitted from our 'Entry Level', Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (DfES 2001) presumably because they involve higher cognitive processes. (See Figure 1) Other than recognising and naming the purpose of a limited selection of texts (e.g. 'this is an information leaflet'), there is little scope for full text appreciation. As expressed by Catherine Wallace (2003, p12) 'there tends to be a preoccupation with micro elements of textual patterning, mainly at word level. Issues of textual variability of style, content or structure are little addressed.'

In Australia in the 1990s a very different approach to reading pedagogy was developed by Peter Freebody and Alan Luke. The Four Resources Model, which was proposed as a framework for a literacy curriculum, stresses text analysis and critical thinking at all levels of literacy. In this model the four 'roles' of a reader – *code breaker*, *meaning-maker*, *text user and text analyst* - are seen as essential and inter-dependent. (Freebody 1992, Freebody & Luke 1990, Luke and Freebody 1999). (See Figure 2)

I share Freebody and Luke's 'profound scepticism toward 'single method' answers to 'the literacy problem'. In my experience, adults attending Entry-level literacy classes often maintain a respect for and a need to 'crack the code' of reading whole books, as much as they wish to punctuate and spell accurately or read and produce a variety of 'functional' texts. Even relatively popular digital literacies, such as text messaging, do not have the same associations as whole books for some learners. Reading a book and responding to it critically can represent 'real literacy skill' in a way that other kinds of literacy activity may not.

The omission of the critical reading of whole texts from our programmes denies learners the pleasure of reading as a social and shared act and promotes a monochrome and one dimensional learning landscape for tutors and learners alike. It has the further long-term effect of keeping learners dependent on being fed resources for sentence and word level processing by a tutor. Seeing and believing themselves independent and critical readers can remain a pipedream.

Background

Before the introduction of Edexcel examinations in my Entry level literacy classes (Edexcel, a private company, is one of England's main examination boards), I set up links with the library in order to encourage learners to choose, borrow and read books from the BBC's RaW (Reading and Writing) campaign (launched in 2009). This evolved into a reading group for emergent readers where I tried to keep the space purely for developing reading skills and critical appreciation of the texts. It was my experience that there was a dramatically positive impact on reading confidence, enjoyment and skill. 'That is the first time I have read a whole book' has been repeated to me on numerous occasions, usually after a learner has completed their first novel from the Quick Reads or First Choice selection.

The reading group offered a discrete route to a mature and individualised journey into reading for pleasure and through it I found that readers expressed opinions on longer narratives coherently and with passion. Issues often arose

around how 'true' something was or how much we 'hated' certain characters. I began by asking questions about why we hated certain characters as portrayed in the books. Who was responsible for us feeling like this about someone we had never met, or who may not even exist? The shift from naive reader to critical thinker was exciting, allowing adults with weaker technical reading skills an opportunity to express opinions and preferences and to reflect their own life experience around a book. This was what I hoped to bring into the literacy class with an Entry 2/3 group. I set aside (it was three months before the introduction of Edexcel) five sessions in which I hoped to develop reading as 'a public and social act as much as individual and private' (Wallace 2003, p5)

The text
Included in the group of twelve were bilingual learners who have lived in England for six years and upwards, native speakers of English (two with specific learning difficulties), learners from the Caribbean who speak and write in part Creole, and African and Asian learners who were educated to varying degrees through English. Such diversity of language, culture and educational background as well as life experience, was bound to guarantee a variety of opinions and fresh perspectives on any text. I had some anxieties about whether this process would highlight the discrepancies in the group levels and might favour the more established readers. This was of great interest to me and I planned to monitor it closely.

Our choice of text, for the purposes of a set of five literacy sessions was 'Chickenfeed' by Minette Walters. We chose it together because:

1. A show of hands established 'true crime' as the most popular genre in the group. Learners referred to true crime on screen rather than in text form.

2. It is one of the 'Quick Read' series aimed at emergent readers. The text is accessible to people with a range of reading skills, so it could be read aloud in class as supported reading and could also be read in private away from class, which ensured that we would have time to complete the novel.

3. It is historical (set in 1920s England), so it allowed us the opportunity to explore changes in perspective, values and social pressures. I intended to use those changes as a way of developing a sense of 'separation' from seeing the text as *true*.

4. It contains good use of everyday, colloquial language and centres round ordinary lives in a family context, usually a good collective starting point. The dialogue is good for looking at how character is developed.

5. It relates to the issue of capital punishment. This issue evokes strong responses in most people and as an issue it resonates across social divide and ethnic grouping. This was the topic for an open class debate on the last session.

The sessions
We began with a shared reading of the first three chapters. Volunteers read aloud and by the second session those reluctant to do so were keen to take a turn. During this part of the session learners were supportive and gentle with each other and willed each other on to progress. I noted a marked improvement in fluency, confidence and phonic awareness across the group and importantly the learners expressed a sense of achievement at braving the 'reading aloud 'hurdle.

The reading was followed by a question and answer and discussion session where I tried to illicit interpretation and opinion rather than just 'facts'. For example, 'who is the main character so far'? Do you like them? Can you say why?' Learners were encouraged to read the next chapter at home and to mark with a post-it note any sections or words they found confusing or difficult, which could be brought up in the next class. This was to encourage reading for meaning and greater engagement at word, sentence and text level but determined by each individual reader.

The text was central to our exploration of adjectives and the power of descriptive writing to affect perspective on character. We liked Norman at first and had difficulty with Elsie. This changed over the course of the novel and we asked why. We asked questions about the author's authority over character development. Could she know these intimate things about these people she had never met? Does this affect our reading of the novel?

We looked at the changing role and status of women in English society since 1925 and learners wrote about which society they would prefer to live in and why. Learners wrote reasoned and well supported answers and used the text as a safe and by now familiar foundation for their work. They wrote letters from the perspective of a chosen character in the book as a way of exploring the author's

power to influence. I noted good cross referencing of vocabulary from the text into the letters.

We ended the five sessions with a structured class debate on capital punishment, arguments written and organised by the learners themselves. One of the challenges set was to argue on the opposite side to how you really felt about the subject. The learners took this difficult challenge to a level I was not expecting and managed to stay convincingly in role for their three minute presentations. Even when opinions were strong the debate never became personal or inappropriate. This showed increased academic detachment and an awareness of the need for considered and backed-up argument.

Reflection
I believe that familiarity with a text, its structure, grammar and narrative helped to incorporate new vocabulary into the lexicon in a more meaningful and holistic way. A few months later a learner referred to her mother-in-law as 'swamping, just like Elsie's character'. She enjoyed making the reference and I noted it as an indication of effective vocabulary building. Her use of 'character' demonstrated her interpretation of a character 'type' being portrayed by the author, and she took this character depiction and made a reference to her own life. To read a novel and be able to ask and answer, 'who does that character remind you of?' must surely be one of the pleasures of reading.

We were free for the duration of these sessions from the need to generate sentence and word level resources, as everything we needed was already contained in the text. We explored spelling, grammatical structure, paragraphing, synonyms, suffixes and prefixes. Presenting exercises on these seemed a natural progression from the reading and required less input from me as tutor than if I had been presenting them purely for the purposes of passing an exam. Learner autonomy in the classroom process ran high over the five sessions.

I had concerns about polarisation between the lower Entry 2 and upper Entry 3 group members and I wanted to see if the omission of critical reading from Entry level programmes was justified pedagogically. On the first letter writing task, two of the Entry level 2 members wrote a summary of the story so far as opposed to the requested 'Write a letter as if you are Elsie or Norman or Norman's dad'. I sat with them

separately and set out clearer instructions, 'Write as if you are.... Imagine you are... How would you feel?' Both learners wrote very moving letters for the next class. One learner wrote as Norman's dad and it ended, 'I am so worried about both of them, such a waste of young lives.' There is a lot of expression in this sentence and it demonstrates an excellent ability to think and write from a new and other perspective, a key to critical thinking.

This 'experiment' with critical reading at Entry level allowed me to get to understand the strengths and areas for development of each learner more clearly. Learners could demonstrate sophisticated and sequential thinking through oral expression, even if they struggled on paper. To be allowed to demonstrate opinion and good reasoning to the whole group actually gave the weaker learners a confidence boost within the group. Strong bonds were built through this exercise and it was clear that the group enjoyed being more at the helm of their own learning.

Conclusion
Peter Goode's assertion that 'a beginner reader is not a beginner thinker' (Goode 1985) resonates strongly: to omit critical thinking from our literacy sessions with Entry Level learners is to deny them the right and power of questioning. I believe that this relatively short foray into the realms of critical reading with learners deemed to be struggling with the higher cognitive skills - whilst also using the text as a springboard for other curriculum based skills - opened learners up to the possibility that their opinions have relevance and that they could and should question the meaning and contexts of the literacies around them. It also demonstrated their competence in doing so and the pleasure they derived from it as adult readers.

David Blunkett, English Education secretary from 1997 to 2001, in writing the introduction to the first Skills for Life strategy document (DfES 2001) had this to say: 'Inertia and fatalism – not least among low-skilled individuals – are our chief enemies. We must be bold and imaginative to overcome them.' What better way to tackle inertia and fatalism, both inside and outside the classroom, than by the empowerment of critical thinking and the motivation of being heard?

Fig. 1

Extract from the *Adult Literacy Core Curriculum for England and Wales*
(DfES 2000)

Below are the text-level elements for Reading at Entry Level 2 (E2) and Entry Level 3 (E3).

Note that critical reading or interpretative skills are not included.

Rt/E2.1: Trace and understand the main events of chronological and instructional texts

Rt/E2.2: Recognise the different purposes of texts at this level.

Rt/E2.3: Identify common sources of information

Rt/E2.4: Use illustrations and captions to locate information

Rt/E3.1: Trace and understand the main events of chronological, continuous descriptive and explanatory texts of more than one paragraph

Rt/E3.3: Recognise and understand the organisational features and typical language of instructional texts, e.g. use of imperatives and second person

Rt/E3.4: Identify the main points and ideas and predict words from context

Rt/E3.5: Understand and use organisational features to locate information, e.g. contents, index, menus

Rt/E3.6: Skim read title, headings and illustrations to decide if material is of interest

Rt/E3.7: Scan texts to locate information

Rt/E3.8: Obtain specific information through detailed reading

Rt/E3.9: Relate an image to print and use it to obtain meaning

Fig. 2.

Extracts from *Further Notes on the Four Resources Model*
(Luke and Freebody 1999)
http://www.readingonline.org/research/lukefreebody.html

The model posits four necessary but not sufficient "roles" for the reader in a postmodern, text-based culture:

- Code breaker (coding competence)
- Meaning maker (semantic competence)
- Text user (pragmatic competence)
- Text critic (critical competence)
- Effective literacy draws on a repertoire of practices that allow learners, as they engage in reading and writing activities, to
- break the code of written texts by recognizing and using fundamental features and architecture, including alphabet, sounds in words, spelling, and structural conventions and patterns;
- participate in understanding and composing meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts, taking into account each text's interior meaning systems in relation to their available knowledge and their experiences of other cultural discourses, texts, and meaning systems;
- use texts functionally by traversing and negotiating the labour and social relations around them -- that is, by knowing about and acting on the different cultural and social functions that various texts perform inside and outside school, and understanding that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality, and their sequence of components;
- critically analyze and transform texts by acting on knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral -- that they represent particular points of views while silencing others and influence people's ideas -- and that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned in novel and hybrid ways.

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Effective Learning for Adults with Learning Disabilities: a case study of practice

Nick Shepherd and Lorrane Borwick

Nick Shepherd is a literacies practitioner who has worked with adults with learning disabilities for ten years. He has recently completed the Teaching Qualification in Adult Literacies (TQAL) course.

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Introduction
In this article we would like to share our learning journey, which was triggered by an action research project entitled 'Effective Learning for Adults with Learning Difficulties' (ELALD) (Hunter and Wilson 2007).

We will talk about the findings of the research, how it impacted on our practice, other sources of inspiration, how we shared all this with other practitioners, and the development plans which have arisen from the experience.

Purpose and findings of the ELALD research

Purpose and approaches used
The Effective Learning for Adults with Learning Difficulties research, based on a social practice approach, explored and sought to develop "…the potential for enhancing literacy learning for adults with learning disabilities by engaging with their systems of support" (ELALD, Summary). The project involved nine Scottish learners with learning disabilities, who had a wide variety of learning needs, ranging from a learner whose goal was to cook independently at home to someone who needed to develop the ability to concentrate on speaking and listening more effectively with a wider range of people. The work of nine literacies tutors in developing ways of engaging with the learners' networks of support was monitored by the research team from Strathclyde University.

A researcher acted as a 'catalyst in encouraging and facilitating meetings between support workers, tutors and carers to establish learning opportunities in the everyday lives' of the learners involved in the project'. Methods used to analyse tutors' approaches included observation, video, interviews and photography.

Findings of the research
The research states that in order to locate learning more effectively for adults with learning disabilities, the following points need to be acted upon:

- Good communication with carers/support workers in establishing the value of literacies in learners' everyday lives
- Resolving issues about learner confidentiality
- Understanding opportunities for learning in the fragmented timetables of some learners' lives
- Adequate support for learners through learning within network of different people
- Sufficient time and funding for tutors to engage effectively with learners and their carers outside their normal situations

A DVD was produced which gives an excellent insight into those involved in the project and the approaches used. (ELALD, Summary)

Our involvement in the research
One of the learners we worked with who participated in the research project received day care support from a council managed social service team and lived with a parent. The key to forming a literacy learning plan for this learner, who was part of a café skills group, was through effective communication between the literacy tutor, support services and family carer.

The tutoring approach, which was monitored and supported by the researchers, used photo learning diaries and symbol/photo-based home work tasks, to enable the learner to show her support network what she was doing in the group and help them build up her skills outside.

Regular contact was maintained with the learner's carer and social care support about what was happening and how learning could be further developed. As a result of this extended and focused process of working together it was possible to build up a much more comprehensive picture of the learner's daily life, her networks of support, special interests and the opportunities for grounding her learning goals in tasks beyond the 'classroom'. This cooperation between tutor and family carer also revealed the benefit of stretching the learner through more challenging learning tasks to make sure she was really engaged while developing her skills.

Through this process of sharing with the support network, the key to the learner's development was revealed to be more communication with people outside her usual social circle. The opportunity to greet people, remember their names, and ask them questions, while also practising reporting back to her family carer what had happened during the day, proved to engage and stretch the learner. Both her family carer and tutor noticed significant development through co-operation. Towards the end of the research the tutor, family carer and a community education worker were interviewed about the ways they had worked collaboratively to enhance learning.

What also emerged clearly was the challenge in trying to adopt this approach; tutors were on sessional contracts, where payment only covered two hours tutoring time and half an hour preparation time. The research showed that engaging effectively with learners' support networks requires a substantial 'out of hours' time commitment

Unfortunately, there has not been any material recognition by learning and development funders of the unpaid work required to implement the research. However, tutors have nevertheless endeavoured to follow the recommendations, to seek out and develop further inspirational research and experiment with different ways of working.

Other sources of inspiration
Reading about other experiences, from journals and reports of projects, of people who work with adults with learning disabilities was very helpful in this search. One new insight we gained was the idea of using a 'Total Communication' approach, which has been developed as a strategy within speech and language therapy services. This recognises that "… in order for individuals to exercise real choice people with learning disabilities have to have the means and opportunities to do so". This means using any means of communication, including facial expression, signing, symbols, objects, photos, art, sound and drama/role play in recognition of the fact that "the majority of people with learning disabilities will struggle at times to understand spoken or written language".

In adopting this approach we have found two tools particularly useful: collage and personal learning planning through ICT.

Collage
Using collage to find out more about learners'

interests and lives is realistic, revealing and apparently enjoyable. Learners work individually, but as part of a wider group; they choose from a range of images and symbols, such as those of the Bonnington Symbol System, and begin to build a picture of things that say something about themselves. We have also used this tool for planning learning. Everyone is encouraged to take the incomplete montage home and work with their carers/support workers in filling it with images that fill in the gaps.

This has proved to be an extremely successful way of encouraging people to communicate with others in a group, and also providing very useful information for the tutor about what goes on in a learner's life. Support staff are then asked to help with learning at home and that way initial contact is made and the idea of support outside the group raised at an early stage. Support workers understand that their involvement is a crucial part of the learning jigsaw.

ICT
Learners have also responded enthusiastically to using ICT as a tool for setting goals and for recording their progress and their pivotal learning moments. It has offered learners an opportunity to communicate more effectively about their learning with key people in their lives.

A group based at the Edinburgh IKEA store decided to use PowerPoint to plan their learning, set their goals and record their progress photographically. They also completed a PowerPoint slide show of questionnaire results from a survey of opinions of customers and then presented it to the management team. The learners in this case either worked with their carers/support workers or mentors at work to practise their communication skills outside the group.

Another group of learners with more significant learning disabilities used a similar process of recording, but utilised sound so that their voices were of equal importance to images and the written word. Learners practised questions and answers, conducted simple interviews and made statements about their learning.

We believe that PowerPoint offers an exciting alternative to paper based forms for recording and sharing learning. It provides a learning plan which is 'alive' and opens up ways for learners to communicate more effectively with their carers and support workers about their learning. The addition of learner chosen images and voice clips

adds an interactive element to the learning plan which isn't possible through pen and paper.

Sharing our experiences with other practitioners

The combination of these successes in our practice and our role in promoting the findings of the research prompted us to plan workshops to share our experiences with other practitioners.

The aims of the workshops included sharing and exploring:

- the successes of using the Total Communication approach along with the tools of collage and ICT, and how this fitted in with the findings of the ELALD research

- the learning plan examples using images and sound in PowerPoint, as this had proved to be a real breakthrough for one learner

- ideas about what was realistic, given the constraints of sessional contracts for tutors and limited resources

The workshops provided a forum for tutors, who are often isolated, to share ideas, seek support in this challenging area and learn more from each other. They also provided a platform for tutors to follow up their own research and/or join with others on small scale action research.

Development plans

From listening to comments from various learners in Edinburgh it became apparent that there was a desire for people to work, and experience in a charity shop was seen as means to this end, a platform for paid employment.

Out of this an innovative project, a course called Shopshape has been developed by a working group including literacy practitioners from CLAN (City Literacy & Numeracy) Edinburgh, support staff from council day services, and the Edinburgh Volunteer Centre.   This group aimed to implement the ELALD findings and look at ways of including the ideas of the key people involved in learners' lives.

From this collaboration a 10 week, 20 hour literacies course has been developed, with input from support workers, which aims to develop communication skills and improve independence relating to charity shop work. The course will run parallel with placements in charity shops, where experiences will be recorded, commented on and evaluated and used to develop the content of the course.

In the group sessions we will use the Total Communication approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of learners' lives and thus tailor the learning to be as effective as possible. Every effort will be made to involve support staff and family carers.

As part of the evaluation of the whole course there will be careful consideration of the effectiveness, or not, of collaboration between learners' support networks and literacy providers.

Conclusion

From the recommendations of the research we can now reflect on the process that has brought us to the Shopshape project.

Following on from ELALD we looked for examples of other approaches which could be as inclusive as possible for learners as well as including their networks of support. We then experimented with different learning approaches (collage and ICT), the success of which encouraged us to share our work with other practitioners. The workshops resulted in tutors forming their own support network to find better ways of ensuring solid links between learning in the 'class' and in learners' everyday lives.

For tutors to really develop this work, funding needs to match the recommendations of ELALD. Consideration also has to be given to sessional tutors being involved at the development stage of any learning programme, being provided with time to carry out wider research and share their findings with fellow practitioners.

Shopshape has gone some way to taking these considerations into account and a short programme of tutor training, involving supported action research, has further recognised the real potential in investing in professional development for literacy tutors.

Unfortunately, funding for any similar work beyond the end of 2009 is very insecure.

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Contacts

We hope that you have found our article interesting and we would welcome any comments you have regarding our approaches. Please also send us any suggestions you have of things you have tried that have worked well or any other research that could be interesting for us to explore.

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Professional qualifications for Literacy, Language and Numeracy teachers – some issues from the field

Sue McCulloch, Marie Kerwin with Yvon Appleby

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Introduction

Dialogue NW (http://www.lancs.ac.uk/dialogue_nw/index.htm formerly NW Skills for Life Research Forum) is a regional research forum where individuals and organisations in the North West can share and develop research and practice in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. In doing this, it encourages the development of research by establishing networks and circulating information.

Last year, members with an interest in post-16 Initial and specialist LLN Teacher Training raised concerns about the provision and take–up of specialist LLN teaching qualifications in the NW. The FE Workforce Reforms 2007 require all new LLN teachers to hold both generic teaching qualifications and an appropriate L5 Diploma in their specialist area, and expect existing teachers to gain appropriate qualifications or recognition of their status. We anticipated that this would both motivate teacher training providers to offer the courses and motivate LLN providers to encourage their staff to access them.

Context

In the NW, Dialogue NW members observed that there were few institutions offering the courses and where they were offered, recruitment was not always robust. It appeared that providers were not actively planning for their existing LLN staff to access the courses, nor were individual teachers motivated to join them. In addition, we knew that potential new entrants to LLN teaching in the NW were having difficulty in getting information both about their route to qualified status and about where courses are offered. We were concerned, so planned to informally investigate to see if this was a concern nationally.

Investigating the issue

We were interested to know whether those concerned with LLN teacher training in other regions were experiencing a similar situation, and if so, the possible reasons for this. Is there a national dimension to some of the issues or does the situation vary from region to region?

Questions we considered include:

1. Are teacher training providers focusing on a new priority of delivering PTLLS and DTLLS rather than specialist LLN qualifications?
2. Are staff busy completing generic teaching qualifications, rather than specialist?
3. Are managers confused by the new requirements or don't see the need to send staff on to specialist diplomas?
4. Do OFSTED and the LSC make clear to providers what staff qualifications are required?
5. Are funding constraints affecting providers' willingness to run courses?

We thought that perhaps the NW picture is untypical of the rest of the country, and wanted to hear from others in the field about their local and regional situation. Consequently, we distributed the above questions via the RAPAL list and additionally the NIACE NW Development Officer circulated it to NIACE regional LLN colleagues. Responses were made in writing and by phone.

Findings

We have had responses from individuals in the NE, East, South, W Midlands and SW regions. In 4 of the 5 regions in general, people agreed with the main issues, that uptake of specialist LLN courses is poor and less than when the previous level 4 specialist qualifications were delivered. In one region, providers are running courses with less than 10 in them. Numbers only rose above that where literacy and ESOL groups were combined. In another region, courses *are* available, but there are issues around uneven geographical spread which affects recruitment. However the situation in the West Midlands is different as they don't appear to be experiencing the same difficulties reported by colleagues in other regions.

Here we summarise comments from the 4 regions (NE, East, South and SW) experiencing difficulties against the initial 5 points. This is followed by additional points they make.

1. Are teacher training providers focusing on a

new priority of delivering PTLLS and DTLLS rather than specialist LLN qualifications?

2. Are staff busy completing generic teaching qualifications?

Staff turnover is reported to be high, so colleges are focusing on their internal market to adhere to the requirement, 'enshrined in the regulations' to have all staff trained. It is perhaps significant that the LLN specialist qualifications, while notionally mandatory, are not enshrined in regulations in the same way. Linked to this, different colleagues report that organisations give clear *direction* to unqualified staff about the need to gain a generic teaching qualification, while *advice* is given about doing a specialist qualification.

Colleagues raised another point relating to difficulties in delivering the L5 qualifications due to the new priority: As the focus in the FE sector has moved to provision for 14-19 year olds with embedded LLN, and funding for adult provision has declined steeply there is less provision suited to LLN teaching practice. This makes it *more difficult for teacher trainers to arrange teaching placements* for candidates on specialist teaching courses.

3. (a) Are managers confused by the new requirements?
   (b) Do managers think that there is no need to send staff on to specialist diplomas? Colleagues identify that sometimes there is a combination of barriers including both confusion about the requirements and, for some, an unwillingness to release staff for training. Additionally, there are grumbles about the cost to candidates (see 5 below).

(a) Are managers confused by the new requirements?
i. There is *general consensus that the specialist diplomas are seen as complicated by organisations* and that a mood of initial panic and questioning seems to have given way to further sidestepping – with the new qualifications being regarded as a step too far. The fact that organisations have been through the previous L4 development and implementation cycle hasn't helped.

ii. *Individuals*, as well as managers, including those thinking about joining the profession, PGCE students and existing practitioners are confused about what path they should take and such things as the level of numeracy skills required.

iii. The *L3 entry requirements*, essential though they are, have affected recruitment of those who work and are new to teaching adult literacy

iv. Greater clarity is needed about the requirements from a national level. A clear indication of the benefits would help enormously, so some publicity needs to be produced that makes the business case to managers for staff development.

v. There is not enough information about the precise need for specialist qualifications in the wider field (vol/comm., private training companies).

Case Study 1:
In one southern county, highly targeted research (project funded) was undertaken to identify who was delivering LLN and what qualifications they needed to take. This was followed up with information sessions with managers combining that with IAG so they knew the routes their staff should take. From this, 45 staff were recruited to Numeracy teacher training courses.

Instead of this sort of approach, LLN teacher training providers rely on open evening / website information to recruit – insufficient for those who are confused by or ignorant of, what the qualifications are and what route to follow. Providers need to be more proactive.

(b) Do managers think that there is no need to send staff on to specialist diplomas?

i. While some LLN staff in colleges have often been integrated into vocational areas, it seems from the outside looking in, that *providers do not always see the need to have qualified, specialist LLN staff to support embedded LLN* – probably due to the additional costs involved and arguably because they are not aware of the results of NRDC research relating to effective practice in embedding.

ii. There are reports of staff with a specialist qualification being expected to teach all 3 specialisms. Some managers want general LLN staff, not specialists. And in Train to Gain, there is a pattern of staff having neither general nor LLN teaching qualifications.

While this seems a negative picture, when staff at a senior level is knowledgeable and committed to developing their staff appropriately, it can be more positive.

> *Case Study 2:*
> In an eastern county, a strategic ACL manager feels well informed by their staff development manager who has kept them up to date with developments. They have made use of the flow diagram on the LLUK website to guide people on the appropriate route for them. They feel that this makes it quite clear what qualifications individuals need to have. Also, their 2 local providers offering the subject specialisms held an information evening where managers and tutors could go along to presentations and then discuss individuals' needs with the providers. All LLN tutors are encouraged to do both generic and specialist training if they haven't already got a teaching qualification and they have had a good uptake from their staff this year.

4. Do OFSTED and the LSC make clear to providers what staff qualifications are required?

i. There appears to be inconsistency in the LSC approach across regions. When recruiting in one region, teacher training providers have tried telling organisations that the LSC would not give contracts to providers who do not ensure that their LLN staff are appropriately qualified. However, the LSC continues to give contracts - particularly to Train to Gain contractors. It would be helpful if all LSCs would specify such a requirement.

ii. For FE colleges, the AOC could usefully get involved to increase the impetus in colleges to take up and deliver the specialist qualifications.

5 Are funding constraints affecting providers' willingness to run courses?

i. The cost of observations particularly, is an issue. One college wanting to run a partly integrated literacy diploma worked out the costs and couldn't afford to do it. They will work with their HEI now to produce something that will slot into their current PGCE/Cert Ed programme.

ii. Providers can run the courses but there is an issue about the availability of funding to provide "access" course, or clear progression routes towards QTS.

iii. Individuals are unaware of the potential to access bursaries for DTLLS but have also been deterred where there was not support for funding for the stand-alone diploma.

Additional issues raised

1 LLN infrastructure
One respondent with a regional perspective reports that the LLN infrastructure has been disappearing over the last 3 years leading to a reduction in the numbers to be trained. There isn't the LLN provision in providers previously offering it, as the focus in the FE sector has moved to 14-19 with LLN embedded, while funding for adult provision in other providers has declined steeply.

2 Functional Skills
What qualifications will staff who will be delivering Functional Skills in schools and other providers of post-14 education be required to have? And which professionals will be delivering them?

3 Alternative modes of delivery
There is an urgent need for alternative models of delivery to suit providers' and individuals' needs, specifically blended learning to avoid the need for weekly meetings. Small providers with e.g. one specialist, cannot release them for a day a week to attend a traditional course. A college in the SW is offering blended learning additional diplomas in literacy, numeracy and ESOL - particularly appropriate given the geography of the region. These continue to recruit reasonably well due to take-up by those already employed in the sector across a wide geographical area.

4 LLN career structure
There is still little or no career structure for SfL staff in many organisations and the opportunities are declining, particularly in outlying regions such as the South West. Recruits new to the profession know they will have to move out of the region if they want to get jobs and recognise that they must expect to be flexible in their approach to the job market.

5 IfL's CPD arrangement
Linked to this are the IfL's CPD arrangements which can lead to staff collecting fairly meaningless 1-day event 'certificates' rather than promoting involvement in some sustained, rigorous activity like the diplomas which could/should be more closely linked to a recognised career structure.

Since initiating these discussions, Dialogue NW has learned about and started to work with the Fusion project being run in the NW. This is an LSC/ESF funded project which continues to the end of 2010. Its aims are to:

- map provision, assessing if there is sufficient spread of high quality provision for the delivery of all of the LLN specialisms
- publish a directory of training opportunities
- provide a central information point and clarify the training needs of trainers in a range of organisations.
- In this they are being supported by NRDC and LLU+ who share the work that's described as 'Professional Development and Consultancy' in the 08-09 SfL Improvement Programme. NRDC and LLU+ project staff have started to liaise with NW teacher educators through the Fusion project.

This demonstrates that the NW LSC, like other LSCs, together with the SfL Improvement Programme clearly recognise that individuals and teacher training providers need support to engage with the 2007 decisions about the qualifications it is necessary for LLN staff to have.

The West Midlands on the other hand, and unlike the four regions discussed above, report much less difficulty with recruitment. The region has well established Professional Development Centres, started about six years ago with Advantage West Midlands LSC and ESF funds. When this funding ceased after about two years, the PDCs were absorbed into local universities and continue to give information and guidance and provide courses sub-regionally. The sub-regional PDCs work independently of each other, and differently – determined by their local needs.

Their responses to the 5 questions are summarised here:

West Midlands
Overall they have increased the number of subject specialist providers by two this year and can identify very local reasons for specialist courses elsewhere not recruiting well. In some subregions they have increased the number of partly integrated courses for DTLLS – an attractive option because candidates can qualify in two years rather than three. These courses have run with

satisfactory numbers.
They *are* aware of deep confusion in a range of people about what are the new requirements for LLN teachers. However, the PDCs are well known as sources of information and guidance about them. There isn't a feeling that managers in general are saying that teachers do not need the specialist qualifications. In fact there has been an increase in the number of staff 'sent' to do the specialist courses.
With regard to support from the LSC, one local LSC has specifically requested that the PDC produce a leaflet for training providers to make it clear who needs to get the specialist qualifications.
And in terms of financial issues, the universities do not take fees from candidates from partner colleges for HEFCE funded specialist courses.

This leads to a significant question: what is happening in the West Midlands to enable such a different response to other regions?

Discussion
Our small-scale survey suggests that the overall picture, despite national support, is that uptake of specialist LLN courses is poor or patchy and appears to be less than when the previous level 4 specialist qualifications were delivered. We are aware that this is a limited snapshot and only represents those who replied but overwhelmingly respondents largely identify with the points suggested by Dialogue NW. That is that there is:

- confusion among providers and individuals about the requirements of the course and the qualification required to gain employment
- a lack of active support from some LSCs to enable these changes to be implemented successfully
- a wider shift in policy focus away from LLN teacher training with more focus on generic teacher qualifications. And lastly there is
- a lack of recognition of the financial implications of training.

However, and significantly, the West Midlands situation appears to be different. The responses we received did not identify the same problems and provision appears to be stable or growing. What is happening in the West Midlands that other regions can learn from? We are not in a position to answer this question as our small survey provides just a snapshot but it does

suggest that there are issues which need to be tackled at a national level if the 2007 reforms are going to work across the country. It begs the question of how the regional and national infrastructure is working, or not, to implement these new changes for Subject Specialist teacher training.

Dialogue NW planned an event in early April to provide a regional forum to debate these issues with funders, college managers, teacher trainers and practitioners. Whilst we acknowledge that the timing might have been difficult, as it is near the end of term and just before Easter, we have had little interest. This suggested that we needed to find out more about what people were interested in, concerned about and wanted to explore in relation to professionalisation. From our own meetings we know that a vital aspect of our network is discussing these issues and updating our own knowledge. We concluded, as we are engaged like others in this field, it is not apathy or even complacency that we are encountering but possibly overwork and a less clear focus about where literacy, numeracy and ESOL fit within the new functional skills agenda.

To find out more we conducted our own research by emailing our extensive contact lists to ask what people would be interested in attending and what the focus should be. Again, we have been underwhelmed which is in stark contrast to other events we have organised over the last four or five years linking research to practice. As a response we are looking at refocusing and widening our reach to include those providers and practitioners who may now be delivering literacy, numeracy and ESOL but under another name. We are concerned that whilst we see the development of subject specialist programmes and qualifications as highly important, the reality, as suggested in our telephone survey above, shows that this is not an attractive option. And, rather than leading to professionalising the workforce we are seeing people, with some (rather than 'rare'?) exceptions, voting with their feet not to enter training. The outcome is that there will potentially be fewer (rather than 'less') qualified subject specialist teachers reinforcing the move towards using general staff to teach functional skills. This seems to be the opposite of what was intended.

Dialogue NW
http://www.lancs.ac.uk/dialogue_nw/index.htm

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Our reviews editor Maxine Burton is looking for members to review materials for the journal particularly practitioners and those involved in training who can make helpful comments to guide others.

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Quality and worthwhile professional knowledge: an unsettling, dangerous knowing

Carol Azumah Dennis

I am currently employed as a manager of discrete Adult Skills for Life for at Lewisham College. As a literacy specialist who has worked in and out of the area for some years, I have recently completed a Professional Doctorate (Ed.D) at the Institute of Education, University of London. This paper is based on the final chapter of my Ed.D thesis 'Controlling the Imagination: how do teachers and managers define, achieve and maintain quality.'

This discussion is part of my ongoing attempt to understand the various meanings embedded in the notion of 'quality' when it is applied to the teaching and managing of Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy (ALLN) in England. In it I draw on an analysis of 16 partially scripted and transcribed conversations with colleagues, ALLN teachers and managers working in 11 further and adult education colleges in London graded, by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) / ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate), as 'good'.

Conducted between 2006 and 2008, the analysis forms part of my doctoral studies at the Institute of Education in London. Initially I drew on personal knowledge and the Ofsted / ALI website to identify colleges that had been given a Grade two for their ALLN provision in their most recent Ofsted / ALI inspection. I made several speculative phone calls and 16 colleagues representing 11 different organisations agreed to be interviewed. Of these, 13 were female and 3 were male. Each had varying degrees of direct responsibility for Skills for Life depending on the structure and their positioning within their organisation. Two managers had what they described as a 'holding brief' for *Skills for Life* (the policy framing that since 1999 has surrounded ALLN) while two were part-time teachers with no management responsibility. Three were senior managers with no direct teaching and 13 were college managers who had both teaching and management responsibility. All but one of the participants had worked in ALLN for enough years to quote pre-Skills for Life experience. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to one-and-a-half hours. They were each recorded and transcribed. Research participants were invited to view and comment on the transcription. My data analysis draws on techniques most closely associated with *grounded theory* (Glaser and Straus 1967). I have read, listened to, analysed, re-read, listened to again and identified recurrent themes. I created codes to reference recurrent themes and established relationships between them, moving backwards and forwards between data and theory throughout, picking up

and modifying references in all 16 transcriptions. I used *Word* for annotations – each transcribed interview generated an equal amount of textual commentary. I used the software package *ATLAS-ti* for coding, relation building and the simultaneous comparison of several interview texts. The interviews were semi structured, a controlled conversation, so my questions varied. A skeletal interview schedule is provided in Appendix i.

All the ALLN teachers and managers I spoke to placed enormous value on the idea of quality. Most have found riding the crest of the Skills for Life policy wave (Hodgson *et al* 2007) exhilarating, exciting and exhausting. In some instances they have offered a heart and soul commitment to working in partnership with New Labour to achieve policy objectives. For example, an ESOL manager described his role as 'a mission'. Several colleagues are motivated by a desire to promote social justice and equality; they refer explicitly to disadvantage, poverty and underachievement. There is a strong sense that these practitioners want to make a difference to the quality of people's lives. ALLN is, as other manager states, 'worthy work'. There is a suggestion here that the motivation to work in ALLN and achieve quality in Skills for Life is not policy *driven* but is policy *resourced*:

We've actually had 8 years without provision being touched [and it's been] pretty amazing, but why can't it continue? You can make so much progress when there's enough funding around.

College Manager But the quality valued by the ALLN practitioners who took part in this study does not always extend to an acceptance of what I would call the 'rage for accountability' which at times conspires against their capacity to do a good job. As discussed by Hodgson *et al* (2007), many practitioners feel it is possible to meet the target but miss the point; it is possible to meet the external requirements placed upon organisations by the quality regime, while the actual needs, desires and possibilities of learners

remain unmet. For example, the required number of learners may gain the nationally recognised qualifications that designate their literacy and numeracy skills as adequate. These learners are counted as a 'success'. Yet these same students may not have achieved the confidence with writing to which they and their teachers aspired (and which the test does not assess). Teachers may spend a considerable amount of precious time completing ILPs (Individual Learning Plans), instead of attending to the pastoral need of learners, simply because success on non-accredited courses requires 'robust' ILPs to evidence achievement (Hamilton 2009). But what counts as *evidence* of quality, may not capture practitioners' perceptions of what counts as *actual* quality.

> *I think it's different what I as a tutor think is quality and what I'm being asked for (by my manager). What I'm being asked for is paperwork. That's all that I've got to show that I'm achieving quality. Whereas from my perspective [what matters is] what the student is getting from the teaching. I don't think paperwork proves the quality.*   Teacher

This teacher contrasts what she is being asked to do – produce lesson plans, schemes of work, ILPs and so forth – with what she feels matters i.e. what the student is getting out of the course.

Professional tensions

My reading of the interview data suggests four tensions along two axes. There is **quality-as-demand** in contrast to **quality-as-aspiration**, which is further complicated by **quality –as-embodied** and **quality-as-abstraction**. These are diametrically opposed notions of quality. Wrenched apart by competing gravitational centres they co-exist uncomfortably. Each

represents a 'solitude'. Like the inhabitants of an enclosed city, they share a geographical space and common identify. They jostle against each other on a daily basis, but speaking different languages they are only able to achieve a dialogue of the deaf.

A figurative illustration of these tensions is offered below in Figure 1. At no point during our conversations do colleagues explicitly reference the tensions surrounding quality in the way I have rendered them. They rather discuss their aspirations and frustrations, fears and successes, actions, biographies and ideas. Through analysis, contradictions emerge that may be placed in relation to each other. The illustration is deliberately fluid. I do not aim at theconstruction of ideal types. Nor do I suggest that particular managers have this or that fixed idea about quality. Instead, I trace a tightrope along which ALLN professionals walk. The image of the tightrope walker evokes precariousness, spectacle, astonishing expertise, public exposure and a queasiness that just about manages to hold nausea at bay. The tightrope walker refuses to pay attention to the distractions of what has gone before. Like ALLN teachers and managers, s/he knows that a fleeting glance away from the quality target is a life threatening indulgence. And so ALLN teachers and managers ease their way through a shifting, ill-defined space between the 'ecology of practice' -the depositions, dilemmas, alignments and commitments of professional practice - and the 'economy of performance' -the demands of 'quality', the external and sometimes alienating definitions imposed by policy. I suggest this typology as an exploration of how my colleagues seem to understand what is worthwhile in their professional lives: what counts and what are the dis /entanglements of a policy view of quality and one experienced in practice?

aspirational

romantic   *campaigning*

"A commitment to Skills for Life is a commitment to Skills for Life learners"

"It's everything. None of it would mean anything without it."

embodied

abstract   *critical*

"When we look at quality we are looking at the funders' agenda and the LSC want success rates"

textual

Q: "Does your job include a quality driven responsibility?"
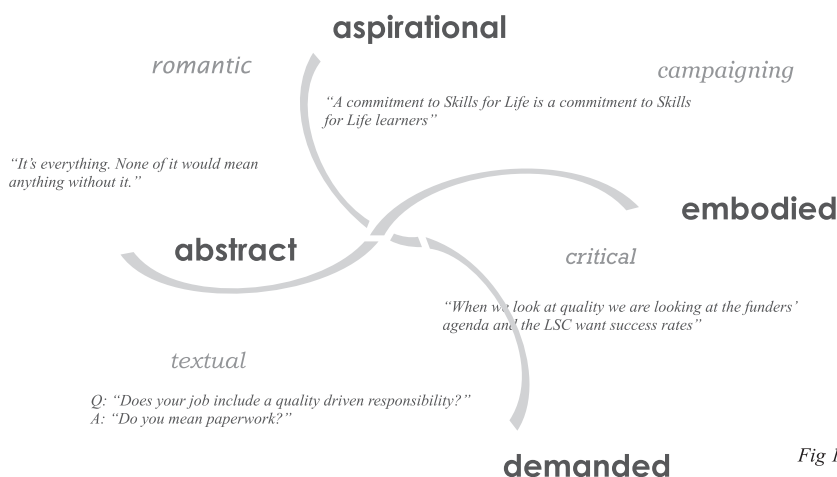A: "Do you mean paperwork?"

demanded   *Fig 1*

i) quality as aspiration - *romantic*

'It's everything. None of it would mean anything without it.'   College Manager

Practitioners believe in quality. It is an extraordinarily powerful condensation symbol (Gillie 2007) in which they invest a great deal of professional self-worth. But it is also something they often define by what it is not (e.g. paperwork). Referenced as 'meaningful', this passion for quality is echoed in vague but attractive commitments to, for example, genuine (as opposed to lip serviced) student-centeredness. The only consistent feature of a romantic notion of quality which I position between quality-as-abstraction and quality-as-aspiration is that it is desirable. The tensions that surround quality – its embodiment and demand - compel practitioners to create ways of working that represent their professional purposes; this may require them to circumnavigate institutional requirements. In this notion of quality students achieving their goal of 'confidence in their writing' is valued even if it can't be recorded.
This teacher, for example, considers the demands of quality to have reduced her sense of what matters in student learning to tiny chunks rather than overall progress:

> *[What matters is showing] people are actually learning something and moving forward, progressing and achieving something. And for some people it may just be that they can gain confidence. And they can participate in a discussion in the classroom without feeling really shy or embarrassed. And I think it takes quite a while for some people. If they can have a conversation, if they can read something, if they can write something that before they could not do. But now I think because it has become more paper based, it means showing small achievements.*   Teacher

ii) quality as abstraction - *textual*

Question: Does your job include a quality driven responsibility?
Answer: Do you mean paperwork?   Teacher

Between quality-as-abstraction and quality-as-demanded I suggest a textual notion of quality. Although practitioners are presented with texts of unambiguous bullet-point brevity, a full understanding of how to deliver what the regime requires remains at a tantalising distance. It is deeply buried within densely written frameworks, research reports, websites, quality

portals, pathfinders and mimetic templates. All of which present slight variations of the same truth. Jackson (2006) argues that this compels practitioners to inhabit 'awkward' spaces between bullet-point specification and ambiguous practical meaning. Here a colleague reflects on the usefulness of a set of government guidelines:

> *It's a very useful document. But when you first look at it you think, crikey, where am I going to find this. And sometimes, all you need is the flow chart. And you don't need all the rest of the bumf to show you, where you're expected to be going. But sometimes ... sometimes there's too much.*   Programme Manager

This is quality as a Kafkaesque nightmare. Practitioners can see the shimmering outline of the quality castle. They might even for a fleeting moment reach it, but 'quality' can never be fully and finally grasped with both hands. Provision is graded as 'good', but there is ambiguity regarding precisely what that 'goodness' pertains to and an insecure precariousness saturates how it might be maintained. For example, a college manager talks about the discursive shift from 'differentiation' to 'personalisation':

> *The agenda is constantly changing, and what was the new big thing very quickly is the norm and then there is another new big thing. I mean seven or eight years ago it was differentiation. You had to do differentiation, that was the new thing to talk about. The following inspection, that was the norm. So we had to be thinking about being more student centred. Now being student centred is the norm, the next thing is we have to be encouraging our students to be independent, we have to be … incorporating work which will give students the skills to go into the workplace. So I think it's the changing agenda, and the speed of change it is much faster, than the context I was working in before.* Programme Manager

iii) quality as demanded by policy - *critical*

'When we look at quality we are looking at the funders' agenda and the LSC want success rates. That's all.' Senior Manager

Between quality-as-embodiment and quality-as-demand lies a 'critical' representation. Some of

the practitioners I spoke to experience the demand for 'quality' as at odds with that to which they aspire. This space offers little scope for exploration. Practitioners simply give the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) what it wants: 'success' rates, Self-Assessment Reports (SAR), graded observations, high retention figures, lesson plans, ILPs and so forth. Indeed, their professional lives depend on it. These documents, quality proxies, are often viewed with cynicism. None of them actually prove quality. Indeed they may well mask its absence. A quality manager during a training session on lesson observation explains, 'the map is not the territory' and a good lesson exists beyond and without a good lesson plan. Paperwork is plentiful. It satisfies auditors but is also meaningless. The real life of an organisation happens elsewhere.

> There's a lot of lip service being paid to quality being about student centeredness – but actually the way colleges are measured is much more to do with things like achievement and this whole debate around measuring achievement in non-accredited learning – so – ergo – its about accredited learning – because that's easy, that's the easy way – that the easiest thing you can actually measure. So there's definitely - the theory over here – there's the philosophy over here and then there's the reality – which is way over there somewhere else. Around quality.   College Manager

iv)   quality as embodied - *campaigning*
Between quality-as-aspiration and quality-as-embodiment, I locate a 'campaigning' quality. This is where ALLN practitioners' commitment to social justice and equality is most pronounced. It represents what I view as akin to a hijack. Practitioners use the institutional resource and momentum attached to Skills for Life policy to continue the struggle to make their quality aspirations real.

They are focused on implementing Skills for Life in their organisation, but as a senior manager expresses it,

> 'A commitment to Skills for Life [is not a commitment to policy. It] is a commitment to Skills for Life learners.' Senior Manager

This manager narrates how, over the life time of a career, 'Skills for Life' became 'rooted at the centre' of his organisation:

> It's been a struggle. It's been a struggle in the college. To get us to where we are. And I think that now we're very firmly rooted at the centre of what the college does. College Manager

In this critical dimension it is also possible to note that embedded in an acceptance of the quality requirements of Skills for Life is a recognition that if pre-Skills for Life provision was of poor quality, this was because it lacked the resources that being the focus of government policy brings. The manager below compares his own early experiences of teaching adult literacy to what the area of work is like now:

> What it [pre-Skills for Life ALLN] didn't have was enough resource behind it, enough of an infrastructure under it, and high enough expectations of it to drive to the centre of what the provision is about. We needed more [...] better management, meaningful accreditation that had the respect of employers and others. Investment was important; [...] It [pre-Skills for Life ALLN] had a wonderful humanity to it but not enough rigour. Manager

The policy, practice, research nexus
The comments of practitioners who participated in my research, as recounted above, would seem to add texture to the meaning of 'quality'. My reading of the data stops far short of asserting that the tensions I have identified make the achievement of quality (whether as demand, abstraction, embodiment or aspiration) undesirable. To do so would be to name the self as undesirable.   The notion of quality as a badge or insignia, which appears to underpin Skills for Life policy, is strongly connotative but it is also fraught with ambiguity. It maintains a tight grip on what counts as the worthwhile enactment of professional knowledge.

In this final section, I weave an answer to the question, What *might* a small-scale research study, into how ALLN professionals define, achieve and maintain quality, imply for practice? In other words, 'quality' may be defined along the four competing axes that I refer to, but what is the significance of this knowledge?

My analysis of quality in teaching and managing ALLN has centred on the gap between the normalisations and standardisations of policy and the messy, lived practices of those who are the targets of policy. I have noticed the

incommensurability between what practitioners know about practice and what policy determines practice is or must be.

Research transforms practice

It is possible that research may transform practice, as the National Research and Development Centre's (NRDC) strap line 'Generating knowledge and transforming it into practice' implies. As part of an ongoing project, the NRDC has redefined what it means to be a professional working in this area. If professionalism is associated with being saturated by a highly-codified and esoteric body of knowledge (Eraut 1994, Dennis 2003) the NRDC is pivotal in enclosing the area by monitoring its epistemic boundaries.
As a researcher of ALLN, I am excited by the work published by the NRDC. As a manager with a curiosity about ALLN, I am wary of its dangers. Once knowledge of teaching transcends the concrete exchange between teachers and learners, the social politics of race, class, gender, language and ability are scripted out of pedagogy. The intellectual and pastoral role that teachers play in the lives of their 'un-teachable' students, the restoration of damaged learner identities and the centrality of the pedagogic encounter are, through the technologisation of teaching, by-passed (Schoonmaker 2007).

This framing negates the intellectual authority of practitioners. Professional expertise is an embodied process driven by knowledge-in-action. It enables innumerable day-to-day judgements. The insistence of evidence-based practice potentially subordinates this knowledge, treating it as if it should be something other than what it is. The implicit and inflated conceit of evidence-based practice is that only decontextualised, transferable and theoretical knowledge generated by an esoteric research community is truly valid.

Research 'overlaps' practice

If evidence-based practice has the capacity to diminish professional knowledge, it may also be implicated in the belittlement of research itself. The 'what works' mantra of evidence-based practice offers what research in the social sciences is unable to deliver. Research in the social sciences is quite unlike scientific research - its truths unfold unexpectedly. They are partial, tentative and suggestive rather than unequivocal. To understand what works in teaching and managing may require diverse and seemingly irrelevant questions. For example a lesson on letter writing may well benefit from an ethnographic study of the out-of-college

practices of learners and only unexpectedly fold back into classroom activity. Why something works may inspire thoughts and ideas about the place of context and content in teaching. An approach which stimulates one group of learners may confuse another. There are so few all-times-and-all-places generalisables in research in the social sciences. What works here might not work there. What worked then, might not work now. There is no context-free, future-proof knowledge.

In moving between practitioner and researcher networks I bring a specific set of insights. My experience of each terrain – research and practice - is altered through my acquaintanceship with the other. As a practitioner I consume and analyse organisational texts, textual communications intended for a professional audience. My reading of them is heightened. Straightforward implementation requires that I hold critical scrutiny at bay. The interrogative, even incredulous stance necessary in research creates too many avenues for nomadic exploration. Immediate action-without-thought becomes an impossibility.

My reading of research based texts, textual communications intended for a research community, is similarly altered. Theoretical engagement is interrupted by the pragmatic impulse. I want to work out if it would work in my own context of practice or the context of my own capabilities. I become fidgety when presented with the possibility of thought-without-action. I want to try it out, to try out what it means for who I am and what I do. I may be enthralled by research that notices learners' motivations as driven by curiosity and pride, but find it difficult to present this possibility as truth to the teachers and managers I work with. It may be apparent to me that the model of 'embedding' adopted by a colleague I am in conversation with has been scathingly critiqued in research reports as likely to lead to poor results for both vocational and literacy course components, but there is enormous risk attached to asserting my version of truth as knowledge. So much of the exchange is based not on knowledge or understanding, but on disposition and sensibility. And of course, the version of truth I enthusiastically reterritorialise from research-networks to practitioner-networks may, in the process of transportation, change. Other bodies of work may emerge slowly or in a slightly different terrain to contradict, add significant detail to or merely cause us to pause and think again.

Research un-frames practice

In suggesting that research transforms or overlaps practice I have been critical but largely optimistic. But the research, policy and practice nexus may also lead to a dangerous unravelling. Research informs, overlaps but also makes 'action-without-thought' practice impossible.

Research into ALLN yields uncomfortable truths that make the unification of policy, practice and research a fraught enterprise. Street's (1984, 1995) notion of autonomous and ideological literacies is a radical critique of policy perceptions of ALLN learning and their translation into policy-sanctioned management and pedagogy. My own exploration of the puzzle of good practice contrasts professional judgement with policy requirements, but is unable to offer a neat resolution. Instead, research promises practice little more that a Goliathian struggle. In the absence of standardised quality forms and checklists here is a series of intricate and shifting compromises. Adhering exclusively to professional judgement is not possible and would place practitioners in a perpetual state of conflict. Yet ignoring professional judgement extracts a high cost. It causes stress and discomfort and limits professional possibilities. In an informal conversation a research participant described a difference in view between auditors and himself about the appropriateness and possibilities of compliance with a particular quality measure. The conflict was not a subjective one of contrasting judgements. What was at stake revolved around a concrete question of the financial resources the organisation had at its disposal and was prepared to leave 'in reserve'. His denial of compromise / his inability to comply resulted in a down-grading of the organisation on one particular quality scale from 'excellent' to 'good'.

Implications: for practice

I have undertaken this study as an ALLN manager with experience of quality and inspection. I have an acute, emotional, and entirely subjective interest in the subject, driven in part by the knowledge that the next inspection is never more than a few months away. The trouble with research is that it is troubling. It forces uncomfortable and dangerous knowings. If 'quality' can never by fully and finally grasped, it can never be fully and finally embraced. Quality-as-embodied, a critical compromise between quality-as-demanded and quality-as-aspiration creates the potential for disorientating disconnections between what I think and feel and what I do, between what the

situation requires and what the regime allows, between what college data systems might capture and what my learners experience, between what is evidenced and what is actual, between the target and the point. But this point of ambiguity and arrival is also a point of potentiality and departure. ALLN teachers and managers may not be able to resolve the tensions that surround quality. But we can shape their embodiment.

Appendix
Interview schedule

Introduction to research focus & purpose of interview: Outline approach – recording & checking - Offer to share final research - Reassure around confidentiality

1) As an introduction, I'd like to ask you to tell me about your job – include an overview of organisational structure – where does SfL (discrete department or cross college support service) happen with what key connections.
2) Ask about personal biography and organisational history – how long have you worked here, has structure of department changed, what was previous inspection like etc.
3) What motivated you to begin working in this area?
4) Does your role have a quality driven responsibility – how would you describe this?
5) Do you think our ideas about what counts as a good teacher have changed – since you been in this job, since you worked in education – how?
6) There have been so many changes for those of us managing, teaching SfL: How would you sum up what that impact has been?
7) I'd like to ask about the CIF - how do you use it?
8) If you were to redraft the CIF – what would you include / exclude? What of its emphasis on student centred learning.
9) If there was any aspect of the quality regime around Skills for Life that you would change – what would it be. What would you definitely preserve.
10) If you were to highlight 2 or 3 things that you feel really made a big difference - that swung it for your grading – what would you highlight?
11) What motivates you to stay working in this area?

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Swearing: A case study of its causes and effects among teenagers in an urban classroom

Kathy Martin

Kathy Martin is a recently qualified adult literacy tutor who has made a career move from business to teaching. She trained at Queen's University Belfast, where she now assists with tutorials in the second year of the qualifications programme. Kathy's experience as a literacy practitioner includes teaching adults and teenagers in inner city training centres and military bases.

> *'The excess use of profanity indicates a lamentable paucity of vocabulary.'*

This statement quoted by my Latin teacher some years ago would be met with twisted faces and 'Ya whaah?' from learners in my own classes today. I am a student literacy tutor working in an urban training centre. The centre is situated in one of the most socially and economically deprived communities in the country and my learners are young people aged sixteen and seventeen. In addition to their English and mathematics lessons, the learners all have vocational classes; young men study joinery and the young women, childcare. During my time at the centre, I have been very impressed by the commitment of the staff and the high standard of the facilities; I have also been acutely aware of the prevalence of swearing. 'Profanity and foul language have become a common part of communication and (are) almost an accepted norm.'(Wade, 2005) In spite of this linguistic decline, my responsibility as an Essential Skills tutor is to prepare young learners for employment, and part of my duty therefore is to increase their awareness and use of appropriate language.

Motivation for my research

I admit that, in certain circumstances, I swear. I have a limited swearing repertoire to which I resort when shocked or exasperated. The fact that I can refrain from this indulgence whilst in the company of anyone other than close family or friends, I feel shows my swearing as a lack of self control. With learners at this training centre, however, swearing seemed to have a different function. I realised that obscenities formed part of everyday conversations and appeared to have little to do with extreme situations or feelings. It was as if, to these learners, the impact and indeed the effectiveness of swear words had become diminished by overuse.

I began to question my instinctive reaction to swearing and the response I should make to the language of those I was teaching. Did swearing form part of their local vernacular and as such did it contribute to their personal and community identity? If so, I needed to respect this identity but provide learners with the opportunity to practise a more universally acceptable form of communication. The important word from Wade is 'almost'; my learners still face rejection, reprimand and restrictions if swearing dominates their only form of communication.

When I joined the centre last year, I made a point of familiarising myself with existing rules and the accepted policy on swearing. Although all learners are dissuaded from swearing whilst on centre premises, the opinion of tutors was that swearing is so ingrained among these learners that efforts to eradicate it from classes had in the past caused violent outbursts, and had left no time for teaching. Knowing that the National Core Curriculum has a zero tolerance approach to swearing during the speaking and listening stages of assessment, I wondered how best to proceed.

During my first classes I explained to learners that I felt swearing showed a lack of respect and I would therefore not be swearing in class; I said I would be grateful if they could try their best not to swear either. No learner has sworn at me but the classes have been full of 'conversational' swearing and I have had to deal with several verbally abusive altercations between learners. I wanted to explore the best ways of challenging this behaviour without provoking direct confrontation or disrupting valuable teaching time. We started 'no swear zone' discussions in every lesson, which soon became sources of good competitive fun as learners tried to catch each other out. The discussions also raised many questions as to what was or was not a swear word and quite naturally led to the differences between formal and informal communication.

After a few lessons, I began to recognise that some learners had quite individual uses for swear words. One learner in particular was in the habit of saying 'b****cks' to express surprise or disbelief. As was the case with his peers' use of similar expletives, he in no way meant to be offensive or critical. I felt such

forms of expression highlighted the fact that most of the swearing I encountered in class was not the result of teenage angst or bad temper. It was more benign. It appeared to be a question of habit, or confirmed the fact that it is indeed simply a widely accepted part of their vernacular. I began to see learners' swearing more clearly as an inability to recognise the contexts and situations in which such language is unacceptable.

A 'light bulb' moment came after a thirty minute relaxed conversation with one of my most scatological learners; I realised that although she had been using her own vernacular, she had not uttered a single profanity. I casually pointed this out as we left the room and her response was a delighted smile and 'S***. Really?' The two of us get on very well and she had been talking about herself and her educational background. Labov and Trudgill (Mesthrie et al, 2004: 180) observed, 'speakers paid less attention to their speech when narrating events in which they had some personal involvement.' I was immediately intrigued by her apparent code-switching, the usually sub-conscious ability to select different varieties of speech as appropriate. This 'ability to use language appropriately in different settings' has been described by Hymes (Mesthrie et al, 2005: 5) as 'communicative competence'. I wondered if approaching the problem from the angle of code-switching could be the key. Perhaps the excess use of profanity by these learners was due more to a lamentable paucity of communicative competence.

To proceed, I needed to find out how aware learners were of the language they were using and if they understood the effects their swearing could have on those around them.

Methodology
Learners were happy to take part in a specific classroom discussion on swearing; one was held with six joiners and one with eight young women studying childcare. The first thing I noticed at the beginning of each discussion was the surprise with which my topic was greeted. The very fact that all learners felt it was 'weird' that a tutor was actually encouraging them to talk about swearing immediately confirmed to me they all realised, on some level, that swearing is wrong. Both groups were very vocal and the two separate situations presented an interesting chance for me to compare and contrast the views of the two sexes.

I received agreement from each class that I could take notes of what was said. I ensured they knew that any comments I used would not be attributed to any individual speaker but simply to a member of either the joinery or childcare class.

The questionnaires were also enthusiastically received. Lunch time chatter led to several learners from other Essential Skills classes approaching me to check if their peers were, in their words, 'yanking their chain.' They wanted to fill in one of the tutor's bright red 'swearing forms' themselves. They must have been quite disappointed to find the forms were simply asking for feelings and opinions and were not in the least explicit. The novelty factor did however give me a slightly larger total sample size of nineteen.

Learners' ability in my classes ranges from Entry Level 2 to Level 2 and as I wanted the questionnaire to be inclusive, I deliberately kept the questions simple and the choice of answers to either yes or no. I also made sure that the tone of the questions was non-judgemental in the hope that learners would be more likely to share their true feelings. 'Is it OK to…?' I felt was less accusatory and intrusive than 'Do you…?'

Findings
In answer to the first general question 'Should we be allowed to swear?' 77% of learners answered yes. When context was added to the question, the answers pleasingly showed learners' appreciation of circumstances demanding adjustment on their part, especially in the case of young children. This form of self-policing, the ability to recognise a no-go area for swearing, was very heartening and confirmed that the important communicative skill of code-switching was indeed already present.

- 94% agreed it is OK to swear with friends
- 39% agreed it is OK to swear with family
- 6%   agreed it is OK to swear near children
- 50% thought swearing should be allowed in the classroom
- 50% thought swearing should be allowed at work

In discussion one young woman was very adamant that swearing is always wrong and she agreed with the policy of the instant dismissal of anyone heard swearing in the nursery where she works. The young men actually made the distinction between swearing with 'your mates' at work and swearing in front of managers or customers. They feared sanctions would be

imposed if they swore in front of managers but could not articulate why they felt it was wrong to swear in front of customers; I did not get the impression they understood that swearing would reflect badly on them or their employer. There seemed to be a consensus, however, that there were occasions when each learner would not swear and that they would apologise if they swore at the wrong time. They also felt that writing a swear word, anywhere, was much worse than saying one. The only exception they made was with texting when they frequently use 'f' as an abbreviation of their most frequently used swear word.

I then made the distinction between swearing when 'with' someone and swearing 'at' someone. To me there is a huge difference between learners swearing in my classroom and them actually directing foul language at a fellow learner or at me.

- 84% agreed they did not mind if a friend swore at them
- 61% agreed they would not mind if a tutor swore at them

I was surprised that these results showed that learners did not feel the personal impact of swearing directed at them, even if it came from a tutor. There seemed no difference in their minds between casual 'conversational' swearing and actually directing swear words at someone. Importantly, both groups made a point of explaining that their reaction to swearing 'depends on how it's said.'

The next questions referred to the type of swear words they used. The learners' grading of the severity of swear words was echoed in a survey on behalf of the British Broadcasting Standards Commission et al (Profanity, 2000) when the British public agreed on a list of words which they considered more offensive than others, regardless of context. Learners' results showed that:

- 84% agreed that some words are worse than others
- 72% agreed that there were some words they would never use

The discussion highlighted several specific swear words which were considered unacceptable by most. Surprisingly, learners in both classes agreed that calling someone 'fat' or 'stupid' was 'just not on'. Such personal criticism was considered a much more serious insult than swearing at someone. Again I was pleased to

see a degree of self-policing and the fact that learners clearly understand they have power to cause distress with words. There seemed to be little understanding however why words they considered commonplace, such as the ubiquitous 'f*****g', could cause such negative emotions or hostile reactions in others. Perhaps this lack of understanding goes some way to explaining the problems tutors are having with learners swearing; if students do not fully understand the effect their language is having, they will not be inclined to accept a rebuke or punishment for using it.

We are all used to hearing conversational fillers such as 'um' and 'you know'. I had noticed that learners seemed to replace these fillers with swear words and in discussion learners said 'they're the first thing that comes into your head.' I wondered if learners thought they were always aware of what they were saying. The discussions had shown they usually swore out of habit, not because they were angry or upset.

- 61% agreed they do not always know when they are swearing
- 61% agreed that they sometimes swear because they can't think of anything else to say

Although swearing is common place among the learners, 50% said they knew someone who does not swear and 61% agreed they would like to be able to stop swearing.

Discussion
Responses to swearing are subjective. We all have inherent values which govern the language we feel comfortable using, or hearing, in any given context. The problem we face is that once a swear word has been uttered, it affects everyone within earshot and like passive smoking, it cannot be avoided. Our own parameters dictate how offended we are by the words we hear.

One possible explanation for the effect swearing has on us is that 'words have an emotional connotation as well as a literal meaning' (Pinker, 2007). Pinker's investigations have shown that literal meanings of words are processed by the neocortex in the left side of the brain. When we hear profane language (or see visual images thereof), then the right side, the amygdala area of the brain, which deals with memory and emotion, is also activated. He explains that advertising slogans such as the recent 'FCUK' exploit this phenomenon to the full.

My learners' speech has been strongly influenced by powerful cultural and community factors. Young people are exposed to more 'bad language' now than previous generations have been. Television and radio programmes, movies, games and song lyrics all create an insidious cultural background where swearing has almost become, in Wade's words, the 'accepted norm.' In the past, Gordon Ramsay's language on his TV cookery programme would not have been permitted and no author of guidance for tutors would have entitled her book 'Getting the Buggers Motivated in FE' (Wallace, 2007).

On a local level, learners in my classes all come from the same close-knit community where swearing is endemic. Milroy (Mesthrie et al, 2005: 123) confirms: 'the use of vernacular forms is associated positively with the speaker's degree of integration into the community's social network.' In a high-density network, 'the members of the network are known to each other and interact with each other regularly.' In a multiplex network, members ' are linked to each other in more than one function (co-employee, relative, friend, neighbour, member of the same sports club and so on).' The learners' community is a dense multiplex social network and so the learners' exposure to swearing is constant.

Contributing to the community hold on learners' lives, and therefore their language, are the prospect-limiting factors of low income, high crime and the far-reaching problems arising from alcohol and drug abuse. In the past year, many young people in this area, including five from my classes, have been victims of physical violence. The incentive for them to find some security by fitting in with a certain crowd is therefore very high. Using the same vernacular is one way of doing this; thus 'the individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which …. he wishes to be identified' Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (Mesthrie et al, 2005: 181)

Most learners come to the centre from local schools and have a history of bad behaviour, absenteeism and low achievement. These educational experiences have also had an effect on the language which learners use. Two in particular vividly recalled 'feeling wick' every time they were called out of normal classes to go to the INR (Individual Needs Room). They said they were 'cut' to be singled out as 'thick and stupid in front of (their) mates' and often 'kicked off' because they were so embarrassed and ashamed. 'To protect a weak self-esteem,

adolescents will develop a range of defence mechanisms' (Long, 2005: 14). These defence mechanisms can easily become 'over-learned patterns of behaviour' (Long, 2005: 21), with reactions such as swearing becoming knee-jerk responses to any hint of criticism or risk of 'losing face' in front of their peers.

At the beginning of the year, I realised one learner was using swearing as a diversionary tactic to hide his lack of understanding. A favourite development of this was to incite and insult busy learners who then joined him in the disruption, thereby helping him to disguise the fact that he alone was unable to do the work. As soon as this learner felt safe enough to ask questions (and also realised that he could not avoid the work by behaving badly and being sent out of the room), the problem disappeared. I felt punishment would have been completely counterproductive in this instance, doing nothing to improve the learner's self esteem, learning, or ultimately, his language.

There appear to be several understandable explanations for these learners swearing but I acknowledge sometimes their behaviour was calculated and deliberate. In teaching guide books, coping with swearing in the classroom is usually found under the chapter dealing with challenging behaviour. Tutors are encouraged to try several coping mechanisms which range from raising one eyebrow to imposing detention. Before we got to know each other, some of my learners experimented with shocking language in an attempt to 'wind me up.' When I stayed calm, used humour to belittle their language and refused to offer any other resistance to their actions, they soon became bored and gave up. 'The quiet, silent, observant position can say a great deal without losing position of power' (Fields, 2008). I realise this tactic will not always be successful but in this instance it was a less stressful and more positive course of action for all of us. The alternative would have been trying to insist that they stop swearing and thereby putting learners in the position of having to back down or lose face. It also prevented an escalation into confrontation where the learners' behaviour could have been fuelled by my increasing frustration.

"Professor Jean Aitchison of Oxford University says the battle against swearing will never be won. "Nowadays, people often use swear words to show they are being friendly, or informal, to show they are not stuck up or pompous." Professor Aitchison said language was evolving all the time and swear words had gradually become the norm' (BBC News, 2001)

In spite of this, tutors and education experts are in agreement that students' swearing in the learning environment is to be eliminated or at least minimised as '….. reducing swearing is inextricably linked with the wider drive to improve standards of discipline, teaching and learning' (Baker, 2001). We are far from agreeing how best to accomplish this:

- Sixty young men have been suspended from a secondary school in Surrey in the past six months for swearing' (BBC News, 2001)
- A secondary school is to allow pupils to swear at teachers – as long as they don't do so more than five times in a lesson. A running tally of how many times the 'f' word has been used will be kept on the board. If a class goes over the limit, they will be 'spoken' to at the end of the lesson' (Daily Mail, 2005)

Conclusion

I am most grateful to the learners who enthusiastically took part in class discussions on swearing and answered questionnaires for this case study. It is in the interests of learners such as these that we seek a more successful range of strategies to cope with swearing in classrooms.

As Essential Skills tutors, we are teaching literacy in the belief that learners will develop their communication skills and, as a result, will experience the empowerment and increased self esteem which possession of such skills can bring. We are taught that learners 'will all have different needs and make different demands on (us).' (Corder, 2004). If we realise that one of these demands is that we try to understand the learners' reasons for swearing, perhaps we can adjust our coping strategies accordingly. Our aim is to create safe, productive and inclusive learning environments where tutors are seen as role models and everyone is treated with respect, even those who swear.

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The impact of tutor strategies on behaviour management: an auto-ethnographic research paper

Dorothy McIntyre

Dorothy McIntyre has recently graduated from Queen's University Belfast as an adult literacy tutor, after working as a special needs classroom assistant for many years. She is currently supporting young people with low literacy and numeracy skills in the school sector, and is now a member of the course team for the tutor qualifications programme at Queen's.

Part 1 The Background

"So, how are you getting on with your research?"

"I'm not," I say petulantly, blaming Miranda, my course tutor, for my recent frustrations. (Please note: this is not her actual name; this is the one she chose for this paper).

"Tell me, what seems to be the problem?" she says softly, ever the indulgent mother.

"I can't get anyone to let me observe them or interview them, and only one who has agreed to fill out a questionnaire. It's no use; I'll have to change my subject."

My voice has taken on a distinct whine and hearing it makes me want to wince.

"Ok, remind me, what's your title?" says Miranda briskly, warning me that it's time to get down to business; no more self-pity.

"The Impact of Tutor Strategies on Behaviour Management."

"Right, what else, apart from contacting other tutors, have you be doing in regards to this?"

"Just some reading on the subject; I enjoyed "Getting the Buggers Motivated in FE" (Wallace 2007). I've been trying out some strategies in class and I've been keeping a diary of sorts, recording what happened, that sort of thing, but that's all," I say a little defensively; surely she realises that the last assignment took up every spare minute I had?

She ignores my tone, determined to turn this conversation into a helpful discussion.

"What sort of things have you been trying out?"

"Well..." as usual my mind goes blank when I'm asked for specifics. Then I remember, "I did try out a strategy a few weeks ago that a teacher where I worked advised me on."

"Tell me about it," she says, making me feel that I should be lying on a soft couch in her office.

I launch into a story about how a young male student in my class kept returning to the computer to look at different websites while he was supposed to be working on a spelling activity. I asked him several times to switch off the computer but to no avail. I had been warned by the teacher mentioned earlier, that becoming confrontational in the class in front of a student's peers should be avoided as, at this age, the most important thing in their lives is their

reputation among their contemporaries, and they will battle to protect it. I was also worried that drawing too much attention to his behaviour would affect the motivation of the rest of the class who were working well. (Wallace, 2007 pg 134)

Under the guise of needing some information from him, I asked him to stay behind after class. I kept the door between us and the busy corridor open. Using a pleasant tone and making eye contact, I explained that I'd prefer it if he didn't use the computer during class, unless it is part of an activity. I said that I was sure he understood the importance of completing activities in class as they were designed to help him with the completion of his portfolio and desk top task. The phrasing of this was deliberate; I had to make him understand that these rules were for his sake and not mine, as suggested by Petty (2004, pg 121).

With no audience to impress and no reason to be confrontational as my tone, body language and conversation all suggested that this was just a friendly chat, he agreed with my 'suggestion' with a mumbled, "Yeah, ok." I thanked him for staying behind and said "Great, see you next week then," in a cheery manner which clearly demonstrated that I bore no grudges and that we could start with a clean slate next week (Petty 2004, pg 122).

"I don't mind telling you, Miranda, I was worried. I had no idea how it would play out the following week." I tell her, recalling how I had guessed that he would either head straight for the computer as soon as he came in (with a chip on his shoulder and a point to prove) or sit angelically waiting for my teaching to start.

"Yeah, you guessed it," I say, watching a knowing smile spread across Miranda's face.

"The little blighter arrived early, was in class when I arrived, sitting at the computer checking out the latest Subaru accessories!"

"So, how did you handle it?"

"Well, I started the class as usual, greeting everyone and telling them what we would be doing. I asked them to sit in groups of three as

we were going to be playing a spelling game. He chose to join the group that was sitting beside the computer he was at. So I asked him, quite pleasantly, to turn off the computer and join his team. I then carried on explaining the rules and giving out sheets."

"And was your prompt enough?"

"Not a chance! He turned backwards and forwards between the computer and his team, in an exaggerated way, waiting for me to say something."

"So you...?"

"Ignored him! I knew he was trying to wind me up and to be honest, because I had been half expecting it, I found it quite amusing. I decided to give him the attention he was after only for a different reason...

So Gary, number 4, what's your team's answer?"

Gary, unable to ignore me as I've addressed him by name, turns slowly, checks the answer sheet and spells, "t-h-e-r-e."

A chorus of 'wr-ong' is sung by the other teams. Gary frowns at his team mates, "I told you it was the other there, t-h-e-i-r."

"Bad luck guys, you should've listened to Gary. Ok," I say, "number 5?"

A shout from across the room spells "m-a-n-u-f-a-c-t-u-r-e."

"Excellent! So Gary what strategy do you think they used?" I say to the back now facing me.

"Uh, I don't know," he says to the screen.

"Have a guess," I insist playfully. "The word is man-u-fact-ure." I say slowly.

"Syllables," he declares confidently over his shoulder.

"Great! OK, number 6."

"Wrench," shouts one of Gary's team.

"What's special about the word 'wrench' Gary?" I say cheerfully.

Exasperated, Gary turns and cries, "I don't know!"

"Have a look at the sheet, and I bet you can tell me."

Gary studies the answer sheet and eventually discovers that there is a silent 'w.' Satisfied, he turns back to the sporty car on the screen.

"Fantastic! Right, number 6, Gary, what'd you get?"

"Why do you keep asking me?!" barks Gary, finally turning around completely.

"Because I really want you to play and I think your team mates need you," I reply. "Remember I've got a prize! If you're not in it you can't win it," I say gleefully. "I promise I'll stop asking only you," I bargain, ensuring he feels it would be a benefit for him to join in.

"Ok, ok" he says finally giving in, "...anyway what is the prize?"

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It all worked out OK then," says Miranda.

"Huh, this time anyway," I reply, rolling my eyes. Miranda's face has taken on that "I've got an idea, but I'm not telling!" expression.

"So... how did you know what to do when you arrived in that room and saw him on the computer?" she asks.

"Well..." I stop and think, wondering where she's taking me. "I guess I just followed my instinct. I had no idea what would happen."

"You were thinking on your feet?"

"I guess so," I say, still thinking.

Miranda says nothing. She watches me; waiting for me to continue.

"It wouldn't have worked with every student, but I guess I've met young people like him before, you know, on the defensive, always looking to make a point. I wanted him to know that I'm on his side, that I'm here to help. He was attention-seeking, so I gave him attention, positive attention, knowing which answers he would be capable of answering correctly. I believe in building relationships, I believe that what I do and how I treat him will affect his behaviour."

"Why?"

"I'm a classroom assistant. I've worked with and observed many teachers over the years. The position I'm in is strange. We're taught to have an 'unassuming presence' in the classroom, so I'm often overlooked by teachers and ignored by students.

"I have very little authority, but I have to get my students to work with me. I can't give out detention or warnings so I have to persuade and cajole and get to know them. I learn what makes them tick. I see how they react with different teachers; they can behave *so* differently depending on who's teaching them. Of course the teachers don't see that, they only see how the student behaves in *their* class, and they make assumptions about the sort of person he or she is. Don't they ever wonder, 'Is it me? Could I change what I'm doing?'

"I sit among the students, I walk in the corridor with them, and I wait outside the class with them. I know them. I know how each teacher makes them feel; I can see it on their faces and hear it in their mumblings."

I can hear the passion in my voice and realise I've been talking for a while. Embarrassed, I stop. What do I know? I'm only a classroom assistant. I hope she doesn't think I'm being spiteful. "Of course they're not all like that. I've learnt some fantastic strategies from a lot of them..." I say in hurry, trying to dig myself out of a hole.

Miranda's smile widens. "So you think you may have learnt a little about behaviour over the years?"

"I suppose I have, at least I've learned a lot about what not to do!"

"Autoethnography!" Miranda declares abruptly.

"Auto...what?" I say, baffled by what seems to be a complete change of subject.

"Look, you can't get anyone to talk to you about behaviour management, yet you've still been able to try out what you've read and *what you already knew*, right?"

"Right..." I repeat slowly.

"I've noticed how a lot of students look for the answers out there," she says, waving her arm out vaguely to the side, "but sometimes you've got to look in here." She places her palm flat on her chest.

"Let's say you were to write about what you know already, what you've learnt from experience, how would that look?" She says, turning to type on the laptop in front her.

I think. Then I think some more, the last thing I want is to look stupid.

"I suppose... it would be like my learning history or...a reflection." I say hesitantly.

"Exactly!" She turns the computer to face me.

"Auto-eth-no-graphy**..."** I read slowly, breaking the unfamiliar word into syllables, "...is a form of autobiographical personal narrative that explores the writer's experience of life."

"I believe that's the form your research should take. OK," says Miranda, becoming brisk and business like once more, signalling that our conversation is coming to a close. "I'm going to give you a few names. Have a look at their work see what you think." With that, she stands up. "I want you to think 'reflexive'; I want you to think 'subjective.'"

"Huh?" I think.

"Are there any examples of this type of research from previous Diploma students?" I ask hopefully, thinking of the green book.

"No, never been done on this course before." She notices my stricken face. "You'll be fine," she reassures me as she walks away.

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In the car on the way home the others ask what I was talking to Miranda about.

"Auto...eff..no..gra...ffy."

"What?" They say in unison.

"Exactly," I sigh.

Part 2 Exploring autoethnography

So I began to research the method of my research, still stumbling over the pronunciation in my head as I typed it into Google.

Ricci (2003) justified the word: "Its purpose is evident in its roots: *auto* meaning directed from within; *ethno* meaning race, people or culture, and *graphy* as the written or pictorial

representation of the research."

He also invited me to share his autoethnographic representation of family cultures, which took the form of poetry. Its unfamiliar form with its familiar family rituals drew from me a chuckle, a feeling of nostalgia for childhood days and made me ask myself why visits to grandparents often dwindle as we get older.

Delighted not to be reading some dry, dusty journal, I researched more and was not disappointed. Ellis' (2002) personal narrative about her disquieting experience during, and in the immediate aftermath of September 11th, made me question, for the first time, the feelings of those who were not casualties of the twin towers, but were none the less affected by the terrible events that day. On entering a gas station that day, miles from the event, she notes how, "...people seem to be especially gentle and courteous." (pg 390)

This reminded me of the aftermath of the bomb that ripped the heart out of my local town in 1992 and how, as a young retail assistant, I worked alongside others with whom I had never spoken before, as we tried to secure broken windows and clean up our businesses as best we could. It made me realise how we humans reach for each other when we feel vulnerable.

Autoethnography has been defined as "...an autobiographical genre of writing and research that ... [connects] the personal to the cultural." (Ellis and Bochner 2000, pg 739). The pieces that I had read so far, which were certainly personal as they revealed thoughts and feelings, had made me not only empathise with the subjects; the researchers themselves, but also reflect on interactions and relationships between myself and others.

Realisation was starting to dawn. I could see why Miranda had suggested this form of research; after all isn't it what I'm interested in researching? How our interaction with our learners can affect their behaviour. Was it possible that by writing about my own experiences I could persuade others to examine theirs?

I was excited by the thought that research could involve writing that was individual, passionate and descriptive. Ellis' 'Heartfelt Autoethnography' (1999) introduced me to writing using dialogue, which her partner Bochner (2000 pg 748) explained would also encourage reflection:

"Invited to take the story in and use it for themselves, readers become co performers, examining themselves through the evocative power of the narrative text."

But under the excitement there lurked an uneasiness. Was this really research? Was it too fanciful, too vague? Would it sit comfortably in the spiral bound book of student research, alongside the interviews, questionnaires and statistics; the cold, hard facts?
Ricci (2003 pg 594) helped to dispel these thoughts by asking: "Does much of what we believe about the life experience of early humans come from cave drawings? Can hieroglyphics be placed with certainty in the category of science or art?"

Another concern was Miranda's explanation that autoethnography is subjective; that would mean that my ideas and experiences must help to inform my research. Again anxious thoughts crowded my head. Who would want to read about me and my ideas?
Ricci (2003 pg 593) protested, "Regardless of what else we do during our time on this planet we do one thing fully and uniquely: we live our life. And we live it in context. This, autoethnographers might say, makes us researchers, scientists, and worthy of reporting."

I remembered being asked by a fellow student about my job. After a quick explanation, he proclaimed, "How interesting it must be to observe so many teachers. I bet you've learnt a thing or two in your time!"

Part 3 Response
What follows is an autoethnographic verse of my observations of how teacher behaviour can affect learners, and how these observations helped to inform my own practice.
The characters in it are an amalgamation of many of the students and teachers I have worked with in the past.

The Learner
Then
She sits in the car, her hands clench the wheel.
What made her think she could do this?
She must be mad; they'll eat her alive,
she's not a teacher-
knows nothing about it.

Before
She sits quietly in the class among the pupils;
unobserved but observing.
She listens idly to conversations about
Samsungs and Sonys and Nokias.
And she learns.

Beside her, he shivers; it's cold in the class.
She whispers, 'Where's your jumper?'
He shrugs and frowns.

He takes her pen and he draws
- anything with wheels.
If they were real perhaps they
could take him away.
And she learns.

She admires his work and he frowns,
'It's rubbish', he says and crushes it into a ball.
In one graceful movement
it flies through the air-
but misses the bin. 'Moron,'
murmurs a voice from behind.
And she learns.

The door opens and closes.
The face at the front yells,
'Right you lot, page 25, copy it out then answer
the questions at the bottom.'
For 12 whole minutes the class work
(she manages 4 minutes longer)-
then they get bored.
And she learns.

'Settle down and get on with it!'
Then more quietly, but still audibly,
'Honestly how did I get stuck with this lot? They
haven't a brain between them.'
Shoulders slump, curses are muttered, phones
come out, pencils start doodling.
The face at the front turns puce,
And she learns.

They file into the next class.
'YOU!' says the angry face at the front
glaring at him.
'I'm not in the mood for you today,
sit where I can see you and do as you're told!'
'Open your novels, you can take turns reading
and we'll start with you at the front.'
He stiffens beside her, hands clench the book,
knuckles white.
She catches the eye of the face at the front and
gives her head an imperceptible shake.
'Ok, not you, who's next?'
says the voice at the front.
'The moron can't read,'
murmurs a voice from behind.
And she learns.

'Hey guys, thought we'd take it easy today,'
mumbles the face at the front, as it chews on a
biscuit and slurps a mug of tea.
'Grab yourselves some paper and
practise your sketching.'
He hurries to sit at a seat near the window
where the light floods in.
Head down, pencil flows, imagination runs riot.
Face flushed, he holds it out and declares,
'it's finished!'

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Without looking up, 'Stick it in your bag and take it home, and don't forget you've got detention with me tomorrow for eating in class.'
And she learns.

The smiling face greets them at the door.
'How's everyone today? What about the match yesterday, did you score? Your mum, how's she doing with the new baby? And you, any more of those fabulous drawings for me?'
The tables are arranged in groups, away from walls to prevent slouching.
He listens as the face, now explaining, walks amongst them.
He volunteers to give out the books. He struggles to make sense of the text, but he asks for help and they work together.
He basks in the glow of effort appreciated.
No voice from behind makes him feel small. It is not accepted in this room.
And she learns.

The face at the front yawns.
'Ok, here are the scores from Wednesday's test.'
'Pass, Pass, Excellent, Pass... you (throwing the test paper down) fail. Do it again, now.'
'Dumb moron,' jeers a voice from behind.
He throws down his pencil and walks out.

After
She stands at the front, terrified.
The room is empty before her.
She checks her phone is off, her activities are ready and she takes a deep breath.
She hears the handle turn, they start to flood in
And she remembers.
"Hello, good to see you all," she says smiling as she walks among them.

****

Part 4 Discussion

I wrote this piece shortly after my conversation with Miranda. I felt buoyed by the idea that the experiences, which had often left me feeling discouraged and impotent, had in fact provided a basis on which to build as a tutor. Yet, reading it over some weeks later, I feel there is a naiveté in the verse. Working with one or two students each and every day allows the luxury of getting to know that student, perhaps in a similar way to a mother who knows her child. Each nuance in their voice and expression on their face tells a story, reveals an emotion. How could a tutor possibly expect to get to know ten, twenty, thirty students in the same way? Yet isn't it possible not to lose touch with the concept of the individuality of our students? To treat their behaviour as something that should be reflected

on and addressed as carefully as their learning styles? In our teaching we readily accept that our learners are of various abilities and that we must include all of them by differentiating our resources and teaching strategies. Yet are we as meticulous with our behaviour strategies?

After reading Petty (2006 pg 3), I became even more convinced of my: naiveté: "Some teachers think a well-planned, interesting lesson will by itself prevent disruption. Or that if the teacher is entirely benign and respectful of students, conflict will simply melt away. This isn't the case."
He revealed that "...the most effective teachers are both dominant (strong leaders) and cooperative (helpful, friendly and fair), but they are neither to the extreme." (2006 pg 7)

Petty also went onto report that, "...teachers new to the profession tend to start too cooperatively and with insufficient dominance." (2006 pg 7)
Believing I was too cooperative, I eagerly turned the page to devour his advice. One of the main points was the importance of 'authoritative body language' or the 'PEP' approach:

- Proximity - Walk around the classroom. Dominance is increased by walking closer to the students
- Eye contact - Holding eye contact expresses dominance
- Posing Questions - Rather than telling a student off for not working; ask questions

I was delighted to read these as I realised I *had* been doing these things. The dialogue I had written which illustrated these points had been written *before* I read Petty's paper. Perhaps I was not so naive after all. This led me to realise that the process of writing had helped me to clarify my actions and now I could reflect positively on my behaviour strategies. I became conscious of the fact that until I had written the dialogue I was still not entirely sure *what* I had learned during the years discussed in the poem. The writing of it made me focus on one particular experience and analyse what had occurred. It revealed details of an almost subconscious knowledge which I had learnt through observation.

I was reminded of a piece I had read by Laurel Richardson, a leader in qualitative research and an advocate of autoethnography who wrote, "I write to find things out." (2002 pg 5) She talks of writing as a method of inquiry and of using

her writing as a way, not only of *telling* but of finding out what she did not know before. With this in mind I decided to re-examine the rest of my writing.

Thoughts of myself as a tutor and a classroom assistant were soon joined with thoughts of myself as a student. Re-reading the dialogue piece showed me that even a mature student, who considers herself emotionally intelligent, can get sulky or irritable when anxious!

Miranda, in her role as tutor, refuses to mirror my mood; instead she ignores it and goes straight to the heart of the problem: my non-existent research paper. She insists on leading me towards, and making me think about, a solution, which in itself makes me refocus my emotions and my behaviour. She shows confidence in me by not over- explaining the research method, but rather allowing me some autonomy over how I will discover it. She uses her knowledge of previous examples of my work, which indicated an interest in writing, to inform the type of research that would arouse my curiosity. Miranda's reactions to my behaviour turned the situation around, and lead me to shake off the grumpy teenager facade and become an active learner once again.
I had always thought of my research topic as based around the 16-18 year old age group but by writing about my own behaviour and by analysing Miranda's reaction to it, I can see that I will have reflect on my actions as a tutor of adults as well.

Part 5 Conclusion
This research began as a piece of action research which, I had hoped, would provide me with a greater insight into the problems faced by tutors of young adults and the strategies they may have discovered to address this. Unable to find sufficient volunteers to participate, which in itself may be a sign that the problems are greater than I first anticipated, my research evolved into an autoethnographic piece.

Autoethnography is meant to be reflexive; it should engage the reader and should "... use [your] experience to make a point about the importance of a particular event, process or form of knowledge." (Student Learning Commons)

 I introduced my subject via a written dialogue, hoping its readability would engage the reader from the start. I used my experience as a classroom assistant, in the form of poetry, to encourage an awareness of tutor behaviour and

the affect it can have on our students. Ensuring we are conscious of the behaviour strategies we employ is not enough. Petty (2004) emphasises the need to amend and change our response to problems in behaviour where needed.

"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." (pg 117)

This research paper may not have provided the answers to problems we face in the classroom in regards to behaviour, but as Goodall (2000 pg 147) explains: "...reflexivity is not necessarily about using self-examinations to come to final judgements about persons, places or things. Sometimes it is reflexive enough just to raise relevant questions."

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Reports and Reviews

Move the body stretch the mind: Open to learning through breathwork, movement and meditation.
Judy Murphy and Mary Norton

Edmonton Canada: Windsound Learning
This is a practical and accessible book which gives clear instructions for exercises which strengthen and relax the body and the mind. It draws clear connections between the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of learning. These themes are reinforced by the inclusion of inspiring quotations. My only reservation about the book is that the layout can be a little cluttered at times, with diagrams and instructional text side by side with quotations and reflections of learning. This might lead to confusion for less confident readers, who might need support to use the book effectively. Despite these reservations, I recommend this innovative text for learners and practitioners alike.
Shelley Tracey

Improving Learning in College - Rethinking literacies across the curriculum
Roz Ivanic, Richard Edwards, David Barton, Marilyn Martin-Jones, Zoe Fowler, Buddug Hughes, Greg Mannion, Kate Millar, Candice Satchwell and June Smith
Published by Routledge (2009) £21.99

'In real life, people do not read and write in a vacuum: they read and write to get things done.'

This is the basic premise of the first major study into the literacy practices of students in Further Education colleges in the UK. Researchers working with college teachers and students compiled a complex and detailed pattern of the literacy practices students engaged in whilst at college, and in their everyday lives.

The book is divided into three sections; the first provides a rationale for the study and challenges the 'deficit model' of literacy. The authors argue that the diversity and range of literacy skills used by students outside college, such as texting or playing computer games, should be recognised and harnessed to enhance their learning.

The second part describes the research process and examines the findings in detail. It presents an analysis of the literacy skills that students used on specific college courses, such as Catering & Hospitality and Childcare. The vocational teachers taking part in the research

were surprised to discover just how much literacy was involved in their courses. The use of the students' own words and the detailed descriptions of how they used literacy make for interesting reading; in fact, I found myself analysing the practices I was using whilst preparing to write this review!

The final part of the book considers the implications of the research findings for teaching and learning in colleges. The authors make a plea for a more practical approach to assessment on vocational courses. They found that often students were required to write assignments, such as logbooks, which bore no relation to the writing they would actually need in their future workplace. They note: *'There is an irony in the fact that recording the practice is more difficult than doing it.'* (p 81) There are many vocational teachers who would agree with this. These seemingly pointless literacy tasks often demotivated learners, who were otherwise observed actively engaging with reading and writing tasks which had a real vocational purpose.

The only time the book lost its relevance for me was when the authors turned to a discussion of the metaphors 'resonance' and 'bordering', which they used to try and describe the complex ways in which literacy practices overlap from one context to another. Also, there were occasional lapses in the generally accessible writing style. I am still puzzling over: *'a new resource with multimodal semiotic affordances and non-linear processing potential'* (p 107) However, the use of photographs, boxed information, tables and summaries of the key points helped to make the information as accessible as possible. Furthermore, there are clear explanations of the research methods used, including some good ideas for how teachers could undertake their own research into their students' literacy practices.

This book will be very useful for teacher trainers delivering specialist literacy diplomas, or the new embedding qualifications for vocational teachers. Its message will come as a breath of fresh air to teachers trying to help their students negotiate seemingly senseless written assignments.

Linda Cook has taught adult literacy for over 20 years and is currently Skills for Life Training Co-ordinator for Norton Radstock College in Somerset. Contact: linda.cook@nortcoll.ac.uk

Review and update on '*Literacies*', 2008-09
Maxine Burton

Issue 9, fall 2008 – *Facing barriers, creating openings*
Issue 10, spring 2009 – *Where are we headed? Reading the future of literacy work in Canada*
ISSN 1705-7434
$5.95

Since my review of the spring 2008 issue of the Canadian journal, *Literacies,* the warning printed in the autumn issue (to the effect that there was unlikely to be further funding for the journal) has become a sad reality. The spring 2009 issue is the last for the time being, although it seems that publication will be able to continue after a fashion, thanks to a partnership proposed by another Canadian journal, *Community Literacies*.

Issues 9 and 10 contain the same stimulating mix of articles by practitioners and researchers, including Jenny Horsman and our own Mary Hamilton, with an extract from her SCUTREA 2008 conference paper, *Agents of change? Tutors managing learner identities in lifelong learning* (10, pp 26-27). It is also good to see an article by Sheila Stewart, a Toronto-based practitioner-researcher, entitled *Laughter out of brackets: a reflective practitioner research project about story and diversity.* This project has involved monthly meetings 'to reflect on practice and on ourselves as practitioners through the lens of story and diversity'(10, pp17-20). Sheila has attended RaPAL conferences, is on our editorial board, and I had the pleasure of working with her and Bonnie Soroke a few years ago when we co-edited issue 58 (winter 2005) of the RaPAL journal.

The subtitles of these two issues seem to reinforce a feeling that the journal's demise is a metaphor for far-reaching problems in Canada with adult literacy teaching and learning in general. As the editor, Tannis Atkinson, says in the editorial on p. 2 of issue 10, under the heading, *What is to be done?*

'Right now the climate is not particularly conducive to genuine education. We are no longer allowed to ask literacy for what, literacy for whom. We are no longer allowed to say that literacy is a right rather than a charitable enterprise. Instead, in many parts of the country … we are told we should be saying essential skills for all, so that the GDP will grow.'

Tannis goes on to say,

'Yet I know that many practitioners keep doing what they have always done: trying to meet the learners on their terms, trying to build from what they know, trying to support learners making changes they want to make, trying to support learners making changes they want to make, trying to help them believe in themselves and to show them that they are making progress'

And she concludes with the stirring words: 'Let us keep naming what doesn't make sense. Let us keep clear about what we know to be true and real, and what is just nonsense. And let's keep speaking out'

This may be about the Canadian situation but doesn't this resonate with UK practitioners too? To find out what progress Literacies is making with finding a way to continue, and to read journal articles visit www.literacyjournal.ca.

To close on an even more positive note, I was interested to read about the *Literacies* initiative in issue 9 of inviting their readers to say what they liked about the journal, what could be better, and how they saw its role in the adult literacy field. The comments from this readers' survey, reported in issue 10, make for an uplifting endorsement of the power and value of sharing practitioner research and practice, and a celebration of the opportunities such a journal offers for professional development, discussion and reflection.

RaPAL Conference 2010

Greenwich University, London
15th - 17th July

Multiliteracies
Changing literacies, changing worlds

It is a decade since the New London Group used the term Multiliteracies in their groundbreaking volume of the same name (Cope and Kalantzis,2000) to describe the diverse linguistic forms and multimodal media we now employ to communicate with each other.

In this conference we seek to explore how literacies and languages interrelate in the context of our linguistically and culturally diverse society. What is the power of different literacies to change lives and worlds, in local and global contexts? Within the field of adult literacy, how do new technologies and new literacies offer opportunities for critical engagement and learning? Workshop themes could cover the following issues:

- Practice, research and policies that recognise and support a variety of literacies and languages

- Practice, research and policies that explore different contexts for literacies, language and learning

- Practice and research that explores the meanings of literacies within different contexts and localities

- How can digital technologies support learner 'voices'?

- What do practitioners need to know in developing pedagogies for multiliteracies and language variety?

We invite you to participate in these themes by offering workshops, taking part in panel discussions, contributing to practice-based workshops or presenting posters. Please note that workshops should be interactive sessions and that proposals should explain how this will be achieved. Workshop outlines should be between 200 and 300 words long.

We welcome proposals from new presenters and will be happy to offer advice and support if you have not presented at a conference before.

For more information or to submit your workshop outline, please contact
Vera Hutchinson 020 7612 6910 or Irene Schwab 020 7612 6311
by 31st March 2010

■■ Writing Guidelines ■■■■■■

Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

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

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

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

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

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

Journal Structure
We want to encourage new writers as well as those with experience and to cover a range of topics, to do this the journal is divided into three main sections and a review section. Each section is slightly different in length and focus. We welcome illustrations and graphics for any of the sections. The journal has a different theme for each edition but welcomes general contributions particularly for Section 1 and Section 2 and for reviews.

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

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

Section 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives
This section is for more sustained analytical pieces about research, practice or policy. The pieces will be up to 4,000 words long including references and will have refereed journal status. Although articles in this section are more theoretically and analytically developed they should nevertheless be clearly written for a general readership. Both empirical work and theoretical perspectives should be accessible and clearly explained. Writing for this section should:

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

Review Section

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

Submitting your work

1. Check the deadline dates and themes which are available in the journal and on the website.
2. All contributions should have the name of the author/s, a title and contact details which include postal address, email address and phone number. We would also like a short 2-3-line biography to accompany your piece. Sections, subsections, graphs or diagrams should be clearly indicated or labelled.
3. Send a copy either in electronic form or in hard copy to the journal co-ordinator **Yvon Appleby at: University of Central Lancashire, Preston, PR1 2HE or to YAppleby@uclan.ac.uk**

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

What happens next

1. Editors and members of the Editorial Group review contributions for Section 1 and Section 2. Contributions for Section 3 are peer reviewed by a mixture of experienced academic, research and practice referees.
2. Feedback is provided by the editor/s within eight weeks of submission. This will include constructive comment and any suggestions for developing the piece if necessary.
3. You will be informed whether you piece has been accepted, subject to alterations, and if so the editor/s will work on a final editing process. Any final copy will be sent to authors prior to publishing.
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 2010

Editors, themes and deadlines

Edition	Theme	Deadline	Editors
Spring	Conference		Amy Burgess Rachel Stubley
Summer	Open Edition	End of March	Linda Pearce Julie Meredith
Autumn	Digital Literacies and New Technologies	End of May	Shelley Tracey Jim Mullin Bex Ferriday
Winter	Conference Edition	End of September	Nora Hughes, VeraHutchinson Carol Azumah Dennis

Tried and tested literacy practice -
adult literacy and numeracy practitioners on a tutor education programme
at Queen's University Belfast reflecting on issues affecting inclusion in learning

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RaPAL Membership form

RaPAL Membership Fees for 2010

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Low-waged, unwaged, student	£20	£30	£30
* includes 1 copy of the RaPAL Journal			
Institutional Membership			
2 copies of Journal	£70	£75	£75
3 - 5 copies of Journal	£90	£100	£100
6 - 10 copies of Journal	£135	N/A	N/A

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