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RaPAL

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

Why not join in?

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

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

Alison Wedgbury and Naomi Horrocks

At the end of the 2010 RaPAL conference in London, delegates encouraged RaPAL to promote our distinctive values and vision during 2011 in a number of ways. These included developing our global identity, making an impact on policy, strengthening dialogue between practitioners and researchers and encouraging creative pedagogy that helps practitioners apply their principles while still 'getting learners through the tests'.

We then started to plan the 2011 conference with a strong commitment from colleagues in the eastern region to make it happen in an area where we all love to live and work. The six eastern region counties of England (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk) are famous for medieval towns, universities, science and technology parks, seaside attractions, holiday homes and distinctive dialects. But that's only part of the picture. People's lives are often affected by rural isolation, local crime, limited access to health services, low wages, variable and seasonal employment, migration, pockets of urban deprivation and the relatively high cost of housing. These raise challenges for literacies teaching and research.



We wanted to make the most of the venue, the University of East Anglia, with its strong local roots and its international perspectives. Together with other RaPAL colleagues we refined the main conference questions as:

How can we use literacies learning, teaching and research to

- strengthen and support local communities and partnerships?

- build regional, national and international connections?
- draw inspiration from our personal and shared histories?
- strengthen our values and vision as we look to the future?

Early in the planning process we were very fortunate to secure three significant keynote speakers: Professors Peter Trudgill, Alan Rogers and Mary Hamilton. They expanded our perspectives with their international expertise, empathy with RaPAL's principles, presentations and generous discussion time.

At the conference, delegates could choose from a comprehensive range of workshops led by practitioners in teaching and research:

- Judith Rose – Is there a 'special relationship' between adult literacy and the development of education for adults with learning disabilities?
- Hazel Israel – Texting to improve literacy.
- Helen Casey – Ways for practitioners to get funding to develop adult literacies projects.
- Julie Westrop – Norfolk Reading Cafés; approaches to family learning.
- Mary Jane Onnen – Integrating technology to strengthen reading instruction (USA).
- Helen Oughton – "220 Fatal Accidents": A literacies perspective on adult numeracy classrooms.
- Bob Read and Victoria Draper – Using documents from Norfolk Archives: issues of language and power in society across the centuries.
- Jane Mace – Literacy and discernment: Quaker ways of writing minutes.
- Amy Burgess – Practitioners' perspectives on Functional Skills: how do literacy educators interpret policy and translate it into practice?
- Jim Mullan and Shelley Tracey – Literacies and museums in Northern Ireland.
- Tara Furlong and Claire Collins – RaPAL on Facebook and social networking.
- Online networking for practitioners: Facebook, Second Life and others.
- Teacher-educators' special interest group.

Much of the material from the conference is available on the RaPAL website:

<http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/conference/2011Conference/2011.htm>

What's in this journal

The first section represents the content of the keynote presentations. Professor Peter Trudgill's scholarly piece written in Norfolk dialect reflects the purpose of his presentation and at the conference he unsettled some of our preconceptions about 'Standard English'. Professor Alan Rogers introduced new challenges to how policy makers and practitioners view 'literacy' in different parts of the world. Professor Mary Hamilton, a founder member of RaPAL, showed us some of her new work on the way the identities of literacy learners have been represented in England in the last few decades. She focused on the changes from early concepts of entitlement to support through to current policies about individual citizens' obligations.

Next is a summary written by Sue Grief, who acted as the overall conference rapporteuse.

Her comments set the scene for articles which some of the workshop leaders have offered for this journal:

1. Bob Read and Victoria Draper develop an adult education resource based on documents in the Norfolk county archives. They raise issues of language and power and of multimodality.
2. Judith Rose reviews the changing relationship between 'literacy' and 'learning difficulties' in English policy and strategy.
3. Hazel Israel writes about texting as a literacy teaching and learning resource and illustrates it with cartoons.
4. Mary Jane Onnen explains her work in the USA using multimodal online resources to develop oral reading fluency.
5. Amy Burgess describes issues emerging from her research on how Functional Skills is being introduced in England.
6. Jane Mace outlines her research on Quaker meetings and the search to 'find the sound of something beyond words'.

Delegates were encouraged to evaluate the conference by writing on tablecloths. A compilation of their comments rounds off the focus on the 2011 conference.

The final section in the journal includes

- a review of a new NIACE publication, *Lifelong Learning and Social Justice*
- news about a collaboration between RaPAL and NIACE for the next 2012 Journal on workplace literacies
- new notes about the Research Excellence Framework which inform the guidelines for future contributions to the Journal.

Naomi Horrocks and Alison Wedgbury thank all those who contributed to the 2011 conference. As well as all the hard work there was fun too in lovely surroundings. The team quiz got everyone outside to explore the university grounds, one group had a memorable guided tour of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and the evening barbecue ended with Norfolk shortcake and carrot cake. The images in this Journal give a flavour of the whole enjoyable experience. Alison celebrated her 60th birthday at the conference and she would particularly like to thank everyone for the gift of flowers.



Whatever can be written in Standard English can be Written in Dialect too

Peter Trudgill

Professor Peter Trudgill was born in 1943 in Norwich, England, where he attended the City of Norwich School from 1955. He studied Modern Languages at King's College, Cambridge and was later awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh in 1971. He taught in the Department of Linguistic Science at the University of Reading from 1970 to 1986, before becoming Professor of Sociolinguistics at the University of Essex. He was Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Lausanne from 1993 to 1998, and after that at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, for whom he still does some work. He is now Part Time Professor of Sociolinguistics at the University of Agder in Kristiansand, Norway and a member of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters as well as a Fellow of the British Academy. He is Adjunct Professor at the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, and Honorary Professor at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England.

Peter Trudgill is a well-known authority on dialects, as well as being one of the first to apply Labovian Sociolinguistic Methodology in the UK, and to provide a framework for studying Dialect Contact Phenomena. He is the Honorary President of the Friends of Norfolk Dialect Society, FOND <http://www.norfolkdialect.com/>, a society active in maintaining a distinctive local dialect. FOND are keen to persuade actors to avoid speaking 'Mummerset' when playing Norfolk characters <http://www.norfolkdialect.com/speaking.htm>.

Why Standard English?



Peter Trudgill challenged our perceptions of 'Standard English' with illustrations drawn from long experience of studying dialect in different national contexts. His talk covered these points:

What Standard English isn't.

- It is not a language.
- It is not an accent.
- It is not a style.
- It is not a register.
- It is not a set of prescriptive rules.

So what is it then?

- It has grammatical idiosyncrasies.
- Its position as the dialect of English used in **writing** is unassailable as a social convention.
- But requiring **spoken** Standard English from the majority who are nonstandard local dialect speakers is unnecessary, impractical and unethical.

See this article for a full version of his approach:

Trudgill, P. (1999) *Standard English: what it isn't*, in Bex, T. and Watts, R.J. (eds) *Standard English: the widening debate*. London: Routledge, 1999, 117-128.

www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/SEtrudgill.htm

Peter Trudgill has allowed RaPAL to use the following recent text to illustrate the issues.

From: Keith Skipper. 2011. *Come Yew On, Tergether!: a Celebration of Norfolk Dialect Writing*. Norwich: Mousehold Press.

Introduction

Until recently, no one in Norfolk would've thought about writing in their local dialect. What I mean is – they wouldn't've thought about it because they would just've gone ahead and done it. That wasn't so very long ago that Horatio Lord Nelson was writing in his log that "Captain Lambert have been very fortunate" That was what everybody done in them days.

Speech come before writing. All the languages in the world was spoken long before they was ever written; and most of them still in't written down. Children learn to speak before they learn to write. And very many people in the world never learn to read and write at all. For nearly all of human history, there weren't no such thing

as writing. Human language developed something like 100,000 years ago, but writing weren't invented until 95,000 years later.

When writing did first develop, what people naturally done was to write like what they spoke. What else were they a-going to do? Writing is just the representation of speech in a more permanent medium, and so they wrote down what they would've said if they had've been a-talking. But now a different practice have evolved. People are now encouraged *not* to write like what they speak – unless they come from the upper social classes. The upper classes speak Standard English as their native dialect; and the rest on us are encouraged to write in *their* dialect, not in our own. The idea seems to be that uniformity is a good thing. But this is a very new idea, and that in't totally obvious that that's a good one. That make for problems for children who have to learn to read and write in a kind of language that in't their own. And is it worth it? Whatever can be written in Standard English can be written in dialect too (as I'm trying to show here), so there in't no linguistic advantages to be gained neither.

Happily, though, there are still lots of places where writers feel free to use their natural vernacular speech forms, in the old way. Here in Norfolk, as Keith's book show, there continue to be a lot of writers what use their native dialect. We do have a long way to go before we get to the level of dialect use reached in Norway, where that's not at all unusual for serious novels and poetry to be written in dialect. But at least the writers what Keith present in this book have been doing their best – and very good that is too, specially when you think of the difficulties what they face. The problems are pretty obvious. Local dialects are often looked down on as inferior – even though from a linguistic point of view they definitely in't. And writing in a local dialect is often considered to be eccentric – even though from a historical point of view that most certainly in't.

So why do our dialect writers do it, then? Where do the impulse come from that all the writers what are eulogised in this here book by Keith Skipper have succumbed to? Of course there is a satisfaction in writing like what you speak. But publishing in the local dialect is a very symbolic activity too. To write in the Norfolk dialect demonstrate an affection for our part of the world; a respect for it; and a feeling of belonging that so many other people elsewhere haven't got no longer. That also signal a desire to preserve our heritage, and cherish our roots. Our dialect, like all dialects, is changing. But that's still alive and well, even if that do tend to run away and hide sometimes – some speakers suffer from a very sad kind of inferiority complex. So what's great about our dialect writers is that they don't share that sense of inferiority. Instead, what they are a-telling on us is that the dialect is something to celebrate; and they encourage all on us to continue to speak it.

Of course, using the dialect can be fun too. Dialect writing don't *have* to be comic. Serious Norwegian authors write in dialect because their dialects get a lot more respect than what English dialects do. That's why the work of writers like our novelist Mary Mann is so valuable. But Norfolk dialect-writing is also important because that portray and employ that very vital part of our local culture, our humour. And there's plenty of that in this here book.

In spite of the humour in these pages, though, Keith Skipper's book is also deadly serious, in its way. The Norfolk dialect do still survive, in spite of generations of dire predictions to the contrary. But all over the world, indigenous cultures and languages are dying out. If we don't do our best to defend our own culture, take pride in it, and defend it against ignorant prejudice – then no one else won't neither. Our Norfolk dialect need defending; and our dialect writers are playing a vital role in that defence.

Ethnographic Approaches to Literacy Learning in Developing Country Contexts

Alan Rogers

*We were delighted to welcome **Professor Alan Rogers** as one of the keynote speakers at the conference. Alan is an adult educator with a long and wide experience of working in many countries, especially in South Asia and Africa. Currently Special Professor of Adult Education at the University of Nottingham and Visiting Professorial Fellow at the University of East Anglia, his key concerns are with adult learning, training of trainers, adult literacy in the contexts of development, and non-formal adult education. He is known to many of us through publications such as Teaching Adults (co-written with Naomi Horrocks, Open University Press, 4th Revised edition, 2010), Adults Learning for Development (Cassell 1992), What is the difference? a new critique of adult learning and teaching (NIACE 2003), Non-formal education: flexible schooling or participatory education? (Hong Kong University and Kluwer 2004) and Urban Literacy: communication, learning and identity in development contexts (UNESCO Institute of Education 2006). Formerly Reviews Editor for the International Journal of Educational Development, he is on the editorial board of a number of academic journals. A consultant on literacy for UNESCO, he is a member of a team working on the training of adult literacy facilitators in ethnographic approaches to literacy (LETTER) in India, Ethiopia and currently Uganda and Afghanistan, which has already resulted in three publications, details of which are on the website: www.uppinghamseminars.com. He is a member of the Literacy Working Group, one of a number of working groups established by the UK Commission for UNESCO.*

In this talk, Alan outlined the Learning for Empowerment Through Training in Ethnographic Research (LETTER) programme, which has been created in the context of 'developing societies'; it has been implemented in Pakistan, India and Ethiopia and is currently being implemented in Uganda. It is based on the concept of literacy as social practice (the so-called 'New Literacy Studies'). and in it, the trainees and others engage in mini research projects into the everyday literacy and numeracy practices of individuals or groups in their localities, using ethnographic methodologies, and building on these findings new literacy learning programmes. Alan presented some of the findings from these studies in Pakistan, India and Ethiopia, especially relating to what have been called 'invisible' or 'hidden' literacies. He discussed the conceptual frameworks for this approach, which brings together both the anthropologies of literacy and learning on the one hand, and theories of adult learning on the other hand. He also invited us to consider some of the implications arising from this approach for adult literacy learning, not only in developing countries but also in countries like the UK, especially the process of building new learning on the basis of the informal everyday literacies.

You can view the slides from Alan's conference presentation by following this link: <http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/conference/2011Conference/2011.htm>
The following article describes the LETTER project in more detail.

I wish to describe some recent developments in both our understandings of 'literacy' and in the practice of teaching literacy with adults in the context of developing societies. There are similar developments in the West (including the UK) but my experience has been in aid-receiving countries. I will leave it to my readers to decide how far such approaches can be developed further in the UK.

The Context

The context is societies in which large numbers of adults are unschooled or inadequately schooled, and these are described by policy makers as 'illiterate'; though recent studies have shown that significant numbers have acquired and use some literacy and written numeracy skills through informal learning. These unschooled are included in the formal statistics of 'literacy' which bodies like UNESCO and others still promulgate, despite being

recognised as very unreliable. These figures are important, for they are used as an indicator of 'development'. One of the key aims of development programmes is to reduce, if not eliminate, 'illiteracy' in the country. For literacy is seen by UNESCO and many other international agencies as the key to development; without literacy, people cannot be involved in development, have access to knowledge or participate in the country's political activities!!

This context is also important, for many (not all) of those classified as 'illiterate' have internalised these labels and regard themselves as in deficit – unable to access knowledge, health or political power. They too have come to believe that it is illiteracy that has made them poor.

Adult Literacy Learning Programmes

This context is also important in another way, for it leads to an assumption that what is lacking is (primary) schooling; and therefore most national adult literacy learning programmes (ALLPs), even when they are not handled by Ministries of Education but by Ministries of Community Development or another government agency, in practice take the form of alternative 'schooling for adults' (even when this is denied). Classes are formed (usually of about 30 learners – a figure which has been sponsored by UNESCO, presumably because 30 is a recommended primary school class size); a local teacher (usually called a facilitator, partly to stress the fact that teaching adults is different from teaching children but in fact much more to indicate that they are not formal 'teachers', which would upset the teachers' unions) is appointed to teach and given (minimal) training and even less support; campaigns to 'motivate' adults to attend the classes (on the assumption that they will not be motivated naturally) are launched; textbooks are written on a standardised model (one-size-fits-all); classes meet for a set period (usually 1½ or 2 hours) for a set period broken by local custom related to the weather or agricultural routines; at the end of a set period (usually nine months), a universally applied test is taken by the learners and a certificate given to those who are judged to be successful in that test. There is little interest in whether the literacy learners use their literacy in their daily lives.

Most programmes make great efforts to relate the contents of the lessons to some development topic – health or farming or income generation projects. In other words,

adult literacy is co-opted into other developmental campaigns – against HIV/AIDS, for example, or malaria; or domestic violence; or increased farm productivity; or small-scale entrepreneurialism etc. Textbooks are specially written (by 'experts') for special interest groups such as women – making assumptions about women's specific interests in such areas as health, reproduction, family support and cooking. This approach has been called 'functional literacy' – a term much used but containing several different elements. For some, it means teaching a literacy which is used in one or other development activity; for others, it means teaching a 'functional' skill alongside a standardised schooled literacy.

This model is very widespread throughout both Asia and Africa. And it is to a large extent welcomed by many adult learners who have been convinced that what they 'lack' is exposure to the experience of primary school.

But the model is very largely ineffective; attendances tend to fall rapidly, many adults withdrawing (usually called 'dropping out') often quite early; and those who stay rarely finding a literacy which they can use in the daily lives. For their daily lives are not changed; existing inequalities bare in fact confirmed; the literacy taught is simply being added to their existing activities.

Because of this, many funding agencies have withdrawn from adult literacy (a waste of money); others are seeking for alternative approaches which they hope will be more effective. Some use 'real literacy materials', texts drawn from the local community (still sometimes standardised, on the grounds that the existing facilitators cannot manage the innovative and spontaneous approaches needed to cope with a wide range of texts drawn from many different sources); stories (whether written or oral), local proverbs, oral poetry, films and songs are one such strand; another is to take important forms such as driving licence forms, bank forms, marriage registration etc for learning 'literacy'. Others (like Freirean programmes, REFLECT and other programmes) work with adult groups on other forms of developmental projects or training programmes and embed an appropriate literacy in that work (a 'literacy comes second' approach) – although in practice a number of these send the non-literate group members off to standardised literacy learning programmes apart from the developmental activity.

Ethnographic Approaches

The ethnographic approach to adult literacy has grown only slowly in developing countries but it is now spreading. What is distinctive about it is that it comes from a combination of two main strands of practice – anthropology and adult education.

Anthropology: The anthropological approach to literacy has now become a standard part of the 'literacy world', both academic and in practice. Anthropology has been used in international development theory for many years, springing from its first origins in the study of the 'other', seeking to understand the exotic, the strange. It has of course developed well beyond this initial phase and – joining with critical theory – has developed into a practice of reflexivity; that is, seeking to understand the interaction between both of the parties involved the international development.

Literacy was bound to come under scrutiny from anthropologists as part of this general trend. And in so doing, anthropologists began to examine the contrasting literacy practices of both the aid receiving and the aid giving parties. From the early 1980s (Brice Heath; Street etc), they came to see that literacy is perhaps best analysed when it is viewed as multiple; that the view of Literacy as a single autonomous set of skills, which (in a deficit model of development), once learned, can be applied to any situation requiring reading and writing for any purpose is not the most helpful way of promoting literacy activities. Street found religious literacies, what he called 'commercial' literacies but which may be extended to 'occupational literacies', and schooled or formal literacies. While these did relate to each other, they each had specific functionalities and different values; the academic or schooled literacies (essential for progressing further in schooling) were valued very highly, indeed were regarded as the only literacy (Literacy per se); while the other literacies (vernacular, informal, local) were ignored, demeaned or even denied. But the ethnographer does not share that value system; to her/him, all literacy practices are different. They are all valuable, if not valued by everyone.

Hidden literacies: What ethnographic studies also revealed in such contexts is that many of the literacy practices were hidden from sight, sometimes just invisible even to those who used them because they were not seen as 'literacy' (literacy is thought to be something which is done in a classroom or in formal contexts or uses formal texts), sometimes deliberately

hidden from feelings of 'shame' ("this is not your literacy"). We have seen domestic servants who read lists of meals when 'making breakfast', who write notes when 'answering the phone', who make lists of items sent to the laundry but refuse to let the researcher see them 'because this is not your literacy'; the plumber who says he is illiterate but yet offers to write a receipt for sums paid to him – in English or in Urdu; hotel workers who develop their own literacy for working out room requirements and who call upon their manager to learn their literacy rather than be required to learn the 'official' literacy (Nabi 2009; Rogers et al 2007). We found that people engage with literacy tasks often unconsciously – they do not define what they do as 'literacy'. They feel that the 'power to name' belongs to the educated elites, not to the poor.

It is because of this that anthropologists came to appreciate that traditional approaches to researching literacy are not adequate for their purposes. Simply asking people about their literacy experience – while very useful and a required part of the process – is not enough. Some will tell the researcher what they believe the researcher wishes to find out – that they are 'illiterate'; some will hide what they do out of shame; some will genuinely not recognise what they are doing as 'literacy'. In addition to such enquiries – and as triangulation – observation is required; watching, hanging about, trying to see things through the eyes of the researched, to see what is important to them as well as what is important to the outsider; being both inside and outside at the same time. And this means the researcher assessing him/herself as well as the 'other'.

Adult education: Somewhat later adult educators came to appreciate much the same thing. Adult educators constantly train teachers of adults that adults bring with them to their classes much prior learning, funds of knowledge (often unconscious knowledge) (Moll et al 1992). In their understanding that all adult education needs to start with the existing experience of the learners, building new learning on prior learning, it became apparent that we needed some way to identify the existing experience, the existing learning of the literacy learners. Rather than assume that so-called 'illiterates', by definition, do not have any relevant experience and do not engage in any literacy activities (the deficit approach), adult educators began to look for ways of discovering what in fact is going on – and found their tools in ethnographic approaches (not a full ethnography but ethnographic approaches). And

they too found multiple literacies – identifying that the literacy practices being taught in the adult literacy learning programmes (ALLPs) are very different (and are regarded as being very different) from the literacy practices experienced in the community, the family, the market, the workplace etc. The transfer of skills, assumed by the standardised ALLPs, from the classroom into daily life did not take place because the two kinds of literacy were not seen as related to each other.

The reason for the delay in the findings of adult educators seems to me to lie in the training which adult literacy facilitators received. Although most such training programmes stressed that teaching adults is different from teaching children and many used group learning methodologies, in practice facilitators were taught to teach like primary school teachers (whole class teaching; copying letters and detached words taken out of context, etc). The facilitators responded to this, for they of course only had experience of primary school to draw upon; and the adult literacy learners saw ALLPs as being similar to primary school classes. In addition, two other factors militated against an ethnographic approach. Firstly, the very concept of 'illiteracy' meant that the adult learners were seen not to have any relevant experience or knowledge to bring with them to the classes; so no-one taught facilitators to look for this experience or knowledge. Secondly, the standardised (one-size-fits-all) nature of the programmes – primary schools for adults, with a standard textbook – meant that local literacies would not have been relevant to any such training. So, although many facilitators were taught that they should regard the adult participants as partners in learning, and draw upon their experience and existing practices, no-one taught them how to find out what those experiences and practices are.

Developments in Research

The first breakthrough came from anthropological research harnessed into education in the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Gee 2000). Shirley Brice Heath's work in USA was crucial (Heath 1983). Then came Street's work in Iran, followed by case studies which discovered the wide range of literacy practices in the field (Street 1984, 1993; Robinson-Pant 2004). The Social Uses of Literacy (Prinsloo and Breier 1996) project in South Africa was one of the earliest, although individual local research elsewhere showed much the same. This has been followed by a spate of such local case studies (Street 1995, 2001; Doronilla 1996;

Robinson-Pant 2004). Much the same has taken place in Western societies with detailed studies of local and situated literacies, community- and workplace-based (Barton and Hamilton 1998, 2000). Educational contexts also have been taken for study in both arenas (Street 2005; Jabari Mahiri 2003). This has of course created its own critical examination; this work has been described as anecdotal, relative, romantic; that it concentrates on the local and demeans the global nature of 'literacy' (Collins and Blot 2002; Brandt and Clinton 2002). But the anthropological work is now well established.

The problem is how to build on this for adult education. In the UK, where a similar trajectory seems to have been followed (e.g. Pahl and Rowsell 2005), there has been a good deal of concern to apply the NLS to schools. The home-school gap (especially in numeracy) has been and is being explored in some detail, and new applications are taking place in areas such as family literacy etc. This has been much slower in the context of 'developing countries'.

The LETTER Project

One project seeks to draw the anthropological and the adult education consciously together. LETTER (the acronym stands for Learning for Empowerment Through Training in Ethnographic Research) was first mooted at an international workshop on urban literacies held in Delhi in 2000 when a local women's educational NGO requested some training to discover the existing knowledge and belief systems of the women they worked with (they had discovered from a participatory project on curriculum building for women that the women held the view that rivers were animate with feelings). In 2004-6, the first such training programme was held in India drawing participants from Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan as well as India; financial support came from the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and other agencies. A one-week workshop on ethnographic approaches was held during which all the participants went out into the streets of Delhi to look at local literacy practices (e.g. shopping or taxi drivers etc). These were presented to and critiqued by all the participants. Particular attention was paid to local numeracy practices, where local measures were contrasted with the more formal standardised measures taught in the ALLPs. The participants then went home and conducted a more detailed case study into local everyday literacy and numeracy practices. A second workshop was held during which these case studies were finalised and made ready for

publication and a start was made on discussing how to apply these findings to teaching adults. A report was written and published by Nirantar under the title: *Exploring the Everyday: ethnographic studies of literacy and numeracy*.

The project then moved to Ethiopia with funding from Pact-Ethiopia, a US-AID funded agency. Some 20 participants from NGOs, government and universities took part in a series of three workshops. During the first, a field visit was made; then a local case study was undertaken between workshop 1 and workshop 2. During workshop 2, the case studies were elaborated and a beginning was made on identifying some findings for use in teaching adults. The third workshop (attended by one of the key figures from Nirantar) finalised the case studies and formulated an approach to using the findings in ALLPs in a three-stage strategy: a) working with the literacy learners to identify some of their existing literacy and numeracy practices, especially the hidden practices; b) exploring these practices in detail in discussion, looking at the power implications; and c) using the existing practices to lead into new literacy and numeracy practices, widening the range of literacies and numeracies available to the participants. Again a publication came from this programme: *Everyday Literacies in Africa: ethnographic studies of literacy and numeracy in Ethiopia* (Gebre et al 2009).

One member of staff from Makerere University, Uganda, joined the training programme in Ethiopia; and he organised a third LETTER project in Uganda funded by the British Council under the DELPHE programme. This includes several different elements, all using an ethnographic approach. A project designing an ethnographic training programme inside Makerere University with some staff training, and a separate project on using ethnographic approaches for the identification of local stories and writing and publishing these for new reading material form part of the project; but the core is a series of three workshops for trainers of literacy facilitators on a similar pattern to India and Ethiopia. The first workshop again included a field visit and training in ethnography; case studies were made by the participants in their home locations; the second workshop (which focused on numeracy to a large extent) refined these case studies and elaborated on ethnographic approaches; the case studies were finalised. The third workshop focused primarily on developing teaching-learning activities from ethnographic findings; micro-teaching formed part of the workshop.

One new element in the Uganda LETTER project is that the participants are required to teach literacy to a group of adults based on their case study. This project too will have a publication but there will in addition be a dissemination meeting to bring the progress of this approach to the attention of other adult literacy agencies in Uganda.

The project is attracting a good deal of attention. Participants from Kenya and Tanzania attended the Uganda LETTER programme, and similar projects may be developed in these countries. Other possibilities under discussion include India (again), Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Mexico and Brazil. This will call for more trainers in this approach – and a start has been made to build up a team of such trainers.

Comments

Because of its double origins, LETTER has two main elements – a research element (probably best seen as surveying the field) and a teaching element. Traditional ALLPs only teach; they do not research; that is thought to be the work of specialists, consultants, academics. In LETTER, facilitators (with their learners) investigate the literacy lifeworlds of the learners; they help to make the unconscious conscious. They then build on what they find to lead into new literacy practices (some of them formal).

There is always a danger in such a project of this approach being seen as the next 'new thing' in adult literacy. This is not our intention. We see this as an *additional* tool which those who teach literacy and numeracy to adults may find helpful. It can be used entirely on its own; equally it can fit into existing standardised functional literacy learning programmes by adding a local dimension to the generalised teaching-learning materials. The one major difference seems to me to be the identification and valuing of local informal (often hidden or invisible) literacy practices, so that the literacy learners do in fact make a conscious and major contribution to their own learning; they are not passive recipients but use their existing literacy practices to lead to new literacy practices.

There are still major hurdles to cross. One is the issue of measuring achievements (Campbell 2007). If the new literacy practices being developed are informal rather than formal, the means of measuring such changes are not clear. They (like some other participatory learning programmes) will find it hard to contribute to the national statistics of 'literacy' (GMR 2005). Since the new uses of literacy will be very

varied, it will not be easy to make comparative judgments about 'levels' of literacy.

A second major issue is the training of facilitators. The time available for such training is very limited; and the normal pattern is of a single-injection model of training with very limited follow up. But changing the whole world picture of 'literacy' away from an autonomous to an ideological model takes a lot of time and support.

But we do not believe this is simply desirable; we believe it is necessary. Teaching a formal schooled literacy to 'illiterate' adults has been shown to be ineffective. Starting with their own (often hidden) literacies is vitally important if we are to help them develop new literacy practices in ways which are really helpful to them rather than contribute to our statistics. But in the context of international development, where the agenda is set by international agencies seeking their own goals, this will be particularly difficult.

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- Alan Rogers is working on LETTER with a number of other people, notably Brian Street and Dave Baker (a numeracy specialist) as well as many people from other countries. This paper has been prepared with Brian Street, with whom Alan is writing a book entitled Literacy in Development: tales from the field to be published in 2012 by NIACE. This will develop the ideas of this paper.*

Moving Testimonies, Uncertain Truths: Constructing Adult Literacy Learners across 30 years of Policy and Practice

Mary Hamilton

Dr Mary Hamilton is Professor of Adult Learning and Literacy at Lancaster University and Associate Director of the Lancaster Literacy Research Centre. She has written extensively on policy, practice and everyday learning in adult literacy. She is co-author of a number of books including Local Literacies (with David Barton); Powerful Literacies (with Jim Crowther and Lynn Tett) and Changing Faces of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy: A Critical History (with Yvonne Hillier). Her conference presentation was based on her new book, Literacy and the Politics of Representation, which will be published in May 2012. Mary was a founder member of RaPAL. You can find out more about her work here <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/edres/profiles/216/2/> and can contact her at m.hamilton@lancaster.ac.uk



Mary Hamilton's talk focused first on the ways in which literacy learners have been characterised in academic, popular and policy discourse, how these characterisations have changed over time, and why highlighting and critiquing these characterisations is important. She also discussed the locations in which literacy learners have been so characterised - academic journals, policy documents, and more widely in the media generally. She then looked at how the learner voice in particular has been represented in policy and practice over time, and the extent to which these voices can be described as 'authentic'. Finally she highlighted what she sees as the key characteristic features of literacy learners' writing.

She argued for the importance of discourse analysis in understanding the ways in which literacy learners are represented and so positioned in academic and policy debates, showing in particular how discourses establish and reinforce conceptual boundaries and thus how both literacy and literacy learners are

constructed in public debates. These boundaries frame and so tend to limit "possibilities for action for literacy, the way we imagine what literacy is, who writes and reads and for what purposes."

The particular "spaces" she discussed, in which public debates about literacy are framed and delineated, included policy, media, research, within teaching and learning activity, and as part of everyday informal talk. She sees in all these discourses and spaces a pervasive deficit orientation, the repeated construction of literacy learners as part of a social "underclass", and increasingly since the 1980s, a tendency towards a concept of participation in literacy classes as a social responsibility for literacy learners, and at the same time a new conception of citizenship as entailing responsibilities as well as rights.

She surveyed three decades of policy on adult literacy, from the Right to Read campaign of the early 70s, through the International Adult Literacy survey of the 1990s, to Skills for Life in the 21st century, tracing the development of key concepts, descriptors and images of adult literacy learners, and the emergence of the technocratic apparatus that now surrounds government-funded adult literacy work. Steadily throughout this 30 year period, she sees the developing articulation of adult literacy within these areas of discourse as a key component of economic efficiency and productivity, and of national prosperity. At the same time, adult literacy work has been situated as a central feature of policy's attempts to address 'social exclusion', a strongly pathologised concept now almost completely free of the notion of justice.

She argued that policy in the UK now presents lifelong learning as a duty of citizens, particularly for those less well qualified. This view was contrasted with language of the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report on Literacy of 2006, which stresses literacy as a key element of human rights, and the addressing of literacy needs primarily as an issue of justice.

Mary Hamilton moved on to give examples of the ways literacy learners have been described and characterised in a variety of policy and campaigning documents since the 1970s. These were contrasted with examples of writings about literacy and life by literacy learners themselves, in such books as *Every birth it comes different* (Hackney Reading Centre 1980), *Who feels it knows it* (Various authors 1980), *Opening Time* (Frost and Hoy 1985), and *Left in the Dark* (Eden Grove Women's Literacy Group 1982).

She drew attention to the aims of the organisations that published and continue to publish these writings: celebrating cultural diversity, the local distinctiveness of 'ordinary' lives and autobiographies, and documenting literacy learners' experiences of schooling and parenthood. These publications used a wide variety of literary forms, and saw their publications as inspirational and educational resources, not least because of their authenticity, the fact that they were the direct expression of literacy learners' ideas, emotions, and experiences. They were literacy learners' representations of themselves, rather than other people's, however well-meaning.

These writings put the discourse about literacy learning contained in policy and academic texts into strong relief: *"I would always put myself down and I still do. It is hard to get out of the habit When you have been told you are thick for most of your life, you start to believe it."*

"I can go to a council meeting and talk with the best of people and argue out that I want to. Whereas if I had to put it down in writing in their way, the way they wanted it, I couldn't do it. It's better written as you want to write it even if it doesn't sound right. I always feel that when I'm writing and I put big words in, it distorts the writing altogether. After all, you don't use big words everyday when you're talking. Why do they put it in writing?"

"Writing and dressing are similar, because you can get a dress that might suit you but won't suit me. Writing should relate to all things in life not just to paper and a pen. It's like sitting down on a chair – I might sit on a chair and be very comfortable, you might sit on it and think it's bloody awful. It's relating things. You see, where a lot of teachers go wrong and a lot of schools go wrong, they relate writing to paper and pencil, not to peoples' minds and not to people seeing. Writing is part of seeing, feeling, touch or even wearing."

Mary Hamilton argued that the way in which such writings were produced is central to the implicit critique they offer of 'mainstream' writing and publishing: the origin of many of the pieces in writing workshops in which groups of people discussed their ideas and their drafts collectively; the editorial process of selecting and working on pieces of writing for publication; and the reading clubs which tried out new publications and fed back on them from the point of view of literacy students. She highlighted the role of 'scribes', and the problematic nature of literary authenticity, situating it as much in the intentions of the writer as in the actual writing itself, and noting how different this is from the orthodox view of mainstream literary production.

She summed up her talk by highlighting what she suggested are the key common features of literacy learners' writing, stressing the deep individuality of each piece, the variety of language and metaphors used, the prominence of hopes and aspirations, of critical accounts of schooling, and of discussions about control, freedom and agency, both in terms of writing and of life in general. The powerpoint slides for Mary's talk can be found on the RaPAL website at <http://www.literacy.lanacs.ac.uk/rapal/conference/2011Conference/2011.htm>

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Literacies in Place and Time: a Personal Response

Sue Grief

When I was asked to share my responses to the conference in the final plenary session I found three headings useful. Two of these, 'place' and 'time', were provided by the title of the conference. A third, that I am sure chimed with the experience of everyone who attended, was 'challenge'.

For many of the participants the conference involved a considerable journey eastwards to a place that may not have been familiar. It certainly wasn't possible, within the time available, to explore all that Norwich and Norfolk have to offer but the conference did have a distinctive local flavour. We had an opportunity to hear two distinguished academics from our field, Peter Trudgill and Alan Rogers, both of whom have strong local links. In the course of his presentation Peter introduced us to some fascinating aspects of the local dialect, based on his own studies in Norwich. Alan drew examples from his work overseas that provided links with work undertaken by the Department of International Development at the University of East Anglia (UEA).

A Norfolk based project that has introduced the idea of 'Reading Cafés' to local schools was introduced at the opening session. This project has succeeded in encouraging parents and children to enjoy reading activities together and is now spreading to other parts of the country. Local literacy practices of a rather different kind were the focus of a fascinating workshop led by Bob Read and Victoria Draper at which some of us had a chance to examine a collection of old documents from the Norfolk archives that reflected the lives of Norfolk people over the years. We puzzled over a medieval spell and struggled to read a crosshatched letter written by local hero, Admiral Nelson. Those of us who were around on the Friday evening had the chance to visit the Sainsbury Centre to see a wonderfully diverse collection of art that is permanently based at the UEA.

In relation to time, we were invited both to look back and to think ahead. The third keynote speaker, Mary Hamilton, took us back over the past 40 years, encouraging us to think about the ways in which literacy and literacy learners have been portrayed. Mary highlighted the implications of this portrayal in terms of policy and practice, both, past and present. Judith Rose, in her workshop, took us back over the

history of the relationship between adult literacy and education for learners with learning difficulties, again highlighting issues that remain 'live' for practitioners today. As someone who has been involved in adult literacy for many years, Mary's presentation evoked memories of the wide range of published student writing that was produced in the 1970s and 1980s and of the ways in which we used this to encourage our own students to write, for themselves and for others. Judith's workshop, on the other hand, prompted memories of difficult discussions and hard managerial decisions. Bob and Victoria took us further back in time, to the Middle Ages, with their literacy artefacts but other workshops looked at recent changes and future opportunities. I was sad to miss Hazel Israel's session on the ways in which texting could be used to improve literacy but very much enjoyed looking at the cartoons on texting displayed in the coffee area. Mary Jane Onnen explored the uses of technology in the teaching of reading and Tara Furlong and Claire Collins encouraged us to take RaPAL into the world of Facebook and social networking.

All of the speakers presented us with challenges. Before listening to Peter Trudgill I would have felt confident that I could explain Standard English but Peter challenged me to think much more closely about what Standard English is, and what it is not, and to consider the implications this has for the teaching of both writing and spoken English. Likewise, the concept of 'multiple literacies' is not new to most participants at a RaPAL conference, nor that of 'embedded literacy'. However, in the context of international development, Alan Rogers introduced me to a different meaning for the term 'embedded literacy', one that acknowledges the tacit 'funds of knowledge' or 'hidden literacies' that are drawn on by those often labelled as "illiterate". Acknowledging these 'hidden literacies' raises big questions in relation to literacy teaching that concern those of us working in the UK as much as those working in developing countries. There were echoes of Alan's arguments in Mary's message regarding the significance of the ways in which literacy and literacy learners are understood, not only by teachers but by policy makers and providers of educational resources.

Being personally involved in research on writing I found Jane Mace's workshop on the taking of

minutes in Quaker meetings fascinating. Jane helped us to gain some understanding of the significance and the particular characteristics of this literacy practice, in the context of the Quaker meeting, where it is understood not just as the recording of the meeting but as a key part of the process of discerning "the will of God". In other workshops participants were challenged to explore museums as a site for learning about literacy and numeracy, to find effective ways to interpret Functional Skills for learners and to write successful bids for much needed funding.

For me the conference was a very positive experience and I feel it is best summed up by using words from the table cloth on which we were all invited to write our evaluations, as we left. Top of the bill were: "Stimulating", "thought provoking" and "food for thought", closely followed by "inspirational". To these were added: "empowering", "informative", "refreshing", "warm and welcoming", "enjoyable" and "fun". Quite rightly there were lots of positive comments on the venue, the organisation, the social activities and the food and finally, and importantly, "See you next year".



Archive documents from the Norfolk Record Office - a free resource pack for adult learning

Bob Read and Victoria Draper

Bob Read is Training and Development Adviser for ACER (Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region www.acer.ac.uk)

Victoria Draper is an Education and Outreach Officer for Norfolk Record Office: <http://www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/index.htm>

This conference workshop was delivered by Bob Read and Victoria Draper, and set out to explore how our literacy practices, whilst ever changing, continue to be shaped by issues of 'language and power'.

As a starting point for discussion workshop participants were asked to complete a timeline activity using a set of laminated documents, covering a range of royal, legal and vernacular texts from 11th century through to early 20th century. As they sequenced the documents in rough chronological order participants were prompted to discuss any insights into the layout, language or varied purposes of the range of texts.

The discussion that followed was lively and wide ranging and confirmed Bob's suggestion that the task could be a valuable and stimulating activity to use on literacy teacher education courses at a range of levels to introduce some key issues in literacy studies.



For example, from Victoria's comments in the feedback discussion the group learned that one of the documents, a 17th century spell was used as a charm to ward off

witchcraft – it still showed the pin holes used to fasten it to an undershirt. Containing strange symbols and a garbled mix of English and Latin almost certainly undecipherable to the wearer, this 'multimodal' document was still clearly valued for its power to protect from malevolent spirits. The spell has only survived because it was used as evidence in a court case of alleged witchcraft. Both in its function then as a charm and its status as legal document this fascinating spell reminds us clearly of the power that we have learned to attach to written texts.

By way of contrast, one of the other items was a much more recent document, a Field Service Record card from the First World War. This

postcard had a multiple choice format and was offered, almost as a 'writing frame' to support soldiers in the trenches with low literacy skills to communicate with their families back in England. The limited tick box options on the card allowed soldiers to make only brief, positive comments about their welfare and in a stiff, officer-class English that would have been very different from their vernacular language. Whilst the document was clearly an early example of military censorship, it prompted a much wider discussion of how the dominant literacy and language practices of institutions shape the values and attitudes of those who work within them.

NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

I am quite well.

I have been admitted into hospital.
(sick) and am going on well.
(wounded) and hope to be discharged soon.

I am being sent down to the base.

I have received your { letter dated _____
telegram .. _____
parcel .. _____

Letter follows at first opportunity.

I have received no letter from you
{ lately.
{ for a long time.

Signature }
only. }

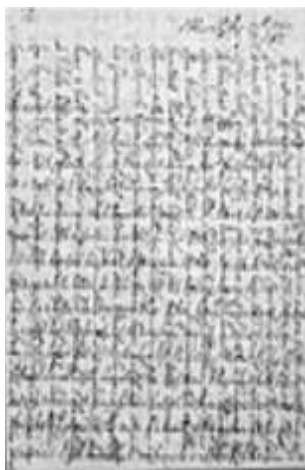
Date _____

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

(5544) Wt. W2497-293 1,136cs. 6/15 M.R. Co., Ltd.

Five other historical documents made up the timeline task: a royal hunting charter (1090), a 'letter sheet' (1824), a 'cross hatch' letter (1840), a six year old boy's touching first handwritten letter (1855) and a 'removal order' (1781). This latter document was used by Victoria to explain how archive resources from the Norfolk Record Office had been used with school groups as well as adult literacy learners. The group heard how Victoria had used one of the texts as a starting point for a discussion of changing attitudes towards homelessness. The 'removal order' was a half typed, half handwritten legal document, issued by the 'overseers of the poor' within a Norwich parish to enforce the transport of an Elizabeth Jessop to another part of Norfolk. Elizabeth had been arrested for being homeless and was described in the removal order as 'a rogue and vagabond' and 'wandering abroad and lodging in outhouses and failing to give a good account of herself'. Whilst Victoria's students found the phrasing quaint, the document prompted some thoughtful reflections on the plight of the homeless and the prejudices that persist across the centuries.

How you can access the resource

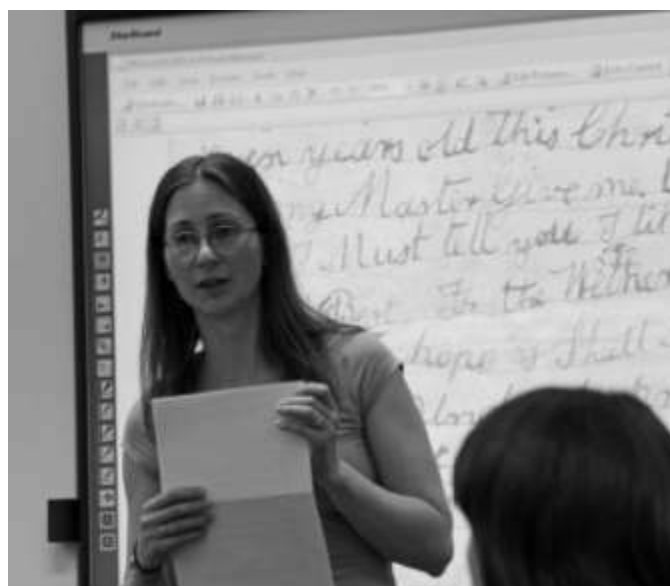


In response to comments from participants in the conference workshop the timeline task and related resources have been packaged and are available for general use as resources for adult literacy tutor training. In addition to the theme of language and power they could also be used to introduce a range of other key topics e.g.

- development of spelling
- genre
- changing conventions in grammar and punctuation
- morphology
- history of the English language
- the use of Standard English
- literacy as a set of social practices
- handwriting

For each document there is a short set of historical notes followed by a commentary on those features of the text that trainers might like to highlight and explore with their group. Some documents are also accompanied by a screencast in which Bob and Victoria discuss some of those language features in more detail. To access the resources click on this link:

<http://www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/e-Resources/Teaching-Packs/NCC099608>
 Contact details for Bob Read and Victoria Draper
 bob.read@acer.ac.uk or 07795 260483
 victoria.draper@norfolk.gov.uk or 01603 222599



Is there a 'Special Relationship' between Adult Literacy and Education for Adults with Learning Disabilities? An investigation into the history of their interaction 1970-2010.

Judith Rose

Judith Rose worked for more than 20 years in adult education in London, starting as a volunteer at Blackfriars Settlement in the 1970s when adult literacy was first being recognised as an issue through the 'Right to Read' campaign. She qualified in Teaching Literacy Skills to Adults in 1981. From 1988 she managed the extensive 'special needs' programme at Southwark Adult Education, working with a range of partners including the Maudsley Hospital, Southwark Social Services and voluntary sector organisations, until the Inner London Education Authority was dissolved in 1990, when she was transferred to Southwark College. In 1994 she escaped to Suffolk, to join Suffolk College as Programme Co-ordinator for Learning Support, and finally became Associate Dean for Student Support at the new University Campus Suffolk from 2007. From 2001 Judith was also part of the Skills for Life initiative, working independently as a researcher, trainer and facilitator, including acting as one of the team which designed and delivered the initial Level 4 Certificate for Adult Literacy Specialists in Suffolk. Judith retired in 2009, and now works as a volunteer.



Background

This article is based on research done for a poster presented at a seminar on the history of Adult Literacy organised jointly by Lancaster University's Adult Literacy Research group and BERA (British Educational Research Association) in March 2011. Subsequently I facilitated a workshop on the topic at RaPAL's annual

conference in July. I was encouraged to write this article by the interest shown by participants, and I would welcome responses or questions from readers.

Introduction

My contention is that the relationship between the teaching of adult literacy and the development of education for adults with learning disabilities has always been a close one, but that it has not been much examined. I believe this is because there has been a tension, which is still present, and which continues to be an issue for current practitioners. This was confirmed for me by the reactions to my previous presentations.

My investigation of the evidence leads me to propose that the relationship has been an

interactive and often positive one, where learners and practitioners have been involved together in constructive work which has benefited both parties. At the same time there has been a lack of analysis, and the critical theoretical work which informs both the New Literacy Studies and the development of education for adults with learning disabilities has not been mutually shared and discussed. I hope this article can be one element in such a debate.

This analysis is mainly based on 'official' documents, such as legislation or government funded reports, plus my own reflections and observations as a practitioner.

The History

The campaign for an adult literacy programme in the UK began in the University Settlements in the 1970s. In fact the first public Adult Literacy Scheme opened in 1963, co-ordinated from Cambridge House in South East London. In 1969 the British Association of Settlements (BAS) built on this initiative with a pilot project for adult literacy in South London, including at Blackfriars Settlement, where I became a volunteer in 1971.

As described by Hamilton and Hillier (2006), the campaign was developed in the spirit of liberation and community development which characterised the civil rights campaigns of 1960s in USA and UK. The manifesto document, A

Right to Read, (BAS, 1974), used the same title as the American publication.

I was dimly aware of the difficult relationship between provision for adults with learning disabilities and the adult literacy movement at this early stage because the scheme I was assigned to at Blackfriars was designed specifically to meet the needs of young people who had left special schools and were working, or looking for jobs. They were categorised as Educationally Sub-Normal (ESN). It became clear that this group was not welcomed as part of the new adult literacy campaign. When researching this subject last year in the *Changing Faces of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy* archive at Lancaster University, I discovered in the minutes of the Adult Literacy Campaign meeting, 5.3.73, that "other schemes (than Blackfriars) represented at the meeting either did not accept ESN pupils, or only occasionally, if they were motivated to learn". I think the embarrassment behind this statement is still evident.

The adult literacy campaigners were understandably anxious to avoid any perception that the 'illiterate' population could be defined as ESN. The *A Right to Read* document therefore included the following disclaimer:

It is a common misconception that all people with chronic reading problems are at least educationally sub-normal, if not mentally defective. But none of the statistics we have quoted...have included adults from either of those categories.....They are a wide variety of men and women doing all sorts of different jobs, suffering from their inability to read in different ways. p11, A Right to Read

It is clear that at this stage the adult literacy movement wanted to distance itself from any suggestion that people who had literacy difficulties had generic learning difficulties. Indeed, as we have seen, the original schemes actively discouraged people who might have the label ESN from attending provision.

At the time the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) had a responsibility under the 1944 Education Act "to provide for all young people who want continued full-time education between the ages of 16 and 19". In practice provision for people with learning difficulties over the school-leaving age of 16 was hard to find.

1978 is a very significant date in this story because it was the year when the Warnock Committee chaired by Professor Mary Warnock published their report, *Special Educational Needs: The report of the committee of enquiry into the education of handicapped children and young people*. The report represented a revolution in the approach to the education of people with learning difficulties or disabilities. A policy of integration was introduced, and the language of special educational needs was born.

Chapter 10 of the Warnock Report dealt with the subject of learners over the age of 16. It is clear that the authors were shocked at what they had discovered. They demanded action.

Provision for young people over 16 with special educational needs has received little attention in the past...the field is relatively uncharted and is extremely complex (10.2).

We cannot over-emphasise the urgency of finding ways of challenging attitudes so that such people are accepted as ordinary people who merely have certain special needs. (10.5)

Almost as an aside, the Warnock Report mentions a finding which is particularly interesting for this study.

Of young people ascertained as handicapped in the sample studied in the National Children's Bureau research project, who had undertaken some form of further education since leaving school, over half were receiving tuition in adult literacy classes. (10.35)

Despite the overt lack of encouragement adults with learning difficulties/disabilities were finding their way to adult literacy classes. The NCB research project was the first longitudinal study of a cohort of babies, which was followed from their birth in 1958. It was not concentrating on disability but recorded the experience of young people who would now have been 20 years old. The numbers in the sample would have been small but it provides absolute proof that young adults with learning difficulties were accessing literacy classes in the community. I believe this was the truth of what was happening all over the country. The adult literacy campaigners had tried to close the door, but the people who wanted the learning had pushed it open. And I think that the teachers on the ground co-

operated. An unofficial accommodation was in place, but there was little support for the tutors, because of the original philosophy of the adult literacy founders.

After the Warnock Report things began to move in terms of post-16 education for adults with learning difficulties. The new order was recognised when the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 specifically required the funding agencies to 'have particular regard to the needs of people with learning difficulties'. Under the fearsome Schedule 2 which defined provision which the new Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) would support, Basic Skills and programmes designed for adults with learning difficulties or disabilities were grouped together as Programme Area 10. In some cases this meant that the staff involved were seen as obvious colleagues, and worked under a single manager.

This massive change ensured that post-16 education was open to adults with learning difficulties. The battle to get this group of learners into mainstream education was won, and adult literacy teachers everywhere had integrated classes, or taught groups which were specifically designed to meet the needs of adults with learning difficulties, sometimes in the context of day centres. In retrospect it seems that there was a questionable assumption that anybody who had difficulty in learning must benefit from a literacy class.

With the funding came new objectives, new regulations and formal inspection. All Schedule 2 provision had to have qualificatory outcomes, leading to the rule of Wordpower and Numberpower, and the development of certificated courses in 'living skills', such as Asdan. FEFC inspections and Basic Skills Agency quality measures were used to try and ensure that standards of provision were consistent across England and Wales. At the same time legislation against discrimination which disadvantaged people with disabilities was raising awareness across society generally. 1995 saw the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Concerns about standards, access and equal opportunities led to another very significant report. In 1996 *Inclusive Learning, the report of the FEFC Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee*, chaired by Professor John Tomlinson, was published. This is how they explained what was meant by 'inclusive learning'.

The aim is not for students to simply take part in further education but to be actively included and fully engaged in their learning. At the heart of our thinking lies the idea of match or fit between how the learner learns best, what they need and want to learn and what is required from the Further Education sector, the college and teachers for successful learning to take place.

p2, CSIE Summary of Tomlinson Report (accessed February 2011)

The principal message of the Tomlinson Report was that education providers had to take responsibility for the accessibility of the programmes they offered. Inclusive learning sought to ensure that the learner was at the centre of the learning process and that institutional barriers of all kinds were removed. Here is a list of the main recommendations which Tomlinson regarded as essential to the "individually designed learning environment" or "learning eco-system".

- an individual learning programme
- a curriculum which promotes progress in learning
- effective teaching
- counselling, guidance and initial assessment
- opportunities for students to discuss and manage their own learning
- support for learning
- support for learners such as creche facilities
- procedures for assessing, recording and accrediting achievement
- learning materials and resources
- technical aids and equipment
- learning technology
- trained staff
- physical surroundings, for example teaching rooms, canteen and library

The impact of the Tomlinson recommendations on practice is evident I think, in that all of these elements now seem to us to be obvious requirements. Individual learning programmes are integral to most adult literacy programmes, but this was not so before the Tomlinson Report. It seems to me that this is an example of where good practice in the field of 'special' education translated into a universally accepted tool in all post-16 educational provision.

In 2000 the Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, launched the Skills for Life programme and explicitly included people with learning difficulties and disabilities in the potential target groups of learners. The alliance formed by the FEFC had become an embedded feature in the government view of literacy and numeracy. It fitted neatly into the drive to get more people off benefits and into work. There were people who questioned this 'one size fits all' approach, and in May 2000 *Freedom to Learn: Basic skills for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities* was published by a working group appointed to consider the basic skills needs of adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. Their concerns led to the production in 2002 of the Core Curriculum for Entry and Pre-Entry Level, which extended the Skills for Life framework to allow more basic communication skills to be measured and assessed. The rationale behind these developments is clearly rooted in the belief that all learning is valuable and should be acknowledged. The problem which arises in practice is that where progress and funding depend on assessment, adult literacy teachers can find they are struggling to evaluate learning in complicated cognitive areas.

In the new world of Functional Skills, now replacing Skills for Life, it is not clear that this issue has been addressed by the loss of Pre-Entry Level or the introduction of qualifications in Personal Progress. Literacy teaching has become part of an economic project, and it is now seen as natural to use it to address the barriers which may affect adults with learning difficulties.

Conclusion

This brief survey of the evidence leads me to conclude that adult literacy practitioners have always worked with adult learners with disabilities, and a range of difficulties in learning. On the other hand the initial reluctance to recognise the rights of adults with learning difficulties to take up their places in the adult literacy movement has persisted in the form of a lack of interest in how the relationship between adult literacy and the development of education for adults with learning disabilities has worked on the ground. I believe that huge steps have been made in understanding what people with learning difficulties can achieve and there are tremendous examples of highly successful schemes which offer an integrated experience or which concentrate on the needs of particular learners. There are good operational

relationships, but few examples of informed dialogue about the theory and pedagogy involved.

I am concerned that adult literacy practitioners are under pressure to engage in a programme which focuses on the perceived needs of the economy, homes in on the diagnosis of learning disabilities, works on a deficit model and reflects 'social management' priorities rather than 'social practices'.



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Illiterate or E-literate? Conference Workshop: Texting to Improve Literacy

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Following a survey of 180 16-19 year olds at Gower College Swansea (an FE College), learners stated that the majority of reading and writing they did outside of college was through texting and they perceived it to be the most important reading and writing that they did for personal and social uses. This prompted me to consider the place of texting and how practitioners might harness the learners' sense of the value of texting to improve literacy learning.

Historically, advances in communication technology have always had an impact upon language; consider the introduction of printing, telephones, radio, television and, most recently, computers and mobile phones. Inevitably, language use will evolve and adapt to make best use of these technologies. The impact of electronically mediated communication is perhaps the greatest paradigm shift to redefine literacy in recent years, redefining the ways in which we read, write and communicate. These changes in language use have attracted much attention. Stories about the effect of texting on English usage, particularly amongst young people, are a regular feature in contemporary British media. Instant mythologies were perpetuated by headlines, warning of the horrendous effects of the overuse of 'textspeak' or 'chatspeak' on the spelling and grammar of young people, indeed on the English language itself. There were even fears about the impact of texting on young people's health and wellbeing.

"Texting fogs your brain like cannabis. Texting replaces speech for communication among teenagers. Texting deprives children of sleep." (Crystal 2008 p.3)

"Texters (are) SMS vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours eight hundred years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped." (2)

In his online lecture *"Texts and Tweets: myths and realities"* Crystal (2011) recalls the appearance in 2003 of a hoax essay on the internet, allegedly submitted to a teacher as a piece of coursework, describing a holiday to New York. The essay was written almost entirely in 'textspeak' and the 'teacher' was so horrified that she posted it on the internet to demonstrate the impact of texting on young people's writing skills. This 'story' was picked up by the tabloids and used as an illustration of how the English language and student performance was suffering degeneration through these terrifying and disastrous practices.

As concern grew, some themes emerged, described by David Crystal as the "five myths":

- that a whole range of 'new fangled abbreviations' were being devised
- that these abbreviations were an attempt by young people to create a new language of obscurity that adults could not understand, subverting and ruining the English language
- that young people no longer knew how to spell
- that young people were regularly using this language in their coursework and exams (which they were failing) and could no longer spell or use grammar and punctuation correctly, and
- that we were raising a generation of young people who have no sense of responsibility towards the English language." (Crystal 2011)

In fact, Crystal argues, none of these myths is true. Not only does Crystal eloquently and entertainingly dispel these myths in his online lecture, but a range of research has been done (Plester et al 2008) and the headlines grew increasingly positive about the uses of texting: examples include "Expert says txt is gr8 4 language."(3); "Texting "improves language skill"(4); and "Text messaging "improves children's spelling skills"(5).

Crystal notes that only an average of 10% of words contained in text messages are abbreviated. In one study of college students' instant messaging conversations, only 31 out of 11,718 words were 'online lingo' abbreviations, and only 90 were acronyms (of which 76 were 'LOL') (Baron 2009). Crystal suggests that 80% of texts sent are not sent by young people at all, but are used by adults and corporations sending large numbers of group texts. Barack Obama, for example, sent out texts as part of his presidential campaign. It is also the case that television programmes and radio programmes invite viewers and listeners to text in requests and enter competitions and, in what is known as 'textiquette', specifically ask that abbreviations are not used, as they can be ambiguous.

Abbreviations are not some new fangled and fiendish invention dreamt up by a cavalier and careless younger generation hell bent on murdering the mother tongue. Abbreviations have been used for centuries. When early paper was very expensive, it was more economical to use abbreviations, as was the case when text messages were initially limited to 160 characters. If we consider the practice of sending postcards, which peaked in the Edwardian age, the limitations of space on the card prompted the increasing use of abbreviations, with public responses to this practice mirroring concerns about the effects of texting.

It is also not the case that people who text do not know how to spell. In fact the research from Coventry University (Plester 2008) suggests that texters are the best spellers. The younger you are when you start to text, the better your literacy skills will be, simply because you are engaging meaningfully and productively with written language. Texting provides increased opportunities to practise reading and writing in motivational and enjoyable ways.

Neither is it the case that students and pupils do not know the difference between when it is and isn't appropriate to use textspeak. Having

marked thousands of GCSE English exam papers, Functional Skills exam papers and mountains of English homework, I can confidently say that it is the rare exception where these 'textisms' slip into work intended for formal assessment.

The conference workshop 'Texting to Improve Literacy' began with a card matching exercise involving statistics regarding levels and costs of mobile phone use and ownership to highlight and emphasise how prolific the practice of texting has become. "The continued growth of messaging is highlighted by a 2009 daily average of 265 million text messages and 1.6 million picture messages. 2009's text message total was 96.8 billion, while over 600 million picture messages were sent across the whole year." This data shows a 21% increase on 2008 data (Mobile Data Association 2010). It is interesting to note that there is no formal learning provision to teach the use of mobile phones and texting; people text, prolifically and proficiently, with no formal instruction at all.



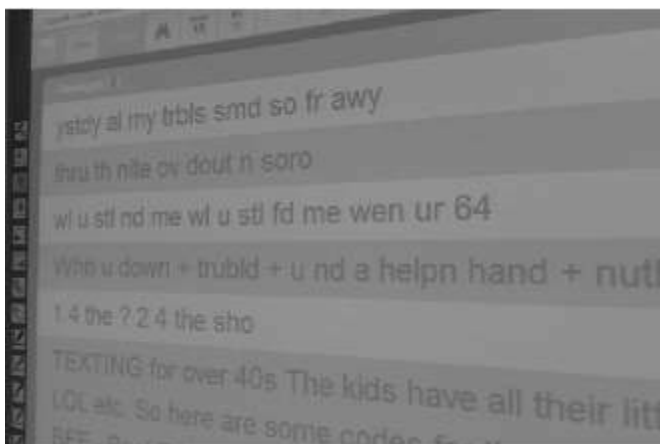
Workshop participants then read a selection of online articles, each outlining a positive or negative position regarding the uses and impact of texting as literacy practice, highlighting key points to discuss and debate. A number of the articles outlined how teachers in the US were harnessing the particular characteristics and features of texting practices to develop and improve literacy skills

These examples of educational practices show that technology need not be the enemy of literacy. In fact, it would be foolish to ignore the pleasure and motivation associated with the use of texting, and not to harness it in the name of developing literacy skills. For learners who lack confidence in such skills, the informality associated with texting can provide a medium for development with which learners feel comfortable. The great familiarity which many people feel, with regard to the texting medium, can enable learners to communicate more freely than they might with pen and paper.

Texting brings potential flexibility and mobility to learning. Where adult literacy learners struggle to attend classes regularly, learning can be sent directly to them, reducing transactional distance and providing real time responses.



One tool used in the workshop was the TextWall (www.textwall.co.uk), which enabled participants to text messages which are then displayed in real time on a virtual message board. This tool has many potential uses. In the workshop, participants used it to create a quiz, using a glossary to 'translate' song lyrics into textspeak for others to guess.



Participants enjoyed the instant presentation of their contributions on the virtual wall and commented positively on the activity. Many other free, online tools exist, providing opportunities which encourage learners to contribute confidently and creatively to learning activities, such as www.polleverywhere.com and www.voki.com.

When learners text contributions to these online tools, it enables and encourages interactions between learners as they share their writing publicly. Texting can provide more comfortable collaborative learning opportunities for learners who lack confidence to contribute to class discussion, motivating and encouraging them to

do more writing and to express themselves through their writing. Developing the use of texting in literacy classes can provide literacy learners with access to web based social interaction, promoting an increased sense of community and collaboration, as well as very important skills for 21st century life.

In conclusion, far from undermining and degrading the English language, texting can in fact foster a very creative use of language. In 2001 *The Guardian* organised a text messaging poetry competition where entries were variously beautiful, ironic, subtle, humorous and powerful. Anyone lucky enough to be on Shelley Tracey's text poetry distribution list, (for more information, contact Shelley at shelleyztracey@gmail.com) can attest to the potential creativity and success of the medium for poetic expression (Tracey 2011).

The limitation of 160 characters to a screen is somehow less daunting than a large empty page to fill with writing, or to read. The most recent development in text use has been the publication of a text novel for young people, inspired by the Evening Standard's Get London Reading campaign. It is the UK's first *Keitai* novel, also known as a mobile phone novel, a concise literary form pioneered in Japan (Dziesinski 2004). *The Perfect Poison Pills Plot* was written on a Nokia E6 Qwerty phone and has been narrated by Chipmunk, a rapper popular with young people, in a series of five short video clips. A total of 1,600 words long, it is written as 16 chapters of 100 words, each the length of a text message. It is aimed at 7-17 year olds and is expected to prove as popular as the medium has been in Japan.

Potentially, texting can not only increase literacy learners' engagement with and consumption of text, but could also inspire them to become authors themselves, to become owners of online spaces where they are free to explore and express themselves as they see fit.

"To become fully literate in today's world students must become proficient in the new literacies of the 21st century technologies. As a result, literacy educators have a responsibility to effectively integrate these new technologies into the curriculum, preparing students for the future they deserve."

The International Reading Association position statement 2006 (6)



(Crystal 2008 p.vi)

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How Do Literacy Practitioners Exercise Agency as Policy Actors? A study of the introduction of Functional Skills in England

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Introduction

What is education 'policy'? What is the relationship between policy and practice? What kinds of work do practitioners do when they translate policy into practice? In a workshop at the 2011 RaPAL conference I invited delegates to reflect on these questions. I presented research I am currently engaged in which explores how a new policy initiative for literacy in England, *Functional Skills* (FS), is being implemented by practitioners. I have recently undertaken a small-scale pilot study and am now considering how to carry the work forward with a larger study.

In 2007 the now-defunct Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency announced the introduction of a new set of qualifications in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT, designed for learners in England over the age of 16.¹ There followed a three year period during which this new policy was developed through a range of activities such as staff training and the piloting of new assessment systems by awarding bodies. In September 2010 the development phase officially ended and implementation started as practitioners began to teach the new qualifications. During the autumn of 2010 I carried out interviews with eight literacy practitioners with a variety of roles who are currently involved in implementing FS in different contexts. Interviewees described how they had been preparing for the introduction of FS; its likely impact on their practice and on their learners; the rationale for its introduction; and the conceptualisation of literacy and literacy education on which they perceived FS to be founded.

Current research in education conceptualises practitioners not simply as passive recipients of policy but as active agents who creatively

translate it into practice according to the opportunities and constraints of their local contexts (Ball 2006). There is a strong tradition of adult literacy practitioners working in this way. In their history of ALLN from the 1970s to 2000, Hamilton and Hillier (2006) document how the policy context changed continuously and often unpredictably during this period and how activists, including practitioners, advocated for the field through "ingenious everyday tactics", and sometimes felt the need to subvert policy where it failed to align with their own values and vision. Critical engagement with policy, coupled with a perception that certain aspects of it may need to be challenged, continued after the introduction of *Skills for Life* (SfL). The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) longitudinal study of the impact of SfL on teachers (Cara et al 2008) found them to be positive about some aspects of the initiative but less so about others, views which Carpentieri (2008) summed up as "critical but positive". However, as Ade-Ojo (2011) notes, many of the questions teachers were asked focused on administrative issues, rather than on teaching and learning. In his own study comparing the vision and values of SfL practitioners with those underpinning the SfL policy, Ade-Ojo (2011:71) identified a "yawning gap" between the views of policy-makers and practitioners. My research builds on these studies in two ways. Firstly, it explores whether the interviewees perceived such a gap to exist between policy and practice in FS. Secondly, it documents some of the "ingenious everyday tactics" which practitioners are adopting as they translate the FS policy into practice. My purpose is to open up a space for practitioners to reflect on the opportunities for, and constraints upon, their own agency and capacity for creative social action in the context of translating FS into practice.

1. *Functional Skills* has since been changed and is now designed for learners over the age of 14.

Translating Policy into Practice

Much policy analysis focuses on what is known as the 'implementation gap' which can exist between the intentions of policy makers and the effects of policies as they are put into action in local contexts. Ball (2006:46) explains one of the reasons for this perceived gap:

"Policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed or particular goals or outcomes are set. A response must still be put together, constructed in context, off-set against other expectations. All of this involves creative social action not robotic reactivity."

However, the metaphor of a 'gap' is limited to the extent that it assumes a binary distinction between policy making and policy implementation. I have worked with an understanding of policy inspired by actor – network theory (ANT) (Latour 1987, 2005; Law and Hassard 1999) which sees policy as a fluid network that is continuously produced, sustained, challenged and transformed through the 'acts of translation' performed by a great variety of social actors working in and on different parts of that network. ANT views policy not as a pre-determined entity which may be implemented by practitioners with more or less success, but rather sees policy and practice as parts of the same network – in this case the network of FS. Adopting an ANT perspective therefore enables us to understand that when a policy works out differently in different contexts, or when its effects differ from its intentions, this is a normal state of affairs, and not necessarily the result of errors or misunderstandings on the part of practitioners.

My interviewees were very aware of tensions between the intentions and effects of policy, as well as the (frequently frustrating) complexity of the task of putting together a response in their local contexts. In order to explore these issues I've found it useful to work with the metaphor of '*translation*' – of practitioners '*translating*' policy into practice rather than merely '*implementing*' it. I've drawn on ANT because it offers a particular way of understanding *translation* which is relevant to the issues and themes emerging from my data.

ANT emerged in the 1980s in France and is associated with the work of writers such as Bruno Latour and John Law (see for example Latour 1987, 2005; Law and Hassard 1999).

Fenwick and Edwards (2010) explain that ANT is not a theory that aims to tell us *what* to think, but rather an approach to understanding the social world, a guide to *how* to think. When used in educational research its aim is to "intervene in educational issues to reframe how we might enact and engage with them" (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:1). ANT invites us to look at the social world in a very different way from the way we are used to. Its most distinctive – and controversial – feature is its assertion that all entities – both human and non-human – can potentially have agency. Artefacts can have a life of their own and can act back on us as we act on them. Furthermore, humans exercise agency by using artefacts. Previous studies of policy have shown that a particularly significant kind of artefact for policy implementation is texts (Ball 2006) and, as is shown by one of the data examples below, my own analysis confirmed that much translation work was accomplished through the production and use of texts.

One of ANT's central tenets is that social actors are not fixed, discrete entities but parts of fluid, constantly changing networks. Anything we might think of as an entity, moreover – whether it be a policy, a curriculum document, a concept such as "problem solving" or even a practitioner – is itself a network. So anything that exists and acts in the social world – whether human or non-human – can be described as an 'actor-network'. Actor-networks are not static, and they don't simply exist 'out there'. Instead ANT asks us to understand all these things as "assemblages of disparate things held together through fragile ties that demand a great deal of work to maintain them" (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:129). This idea can be illustrated with the example of the Functional Skills policy. ANT would not view FS as a distinct entity that exists outside or beyond the activities of the people and things which are part of it. Many different things have to be mobilised and co-ordinated in order for FS to have any existence; a few examples being concepts such as 'functionality' and 'literacy'; findings of research studies which are used to justify the policy; standards documents; pilot studies; staff development sessions on FS; people who are designated as FS teachers. Without all these things and the work that is done to produce them and connect them, the 'actor-network' that is Functional Skills could not exist. ANT uses the notion of *translation* to describe the kind of work that is needed to produce actor-networks and keep them functioning. It offers translation as "a way to think about how things come to be and how

they might change” (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:5)

ANT does not accept anything in the social world as anterior or given in the order of things. Thus agency is viewed not as a pre-given property of individuals but as an effect of their interactions with other entities – both human and non-human – in the networks through which they circulate. ANT is therefore well suited to investigating the processes by which agency is exercised and constrained. By tracing networks and making visible the work required to create and sustain them, ANT also reveals where the weak points and gaps in a network might be and how counter-networks might be formed – how alternative spaces for thinking and acting might be produced. As Hamilton (forthcoming p30) writes, “ANT aims to uncover the workings of power and to show the instability of social policy thus offering hope for those who would like to take a more activist role in shifting policy in a particular direction.”

ANT also challenges researchers to pay attention to those things that could be overlooked when the social world is understood through the metaphor of networks. We can easily identify such things as standards documents, assessment criteria, funding regulations or marking schemes as parts of the FS network, but it's also important to look at the things which are not officially defined and specified. My preliminary analysis indicated that these were often the aspects of FS which people thought were unclear or about which they had questions, such as which teaching resources to use; whether to adopt an embedded model of teaching; or exactly how workplace assessors should work in partnership with college staff.

By exploring examples of the translation work done by FS practitioners and identifying weak points and gaps in networks, my analysis reveals some of the places where practitioners can exert agency and intervene in small yet significant ways, in the policy process.

Methodology

I carried out in-depth, recorded telephone interviews with eight literacy practitioners who were involved in implementing FS in a variety of ways. All the interviewees either were, or had recently been, teaching literacy in colleges or private training providers; most of them also had other roles, including teacher training, acting as FS leads within their institutions or working as SfL development advisors. Some were working full-time, whilst others were part-

time, hourly paid tutors. They had been in their roles from 18 months to 10 years and were from various parts of England. The interviews explored their experience of interpreting the FS policy and translating it into practice. The overarching research question was

- How is the transition to FS experienced by practitioners?

I broke this down into the following sub questions

- How far do practitioners feel they have been able to influence the development of FS (both within their own institutions and more generally)?
- How have they prepared for the introduction of FS?
- How do they think the introduction of FS will change their practice?
- What is their understanding of the policy's rationale and the vision of literacy that underpins it?
- How far do these accord with their own values as educators?

Initial analysis of the data identified the main themes covered. As the above questions suggest, the main focus at this stage was on initial experiences and expectations of implementing FS, and in particular whether or not practitioners perceived any (potential) mismatch between the policy and their own practice. The second phase of analysis drew on ANT and used the notion of translation as an analytical tool. The findings of this stage of analysis have wider relevance beyond FS as they shed light on questions about the relationship between policy and practice more generally, particularly about how practitioners make sense of their own roles in the policy process and the kinds of work they do in order to translate policy into practice.

Emerging Themes and Findings

Initial analysis showed that practitioners did perceive a gap between policy and practice and that they felt excluded from the development of FS, just as they did from SfL. Although two practitioners held generally favourable views about the content and aims of FS itself, the others did not feel that it aligned well with the interests of students, nor with their own values and beliefs as educators. Furthermore, all except one described *policy-making* as remote from them, asserting that policy is imposed from the top down without adequate consultation. Moira², for example, stated that “Most

2. The interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms, except for one person, Naomi, who asked to be identified by her real name.

practitioners think it's a bit remote from them Most of them don't think they've had any effect on policy at all" and Katrina stated that staff in her college were 'disgruntled' because they had participated in FS pilots but not had the opportunity to provide feedback. Practitioners' descriptions of how they implement policy suggested that they regard it as consisting mainly of regulations concerning funding and the requirements of awarding bodies. Naomi summed up these views as follows

"I don't know if this is me being a victim but I've always just kind of assumed that we are kind of at the whim of decisions made by government officials..... 'we' meaning literacy and numeracy practitioners, especially in the post compulsory sector because we're so guided by funding..... It seems like if a decision is made we kind of have to do what they say or we don't get our funding, we can't say this is illogical for our learners in this context, we just have to say, ok we'll find a way to do it."

Although initial analysis suggested that most practitioners felt they were forced into the kind of "robotic reactivity" described by Ball (2006), more detailed analysis using the concept of translation as an analytical tool showed practitioners engaging in the kind of creative social action described by Ball (2006). The following three sections present the findings of this analysis, showing three different types of translation work that practitioners were carrying out. These were translating the abstract into the concrete, translating official documents into usable versions, and practitioners being "translated" from SfL practitioners into FS practitioners.

Translating the Abstract into the Concrete

Jackson (2005) notes that "abstractions from reality", such as the concepts of "essential" or "generic" skills, are useful to high level policy makers, who need to formulate definitions and descriptions that can be applied to a large range of people in many different contexts. She goes on to argue, however, that these kinds of abstractions are not useful in specific contexts precisely *because* they are abstractions. My analysis revealed examples of people actively translating abstract concepts such as "functionality" into more concrete versions that they could make use of in their own contexts. They then deployed these working definitions to enable them to carry out other translation activities, such as recognising something a learner does or says as an instance of "being

functional". This would involve noticing and probably recording particular aspects of the student's behaviour (but perhaps disregarding other aspects) so that it could be 'translated' into examples of the criteria specified by FS.

A quote from Moira demonstrates how this kind of translation work involves co-ordinating various entities which were not necessarily equivalent or compatible with one another in order to sustain the FS network. She described the difficulty of using the marking guidance provided by an awarding body, complaining that marking one batch of assessments had taken her nearly three days. "You read the marking guidance but the trouble is in real life students don't do what the marking guidance says." Her words show how the process of marking the assessments required her to try and bring into alignment the 'ideal' notion of 'functional' embodied in the mark scheme, her own personal definition of it and the various ways in which her students might have understood it as they were completing the assessment. She co-ordinated all these things and translated them into another entity, a grade for the student.

Another example from Moira's interview illustrates the complex and intellectually demanding nature of this kind of translation work:

"I wish I could stop using the word functional I don't want it to get mixed up with FS. Being functional is not the same as FS it's all down to the individual person, it depends on your life."

In formulating her own working definition of 'functional' Moira is bringing her own values as a literacy educator into play and is trying to develop a definition that encompasses more than what she believes to be implied by the official policy definitions.

Looking at these quotes through the lens of ANT shows that the definition of functional literacy is not finalized by policy makers or curriculum developers. It is not a ready-made entity that practitioners pick up and use, neither is it completely comprehensive. In this case, it did not tell Moira how to mark her students' assessments and it appeared to be restricted in comparison with her own vision of literacy education. She, like other practitioners, has to construct her own version of it – she has to translate it. In doing so she is able to exercise agency in a small but none the less significant way.

Translating Official Documents into Usable Versions

Another kind of translation work that practitioners talked about a great deal in the interviews involved producing documents. On the face of it, this might seem strange considering the huge volume of documentation, both paper and electronic, about FS which is already in existence. This includes everything from government white papers through to standards documents, assessment criteria, sample assessment tasks and much more. However, it was clear that practitioners frequently needed to 'translate' such documents into something that fitted their own particular context.

Sarah, who had worked as a SfL development advisor, described how she had developed her own training materials for practitioners who were preparing to teach FS, even though there were published materials available:

"I've got a FS file on my computer and I've got examples of teaching and learning activities, problem solving activities that were churned out by FSSP, developed by LSN or I think Nord Anglia were part of it as well. But it still didn't really tell me when push came to shove, how do you support an assessor in the workplace who's having to look at mastery, as it was called, of functional skills, to work in partnership with the literacy tutor in the provider itself who's having to teach the FS curriculum. These kind of questions, these very practical questions of models and implementation, to my mind aren't dealt with through any formal support materials."

In order to provide training that was relevant to the practitioners she was working with, she needed to translate the published materials into a form that answered their specific concerns and questions. In the process of making this translation, she was – albeit in quite a small way – expanding, refining, perhaps also challenging, concepts like what counts as being 'functional' in the workplace, or what counts as a 'partnership model of implementation'.

Translating SfL Practitioners into FS Practitioners

Using the idea of translation we can also ask questions about professional identities and how practitioners are being translated from SfL or Key Skills teachers into FS teachers. This is not just a question of people being given a ready-made identity in the same way that they are given a new job title. ANT asks us to think of

identity not as a set of attributes that people possess, but rather as an ongoing process, something which people continuously produce and transform as an effect of their participation in networks. It is a process that can be fraught with tensions and contradictions, as the following quote from Sue reveals.

"If you're teaching FS then you are the ambassador for FS in my college at the moment I think somebody's seen a long-term problem in that any teacher now may have to teach FS so the qualifications that we've [literacy specialists] done do not make us the only people that can teach it [literacy] now and therefore our jobs aren't secure, are they? The way they've tackled that in my college is that each member of staff in my department that requested has been made into a link person for that area so they have to oversee all the registrations, all the training and so on for a particular area, so for example I'm the link person for health and social care Nobody knows what they're doing at the moment."

Moira expressed a similar feeling of uncertainty about being forced to adopt a contradictory position:

"It's a bit confusing even for me because I've been given 100 hours to support them [colleagues in the Foundation Dept] because of the switch over to FS but I also teach in there as an hourly paid lecturer. It's like I'm my own support person."

Unlike some of the tensions and gaps in the FS actor-network described in other interview extracts, these two quotes provide evidence of a particular kind of contradiction which can, as Fenwick and Edwards (2010) argue, actually strengthen a network. In this case, there seems to be little opportunity for Sue and Moira to exploit the contradictions and create alternative spaces for thinking and acting, or to question the particular 'translation' of FS which is being developed by senior managers in their colleges. These two examples suggest that the very processes which are helping FS to become established, to spread across colleges and to achieve a high status, are actually weakening the position of some of the specialist practitioners who might be thought of as essential to its success. Managers have tried to find ways of protecting these practitioners, but they are vulnerable and it's difficult for them to do anything which might appear to challenge the FS network if their jobs are at risk.

However, there were examples of people experiencing conflicts in their professional identities in a less threatening way. Jackie stated that many SfL practitioners had experienced tension between preparing students for the national tests and helping them with the kinds of literacy practices they might want to use in their everyday lives:

"There were tensions between preparing students to do the tests and preparing the students for what they actually wanted the literacy for and I think usually most tutors were able to manage both at the same time and I think it might just become that little bit more difficult."

Later in her interview, in response to a question about whether FS provides an adequate basis for literacy education, she stated:

"Not to me, because I'm interested in all the other stuff around it. That's what most adult basic skills tutors are interested in, the full picture. It's about the mechanics, not the full picture."

Jackie is clearly experiencing a mismatch between the requirements of FS and her own values and vision as a literacy educator. However, she seems cautiously optimistic that she and other practitioners will find a way to manage this tension without compromising their values. It's important to note that this is the point in her interview where she chooses to explicitly identify herself with a wider community of tutors, suggesting that her values are sustained through her sense of belonging to this group, which itself constitutes another network. There may be some tension between the FS network and the network of 'most adult basic skills tutors', but for Jackie it is a productive tension from which she draws the strength to sustain an identity with which she is comfortable.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to investigate the interface between policy and practice from the perspective of literacy practitioners. Using the example of the introduction of Functional Skills and drawing on Actor-Network Theory and the concept of translation, I have sought to uncover some of the complexity of the work of translating policy into practice.

Cara et al (2008) draw attention to the necessity for practitioners to be fully involved in the policy process:

"More often than not, teachers working in this field are motivated by a clear sense of purpose, even moral purpose, and a commitment to social justice. If they are to function as agents of change, and agents of the social, cultural and, particularly, the economic transformations that the government trusts Skills for Life will achieve, then they must not only feel included in the reform process, but share ownership of the reform initiatives." (Cara et al 2008 p100)

The practitioners in my study did not have a strong sense of agency and appeared to feel frustrated as a result. Cara et al suggest that this could be at least partially remedied if they "feel included". My analysis suggests some ways in which it might be possible for them to include themselves. ANT asks us to see agency and efficacy not as pre-given properties of individuals but rather as the effects of their participation in networks. This view therefore enables us to see where and how social actors can participate in networks in ways that enable them to increase their agency, at least to some extent. My aim in analysing some of the translation work done by the participants in this study is to create an opportunity for other practitioners to reflect on their own roles within the policy process and on the points where they may have some freedom to shape it. The analysis shows that the possibilities for practitioners to act as "agents of social change" may be restricted – sometimes in ways that they find deeply frustrating – but they do exist.

Acknowledgements

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Increasing Oral Reading Fluency through an integrated wiki site

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Mary Jane Onnen is a literacy teacher at Maricopa Community College in Phoenix, Arizona, USA. She has developed multi-modal online material to help students improve their reading in class and at home.

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Have you ever overheard someone deploring the deleterious effect of Twitter, Facebook and other social media? Digital communication is ubiquitous; in fact, this online literacy has become an important component of general literacy proficiency. Social media has pulled in a large audience with Facebook, Twitter and other sites, and texting on mobile phones occurs more often than a phone conversation. While some may assert that the attraction of social media diminishes the time given to traditional print literacy, I view the familiarity with and use of technology as an opportunity to increase literacy skills and have created and integrated a wiki site into my reading instruction to further scaffold my students' reading skills. In particular, I have focused on increasing their oral reading fluency (ORF) as a key component in building and improving reading comprehension.

Background

I teach developmental reading to students who are about three to six grade levels below the reading proficiency needed for courses at our college. Some students are second language learners while others are non-traditional students who have been out of school for a few years and are re-entering academia. A few are recent high school graduates. Their ages range from eighteen to fifty. Integrating online assignments as part of the reading course benefited the students in several ways.

A wiki facilitated opportunities to strengthen and practise important elements of reading proficiency. Students in my class were able to access reading selections from the textbook and build comprehension and oral reading fluency through an online site that was available twenty four hours a day. In addition, the students had the freedom to work as often and as long as desired and in a more private setting. In particular, oral reading fluency, or reading rapidly and smoothly with few errors, could be developed more easily. Many adults may view reading aloud as an activity for elementary school students or feel uncomfortable reading in front of their peers.

Moving oral reading practice to a wiki allowed students to work on their reading fluency in private outside the classroom. It also gave them the flexibility to complete the assignment at any time and with unlimited time if desired. Last of all, familiarity with technology comes with the use of technology, and this assignment required a student to use a computer. Our campus has nearly unlimited access to computers, so this online assignment was not onerous. The majority of students had access to computers and an internet connection at home as well.

However, the original impetus for this project did not arise in my use of technology. In 2008, while attending a regional conference for teachers of English as a second language, I participated in a workshop for teaching reading. William Grabe, a professor at Northern Arizona University, assigned us to read in pairs during his session on strategies for reading improvement. As we went through the cycle of repeated reading, I was impressed by the almost instant progress in our fluency and decided to try the paired reading activity with my own developmental reading students.

Returning to my classroom, I paired up students and had them read from a common text for two minutes at a time and repeat the same reading a second time. The same improvement in fluency and speed was experienced by the students. It occurred to me that this activity would be even more beneficial as an assignment outside class as well. However, it wasn't as easy for students to find someone to read along with outside the classroom. This problem led to the development of the wiki and its reading resources.

As I began work on this project, I conferred with David Caverly, a professor at Texas State University, who had mentored me in a week-long technical institute for developmental education at Texas State University. He pointed out that merely providing practice in oral reading was insufficient in that it could lead to

mere "word calling", or reading rapidly with few or no mistakes but little or no comprehension. He counselled me to include measures to engage the students with the text and improve their comprehension as well. Consequently, the recorded texts were further refined to include an initial pre-reading discussion question to activate the students' prior knowledge. Furthermore, the multi page reading selections from the textbook were "chunked" or divided into logical shorter sections. Vocabulary pop-ups and embedded quiz questions were incorporated as well.

Rather than try to describe the reading resource, I invite you to visit the site <http://preview.tinyurl.com/RAPALrdg> to get a flavour of students' experience.

During the summer of 2011 I had the opportunity to develop the materials further through matching the components with the elements found in the deep processing fluency model (DPF) developed by Keith J. Topping. The foundational elements or predisposing factors to increase fluency and comprehension that Topping proposed are illustrated below (adapted from Topping 2006).

Topping's Deep Processing Fluency Model

Predisposing Factors should be present.

Management of text difficulty
 Time: exposed, on task, engaged
 vocabulary
 memory
 motivation
 confidence
 support

Surface Fluency Factors lead to maximized successful practice and automaticity.

Auditory: Phonological decoding
 Visual: orthographic skills
 Semantic: prediction from context
 Structural: syntactic prediction

Strategic Fluency builds comprehension and oral expression.

meaning extraction: good comprehension
 confidence anxiety balance
 speed regulator

Deep Fluency

personal reflection: reconstructing new meaning
 processing external feedback/reinforcement
 metacognition

Topping's model of deep processing fluency allowed me to examine my own resources based on each of his divisions. I looked at predisposing factors that would lead to deep processing first. The first requirement, text difficulty, was appropriate as the reading material used in the wiki is at the students' reading level. In fact, it is taken from the textbook used in class. Using material from the textbook not only ensures the material is the correct level of difficulty but also avoids student perceptions that the online assignment is an extra, unrelated assignment. Vocabulary, another foundational concern, is covered through embedded vocabulary text poppers. Concerns about time are answered by the assignment parameters. Memory, both visual and verbal, is supported through providing the reading selection both visually as a text document and aurally in its recording. This feature also helps develop confidence. The recorded digitized text is always available and an ever present support. The last predisposing factor, motivation, is also satisfied. Grades are a standard motivator; this activity is a scored assignment.

Once the predisposing factors are in place, information processing was checked. The reading selections taken from the textbook are digitized, recorded and made accessible through a wiki. Each selection has an open-ended pre-reading discussion question, which is designed to activate background knowledge. These questions are also hosted on the wiki and the answers are on a common page which may be viewed by all the students. A further benefit of pre-reading discussion questions is that the class begins to become better acquainted through reading the posted answers.

Digitizing the text selections also allows "chunking" of long readings. Within the divided text, quiz questions and vocabulary "pop ups" are embedded. Once students begin reading the text, they are quizzed for comprehension and given immediate feedback on their responses. It is not possible to race through a reading; skills such as finding a main idea or identifying the overall purpose of a reading selection may be reviewed through the embedded questions.

The final activity within the wiki is an assignment to build oral reading fluency and this follows the parameters set for strategic reading skills. Students are asked to follow a multi-step process. First, they must listen to

the recording of the selection and read along. Next, the students read a portion of the text aloud and note any words that they are unsure of. After that, the students listen to the recorded text a second time paying particular attention to the words that were problematic. Finally, students produce their own two minute recording of a section of the text through a phone (usually a mobile phone). Their recordings are sent to a [website](#), stored and accessed.

Instructor feedback based on an oral reading fluency rubric is the next component in the students' path to improved fluency and comprehension. An initial report for a student with feedback on clarity, pausing and words per minute is created. The student's recording of the reading selection is linked as well. These recordings and rubrics are processed throughout the semester. At the end of the semester, students are asked to re-record the initial reading selection to compare the first and final recording to assess their progress.

Multidimensional Fluency Scale

	1	2	3	4
Expression and Volume	Reads in a quiet voice as if to get words out. The reading does not sound natural	Reads in a quiet voice The reading sounds natural in part of the text, but the reader does not always sound like he or she is relaxed	Reads with volume and expression However, at times the reader is expressionless during reading & does not sound relaxed	Reads with varied volume/expression. Reader sounds relaxed with a voice matching the interpretations of the passage
Phrasing	Reads word-by-word in a monotone voice	Reads in two or three word phrases, not adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation	Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid sentence pauses for breath & some choppiness - reasonable stress and intonation	Reads with good phrasing, adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation
Smoothness	Frequently hesitates while reading, sounds out words, & repeats words or phrases; makes multiple attempts to read the same passage.	Reads with extended pauses or hesitations The reader has many "rough spots"	Reads with occasional breaks in rhythm The reader has difficulty with specific words and/or sentence structures	Reads smoothly with some breaks, but self-corrects with difficult words and/or sentence structures
Pace	Reads slowly and laboriously	Reads moderately slowly	Reads fast and slow throughout reading	Reads at a conversational pace throughout the reading
Scores of 10 or more indicate that the student is making good progress in fluency. Score _____				
Scores below 10 indicate that the student needs additional instruction in fluency. Wpm _____				
Adapted from the appendix of Fluency Instruction: Research-based Best Practices				

While the listening-while-reading and required recording develop strategic reading fluency, deep reading fluency, the final component of Topping's model is nurtured through a further assignment requiring reflection completed outside the wiki. Four discussion questions ask students to revisit the reading selection and connect the text to their own experience.

Although I was pleased to see that I could identify how the material and methods used by my students matched elements of Keith Topping's model, the ultimate determinant of the wiki's worth is student progress. I have implemented the reading wiki and tracked student results over several semesters. Using and developing this material is an ongoing process and monitoring its success from one semester to the next results in constant adjustment to the material and the way it is presented to the students and monitored by me. At the end of the fall 2009 semester when I used the wiki, I reported the following, "The student vocabulary test scores rose from an average of 43/100 at the beginning of the semester to an average of 52/100 at the end of the semester. The audio recordings showed improvement in pausing and accuracy since the beginning of the semester. Moreover, the

average rate of words per minute at the beginning of the semester was 137. The average at the end of the semester was 153 words read per minute. These numbers were calculated from the fourteen students who had both a beginning of semester and end of semester recording for "One Reader's Story". I feel the improvement in scores justifies this activity and plan to continue assigning RWL (reading while listening) next semester."

Clearly, the progress of fourteen students over a four month semester is a very small sample. Continued use of the wiki material and further assessment of student progress will continue. Because this project is labour intensive and time consuming, another goal is to find a more efficient way of assigning and assessing. I hope to have more conclusive data in the future.

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Silence and Text in Quaker Business Meetings: Notes from a Research Study

Jane Mace

Retired as a professional, Jane continues to have a lively interest in the social relationships in which we engage with literacy. This piece develops themes raised in her RaPAL workshop, 'Literacy and discernment: Quaker ways of writing minutes'. Details of her other published work can be found on: www.janemace.co.uk.

Stillness and Silence

Like many people, I used to think of Quakers as people who sat in silence, aspiring to be moved by the spirit. Since becoming a Quaker myself, I find I no longer think of worship as a silent matter. Instead, I have come to prefer the idea of 'stillness' as both reality and aspiration. "We seek a gathered stillness" is one of my favourite Quaker sayings: it expresses a wish to be actively and collectively making an effort to be still together: to find the sound of something beyond words.

As I have also come to discover, the practice of worship among Quakers worldwide today is certainly not always silent. 'Unprogrammed' meetings for worship, in which participants sit in stillness with occasional spontaneous spoken ministry, grew out of the worship form of early, 17th century Quakerism. Today, it is the practice of some 55,000 Quakers globally, belonging to what is known as the Liberal tradition.¹ Programmed worship, on the other hand, in which participants worship with a pastor, sing hymns and have a more planned service, can claim over five times that number of adherents. These regard themselves as Evangelical Quakers.² Liberal Quakers, who see experience as the primary authority and silent worship as central, are very much in the minority.

From published writing about the matter, however, it seems that the basic principle at the heart of the Quaker way of running business meetings is common to both these traditions, with writers on the subject including both Liberal and Evangelical Quakers.³ This principle consists in a commitment to listening for divine guidance and to a corporate discipline of working for a discerned 'unity'. Both process and outcome are claimed to be distinct and different from those of consensus or vote sought in the secular world of committees or boards. For Quaker writers, the idea of silence, or stillness, being central to these meetings as well as to meetings for worship, is a constant theme. John Punshon, one of the sources often quoted on the matter, is unequivocal:

"The business meeting is a meeting for worship, and it takes place on the basis of silence just like any other meeting... without the discipline of silent waiting, it would be impossible for the process to carry the theological weight Friends claim for it."

Quakers as Readers and Writers: Now

From the research field of literacy practices, we know that there are uses of reading and writing that are so familiar to members of a given community that they do not notice them, and yet which, when examined through this lens, can give insight to the values and assumptions on which that community bases its activities. With that in mind, since December 2010, I have been exploring the uses of literacy within the community that I had begun to join nearly ten years earlier – that of Quakers, or (to use the full title) the Religious Society of Friends of Truth.⁵ In sharing the findings from this study, my hope is twofold. One, that these may help those of us within this Society to gain an insight into the values that lie within our literacy practices; and two, that they will offer a wider audience a glimpse of a specific communal literacy practice being put to use in the service of religious faith.

Curiously, it was an interest in these practices, rather than a conscious search for such a faith, which drew me in to Quaker life in the first place. I was researching the role of the scribe and the ways in which the old practice of scribing still features, almost unnoticed, in social relationships today.⁶ A friend asked me if I had heard of the Quaker way of clerking business meetings. No, I said. Some time later, at her invitation, I sat in a Meeting House, participating in a Quaker Meeting for Worship for Business: and there, as she had told me I would, I witnessed a scribe at work: a Quaker clerk.

It was the first time I had seen anything like it. As in countless other meetings I had been to over the years, there were copies of an agenda on every seat; but there, the resemblance ended. The meeting began in silence. The clerk

introduced each item. There were some questions and comments made. Then, at a certain moment, with all others present waiting in silence (or stillness), the clerk and her assistant began writing. After a few moments, she stood up and from the file she held open in front of her, read out what she had written so far, looked up, asked: "Is that acceptable?" and sat down. Individuals in the group, one, then another, offered a couple of small amendments. The clerk then conferred with her assistant again and wrote a little more. Once again, she stood up and read aloud – this time, a slightly revised version of the same text. Once again, she asked if it was acceptable. This time, the group murmured assent. And one by one, for each subsequent item on the agenda, they repeated this pattern. (As I came to learn later, in many cases – especially if it seemed likely to be a fairly straightforward matter, a clerk will pre-draft parts of a minute, before the meeting, so that the labour of composition is kept quite short. In many cases, too, there are no amendments offered.)

The other Side of the Table

It was not till two years after this that I began attending weekly meetings for worship regularly (at that time, knowing no other Quakers). Barely a couple of years after that, I applied for membership, became a Quaker and not long after, was appointed to the role of a clerk for my Local Meeting. For the next three years I learned what clerking felt like from the other side of the table. In the early days, the thing that struck me most strongly was how different I felt about the group's silence as the clerk writes. I felt keenly the sense that I was *keeping people waiting*. In social practice terms, I had brought with me the literacy experience from other domains.⁷ Instead of experiencing it as support, I felt alone and anxious. "Trust the process", Friends would advise me. And sometimes, I did. Over time, I came to have faith that we were all in this together; that, as my friend had told me years earlier, the minute I was writing was not mine, but the meeting's:

"The clerk/scribe is not the author. The author is the whole group, including God. She or He isn't dictating to me, but God is part of the meeting. What I'm trying to do is scribe the sense of the meeting."⁸

From the basis of that experience, I have been researching this year the variety of ways that British Quakers within the 'liberal tradition' set about applying the basic principles of waiting, listening and discerning. On being granted the

award, I set off – using questionnaires, interviews, observations and literature search. Nearly a year later, at the time of writing this, I am in the midst of drafting a larger piece of work, which is likely to become a book.⁹ A good time to ask: given our commitment to simplicity and to listening, do Quakers do more writing and reading than is helpful?

Too Much Text?

One aspect of the Quaker exercise of drafting minutes is certainly not a silent one: namely, the relatively widespread use of *listening to texts being read aloud to the group*. For a literacy practitioner, at first sight this has a marvellous appearance of inclusivity. All can listen as equals, reading a text at the same time, and at the same speed, as others. Any trouble that any may have reading a text on our own is irrelevant.

Putting on one side the practice of reading out the draft of a minute, I have come to realise that there is a lot of such reading loud in Quaker business meetings. During a typical two-hour session, there can be as many as six or seven other documents read in this way. At one meeting, for example, the documents heard were:

- a short extract from 'Quaker Faith and Practice'¹⁰ (read out by the assistant clerk)
- a letter, asking the meeting to convey a concern about the lack of conviviality in the proposals for this year's Junior Yearly Meeting' (read out by the clerk)
- a section of the trustees' report, (read out by the clerk to the trustees)
- a report from a conference on Quakers and Criminal Justice (read out by the Area Meeting's prison 'chaplain' who had attended it)

and

- an extract from a funding application for funds from this meeting to another body (read by clerk)

These are fairly typical of the kind of texts Quakers expect to hear, particularly at an Area, rather than Local Meeting for Worship for Business.¹¹ When a treasurer is bringing the accounts, for example, they are likely to stand up and read out a two-paragraph treasurer's report to go with them. If the meeting's elders wish to propose an idea, the convenor of the

elders may stand up and read out the minute on the matter which the elders' meeting had produced. When the nominations committee brings to the meeting the list of roles to be filled and names of those proposed to fill them, this list too will be read out, like a roll call. Sometimes (but usually not, I have found) as well as the person reading aloud, everyone present will have a photocopy of the document that they can scan at the same time as listening to the reading.

This approach to reading certainly offers the chance of everyone having equal access to the same text. It can also provide a group with a very real sense of community. But the research is suggesting that there is also a tension going on. With all this text to hear, there is often little time left in the meeting for the 'gathered stillness' necessary for the discerning process to take place. There may, quite simply, be too much text.

Quakers Reading and Writing: a Look Back

As we are well aware, before widespread schooling, reading aloud from a newspaper or book – one person reading aloud to others – was commonplace in this country. It equalised an otherwise unequal access to literacy. In the words of historian David Vincent, this was for a long time the world's most usual form of using text. Right up to the mid-20th century, he reminds us, a majority of readers would be listening to, rather than looking at a given text; so that

“most printed words found their way into the minds of most of the populations of the past through their ears rather than their eyes.”¹²

But reading aloud is a much rarer practice today and its use in a present-day Quaker meeting for worship for business may seem to a secular observer curious, almost archaic. So why do Quakers persist with the expectation of hearing texts read out at our meetings – when any one of us, in any other setting, do not expect the same? From published sources so far consulted, I have found neither ruling nor guidance on this.

A clue to the answer lies, I think, in the primacy of speech among founding Quakers. For them, the written word was a secondbest, less trustworthy form. As Kate Peters points out, a reader reading privately might interpret a written tract differently to the author's intentions. Authors would thereby lose control over interpretation. “Public preaching”, by contrast, “allowed speakers to respond to

questions and audience reaction”.¹³ Nevertheless, like other religious sects of the time, Quakers wanted their word to spread, and there were limited numbers of them available to travel. So they wrote, and published their writings; but they wrote with the expectation of being *heard*: their writings were distributed and sold to be used publicly, read aloud by Quaker ministers, in market places and churchyards, like prepared sermons.¹⁴

Only a handful of these early Quakers were authors of tracts (and even fewer were women); but those who did write were first and foremost powerful speakers. In the 1650s, Margaret Fell wrote tracts to be sent further afield than she could travel, in the expectation of them being read aloud. When, in August 1655 one of these writings was read out at a Meeting in Sunderland, William Caton, a former member of the Fell household, then aged about nineteen, was so moved (as he wrote to Margaret Fell) that:

“truly my hart was much broken to hear thy voice, it was so pure and pleasant to my eares”¹⁵

Through text, and through another reader's voice, he could almost hear hers.

Perhaps William Caton offers us an insight into present-day Quakers' insistence on hearing texts. Reading aloud, however imperfectly undertaken, holds a certain power. When a number of people are silently listening, it is as if there is another sound, too: the sound of attention. The voice of the reader, the company of listeners, the stillness before and after: all this, just occasionally, holds the possibility of giving the words the status of an oracle.

In practice, there are problems. Too often the reader does not project their voice. Their voice is inaudible or uninteresting to listen to. In today's multimedia society, we are used to expecting quite a lot when someone stands in front of us, expecting our attention. (As one Friend – a consultant and trainer in communication skills – said to me after a particularly “texty” business meeting: “Hmm. That was *boring*! Everyone knows that only 7% of a presentation is the words. Why did she not look up? She didn't raise her head once from the page in front of her! We need more *eye contact*.”)

One Text, Three Readings

From the responses of Friends round the

country, from observations and from interviews, it seems that finding a right balance between speech, silence, reading and writing in a Quaker business meeting is an elusive matter. But at one or two moments, sitting in business meetings where, for at least part of the time, there really is a sense of being 'gathered' I have felt a minute bloom. The draft is read. One Friend, then another, stands to offer a possible addition, or rewording. A third points out a correction. The clerk rises again, reads again and asks: is that acceptable? The murmur of assent goes round the room. And there is a sense of being settled, united. However small or mundane the actual decision, as some respondents have said in this study, when this happens, you can go away after such a meeting feeling uplifted: trust restored in the love at the heart of the process.

As one Quaker pointed out to me recently, it is strange then, how once outside the context of that careful process, the written minute, composed with such care, can seem a small, almost paltry thing, when we read back the written text later, on a noticeboard, on laptop screen or in a file of papers.

Such a contrast is especially dramatic when the business meeting is as large as the annual gathering of Quakers in Britain. At Britain Yearly Meeting of the Society in 2011, I was among some nine hundred others, when, after seven sessions of business, the clerk stood before us and read back to us the concluding minute that we had all created. After she sat down, there was a hush and for a few moments, the whole gathering was still.

A month later, reading the same minute, typeset on a sheet of paper in my kitchen, the same text seemed a very short matter, one among many that were scattered on the table: almost a piece of bureaucracy.

Three months after that, however, in a circle of others applying the approach of *lectio divina*¹⁶, a group of us spent half an hour reading aloud, then silently, identifying words that spoke to us, and meditating on another minute of the same Yearly Meeting (typed on one side of an A4 sheet of paper). We allowed for breath and pause between sentences. And once again, there was the sense of something large, wide and deep in which we were all of us participants. We had reclaimed the gathered stillness. We had given time to hear, absorb, taste, wonder about and meditate on what we had read.

Sustaining Silence

These are three among many ways of reading that we could apply in a respectful attention to text: on our own, in the group; silently, aloud; quickly, slowly. A conscious attention to how we, in Quaker business meetings, provide information to each other is one issue among many that this study is offering for consideration. I have mentioned some of my own literacy struggles as a clerk. Questionnaire respondents and interviewees have reported others. I have mentioned other struggles that may be hidden within the apparently simple matter of a group listening to someone read something aloud – the group, then, doing the reading 'through the ears'. I have suggested – speculatively, at the moment – a spiritual purpose for this practice that seems to be equally hidden. It seems that Quaker literacy practices today, despite their apparent inclusivity, hold meanings and values not entirely evident to us – and offer challenges to a newcomer bringing assumptions from other domains of literacy use.

The rationale for composing minutes in the way that Quakers do is that this activity is a worshipful practice. The possible reason for reading documents aloud may have a similar religious purpose. To sustain this practice and this purpose, I have come to believe that we Quakers need to rein in our need to produce and consume quite so much writing and revive our faith in silence as a source of inspiration: giving value to the wonder of the process when it goes well, and making more explicit our desire to hear the sound of the speaking voice.

1. Pink Dandelion (2008) p17-18: most Liberal Quakers are in Europe, parts of USA, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada;
2. Evangelical Quakers predominate in Kenya, the USA, India and Far East Asia (ibid).
3. See: Bitel, Cronk, Fendall, Wood and Bishop, Eccles and Peters in: References (below)
4. Punshon (1987) p96
5. The study is funded by an Eva Koch award, at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham.
6. Mace (2002)
7. See Barton and Hamilton (2000) (p11) for examples of the 'domains of activity' in which we employ literacy practices
8. Caroline in Mace (2002) p109
9. Mace (forthcoming)
10. Quaker Faith and Practice, subtitled 'The Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain' is a guide to matters both of faith and of organisation; updated every few years, it contains a range of contributions Quaker sources past and present. Full text is available on the Yearly Meeting website: www.quaker.org.uk
11. Area meetings, of which there are some 70 in the UK, are the 'umbrella body' for their constituent Local meetings (currently numbering around 500).
12. Vincent (2000) p94
13. Peters (2005) p21
14. ibid p69
15. ibid p31
16. From the 5th century to the present, holy reading – or *lectio divina* – has been a central part of the devotional life of Benedictine monasteries. The approach takes the reader through stages, allowing them to get in touch with the Spirit which brought the words on the page in the first place. An adapted version of it can be found in Cook and Heales (2001).

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RaPAL Conference Evaluation

- Another stimulating weekend and lots of learning
- Stimulating and should be heard by many more
- A very enjoyable time – workshops , key notes , Sainsbury Centre , food !
- A very important event for our practices with OUTSTANDING workshops and keynotes
- Lovely range of thought-provoking workshops – thanks!
- Loved the fabulous keynotes – exciting, stimulating. Would have liked time for discussion after Peter Trudgill
- Very happy, inspired, loved being part of it. Thank you so much Alison and Naomi
- Inspirational
- A whole summer's thinking
- Well-fed intellectually and physically
- A great organisation to be part of
- Thanks for all the hard work put into it
- So glad I belong to RaPAL. Brilliant keynotes
- As always much food for thought, many new ideas linking to existing practice. Thank you all concerned for your hard work
- Fab conference. Thank you so much
- All the sessions I attended were excellent and gave lots of food for thought. A great event
- I'll treasure the hunt!
- I've enjoyed every RaPAL conference I've attended but this was the best!
- Excellent conference. Thanks. Especially Jim and Shelley's workshop!
- An absolute joy!
- Brilliantly resourceful and empowering! Excellent speakers – inspiring
- well organised
- treasure hunt
- accommodation
- food
- never long enough!
- too much choice of workshops!
- Great conference – venue – food – workshops. RaPAL is very strong. See you next year!
- Couldn't put it better myself – so won't (see above)
- Thank you for yet another thought provoking and stimulating space for reflection. More Peter Trudgill please!
- Lovely venue
- Longer workshops to really explore?
- Warm and welcoming!
- Very refreshing – all of it. It is good to get away from the ticking boxes to looking at the rationale etc and how teaching could/should be. Keynote talks wonderful. Workshops useful
- Love the food
- Is RaPAL also working to rebind theory with practice?
- A helpful and informative conference. Just what I needed. Thanks!
- The feeling of purpose and solidarity (and fun) which RaPAL gives us – very strong. Thank you
- I feel inspired to research. It's all your fault so thank you!

Coming soon!

The next RaPAL Journal is being jointly edited with NIACE, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, and will focus on Adult Literacies (including numeracy, ESOL and IT) in workplace settings. It will include articles on:

- A joint Editorial from NIACE and RaPAL
- Training for workplace basic skills teaching in Cornwall, by Abi Richards and Faye McFarlane
- Interview with a CWU (Communications Workers Union) representative, by Sarah Freeman
- Union Learning Reps, by Judith Swift
- NIACE review of Skills for Life funding – “What did we actually get for all that money?”
- Effects of ESOL provision in the Workplace by government cuts to funds, by Rachel Oner
- A workplace learning approach to basic skills by Alexander Braddell
- E-readers, by Sal McKeown
- Reviews and Links to useful materials

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RaPAL Journal No 77

Editorial team: Sarah Freeman, Jay Derrick, Yvonne Spare and Carol Taylor

RaPAL and the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

Colleagues who carry out research and are employed in universities will already be preparing for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework and considering which of their publications to return. Previously, under the terms of the Research Assessment Exercise, articles published in RaPAL could not be returned because only part of the journal is peer-reviewed. However, we have taken advice from the REF education panel and are pleased to report that this is no longer the case. According to the criteria set by the panel, articles submitted for the REF will be judged solely on their own merits and not according to where they have been published.

As well as providing evidence of high quality research, articles published in RaPAL could also demonstrate engagement with stakeholders, since one of RaPAL's central aims is to foster dialogue between research and practice and the Journal is read by many practitioners. This kind of engagement with stakeholders can be seen as a first step towards impact.

We recognise that the current 4,000 word limit for Section 3 peer-reviewed articles may not give writers the scope to develop their work in the ways required by the REF. We've therefore taken the decision to raise the word limit for Section 3 articles and will now accept contributions of up to 6,000 words.

We remain committed to encouraging a range of contributions from learners, practitioners and managers, and particularly to supporting people who are new to writing for publication. We will therefore retain the three section format (except for the conference edition) and will not change the word limits for sections 1 and 2.

If you have an idea for a contribution and would like more advice and information, please feel free to contact Sarah Freeman and Julie Meredith, the journal co-ordinators.

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 6,000 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 or 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

Julie Meredith
meredith_julie@yahoo.co.uk

Sarah Freeman
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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