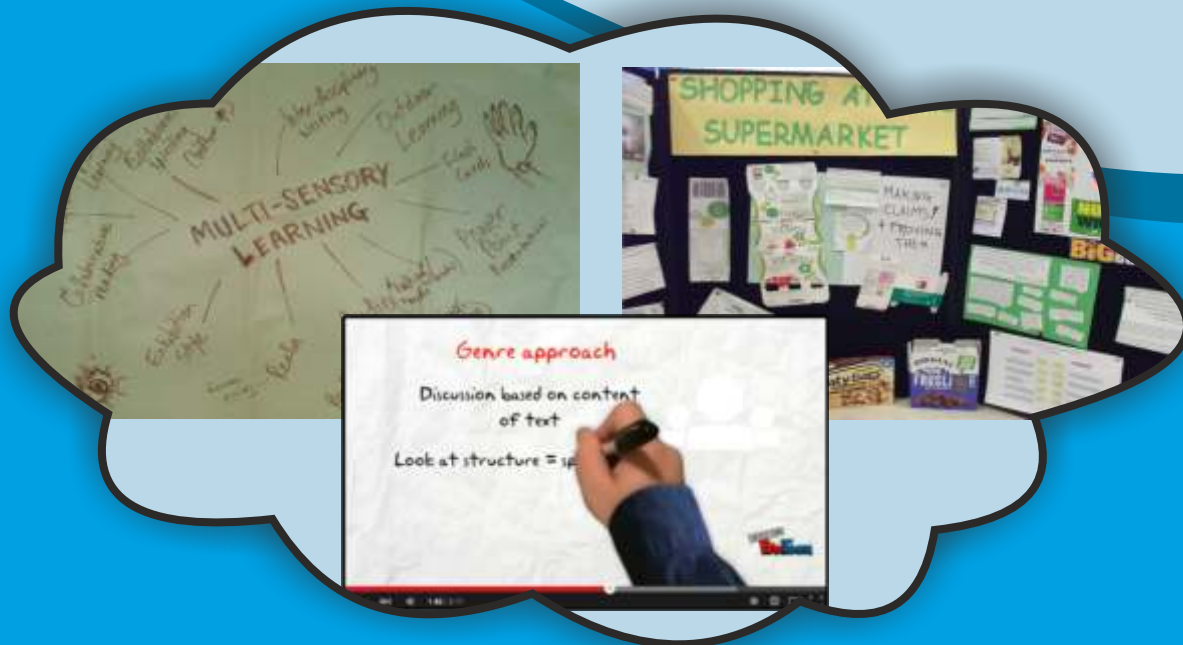


RaPAL

Learning Literacies



The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

Who we are

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

What we do

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

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Editorial Information

The editorial group for 2015 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner-researchers: Sam Duncan, Julie Furnivall, Sarah Freeman, Tara Furlong, Linda Pearce, Anne Reardon-James, Irene Schwab, Yvonne Spare, Peggy Warren and Alison Wedgbury.

RaPAL members are involved in the compilation of the journal as editors, reviewers and referees.

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. The journal is written by and for all learners, tutors/teachers and researchers who want to ask questions about this field of work. It does not matter if the questions have been asked before. We want to reflect the many voices within adult literacy and numeracy work and to encourage debate.

Why not join us?

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

The RaPAL journal is also available from EBSCO Information Services.

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

The RaPAL journal has been designed by Image Printing Company, Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire

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Compiled by Irene Schwab and Rachel Stubbley

Editorial

Rachel Stublely and Irene Schwab

Hello and welcome to this edition of the RaPAL journal, which focuses particularly on the process of professional development for adult literacy practitioners. We, the editors, are both adult literacy teacher educators, and over the years we have worked to support trainee tutors in becoming skilled and dedicated teachers of language and literacies. Since the millennium, we have seen how gaining a subject specialist teaching qualification has helped many practitioners develop skills and understanding and move into a close and committed community of practice.

In the last 2 or 3 years, policy changes across the UK (e.g. following the publication of the Lingfield Report in 2012) have meant that qualifications are not valued as they once were, and funding for training has disappeared. Nevertheless, many teachers, both new and experienced, still value the opportunity for literacy specialist professional development, and many colleges and other employers still recognise the value of well-trained staff. We believe that professional development is a marvellous opportunity to extend and deepen practice. Such views are supported by research, which shows that being involved in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) supports good practice in teaching (Block and Mangieri, 2009; Fletcher, 2014).

The articles in this issue of the RaPAL Journal are examples of how Initial Teacher Education and CPD can promote reflection on issues of concern to teachers, and support creative thinking about how to deal with these. Section 1 starts with Helena Gannon's moving response to a learner's progress into work, and how her learner's life has been changed by becoming more confident with reading and writing. Jonathan Mann discusses how CPD has supported his development as a teacher of English on vocational courses; Joanne Sutton and Katie-Jane Knight reflect on how their perceptions have changed as they develop their teaching skills and become participants in their community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991); and Sonia Morris describes how, moving away from formal support mechanisms, using What's App offers peer support and empowerment.

In section 2, we can see further development of creative and innovative ideas through the work of Linda Ruas who considers how to cover sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom critically. Both Clare Tyrer and Sarah Telfer reflect on collaborative learning approaches, Clare through technology and Sarah through creative writing. Qasir Shah outlines his journey through a range of courses and what he has learned about literacy and his learning along the way

Section 3 (our academic peer-reviewed section) contains an extended piece by Angela Cahill. This is a fascinating and thoughtful description of her research project (conducted in the context of a Masters course), which explores the teaching of phonics with a small literacy group in Ireland within an overall social practices approach.

We believe these pieces are evidence of the value of CPD and reflection in helping us keep our practice dynamic and responsive. Professional development challenges us to take risks in our teaching, which is not easy. However, the writers in this issue of the Journal show us that the rewards can be considerable.

Finally, the editors have put together a list of some of their favourite and recommended resources for "learning literacies". This is followed by the review section, which looks at two very different new titles. We hope the contributors to this edition of the RaPAL Journal will have inspired you to do some additional reading and/or professional development yourselves!

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Note from the Journal Coordinator

Hello fellow RaPAL members. This is just to introduce myself as your new Journal Coordinator. Firstly I have to say how much I have enjoyed reading this issue, thanks to the efforts of the editing team, Irene and Rachel. In our recent survey we found that the aspect of RaPAL that members most valued was the Journal and this certainly reflects my own experience. Through my time as tutor, manager, tutor-trainer and research fieldworker, I have looked forward to each new edition of the Journal and have never failed to find something interesting and informative. However, we can't do this without you. Our editorial team is made up of a small group of volunteers, some from the management group and others just interested in helping to produce the Journal. We meet once a year in the autumn to make plans for the following year and to allocate editors for each edition. This year we are in need of new members for the editorial group. Our next meeting is in September and we would like to invite anyone who has an interest. This is an open invitation and you would not be committing yourself to joining the group, although of course we would be delighted if you did.

Additionally we can't produce the Journal without writers. We encourage submissions from everyone, and this edition includes contributions from both new and experienced writers. We offer as much support as you feel you need, and there are guidelines on our website on the "[Write for Us](#)" page, so come forward with anything from an initial idea to a finished article. We would love to hear from you. For both of these, you can contact me on journal@rapal.org.uk.

At our recent AGM we appealed for new volunteers for our management group. As some of our members have come to the end of their time in various roles, we need people to replace them, in particular as Secretary, Membership Secretary and Treasurer. If you feel able to step forward or even just want to talk about it, please contact any of us – our details are in the Journal and on our website www.rapal.org.uk. Our next big event is our joint conference in October – perhaps you would like to play a part in it.

Whether you are reading this as a RaPAL member or someone who is thinking about joining us, I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.

Yvonne

A Postwoman's Round

Helena James

Helena James is currently completing a Professional Certificate in Education: Adult Literacy at the University of South Wales. She worked for Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council as a Basic Skills Lead Tutor for 7 years, and has recently joined ITEC Training in Cardiff.

Background

I have been teaching in various capacities for over 21 years. For the past 8 years my focus has been on teaching Essential Skills and Family Learning programmes in community and workplace settings across Rhondda Cynon Taff. In that time, I have been continually surprised and inspired by my learners and their ability to draw on a range of coping mechanisms, so that they are able to 'fit in' and function in an ever diversifying literacy world.

One such person was Debbie Armstrong, who I met in a Communities First job club facility whilst supporting a group of job seekers that had identified themselves as having basic skills needs. Debbie had been unemployed for some time and had lost all confidence in getting a job; however, she believed she still had a great deal to offer the labour market. A single parent, who had only been certified with dyslexia in recent years, she was punished for writing with her left hand in school, and made fun of as a child because she was 'different'. She was absolutely right to believe she still had something to give the world of work.

After working alongside Communities First staff and attending basic skills support sessions for 5 months, Debbie was offered full time employment with the Post Office as a postwoman. Debbie decided to be completely upfront about her dyslexia at interview and, as a result of her honesty, her new employer granted her time to continue with her basic skills sessions.

Debbie's coping mechanisms before she attended class allowed her to keep her family safe, her bills paid and people at arm's length. Today, Debbie, when she is not delivering letters, continues to practise her writing skills in the form of autobiographical short stories based on her childhood experiences, hoping to one day help someone else. As Tausczik & Pennebaker (2010) put it; 'Language is the most common and reliable way for people to translate their internal thoughts and emotions into a form that others can understand.'

This poem has been inspired by Debbie and her courage to overcome all that has been negative in her literacy life and turn it into a life changing positive.

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A Postwoman's Round

Cut through my life with words and anxieties
Punish me with no thought of difference.
I cannot feel what you hear, I cannot write or read
I survive without you in my life.

I can speak and be heard
But I cannot be read or understood.
I suffer because of this...
Why did I not break down those walls?
Why did I not say...
Reading and writing is easy for you!
But for me, it's where the darkest days lay.

I am okay now I am signing on
I can feel included; be as one.
I have discovered something new you see
Writing can be a form of liberty

I write and I punctuate
On my proof reader's breath
To understand my story needs a listener's quest.
I will continue along with my strategies
Mnemonics and Rhyme
Helped along with yellow, green vision
Film, symbol and sign.

I now know that writing walls can be
Smashed down
Because
I read letters for a living
On my postwoman's rounds.

Practical Approaches to Vocational Contextualisation

Jonathan Mann

Jonathan Mann has been an Advanced Practitioner at Greenwich Community College, teaching English to vocational learners on a variety of study programmes. He is moving to become a Tutor for English for academic Purposes at the University of East London. He studied for a PGCE at the Open University, following the School Centred Initial Teacher Training Scheme at Kent and Medway Training, Dartford.

Introduction

When I first joined the world of adult literacy, I was armed with experience of secondary teaching and a smattering of ESOL. I had also read-up on contextualised practice in Further Education. Whilst I understood the theory of embedded literacy teaching and learning, I had yet to use it or observe it in action. In this short reflective article I will record how I semi-osmotically acquired a methodology for contextualisation and embedding when teaching English Functional Skills to classes from programmes of study as diverse as science, electrical installations, and cookery.

My present practice arose out of a number of clarifying moments which I would loosely classify as: 1) collaboration with the English and vocational teams; 2) observation of others, and being observed frequently; and 3) improving lesson structures through CPD input. Through these three key areas, I have also found that co-operation is crucial for embedded practice.

1) Collaboration

Embedded practice revolves around sharing knowledge of both student progress, and - in a very practicable, sensible way - knowledge of what literacy and vocational teams are teaching. This enables learners to accommodate literacy knowledge within the framework of their vocational learning. I initially arranged meetings and what might be described as a small programme of training and observation. Busy departments, I soon realised, don't always have time for this; it was not practicable or realistic.

A softening of strategy was required. I opted to stop using Outlook, and start using staff rooms. Knowing exactly when and where I could find my key contacts become very important, as did purposeful socialising. My ad-hoc staffroom visits soon became helpful exchanges of ideas, and - eventually - data. This developed into me agreeing to regular office hours in a vocational staff room. From here, we have been able to share approaches, which has led to some team-teaching. The softening of approach has led to true co-ordination, although time is a constant enemy. Collaboration, then, has proven to be a particularly useful form of CPD, where partnered practitioners from separate subjects learn from each other.

2) Observation

Observations remain a crucial CPD tool for contextualised teaching and learning. Graded or developmental observations will naturally make any teacher nervous. However, I have increasingly taken the view that they were also an opportunity to hopefully validate hypotheses about contextualised teaching and learning. I thus presented my lessons as "honestly" as possible. Happily, the college seemed to approve of how I wrapped the vocational content into, for example, starter discussions, which linked the lesson's subject to its real-world applicability. Learners seemed to find it motivating to know how persuasive emails are useful for acquiring pay-rises, or gaining more follow-on domestic electrical installation work. My re-writing of exam questions to include laboratory situations was likewise workable. There were inevitable negative points observed: whilst a particular web-based resource was exciting, did it help my learners to pass their exams? Even though there were questions about the staging of my lessons, I was getting the context right. I needed a balance, clearly.

On the other side of the coin, I, too, became an observer, watching lessons and tutorials as diverse as

plumbing workshops, electrical theory lessons, and leisure and tourism tutorials. This gave me unique insights into students' performance in their "home" subjects, as well as allowing me to match the skill-sets they use for their vocational subjects' exams to those we teach in English Functional Skills. Moreover, through collaboration, the subject tutors and I compared important notes on student performance, and created resources that would help make the link between English skills and vocational assessments more explicit. Observation of teaching from other subjects has been key in knowing the practicalities of embedded contextualised learning. It is also beneficial to students' confidence when they see teachers working as a team.

3) Developing Lesson Structure

Like most practitioners, I have both enjoyed and endured a multiplicity of CPD sessions in the last academic year. Importantly, I learned that aims and objectives set the rhythm of a lesson. Sharp aims and objectives govern how the inevitable measurement of learning can be adequately staged, and how learners find it reassuring to know that they are reaching the end of the lesson. More prosaically, I was told a lesson's *aims* can be seen as a destination that lies *over a river*, and the *objectives* can be viewed as the *stepping stones* for getting there. I had never achieved such clarity before in either CPD, or in my CELTA and PGCE studies.

In discussions of our aims and objectives, I elicit examples concerning their future employment; we may arrive at different examples, but they are always equally applicable. Comprehension questions may draw on radically different subject content, but each question will always demand the same reading skill. Lessons tend to proceed on the same lines between groups, but with differentiation happening according to ability, group profile, and, importantly, vocational context. Accordingly, I can cover the same learning from the scheme of work, and drop in references, examples, terminology and texts that are specific to learners' programmes of study. Lesson structures tend not to differ radically, which adds sanity to planning phases. The majority of additional time is spent finding "equivalent" texts that can be used for the same pedagogical purpose (be they adverts, reports, descriptions, informative texts, etc.). Re-conceptualising lesson structures through a closer understanding of aims and objectives has, then, been absolutely central to developing my professional practice.

Conclusion

The three aspects of CPD that I have experienced are interrelated. They represent a large amount of what I have needed in teaching learners who, initially, may not have appreciated the applicability of literacy to their vocational subject. That is not to say that I no longer have learners who are resistant to or weary of a mandated subject within their programme of study, but I feel as though my recent understanding of the importance of structure has helped enable these less motivated learners appreciate how literacy is a keystone for vocational studies.

“WhatsApp-ning?” WhatsApp as a site of support and empowerment for NQTs – A critical reflection

Sonia Morris

Sonia Morris has recently completed a Post Compulsory PGCE in Literacy and ESOL at the Institute of Education. Currently, she teaches at Working Men's College in Camden where she works onsite as well as outreach delivering ESOL and Functional Skills in English classes.

On the very first day of my PGCE course, the course leader made a seemingly innocuous statement regarding the importance of nurturing an effective social network among our peers. Nearly a year has passed after the rigours of the course, yet this advice has even more resonance than the day it was given. Forming a strong social and professional network has served as a necessity as we make the transition from being trainees into the foray of further education, a sector experiencing tumultuous change.

This change brings uncertainties. It is disturbing to hear stories from individuals new to the profession (and even experienced staff) whose morale is at rock-bottom. It is at this point that a sympathetic ear or a practical suggestion becomes integral to a teacher's survival, as we struggle to adjust to different ways of working. This article will be looking at the efficacy of WhatsApp messaging service as a locus of support and empowerment and an important tool in forging resilience, particularly among newly qualified teachers.

As an NQT, I have found that we tend to be employed as sessional or hourly-paid staff, often working in offsite locations delivering outreach or community classes, or providing cover. As a consequence, our teaching experience is often a disjointed solitary activity, seeing our colleagues weekly rather than daily. This lack of face-to-face contact can have quite a disorientating effect – as part-timers and outreach tutors can often be unintentionally 'left out of the loop'. Staff members are encouraged to check the college's intranet and mailbox at least once a week. However remote access can sometimes be problematic, and for those who are 'technologically challenged' it is easier to wait until the next visit to the staffroom.

The staffroom is often a hive of activity, as well as the space where we experience 'downtime'. We fledglings often 'pick the brains' of the more experienced colleagues in our desperation to grapple with the unfamiliar elements of teaching such as paperwork. The preparation of schemes of work and lesson plans, coupled with the compilation of course files often places us far outside our comfort zone. Unfortunately, due to timetabling, opportunities to consult more experienced staff are rare. In a desire to maintain professionalism, unpaid hours are dedicated to preparation and planning. Often, caretakers and security staff usher us out of the building a couple minutes before closing time, laughingly inquiring whether we have homes to go to.

Therefore as new recruits, maintaining contact is an important element of our teaching practice. Sharing our 'highs and lows' is valued as an effective coping strategy with our mobile phones as a useful conduit. After persistent badgering from a couple of my colleagues, I decided to sign up to WhatsApp. According to whatsapp.com, this is “a cross-platform mobile messaging app which allows you to exchange messages for free”. What distinguishes this form of communication from other forms of social media is its accessibility. Although is quite similar to texting, it offers greater flexibility – you can send and receive voice messages, videos and images, all without charge!

It is also a more interactive activity – cues, such as 'typing...' and the double ticks, give an assurance that your message has not only been read but will be imminently responded to. Using WhatsApp is more aesthetically pleasing than texting for each contact usually has a profile picture. I use a photo of myself but others are more

imaginative, updating their image regularly and including humorous or thought-provoking quotes. Its greatest appeal is its simplicity. Unlike other forms of social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp is uncluttered and uncomplicated. The user does not log in, and as soon as you add a contact, they are available (as long as they have downloaded the application).

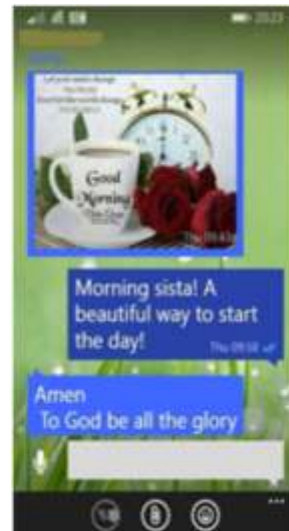
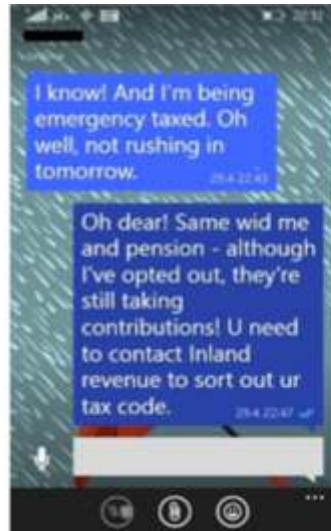
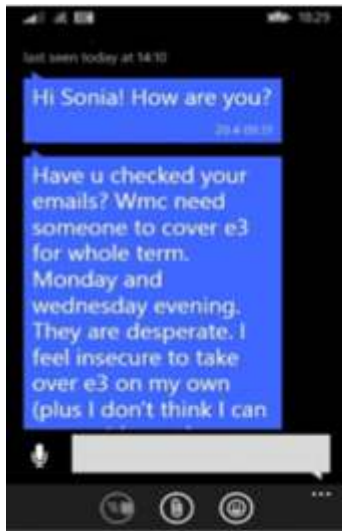
An added feature is that threads can be emailed. This can be a double-edged sword as confidential information can be shared at the click of a button. Further drawbacks in using this type of messaging include: cybercrime, with your account being hacked into and information appropriated or worse, your identity stolen. It can also be a distraction as you might interrupt other activities to check and respond to messages. WhatsApping can also be highly addictive as it seems more socially acceptable for individuals to be engaging with each other through their phones rather than face to face.

Despite these limitations, communicating through this medium is a fun, trendy way to engage - to be part of an online community, even forming 'groups'. Connecting with each other via WhatsApp involves the forging of trust that confidences will be held. You can communicate surreptitiously, unlike speaking over the phone - useful in an intimate space such as the staffroom.

I find the silence that exists on trains quite disconcerting, for often these are times when internal dialogues rage within. Reaching out to a trusted confidant, allows me to make sense of that turmoil. Unsurprisingly, the person at the other end is often experiencing similar issues. Often these exchanges are akin to conducting a forensic analysis of teaching practice; venting frustrations (both personal and work-related); sharing encouraging words and drawing strength from each other.

Hence, I have realised that my initial reticence in using a messaging service has morphed into something else, for I have begun to view my mobile phone as multifaceted. It is now not only a device reserved for checking emails and making the occasional call, it is a tool - with WhatsApp as a portal through which I have self-expression. This mode of expression is both generative and liberating, for I can be myself - using the language in subversive and deviant ways, enjoying the fluidity this brings. For instance, not engaging in abbreviated text talk; bringing my faith into the professional domain and of course, 'chat mi patois'. These exchanges serve not only to lift my flagging spirits but allow me to articulate my innermost thoughts without a single utterance.

Using a messaging service to communicate with others can often be considered as a disembodied experience, tapping away on your keypad in solitude. However, this exchange bridges time and space offering nurturance, advice, encouragement (sometimes rebuttals) - often used as a confessional or a space for ranting. Whatever the reason for connecting with others, WhatsApp enables me to contextualise the gritty reality of working in a chaotic sector where you are often at best, 'thrown in at the deep end' or at worst given the proverbial basket to carry water. Using this medium as a critical lens, allows me to draw on exchanges from an everyday activity that could be considered mundane and even trivial, gaining a fresh perspective. Through these exchanges via WhatsApp, I am reminded that there is a network of colleagues who value the importance of social interaction, and show a generosity of spirit that leaves you feeling supported and empowered.



Learning to be a Teacher

Katie-Jane Knight

Katie-Jane Knight currently teaches GCSE and Functional Skills English at Newham College of Further Education in London. She has recently completed a PGCE and Additional Diploma in Teaching ESOL and Literacy. Katie-Jane wanted to share some of her key experiences as a trainee teacher.

On the brink of completing my PGCE and Additional Diploma in Teaching ESOL and Literacy, I find myself looking forwards to a career in teaching, as well as looking back on how far I have come.

The past two years of being a trainee teacher have gone by in a blur. I can distinctly remember the feeling of those first few lessons – a cross between excitement, nausea and blind panic that everything would fall apart! I can remember my mentor telling me I would be fine after observing me in my second week. I wasn't entirely convinced she was right at the time, but the feeling of panic gradually started to fade. It's hard to pinpoint exactly when I started to feel comfortable in the classroom. There was definitely a shift somewhere when teaching started to feel more natural and this came with an increased confidence that if things do go wrong (which they inevitably do) you can usually put them right again, perhaps with a little help from your colleagues.

Teaching is a challenging career, but it challenges me for the right reasons: the changing pace of the day, the anticipation before every lesson, the careful planning and the realisation that something you teach could make a real difference to someone. The wide range of students I have taught has thrown some interesting experiences my way. Below, I have outlined a snapshot of a few important factors from my time as a trainee teacher.

Language and Literacy

It is interesting to look back on how my opinions about language and literacy have changed. As a new language teacher, I questioned my own understanding of the complexities of the English language, and consequently, my ability to teach it.

Studying the Additional Diploma in Teaching ESOL and Literacy has made me increasingly aware of the importance of language and literacy skills for all learners. This might seem obvious, but learning about theories of language learning has definitely helped me to support students, especially through giving accurate and detailed feedback. The journey from having to research specific language points in preparation for a lesson to being able to give on-the-spot language feedback accurately sums up a huge area of professional growth for me!

Schema

In the dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, Snowman has difficulty introducing new concepts to the 'Crakers' (genetically modified humans); 'To them his name is just two syllables. They don't know what a snowman is, they've never seen snow.' (Atwood, 2004, pp7-8) This is because the 'Crakers' cannot access their past experiences. They have been raised in a bubble dome where only very basic concepts and objects needed for survival have been introduced to them.

Although our learners are very far removed from the idea of the 'Crakers', they do rely on their own past experiences to support their understanding of learning a new language. Each individual learner has a different schema depending on his or her own experiences. For example, in a lesson about fruit with some 16-18 pre-entry learners, I had some trouble explaining that a blackberry was a fruit! Their schema associated the word 'Blackberry' with something they were familiar with – a mobile phone. It is important understand

why learners make these associations and be able to put effective strategies into place to help learners modify their schemata with new information. This links back to having a solid understanding of learners and their experiences and ensuring that you build your lesson from a starting point they will understand.

Differentiation

Differentiation is an essential part of teaching, important to all subject areas, however, in language and literacy learning there is often an increased level of support needed. Many learners will be studying at one level in their vocational course, but may have completely different needs in their English lessons. Effective differentiation can be a difficult skill to master, particularly when you are new to teaching. My understanding of differentiation has developed through five stages:

Stage One: What is differentiation?

Stage Two: I understand differentiation, but I don't know how to do this in my lesson.

Stage Three: I feel comfortable planning for differentiation.

Stage Four: I can implement the differentiation I put in my lesson plan.

Stage Five: I understand the learners and their individual needs. I can usually plan for differentiation and provide any additional support and guidance within my lesson.

I have found that the key to effective differentiation is to ensure that 'every student can leave the room feeling that they have been challenged and that they have achieved something.' (Rose, 1997) It is undoubtedly rewarding to see learners achieve even a small personal goal, especially when it is the result of carefully considering their needs and providing individualised support.

Reflection

Being a reflective practitioner is a fundamental part of developing as a teacher. Brookfield 'suggests that we employ four "critical lenses" through which to view and reflect upon our practice.' (Brookfield, 1995) I find this to be an effective method of reflection as it encourages teachers to consider things from a range of perspectives.

The four critical lenses suggest that we 'look at a situation from our own viewpoint, from our colleagues' viewpoint, from our learners' viewpoint and from theoretical literature.' (Hillier, 2012, p.11) The ability to reflect as a teacher is encouraged throughout training as a teacher by writing self-evaluations and completing tasks such as video observations. Studying theory enables you to gain a wider perspective into the reasons behind the decisions you make as a teacher. Additionally, your learners can provide a good mirror from which to reflect. They will usually be honest about their experiences and this can help you to provide a better learning experience for them. However, the most useful lens has to be my colleagues. The people who listen when you had a disastrous lesson and point out where things weren't that bad, and the ones who offer advice when you really need it have been invaluable in my experience. Reflection doesn't have to be a solo experience and a little guidance from a colleague always makes a big difference.

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Learning to read the readers

Joanne Sutton

Joanne Sutton is a freelance documentary photographer and has worked in community arts projects across Wales. She is currently completing her PGCE Adult Literacy and Communication at the University of South Wales.

I can vaguely remember a time when I was *learning* to read. However, I don't remember a time when I *couldn't* read, and before I started my PGCE teaching practice placement I hadn't had much exposure to entry level literacy classes with adults.

Taken from my Reflective Journal: Dec 16, 2014

I was asked to sit next to N in today's Entry Level One Communication class to assist with her reading. I hadn't seen her in the class before and didn't know much about her other than that she was the eldest member of the class. As a group, we looked at different examples of texts and their purpose. We talked about adverts and recipes, lists and leaflets, among other things. During the discussion N mentioned to me that she bought all her cakes. As we didn't know each other very well, and had barely spoken all lesson, I thought she was just making conversation and thought nothing more about it. A little later, I overheard her share this same information with a fellow learner, but added that she had never made her own cakes because she couldn't read the recipes. I later found out that she had started the Communication class to learn how to write her name, and she could read little more than she could write.

My first reaction was shock. How could this happen? How does somebody get through the majority of their life without being able to read? From a young age I had been empowered by learning to read. I read for pleasure, and I read for information. Sometimes I took pleasure from reading for information! My shock turned to anger as I began to realise that, for whatever reason, N had been denied that same empowerment. I was struggling to empathise with my learners, I could only sympathise. I couldn't put myself in their shoes and understand how to negotiate a world that seemed so dependent upon being literate. Somehow I had adopted a deficit perspective. I was too caught up in what I perceived to be my learners' shortcomings (i.e. what they couldn't do) to be able to recognise their strengths: a creative flair for understanding the world that isn't dependent upon linguistic ability; a substantial support system for dealing with literacy challenges; and the 'funds of knowledge' that every adult learner brings to the classroom.

As Appleby and Barton suggest, "People are complex: they have histories, identities, current circumstances and imagined futures" (2008, p. 5). Though entry level literacy learners may not be well versed in the written word, they do not come to the classroom empty handed. They possess cultural resources shared by members of the same household and/or community (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, cited in Oughton, 2010) and bring with them their understanding of the world, the knowledge, experience, and "practices that they have acquired throughout their life" (Ibid, 2010). These are their 'funds of knowledge'.

While the world of literacy is rich in poetry, prose and text, the world of entry level literacy can be rich too. If I were to imagine this world as a place, it would be a community art space: a gallery, museum or exhibition hall whose walls would be adorned with signs, symbols, pictorials and photographs. These artifacts would not be used to replace the world of text: they are steps on the road to literacy, as well as texts in their own right. In my life outside the classroom, as a freelance photographer, I have a sensory preference for the visual and respond best in a learning experience when I can see the stimulus. It makes sense therefore that the world I have just described is the richer, to me. This may not be the case for my learners and I need to be mindful that my natural bias for the visual doesn't dictate my lesson planning.

In this last term I have been designing resources and adapting teaching methods for an entry level literacy class that is exploring the information on food labels, recognising and reporting on safety signs, responding to symbols found in the community, and reading pictorial instructions such as operating a fire extinguisher or signing 'thank you' using British Sign Language. Consequently, our discussions have been enriched with colour in both physical and metaphorical senses. From the tangible - the shape and colour - to the messages conveyed in the colour and composition, and how they affect our decisions and/or judgments.

I have learned that these classroom activities and the consequent discussions are relevant to my learners' lives outside the classroom. They actively share stories, histories and anecdotes and learn from each other as much as from me. Due to their knowledge and experience of support systems they see the benefits of working collaboratively; they understand each other's learning needs as many of their needs are shared, and they extend each other the compassion and support to succeed.

The learners in this group are used to working within a kinaesthetic, tactile and active learning environment. They are responsive to activities that involve them doing most of the talking in class, moving around the classroom and using mobile devices to record, photograph and document each other. To this end they are also gaining a wealth of knowledge regarding digital literacy, citizenship and working with others. A question for my further professional development now is, how can I encourage this way of thinking in other groups of learners: to replicate this safe and encouraging learning environment, to spread the love of group working, and extend this compassion and support?

I have come to realise that my perceptions of learners, regardless of their literacy level, is a powerful influence in itself. If I hadn't been able to shift my perspective from the deficit model, I would have been limiting not only their personal development and potential for self-actualisation, but I would have been limiting my own professional development. I was viewing learners by their literacy ability alone. As I have come to know the learners, I have been able to develop a reflective teaching practice that is responsive to learners' developing and multiple needs. My perspective is now firmly rooted in the social model, and I have grown to forgive myself for my own shortcomings.

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Taboo or not taboo? – bringing the real world into ESOL and literacy classrooms

Linda Ruas

Linda Ruas is an ESOL/Functional Skills lecturer, CELTA trainer and Teaching and Learning Coach at Greenwich Community College. She did an MA in Second Language Learning and Teaching at Birkbeck College, London University, and taught EFL in private schools in London and Japan before teaching and training teachers in Brazil for ten years. After returning to the UK, she started working in Further Education, taking a PGCE at Greenwich University.



Disability, rape, land grabs in Africa and protests against mineral exploitation. Does all this have a place in the ESOL and literacy classroom? We need to guide our learners with issues such as health and money but does this include discussing GM crops, fracking, gender imbalance and democracy?

I know learners in my class often need very personalised lessons about their own worries, lives (e.g. with ReflectESOL tasks, where groups work with the participatory tools like trees, rivers and matrices to discuss ideas and community issues) (Reflect, 2009) and how to understand and respond to that letter they received from the council. They also need lighter topics and humour, video clips and games. But I believe learners also have space and interest to move away from the very personal and from light humour to learn more about global issues.

Over the past few years, I have developed the **Easier English wiki – New Internationalist**. I started it as a way of making global justice ideas more accessible to language learners, and it has grown. It's primarily a self-access learner resource of simplified articles (and has just been shortlisted for an ELTons award for 'Innovation in learner resources'), but also includes a range of resources for teachers to guide learners. There are many lessons for teachers to use (in the Ready Lessons section); quizzes and infographics; category and search features to research topics; and argument, photo stories and country profile sections. Here is a link to the wiki: http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/Main_Page

Using more of these materials over the past few years, I have experienced totally demotivated literacy learners seize on the topic of climate change in Bangladesh and write impassioned letters to world leaders; a literacy class of women, many originally from Africa and Asia, discussing female genital mutilation; an ESOL learner from Angola explaining about landgrabs in his country; and Somalians writing about piracy in theirs. These topics can help learners to share their experience and be a starting point for interest in the lives of others. And learners are also developing their literacy and language skills: focussing on various grammatical structures in context, replacing punctuation, correcting spelling, and developing a wider vocabulary.

However, I started with some trepidation. I wondered whether all learners would feel engaged and interested to learn both new content and new language at the same time. I also worried that I might offend learners, start conversations that would become bigger than I could handle, or influence the learners.

Initial training courses often advise teachers never to give their own opinions. However, I feel that my opinions are so much part of me that I would find this impossible, or turn into a false, monitored version of myself only ever voicing general platitudes. So I started with "safer" topics, for example relating

vegetarianism to sustainability. Many of the learners had food restrictions for religious reasons, so they accepted the fact that I was vegetarian, and many interesting points came out of the speaking and writing tasks, including the health benefits.

So my confidence developed in both using taboo subjects, and truly being myself in the classroom. I also thought a lot more about which classroom tasks would really engage learners with these world issues. I found that both ESOL and literacy learners often responded very well to group quizzes and prediction tasks before reading. Also, different types of dictation (e.g. running, shouting, loop, jigsaw and dictogloss) (Davis/Rinvoluceri, 1988), discussing visuals, and role play often worked well with any text, including these more challenging, taboo topics.

I also developed “Radical Phonology” to help ESOL learners speak with more clarity. Learners, in groups, summarised articles and topics in one pithy phrase on a protest banner, and chanted them in a very authentic, meaningful drill. This helped many learners feel more empowered and develop confidence in their own voice and what they want to say.

Some adult literacy groups were initially less interested in global issues, maybe due to lack of background knowledge, but I found I could lead them in from an immediate, local issue, e.g. the gold of someone's wedding ring to discovering how (un)fairly gold is mined, and from discussion about their own energy bills to finding out more about renewable energy and plans to bring solar power from the Sahara.

These Ready Lessons can be downloaded from the wiki in PowerPoint format so teachers can adapt them to what they know will draw their learners in. Most of the lessons are for intermediate / L1 learners and include an ESOL-type language focus which can, of course, be omitted or adapted with literacy groups.



I have seen many of the learners improve noticeably in independent learning and study skills. The learners can choose any article, read the easy version, then click on the original and read that, possibly noting down some new vocabulary or phrases. This is based on “gradual approximation” (Widdowson, 1979) and the “Comprehension Hypothesis” (Krashen, 2008), exposing learners to language they can understand before moving on to more complex texts. This independent reading task can be set regularly for homework with follow-up comments on a Moodle discussion forum. Several women learners have commented that this has helped them feel more important at home. Now, as well as their husband and children needing to use the home computer for paying bills and school work, they also have to negotiate a regular time on the computer for their own studies.

These topics can give learners a window on the world. They can become more confident talking about sustainability, news and politics and find more information about women's issues, health and food. These texts can provide meaningful contexts for writing practice. The Edexcel Functional Skills exams often set a writing task of contributing to online forums, so the more they practise responding to the comments and ideas of others, the better. Or they can write real letters to real Heads of State or Directors of companies about the real issues, and maybe even become more motivated by getting a response.

However, we do need to be extremely sensitive and supportive. Many ESOL and literacy learners are vulnerable, asylum-seekers and refugees, victims of horrific rape, domestic violence and many types of abuse. We can choose to focus only on happy, light topics in the classroom to try to help them forget all this. But then they may be asked about their family or their past in, for example, a job interview, or speaking assessment, and finally have to confront their experience, alone, in a stressful situation.

Or we can choose to bring potentially problematic topics into the classroom and make the group a sensitive, supportive place to share problems, past and present. This may help some learners come to terms with some of the issues in their past, and it may help them understand each other more and even want to help others in the same situation. Not all of them will be ready to share their stories at first. And we must be prepared to accept emotion, tears, and interruptions to our planned sequence of tasks in the lesson. We may need to spend a little extra time with them, referring them to other types of professional support if necessary. I feel these emotions I have been privileged to share with learners have helped me to understand them and their background more. The more I have felt able to open up as a genuine person with my own opinions, the more I have got to know them as real people too.



Not all the articles about global justice are negative, of course. There are stories about people in Norway making a circle of hope around the mosque to stand together for religious freedom; stories of indigenous peoples winning the fight against massive multinational mining companies to protect their land; stories about recycling and community spirit in hardship; and the very positive and hopeful fact of simply raising awareness of the secrets that many in the world hoped to keep: child labour, modern slavery, environmental destruction by big business and insidious corporate control of food, banking and health.

And in this hope, we can develop a voice in the learner. Of course we ought to link lessons and learning to the workplace, and link literacy lessons to vocational areas, but there are only so many phone messages or formal letters to order work materials you can write.

Paulo Freire talks about inspiring and empowering learners to participate, using literacy and language teaching to allow learners to develop their voice and have an effect (Freire Institute, 2015). Using global justice topics, we can inspire learners above and beyond the workplace e.g. Functional Skills learners on a Childcare course to encourage children to protect the planet; Electrical Installation students to get interested in renewable energy, debating the pros and cons of multinationals developing solar farms in the Sahara; literacy groups studying Health and Social Care to compare health systems across the world and the imbalance of power in organ donations; and Accounts students to look at cooperatives, global debt and whether there should be a maximum wage.

If we help develop in learners the idea that action works, that people power can fight for and achieve lasting benefits, we can maybe give them more control over their own future. We can also encourage learners to get involved in local community issues or our national battles for more funding for Further Education. And this may increase their feeling of self-worth and ability to change and affect life around them.

We may have become slightly conditioned by a lot of published course book material, which can often be bland - understandably, as it needs to appeal to a world market. Course book contributors can be told not to include 'PARSNIP's (politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, -isms and pork) (Flood, 2015), but, if we know our learners and their backgrounds, these topics can be the perfect wake-up call to help them confront stereotypes, find solutions to cultural or community difficulties or simply to engage more in learning.



Encouraged by the interest and response of learners, I have integrated materials from the wiki into CELTA training courses and presented at NATECLA and IATEFL conferences, to encourage other teachers to use global justice topics. This has really improved my confidence at presenting in public and making links with many other like-minded teachers. I used this Prezi: https://prezi.com/5dmozoestjf/around-the-world-in-90-minutes/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy – you can see that these stories are helping to redress the imbalance in world news. Instead of learning about the developed, successful North, these stories are mainly from the “Global South”.

Finally, and maybe most importantly of all, we need to look after ourselves as teachers and find ways to maintain our energy and enthusiasm for teaching. Using these global justice topics and the wiki material has really helped me feel that I am constantly learning and working with materials that actually mean something, are up to date, and make me feel part of the real world. In developing my own confidence to be myself and bring issues that I think are really important into the classroom, I feel I have also developed the confidence of learners in my classes and been able to empower them to feel they have more of a place in the world.

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From resister to enthusiast

Clare Tyrer

Clare Tyrer is Curriculum Team Leader of Teacher Education at Newham College of Further Education and is responsible for co-ordinating and delivering generic and ESOL/literacy specific teacher training programmes. She took a 10-week Level 3 course in e-learning at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College in October 2013.

When I first started teaching English in the 1990s in the Czech Republic, I found the blackboard an excellent way of recording information and clarifying points for learners. But time moves on and so does technology. From blackboard to whiteboard to the OHP, I felt I was able to deliver my lessons just as effectively as those who could extol the merits of voice technology, apps and infographics. Back then, I could have been labelled as a 'resister' (Hill, 2003): someone who is loathe to see the benefits of ICT. For me, at least, technology felt too scary, overwhelming and inaccessible.

However, there is no denying that technology is everywhere. We are likely to be confronted by learners who think nothing of surfing the web, downloading apps and communicating via social media. Furthermore, in the Education and Training Foundation Professional Standards (2014), it is stated that teachers and trainers in the further education and skills sector should "promote the benefits of technology and support learners in its use." Rather than turning my back on these innovations in learning technologies, I knew I had to face my fears and embrace the digital world. In October 2013, I embarked on a Level 3 e-teaching course at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College. This course was aimed at teachers and trainers who wanted to explore the benefits of e-teaching and to develop engaging resources which would enhance the learning process. The trainer reassured us that he was no 'techie' himself, rather somebody who wanted to make us aware of a range of tools to support learning.

In this article I have provided a few examples of how I have tried to get the most out of using technology to enhance learning on our teacher education courses.

Using blogs

As part of my e-learning course, we needed to be able to use a blogging tool to demonstrate and assess a range of resources. I wanted to see the immediate impact of a blog in the classroom so set about creating one with a group of students working towards the Level 3 Award in English for Language and Literacy teaching. Although the students had access to the college's Virtual Learning Environment, I wanted to use a blog as a way of extending discussions outside the learning environment, to post reminders about the course and to encourage collaborative learning. An example of individuals learning from each other is provided below. Using the online noticeboard tool, embedded in the blog, learners posted any websites or other information that had been of use to them in preparation for their timed summative assessments.

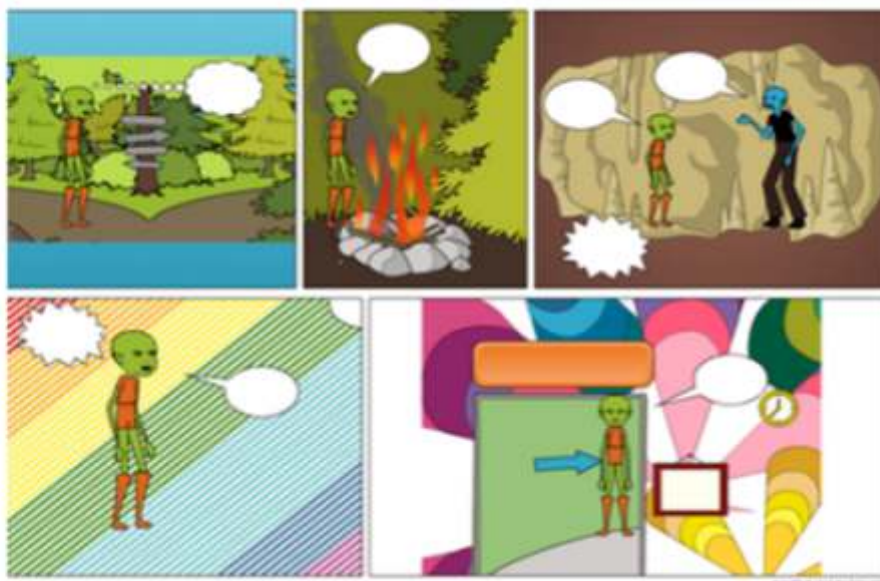


(created using <http://en.linoit.com/>)

However, beyond the trainees' input via [Linoit](#), I was aware that my virtual “presence” was dominant. I was in control of the blog's content even though the learners were given opportunities to share information and comment on posts. I wanted to give the students more of a voice, to be able to reflect on their learning and to feel part of a learning community. For these reasons, I started to create multiple-author blogs to encourage learners to be responsible for the blog's content. The example below is from a post written by a trainee teacher studying for the Additional Diploma in ESOL and Literacy on how her learners produced some great pieces of writing.

This worked well - good stuff. But the next part is where it gets really crazy. I read them a story and asked them to think about the way vocabulary was used. Was it interesting? Could they identify any words that they would change? Why? They responded well to this (although the story I chose wasn't great - I'll rethink that for the future) and seemed excited when I asked them to write their own stories...

However, I didn't just tell them to write. I gave them a blank cartoon strip (see below) and asked them to use it as a basis to write their story in groups. We talked about synonyms and common words that were banned from the task (nice, great, good, boring, big). Can you guess what happened? They loved it! The stories they came up with were simply fab, and there were constant shouts of 'Miss, is there a better word I can use for (insert word here)?'



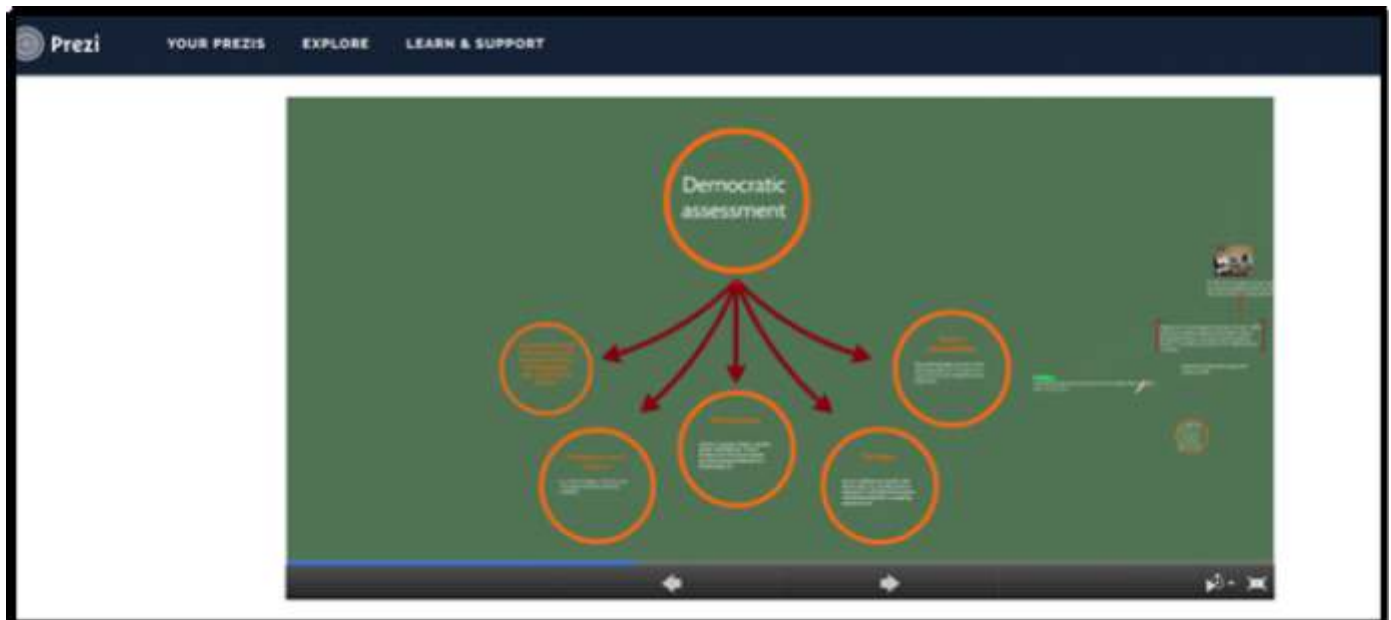
In the future, I would like to take this further and develop a class Wiki, so that learners can work collaboratively to edit site content, produce lesson summaries and critique each other's work.

Cloud-based presentation tools

Like many other teachers and teacher trainers, I use PowerPoint as a presentation tool a great deal. I can also admit that sometimes I have been guilty of using it as a “crutch” to help structure my teaching. Whilst I appreciate its simplicity, I have found it somewhat restrictive and predictable. I therefore wanted to consider other presentation options to see whether they increased student engagement and interaction.

There are many cloud-based presentation tools not all of which use visuals. For example, I have created podcasts using [Audioboom](#) for learners to listen to inside and outside the classroom. Learners can also create their own audio clips which are easy to upload and share with one another.

One example of a visually-striking, non-linear presentation tool is [Prezi](https://prezi.com/). I have used this in different ways to steer my students through information, but also as a way of flipping learning. This is an approach to learning which reverses the concept of a traditional classroom. Learners view or listen to the presentation of material outside the learning environment which leaves more time for discussion and hands-on activities to take place in the classroom. In the example below, trainee teachers were asked to work through the presentation on assessment at their own pace before sharing their knowledge as a group.



(created using <https://prezi.com/>)

What I like about Prezi is how it shows relationships between different elements. Key information can be highlighted using the zoom feature and the tool is not hard to use. Learners can work together to create their own presentations. It is particularly useful for certain individuals, such as some people with dyslexia, who prefer to see the whole picture first and discuss the connections between elements.



(created using <http://www.powtoon.com/>)

Another cloud-based tool with which I have been experimenting is [PowToon](https://www.powtoon.com/). Its main appeal is how only a few minutes of content can be exploited effectively in the learning environment. Once you have created a PowToon video, it can be uploaded to YouTube in perpetuity. This also makes for an excellent flipped learning

tool as learners can save the link and watch it as many times as they like. It took me a while to work my way around PowToon as understanding how the timeline works is crucial. However, once you have mastered this, it is easy to make adjustments to your presentation and introduce information sequentially. One of the limitations of the tool, however, is that there is not a great choice of animation objects, particularly with the free tool, and those on offer are difficult to customise. This means that the presentations tend to look similar and I would not opt for PowToon if I wanted to present a lot of information to a group of learners. Below is a snapshot of a video I created on different approaches to writing.

Digital storytelling

Finally, I want to share how I have used digital storytelling in a variety of ways with trainee teachers. I have interpreted the term quite loosely but essentially see it as way of linking narrative with different digital multimedia to engage learners and encourage collaborative learning.

[Animoto](#) allows users to create free 30-second videos using photos, text and song. The paid version offers more opportunities for creating narratives but the free tool enables you to create mini-presentations. A useful way of introducing a new topic is to ask learners to come up with ideas or key words relevant to a particular area. This gives the learners an opportunity to activate their existing knowledge of, and interest in, the topic. In the example below, key terms relating to the topic “characteristics of spoken language” flash up on the screen. The learners can then compare these with their own ideas.



(created using <https://animoto.com/>)

Furthermore, learners can create their own presentations easily without recourse to video editing software. For example, they can take photos or source digital images to illustrate something they have read and explain how these visuals are related to the poem or story.

Using materials other than traditional texts can be highly motivating and help promote writing confidence. I

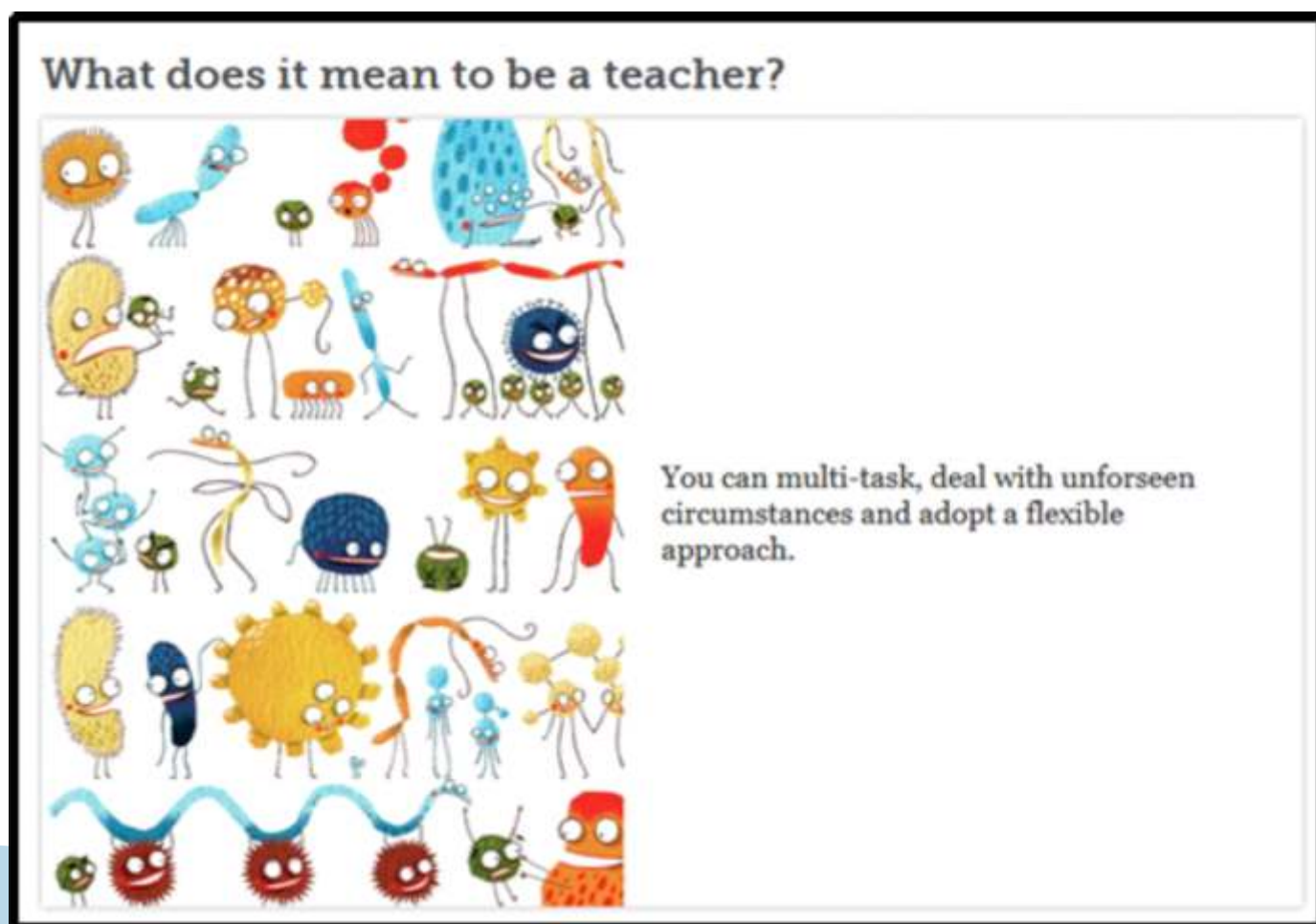
have found comic strips and storyboards to be powerful learning tools, particularly for those learners who struggle with traditional writing tasks. They promote individual expression and the introduction of storyboards and comic strips can facilitate the planning process, supporting learners with organisation of ideas and sequencing of events. On teacher education courses I have used them mainly to consolidate learning in a few images. For example, trainee ESOL tutors are provided with different ways of presenting language, asked to identify them and then compare the approaches (see below).



(created using www.pixton.com/uk/)

Comic strips can be exploited in the learning environment in a number of ways. One activity is to give learners a comic strip cut into frames. They then discuss how to sequence the events in an appropriate order. This encourages learners to become more aware of narrative conventions and sequencing devices. Completing empty speech bubbles in their own words also gives the learners a medium of self-expression and encourages creativity. Finally, supporting learners in creating their own comic strips to revise content or extend their knowledge of a topic can help students to make sense of complex information. One of the difficulties I have had with comic strips is how time-consuming they can be to create. It is important to consider whether the effort of creating one is worthwhile in terms of how effectively it can be exploited for classroom use. Additionally, learners need training in how to create comics using technological tools. They may also become distracted by the visual appeal of the medium and lose focus. However, overall, I have found them to be useful in developing learners' motivation to improve their reading and writing skills.

The final digital storytelling tool which I would like to share is [Storybird](#). This is a website where learners can work collaboratively to create stories using ready-made illustrations. They have the possibility to share them with each other and give feedback on what they have read. I have used the tool mainly to summarise key information for trainees and to highlight specific linguistic devices. (See the examples below.) The main disadvantages of using Storybird are that the choice of artwork is limited. There is a bank of ready-made images but you are restricted to using the artwork of one artist. These illustrations cannot be adapted and may limit creativity. In addition, there may be stereotyping issues as some images can reinforce traditional norms, for example pictures of male fire-fighters and women surrounded by cats.



The beauty of language

The wind howled as she splashed in the puddles, enjoying the rain as it trickled down her face.



(created using <http://storybird.com/>)

In this article, I have shared a few ways in which I integrate technology in teacher education courses, after being introduced to a multitude of digital resources on an e-learning course. I am by no means an expert and do not believe that technology is automatically the best way of presenting information or assessing students. It is important to view technology with a critical eye and to consider how its use will support learning rather than acting as a substitute for more traditional methods. Here are some questions I think about when reflecting on the usefulness of a digital tool:

- What is the aim of the resource? Which skills and knowledge are being acquired?
- What are its benefits?
- Are there any issues of accessibility and e-safety?
- Does the tool encourage collaboration and interaction, and critical thinking skills?
- How easy is it to use?
- Is it likely to appeal to all learners?
- How will the activity be assessed?
- What is the role of the teacher? Is the teacher using the resource as a method of instruction or to encourage more independent learning?

With the FELTAG (Further Education Learning Technology Action Group) recommendation that from 2015/2016, all publicly-funded courses should offer a 10% online element with this rising to 50% in

2017/2018, it is important to consider the impact technology can have on teaching and learning and how best to integrate it. No matter what resource is being used, digital or not, it is essential to consider the quality of the educational experience for the learners. I can confidently say I am no longer resistant to technology. In fact, I am due to enrol on a course in online tutoring and would now describe myself as an “enthusiast” (Hill, 2003): someone who still has a lot to learn but keen to experiment with innovative technology.

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A Teacher Reborn

Qasir Shah

Qasir Shah has taught EFL in China, Japan and Taiwan. He has also taught ESOL Skills for Life courses for private training providers and Slough Council, and is currently an ESOL Lecturer in an FE college. He completed his Masters in Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy in 2014, and began his PhD in the Philosophy of Education, at UCL - Institute of Education in April 2015.

It was with a heavy heart and quite a lot of disgruntlement that I enrolled on a PGCE in January 2011. Why you may ask? Quite simply, I had completed my DTLLS (the generic teaching qualification) a year before, which had been quite a chore as I did not believe it would turn me into a 'better' teacher. I had already been teaching EFL/ESOL for 13 years and in addition I was qualified as an ESOL examiner, so was rather resentful at being forced to do DTLLS. However, I had little choice because it was the latest qualification requirement in the government's drive towards '*professionalising*' teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector.

The most dispiriting fact about DTLLS was that at my college only the generic diploma was offered, without the ESOL specialisation. Consequently I knew that afterwards I would still need to do an extra year to gain the specialist qualification, which was now an essential requirement to remaining gainfully employed, and so I plodded through the DTLLS, doing the minimum that was required to pass.

The PGCE

After two years of toil I was faced with the prospect of another year's study but was unable to enrol for the ESOL subject specialism at another college because of work scheduling issues. This forced me look for alternatives that would suit my working hours. The Institute of Education seemed an attractive proposition because of the possibility of converting the PGCE into a Masters in the second year, if I so wished. Little did I realise this step would change my life for ever.

I thought the PGCE would be a doddle because I presumed - wrongly - that it would be quite similar to the DTLLS, covering a lot of the same ground, and I expected my DTLLS assignments would come in handy. In fact, the PGCE was far more challenging, and opened up completely new areas of specialist study. Whilst doing the PGCE I would sometimes look back at what I had written (or should that be 'cobbled' together) to pass the DTLLS, and I felt quite ashamed... but then for the DTLLS, I was only interested in passing. Bar the lesson observations, the PGCE turned out to be an enjoyable experience - I enjoyed being a student again.

Discovery of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

During the PGCE I came across CDA, a theory which had great impact on my thinking both as a person and as a teacher.

What is CDA?

(It) "is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality." (Van Dijk, 2003).

How did CDA help me?

CDA made me reflect critically about the language of texts, how they may be formed socially and politically, and I began to think more about the following:

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Question | Always question what you know, hear, see and are told |
| Reflection | Reflect critically about the lexis of texts - how they may be socially, politically and historically formed. |
| Reflexivity | How does the reflection impact upon your beliefs, assumptions, values, etc., and what you do, how you interpret things ... |
| Comparison | Comparing texts on the same topic - similarities, differences, inclusions omissions and their implications. |
| Language | How the text is formed grammatically i.e., active or passive voice, adjectives, tense and aspect, who the audience is, what does the language presuppose and what beliefs does the writer hold? |

(Table amended from University of Strathclyde website)

This framework has helped me and my students in our discussions and the study of texts. Prior to the PGCE, I had already begun to impress upon my students the importance of being critical and sceptical, and not accepting received 'wisdom' at face value but to try to discover its source, and if necessary challenging what may have been regarded as *common sense*. CDA provided me with a framework to do this.

A recent example of my use of CDA concerned examining articles on food banks. I asked learners to look at two articles from the Mail and the Guardian and to reflect critically upon their social and political context; how this may or may not impact upon their own beliefs on the topic; the content and language of the two articles – the inclusions, omissions, and their implications; and lastly to think about the audience the articles were aimed at, and the beliefs of the writer. This was an extremely successful lesson because students realised that language/discourse is never neutral, and so they must question everything they see, hear or read. Thus for example the Guardian will write from a left-of-centre viewpoint and the Mail from right-of-centre.

The Masters

After completing the PGCE, I decided to do the Masters. This was another step up academically which opened my eyes further to the impact of philosophy on educational policy, and in particular to the history of the Lifelong Learning discourse and its current skills-based agenda.

Understanding Lifelong Learning Policy

Since the 1980s lifelong learning policies have seen important changes in many nations around the world. It has increasingly been conceived of in terms of an *economic imperative*, both in terms of policy and practice. The OECD (1997) and EU (Van der Pas, 2001) have been instrumental in achieving a change in the discourse of lifelong learning under the guise of the '*learning economy*'. This contrasts with pre-1980's policies which viewed lifelong learning as being "a personal good and as an inherent aspect of democratic life" (Biesta 2006:169).

Before the Masters, not knowing the history of lifelong learning or its purpose and philosophical underpinnings, I had bought into the idea of its skills-based learning economy agenda. However, having worked in both the private and public sectors teaching Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL, I know that successive

governments have failed in their drive to develop literacy and numeracy provision in this country. The Skills for Life field has impressive statistics for the number of qualifications obtained since its inception, but this has been mostly an exercise in providing people with certificates to validate their levels. Ever-declining budgets, and a result-obsessed culture have resulted in a perverse state whereby those who really need education are not given it, and those who do not need it may be provided with it. For example, in my current place of employment if a student is judged unlikely to pass their exam a second time they will most likely not be offered a place to repeat the course. However, the elephant in the room, and the root cause – namely structural inequality - is rarely addressed.

In this learning economy, teachers are seen not as creative or knowledgeable but as transmitters of skills, of proscribed curricula, and not as "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1988) who develop critically thinking citizens; instead teachers reproduce the ideologies of the hegemonic culture. The present skills-based agenda has less to do with mastery of the subject and more to do with economic 'functionality'. In case of ESOL learners, we provide them with the English that will help them to function as economic units as soon as possible, ignoring their pre-existing knowledge and experience. This aligns with the American pedagogue E.D. Hirsch's belief (1987) in the teaching of 'cultural literacy' - 'core knowledge' of facts, figures and phrases about historical events. A prime example of this would be the Citizenship Test which has become more a memory test of facts and figures than about the culture and values of this country. Hirsch's method perpetuates current hegemonic views of history and does not ask the student to be critical of facts and figures.

Education as Empowerment

CDA, and the writings of Foucault, and Gramsci, which heavily influenced CDA, have been instrumental in me becoming a more political teacher. Through Foucault one comes to recognise how the '[dominant] discourse constructs the topic, defining and producing the objects of our knowledge (cited in Hall 1997, p.72). Knowledge is power and assumes the authority of 'the truth' (cited *ibid* p.76). This aligns with Gramsci's idea that the hegemonic class project their thinking upon the subordinated - who come to believe this thinking as '*common sense*' and '*natural*'.

In both writers I found hope, because this hegemonic discourse can be contested. As Gramsci stated, such '*common sense* is not ... rigid and immobile but is continually transforming itself' (cited *ibid* p.73) (the changes in lifelong policies attest to this fact), and as such, affords opportunities for it to be resisted. But before that can take place, it is important, to recognise and question social norms – '*of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time*' (Foucault (1980) cited in Rabinow 1991, p.75).

A New Beginning

The Masters helped me understand that the role of Education/Literacy '*should be regarded as a way of preparing man for a social, civic and economic role that goes beyond the limits of rudimentary literacy training consisting merely in the teaching of reading and writing*' (UNESCO (1965) cited in Eldred et al. 2007 p.7)

And now, as I embark on my PhD in the Philosophy of Education at the age of 44, it almost feels like a new beginning for me both as a person and as a teacher. I see all education now, not simply in terms of skills but in the Platonic/Aristotelian idea of fulfilment: in the forming of the body, mind and soul of a valued citizen, and that such learning should take place throughout one's life - all this I impress upon my learners. As for me, going back to education has rejuvenated and revitalized my being – mind, body and soul - I feel nourished, and as I enrol for yet another "qualification", positively grunted!

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Using Collaborative Creative Writing Tasks in the Literacy Classroom: How using such techniques can enhance literacy learning and teaching.

Sarah Telfer

Sarah Telfer is a Senior Lecturer in Skills for Life and Teacher Training on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses at the University of Bolton. Sarah completed a BA (Hons) in Drama and worked as a professional actress before applying these skills to teach literacy. She is currently completing her Doctorate in Education and her areas of special academic interest include interaction in the literacy classroom by embedding drama, creative writing and literature into English Language teaching. Her specialist research focus is the use of storytelling to promote engagement and interaction in language teaching.

Introduction

Building literacy and language skills is all about being able to communicate with other people and by its nature involves collaboration. Real life communication and work-based skills often involve creative interaction between people, or groups of people.

The new Education and Training Foundation (ETF) Standards (2014) state that teachers should be 'creative and innovative' in selecting and adapting strategies to help their students learn. Collaborative writing activities can help to inspire and motivate meaningful and enjoyable interaction among literacy learners, using activities which involve pair work, and group work collective writing activities. Shared tasks can help to build positive and collaborative relationships between learners, offering scaffolding with productive writing activities. As a teacher trainer and literacy practitioner, I have found the use of collaborative creative writing tasks to be a very useful pedagogic tool in not only my own classroom, but in my trainee teachers' classrooms. As so many 14-19 year old learners who struggle with written English have negative experiences of literacy education in the past, literacy teachers could consider implementing creative and diverse teaching methods, in order to help these profiles of learners develop essential writing skills. The ETF standards state that teachers are expected to consciously address the English needs of such learners and work creatively to overcome individual barriers to learning (ETF 2014). In November 2014, Nick Boles, Minister of State for Skills and Equalities, asked the ETF to lead a review of what employers and learners need from the Maths and English qualifications taken by students who are not studying GCSEs. The findings revealed that employers want practical and applied English skills, but more importantly that engagement and motivation are critical to successful learning in English.

How then can we motivate and engage learners using more creative and diverse teaching methods? Trainee literacy teachers often report that writing is the skill their learners find the hardest and, when observing literacy classes, I found this to be an area in which learners frequently feel the most anxiety, often lacking inspiration and motivation. Literacy learners express reluctance to write and are often resistant to writing tasks in general, as writing is a skill which involves conscious physical and mental effort. Young 14-19 year old learners can be harder to engage and motivate, as often their previous experiences of writing is from GCSE classes which are very exam focused and involve little creative collaboration.

Literacy teachers can also put up barriers to creative writing in the classroom, worrying primarily that they themselves need to be creative to implement creative activities, or that creative writing activities will not cover aspects of the curriculum or exam syllabus. I would argue that a teacher's role can be more as facilitator in creative writing activities, activating learners' schemata, eliciting generating ideas, and tuning students into a topic, leading them into the writing activity; but that the content of the writing can come mainly from the learners themselves working co-operatively. Creative writing tasks involving pair work and small groups can help to make the writing process less daunting by offering peer support. Pair work interaction can enhance imaginative creativity, lower anxiety, and encourage peer learning and support for writing skills.

Learners can help to generate ideas as a group, using activities in which they tell stories of family histories, relate memories or experiences, share problems or discuss issues that may be current and important in their lives.

Mallows (2014) advocates a 'participatory approach' to teaching English language which draws out and builds upon the story of students' experiences to develop a shared critical understanding of the world. Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke (cited in Mallows 2014) define a participatory classroom as one which is driven by learners' exchanges, these exchanges being always relevant and meaningful to the learners' lives. According to Halliday (1985) writing tasks should reflect plausible, real-life communication; creative writing tasks must therefore focus on meaningful collaborative communication.

How can literacy teachers change the writing tasks in the classroom to make them more aligned with everyday realistic authentic tasks? How can they add creative input? We use writing for a variety of everyday communicative purposes, so firstly teachers need to identify the common usages of writing on their schemes of work and then consider how to embed these into creative and collaborative teaching activities; ideally based around subject matter that will engage learners' interest, but also using activities that are contextualised in real and meaningful communicative practice.

Collaborative writing tasks that I have observed to be successful embed pair work, small group work or larger group project work into literacy sessions. Creative writing activities which I have found to be useful with basic level classes include the following pair work activities: writing a shopping list for an imaginary holiday or trip such as a safari or jungle expedition; writing notes with imaginative excuses for absences from class or for missing work; or writing simple descriptions of a fictional friend or character. Literacy learners can pool vocabulary and have fun grouping the words together to describe something or someone who exists.

Activities which I found to be useful with a higher level class include: writing collaborative short stories based on the learners' experiences, using the students themselves as a creative resource. More advanced students can be asked to write creative descriptions using their senses writing notes of the scene around them, describing sounds, lights, smells, tastes and textures, observing what they can see, hear, smell, taste, or how they feel. Later in class or for homework these can be worked up into a piece of descriptive writing.

Writing imaginative and creative descriptions can be based on any topic and completed at all levels. Pictures, objects, and texts can all be used as a basis for description, or the students themselves can become the source of descriptive language.

Poetry Writing

Using basic poetry writing can be used at all levels for creative tasks. Short poems using concrete vocabulary are especially effective for lower level students with a limited vocabulary, as it allows students to realise that they can write imaginatively and express sophisticated thoughts. At higher levels students can experiment more creatively with different styles of poems and more complex linguistic forms. (Homstad and Thorson 1996). Writing poetry together encourages students to think about the sounds of words, the rhythm of language, rhyme, intonation, word stress, sentence stress.






Examples of poetry tasks I have successfully used collaboratively in the literacy classroom include the writing of acrostic poems. In pairs the learners choose a class member and write the person's name vertically on a piece of paper. Then they write adjectives or phrases they feel describe that person e.g.

Sarah



Serious
Ambitious
Realistic but open to new experiences
Animated
Happy

Cinquain poems are also very effective in generating descriptive writing. These poems consist of five lines which explore the concept of a person, event or a genre etc. In pairs or small groups, learners agree on a topic which interests them and as a team they write a five line poem to describe it. If working on a computer they can add pictures or visuals to enhance their piece, for example:

- Line 1:** State a subject in one word (noun) **Travelling** 
- Line 2:** Describe subject in two words (adjectives) **Exciting and adventurous** 
- Line 3:** Describe action about the subject in three words (infinitives/a phrase) **broadens the mind** 
- Line 4:** Express an emotion about the subject in four words **I love the freedom** 
- Line 5:** Restate subject in a single word **Travelling** 

Using Technology in Creative writing

The Further Education Learning Technology Group (FELTAG) Report (March 2014) recommends that FE teachers move towards a more extensive and effective use of virtual, blended and online learning of all kinds, taking account of the different needs of different learners and promoting learner engagement in the use of technology-based learning. Computer literacy is a skill that enhances learners' employability skills and employability is a key word in the current government's education policy.

Using technology in a literacy classroom is now an essential component rather than a choice, as trainee teachers are required to embed ICT into their literacy practice. Creative collaborative writing tasks can embrace the use of new technology, setting up activities on college VLEs in which literacy learners can interact with each other online on using blogs, chat forums or editing Wiki pages. Creative writing on the internet can open up a live audience to learners and may also be a preferable mode of written communication for some.

I have found the following activities to be successful in encouraging collaborative creative writing using technology:

Short stories Site

Learners can not only upload fictional short stories which can be read by their peers, but they can be encouraged to review and critique their peers' stories encouraging peer assessment. After reading each other's stories contributions they can choose their favourite story and reply with comments and responses to their peer. This not only enhances creative writing skills, but also expands critical thinking skills and fosters learner interaction.

Online Weekly Diary or Blog

Learners can be encouraged to keep a weekly blog or fictional story diary online. This could describe their own daily experiences, or detail a fictional character's feelings or weekly life events. Blogs can also be used as leaning journals for learners to reflect on what they feel they have learnt during literacy classes.

Online Research Ideas

Learners can be encouraged to use the internet to research a famous celebrity of their choice to find out five facts they did not know about that person. They can use this initial research to write a brief biography of their celebrity, attaching pictures and relevant visuals. They can upload these to a VLE site and read each other's posts commenting on whether they found the information interesting or if they like/dislike this celebrity. They could even create a fictional celebrity blog which other learners can 'follow' on line. More ICT literate students can work together to create web pages on their chosen topic focusing on an area of interest, current event or news story.

Soap Opera or Murder Mystery Wiki

Soap operas or murder mysteries can be good creative writing projects for a collaborative class writing task, as most students are familiar with their structure from watching television. This can generate good discussion, developing understanding of a literary genre. Writing a murder mystery story or soap opera can be written collaboratively, the class deciding on the characters or murder victim, the location, motivations for the characters' actions etc. for their story. The students could either write in small groups or even produce the story on a wiki site, writing the unfolding plot line over the course of a week. Students can edit each other's writing, add on and insert new events into already, or add to the story sequentially.

Producing a class magazine/Facebook page/ website

Literacy learners can often be encouraged to write creatively if they are creating a real product of some kind such as a class magazine, class website or Facebook page. Learners can be divided into groups to create a written article on a topic of particular interest to them; poems and short stories can be 'published'; learners who more proficient or artistic in the area of ICT or graphics can work on layout, visuals and pictures to enhance their peers' written pieces.

Collaborative class profiles can be created by each learner writing a brief autobiography of their life.

Conclusion

The inspiration and ideas for the activities given in this article come from the trainee literacy and ESOL teachers at the University of Bolton, who endeavour to use imaginative and innovative teaching methods to engage and motivate their learners to write creatively in collaboration with their peers.

In their post-lesson reflections trainees have described how collaborative creative writing tasks acted as a springboard to engage learners in interactive classroom activities, creating an enjoyable 'community' class atmosphere conducive to literacy language development and learning.

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'It Sounds Funny But It Works' An Adult Literacy Tutor's Experience of Using Phonics With Adult Basic Learners

Angela Cahill

Angela has over eight years' experience as a literacy, numeracy and family learning tutor and currently works as a Resource Tutor with Louth and Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) in Drogheda, Republic of Ireland. In this role, Angela combines teaching with a learner and tutor support role. Angela has recently completed her M.A. in Education with Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The study described here was undertaken as part of a small scale research dissertation project for the M.A. under the supervision of Dr. Maeve O'Grady

'It sounds funny but it works' was a comment made by one of the people in my class regarding the use of phonics and specifically, nonsense words, as part of their reading and spelling instruction. The opportunity to conduct a short ten week research project, as part of my Masters in Education, gave me the chance to examine the value of using phonics in the adult basic education (ABE) classroom. I was unhappy with the way that I had used phonics on an *ad hoc* basis previously and felt that I could not make a decision as to its value, having never really used it in a systematic and consistent manner. I welcomed the opportunity to critically examine practice and to reconcile to some extent whether the teaching of a de-contextualised skill such as phonics can sit alongside a social practice ethos.

The adult literacy landscape in Ireland is predominantly conceptualised as one of social practice (Stewart, 2011). The National Adult Literacy Agency's (NALA) definition of literacy is;

'Literacy involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. But it includes more than the technical skills of communications: it also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals, families and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change' (NALA, 2012)

Thus, literacy is recognised as more than a set of technical skills to be acquired. As Stewart mentions, 'the purposes, uses and contexts of literacy practice are fundamental to literacy development in Irish basic education' (2011, p.45). So does phonics instruction have a role to play in the literacy classroom in Ireland?

Phonics is an approach to teaching reading and spelling that is based on the association of sounds with letters. English is an alphabetic language meaning that written English uses letters (graphemes) to represent the sounds (phonemes) in words. Decoding involves using letter-sound correspondence to recognise words in print (phonics), essential in the reading process. Phonemic awareness is the ability to detect individual sounds within words and is important in spelling.

There is compelling evidence that using a systematic phonics approach with children in early literacy instruction promotes phonemic awareness, the development of decoding skills and results in better outcomes in word identification (Burton, Davey, Lewis, Ritchie and Brooks, 2008). Research from both the US and the UK suggests that phonics has a role to play in reading instruction with adults (Kruidenier, 2002; Kruidenier, 2010; McShane, 2005; Burton et al, 2008). The US research identifies four components of the reading process, alphabetic (incorporating phonics and phonemic awareness), fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension, as forming an evidence-based framework for teaching reading to adults in basic education settings (McShane, 2005). Most adult reading research in the US is quantitative in approach using random controlled trials and large sample sizes. Very few qualitative findings, with the exception of Massengill's work (2004, 2013), have emerged from the US. The 'Phonics Project' in the UK (Burton et al, 2008) investigated the effect of a phonics intervention strategy with adults. The authors reported significant progress in reading comprehension and spelling. Most importantly, the authors, using qualitative measures,

found there were increased confidence, motivation and enjoyment on the part of the learners even though the time-span of instruction was short (5-6 sessions).

Reviewing the literature throws up a dichotomy between an autonomous model of literacy which considers literacy as a set of discrete technical skills to be acquired and a social practice view of literacy where reading and writing is embedded in ideas and contexts. The US research puts emphasis on using assessment measures to identify the four components of reading and in tailoring instructional practices to address learning needs (Kruidenier, 2002; Kruidenier, 2010; McShane, 2005). Most US research literature begins with statistics on rates of literacy difficulties and the consequences of poor literacy skills such as poverty, unemployment and criminality. One can ask if the US model of literacy is one of teaching functional, de-contextualised skills, thus promoting a deficit view of the adult literacy learner. A social practice approach considers reading as going far beyond the decoding of words and includes understanding the purpose and function of texts and the 'cultural values, beliefs and power relations they embed' (Moss, 2005, p.25). This approach considers that the learner is the expert in their own use of literacy and values their opinion on what should be taught in the classroom. Research by Burton et al (2008) and Duncan (2009) in the UK gives value to the voice of the learner in the research process.

The dilemma for the practitioner is therefore what to do with all the academic research. How do I put the research into practice and how does it affect my underlying philosophical foundations? By putting an emphasis on phonics in reading and spelling instruction, am I addressing only the learners' technical needs? However, by not teaching foundation skills directly and using a more social practice approach, will I enable learners to engage and critically read texts? Being mindful of this dissonance was necessary for the research process being undertaken. The following quote from an adult beginner reader suggests that he needs to go back to basics in order to further his reading abilities and helped me to reaffirm that my stance on phonics may be justified. *'It's not that no one ever taught me to read before, it's just that they never took me back far enough. They didn't know what I didn't know'* (McShane, 2005, p.33).

The rationale for my research was to investigate, using an action research design, the effect of a phonics intervention and in particular, the use of nonsense words within that phonics instruction. An action research approach was chosen as it allows the practitioner to change an aspect of their practice and to reflect on that change in order to better understand their practice. The two research questions guiding this project were;

1. Will the learners improve in their reading and spelling of regular and irregular words after a phonics intervention strategy incorporating the use of nonsense words?
2. What will the learners say about their perception of using phonics and nonsense words and how will they feel about how it may have affected their reading and spelling performance?

The participants in the study were four learners, from a small, rural town in the Republic of Ireland, who were engaged in a literacy class for 3 hours a week. The learners were all of a similar level working towards Level 2 awards in reading and writing on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) equivalent to Level 1 on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EFQ). All four learners reported difficulties with spelling in particular and had requested that spelling strategies be a focus of their class. As part of this emphasis on spelling, I discussed the possibility of using phonics in a more consistent manner with the group, before planning the action research project. I had worked with the group for over a year at that stage and the learners knew that any change to practice was rooted in a desire to improve my teaching and hopefully, their learning. I conducted a semi-structured group interview before the phonics intervention to hear the learners' thoughts and opinions on what makes a 'good' reader or speller and what they thought might help their learning. Duncan (2009) suggests that 'learners, more than models of fluent reading, may be a useful

source of guidance on reading development' (p.340). The interview suggested that spelling was the biggest issue for this group of learners and that they were aware of several spelling strategies of which phonics was one mentioned. When asked if they thought phonics could help them with spelling or with the reading of an unknown word they were quite pessimistic. Comments included '*sounding out – I hate it! I can't sound out a word*'; '*not for me because I can't break up words*' and '*it's working well for kids....I think it will help me*'.

In the action research project described here, I used a primarily qualitative approach and asked for the learners' experience of using phonics as a reading and spelling strategy. The phonics intervention used in this research was based on '*Jolly Phonics*', a systematic, synthetic phonics programme (Lloyd, 1998). Only the sound groupings and example words from the programme were used as much of the other material involves rhymes, songs and stories aimed at young children. I found the *Jolly Phonics* programme easy to use even though I am not a phonics expert, have no linguistics background and only 'on the job' training. Group 1 contains the sounds to match the following graphemes;

s a t i p n

Using these sounds the learner is able to blend sounds to make a number of words from the very first lesson (e.g. *pan/snap/insist/pasta*). This is especially important when working with adults as they may feel that 'sounding out' words is childish and thus need to see the point of the phonics work, i.e. the production of words, quickly.

Nonsense words are phonetic words with no meaning in English. The role of nonsense words in this study fulfilled two purposes. Firstly, to aid in distinguishing between learners who have mastered the sounds of the language and were using phonic decoding skills and learners who were relying on visual memory to read or spell words. Greenberg et al (2002) describes the decoding of nonsense words as a highly phonological task because of the need to assemble and hold in memory phonemes derived from graphemes and then to blend these to form pronunciations. Secondly, to provide learners with a 'practice run' for decoding real but unfamiliar words encountered in their own lives and contexts. There is no peer-reviewed literature published on the use of nonsense words with adult basic learners, however two practitioner reports detail nonsense words being used as part of phonics instruction in the classroom rather than just in the assessment of skills (Geertz, 2001; Hager, 2001). There were no indications that any of the four learners in this study had dyslexic tendencies. It is worth noting that phonics and in particular nonsense word decoding might prove very difficult for learners with auditory processing difficulties.

The phonics intervention in this study occurred over 10 sessions lasting approximately for one hour of a three hour class. Development of phonemic awareness skills was practised before focussed work on decoding. Working in pairs, I gave one person a nonsense word and asked them to blend the sounds together so that the other person (who could not see the word) could write it down on a mini-whiteboard. After a few rounds of nonsense words, the pair would swap roles. I asked the group to spell longer words from the particular *Jolly Phonics* group they were working on, again using the mini-whiteboards. I used individual laminated letters from the particular group to give learners a multi-sensory approach to practise making real or nonsense words. Over the 10 sessions, sounds from the first four *Jolly Phonics* groups were introduced.

The quantitative skills assessments in this study showed that all participants made gains in their reading and spelling after the phonics intervention. There was also an improvement in the 'quality' of mistakes made in the spelling assessment. For example, the word *transport* was spelt *talaspote* by one learner, bearing little resemblance to the target word, before the phonics intervention but became the more phonetic *trantport* after the phonics work. A dictionary or spellcheck facility might then be of more use than if a spelling error bears no resemblance to the actual word.

Qualitative elements in the study included questionnaires, group and individual interviews. The ratings questionnaires suggested that learners were more positive in their feelings towards reading and spelling after the phonics intervention. They also self-reported that they found it easier to 'break up', read and spell unfamiliar words after the intervention. While these findings may be regarded as subjective, they do give a sense of increased self-efficacy and confidence by the learners after the phonics work. Massengill-Shaw and Disney (2013) remark that there is a paucity of qualitative literacy related measures, however, the affective characteristics that learners bring to a class are among the intrinsic factors impacting literacy acquisition.

In the individual interviews, one learner remarked that *'I break the word down, before-hand I was not paying as much heed to it'* suggesting that this learner is now incorporating a phonics strategy in his reading and spelling. He noted that *'you're in an easy environment.....there's no pressure'*, an important consideration for the ABE classroom (Burton et al, 2008). He continued by saying that *'people might find it difficult at first, it does work if you give it a chance'*. With respect to spelling, this learner commented that *'I can spell 'adjustment' now, some of the words we had in front of us (to spell) it was amazing!'* Lastly he commented that the group should *'be more active in the reading'*. Duncan's qualitative study (2009) with literacy learners also indicated that the learners wanted more reading in their classes.

Another learner talked about the *'big difference'* since taking part in the phonics work in her ability to help her daughter with homework, *'she's starting to come to me now'*. Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson and Soler (2002) stress the importance of assessing changes in literacy practices or events when evaluating literacy interventions as they give a measure of what people actually do with their skills. Another mother in the group also mentioned a change in her literacy practices, commenting *'it helps me with the kids, if.....asks me to spell something, he'll say the word and I'll get him to say it slower, say the sounds in my own head and then I should be able to know what the word is'*. Purcell-Gates et al (2002) suggest that a change in literacy practices within the family can have an intergenerational effect. One person in the group, when asked if they felt more confident in their spelling after the phonics work, said, *'yes...because I always found it hard to sound out but I can now.... well a lot better I think anyway'*. The most reluctant learner in the group, in terms of phonics, acknowledged that *'I'm more confident.....I actually am more confident'* in his spelling after the phonics work. This learner was especially pleased to see his actual results from the quantitative assessments needing perhaps that 'hard evidence' that he had made improvements. When I asked why did the learners think I used nonsense words in the phonics instruction, one man said *'because you spell them the way they are....they don't mean anything but you can have a go at spelling them'*. Another learner commented that *'if you can spell the nonsense word you can spell the real word, it gets you used to the sound of the letters'*. Both of these comments show that the learners could see value in using the nonsense words and helped me to justify their use in practice.

I kept a reflective journal for the duration of the study and this gave me a forum for teasing out my dilemma of balancing a social practice ethos with the teaching of foundation skills which might be viewed as veering towards a deficit approach to literacy. As previously discussed, the US literature favours an evidence-based component framework towards reading acquisition. Other researchers value the voice of the learner in the process while still acknowledging the place of phonics in a literacy class (Burton et al, 2008; Duncan, 2009). Burton talks of the dangers of 'dichotomous thinking with viewpoints expressed as mutually exclusive'. She continues 'a belief in the potential of phonics for adults does not imply an approach that excludes all other teaching methods. Surely we can agree that an inclusive and open-minded approach is the way forward in helping adults to improve their literacy?' (in Brooks, 2010, p.23). I used my reflective journal to wrestle with this dilemma - teasing out the findings from the US literature, based mainly on researching the four components of reading (phonics, fluency, vocabulary development and comprehension) against a more social practice view which values the real world contexts and social practices of the learner. By using a more qualitative approach in my own study I endeavoured to listen to the learners' views as to their experience of

the phonics intervention. As I wrote in my journal, *'I'm teaching a foundation skill but I'm going to be guided by the learners' voices as to their experience of it'*. While the phonics work followed a skills-based direction I tried to use learners' own interests and needs in the choice of reading and spelling material, mixing authentic texts with more class-based resources. For example, a conversation in class around healthy eating led to learners bringing in healthy recipes and these were used as reading and spelling resources for the next few classes. Massengill (2006) recommends using the Word Study approach (which incorporates phonics) but suggests that learners search for words with similar patterns in their own lives to reinforce learning and to provide a connection to their own daily literacy tasks. It may be argued that a certain amount of foundation work is necessary in any ABE classroom as how can learners be encouraged to critically engage with texts if they have not mastered the basic skills?

In the last phonics class I noted in my journal that one of the learners expressed frustration with the nonsense words decoding saying, *'we are never going to use them'*, a valid comment which seems to put the use of nonsense words in phonics instruction in direct opposition to a social practice approach. Massengill (2004) suggests that even though nonsense words are not authentic they have a purpose in challenging learners to analyse sounds rather than guess at the word, offering a strategy for solving the 'problem of an unknown word in a real-life task' (p.591). That is, the 'practice run' mentioned earlier.

The process of undertaking a piece of research is as important, in some ways, as the outcomes obtained. During this action research study I had the opportunity to be informed from literature, to observe, to plan, to re-plan, to listen, to reflect, to reaffirm beliefs and to think. It gave me a rare opportunity to step back from practice, to look at what I was doing with fresh eyes and to justify and modify my teaching approach. By listening to the learners' experience of the phonics teaching, a deliberate attempt was made to better understand practice.

The following recommendations are aimed at literacy tutors who may be interested in adding phonics to their reading and spelling methodologies repertoire.

- . Phonics teaching may be enhanced by using multi-sensory methodologies. In this study I used mini-whiteboards, word boxes and laminated letters for nonsense word exercises.
- . Phonics work needs time for practise and repetition. In this study it took ten sessions to get though 24 of the sounds. Burton et al (2008) specifically advises against moving on too quickly in phonics work.
- . Use the meta-language of phonics when teaching. In this study I explained my reasoning behind the methods I was using to the learners, at all times using words such as blending, segmenting and phonemic awareness when explaining and teaching.
- . The importance of a relaxed atmosphere and humour in the phonics classroom was suggested by Burton et al (2008) as being important and after conducting this study I would agree. Phonics has the potential to be a very dry and monotonous venture, therefore it is essential to vary delivery and to encourage laughter as some of the sounding out does 'sound funny'. I always acknowledge when teaching phonics that I feel 'silly' at times over-pronouncing words but I am willing to risk it if the learners will also 'give it a go'. Trust has to exist within the group so that learners will take that step and give phonics a chance.
- . Being both teacher and researcher for this study afforded me an appreciation of how best to approach the learners in the group and gave me an understanding of their underlying difficulties. Likewise the learners knew my ways of working and that my intentions were rooted in their best interests. Bell (2010) suggests that being a practitioner-researcher allows for an intimate knowledge of the context of the study.

In conclusion, this research project answered the guiding questions posed at its beginning. The assessment of skills showed that learners improved in their reading and spelling performance after the phonics

intervention. The qualitative findings, exploring the learners' self-perceptions of their abilities, indicated that they felt more confident in their reading and in particular their spelling after the phonics work. The use of nonsense words gave learners a 'practice run' at decoding an unfamiliar word thus providing a strategy for spelling or reading an unknown word in a learners' everyday life. Phonics should be taught in such a manner as to give learners opportunity to practise their phonic skills with authentic resources for use in real-life contexts. Thus, I suggest, the dilemma of teaching a foundation, de-contextualised skill within a realistic context of relevance to the learner may be resolved.

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Literacy and Education

By James Paul Gee

Cost: £22.49

Publisher: Routledge

Pages: 148

ISBN 978-1-138-82604-5

Reviewed by Aileen Ackland

Aileen Ackland is a senior lecturer at the School of Education, University of Aberdeen where she teaches and researches in relation to community and adult education. Her doctorate research explored the power relations between theory, policy and practice in the adoption of the 'social practices approach' in the Scottish Adult Literacies initiative.

This slim volume by James Gee is the latest in Routledge's series of books on Key Ideas in Education. Described as 'virtuosic', these short introductions to critical topics promise dialogue and conversation with seminal figures. James Gee is certainly an inspirational writer in the field of literacies and was hugely influential on my own thinking as I researched how a social practices perspective of literacies was construed in theory, policy and practice in Scotland. I approached this book, therefore, with great anticipation. It is a book which is easy to get drawn into, quick to read and may be a catalyst for flashes of insight. If you are looking for a comprehensive guide to the topic, as implied by the title, you may, however, be disappointed.

The tone is mainly conversational as Gee tells the reader stories – of his own development as a researcher, of the emergence of the New Literacy Studies, of the changing practices of literacies in society. The writing is rich with metaphor as he explores how literacy 'left the mind and wandered out into the world'. Gee wanders through the world of literacy, illuminating with stories diverse literacies practices from the epic poets of ancient Greece to contemporary digital games designers.

The book is in four chapters: Introduction; Literacy; The Social Mind; Digital Media. The chapter titles, and indeed the section headings, however, are not particularly helpful and this is a book best read, I think, as a stimulating conversation in four movements. It is not a text book and as an introduction to the topic its merit is in provocation rather than explanation. As with any conversation, it is uneven, sometimes tangential, occasionally maddening. There were times when reading that I wanted to stop and ask why, remonstrate or argue back. I found it an engaging read.

In the preface, Gee justifies his decision to limit the references in the text to major accessible sources. These references are ample and a reader provoked to consider alternative understandings of literacy might use these references to explore the territory in more depth. I hope readers encountering this book as an introduction to a social and cultural perspective of literacy will be encouraged to delve deeper. I have a concern that some important ideas are not made explicit enough in this book to challenge prevailing assumptions about literacy.

The word education is used in the title but it is mainly schools and schooling which are dealt with in the text. There is much that is relevant to adult education but very little is made explicit and although I believe Gee's overall argument is to question the privileging of school literacy, it is not always easy to follow the thread of this argument through the different stories. Vital points such as that school achievement and status are not the only markers of success are relegated to bracketed asides.

Chapter three deals at length with parenting and gives examples of the myriad ways in which 'educated parents' prepare children for the expectations of school literacy. In contrast, in chapter one Gee has

explored the distinctive lifeworlds of literacy and told us Leona's poetic 'puppy story'. Leona's story is characterised by the markers of a tradition of African –American storytelling but is deemed inadequately coherent as a 'story' in the context of school. The connections between Leona's story and the examples of parenting in chapter three are not overtly articulated thus leaving the challenge to schools to recognise, and value, alternative literacies practices unsaid. One would be forgiven for coming away from this conversation with a confirmed view of the inherent rightness of 'educated' parents' attitudes and behaviours and the need to replicate these for disadvantaged children.

The entanglement of literacy with power relations, which Gee's previous writing has helped me understand so well, is much less openly addressed in this short book. For readers new to the topic I fear it is too implicit. The lack of a clear definition of literacy at the outset might also be confusing. Particularly in the world of adult education where there are debates about the use of the singular or plural and the scope of what is included in a definition, it would have been helpful if Gee had either offered his own definition or addressed the disputes directly. Gee also refers on a number of occasions to literacy 'sponsors', referencing Deborah Brandt, but without an elucidation of her specific use of this term in relation to literacy.

With these concerns, I wondered then whether I would recommend this book to adult education practitioners or students new to a socio-cultural view of literacy. In my experience as a teacher educator, the different conceptualisations are not easy to grasp and the conversational style of this book leaves some ideas sketched in rather than explicated carefully. Its power, however, is in the stories. Gee makes the point that 'words in a text gain their meanings from the experiences people have had' (p. 130) and in this book he continually invokes the reader's experiences through authentic examples with which they can identify. I believe that through the recognition of the stories, readers will be provoked to see alternative views of the world of literacy. Within my own teaching and research I have frequently used Gee's example of the 'aspirin bottle problem' (Gee, 2008, p.45 – 49) to demonstrate how teaching the 'reading' of the health warning text must go beyond decoding to engage with questions about drug companies, social relations and the structure of society. This book is a rich resource of many more examples to draw upon with students and practitioners.

Gee, JP (2008) *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in discourses*, 3rd edition, Routledge, Abingdon

Training to Teach Adults English

By Irene Schwab (with Jane Allemano, David Mallows & Anne McKeown)

Cost: £14.95

Publisher: NIACE

Pages: 132

ISBN: 978-1-86201-841-9

Reviewed by Rachel Stublely

Rachel Stublely is a senior lecturer in post-compulsory education at the University of South Wales. She leads specialist teacher education courses in ESOL and Adult Literacy/Communication and teaches on the PGCE Post-compulsory Education. She is currently researching writing and teacher education from a social practice perspective for her doctorate at Lancaster University.

I approached this text a little sceptically. For a range of demographic, policy-related and perhaps other socio-cultural reasons, teacher education in Wales (where I have been based for 13 years) has yet to embrace the idea of joint adult literacy and ESOL teacher education and this book is clearly aimed at participants on such courses. Even before I got to this, I was unsure of what the word “English” in the title referred to - it turns out that the original title Training to Teach Adults English: literacy and ESOL, which would have been clearer to me, was partially lost in the final edit. Having read the book, I am however (almost) completely won over.

Chapter 1 The Learners immediately allayed my fears that a joint 'literacy and ESOL' approach might confuse brand new practitioners, 'diluting' the distinctive subject expertise of adult literacy or ESOL practitioners, or even disadvantaging some or other learners. By clearly unpacking the range of factors (linguistic, personal, educational etc) impacting on learners, and encouraging the reader to look carefully and separately at the oral and written skills learners bring, Schwab sets out the scope of professional insight and understanding required to do the best by all our learners. All in only nine attractively laid out pages too!

The slightly longer chapter 2 Approaches to Literacy and Language Learning is a proper introduction to key debates in literacy and ESOL (e.g. skills vs social practices; cognitive vs social theories of learning; even the pros and cons of ESOL frameworks such as PPP) but makes these entirely accessible to new teachers by the skilled use of examples and illustrations from both inside and outside the classroom. This is a really excellent introduction to learning theory for literacy and ESOL teachers.

The next chapter looks at The teaching and learning cycle. As throughout the book, this chapter manages to be most succinct without ever feeling sketchy or superficial. Every chapter also uses a small and carefully selected range of references and provides ideas for further reading. Schwab returns to planning and teaching in later chapters on The four skills (which skilfully integrates and, where necessary, differentiates, ESOL and adult literacy concerns) and Planning learning for inclusive practice, ensuring that a very sound range of pedagogical principles and practice are discussed.

The three remaining chapters, which focus on the trainee teacher's own development as a professional, are contributions by other authors, all of them experienced teacher educators and academics at UCL Institute of Education London. The chapter Language knowledge addresses the need for literacy and ESOL practitioners to develop their understanding of language (examined here under four headings: word, sentence, text, phonology). However, presented without a language or literacy learning context, or the possibility of identifying individual learner needs, there is the danger that new practitioners will be encouraged to study and then teach 'grammar' out of context. The hope (here, and in general) is clearly that practitioners will use their developing linguistic knowledge to underpin their work in supporting learners' language and literacy development. Bearing this in mind, this chapter of the book may need the additional guidance of a teacher

educator to ensure that it supports good practice in literacy/communication or ESOL teaching.

The Teaching Practice chapter is at times a little prescriptive for my taste, but many brand new teachers will undoubtedly find it very supportive. In the Professionalism and CPD chapter, I particularly liked the section on Reflective Practice; like much of this book, it managed to convey the essence of quite sophisticated ideas about teaching in a very clear and accessible way.

The book as a whole is a triumph of clarity and succinctness. It will be an extremely useful resource for intending adult literacy and ESOL teachers at early stages of their professional development – perhaps as pre-course reading for PGCE candidates, or as an accessible 'starting point' for reading in the first year of a part time teaching qualification. It could also be an excellent resource for managers or teacher educators who wish to develop CPD for ESOL and adult literacy/functional skills tutors in FE or other post-16 contexts. There are ready-designed tasks throughout the book that can be used or adapted for this purpose.

Some selected recommended resources for learning literacies

We hope the following list will be of interest to any literacy practitioner, whether embarking on a PGCE or other professional course, or wishing to read something to inspire their thinking and practice in a less formal way. We believe they provide a very good introduction to looking at literacies, and we know many course participants have found them to be clear and useful for their professional development.

They are mainly oriented to literacy teaching but some could also be useful for ESOL or numeracy teachers. Although some are quite old now, we have included them because we believe they still have resonance and relevance for today's literacy practitioners.

Crystal, David (2nd ed. 2004) *Rediscover Grammar with David Crystal*, Harlow: Longman

Crystal, David (2004) *Making Sense of Grammar*, Harlow: Longman

David Crystal has written many books about language, all of them both entertaining and useful. These two companion pieces offer clear and concise information about the grammar of the English language. *Rediscover Grammar* explains the key elements of sentences and the place of different types of phrases in the construction of sentences. *Making Sense of Grammar* goes further with the analysis of grammar by focusing on semantics (the meaning expressed) and pragmatics (the effect conveyed by that meaning).

Duncan, Sam (2012) *Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development*, London & New York: Continuum

This book describes Duncan's research with a group of literacy learners reading a novel together. It is inspiring to read in these days of Functional Skills, of pleasure that literature can bring and how learners can work collaboratively to support each other in gaining meaning from texts. Duncan takes as her starting point the learners' perceptions of the process and what they gained from the experience. Additionally there is a fascinating historical account of reading, in particular reading as a communal and social process.

Fowler, Ellayne and Mace, Jane (eds) (2005) *Outside the classroom: researching literacy with adult learners*, Leicester: NIACE

This book is a valuable professional development tool for several reasons. Firstly, it contains very accessible descriptions of key ideas in adult literacy education, especially the concept of literacy as a social practice (chapter 1) and communities of practice (chapter 2). Secondly, it grew out of a course for literacy teachers, and, illustrating the theoretical content of each chapter, there is a series of engaging learner profiles written by the literacy teachers themselves. Thirdly, it is an introduction to the writing of Jane Mace (a founder member of RaPAL). Her work is a real pleasure to read, being consistently insightful and creative as well as

academic. Other Mace titles include *Playing with time: mothers and the meaning of literacy* and *The give and take of writing: scribes, literacy and everyday life*.

Grief, Sue & Chatterton, Jan (2007) *Developing Adult Teaching and Learning: Practitioner Guides – Writing* Leicester: NIACE

A short and popular guide for teachers, this is practical and easy to read, but based on excellent research and principles. Chapters are organized around key aspects of writing (e.g. introducing learners to writing; writing is a process; looking beyond the classroom; technical aspects; collaborative writing) and the book is full of ideas for teaching and further reading. This is one of a series of accessible guides to good practice, based on NRDC research into effective practice. The series includes other useful titles e.g. on ESOL, Numeracy and Responding to Learners' Lives.

Ivanic, Roz, Edwards, Richard, Barton, David, Martin-Jones, Marilyn, Fowler, Zoe, Hughes, Buddug, Mannion, Greg, Miller, Kate, Satchwell, Candice and Smith, June (2009) *Improving Learning in Colleges: Rethinking literacies across the curriculum*, London & New York: Routledge

This book is based on a two TLRP projects. The first 'Literacies for Learning in Further Education' examined literacy practices in FE colleges in Scotland and England between 2004 and 2007. The projects examined the literacy practices required by learners' courses of study and explored what practices those learners' brought with them and how they could be used to enhance their learning. The second (and smaller) project 'Bilingual Literacies for Learning' worked with a Welsh college and focused on bilingual literacies. There are many useful ideas for developing teaching practices to take into account the huge resource that learners bring with them to college.

There is also a useful DVD, *Literacies for Learning in Further Education*, which offers glimpses into the ways in which the lecturers and researchers gained insights into the literacy practices of FE students and how they used those insights to make changes to their courses.

Hughes, Nora & Schwab, Irene (eds) (2010) *Teaching Adult Literacy: principles and practice*, Maidenhead, Berks: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press

The first ever comprehensive text book for trainee literacy/English teachers – and more experienced tutors will find much of interest here too. The book contains a very useful section of learner profiles and learners' writing, which is referred to throughout the book, and helps link the teaching ideas to real people and their learning. The key central section has substantial chapters on teaching reading, writing, spoken communication, and provides (as the title promises) both practical ideas and a clear introduction to the principles on which such ideas are based. Useful early sections introduce 'Literacy in its social context' and 'Language awareness for literacy teachers'. There are a number of contributing authors, and chapters on 'Dyslexia' and 'Literacy learning for adults with global learning difficulties' provide supportive and informative starting points for new practitioners.

Jacobson, Erik (2012) *Adult basic Education in the Age of New Literacies*, New York: Peter Lang

There has been a burgeoning of books on digital literacies ever since the New London Group produced their classic 'Multiliteracies' in 2000. In particular Gunther Kress's ideas about the issues, which he expanded upon in 'Literacy in the New Media Age', have been highly influential. However, digital literacies is a subject in which research and practice moves on at an astonishing pace which books find hard to keep up with. Jacobson helps us to sit back and consider these changes in a variety of contexts. He discusses new literacy practices that have grown up around technology use and their affordances and what this means for adult literacies education. His analysis covers three areas: learning, teaching and organizing which provides something of interest for everyone involved in adult literacy, language and numeracy education.

Janks, Hilary (2014) with Kerryn Dixon, Ana Ferriera, Stella Granville and Denise Newfield *Doing Critical Literacy: Texts and Activities for Students and Teachers*, New York and London: Routledge

This book is firmly on the side of an ideological view of literacy and is an antidote to Functional Skills. It is first and foremost a practical guide to taking a critical view of texts, with ideas for activities that can be done by teachers or students or both together. The book takes a close look at aspects of language, identity and power as expressed in a broad range of multimodal texts and offers tasks to explore the issues in some depth. As many of the sample texts Janks uses are from Africa, this helps us as Europeans to see things from an unfamiliar angle, but also may make it difficult to use directly with some student groups. However, the texts and activities can be used as models and can easily be adapted.

Maybin, Janet (ed) (1994) *Language and Literacy in Social Practice: a reader*, Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters/The Open University

Now over 20 years old, this collection of edited chapters contains a number of classic studies and is a good book to dip into. Two ethnographic papers are of particular interest. Shirley Brice Heath contributes '*What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School*' from her major study into the different home reading practices of three communities (urban middle class, black working class and white working class) in the Carolinas (USA). This short paper amply illustrates her key thesis: that very young middle class children fit in immediately and do well in school because school and home literacy practices mirror each other. She demonstrates how very young children from other English-speaking communities, being unfamiliar with school 'ways with words' are disadvantaged. Mukul Saxena's paper '*Literacies Among the Panjabis in Southall*' looks at the literacy and language choices of three generations of one multilingual family, and the factors influencing their choices. Brian Street, Paulo Freire, James Paul Gee, Harvey Graff and other well-known writers and thinkers contribute further chapters on cultural, historical and political aspects of language and literacy.

Mooney, Annabelle and Evans, Betsy (2015) *Language, Society and Power: an introduction 4th Edition* London: Routledge

This is a book written for undergraduate students of English language, communication, media or related subjects, rather than specifically for literacy teachers, but it is recommended to anyone interested the social dimensions of language e.g. to support critical reading and skilled communication. The book examines language variety (with chapters on ethnicity, age and social class) and considers language in the media, politics and everyday talk. This edition has been revised to include material from social media, newspapers, YouTube etc., and there is a companion website with video and audio clips, and links to further reading. Previous editions of this book (all with the same title, but with different authors over the years) would also be worth buying second-hand.

Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

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

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

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

Guidelines for contributors

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

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

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

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

1. Ideas for teaching

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

2. Developing Research and Practice

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

3. Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives

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

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

Reviews

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

Submitting your work

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

What happens next?

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

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

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