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# RaPAL

Free Taster Issue September 2013



# Journal

# The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

## Who we are

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

## What we do

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

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

### Why not join in?

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

The RaPAL Journal is also available from EBSCO Information Services.

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

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# Editorial

## Sandie Stratford

Welcome to a free taster issue of the RaPAL Journal. RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacy) is a professional body supporting all those who work either in education or in other fields where everyday literacy, language and numeracy practices are the main focus. RaPAL produces a journal three times a year covering major and newly emerging 'literacies' themes.

We produced our last taster journal in 2006 when circumstances were very different: ESOL was offered widely and funded reasonably well; the Skills for Life strategy was underway and adult literacy had emerged from the ashes of Cinderella's kitchen into the sunlight of mainstream adult provision. Literacy teachers had led the way in creating the 'learning infrastructure' which is now the height of pedagogical orthodoxy.

### So Why is RaPAL Different?

RaPAL is a friendly, independent network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult basic education. It encourages a broad range of collaborative and reflective research involving all participants in literacy, language and numeracy work as partners; it values the involvement of students; it critically examines the assumptions on which literacy and numeracy practice is based; it challenges the myths put about by successive governments (for example that gaps in literacy cause unemployment or correlate with low intelligence; that parents pass on literacy difficulties to their children; that literacy consists of a narrow set of discrete skills; that people are to blame for their lack of skills). We have strong links with literacy specialists in other countries, including Australia, the USA, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. We support teachers in initial training as well as through Continuing Professional Development in adopting increasingly democratic methods.

### Why a Taster Journal?

Since the election of the coalition government in 2010, funding for 'traditional' adult education has been seriously threatened, and much literacies learning is now taking place within the 16-19 sector, or the so-called 'third sector' (voluntary or charitable organisations). The terms 'English' and 'mathematics' have replaced 'literacy' and 'numeracy' in the vocabulary of policy makers. The rationale for a taster magazine is to make the ethos of RaPAL available to newcomers to the literacy scene. It aims to lay before the reader a selection of articles reflecting RaPAL's search for an authentic alternative to the 'tick box' mindset of the target-obsessed culture which happened to

coincide with the Skills for Life agenda, and more recently, the Functional Skills agenda.

### What's in the Taster Journal 2013?

We've brought together a selection of our best articles from recent issues. It was tempting to 'update' published articles to keep up with changes – on an almost daily basis – of government policy and procedures. We decided instead to present the articles as a 'snapshot', accurate at the time of their publication, and to continue to alert members, via the email circulation list and the website, to significant change as it happens. **Sarah Freeman's** useful summary of the developments in adult literacy provision in the last 7 years sets the Taster Journal in its historical context. **Alison Wedgbury** offers an historical perspective on the rapidly changing teacher training qualifications in England from the 1970s to 2013. **Peggy Warren** draws on her own research to present case studies of black female work-based learners benefitting from Skills for Life classes. **Judith Swift** continues the historical overview, celebrating the success of 'unionlearn' and the difference it has made in many working people's lives and beyond. **Pip McDonald** outlines a range of tools by which 'New Media literacy' is made accessible to literacy learners of all ages; Pip explains some of the advantages of using digital technology. In a one-page easy read, **Roberta Scott** shares how, as a student on a Numeracy tutors' course, she discovers a creative method for reflection using digital media. Finally **Sally Haywood**, a recent graduate from the Literacy subject specialists' course, gives an enthusiastic review of Hughes and Schwab's *Teaching Adult Literacy: Principles and Practice*, 2010.

The RaPAL Journal is produced 3 times a year, and is distributed electronically. We depend solely upon membership subscription. Members keep in touch via an electronic circulation list, and regional advocates use Skype to keep our carbon footprint modest. We are currently holding annual or biannual one-day conferences, and sometimes in conjunction with NIACE (National Institute Adult and Continuing Education) and UCU (University College Union).

We hope this Taster Journal will give you a feel for RaPAL, and a perspective on the current thinking in the field of literacies. Why not join us?

**The Taster Journal 2013 was edited by Irene Schwab, Sandie Stratford and Sarah Freeman.**  
**Production Editor: Anne Chester**

# The Period 2006 – 2013 in the Development of Adult Literacy Provision in England

Sarah Freeman

When	The History of move to Functional Skills	By Whom
March 2004	White paper 'Getting on in business, getting on at work'	<b>Government</b> <a href="http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20071104165907/http://dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/index.shtml">http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20071104165907/http://dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/index.shtml</a>
End 2006	Publication of The Leitch Review on 'Skills'	<b>Government</b> - see references below
2007	Publication of the Functional Skills standards	<b>QCA</b> <a href="http://www2.ofqual.gov.uk/downloads/category/68-functional-skills-subject-criteria">http://www2.ofqual.gov.uk/downloads/category/68-functional-skills-subject-criteria</a>
Feb 2011	Evaluation of the Functional Skills Pilot Summative Report	<b>QDCA</b> <a href="http://www.great-learning.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Evaluation_of_the_Functional_Skills_Pilot_Summative_Report-feb-11.pdf">http://www.great-learning.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Evaluation_of_the_Functional_Skills_Pilot_Summative_Report-feb-11.pdf</a>
2012	10 exam boards now offering FS English E1-L2	<b>See</b> <a href="http://www.guroo.info/functional-skills-info/functional-skills-exam-boards/">http://www.guroo.info/functional-skills-info/functional-skills-exam-boards/</a>
2012	Skills Funding Statement 2012-15	<b>Department BIS</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/82774/bis-12-p172x-skills-funding-statement-2012-2015.pdf">https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/82774/bis-12-p172x-skills-funding-statement-2012-2015.pdf</a>

"This is an exciting time to be involved in literacy education. Wherever we turn, written texts of some kind are part of our lives. From the MP3 player to the DIY shop, written language, pictures, diagrams mediate our activities and interactions. At the same time, researchers are developing new insights into the importance of literacy for social inclusion – particularly in the light of world economic changes and the growing importance of digital media. In England, the government has put literacy at the centre of its educational policy, both in schools and in the lifelong learning sector. There has never been a time when it is more important to reflect on what we mean by literacy, what assumptions we make about it and what theories should guide practice."

(Hamilton, M, in **Teaching Adult Literacy: principles and practice** ed. Hughes & Schwab p.7; 2010)

These are the words of Mary Hamilton, opening a chapter on introducing Literacy in its Social Context in an important book for teachers of Adult Literacy. What are the implications for teachers of literacy?

Hamilton together with Hillier also wrote about the history of changes in Adult Literacy provision

in 2006 – *Changing Faces of Adult Literacy Language and Numeracy*. They identified that one of the recurring themes throughout the various periods of development of literacy provision for adults was that the issues grappled with in the field 'are not temporary or inexplicable peculiarities of a misguided policy process, or the fault of individual personalities or of one organisation. They are more enduring tensions that have to be managed' (p xiii). Functional Skills English & maths have been no exception. The ethos behind Functional Skills English is mainly work-oriented literacy practices but by its very title Functional Skills excludes the likelihood of more in-depth study of the art of English language. It thus begs a tension between a technical pedagogy and a pedagogy that fosters English as an art and a vehicle for self-expression.

At the end of 2006, the Leitch Review *'Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills'* was published, where the word 'skills' occurs approximately 1500 times in 154 pages, compared to the word 'learning' occurring only 212 times. The idea of 'learning' was much less an economic asset than 'skills' at that time and the emphasis from then on was increasingly on the product and not the process of getting there.

Leitch argued that skills are 'the best form of welfare to ensure that people can adapt to change. Skills were once a key lever for prosperity and fairness. Skills are now increasingly *the* key lever.' (p4 of the final report, 2006).

The 2006 Leitch Report led to the fine-tuning of the focus of funding for adult literacy. It means that those whose skills can easily be upgraded stand a chance of upskilling for the exact purpose of joining the workforce. The Functional Skills standards are based on sound, technical reading and writing skills and are carefully dovetailed into the Skills for Life Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001). But those who come to learn literacy for reasons outside work are less likely to fit in with the faster track courses. They want to interact more fully with literacies – to become better able to form and express opinions, be more critical. For example a student may want to read a new novel and discuss it with other students, work at length on improving their spelling or write a blog. Instead they are fast tracked to do exams which many may not have the academic confidence to undertake. There have never been more obvious contradictions between the provision dictated by our economic needs on the one hand, and the legacy of respect for equality & diversity with its rationale for learner-centred approaches on the other hand.

Add to this the rapidly changing concept of what literacy is in real life at this time of the new Taster Journal – texting, social networking, blogging, messaging, online searching etc. The end result is another gulf between what is real literacy for a real world and the Functional Skills emphasis on correct English. Furthermore (and this can be evidenced from my own experience as an adult literacy practitioner and researcher), there are older learners and those with less income who cannot become digitally proficient because they are now financially prevented from joining classes which offer such support. There is little prospect for them of the promised

'prosperity and fairness' mentioned by Leitch (2006, p4).

The question now is how do we provide, let alone who will provide, for those adults who want to develop more than just their vocational skills? Their ambitions might be represented typically by a learner who said to me in March 2012: 'I'm ashamed I don't know more. I want to go on because I think there is more to learn. The more I read the more I understand how much there is to learn still'. Fenwick and Tennant have said that 'no one theory of learning or facilitating learning trumps the others and learning is not a mental process occurring in a vacuum' (Foley, G., (ed) 2004 p55,). While we may be able to welcome the Functional Skills standards for their rigour, we also need to look at the much wider picture and ask whether as educators we are also addressing the needs of our learners in their communities, their family lives, their health needs and other concerns. In 2013 humans are still, despite all the bureaucratization of our public lives, 'completely interconnected with the systems in which they act.' (ibid p65). By always looking at learning as a holistic experience we will ensure that we don't decontextualize our approaches to learning from our learners' lived experiences.

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# The Changing Context of Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Teacher Education

Alison Wedgbury

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At the October 2012 conference Helen Casey, Executive Director of NRDC at the Institute of Education [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk) outlined features of the professional training of teachers for adult literacies in England since the 1970s. She then initiated a discussion about current policy and practice including the effects on courses planned for 2012-13 in the nine English regions. Her presentation is available on the NIACE website: <http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/events/C3095A-1012/Helen-Casey.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2013).

This article draws on the content of Helen Casey's workshop material and then adds some comment on some key policy reviews and funding proposals since October 2012 that affect teacher education in England. The situation is different in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as each country in the UK has its own development priorities.

Helen Casey's conference presentation tracked changes in the English system from the 1970s up to early October 2012. Briefly, these were:

## 1970s

Teacher qualifications and CPD (Continuing Professional Development) developed 'bottom up' to suit different contexts and without a national plan.

## 1980s

Qualifications for both learners and teachers were further developed, mainly by awarding bodies which operated nationally but did not use a common set of standards. There was no clarity about who was qualified to teach.

## 1990s

During the 1990s a national system for vocational qualifications emerged as NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications). In 1999 the Department for Education and Employment published *A Fresh Start'* (DfEE 1999), the report chaired by Sir Claus Moser that paved the way (in England only) for the 'Skills for Life' era. For the first time, a national set of learner and teacher qualifications was proposed for the 'basic skills' of literacy and numeracy.

## 2000 to October 2012

In 2001 new regulations for the teaching of all post-16 subjects (in vocational and adult education) led to the introduction of specialist Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL teaching qualifications aligned to new national standards. Universities as well as awarding bodies offered these qualifications and the supply of courses was variable across the regions.

In 2007 there were revisions to the post-16 teaching qualifications/standards and new application guides for Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL led to revised teaching qualifications. More universities across England were now offering these qualifications, some with progression to Master's level. The balance was shifting away from awarding body qualifications towards those taught in universities and/or in partnership with further education colleges. Nationally funded research dedicated to adult literacies was flourishing and was now available to all trainee teachers and their course leaders in print, online and at conferences.

From 2010 the new Coalition Government implemented major changes in school, vocational, adult and university education for England in accordance with their policies on de-regulation and 'freedom' from central control. Funding reductions had already started in a time of economic recession.

In March 2012 an interim report was published on *Professionalism in further education*, a government review chaired by Lord Lingfield (BIS 2012). That interim report proposed features of de-regulation that would affect teachers across the further education system in England in which all Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL teachers work. By this time universities or HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) had already considerably raised their student fees because of the changes in their own national funding. This had led to a shift back to awarding body teaching qualifications which in many cases were more cost effective for individuals and institutions. It is not yet clear how many of the HEI and awarding body accredited courses that planned to start in 2011 or 2012 actually started.



### After October 2012

In late October 2012 the final 'Lingfield Report' (BIS 2012), confirmed that government recognised the need for specialist expertise in teaching adult literacies and in teaching disabled learners. This was generally welcomed and overlapped with the start of a review to 'simplify' all post-16 teaching qualifications. During October and November 2012 proposals were discussed across England by individuals and institutions in regional meetings. The aim was to quickly publish the structure of new qualifications for teachers so that universities and awarding bodies could start developing their courses in 2013.

During 2012 and up to the end of February 2013 individual bursaries were also offered to offset some of the cost of qualifications. Bursaries for courses accredited by HEIs were higher than those accredited by awarding bodies. After August 2013 it is expected that there will be no more bursaries but that individuals can apply for student loans. The details of those loans have not yet been published.

### **New Qualifications for Teachers of English (Literacy and Functional English), Mathematics (Numeracy and Functional Mathematics), ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).**

At the time of writing for this journal, the qualifications have just entered the development phase after the publication of the Findings Report (LSIS 2013). Details will emerge during 2013 and it is intended that some courses will start from autumn 2013. In general, the changes for this area of work are less about content than about structure, progression between different levels of qualifications, synergy with other qualifications about learning and development and about the facility to contextualise some aspects for particular working contexts.

People who have already started the 'old' qualifications will continue and complete them and the status of their qualifications will not change. New qualifications are also proposed for teachers of disabled learners and the content of those has not yet been established.

There remain issues that may continue to be debated by RaPAL members in England. HEIs will continue to design, name and, crucially, cost their own qualifications while awarding bodies will use the names designated in the national proposals. Individuals and/or their employers may need careful guidance on choosing between offers. People wanting to start a career in teaching English, Mathematics or ESOL will find courses in some parts of England and not in others. For trainee teachers the costs of getting qualified are likely to continue, in terms of higher fees, travel time, travel fares and increasing amounts of independent study. Teacher educators may feel constrained to reduce the depth of study to fit the new proposed structures.

There will continue to be plenty of discussion points for RaPAL to consider, including the differences between England's approach and the one taken by other UK countries and others worldwide.

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## Work-based Skills for Life proven to be inspirational!

*Peggy Warren*

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

### Introduction

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

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

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

### Rationale for undertaking this study

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Methodology and questions explored**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Findings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

day of their course as their rest day, rather than accept the study day previously approved.

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

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

### **Positive Retentive Motivators**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Was the Skills for Life Programme Influential in Accessing Other Courses?**

Here, the enormity of the question was understood, but the interviewees in the study shared with passion clear positive influences the SfL course had on their future learning aspirations. This question required a level of reflection and there were a range of commonalities in the responses produced.

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

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

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

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

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

### Conclusion

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

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

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

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

There were some limitations worth highlighting

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

### Recommendations:

#### Tutors

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

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

#### Organisations

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

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## What is Union Learning for? What have we learnt from the past 10 years?

Judith Swift

*Before the launch of unionlearn, Judith worked nationally for TUC Learning Services since it was set up in 1998. Her role has been to support the work of unions and union learning representatives, particularly through the Union Learning Fund, which started in October 1998.*

*Judith has had responsibility for co-ordinating the TUC support to unions in ULF and in particular for Adult English and maths. The last few years have seen a rapid expansion of unions and union learning representatives engaged in learning including personal, professional and workforce development. Over 40 unions are currently involved.*

*Judith was appointed as Union Development Manager for unionlearn in January 2006 and is responsible for supporting unions and their ULRs to develop their learning and skills strategies. Her area of responsibility includes the Union Learning Fund and unionlearn's network of learning centres.*

*She was awarded the MBE in 2005 for her work in adult basic skills.*

*Immediately before joining TUC Learning Services, Judith worked as a TUC tutor for a number of years in the North West delivering courses for union representatives and health and safety representatives. Her wider background in FE also includes teaching English and German primarily, but a few other bits and pieces too.*

In this article, I will review the activities of unionlearn who work with over 60 unions, with a particular focus on English and maths. I will identify the features of our work which makes union learning different from, other forms of adult learning, whether this is through organisation, target groups catered for, or content. Using a case study from of a major union/employer programme in the North West, I will try to pick out effective elements of union-sponsored provision. Finally, I will set out some key issues for the future of union learning; and how the relationship between unions and education providers might need to develop for new contexts.

### Background

Unionlearn is the learning and skills organisation of the Trades Union Congress (TUC). Unionlearn works to assist unions in the delivery of learning opportunities for their members as well as managing the £15 million Union Learning Fund (ULF), which provides unions with the funding to develop new programmes for members, non-members, families and communities. Over the past 12 years, more than 28,000 union learning representatives (ULRs) have been trained and 230,000 people are being given training and learning opportunities through their union every year (Source: Unionlearn Annual Report 2011). Unionlearn is also responsible for providing education and training opportunities for workplace reps and professionals via TUC Education. Each year more than 50,000 trade union members enrol in trade union education courses organised by the TUC.

Of course, trade unions have been involved in the education and development of members since the nineteenth century. In the field of adult English and maths, unions got involved in the current campaigns early, beginning with the NUPE basic skills programmes at Imperial College London in the 1980s, at a time when UK workplace literacy programmes were few and far between. Unionlearn came into being in 1998, with a remit from the TUC General Council to provide a "high profile role for the TUC and trade unions as providers and/or facilitators of vocational and other learning opportunities for members and potential members".

### What is Union Learning for?

Since the nineteenth century, unions have included education as part of their remit. Unions were responding to the general lack of opportunity for working class people, and recognised that mutual support and organisation lay at the heart of their efforts:

*"The healthy spirit of self-help created amongst working people would more than any other measure serve to raise them as a class, and this, not by any pulling down of others, but by levelling up to a higher level"<sup>1</sup>*

Modern union learning is founded on the same principles. Union programmes are based on the notion of 'Doing with, not doing to'. This entails building programmes that meet learner demands, ranging from basic English, maths and ICT programmes through to higher education entry programmes. It has brought about

systems of advice, guidance and learning journey planning that respond to learner needs. For example, the union Climbing Frame<sup>2</sup> helps learners plan their learning to encompass employment, career and personal goals. Finally, the principles that underpin our work lead union members to become Union Learning Reps (ULRs), workplace assessors and, in increasing numbers, training as teachers.

Successive governments have recognised the value of union learning to the individual, but also to the economy and wider society. They have therefore continued to fund both access to learning and union learning programmes themselves; but at the same time they have acknowledged the value of the independent approach that unions take, in reaching learners who would not otherwise be engaged; by negotiating for learning to take place in workplaces that would otherwise not offer any staff development; and by building progression routes that take learners into higher learning and qualification.

Fundamentally, union learning programmes share one aim: to support adults to get into work, stay in work and thrive and progress. And it has worked. In the past 10 years:

- Over 60 unions have been involved in ULF English and maths learning
- 257 Union Learning Fund projects have run
- 475 union learning centres have been established
- Over 20,000 ULRs have been trained
- There have been 138,662 SfL learners
- 43,083 achievements have been reported to date.<sup>3</sup>

### Case Study: Merseytravel

Merseytravel is the authority responsible for overseeing the public transport network on Merseyside, and are responsible for coordinating bus and rail services, maintaining transport infrastructure. Over the past decade, the organisation and its staff have overcome a number of problems – from poor industrial relations to the overall performance of the company.

What changed? At the heart of it was the approach to education and training, initiated by a new attitude by senior management, and co-operation with the unions. At the heart of the new approach is that 'Merseylearn supports workers in the transport sector on Merseyside to gain the skills they need to be successful in their jobs'. As a result, it has been possible to

negotiate a system of ULRs, the establishment of a learning centre with a hub and spoke model throughout Merseyside. The company has adopted a whole organisation approach to Skills for Life. New opportunities for learning have been introduced, supported by an in house tutor. ULR forums ensured unions worked together, between themselves and with management, to grow learning and progression opportunities.

The outcome has been a total of 1611 English and maths learners, with 893 achievements of qualifications to date. ICT programmes have flourished, drawing in not only Merseytravel employees, but staff from other workplaces. Now Merseytravel are gearing up for the introduction of Functional Skills, piloting with English and maths learners before September 2012, undertaking focused work with ULRs so that they understand and can advise workers on new learning, reviewing practice and materials, utilising workplace scenarios for writing and problem solving.

Merseytravel is an example of what unions can achieve, working with management to institute learning that meets the needs of the company and the individual. Of course, it's not always so successful. The attitudes of too many employers towards learning is still negative. However, Merseytravel is just one example of what can be done.

### What have we learned from the past 10 years of unionlearn?

*There is robust evidence that union learning is successful in engaging learners from groups underrepresented in adult learning such as those without a Level 2 qualification. Once engaged in such learning learners progress through different levels. In one analysis of the one-third learners who had progressed to another level, almost half of them had improved on existing qualifications by two levels.*

The past ten years have demonstrated that there is a clear role for unions in promoting, advising, supporting and providing learning around the workplace. Members and other workers want it, and continue to bargain for it. Employers and wider society, through continued engagement with union learning programmes, appear to recognise its value. Unions have shown that they can deliver good, popular and effective learning.

The features of union learning that seem to be important are:

- A better route to motivation and advice to learners. The role that **Union Learning Repts** play in promoting learning, and giving advice and guidance. Coming as they do from the ranks of employees in the workplace, they both speak the language of the potential learners, and bring confidence and reassurance that what learning offers is both useful and safe. Their training gives them the skills both to advise individuals of the possible learning paths, but also gathers evidence of learning needs in the workplace that will inform union-management bargaining.
- The development of learning spaces and centres, in and around the workplace, where adults, often with limited time and sometimes confidence, can follow sustained learning programmes. We have many examples of individuals who have not taken up external courses for different reasons of opportunity, time or money, who have been able to start in a centre on workplace premises, with courses at a time to suit them.
- The flexibility of what we offer. There are many instances where government or local provider policy has coincided with what learners demand and unions look at develop. Literacy and numeracy, ICT skills are obvious examples. But learners want more and want different, including non-vocational learning, new career opportunities, and the chance to progress to higher education – and the funding and courses for these are not always available. Unions must respond to these aspirations of learners; and to do this....
- Partnership with providers has been an essential element of our work. Without the involvement of colleges, adult providers, HE institutions and others, what we can offer is limited and sometimes of poor quality. These relationships have enabled us to go further with the offer to learners.

It is also important for us to look at what has not worked so well, or provision that we have not been able to maintain. Some unions have organised learning in such a way that it has been better able to withstand changes (reductions) in funding or available college support. Functions, not structures, are the key, by which I mean getting the learning programme and employer relationships right, rather than the physical infrastructure or staffing based on too temporary

a funding base. Union learning cannot and should not replace, either by design or accident, good local adult provision. But by working together, we can help to protect some local provision, and bring it into the lives of many of our members.

### Key Issues for the Future

*Although overall the messages offer optimism about the sustainability of union learning there are limits as to how this impacts on policy and practice in a vocational education and training system that is voluntary and where decision-making social partnership institutions are nonexistent and collective bargaining is limited.*

What is happening currently for unions and their work? Despite the difficult financial climate, demand for the work of union learning grows. The number of English and maths learners continues, and recently we have seen growth in numbers both an Entry Level and at Level 2. Additionally, a number of themes are emerging for our future work:

- Workplace and beyond. Many union centres are opening their programmes to wider groups of learners. These include the families of workers, members of the wider community, employees of neighbouring companies, including non-unionised workers. Recently two ULF projects, run by the First Division Association (FDA) and Managers in Partnership (MiP), have opened their centres to draw in ex-offenders and unemployed adults, offering routes back into work. In partnership with local Community Learning Trusts and others, unions see this as a continuing part of their work.
- The demand for digital skills learning grows, as does education around the green skills agenda.
- Provider/union/employer partnerships must change in the current context. There are benefits and strength to be gained in co-operative planning with local providers. Employers and their sector bodies must get more involved in joint efforts to raise levels of education and training in the workplace, to match levels of activity elsewhere, for example in Germany. Learning agreements form a key part of union strategy to ensure that what learning is developed for workers lasts.

Ten years on, unions can be proud of what has been achieved. We have a lot of successful (as

well lessons from unsuccessful) experience to draw on. The next ten years will be harder, but the demand for our work will be greater than ever.

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## A Hand in Reflective Learning

Roberta Scott

*Roberta Scott has just completed a course for tutors of Adult Numeracy at Queen's University, Belfast. For the reflective learning journal assignment, she had to explore some of her main learning from the course. This is an extract from one of her entries where she has used various digital tools and practices to help herself with a creative approach to reflective practice.*

In order to help me analyse my learning from the Diploma course I decided to look into creative methods of reflection. At first, I wanted to create a "wordle" <http://www.wordle.net>. This involved writing down all the words that came to mind associated with the course and loading them into a program which turns them into a "word cloud". This seemed helpful as it allowed me to identify words and topics which stood out as my main learning outcomes. There is also some imagination and free association involved, giving a broad brush stroke over the course. From this, I can decide which topics I want to focus on. I gave myself free rein in terms of the words: how had I felt about the course? What were the aspects that I could remember clearly? What were the most important things to take away with me?

As I looked into wordles I came across a program called "Tagxedo"



<http://www.tagxedo.com/>. This allows you to load your wordle words into an image. I decided to think of an image I could use as a metaphor for my experience on the course. I looked at images on Google along the themes of key, education, essential skills, books, education, world, but nothing fitted. At the time, the best image seemed to be of a maze – going from the start to the finish, other people in the maze taking different turnings and offering you directions, some of the words being "thorns" in the hedges, eg, pressure. However, I was not 100% happy with this.

Finally, I decided to make my own image and scan it into the program. At first I drew a picture of a person with open hands to represent open to learning. From this, I got the idea to trace an outline of my hand, scan it and use this in the tagxedo program. I felt this was the image I wanted to use for the following reasons:

- It represents my personal learning from the course – the image is personal to me
- It's me, making my mark on the course
- Hands are communication, openness, warmth, strength, creativity, relationship, welcome
- Hands represent labour and work
- Hands are extended to those around us
- They represent passing on and receiving knowledge
- Hands offer guidance, support, discipline and correction
- To give a hand, hand out, thumbs up, hand in work
- Digits used for fingers and numbers, representing the relationship between numeracy and language
- Some students might be handfuls, but others are within our reach

I also played around with the image, colours and language. After this, I used the words in the image to help me clarify what I have learnt from the course.

## Potential Benefits of Embedding Digital Storytelling into Literacy Sessions

Pip McDonald

*Pip McDonald currently works for the University of Sunderland supporting learners on the English for Professional Purposes (EPP) programme.*



Traditionally, storytelling has been defined as “the oral interpretation of a traditional, literary, or personal experience story” and, according to Peck (1989:138) is currently enjoying a “renaissance”. The critical components of stories have been an on-going focus for analysis. Labov (1997) identified and sorted narrative structures into the following categories: abstract, clauses, orientation, complicating action, result/resolution, evaluation and coda. The amalgamation of traditional storytelling, as proposed by Labov, and the digital platform is where digital stories can be created. Digital Storytelling<sup>1</sup> can be defined as:

*“the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. Digital stories derive their power by weaving images, music, narrative and voice together, thereby giving deep dimension and vivid colour to characters, situations, experiences, and insights. Tell your story now digitally” (Rule, in Barrett:2011).*

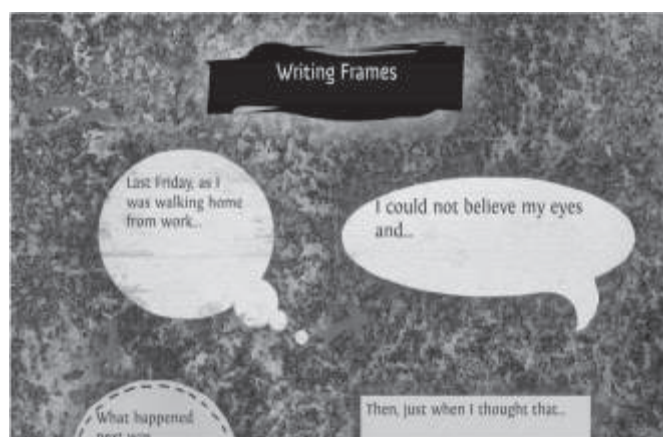
Digital storytelling can be produced in a variety of different formats. For example, an e-portfolio or e-ILP<sup>2</sup> can be defined as “a purposeful collection of work that demonstrates effort,

progress and achievement over time, stored in an electronic container (CD, DVD, WWW)” (Barrett:2011).

### Web 2.0 tools which can support learners to express digital narrative

#### Glogster

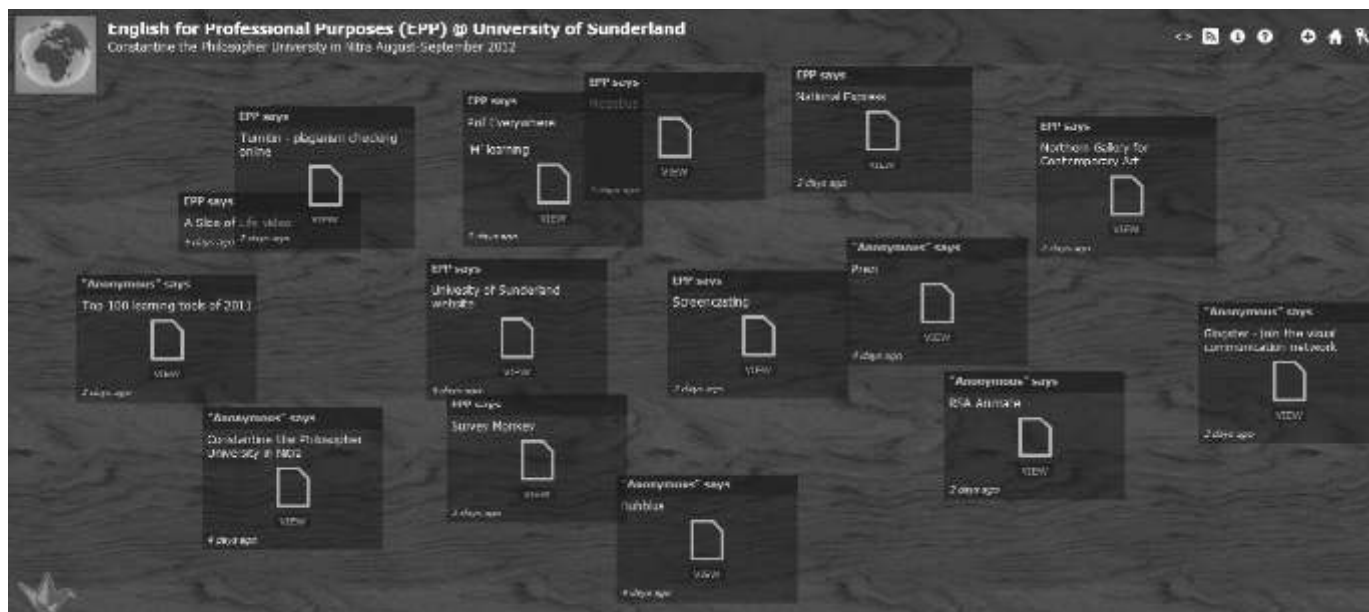
Opportunities to add user-generated content to online environments have increased from using blogs<sup>3</sup> to phlogs<sup>4</sup> and vlogs<sup>5</sup>. Glogster<sup>6</sup> is a “unique social network based on the creation and sharing of glogs<sup>7</sup> - interactive posters loaded with text, graphics, music, videos, and more” (Glogster:2012). In virtue of Glogster being an interactive tool, it can be linked to discovery learning and can be defined as a process whereby, “learners come into contact with a fact, object...followed by a cognitive process in which learners make sense of the new learning” (Coles:2006). Telling and retelling a story using a digital platform encourages learners to develop “oral language and a sense of story”, and “exploration, inquiry, and observation” (Reflect & Refine: Building a Learning Community:2012). Both interactive and dynamic e-learning resources can be created using the Glogster platform.



#### Wallwisher

Wallwisher<sup>8</sup> gives literacy learners a blank canvas online where 'stickies' like digital post-it notes can be added as notes on the wall akin to an online noticeboard (Wallwisher:2012). Text, images, video and websites can be added to the wall to encourage sharing, discussion and dissemination.

1. See glossary 2. Ibid 3. Ibid 4. Ibid 5. Ibid 6. Ibid 7. Ibid 8. Ibid



## Screencasting

Screencasting<sup>9</sup> can be used by learners to create a digital story or a guide in real time, for example by using a web-based recorder to capture the screen trajectory used by the learner. It is also possible to publish and share screencasts. One of the main online tools to enable learners to do this is Screenr<sup>10</sup> which makes screencasts available on iPhones without the need to download and install software (Screenr:2012).

## Podcasts

Literacy learners can create and edit sound using a variety of audio capture and editing tools and software. For example, podcasting can be used as a way to communicate a story in itself. A podcast<sup>11</sup> is a form of digital media which can be shared on the internet for playback. This is a really good way of giving learners the opportunity to have a voice. Aviary<sup>12</sup> has a variety of audio and music creation tools that can be used to this end.

## Avatars<sup>13</sup>

An avatar can be defined as, "a virtual representation of the player in a game" (Webpedia:2012). It is possible to create avatars for "designing digital stories or delivering content" (King:2010). Avatars can act as a tour guide through a story guiding the reader or listener (King:2010). However, one of the criticisms of digital engagement is online privacy and identity threats. Researchers from Cranfield University in partnership with The Visualisation and Other Methods in Expression (VOME) project recently implemented an internet privacy card game to bring this issues to the attention of internet users (VOME<sup>14</sup>:2012).



Whilst e-safety<sup>15</sup> concerns are omnipresent, the benefit of avatar creation is that learners can remain anonymous if they wish to and focus on the story itself. Voki<sup>16</sup> is an online tool whereby learners can create a speaking and moving avatar in a variety of different languages. The text-to-speak feature enables literacy learners to type in text for the avatar to speak in different languages (Voki:2012). Voki can be used as a differentiated literacy learning tool in terms of character styles, appearance, voice and background. Voki Classroom is a tool explicitly for learning contexts in terms of classroom management, teaching delivery and lesson plans (Voki:2012). Similarly, Build Your Wild Self<sup>17</sup> from New York Zoos and Aquarium enables learners to create a customisable avatar.

9. See glossary 10. Ibid 11. Ibid 12. Ibid 13. Ibid 14. Ibid 15. Ibid 16. Ibid 17. Ibid



## Visualising the Learning Journey

### E-scrapbooking

E-scrapbooking<sup>20</sup> can be an effective way to visualise ideas and build up reflections to unpack a literacy learning journey. It has been argued that, "academic scrapbooking is actually being used as a powerful classroom tool to help students better connect with the subject at hand, from lessons on ancient Greece to an exploration of themes of love in literature" (Moses:2012).

<http://www.edutopia.org/academic-scrapbooking-photographs-journals>.



### Storyboarding

Visual Literacy<sup>21</sup> can be developed through effective use of storyboarding; "Storyboarding<sup>22</sup> is a way of planning which uses sketches and text, like a comic strip. It will show others what you are planning to do and save you time and film." (Education Scotland:2012)

The Life Online Gallery<sup>23</sup> at the National Media Museum<sup>24</sup> included a digital storytelling project: Ross Phillips's *Read Aloud* invited gallery visitors to read a line from a book including Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*. According to the National Media Museum (2012):

*"The piece mirrors the collaborative nature of the open internet and the fact that we can all create, consume, collaborate on and share content online, often making new versions of existing content."*

Similarly, the Edinburgh International Book Festival<sup>25</sup> site included a Story Box tent in which stories could be explored. Meanwhile, Seven Stories<sup>26</sup> in Newcastle upon Tyne is both gallery space and an archive seeking to celebrate children's books and seeks to "raise the profile of reading for pleasure across your school and develop a lifelong love of children's books" (Seven Stories:2012).

### Digital storytelling can be used to support other learning resources

#### Rory's Story Cubes

Traditional storytelling and digital storytelling are not mutually exclusive but can both be used to support learning effectively for example with Rory's Story Cubes<sup>27</sup>. Here storytelling is transformed into a game making learning fun. They comprise nine cubes with a total fifty for images or 'picto-verbs' to amalgamate in order to create a story. Further sets of story cubes are

### 'M' Learning<sup>18</sup>

QR (Quick Response) codes<sup>19</sup> are black and white graphic projections that can be linked to information, text, a URL or other data (Stansberry:2011). Stansberry (2011) also argues that QR codes can improve literacy, and suggests that, "the potential for QR codes in education is extensive". Given that most learners have smart phones, it is possible for them to both create and read QR code to tell a story for example a QR code treasure hunt.



18. See glossary

19. Ibid

20. Ibid

21. Ibid

22. Ibid

23. Ibid

24. Ibid

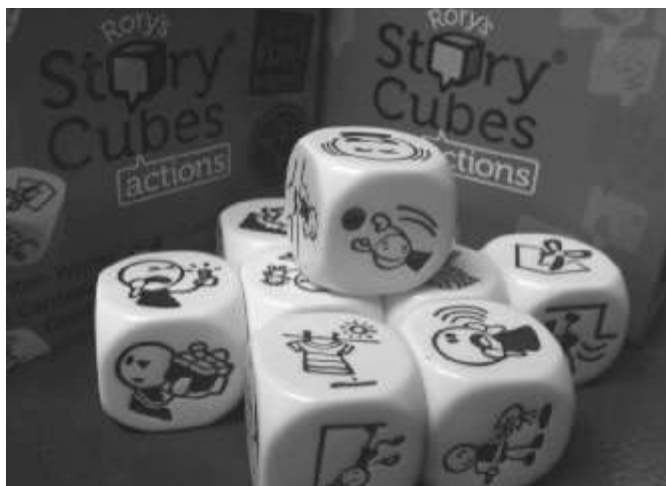
25. Ibid

26. Ibid

27. Ibid



available such as expansion sets including important verbs, and voyage cubes encouraging learners to tell stories about adventures. The story cubes are also available in larger versions (Rory's Story Cubes:2012). An opportunity to digitise the story cube process is available on an iPhone application as a commitment to 'M' Learning.



### Inclusive Learning

Embedding digital storytelling into the literacy curriculum is an inclusive learning strategy. Banaszewski (2002) argues that encouraging learners to write in an autobiographical capacity requires the development of trust in a tripartite way: trust in themselves, their peers and the tutor. Therefore, for digital storytelling to be effective every learner needs to feel included and as a result a community is developed.

### Folding Stories

Another significant way that digital storytelling is inclusive is by virtue of the opportunity it provides to engage remotely with literacy learners all over the world. Programmes such as Folding Stories<sup>28</sup> enable many writers to co-write open stories as a group storytelling game and to read completed or 'folded' stories (Folding Stories:2012). Digital storytelling promotes expression of identity and differentiated narrative. Howell in Barrett (2006) argues that identity is fundamental as a "compelling personal narrative" giving the learner a real, individualised and differentiated voice. Developing digital lives becomes integral to learning. However, as practitioners we need to be aware that this could create digitally exclusive learning experiences causing a digital divide between "competent movers in digital worlds" and those who are not as competent on digital journeys (Graham:2008:10). Ways in which teachers manage digital technology in the learning process therefore needs to be inclusive.

### Collaborative Learning

Waters (2011) argues that the Surrealists valued the impact of "collective creative". It's possible to view this storytelling model as akin to the Surrealist "exquisite corpse"<sup>29</sup> strategy which can be carried out using both words and pictures whereby a sentence or image is produced and the last part of it is visible to the next author to continue. The benefit is that, "everyone gets a chance to add a line or two to what becomes a story composed by the collective, rather than by a single author - a story created together" (Watters,2011). A variety of iPhone and iPad applications exist to digitise this process, for example Fold Mini-Man.

### Outdoor Classroom

Digital storytelling is not a phenomenon restricted to computer rooms and classrooms. Literacy learning walks can be used to engage learners outside their traditional learning contexts. Whilst this phenomenon is not exclusively digital, opportunities to digitise outside classroom learning can be carried out using location based technology such as the iPhone/iPad application VisualMap<sup>30</sup> which visualises location and provides a map. This can be used to create a literacy learning game such as a treasure hunt. Furthermore, location-based literacy learning opportunities can be carried out using geocaching. Geocaching<sup>31</sup> can be defined as "a free real-world outdoor treasure hunt. Players try to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, using a smartphone or GPS and can then share their experiences online" (Groundspeak,2012). A variety of mobile phone applications exist to make this possible.



In conclusion, Ohler (2006:8) argues that through digital engagement, literacy has been transformed in fundamental ways; “just being able to read is not sufficient”. Firstly, the impact of e-learning tools has meant that what it means to be literate has changed accordingly to include New Media literacy<sup>32</sup>. Secondly, literacy learners are now required to be able to engage with digital expression both individually and collectively, and finally, Social Media Literacy<sup>33</sup> is an important component of Digital Literacy<sup>34</sup> for literacy learners (Ohler:2006).

The Centre for Digital Storytelling's motto is “listen deeply, tell stories”. What could be more relevant, meaningful and explicitly linked to the outcomes of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum? “It's not what we know, it's what we're willing to learn.” (Reflect & Refine: Building a Learning Community:2012)

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## Glossary

**Avatar** – a visual representation of a person in a virtual format

**Aviary** – a series of online tools which enable users to create music and edit images

**Blog** – an online website including text, images and video

**Build Your Wild Self** – an online tool which enables users to create an avatar from New York Zoos and Aquarium - [www.buildyourwildself.com/](http://www.buildyourwildself.com/)

**Centre for Digital Storytelling** – an organisation which seeks to support participants with telling stories using media - <http://www.storycenter.org/>

**Digital Literacy** – skills in literacy associated with the use of tools available on digital platforms

**Digital Storytelling** - using text, images and sound to communicate a digital narrative

**Edinburgh International Book Festival** – annual book festival to celebrate the written word in August - <http://www.edbookfest.co.uk>

**E-ILP** – digital Individual Learning Plan.

**E-safety** – “E-safety is about managing the risks of a digital world sensibly in a risk adverse society.”

**E-Scrapbooking** – digital compilation, amalgamation and arrangement of images and text to create personal timeline and history and archive

**Exquisite corpse** – Surrealist collaborative strategy combining text and images

**Folding Story** – group collaborative storytelling website - <http://foldingstory.com/>.

**Geocaching** – a game whereby players use GPS - [www.geocaching.com/](http://www.geocaching.com/)

**Glogster** – an online tool that enable users to create a graphic blog

**Glogs** – graphic blogs created using the online tool Glogster

**'M' Learning** – learning opportunities using mobile phones

**National Media Museum** – is located in Bradford, UNESCO city of media - <http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/AboutUs.aspx>

**New Media Literacy** – skills in literacy associated with new media

**Phlog** – a photographic blog

**Podcast** – a digital media of sound

**QR Code** – quick response codes

**Rory's Story Cubes** – storytelling game used dice - [www.storycubes.com/](http://www.storycubes.com/).

**Screencasting** – a process whereby it is possible to make a video tutorial to capture the real time screen activity with sound.

**Screenr** – an online tool which enables users to screencast - [www.screenr.com/](http://www.screenr.com/)

**Seven Stories** – gallery and archive to celebrate children's books in Newcastle -Upon-Tyne - <http://www.sevenstories.org.uk>

**Social Media Literacy** – skills in literacy associated with social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter

**Storyboarding** – graphical curation of events in a narrative

**Storytelling** – using text, images and sound to communicate a narrative.

**The Life Online Gallery** – gallery space located within the National media Museum to explore the impact of technology on life -

<http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/PlanAVisit/Exhibitions/LifeOnlineExhibition/PermanentGallery.aspx>

**Visual Literacy** - skills in literacy relating to visual media

**VisualMap** – mobile phone application which enable users to use GPS to visualise the location - <http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/visualmap/id348529030?mt=8>

**Vlogs** – A video log

**Voki** – an online tool which enables users to create a speaking avatar in different languages and voice styles - <http://www.voki.com/>

**Wallwisher** – online noticeboard where users can create 'stickies' or online post-it notes to share a variety of content including images, video and web links

# Reports and Reviews

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

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

### **Reviewed by Sally Haywood**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

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

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

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

### Guidelines for Contributors

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

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

### Journal Structure

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

#### Section 1. Ideas for teaching

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

#### Section 2. Developing Research and Practice

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

#### Section 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives

This section is for more sustained analytical pieces about research, practice or policy. The pieces will be up to 6,000

words long including references and will have refereed journal status. Although articles in this section are more theoretically and analytically developed they should nevertheless be clearly written for a general readership. Both empirical work and theoretical perspectives should be accessible and clearly explained. Writing for this section should:

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

### Review Section

Reviews and reports of books, articles, and materials including CD should be between 50 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 2-3 line biography and your contact details. You can write the review based upon your experience of using the book, article or materials in your role as a practitioner, teacher trainer, and researcher or as a student.

### Submitting your work

1. Check the deadline dates and themes which are available in the journal and on the website.
2. All contributions should have the name of the author/s, a title and contact details which include postal address, email address and phone number. We would also like a short 2-3-line biography to accompany your piece. Sections, subsections, graphs or diagrams should be clearly indicated or labelled.
3. Send a copy to one of the journal co-ordinators  
  
**Naomi Horrocks [naomi.horrocks@gmail.com](mailto:naomi.horrocks@gmail.com)**  
**Sarah Freeman [azdak@btopenworld.com](mailto:azdak@btopenworld.com)**
4. Your contribution should be word processed, in Arial size 12 font, double spaced on A4 paper with numbered pages.

### What happens next

1. Editors and members of the Editorial Group review contributions for Section 1 and Section 2. Contributions for Section 3 are peer reviewed by a mixture of experienced academic, research and practice referees.
2. Feedback is provided by the editor/s within eight weeks of submission. This will include constructive comment and any suggestions for developing the piece if necessary.
3. You will be informed whether your piece has been accepted, subject to alterations, and if so the editor/s will work on a final editing process. Any final copy will be sent to authors prior to publishing.
4. Where work is not accepted the editor/s may suggest more relevant or alternative places for publication.

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

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## The Changing Context of Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Teacher Education

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## Work-based Skills for Life proven to be inspirational!

Peggy Warren (Volume 68/9, 2009)

## What is Union Learning for? What have we learnt from the past 10 years?

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## Teaching Adult Literacy: Principles and Practice

Reviewed by Sally Haywood (Volume 73, Autumn 2010)

and  
by me  
are there  
our views.  
organisation  
literacies in adv  
**RaPAL** is an independ  
of learners, teachers,  
researchers engaged in  
and numeracy. Our suppl  
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