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# RaPAL

Conference Edition



# Journal

# The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

## Who we are

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

## What we do

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

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

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

### Why not join in?

**Further information can be found at our website: [www.rapal.org.uk](http://www.rapal.org.uk)**

The RaPAL Journal expresses a variety of views which do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial group. The RaPAL Journal has been printed by Image Printing Co., Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire. Matlock, Derbyshire.



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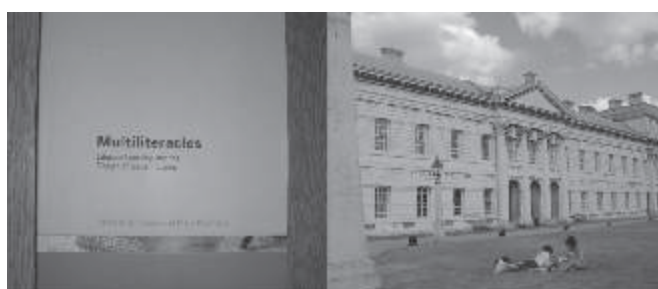
# Editorial

## Azumah Dennis and Nora Hughes

*Azumah is a Senior Lecturer in Post-Compulsory Education and Training at the University of Hull. Nora is a former literacy teacher and teacher educator based in London. She is a member of the RaPAL management group and joint coordinator of the RaPAL journal.*

Welcome to the RaPAL journal. This edition is in two sections: Section 1, *Multiliteracies*, is a celebration of and reflection on, the RaPAL conference held in London in July 2010; Section 2, *Lifelong learning: principles and practice*, encompasses articles and reviews which, though varied in their subject matter and approach, all grapple with the theory, practice and politics of adult learning.

### Section 1: Multiliteracies



We open this section with ***Changing literacies, changing worlds***, in which **Azumah Dennis** describes how the keynote speaker and workshop presenters addressed the questions which the conference set out to explore:

*How do different languages and literacies interrelate in a diverse and changing society?*

*What is the power of different literacies to change lives and worlds?*

*How do new technologies and new literacies offer opportunities for critical engagement and learning?*

This is followed by four articles based on conference workshops, in which the authors develop and reflect on the ideas they introduced in their groups and the discussions that took place.

**Shelley Tracey** suggests 'creating and responding to textpoems' as an example of an 'inclusive literacy practice', which draws on the everyday practice of texting to enhance learners' uses of language and literacy.

**Julie Collins** reminds us of the importance of storytelling, including the power of stories to re/create what it means to be a literacy learner, using powerful multimedia tools.

**Anthea Rose** explores the challenges some parents face in supporting their children's learning in a technologically-driven school environment. Rejecting the labelling of these parents as 'hard to reach', she argues for the kind of support that would allow them to engage with schools on a more equal basis.

**Amy Burgess and Karin Tustin** offer a firsthand account of a small scale research project that questions the importance of institutionalised literacy learning and teaching. They explore how adults learn new writing

practices in their everyday lives and, in focusing on the role of text in people's lives, signpost a view of all artefacts associated with meaning-making - from images and words to musical scores - as part of what we mean by literacy.

### ***We finish Section 1 of the journal with participants' reflections on the conference:***

In *Rich ideas for literacy learning and teacher education* **Nora Hughes** picks out the main themes emerging from written evaluations by workshop participants.

In *Multimemories* **Julie Meredith** concludes with a funny, thought-provoking account of the RaPAL conference as experienced by a 'first-timer'.

### ***Section 2: Lifelong learning: principles and practice***

This part of the journal opens with *A quacking good literacy lesson!* in which **Frankie High** describes an unusual learning experience and its impact on a group of learners.

**Catriona Carson** and **Philomena McKenzie** analyse the strengths and potential barriers in delivering health education programmes that require highly specialised language and literacy skills, in an article that will interest health professionals as well as adult educators.

**Tracy Part**, while exploring issues in numeracy, offers interesting parallels with literacy. Context, culture and process matter when managing numbers and the value that learners place on their everyday practices has an enormous influence over how they feel when presented with challenges in class.

We are delighted to have as our final article *Learners Got Talent: North of Scotland conference organised by learners for learners, March 2010* in which **Moira Hamilton, Althea Forbes** and **Mary Rhind** discuss the successes and challenges of this learner run event in the context of a national strategy of learner involvement at every level.

### ***We finish Section 2 of the journal with three reviews:***

For anyone interested in the principles and practice of Literacy or ESOL education, **Sally Haywood** reviews *Teaching Adult Literacy* and **Lesley Poulaud** reviews *Teaching Adult ESOL*, published by Open University Press. Both texts have the potential to become (if they aren't already) 'required reading' for trainee teachers and teacher educators.

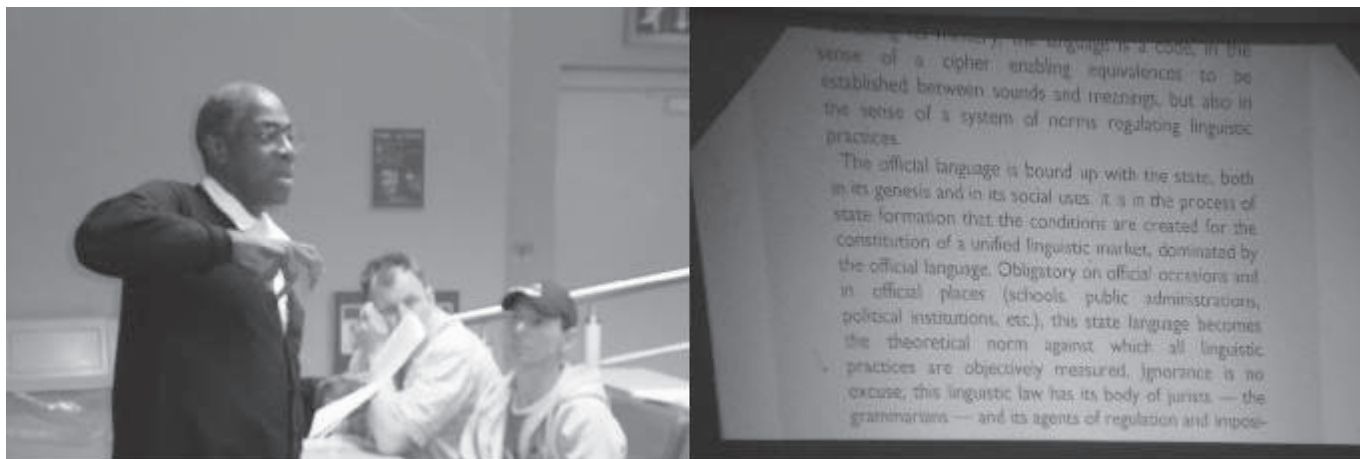
**Gaye Houghton** finds *Learning Through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning* a 'highly readable' and 'important' report, which 'lays out a strategic framework for lifelong learning' and argues for more investment to bring about 'greater equality... economic and social wellbeing and ... social justice'.

## Section 1 - Multiliteracies

### Changing literacies, changing worlds

*Azumah Dennis*

*The conference set out to explore the interrelationship between literacy, language and diversity, the power of literacy to change worlds, and how technology can be used to foster critical engagement. These questions were taken up in a variety of ways by the keynote speaker and workshop presenters.*



#### Keynote presentation

**Roxy Harris** has an almost iconic status amongst practitioners interested in the politics of literacy. It was a privilege to see him delivering the key note presentation, a refreshingly multi-faceted take on the multiliteracies theme. Focusing on speech rather than text, Roxy offered no less than nine different dimensions that shape our use of language. His narrative travelled through space, time and location, reminding those present that how we talk carries residues of what we have left behind, shot through with shard like glimmerings of the people we are becoming, while simultaneously being shaped by the opportunities and affordances of the mainstream culture in which we live. In Roxy's presentation Cockney, Punjabi and Jamaican creoles establish their own versions of Standard English. Code-mixing and code switching are experienced – for some of us at least - as the norm. It's a while since I've listened to Roxy. His take on language, literacies and power, his refusal to use PowerPoint, his gentle reminder that some of us get angrier as we get older, along with his almost nostalgic use of the overhead projector made for a memorable and inspiring presentation.

#### Workshop presentations

Such a broad range of questions will inevitably invite many answers and no single response emerges from the heady mix of presentations. The strongest single point of interest was the use of technology – more than half the workshops featured the use of technology.



The interest here is not on simply how to improve skills or compensate for deficit, instead presenters chose to use digital technologies to explore, celebrate and design. In real worlds and virtual spaces teachers and learners shared the experience of going for a walk in the park and building an online community of practice. Literacy learning and teaching does not start and stop with technology – as Roxy's insistent use of an overhead projector in preference to the digitally enhanced PowerPoint reminds us. The research based workshops exploring the meaning of literacy, what learners do when they read and the significance of everyday practice (as opposed to good, better and ubiquitously perfect) practice made good use of notes written on scraps of paper that workshop participants exchanged ideas around. Given that part of the experience of linguistic and cultural diversity is the experience of displacement and dis / re location how technology connects literacies across and time and space is neatly opened up for further exploration.



# Creating and responding to textpoems: developing an inclusive literacy practice

Shelley Tracey

School of Education, Queen's University Belfast

## TEXTING

Between abbreviations,  
intuiting the unbloomed word.  
The unsung notes are sliding, rising.  
A consonant unothering.x

This text poem, composed and sent out on my mobile phone, was a starting point for the workshop at the conference. We used the poem to explore the idea that the symbolic language of texting has the potential to engage sender and reader in a creative dialogue about meaning making. The practice of texting is often accused these days of having a negative impact on the use of English by frequent texters, in particular young people. To counterbalance this argument, we reviewed the work of Plester and Wood (2009) on the capacity of texting to support the development of metalinguistic skills. In this paper, the authors explain how "textisms", or different uses of text language, support the capacity to manipulate language and to use it creatively.

The next part of the workshop, which involved the creation of text poems, offered participants opportunities to explore their own texting practices and applications to literacy learning. Underpinning the workshop was the recognition that communication by means of mobile phones is a significant literacy practice, in particular amongst young adult learners. Creating text poems is a possible method for building on this practice in literacy learning programmes.

The word "unothering" in the text poem above was coined in the process of writing the poem to convey the idea of connecting effectively with others. To experience the nature of this connection, participants wrote text poems and sent them to each other. This activity took place in pairs to replicate the intimate spaces in which text messages are usually sent and received. The process of making text poems was framed as a series of structured activities based on the idea of writing frames, structured prompts used commonly in literacy learning to support less confident writers in creating different types of text.

The first activity was an examination of the author's text poems, printed on a set of small cards and presented as a collection in a bag. I explained the background to the development of

these poems, and opened up a discussion on how small spaces for writing, such as cards and postcards and mobile phones, might render the idea of the blank page less intimidating for inexperienced writers. In the second activity, participants wrote brief responses to images which appealed to them. The purpose of this exercise was to experience ideas for stimulating writing. In the final activity, participants wrote poems to each other.

A number of text poems were created in the workshop, including the following:

I censor, I hope.  
I convey, I hope.  
Let me know you receive.  
You understand. x

Janet Harper

Grey room  
sunlight  
old spaces  
high  
thinking ... Ready?

Chris Alred

A day away  
from email  
from demands  
from deadlines  
CPD as a time for me x

Susie Kusnierz

We are witnesses.  
Inhaling, exhaling.  
We are the listeners, the watchers.  
The guardians of the letting go.x

Janet Harper

The themes of these poems included the process of making them, the opportunities they offer for creative space, and the exploration of metaphor. The workshop ended with a discussion on applications of the activities to practice, including the importance of expressive language tasks as well as functional ones in literacy learning. It was noted that the brevity of text

poems might be an incentive for the engagement of reluctant writers, and that assumptions should not be made about regular texting practices and access to mobile phones and signals.

These points were confirmed in the workshop evaluations, which suggested that participants intended to share their experiences with ESOL and adult literacy colleagues, both informally and through staff development. Responses to the question on the evaluation form about the most useful aspect of the workshop included:

- Sharing text poems with other people
- This is not an approach I've used before, which means I'm able to pick up loads of ideas
- Opened my eyes to a new method

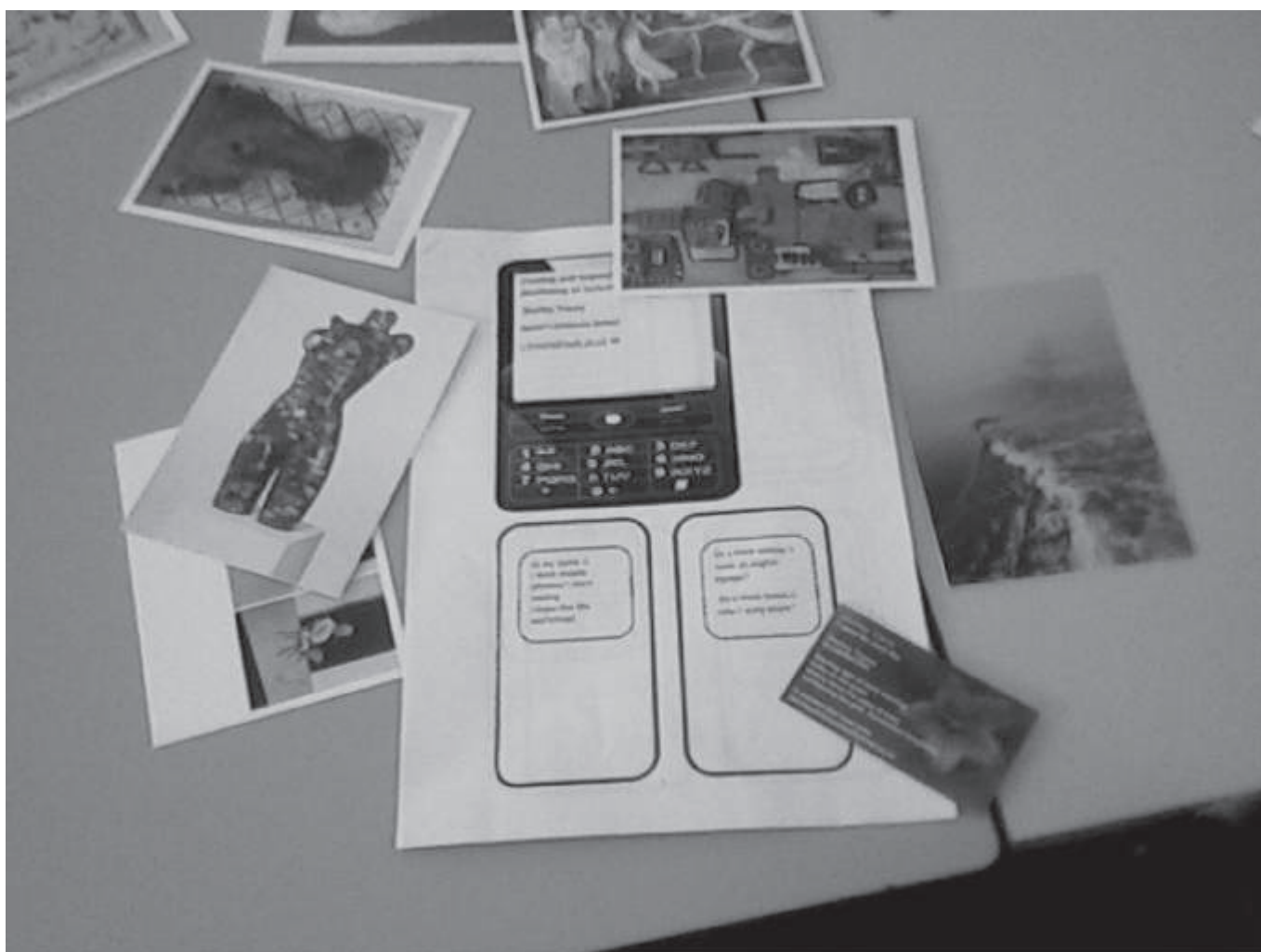
- Having and sharing the experience of composing text poems on the spot! Ideas about the potential of text poem writing for writing development as a whole

Finally, a request for any other comments generated the response that "It's nice to do something like this which is more about personal than functional literacy".

For further information about using text poems in literacy classes, please contact Shelley Tracey on [s.tracey@qub.ac.uk](mailto:s.tracey@qub.ac.uk)

### Reference

Plester, B. & Wood, C. (2009) "Exploring Relationships between Traditional and New Media Literacies: British Preteen Texters at School" *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14 (2009) 1108-1129



## Stories in the telling

Julie Collins

*As a Basic Skills tutor I have worked in various community settings. I am particularly interested in the power of narrative and the use of different media to tell stories. This article is based on the RaPAL conference workshop 'We are our stories'.*

### Why story?

'We spend a phenomenal amount of our lives following stories: telling them, listening to them, reading them, watching them being acted out on the television, screen or in film or on stage. They are far and away the most important features of our everyday existence.' Booker (2004).

It is by expressing our emotions and feelings in words, pictures, song and photographs that we begin to know our world and what it means to us, and others.

The advent of digital media has given us more possibilities to encourage learning and reflection through the sharing of stories.

### Tools

Over the past 10 years I have worked with Gypsies and Travellers across Cheshire and residents in a homeless hostel using video, photography, ceramics, web, family history, rapping, sculpture and poetry, each medium a tool to share our stories

Information, records and stories about these lives exist but have not always been public. Some were written on scraps of paper; some are evoked by objects; some events have been unravelled in articles in newspapers or on the internet; some are engraved on skin; some are transformed into portable wealth; some are kept on mobile phones; others now exist in graves but many more are alive in memory.

### Many ways to tell a story

Stories come in many different guises, if we just have the time to notice.

Tobias (1993) introduces us to the worlds of storytelling by saying, 'The shelves of libraries are stacked with the stories of centuries, but out on the street, the air swarms with newly made fiction. These living stories are so much a part of us that we hardly think about their role in our lives. They are rumour, gossip, jokes, excuses, anecdotes, huge outrageous lies and little white lies – all daily inventions of fiction that create the fabric of life.'

Story making and telling is synonymous with the

value of life itself. Story is learning, celebrating, healing, and remembering. Each part of the life process necessitates it.

As literacy tutors we need to have multiple genres and practices to draw from to enable the telling.

### Examples of Practice

Working on the Travelling through Time project funded by the LSC and supported by the BBC, three Further Education Colleges in Cheshire collaborated to encourage basic skills learning in the Gypsy and Travelling community. Mid Cheshire brought individual members of the community into college to attend classes. South Cheshire decided to focus on 1:1 spelling and reading within the Gypsy community, whilst Warrington Collegiate focused on digital storytelling and rapping. As Project Manager, running the Warrington Collegiate programme, I was challenged about whether 'digital storytelling' was literacy.

More recently, I travelled with students and staff from a Salvation Army homeless hostel to participate in Voices Across Boundaries (Grundtvig Learning Partnership) conferences in Oslo, Mechelen and Anghiari and used different media - metal sculpture, silk painting, family history, film and song - to share their stories, to challenge stereotypes and encourage understanding.

This telling of story is a powerful way to build literacy skills. It does more than just help us to communicate and create a record of events. It celebrates who we are and so it values both the differences and similarities of people and in turn encourages reflection and critical thinking.

### Developing ideas for the Conference workshop

Is it possible that when we share our stories we get to know each other as being human, that issues of culture, class, gender may begin to melt away?

For the two groups, does the impact of being seen as 'other' by the wider community start to change because the process of making, recording, reflection and observation empowers the individual/s who become part of that



practice. Can this learning and the acquisition of new tools begin to challenge 'habitus', in Bourdieu's terms? (Bourdieu 1977)

It was this practice and these ideas that I wanted to share with the Conference.

**As literacy tutors how can we work with story using these same technologies?**

Using multimodal approaches, I wanted individuals to share their ideas, memories and lives and celebrate their identity or create 'other' identities

"Every community [also] has a memory of itself. Not a history, nor an archive, nor an authoritative record... a living memory, an awareness of a collective identity woven of a thousand stories." Joe Lambert (www.storycenter.org)

If we embrace computer and digital technology such as You Tube, Mobile, Web 2.0, Apps as tools we may enable more voices to be heard.

**The WORKSHOP**

When I planned the workshop, I was hoping, as is customary in Google maps, to set my start (A) and end points (B) on a journey and if there was time, to visit several of the 'Points Of Interest', encouraging those who had come 'along for the ride' to experience the elements.

Near journey's end I had planned time to think how they could create their own story developing their own narrative voice on the computer, using photos, artefacts, memories.

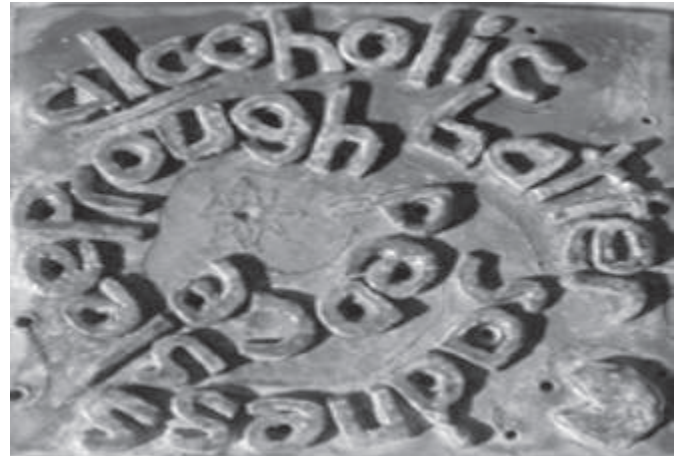
**Session One**



We looked at different types of story; some were drawn from a single image, fabric, letter.. A photograph has the ability to convey emotion, mood, narrative, identity, ideas and messages -

all of which are important elements of story telling.

It is important though to acknowledge that not all pictures tell a story.



I also wanted to share ways of eliciting stories from the groups I have worked with.

These exercises that I and others, writers, journalists, poets, textile designers, photographers and potters had used to help the process of celebrating memories, thoughts and lives.

The raku tiles witness 6 words of importance to share a story including one feeling word.

For the workshop I wanted to focus on two poetry techniques, to draw out a story.

**1) Haiku - capturing moments in time**

On a residential in Dimmingsdale, residents from the hostel photographed nature - focusing on fire, water, earth and air. They wrote a haiku to bring together words and thoughts elicited by the image. Haikus are a Japanese verse form using 17 syllables.

Time like some great bird  
Hangs motionless upon the wind  
Talons bearing down

**James Lee House resident**

Tamoya, one of the workshop participants, wrote this haiku after looking at his family photo. His workshop reflections are recorded at the end.

ka - ga - ka - ze - fu      家 - 風 - 吹 - 石  
my      family  
ka - na - re - te - ki - zu - fu      家 - 離 - 後 - 我 - 知 - 石  
after separation      I realize  
ka - ze - ki - zu - na      家 - 風 - 吹 - 石  
it      ties

my family  
after separation  
I realize its ties

### 1) A prepositional poem

When I wrote the poem 'Family' I was a learner on a Grundtvig training course. I brought the objects that helped me create this to the conference, so that I could explain how I put this together. During the process I reflected on my understanding of objects familiar to me, usually held but not examined for their particular significance in our family story.

The use of a prepositional poem helped me to ask questions - what happened before the event and what happened as a consequence. You can choose to use other prepositions to explore and play with ideas and language. Above - below, inside - outside.....

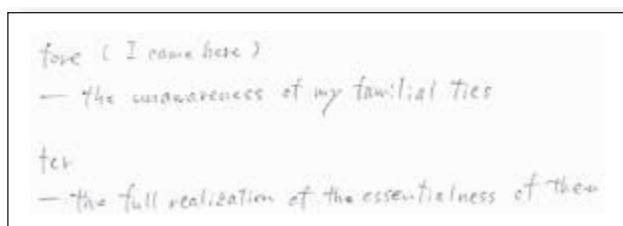
#### FAMILY

Before - a whisper of love, then sadness

After - sadness, a family survives  
(grandmother's locket)

Before - the journey, a soldier signs, hopes of returning

After - hope, memories lie scattered across a field in Pithiviers.



Before (I came here)

- the awareness of my familial ties

After

- the full realization of the essentialness of them

During the session we had considered relationships – spatial, temporal and logical - semantics, mediums and modes of representation and the influences of communities and culture.

### Session Two

Originally the idea was to create a movie and or poster using everyone's photographs and two line prepositional poems. Instead, we decided to select 5 photographs from the conference to create a story using Apple's I movie. The group were shown how to

#### Import **Images**

Change the order of selected images using

#### **Drag and Drop**

Apply **Transitions**

Add a **Sound Effects** file

Record a **Voiceover**

Create a **Title** and **Credits** page

Burn CD / DVD

The final step was to decide whether to upload the movie to I Tunes, choosing the size of the file for mobile, TV or computer, or to burn it to CD.

Tamoya's reflections on the workshop:

*"First of all I realized again the importance of people's own stories and remembered Japanese literacy education has also set a high value on learners' stories. I was also impressed by the learners' storytelling in the videos. Second, I actually felt the impact of digital media in telling our own stories and could experience various concrete methods of making digital stories, though I'm not sure if I can make full use of them. Third, It was very hard for me to make the haiku about my family, but it was extremely valuable experience because I could rethink of my family."* (Tamoya2010)

#### **My own reflection after writing for this journal.**

What differences have multimodality, or the affordances of the new technologies made to telling our stories? Have they helped to remove the barriers of power and control? Is it important how we use technology and what literacies are taught or shared? We need to learn from history whose stories are recorded, whose are heard.

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?

The books are filled with the names of kings.

Was it the kings who hauled up the craggy lumps of rock? Brecht (1987)

Bruner (1986) described learning as a multifaceted process in which thoughts, emotions, and actions do not occur in isolation, but are aspects of a larger, unified whole. If telling stories has relevance, what digital tools encourage and enable the telling in 2011?

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[http://www.i-am-everyone.co.uk/i-am-markbeaumont.php?video=mark\\_b\\_advert](http://www.i-am-everyone.co.uk/i-am-markbeaumont.php?video=mark_b_advert)  
[http://www.photobus.co.uk/index.php?id=6&movie=the\\_bus.flv](http://www.photobus.co.uk/index.php?id=6&movie=the_bus.flv)  
<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Haiku-Poem>

Contact Julie at **guilamena@hotmail.com** for links to websites

Many thanks to Tamoya and Julie. (grandfather's letter to my Dad (aged 4) written on the battlefield in Flanders)

Before - the privileges of class and wealth, servants and warmth  
 After - warmth changes to cold, the search to belong  
 (South Lodge - family home)  
 Before - the connection of marriage and life  
 After - life ends, charms reveal that love was never felt  
 (unrequited love through 25 years of marriage)

Tamoya created a two line prepositional poem in response to his family photograph.



# Exploring the challenges some parents face in supporting their children's learning in an increasingly technologically-driven school environment

Anthea Rose

*Anthea Rose is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) based in London Metropolitan University. Whilst her current post involves research across the full spectrum of education stages, she has a particular interest and expertise in researching adult literacy and community learning; specifically family literacy.*

## Introduction

This year the annual RaPAL conference looked at changing literacies and how new technologies offer opportunities for critical engagement and learning. I would like to contribute to this discussion by highlighting some of the challenges some parents face, particularly those with educational qualifications up to and including level 2<sup>1</sup>, in supporting their children in an increasingly technologically-driven school system that they cannot afford to participate in, and do not fully understand.

Schools are relying more and more on a range of technologies to communicate with parents and for teaching and learning. For example, it is now common practice for schools to send text messages to parents' mobile phones when children are absent without authorisation, or to notify them of unscheduled school closures, and many schools communicate with parents using email. In addition, the majority of schools have their own websites and in many cases schools provide interactive "learning platforms" for pupils' personal study, for completing and submitting homework tasks, and for parents to see what their children are learning. Finally, there has been an expectation that by 2010 all schools in England will provide parents with online reports. This means parents should now be able to electronically access "real time" information on their child in relation to attainment, attendance and behaviour. At the time of the study Becta<sup>2</sup> had been the government agency in England responsible for ensuring the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning, both in and out of school. Under the current government its closure is imminent.

Such measures have been seen as revolutionary for improving parental engagement in children's education. However, some research suggests such improvements are not benefiting all parents equally. This paper draws on the findings of a Becta-funded research study (Hollingworth, et al., 2009) carried out in 2009

at the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE), London Metropolitan University, in conjunction with the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI). Whilst the report highlighted the barriers faced by many parents (for example those with English as an additional language (EAL) or with children of special needs) when engaging with technologies for learning, the difficulties encountered by those on low incomes and with education qualifications up to and including level 2 were not specifically explored. As one of the researchers involved in the study, I decided to look at one such group of British parents from one of the case study areas more closely. Here I argue that whilst technology can offer the opportunity for critical engagement with children's learning, some parents – particularly those with educational qualifications at or below level 2 and/or on low incomes – find the increasing use of technology in education a difficult, fraught and sometimes alienating experience.

The parents on which this article focuses are often described by schools and government as 'hard to reach' (Home Office, 2004). Frequently there is an assumption that such parents are disengaged and uninterested in their children's education (FPI, 2008; Carpentier and Lall 2005). I would like to contribute to the growing body of research that problematises these assumptions, and to suggest that most parents, regardless of their educational or economic background, do want to be more involved in their children's education, but do not necessarily have the resources or know-how to do so (Moon and Ivins 2004). They do want to engage more fully with schools to ensure the best outcome for their children's education, but often find this difficult; part of the problem, according to the parents' testimony presented in this article, is that they feel they are not treated as equal partners by the schools.

## Methodology

The project team conducted ten focus groups across England with a total of 80 parents of

children up to the age of 14. Parents were diverse in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, income, ethnicity, housing situation and marital status. The majority of parents (68 of 80) had home internet access. The focus of the research was to explore the role of technologies in both home-school communication and learning within the family, specifically to gain a parent-centred perspective.

This article focuses on the experiences of parents in one particular urban locale: a set of 13 parents (eleven mothers and two fathers) who might be described by policy-makers as 'hard to reach'. Their children attended a range of local primary and secondary schools. The majority of these parents were White British (11 of 13), had low levels of household income (ten with incomes less than £20,000) and most had few or no educational qualifications (nine up to and including level 2, with six of these having no qualifications at all). The majority (eight) were lone mothers and only the two fathers were employed full-time. None of the parents were home owners. Nearly two-thirds of the parents (eight) did not have personal computers (PCs) in their home and therefore no home access to the internet; however, many reported technology still featured in their home in the form of game consoles, televisions and mobile phones.

### Communication with schools

Many of these parents felt powerless to engage with schools and some even felt excluded because of the way the school failed to engage with them, especially secondary schools. Parents felt they were only contacted when their children were 'in trouble' (for example, when they were accused of truancy or disrupting classes), when they were ill or when the schools wanted something from parents, such as financial contributions towards the cost of a school trip. When asked about school contact and the type of information they received from schools, responses were typically negative:

*You get a school report every year to say how your child is doing and that but they don't really communicate with you apart from that.... Only when the child is poorly I suppose.*  
(Peter, Father)

*If there is fighting at school, they are definitely on the phone.* (Tina-Mother)

Parents felt that communication with school was limited, often taking place at the schools' and teachers' convenience. The increasing trend in schools to use new technology such as text

messaging and email to communicate, exacerbated what these parents already perceived as a one-way activity; it was perceived as being sent *to* the parent *from* the school with little opportunity for two-way discussion.

### Access to technology

Parents were also disadvantaged because only five of the 13 had a computer with home internet access. Parents did not use email a great deal in their daily lives and just one parent, a father, used technology in the workplace. Even when they knew how to use email, many did not see the need and were not interested in email forming part of their regular communication:

*I do have an email address I check...I wouldn't want a job in [technology]; I don't care for it at all. But I can do it - but it's little, it's not often, I've got no interest...* (Kerry, Mother)

Parents naturally reported concerns about the cost of computers and the on-going expenditure required for online home internet access. Earlier this year the previous government launched the Home Access Scheme intended to provide laptops to all low income families as part of the Digital Britain Agenda (BIS & DCMS, 2009; Technology Strategy Board, 2009). The scheme was viewed with some scepticism by this group of parents. Some discussed how their child had received a laptop from the school, but reported the financial burden they experienced in ensuring their child could benefit from the scheme; particularly having to pay for home internet connection:

*Even if you get a laptop and everything you have still got to subscribe to Virgin or Sky or something like that or buy one of these sticks [wireless dongles] that cost absolutely a fortune...* (Jane-Mother)

Some parents felt obliged to buy a computer that they did not really see as an expenditure priority because they feared their children would be penalised by the school if they did not have internet access at home. One mother recalled how her son was 'threatened with detention' because they did not have the internet at home and he was unable to submit his homework via the school's learning platform:

*We didn't have a computer in the home let alone Internet or anything and he was threatened with detention for not going on the school learning site - not getting enough hours on this learning thing.* (Anne-Mother)

Parents talked about how they and their children

negotiated this threat of being penalised for a lack of home access to technology. For example, children had to find alternative, less convenient times and places to complete and submit homework tasks, such as staying behind after school, working at lunch or using the local public library. The unfairness of the situation was not lost on these parents with one mother stating, 'I think it is really unfair how they make them go home and do their homework on the computer' (Tina, Mother).

### **Access is not enough**

Providing such families with the necessary technological hardware is insufficient to resolve the challenges they face. These parents did not have the necessary skills, knowledge or confidence themselves to use technology effectively to support their children's education. However, they did understand and appreciate that it was necessary for their children to have such technological skills and know-how, with one father commenting, 'I do get where they're coming from... 'cos in business ...that's how you work' (John, Father).

Parents felt that they lagged behind their children technologically. In many cases their children taught them how to use a computer, '...my kids learnt how to use the internet, then they helped me...' (Tina, Mother). However, this often made parents feel inadequate, and sometimes ashamed:

*...they were just showing me...I didn't like it...I just thought, I should have been teaching them ... (Emily-Mother)*

Many found the technology daunting: 'I can't do it, I go on and I'm panicking, what do I press?' (Sarah, Mother). This fear was compounded by worries about the safety of their children whilst on the internet. Most did not know how to safeguard their children from internet 'stranger danger' and accessing inappropriate content. Parents also raised concerns over the negative impact of technology on their children's health, especially increased obesity; worried they were playing outside less.

Because of these issues parents were divided over the educational value of technology. Some felt technology was a learning tool whilst others were concerned over its negative impact on learning, particularly on children's ability to write and spell correctly, commenting:

*I do believe intelligence is important but so is writing itself, English, not just spell checking*

*on a PC... I think they should go back to pen and paper... (John, Father)*

*I think we all learnt to spell properly back then, but now there is Facebook and MSN and texting you don't have to bother writing the name properly... (Sarah, Mother)*

Parents questioned whether children actually learnt from technology-based homework tasks, if it was 'real learning', or 'idle knowledge', or simply an exercise on how to operate a computer:

*It's so easy just to copy...its not real learning...I just see computer skills as working and operating... (John, Father)*

### **Conclusion**

For this group of parents an increasingly technologically-driven school system appeared to be widening the gap of school engagement between families who have access to technology and those who do not. However, providing the parents with access to technology alone was not seen as the solution. There is the difficulty of affordability, sustainability and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Further, the attitude and behaviour of schools towards the parents was also problematic. They felt powerless to engage with schools, that the relationship was unequal and that it was the schools, not them, that were hard to reach. Therefore, schools need to address these underlying issues if all parents are to feel able to engage with schools equally. Perhaps one way parents such as these can be supported is through appropriate adult ICT learning linked to the needs of their children at school, in much the same way as some family literacy and numeracy programmes (i.e. Keeping Up with the Children) try to help parents better understand current pedagogy in schools. The concerns of parents in relation to technology in schools for learning and communication need to be taken seriously if parents in similar situations are to overcome their technological fears and anxieties and improve their skills and knowledge for the benefit of their children's education.

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## Changing lifeworlds, changing writing: how adults take on new writing practices at times of change

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### Introduction

Research in literacy studies has drawn attention both to the importance of *informal learning* of literacies in people's lives (Barton and Hamilton 1998, Barton and Hall 1999), and to the growing significance of *writing* in a textualised social world (Brandt 2009, 2001; Iedema and Scheeres 2003). In our workshop at the 2010 RaPAL conference, we presented research we are currently engaged in which brings these concerns together, exploring how adults learn new writing practices in their everyday lives, outside formal educational settings.

We have recently completed a small-scale pilot study and we are now looking at how to take the work forward with a larger study. We have carried out interviews with a range of people who have learned new forms of writing at times of transition in their lives, such as taking up campaigning activism, becoming involved with community groups, or moving into retirement. People have talked to us about a range of different learning strategies, such as drawing on previous life experiences, finding models, calling on peers or family members for support, or using new technological resources.

In the workshop we shared some of the emerging themes and early findings from the pilot study. We also asked participants to discuss their responses to what we've found so far, in relation to their own personal experience and their experience as practitioners and/or researchers.

### Texts in the social world

Writing, and written texts of various kinds, are centrally important to how our society is organised. The sociologist Dorothy Smith, along with others working in a field of sociology called 'institutional ethnography', have analysed in

detail how the processes organising social relations depend on written texts. She and her colleagues are interested in developing a new type of sociology, rooted in people's real lives and experiences. She rejects the approaches of 'mainstream' sociology which impose academic theories and concepts to interpret social life. Instead, she and her colleagues start from accounts of people's experience, and then explore how these real lives and activities are co-ordinated, hooked together, and made to work together in social life. They are particularly interested in how the real stuff of people's lives gets slotted into institutional frames and concepts which bear little relation to people's own experiences. For example, it is not uncommon for people filling in official forms to feel they are forced to choose from a range of categories to describe themselves, none of which adequately represent their own lives and circumstances.

Smith and her colleagues in institutional ethnography have shown, through ethnographic work in a range of settings, how central a role texts play in this process of co-ordinating people's lives and activities. Texts can be replicated in many different local times and places. (The term 'text' is used in a broad sense, to mean any material meaning-making artefact which can be replicated, including images, multimodal texts, even musical scores. But most research in the field does primarily focus on texts which involve a lot of writing.) This capacity to be replicated means that texts can be - and are often - used to co-ordinate and standardise people's actions within institutions, and to record and describe actions within the categories and concepts that the institution can interpret and use.

We see this, for instance, when colleges attempt

to standardise teaching practice by requiring teachers to complete lesson plans and schemes of work in the same format, in many different sites and subject areas across the college or indeed across the region. Teachers are required to produce written accounts of their working practices, using the categories, concepts and frames provided by the form, reconstruing their local experiences within the possibilities and limitations of a particular institutional discourse. This text-based standardisation of local practice is enforced by disciplinary practices such as regular observations and inspections of documents to ensure teachers are completing them in the correct way. (However, resistance to the terms set by the institutional discourse is also possible. Teachers can and do find ways to liberate themselves from standardised lesson plans to better support their own practice, in creative and unpredictable ways .)

This central importance of text leads Smith to argue that social organisation is 'textually mediated'. Our lives and experiences are framed within what she terms 'ruling relations', overall structurings and orderings which are made possible by the extensive mediation of (mostly written, both paper and digital) texts. This central role of texts in organising our society means that texts are pervasive - present in almost every setting. In such a highly textually mediated society, writing takes on a particularly important role in enabling people to participate in, and possible to resist and reconstruct, such institutional processes.

It's clear from this brief outline that this account of textually mediated social organisation has a lot in common with the approach of 'literacy studies', which insists on the importance of understanding literacy by observing people's concrete practices, while making the links between these local practices and the societal and institutional processes that these are part of.

### **The Increasing Importance of Writing**

In this textually mediated world, writing is crucial to many central areas of our society: in the workplace, for democratic participation, in family life, and in accessing power and resources. In many jobs that used not to involve a great deal of writing, people now have to write a lot as a routine part of their work, two examples being work in care homes or childcare . Increasing use of new technologies means that people send e-mails and texts rather than making phone calls. Similarly, the popularity of social networking sites like Facebook or online discussion forums results in people writing

more. The current economic crisis has meant that many people have new writing demands connected with such things as changing jobs, coping with unemployment or managing their finances. More people are now entering Higher Education, where writing is still central to learning and assessment. The American scholar Deborah Brandt has summed up these changes by observing that 'more and more people around the world are spending more and more time in the posture of a writer' . This immediately becomes apparent when we compare leisure time literacy activities in contemporary homes with such activities a decade ago. In the past, people engaging in such activities would most likely be found sitting or lying on a sofa with a newspaper or book. Now, we are much more likely to be sitting at a computer, or holding a mobile device – and even when we are apparently 'just reading' the screen, our hands will be poised over the keys ready to type.

Writing is also crucial, as it always has been, to democratic participation. Levine argues that writing "conveys and records innovation, dissent and criticism; above all, it can give access to political mechanisms and the political process generally, where many of the possibilities for personal and social transformation lie". It's also an important way in which people make sense of their experience and express their creativity.

However, there's been very little research into how adults actually develop as writers. Work in literacy studies has shown the importance of people learning informally, outside education settings, but very little is known about the strategies and practices that people use.

In the Box 1 we present a pairs activity we used in the workshop to encourage participants to reflect on their personal experiences of learning new writing practices. We include it here and invite readers to use it to reflect on their own experiences.

### **Box 1 Reflection**

Your experience of changing writing practices. Think about one experience you've had of taking on a new writing practice in your adult life. What was this new kind of writing? Why did you have to learn it? How did you work out how to do it?

### **The Pilot Study**

In our pilot study we carried out recorded, in-depth interviews with five people, exploring the



new writing demands they have dealt with and the strategies they have adopted in addressing these. We also asked them about their memories of learning to write and experiences of writing at different stages of their lives. The interviewees were:

1. A member of a local pressure group
2. A church youth worker
3. A recently retired woman
4. A member of a community arts organisation
5. A retired woman who has recently participated in a variety of educational opportunities.

Interviewees were selected to represent different purposes for writing in different domains of life and life stages.

### **Research Methodology**

We found it particularly useful to encourage people to tell us stories about particular occasions and situations when they learnt new kinds of writing. Such narratives often involved discussion of key moments around writing, such as learning to write at school; writing in connection with hobbies and interests; writing related to work; and writing connected with plans and hopes for the future. Specific stories have enabled us to understand people's development as writers over time. For example, one interviewee told us about how she dealt with her first request for writing a reference - a new genre for her - by turning to her husband for help. He was a manager, and wrote references all the time. He helped her with specific phrases and proof read her first attempt at writing. This then led on to further discussion of how the relationships between them had changed over time, with first herself having been the more practised writer, and then the balance of expertise shifting once he moved into a management role.

Narratives are a particularly rich form of data because they don't just reveal what happened, they also provide information about how the participant has experienced and made sense of what happened in the context of their own life. We were also able to see from their narratives how they draw on this element of their own story as a meaning-making resource, and therefore how they can draw on it as a learning strategy. For example, the church youth worker we interviewed told us about setting up a website for her church in her previous role as church administrator. One crucial aspect of this was to get the support of church members, including a number of elderly people who had no

experience with computers and who were initially very sceptical about the need for a website. Our interviewee organised a workshop for all members of the church, during which she explained why she thought a website would be useful and asked them for their suggestions about what kind of content it might include. This proved to be a very successful approach as it enabled our interviewee to gain enough support to go ahead with setting up the website. Her interpretation of this experience led her to draw two 'lessons' from it. The first was that in order to get things done in her church, she felt it was necessary to take the initiative rather than waiting for other people to act. She also learnt that it was essential to get support and co-operation from other people who might have an interest in what she wanted to do. She had later used this understanding to help her with some of the new writing she had to undertake when she took on the job of youth worker. For example, she knew that because she was working with young people there were various legal requirements, but no-one offered her any training on this. Her response was to organise a training session for all the church youth workers in the diocese and invite someone in to train them all together. In order to get the support she needed as youth worker she had set up an advisory group.

We discovered in the course of the pilot study that by asking people to tell stories about learning new writing practices we were able to address one potential difficulty in the interviews. We found that people had particular preconceptions about what we were interested in when we started to ask them about 'writing'. They often began by mentioning handwriting, learning to write at school, writing in educational settings generally, and creative writing or 'English'. While we are interested in these things, we are interested in many other things too, and probing for narratives about writing related to specific other domains, such as hobbies, community work or church, enabled us to elicit stories that people would not have produced spontaneously when we asked in more general terms about learning writing practices. These preconceptions are revealing in themselves; for example, one interviewee (jokingly) apologised for not having started a degree when she retired, as she thought this would mean that she probably wouldn't have anything to talk about.

### **Interview Schedule**

Interview schedules varied depending on who we were talking to, to ensure we addressed

topics relevant to the research, but in broad terms covered topics of writing throughout people's lives; writing related to the organisations and / or activities they are involved with; and writing in their lives more broadly, using a range of prompts.

### Emerging Findings

On analysing the data to identify content and principal themes covered, initial findings emerged in a range of areas: the strategies people engaged in as they dealt with new writing demands; the wide range of new genres they were dealing with; and the importance of identity (expressed both explicitly and implicitly) in shaping people's responses to new writing demands.

### Strategies

Strategies people used included:

- drawing on people available at home. For example, the woman who talked about getting help from her husband when she first had to write references also told us about producing her own teaching resources when she started her first job as a primary teacher in the 1970s. There were very few books and resources in her school, so she spent the summer before she started teaching making workcards for the children. This was very time consuming, so her husband helped her, and even her grandmother when she came to stay.
- copying what the previous person in the job did. One woman explained that when she first became secretary of a local community group, she was unsure how to write minutes, so she read what her predecessor had written and used this as a guide.
- searching the Internet for examples. Someone who was involved with a local campaign group told us that when producing their submission to a planning enquiry, the group had looked on the internet and found an example of this kind of document on the Friends of the Earth website.
- transferring knowledge gained from work. For example, one woman described how she drew on her background in project management to plan and publicise events she was organising with the church youth group.
- remembering back to school experiences. A retired woman told us about starting an Open University course: 'I remember my first

essay, which I really enjoyed writing, because I did enjoy the academic side of school, so I did enjoy it.' It seems that it was the memory of enjoying school that helped her with the essay, rather than remembering specific things she may have learnt about writing when at school.

- 'just doing it'. The person from the community arts organisation told us that she had recently started writing a blog and that she had 'just dived in'. She had already told us that she had experience of writing copy for websites and other electronic formats and felt the internet was a force for democratisation in writing. She also said that it enables people to be more idiosyncratic and playful than they can be when writing in more conventional media. Her perceptions and beliefs about technologies and media seem to have given her the confidence to 'just dive in'.
- Occasionally people mentioned strategies they'd tried which had not been successful. The person from the campaign group told us that when she took on the role of press officer she had no experience of writing press releases and that the committee had tried to write the first one collaboratively. However, this took so long that they decided it wasn't an efficient use of time.

### Genres

Interviewees mentioned several genres of writing which seem to be common in a variety of settings and which often prove challenging. These include meeting minutes, formal letters, 'creative' writing and making applications for funding. Other new forms of writing described include producing blogs and websites. In the main study we plan to explore particular strategies and resources that people find especially useful in learning to write texts in new genres.

### Identities

People often expressed particular versions of their identity in the interviews, from explicit self-identifications such as "I'm a communicator"; "I was a scrapbook girl"; "I'm a born collaborator", through evaluations of their capacities like "I struggle with computers", "My handwriting is poor", "My memory isn't good", to more subtle self-identifications implicit in their descriptions. One woman identified herself quite strongly as someone who enjoyed close and happy relationships with her immediate family. She spoke with warmth about memories of her

mother reading stories to her as a child. She also told us that she and her husband get on very well together and have similar interests, so they are looking forward to spending more time together now that they have both retired. Not surprisingly, she saw her family as an important setting and resource for learning to write. When telling us about learning how to write references for people who were applying for jobs, she said she used 'the resource I had in the home – my husband.' She was keenly looking forward to being able to help her grandchildren with reading and writing, telling us 'I'm very keen on them loving books because I remember my mum reading books to me.'

Having shared emerging themes and findings, we opened up the workshop for small group discussion. In Box 2 we present the questions we used as a stimulus and we invite readers to reflect on them now.

## Box 2

### Questions and Issues for Reflection

We've focused on informal learning outside educational settings, but what are the implications for literacy education? How could literacy teachers make links between literacy learning in more formal settings and the practices and strategies that people use in other contexts? Could any of the strategies be transferred into educational settings?

Our pilot study has shown a number of specific strategies that people used when learning new kinds of writing. From your own personal experience and your experience as a practitioner, would you say that these are common strategies that people use? Are there other common strategies that our interviewees didn't mention?

From your experience as a practitioner and/or researcher, what would be your thoughts about how we might take this research forward?

say something about some of the things that people said in the discussion - AB has indicative notes.

Delegates raised a number of interesting issues in the discussion, including the following implications for practice.

- The examples show that when writing in their everyday lives, people often seek feedback either immediately after they have finished the writing or while they are still working on it. This reminds literacy teachers

about the importance of offering feedback quickly and making time for it while learners are engaged in writing tasks.

- When people who are learning new writing practices subvert the conventions, they have rational reasons for doing so and it should not be seen as a sign of failure or cognitive deficiency, but rather as a necessary part of the learning process. It's therefore important for literacy educators not to dismiss departures from the conventions as simple mistakes, but to explore with learners the thinking processes behind them and use this as a starting point for more learning.
- The data show that everyone struggles when faced with new writing demands and this should be seen as a normal part of being a writer. Literacy educators can support learners by helping them to develop a sense of themselves as belonging to a community of people who take on new writing practices. It's important to foster the understanding that being a member of such a community of writers does not mean knowing how to write any given text before you have tried. In other words, it's OK not to know.
- Delegates also commented on the dynamics of the relationships between the writers in our study and those they asked for support, who were often close friends or family members. These supporters may not necessarily have had any specialist knowledge to bring to the writing, but were able to give time and practical help. In contrast, literacy tutors do not have existing close relationships with learners but are able to offer specialist knowledge. We intend to explore this idea further in our main study and try to find out more about how the dynamics of the relationships between writers and their supporters impact on the learning process.

### Next Steps

This account of our initial pilot study has explored how people learn writing in their everyday lives. Starting from a perspective which acknowledges the importance of written texts in mediating social life, and the increasing significance of writing in people's lives, we have drawn out some key points from our research interviews with people who have recently been faced with and learned to deal with new writing demands in a wide range of different contexts. We have explained the importance of drawing



out narratives from people. We have described key points which emerged from the analysis of these narratives. These included the wide range of learning strategies people described, the ways they learned to deal with new genres, and the significance of identities in their learning processes.

Analysis of this data, coupled with our discussions with workshop participants at the RaPAL conference, have suggested a number of questions and issues for us to focus on as we take this research forward.

These include:

- What new writing demands are our research participants faced with in their everyday lives?
- How do they respond to them and develop new practices?
- What tools and technologies do people draw on? Are these specific to the everyday life setting?
- How do people's histories, identities and contexts shape the learning they engage in? What resources do people draw on in their learning?
- How do people's writing demands, practices, tools and resources change and develop over time?
- What are the outcomes of participating in new contexts for writing - in terms of learning new discourses, practices and genres; identity construction and development; and social action, citizenship and democratic participation?
- What happens when people experience conflict between different contexts for writing? In what ways are these contradictions reconciled through the learning process over time, and what tensions remain?
- What can this research tell us about how to support people better in dealing with new writing demands? To what extent can the self-directed strategies identified here be transferred to a more formal learning setting, and to what extent might this transfer change the nature of the practices?

We look forward to returning to RaPAL with some more detailed responses to these questions to discuss with delegates at future conferences!

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## 'Rich ideas for literacy learning and teacher education': participants' evaluations of RaPAL conference workshops

Nora Hughes

This quote from a conference participant conveys in a nutshell what many people expressed in their evaluations. Some 'rich ideas' came from new research: its findings, underpinning theory and above all, from accounts of the research process itself by those involved, including learners and practitioners as co-researchers. Another inspiration was the abundance of innovative approaches to learning and teaching, which practitioners could take away and apply to their own practice. Most respondents also valued the interactive nature of workshops, the space they provided for generating ideas in a group and the opportunity to try out new applications in a supportive environment.



A significant thread running through all the evaluations was the inclusion of different perspectives; in many workshops there was a strong sense that in various ways, learners, teachers and researchers all contribute to our understanding of how 'multiliteracies' can be supported and developed.



### Learning from research

For many people the conference was a chance to learn about current social practices research. They valued the inclusive way the research was presented, the fact that presenters 'contextualised [it] through specific narratives,

linking it to our own lives' and used case studies as a way of sharing 'ordinary' practice. Equally valued were presenters' reflections on methodology: 'hearing about the way it was set up – the collaborative nature, how learner and teacher roles played out', 'how the research was structured' and 'the practical specifics'.

### Theorising literacy

While all workshops linked theory with practice, some had a particular theoretical focus, for example investigating the meaning/s of 'literacy' using a new framework, examining cognitive and other dimensions of 'visual thinking' in literacy acquisition, exploring ideas about literacy and identity, or more specifically considering how Gallic speakers acquire and enhance their literacies, in the context of broader cultural and political developments.



### Ideas about reading and writing development

A strong theme in several evaluations was that workshops provided a stimulus for discussion about how literacies are sustained and developed. Some focused on writing, discussing 'genres and how people go about constructing new writing practices', 'the power of images in writing life stories' or 'the idea that creativity can be useful for all areas of writing'. Others focused on reading, for example considering 'the difference between reading a novel and reading a newspaper' or how the experience of being in a reading circle had 'developed learners' confidence and skills'.

### Developing our practice: using different media

Many workshops offered the chance to 'have a go' and 'have fun with different techniques', from composing textpoems to electronic gaming, meeting in Second Life or setting up a web forum. Not all workshops used digital media, but in other ways offered what one participant

described as a 'truly multimodal experience', for example a 'multiliteracy walk', exploring 'images, seen and unseen', 'walking and making friends while talking about literacies'.

### **Critical engagement with technologies?**

All presenters who introduced new applications of technology were concerned about their usefulness for literacy learning. Some offered a 'useful pedagogical framework', while others relied mainly on group discussion to explore implications for practice. In some cases the presenter 'helped [participants] to understand the tool and the advantages/ disadvantages of using it'.

However, in some evaluations people said they were 'still to be convinced of the value of this technology, its potential for teaching literacy' or expressed the need for 'a more critical approach to the way materials are presented'. It's tempting to see the 'digital revolution', with the exciting new opportunities it brings, as the answer to all our needs as literacy learners and practitioners. Perhaps these workshop comments could serve as a gentle reminder to us - that a tool is only a tool, whose potential for empowerment can never be taken for granted but depends entirely on how it is used.

### **Other issues**

As we all know from bitter experience, the effectiveness of technology also depends on practical realities! Even in some very popular workshops there were hitches, such as poor sound quality, images being too small for everyone to see, or the familiar problem of mobile phone reception being 'an issue'. Future conference organisers will no doubt anticipate these kinds of problems but, with the best will in the world, they may not be able to prevent them entirely.

One issue we could continue to debate is whether or not to make workshops longer. Some participants said they wanted more time, for a variety of purposes including more 'group discussion', 'hands-on activities', 'practical applications' or 'to think about how we can use case studies'. One enthusiastic respondent wanted more time 'to hear Gaelic spoken or sung'.

### **The 'learner voice'**

It seems appropriate to end this summary of workshop evaluations on a celebratory note. People who attended the 2010 RaPAL conference greatly valued the multiple perspectives on 'multiliteracies' to which it gave them access, indeed they felt there was an implicit message in the workshops that we are *all* researchers, teachers *and* learners. Among the most appreciative comments were those which referred to literacy learners' voices being heard, for example through samples of their writing or multimedia texts. In the case of Alice, who co-presented the session 'Reading circles, novels and adult reading development' with Sam Duncan, participants were particularly inspired by her description of taking part in group research and her 'joy of achievement'.



## **Build up your resources for free by reviewing something for RaPAL**

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.

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

Maxine Burton [maxineburton@mac.com](mailto:maxineburton@mac.com)

## **Photos/images wanted for the new cover**

We hope you like the the new look journal. The new cover will have changing images and photographs that represent RaPAL, our work and our view of literacies.

We need members to send in good quality photographs or images with permission to Bex Ferriday who will manage our journal image library. We will credit any material used.

Bex Ferriday [bex.ferriday@st-austell.ac.uk](mailto:bex.ferriday@st-austell.ac.uk)



## Multimemories: impressions of a first-timer

Julie Meredith

Julie Meredith is an adult literacy tutor at CALAT. When she isn't cutting up laminated paper or wishing her rucksack was a bottomless carpetbag à la Mary Poppins, she enjoys learning BSL in a paper-free classroom.



1

### What's in a word?

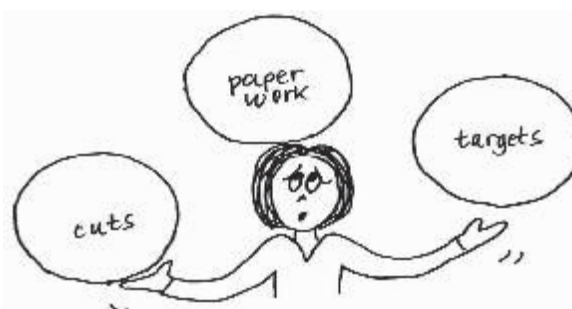
Conference: what does that word bring to mind? Being *talked at* and sneakily clock-watching while wondering what the spread will be like for lunch? A day (or two) off work? Something *good* for your CPD - the professional equivalent of cod liver oil? As a tutor working in adult education, I've limited experience of conferences and the couple I'd been to previously were, well, disappointing. Had I gone with unrealistic expectations? My first RaPAL conference provided an answer.

### Selecting and sharing



My fingers hover over the keys. They hesitate, but I heed advice to "start writing even though [you] do not know exactly what [you] want to say, because writing is a process of meaning-making, not just a process of transcribing

ready-made meanings" (Clark and Ivanic, 1997, p.110). I'm conscious that there are choices to be made and wonder whether to dig out a previous conference edition to see how others have tackled this before me or just dive in<sup>2</sup>. In one ear, Sinor (2002) reminds me that "texts are always only the sediment of choices" and readers will question "what has been left out, left behind, left over". In the other ear, I hear her say that "texts are never free of their contexts<sup>3</sup>; and speakers always utter someone else's words". If we shared time in Greenwich, you may read yourself here.



### Arriving with anxiety

The RaPAL conference coincides with end of term paperwork and, picturing the books and websites I haven't read, I wonder whether I have the mental oomph for this. A Google search reassures me that I do at least know what multiliteracies means and haven't misremembered or misunderstood. Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope's *New Learning* website says:

*"Multiliteracies is an approach to literacy which focuses on variations in language use according to different social and cultural situations, and the intrinsic multimodality of communications, particularly in the context of today's new media."*<sup>4</sup>

My internal rendering had fewer syllables but was on the right lines.

The sun is shining as I head over to Greenwich after work. When I look through the list of delegates, a number of names jump out. These are names from book spines; the 'celebrities' of the literacy world. I share this observation with another delegate, like me, *just a tutor*. I realise that this is my Inner Critic's interpretation. Isn't this the equivalent of a new learner seeing my badge emblazoned with my job title? Words confer the best (or worst) connotations and expectations.



## Learning with laughter

On Friday and Saturday I am celebrating stories<sup>5</sup>. The large room has been transformed and my eyes dart about. I'm surrounded by pottery, photography, collage, embroidery, artefacts and an array of technology. Clay, silk, voice and image tell personal stories as we learn about the processes. We discuss translating our initial fascination into classroom practice.

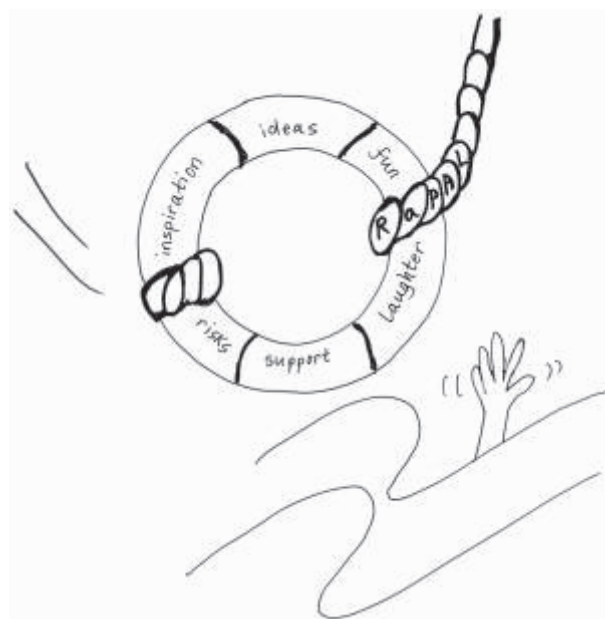
I find myself in front of iMovie with a mixture of nerves and excitement. As time is short, we opt for each making a short film about the conference. I select five photos, add the sound of lapping water, titles, credits and transitions. At the very moment I note that I'm not the only one avoiding voice over, Julie Collins is beside me showing me how to do it. *Record*. I freeze, say, "Speak ... yes!" Then the audio file is filled with our laughter. This teaches me the pros and cons of spontaneity over scripting. We watch each film and beam with satisfaction.



## Defining conference

On looking back at her first experiences with her great-great-great aunt's diary, Sinor writes, "I remember little of what I actually read of her life, but I remember all of what I felt." (p.32) I share this sense with the conference. Like the best kind of classroom, I didn't feel like I was learning because I was enjoying myself. The challenge now is to put fresh ideas and learning into practice and my new Facebook friends remind me daily.

Above I borrow images from a reading circle participant in my new internal definition of conference. RaPAL brings together rigorous research and passionate practice. It is a lifeline.



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1. My drawings got assistance from Margulies and Valenza (2005).

2. These are two of the different learning strategies mentioned by adults when taking on a new writing practice. (Conference workshop: *Changing Lifeworlds, Changing Writing* with Amy Burgess and Karin Tusting)

3. My current reading forms part of my context, hence Sinor finds herself here.

4. <http://newlearningonline.com/news/kalantzisandcope/>

5. Conference workshop: Celebrating Stories – multimedia practices and multimodal responses (Parts 1 & 2) with Julie Collins

6. This recreates feedback shared by Sam Duncan in her workshop: *Reading circles, novels and adult reading development*.

A heart, brain and graph (showing fluctuations in feelings) were how one member of the reading circle summed up the experience.

## Section 2 - Lifelong learning: principles and practice

### A Quacking Good Literacy Lesson!

#### Frankie High

*I work at an FE college teaching literacy and other essential life and living skills to 16-19 year olds in an LDD (Learning Difficulties and Disabilities) department. The learners attend literacy as part of their full time curriculum.*

The nights are drawing in. The clocks have gone back. The new students have been in class for nearly a term now and we are all feeling the pressure of learning. The students I work with have chequered learning histories. Some have a diagnosed, recognised, statemented and supported learning difficulty. Others have been excluded from school or have self excluded. Some have been put in remedial classes in school despite never having been assessed as having any difficulties. All have achieved little or nothing in terms of qualifications and academic skills in their formal, compulsory years of schooling.



We have talked in class about self directed learning. We have discussed what skills and literacy practices they would like to become better at. Many feel they should focus on skills which will enable them to 'pass the test' rather than try to master the practical, truly functional skills they need in every day life. A large number, for example, want to 'Spell Better', and while it is completely understandable that they feel a need and desire to get to grips with 'biggies' such as their own address, it does sometimes feel like a lost opportunity to utilize other literacies to reinforce their abilities, rather than constantly harping on about something that these days can be easily rectified with the use of a computer (though admittedly the spellchecker does not always help). Most of the students use computers accurately, routinely changing words seemingly randomly underlined in red squiggly lines. (I am rather disappointed that squiggly does not have a red squiggly line under it when I type it...) Anyway, spelling: we design and use spelling books; we ritually copy the correct spelling, cover it and with concentration attempt to write it correctly. Some words are spelt correctly. Some are even consistently spelt correctly and could be deemed to have been 'learned'. But most fall by the wayside and it

seems I/we have recreated the endless, pointless hamster wheel of spelling exercise that all hopelessly participated in at school. For most cannot remember how to spell words correctly no matter what teaching methods or learning styles I use.



In my never-ending quest for learning that is fun and complements effective classroom delivery, I devise a cunning plan to visit a local pond and beauty spot. There are woods and ducks and sand. I remember writing my name in the sand, as a child, and feeling pleased and happy and as if I had more substance. My class are constantly struggling with the idea of sentence boundaries and so in a moment of inspiration (madness!) I imagine them carving sentences in the sand and then digging sticks in to signify the full stop at the end. It is kinetic and will be visually very strong. The more I think on it the more I feel it might well have an impact on their ability to retain and use punctuation effectively.





The night before the visit was planned, my partner asked if we were going to feed the ducks. Now when I go there with my family or even when I go alone for a dog walk, I always feed the ducks. They are funny and endearing and they make me smile. There is always the one duck who is bullied by all the other ducks and never seems to get the bread and you just have to keep throwing bread to the poor, hungry, picked on duck while trying to shoo the others away. We just had to feed the ducks! As I went to sleep that night I began to think of ways I could use the duck feeding to help in learning.

Perhaps we could explain to the ducks about sentence boundaries as we fed them.... Perhaps we could recite the alphabet while feeding the ducks.....Perhaps we could cut the bread into fingers and count the number of bits of bread ... Perhaps we could cut our name out in the bread....perhaps we could cut out a word we wanted to learn how to spell and feed our words to the ducks. It might focus the mind on letters and spelling strategies....

On the way to work the next day I picked up five loaves of bread.... four for breakfast club and one as duck food. Everyone in the class chose a word they wanted to learn to spell and very carefully we cut the words out of bread with scissors. Now this is a lot harder than it sounds. It actually takes a lot of focus and concentration on the shape of the letter and how the different parts of the letter are put together. Finally, after a long fifteen minutes, all learners had their letters and their word in an envelope with their name on it. Off we went in the minibus.



We had a magnificent time feeding ducks, running in the woods, writing sentences in the sand and punctuating them with sticks and practising our speaking and listening skills. Three weeks later I gave the class the task of writing their duck bread word down. We had not practised writing the words or spelling them since the pond visit. 10 of the 11 students confidently spelt 'their' word correctly. Not only could they spell their words correctly during the test but they continued to spell the words correctly in context in their written work. They had learned them! This is the highest success rate I have ever had with this learner group.

There are endless possibilities... Bread doesn't just have to be fed to ducks! Learners could make sandwiches that spell words and then eat them. For me cheese would be delicious but marmite is disgusting (You don't have to eat the disgusting one if you can find a partner who thinks it is yummy!). It supports and encourages links with independence skills, food hygiene, shopping, counting money and a plethora of related literacy and numeracy topics.

All in all it's not a bad way to spend a morning.

# Learning about diabetes: Type II Diabetes education programmes from a literacy and numeracy perspective

Catriona Carson and Philomena McKenzie

*Catriona Carson is Health Improvement Lead for Literacies and Philomena McKenzie is a Diabetes Specialist Nurse in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.*

## 1. Introduction

Understanding and managing a long term condition such as type II diabetes can make demands on our literacy and numeracy skills. These demands can include understanding dietary advice as well as blood glucose and cholesterol test results relating to their condition. Indeed, evidence correlates literacy skills at level 1 and below<sup>1</sup> to problems with self-management of diabetes. A study by Schillinger et al (2002) found that, of patients with literacy and numeracy difficulties:

- 36% had diabetic retinopathy (an eye disease associated with diabetes which results in damage to the blood vessels in the retina), compared to 19% of patients with more developed literacy skills.
- 20% had optimal blood sugar control, compared with 33% of those with more developed literacy skills.

To help with understanding and managing their condition, patients can be referred to diabetes education. But there are issues, strengths as well as barriers, in delivering such programmes to patients with levels of literacy at level 1 or below, some of which we describe here. This is potentially an area of interest to adult educators as well as health care professionals.

## 2. Methods

Patients are referred to diabetes education programmes by their local GP practice, often by the practice nurse. This tends to be when they are newly diagnosed, though there are also programmes to offer ongoing support for the self-management of this long term condition.

We looked at two of the type 2 (II) diabetes education programmes currently being delivered in our local area; Conversation Maps<sup>i</sup> and DESMOND<sup>ii</sup>. These are internationally available programmes which consist of curricula supported by tools, resources and facilitator training. Conversation Maps stimulates and guides discussion through the use of table top map-type diagrams. DESMOND is a structured programme using tools such as group discussion

and a participants' manual. Both programmes are designed to help patients better understand and self-manage their condition.

One of us delivered a Conversation Maps session and co-delivered DESMOND with a colleague while the other observed, with the agreement of participants.

The DESMOND session had five male participants, one of whom we considered to be experiencing some literacy difficulties. We inferred this from his reluctance and uncertainty over the literacy and numeracy tasks which were components of the session. This patient had been diagnosed more than two years before while the other participants had been diagnosed within two months of attending. While the staff supported him during the session, it remained a direct opportunity to see some of the barriers for patients with less developed literacy skills.

We didn't have this opportunity within the Conversation Maps session because all participants demonstrated a high enough level of skill to engage with the literacy and numeracy tasks. Discussion around how the five participants had so far managed their condition related partly to how they had accessed information about their condition. This gave us a reasonable idea of literacy skills. All seemed to agree that the information available, whether from friends or via sources such as online, was often conflicting. Many seemed to be confident readers who were good at understanding information and identifying key issues related to their condition.

We, therefore, felt it would be useful to invite some patients who had participated in Conversation Maps to discuss the programme with us in relation to potential barriers to participation. Patients who had attended a group over two sessions in the last year were invited to participate in feedback about them.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Potential barriers within the structured education for patients with a literacy/numeracy issue

### Content and duration

Both programmes contain a relatively high level of content with a degree of medical language e.g. pancreas, insulin. (It was clear from the sessions and discussion that most, though not all, patients knew what a carbohydrate is.) The DESMOND programme is delivered as a full-day session of 6 hours while Conversation Maps is two x 2 hour sessions.

The "What diabetes is" section in DESMOND "The Professional Story 1: Type 2 Diabetes and Glucose" is allocated 50 minutes and contains complex information about the body. Some patients demonstrated existing knowledge and were able to participate well, building on that knowledge. The participant with less confident skills, however, was less involved during this section than at some other times during the day. The patients we spoke to agreed with each other that there was a lot of information when asked about potentially negative aspects of the Conversation Maps programme. Despite this, none identified any content as unhelpful. Nor did they want to remove any component or reduce the number of components from the programme. When asked whether it would be difficult for someone with literacy or numeracy difficulties, two of the participants said they had a friend or colleague who was a non-reader. They acknowledged it would be difficult to encourage the person to attend if they were diagnosed with diabetes.

The structure of content may also be less easy to interpret for some. One of the people we spoke to said that the emphasis was on healthy foods but she would find it easier to have a list of "what's bad for you".

### Specific Literacy and Numeracy Tasks

Both programmes contain literacy and numeracy tasks. Conversation Maps has some text on the mainly pictorial maps, test results are discussed and participants read out some discussion cards. DESMOND, which has a greater amount and range of tasks, uses flipcharts, a manual, food products, test results and an exercise in plotting test results on a chart.

Among the people we spoke to, the "knowing your numbers" section in Conversation Maps raised the most issues. When asked if perhaps this part had too much information, the group said they wanted to know their results. They also wanted information accompanying results, including advice on how they should address issues i.e. if they are told that their blood pressure is high, what they can do to reduce

this. All were interested in comparing current results with their next set. One patient was keen to understand the numbers, particularly because he did not feel more unwell with higher figures. One participant said it would be good to have the information in "words not percentages".

Although all participants demonstrated some understanding of the test results during the DESMOND session and were able to discuss and raise questions around them, the person who was less confident was reluctant to read them. This was particularly evident when he was asked to find the chart in the manual and plot results onto the chart. He put his glasses away and didn't attempt to undertake the task on his own. He was assisted in this, but the educator made a point of checking that the others also had the correct page, to minimise any apparent differences.

There is potential within education sessions to provide support for literacy tasks and this was achieved sensitively in the observed sessions, such as finding information in the manual with individual participants and highlighting the main points. Staff also demonstrated an awareness of signals during the initial stages of the session, providing participants with examples of why they might not want to participate in literacy tasks, such as saying that some may have forgotten to bring their reading glasses or not like reading and suggesting the map isn't particularly easy to read. For Conversation Maps, checking that participants understand by revisiting the content via a discussion on facts and myths, was a useful activity.

There can be additional psychological barriers for people with less developed skills when confronted with literacy or numeracy tasks. This may be related to managing disclosure, concerns that the content is inaccessible to them and about being able to transfer skills such as understanding test results beyond the session. Understanding numerical information, such as blood sugar test results, was identified by the patients we spoke to as potentially problematic for everyone.

### 3.2 Strengths relating to the programmes for patients with literacy and numeracy issues

A representative from the DESMOND organisation stated the following when asked about the accessibility of the training: *"DESMOND uses a 'storytelling' framework, and as such, is very accessible for people with literacy issues"*



The experiences within the class supported some but not all of this statement.

The storytelling framework was successful in engaging patients. The patient story and consequences of diabetes sections consisted of patients constructing personal narratives. These were strongly related to onset of symptoms and diagnosis. All participants were highly engaged when discussing their stories. Very rich information emerged from this session relating to skills, knowledge, lifestyle and acceptance of diagnosis.

We have asked for similar information about Conversation Maps but haven't yet received this. Information available on the philosophy of Conversation Maps states that the programme uses the materials to guide the group conversation and engage participants in a process of exploration and learning. A guiding principle is that people don't just learn and get engaged by hearing something; they learn by hearing, seeing, discussing and doing.

The discussion based approach in Conversation Maps was identified as a strength among the patients we spoke to. All three stated that they enjoyed all aspects of the session. The group agreed that the inclusion of a discussion about feelings was important. The partner considered this especially helpful. Each participant was able to identify the information they had been looking to get out of the session e.g. one wanted to know why it is important to keep blood sugar levels down and the consequences of not doing so.

Both DESMOND and Conversation Maps build on participants' prior knowledge - established through discussion - thus using scaffolding as a learning strategy. Some participants in both programmes indicated previous reading and were knowledgeable about their condition, despite several questioning the diagnosis.

Two participants had read websites for diabetes information, the others had got information through conversation with relatives and friends. All participants described these types of information as vague or confusing. The class and staff provided a reliable source of information where they were able to compare and check information they had found themselves.

The people we talked to agreed there were benefits to being in a group such as being able to pick up on information from other people's questions. One participant, who was nervous of group situations, said "you don't feel you're stupid once you get there".

There was a high degree of interest in the diet section and, perhaps, an expectation from patients that this will be the core content of education sessions. The group were asked if they would have preferred this session to be first. All thought the order of sessions should remain as it is and there was a risk some wouldn't come back to the second session if it was changed.

#### 4. Linking to adult literacy learning

On the basis of findings from working with this group of patients, we would recommend the following:

- A choice of structured diabetes education programmes should be available to meet the needs of the diverse skills of the population.
- Screening for literacy issues at the point of referral, followed by a short discussion around what the class entails, could potentially help establish which programme was individually suitable and allay patient concerns.
- This should be supported by staff development opportunities to increase literacies awareness for those who are referring to and delivering programmes.
- The resources, such as visual indications of the meaning of test results, would be helpful in other contexts too.
- The patients we spoke to said a summary of key points would be useful.

The health sector could support those participating in patient education programmes to access literacy programmes in order to access broader skills development opportunities.

#### Reference

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1. In England, Northern Ireland and Wales Level 1 is broadly equivalent to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades D-G.  
i. See <http://www.healthyinteractions.com> (Accessed 16.3.11)  
ii. See <http://www.desmond-project.org.uk> (Accessed 16.3.11)

## We have made numeracy; now all we need to make is numerists.

### Tracy Part

*Tracy Part has been teaching for about 15 years. In this time she has taught across the Skills for Life subjects: numeracy, literacy, IT and ESOL. She has worked in Further Education, Adult Education, prisons and in a family learning setting but has also taught in informal educational settings; including a centre for street children in Ullaan Bataar, Mongolia. She is presently studying for a PhD with London Metropolitan University, London. The topic of her research is What is Mathematical Well-being? What are the implications for practice and policy?*

*"For over 2000 years the philosophy of maths has been dominated by an absolutist paradigm which views it as a body of infallible and objective truth, far removed from the affairs and values of humanity. Currently this is being challenged by a growing number of philosophers and mathematicians ... (who are) affirming that that mathematics is fallible, changing, and like any other body of knowledge, the product of human inventiveness" (Ernest P, 1991)*

Imagine you have been asked to take up a mathematical opportunity. This may include you as a numeracy learner attending a discrete numeracy course, or embedding numeracy into your existing scheme of work or even facilitating your own discrete numeracy class. Before continuing with the rest of this article, please just take a few minutes to visualise yourself in an appropriate setting and then consider three ways in which such a challenge would appeal to you, or not as the case may be, and to outline the support that you would want to receive. Now look back to the opening quote. Did you find yourself reflecting on your early experiences of learning maths or judging the level of mathematics that you use to resolve everyday problems? Did you think about how your values and beliefs affect the ways in which you approach and resolve mathematical problems? I bring this up as a point of consideration because I think learners are most effective when they are encouraged to reflect on their values and perceptions of mathematics and to visualise themselves, and their future selves, as everyday mathematicians.

### **An introduction to the philosophy of mathematics.**

There are two distinct schools of thought about the origins and purposes of mathematics. The traditional Absolutist school views mathematics as a series of discovered mathematical truths that must be adhered to in order to produce a correct answer, an approach that is polarised by the Fallibilist School. Fallibilists see

mathematical processes in terms of inventions that are historically, culturally and socially positioned (Ernest, 1991).

Teachers using an Absolutist lens tend to approach mathematics in the classroom with certainty; encouraging learners to practice the application of rules through prescribed procedures that when practiced enough, will produce a correct answer (Boaler, 2009). Advocates refer to examples such as the mathematical foundations of science, or the perfect repetition of number patterns (across the natural world) to demonstrate that with the correct application, irrespective of location or culture, one correct answer can be derived (Ernst, 1998).

Teachers approaching mathematics through a Fallibilists lens on the other hand, view mathematics as a human activity designed to produce a body of knowledge that is responsive to human and societal needs (Boaler, 2009). Mathematical knowledge is seen as malleable, socially constructed works in progress that invite multiple solutions dependent on the (cultural) context of the problem (Ernest 1991). In this respect, problem solving in the classroom tends to be judged in terms of the appropriateness and justification of the strategy and is rarely confined to the final answer. This provides a great deal of space for the learner to contextualise the problem, to decide what it means, which aspects are important to them and then to choose the processes by which to solve the problem.

### **What is the impact on adult curricula in the UK?**

Paul Ernest argues that for far too long, the mathematical community has sought intellectual refuge from the ethical dimensions of mathematical knowledge, particularly in relation to teaching and learning. He vehemently disagrees with the absolutist vision, arguing that the multi-faceted nature of mathematics must be recognised as anything other than "culture and value free" (1991) and I argue that in adult

education, we find ourselves caught up in this dichotomy. Three decades of political and educational pressures have empowered the architects, from a Fallibilist school, to mould a new Functional Skills framework (2009) that prioritises the choice of strategy over the final answer. However problematically, research (Boaler 2009; Swan, 2006; Mendick, 2006) also suggests that learners' (and to some degree teachers') perceptions have all but stagnated around traditional notions of "right or wrong" mathematics. Despite, in my opinion the pedagogic advances of the Functional Skills, external pressures and diminishing access to CPD makes it increasingly difficult to envisage the process and navigate a new curricula that all but forces learning (and teaching) away from traditional notions of predetermined mathematical procedures.

### ... and the impact on the learner and learning?

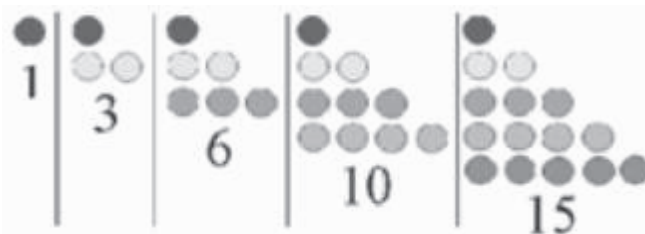
I have been teaching numeracy for about 15 years, and have used a dialogical approach to learning mathematics for about 10 years. I frequently come across learners keen to work with peers, but who find it daunting to discuss reflexively their mathematical strategies. Last year I worked with Nicola. Nicola wanted to progress to an Access to Science course but needed to strengthen her mathematical and scientific knowledge. She enrolled on a "Pathway to Science" full time level 2 program and although the numeracy was allocated as a level 1 qualification, she (along with her peers) requested an introduction to algebraic reasoning, which I enthusiastically incorporated into the scheme of work.

Nicola enjoyed and excelled at primary school maths, but had become disillusioned during secondary school. She worked in a bookie in East London and although she recognised the skills that enabled her to identify mathematical relationships in both her everyday and her workplace context, she (like many adult learners) branded this as "common sense" and not as mathematics (Coben, 1998). Nicola proactively participated in the learning community, offering insightful comments to further her and her peer's mathematical reasoning; however, she often became agitated when asked to conduct similar discussions to solve abstract problems.

In an attempt to encourage her (and her peers) to make links between algebraic and everyday mathematical thinking, I asked the learners to study a picture of a beehive<sup>1</sup> and identify the

recurring patterns. Nicola was the first to spot the different types of patterns and was very quick to identify that some of the patterns would probably be quite complicated. Two other members of the group remembered something about triangular<sup>2</sup> numbers and from this discussion, I then asked the group to co-construct an algebraic statement. Nicola, through visualisation, suggested that they would probably need to use square numbers<sup>3</sup>, although she had some reservations about the growth pattern because she could clearly identify the emerging shape as a triangle.

The group then decided to use a paper based trial and error method to identify the number pattern, but from this stage, Nicola found it increasingly difficult to engage with the exploration. She became very distrustful of her original estimation; that square numbers were probably going to be involved. On completion of the task, the other members of the group were amazed at how close Nicola had come to the solution. She essentially needed to take off a bit and halve her estimated values<sup>4</sup>. However, no amount of persuasion (from the group) could persuade her to relate her original "common sense" estimation to the mathematical formula that she had helped, however haltingly, to construct.



2. Triangular numbers

3. Square numbers:  $2^2 = 4$ ,  $3^2 = 9$ ,  $4^2 = 16$  etc

4. To find triangular numbers

This anecdotal example demonstrates how a strong learned reaction, to abstract mathematical structures, can frustrate the learning process. When feeling uncomfortable in abstract mathematical territory, Nicola reverted to her habitual absolutist frame of reference, which all but resulted in her ignoring her mathematical reasoning. She instead reverted to demanding an authorised solution from which to produce a right or a wrong answer. Tine Wedge (1999) provides a theoretical framework to explain this common response. She suggests that learners use a mixture of formal and informal experiences to make sense, to recall and to generate strategies. However, because these strategies are rooted in habitual behaviour, learners often instinctively revert to habitual modes of learning, which in Nicola's case



revolved around fixed and authorised pedagogic practices. Wedge argues that in order for adult learners to be able to value, particularly their informal, mathematical procedures; they need to develop a confidence in their own authority, their agency, to create and mould their own mathematical world. In terms of my practice, Nicola needed me to build in a curriculum space that encouraged her reflexively to consider the distinction that she had created between common sense and mathematics. Towards the end of the year, she did begin to recognise the similarities between the mathematical reasoning of everyday life (and in particular in the bookie) and that of algebraic problems; however, perhaps more significantly, she also realised that she wanted to be able to reposition herself as a mathematical thinker, rather than as a purveyor of fine mathematical rules.

### So how do learners identify themselves as mathematicians?

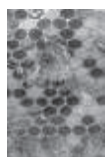
21st Century citizens, according to Boaler, need mathematics to function successfully in society, but she argues not the kind of standard methods that are typically taught in the classroom (2009). Adults in everyday life need to be able to reason, problem solve and apply individually tailored methods to solve problems that are appropriate to context. In order to empower learners to construct, articulate and value their own mathematical ideas, we need to encourage them to engage with open-ended dialogue in the classroom (Swan, 2006). However, open-ended tasks conflict with the idea of "mathematical clarity" and invite ambiguity into the classroom. Mathematical rules, however painfully learned, become less and less useful as the solutions become more and more subjective and reliant on the learners' relationship and understanding of the context: A critical approach to pedagogy that as Skovsmose (1994) warns opens the door to human agency inviting power dynamics, and other social factors that affect learning, into the classroom.

Research shows that teaching is most effective

when it encourages learners to ask higher order questions or to develop problem-solving strategies, (Swan, 2006; Smith, 2002; Boaler, 2009). However, research also shows that adult learners have strong, often traditional, views on the origins and purposes of mathematics (Boaler, 2009; Swan, 2006; Mendick, 2006). Functional Skills, fortuitously in my view, require the learning community to contextualise and bring mathematics to life, but many learners are distrustful, seeing mathematics as something unobtainable and outside of their control; something that simply must be endured and learned (Wedge, 1999). I think it essential to ask learners to question their perceptions of mathematics and invite them to consider the idea of multiple numeracies (Street, Baker, & Tomlin, 2005), a similar concept to multiple literacies, that can allow them to take control of the way that they create and present mathematical language and structures.

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1. A small section of the bee hive picture that shows the number pattern chosen to explore, by the learners.

## 'Learners got Talent': North of Scotland conference organised by learners for learners, March 2010

Moira Hamilton, Mary Rhind and Althea Forbes

*Moira, Mary and Althea work in Adult Literacies in Scotland: Moira in the Communities Team at Learning and Teaching Scotland, Mary in Highland Council and Althea, now freelance, previously with Moray Adult Literacies Partnership.*

### History

Learning Connections<sup>1</sup> (LC) was set up in 2003 as the 'development engine' for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) in Scotland, as recommended by the ALNIS report<sup>2</sup> of 2001, which committed £60m of new funding to local community partnerships to attract and provide for new learners.

Other reports published at that time also reflect the Scottish Executive's commitment to involve learners in the development of the strategy. One of these is *Listening to Learners* by Juliet Merrifield (2001) who makes the point that learners can be involved at different levels – class, programme and national – but that none of it is easy and all of this work is time consuming.

### How far have we come with the involvement of learners?

Although the picture is patchy, there is still evidence of a nationwide commitment to the involvement of learners: the learner is at the heart of the ALN Curriculum Framework; ALN learners feature in the annual learner awards hosted by Scotland's Learning Partnership; some learners are involved in learners' forums; in March 2010 a successful conference was held, organised for learners by learners from across the North of Scotland, building on an earlier conference run by Moray Adult Learners Forum (MALF).

MALF was established in 2004 after consultations throughout rural Moray with groups of learners in different settings. Since then the forum has met every 2 months. Activities include assertiveness training, outdoor pursuits and visits, as well as opportunities to discuss their learning and how it could be improved. The forum provides support for learners by learners and operates as a direct channel of communication between learners and the Moray Adult Literacies Partnership to influence policy and practice.

### 'Get Connected'

In 2007 LC gave MALF a grant to plan a learners' conference entitled 'Get Connected'.

This attracted people from all over the North and gave the Moray group the opportunity to learn about team work and organising an event. The conference was residential so that participants could have dinner together and get to know each other. About twelve learners from the Moray forum organised the conference, with support from staff. Regular meetings were held, a visit to the venue organised and individual support given for certain tasks, including phoning the hotel, writing to workshop leaders and making up conference packs. On the eve of the conference the Moray learners were in the hotel foyer to welcome delegates, sat at different dinner tables to act as hosts and led a team building game after dinner to break the ice.

At the conference itself the Chair of MALF gave a keynote address on the importance of learners' forums, how he had benefited from improving his reading and writing and his involvement with MALF.

A Dundee poet who writes in Scots acted as an inspirational start to the day's activities. Although his use of profanities was not appreciated by some participants, most were surprised and amused that you could write poetry in the everyday language of the street. Subsequently the most successful workshops were creative writing, fun with numbers and poetry.

A highlight of the day was the Big Brother chair, where learners were filmed responding to the question 'What has been the Big Plus<sup>3</sup> for you in learning?' The group then produced a report and DVD of the conference. In this report the local Coordinator writes 'If you risk nothing you achieve very little' and admits to the risks associated with handing over the reins to learners. However, she says 'The learners pulled off an excellent event which was driven and delivered by them. There was no sense of tokenism in their involvement.'

### 'Learners got Talent'

The Moray group were keen to have another learners' conference but felt that others should

organise it this time. At one of the quarterly meetings between LC staff and the seven North of Scotland ALN partnership coordinators (North Connection), it was suggested that a learners' conference be organised across the whole of the north area.

Individual areas contributed funding and to this was added the cost of learners' time given voluntarily, which brought in match funding from LEADER Plus<sup>4</sup> (European funding to support capacity building in rural areas).

There was much discussion about how to involve learners and it was agreed to hold an initial planning meeting in the conference hotel with, ideally, a couple of learners from each of the seven areas so that they could see the venue (this venue, previously used by MALF, is central for all the areas). The planning would then continue using electronic means.

### The planning process

A programme for the planning meeting was agreed. In each local area, preparation would include talking about what a conference is and what learners would want to get out of it. It was also mooted that learners could be accredited for their part in the conference organisation.

At that meeting it started to dawn on everyone that what was being proposed was extremely challenging! The MALF all knew each other and already worked as a group. North Connection were now bringing together a disparate group of individuals who would all have some difficulty with reading and writing and some with fairly low self confidence.

Even volunteers from the same area might not have met before, as happened in Highland, whereas in Shetland all were from one learning group. There were also differences in how people were engaged in learning: some liked clear structure and a framework for learning, while others preferred to be more self directing. In the LEADER application a second face to face meeting shortly before the conference had been costed and this now seemed like a very good idea.

The reality of seven areas video conferencing also became clear - it would be difficult due to lack of equipment in the right place - however, despite the challenges it was agreed to proceed.

*What is a conference? What goes on? What happens?* This was the starting point for the planning meeting. After an icebreaker, the DVD

of 'Get Connected' was shown, then small groups discussed what tasks would be needed.

Area groups volunteered to take on tasks as follows:

1. Marketing, media, photos, filming, report: Shetland, Aberdeenshire
2. Budget, accommodation, catering, displays, transport, travel: Highland, Orkney
3. Content arrangements, registration, booking forms: Aberdeen City, Western Isles
4. Overall coordination: Moray

and one learner suggested the title 'Learners got talent'.

The aims of the conference were:

- to bring learners together to share experiences
- to provide support for each other
- to promote learners' forums
- to provide adult learners with an opportunity to try a new learning activity
- to provide an opportunity for learners to gain event management experience, in a supported way, by working together and developing transferable skills.

Planned overall outcomes were:

- a strengthened network of adult learners in the north of Scotland who can inform and influence policy and practice on adult learning both locally and further afield
- an increased capacity for learners to have a voice and participate in their communities
- an established community of interest who provide support for each other (low levels of literacy can lead to feelings of isolation and low confidence)
- development within participants in the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence<sup>5</sup>, that is, as confident individuals, successful learners, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

### Working in real and virtual communities

When we discussed how best to communicate, a *wiki* was suggested by one of the tutors and this really took off as a means of communication between learners. Opinions were expressed, decisions made and problems resolved, though not everyone agreed all of the time. People participated, contributed and made decisions. Back at the different bases, small groups worked on their tasks, so all along learners were working in both real and virtual communities.

The *wiki* proved a good solution to communicating over a vast geographical area,



but was a system most of us were unfamiliar with and presented its own challenges. As most of us did not know each other, it helped when members of the *wiki* posted photographs of themselves, so you could picture who you were talking to.

At the second planning meeting a degree of panic set in - there was still a lot to be done in the short time until the conference. Moray took on the organisation of this meeting. Unlike the first meeting, we did not split into small groups, which affected contributions from learners. The group was large and most of the talking was done by staff. In order to make progress with the conference plans, which were in danger of derailing, learner participation suffered at that meeting.

### **The conference itself**

The conference was judged to be a great success by all who participated. It attracted over seventy delegates, twenty of whom were learners involved in the organisation and planning, who took responsibility for all aspects and tasks – making up conference packs, greeting delegates on arrival, chairing the conference, leading workshops, stewarding groups to venues, reading aloud and speaking in public. Staff provided support or advice if requested, but the learners were in control.

The local councillor, Sandy Park, who convenes the education committee in Highland Council welcomed delegates. Michael Power from Ireland then spoke about his learning journey - from working in a factory making great efforts to hide his lack of reading and writing skills, to getting qualifications, through a desire to join 'the circle at the table' of his wife and kids doing their homework. Michael is now the Chair of NALA, the National Association of Adult Literacy in Ireland. His talk without notes was eloquent and moving. After his introduction storyteller Margot Henderson led the crowd in a song, 'Learners Got Talent, learners got class....' which everyone joined in with enthusiastically.

We also had input from Liz Hargreaves, a learner from Fife involved in EUR-ALPHA, a European network on adult literacy and numeracy which promotes learner participation and empowerment. Liz told the conference about a forthcoming learners' workshop in Namur, Belgium, and this opportunity was taken up by Allan Campbell, a learner and Gaelic speaker from the Western Isles.

The workshops were an interesting mix. Some were led by learners and others by tutors.

The atmosphere was tremendously friendly and inclusive. Learners from Shetland filmed, took photographs and produced a film for the conference report.

In the afternoon Tim Turnbull, a poet and former writer in residence at HM Prisons Edinburgh and Castle Huntly, introduced learners who read stories and poems they had written, which led us movingly and courageously through personal experience.

On the day it was learners who took the big risks, shared experiences, taught us what they know, and earned respect and admiration from everyone.

Participants' comments at the end of the conference - written on paper leaves and stuck to a fabric tree on the wall - included:

*From fear of coming to fear that we may not have such a chance again. It was a big learning curve. Confidence yesterday ↓↓↓  
Confidence today ↑↑↑.*

*I discovered what fun meeting new people could be. The whole experience has taught me that life is fun.*

*I have discovered that speaking in public is scary but exciting as well. Dealing with an unknown situation in a public room is a BIG challenge! But I did it!*

*What an experience! 3 words sum it up.  
Great. Greater. Greatest! Enjoyed everything.*

Learners from Aberdeenshire produced a report of the conference which included the Shetland film as a DVD<sup>6</sup>.

### **Accreditation**

The learners from Moray involved in the coordinating group all achieved SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) Core Skills Working with Others and ICT SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) level 4.

### **Conclusion**

'Learners Got Talent' was inspiring, innovative, creative. It celebrated learners' success, had an international perspective, gave learners a chance to use their voice, nurtured partnership working and opened a world of knowledge. Ultimately it created confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors and successful learners – the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence.

We learned that learners are more than capable

of taking on a variety of roles and of supporting each other. As staff we took Mary Norton's *Challenges to sharing power in adult literacy programmes* (2001) as a reference point. Like Norton (and Campbell and Jurmo who she cites), we believe that participatory approaches can enable people to experience more equitable power relationships within literacy programmes and gain skills and confidence to participate more equally in other settings. In reality, our practice sometimes conflicts with our beliefs, but this project strengthened our convictions and gave us a better understanding of how we can have more equitable power relations with learners. We didn't always manage to "let go" but we did learn that we need to, and allow learners to get on with it.

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1. Learning Connections became the Communities team in Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) in April 2010  
<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/communitylearninganddevelopment/>
2. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/158952/0043191.pdf>
3. The Big Plus is Scotland's national TV and radio awareness raising campaign [www.thebigplus.com](http://www.thebigplus.com)
4. Leader + is one of four initiatives financed by EU structural funds and is designed to help rural actors consider the long-term potential of their local region.  
[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index_en.htm)
5. Curriculum for Excellence aims to achieve a transformation in education in Scotland by providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18.  
<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/index.asp>
6. If you would like a copy of the conference report and DVD contact [m.hamilton@ltscotland.org.uk](mailto:m.hamilton@ltscotland.org.uk)

# Reports and Reviews

## **Teaching Adult Literacy: principles and practice**

Nora Hughes and Irene Schwab (Eds) (2010)  
Open University Press

### **Reviewed by Sally Haywood**

*Sally is a Skills for Life lecturer at Cornwall College, St. Austell. Formerly a learndirect tutor, where one-to-one teaching was the "norm", she gained the Level 5 Diploma in Teaching English (Literacy) in 2009 and has just completed her first year of teaching adult literacy to classes in what can be described as an enjoyable learning curve!*

This book is a definite "must" for anyone involved with Adult Literacy subject specialist qualifications. Written in an easily-digestible style, without jargon or acronyms, it covers many areas of the Level 5 course curriculum, bringing together the background, research and best teaching practice in the field of adult literacy. This meaty 384-page book is jam-packed with useful and interesting nuggets – or whole chapters – of information and usable teaching ideas.

It starts with an excellent depiction of the changing face of adult literacy learning, placing it in its social and political context. This is followed by sections on who adult literacy learners are, how language works and language variety. The research element is handled lightly, skilfully interspersed with practical examples from the authors' teaching experience.

The bulk of the book devotes itself to a consideration of best teaching practice with dozens of practical teaching suggestions. This is what I was looking for and I dipped into the Writing section first, picking up lots of great tips and reminders.

My own experience to date has been with the adult literacy basic skills programme in which Speaking and Listening skills have not been part of the national test. With the Functional skills programme now emphasising the importance of discussion and presentation skills, I suspect others, like me, will be very grateful for the excellent, clear guidance given on how to teach these skills; the book is worth it for this alone.

By the time I got to the Reading section, I just wished there was a CD-Rom of the sample resources so that I could actually use the

materials shown instead of having to go and find my own similar materials!

The latter sections cover planning and assessment, dyslexia, global learning difficulties and embedding literacy. I was delighted to get practical suggestions on how to give effective feedback on written work – something that I have never been explicitly taught before!

I was caught short a few times by the use of "she" when the sex of the teacher or student is not known. Very egalitarian but I found it broke the flow to have to look back and work out if I was supposed to have known the person was female.

Much more distracting was the poor signposting to the sample learner texts which are referred to throughout the book. At first, I thought the problem was mine as I dipped into the book mid-way through. When I started from the beginning, however, I still couldn't find those texts! Eventually, they turned up at the end of Section 3, a third of the way through the book. My suggestion for the next edition would be to include page references for these texts and either place them (ideally) at the beginning of the first section which uses them, or at the end as an easily reached Appendix.

The book treats its readers with respect and "reminds" us of ways we can ensure the learner gets the best possible learning experience. There is not so much detail that it patronises (the introduction explicitly states that the book is not aimed at beginner teachers but rather at teacher trainers, those undertaking teacher training qualifications and teachers with some experience of teaching adult literacy) but plenty of ideas to prompt, to rekindle enthusiasm for the subject and inspire.

With many subject specialist courses now taking a form of "blended learning", where the opportunity to exchange ideas in person with the teacher and peers is limited, this book becomes an even more valuable teaching aid. It is an intelligent read that simply reeks of the wisdom, experience and teaching talent of the authors. I only wish I'd had access to such an extensive collection of literacy teaching ideas on my course and would recommend the book highly to others.



### **Teaching Adult ESOL: Principles and Practice**

Anne Paton and Meryl Wilkins (Eds) (2009)  
Open University Press

#### **Reviewed by Lesley Poulaud**

*Lesley has worked as an ESOL/EFL tutor for 23 years and has been employed as joint course leader at Warrington Collegiate for the past 10 years, where she is responsible for delivering and co-ordinating ESOL for learners in the 19+ sector. She teaches Skills for Life programmes and also FCE, CAE and CPE. She previously worked in Greece as an EFL teacher, as the English Language Co-ordinator for a Spanish College and also as an ESOL tutor in north Manchester.*

*Recently she and her course leader colleague have been funded by Warrington Borough Council to develop and deliver ESOL Awareness Training as part of a wider participation project for community cohesion. She can be contacted at L.Poulaud@warrington.ac.uk*

This book will particularly interest those who are embarking on the process of becoming an ESOL tutor, or students who are currently enrolled on a course to become an adult ESOL practitioner. The way that the articles are divided into sections (such as '*ESOL and Society*' and '*Teaching and Learning ESOL*') which are clearly headed according to the area of knowledge they cover, allows the reader to 'dip into' them without having to plough through the whole book.

Although at first glance the book appears to be dry and slightly unattractive due to the very 'wordy' articles with no pictures, it does, on closer inspection, prove to be a thorough investigation into the global context of ESOL, as well as offering in-depth accounts of experiences of tutors working in the UK.

I particularly liked the use of tasks and lesson planning in the chapter entitled *Language and context in ESOL teaching* and think it would be especially useful to a new ESOL tutor as it gives a very thorough and detailed lesson plan. On the whole, this is a book which will prove invaluable to those needing a useful resource for assignments on teacher training courses.

### **Learning Through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning**

Tom Schuller and David Watson (2009)  
National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE)

#### **Reviewed by Gaye Houghton**

*Gaye, who has just successfully completed her doctoral studies at the University of Birmingham, has been an active member of RaPAL since 1995. She is currently doing some temporary, free-lance academic editing work.*

This highly readable report, from the independent *Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning* [IFLL] set up in 2007, is sponsored by the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) and lays out a strategic framework for lifelong learning for the next 10-15 years. Its authors, Tom Schuller and David Watson, strongly maintain that more investment in the area is needed in order improve peoples' lives and to bring about such things as greater equality, better economic and social well-being, improved social justice, increased ability to adapt to change, wider access to technology, more social mobility, lower crime rates and improved health and longevity. However, for many prospective learners the UK current policies have been found to be wanting and ineffective.

Starting from the premise that learning through life is a fundamental human right, Schuller and Watson do not 'pull their punches' as they clearly outline the faults of the current UK system which is narrowly focused on young people, and on paid employment. The system has failed to acknowledge huge demographic changes such as an ageing society, does not recognise the increasingly diverse transitions into and from employment, ignores the educational inequalities which build up over the life course, fails to realise the need for training at work for those over 55, and does not take into account the growing need for learning for life beyond work

The authors compare the current state of lifelong learning in the UK to that of 17 European Union countries and Norway, with a focus on expenditure and participation rates. In respect of expenditure Schuller and Watson are innovative in that they bring together forms of spending not previously considered jointly, such as expenditure by public authorities, employers, the voluntary sector, individuals and households. The total sum is very large, approximately £55 billion which is 3.9 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Schuller and Watson stress that this overview, which also shows that the weight of funding is heavily in favour of young full-time students, is not perfect but does provide a basis on which to build a better base for future policy decisions on lifelong learning. In respect of

participation rates, the UK seems to compare well with the other countries. However, when it comes to *duration* of participation there is a stark difference. UK learners take part for much shorter periods. For a quarter of UK employers half the recorded training is on short-term items such as induction procedures and statutory health and safety training.

The report provides evidence that adult learning in the UK reflects society's inequalities and that participation is strongly related to social class; the more qualifications, income and occupational status people have the more likely they are to participate in learning. It also points out that opportunities and funding for participation decrease in the post-25 age groups.

Schuller and Watson propose that a genuinely lifelong view of learning should be based on a four-stage model – up to 25, 25-50, 50-75 and 75+ which will alter the distribution of learning over the life course. The rationale for their model is driven by three main influences: demographic, economic and social. Schuller and Watson recommend that an ageing society combined with extended transitions in and out of employment requires a new approach which removes arbitrary dividing lines such as retirement at 60/65. An essential part of the model would be to change social attitudes and develop a new contract between generations based on the mutual advantages which can accrue if all generations have access to learning.

The model involves three *general entitlements*: a legal entitlement to free access to basic skills (literacy and numeracy) tuition; a financial entitlement to a minimum qualification (currently level 2 but likely to increase); a good practice entitlement involving 'learning leave' as part of employment. The authors also propose a set of *transitional entitlements* based on the importance of key transition points in people's lives such as guaranteeing access to learning for those leaving prison or institutional care, moving between areas or countries, or becoming 50. Underpinning these entitlements would be a universal infrastructure of access to digital technology and of advice and guidance.

Schuller and Watson envisage a system of *Learning Accounts* for building and using the *entitlements* which allow for contributions from different stakeholders over time. They maintain that Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) were a bold and imaginative venture when they were first introduced in 1999. However, the initiative was stopped in 2001 because of fraudulent

activity by some learning providers. The authors suggest that these weaknesses can be overcome and that the principle behind Learning Accounts is still sound and has plenty of scope for development. One idea is that instead of individuals banking Learning Accounts until they are needed the accounts could also be pooled into a pot for family, fellow workers, community or other collective use.

With regard to the content of what is learnt, the authors propose a 'citizens' curriculum' based on four 'capabilities': civic, health, financial and digital which they see as essential to the role of lifelong learning as empowering people to take control of their lives. They admit that there are alternatives which deserve equal attention but maintain that these capabilities are the ones which came to light in their research.

My response to this report is mixed. When Schuller and Watson outline the faults of lifelong learning as it is today their account is refreshingly blunt and to the point. However, when they talk about about reviving the tainted Learning Accounts my response is rather more circumspect. I have to admit that I do not know with what to replace Learning Accounts but feel some new thinking is required here.

To conclude, this important report provides a comprehensive coverage of the main developments concerning lifelong learning in the UK over the last ten years. It also contains extensive references to the ideas of key people and to the policies on which lifelong learning is based, and might be based in the future. As such I would recommend it as a very useful read for anyone involved in the post-compulsory education sector.

## 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 to one of the journal co-ordinators

**Nora Hughes**    [nora.hughes@gmail.com](mailto:nora.hughes@gmail.com)  
**Sarah Freeman**   [azdak@btopenworld.com](mailto:azdak@btopenworld.com)

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 your 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.

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