



# The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

## Who we are

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

## What we do

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

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# Editorial

Early in 2013 we started planning this themed edition of our journal. We are delighted now to include RaPAL's usual mix of research, practitioner articles and learner contributions. We cover some history of policy making, a review of European research and articles from different regions of England, Scotland, Wales, The Republic of Ireland and The Netherlands.

## What is family learning?

*'Family learning' refers to any learning activity that involves both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family. That is the definition at the start of the Family Learning Works: The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales (NIACE, October 2013).*<sup>1</sup>The Inquiry video on YouTube is very striking and many RaPAL members will be familiar with this learner's experience from page 7 of the report:

***I didn't know how to deal with my money or anything. I was really struggling. My confidence had hit rock bottom... Family learning made me feel human again. It gave me hope for the future. I was a single parent. I realised I did have options and I wasn't alone anymore ... My kids see me learning now. We all sit down and do our homework together and they understand how important it is to listen at school. It's such a good feeling as a parent to be involved in your children's education.***

## What is in this journal

We start with **Naomi Horrocks'** interview with **Andrea Mearing**, one of the key government advisors on the original family learning policy and strategy in England and Wales. Andrea comments on the growth of family literacy, language and numeracy as it has developed into areas including offender learning, homeless learners, travellers and the workplace. We include a video on family learning in a prison ([link to HMP Wolds video](#)) to illustrate this. Next is an article by **JD Carpentieri** from the Institute of Education, London, a member of the Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales. His research article on developments in European family literacy policy offers a wide perspective and comments on *'the tyranny of*

*effect sizes'* when policy makers respond to questions of impact.

Then we offer accounts from practitioners. In England and Wales they focus on family literacies in both urban and rural areas. They highlight the enduring benefits for learners, the creativity and flexibility of practitioners and the challenges of managing changes in policy, funding and requirements for outcomes. From England, **Lisette Veit** describes family learning in Cambridgeshire, **Gill Sargent** outlines her work with travellers and **Sarah Burkinshaw** takes us through developments in Derbyshire. From Wales, the land of song and storytelling, **Eirwen Malin** describes a NIACE Family Storytelling Weekend. From **Scotland**, family learning in North Lanarkshire is illustrated by a video ([link to video provided](#)). In The Netherlands **Christine Clement** is a Programme Leader for *Taal voor het Leven* (Language for Life). Together with RaPAL member **Claire Collins**, she explains their work. Their video, *The Story of Lisa (in English)* illustrates this. ([link to video provided](#)).

Next we celebrate the diverse teaching, learning and life experiences that exist in literacies provision. We include original writing from **Margaret Kelly**, a learner in the Republic of Ireland, and **Louise Walsh** and **Maddie Tyack**, both teachers in Wales. We are delighted to include their winning entries from the recent RaPAL web launch writing appeal.

Finally **Sarah Holmes**, **Anne Power** and **Sheila Scott** review a 2013 book from NIACE *Pass the New Life in the UK Test* by Celine Castelino.

1. NIACE (2013). Family Learning Works: the Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales. The report can be accessed at <http://shop.niace.org.uk/family-learning-inquiry-report.html> (accessed 2 December 2013).

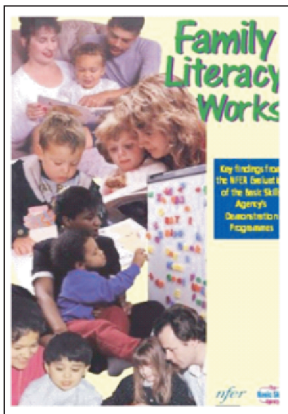
## Family Learning – a personal perspective from Andrea Mearing

### Andrea Mearing / Naomi Horrocks

*Andrea Mearing has had a long career in basic skills and adult learning. She was instrumental in setting up and managing family learning in Norfolk before first moving onto the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) and later the Skills for Life Strategy Unit within the Department for Education (DfE) in 2001. Although Andrea was responsible for the implementation of the Skills for Life Strategy in the East of England she also had responsibility for family learning policy and the development of Skills for Families across the country. Though officially retiring in 2005, Andrea continued to work in family learning undertaking consultancy for the DfE, the Learning and Skills Agency (LSA), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and NIACE and was involved in the development of the DfE Family Learning Impact Fund from 2008 to 2011.*

*Naomi Horrocks worked with Andrea at the Norfolk Adult Education Service, continuing their working relationship when Andrea moved on and Naomi became freelance in 2000. Naomi has been involved in adult, further and higher education for many years, starting off as a literacy and numeracy tutor for ILEA in 1982. She now divides her time between literacy, numeracy and language projects and research.*

What follows is a record of a recent conversation between Andrea and Naomi as they reflect on family learning and family literacy in particular, over the past 20 years. This article is based on our personal views and is not intended to be a systematic review of family literacy, language and numeracy.



We began by talking about what was happening in Norfolk prior to the start of the BSA National Family Literacy Demonstration Programme in 1993 (BSA, 1995). Before then, the adult education service was trying to find different ways to engage adults in learning. It was becoming clear that parents were interested in their

children's learning and classes in the community with a crèche attached were beginning to appear. The service was working with, for example, libraries and a young women's project to provide literacy learning that was geared at adults and delivered through the context of family.

The impetus for Family Literacy Demonstration Programme came from work in the USA, particularly the American Early Start Programme in which parents of underachieving children were selected and made to attend literacy provision or have their benefits cut. The results were positive in that both parents and children improved their literacy but the BSA was not keen to replicate the punitive aspect of the American programme. They were, however, enthusiastic about an

approach that offered 'double duty dollars' (BSA, 1995 p3) in that it targeted both parents and their children – "teach the parent, reach the child" was how Andrea put it.

The Demonstration Programme worked with parents with poor literacy and their children aged three to six years old. The programme offered courses of 96 hours. The parents worked on their own literacy whilst the children were offered intensive early years' teaching. Parents and children then came together for a session in which the parents used the strategies they had been taught to help their children. A crèche was provided for younger children.

Andrea believes that this dual approach of working with both parents and children was a key component in the success of the programme. Parents improved their literacy skills and so were better able to support their children, but in addition to this, developed their own confidence and were in a better position to go on to further learning, volunteering or employment. The children also improved their literacy skills through sessions with qualified early years' teachers which were then reinforced by parents as they used their new-found skills and confidence to support their children's literacy at home.

BSA was able to report some success as a result of the Demonstration Programme. The programme was evaluated by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The children made progress in their reading and writing, improvements that continued for the six months following their course. Parents too made progress, not only improving their reading and

writing ability but sustaining this for up to nine months after their course. 95% of them gained an accreditation and 70% went on to further study (BSA, 1995). Two years later NFER reported that the support offered by parents in the home through reading to their children and other activities still continued.

The evidence produced by the NFER persuaded the DfE to continue to fund family learning through each local education authority (LEA) via The Standards Fund initially. When the funding was transferred to the Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) in 2003 it became core funding and had some stability and permanence. There has always been a dilemma in funding family literacy. Where the funding sits determines how it is viewed and organised. Should it sit within schools funding, community provision or further education (FE)? All have advantages and disadvantages but Andrea feels that the key to success is that the focus should be on literacy, language or numeracy and that *both* children and parents should participate if those fundamental principles of improving the literacy language or numeracy skills of both parents and children, together with improving parents' ability to help their children, are to be maintained. Family literacy, language and numeracy works best, says Andrea, where it is part of a wider offer of family interventions. Both Sheffield and Wakefield authorities have successfully adopted this approach.

A distinction needs to be made between parental involvement and parents as learners. The value of family literacy, language and numeracy is that the parents become learners and become role models for their children. So it is more than parents finding out or knowing how their children learn – important though that is. It is about both parents and children 'catching the bug of learning'. This, says Andrea, is essential for any family literacy, language and numeracy programme.

There have been numerous challenges to providing family literacy, language and numeracy programmes over the years. The programmes are 'expensive' in that they require both teachers of adults and teachers of children. Crèche facilities for younger siblings are not cheap. The need for a minimum of three rooms in a school or other building is difficult for some organisations to manage. To provide enough time for parents to achieve a qualification they need to be substantial courses. Originally 96 hours long, programmes today tend to be

shorter (around 60- 72 hours) and this makes it more difficult for parents to complete a qualification. Recruitment has always been a sensitive area. Attracting the parents who will benefit most is a challenge.

We went on to talk about how family literacy, language and numeracy has developed since those initial demonstration programmes. Andrea has been involved in a number of initiatives including the Adult Community Learning Fund (ACLF), Skills for Families and the Family Learning Impact Fund (FLIF). She has witnessed the growth of family literacy, language and numeracy as it has developed into other areas including offender learning, homeless learners, travellers and the workplace. Each of these developments brings with it benefits and challenges but central to its success is the holding on to those original principles of working with parents and children to improve their own skills and for parents to help their children at home.

### References and bibliography

BSA (1995) *Family Literacy Works*. London BSA. Can be accessed here.

DfES (2004) *Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy a guide for policy makers*. London. DfES

BIS (July 2013) *Family Learning Impact Fund 2008-2011 Summary Paper*. London. BIS. Can be accessed here.

### Editor's comments

You may also like to access various resources about family learning in England, Ireland, Scotland and Australia. Here is a selection of reports and video.

In **England**, The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted - <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/>) publishes 'good practice' resources on its website. These resources include reports and some videos for open access and downloading. Examples include: Family learning in Hertfordshire: a report can be accessed here.

Family learning in a prison setting (HMP Wolds): a 2012 report can be accessed here and a video of this work is available here.

Using audiovisual technology to help offenders maintain family ties: a report on a 'Story Time Dads' project in prison can be accessed here.

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In the **Republic of Ireland**, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has a range of activities on family literacy. Their statement of policy and more information can be accessed [here](#).

In **Scotland**, a video case study on family learning work in Dunrobin Primary School can be accessed [here](#).

In **Australia**, the Australian Journal of Language and Literacy includes a 2013 article on 'Family literacy in response to local contexts'. This can be accessed [here](#).



## Developments in European literacy policy: putting greater focus on the family

JD Carpentieri

*JD Carpentieri is Senior Policy and Research Officer at NRDC (National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy), Institute of Education, London. He is a member of the Independent Inquiry into Family Learning (England and Wales). This Inquiry into Family Learning, carried out under the umbrella of the NIACE Centre for the Learning Family, took a fresh look at family learning in England and Wales between October 2012 and June 2013, with the aim of gathering new evidence, generating new thinking and influencing public policy. Its findings can be found [here](#).*

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### Abstract

Despite ample evidence of its beneficial impacts for children and adults, family literacy has traditionally been ignored in European Union (EU) policy documents and directives. That is no longer the case. This article traces EU policymakers' rising interest in family literacy, as evidenced in a number of key policy documents and directives. The article then summarises the findings of a key European Commission (EC) research study which has played a central role in encouraging a greater focus on the family. Drawing on meta-analytic evidence, this study found that family literacy programmes are efficient and effective tools for improving child literacy skills. Such programmes also produce a wide range of important non-cognitive outcomes for children and parents, with significant long-term benefits for society. However, if family literacy is to continue to increase its profile, it will have to overcome a number of daunting policy barriers, including institutional antipathy and the "tyranny of effect size". While unable to provide guaranteed solutions to these problems, this article does offer some examples of success in overcoming them.

### Introduction

Despite ample evidence of its beneficial impacts for children and adults, family literacy has traditionally been ignored in European Union (EU) policy documents and directives. While the EU policy landscape of the early 2000s included the Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy (PEFaL) project, a European-Union funded six-nation initiative, this did not appear to lead to high-level EU policy commitment to family literacy. For example, a series of key policy statements in 2009 and 2010 (Council of the European Union, 2009, 2010; European Union, 2010) addressed literacy issues and objectives for children and adults, but had nothing to say about their nexus: the family.

But family literacy now appears to be garnering

more high level policy attention. For example, a recent European Commission (2013) proposal for the launch of a "European Policy Network of National Literacy Organisations" made it clear that this network must include family literacy experts and organisations. This network proposal is a response to the 2012 EU Council of Ministers Conclusions on Literacy (Council of the European Union) which suggested that EU Member States should develop national literacy strategies, and that intergenerational initiatives should play an important role in those strategies, because "[t]here is evidence to show that family literacy programmes are cost-efficient and highly effective" (p. 3).

These conclusions, in turn, were strongly influenced by the 2012 report of the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012). This group, which was charged with examining "the most effective and efficient ways of supporting reading literacy throughout lifelong learning and [making] proposals aimed at supporting policy in the Member States" (Council of the European Union, 2010) placed significant emphasis on the role of the family, mentioning "family literacy" 13 times in its 103-page final report. Significantly, that report argued that "family literacy programmes are under-used by policy-makers" (p. 40), and recommended that EU, national and regional governments "[d]evelop more extensive, larger and better coordinated family literacy initiatives" (p. 98), both to reduce child literacy gaps and to support the development of a "more literate environment", including a Europe-wide culture of reading for pleasure.

The High Level Group's positive attitude to family literacy was itself shaped in part by a 2009-11 European Commission-funded family literacy research project, led by National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) and including the UK National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

and researchers from seven European countries (Carpentieri et al, 2012). This study investigated family literacy programmes and policies throughout the EU, as well as in the European Economic Area and the European Free Trade Association. This meant that the study was not limited to EU Member States (MSs) but also included countries such as Turkey and Norway.

### Findings

Our research project investigated a number of issues, including:

- The effectiveness of family literacy programmes. Questions included: Do such programmes improve child literacy skills, practices and attitudes? Do family literacy programmes help parents to improve their own knowledge, confidence, skills and attitudes? Which types of programmes appear to work best for particular outcomes, and why?
- Barriers to programme success, and how these can be overcome
- Barriers to effective policymaking, and how these can be overcome.

This article will focus on the first and third issues: programme effectiveness and policy development. In doing so, it will draw on several strands of research which were undertaken as part of the broader research project, including:

an international research review; analysis of programmes and policies throughout EU; qualitative, semi-structured interviews with policymakers and other key stakeholders, including leaders of successful programmes; and case studies of innovative, effective initiatives. More details on all these research strands are available in the full project report.

As this was a European project, we defined family literacy in the European sense, using a broader definition than that incorporated in the UK and Ireland. Our definition of family literacy included all programmes aimed at improving parents' ability to support child literacy development. Family literacy programmes may focus on improving parents' literacy skills (as in the UK and Ireland); more frequently, they focused on improving parents' support skills, e.g. by increasing the amount of time they spent reading with their children, or the strategies they incorporated when doing such reading. UK-style "dual track" family literacy programmes were just one of the many types of initiatives we investigated. Table 1 divides programmes into four types, based on: length of programme, breadth of programme, and objectives, both for parents and children. Based on these criteria, we categorised programmes as either: short and sharp; holistic; dual track; or "slow burn" / culture change. Table 1 provides examples of each type.

**Table 1: Typology of European family literacy programmes**

PROGRAMME TYPE	DESIRED GAINS FOR CHILDREN	DESIRED GAINS FOR PARENTS	EXAMPLE
<b>Short &amp; sharp</b>	Cognitive gains	Improve cognitive support skills	Dialogic reading initiatives
<b>Holistic</b>	Cognitive & non-cognitive	Improve cognitive and non-cognitive support skills	Mother-Child Education Programme, Turkey
<b>Dual track</b>	Cognitive & non-cognitive	Improve cognitive and non-cognitive support skills;  Improve parents' literacy	UK and IE gov't-funded programmes
<b>"Slow burn" / culture change</b>	Cognitive & non-cognitive	Improve cognitive and non-cognitive support skills;  Culture change	Booktrust

## Impacts on child literacy skills: meta-analytic evidence

Our first consideration was: Do family literacy programmes improve child literacy skills, as measured on standardised assessments taken at the start and end of the programme? In the modern “evaluative state” (Neave, 1998), literacy programmes of all types, whether school-based or targeted at adults or families, are ever more frequently required to demonstrate quantifiable evidence of impact. Many policymakers who fund such programmes argue that the modern welfare state is a heavily contested policy environment, characterised by a demanding public and competing claims for investment (Pierson, 2001). Because programmes in one policy area (e.g. literacy) compete with those in other areas (such as health) for government funding, there is increased pressure on all types of initiatives to show measurable evidence of impact (Carpentieri, 2013).

In seeking such evidence, it was felt that a single study, no matter how rigorously conducted, could not answer our questions about programme effectiveness. “Family literacy” covers an extremely broad and varied range of programme types, and a study of only one (or even several) programmes would not be generalizable to the field as a whole.

For generalizability, a research review was preferred. However, this route also presented problems. First, much primary research has been methodologically weak. Second, typical research reviews are subject to selective use of the available evidence. One of the primary challenges associated with assessing programme impact is the fact that research studies often arrive at conflicting conclusions. Moreover, such studies often vary significantly in quality and methodological rigour. These factors can encourage decision-makers to “cherry pick” findings, choosing the evidence that best fits their preconceived notions. For example, policymakers in favour of investing in family literacy interventions can readily point to studies showing evidence of success. On the other hand, policymakers who would prefer not to invest in such initiatives can likewise point to research supporting their stance. One solution to this problem, and the one which we adopted, is to use meta-analysis.

Meta-analysis provides a tool for overcoming many of the challenges associated with conflicting research evidence and variable study quality. Meta-analyses systematically combine the results of a number of primary research studies in order to arrive at a more robust conclusion about programme effectiveness (Coe, 2002). This

means that instead of looking at just one study, meta-analyses combine the results of several research projects. In doing so, meta-analyses also assess the quality of primary research, filtering out or giving less weight to lower quality evidence.

To quantify programme effectiveness, meta-analyses use a measure known as effect size, which is a numerical estimate of the magnitude of an intervention's impact (Coe, 2002). Expressing impacts in effect size allows for the quantitative comparison of the relative impacts of two or more different interventions, or an intervention compared to a control group.

An effect size of 1.0 is equivalent to an increase of one standard deviation. This would be an extremely large impact – the equivalent of advancing a child's achievement by two to three years (Hattie, 2009). In an international summary of more than 800 meta-analyses (consisting of more than 50,000 primary research studies) of educational initiatives, Hattie (2009) found that the average (mean) effect size for educational interventions was 0.4. Unfortunately, his analysis does not include family literacy programmes – perhaps further evidence of the field's historic marginalisation.

This is an omission that our own study sought to partially remedy, by reviewing and summarising the results of the six known<sup>2</sup> meta-analyses of family literacy programmes. Covering a total of 109 family literacy studies, these meta-analyses found aggregate effect sizes ranging from a low of 0.25 to a high of 0.68.

Table 2 provides details of each study, along with an illustration of the impacts of each study's effect size. For example, the bottom row of this table presents the results of a meta-analysis by Sénéchal and Young (2008), whose synthesis of studies investigating the effects of family literacy programmes on children's acquisition of reading found an effect size of 0.68. Columns 3 and 4 of this table illustrate the impacts of particular effect sizes. For example, Column 3 shows that with an effect size of 0.68, approximately 75% of the children in a control group (i.e. not receiving the intervention) would score below the average child participating in a family literacy intervention. That is, the effect of the programme is the equivalent of moving a child from the 50th percentile to the 76th. This is a large gain. Still focusing on Sénéchal and Young's meta-analysis, Column 4 shows that the average family literacy intervention group score (i.e. the 13th highest score in a group of 25) would be equivalent to the sixth highest score in a comparable control group.

**Table 2 Family literacy effect sizes, and gains expected from these effect sizes**

Study	Effect size	Approximate percentage of control group who would be below the average person in the experimental group	Approximate rank of person in a control group of 25 who would be equivalent to the average person in the experimental group
van Steensel et al (2011), How effective are family literacy programmes? Results of a meta-analysis	0.25	60%	11th
Manz et al (2010), A descriptive review and meta-analysis of family-based emergent literacy interventions: To what extent is the research applicable to low-income, ethnic-minority or linguistically -diverse young children?	0.33	63%	10th
Nye et al (2006), Approaches to parent involvement for improving the academic performance of elementary school age children	0.42	66%	9th
Erion (2006), Parent tutoring: A meta - analysis	0.55	71%	8th
Mol et al (2008), Added value of dialogic parent - child book readings: A meta - analysis	0.59	73%	7th
Sénéchal and Young (2008), The effect of family literacy interventions on children's acquisition of reading from kindergarten to grade 3: A meta-analytic review	0.68	75%	6th

*(NB: Van Steensel et al found no positive effect in randomised studies. In contrast, Nye et al found an effect size of 0.42, even though their review included only randomised studies.*

These findings suggest that family literacy interventions have a relatively large impact on child literacy acquisition. To put them into context, the average effect size of giving homework to primary school pupils is only 0.15 (Hattie, 2009), while reducing class sizes from 23 to 15 yields an effect of 0.3, at a high budgetary cost (Hattie, 1999). The average effect size for all the educational interventions included in Hattie's synthesis of meta-analyses (2009) was 0.4. Hattie therefore argues that if educational interventions cannot produce an effect size of at least 0.4 (the average) they should probably be replaced by programmes that can. The key question in deciding whether or not to employ a particular intervention is not "Does it work?" Most educational interventions work to some degree (Hattie, 2009). The key question is: "How well does the programme work in comparison to other viable alternatives?" While school-based interventions tend to be "either-or" propositions – if one intervention is being implemented in a classroom at a particular point in time, another cannot be – family interventions (the vast majority of which occur outside of school hours) are more likely to complement than to compete with in-school programmes. Family literacy programmes present very low opportunity costs. Therefore, it is fair to compare their effects to a baseline of zero, rather than 0.4. This makes the strong results found by our meta-analytic review even more impressive. These findings have since been supported by a later review. Summarising a number meta-analyses (some of which were also summarised in Carpentieri et al, 2011), van Steensel *et al.* (2012, p. 37) found a "generally positive" impact. While effect sizes differed, almost all the studies reviewed by van Steensel and colleagues found statistically significant effects on child literacy development.

### Longitudinal evidence

The quantitative evidence drawn upon in our own study (and that of van Steensel *et al.*, 2012) is, however, limited, particularly in terms of European programmes. Due to a lack of high quality European research, most of the studies included in the aforementioned meta-analyses are American, and may not be generalizable to European contexts.

To overcome this evidence gap, our review also took account of high quality primary research from the European area. While the Netherlands and the UK have produced a fair amount of quantitative evidence, the most rigorous and valuable research came from Turkey. The Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP), which has since

evolved into the Mother-Child Education Program (MOCEP), has been the subject of a multi-decade longitudinal evaluation (Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 2001, 2005). The intervention focused primarily on improving mothers' capacity to promote these outcomes. Unlike the studies included in our meta-analytic review, it did not focus on short-term literacy gains for children.

Results in Turkey have been extremely impressive, across a broad range of outcome measures and over a long period of time. The Mother-Child Education Program has now run in Turkey for nearly two decades, serving more than 300,000 families; it has also been implemented in five Western European states (Bekman and Koçak, 2010; Carpentieri et al., 2011).

### Non-cognitive outcomes

While the programmes included in our meta-analytic review tended to be "short and sharp" (see Table 1), the Turkish approach to family literacy has been more holistic, and more long-term. In MOCEP (and TEEP before it) the focus has been on the mother, who receives training in how to support her child's cognitive development, but also in how to support the child's non-cognitive growth. This includes a strong emphasis on: the socio-emotional development of the child; the quality of parent-child interaction; good at home parenting (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003); and the mother's self-concept & self-efficacy (Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 1992, 2001, 2005). While the Turkish research included measures of short-term literacy gain (i.e. immediately post-course), the emphasis has been on longitudinal development and tracking. A follow-up seven years after the course found the following benefits, when comparing of programme participants with a matched group of non-participants:

- Better school attainment, better literacy
- Better child and parent attitudes to school
- Higher parental expectations
- Fewer behaviour problems
- More positive parent-child relationships

Nineteen years after the programme, participants (who were now in their mid-20s) were characterised by better educational attainment (e.g. 60% more likely to attend university) and higher occupational status. Family literacy had paid off, and not just in terms of literacy itself.

These broad-ranging, long-term outcomes are reminiscent of those found in longitudinal studies of early childhood education and care (ECEC)

programmes, e.g. studies of the US Perry High/Scope preschool programme (Schweinhart *et al.*, 2005). In both family literacy and ECEC, these long-term outcomes may be significantly driven by the programmes' focus on socio-emotional benefits. Analysing the Perry High/Scope programme, Heckman *et al.* (2009) concluded that the key to long-term gains – for example, improved academic performance in secondary school – was the programme's attention to children's non-cognitive development.

Our research review found that family literacy interventions appear to produce an important range of non-cognitive benefits, including improved social and cultural capital, improved parental self-confidence and self-efficacy (Swain *et al.*, 2009), and improved child self-concept as a reader and learner (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003). Policy stakeholders interviewed in the course of our research observed that even in programmes in which it was not a core objective, parental empowerment of low-income, poorly educated and/or migrant mothers was a common outcome of family literacy initiatives.

Family literacy programmes also appeared to have impacts at the societal level – helping to create “a more literate environment”, in the words of the High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) report. For example, a core objective of book gifting programmes such as Bookstart (in its various guises throughout Europe) is to encourage a celebration of books, stories and reading for pleasure. This is also the aim of programmes such as Every Czech Reads to Kids and All of Poland Reads to Children. Such programmes seek to contribute to a cultural shift in which reading becomes seen by all families, including disadvantaged ones, as an enjoyable part of daily life and a key means through which parents bond with and support their children.

However, there is a clear challenge for family literacy programmes focused on non-cognitive and/or cultural outcomes, a challenge epitomised in our own study: policymakers tend to be much more interested in quantitative measures of literacy gain than in measures of non-cognitive impacts. They want “hard” data on “hard” outcomes, and tend to overlook or underestimate the importance of “soft” outcomes such as improved attitudes and self-confidence. The need to demonstrate “quantitative data on short-term measures of skills gain led the leader of a particularly successful family literacy programme – winner of the 2010 King Sejong Literacy Prize from the UNESCO Institute for

Lifelong Learning – to decry the “tyranny of effect size” faced by such programmes, including her own. This “tyranny” is characterised by a focus on one readily measured short-term outcome (i.e. skills gain), within the context of a programme that produces (or aims to produce) a broad range of inter-related, often long-term outcomes. Such outcomes may include skills gain but also are likely to include benefits such as changes in reading habits, improved attitudes to school and higher levels of parental confidence.

In this context, large effect sizes such as those found in our review are useful, but can also be a burden for programmes, by providing a target that is both too high and too narrow, especially for initiatives targeted at the most disadvantaged families. One of the central goals of family literacy programmes is to help instil a culture of reading and learning in families that may not have such a culture, or may view this as the job of schools rather than parents. Programmes targeted at more disadvantaged families may fail to achieve quantitatively measurable skills gains, because the objectives of these programmes need to be more basic: 1) showing parents and children that reading can be fun; and 2) showing parents that reading can be a source of pleasurable bonding between parent and child. This means that programmes which are having large and important impacts on essential non-cognitive characteristics may be deemed failures, simply because their participants are less “test-ready” than those in other programmes. While measuring programme impact is important, a misguided emphasis on inappropriate measures is bad for policy, practice and participants. Unfortunately, space does not permit a discussion in this article of possible solutions to this conundrum; however, this issue is addressed in a special issue of the *European Journal of Education* devoted to the findings of the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (Carpentieri, 2013).

### **Improving family literacy policy**

The tyranny of effect size is one clear barrier to better and more expanded family literacy policy. Other barriers to good family literacy policy are institutional. A key obstacle highlighted in qualitative interviews with family literacy stakeholders was the widespread lack of knowledge of or interest in family literacy on the part of key policymakers, including many working in the field of education. In some Member States, this lack of knowledge manifests itself in the form of policy vacuums. In such countries, there is almost no understanding of or policy interest in family literacy. In Cyprus, for

example, education is largely seen as the responsibility of schools alone, and schools typically discourage parental involvement. In Romania, centralised, top-down education planning leaves little room for "new" ideas or initiatives such as family literacy. However, in some countries with policy vacuums there is evidence of "policy pioneers" working to raise the profile of family literacy and to adapt lessons learned from other Member States.

Even in countries where family literacy is on the policy agenda, policymaking tends to suffer because the field lacks a clear policy home. Traditional policymaking tends to be based around institutional and departmental lines: rather than putting the child or the family at the centre of the policy process, developments are often driven by the interests and requirements of particular institutions, such as schools, or particular governmental organisations, such as Departments of Education. In addition, policymakers and other stakeholders rarely have "childhood-wide" subject knowledge – for example, policymakers in Departments of Education may have little expert knowledge of family-centred interventions, and may even be hostile to the inclusion of parents in what have traditionally been school-focused agendas. Policymakers in adult funding streams may have limited understanding of parents' child-centred motivations for participation in family literacy (Swain *et al.*, 2009), or limited interest in tracking impacts on adults *and* children.

Unsurprisingly, cross-departmental policymaking can be a challenge. A focus on families requires "joined-up" policy making. In part because of institutional boundaries and expertise, this is easier in principle than practice. However, we did find examples of success. For example, despite a reduction in funding for family literacy, the Netherlands has made positive strides in crafting "childhood-wide" policies which require cooperative efforts from a number of departments or ministries, particularly those responsible for education and health. As a Dutch respondent observed in our study: "Instead of having three different institutions, we work to make it one." Likewise, Bookstart in the UK utilises home health visitors to provide free book packs to children, while Buchstart in Hamburg distributes book packs via paediatricians.

We also found evidence of conflicting funding agendas hampering the development and sustainability of family literacy. For example, in the Netherlands increased funding for early childhood education and care (ECEC) has come

at the expense of family literacy programmes. This example points to the broader issue of a lack of overall policy coherence in the development of child literacy strategies, which rarely include family literacy as a key component. One promising counter-example is Malta, where a new national child literacy strategy includes a specific and well-defined family literacy component.

### Conclusions

Our study concluded that family literacy programmes are an effective tool for improving many children's literacy skills as measured in the short-term. More importantly, they can play a key role in producing long-term improvements in children's education attainment and later occupational status. The key mechanism for these long-term improvements is improved parental literacy practices, e.g. more frequent and higher quality parent-child reading, better parental attitudes to literacy, and improved parental self-confidence and self-concept. Furthermore, the meta-analytic evidence suggests that family literacy programmes are particularly cost-effective.

Our report therefore recommended that all European nations' literacy strategies should include a significant family literacy component, and that policymakers should more actively support the widespread proliferation of family literacy interventions.

Reviewing these recommendations in the light of recent policy developments, it is clear that some positive strides have been made at EU level. Despite its weak position in many if not most European Member States, family literacy now has at least a tentative place at the EU policy table. The next questions to ask are:

- 1) What will be the national-level impacts of this EU policy interest?
- 2) Will family literacy be able to overcome the many policy barriers it faces? and
- 3) Will family literacy remain in fashion if it struggles to overcome these barriers?

Answers on a postcard, please.

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## Family Literacy in Cambridgeshire: a practitioner's viewpoint

Lisette Veit

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This article describes the provision of Family Literacy in Cambridgeshire from a practitioner's point of view. The article focuses on how the disparate literacy needs of adults can be addressed simultaneously within Family Learning classes, particularly through the development of underpinning speaking and listening skills.



Travelling by train from Peterborough in the north of Cambridgeshire to Cambridge in the south, I recall musing once that the landscape looks as though Mother Nature took out her ironing board and ironed it. The countryside is flat and fertile, easy farmland to feed much of Britain with salads, cereals and bacon. A church spire dominates each of 124 leafy villages, while towns are small and varied in character.

Peterborough is a sprawling city which operates independently for many local government functions, including adult learning. Cambridge is a startling amalgamation of ancient and futuristic, combined in the various colleges and properties of the eminent university at her heart.

"Surely," asked a sceptical colleague from industrial Liverpool, "there are no problems with literacy in Cambridgeshire?"

Of course there are, and for so many reasons.

"We talk about 'pockets of need'. These range from isolated rural communities, where people can live and die without travelling as far as Cambridge, and can be home to families that don't value education at all; to housing estates and small towns where populations have been lifted from their substandard homes and tucked away with little support to replace the social ties they left behind.

Although the county is in the middle of the secondary school league tables in England and Wales, we have some of the best schools in the UK in Cambridgeshire.<sup>1</sup> Children who leave compulsory education having achieved the required standard of five GCSE grades A\* to C have an excellent outlook. On the other hand, the 43% of children who don't make the grade have some of the lowest prospects in the country, with very few semi-skilled and even fewer unskilled jobs available.

Traveller communities make up the second highest ethnic group in Cambridgeshire, and the county is home to more Gypsies and Travellers than any other in the UK. Highly disadvantaged in access to education and stable accommodation, literacy levels are found to be particularly low amongst these groups. The benefits of being literate are sharply defined by differences in health and life: "*A lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality rate, poorer health outcomes and poorer access to preventative care is found in the Gypsy and Traveller population compared to the general population and there is evidence that mental health problems are more widespread.*"<sup>2</sup>

The rural nature of much of the county also attracts migrant workers from all over the world. Families with little to no English settle and send their children to school. Parents work long hours in frequently changing shift patterns, making adult education difficult for them to access. A fair proportion of migrant workers come from highly qualified backgrounds, but there are also plenty of people who haven't attended school at all. Sitting in a nursery school classroom in the conservative town of Huntingdon, listening to a woman describe how her mother gave birth to her on a mountainside in Zimbabwe and tied her umbilical cord with bark, is a lesson in how small the world has become. We are privileged to benefit from such a rich array of cultural heritages in Cambridgeshire, but must also recognise our responsibility for integration through English literacy.

Family Learning has been a consistently successful mode of literacy delivery in Cambridgeshire since the late 1990s. Using money from the Standards Fund<sup>3</sup>, courses were

set up for parents in further and community education colleges<sup>4</sup> (secondary schools with an additional focus on education for the wider community) in the most deprived urban areas of the county. Classes were well attended, and have been since this time, in no small part due to the complementary crèche provision. Parents feel comfortable learning while certain that their young children are being well-cared for in the same premises, but the benefits of crèche provision are wider than this.

For some parents, the family learning crèche is the first step in a journey of accessing help outside of the immediate family. For those parents who hold a deep mistrust of state-funded institutions - from school to social services, the police and beyond - leaving a child in the hands of strangers requires a huge leap of faith. Joining other parents in similar circumstances while exploring topics that centre on literacy in the home has the potential for a powerful impact. That impact is lessened considerably where parents are anxious about their children, but the knowledge that a crèche worker will approach them respectfully if their child won't settle eases everyone's minds.

Short courses began as '*Keeping Up With the Children*' and centred on exploring those English and maths skills that found their way back into a National Curriculum<sup>5</sup> after a long period of relative freedom in education. These courses were, and remain, a popular draw for parents. Longer courses were encouraged by the Basic Skills Agency and the Standards Fund, but by 2002, when Cambridgeshire County Council appointed a manager to oversee the programme, fewer than twenty short *Keeping Up* courses were being delivered county-wide per year.

Flora Sheringham, the driving force behind Family Learning in Cambridgeshire since 2002, has overseen many changes in funding, policy and outcomes for learners. By appointing a team of Development Practitioners and tutors, she has nurtured the growth of provision until in 2011 / 2012, Family Learning provided opportunities for two thousand adults.

Family Literacy is powerful because of its effective engagement. A colleague describes it as 'dropping a stone into a pond with the ripples it causes'. If the pond is the family, the stone is comprised predominantly of speaking and listening skills.

In a discussion paper compiled by the National Literacy Trust, the premise that children's

communication skills - the building blocks of literacy - are in decline is expertly explored: "*There is a growing body of opinion among professionals that an increasing number of children are suffering from communication difficulties.*"<sup>6</sup>

The reasons for the apparent decline in speaking and listening skills in children are multiple, but the effects don't impact on the children alone. Parents who don't know how to talk to their children don't know how to enjoy being with them, either. One Family Literacy course I taught stands out in my mind as an illustration. After spending some time getting to know the parents in the group, which included some with professional qualifications, my colleague went to fetch their little Sophies, Jameses and Daniels from their classrooms. By a strange twist of fate, she inadvertently gathered the wrong child (albeit with the right given name) for each parent. Walking back into the hall with a short snake of five, six and seven year olds, we waited for parents and children to claim each other. Their complete lack of reaction alerted us to the mistake. Another trip around the school brought the correct group of children into the hall; but to our surprise, the reaction from either side was as muted as before. The adults remained in their seats, without making eye contact or greeting their offspring. The children remained passive, focused more on the activities laid out on tables than on their parents. In that first session, the majority of the communication from parent to child was corrective: *put that down; give that to me; no; stop it; if you don't behave, Mummy won't come any more; you'll have to go back to the classroom!*

In contrast, here are some of the things parents have told us at the end of a Family Literacy course:

*"The importance of play has now reflected in my behaviour with my children. I have learnt to relax and let them do certain things their way."  
"I am a lot more confident with the children. Now I have to work on talking to the adults! I realise I do not say enough."*

*"I feel more confident and tend to be asked for help by the children in school. I have confidence in doing writing and will take part in discussions now."*

*"I am now more confident in speaking out and in a group discussion. It has also shown me ways of dealing with my own family in the way they play and develop."*

*"I am so much more relaxed about reading with my child at home. Without this course, I would have kept forcing him to read for far too long and he would have hated reading."*

*"I now talk to her about what we are doing at home and we are having more fun!"*

*"It has refreshed my knowledge of English. But most importantly, it has made [XX's] learning at home much more enjoyable for her and me."*



One of our most successful Family Literacy courses centres on the creation of storybags for parents to share with children. These comprise handmade sacks filled with an age-appropriate storybook and related games, toys and learning aids. In a primary school serving a particularly deprived area, we put on a storybag course that attracted some very hard-to-reach parents. The tutor told us:

*"Some of the parents couldn't make eye contact with anyone at the beginning of the course, and had to be escorted to the session by their child's class teacher. The whole class made a book to sell for charity. It gave them such a buzz to be doing something for someone else and their children. Every week, the kids came into the classroom and read the verses that had been written, and made collages to illustrate them. By the end of the course, each parent had a storybag to share and had contributed something to the book, which we printed and sold. The children were really proud, and so were their mums!"*

This is a learner reflecting on her experience: *"Creating this storybag made me look at the*

*book in a totally different way. Instead of just reading it and putting it back on the shelf, I started coming up with all sorts of ways to make the concept of reading more enjoyable. I would very much recommend the use of storybags with all children because it teaches them all sorts of new skills and can help them improve on others. The main thing it teaches them is how to have fun with a book, and let's face it, children enjoy having fun! If they are enjoying something, they are learning and don't even know it. I think my storybag is a success because of all the fun my daughter and I have had putting it together. We have read, made and played our way through this sack, which has enabled us to spend quality time together where we have both learned a lot of new things."*

Courses like these have an impact on the children who join the classroom activities, but perhaps the biggest impact is on subsequent children. A case study written by a colleague at the end of an Early Years Literacy course states:

*"Two pregnant women felt happier about understanding the information they were being given and more able to explain their needs and health problems. Generally all reported that they felt more able to deal with the day-to-day family life and work. They felt coming to class and talking about what had happened during the week and how to sort things out that were problems was useful, and often positive outcomes would be talked about the following week. Learners would praise and congratulate each other if they sorted a problem out."*

The bonds forged between parents in this course also reflect the increased bond between parent and child. Schools, nurseries and Children's Centres that establish Family Learning courses inevitably come back for more. They value the impact courses like these have on the children, even in courses which focus entirely on the parent.

This blog was created by Family Learning and has posts from learners in a Functional English class at a Children's Centre in Huntingdon: <http://familycambs.blogspot.co.uk/>

These parents were learning English for themselves, but the impact on the family is noticeable in how they report on their success:

*"I feel like I have achieved a lot and refreshed my English skills totally. I now have the confidence and hopefully the necessary achievements to have enabled myself to find a*

*new job. My children are also asking me to assist with their English homework, which I now love to help with due to refreshing my skills. I am going to look for a new job very soon, but am also wondering whether to start another course to do with accountancy. I can fully support my children in their learning now, so I'm pleased to have attended this course."*

*"I have achieved my goals and a lot more. I can read a story to my grandchildren. I read magazines and I write notes to my husband. I used a recipe for the first time and baked bread. I joined the library and I did wordsearches and puzzles from a book. I can spell lots of children's names. I wrote a letter to the Nursery School. I'm planning to do the next course and work towards a higher level."* [This learner never attended school, and could not read the names of the children in her new job as a dinner lady at the nursery school where the course was held. By the end of the course, she had achieved an Entry Level 2 qualification in Functional English.]

Our traditional view of literacy is focused on the ability to read and write, but the evidence from classrooms, community venues and Children's Centres across Cambridgeshire is that the speaking and listening skills that underpin children's reading and writing are just as important to adult learners.

We have found that many parents, even those who are skilled professionals, need help to understand how to play and encourage language in their young children. Family Literacy classes are an ideal place for this to happen, as they address both parenting and literacy skills.



Parents who speak other languages at home need encouragement to continue to speak and interact with their children in their primary language; but they also need support and

opportunities to improve their personal English skills. Again, Family Language classes are ideally placed to meet both needs, and the provision of a safe and secure crèche on-site allows access to a much wider group of adults.

'Speaking and listening' has always made up one third of the adult literacy core curriculum. At every level, speaking and listening skills complement and underpin reading and writing skills. A widening vocabulary (at word level) is essential to reading; the ability to hear, retain and act upon instructions (at sentence level) is a key skill in improving writing; identifying bias in speeches and media (at text level) leads to discriminating reading skills; from entry level to level two and beyond, the value of applying pedagogy to speaking and listening is difficult to underestimate. And once again, Family Literacy is ideally placed to embed teaching and learning in a subject that very few adults would identify as a need or a goal.

On the face of it, the groups of people with literacy needs in Cambridgeshire are disparate and have little in common. In practice, a high proportion are settled families with children. Because children have health and educational needs that bring families into the agencies that link to Family Learning, we are ideally placed to offer them classes they are comfortable accessing. Because we work in the same settings repeatedly, families begin to trust and value what we offer. Once parents are through the door, they meet other families with similar needs. They begin to trust 'outsiders' with care of their children. By increasing their literacy skills, they access information and opportunities they were not party to before. By improving their parenting skills, they not only improve outcomes and opportunities for their children, but begin to enjoy family life much more. The impact is exponential.

Family literacy is the most rewarding area of work I have been involved with, and even as my career develops and changes, I expect it to remain so. Gazing out of my window at the peaceful, leafy village I inhabit, I am aware of the hidden struggles and hard won accomplishments of those around me. This may not be Liverpool or London, but there are needs here and Family Literacy has an immeasurable impact on them.

## A small group for traveller family members: some key issues

Gill Sargent

*Gill Sargent is a literacy teacher who works in a variety of locations in a rural county in England. In this article she describes how she met the aspirations of a small number of learners from an Irish Traveller community. They had responded to an offer of an adult literacy group that could meet every week in a hall within walking distance of their homes. Participation for family members ranging from teenagers to older women was funded by a flexible partnership between the local Early Years' Centre and Adult and Community Learning.*

I am the tutor for a small literacy project working within the Traveller community. We meet once a week in local premises, accessible to the learners, for two hours.

This project has been set up to support the learners to gain basic literacy skills which they can use in three key areas: official correspondence, reading for pleasure and supporting their children's education. These are the key areas identified by the group as being important to them so the learning aims and materials are selected from these areas.

The learners want to be more able to deal with more of their own correspondence. Official correspondence is a difficult area because of the volume of information we all receive from organisations – health, DWP, Tax Credits, local councils to mention but a few. A lot of official correspondence will have penalties attached if it is not responded to within a specified time-scale, such as the loss of benefits or fines imposed by the HMRC. Therefore the learners need to be able to decipher what is important and needs some action to be taken, especially if they need to seek help to deal with the information. Currently many of the group either rely on their children or friends who can read, or professionals to read correspondence to them which means there is often a delay in being able to read the information or issues of sharing personal information with others.

One of the things I have worked on to help them cope with their correspondence is matching local and national logos to correspondence so that they can recognise the source of their correspondence. For example recognising a letter from the local health centre by its logo, as they know this is important and is likely to need action of some kind. We then moved onto looking at key words which appear in correspondence that they need to recognise, such as dates and times for appointments. This work has been useful in enabling the group to take more control over their own correspondence rather than storing it all for someone else to read for them. These days we are all overwhelmed with paperwork so being able to determine what is important from junk mail is necessary, especially as this has helped them to avoid missing appointments.

Previously these learners had not been able to access reading for pleasure. I have introduced some short stories and plays which have shown that reading can be fun. This is difficult because there is very little suitable material for low Entry level readers so I have adapted some reading material to make this more accessible. Importantly the material they want to read needs to be chosen by the learners so it is of interest to them.

Those who are parents within the group are keen to support their children's education. By learning to read themselves they can share books with their children. We have talked about how children learn to read and discussed the value of using the pictures to predict likely meanings and words in the story. This increases the parents' confidence when speaking to their children's teachers and engaging with the local schools; it increases their cultural capital and enables them as parents to work in partnership with their child's school.

The work is very much determined by the group. Unlike adult college groups, they are not so interested in gaining a qualification nor do they see improving their literacy skills as a step towards employment.

Therefore this brings a freedom to teach to the groups' interests and identified needs rather than to a set curriculum. For this group, learning to read is more important than writing, though they are interested in texting and this is a way of introducing writing skills into something they can perceive a practical need for, whereas they do not want to write letters as they see no immediate need for this skill.

There are challenges to overcome with this work, principally that their lifestyle does not necessarily fit into academic structures. Obviously they spend some of their time travelling so the teaching times need to reflect the times of the year they are available and be flexible enough to accommodate their lifestyle.



## Family Literature in Derbyshire

*Sarah Burkinshaw studied psychology and has worked within a social inclusion agenda throughout her career. In the 1980s she researched adult learning styles but went on to teach teenage pupils with special education needs. In Australia she worked with unemployed young people and helped develop the youth service and youth policy. Sarah joined the local government in Derbyshire in 1988 and worked in policy, regeneration and consultation. In 2007 she was delighted to become the Director of Read On Write Away! Sarah continues to combine her fascination with learning, social inclusion and strategy as a Literacy Coordinator at Derbyshire County Council.*

Just over a year ago the funding for Read On Write Away! (ROWA!) finally ran out. Originally conceived by the Education Department of Derbyshire County Council to support literacy throughout the county and the city of Derby, it was jointly funded by the two councils and representatives from other organisations: the tertiary skills sector, business and enterprise, the voluntary sector and the National Literacy Trust. In 1997 this represented a novel collection of stakeholders who recognised that the local level of literacy skill was an economic time-bomb as well as an issue of social justice.

Over the years, ROWA! could claim that it played a strong development role in many literacy approaches that are now considered to be the backbone of adult or family literacy. ROWA! was among the first to trial books for babies, book boxes for looked-after children, new reading buddy schemes, story-sack projects, family learning, literacy celebrations, prisoner projects, projects for Gypsies and Travellers, embedded workplace learning and children's university. ROWA! developed literacy training for teachers and teaching assistants and influenced classroom practice. There were two ROWA! double-decker bus classrooms and a 'learning lorry' which took literacy support right into the heart of all sorts of communities.

The thread throughout all of this work was a conviction that all learners begin with skills and interests and that literacy is best developed as an extension to these skills. Family Learning, in all its guises, is built on the premise that parents are an exciting mix of existing skills and a highly motivating new interest – their children. The ROWA! method was deeply grounded in starting from strengths and embarking on mutual learning journeys.

We never underestimated the considerable access issues which hinder adults' ability to restart their learning in 'basic skills'. Financial and aspirational poverty, low self-esteem, lack of opportunity, a disconnect with formal learning of any kind and domestic upheaval or discomfort all get in the way of knowing those strengths. ROWA! was skilled in the long art of attracting

learners' attention, gently reeling them in over the access issues and growing them into independent learners with accreditation.

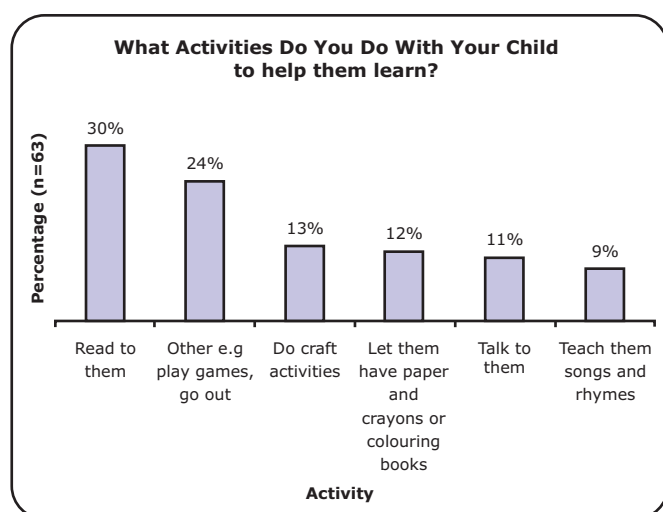
In 2009 ROWA! joined a new project led by the National Literacy Trust. The aim of this project was to help close the literacy achievement gap experienced by disadvantaged children by helping their parents develop more productive home learning practice or resources. The innovative twist was to reach those parents who were beyond the reach of the usual literacy providers, through other service providers. In short, to recruit housing officers, health visitors, community centres, family intervention workers, police officers, women's refuges etc. into being literacy message carriers and enthusiasts. If all of these people could become comfortable with the idea of encouraging and supporting family literacy then the hardest to reach families would have a better chance of being encouraged.

We carried out research with non-literacy colleagues and with harder-to-engage families. Around two thirds of non-literacy colleagues admitted that their adult clients' level of literacy skill made their work harder and most of them were willing to be a part of a solution.

The survey of 63 'harder-to-reach' families from three disadvantaged areas of Derbyshire found that, although two thirds of parents said they wanted to help their children to succeed, far fewer knew how to do this. The extract below from the survey report illustrates this issue, showing the responses from parents when asked what they did to help their children learn. The number of parents who gave a positive response to various suggestions is low. Critically, only 11% felt that talk was important. We asked (mainly mums) what they did with their babies and toddlers and many said, 'walk to a park or to the shops' (meaning push baby in a buggy) and, 'watch TV' (many thought that this was a better language option than anything they could provide).

We learned that many parents do not even know that they have a role in language development and that many of those who thought they had a

role, but who lacked confidence, did not access existing support. We were also reminded about access issues, about just how small some parents' 'travel to help area' is and just how challenging it would be to ask for help. There was a consistent request for knowledge ('someone should tell us this') and very local help ('I'd like someone like me to tell me this stuff').



As a result of this research ROWA! set about developing family literacy information and resources which could be delivered by non-literacy colleagues and community mentors. This obviously appears to fly in the face of diligent adult tutor training and qualifications but the main message here is not technical but attitudinal, about sharing enthusiasm and having a go at whatever level. In short, 'it's important that you talk with and read to your children'.

The result of this research and the pilot projects was presented to the Shadow Derbyshire Health and Well Being Board as a proposal for a Derbyshire Family Homes Reading Strategy. As ROWA! disappeared, this new work, to create support for families in their own homes, began to take shape.

The work has three elements: the first is aimed universally at all parents and the other two are targeted at families most likely to need support. The aim is to develop:

1. A visible marketing tool to show families and colleagues where literacy support is. Lots of our current support is hidden behind quirky names and promoted differently. The idea is to promote the sessions, groups, events and resources as belonging to a communication and reading theme.
2. Literacy pathways in communities by looking

at what is currently provided by health services, council services, volunteer groups and thinking about this as a joined-up pathway with different types of experiences and progression as well as identifying gaps in the type of offer available.

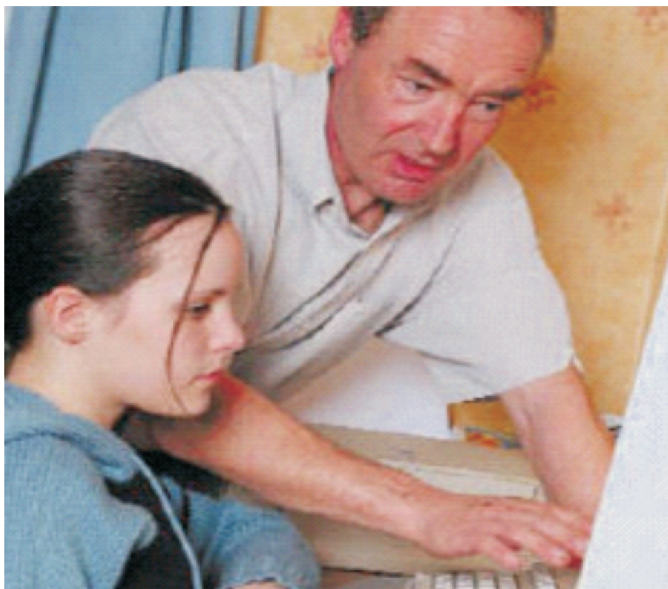
3. Volunteer literacy mentors: people from communities keen to share their 'know-how' with other families. These volunteers will be sharers of enthusiasm and ideas, not adult educators. It is their job to promote having fun with stories and books, games, sounds, and rhymes and to introduce families to other people and resources in children's centres, adult learning centres and libraries.

This strategy involves getting non-literacy colleagues to deliver an outcome which is not directly linked to their own work but the 'trick' is to see that literacy activities can deliver a lot of outcomes. Other colleagues are interested in activities which develop resilience, social cohesion, attachment, family routines and positive results. Literacy activities can deliver on all of these and be a useful tool in the kitbag of a wide range of service providers.



In pilot work with literacy mentors we learned that parents appreciate learning about sharing stories and books with their children not so much because of the skills, but because the activity brings about other valued outcomes. Parents told us, just as colleagues had done, about having more fun at home, more pleasant bedtimes, something to do or talk about, quiet time and increased affection. In thinking about marketing literacy we looked at the bigger picture, what it

does for family life. What we call the home learning environment also encompasses love, affection, praise, self-esteem, memories and constructive conversations; literacy has a key part to play in delivering these outcomes.



Once again we have joined the National Literacy Trust in a national project to work with volunteer mentors to encourage more communication and literacy activities in family homes. We will be doing this against our marketing backdrop, the 'Read It!' campaign. Read It! buddies will work with parents, including dads, who have been included in the marketing, to show how fun with chat, rhymes, song and stories can help them feel more confident about family time and sharing books. The buddies will also introduce families to services which they may not yet have used and show them how they work. A giraffe family has been designed to show family members using books and stories in every part of their lives and to promote places where parents can go to get resources, help, or just have fun.

This approach builds directly from ROWA!'s principles; it is about strengthening communities by building positive activities and aspirations into them, helping individuals become local catalysts for change and building on strengths.



# Family Storytelling Weekend in Wales

## May 18th /19th 2013

### Eirwen Malin

*Eirwen Malin joined NIACE Dysgu Cymru in 2003 as a part-time project officer for Older and Bolder. Since then she has developed the work around learning in later life within NIACE Dysgu Cymru and also is responsible for the work on Family and Intergenerational learning. Within this context Eirwen has managed a number of successful pilot and research projects to inform policy and practice development.*

*After an initial degree in Pure Maths and Physics, followed by a teaching qualification Eirwen has spent more than 20 years working in the voluntary sector in Wales. Her work has focused on developing individuals through learning, volunteering, community action and the Arts. She has an MSc from the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University in Evidence Based Research and Applications during which she undertook research into the use of new media technologies in social science research.*

*Alongside her work as Senior Project Officer for NIACE Dysgu Cymru Eirwen works on a freelance basis as a researcher, facilitator and trainer. She has a particular interest in narrative approaches and uses storytelling, creative and participative techniques in her work.*

PERFFORMIADAU	PERFORMANCES
<b>Y Cwprdd Rhyfedodau</b> <i>Digwyddiad amser cinio 1pm 18fed Mai</i> Chwedlau gwerin llafar lleol Ceredigion. Hanesion am gonsurwyr, crochanau, morforynion, y tylwyth teg, bwganod a moch hudol. Peter Stevenson yn adrodd storïau. Croeso i bawb <a href="http://peterstevensonart.co.uk/">http://peterstevensonart.co.uk/</a> i'r holl deulu, rhan o Benwythnos Adrodd Storïau i'r Teulu, Niace, ar gyfer oedolion sy'n dysgu <a href="http://www.niacec.org.uk/">http://www.niacec.org.uk/</a>	<b>A Cabinet of Curiosities</b> <i>Lunchtime event 1pm 18th May</i> The local oral folk tales of Ceredigion. Tales of conjurors, cauldrons, mermaids, y tylwyth teg, bogeys, bwgans and enchanted pigs. Storytelling with Peter Stevenson All Welcome <a href="http://peterstevensonart.co.uk/">http://peterstevensonart.co.uk/</a> for all the family, part of Niace's Family Storytelling Weekend, for adult learning <a href="http://www.niacec.org.uk/">http://www.niacec.org.uk/</a>

South Wales we find the George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling<sup>3</sup> dedicated to promoting, teaching, developing and researching storytelling in all its forms. This year CADW<sup>4</sup>, the Welsh Government's historic environment service, celebrated National Storytelling Week by using storytelling as a way of interpreting its heritage sites. The link between stories and literature is also deeply rooted in Wales with the stories known in collection as "The Mabinogi", set down in medieval Welsh, in manuscripts dating back to the 14th century and thought to originate from sources several centuries earlier<sup>5</sup>. When NIACE, which works in Wales as NIACE Dysgu Cymru (NDC), decided that Adult Learners' Week in Wales in 2013 should start with Family Storytelling Weekend, perhaps it was no surprise that there was immediate and enthusiastic interest.

A successful application for a small grant from the 'Big Lottery, Awards for All' Fund in Wales enabled NDC to provide support to organisations to "buy-in" some additional expertise or professional help to add value to learning through stories over the weekend. As part of Adult Learners' Week in Wales, the aims were to:-

- Encourage storytelling-related learning activities for families and
- Encourage participants, particularly the adult participants, to engage with further family learning or other learning activities

At the current count, nearly 50 different activity sessions took place as part of the initiative, some quite large-scale with well over a hundred

Wales may be known as the Land of Song but it is also a country that lives and grows through its stories. From the Land of the Sleeping Giant in the south west to Gronw's Stone in the north, the very landscape is woven from stories.<sup>1</sup> For 21 years Wales has hosted Beyond the Border, Wales' International Storytelling Festival<sup>2</sup>, which celebrates the art of storytelling as oral literature and is recognised as one of the foremost such festivals in the world. Within the University of

participants and others intimate affairs with just a few families and a storyteller. The nature of the events varied as much as their size with puppet-making, mask-making, song-writing, kite-making, woodland walks and other outdoor activities featuring alongside storytelling directly focussed at encouraging engagement with books, particularly as a family activity at home. A few examples have been selected to give a snapshot of activity and a fuller report will be posted on the NDC website ([www.niacedc.org.uk](http://www.niacedc.org.uk)) in August, when all the reports have been collected, so that many more can share the exciting ideas and good practice examples that were inspired by the weekend.

As might be expected there were many activities that used the opportunity of an engaging storytelling performance to inspire further reading and activity at home, with some groups being given books to take home and with parents learning how to build other activities alongside the story. Simple puppets were made to animate story reading at home and encourage even unconfident parents to read to their children and tell their own stories. Parents were also shown how to create activity sheets, word games, colouring activities, discussion points etc. to enhance their children's learning and enjoyment. In a session in Wrexham, more than half of the participating parents signed up for a Storybox making course that will run in the Autumn Term. Some of the other activities were more unusual.

In the small village of Ysgeifiog in Flintshire, the existing children's storytelling club was opened up to include adults. Supported by storyteller Fiona Collins, a handful of children have been meeting regularly for a few months to listen and learn how to tell stories themselves. Parents and other adults from the village were invited to the special session and after a workshop there was an evening of storytelling with children and adults performing and making use of the new skills they had learned. In all 70 people took part, either as workshop participants or audience for the stories told and all looked forward to more stories from villagers at the Ysgeifiog Mid-Summer Festival.

Prue Thimbleby, the Arts in Health Coordinator working with Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, brought in the specialist skills of Clinical Psychologist and Storyteller Dr Steve Killick, who worked particularly with the families of children with disabilities and staff and volunteers who work with them. The health board is refurbishing a part of Singleton hospital as a Children's Development Centre, intending to

bring together a broad range of services to encourage the children's development. The interaction of the children with Steve's multisensory storytelling convinced staff and parents alike that this was a valuable developmental activity and a training day on the use of story has been planned for staff and volunteers in October.

Oasis is an organisation that works in Cardiff to support refugees and asylum seekers. In their interpretation of "family", older and younger members of this unstable and sometimes very transient community were brought together to share the timeless truths of traditional stories. Once they had heard a couple of stories from storyteller Cath Little, participants were apparently all too keen to share stories from their own traditions; sometimes haltingly in their only common language English and sometimes in their home tongue. There were also poems, songs and the occasional tear shared. One man commented that if he had a story every day he would soon learn English. Fortunately he may get his wish, as following their involvement in Family Storytelling Weekend, they will be taking part in a new project that NDC is running based on exactly that principle.

Meanwhile NDC will be working hard to build on the success of the weekend of activities and considering whether we can turn those 50 activities into 100, and engaging participants in the thousands in 2014.

For more information on any of the above please contact Eirwen Malin: [eirwen@niacedc.org.uk](mailto:eirwen@niacedc.org.uk)



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1. See article of interest  
<http://tinyurl.com/rapallink07>  
by Welsh Storyteller Michael Harvey
2. <http://tinyurl.com/rapallink08>
3. <http://tinyurl.com/rapallink09>
4. <http://tinyurl.com/rapallink10>
5. <http://tinyurl.com/rapallink11>

## Taal voor Thuis - 'language for the home'

### Christine Clement

*Christine Clement is a Programme Leader for the pilot Taal voor het Leven (Language for Life), a national four year adult and family literacy programme in The Netherlands being delivered by the Dutch Reading and Writing Foundation 'Stichting Lezen & Schrijven'. Christine previously worked as the director of a voluntary organisation for language coaching of women and, prior to that as a researcher of women's empowerment and language acquisition. Christine developed several educational language and social skills programmes for women and children. She studied linguistics and speech therapy and has her doctorate in psycholinguistics from the University of Amsterdam.*

### Claire Collins

*Claire Collins is an educational adviser for Taal voor het Leven, responsible for researching international adult literacy programmes and practices. Claire has worked on numerous UK government and local authority-funded adult literacy projects such as the 'Skills for Life Support Programme'. She has written and co-written several guides and case studies, for example on embedding literacies in vocational, family and prison contexts. Claire has an English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) and adult literacy teaching background and has a Master's in Adult literacy, Numeracy and ESOL from the University of Lancaster.*

#### Introduction

*Taal voor Thuis* (Language for Home) is a family literacy initiative currently taking place across The Netherlands. The programme is aimed at parents/carers with children aged 2 to 12 years. Unique to this programme in The Netherlands is the combination of training parents in home learning strategies for language and literacy development, alongside developing their own Dutch literacies and self-sufficiency. All these three aspects are given equal importance in the programme. Language for Home is funded by the Dutch government's Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The programme is part of the national pilot *Taal voor het Leven* (Language for Life), a four-year programme, due to continue until 2016. Language for Home starts in September 2013, targeting at least 900 parents in 60 (pre)schools in 11 Dutch cities by the end of June 2014. The programme team expect that at least 3000 Dutch parents/carers will join Language for Home in the coming two to three years.

#### Home learning environment

A key outcome of the work of Language for Home is to support parents/carers, especially mothers, to become more confident to support their children's language and literacy development. In addition, the programme aims to have an impact on children's home learning environments, which can be understood as "active parenting strategies (that) help to promote young children's cognitive development and educational achievement" (Melhuish, 2010, p.3), also known as "language stimulation strategies". For example, the amount and way that parents talk to babies and young children

have been shown to have a direct positive impact on children's linguistic abilities at ages 3 and 10 (Hart and Risley, 1995). According to Hart and Risley's influential study, parents/carers can provide the building blocks for literacy and cognitive development by:

- chatting as much as possible during normal daily life, using a wide vocabulary
- praising rather than criticising
- talking to children about things, using language with a high information content
- giving children choices rather than simply directing them
- listening and responding to what children say

A critique of the methodology used in Hart and Risley by Paul Nation (Nation, date unknown) challenges the conclusion that children from 'lower' socio-economic backgrounds have a smaller vocabulary than those from 'higher' socio-economic backgrounds. However, many early years and family literacy specialists concur that the home learning environment is a useful framework through which to view the development of children's literacy and language practices. <http://tinyurl.com/rapallink12>

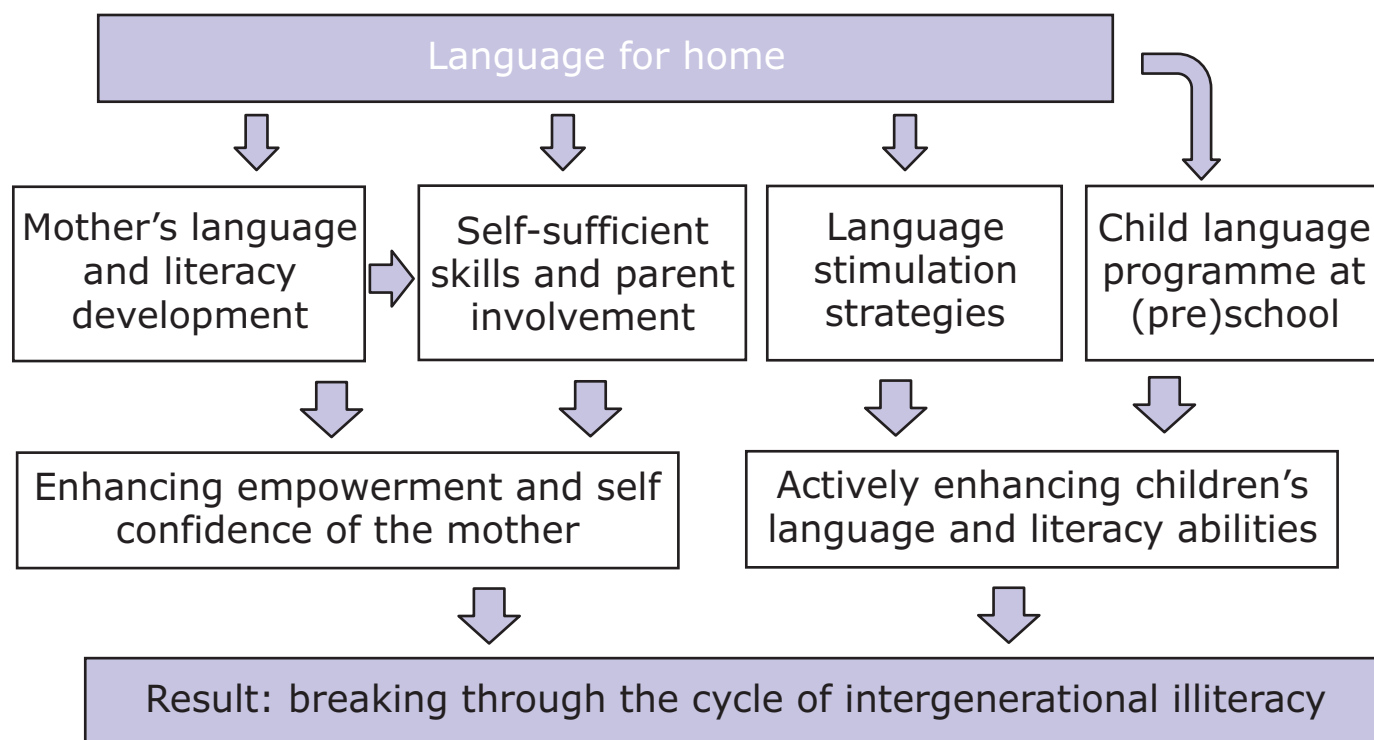
The 2009 European report "Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development" found that "family literacy interventions emphasising both child literacy and parenting skills are the most likely to produce long-term gains in child literacy and related areas." (Carpentieri et al, 2011, p.229).

**Dutch language skills and self-reliance**

Another key outcome of the work of Language for Home is to support parents/carers (predominantly mothers) with their own Dutch language and literacy development as part of the parenting skills programme. Worldwide, two-thirds of the almost one billion people with very low literacy abilities are women (SIL International, 2013). This can be seen in The Netherlands, where more women than men struggle with literacy practices (57% and 43% respectively). The largest group of women in the Netherlands with low literacy abilities are financially dependent on their partners. Most of them do not work and, therefore, don't join language programmes at work (Fouarge et al, 2011, p. 23).

Therefore, in addition to language and literacy development, the programme aims to help parents, especially mothers, to become more self-reliant and self-sufficient. Being more self-sufficient is recognised as a measure of a social programme's success in The Netherlands. This is framed in a model known as the 'participation ladder', whereby increases in employment and reductions in welfare claims sit alongside other individual and social measures of someone's well being.

Empowerment (for women as well as other groups of people) is a natural result of literacy education (see Miller and King, eds, 2009, for an overview), but during the Language for Home programme, additional special exercises are undertaken around empowerment topics. The programme focusses on the school environment in order to stimulate parent/carer involvement in their children's education as a form of self-sufficient behaviour. Examples of self-sufficiency exercises that are performed in the pre-school context are talking at school with the teacher, going to a parent information meeting at school and reading school newsletters. The programme rests on parents/carers being motivated to join to support their children's language and literacy acquisition. However by developing their own Dutch language, literacy and self-sufficiency skills at the same time, a better modelling situation is created for their children, necessary to break through the cycle of intergenerational barriers to literacy practices.



**Fig.1. Model of Language for home**

## The programme



In light of the evidence to show the positive impact of family literacy interventions, Language for Home aims to help parents and carers (predominantly mothers) promote their children's language development and, at the same time, improve their own (Dutch) literacy and language abilities and their self-sufficiency. The

programme can be followed in small groups, a maximum of eight parents/carers, at the (pre)school or individually at home. Participating parents/carers have access to a free course for six months and the programme provides them with free materials in themes connected to children's early years development between 2 and 6 years old and between 6 and 12 years old. Examples of themes for parents of the pre-school children are food, traffic, celebrations and weather. Examples of themes for parents of the school children are homework, how to set boundaries, food and sports, future dreams, how to help at school and the school library.

During the course, parents/carers learn how to work with the materials and to do the exercises at home and at their children's (pre)school. This work is closely related to work taking place in schools and pre-schools for these children's age bands and the (pre)schools are closely involved in recruiting parents/carers for the programme.

## Volunteers

### Training

Specially trained volunteers provide small groups and one-to-one support for parents/carers on the Language for Home programme at the schools and pre-schools their children attend. The language volunteers attend four sessions of basic training in language/literacy coaching, followed by two sessions specifically focussing on the Home Learning Environment. During their training, volunteers learn how adults with low literacy abilities develop their reading and writing confidence and how to work with small groups. They also learn about children's language and literacy development, along with language stimulation strategies and how to work with the training and parenting materials. In some cities such as Amsterdam, professional teachers will be working together with the

volunteers. In these cases, the volunteers only take part in the two specialised sessions.

### Materials for volunteers

The volunteers work with their own materials that provide detailed suggestions for a 20-session course for parents of pre-school and school children. The 20 sessions become more complex every week, based on an anticipated increase in parents'/carers' abilities and confidence as the programme progresses. At the same time, the home learning themes for materials can be chosen according to the themes their children are working on at school. The aim of this flexible method, instead of a fixed programme, is that children and parents work on the same theme at the same time, in order to stimulate talking about the theme at home and maintain the connections with school as much as possible. During their training, volunteers learn how to adjust the themes to meet the parents' individual strengths and learning needs.

### Voluntary supervision

Programme volunteers are recruited in several ways including via advertisements in local newspapers, information cards, posters and local information meetings. After their training, the volunteers are supervised by networks of local voluntary organisations that are co-operating in the Language for the Home project. Both local voluntary organisations and (pre)schools are supervised by the local *Taal voor het Leven* teams.

### Assessments, effect and evaluation study

Parents'/carers' language and literacy abilities are assessed with an existing Dutch tool in the form of a questionnaire (De Greef et al, 2010). Parents' language stimulation skills are assessed with a questionnaire with 10 questions, which are about reading aloud, chatting, playing, responding to their children etc. The parents fill in both questionnaires at the start and at the end of the course, so an increase in abilities due to the programme can be measured. In order to determine medium-term impacts, parents/carers will be contacted again and asked to complete the same questionnaire six months after the programme ends.

The assessments provide data for the effect study and the first results will be reported at the end of 2014. The parenting materials and course and the materials and training for the volunteers will be evaluated around July 2014, and the evaluation results will be reported at the end of 2014. The large number of (pre)schools and cities

that have chosen to join the programme gives an indication of the need for this programme in The Netherlands. One of the school teachers who will be taking part expressed it in the following way: "Language for Home will help parents with their own Dutch, but it also helps them with bringing up their children. This will help me a lot in my own work! When can we start?". Programme leaders hope that such enthusiasm for the programme will lead to a positive working model for adults and children's language and literacy development, as well as empowerment and self-sufficiency for those who take part.

An English language version of the programme video can be accessed here (insert The Story of Lisa video).

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## RaPAL's Web launch Winners 2013

### Love Literacies, Love Lifelong Learning, Love RaPAL and Be Published!

We are delighted to publish the following reflections on teaching and learning from across the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland to celebrate the launch of our reconstituted website <http://www.rapal.org.uk/> in May 2013. We hope you find that they celebrate the wonderfully authentic voices of the diverse teaching, learning and life experiences that exist in literacies provision.

#### Margaret Kelly

Margaret is a 51 year-old learner with the Adult Learning Scheme run by Waterford City Vocational Education Committee (VEC), (now the Waterford, Wexford Education and Training Board or ETB), in the south east of the Republic of Ireland.

Because of family circumstances her schooling was patchy but she has always loved to read and especially to write. Her gift with words has led her to join a Creative Writing group here in our centre but she is also working on her core skills and hopes to join computer and numeracy courses as well as further honing her writing skills.

Margaret was delighted to hear that she will become a published poet.

Contact: tutor Liz Parkin  
lizparkinvec@gmail.com

#### A Second Chance

That little girl I knew before  
in school they labelled "slow";  
the invisible child at the back of the class.  
It's no-one's fault I know.

I never gave it a second thought;  
the past was gone. I didn't care,  
but a poster caught my eye one day:  
"there's adult education at Railway Square" !

I panicked as I made the call.  
Was it fifty years too late?  
But the guarantees were there and then:  
"at any age they educate"!

So I've dusted the cobwebs from my brain,  
surprised at what I know.  
I wonder, where's that little girl  
In class they labelled slow?

I'm meeting lovely people there  
and learning at my own pace;  
already a big improvement;  
finally part of the human race.

So now I have this second chance  
to learn from those who care.  
I'm glad I made that phone-call,  
to the VEC at Railway Square.

#### Louise Walsh

Louise is 39 years old and lives in Cardiff, where she also works as an Essential Skills Tutor after achieving her Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Adult Literacy teaching qualification this year with the University of South Wales, Newport. She has always loved writing and her first novel, *Fighting Pretty*, was published in 2008. She is a member of Cardiff Writers' Circle and is currently working on her second novel.

Date: 09.06.13  
Email: louise.walsh4@ntlworld.com

#### EVERYTHING MACE WROTE

I chose to study Adult Lit PGCE  
As a writer, it was right for me  
And from the off, they told us to see  
Everything Mace wrote on literacy.

As the course went on, with no time free  
We learnt the value of authenticity  
And relevance, yes, that too was key  
In everything Mace wrote on literacy.

As we started teaching nervously  
Acquainting ourselves with learner psyche  
It was a comforting thing that the library  
Had everything Mace wrote on literacy.

I took her advice quite literally  
I quoted her fully and frequently  
Sprinkled in assignments liberally  
Was everything Mace wrote on literacy.

I followed instructions to a tee  
Did language experience diligently  
Self-published a college community  
Tried everything Mace wrote on literacy.

Of course, I referenced Geoff Petty  
And Hughes & Schwab in my bibliography  
But eternally committed to memory  
Is everything Mace wrote on literacy.

**Maddy Tyack**

Maddy has over 15 years' experience in teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). She currently teaches ESOL at Cardiff and Vale College in Wales.

Date: March 2013

Email: mtyack@cavc.ac.uk

**Metro**

'I like this woman – she is a player!' said Makhadi, looking up at me from a reading task about a woman who had managed to juggle three boyfriends. This spontaneous comment came as the rest of the class read in silence, absorbed after a discussion about the headline *The Woman with Three Boyfriends*. Such an involved reaction is rare in this class, in which many of the learners have weak literacy skills and are daunted by any form of text. In fact, this was the first time I had seen them motivated purely by curiosity.

The text in question was from the free newspaper *Metro*, which has become an indispensable source of material in my lessons. Its connection with reality prompts far greater learner engagement than any course-book or online resource. Interest levels never fail to escalate once I have confirmed that a story is true or someone realises they have seen it on the news. While any true-to-life story can have the same effect, a widely-distributed free publication has the advantage of being familiar and easily obtainable to ESOL learners. For many, it is all they read outside class that does not serve a religious or functional purpose.

Nevertheless, many more are deterred due to an inability to skim-read and the overwhelming amount of new vocabulary. 'I look, look but don't understand!' said one learner some minutes after being instructed to search for an interesting article. Therefore I have devised numerous activities which enable learners of varying reading abilities to engage with the newspaper at different levels.

Lower levels can concentrate on the pictures and describe what is happening. Those who keep abreast of current affairs are often desperate to share their knowledge at this point, while others can speculate and use captions and headlines to glean clues. As well as preventing demotivation, focusing on the visual aspect raises awareness of layout; many learners are confused by the

juxtaposition of articles, photos, headlines, captions and advertisements. What's more, if a story is intriguing enough even weaker readers will try to extract more details from the article.

Higher levels can be instructed to scan an article for the main points or to write a one-sentence summary. Following a scheme of work may not be entirely compatible with the kind of last-minute planning required when using up-to-date articles, but any issue of *Metro* can be used to analyse a specific grammar point. For example, learners can underline relative clauses or uses of the passive, or they can summarise a story with a conditional sentence, e.g. She wouldn't be in the newspaper if she hadn't crashed into such an expensive car.

Learners who read for pleasure or interest in their own time tend to be those who have transferable skills from their first language. However, it is often these very learners whose vocabulary expands the most and who have a deeper understanding of the wider society in which they live. Exposing learners to newspapers and magazines during lessons should demonstrate that reading can be both fun and informative and need not be viewed as 'studying'. Out of this will hopefully develop higher levels of social engagement and confidence in literacy.



# Reviews

## **Pass the New Life in the UK Test: The Complete Study Guide for 2013**

Celine Castelino, edited by Chris Taylor (2013)

Published NIACE, Leicester

ISBN 978-1-86201-702-3 (print)

Also available in Kindle version and other e publications

No. of pages 339; Cost: £11.95 print version

*Sarah Holmes is Director of Foundation Learning. Anne Power and Sheila Scottare her colleagues at Southend Adult Community College. As well as having an enthusiastic team of ESOL teachers they also have a growing community of learners whose learning is encouraged at local Children's Centres but who cannot access SFA funding / college classes because of the cost of the fees.*

As a college with a history of supporting members of the local community to achieve citizenship, we have traditionally accredited skills through City and Guilds with citizenship topics embedded into the delivery of all ESOL classes from Pre entry ESOL to progressing ESOL learners undertaking level 1 and 2 Functional Skills English. This book was therefore a very welcome addition to the resources considered by the ESOL team at Southend Adult Community College.

From a wide range of delivery contexts (fee-paying learners and those seeking work with access to free provision, Family Learning, DWP referrals and self-referring learners, coming from a wide range of cultures and first languages) all the team found the book very readable and a great improvement on the previous Life in the UK text/test book available. The overall layout, font size and choice, spacing of text, use of bullet points and organisation of information on the pages made it very easy to access information and find your way around.

It did exactly what it said it would.

There was much to like:

- The breadth and range of the six chapters provides enough material to deliver an interesting start to the topics – supporting tutors who do not have much personal knowledge of, say, the battle of Bosworth or women in work.
- With the help of a range of well-placed charts and graphics, and with embedded study tips, the chapters come to life and encourage the transfer of study skills and independence in learning. There is encouragement to research and explore all topics further. Complicated topics are presented simply.
- Tutors valued the range of useful lesson topics inside the covers of this one book, the

underscore on key terms, the stretch and challenge the vocabulary presented (words like 'optimism' and 'advocated') with the helpful glossary at the end of every chapter and the clarity of the information about citizenship test application and procedure.

A few tutors thought they could refer their independently-reading learners to the book for self-study, some suggested how they might adapt the activities for less confident readers, others would use some of the activities as stretch and challenge reading tasks in group settings and pair work.

Tutors were enthused enough to immediately attempt some of the activities themselves and then with their learners, engaging with the book on first sight. Learners enjoyed the well-structured activities.

Two chapters were particularly welcomed and shared with other colleagues in the Foundation Learning team (tutors of personal and social development and maths, English and ICT): Chapter 4 - especially useful for equality and diversity and Chapter 5 - especially useful for UK laws. At a time when we are designing sessions to encourage learners to feel confident to explore the less-known or completely unknown, this book was seen as a really useful resource for the whole team. Contents could also be used across curricula to talk about the test. We understood more clearly how to increase learners' awareness, improving awareness of what is being asked of others to gain citizenship and thus increase social cohesion.

Were there any dislikes or fears? Yes, but more about the content of the citizenship test than the book! (Why do new residents have to learn about the Battle of Bosworth?) The other fear is how quickly information will date – for example around the courts and the judicial systems/law which is currently undergoing real change.

And suggested improvements? Yes, three: an index list with keywords would be useful (for example National Insurance Number – page 269, smoking – page 254, the education system – no specific page), a complete sample test to be included to give potential candidates an idea of what to expect and a photocopiable version!

So our thanks to Celine Castelino for a resource to get enthusiastic about and that makes our learners' lives interesting and easier; to Chris Taylor for her editing and to NIACE for having published this book at under £12 which seems such a reasonable price.

## Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

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

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

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

### Guidelines for contributors

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

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

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

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

### 1. Ideas for teaching

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

### 2. Developing Research and Practice

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

### 3. Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives

This section is for more sustained analytical pieces about

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

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

### Reviews

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

### Submitting your work

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

### What happens next?

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

If you have any questions, please contact the journal coordinator by emailing [journal@rapal.org.uk](mailto:journal@rapal.org.uk)

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## REVIEWS

**Pass the New Life in the UK Test: The Complete Study Guide for 2013**  
*Reviewed by Sarah Holmes, Anne Power and Sheila Scott*

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