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RaPAL

Health Literacies,
Partnerships and Workplaces

See
Inside for
details of our
October
Conference!



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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Editorial

Claire Collins, Peggy Warren and Sarah Freeman

The Conference 2014 edition of the Journal revolves around the themes of *Health, Well-being, Partnerships and Workplaces*. The event took place at City Hospital, Birmingham and boasts a number of firsts: it was the first time in RaPAL's history that we have held a conference in a hospital setting, and for the first time RaPALers interacted live with literacy colleagues in Australia. We were also treated to a video keynote by Professor Sondra Cuban from West Washington University, USA - another new event for RaPAL. Steph Taylor's "Rapporteur's Report" reveals the essence of the day from the delegates' point of view. Workshop facilitators and keynote speakers have contributed material to read and watch and there is an innovative new space called "Windows to the Conference".

The first article by Jonathan Berry from the Community Health and Learning Foundation, guides the reader straight to the connection between promoting well-being and partnerships. He draws attention to the need for more joined-up thinking between literacy programme leaders, practitioners and personnel involved in public health programmes.

The theme of situated literacies is drawn on strongly throughout the Journal, focussing attention on the need to weave in curriculum approaches that resonate with the lives and practices of those in learning. Victoria Wright and Rob Smith focus on learners who are "not in education, employment or training" (NEET). They outline first-hand research they have undertaken with student literacy teachers.

Bob Read's presentation from the conference (shown in "Windows to the Conference" section) provides an example of how embedded learning can also support health-care professionals in their training and development.

Central to RaPAL is its wide agenda for inclusiveness in curricula and in literacy policy. We are proud of our history of creating space for students' voices in our publications and conferences. Peggy Warren provides us with a powerful account of how non-traditional students can enhance and make literacies used in higher education settings more accessible. Along with Jenica Richards (a student), Peggy provides us with an illuminating perspective on the "widening participation" agenda. In this, the first of our multimedia articles, the reader can relive aspects of the workshop delivered by Peggy and Jenica, which included poetry, music and a first person narrative.

You can view the second of our Keynote presentations by Professor Linda Lang through our "Window to the Conference". Professor Lang spoke about the concept of Lifelong Learning in the health sector, focussing on a recent development in a University Technical College (UTC) in the Midlands. Building on the idea of partnerships between health and literacy practitioners, you can watch the illuminating Australian video article from Ros Bauer and Isabel Osuna-Gatty, especially made for the RaPAL event. This describes successful education schemes that embrace health and literacies in outlying, widespread communities and shows that strong partnerships are critical to implementing literacy programmes across Australia. Their literacy projects and training programmes, underpinned by a combination of social practice and skills-based approaches, not only develop people's personal and workplace literacies, but also enhance their general well-being.

The NHS and wider health contexts (work places) have historically been sites of educational disparities and injustices, particularly for migrant groups. Sondra Cuban's visual presentation and the review of her book by Peggy Warren, highlight some of the literacy challenges adult learners navigate whilst undertaking work-based and other forms of learning.

Shelley Tracey reviews Vicky Duckworth's book, *Learning Trajectories, Violence and Empowerment amongst Adult Basic Skills Learners*, a detailed insight into the lives of sixteen adult literacy learners in Lancashire, which draws attention to how their situations hampered their progress in education but didn't deter them from being able to learn how to express their predicaments and those of their local communities.

It was at this conference that we agreed to transition the 'L' in RaPAL from *Literacy* to *Literacies*. We outlined the path that took us to this decision in Claire's (1985) presentation and this gem is embedded in "Window to the Conference". Following the same theme – that of seeking the literacies that are in sync with participants' life experiences - Genevieve Clarke's article, "Reading changes lives" and Vicky Duckworth's review of Sam Duncan's new book, *Reading for Pleasure and Reading Circles for Adult Emergent Readers*, both remind us of the life-transforming nature of reading. Genevieve illustrates how working on reading in partnership with unions and NHS trusts is creating positive social opportunities, as well as contributing to mental wellbeing. Further to this, Sue Grief's article highlights aspects of "taken for granted" writing practices undertaken in small businesses – the literacies which we barely notice, but which are key to everyday local life.

What a privilege it has been to work on such important and topical areas. As RaPAL aspires to keep abreast of the digital age, we have also been reminded of the impact of what practitioners do and strive to do. As a professional body we promote the engagement of learners where they feel comfortable, and minimisation of the barriers they encounter as they engage in learning. Likewise, we are committed in our support of practitioners who endeavour to make learning meaningful in the field of adult literacy.

**Details of our
October
Conference!**

Motivated or mandated:

engaging adults in learning and supporting them to succeed

**Joint annual conference with NIACE, NRDC,
RaPAL and UCU to support adults with maths and English**

Date: 20th October 2014 **Venue:** London
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Ref: C3253/1014 **Fee:** Non-members fee - **£140**
Members of UCU, NIACE, NRDC and RaPAL - **£65**
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An overview of health literacy for adult literacy practitioners

Jonathan Berry MA

*Jonathan Berry is the Director of the Community Health and Learning Foundation (CHLF). He has an extensive health background and has been the **ContinYou's** Executive Director for Health and Wellbeing for five years. Before that he was Head of Public Involvement for Rugby PCT. These roles were preceded by spells running a Community Health Council and as Director of the West Midlands Health Research Unit. An experienced strategic and project manager, Jonathan managed Phase 2 of the national Skilled for Health programme on behalf of the Department of Health and BIS which led him to develop a particular interest in health literacy and the links between learning and health inequalities. The CHLF specialises in delivering health literacy courses for people with low basic skills and health literacy training for the practitioners working with them.*

Introduction

This article aims to define health literacy in a manner which makes it accessible and meaningful for literacy practitioners. It outlines the impact that having lower levels of health literacy can have on people's health. It also discusses to what extent literacy practitioners can and do engage with the health literacy agenda and how they might do so in the future. It describes the national health literacy course, *Skilled for Health*, and examines how this might be of use to literacy practitioners.

This article is based on a workshop given by Jonathan Berry at the recent RAPAL annual conference held on the 5th April 2014 in Birmingham and on a guide to health literacy - a collaboration between the CHLF and NIACE. The latter will be published in the summer of 2014 and will cover the issues explored below in much greater detail.



What is health literacy?

According to Nutbeam (2008), health literacy research has traditionally been generated by the clinical care paradigm or the health promotion paradigm. In the former, it is a basic skill, the lack of which constitutes a risk to the ability to achieve and maintain good health. Nielsen-Bohlman et al (2004) sees health literacy as a basic skill:

The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

A wider view of health literacy is offered by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Here health literacy includes the ability to understand scientific concepts, content, and health research; skills in spoken, written, and online communication; critical interpretation of mass media messages; navigating complex systems of health care and governance; and knowledge and use of community capital and resources, as well as using cultural knowledge in health decision making. Within this construct, health literacy implies the achievement of a level of knowledge, personal skills and confidence to take action to improve personal and community health by changing personal lifestyles and living conditions. Thus, health literacy means more than being able to read pamphlets and make appointments. By improving people's access to health information, and their capacity to use it effectively, health literacy is critical to self-empowerment. In other words, health literacy facilitates sound health decisions in the context of everyday life: at home, in the community, at the workplace, in the health system, in the market place and in the political arena. This is significant for literacy practitioners because it means that health literacy sits very firmly in their domain (e.g. courses on healthy eating and other lifestyle and preventative measures) as well as in the medical domain (e.g. where patients are taught to self-manage a long term condition).

What do we know about health literacy?

Although there is little research into levels of health literacy skills in the UK, a recent study (unpublished) carried out by London South Bank University, identified that 43% of adults in England aged between 18 and 64 routinely do not understand health information. This figure rises to 61% when an element of numeracy is involved. We also know, from a WHO report (Kickbusch, I. 2013) that limited health literacy is prevalent.

Like general literacy, health literacy can be measured at the individual, organisational, community and population levels. The European Health Literacy Survey (2012) revealed that 12% of all respondents have inadequate general health literacy and 35% have problematic health literacy. Limited health literacy in Europe is thus not just a problem of a minority of the population. The WHO report also noted that specific vulnerable groups have much higher proportions of limited health literacy than the general population in Europe. These groups include people of lower social status (low self-assessed social status, low level of education, low income and people with problems in paying bills), people of worse health status (measured by self-perceived health, long-term illness and limitations in activities because of health problems) or people of relative old age.

Why does it matter?

From a health perspective it matters significantly. In a recent WHO report (2013:7), Kickbusch et al note that 'limited health literacy is associated with less participation in health-promoting and disease detection activities, riskier health choices (such as higher smoking rates), more work accidents, diminished management of chronic diseases (such as diabetes, HIV infection and asthma), poor adherence to medication, increased hospitalisation and rehospitalisation, increased morbidity (illness) and premature death.' Examples of the above have been provided by Williams et al (1998), who report that asthma sufferers with low health literacy were more likely on the one hand to have poorer knowledge of the correct use of inhalers and on the other hand make more use of emergency services. Garbers and Chiasson (2004), report that women with low levels of health literacy were less likely to have undergone cervical screening.

Health literacy is also important because it has a major impact on *health inequalities*, the term used in a number of countries to refer to those instances whereby the health of two demographic groups (not necessarily ethnic or racial groups) differs despite comparable access to health care services. Examples include higher rates of illness and premature mortality for those in lower occupational socio-economic groups. These differences were highlighted in the 2010 University College London *Fair Society, Healthy Lives* report (Marmot, 2010) on the relationship between health and poverty. They showed that the life expectancy of the poorest is seven years shorter than for the wealthiest, and that the poor are more likely to have a disability. It is also acknowledged that those people with the lowest levels of health literacy also experience significant health inequalities.

How can literacy practitioners improve health literacy?

Every time literacy tutors use the theme of health in a literacy class, they are increasing the health skills and knowledge of their learners. This in turn means those learners may make informed decisions about a whole range of choices regarding their health, such as deciding to increase physical activity, to drink more fluids, to eat more fruit, to drink less alcohol or to contemplate quitting smoking. However, it is likely that many literacy practitioners would never describe their work in these terms; rather they see it as part of their primary remit - improving literacy. On one level, of course, that doesn't particularly matter, after all, unintended beneficial consequences are a by-product of many activities, not just those of literacy practitioners.

There is a growing body of practitioners, in health as well as in learning, who think that literacy practitioners might be missing out on an opportunity to expose the full value of what they do. This is because it is becoming

widely understood that improved health literacy is seen as a prerequisite for addressing health inequalities. Literacy practitioners are contributing to this key government priority. There is no explicit acknowledgment that adult education is playing a role in promoting health literacy and there are also missed opportunities for literacy practitioners to work more closely with health practitioners.

The recent changes in the NHS have created an additional opportunity for this collaboration. These involved, in April 2013, the transfer from the NHS to local government of responsibility for many public health functions within its locality. This has been accompanied by the transfer of a significant number of Public Health staff into local authorities. This means that for the first time in over forty years, lead responsibility for public health and adult learning is vested in the same organisation. If those responsible for commissioning public health programmes which address health inequalities can see that their new colleagues make a significant contribution to this agenda, might this not be the start to a new mutually beneficial form of partnership working?

The key to these new partnerships will be how a shared mutual understanding develops between public health and adult learning personnel with regard to how each might contribute to the other's priorities. This clearly requires considerable thought from both sides. However, the focus here is on literacy practitioners and suggests that literacy practitioners will need to show how their work contributes to addressing health inequalities and improving health literacy. The joint CHLF/NIACE guidance (forthcoming) will address this in much greater detail.

Skilled for Health

One area where collaboration has already proved possible is shown by public health and literacy practitioners in delivering *Skilled for Health* (SfH). The SfH programme integrates the goals of reducing inequalities in health with those of improving the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults. The underlying premise is that by addressing both issues simultaneously, the impact on both sets of issues is greater than the impact of addressing them independently. It was developed by CHLF's predecessor organisation, *ContinuYou*, in partnership with the Department of Health and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. A booklet called *Skilled for Health; Making the Case* (Berry, 2009) accompanies the resources, and makes the case for this sort of joined-up work in much more detail.

Created with the model of co-delivery in mind, the *Skilled for Health* programme has been and continues to be delivered in various parts of England. In some places it has been a vehicle for enhanced collaboration between literacy and public health practitioners, but this has been sporadic. This is despite the fact that by delivering it in the manner described above it can improve learning and health outcomes. The evidence for this is an evaluation carried out by the Tavistock Institute (2009), which found, among other things, that the programme changes health behaviours, improves confidence, reduces isolation and re-engages people with learning. It can be argued that a joint programme of this nature offers a platform to build collaboration between health and literacy practitioners as well as a health literacy course which literacy practitioners could themselves offer to their learners.

Skilled for Health includes modules on healthy eating, the benefits of physical activity, sexual health, how to access NHS services and how to manage medication. It is designed to enable participants to increase their knowledge and thus make informed decisions about their own and their family's health. The resources can be downloaded from the CHLF website (see [Here](#)).

Conclusion

There seems little doubt that literacy practitioners can, and do, contribute to improving health literacy. This in turn assists in tackling health inequalities. However, many literacy practitioners may not be aware that they do this and will probably not describe their outcomes in health terms – certainly not in health terms that resonate with public health practitioners. Nonetheless there is great scope for collaboration and for helping public health practitioners to realise the significant contribution that literacy practitioners can make to health literacy and health improvement. The *Skilled for Health* programme is one possible platform to bring this about, as is the transfer of many public health functions into local authorities.

However, despite all these promising opportunities, there seems to be very patchy evidence that anything of this sort is yet happening systematically. Public health is still settling into its new role within local authorities and not yet really thinking about its relationship with adult learning. Is this an opportunity for literacy practitioners? The CHLF certainly thinks so and in the lead up to the next general election will be ensuring that all the key spokespeople in the main political parties are made aware of the role that literacy practitioners can play in addressing health literacy.

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Literacy education and NEETs: skills-based versus socially situated approaches to curriculum

Victoria Wright and Rob Smith

Victoria and Rob work in the post compulsory education team at the University of Wolverhampton. Victoria is a senior lecturer and Rob is a principal lecturer who also works for the University's dedicated research Centre for Research and Development in Lifelong Education (CRADLE). Both have been involved in teacher education and literacy provision for a number of years.

The article shares a study of literacy education delivery in Foundation Learning and Functional Skills classes in a range of further education (FE) settings in the West Midlands region. The focus for the research arose primarily from reflective journal entries and teaching practice lesson observations of postgraduate Certificate in Post-Compulsory Education (PGCE PCE) English/Literacy student teachers. We identified a range of factors that influence literacy provision for the student group ascribed to the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) category. The study is underpinned by New Literacy Studies research and perspectives on literacy. In particular, we look to identify ways to engage or re-engage NEET students. We share some examples of more effective teaching approaches. One example relates to the writing of Grime lyrics.

Introducing a stimulus for the research

The PGCE PCE is a one year full-time course. On the English/literacy route for student teachers, the latter study professional development and English/literacy specific modules. They reflect continuously on their development as teachers and on their experiences of working in literacy education. Some student teachers in the study were working with students belonging to the NEET category. A range of issues began to surface in their reflective blogs (online journalling). These issues also became apparent in their assessed lesson observations. The student teachers discussed differences they were seeing between a more holistic, social practice model of teaching literacy (informed by discussions on the PGCE course) and a narrower autonomous approach experienced in some of their placement settings.

Definitions of literacy: differences between autonomous and social practice models

The autonomous approach to literacy teaching emphasises a technical skills-based focus. Street (1984) critiques this view of literacy as “autonomous” of social context. Hamilton, Tett, & Crowther, (2012: 2) describing it as “a literacy ladder” or “step by step” approach, point out that that 'literacy is also more than this.'

In New Literacy Studies research, the social practice approach recognises literacy as 'variable with regard to its forms, functions, uses and values across social settings, and thus varying in its social meanings and effects' (Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009: 1). Street explains:

If literacy is seen simply as a universal technical skill, the same everywhere, then the particular form being taught in school comes to be treated as the only kind, the universal standard that naturalises its socially specific features and disguises their real history and ideological justifications. If literacy is seen as a social practice, then that history and those features and justifications need to be spelled out, and students need to be able to discuss the basis for the choices being made in the kind of literacy they are learning. (2012: 17)

The *Literacies for Learning in Further Education* (LlLFE, 2004-2007) project sought 'to uncover actual and potential overlaps and connections between literacy practices in students' everyday lives, the literacy demands of their courses and the uses of literacy in the workplaces in which they are hoping to gain employment.' In an LlLFE associated paper, Satchwell and Ivanič (2007: 315) reflect that 'success in their

courses may depend on students being enabled to take ownership of these literacy practices in the same way as they engage with the literacy practices in the contexts of the rest of their lives.' In this article, we reflect that this socially situated view of literacy is particularly important for those students ascribed to the NEET category.

What is NEET?

In 1999, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) produced a report, *Bridging the Gap*, which introduced the label "NEET" as part of a policy discourse around education, training and employment. Fiona Hyslop, former Cabinet Secretary for Education, is quoted as identifying "so-called" NEETs as: 'young people in need of more choices, more chances' (Finlay et al., 2010: 854).

The *Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training* (Pring et al., 2009:3) reviewed education and training provision in England and Wales. It focused on the 'need in policy, and in the provision and practice of education, for a clear vision of what all these interventions and investments of money and effort are for'. It referred to NEETs as the most needy learners' (Ibid:7), and commented that 'the voluntary and community sector that helps them (e.g. "detached youth workers") receive least money, typically in the form of short-term initiative-led funding.'

The *NEET Quarterly Brief January to March 2014* records 'the overall 16-24 rate at 13.1%' (DfE: 1). McCrone et al (2013: 7) reported that provision for NEETs was 'typically... a range of training including employability skills, basic or foundation skills, life skills and vocational courses offering technical skills training in different sectors' The same report (ibid:7) suggested 'FE colleges were more likely to use the funding to enhance existing provision and to extend its availability by offering more places to young adults.'

Simmons and Thompson (2011:158) refer to a 'discourse which constructed learners as unable to cope with written work and, by implication, unable to learn successfully in formal settings.' In the report by the Institute of Education, *Tackling the NEETs problem* (LSN, 2009: 1), the NEETs category is described as very heterogeneous. Most participants did not conform to the media stereotype of the work shy and feckless young person. They were likely to suffer from economic and social disadvantage, to have low levels of attainment, and to have been turned off by the education system, and consequently to see themselves as failures.

Three categories of "so-called" NEET young people are expounded in a NEFR report (see Spielhofer et al., 2009:2): an "open to learning" group, an "undecided" group and a "sustained" group. The last two sub-groups are described as having "negative" previous experiences of education or of being 'dissatisfied with the available opportunities.'

The *Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training* (Pring et al., 2009: 8), indicated that 'the system...encourages teaching to the test, thereby impoverishing the quality of learning.' Lumby's (2012: 272) research into disengaged young people in the 11-19 age range, identifies some students' perceptions of a "gulf in communication" between themselves and their teachers. The students' use of informal language is corrected and therefore, a 'need (for) an alternative vocabulary to that used at home in order to communicate,' is recommended.

Our study: gathering the data

We collected data between January and June 2012, while some further interviews were carried out in early January, 2013. Our research sample was of thirteen participants who delivered literacy education for eleven providers. The first group comprised eight participants who were PGCE student-teachers. The second group comprised five participants who were teachers; one was recently qualified and two were also managers.

Interviews with Group Two (teachers and teacher/managers) were usually scheduled in FE settings. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and returned for any amendments or comments.

We did not directly ask for the views of the student group (NEETs). This was a conscious, ethical decision. Observations and discussions with PGCE student teachers had highlighted the time and effort needed to sustain positive and trusting relationships. It was not appropriate for us to foster such relationships for the purpose of the study. We had also picked up in discussion that the label *literacy* had negative associations for many so-called NEET students.

We were in close contact with the student teachers for at least a year. This lent an ethnographic dimension to the research in the sense that 'ethnographers rely on informants in the field to tell them stories, feedback on interpretations and to answer questions' (Cousin, 2009:123). The PGCE student teachers were invited to develop a piece of reflective writing that addressed the following:

- How is literacy/ or how are literacies conceptualised on your placement?
- What different approaches to literacy education are currently being employed?
- What are the barriers to teaching literacy effectively in existing provision?
- How does student progression from Foundation Learning programmes to other courses work in your placement?

In follow up discussions, the student teachers were asked to identify any examples of perceived good practice in literacy education with students from the NEET category. The question prompts we had devised for our student teachers underpinned the broader semi-structured interviews for Group Two (teachers and teacher/managers).

Table 1: Participants and FE settings (anonymised at discretion of participants)

Participant	College	
Abigail	New College Temevale VIth form	Post graduate student
Charlene	Netherton College	Post graduate student
Charlotte	St Peter's: Community provider	Post graduate student
Fenella	Treetown College	Post graduate student
Margaret	Coalville City College	Post graduate student
Martha	Rivertown College	Post graduate student
Morgan	Rayburn training provider	Post graduate student
Natasha	St Peter's: Community provider	Post graduate student
Caroline	Central Copleton College	Teacher / manager
Jen	Copleton People's College	Teacher
Jill	St Peter's: Community provider	Teacher (recently qualified)
Julie	Mucklow College	Teacher
Tom	Dedicated unit in Treetown College	Teacher / manager

Findings

It was found that Foundation Learning courses were widespread, but courses delivered exclusively for so-called NEETs were more niche. There were usually only a few classes taking place in a specially staffed “unit” in any one provider. One college had Foundation Learning courses and also separately funded provision targeted at young people identified as NEETs. In other settings (most noticeably in community settings), the only provision available was targeted and there were no other mainstream courses available on-site.

Our research revealed some provision where the autonomous model of teaching literacy was more prevalent. Literacy delivery involved and tested knowledge based on punctuation, word class and grammar. In this provision, a lack of student engagement was also noted. In what was identified as more effective literacy provision, approaches to teaching literacy were more holistic.

Discussions around the impact of current funding arrangements re-emphasized some of the challenges faced by providers who sought to establish a more student-centred provision. Our study also echoed other research on NEETs in identifying a diverse group of students. Our teacher participants saw a lack of qualifications as characteristic of that group.

Challenges and barriers

Various issues surfaced frequently in the data, mostly related to challenges and barriers. These were identified under the following headings.

- the lack of strong pastoral support
- students' needs and lack of confidence
- the students' previous negative experiences of education
- the students' perceptions of their current programme of study
- the emphasis placed on job skills within provision
- the impact of funding regulations on providers.

The need for a strong pastoral support system was emphasised in the student teachers' reflections. Margaret, for example, commented that

Sometimes they need somebody to talk to and they want somebody to talk to. They are not interested in what you are doing and they just need a bit of attention.

In better-resourced provision, there was an additional member of staff who would support the needs of the students and was able to work with them more flexibly. In some cases it seemed that students needed that kind of emotional support daily. Not all provision could provide this level of care. Being less well-resourced inevitably impacts on the type of provision offered. This also has implications for the effectiveness of preventative and social inclusion policy measures.

Students' needs had to be prioritised in order to support them engaging or re-engaging with learning. The *BIS Research Paper into training for NEETs* highlighted that on the whole, the majority appeared to lack self-confidence and self-esteem' (McCrone et al, 2013: 9). Morgan reflected on students' reluctance to taking work down if they felt their work would be displayed. He related this to low levels of confidence and emphasized the need for a strong degree of trust between teacher and student.

Charlene reflected on some students' negative prior experiences of education. She saw

a deep resentment towards structured and prescriptive writing activities since this replicates school-based work.

In our sample, teachers and student teachers were conscious of seeking to engage students in learning by trying more student-centred and creative strategies. They wished to distinguish the current learning experience from the previous negative experiences students described. The teachers in these groups were trying to present an alternative to what students perceived as more prescriptive versions of literacy teaching. For Morgan, this meant that

you've got to see what their interests are and then make it social.

The students' perceptions of what it meant to study and be on a Foundation Learning or Functional Skills course were also perceived as a barrier. Abigail talked about students asking why they needed to write letters on a Foundation Learning course:

They tell me that they don't need to use reading or writing skills in their daily business.

She outlined what she saw as the students' perception of themselves as “stupid” because of the type of course they were on.

This was linked to poor attendance and lack of student engagement. Martha was critical of the appropriateness of the content being assessed in Functional Skills. She commented that

the FS assessments that they've got to do (are) just not related to their age range.

Another barrier identified in the data was the link between learning and employability or the development of employment-related skills. Martha referred to students completing an application

for a mythical job that they haven't got the qualifications or experience for.

In Morgan's setting, the sole focus of literacy work revolved around future job prospects. This echoed a common view that the aim of these courses for young people was work.

Criticism was expressed in relation to the ways in which provision was funded. The resulting negative effects on teaching and learning have been considered in other research (e.g. Smith and O'Leary, 2013). Charlene referred to the pressure on tutors to make sure everyone passed the course. She saw one of the consequences of this as a

more prescriptive and “to the test” scheme of work and lesson content.

In a different setting, Fenella commented similarly,

We are contracted by the Job Centre to ensure our clients progress to at least one level above what they are initially assessed at. We are to teach to the test, any variation is to be directed towards employment.

The challenges that such funding drivers generate for providers has been identified in other papers (see for example, Literacy Study Group, 2008; Smith, 2007; Smith & O'Leary, 2013). Reflecting on this study, it would seem that, in recognition of students' complex needs and backgrounds and in tune with New Literacy Studies research, a more student-centred and socially situated curriculum should be considered.

Examples of more effective provision

We identified two examples of more effective provision. These examples resonate with the social practice model of literacy (i.e. New Literacy Studies research).

The first example is a strategy that Jill had employed. She is a recently qualified teacher (one of our previous postgraduate students) who is teaching in a community setting. In her view, effective literacy teaching meant working

with things that they know so that they don't think 'Oh I can't do it.'

Reflecting on the interests and previous knowledge of her students, she developed lessons around Grime, a genre of urban music. She approached it, she said,

as a step-by-step process.... At first the students just wrote a few lines... the language was urban slang...I wanted them to write about themselves or as a story.

Through this activity she was developing their skills in spelling, in consciously making particular word choices and in creating rhyme. The group also checked the accuracy of each other's work because everyone had to write their lyrics on the board.

She invited her cousin in and

he did a 16 bar with them.... He put a lyric together. He got them looking for rhyming words for the line ends and especially he got them to look at the hook.

The students understood that at the end of the activity they were going to go to a studio to make a recording. Such an outcome ties in to earlier discussions in this paper around the students' perceptions of the relevance of class work (and again to New Literacy Studies research). Jill also reflected on the group's motivations:

A lot of them were good at graphics and drawing so they did the cd cover. And they enjoyed that.

This example illustrates a socially situated approach to literacy teaching. Jill sought to foster the students' ownership of their learning and reengage them by drawing on their informal literacy practices. The focus was on making meaning and on producing something, in this case a recording. It was underpinned by a desire to boost their confidence and to instill an understanding that their own literacy practices (outside of educational settings) could have relevance and support their development within more formal literacy learning. As Hamilton(2010: 13) suggests: 'Many of the literacies that are influential and valued in people's day-to-day lives, that are widely circulated and discussed, are not seen as having a place in educational institutions.'

Jill came from the same area as her students. She thought that this was very beneficial. It enabled her to understand their backgrounds. She felt it supported her in establishing a positive relationship with them as she was "one of them".

In the second example, the teacher also came from the same area as his students. This example relates to the only instance we saw in our study of young people from the "sustained" category (Spielhofer, et al., 2009: 2) and therefore likely to highlight negative previous experiences of education. The provision was in a dedicated unit in Treetown College. It was particularly noteworthy because the teachers had designed the curriculum themselves. The scheme of work did not lead to the completion of external assessments. In the first year,

there was special attention given to pastoral support. This was an aspect that had been reiterated throughout our data-gathering as highly significant. Underpinning the programme was a shared perception of the need to reengage this student group. In its second year, the programme developed to lead towards students re-entering mainstream education.

In this second example, the provision drew on European funding. There was therefore increased flexibility when it came to managing assessment, which is relevant for the earlier discussions (see also Edwards and Smith, 2005; Literacy Study Group, 2008: 450; Smith and O'Leary, 2013: 257) on the impact of funding and assessment requirements on provision.

Again in this second example, a key member of staff was brought up and still lived on the same estate as students. Like Jill, local knowledge supported him in gaining students' trust. This seems to be particularly important when working to support and teach students in the NEET category. The example emphasised the benefit for the NEET students of teaching and learning approaches that are more holistic, situated and responsive to local needs.

Conclusion

We have seen in our research evidence in some provision of an approach that would reengage the students by resonating with their literacy practices and lives and would as such be different from students' previous (negative) educational experience. The teachers were “working around” an autonomous view of literacy. For example, they were working with assessments that were not seen to be suitable in the context and had to deal with funding priorities that were at odds with the needs of the students and their learning. In other examples the providers were more closely working within a “teaching to the test” approach. We have highlighted some of the challenging contextual factors, for example, the funding and qualification requirements that impact on delivery. The data we collected also highlighted the need to reflect on the students' prior experiences and individual needs in order to develop more flexible and creative teaching approaches. Student-focused delivery was key to reengaging this particular student group in education.

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The harder the struggle, the sweeter the victory!

Peggy Warren and Jenica Richards

Peggy Warren currently works within the learning and development department of an inner city UK hospital. Her research interests include the educational development of mature black women, working in roles which are low-skilled and low-paid. Jenica Richards works as a nursery nurse in the community and has completed her Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care.

Background

Peggy predominantly works with women employed in low-skilled, low-paid roles within the National Health Service (NHS) Trust. She has journeyed with the participants of this study as they undertook *Skills for Life* Literacy level 1 and level 2 courses in preparation for vocational and subsequently academic study. Peggy adapted a Freirean approach to adult literacy, especially as the women she worked with had not found compulsory education a positive experience in most cases and they operated on the lowest tiers of the NHS hierarchical structure. Paulo Freire is credited as one of the most influential educational thinkers of the educational praxis of liberation. He advocated that for those teaching the oppressed, they should consider a shift from formal teaching to dialogue, which he advocated should be deep and purposed, therefore resulting in education which is reciprocal, life engaging and life transforming. Peggy introduced critical thinking and critical reading through exposure to a range of authors on the work-based Skills for Life (SfL) programmes. She taught from authors including Booker T, W.E.B Dubois, Maya Angelou and Bessie Head. Her students, well, they taught her insights into life.

Introduction

What we aim to do in this article is to explore the literature that underpins a doctoral study currently undertaken by Peggy Warren, exploring black British and black Caribbean women's perceptions and experiences of higher education and the foundation degree qualification. Jenica Richards shares her experience of being a first generation university (FGU) student undertaking the foundation degree in Health and Social Care, and makes recommendations for tutors and FGU mature women accessing Higher Education (HE).

The Widening Participation (WP) debate

Widening Participation (WP) policies facilitated the implementation of a number of new undergraduate qualifications which have created new tiers within established career hierarchies, including the fields of education, childcare and allied health. The aims of widening participation in higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) were twofold: to improve the economic positioning of the UK and to ensure fair access from under-represented groups to HE (DfEE 1998). The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) agreed to 'set targets to extend learning opportunities to those who would not generally have the opportunity to access learning and to increase both the accessibility and the flexibility of education' (2006:8). To meet their goal, they aimed to remove barriers to accessing education for many, including those working in low-skilled and low-paid roles.

There has been wide-ranging debate around the rhetoric and praxis of WP policies. Archer (2007), Tierney and Slack (2005), and David (2009) suggest that WP has certainly created the opportunity for non-traditional learners to access higher education courses and institutions. However, these authors have argued that in as much as HE widens provision, the experience and access it claims to provide are not equal.

Leathwood (2001), David (2009) and Archer (2007) explore how concepts - such as diversity, which is so complex - are used to mask some of the inequalities. David (2009) argued that WP policies disproportionately benefit traditional learners. Conversely, Kallenbach (2003) suggests that widening participation might serve

the interests of disadvantaged sections of society, but this could be at the expense of the more advantaged and prosperous. One area is mobility. The more prosperous are able to relocate to benefit from employment and personal development opportunities.

Archer (2007) and David (2009) suggest that to further establish the vision of diversity within HE, the government claims it has created choices for non-traditional learners and has encouraged HE institutions to identify and locate themselves within the HE market as service providers, targeting specific “consumers”. They further suggest that the WP policies offer no real “consumer” choice, rather the choices on offer are tightly bound and restricted according to one's social background, given that, as they argue, diversity across the student population does not necessarily equate with equal forms of participation or results.

It is argued that the widening participation agenda has created what Archer (2007) describes as new tertiary tripartism. The “tiers”, Archer explains, result in what equates to gold, silver and bronze perceptions of universities, specialising consecutively in research, teaching, and those predominantly catering for the non-traditional students. It was clear in a study conducted by David (2009) that when mature females participated, they attended lower status universities. Archer (2007) notes that “bronze universities” generally fail to offer social mobility opportunities and are tied into the lifelong learning policy agenda. Skeggs' analysis (2004), which discusses the processes through which social class is constructed, argues that processes of “immobility” and “fixing” are central to the reproduction of social inequalities. In this view, the privileged are able to access the national and international arena, whilst the less privileged are restricted to less powerful spaces which generally restrict their opportunities to become professionally mobile.

The foundation degree (fd) qualification

As a result of collaboration between the Further Education Colleges (FECs) and HEIs, foundation degrees (fd) were launched in the late 1990s. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) describes foundation degrees as degree-level qualifications which combine academic study with workplace learning designed in association with employers. They are qualifications to equip people with the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to achieve academic results as well as improve performance and productivity in the workplace.

This “new” tier qualification was seen as the answer to upskilling current employees working in low-skilled roles. Parry (2005) pointed to the new expectation placed upon post compulsory education institutions being a source of unease in both the HE and Further Education (FE) sectors. The concerns primarily focused on the weak demand for sub-degree courses and the quality of HE accredited courses delivered through colleges. The unease continued outside the educational sector, and the fd qualification has stimulated much debate in workplaces which have become developers of new professions, as in health and education, for example. The role of the assistant practitioner (AP) has been developed to transcend professional boundaries.

Evetts (2011) expounds the occupational and institutional approaches taken to new professionalism within the NHS. The former focuses on individuals and groups and creates opportunities to improve occupational status through education and skills development. The institutional approach is focused on the hierarchical structure which includes elements of bureaucracy, output and performance measures through specific styles of management. In response to the need to modernise the NHS and to address the significant economic challenges facing the public sector provision, as well as the shortage of nurses and teachers, the role of the AP has been created.

Within the care sector, the fd qualification has provided the platform from which to launch new professionals. Tierney and Slack (2005) and Foskett (2003) acknowledge that whether in the public or private

sector, the fd contributes to the employers' modernisation agenda and provides opportunities to create new roles, utilise the developed skills and offer appropriate remuneration for those who succeed in gaining the qualification. Foskett (2003) suggests that in the healthcare sector the fd will produce workers that can operate across inter-professional boundaries in a supervised environment and provide career progression and new grading structures.

However, the new qualifications and new roles have presented challenges for established roles. Daykin and Clarke (2000), Law and Aranda (2009), Rakovski and Price-Glynn (2010) have discussed the tensions created - for example in nursing by the AP role - and have highlighted issues around the hierarchical division of labour, the subordination of occupational groups and the exclusionary strategies used by nurses as they create distinctions between "clean" and "dirty" work. The debates generally have concluded that registered practitioners may need to rethink their relationships with support staff in order to develop more inclusive strategies for valuing support work and embracing the new professionals emerging from fd programmes.

Mature women and foundation degrees

In a number of evaluations of foundation degree studies, mature women were the dominant group studied. In a study by Selfe et al (2002), over 80% of participants were 31 years or older with 45% of the assistant practitioners aged between 41 and 50 years old. David (2009) found that working class mature students considered that for people like themselves, the economic value of a degree in the workplace would never provide them with the same rewards as for those who accessed elite institutions which were inaccessible to them.

There were some interesting insights into mature women's experience of foundation degrees. In a discussion of the effectiveness of preparing mature entrants for HE, Martin and Munro (2010) quote Hoskins et, al. (1997) and Houltram (1996), who found that the best degrees were obtained by mature women with non-traditional qualifications. They also found that mature students were often well motivated and demonstrated that motivation was probably a better predictor of success than traditional entry qualifications. Motivation, it was felt, often provided the impetus to work through barriers.

In the exploration of barriers, a study conducted by Macdonald and Stratta (2001) examining tutors' responses to students on fd programmes, found that the attitudes of the tutors did not correspond with either the students' anticipation of the undergraduate study or the institutional strategy. In general the perception of staff was that mature students didn't actually enjoy their studies, became anxious and needed assistance in learning how to cope with the challenges of full-time employment, academic studies and life. Tutors felt that non-traditional students were needy and required a great deal of support with academic elements of programmes. Griffiths (2003), from a study conducted with mature women, identified that these non-traditional learners have not benefited from the taken-for-granted development provided by programmes of study that develop cognition and critical analysis skills. Reay (2002) looked at non-traditional students' backgrounds and found that one point of commonality which occurred across the intersections of gender, class and ethnicity amongst mature students, was a negative educational history where the contributing factors were as varied as the groups themselves.

Students' voices in the literature

Students' voices have been present in only a minority of the studies on fd programmes. Tierney and Slack's study (2005) included narratives which outlined the students' perceived lack of interest and support from managers. This was corroborated in the findings of Kendall et, al. (2012) who, in addition, found that students felt that there was a lack of joined-up working between the HEIs and workplace practitioners, managers and

mentors. Students both in health and child-care settings found that there was a lack of awareness in the wider team of the new roles created by fd qualifications. This resulted in a crisis of confidence in the students taking on new responsibilities. For example, in the transition from the assistant to the practitioner roles they felt that they were “stepping on the toes” of those in established roles (Selfe et al. 2002). For some of the students the foundation degree programme proved to be challenging because there was no structure in place to ensure that the theory they studied at university was linked to the practice in their work-based settings. Some expressed the opinion that the mentor's role was under-utilised, or that mentors were unclear of what was expected of them (Smith and Betts 2003).

Below Jenica Richards reviews reflections from the workshop at RaPAL's 2014 conference where she had shared insights of her HE journey. Jenica had embarked on the fd with the hope of gaining a higher level of education as well as a pay rise for the additional skills and responsibilities she would undertake. She found the course challenging but engaged with it successfully. Though she completed the course, for her and so many others like her, there was no pay increase.

Let's reason

In a Caribbean context the word *reason* means to speak freely, to simply tell it as it is.

Reflections on time management

I can still remember the first day at Uni and one of the first discussions we had around time management. The tutor posed the question: 'How much study time do you think this course will require per week?'

Well, I thought, maybe about five to ten. How wrong was I? When she said 40 plus, I thought, does she mean hours or minutes? When it was confirmed that she meant hours, I thought, you know what, get me out of here, that's another working week on my working week! I did bounce back from that thought though and decided to give it a go.

I started reflecting... they encouraged reflection a lot on my programme. After reflecting on a typical day, I realised I was doing a lot, but on analysing what I had done. I realised how much time I was wasting because I was repeating the same activity maybe 2-3 times on a daily basis. I did this because nothing I did ever felt good enough for academic work. Yes, you hear that phrase a lot in lectures, 'You are now doing academic work!'

My diary became my best friend, in order to get home, work, study and all the unplanned aspects of my life managed, I had to keep a diary which was highlighted and colour-coordinated. This simple approach saved me so much time and frustration.

Reflections on language

My fellow students and I felt that some tutors would tell/teach us something new once, generally in a formal lecture style and expect us to get it and get on with the assignment, after all we were at university now and lecturers weren't there to hold our hands. When we didn't get it first time we would often hear phrases like, 'It's not rocket science you know.' They were right, it wasn't rocket science, but it might well have been as it was unfamiliar language. I often heard my inner voice screaming, could we discuss this? Could you get it to us another way? Was there another explanation, another approach to conveying the same message? Help! The looks on my colleagues' faces and the discussions that followed in the canteen assured me that I wasn't the only person in our group that was lost. In fact, the majority of us were.

Reflections on the workshop

When Peggy asked me if I would like to co-present a workshop to share a part of my story of being a mature non-traditional black female student, I was quite honoured. However, after thinking about it, doubt visited and lingered for a while. Could I do this? Why me? Will anyone be interested in my story? As I am getting older, I am becoming a lot more confident, so I sent a message to doubt, 'No, I won't let anything put me off.'

We felt that a creative way to get this group of professional educators to understand how I felt in some of the lectures was to introduce a language that was alien to them. To let them hear it and share their understanding of it after the first hearing. It was interesting to observe the participants as they listened to our recording of a poem in Jamaican Patois. I watched with interest as they engaged their total concentration, involving their whole bodies through forward posturing, some with contorted faces as they listened for a few minutes to the recording of the poem.

Our lectures were sometimes hours in length, why do educators think it's ok to talk at others using unfamiliar language for such long periods of time? Shouldn't educators know that this method is ineffective for the majority?

The second phase was to present the RapALers in our workshop with the written text in Patois and ask them to read and discuss. I observed moments when for some the light came on and once it did, they seemed encouraged to share. It was evident that learning was happening. Finally the poem was presented in written English. The feedback following the exercise was interesting, I recall hearing a participant say, and 'We got the gist when listening, but seeing it on paper supported the process of deciphering.' Some within the workshop had developed strategies for understanding the poem and shared their strategy and almost everyone acknowledged that the Jamaican patois version of the poem required re-reading to develop understanding.

I guess those were the messages we wanted to convey. I would love to implore HEI educators to support us mature students to enjoy and make the most of our HE opportunity by adapting non-traditional approaches to educational delivery, please. Most of us are non-traditional learners, because the traditional school system didn't work for us.

Louise Bennett and read by Peggy taken from

<http://thecaribbeancurrent.com/>

*Recommendations for mature students:
Ensure you engage in pre-course preparation
Invest in your Self Esteem and Confidence
Get yourself up to speed with IT
Get the family on board
Utilise support
Share- the good, the bad, the ugly!*

"Build resilience, you wont make it if you don't



*Recommendations for Tutors:
Longer Inductions please!
Small group tutorials
Differentiate the style of delivery – Minimise lectures
Use 'common' examples to help to engage us
Use the mature students' experience
Make allowances and fewer assumptions*

Conclusion

Griffiths (2003), Leathwood (2001), David (2009), Archer (2007) and Skeggs (2004) have identified that the area of gender and ethnicity in education are under-researched. All of the above have discussed the need for further research to be conducted with women. This excerpt is part of a wider PhD study exploring the lived experiences of black British and Caribbean women's experience of nursing education in higher education. This study will explore the impact of their experience on their professional identities as well as their salaries and how they built resilience, it also aims to add to the thus far sparse research on black women and WP education. Quantitative studies have highlighted that black women are disproportionately present in HE but a number of education researchers have called for further exploration which focusses on gender, race and experiences which contributes to feminist epistemologies (Hill-Collins, David 2009) and (Archer 2007).

Jenica's final words

To get through this course I had to build resilience. I had my first child at age 19. From the birth of my daughter, I resolved that her life would be different to mine. Since her birth, anything I put my mind to, I refuse to give up on. I am determined to see things through, I am a finisher. The building of resilience for me is

an ongoing process, my resilience construction started from the struggles of growing up in the 1970s in Birmingham as a black person of dual heritage, confronting the tensions of my own and other people's perception of my identity. Influenced by my mother and her strength of character, though many failed to complete the qualification, and understandably so, I persisted. I closed the workshop with quotes. I have learnt and am learning the power of words. Mature students must share the tensions and demands of work, study and family life, use support, but as the lyrics of the popular song of the 80s reminds us, "Search for the hero inside yourself". The harder the struggle, the sweeter the victory.



Peggy and Jenica's workshop at the conference

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RAPAL LITERACY CONFERENCE 2014

by Steph Taylor, College Leader, Offender Learning

Steph was a rapporteur at the RaPAL Conference.

A very warm welcome awaited visitors at the RaPAL Literacy Conference in Birmingham. Sallie Condy, Chairperson of RAPAL, gave a most enthusiastic welcome and update on the activities of the group.

Professor Linda Lang, Dean of Education of Health and Wellbeing from the University of Wolverhampton gave a keynote presentation on experiences in professional learning and the lifelong learning barriers and bridges to higher education. Linda spoke about how access to higher education has improved as previously only the extreme elite got into university. Now there are many bridges being built to higher education and better access to courses through partnerships between universities and schools with taster days and visits.

Professor Linda Lang talked at length about the new University Technical Colleges or UTCs for 14-18 year old students. Some are opening in September 2014. The universities are working with industry from the start. Health Futures is the new University Technical College opening in September 2015 with 23 partners across Wolverhampton for 14-19 year olds, adopting a careers-focus across its regional catchment area. [LEaP](#) was also mentioned which is "Learning Education and Progression", a course for first steps to higher education for which the response has been good.

The choice of workshops was excellent and it was difficult to choose as I wanted to go to them all. I chose "Mental Health Literacies" with Jonathan Berry, Director of the Community Health and Learning Foundation. With an excellent power point presentation, Jonathan gave facts and figures about health issues that affect different communities. It was a fascinating delivery of health facts and how preventable some deaths could be if literacy skills were improved. We also joined in with some gentle activities which brought laughter and amusement to the presentation. It really made me think about how we can link more health-related classroom activities in our literacy and social life skills setting in offender learning, my work area.

Lunch was a good time to network and I sat with a very friendly group and chatted about literacy, the morning talks and teaching in general.

Feeling refreshed, we returned to the main lecture theatre and Claire Collins gave an enthusiastic talk about digital literacies with a presentation of how we can use technology to enhance our teaching. Claire's passion was apparent, which is always great to experience. As I get older I think it gets more difficult to keep up with all the technology, so well done Claire for motivating us into talking about the new technology. Claire also had been working with a colleague in America and we linked up to hear about a project which was also very interesting. There was not enough time to hear all about the project as we needed to walk to the next workshop.

The last workshop was with Tara Furlong talking about her research work on literacy in letter writing. The case study shown was of work from two different solicitors and the difference in the text and writing. Tara's presentation was most professional and it was evident that Tara is very talented in the use of computer technology.

As Claire Collins mentioned earlier in the day, 'It is great to meet up with like-minded individuals that want to share good practice in literacy and education.'

I would like to congratulate RAPAL on an excellent conference. This has enthused me to join RAPAL. Also I would like to thank the West Midlands committee of NATECLA that supported me in attending the conference.

Steph Taylor
11th May 2014

Steph Taylor is a College Leader in Offender Learning and previously spent six years teaching young offenders literacy and life skills to 18-25 years in a young offenders' institution. Steph is passionate about raising standards in offender learning and providing a safe, creative and inspirational learning environment in the prison setting. She says, 'Offender Learning, as I always tell tutors, is an emotional rollercoaster as you either love it or hate it. When the students succeed and find a new life and a rehabilitation pathway, away from offending, it is immensely satisfying.'

Offender Learning is not an easy option for tutors as the average length of a class is 3 hours long. Therefore, tutors have to find inspirational and engaging activities to fill the lesson time. We help and encourage new tutors and provide support for the tutors. We are also working in collaboration with local universities on research projects and other agencies such as the British Red Cross and the British Council on new programmes of learning.'

If you would like to share ideas and good practice or chat about offender learning email Steph at steph.taylor@serco.com



You can view the 2014 conference materials [here](#), including Professor Linda Lang and Professor Sondra Cuban's keynotes and a video article from Isabel Osuna-Gatty and Ros Bauer. You can also access presentations from Jonathan Berry, Bex Ferriday and Genevieve Clarke and watch video recordings from Bob Read, Claire Collins and Tara Furlong.

This page is in the “members only” area so you will need to use the password **Bham2014** to gain access.

Reading changes lives

Genevieve Clarke

Genevieve Clarke, Programme Manager at The Reading Agency, on how their work brings together the themes of this year's conference.

It seemed like a dream - a conference combining literacy, health and workplaces as topics, all of which we deal with on a daily basis at [The Reading Agency](#). We're an independent charity, nearly eleven years old, with a mission to give everyone an equal chance in life by helping people become confident and enthusiastic readers - because everything changes when we read.

We've been working in the field of adult literacy since the start, encouraging our key national partners, the public library service, to link with local learning providers. The aim has been to weave creative reading activity, expertise and resources of libraries into the delivery of literacy provision whether formal or informal. This is based on our experience of observing that once engaged in an enjoyment of reading, learners are keen to continue, thus improving their skills in the process.

Six Book Challenge

Our focus in recent years has been on a very practical scheme, the [Six Book Challenge](#), which provides a flexible framework to get adults at every level of literacy to develop a new reading habit. And it works! At least 35,000 people registered for the Challenge in 2013 - through public libraries, adult and community learning, colleges, prisons and workplaces. Ninety per cent of those surveyed said they felt more confident about reading after taking part.

This brings me on to the second focus of the conference - workplaces. There's been a huge push to improve the literacy skills of the nation's workforce over the last decade under the current and previous governments. Trade union learning has played an especially important part and we've been working with unionlearn, the TUC's learning arm, and with the Campaign for Learning's Learning at Work Day (now a Week) to promote reading for pleasure in workplaces. Trade unions such as Usdaw, CWU, UNISON and Unite see the Six Book Challenge as an excellent way to engage people in a conversation about learning opportunities for themselves and for their families. Staff at McVitie's factory outside Manchester have worked with Stockport Library Service to make sure there's a wide selection of books on offer to challenge participants. Train drivers in Liverpool and Manchester have been trying out the scheme. And UNISON is encouraging its members in local councils in the East Midlands to get reading.

Now an increasing number of NHS Trust libraries are catching on to the idea of using the Six Book Challenge to draw support staff into using their collections. Staff at the Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust were recently treated to a visit from [Six Book Challenge ambassador and bestselling author Martina Cole](#) to promote the scheme. They've been able to extend it to some of their service users, especially in the eating disorders unit. The University Hospitals in Birmingham are also running the Challenge and the City Hospital, location for this RaPAL conference, is showing interest.

Meanwhile Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Trust are into their third year of the Six Book Challenge, this time running it across ten sites. In 2013 they ran it across five hospitals and two outlying sites with 168 people taking part, including laundry and night shift workers, with 96% of participants completing the scheme. All of those surveyed said that they'd recommend it to their colleagues. Managers remarked upon a positive impact on staff that do not have English as their first language and also saw the Challenge as a way for staff to enhance their reading and writing skills.

Reading well

This activity in support of literacy is taking place alongside an enormous interest in the strong links between reading and health. For instance, a study by Verghese, et al (2003) indicates that reading can reduce the risk of dementia by 35% and in 2008 in Canada, regular reading was shown to increase health literacy.

In response to this, The Reading Agency has developed two strands of work under the banner [Reading Well](#) which bring together self-help reading and reading for pleasure. Public library services have long been running books on prescription schemes with local NHS services whereby GPs signpost patients to their local library. Now, working with the Society of Chief Librarians, we have initiated a national programme in England based on an original scheme developed in Cardiff by Professor Neil Frude. The Reading Well Books on the Prescription list provides self-help reading for adults based on cognitive behavioural therapy for a range of common mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, phobias and some eating disorders. It has been endorsed by a range of national organisations, including the Royal Colleges of General Practitioners, Nursing and Psychiatrists, the Department of Health through its Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Programme (IAPT), the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies, and The British Psychological Society and Mind. The next steps include developing a similar list focused on dementia.

The second strand, Mood-boosting Books, has been focused on promoting collections of uplifting fiction, non-fiction and poetry titles. These have been chosen by reading groups with an eye to different audiences such as young people and the elderly. We have also worked with Macmillan Cancer Support to involve people who have been diagnosed with cancer in recommending a special list of titles for cancer patients and their carers.

Reading for enjoyment and information truly can transform lives and should be an essential part of all literacy provision for adults. One of our Six Book Challenge completers, [Declan Lapham](#), in his twenties and from south Wales, put it very succinctly: 'Reading comes into everything you do in life – you aren't going to get very far without it.'

References

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- Murray, T, et al. (2008) *Health Literacy in Canada: A Healthy Understanding*. [Here](#)

Workplace texts: what do they tell us about the ways in which writing is used in small businesses?

Sue Grief

Sue worked as a teacher, manager, development adviser and research manager in the field of adult literacy. She was involved in a number of research projects for the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), including several that focused on writing. Now retired, Sue is undertaking a PhD at the Institute of Education, University of London.

The workshop focused on evidence that has been gathered as part of a small research project undertaken for a PhD. This took the form of examples of everyday texts from four small businesses and extracts from interviews with the writers. I was keen to know how the participants in the workshop would respond to the texts I am currently analysing; and, in turn, I hoped the participants would find them of interest in relation to their various roles as teachers, teacher trainers and researchers. In this article, as in the workshop, I will first provide some background to the project and attempt to give a flavour of the types of the texts in question and the contexts in which they are used. I will then summarise the observations we made on the roles the texts play in the workplace and the nature of the writing they include. There are a number of theoretical strands to the analysis of the data but this is still a work in progress and as space is limited I will not attempt a discussion of these here.

The research project arose from personal interest. Towards the end of my career I was involved in several research projects on the teaching of writing in adult literacy but became increasingly aware that I understood very little about the writing the students who I encountered, actually did at work. I sensed that what many of them were looking for, when they enrolled for classes, was success in the type of writing used in education, writing they felt they had not fully mastered at school. They seemed not to value the writing they undertook at work. My initial question was very open: 'How is writing used in small businesses?'

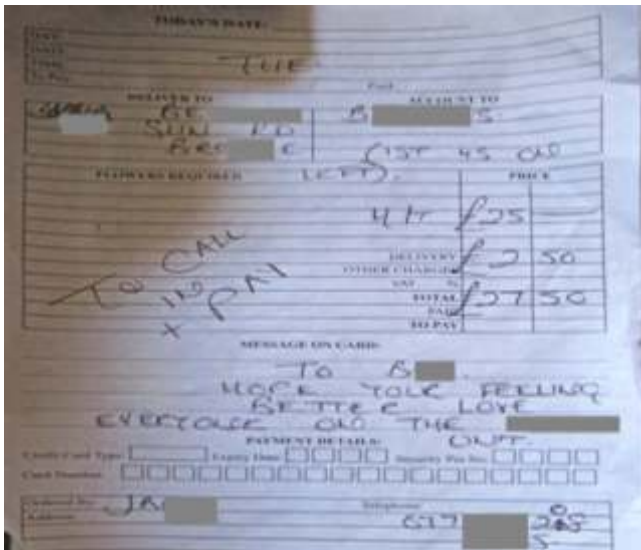
The project is based around case studies of four small businesses. These could be classed as micro-businesses as all have fewer than 10 employees. All are located in the same small town and were selected after initial interviews with personnel from 20 businesses of this type. In none does writing constitute the product of the work. They include a hairdressing salon, a florist's shop, an independent garage and a self-employed builder. I have approached writing in these case studies as a situated social practice and, although I cannot claim to have undertaken a full ethnographic study, my methods were guided by ethnographic principles. I used semi-structured interviews, observation, my own experience as a customer and detailed examination of texts. I have chosen not to approach the study from an educational perspective. I have positioned the people who work in these businesses as the experts in relation to their work, including the writing this involves, and I have deliberately avoided any focus on literacy needs. At least three of the people I interviewed made reference to individual problems with different aspects of writing but, aside from light-hearted references to other people's handwriting, no one I interviewed thought writing was ever the cause of problems at work.

Two seemingly contradictory responses that I received, from almost all of the owners I interviewed, provide a starting point for understanding the role writing plays in businesses of this type. The first was to insist that the staff did very little writing, coupled with surprise that I should find their writing of interest; the second was to stress that writing was of real importance in their work.

One example that sheds light on these responses is the use of the florist's order. This is an A5 form, designed specifically for florists and obtained from a supplier. It is filled in, standing at the counter, as the person in the front of the shop speaks with the customer, face to face or on the phone. The writer uses simple phrases and

abbreviations to record what flowers are required and completes just as much of the rest of the form as he or she judges to be necessary. The line for "Today's date" is always left blank as this is not relevant to their system and the address of the recipient is usually omitted if the order comes through a funeral director they know well. However, additional information, not requested by the form, may be added to make things clear for others who will need to use the form, such as special directions for the delivery driver or a note that the customer will call in later to pay.

Figure 1. The order form is used at different times, in different locations and by different people, as the following quotation from the owner explains.



The order sheet does a lot of travelling. It starts off near the till then it goes into the folder and from the folder it goes into the (florist's) make up basket and from there it goes back into the shop to be wrapped. That piece of paper then gets transferred onto the board for V to pick up and then to deliver the order. It's a well-travelled piece of paper but it seems to work well.

In fact this does not tell the whole story, as I have attempted to illustrate in Figure 2 below.

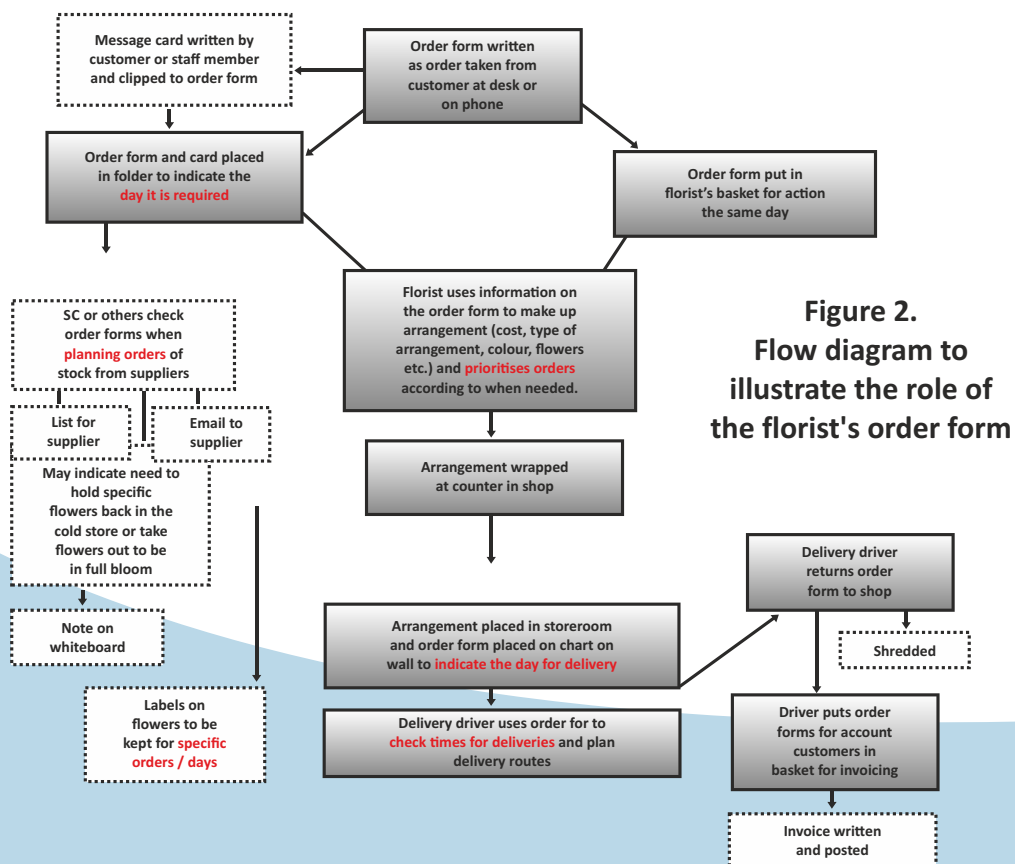


Figure 2.
Flow diagram to illustrate the role of the florist's order form

The orders are placed in the appropriate section of a plastic folder with sections for each day of the week and the owner checks these regularly to ensure that she orders the flowers needed. The florist also checks the orders and may put flowers in the cold store to keep them in bud or bring them out to open up in time for a wedding or funeral. This involves writing labels on containers and reminders on a whiteboard. Once the flowers are delivered, the orders are returned to the shop and, in the case of account customers, placed in another basket for the person who writes out the monthly invoices. This one written text is central to the work-flow of the shop.

Some texts are for personal use only and often take the form of lists or brief notes. I looked at an example that included nine or more different pieces of information, written at different angles and in different inks, on both sides of one scrap of paper (see Figure 3 below).



These were written by the builder while he was out and about during the day. The notes are for his use only so he holds the context in his head and simply records the details he might forget: measurements, quantities, prices and telephone numbers.

Last night I had to write something for an invoice so I wrote it on my hand and then M. (had a pad on) the dashboard so I then scribbled it down on that and the address because it was his job and I didn't know the name or the address, chucked it in my lunchbox so I had it when I got home to write the invoice. Bear in mind that was written going at 50 miles an hour on the road...

In our discussions on these and other examples, a number of observations were shared.

Writing is done on the job

Whether it is the builder travelling at 50 miles an hour, the florist completing the order form as she speaks with the customer or the garage mechanic filling in a job card on his workbench, writing on a day to day basis is usually done in less than ideal circumstances. It also needs to be completed quickly and efficiently.

Information is written directly onto forms, where these are used, with minimal time for editing. Forms provide a frame for the writing, requiring the writer to complete the essential information only. If they are used for internal use, shared conventions, including abbreviations and other graphic devices, are employed to save time. There are of course some exceptions such as the builder's estimates and invoices which are planned and drafted at home in the evening, before being typed up by his wife.

Writing is central to the management and coordination of the work

The florist's order illustrates the way written texts support the management of work. Timing is important in the preparation of flowers and in Figure 1 the text in red highlights the way the order form is used to coordinate the work and ensure the correct timing is achieved. The workshop diary at the garage and the hairdresser's appointment book are also used to manage time. The owner of the hairdressing salon said that the most important thing, in relation to writing in the salon was, '... making sure the appointments are booked with the right allocated time.' The stylists not only need to record the exact day and time of the appointment, they also need to allow the time required for the specific treatment and ensure they make bookings for colleagues at times they are available.

Writing is an essential part of the job

Almost all the writing I observed was integral to the ongoing activity of the business. It is used to communicate with other members of staff or with the customer as well as to keep information safe for future use. Although some people felt more comfortable with writing than others, no-one I spoke with expressed any doubts about the necessity of the writing they undertook at work. Aside from records of hours worked, none of the day to day writing is done for purposes of accountability. I noted that this is in marked contrast to the writing described in recent studies of larger organisations. These have tended to focus on the impact of globalisation, the 'New Work Order' and total quality management and feature writing that is often seen by workers as additional to the requirements of the work process.

Texts are collaborative

Participants commented on the fact that unlike most texts in educational settings many workplace texts involve a number of different writers. This is true of the workshop diary in the garage and the job card that doubles as an invoice. Others, such as the florist's order form may be written by one person but in the knowledge that others will need to read and use the information. Completing a workplace form in these contexts involves taking the needs of others into account and is far from being simply a mechanical exercise.

Texts are multimodal

Writing is used alongside other modes of communication. In many of the texts I looked at, there were examples of non-linguistic features of writing being used to convey meaning, such as capital letters for emphasis and text written at an angle, underlined or circled. Colour is used to highlight new or important information and scraps of dress materials may be attached to wedding orders. The visual aspects of some texts were also noted, such as the hairdresser's appointment book. In this the stylists add appointments over time, building up a timetable for the day in a tabular format using shared conventions, in the form of diagonal and squiggly lines, to mark out the allocation of time.

The location of a text has significance

The location in which a text is placed can be meaningful, as in the example of the florist's order form. I noted the way the builder spoke of placing important information in his wallet to keep it safe and how the job card/invoices are placed on the reception desk in the garage, when a job is completed.

People write more than they think they do

People often do more writing than they think. Participants in the workshop had found this to be true in other contexts.



The people I had interviewed, once they were challenged to think about it, had also been surprised by the amount of writing their work entailed. The texts, particularly those that are for internal use only, are very brief and can look scruffy, incomplete and sometimes even chaotic. However, they do the job. Perhaps the most striking observation made at the workshop was the comment that many of the completed forms we looked at would not pass an assessment but, on the other hand, a form completed to the standard required for assessment might be neither practical nor appropriate in the context of a busy workplace where speed is of the essence and shared knowledge can be assumed. Texts of this type are easy to overlook or simply categorise as repetitive or routine, but analysis shows that those writing them require a good understanding of the work of the business and need to take careful account of the needs of their audience. They must write quickly, accurately and legibly in challenging situations and exercise judgement about the information that it is necessary to record. As described by Kress (2010) in his work on the Social Semiotic Theory of Multimodality, it is possible to see this writing, not in terms of what it lacks but as the effective and sometimes creative use of the available resources for meaning making within the constraints of the workplace context.

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Juggling digital communication and exploding paperwork

Sondra Cuban

Professor Sondra Cuban is a professor and director of the Adult and Higher Education programme in Woodring College, with an interdisciplinary background in adult and higher education. Her areas of interest are in higher education and e-learning, service-learning, international and comparative education and community technologies for marginalised groups. Sondra has worked in a range of educational settings including prisons, libraries, community colleges, and non-profit organisations, and with disenfranchised groups and non-traditional students. Pivotal in her work is academic activism, with community-university partnerships, researching and teaching these through intersectional and critical approaches using ethnographic methods and with social justice aims.

In her video keynote, Sondra highlights findings from her ESRC study and subsequent book, *Deskilling Migrant Women in the Global Care Industry*.



She focusses on the differing literacy practices the women take part in, interweaving the separate work and family literacy approaches they use. Highlighting what she describes as, “text-based tactics”, Sondra illustrates how a predominance of paper-based documents and a lack of digital literacies in the workplace are used to restrict migrant workers to subordinate spaces in the UK Care industry. For example, she discusses the fact that highly skilled women were chosen for their professional skills as well as their experience for undertaking copious documentation. However, the paper-based workload though unnecessary, had to be manually duplicated, in essence as a means of social control by capturing every aspect of the women's work life. Conversely, her study highlights how “technological prowess and digital strategies” empowered this same group of migrant female workers to juxtapose with their professional lives, the management of their domestic, family and social lives in their countries of origin from their UK base. Sondra's study provides narratives from migrant women who communicate with children, parents, siblings and other family members through phones, internet and computers. Ranging from engaging with children through text messages on a daily basis, sometimes using single words to convey important messages, to liaising with teachers in schools and wider families members though internet mediums such as Skype.

You can access Sondra's Keynote [here](#).

Patient Stories

Rebecca Ferriday

Rebecca Ferriday started her career in adult education as a literacy tutor before becoming a teacher educator in FE (running and delivering the PGCE and Cert Ed), but her growing love of technology has led her to become a Learning Technology Manager in HE. Despite moving from away teaching literacy, she still looks for links between this and her current role and keeps a keen eye on how the delivery of and interpretation of literacy (and now adult and digital literacies) is managed.

When studying to become a healthcare professional, learning medical theory and hard facts can become all-consuming, often to the detriment of equally important concepts and skills such as empathy and understanding of patient need.

In order to bring about a greater balance between learning medical terminology and learning to understand how a patient feels, filming interviews with individuals who have been affected by illness have been standard practice at Cardiff University's School of Healthcare Sciences for several years. These films are made available to students to watch in their own time (via the university's in-house 'YouTube-alike' media player), or on the university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and students are encouraged by lecturing staff to watch them. Historically (and typically), this hasn't happened. Student uptake has been virtually non-existent, and the films languish in digital purgatory, never to be viewed by those for whom they were intended.

I have always believed that people learn when they are actually *doing* something: when they are active contributors rather than passive viewers. I wanted to pursue this belief, and use the patient story films as a basis for an idea I had about producing bite-sized pieces of online learning. I met with the lecturer who had made the original films, and we decided to look at how to re-purpose these films so that they might make more of an impact.

Each of the films was 30 minutes or more in length. With the best will in the world, watching a static camera filming somebody sitting in an armchair and talking for more than a few minutes can be a dull and passive experience. Not only that, but the few students who had watched these films had no way of gauging whether learning and understanding had taken root. There was nothing to assess, per se.

And so it was agreed that we needed to make the films more engaging, and that to do this they needed to be broken into shorter chunks. To gauge learning and understanding, students could be asked questions after each clip. These questions could be open in order to gauge individual opinion, or closed, completed as multiple choice or true/false style questions to assess understanding.

The following strategy was employed:

1. Students watch a brief film clip
2. They are then presented with a couple of online questions
3. Once the questions have been answered, the activity moves to the next film clip
4. Stages 2 and 3 are repeated until the film is shown in its entirety
5. Links to useful journal articles papers, websites are provided, either interspersed throughout the activity or at the end.

Once authored, activities are uploaded to the university's VLE and the option to track student access is switched on. This means that lecturers can grab user statistics and see how many times the activities have been accessed, and look at the responses given to questions.

The re-working of the videos has been promising. The first activity that was piloted had over 500 hits within three weeks of being uploaded. Subsequent activities have had an equal hit rate.

Based on these “quick and dirty” forms of assessing success, expectations have been exceeded. Moreover, lecturers delivering other curricula have also expressed an interest in dusting off their own patient story films in order to receive the same online treatment.

An Australian Perspective: literacies, lifelong learning, health, well-being, partnerships and workplaces

Isabel Osuna-Gatty and Ros Bauer



The video article on the following page was shown live at the 2014 RaPAL Conference in Birmingham. In the film, Isabel Osuna-Gatty and Ros Bauer explain how the literacies projects they have worked on in Australia have been grounded in the [UNESCO](#) view of 'literacy as a fundamental human right and the foundation for lifelong learning' and include a range of partnerships in the contexts of health and well-being. Participants from the projects also talk about their needs and their experiences.

Isabel and Ros explain how the literacies projects and training programs they have worked on with aboriginal and other marginalised communities have been underpinned by a combination of social practice and skills based approaches.





As a mental health professional and an English as a Second Language teacher, Isabel Osuna-Gatty has worked in literacies programs in South America and, more recently, has been involved in the funding and implementation of work-based literacies programmes across Australia.

Isabel provides official statistics from Australia which show that almost 60% of Australian adults don't have sufficient functional literacy to understand and apply general information about their health and wellbeing. Isabel's work to address this issue focuses on culturally and

linguistically diverse communities across Western Sydney. Her projects include the deconstruction of text in mental health literature and offering workshops which seek to demystify mental health and address stigma associated with mental illness. The literacies and health workshops that she facilitates provide opportunities for community members to share their knowledge, whilst learning about tools and resources in a non-judgmental and open environment.

Ros Bauer, an adult language, literacy and numeracy specialist, then talks through some Australian initiatives around the opportunities and challenges that exist in workplaces with regards to reading, writing, listening, speaking, using ICT and numeracy. She also provides us with an in-depth case study on the workplace literacies project she has been working on in a remote Aboriginal community, which led to her receiving the prestigious 'Excellence in Adult Language Literacy Numeracy Practice' at the Australian Training Awards in 2013

You can access the video article [here](#)



***Reading Circles for Adult Emergent Readers, Insights in Adult Learning* by Sam Duncan**

Author: Sam Duncan

Title: *Reading for Pleasure and Reading Circles for Adult Emergent Readers, Insights in Adult Learning*

Cost: £7.95

65 Pages

ISBN: 978-1-86201-823-5

Reviewed by Vicky Duckworth

Vicky Duckworth is a senior lecturer and MA lead in Further Education and Training and Schools' University Lead at Edge Hill University, UK. She has published on a range of issues in the field of literacy, critical and emancipatory approaches to education, social justice, widening participation, inclusion and community engagement.

Reading can have an intense effect on self-esteem, confidence and making sense of the world around us. This short volume is an engaging and timely book which encourages us to explore how rewarding reading is and how it provides opportunities for readers to make meaningful connections between literacy and literature.

Through the use of insightful case studies we are taken into the worlds of members of reading circles. For example, we explore Anna's reading journey. After leaving school without qualifications and working mainly in shops, now a full-time mum of two young children, she has joined a reading circle. This circle has developed Anna's confidence, fuelled her imagination and extended her social network where words on a page, spoken words and friendships are threaded together. The case study really illuminates how reading and reading in conjunction with other people can provide a space for people to share ideas and have fun while doing it.

Following on from Sam's previous work, *Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development* (2012), this book is more of focussed on "emergent readers". This title also focuses in greater detail on what "reading for pleasure" means beyond the context of reading circles, and how it relates to reading development.

Sam takes what could be a complex topic and makes it accessible and rich not only in terms of reading but also in terms of sharing creativity, world pictures and diverse journeys. Although not drawn upon explicitly in the text, I was reminded of Paulo Freire's (2006) "culture circles" and how reading and exploring the concepts and ideas through dialogic engagement can generate consciousness-raising, liberation, empowerment and transformation (Duckworth, 2014) and in doing so the subject 'has the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and transform [their] reality' (Freire, 2002, p. 4).

The book is well-written, engaging and motivational. So much so, that after reading it I feel enthused to start a reading circle and to set up my own reading group. Any takers

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***Learning Trajectories, Violence and Empowerment Amongst Adult Basic Skills Learners*, by Vicky Duckworth**

Author: Vicky Duckworth

Title: *Learning Trajectories, Violence and Empowerment Amongst Adult Basic Skills Learners*

Cost: £90

214 Pages

ISBN: 9780415828727

Reviewed by Shelley Tracey

Shelley Tracey was a teacher educator in HE specialising in adult literacies. She is now developing her practice of using poetry with adult learners in a range of community arts settings. Shelley has recently completed her PhD on teacher creativity and is training as a Poetry Therapist. She is interested in multimodal literacies and their capacity for inclusion. Despite living in Northern Ireland she has made valuable contributions to RaPAL and supported RaPAL's work for many years.

Many of the learners in adult basic skills classes arrive there as a result of challenging experiences in their schooling or personal lives or communities, or perhaps all of these. Focusing on the stories of 16 learners from Oldham, Duckworth explores the complex factors which have impacted on the research participants' learning trajectories. She frames their experiences in terms of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence. The learners' experiences are located within a carefully constructed theoretical framework, which establishes the foundations of the stigma which these learners have endured. At the same time, the distancing effect of theory is counteracted by Duckworth's references to her own experiences as a member of the community to which the learners belong.

The dual positioning of the author as insider/outsider researcher (Stringer, 1999) poses a challenge for the discourse of this text. It has to negotiate between the academic analysis and the emotive stories of learners who have experienced disempowerment and also found ways to renegotiate aspects of personal power. Duckworth manages the dichotomy between the analytical and personal effectively, setting the learners' stories at centre stage in each of the chapters and then standing back and reflecting on their experiences, relating them to the concepts of symbolic violence.

The use of not only social, cultural and economic capital in this book as well as "glamour" and "muscle" capital might, on the one hand, be seen as an over-elaboration of Bourdieu's notion of capital in this text. However, the notion of linguistic capital is clearly explained, and adds a useful layer to Bernstein's elaborated and restricted codes (1971). Overall, the operations of these different aspects of capital are explained effectively through the text.

This is a courageous book which requires courageous readers. It is not for those who might believe that the process of transformation that occurs through involvement in lifelong learning is simple and straightforward. Nor is it for those education policy makers whose technicist policies manifest a belief that those who are unsuccessful in their learning are somehow responsible for their own failures. If your perception of literacy is of a school-based set of competences, unrelated to social practice, then you might well leave this book off your reading list.

I recommend that you read this text if you are a researcher or educator concerned about the relationship between education and social justice, and the injustices and disadvantages with which the majority of adult basic skills learners have to contend. You will also find enlightening the insights into learners' literacy practices and the beliefs and values which these practices embody. This text carries on the ethnographic

tradition from Barton and Hamilton's innovative *Local Literacies* (1998), which explored and described people's literacy practices and events in Lancaster. Duckworth's text focuses more on the emotional and social impacts of negative learning experiences than *Local Literacies* does.

Learners' personal accounts are presented with extracts from interviews; the use of their own words renders them poignant and painful. A particularly evocative example illustrating symbolic violence (in this case interwoven with physical violence) is an incident in the early school career of Stella (p. 45). Stella was left-handed when she came to school. Her comments are in italics; the other words are Duckworth's:

The teacher tied me left hand to a chair and tried to get me to write with me right hand ... distressed I went home heartbroken.

From then on she would go in school for her mark and then "wag it".

The teachers didn't care about us scruffy kids ... kids from poor families were left to do whatever they liked.

Stella clearly identifies how as a member of the working class and being poor, her tribal identity was seen as a blemish on her individual character. Moreover, struggling to read and write, her body was used for abomination.

Despite their many challenges, most of the learners do manage to transcend them and achieve success in their learning and growth in their self-confidence. However, as Duckworth shows, there are no fairy-tale endings; the successes are interwoven with sacrifices and losses of significant relationships.

This is an innovative text in its exploration of the learning experiences of people in marginalised communities. It combines scholarly analysis with what Dadds (1995) calls the "passionate inquiry" of the educator who is committed to researching and improving his or her practice. A further achievement of *Learning Trajectories* is its challenge to the simplistic discourses of the knowledge economy, which fail to take into account the cultural and social issues affecting learners in disadvantaged communities. This book also opens up effectively the connection between literacy and transformation in a chapter of the same name, offering useful insights for practitioners in adult basic skills settings.

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***Deskilling Migrant Women in the Global Care Industry* by Sondra Cuban**

Author: Sondra Cuban

Title: *Deskilling Migrant Women in the Global Care Industry*

Cost: £49.78

249 pages

ISBN: 978-0-230-342330-0

Reviewed by Peggy Warren

Peggy Warren teaches in the field of work-based learning. She is currently undertaking research on women working in the healthcare field who have transitioned from vocational to academic studies.

I came to this book from personal and professional interests. I work within the National Health Service and I am currently undertaking a PhD which explores the nursing education experiences of postwar black Caribbean immigrant women in the United Kingdom. *Deskilling Migrant Women* is a true page-turner; it invites the reader into the private and professional lives of highly skilled, professionally educated women who migrated from the Philippines, India, Poland and Zimbabwe to fill what they perceived to be qualified healthcare positions here in the UK. The women were not expecting to be handed professional roles on a silver platter; they fully understood that they would develop into the UK roles following appropriate conversion programmes. “Deskilling”, the author tells us (49), ‘generally refers to the underutilization of skills leading to contradictory social mobility.’

This book provides accounts of exploitation, subjugated professional trajectories, the women's acceptance of lost dreams and subordinated (deskilled) roles as well as, in a few cases, narratives of grit, determination, resilience and liberation. Sondra explicates the complexity of some of the issues she had to consider and work through as an academic researcher. These included, power relations and ethics. She outlines the tensions that presented as she considered her positionality in the study with her participants and described (2), ‘a feeling of being implicated by using people in the study who were migrating on precarious visas.’

The theory of [intersectionality](#) (‘a theory of specificity, of examining intra-group differences and acknowledging how women are different from one another... [which] puts inequalities at the centre rather than the margins of social theory’ [18-19]) is used to examine intra-group differences through an exploration of the women's experiences as well as their gendered identities as migrant women, outsiders and foreign staff. The author focuses on the women's race, gender, class and language and discusses how each aspect of the migrant women's lives were used to discriminate against them within a work setting. The author ascribes to an ethics of care, giving a voice to, as well as protecting the participants. The women's voices are presented through narratives of their experiences. There is story after story of exorbitant fees paid to unscrupulous agents and accounts of false and unfulfilled promises made by employers and agents who promised that the women's overseas degrees would be respected in the UK following short term conversion courses. All were promised training, financial support to get started in the world of work and respectable remuneration as well as professional recognition. Their realities however were worlds apart from the promises. The women shared experiences of ten-hour shifts, duplicated paperwork production, mandatory National Vocational Qualifications, personal and professional isolation, subjugation by British colleagues, patients and managers.

Financial support was received by a few in the form of a loan from their managers to purchase a car for working in a rural setting, but was only levered to keep them in their subordinated spaces. The women explained what the impact of failing to convert their “academic capital” into “economic capital” had on their health and wellbeing, describing somewhat depressive episodes. They shared how they chastised

themselves for not reading more in preparation for the elusive conversion courses they lived in the hope would one day materialise. This self-chastening occurred even though they were working in excess of ten-hour days, sometimes with only a 45 minute break.

For the majority of the migrant women the high cost of living in the UK, juxtaposed with the responsibilities to financially support families and maintain homes in their countries of origin, created a great deal of mental and emotional anguish. In addition, aspects of their identity were called into question as they found themselves in what the author (142) describes as the “occupational dustbin” transitioning from registered professional status to “care-worker” status. Care-workers in the UK are neither registered nor deemed to be a position of importance amongst the wider healthcare professionals.

This books packs a lot in. I would recommend it not only to those interested in the fields of gender or health. This would be suitable for anyone doing research and wanting to gain insights into a range of theories to support their study. In my opinion, the author has done a stalwart job of underpinning her findings with theories that are probably somewhat unconventional. She succeeds in stimulating the reader to explore some of the non-traditional approaches to ethnographic research methods and methodology.

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. Our journal is now produced online and so we welcome articles, reviews, reports, commentaries, images or video 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 Ireland, 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.

We want to encourage new writers as well as those with experience and to cover a range of topics. We aim to have three different kinds of articles in the journal plus a reviews section; these are slightly different in length and focus. We welcome illustration and graphics for any of the sections and now have the facility to embed audio and video files into the journal. The journal has a different theme for each edition but we welcome general contributions too.

Below you will see more details about the different themes and topics:

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.

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.

3. Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives

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

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

Reviews

Reviews and reports of books, articles and materials (including online materials) should be between 50 to 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 to 3 line biography and your contact details. You can write the review based on your experience of using the book, article or materials in your role as practitioner, teacher trainer, and researcher or as a student.

Submitting your work

1. If you are responding to a call for articles via the RaPAL email list or directly by an editor you will have been given the email address of the editor(s) for submitting your work, together with a deadline date and the theme of the journal.
2. If you are submitting a piece of work that you would like RaPAL to consider for publication that has not been written as a result of a call for articles, please send it to journal@rapal.org.uk in the first instance. The journal coordinator will then let you know what the next steps will be.
3. All contributions should have the name of the author(s), a title and contact email address and telephone number. You should also include a short 2 to 3 line biography. Sections, sub-sections and any images should be clearly indicated or labelled (further guidance on image size is on the website www.rapal.org.uk).
4. All referencing should follow the Harvard system.
5. Articles should be word processed in a sans serif font, double-spaced with clearly numbered pages.
6. The article should be sent to journal@rapal.org.uk

What happens next?

1. Editors are appointed for each edition of the journal. They review all contributions and will offer feedback, constructive comment and suggestions for developing the piece as appropriate.
2. Articles submitted for the third category 'Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives' will be peer-reviewed by an experienced academic, research or practitioner in the field in addition to being edited.
3. The editor(s) will let you know whether your article has been accepted and will send you a final copy before publication.

If you have any questions, please contact the journal coordinator by emailing journal@rapal.org.uk

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