RaPAL

Open Edition

Photo: The Reader Organisation

Journal

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

Who we are

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

What we do

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

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

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

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Editorial

Linda Pearce and Julie Meredith

Linda is a Parent Support Coordinator at Plymouth Parent Partnership, an Independent Evaluator and a member of the RaPAL Editorial Group. Julie was an Adult Literacy Tutor at CALAT for 7 years. Following redundancy, she joined Action on Hearing Loss where she works with Deaf adults with additional needs. She is about to start at Wakefield College as a Study Coach and Specialist Learning Support Assistant for Deaf and hard of hearing learners.

Welcome to this Open Edition of the Journal. We are sure you will enjoy the stimulating collection of contributions. Over the last few months we have been buoyed and distracted by London 2012 whilst working in a context of job insecurity. We are most grateful to all the writers working with us for their commitment and resilience. We appreciate that for some this has been a considerable challenge.

We open with a tribute to our colleague, **Gaye Houghton**, who passed away in January. Members share their memories and celebrate Gaye's impact within RaPAL and beyond.

Colleagues, friends or strangers can have an impact on us, and a newspaper article about a businessman with dyslexia made a lasting impression on student **Shauna Ellis**. Her letter to him gives part of her own story and leads to her realisation: "Everything in life is hard. It is just down to me whether I am willing to work hard enough to get there."

Full-time literacy tutor **Cheryl Penn** has learnt many lessons of her own during her teacher training and reflects on some of these. In her *Learner Case Study*, she considers how to identify and meet the needs of one individual. We share the journey from his initial interview to the point when he reminds her that he has to choose his own path. In her second piece, Cheryl explores how to motivate learners to read, by reflecting on feedback from an observed lesson and doing lots of reading herself.

We move next from the observed to the observer. **Sarah Huaraka** argues why she believes a big challenge for trainee literacy teachers is to develop a sense of audience. She explains what this means to her and shares some tips.

In last year's Open Edition[1], we were introduced to Get Into Reading (GIR) groups run by the Reader Organisation[2]. **Clare Ellis** returns to explore the benefits of the shared reading of difficult poetry within GIR groups. The inclusion of partial transcripts from sessions allows us a unique insight into readers' responses.

Our next two contributions take us outside the UK. **Tina Byrne** shares research findings from Ireland's National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). NALA focused its research on family literacy from the perspective of the adult learner, the recommendations of which are relevant for us all. From Ireland we are taken to various other points in Europe with **Moira Hamilton**'s piece on the Eur-Alpha Network. She explains the purpose and progress of the project, the role learners played and celebrates its positive outcomes.

Peter Shukie and **Pip McDonald** consider what literacy means in the 21st century. Peter questions whether research based on outdated ideas and methodologies is fit for purpose. He fears for future policy unless research has a radical overhaul. Peter's article grew from an online discussion between RaPAL members and invites further reflection. From Peter's perspective, Pip is looking in the right place, the right worlds. Through a focus on digital storytelling, she considers the wealth of Web 2.0 tools available for tutors and learners.

Conflicts between tradition and modernity come up in **Sue Charlton**'s *Case Study* of a learner from the Traveller community. Sue sets out to discover whether teaching provision for this minority group is effective and quickly realises that the first challenge for educators is to gain knowledge and understanding of the community's culture and beliefs.

This section of the Journal closes with a Research Project carried out by **Kim Buggins**. She explores why a 17-year-old's writing is significantly weaker than his other skills and wonders what strategies will support his development. Among other things, Kim considers Orthographic Motor Integration, automaticity and attitudes to writing.

1. *RaPAL Journal* Volume No. 75, Autumn/Winter 2011, pp14-16
2. TheReader.org.uk

Reviews
We are delighted to have a bumper selection which starts with a review of Sam Duncan's *Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development.* Journal readers may remember Sam's piece *Researching the Reading Circle Experience*[3] from our Open Edition in 2010.

Greg Brooks warmly welcomes the book and thinks its "humane approach deserves to be widely adopted". He recommends it to "everyone who is passionate about both literature and adult literacy".

Sarah Freeman shares her thoughts on two titles on digital literacies: *Multimodality* by Gunther Kress and *Language and Learning in the Digital Age* by James Paul Gee and Elisabeth R Hayes. Sarah sees that what "makes these books stand out is how their respective expert authors contextualize language, literacy and multimodality in our present global society". They go beyond mere fascination at the rate of change and consider "how influential digital communication has become in shaping society" for better or worse.

The NRDC's report *Literacy, Numeracy and Disadvantage among Older Adults in England* by Andrew Jenkins et al is timely as **Maxine Burton** acknowledges in her review. With so little research focusing on the literacy and numeracy of older adults, Maxine considers that "the entire report would repay careful reading" and it is available as a free download.

Lifelong Learning and Social Justice: Communities, Work and Identities in a Globalised World from NIACE edited by Sue Jackson is reviewed by **Alison Wedgbury**. She suggests that "RaPAL readers will find all the chapters stimulating and will recognise in their own work both the pressures and the opportunities afforded by this wide range of contexts". The eleven chapters call for a "re-focus on lifelong learning aligned with social justice".

We return to the topic of technology in **Sam Duncan**'s review of *Adult Basic Education in the Age of New Literacies* by Erik Jacobson. Sam found this slim publication a "surprising book". Similar to the NIACE title on social justice, "it asks us to question how our actions as learners, teachers and as users of different forms of literacy relate to larger political and economic forces".

The issue of measuring skills raised earlier in this Journal by Peter Shukie comes up again as **Jay Derrick** comments on *Literacy, Numeracy and Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments: Framework for the OECD Survey of Adult Skills*. The booklet's purpose is "to present the detailed conceptual approach that is being taken by the latest of three large scale surveys of adult foundation skills by the OECD". Jay considers that "it takes far greater care than the earlier studies did to measure skills in the context of 'the digital age'" but a number of concerns remain.

We close this Open Edition with reviews from two learners. **Aneila Sultan** and **Ezra Hardware** share their opinions of *Hot Flush* by Helen Fitzgerald and *Sawbones* by Stuart MacBride respectively. Both learners were reading Barrington Stoke titles for the first time and they give mixed responses to the publisher's stated aim to make their titles accessible by minimising "the obstacles that can stop struggling, reluctant or dyslexic readers really getting hooked by a book".[4]

Aneila, who has well and truly become hooked on reading, goes on to review two of this year's Quick Reads: *The Cleverness of Ladies* by Alexander McCall Smith and *Get the Life You Really Want* by James Caan. As well as getting a sense of these titles, we're sure you'll see both final pieces as the work of budding reviewers and encourage you to invite your learners to write reviews for future Journals.

Please note that the views expressed by individual contributors to the Journal do not necessarily reflect those of RaPAL.

3. RaPAL Journal Volume No. 72, Summer 2010, pp32-37.
4. http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk/ (accessed 10/9/12)

Gaye Houghton

Many RaPAL members were deeply saddened to hear the news of the death of Gaye Houghton in January. Gaye was an active member of RaPAL for many years and her dedication and great sense of fun were an inspiration to many people. Mary Hamilton represented RaPAL at Gaye's funeral and passed on our condolences to her family. Below we print tributes to Gaye from some of her friends in RaPAL.

Roz Ivanič writes:

Gaye was unstinting in her energies on behalf of RaPAL, and in her selfless generosity in her dealings with everyone she met. She was a member of RaPAL from its earliest days, she saw it through its shaky days when it was uncertain whether it would survive, and is to a large extent responsible for turning it into the thriving organisation it is today. She was a team player and a champion for all: for adult students on her courses, for tutors in her college, for other members of RaPAL. She gave her warm-hearted and exuberant encouragement to everyone she encountered.

At her memorial service, her family gave moving tributes to her for her stamina and determination. They took joy in the enormous number of certificates and accolades she had received for academic achievement. They said they felt she had always been studying, always wanting to achieve more and more. I first met her at the beginning of this journey, studying for a Diploma in Reading and Language Development in her early forties. She did not stop there, but took one post-graduate course after another, being awarded her PhD just two years before she died.

Her daughter spoke of the enormous respect Gaye had for education, and she impressed this on her children.

"Whatever you want to do, you can do it!"

This is the message she had drummed into her children, and they said her belief and her support had helped them become what they are today. This seems to epitomise everything about Gaye: it is the way she approached life herself, it is what made her such an inspiration for many generations of literacy students, and it is the spirit she brought to RaPAL to share with us all.

Maxine Burton writes:

RaPAL and Gaye were inextricably linked in my mind, and, although I don't remember exact details of our first encounter, I suppose it must have been at a RaPAL conference; the first one I attended was in Nottingham in 2001. Thereafter I looked forward to seeing her each summer with her warm and friendly welcome.

She interviewed me as part of her doctoral research and I was so pleased when she was awarded her PhD, especially after having the first date for her viva postponed because her examiners were stranded abroad after the eruption of that Icelandic volcano! Here is what she wrote to me in an email in early June 2010:

> *"I had my viva just over a week ago…. It went brilliantly! In his report my external examiner said that it was 'an excellent piece of work'. My internal examiner said that 'the thesis is the work of a scholar'. I am really chuffed. I have no revisions apart from a few typos which I had spotted before the viva so they were already done."*

Gaye's moment of glory couldn't have happened to a kinder or more deserving person.

To go back a few years, I also worked with Gaye on a couple of NRDC research projects at the University of Sheffield, from 2004-07. She was one of my practitioner-researchers in the second year of the Effective Practice in Reading study, and then a member of the Consultation Group for the NIACE/NRDC Practitioner Guide to Reading. For that I remember her insisting, very strongly, that our first task must be to outline the different theoretical approaches to reading before we could engage with the predominantly skills-based focus of the publication. In all my dealings with Gaye, her enthusiasm, cheerfulness and commitment shone out. Here she is, with some of her fellow researchers in 2005, in the photo below.

Team from left to right:
Liz Heydon, Naomi Horrocks,
Gaye Houghton and Gill Fuller

My last message from her was in early 2011 after she had submitted an excellent book review for RaPAL (published in issue no 73). She mentioned that she had been having assorted scans and tests, but not to worry as she really wasn't feeling ill. Her ever-positive approach misled me, and the news of her death came as a dreadful shock. I still find it difficult to believe that such a larger-than-life presence is no more.

Below are the messages sent to the RaPAL email list in the days following Gaye's death

I share the sorrow of all Gaye's colleagues and friends in RaPAL and want to add my condolences to her family and friends. Gaye was always a welcoming and generous member of RaPAL, giving her time and thoughts freely and being around to greet new members. I respected and enjoyed her open attitude, willingness to contribute and her commitment to adult learners. One of my best experiences in RaPAL was meeting at Gaye's for an editorial meeting for one edition - she had a way of getting the job done and getting it done with kindness and good nature. We'll miss her - but we were lucky to have had her alongside us.
Mary Wolfe

I was also really sad to hear the news. I took over the RaPAL treasurer role from Gaye and she was so helpful and supportive in the handover period and beyond. She was always so generous with her time and expertise.
Irene Schwab

Gaye was a great inspiration. She was encouraging and committed and it was wonderful to meet her through RaPAL.
Shelley Tracey

I too am very sorry to hear that Gaye has died. My main contact with her was as a fellow researcher on a Sheffield University project. Gaye was always supportive of me as a new researcher, generous with her time, knowledge and experience.
Naomi Horrocks

Gaye was very supportive when I first took on the role of RaPAL Secretary several years ago - the post had been vacant for a while so there was no form of handover or guidance and I was new to RaPAL. Gaye was always very responsive and I remember her being described as 'a force of nature' with a huge amount of affection.
Tara Furlong

A force of nature with a huge amount of affection

does it very well. She was a lovely lady. Her PhD was very important to her and it is gratifying to know she had some time to enjoy being Dr Houghton, as she so deserved to be.
Hugo Kerr

I am so sorry to hear this news. Gaye and I worked together on the RaPAL committee. One of my happiest memories of her is the interview she did with me as part of her PhD. She was an inspiration in my own studies. I am so glad the PhD was completed. As with everything she did, she put so much into it.
Ellayne Fowler

Gaye was such a great person. I too remember my interview as part of her PhD and the discussions that went along with it. And the way she had of getting positive energy to flow. A sad loss.
Helen Casey

Such sad news. Gaye always greeted people with a hug and a big smile, she was such a warm, lovely person. All the posts to the list tonight show how greatly she will be missed, she leaves a big hole in the RaPAL community and she will be remembered very fondly.
Karin Tusting

Like others I am saddened by Gaye's death, she will be missed by us all. She has been an inspiration and steady companion to RaPAL for many years quietly getting on with things that needed doing. Always cheerful, in spite of her illness, she added much wisdom as well as lightness to the things and the people she engaged with. Her family were important to her, a source of pride and enjoyment. I hope they realise and will take some comfort in knowing how much she meant to others in all the different parts of her life.
Yvon Appleby

This came as a bit of a shock. I haven't seen Gaye for some time but used to know her well. Passionate about adult literacy, very enthusiastic. Loss to the world.
Wendy Moss

I never met Gaye but I was privileged to work with her jointly editing a RaPAL edition of the journal. We did this by phone and email and I am so sorry not to have met her. She was an inspiring support, taught me a great deal and was always affirming. Her warmth, positivism and energy was uplifting. This is a huge loss for RaPAL and tragic for her family.
Colleen Molloy

I just need to Go For It!
Shauna Ellis

Shauna is a mother of three and a student in Croydon who recently gained Level 2 in English and maths.

In 2011 as part of its Literacy Campaign, the *London Evening Standard* published an article entitled *Secret of the £400 million tycoon*[1]*.* The tycoon in question, Andreas Panayiotou, disclosed that he has dyslexia. He recalled his difficulties at school and discussed his ongoing challenges and the strategies that work for him. He went on to voice his concerns for children with learning difficulties at school today. Shauna read the article in her English class and wrote a letter to him. She shares her letter here.

Dear Mr Panayiotou

In my English class the teacher gave us the *Evening Standard* article about you as part of our work we was doing that day. It was just the day before that I was on the internet looking up college courses that I was thinking I could do the next year, instead of doing the course that I have actually wanted to do for a few years now.

After reading the article I felt that gave me a confidence boost and it made me rethink. No, I cannot choose the easy way out. I just need to go for it!

I left school in 2002 with 5 GCSEs but cannot say they were good grades. In school I got into trouble and messed around. Recently I got referred to do a dyslexia assessment at which I was told I am dyslexic. This made me reflect on how I was at school and mainly about my future.

I understand now why maybe I did misbehave but maybe that was to cover up the fact that I did not understand or that I could not do the work. Misbehaving is one of the most classical signs of dyslexia, but a lot of teachers and schools choose to ignore the signs as it can cost a lot of money to support that child. If the reason for my behaviour had been picked up on and supported in the right way maybe I would have achieved more in school.

I am now 25 and have 3 children. My 3 children have gave me the motivation to go back and study to get myself a career. It is also beneficial for my children to see me studying and doing homework as I feel that will encourage them to do well and achieve in school which is very important to me.

Being dyslexic can be hard at times as I want to go on to do a higher course at college but being dyslexic can knock your confidence in many ways. Sometimes I find myself wondering, *Can I really do this?* or *Am I clever enough to be able to achieve the level to be able to do what I want to do?*

I had also started to change my mind in what type of career I want. For years now I wanted to be a social worker and work with young children but I find I am thinking of different options and different careers that I should do instead; stuff that is easier or simpler to achieve and that to study to be a social worker is a bit out of my reach.

After reading the article it has made me realise that I should go for it and not take the easy way out. Everything in life is hard. It is just down to me whether I am willing to work hard enough to get there.

Yours sincerely

Shauna Ellis

1. http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23956110-a-pound-400m-property-empire-three-jets-and-a-yacht-but-my-secret-shame-is-i-cant-read.do

Learner Case Study
Cheryl Penn

After working as an administrative officer in the Learning & Skills Department for the Prison Service for several years, Cheryl Penn was offered the opportunity of doing her Level 3 Certificate in Delivering Basic Skills to Adults. At the same time, she was given the chance of delivering literacy one day a week at the prison to a group of adult male learners, ranging from Entry 3 to Level 1. She was soon to realise that she thoroughly enjoyed this exciting, but challenging, new experience and decided to pursue further. Last May, she took on a full time position at the prison and progressed onto the Level 5 Certificate in Teaching Adult Literacy in September of the same year. She has now reached the final stage of this course and started her PGCE/Cert Ed this September and can't wait to continue with her learning. Her only regret is that she didn't start earlier, but then again, as a 45 year old 'mature student' she feels that it can never be too late to start!

Context

As part of the module 2 assignment work for the Level 5 Certificate in Teaching Adult Literacy, we were set the task of completing a 2,500 word case study on one of our learners, which was to focus on how we developed their reading and/or writing. My piece reflects the background and experiences of a 31-year-old student who enrolled on my literacy course and how I, as his tutor, set about putting a learning programme in place that would help him to achieve his goals.

Socio-cultural and Educational Background

Lee is a 31-year-old male who is currently serving an IPP sentence (Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection) which means that there is no set date for release.

He started school when he was four years old and says he doesn't have very good memories. Whilst he had some friends he would spend time with, he said he liked to sit at the back of the class alone "so he wouldn't be asked to do things by the tutor". He enjoyed outdoor activities such as gardening and visits to animal sanctuaries and farms, but didn't like English and maths, as he felt the teachers weren't helpful and ignored him.

When asked if his parents encouraged him in his education, he stated, "My step-dad made sure I went to school" and told me that was all he wanted to say on the matter, but went on to say that while this period wasn't particularly favourable, he never missed much time. However, at the age of twelve, he was expelled for blowing up the science block.

For approximately eight months he had a private tutor, who he thought was "great". Not only did he enjoy the walks and trips to the deer park to identify plants and animals, he also enjoyed the English and maths sessions. When asked what was different about the subjects being taught by her compared to school, he said that she made it interesting because she mixed it with outdoor activities and said he really felt that he learned from her.

When this private tuition ceased, he attended boarding school until he was fourteen, and says whilst there he didn't conform to education. He subsequently left education at the age of 16 without any formal qualifications. At this point he started 'living rough' and moved around from place to place, living in a tent. He discovered an interest in food and started a course at a catering college but gained no qualifications as 'life on the road' became too difficult.

Other fond memories, which he says particularly stay with him, are of spending time with his grandfather in his allotment planting fruit and vegetables, and learning about the land from him. I was to find out that these happy, but poignant, memories were to prove a driving force in Lee's future goals.

From the initial interview, he appeared very withdrawn and it was apparent that he lacked effective communication skills. In order to create rapport, I attempted to further explore his motivation for joining education and identify his ultimate goals and aspirations. Tutor and leaner relationships are paramount to successful learning and as Coffield (2008:39) contends, "effective learning relationships […] are based on: a climate of mutual trust and respect which allows for rich, warm and personal exchanges".

When Lee joined the Learning and Skills Department in October 2011, he told me he liked learning about subjects that he was interested in. His main interest was forestry and his long term goal was to work for the Forestry Commission, but first he needed to do an Open

Learning Horticultural Course and this wasn't possible, until he achieved his literacy and numeracy Level 1; hence, the major reason for joining my group.

Other interests included walking, architecture, the scientific world and animals. He said he loved sci-fi, both watching movies and reading books, and that he didn't prefer one or the other as both methods have their benefits. He said that, "when watching TV, the work is done for me and I don't have to worry about anything, but when reading, I get more details". He said he read very little other than sci-fi and Pagan books.

Lee's writing material was almost non-existent. He stated that he never felt the need to write, and at most, writes post-it notes to himself. However, when asked what he thought might be important to him in the future, he replied, "maybe writing letters".

Talking to him throughout the interview I sensed an awkwardness at first, but he seemed to relax after a while. Calling on Mace (1979) as cited by Hughes and Schwab (2010:284), I felt that whilst it was important to be sensitive towards his shyness, it was necessary to create a dialogue in order to understand his motivation for learning.

Current Assessment of Reading and Writing Skills

Diagnostic results of his BKSB (Basic and Key Skill Builder) initial assessment revealed that he was mainly working toward Literacy Level 1, with skills gaps in word focus. I explained to him that this type of assessment only provides a partial picture and that a short free writing exercise would be another beneficial way of determining his strengths and weaknesses. Grief and Chatterton (2007:14) agree that careful examination of this can reveal more about the learner's skills. However, they go on to say that some learners find it an intimidating experience and that the tutor should wait until the learner is ready to participate.

Taking this into account and in order to increase Lee's confidence and motivation, I drew on Hughes and Schwab's (2010:218) suggestion that reading can be an inspiration for writing and proceeded to ask if he could tell me about the last book he read. He responded with enthusiasm, in great detail, about the story and a few days later produced a short narrative. On assessment of this piece of work, the results revealed that there were still skill gaps at Entry 3.

I was conscious of not overloading him at this point and focused primarily on positive verbal feedback. I felt that this was important as it would encourage a two-way discussion and promote self-esteem; Bowen (1993) as cited by Hyland (2002:81) suggests that oral feedback can be more successful than written comment when trying to help learners to improve themselves.

I emphasised the fact that this was a very interesting piece of writing and I proceeded to ask related questions. I told him his use of full stops and capitals was good and that while there were a few spelling mistakes, I knew what the words were supposed to be, which was a positive factor, and that we could look at spelling strategies to help combat this later on. Other further developments needed were in the use of punctuation, grammar and sequencing skills.

After carrying out a learning styles questionnaire, the results pointed to Lee being a visual learner. Although he tended to agree with this outcome, I was of the same accord as Hillier (2005:68) who argues that learners should not be categorised and for that reason all three learning styles were embedded into classroom activities.

As previously recognised, a very important motivating factor to learning for Lee was doing something he found interesting. This meant setting achievable targets that would enable progression onto a Horticultural Course, which would eventually lead onto a career with the Forestry Commission. In order for him to achieve these goals, I felt it was essential that he take control of his own learning and I act as a facilitator to guide him through. Drawing on Hughes and Schwab (2010:34) I was conscious of not bringing Lee's previous negative memories of school with him, and for this to be a positive experience it was crucial that I gave constructive and positive feedback throughout, in order to promote self-confidence.

Lee's short term goals included improving his writing, spelling and punctuation and "to learn new words". An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) was set up and a subsequent learning programme put in place.

After explaining a little more about what the course entailed, he seemed optimistic, but warned me that I wouldn't get anything out of him in group discussions. It was evident that Lee had an introverted nature which needed sensitive handling and in order to break down this barrier,

lesson planning would necessitate careful consideration; group work could be a problem for Lee if I didn't plan and administer carefully. As Petty (2004:220) states, "some group members may become passengers, letting others take the lead".

Strategies, Materials and Evaluation

Based on the principle proposed by Barton and Hamilton (2000) and cited by Hughes and Schwab (2010:34) that learners bring with them funds of knowledge, it was vital that I establish Lee's interests and current understanding so that I could organise regular group discussions gauged around topics that I knew would eventually encourage dialogue. Hughes and Schwab (2010:40) state that "by listening to learners it is possible to see what people bring with them and what they want from learning".

The focus of these discussions would be topical subjects and everyday issues in prison, plus areas of personal interest; concentrating on real life situations would ensure true learning took place. This is also promoted by Appleby and Barton (2007) as cited by Grief and Chatterton (2007:42) who claim that "using authentic materials in authentic tasks for real purposes, helps to make links between learning and literacy ... in people's everyday lives". These discussions would also provide a scaffold for the reading and writing activities that were to follow. At first Lee was inhibited but he finally showed an interest and engaged both in the lesson and with other members of the group, who were to have a positive effect on his confidence levels and subsequent learning.

Learning the writing process was something that all my learners found advantageous. From what I had already experienced from Lee and many others, their expectations and anxieties about getting a piece of writing correct first time were a debilitating factor. In order to alleviate negative feelings, the process was broken down into manageable stages via group discussions and various writing activities. Emphasis was placed on the fact that it is acceptable to not get it right in the first draft. As Grief and Chatterton (2007:25) state, "at its simplest the process of writing can be represented as three stages: Pre-write – Write – Rewrite".

Lee enjoyed brainstorming ideas and started to get his thoughts and ideas down on paper. He liked the idea of a spidergram as it only required one or two words and not full sentences. The discussions proved useful here as he would use others' ideas as well as his own. He started to

think about his purpose for writing and who was going to read it, and practised planning and drafting different types of text. Research carried out by Purcell-Gates et al (2002) and cited by Grief, Meyer and Burgess (2007:43) indicates that "authenticity in the classroom is positively related to change in students' everyday literacy practices". Therefore, we worked on authentic writing tasks such as replying to simplified newspaper articles, writing letters to the governor, CVs and so on.

A big problem for Lee was sequencing the ideas he had, and whilst group activities can be a motivator and "beneficial in the development of writing skills" as stated by Bruffee et al (1987) and cited by Grief, Meyer and Burgess (2007:42), he wasn't quite happy with the initial prospect of actually pairing up with anyone to write. I found writing frames a very useful motivator here and used as many different types as possible. In addition to these frames, I found that the more we started to explore a wider range of reading material, the more he improved his sequencing skills. He started to realise that there were common patterns to similar pieces of writing, which in time, he started to replicate.

In order for Lee to understand how punctuation works, we explored the rules. We looked at texts of various types, highlighted the different punctuation and discussed its use. What I found particularly useful to assess prior knowledge was to create activities in which they had to match up the punctuation symbols to their names and meaning. This provoked further discussion about the use of conventional punctuation which boosted their self-esteem; as Hughes and Schwab (2010:240) corroborate, "it can be empowering for people to explore changes in punctuation, as it challenges the view that punctuation is always right or wrong." To help Lee use 'standard' punctuation, I also felt it was important that he understood sentence structure and so created activities that would reinforce his knowledge, by getting him to identify the key components and put them into practice in his own writing.

Spelling, for Lee, was a problem initially, in that if he couldn't spell a word, he would stop writing until he was satisfied that it was correct. This pause could take up to several minutes at any one time which didn't help the flow of writing, and in effect, contributed to his sequencing difficulties. Drawing on Grief and Chatterton (2007:29), I responded to his work positively as a reader and not the teacher, and encouraged him not to ponder on his spelling or any other

mistakes in the first drafts but wait until later. Concurrently, strategies were put into place to help Lee with his spelling difficulties.

Many combinations of spelling strategies were tried out in class and the one that particularly seemed to work for Lee, and which Hughes and Schwab (2010:169) say can be more helpful than decoding every word, was word recognition. He specifically enjoyed the 'look, say, cover, write, check' method and would often practise out of class hours. A further strategy he found useful was to create his own personal spelling dictionary, which he could refer to if in doubt, and add new ones when necessary.

Gradually, Lee became confident enough to leave his spelling concerns until he got all his ideas down. He then corrected his own mistakes by using various reference materials. However, it was evident that while he managed to amend some spelling errors, he still missed some which caused him frustration. This is where the use of IT played a vital role in the final stages as he would attempt to correct the underlined misspelt words himself before using the 'spell check'. I found this a good motivator and support mechanism for Lee as he loved working on the computer and seemed much more confident and not so anxious anymore. Hughes and Schwab (2010:215) supports this idea, saying that writing on a computer can have an impact on the writing process. Another useful IT tool that came into play at this stage, and related back to his "wanting to learn more new words", was the use of the thesaurus, which proved helpful for substituting any repeated words with a suitable synonym.

Lee completed the course in January 2012 after achieving his Essential Skills Wales Level 1 in Literacy and Numeracy. Whilst I feel that he has made tremendous progress, I would, nevertheless, have liked him to progress to Level 2 before moving onto Open Learning. I believe we could have worked on strategies that would have extended his knowledge further and benefited him significantly. Nevertheless, in January 2012, he reminded me that he was the one setting his goals and left to pursue his ultimate aim.

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Critical Discussion: Reading
Cheryl Penn

Cheryl is a full-time literacy tutor in a prison.

This piece of work was a set task for the module 2 assignment for the Level 5 Certificate in Teaching Adult Literacy, which was based around developing reading as a key aspect of teaching and learning. My critical discussion is related to an observed lesson by the assessor, but also goes beyond this and links to my everyday practice, experiences and challenges.

The biggest challenge for me when planning a reading session is learner motivation. In order for each individual to engage and to ensure real learning takes place, it is essential they can relate to what is being taught, and for that to happen I need to be aware of what reading material I use in the classroom. As Petty (2004:275) rightly states, "reading does not guarantee learning".

In the past I had used over-complicated texts that contained difficult vocabulary and/or structure and consequently my objectives were not met. As McShane (2005) cited by Hughes and Schwab (2010) claims, "for a learner to be able to access the content independently without strain, the vocabulary needs to be about 98-99% familiar". Working on the premise that learners are individual people with individual needs, goals and interests, I realised the necessity of using authentic, relevant and familiar texts that would motivate my learners.

By using everyday texts such as posters, food packaging and junk mail, learners do not only familiarise themselves with different genres and how language and structure can change accordingly, they also become familiar with certain vocabulary.

Frank Smith's idea of a print rich environment and his strong views regarding learning to read as being the result of trying to make sense of print is a pivotal point of view as far as I am concerned. Whilst these fundamental views are directed towards children, I am of the same accord in that adults too, learn by trying to decode what they see in front of them.

However, whilst I agree with this viewpoint, I have also taken into consideration a critique of Frank Smith's hypothesis of reading by Mike Baynham (1995:170-188). He counter-argues that someone's ability to be able to predict meaning will depend on his or her cultural background, and taking this on board, I recognise that careful deliberation is required when planning for a diverse group of learners. According to Ivanic et al (2006) as cited by Hughes and Schwab (2010:210) "tutors should make listening to

learners, and gaining knowledge of learners' lives, motivations, interests and capabilities, the cornerstone of their pedagogy".

With consideration to the above, and the fact that the learners themselves bring with them their own personal knowledge and experience, I focused on opening the session with questions to elicit a response and assess current awareness. Hillier (2010:161) is of the same opinion, "The first resource in any group is the learners themselves." Barton and Hamilton (2000) as cited by Hughes and Schwab (2010:34) also agree with this theory, arguing that people are stimulated by their own interests, and are able to draw upon their own understanding and approaches when learning.

This social view, as Hughes and Schwab (2010:156) mention, focuses on the reader using the knowledge they already possess to try and decipher what they find in the text and then reading further to corroborate their thoughts.

In order for fluent reading to take place, it is important that time is spent activating the schema. From reflection on the session and listening to the observer's comments, I could have discussed the layout and structure of the letter with them first, thus preparing them for what was to follow. Hughes and Schwab (2010:176) go on to say that by using text schemata, the learner can identify the type of text and make guesses to what it is about.

Hughes and Schwab (210:149) make reference to a recent study by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) which noted that "learners may not be making enough progress in reading because not enough of the class session is spent on reading activities" and cited that "a larger proportion of adult literacy sessions need to be devoted to reading". On reflection of my own teaching practice, I certainly agree that less time is spent doing reading activities than writing activities, which is something I need to take on board in the future.

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Developing a Sense of Audience on Pre-service PGCE DTLLS Literacy Programmes

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Learners, What Learners?

In my professional role as a teacher educator, I visit many trainee teachers on the pre-service PGCE – LifeLong Learning Sector programme, with a literacy specialism. When I observe a trainee for the first time, I do not expect an outstanding lesson, but there are basic professional skills and knowledge that I would expect to see develop through the course.

Firstly, I expect the trainee to know the tools of their trade; that is to have good personal literacy skills in areas such as grammar, spelling, punctuation or use of tenses. This skill set is one that I expect trainees to have prior to starting on an initial teacher training course, but one that trainees who have gaps in certain areas can remedy fairly easily with a good grammar book and a bit of hard work. Secondly, I need trainee teachers to have an awareness of their audience. This second area – the focus of this article – is trickier to acquire and this is certainly a skill that can make or break a literacy class.

I can recall incidents over the years where the trainee teacher has decided to teach, for example, the present perfect to an Entry Level 1 literacy class; paragraph coherence in extended writing to a foundation group in painting and decorating; the use of the semi-colon in formal letter writing to NVQ Level 2 students in hairdressing; the spelling of 'accommodation' and 'sub-committee' to students on a pre-access to nursing course. Some of these brave attempts were, though arguably unwise, rather successful, while others were a spectacular failure. The desire to pass on knowledge was in most cases present in the trainee teachers' approach, as well as the personal literacy skills to do so. The difference? Those who were successful knew why and how to teach it; the others only had a notion that knowledge needed to be transferred from teacher to student – what happened during the transfer was not a consideration at the time of planning of even delivery.

The consequences for those with only the

intention to teach a skill were painful to watch. In one unfortunate instance, a trainee decided to review the requirements for the reading and writing exam that students needed to take by the end of the year and bravely soldiered on while students were busy texting their friends, playing solitaire on their mobile phones, chatting about the latest TV dramas, plaiting each other's hair, staring vacantly at the wall or blissfully falling asleep. In another incident a trainee decided to teach students how to write personal statements in support of job applications for students on a construction course. The trainee teacher stubbornly stuck to their PowerPoint presentation, reading long slides and distributing staggering amounts of worksheets; here again, mobile phone use was in full swing, and once students were allowed on the computers to write their statement, they gave up quickly after a few sentences, switching to Facebook or YouTube. These approaches by the trainee need to be developed through reflective practice and feedback.

A Sense of Audience

So, what do I mean by a sense of audience? The skills described above could be taught successfully if the trainee teacher did it for the right audience, at the right time and for the right purpose. I would therefore define this concept as the ability to connect with a group and consequently make learning happen. This takes place as a result of taking the necessary steps to find out about the students' strengths, needs and prior knowledge, as well as the differing abilities within the same group. It also involves identifying the vocational course they are on, such as construction, beauty, media or catering, as much literacy teaching is embedded within these courses. This means finding out about a student's motivation for taking that vocational course and this might mean gleaning some information about their personal background. We do not just teach literacy, we teach it *to* individuals who are all unique.

When a trainee teacher has an understanding of

who is in front of them and tailors the teaching to suit the needs of the class, the knowledge gained by students suddenly becomes relevant, contextualised and timely. I once observed a trainee teacher teaching the use of adjectives to students on a childcare course. Students first discussed what an adjective was and its uses and were encouraged to come up with adjectives that were likely to be needed to support children in their care. They also used flashcards to select adjectives from other types of words, while having to justify their choice. The teacher then showed them beautiful pictures from a children's story on the Smartboard. The students were asked to identify the adjectives and argue their effectiveness. The teacher had carefully divided the class into groups of mixed abilities and personalities.

I also observed a trainee teacher teaching persuasive language to a group of challenging teenagers who were attending a community centre to socialise, reconnect with education and find jobs. As a warm-up exercise, the teacher had pinned well-known logos and matching slogans on the wall and students had to put them back together. The teacher also distributed some adverts that would appeal to a young audience and asked students to discuss their effectiveness. The lesson culminated in students writing their own poster to promote the centre.

As a final example, I also observed a trainee teacher teaching Entry Level 1 students with learning difficulties on a Skills for Life and Work course how to write a newsletter. The trainee demonstrated a strong knowledge of students' abilities and learning difficulties in the lesson plan and in differentiation strategies throughout the activities. The class started with a brainstorm on basic media terms and what the main elements of a newsletter were. The class was then divided into two groups based on abilities and learning preferences and students had to design the front page of a newsletter to describe the work of their department.

In all of the examples above, the teachers knew their students' strengths and weaknesses; they were aware of any learning disabilities; they showed an interest in their success on the course; they were aware of the vocational course they were on and what the literacy skills required for these courses were and they arranged their classes, created resources, designed activities and managed groups in order to create an optimal learning environment. The results of this approach were learners who were engaged and responsive, happy to learn, focus

on the tasks, clear about what they were doing and why they were doing it.

Tips for Trainee Teachers
Unlike teaching personal literacy skills, helping trainee teachers develop a sense of audience is not easy for the teacher educator, especially when teaching pre-service trainees with little or no prior classroom experience. One of the units on the PGCE with literacy is entitled *Literacy and the learners*. The aim of the unit is to "demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the factors which influence literacy and language acquisition, learning and use" and to "a knowledge and understanding of the relationship between language and social processes" (LLUK 2007). These are not concrete or practical skills, but ones that a trainee teacher must explore, experiment with and reflect upon. While a lot of discussion can go on at university about the theoretical aspect of these skills, they can only be evidenced in the trainee teachers' teaching practice.

I would now like to offer below a few strategies that trainee teachers can employ to acquire and develop their sense of audience:

1.   Learn and use students' names. My principal exercise when I meet learners for the first time is to learn their names, quickly, saying and spelling them correctly and using them for the rest of the year. We all like to be called by our names because it is an acknowledgement that someone is taking an interest in us as individuals; the same is true for learners. Observing a teacher pointing at a student to get their attention or to get them to answer a question without knowing their name makes my heart sink. Some of my trainees have told me they find it very difficult to memorise names. While it is true that it is hard for some to remember names, we owe it to our learners to make the effort. Strategies I have suggested to my trainees include putting name cards in front of learners for a few weeks until names are memorised, or printing out a class list with pictures to match a face with a name.

2.   Do your homework. I often ask my trainee teachers why they chose a particular topic when it really did not seem appropriate or it was clear that students were not interested. The answer is often, "I do not know what they like or what they've already done." To which I reply, "Did you ask them?" The answer is too often, "No." I expect trainee teachers to read application forms, Individual Learning Plans, initial assessments etcetera and make notes. If the

information is not available or not accessible for data protection reasons, I expect them to discuss students with their mentors and more importantly to engage in a dialogue with learners to find out – perhaps not all on the first day of class, but progressively to build a bank of knowledge which will assist them in knowing more about the individuals in the class. For instance, when I observe a trainee teacher, I want evidence that they know about any learning difficulties their students might have, any childcare commitments, courses their students are enrolled on, any difficulties with their spelling or grammar, if they are shy or boisterous, if they like watching horror movies or read fantasy novels, if they dislike working in a group or if they like to be the centre of attention etcetera. This will inform seating arrangements, appropriate resources and topics and will allow teachers to pitch their lesson at the right level.

3. Sort out your seating arrangements. Once the information in point 2 is gathered, it is vital for the teacher to place students based on their abilities, their learning preferences, their interests etcetera. This can vary according to what the teacher is trying to achieve. Thus, it might be appropriate to put all the more able learners together to allow them to work faster, while the less able learners are given more time; or it might be useful to create mixed level ability groups to stimulate peer support. It is always very important to split the dominant learners. If not, there is a danger that the class will turn into a social club for the outgoing students and the less vocal ones will feel too awkward to have a go at answering questions and participating in activities. I remember one lesson where the trainee teacher kept saying to a group of loud and boisterous young men who were all grouped together and completely disrupted the class, "Stop talking or I will separate you!" It took all my strength not to get up and say to the teacher, "For the love of God, do it and do it now!" When I ask trainees why they did not change the seating arrangements, they often answer, "They do not like being moved, they like sitting with their friends." I often remind trainee teachers that a classroom requires a different form of social interaction than that always found between friends. Students will be reunited with their friends after the class without suffering permanent damage. It matters. It shows the teacher is in control of his/her class and that they intend for learning to take place.

4. Practise and fine-tune your 'teaching persona'. I often tell my trainees that teaching is a performance, that I am not necessarily the same person in front of a class and in my living-room with my own family. This means that teachers often have to get out of their comfort zones by asserting their presence in the classroom even if they find close proximity with students uncomfortable. It also means that they need to welcome them to the class, smile, use humour, praise and reward even if they are not having a great day; students should not be the recipient of our own personal problems, they are in the class to learn with our help and friendly support. When trainee teachers have a hard time controlling a group, they become upset and angry with the learners who in turn feed on this negativity and this makes the class even less of a conducive environment for learning.

5. Rethink the concept of the teacher as the fountain of all knowledge. It takes long and hard reflection for some trainees to put the learners at the centre of learning, to create student-centre resources, activities and ethos. This issue is sometimes cultural when trainee teachers were themselves taught in a very conservative way where the teacher was to be respected regardless of their abilities. This status of the teacher at times takes a big knock in further education and I urge my trainee teachers to be ready to listen, to apologise when needed, to acknowledge mistakes and move on with the knowledge that students will respect them for it.

The five points above could be described as common sense, but can be a painful shift in thinking and attitudes for some trainee teachers. They are, however, all about developing an understanding of the students we teach. To me, they mean we care, we have an interest in learners' success, we expect great things and we take pride in both our subject specialism and our pedagogy.

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"Deals out that being indoors each one dwells": Discovering a New Language through the Shared Reading of Difficult Poetry

Clare Ellis

Clare is a Family Project Worker at The Reader Organisation and has been facilitating shared reading groups on Merseyside for over five years. Her current specialisms include reading with young children and their families, reading with adults with learning disabilities, reading with people with depression and other mental health conditions, and reading with people with dementia. Clare studied English Literature at the University of Liverpool and wrote her PhD on working-class writing in Victorian England. Her publications include Shaping Belief: Culture, Politics, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, *edited with Victoria Morgan.*[1]

This article will consider the benefits of reading challenging poetry within a Get Into Reading (GIR) group for adults living with depression. GIR is a social inclusion programme developed by The Reader Organisation, where all material is read aloud and all responses are valued as meaningful.[2] The discussions explored have been taken from recordings of two GIR groups that took part in a research study into the therapeutic benefits of reading in relation to depression and wellbeing. Some of the participants reported low levels of literacy, whilst others were highly literate in terms of their reading and writing skills but found themselves unable to read for pleasure due to their illness. The study found that participating in a GIR group helped improve social, emotional and psychological wellbeing[3]. It also identified four key components of the intervention: the literature, the facilitator, the group and the environment. The present article will consider the literature component and explore how the shared reading of difficult poetry can help people experiencing limiting language worlds and ways of being, whether that be due to low levels of literacy or to the reductionism brought on by mental illness and social isolation, to discover alternative languages for self and world.

The Reader Organisation aspires to promote the shared reading of a particular kind of literature; one that is able to enrich and expand cognitive capacity in terms of thought and feeling, and also their expression. It may be challenging in terms of the type of diction or syntactical structures used, but it may equally be difficult in terms of the questions of life it asks us to confront through the conceptual, psychological and emotional issues it addresses. The study found that the use of such a range of literature was fundamental to the success of the intervention, enabling participants "to engage in discussion and thinking which called on the 'whole' person rather than just the 'depressed' part"[4]. It also reported that "difficulty of the material was never in itself a difficulty or obstacle but more often appeared a cooperative challenge [where] difficulty or puzzlement itself initiates group meaning-making"[5]. It is the shared exploration of difficulty in literature that raises individuals out of themselves into a broader space of thought, feeling and experience. I will be exploring how participants engaged with the verse of Gerard Manley Hopkins. He is a writer who is particularly challenging for contemporary readers not only because of his use of unusual diction and syntax or because of his dealing with the metaphysical, but also because he offers us a distinctly particular world view as a 19th century Jesuit priest.

A weekly GIR group in a doctor's surgery in Liverpool share The Mayor of Casterbridge.

1. Liverpool University Press ,2008
2. The Reader Organisation is a national charity dedicated to bringing about a reading revolution. For more information about the charity and its leading outreach project Get Into Reading, please visit www.thereader.org.uk
3. Billington, J., Dowrick, C., Hamer, A., Robinson, J. & Williams, C., (2011) *An Investigation into the Therapeutic Benefits of Reading in Relation to Depression and Wellbeing*. LivHIR Research Report.
4. Ibid., pp. 25-26
5. Ibid., p. 32

Initial readings of poems are often followed by silence. Our task as facilitators is to encourage participants to stay with such silences; to nurture attitudes of wonder, curiosity and excitement towards what is difficult to understand rather than giving way too quickly to the more natural impulses of fear, panic or anger[6]. It is a mental shift that requires time and practice. For the two groups explored in the present article, participants began their journey by simply listening to the facilitator read aloud Hopkins' poem *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*:

As kingfishers catch fire,
dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells,
each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells:
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*[7]

Group A, made up of about 8-10 members in a community mental health drop-in centre, began to offer a range of responses which included the words "confused" and "strange", but also the word "colour":

I: What a way with words he has got.
F: What a way with words.
M: Everything brings to colour.
D: Confused.
J: She has found another one then!
F: Confused.
M: Everything brings out colour.
F: Colour.
M: Because I mean there is no brighter fish than a Kingfisher.
F: Yes.
M: It's all very colourful.
D: Some of the words are really strange that are put in there, don't know what they mean – like roundy, roundy – what's a roundy?
I: Like round basically.[8]

Even after this first reading, Hopkins' language was beginning to stir something in the group that necessitated them to find a language that is situated somewhat outside of the grammar of ordinary speech. M, a 70-year-old woman, was struck by the fact that the poem is colourful, but appeared unsure as to the exact source or full significance of this impression of colour. The

sense of discovering a new way of thinking can be seen in the irregular and unfinished grammatical structures of her first two responses and the subtle shifts between them, "Everything brings to colour", "Everything brings out colour". She appeared to feel the need to be more specific, although made the error of referring to the Kingfisher as a fish here instead of a bird as she attempted to explain, "Because I mean there is no brighter fish than a Kingfisher." However M had not yet articulated all that she wanted to say about the poem and provided the additional, "It's all very colourful." The poem refuses to let her settle with the purely familiar. We can see a parallel with D, a 45-year-old man who has a speech impediment, when he excitedly asked, "What's a roundy?" It is a question D perhaps never would have asked without reading Hopkins' poem, however his tentative movement beyond the obvious was somewhat halted by I's answer, "Like round basically." But the assumption of the fully knowable is the one thing that Hopkins' poetry will not permit and the group therefore returned to the poem for another reading.

The need to translate too soon can be made out of a fear of not knowing or an all too zealous desire to know. The danger is that you read away the poem rather than read yourself into and out of it. Once members are reassured that they don't have to understand the poem then ironically small steps of understanding begin to take place and participants will often use the words in the poem as a beginning to find a suitable language for themselves. We can see this process of initial 'meaning-making' happening in Group B, which was made up of about four participants in the consulting rooms of a doctor's surgery. The participants in Group B had some of the highest levels of depression in the study as a whole. We had just finished reading a chapter from Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* when Hopkins' poem was introduced:

A: *Kingfishers…*
B: *Kingfishers catch fire…*
F: Yes.
B: *Dragonflies draw flame, as t… tumbled over rim in r… roundy wells stone rings. Like each tucked string tells, each hung bell…* It's like bell-ringing in a church isn't it?
F: Yeah.
B: It reminds me of…Unless it's…Stone rings tucked under… it's like…
F: Let's just look at those first three or four

6. For further reading on The Reader Organisation's approach to reading poetry please see Jane Davis, 'Living with poetry:
A look at poetry and its purpose – shaking the mind awake' in *The Reader Magazine* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 2002), Issue 11, pp. 5-10.
7. Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'As Kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame', in Manley Hopkins, G. (1985:51). *Poetry and Prose*. London: Penguin.
8. Please note all participants have been made anonymous due to reasons of confidentiality. Facilitator is signalled by the letter F in all transcriptions.

lines, OK? *As Kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame, as tumbled over rim in roundy wells stones ring. Like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's bow swung, finds tongue to fling out broad its name.*

B: It's like bell-ringing! It's like bell-ringing isn't it? The stones ring. Well it's like *Each tucked string tells, each hung… each hung bell's bow swung find tongue…* well it's like the ringing of the bell isn't it?

F: Yes. It's strange isn't it? Because we start off with *As Kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame…*

B: Kingfishers catching fire might be the sunset.

F: Aahhhhh.

B: The sunset of the day, you know… and the kingfishers and the dragonflies are starting to come out. The setting of the sun…

F: Oh yes…

A: Yes draws flames.

B: It changes colours, doesn't it? It's like the day's end. You know church bells ringing in the village…

F: Yes…

A: It doesn't mean a lot this…I can't…I wouldn't say it's…

After an initially hesitant start, where words were not yet adding up to full sentences, the gaps themselves being presences of the difficulties expressed in the poem, "It reminds me of…Unless it's…Stone rings tucked under… it's like…", B had a moment of realisation, "It's like bell ringing!" B, a woman recovering from a nervous breakdown, found herself weaving in and out of the poem to find the words from which she might create meaning and what she created went beyond the literal space of the poem. She painted her own picture, "Church bells ringing in the village." However the flow of 'meaning-making' was halted with A's signal for help, "It doesn't mean a lot this…I can't…I wouldn't say it's…." We re-read the poem:

A: Yeah I think it's about….

B: He could be fishing.

A: He could be fishing because he's going fishing but then it would be an evening service, wouldn't it?

B: Or it could just be bell ringing, couldn't it? And he's sitting there watching…

F: Yeah. Yeah

B: Picking up on the nature of things, and listening to the bells. And, you know…

F: Yeah

B: Who feels that being indoors, some people who are indoors, and… you know, if there is a church service going on and people are getting ready to go there, but he's doing what he does himself.

A: Yeah, yeah. Well He's thinking about…as he's fishing he's thinking about… he's aware of his surroundings, even though he's fishing. I mean we're assuming he's fishing.

Participants continued to weave meaning that they wanted to be true to the poem but also to themselves. They worked hard, building several pictures and having to adjust them slightly each time they referred back to the words in the poem. Is he fishing? Is he listening to bells and are they coming from a church? If that was the case though, what time would the service be? If he isn't listening to bells from a church service, what else might be going on? "That being indoors" had certainly captured the imagination, the sense of an inside and outside of the self, and there continued a reaching for a language to translate what the poet might actually be "thinking about….thinking about…"

Participation in a GIR group can help improve social, emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Then A, a pensioner who suffers from panic attacks, after initially rejecting the poem as not "meaning much", came to recognise that they had created only one possible interpretation, that they were only "assuming he's fishing". This is important as it signals the possibility of otherness, of something beyond our own individual world view. This is a shift particularly important for people suffering from depression where illness often shuts down alternative routes for meaning. A continued her reflection on difference at the end of the session,

"He's said all that, but that's the idea, it makes you think, it makes your mind think doesn't it? Because different people have different perspectives on it haven't they? It's OK to make your own mind up about things isn't it? Probably that's what it's telling us."

By the end of the session A felt the poem was encouraging her to find her own meaning, her own voice as opposed to the initial impact of limitation. The realisation that "it's OK to make your own mind up about things" as opposed to receiving knowledge from supposed experts is very empowering.

The reading of difficult poetry is not however simply about providing people with the words to be able to begin a movement of self expansion; it is also about providing them with a cognitive space to be. With this final point in mind I would like to return for a moment to Group A, where we see L, a 50-year-old woman with learning difficulties, struggling to both find and assert her voice through the shared reading of the poem. The group had already had several re-readings and L had not yet spoken. The facilitator asked again if anyone would like to pick out any particular lines. L suddenly spoke and very quietly said, "Each mortal thing does one thing and the same…that bit":

F: Yes that line, *each mortal thing does one thing and the same*. That line stands out to you then L does it?

R: It's life isn't it, manifestation of life.

F: *Each mortal thing does one thing and the same, deals out that being indoors each one dwells*. Because the line that you picked out L is picked out somehow to that one just one below but it's very interesting that isn't it that those two lines. Has anyone got any thoughts about them? Each mortal thing does one thing and the same.

I: It's a double phrase for reinforcement. One thing and the same, when I say one thing, I mean one thing. [laughs]

F: A double phrase, I like that, that is interesting that. Each mortal thing does one thing and the same. Deals out that being, indoors each one dwells. What is happening there?

L: Trying to dwell on something

F: Trying to what sorry?

L: Dwell out something,

F: Dwell out something, do you mean get something out as it were, something that is on...

L: Something at the bottom and coming out.

F: Yes L.

L: I am trying to explain [laughs]

F: No I think you are on to something there L because you are right because it does talk about something being indoors, getting dealt out doesn't it, something inside coming out.

I: Yeah, bursting out, bursting out.

D: Like it was saying about the bell.

It is significant that it is L, the least 'literate' of all of the participants in the study as a whole, who perhaps got closest of all to the elementary heart of the poem with her succinct and also essentially still unfinished statement, "something at the bottom and coming out". It is paradoxical that to begin to really get close to poetry we need to sometimes be prepared to use fewer words and fewer definitions. L crucially recognised that the poem was talking about a movement of something inside the self coming out. You could, as one member stated, call it "the manifestation of life". But L's contribution importantly sits in that in-between space of knowing and not knowing, which is really the best way to read poetry. Other members tried to expand and develop her comments by saying what such a movement might be like, "bursting", or comparing it to a specific object, "like it was saying about the bell", but it was L's use of the non-specific, "something at the bottom and coming out" which was perhaps the closest we got to begin alternative thinking without prematurely closing it down into the familiar or knowable.

From this we can see that GIR groups not only provide people with words therefore, whether they come from the poem or from an effort to respond to the poem and other people's comments, but also open up space for a new way of being that can sit somewhat apart from the utilitarian functionality of the everyday. As L concluded at the end of this session,

"I'm trying to work it out, you know, trying to get my meanings out. I don't know if I say the right thing or the wrong thing, but I'm going to try and do more thinking … Getting my brain to take it in, getting my brain to take it in. You know what I mean."

I was very happy to let L know that I knew exactly what she meant.

At the end of the session R from Group A, a highly educated man whose articulation had been severely impaired by medication, said to me of Hopkins' poem, "It's ultimate reality…I don't know what that really means but that's what it seems to me". Another member agreed, "You can't get any more real than that." It seems to me quite revolutionary that a 19th century religious poet should be able to be valued for articulating something more real than the life and language worlds surrounding these

participants living in a deprived inner city area and struggling to cope with mental illness and multiple deprivation. This to me seems one important argument for the shared reading of difficult poetry, for reading poets like Hopkins, with people who are themselves in situations of difficulty. Bringing a writer like Hopkins back into the discourse of modern day life, whilst presenting challenges, is clearly an incredibly enriching experience which helps to draw those hidden, undiscovered or forgotten modes of being outwards.

Family Literacy in Ireland
Tina Byrne

Tina Byrne is Research Officer at the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and has over 10 years' experience in the area of social research. Tina has a wide range of experience in research design, fieldwork, qualitative and quantitative studies and evaluation. Before moving into the area of social research, Tina worked as a community worker for a number of years.
NALA is an independent membership organisation concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland. NALA has actively campaigned for recognition of, and a response to, the country's adult literacy issues.

Context

The objective of this article on family literacy in Ireland[1] is to summarise the main points from recent National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) research[2]. NALA's focus on family literacy is from the perspective of the adult learner. In *Working Together: Approaches to Family Literacy* (2004), NALA suggests that a key feature of an adult education approach to family literacy work is the recognition that literacy is a broader concept than the needs and demands of school work. The literacy learned at home and in local communities is rich in the use of local language and the expression of the experience and history of families, communities and cultures.

Family literacy policy and practice highlight the important role parents play in the development of their children's literacy. Yet research shows that not all children come from a 'literacy rich' home and that for pupils in disadvantaged areas, schools take a negative view of their own literacy achievement (Eivers et al,2005).

To date there has been little detailed study of the nature of family, home and community literacies in an Irish context. In carrying out this research, NALA sought to develop adult and children's literacy through understanding and supporting family literacy practices. With this in mind, NALA conducted a number of research studies in settings, other than the school, where literacy takes place. Participants included in the research are parents who engaged in adult literacy courses, parents who do not take part in adult literacy courses, adult literacy tutors and co-ordinators, and school staff including home school liaison officers (HSLOs) and school principals.

Family Literacy in Ireland

In May 2005 the Irish government launched the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion (DES,2005). Although it focuses on the primary and secondary sector, DEIS included provision for expanded family literacy programmes and recognition of the vital role of the home and community in children's learning experience and outcomes. The target of DEIS and of the subsequent *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016* is to reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties to below 15% by 2016 (DES,2005; Government of Ireland,2007).

A national literacy and numeracy strategy is currently in development and entitled *Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People: A draft plan to improve literacy and numeracy in schools* (November 2010). NALA made recommendations on nine areas which it believes should be considered and included in the final plan[3]. Subsequent to the submission, NALA has been named as a partner with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) on two of the objectives in the finalised National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy[4]. These objectives are firstly, to support a national public information campaign highlighting the role all parents and communities can play in supporting literacy and numeracy learning; and secondly, to provide advice and information to parents to enable them to support their children's language, literacy and numeracy development.

In addition to contributing to the national strategy, NALA has updated its policy brief on family literacy (2009)[5]. In the policy brief NALA makes a number of recommendations with regard to funding and promoting family literacy. These include the establishment of a dedicated and significant funding stream for family literacy work, and a DEIS initiative that supports family literacy initiatives in all schools located in designated areas of disadvantage.

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1. Family learning programmes in Ireland are provided through Vocational Education Committees and are primarily funded under the adult literacy budget.
2. Taking Care of Family Literacy and Family Literacy in Action are available to download free from www.nala.ie
3. NALA's submission on the draft plan is available to download from www.nala.ie.
4. http://www.education.ie/admin/servlet/blobservlet/lit_num_strat.pdf?language=EN&igstat=true
5. NALA Policy Brief on Family Literacy 2009 is available to download from www.nala.ie. Updated Policy Brief 2011 (forthcoming).

What is Family Literacy?

The term 'family literacy' was introduced as a concept in Taylor (1983) who studied the development of literacy and language at home in the USA. Since then the term family literacy has been used to describe literacy development work that focuses on how literacy is developed at home, and education courses that support and develop this dimension of literacy development. Research in Ireland and at international level reveals similar issues in relation to literacy, schools, children's learning and the key role of parents and carers. In particular, the research highlights the vital role played by parents, grandparents and other care-givers in children's education. According to the research, parental involvement in a child's learning has more of an impact on their educational outcomes than any other demographic measure including social class or level of parental income (Desforges, 2003;Feinstein et al,2004;EFLN2008).

Findings from NALA research

The findings are presented under the following headings: demographic profile, learning in the home, school issues, impact on home school relationships, benefits to parents and finally, recommendations from the research.

Demographic Profile

The vast majority of parents included in the research were women aged 25 years and over. More than half were early school leavers and nearly a third had left school without any formal qualifications. There were equal numbers from urban and rural settings included in the research projects.

Learning in the Home

Parents described family literacy as what happened outside school. This learning activity was seen to be located within the wider nurturing work of the family and to have care, resource and skill implications. Views of family literacy were clearly rooted in parents' own experience of nurture and how they had processed this in adulthood. There were frequent references to their own childhood experiences of learning at home and school. Parents spoke of building individual and family bonds with children around learning, paying attention to their concerns and bolstering their learning identity. They talked about heaping praise on their children's efforts and achievements and creating spaces when, as a family, they could talk and listen to each other. The following quotes are examples of what parents said:

"There are games like hopscotch, giant steps, *snakes and ladders … number games that help with counting. You nearly do it without thinking about it because your parents did it with you." (Parent)*

"If they are watching telly or playing their computer games they are not talking to each other or to us. Even if playing board games together ends in an argument, it is real. You get them to do something and not just vegetate in front of the television." (Parent)

School Issues

Analysis of the research data showed that when it came to school issues; parents felt confident about family literacy work that happened prior to formal schooling but that parents level of inclusion and involvement in their children's schooling was largely determined by the ethos of individual schools and the leadership provided by the school principal. The degree of home-school collaboration was found to impact on the quality of family literacy and how best to support children. As some parents said;

"You are learning your kids before they start school. You are not teaching them in a school way but you are their teacher." (Parent)

"In my childhood I have been on the other side where no-one is there and you just have to pick things up as best you can through what you haven't got. That's why I will get involved now." (Parent)

Impact on Home-School Relationship

The data shows that participation in family literacy programmes has firstly, helped equip parents with the coping skills to interact more effectively with school and school staff, and has helped facilitate better communication between the home and school. Secondly, participation has provided parents with a better understanding of the requirements of their child/ren's school work and has had positive academic outcomes for the children involved. Thirdly, it has raised recognition among many school staff of the important role family literacy performs in enhancing home-school relationships and improving the behaviour and academic performance of the children involved. As the following quotes from staff evidence:

"The main thing is the confidence. The key factor is the parents become much more involved and parental involvement is hugely important to the child doing well in school. You can see an almost immediate improvement in their [child's] concentration in the classroom,

completion of homework, attendance and general overall behavior." (Home, school, community liaison teacher)

"In my opinion education is power. In this particular area alone you can have third and fourth generations of families with a history of early school leaving. It is now very important that we remove the barriers especially around parents' negative experiences of school. They have gone through a system that has left them with shattered confidence and self esteem, and has virtually thrown them out on the streets." (School principal)

Benefits to Parents

According to parents, participation in family literacy programmes has had a number of benefits, which have included firstly, providing them with an opportunity to socialise with other parents alongside developing their learning skills. Secondly, it has been of benefit regarding helping with their children's homework and other related school work. Thirdly, it has provided all round family support that extends beyond the requirements of school work, which has in turn helped to alleviate some of the pressure experienced by parents with literacy difficulties. In addition, the provision of a small allowance to cover additional costs e.g. for childcare, has assisted low income families to continue in and progress in family learning programmes. As evidenced in the following quotes:

"It could show you what you have to do to get your kid prepared for school and that it's not going to be that hard on you. Showing parents that they are able to do it. Giving them confidence by laying out the steps." (Parent)

"We learned a lot, we did a load of spellings and a lot of maths skills. Just doing something like that makes your confidence come up and you're after meeting new people and you're speaking to new people and you're after doing all this work yourself and it's like here I'm not stupid at all. Do you know what I mean?" (Parent)

Conclusion

The research carried out by NALA has been with parents in some of the areas of greatest disadvantage in Ireland. Literacy development remains a crucial and pressing issue in Ireland and investment in family literacy provides a win-win scenario to policy makers. In the context of the current economic downturn, family literacy provides a policy option that can help deliver value on several socio-economic priorities such as raising adult literacy levels, enhancing child literacy development and improving children's performance in schools.

Research has shown how family literacy work helps to overcome the barriers to learning felt by some adults and children. It is an important way of recognising and building the literacy strength of families who, up until now, have felt excluded or marginalised from the expectations of schools and society. The research has highlighted how family literacy programmes can improve the literacy practices of family members. More importantly family literacy work offers potential opportunities to break inter-generational cycles of educational disadvantage that exist in Ireland. As one parent said:

"Trying to teach your kids as well as trying to teach yourself is difficult which is why support is so important." (Parent)

Recommendations from the Research
Policy Recommendations

- National literacy policy should include an increased commitment to family literacy as a basis for improving chances of educational equality for children and adults.
- HSCL personnel should have access to relevant adult literacy awareness training.
- Family literacy also needs to be supported and enabled with quality childcare provision and peer support opportunities.
- A NALA, DES, Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) partnership should work with DEIS schools to make a systematic community development model of family literacy available to parents in their locality.

Practice Recommendations

- Parents with literacy needs should be offered access to an intensive family literacy programme as a first stepping-stone back into learning. Where necessary advice, guidance and counselling should be made available.
- When it comes to the design and delivery of family literacy programmes parents want to be consulted about the content of the programmes as their needs are complex and change according to the age and number of children.
- A menu of accredited family literacy modules should be made available to parents. These modules would include: understanding how learning happens; early years language development; reading with children; fun and creativity in language, literacy and numeracy; computer skills; communicating successfully with schools; dealing with bullying; and

strategies for family literacy with children who have specific learning difficulties.

Further Research

Firstly, best practice DEIS primary schools should be identified and investigated as a base for family literacy programmes with educationally-disadvantaged parents. Secondly, best home-school collaborative practice in DEIS schools should be recorded, analysed and disseminated in areas where parents are not included meaningfully in their children's learning.

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Literacy Learners in Europe: The Eur-Alpha Network
Moira Hamilton

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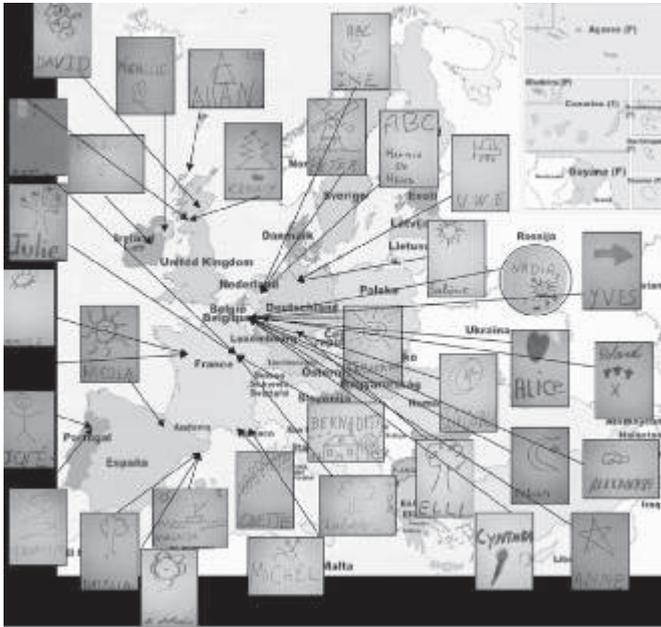
The Eur-Alpha network on Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) was initiated by the Belgian organisation Lire et Écrire in 2008 and received funding for a 3 year project (2009-2012) from Grundtvig, one of the European Lifelong Learning Programmes. Learning Connections, the development agency for ALN in Scotland, was invited to become a partner in the project, which aimed to share good practice in adult literacy and numeracy specifically around the theme of empowering learners.

As a Development Officer in Learning Connections, I attended the start-up meeting in Brussels in October 2008 with representatives from other European countries. The initial paper from Lire et Écrire and the structure of the project were difficult to grasp as were the funding arrangements for the project. Several of the partners made the point that without direct funding to their organisation, they would be unable to take part and indeed some did then withdraw at that early stage.

However, I left Brussels with a commitment to recruit to two 'scientific committees', one for trainers on how they train in order to empower learners and one for learners themselves. It seemed to me that this was the exciting part of the project for learners to be involved directly in the network and in the meetings in Europe. I

would continue to be on the third grouping 'the consortium' which coordinated the project.

In Scotland we have a network of 'key contacts' in Adult Literacy and Numeracy, one for each of the 32 local authority areas and through this network we invited nominations for a learner and a trainer to take part in the Eur-Alpha committees. We drew up criteria and used these to recruit from a fairly small pool of applicants. We made it clear that the learner would probably be someone not totally new to learning but someone who has been involved for some time, with a certain level of confidence and ideally be involved in a learners' forum. They would have to be willing to travel to Europe and take part in meetings. We do not currently have any national literacies learners' organisation in Scotland, although we do have Scotland's Learning Partnership, which is the national adult learner organisation and we have kept them informed throughout the process. The learner representative was recruited on the basis of her many years in learning, her current situation as a learner 'buddy' and as a community activist.

The first meetings of Eur-Alpha were held in Paris in February 2009. I met our learner rep Liz Hargreaves from Fife at Heathrow as she travelled from Edinburgh and I came from Aberdeen. We then travelled together to Paris. I don't know that we made best use of the literacies learning opportunities available on the Paris metro and in finding our hotel, but we got to know each other and have worked productively together over the course of the project. The trainer representative who was initially recruited to the project had to give up the role for personal reasons and a replacement trainer rep, Ann Swinney from Perth and Kinross Council, joined Eur-Alpha in the second year.

Subsequent meetings were in Thessaloniki 2010 and Lisbon 2012, where Scotland had representation on the three groups. There are 16 partners in Eur-Alpha from 12 countries, but not all partners had learners involved partly because of the language difficulties. There was always simultaneous translation in English and French but both the Catalonian and German learners had a supporter with them who did on-going

whispering translation (which I believe is called *chuchotage* after the French for whispering).

There were no learners involved from Greece or Turkey.

Lire et Écrire and many of the other partners knew each other from previous European projects, some individuals had a role within their organisation of making European links and two of the partners had been identified in the Grundtvig application to lead the 'scientific committees'. National Federation of AEFTI (Association pour l'Enseignement et la Formation des Travailleurs Immigrés et de leurs familles[1]) from France led the trainers' committee and FACEPA (Federació d'Associacions Culturals i Educatives de Persones Adultes[2]) from Catalonia led the learners' committee.

Each year of the project there was also a five day workshop for learners and a five day workshop for trainers. This was also predetermined and Edinburgh was to be the venue for a learner workshop in 2012. We were quite happy to do this although it became clear that we would have to apply for separate Grundtvig funding to host the workshop as it was not included in the Eur-Alpha budget.

The work of the project was often slow and difficult with so many partners involved and so many different ways of doing things but over the three years of the project there have been many positive outcomes. Most striking has been the involvement of learners and the opportunity for them to work together in Europe. The final conference of the project was held in Bonn, Germany in September 2012 and the learners presented their manifesto, which they had worked on throughout the project.

The first learner workshop was held in Namur in Belgium in April 2010, hosted by Lire et Écrire, and three learners and one tutor attended this workshop from Scotland. As well as many artistic activities that did not involve reading and

writing, which was appreciated, the learners visited the European Parliament in Brussels and met with four MEPs[3]

The second learners' workshop was held in Barcelona in October 2011 and four learners from Scotland attended with a supporter/tutor. The Scottish learners felt that there was far too much 'paper work' involved in this workshop and they had to work long days until 10pm. There were tensions also in the group and our learner rep managed to diffuse this by suggesting that everyone demonstrate a dance from their country.

The third learners' workshop was to be held in Edinburgh in 2012 and the Grundtvig funding application had to be submitted by the end of February 2011. This was a fairly detailed application and we devised an interesting programme with provisionally booked accommodation in the Edinburgh University halls of residence. However, we were told in May that we had been unsuccessful and were on the reserve list. Later in the year we found out that we were 18th on the reserve list so the Edinburgh workshop was clearly not going to happen. The host is funded to provide accommodation and food but also to arrange and pay for the flights for the learners from Europe so the budget was hefty and was not going to be found elsewhere.

The project finished with a final conference in September in Bonn but the network will hopefully continue. As there was no learner workshop in Edinburgh in 2012 all learners who had an involvement in Eur-Alpha were invited to the final meeting in Brussels in June 2012 where there was a drama specialist to work with the learners on how to present their manifesto to the conference in the most dynamic way.

The learner rep Liz and trainer rep Ann met with me to discuss how we could disseminate the work of Eur-Alpha to other learners in Scotland.

To do this we planned three learner events to let learners in Scotland know about Eur-Alpha and to involve them in the manifesto. We also used these gatherings to find out if there was interest in a national literacies learners' network for Scotland.

In April/May 2012 the three learner events were held in Kirkcaldy, Inverness and Glasgow. Numbers attending were low but through presentation of the learner manifesto and a 'strictly come dancing' style ratings system all the learners attending became engaged in the discussions and all are interested in the idea of a national learners' network. There was a feeling that as well as making links with learners in Europe it was good to make connections with learners from other parts of Scotland.
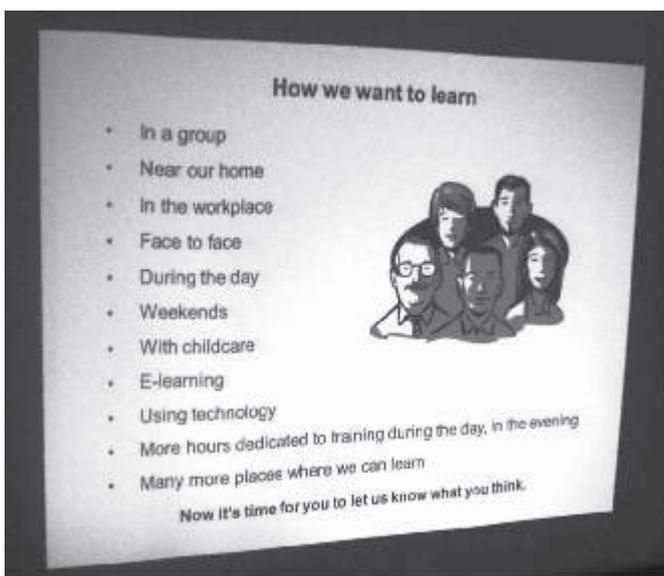
Some of the positive outcomes of the Eur-Alpha project are:

- The Irish learner rep was invited to be a keynote speaker at a North of Scotland literacies learner conference 'Learners got

Talent' held in Nairn in 2009.

- Contact was made with colleagues from Switzerland who were impressed with the Scottish approach to adult literacies and visited Scotland in December 2010. As a result of the visit they set up a basic skills centre in Zurich.

- Two of the learners from Scotland were invited to speak at the annual learners' conference in Waterford, Ireland, hosted by NALA (National Adult Literacy Association).

- As a result of the dissemination events learners are being asked about a national literacies learners' network in Scotland which fulfils one of the commitments in the Scottish Government's Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020 Strategic Guidance.

- The network has promoted understanding of Europe, of other countries and cultures while reinforcing to learners that they share similar difficulties with their literacy and numeracy and a desire to improve their education.
· European partners have become more aware of, and impressed by, the adult literacies work going on in Scotland.

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Exploding Feathers and Virtual Reality: Are Literacy Researchers Looking in the Wrong Places, the Wrong Worlds?

Peter Shukie

Peter has worked in literacy education since 2000 with a range of organisations in life skills, community, workplace and family learning settings. He worked as Skills for Life Manager in Blackburn and fully immersed himself in the ways of SfL, having tests with Indian Head Massage preparation, running the literacy and numeracy tests on the Big Wheel in Manchester and creating online classes and tests that ran in workplaces and community settings across the region. He is currently working on a BA Education Studies programme, teaching Digital Literacies, ICT in Learning & Teaching and Research modules. He is also doing a PhD in Technology Enhanced Learning and looking for ways of creating a less hierarchical and more inclusive learning environment for all.

Following the publication of the latest research into literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in the UK (dBIS,December 2011), it seems not much has changed. The results are mixed. Significant increases in Level 2 skills are presented for literacy, up to 57% from 44% in 2003, though numeracy shows a small decline. ICT measures indicate that the majority of people are operating above Entry Level, though no sense of reflective irony is displayed in the better performance in spread sheets (61% at Entry 3) than in word processing (57%) when correlated with the changing fortunes in literacy and numeracy. The temptation is to look at these figures and begin anew the discussions of how we can ensure the one in six individuals with poor skills are not "disadvantaged as employees, citizens and parents" (Carol Taylor,NIACE,2011). In so doing, are we not in danger of recreating a view that is missing what is going on in people's changing literacy practices, uses of numeracy and, significantly, in their use of technology?
I found the research very depressing, and not only because of the apparent lack of shift at the lower levels, or the decrease in numeracy skills. What was so depressing to me was the lack of any shift in the concepts of literacy on the part of the research authors.

The significant investment in the Skills for Life agenda was instrumental in developing a 'professionalisation of the workforce' and the development of literacy (and numeracy) communities that established innovative approaches to developing literacy, including wider notions of literacies being shared, discussed and used as a basis for the ways in which learning, teaching and assessment take place. The ways people work and communicate are perhaps changing more rapidly than ever before. The advantages afforded by a responsive and aware Skills for Life sector, with open-minded, innovative and progressive teaching practices working alongside and with learners, have never been more essential.

Despite this, the research uses the same tools as in 2003. Looking back at what was used then, the questions will be familiar to UK literacy practitioners as the online practice tests on *Move On* offered the model. In fact, the examples given in the research outline in 2003 (Dfes, 2003) and used again in 2011, are still evident as questions currently on offer in the Move On mini test (http://www.moveon.org.uk/testyourskills/ilr_minitest/index.html).

These questions were then, and are now, seemingly agreed as solid, and accurate measures of literacy and numeracy. I think in my own experiences at the time of the first research, I would have been less than certain that a single measure of literacy could have been devised to give a certainty that the research report aims to present. After a near decade of developing my understanding of literacy, literacies and learning in a whole range of related areas, I am now absolutely certain that reliance on such singular tools of measurement is futile.

In Carol Taylor's response the mention of *Quick Reads* and *family learning* indicate a range of the learning opportunities and initiatives that stem from the professional literacy sector, even while recognising the grouping of maths and English into 'basic skills' means maths is still often taught by non-maths specialists. Even here, though, it would seem that the NIACE response is still unquestioning of the validity of the research tool in the first place, and the range of

the meta-organisations in recognising where literacy has changed, and the ways people are communicating. One point of interest in the full research practice from 2003 (Dfes,2003), presumably used again in 2011, is a research question style that seems quite ready to bring the issues of individual responsibility to bear. Asking those that have stated they are perhaps less confident with numeracy or literacy, the interviewer is prompted to ask if this "has led to then making mistakes at work" (p.274) followed by the accusative "and do you think these mistakes have cost your employer money?" It is not that this in itself is an approach that leads to an individual blame culture, coming as it does midway through an in-depth interview that has asked about qualifications, parental education, the relationship with children, and working history. It is perhaps that this form of enquiry is already creating for the respondents a sense of what is important, an external set of events that they navigate, skills for the benefit of others and skills that are measured easily and are only valuable (or not valuable) based on what they provide to the economy. There seems no space here for respondents to move outside the prescriptive categories the interviewers bring with them, and a set of tests that fix these skills in a context-free, academic format of on-screen assessments.

Where have issues of multiple literacies, powerful literacies and the importance of cultural and individual concepts of what literacy *is* been included in this research? It would seem nowhere, and that is what is most depressing, the results are significant measures that will be used to design policy, target funding and shape educational practice for the next decade, and they seem so *shallow*! The insistence on asking people if they have cost their employer money may be better aimed at the financial sector in the south east of the country following recent catastrophes, rather than a replication of the 2003 findings that people in this region and sector are strong across all skill sets. The insistence on the individual as a problem, the institution (employer, government, economy) as being beyond reproach remains intact. It is a fundamental lack of recognition of wide and diverse practices, of ways of living that enrich the economy and cultural vibrancy of the UK.

A significant amount of discussion in the research report findings surrounds the ICT assessment. Incredibly, this also remains the same as in 2003. Despite the intervening years seeing an explosion in digital technologies, prosumer skills and the rise of YouTube,

Facebook, Blogs, online games that cross international and cultural boundaries and the implications of technology in the London Riots, the Arab Spring, the judicial changes in privacy laws in the UK through Twitter issues, and the advent of crowd sourcing, mass protest and self-directed learning via the web. Despite all this, ICT is measured on Word, email and spreadsheets. Such a reductive view of the world that stares us in the face means that the limitations of this type of research are too stark to make any realistic decisions about the state of literacy, numeracy or ICT.

It reminds me of a student in an Entry Level 3 class two years ago, who was telling me that his tutor thinks he is doing well, but needs to focus more on written communication because he wasn't clear enough. He had a few worksheets with him on formal letter layout. In the next twenty minutes of discussion he told me how he designed exploding feathers (really!) as a weapon on a web-based fantasy adventure game. This involved selling the weaponry on his own online store, designed and operated by him alone, and using text-based interactions in a chat function on the game platform. He made hundreds of transactions a month, all conducted through typed responses in speech bubbles of avatars, and conducted globally. No doubt, as his letter writing wasn't 'up to scratch' he'd be bringing the research figures down a notch, but is he really struggling to communicate, does he have issues with literacy? Is he likely to be disadvantaged in the workplace, because his skills aren't adequately reflected in the narrow tools of assessment that the research allows? It seems that his are the very skills that are responsive to a changing digitalised economy, utilising new forms of communication, recognising new formats and practices, and shaping his own practices to allow him to become involved and to flourish. The figures from the dBIS survey will serve to shape a response that misses what diverse needs are, focusing on a diminishing view of skills that seem to relate to a culturally defined sense of *lack*. Without the skills or the remit to recognise these practices, the teachers in this scenario were bound to focus on what couldn't be done, rather than what was happening in a positive and economically beneficial way. It seems that an approach that fixates on his creation of a CV, rather than perfecting his skills in globalised, informal communication, is where we remain.

Elsewhere, *Digital Britain* (2009) and the *Leitch Review* (2006) the need for new practices, and recognition of new skills for jobs yet to be

created, permeate the discussion. By focusing so singularly on a literacy measurement that is fixed, unresponsive and culturally bound to a set of skills and practices aligned to a prescriptive curriculum, the figures here will serve to alienate, marginalise and problematise huge swathes of people.

While the systematic research only recognises such a narrow, and increasingly marginalised band of 'literacy' it will continue to create the material for politically valuable 'crisis narratives' and help with the continued dissemination of a culture that recognises and responds to a deficit model. It will not help us recognise where the developed awareness of literacies amongst newly involved professionals, the students they work with, and the organisations and initiatives they have informed, has made a significant shift in our understanding of a world mediated by different forms of language, and helped us to value diversity and change.

The research will, it is hoped, provide a compulsion for government to continue to fund literacy and numeracy programmes. Clearly a positive outcome, though to continue along this trajectory of making people fit the literacy measure, rather than involving our changing uses of language to shape what we consider literacy/literacies to be, will only serve to continually replicate these findings; the "low hanging fruit" (NIACE,2011) of easy to hit exam targets will continue, with a curriculum and assessment regime designed for that purpose. The option is there for an appreciation of how language, number and ICT use have altered, and continue to develop. Once this is recognised perhaps then the researchers and funders can appreciate the expertise and development in the Skills for Life sector. We can look again at ways in which these could be developed as models of good practice, even using *new* approaches to start the task of creating meaningful and elucidating research into what people *are doing* with their skills.

The professionalisation of the sector, with the introduction of the diplomas and subject specialist qualifications, has generated awareness of the diversity inherent in literacy as a situated practice, with global as well as local impact. Rather than ignore this and return to decade-old measures, based on a dominant ideological notion of what skills are, this could be an opportunity to recognise these limitations. The next step could be to begin a similarly large and impressive scale of research to find out the relevance of the assumptions made, see what

people are using in their lives, what opportunities for growth and inclusion – economic and personal – are and develop a fluid and organic way of learners and their teachers growing their skills together.

In summary, I think the researchers have highlighted how *research* has perhaps not made any significant changes in the last decade. Perhaps it is in need of a radical overall: investment in the staff and systems that deliver it; a greater element of professionalisation in the research outlook; and a better awareness of how these individuals can learn to become more effective in their roles and provide something useful and functionally beneficial to society. That is assuming they don't mind being spoken about in that way, of course, and they don't cost their employers any money! They do remain valued and significant members of the community, and only by helping them to conduct research from a wider, more aware and relevant perspective can we ensure they are able to reach their potential and provide support and investment in their communities.

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Potential Benefits of Embedding Digital Storytelling into Literacy Sessions

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

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

Digital storytelling can be produced in a variety of different formats. For example, an e-portfolio or e-ILP[2] can be defined as "a purposeful collection of work that demonstrates effort, progress and achievement over time, stored in an electronic container (CD, DVD, WWW)" (Barrett:2011).

Web 2.0 tools which can support learners to express digital narrative

Glogster

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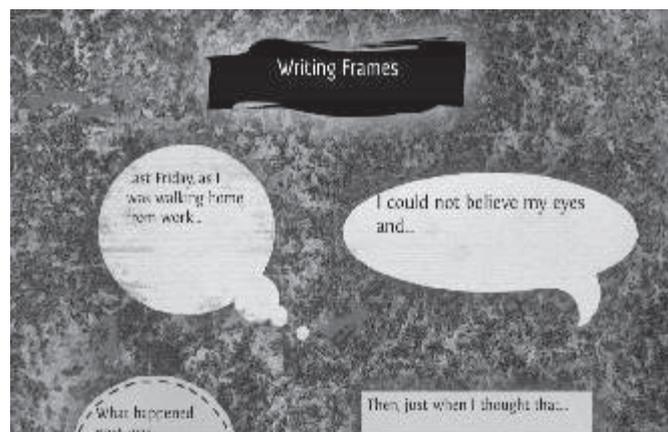
Wallwisher

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

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

Screencasting

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

Podcasts

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

Avatars[13]

An avatar can be defined as, "a virtual representation of the player in a game" (Webpedia:2012). It is possible to create avatars for "designing digital stories or delivering content" (King:2010). Avatars can act as a tour guide through a story guiding the reader or listener (King:2010). However, one of the criticisms of digital engagement is online privacy and identity threats. Researchers from Cranfield University in partnership with The Visualisation and Other Methods of Expression (VOME) project recently implemented an internet privacy card game to bring this issues to the attention of internet users (VOME[14]:2012).
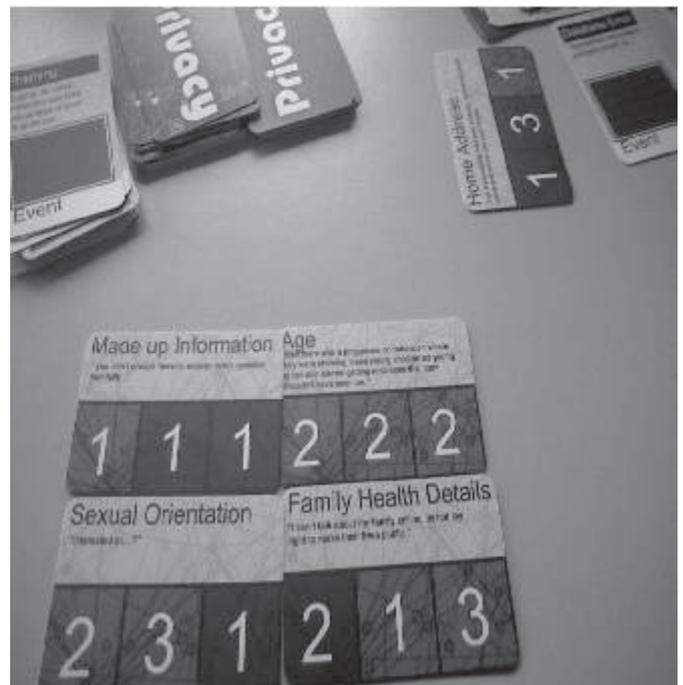
Whilst e-safety[15] concerns are omnipresent, the benefit of avatar creation is that learners can remain anonymous if they wish to and focus on the story itself. Voki[16] is an online tool whereby learners can create a speaking and moving avatar in a variety of different languages. The text-to-speak feature enables literacy learners to type in text for the avatar to speak in different languages (Voki:2012). Voki can be used as a differentiated literacy learning tool in terms of character styles, appearance, voice and background. Voki Classroom is a tool explicitly for learning contexts in terms of classroom management, teaching delivery and lesson plans (Voki:2012). Similarly, Build Your Wild Self [17] from New York Zoos and Aquarium enables learners to create a customisable avatar.

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

Visualising the Learning Journey

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

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

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

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

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

Digital storytelling can be used to support other learning resources

Rory's Story Cubes
Traditional storytelling and digital storytelling are not mutually exclusive but can both be used to support learning effectively for example with Rory's Story Cubes[27]. Here storytelling is transformed into a game making learning fun. They comprise nine cubes with a total fifty for images or 'picto-verbs' to amalgamate in order to create a story. Further sets of story cubes are
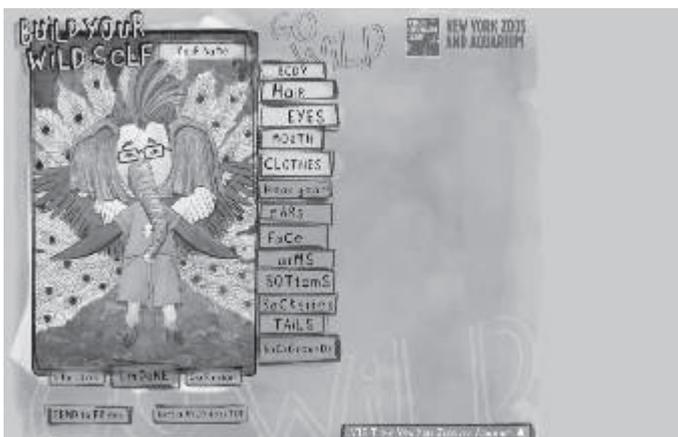
'M' Learning[18]
QR (Quick Response) codes[19] are black and white graphic projections that can be linked to information, text, a URL or other data (Stansberry:2011). Stansberry (2011) also argues that QR codes can improve literacy, and suggests that, "the potential for QR codes in education is extensive". Given that most learners have smart phones, it is possible for them to both create and read QR code to tell a story for example a QR code treasure hunt.

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

Inclusive Learning

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

Folding Stories

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

Collaborative Learning

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

Outdoor Classroom

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

28. See glossary   29. Ibid   30. Ibid   31. Ibid

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

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

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Glossary
Avatar – a visual representation of a person in a virtual format
Aviary – a series of online tools which enable users to create music and edit images
Blog – an online website including text, images and video
Build Your Wild Self – an online tool which enables users to create an avatar from New York Zoos and Aquarium - *www.buildyourwildself.com/*
Centre for Digital Storytelling – an organisation which seeks to support participants with telling stories using media - http://www.storycenter.org/
Digital Literacy – skills in literacy associated with the use of tools available on digital platforms
Digital Storytelling - using text, images and sound to communicate a digital narrative
Edinburgh International Book Festival – annual book festival to celebrate the written word in August - http://www.edbookfest.co.uk
E-ILP – digital Individual Learning Plan.
E-saftey – "E-safety is about managing the risks of a digital world sensibly in a risk adverse society."
E-Scrapbooking – digital compilation, amalgamation and arrangement of images and text to create personal timeline and history and archive

Exquisite corpse – Surrealist collaborative strategy combining text and images
Folding Story – group collaborative storytelling website - http://foldingstory.com/.
Geocaching – a game whereby players use GPS - *www.geocaching.com/*
Glogster – an online tool that enable users to create a graphic blog
Glogs – graphic blogs created using the online tool Glogster
'M' Learning – learning opportunities using mobile phones
National Media Museum – is located in Bradford, UNESCO city of media - http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/AboutUs.aspx
New Media Literacy – skills in literacy associated with new media
Phlog – a photographic blog
Podcast – a digital media of sound
QR Code – quick response codes
Rory's Story Cubes – storytelling game used dice - *www.storycubes.com/.*
Screencasting – a process whereby it is possible to make a video tutorial to capture the real time screen activity with sound.
Screenr – an online tool which enables users to screencast - www.screenr.com/
Seven Stories - gallery and archive to celebrate children's books in Newcastle -Upon-Tyne - http://www.sevenstories.org.uk
Social Media Literacy – skills in literacy associated with social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter
Storyboarding – graphical curation of events in a narrative
Storytelling – using text, images and sound to communicate a narrative.
The Life Online Gallery – gallery space located within the National media Museum to explore the impact of technology on life - http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/PlanAVisit/Exhibitions/LifeOnlineExhibition/PermanentGallery.aspx
Visual Literacy - skills in literacy relating to visual media
VisualMap – mobile phone application which enable users to use GPS to visualise the location - http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/visualmap/id348529030?mt=8
Vlogs – A video log
Voki – an online tool which enables users to create a speaking avatar in different languages and voice styles - http://www.voki.com/
Wallwisher – online noticeboard where users can create 'stickies' or online post-it notes to share a variety of content including images, video and web links

A Case Study: Is the Teaching of Adult Literacy to Learners from the Traveller Community Effective?

Sue Charlton

Sue Charlton has been teaching literacy for the past two years in a local Skills Plus Centre, including teaching literacy to students from the Traveller community. She previously taught literacy to students with a range of learning disabilities at an adult education centre as part of an Independent Living Skills Programme.

This research project undertaken as part of the Additional Diploma in Teaching Skills for Life in the Lifelong Learning Sector (Literacy) at Canterbury Christ Church University considers the effectiveness of adult literacy provision for a member of the Traveller community who attends classes at his local Skills Plus Centre. By focusing on an individual, it is hoped that wider issues may be raised and explored to inform practice.

This project starts with a definition of 'Traveller'. This is a generic term used by the wider community, and by some Travellers themselves, to describe a number of diverse groups and communities living within the United Kingdom. It continues by describing some specific and relevant aspects of the culture and traditions of the Traveller community. It then explores the Traveller community's sometimes difficult relationship with the education establishment and with literacy as a specific representation of the wider society's values and beliefs. Within this context, and through a series of interviews with the learner and some examples of the learner's work, the relevance, effectiveness and inclusiveness of the literacy provision, and the impact of these issues within the classroom, are considered. The project asks whether the literacy provision is appropriate as preparation for life and for access to current employment opportunities. The research closes with a summary of the findings and suggestions for how they might inform future practice.

The term 'Traveller' is widely used within the UK, and beyond, to define and explain a whole range of communities based on similar ways of life, traditions, values and beliefs. The word 'Traveller' is often used interchangeably with other terms such as 'Gypsy', 'Roma' and 'Romany'; terms used to describe communities ranging from "English and Welsh Gypsy groups, Irish and Scottish Travellers and Show-People (Fairground and Circus communities)" (Levinson 2007:12). The terms used within the UK have become synonymous with a lifestyle considered by many people living within the wider community to be 'unacceptable', and in many cases 'threatening'.

This sense of threat is a complex issue relating to both society's need to assimilate groups that choose to live differently on its margins, and to some wider communities' negative experiences of the Traveller community. Although many Travellers now reside within the 'settled' community and are no longer nomadic, they live in many senses of the word on the margins of society. This is sometimes by choice; nevertheless, they often suffer discrimination and exclusion. Additionally, although many Travellers no longer live in physical communities, they still hold on to, and are fiercely proud of, their traditions and culture. This is reflected in the learner's writing. He also discussed this in the first of two interviews carried out for the project. He says, "I'm very proud of my culture but people don't like our ways because we're different." In terms of teaching literacy to members of the Traveller community then, it is important,

> *"for professionals to see learners in the context of their family culture and the community they live in, in order to relate to them and their cultures in an enabling way".*
> *(Hrubiak 2009:9)*

Tutors themselves need to gain knowledge and understanding of the Traveller community, its culture and beliefs, for literacy teaching to be successful and effective.

For the Traveller community, as with all communities, expressions of culture and traditions are closely related to issues of identity and group membership. The Traveller community is very family orientated and, as with most communities, the family is central to how Travellers operate and pass on their culture, beliefs and traditions. The Romani language, which is based on Indo-Aryan languages using a 'Standard' English construction, is also fundamental. The language is essentially an oral language with its own unique "grammatical structure, dialects and forms of use"[1] and the dominant means by which Travellers transmit their culture and beliefs through the family, and within their own wider community. This transmission of culture and beliefs is essentially

1. http://www.gypsy-jib.com/romany.htm (accessed 20/7/12)

passed on through a long tradition of oral storytelling. Consequently, spoken language has been of considerable importance to members of the Traveller community. Travellers' traditions and culture are also transmitted through the passing on of traditional skills, such as horses and scrap, from generation to generation. Travellers have acquired these skills over centuries but they are not reliant on reading and writing skills but on the honing of oral skills on which Travellers have depended to make their living, oral skills used to sell both products and services. Travellers have developed and relied on the development of their oral skills and consequently many Travellers cannot see the economic benefits of learning to read and write, but others realise that the belief that they can rely solely on traditional skills to survive is now under threat. Major changes within society mean that the Travellers' traditional skills are no longer needed. In their place, within an increasingly pressured economic environment, reading and writing skills are an essential requirement for employment within the wider community.

Many Travellers are beginning to realise that to survive they must change and adapt to a world that is far removed from the world in which they, or their ancestors, were able to lead a nomadic life and rely on their traditional skills to find employment and survive. However, some Travellers still resist this pressure, creating a tension between tradition and change. This tension is evident in the interviews with the learner in which he accepts this need for change, but fears the traditions and beliefs of the Traveller community will die out. He says, "'I know we have to change but it's important that we hold on to our culture because it's our identity." Within the current social and economic environment, many Travellers believe it is becoming harder to hold on to their identity and traditional values and beliefs, and that they themselves are under threat from a wider society which is constantly attempting to impose on them its own values, beliefs and way of life. This is acutely evident in the area of education in general, and literacy in particular.

According to Levinson (2007:6 & 11) many travellers believe that education, and in particular "the acquisition of literacy equals the acceptance of the wider society's values" and is not "merely a technical or neutral skill". He highlights the fact that for many years Travellers have resisted attempts to draw them into the education system. Many Travellers only have contact with the educational system through their relationship with their children's school,

which is often tense. The Traveller who is the subject of this research project describes in the interviews which were the basis of the project his many 'run-ins' with his children's schools. He believes, and Levinson supports this view, that Travellers are not wanted, or accepted, within the school system, and that many schools do not understand their culture and way of life. This raises tensions and important issues for Travellers entering the education system as adults.

The main challenge is how to include Travellers in the provision of literacy but support them to retain a sense of their own language, traditions and values. This must necessarily include an understanding and respect for Traveller culture and traditions because the acquisition of literacy skills is a complex issue involving both personal and cultural identity. Effective teaching is, therefore, dependent on inclusiveness and relevance for it to support a learner's ability to respond and adapt to the wider world in their own way, for personal and economic growth.

The Skills Plus Centre's literacy provision for Travellers is essentially effective, but there are issues relating to inclusiveness which need to be addressed to ensure that provision is developed and becomes more effective. The learner at the centre of this project has been attending the Skills Plus Centre to develop his literacy skills for one hour a week for the past 18 months. He lives within the 'settled' community, but retains close links to his local Traveller community. He is intensely proud of his Traveller heritage and culture and uses the Romani language within his community. He sees the Romani language as an expression of his Traveller heritage. The learner is 46 years old and married with eight children. He received very little formal education as a child because his parents were traditional Travellers, who led a nomadic existence and travelled throughout his childhood. The learner began attending the centre after enquiring into literacy courses at his local Job Centre. He accepts that he must learn literacy skills to compete in the current job market and that the traditional skills he already has like "mending things" and farrier skills are now less relevant to the current job market. During one interview he reflected on how difficult it is for him to find employment without literacy skills because,

> "the jobs we used to do like fruit-picking, now foreign workers come in and do those jobs. Opportunities have been taken from us. It is difficult to find work so I must be able to read and write."

The learner realises that he must find alternative employment and is currently looking for work in the construction trade. He has attended various other education organisations but felt they were unable to meet his needs. Despite only attending the centre for one hour a week, the learner has progressed steadily and he is generally motivated to develop his literacy skills. He is currently working towards the OCR Entry Level Literacy Examinations at Entry Level 2.

In order to ensure that the literacy teaching provided by the centre is effective, it must then be relevant and inclusive in terms of developing the literacy skills the learner needs for life and to compete in the current job market. Activities are planned after discussion, and in collaboration with him, and are relevant to his everyday life and needs.

The literacy provision is relevant because the focus for this particular learner is on everyday skills such as writing a note to a child's school explaining an absence or developing the skills needed for employment such as reading a job advertisement and being able to write a reply. The tasks are effective because they reflect the Traveller community's approach to language as essentially practical and as a basic means of communication. However, this approach to language by the Traveller community has implications in the classroom for the literacy learner. Developing the learner's literacy skills beyond the basics required to get a message across is a difficult task, simply because he does view language as being purely 'functional'. For example, during a recent lesson planned to begin to develop the learner's writing skills using conjunctions, he expressed a lack of understanding about why he would need to use them. He said, "If it's raining, I say it's raining. I don't need to say anything more than that."

The learner often comes across Standard English words, in a text or in a resource, which he has no knowledge or understanding of, or he uses the word in a different way to its standard meaning. He recently encountered the word 'distressed' in a text and had no experience of it. Although this raised the opportunity to expose the learner to a wider range of vocabulary, he had no interest in the word or exploring its structure and meaning.

As part of the development of the learner's literacy skills, he encounters and uses a variety of texts and resources available at the centre. However, the texts represent discourses reflecting the wider community, and contribute to his sense of being different "because texts are not neutral but embody the social structures and values of the societies which use them" (Hughes and Schwab 2010:58). The use of these resources has implications in terms of their effectiveness in engaging this learner. He should have access to texts, resources and images which reflect his own culture because the provision, as Wallace (2007:114) argues, should "include learning activities which are accessible to all learners and which do not make any learner feel excluded either directly, or by implication". The inclusiveness of the provision is important to ensure that a good relationship is developed with the learner, and that he feels his culture, beliefs and language are respected and understood. The use of texts and resources reflecting the Traveller community would not only support the development of the learner's literacy skills, but may also contribute to a greater understanding and acceptance within the wider population of the culture and traditions of the Traveller community. Although there are resources reflecting other minority groups within the centre, the Traveller community is not represented. The learner would like to see his community reflected in the texts and resources used to teach him.

The Standard English texts and resources used at the centre are effective in enabling learners from the Traveller community to access the wider community and the opportunities it offers. However, there is no representation of the Romani language, which again raises issues relating to inclusiveness and an appreciation and understanding of other languages and 'literacies' within the wider community. The Romani language contains a wide and varied vocabulary, some of which has entered the English language. Two examples are 'cushti' meaning good and 'chav' meaning child. The Romani language is the means by which Travellers express both themselves, and their culture. However, it is very much an oral language and mainly practical because "language for gypsies is not an instrument of conceptual analysis" but a "basic means of communication" (Levinson 2007:13). This has implications for developing both reading and writing skills for Travellers within the classroom. Writing is considered by Travellers to be a lesser skill. This has implications for teaching writing in the classroom as a literacy skill. The learner is less keen to write and to develop his writing skills, because for Travellers writing is seen as a "far less persuasive and expressive than person-to-person action" (Levinson 2007:13). However, writing using Standard English does allow the learner, and

other Traveller learners, the opportunity to use writing and other literacy skills "as a means to fulfilling their goals and aspirations" (Hughes and Schwab 2007:209) within a wider society which relies on Standard English as the 'desired' form of speech and written communication. Freire (2006:1) says that the real power of literacy "lies not in a received ability to read and write, but rather in an individual's capacity to put those skills to work in shaping the course of his or her own life". This theory highlights "the importance of literacy for social inclusion" (Hughes and Schwab 2010:58), but literacy is a reflection of many forms of language and these should be recognised as being an essential part of the identity and culture of the many different communities living within the wider society of which we are all a part.

In conclusion, the purpose of this research project has been to explore whether the provision of literacy for one learner from the Traveller community within a local Skills Plus Centre is effective, and whether the exploration of its effectiveness might raise wider issues concerning literacy provision for Travellers in general. The findings of this research project suggest that, although the provision for Travellers at the centre is essentially effective in terms of its relevance as preparation for life and for the employment market, there are wider issues around inclusiveness to be addressed. One is the challenge presented to literacy teachers to incorporate Traveller culture, particularly the Romani language, within the classroom as one of the many 'literacies' used within the UK, while simultaneously teaching the 'standard' literacy needed for individuals to be included in, and to access, the wider community for both economic and personal growth. A key finding is that issues relating to relevance and inclusion have a direct impact on the effectiveness of teaching within the classroom. This raises wider issues about the literacy provision for Travellers. The relationship between Travellers and the education system has been a difficult one. One way to ensure that the provision is truly inclusive would be to ask Travellers themselves what they would like to see in terms of literacy provision, and to explore ways in which these ideas might be included in the curriculum itself to develop more effective practice.

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Research Project: Why are a 17-year-old learner's writing skills significantly weaker than his reading, listening and speaking skills and what strategies will allow the learner to develop and apply more effective writing skills?

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Introduction

Since I started teaching literacy and language in the post-compulsory sector in 2005, I have worked with many students where there is a clear link between weak reading skills and weak writing skills. Often a diagnosis of dyslexia, in one form or another, has been given, leading to guidance on strategies to use in class and in practical applications of reading or writing activities. However, this year I have a student (who I will refer to as 'the learner') who is an avid reader with very fluent speaking skills where he evidences lexical density, but whose handwriting is poorly structured and lacking in basic punctuation. He has also demonstrated an apparent reluctance to participate in writing activities in class and a failure to plan and complete assignments for his vocational course.

As I have tried to support him in class, I have become aware of his frustration at his lack of academic success and concerns about the likely impact on his future career ambitions. This led to my asking the research question, "Why is the learner generally failing to master the complexity of skills needed to write effectively?" Kamen (2000: 146) highlighted that acquiring and applying writing skills is more difficult than reading skills because of the combination of physical and cognitive demands required. The need to write legibly, punctuate and choose grammar and sentence structure and spell correctly, as well as writing with sufficient detail and content to achieve the intended purpose, is a demanding process. To investigate this learner's difficulties, the research focused on the following three areas: handwriting problems, attitude to writing and possible learning difficulties.

With the student's full agreement and co-operation, I undertook this case study using the following methods: a review of written work; a questionnaire and interview; and analysis of his college assessment for additional support.

Case Study

The learner is 17 years old and is studying a one year Level 1 Health and Social Care course at a further education (FE) college. He completed GCSEs at a secondary school and a Level 2 Diploma in Electronic Engineering. All his GCSE grades, including maths and English, were D or below. At the start of the academic year his ambition was to become a nurse and he was placed onto the Level 1 course, despite being qualified for the Level 2 course, because of concerns regarding his writing and confidence. Attendance has not been ideal with lack of finance normally blamed. As the year has advanced, he has reviewed his progression and, as at March 2012, is hoping to join the army working in communication and logistics.

Writing Review

Since the start of the academic year, the learner has produced a number of different texts. Three were selected for review as they covered different types of writing and skills including summarising, punctuation and report writing. To engage the writer, two were based upon a major interest of his: football.

In the first, 'Javier Hernandez', facts were provided relating to three varied celebrities to allow students to write a short description of one of them. The second was a Skillswise[1] exercise to insert capital letters. For the third, a 'Report to the FA on challenges facing professional football', the learner had to write a report using his own schemata on the topic which was known to be of interest to him. He was asked to concentrate on the content and report structure, and to get his draft down on paper during the 45 minute session without worrying about spelling.

The learner's texts followed a logical sequence and at Text Level the submissions were

effectively planned. With the FA Report, the instruction to ignore the lower order skills (to be sorted later) seems to have allowed his thoughts to flow onto paper.

Turning to Sentence Level, on a number of occasions full stops were absent from sentences. The use of capital letters was also inconsistent. Whilst they were used correctly in all three texts for names, they were not used consistently at the start of sentences. Extra capital letters were used on a number of occasions e.g. *Joined* and *Against*, in mid-sentence as well as for *Is It* and *In*.

At Word Level the learner included an effective range of lexis including *idol*, *inspires* and *role model* and also showed an ability to use word families such as *charges*, *dropped*, *prosecuted* and *accuse*. Spelling accuracy varied, with some quite difficult words spelt correctly such as *learnt* and *August*. However, words were not consistently correct. *Opinion* was spelt correctly in the Hernandez text but incorrectly in the FA text (*opion*). *Appearances* was shortened to *APPera*. In the FA text, where he was specifically told not to worry about spelling accuracy, a higher percentage of words was spelt incorrectly. The learner's handwriting was untidy but normally legible, however all of the handwriting sat on the line including letters with a descender such as g and y.

Questionnaire and Interview
In a major online survey by the National Literacy Trust entitled *Setting the Baseline – Young People's Writing in 2010*[2], over 18,000 young people aged 8 to 17, were asked about their attitude to writing. The survey, Clark (2011), tried to move away from traditional formal styles of writing taught in schools to consider writing in a much wider range of contexts which young writers are more likely to participate in on a regular basis. I extracted questions used in the survey to both analyse the learner's attitude to writing and to allow comparison of the learner's attitude to writing with the survey group which were included in the primary review questionnaire.

Student Assessment for Additional Support
Due to my concerns regarding the inconsistencies between the learner's skills, he was referred to the FE College Support Team for an additional learning support assessment. The lucid screening indicated some weaknesses with word recognition and construction, but identified that his verbal and non-verbal reasoning were both average. His working memory test showed no difficulties and this was seen as a strength. The outcome was that he showed "low" indicators of dyslexia.

The learner was deemed not to qualify for any exam concessions or extra in-class support although it was suggested that he should make use of IT support and attend 1-to-1 sessions with the Student Support Team for help with assignment planning and proofreading. The interviewer stated that he "presents as a confident learner who is verbally very competent. He clearly has a sound understanding of technical vocabulary and he expresses his ideas coherently... [The learner] says his work is messy and looks careless".

Research Summary
Poorly structured handwriting, inconsistent spelling and problems with sentence construction often stop the learner from producing the Text Level work of which he is capable due to concentration on, or concern about, the lower order writing issues. As a result, his underlying knowledge, reasoning and strong vocabulary are not normally evidenced in his writing. Whilst competent in using IT, this skill is not overcoming the writing challenges which the learner faces.

Research Findings
I will now consider the findings in the light of the research outlined. The learner's difficulties with producing effective written work is longstanding and seems to indicate that there is an underlying problem which has not been addressed and overcome. This appears to revolve around handwriting and physically putting the "word" into the written format. Accordingly, I have concentrated my research on poor handwriting, the learner's attitude to writing and whether he has any specific learning difficulties having discounted dyslexia.

Handwriting
In July 2009, the Institute of Education, London, and University of Exeter organised a conference with the theme *Writing Development: Multiple Perspectives*. A series of presentations was made by researchers from around the world covering a wide range of topics, but of particular relevance to my research was the presentation by Dr Carol Christensen entitled *The Critical Role of Handwriting.*

Christensen is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Education at the University of Queensland, Australia. Christensen (2009) made the case that to achieve a high quality and quantity of written

text, the writer needs to have strong Orthographic Motor Integration (OMI) and high levels of automaticity. Christensen (2004) explained OMI as "the way in which orthographic knowledge is integrated with fine motor demands of handwriting". Orthographic knowledge includes such things as letters and sequencing, proper use of letters and words, spelling and how letters are put together to express words or meaning. The fine motor demands are the physical needs to produce the writing on paper by hand, or indeed via a keyboard onto a computer.

Automaticity is described by Christensen (2009) as the ability to produce writing quickly, accurately and effortlessly so that it does not "consume" too much of a writer's attention. She suggests that unless a writer has competent OMI and automaticity skills they will be unable to produce quality writing and that unless these are addressed, written skills cannot get better. She recounted a story about a teenage Australian student with poor writing skills but who was apparently very 'bright'. She quoted him, "I can write 2 or 3 words and then the words get stuck." This seemed very similar to my learner's experiences.

When considering ways to improve OMI and automaticity, Christensen (2009) referred to issues of cognitive overload. She broke writing down into a series of steps: ideation (content), technical accuracy (spelling and punctuation), communicative competence (audience and language), genre and executive control (review). To achieve automaticity in OMI, she proposed that it was essential to address cognitive load as writers can only think about one of the steps at a time. This can be done by breaking down and sequencing the steps with the suggestion that technical accuracy should be left to last. Thus effective chunking or sequencing of the writing task should be a way for students to manage the cognitive load.

However, because handwriting is needed at each step, Christensen (2009) suggested that it is not possible to "sequence out" handwriting. Accordingly, it needs to be worked on to achieve automaticity so that it is done without thinking to leave the writer to focus on the "attentional demands of the text". She states that automaticity can be improved or fixed by concentrating on and practising fluency and shapes rather than neatness and fine motor control. Shapes on the floors, walls, whiteboards and moving around or writing on these could be more useful than trying to write on small lines on paper. Conventional teaching practices including

emphasis on pencil control and use of double lined paper were challenged (as indicators of poor skills in learners' minds). The importance of time trials was stressed as a key element of practice and as a motivator as they show progression achieved to the writers. Christensen (2009) referred to a study with adolescents, which compared students undertaking 15 minutes of handwriting practice a day with control groups. The study showed significant improvements in handwriting as measured by OMI tests, quality of written texts and lengths of written texts when compared to the control group.

In her presentation summary Christensen (2009) states:

"OMI has a remarkably strong and enduring relationship with students' capacity to produce high quality written text. This applies to young beginning writers, older secondary students and tertiary students and adults. The problem is embedded in issues of cognitive load. Effective instruction in handwriting can prevent the development of problems in written language for young children and remediate them for older students."

To try to identify whether OMI was an issue for my learner, I discussed with him the strategies he has developed and how he uses them to write more effectively. The learner concluded that he "writes slow and small". This approach indicates a big focus on the lower order skills and a move away from automaticity which would allow him to concentrate on the high order tasks. In class a concentration on producing small amounts of text but trying to get spelling and punctuation right has been observed. Going forward, developmental and coping strategies taking a different approach should be considered.

Attitudes to Writing
The learner's attitudes to writing emerge clearly from his responses to the questionnaire and interview questions outlined below.

Which of the following do you write at least once a month, not counting the stuff you write for school?
The learner confirmed that he writes all of the following texts at least once a month: text messages, emails, social networking sites, instant messages, notes, lyrics, fiction, poems, blogs, reviews but not letters, diary or essays. Fewer than 20% of boys surveyed write lyrics, fiction and poems. The learner told me that he enjoys writing fiction and poetry and often does so with his girlfriend.

What do you think makes someone a good writer?

The learner felt that enjoyment, correct punctuation, checking, spelling and writing neatly were needed as well as reading a lot and knowing how to type. However, he did not select "writing a lot" and "talking about writing" as activities which make someone a good writer. In the survey over 50% of boys felt that writing a lot makes a good writer with just over 30% stating that being able to type was important. 46% said writing neatly was needed.

Attitudes to Writing

Finally when considering attitudes to writing, the survey asked whether the participants agreed or disagreed with various statements. A number of my learner's responses differ to the survey's findings with boys. He disagreed that writing is "more fun when you can chose the topic", "the more I write the better my writing gets" and "if I am good at writing I will get a better job". The survey results for these three were 75%, 74% and 41% in agreement respectively. The learner quickly and firmly agreed that "it is easier to read than it is to write" but in the survey fewer than 50% took this view.

The comparison of the learner's results with the survey findings indicate that he is a regular writer but that his own writing problems have influenced elements of his attitude towards writing. His disagreement with the statement that "the more I write the better my writing gets" perhaps confirms earlier comments about frustration with writing skills and their impact on him. In terms of considering support and development strategies, the regular participation in writing outside of the classroom needs to be incorporated.

The learner, when asked about his feelings on his own writing skills, said, "They need to be improved as they were my downfall in English." He also felt that they impacted on his science and maths.

Specific Learning Difficulties – Dysgraphia

During my early research I came across the term dysgraphia; further investigation clearly highlighted that although his college assessment discounted dyslexia the learner exhibits a lot of signs commonly associated with dysgraphia.

The National Center for Learning Difficulties, NCLD (2006), defines dysgraphia as "a learning disability that affects writing abilities. It can manifest itself as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting and trouble putting thoughts on paper". Whilst stressing that bad handwriting on its own does not mean that a person has dysgraphia it may be one of many indicators which are referred to by NCLD (2006) and Brain (2006).

One of the first of these indicators which I observed with the learner was large gaps between written ideas and understanding demonstrated through speech. Other indicators relate to the actual writing including awkward gripping of the pen or pencil, illegible handwriting, inconsistencies with a mixture of print and cursive, upper and lowercase, irregular sizes and inconsistent position on page. Some relate more to the activity such as avoiding writing tasks, difficulty organising thoughts on paper, saying words out loud while writing and slow or laboured copying or writing. A number of indicators link to spelling and grammar including unfinished or omitted words in sentences, difficulty with syntax and grammar, random or non-existent punctuation and spelling errors with the same word spelt differently. [NCLD (2006), Brain (2006)]. The learner answered yes to experiencing most of these, although he made the point that his handwriting is untidy rather than illegible. My observations including those made in the writing review above confirm this.

When writing the FA Report, I put pressure on the learner to speed up to finish the text. He moved from a more careful "slow and laboured" printing to a cursive style which was harder to read. This rushed section only contained one full stop mid paragraph and one at the end although he wrote 17 lines. Upper and lower case use was inconsistent. Irregular letter sizes were apparent throughout the text.

I discussed the possibility of dysgraphia with the college assessment team who advised that they cannot currently test for dysgraphia and thus are unable to agree exam concessions or classroom support. Lack of funding, expertise and availability of suitable tests were the reasons given. NCLD (2006) divides possible support strategies into three categories: "accommodations providing alternatives to written expression, modifications by changing expectations or tasks to minimize or avoid the area of weakness, and remediation by providing instruction for improving handwriting and writing skills".

Mamen (2002), a Canadian psychologist, published a paper titled *Written Expressive Difficulties in Children*. Defining written expressive difficulties (WED) as having

"problems getting things down on paper", she listed 19 likely characteristics of WED. Whilst her research and findings specifically relate to school age children, many of the characteristics can be linked to the learner in this study, for example, "an obvious discrepancy between their oral skills and their written output" and a tendency to "simplify what they have said orally when they put it on paper". Mamen (2002) goes on to suggest many strategies for supporting children and splits them into two categories: compensating for difficulties by utilising alternative means of output, and encouragement to practise and improve skill levels. Mamen does not specifically use the term but there appears to be a close correlation between her written expressive difficulties and dysgraphia.

Strategies
A number of possible support strategies have emerged from this research and have been grouped below:

Accommodations and Support
- Maximise use of IT/assistive technologies including voice-activated software, tape recorders for notes, proofreading and correcting tools such as spelling/grammar checks.
- Provide notes and hand-outs in class with space for own notes as needed to avoid concentration or concerns about writing in lesson when concentration on listening or reading is more important.
- Depending upon the nature of the written task, use a scribe to ensure that the learner can get down on paper his understanding and plan.
- When handwriting is needed ensure suitable paper and pens are available to help with writing.
- Use IT at a much earlier stage for drafting and planning with less reliance on the learner doing handwriting during these stages. Provide laptop in class.
- Investigate further aspects of dysgraphia potentially with a formal assessment. This could be important if the learner progresses to higher academic levels to ensure support and/or exam concessions are agreed if appropriate.

Remediation including development of Automaticity and Handwriting Skills
- Practise handwriting daily with an initial concentration on letter formation and flow rather than neatness. Include timed exercises to evidence progress and avoid slow concentrated writing. Undertake further investigation to identify suitable exercises and activities. Consider extending to include keyboard automaticity.
- Sequence writing tasks carefully to allow concentration on one specific step with technical and accuracy checks coming towards the end of the sequence.
- Support to concentrate at Text Level when initially undertaking writing without concerns about Sentence and Word Level errors.

Conclusion
The learner has problems with his writing skills. It would seem that these problems lie fundamentally in the lower order skills and specifically with his handwriting, which in turn makes it very hard for him to exhibit the higher order writing skills which he could be capable of. This has already impacted on his academic achievements and is likely to continue to impact on his ability to undertake more formal written tasks that will be required in his future career and life experiences. He does, however, write on a regular basis albeit normally in more informal contexts. From my research, I cannot say whether the learner has a 'formal learning difficulty' or whether he will be able to resolve his current problems by improving his automaticity, however, many of the strategies suggested will be relevant to both possibilities. These strategies should concentrate not only on accommodations but also on remediation including the development of automaticity to free up cognitive capacity to concentrate on the higher order skills.

After the course it will largely be down to the learner to implement the suggested strategies both in any further studies and in his own writing. Whilst the development of automaticity could be extremely beneficial, this may be difficult to achieve outside of formal education, and at age 17 the learner may need convincing that working on his handwriting will be useful. As regards future learners in my classes with handwriting difficulties impacting on their writing skills, a much earlier support and development strategy should be implemented.

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Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development

Sam Duncan
London and New York: Continuum 2012
ISBN 978-1-4411-7315-7
x + 220pp
Hardcover: £75.00

Reviewed by Greg Brooks

The heart of this book is an account of the reading circle that Sam Duncan and her students ran within a year-long adult literacy class in London. The book is based on her 2010 EdD thesis (Institute of Education, University of London), and should be read by everyone who is passionate about both literature and adult literacy.

Sam's declared aim (p.2) is "to make one primary argument: that reading circles should be used in, and as, adult literacy provision", and she puts up a very convincing case. The class met for three hours once a week for an academic year. There were 10 learners, of whom three were native speakers of English and seven had English as a second, third or fourth language; three had to drop out part-way, but the others attended throughout. All were assessed at Entry Level 3/Level 1, so around the threshold of functional literacy. With their enthusiastic agreement, for most of the year the last 40 minutes of each session were spent working through and discussing – and, crucially, loving and learning from – a novel which the learners had voted for from a small selection. The learners also gave fully informed consent to Sam's use of the reading circle as a case study for her research, gave her their notebooks, and agreed to be interviewed at the start and end. Her intended stance during the reading circle times was as a 'marginal participant' (she needed to take notes and manage an audio recorder) but, inevitably, on listening to her recordings she realised she had sometimes been more involved than that.

The evidence she gathered provides a richly textured basis for five of the 11 chapters; these detail respectively how the reading circle worked and Sam analysed the data, the overall findings, reading as experience, reading circles as 'ideal pedagogy', and the individual and communal aspects. What did the learners get out of it? They had a disparate range of starting points. One of the native speakers (also fluent in another language) had very little literacy in either language at the start and reported great progress. Among the ESOL learners some also had little literacy, while others were already highly literate in one or even two other languages. Sam shows (see especially p.158) that they were all able to contribute, support each other, and learn a lot. In her final interview one learner came up with this brilliant definition of a novel: "I'd say it's … a quiet place to go … into someone else's life" (p.167).

In the first half of the book Sam places all this in the contexts of how reading is defined and researched, how people learn to read, the relationship between literature and literacy development, and what a 'reading circle' is – a sibling of reading clubs, reading groups, book clubs (where these involve meetings rather than online ordering, that is), book groups and literature circles – and analyses some other published examples, both real and fictional. Her values are explicitly those of literacy as social practice (p.14), "a predominantly text-based approach ... with word- and sentence-level work led by the text" (p.97), and learner-centred pedagogy (p.156), a stance which she describes at one point as the current orthodoxy in adult literacy practice in this country. It is clearly her intention to contribute to and strengthen that tradition. Consistent with this, both her own few allusions to using phonics (complete with exact use of phonetic symbols and terminology) and her students' references to sounding out show that this was done incidentally and as needed; learners at lower levels may well need something more systematic.

There was, however, one respect in which practices within the reading circle diverged radically from that orthodoxy: there was a great deal of reading aloud. Sam acknowledges that this "is hotly contested as a way of developing reading skills, in both adult literacy and EFL circles" (p.160), but defends it strongly both as having arisen naturally in these circumstances and as a learning tool – for more evidence on the latter point see the work of Maxine Burton (2007;Burton *et al*.,2008).

If I have a quibble, it is that Sam seems to me to set up a misleading distinction between the type of literacy she believes in and wishes her research to contribute to and 'functional' literacy. She seems to equate 'functional' with something like 'mechanistic, soullessly economic', whereas I think of functional literacy as the level everyone needs as the basis for achieving their aims as individuals, family members and citizens, not just as employees. This is an enterprise where

we really are all in it together.
Overall, this is a thoroughly worthwhile book which will provoke a lot of thought and whose humane approach deserves to be widely adopted. And finally, Sam may be amused by a peril of computerised literacy her text seems to have fallen prey to: at several points a spellchecking imp appears to have changed EFL to ELF!

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Language and Learning in the Digital Age
James Paul Gee & Elisabeth R Hayes
Abingdon, Oxon, UK; Routledge 2011
ISBN 9780415-602778

Multimodality
Gunther Kress
Abingdon, Oxon, UK; Routledge 2010
ISBN 9780415-320610

Reviewed by Sarah Freeman

"We have hope and fear. Hope that diversity and commonality, as well as production and consumption, can finally find a happy marriage. Fear that … common cause and a public sphere (both nationally and globally) will erode or become dominated only by the technologically elite." (Gee & Hayes 2011:4)"

Two books about the burgeoning of digital literacies are juxtaposed and also compared in this review. Gunther Kress (Institute of Education, UK) and James Paul Gee (Arizona State University, USA) are both keen chroniclers of the rapidly changing technologies that are transforming not only communication through the written word but multiple modes whereby we interact with one another. Gee co-authors his book with Elisabeth Hayes (Arizona State University) whose academic background in literacy teaching and virtual games has helped ensure their book is steeped in practice and diverse research sources as well as theory.

The most urgent message behind both titles is that we cannot conceive of communication reshaped by new technological advances in the same way as we thought about it twenty or more years ago. Such a statement may sound crass when as practitioners in communication – teachers, researchers, lecturers, writers, publishers – we are only too aware of the massive changes in how we deliver our education, communicate with our colleagues, produce and store our materials and records, access information and disseminate our findings.

But there is something more profound about the theoretical frameworks in Kress and Gee's thinking – they warn about "downsides" such as: "splintering and polarizing" (Gee/Hayes p4); as well as too much emphasis on consumer interests and emotive issues at the cost of "lack of common civic purpose, shared values, and commitment to the nation or humanity as whole" (Gee/Hayes p140). Kress indicates that loss of authorative texts means loss of predictability (Kress p20) so that we cannot rely on the sources of our information. Thus the issue of risk becomes more pertinent. There is a need for new priorities, assessments and education to be devised in conjunction with the emergence of all new communication devices to protect our citizens/students, school pupils (Kress p196).

But what really makes these books stand out is how their respective expert authors contextualize language, literacy and multimodality in our present global society, and conversely that they indicate how influential digital communication has become in shaping society. Kress writes powerfully at the outset of *Multimodality* about how the market, in dominance over the state (Kress p20), has favoured "social fragmentation to maximise the potentials of niche markets". Thus, there are "clusterings of social and cultural factors and resources, such as education, gender, age as generation, ethnicity, occupation and regionality" all of which are in flux and which are moving away from notions of set professional standards, predictable roles, established authorship and national tradition/beliefs. The period is one of profound change and for Kress, at length, this has been the key to what linguists must do:

"our major problem is not just change itself, but the fact that we are forced to confront this world of change with theories which were shaped to account for a world of stability. There is an urgent need for theoretical accounts that tell us how to understand communication in periods of instability." (Kress 2003:11)

Gee and Hayes also make the regrouping that the global/information society has brought with it a core issue of *Language and Learning in the Digital Age*. They distinguish between "strong and weak ties" (Gee/Hayes p34) and suggest that in a period of rapid change the weak ties between people who may not share the same workplace, locality, community group and interests may in fact be of particular importance when so many other certainties in life may be pulled from under our feet. For some it is possible to "reshape their identities, resell themselves to meet ever-new opportunities or crises" (Ibid p119). Gee and Hayes are concerned that those who have adaptability through their digital online activities and are not affected by changes to their immediate physical surroundings are not attentive enough to shared responsibility. "There is a dire need today to re-imagine what citizenship is to mean in the global world." (Ibid p110).

Gee and Hayes' style of writing is surprisingly didactic at times. There is something subdued as well in some of the chapters on the history of language, literacy, school and on interpretation in oral literacy. Nevertheless, references from the classics – Plato's reservations on the emergence of written texts through to present day lack of trust in American authoritative texts – give the text an accomplished, immediate, well argued and highly pertinent character. The authors also gravitate towards passages which contain interesting psychological insights into individual online users which help to build up the picture they draw of the current role of social networking.

Kress on the other hand is focused on the whole massive process of transition, the contemporary driving forces, the demise of the media ('multimedia') which were there to transmit information rather than for people to generate it themselves, and the need for a new language with which to describe the new world of communication. His vivid description of the dramatic, wide reaching transformation that has taken place because of the dominance of market forces makes this compelling reading. But Kress's book is more than this. It introduces a

"social-semiotic theory of multimodality" through a systematic approach to his arguments.

For those who want to look only at the more specific linguistic ideas Kress is developing about multimodal forms of communication it isn't difficult to isolate these ideas. He devotes a substantial amount of the book to explaining 'modes', 'design', 'meaning as a resource' and the implications of 'convergent mobile devices'. The book ends by describing the use of the Smartphone as a newly recognised form of 'habitus' – structure of mind created through habitual practices (but, unusually, no references to Pierre Bourdieu are made).

The books are rewarding to compare because while their authors share a fascination and overall understanding about the technological revolution we are living through, they also have identical, deep concerns about what is emerging in terms of a new, technocratic elite. Gee and Hayes provide a literary commentary on the theme combining philosophical, psychological, educational and sociological reflections. Where Kress's book stands out however is in his introduction of a new theoretical language, his vibrant language, constructive suggestions for new terminology and systematic approach to his overall task.

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Literacy, Numeracy and Disadvantage among Older Adults in England
Andrew Jenkins, Rodie Ackerman, Lara Frumkin, Emma Salter and John Vorhaus
London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC)
2011
82pp
Only available online - free download from http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=187

Reviewed by Maxine Burton, Reviews Editor

This report is a timely one, in view of our ageing population, and the projected raising of the retirement age. The rationale for this research is

the significant gap in the evidence base on the literacy and numeracy of older adults. 'Older adults' are taken to mean people of 50 and above.

There are two strands to the research – a literature review, and quantitative evidence based on data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). The review of the literature (Chapter 2) confirms that most analyses of the relationship between employability, and literacy and numeracy skills have focused on younger people and that policies such as the *Skills for Life* strategy have been geared towards younger participants. It also identifies the major NRDC Effective Practice studies (Brooks *et al.*,2007; Grief *et al.*,2007) as not identifying whether effective teaching strategies needed to be adjusted for older learners. I was involved in the Effective Practice in Reading study, carried out 2003-06 (Brooks *et al*) and although we included a top age band of 'over 59', it only represented 9% of the total number of learners studied; this age group performed significantly worse on the reading assessment than younger learners.

ELSA is a large-scale survey of adults aged 50 and over and began in 2002. The dataset includes the results of short literacy and numeracy tests, and data on aspects of lives of older adults, including work, retirement, health, wealth and well-being, with some of the information derived also from retrospective life histories. The report gives detailed analyses of the data (Chapters 3-7). The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- Differences in literacy and numeracy levels varied by age, with people in their 50s tending to do better on the tests than those in their 80s

- No evidence that either literacy or numeracy was related to the likelihood that an older adult was in work and little evidence that moving out of work and into retirement was associated with literacy or numeracy levels as such

- Amongst older adults with jobs, pay was less for those with low numeracy skills (although not significantly so for those with low literacy)

- Those with lower literacy and numeracy skills were more likely to judge their health as poor and less likely to regard it as good

- Those with lower literacy and numeracy skills

tended to score relatively highly on a measure of the presence of depressive symptoms

- Those with lower literacy tended to have lower levels of subjective well-being.

The overall picture is far more complex than the above summary can convey and the entire report would repay careful reading – by practitioners, teacher-trainers and policy-makers. The finding that low literacy and numeracy skills appear unrelated to being in employment seems counterintuitive but may, in part, reflect fluctuating job markets over the decades. However, the relationship that holds between poor basic skills on the one hand, and such aspects of life as physical and mental health, and general well-being on the other is a clear one and must be taken seriously. The report concludes with a recommendation for

"studies of both how to encourage participation in learning amongst low-skilled older adults and the kind of approaches which work best for adults in this age group" (p.78).

Finally, to close with a more positive finding, which the report did not highlight: the Effective Practice in Reading Study (Brooks *et al*,2007) found that "there were no significant differences in progress between age bands" (2007:29). In other words, older learners (who tended to perform less well on the assessments) still made as much relative progress as younger learners – a further argument for making provision for older learners a priority.

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**Lifelong Learning and Social Justice:
Communities, Work and Identities in a
Globalised World**
Ed. Sue Jackson
Leicester: NIACE (2011)
Print ISBN 9781862014541
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AER ISBN 9781862014961
Online ISBN 9781862014978
Reviewed by Alison Wedgbury

Eleven chapters on policy and practice in lifelong learning in the UK and other countries are organised in three parts: Sustaining Communities, Learning and Working, Identities. Professor Sue Jackson of Birkbeck College, London, provides an introduction and conclusion for each part. Together, the contributors argue for a sharp re-focus on lifelong learning aligned with social justice. This is vital at a time when policy on lifelong learning has become driven in many parts of the world by economic imperatives: gendered, class-based and skills-driven.

The issues covered in this book range across many learning contexts including environmental sustainability, peace-building in Northern Ireland, 'good university', welfare to work, social inclusion in Scotland, Chinese immigrants in Canada, globalisation, teacher identity and women's informal learning. I suggest that RaPAL readers will find all the chapters stimulating and will recognise in their own work both the pressures and the opportunities afforded by this wide range of contexts.

Two chapters are directly relevant to literacy learning and teaching. In Chapter Two, *Literacy, lifelong learning and social inclusion: Empowering learners to learn about equality and reconciliation through lived experiences*, Rob Mark describes a project in Northern Ireland working with marginalised learners from both the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities. The context provides stark reminders of deep-rooted inequalities, hurt and conflict. The Literacy and Equality in Irish Society (LEIS: 2004-6) set out to promote reconciliation and peace-building through adult literacy learning. Mark argues that the positive outcomes were possible because the project was based on a social practice theory/account of adult literacy rather than a skills-based approach. Issues of confidentiality and community sensitivities meant that there were no easy answers. Simply bringing people together into an adult literacy class was not going to be effective. But the focus on equality and creativity enabled learners to explore commonalities rather than differences. Image theatre, music, visual arts and story-telling stimulated talk and writing about people's understanding of equality.

The chapter is strong on theory and provides very useful references to a range of sources of research and ideas about pedagogy, equalities, adult literacy and creativity. There are few practical examples of what happened in the learning groups but a resource guide for teacher educators and an evaluation can be downloaded from the LEIS website: http://www.leis.ac.uk/ (accessed 4 July 2012).

In Chapter Eleven, *Love in a cold climate: Mental illness and learning to write 'I love you',* Olivia Sagan provides a very different kind of account with personal details of learners, their writing and her own family's experience of her father's dementia. The chapter illuminates work on first-person narrative writing with mentally ill learners who have very low levels of literacy and verbal articulation. Sagan draws in general on her study of a group of 14 mentally ill adults, aged between 24 and 65 but gives a very detailed account and analysis of two particular learners' (Tili's and Dexter's) writing and talk.

As in Chapter Two, there is a commitment to a social practice theory of adult literacy learning. Sagan also writes with a strong antipathy to the kinds of welfare, health, social care and education policies that reduce individuals' lives and marginalise them rather than strengthen them. Her style of writing is distinctive and sometimes complex but the issues are clear and practitioners will recognise many aspects of the case study learners' lives. There is a good list of references here for teacher education and CPD, ranging widely across many more disciplines than just literacy.

Most RaPAL readers are likely to find rich material in this book for a wide discussion of social justice and lifelong learning. People who are most committed to a skills-based, cost-based agenda may not be attracted by the arguments here but it gives the rest of us a fascinating resource to help convince them.

Alison Wedgbury has worked in adult literacies teaching, work-based learning and teacher education for over 30 years. She is Treasurer of RaPAL and is currently acting lead for the Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training in the Eastern Region (EECETT).

Adult Basic Education in the Age of New Literacies

Erik Jacobson
New York City: Peter Lang 2012
152pp
Paperback: £23

Reviewed by Sam Duncan

Adult Basic Education in the Age of New Literacies is a surprising book. It is about so much more than I would have guessed. This may say something about my previous understanding of the term 'new literacies' and it certainly says something about my limited understanding of new uses of technology in teaching and learning. Yet, most importantly, it says something about how broadly, thoroughly and imaginatively Erik Jacobson has addressed his topic.

The structure of the book gives us a clue. Part one is about how 'new literacies' can be used for learning (adult learning in general and 'adult basic education'- literacy, ESOL and numeracy - in particular), part two is about how teachers can use 'new literacies' (not only to teach learners but also for their own teacher training and continuous development) and part three is about 'new literacies' and the organisation or politics of literacy use and education. But the breadth goes much farther. This is a book which continuously interrogates the meanings of both 'new literacies' (new *practices*, some born of new technologies and some not, as well as new *ways of understanding* or conceptualising existing practices) and education.

This is a book which examines models of distance learning, ideas of collaborative study, notions of how we learn to teach, and ideals of democratic education. It is about the affordances of new technology and how they relate to our shifting understandings and uses of literacy. It is also a book packed full of genuinely fascinating examples of practice from "Webinars on interpreting political cartoons" (p.59) to adult literacy class collaborative projects on "real-world scenarios" such as "The Antarctica Project: could you survive in an ice-covered environment?" (p.67). At the same time, Jacobson addresses the harder or wider issues. He provides examples of online stalking and sexual harassment (such as websites where men can post erotic photographs of ex-girlfriends) and the organisations fighting this trend ("Take Back the Tech"). He highlights the 'human and material costs' (p.122) of many 'new' technologies, including this much needed reminder: "Introducing new devices into adult basic education means that old devices have to go somewhere, and more than likely the disposal of the old devices will put our students (or other people's students) at more of a risk than our teachers" (p.123). The entire 'The Political Economy of New Literacies' section (in Chapter 6) should be required reading for us all.

This slim book forces us to think about important questions: what the 'new' in 'new literacies' could or should mean; what literacy has to do with education and what education has to do with literacy; the nature of communal learning; the task of teacher training; and the value of innovation. It asks us to question how our actions as learners, teachers and as users of different forms of literacy relate to larger political and economic forces. There are not many books which both tell and ask so much. *Adult Basic Education in the Age of New Literacies* serves as a reminder and an inspiration - and gives us a very clear mission, because "if we change nothing but the technology, then we will not have changed adult basic education" (p.141).

Sam is an adult literacy teacher and teacher educator in London. She is the author of Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development *(2012). You can contact her on s.duncan@ioe.ac.uk.*

Literacy, Numeracy and Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments: Framework for the OECD Survey of Adult Skills

Paris: OECD Publishing 2012
Available at:
http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264128859-en

Reviewed by Jay Derrick

This booklet, to describe it in some of its own technical language, is a 'mixed' text, primarily 'expositional', with a partially 'matrix' layout. Interestingly, it is a 'print' rather than a 'digital' text, as the version available online is simply a digitised version of the print document, with no hypertext links within it. Its purpose is to present the detailed conceptual approach that is being taken by the latest of three large scale surveys of adult foundation skills by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), starting with IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey) in 1994. The present study, known as PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), has just completed its data collection phase, and its results will be published in 2013.

PIAAC's design is based on what is described as 'direct measures of cognitive skills' (i.e. tests), which are now generally seen as better indicators of 'the stock of human capital' than indirect measures of achievement, such as the highest level of education, or years of schooling completed. PIAAC takes far greater care than the earlier studies did to measure skills in the context of 'the digital age', particularly in the domains of literacy and problem solving; nevertheless, it has been designed to allow for comparison between the results of all three studies.

It briefly unpacks each of the three main components of the study: Literacy and Reading, Numeracy, and Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments (PS-TRE), providing definitions used, categories (for example of texts and types of text), task analysis concepts and tools, factors deemed to affect task difficulty which the survey aims to account for, and examples of items used in the tests. For reasons that are not explained, features of 'numerate behaviour' are enumerated and surveyed, whereas 'literate behaviour' is not. It is clear, however, that the elements of each main component were developed by separate groups of authors, which perhaps accounts for such apparent differences in the way each component is conceptualised. The most innovative section is that on problem solving in technology-rich environments, which is presumably a response to criticisms of the earlier studies. It notes that 'digital technologies continue to evolve at a rapid pace, as do the personal, social, and work-related uses of these technologies'. A definition of PS-TRE is provided, but it is unclear to me how this relates to the brief discussion of theory that precedes it.

This framework is the latest attempt to address the problem of how to satisfactorily conceptualise and measure adults' skills, so as to be able to make comparative evaluations of the different approaches taken to secondary education systems in different member countries of the OECD. Studies focused on this problem, surely a paradigm case of the need for skills in 'problem solving in a technology-rich environment', have so far resulted in little observable convergence among such systems. We must assume therefore, that, notwithstanding the earlier studies, there is still very little agreement about the best way to describe and to measure such skills.

The problem is that all conceptual structures of this kind are partial: they are artificial models of reality, rather than 'the thing itself'. We can argue about their nearness to reality, but not about their essential quality of being inexact, approximate, and potentially misleading. This problem is increased when the concepts are converted into measurable categories, when tools are devised to carry out measurements, and also of course, when all these elements are translated into different languages, and applied in different cultural environments.

The OECD's approach to the problem invites comparison, of course, with other such conceptual constructions, such as, for example, the UK (England) *Skills for Life* National Curricula for Literacy, Language and Numeracy, (DfES 2001a, b, and c), and *Equipped for the Future*, launched in 1994, and developed over nearly 10 years by the National Institute for Literacy in the US. *Skills for Life* seems to have been designed from the word go to provide quick and cheap measurements of success, for learners, and, by a process of accumulation of thousands of individual test results, for provider quality and for the effectiveness and value for money of the policy strategy itself. The curriculum documents themselves were produced by consultants in a matter of months. The priority of *Equipped for the Future* (EFF), on the other hand, was authenticity, rather than measurability: the project initially canvassed views of thousands of students and teachers about exactly what skills were needed for work, life and citizenship in the 21st century. These were distilled into what were called 'role maps', which were themselves road-tested before being further refined into the EFF standards (NIFL 2000). It was planned that from the standards, benchmarks, levels and performance rubrics would be developed which would enable assessment and system evaluation, but this stage was never reached after funding was cut by the Bush administration. Those standards measured by *Skills for Life* and PIAAC account for only half those identified and validated by *Equipped for the Future*, which additionally include co-operate with others, advocate and influence, resolve conflict, take responsibility for learning, learn through research, and others.

The relative narrowness of the PIAAC system is probably due as much to the perceived need to find effective and cost-effective accountability measurements, as to narrow political views among OECD partners in relation to the skills and capacities needed by individuals in the 21st century.

About 10 years ago I heard Harvey Goldstein,

the eminent British statistical scientist, talking in London about IALS, the ancestor of PIAAC. After the survey's results were published, there was shock in some quarters, not least Britain and France, which had both come very low in the tables for adult literacy. "The response of the British was to design and implement *Skills for Life"*, Goldstein said. "The response of the French was to withdraw from the study, saying it was flawed." The audience laughed at this. Goldstein continued, "and of course, they were right!"

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Barrington Stoke

Barrington Stoke has approximately a dozen titles specifically for adult readers. The publisher says the books are "edited and designed to minimise some of the obstacles that can stop struggling, reluctant or dyslexic readers really getting hooked by a book"[1]. Their website lists seven "tricks" that make the titles accessible. These include cream paper, a dyslexia-friendly font and special line, character and paragraph spacing.

All titles are marked with an IA (interest age) and RA (reading age), which means that "the content is appropriate to the actual age of readers but the text has been edited to suit a lower reading age"[2]. The use of an IA/RA classification is clearly linked to the publisher's primary focus on children's books, but needs a rethink for an adult audience to avoid patronising or stigmatising. Adults have "much greater experience of life"[3] and exposure to different types of text. "One thing readers bring to the meaning-making process is their knowledge and understanding of the world.[4]" Therefore

"the idea of a 'reading age' in years can be misleading, particularly when related to adult literacy levels. Reading age does not necessarily correspond to thinking or comprehension age so in talking about the difficulty of text, it is more useful to describe it in terms of readability levels[5] rather than reading age. Readability levels are defined by sentence length and complexity of vocabulary".[6]

Two Entry Level 3 learners with dyslexia volunteered to read a Barrington Stoke title. Both *Hot Flush* and *Sawbones* are labelled: IA adult and RA 8.

Hot Flush

Helen Fitzgerald
Edinburgh: Barrington Stoke (2011)
ISBN: 978 1 84299 866 3
£5.99

Reviewed by Aneila Sultan

When I first looked at *Hot Flush*, I liked the picture of shoes and clothes on the cover because it seemed like a girly book. The title immediately shouted out menopause and I wasn't sure about that.

The story is about a Probation Officer called Eileen and a man on probation called Jim. Unlike Jim, Eileen has never done anything wrong in her life even though she is not treated well by the people around her. The story looks at how Eileen and Jim's relationship changes when a hot flush makes Eileen behave out of character. The way it's written, I found it was simple enough to read. I only got stuck on one or two words that I didn't recognise. However, I didn't like the layout on the page and felt it started too close to the top edge.

It took me two hours to read. At first, you're introduced to the two main characters and the story revolves around them. I thought there would be more to it than meets the eye, but there wasn't. The end was a letdown. The pace slowed down and it became predictable. I was disappointed that the ending wasn't more serious and it was a bit boring.

I felt that Eileen wasn't respected by anybody and was just a stereotype. I also felt the menopause issue was just thrown in randomly. Jim was more realistic and I warmed to him more than Eileen.

1 http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk/ (accessed 10/9/12)   2 ibid
3 Hughes, N. & Schwab, I. (Eds) (2010) Teaching Adult Literacy. Principles and Practice. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education. p155   4 Ibid p176
5 This NIACE leaflet gives advice on how to write and present written material in a way that is easy to read. http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/readability (access 10/9/12)
6 National Literacy Trust http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/adult_literacy/illiterate_adults_in_england (accessed 10/9/12).

I wouldn't recommend it and wouldn't read it again. There were points when I was going to put it down and I only finished it so that I could give a fair review.

It would be ok to read as a group in class because it doesn't go in the direction you think it's going to go in.

Aneila successfully completed Entry Level 3 in July. She has recently started her own development company and is handling all the paperwork herself.

Sawbones

Stuart MacBride
Edinburgh: Barrington Stoke (2008)
ISBN: 978 1 84299 957 8
£5.99

Reviewed by Ezra Hardware

If I saw *Sawbones* in the library, I'd pick it up. It's about a serial killer in America who kidnaps women. When he takes the daughter of a notorious gangster, her father wants revenge. Stuart Macbride gives us a backseat-of the-car view of what happens.

This book is gripping and you want to keep reading. The characters are pretty convincing because they are nutcases! The style is easy to read and the details, including the bad language, make it feel realistic even though it's made up.

I would recommend it for men or women over 16 but know it won't be to everyone's taste. It's not a book for a group read in class because the language would offend some people. Personally, I feel that stories in books or on TV with bad language don't change you as a person so aren't a problem.

The size of the print is bigger than regular books, which means it should suit most people. Chapters are no longer than 9 pages, which is a comfortable length and good for reading at the end of the working day or on public transport.

I'd like to read more by this author.

Ezra works full time and is a student at CALAT. He completed Entry Level 3 English and Level 2 maths in July.

Quick Title Reads 2012

The Cleverness of Ladies
Alexander McCall Smith
London: Abacus, 2012

ISBN 978-0-349-00028-2
£1.99

Get the Life You Really Want
James Caan
London: Abacus, 2012
ISBN 978-0-241-95878-0
£1.99

Reviewed by Aneila Sultan

The Cleverness of Ladies has five short stories in it and it is only the first one that is about the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. I think I picked it up because I've seen the TV programme. However, after looking at the first story, I put it back down again. I've only just learned to do that really - to try out a book before I buy or borrow it.

I didn't like *The Cleverness of Ladies*. I couldn't connect to it and didn't get past the first couple of pages. The repetition of names like Mma Makutsi and Mr J. L. B. Matekoni was intimidating. As this was the first story and I didn't get into it, I didn't look at the other four. I wouldn't recommend this title, but not all Quick Reads are like that.

I read *Get the Life You Really Want* flat out in 3 hours and then read it again! As the title probably suggests, it would come under Self Help in a bookshop. I found it inspiring and it kept me interested. It was full of realistic ideas and led me on to the next page. I started reading it in class and carried on on the bus home. The language flowed and there weren't any words that I didn't know. I didn't struggle with any words and didn't have to ask anyone.

I felt excited reading it and hadn't read a book by an Asian writer before. Where he was talking to his sister who was making samosas, he was advising her to sell them at her children's school and I found it connected with my cultural background. I could imagine myself in the kitchen with my mum.

James Caan says, "It is possible to get the life you really want. You just need to change the way you think." Anyone who wants to move forward or change direction should definitely read this book. Someone else from my English class borrowed it straight after me. Interestingly, nobody borrowed the book by Alexander McCall Smith. Perhaps it will appeal to an audience of confident readers who are short of time in a way it didn't to the people in my adult literacy class.

Aneila is a student at CALAT who has just started a Level 1 English course.

Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

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

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

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

Guidelines for Contributors

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

- Writing should be readable avoiding jargon. Where acronyms are used these should be clearly explained.

- Ethical guidelines should be followed particularly when writing about individuals or groups. Permission must be gained from those being represented and they should be represented fairly.

- We are interested in linking research and practice; you may have something you wish to contribute but are not sure it will fit. If this is the case please contact the editors to discuss this.

- Writing should encourage debate and reflection, challenging dominant and taken for granted assumption about literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

Journal Structure

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

Section 1. Ideas for teaching

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

Section 2. Developing Research and Practice

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

Section 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives

This section is for more sustained analytical pieces about research, practice or policy. The pieces will be up to 6,000 words long including references and will have refereed journal status. Although articles in this section are more theoretically and analytically developed they should nevertheless be clearly written for a general readership. Both empirical work and theoretical perspectives should be accessible and clearly explained. Writing for this section should:

- **Relate to the practices** of learning and teaching adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL.

- **Link to research** by describing and analysing new research findings relating this and any critical discussion to existing research studies.

- **Provide critical informed analysis** of the topic including reference to theoretical underpinning.

- **Write coherently and accessibly avoiding impenetrable language and assumed meanings.** The piece should have a clear structure and layout using the Harvard referencing system and notes where applicable. All Terminology should be explained, particularly for an international readership.

Review Section

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

Submitting your work

1. Check the deadline dates and themes which are available in the journal and on the website.

2. All contributions should have the name of the author/s, a title and contact details which include postal address, email address and phone number. We would also like a short 2-3-line biography to accompany your piece. Sections, subsections, graphs or diagrams should be clearly indicated or labelled.

3. Send a copy to one of the journal co-ordinators

   Sarah Freeman
   azdak@btopenworld.com

   Naomi Horrocks
   Naomi.Horrocks@gmail.com

4. Your contribution should be word processed, in Arial size 12 font, double spaced on A4 paper with numbered pages.

What happens next

1. Editors and members of the Editorial Group review contributions for Section 1 and Section 2. Contributions for Section 3 are peer reviewed by a mixture of experienced academic, research and practice referees.

2. Feedback is provided by the editor/s within eight weeks of submission. This will include constructive comment and any suggestions for developing the piece if necessary.

3. You will be informed whether you piece has been accepted, subject to alterations, and if so the editor/s will work on a final editing process. Any final copy will be sent to authors prior to publishing.

4. Where work is not accepted the editor/s may suggest more relevant or alternative places for publication.

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

Inside this issue