

# RaPAL

Conference 2015 Plus



# Journal

# The Research and Practice in Adult Literacies Network

## Welcome

Research and Practice in Adult Literacies (RaPAL) is the only UK-wide organisation that focusses on the role of literacies in adult life. We promote effective and innovative practices in adult literacies teaching, learning and research; and support adult literacies practitioners and researchers. We enjoy engaging in debates that touch on English language and literacy, numeracy and digital skills across homes, communities and workplaces. Through our members, digital journals, conferences and fora, policy and advocacy work, we are active in Europe and have international links.

## What we do

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

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We are a friendly group – open to new members and new ideas. Please contact us with any contributions (views, comments, reports and articles) and do not be put off if you are new to the field or if you have not written for a publication before. 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.

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

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# Editorial

Sarah Freeman, Anne Reardon-James and Yvonne Spare

The October 2015 conference held jointly by UCU, NIACE, NATECLA and RaPAL came as a challenge: 'Skills for Life? English, maths and ESOL for 21st Century Citizens'. The title suggested on the one hand that this could be additional training for those of us already immersed in a government run, strict, rigorous, results-focussed system for keeping the qualifications rolled out. Alternatively, the 'Skills for Life?' suggested that delegates might be questioning how fit-for-purpose our current programmes are. What is striking is that those who spoke in the conference and contributed to the journal are all enthusiastic and optimistic about the possibilities for literacies, when delivered with sensitivity, within and outside the classroom.

In this edition there are articles and book reviews that are about examining feasible, tried and up to date ways for situating adult literacy through other contexts – outside college, outside the curriculum; within schools, communities and other venues.

Alex Stevenson's article which opens this Conference 2015 edition sums up the contents of our contributions. Alex explains what the drive towards a 'Citizens' Curriculum' is about: 'More flexible, creative and innovative models are needed to engage and motivate learners and meet the challenge of poor basic language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the context of rapid social change.' NIACE may have now changed its name to Learning and Work Institute but we can be thankful that Alex continues to manage the 'Citizens' Curriculum pilot project'. Alex heralds new terminology and the use of the expression 'capabilities' rather than 'skills' to describe the potential in adults' agency and ability.

This is followed by a peer-reviewed article about terminology stemming from work carried out and presented at the conference by Sam Duncan and Irene Schwab. They advocate seven principles around the use of terminology including precision, the importance of respect and flexibility in particular.

Sallie Condy, also Chair of RaPAL, spoke at the conference about provision for adult literacy in Scotland, which has remained focussed on enabling adults most recently through The 'Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020' (ALIS2020) working on the basis that skills developed must be 'life-wide'. This interview opens our eyes to important work that is happening within a neighbouring country.

Following on are four action reports from projects which have successfully run in England: in numeracy, ESOL, The Reading Agency and the WEA. Charlotte Robey reports on the background and implementation of a NIACE pathfinder project which explored the effectiveness of 'flipped classroom' approaches in family numeracy classes supporting a learning culture in the home. Judith Kirsh, NATECLA Treasurer/Trustee and project coordinator, describes the successful running of joint projects between Learning Unlimited and three partner organisations to promote integration of women and children newly arrived in the UK. Genevieve Clark has brought us more uplifting news about the continuing and expanding popularity of Reading Ahead which is an annual incentive scheme that invites people to pick six reads and log, rate and review them in a diary. The scheme focusses on enthusing those providing the books as well as readers in libraries in the community, colleges, prisons and workplaces, offering not just appropriate books but expertise and encouragement. Then, Sarah Frances Lund describes how projects flexibly run through WEA in the Yorkshire and Humber area are working in three different partnerships, namely delivery-only, management and floating, in order to deliver the most effective provision. Sarah's article is a summary of her on-the-ground case-studies PhD research, and is a good model of how findings can be effectively presented and used to support a perceptive and carefully delivered research area.

# Editorial

Our final article takes on globally situated literacy proportions – taking us to the West African country of Sierra Leone, where beside the use of 23 local languages English remains the language of education and commerce. At the same time as our conference was running in October, an organisation, BAICE (promoting international and comparative education), indirectly linked to RaPAL, was running a series of seminars about ‘Bridging the Gap’. RaPAL members attending these seminars learned about some of the widespread projects taking place across the developing world. Harriet LaBouchere works for Lifeline Network International and her article, richly illustrated, is about literacy coming ‘second’ (but nevertheless coming effectively) in post-Ebola Sierra Leone. These articles are like beacons of hope and innovation, where constructive changes and projects are taking place and it might be said that as a whole they indicate a sea change that is occurring in adult literacy, despite the way it has recently been used as economic leverage by governments worldwide. What is happening is that practitioners, students and even in some cases politicians are pointing out that literacy is vital as a quiet, underlying capability to the development and building of confidence for adults everywhere.

Three of the books reviewed for this edition were among a list of ‘Literacy’ books from Routledge that were offered to us for review in the autumn. The linking factor is that they all provide frameworks for approaching literacy afresh. The titles do not spring from adult learning in the UK, but are written by literacy enthusiasts who have produced frameworks for widening the minds and experiences of learners through other skills and topics such as: educating for sustainability (Victor Nolet) reviewed by Anne Reardon James; place-conscious [literacies pedagogy] advocating greater awareness of the geographical and spatial (Barbara Comber) reviewed by Rachel Stuble; and peer approaches for building argument and counter argument (Kuhn, Hemberger and Khait) reviewed by Irene Schwab .

A different book (Zuber-Skerritt, Wood and Louw), reviewed by Tara Furlong, about action leadership in South Africa suggests a participatory framework - Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR); this brings together teaching, research and community through ‘humanising’ techniques.

These titles have been collected from literacies’ global family including Australia (Comber), America (Kuhn et al) UK and South Africa (Zuber-Skerritt, Wood and Louw), suggesting the hunt for more contextualised approaches to literacy is becoming recognised mainstream worldwide.

Remembering Alex Stevenson’s urgent assertion in the article at the beginning of this journal that ‘more flexible, creative and innovative models are needed to engage and motivate learners, we consider that these books are all doing just that – turning us outwards from the classroom to consider other ways to make literacy studies meaningful.

## News from the Sector

### Tara Furlong

*Tara Furlong is RaPAL's webweaver and can be contacted on [webweaver@rapal.org.uk](mailto:webweaver@rapal.org.uk).*

#### **Building Skills for All: A Review of England**

The OECD recently released an analysis of adult literacies in the UK, commissioned by BIS, which made it clear that literacies continue to need to be developed and integrated through all educational levels and forms of provision. *OECD (2016) Building Skills for All: A Review of England policy insights from the survey of adult skills* Available online: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf> and blog post <https://rapal.org.uk/2016/02/01/building-skills-for-all-a-review-of-england/> for more discussion

#### **UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals**

In early April, RaPAL are participating in a three-day seminar on instituting adult literacies in a lifelong learning framework. Under the Millenium Development Goals, adult education was subsumed by attention to compulsory education internationally. We'll be reporting back but if you have any input, please send it to [webweaver@rapal.org.uk](mailto:webweaver@rapal.org.uk).

#### **The new Apprenticeship standards**

Inter- and intra- company co-operation projects are working together to develop these at a right old rate, in response to a government levy on large companies <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/apprenticeship-standards>. English and maths are integral. Businesses contract learning providers; and assessors. The Education and Training Foundation are running training on it all - see <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/events/>.

#### **Functional Skills review**

Employers gave very encouraging feedback on Functional Skills last year <https://rapal.org.uk/2015/05/29/ra-ra-go-functional-skills/>. There is still time to feed in to improvements, with a focus on providers from mid-May to late June this year: <http://www.pyetait.com/fsreform/> for detailed information and <http://feweeek.co.uk/2016/01/14/timetable-for-multi-stage-functional-skills-consultation-unveiled/> for a discursive intro.

#### **More news**

Plenty of FE conferences, sector news etc on the latest Isrn update for anyone interested <https://isrn.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/160311-newsletter-mar16.docx>

## Towards a Citizens' Curriculum

Alex Stevenson

*Alex Stevenson is Head of English, Maths and ESOL at the Learning and Work Institute (L&W) (formerly NIACE). Before joining NIACE as a senior project officer in 2013, he worked in adult learning and further education institutions in a variety of practitioner, curriculum development and management roles in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. The conference workshop this article describes was co-delivered with input from colleagues at two L&W Citizens' Curriculum pilot organisations: Dermot Bryers, Chief Executive at English for Action and Addison Barnett, Basic Skills Manager at St. Mungo's Broadway. Alex can be contacted at [alex.stevenson@learningandwork.org.uk](mailto:alex.stevenson@learningandwork.org.uk).*

The 2015 joint conference on adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL organised by NIACE, RaPAL, NRDC, UCU and NATECLA was an ideal opportunity to present our work on the development of a 'Citizens' Curriculum' to a practitioner audience and obtain participants' feedback to help us shape the next steps of the work. As at the conference workshop, this article explains the background and thinking behind the Citizens' Curriculum and reports on some of the pilots that have been undertaken. It then presents emerging evidence on the impact – for learners, practitioners and providers – and considers the opportunities for future development of the Citizens' Curriculum.

Adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners are well aware of the scale of the challenges we face in tackling basic skills needs in the UK. The 2011 Skills for Life Survey undertaken by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2012) in England found little change from the 2003 survey, with one in six adults having low levels of literacy skills and one in four low levels of numeracy skills. More recently, the Adult Skills Survey (OECD, 2013) found that the UK's literacy proficiency is around average for adults aged 16 – 65 and below average for numeracy. Young adults aged 16 – 24 are more disadvantaged relative to the overall population in both literacy and numeracy. The 2011 census reported that around 850,000 adults are 'non-proficient' in the English language.

We know that language, literacy and numeracy skills are essential in enabling adults to get on in life and at work. But in the 21st century, adults need a wider range of skills and capabilities to achieve their aspirations, particularly as technology plays a greater role at work and in accessing everyday public services. According to Go ON UK, 23% of adults don't have the basic digital skills they need. One in five adults is unable to apply for a job online or check what day the bins are emptied on the council website. Other capabilities are important too. In 2013, the Money Advice Service reported that 18% of the UK population are over-indebted. In times of economic difficulty, and as new online financial products become readily available, adults' financial capability is more important than ever.

At the same time, data shows that adult (19+) participation in English, maths and ESOL provision is falling. Of course, this is due in part to reductions in the adult education budget, which is increasingly under pressure from the competing range of provision which it is expected to fund. Yet there is also a sense that in the context described above, the traditional discrete provision of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes and qualifications may no longer be sufficient to support adults with the full range of capabilities they need. And perhaps this offer is not always as relevant and engaging to all adults as it might be. At L&W, we believe that more flexible, creative and innovative models are needed to engage and motivate learners and meet the challenge of poor basic language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the context of rapid social change. The Citizens' Curriculum is our response.

Practitioners with longer memories might recall that the concept of a Citizens' Curriculum was a recommendation of Learning through Life (Schuller and Watson, 2009), the report of the NIACE Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning. Our task over the last two years has been to scope and pilot the development of the Citizens' Curriculum, taking it from a recommendation on the page and putting it into practice. Consultations with practitioners and other stakeholders suggested three underpinning principles in the delivery of adult learning provision which embodies a Citizens' Curriculum approach. Firstly, it is locally-led, responding to the needs of a particular community, cohort or set of circumstances. Secondly, it involves active learner participation in co-design of the curriculum content. Thirdly, it involves learning language, literacy and numeracy, interlinked with



health, civic, digital and financial capabilities. We have used the term capabilities deliberately, given its more positive connotations with adults' agency and abilities, rather than a deficit 'skills' model.

The work of our pilots has been crucial in helping us make the Citizens' Curriculum a reality. 'Proof of concept' piloting took place in 14/15 with 16 community learning providers and over 160 learners involved. In 15/16, we have extended the pilots with more of a focus on literacy and numeracy provision, with 13 pilots engaging over 230 learners. Each pilot has interpreted the Citizens' Curriculum to meet the needs of the learners it works with, but the underpinning principles and a Citizens' Curriculum 'health check' carried out by L&W at each site ensure that there is a commonality across the diversity of settings and learner cohorts involved.

At the joint conference workshop, we heard from two of the Citizens' Curriculum pilots. St. Mungo's Broadway, a charity working with homeless adults, described how the Citizens' Curriculum was used in their residential college in Clapham. A weekly timetable, including literacy and numeracy classes and a reading circle, digital sessions, and health and well-being sessions, was developed to support St. Mungo's clients to live independently. A weekly meeting, organised and run by the college residents, served a dual purpose of ensuring that the curriculum content was shaped with learner participation and to provide an opportunity to develop civic capabilities through the opportunity for learners to organise, run and participate in the meeting themselves.

English for Action, a charity working to provide participatory ESOL classes across London, reported on interlinking language with the wider Citizens' Curriculum capabilities. These were used to provide a theme, with participatory methods such as 'active listening' identifying a focus relevant to learners' needs. For example, the theme of health capability led to work on learners' experiences of emergency health services. As well as language and literacy to support accessing health services, learners developed civic capabilities through a better understanding of the different services available and how they are used. Learners also identified and carried out actions they could take to help improve services locally. Throughout the pilot, learning and reflections were shared on a class blog, supporting digital capability at the same time.

Overall, the findings from our 14/15 pilots and emerging evidence from the 15/16 pilots are extremely encouraging. Learners report that the approach is engaging them in literacy and numeracy learning, and they are more positive about progressing into further study and looking for work. They also reported increased confidence to participate in the community and access services, both in person and online. For practitioners, they found the approach helpful in linking the learning to learners' lives. And those who had experienced limited opportunities to adopt co-creation of the curriculum in their practice reported a greater appreciation of the value of doing so, and a keenness to develop this further in their work. For providers, the Citizens' Curriculum was felt to offer a more coherent approach to provision, particularly at Entry Level, which added value to the traditional language, literacy and numeracy offer.

The Citizens' Curriculum is showing great potential to address some of the big challenges we face in adult literacy and numeracy. L&W will be reporting in 2016 on the impact of the pilots in English and maths provision, and plans to conduct follow up research to assess the impact in the longer term. We're also exploring its value in new contexts, such as the workplace and in prisons. We aim to influence policy-makers to adopt the Citizens' Curriculum within the adult learning infrastructure. Recent developments in the sector, such as the move towards local commissioning of learning and skills provision, outcome-based success measures (rather than qualifications) and increased flexibilities over how the adult education budget can be used are all areas where the Citizens' Curriculum could have a role. We'd also like practitioners and providers to help us implement the Citizens' Curriculum across the sector, without waiting for the policy-makers. If you think that Citizens' Curriculum could work in your setting, please get in touch to find out more about opportunities to be involved.

## References

**Department for Business, Innovation and Skills** (2012) BIS Research Paper 81, *2011 Skills for Life Survey: A Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Skills in England*. London: BIS

**OECD** (2013) *Survey of Adult Skills First Results. Country Note: England and Northern Ireland (UK)*. OECD (PDF form)

**Schuller and Watson** (2009) *Learning through Life. The Report of the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning*. Leicester: NIACE

## Innovative Family Numeracy: New models for new challenges

Charlotte Robey and Susannah Chambers

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### Introduction

Between January 2014 and August 2015, NIACE (now renamed, Institute of Learning and Work (L&W)) worked with the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to develop and pilot innovative approaches to recruiting families onto family numeracy programmes. The project supported six national pathfinder projects to develop and pilot new delivery models for family numeracy. The models aimed to be innovative by embedding the use of new technologies and adopting a 'flipped classroom' approach<sup>1</sup> to engage families experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage. This article discusses the findings of the project evaluation which aimed to assess the effectiveness of the approaches developed by the pathfinders. First, the article presents the background and context of the project and describes the project and evaluation methodology. It then moves on to discuss the key findings of the project and their implications for practice.



### Background and context

The scale of the basic skills challenge across England and Wales cannot be underestimated, particularly in relation to numeracy. The 2011 Skills for Life Survey found that eight million adults in England have difficulties with everyday maths (BIS, 2011) and the OECD International Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) found that 24.1 per cent of adults in England and Northern Ireland (8.5 million) score at the lowest level of proficiency in numeracy (BIS, 2013).

These skills shortages have huge implications for adults' wider lives. For example, PIAAC established positive correlations between higher levels of basic skills and outcomes such as levels of employment, wages, health and political and self-efficacy (BIS, 2013). In addition, the same study suggests there is a strong positive correlation between parents' level of education and the numeracy skills of young people, while wider research suggests that low numeracy results in a lack of confidence to support children's learning amongst parents and carers (NIACE, 2013). This suggests that there is a considerable risk that low basic skills can contribute to a generational cycle of disadvantage.

<sup>1</sup> A flipped classroom model reverses the traditional delivery method of learning; tutors use videos and online resources to teach learners outside of the classroom and use class time for collaborative work and projects which consolidate learning.

NIACE Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales found strong evidence that Family Learning programmes have a positive impact on the skills, capabilities and aspirations of children and their parents and carers (NIACE, 2013). The evidence suggested that this type of provision is particularly effective for those who are furthest from the labour market and least likely to engage in learning, resulting in significant outcomes for families across a range of policy agendas, including employability, health and wellbeing, and community involvement.

As a result of these findings, one of the key recommendations of the Inquiry was for adult learning and skills strategies to include Family Learning, and particularly family literacy, language and numeracy programmes, as a method to recruit families who experience disadvantage onto provision. The Innovative Family Numeracy project aimed to act on this recommendation and pilot new approaches to delivering these types of programmes.

### **Project and evaluation methodology**

To deliver the project, NIACE recruited six pathfinders (five in England and one in Wales). The pathfinders worked with a local community partner to develop and deliver their innovative delivery models for family numeracy. Each pathfinder delivered their pilot twice (sequentially, rather than in parallel), which allowed providers to make changes to their model following feedback from learners and reflect on the successes and challenges from the first pilot programme.

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, combining the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Baseline learner data were collected through paper-based questionnaires distributed at the beginning of pilot programmes. Learners were asked to rate their attitude towards learning, confidence in numeracy skills and ability to support their children's numeracy learning on a scale of one to six. In order to evidence any difference made by the pilot, learners completed the same questionnaires at the end of their programme. In total, full sets of questionnaires (both beginning and end) were received from 72 learners.

Telephone interviews were conducted with the key contact from each pilot site at the beginning and end of their first pilot programme. The interviews explored the ways in which pathfinders developed their family numeracy model, plans for delivery, key successes, how challenges were addressed, and how lessons learnt would be built into their second pilots.

Case study visits were undertaken with each of the six pilot sites at the end of their second programme, in order to gain a detailed insight into their delivery models and the outcomes for key stakeholders. Each visit involved face-to-face interviews or focus groups with the key contacts from pilot providers, community organisation partners, tutors and parents/carers.

The remainder of this article discusses the key findings of the evaluation and their implications for practice under the main aims of the project: recruitment of families; delivery of innovative family numeracy models; using technology; and adopting a flipped classroom approach.

### **Recruitment**

The recruitment of families was one of the main challenges for the pathfinders. For some, this was because they were trying to engage target groups with whom they had not previously worked. As a result, it took some time to build relationships and understand the needs of and effective ways to engage families onto the programme. Pathfinders overcame this challenge by working closely with their community partners to develop recruitment approaches which were suitable for their target audience. The community partners had an in-depth knowledge of the needs and interests of pathfinders' target groups and could use this to identify suitable families and refer them onto the programme.

For some of the pathfinders, social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, were very effective ways of raising awareness and recruiting to their pilots. However, pathfinders stressed the importance of using a combination of recruitment methods in order to capture the full range of families eligible to participate, as many do not have the technology or confidence to access social media platforms. Therefore, pathfinders and community partners also

spoke directly to target families at nurseries, libraries and community centres, and produced posters and leaflets and distributed these across the local community.

Despite this combination of approaches, pathfinders still found it difficult to recruit fathers and other male carers onto their programmes. Two pathfinders managed to recruit some fathers by running their pilots at the weekend or in the late afternoon, when families said their fathers were more likely to be free. However, this challenge suggests that more work needs to be done to present Family Learning programmes as an activity which is aimed at fathers and male carers, as well as mothers and female carers.

### Delivery

Each pathfinder consulted with its local community as part of the development of its pilot approach. Because of this, each course was tailored to the context and needs of families, and took a flexible approach to delivery so that as learners' interests and motivations developed, the course content and delivery could be adapted. This ensured that families were able to access the provision at a time and venue suitable for them, and that they continued to engage positively with the learning for the duration of the programme.



The majority of pathfinders delivered their pilots through weekly sessions lasting between two and four hours. However, one pathfinder chose to deliver their courses intensively in the October and February half-terms in response to feedback from the local community that they needed more meaningful activities to engage in during school breaks. Four of the six pathfinders embedded maths into an overarching theme such as health or financial capability, but two were marketed as numeracy courses. Tutors covered a wide range of maths topics with their learners and found that practical, hands-on activities were highly effective in maintaining families' interest and enthusiasm. By the end of the project, three-quarters of parents/carers reported improved confidence in their numeracy skills and four-fifths had more positive attitudes towards maths.

### Using technology

Pathfinders used a range of different technologies in the delivery of their courses. These included smartphones, tablets, interactive whiteboards, computers and video players. Learners were also encouraged to use apps, search for information on the internet, watch videos online, and create shapes, pictures and games using mobile devices. This not only made the learning more fun and interactive, especially for the children, but also enabled pathfinders to build additional flexibility into their courses.

In response to learners' concerns about staying safe online, many of the pathfinders built sessions on e-safety into their programme. This helped support over three-fifths of parents/carers to increase their confidence in using technology and the internet as learning resources. Similarly, some tutors needed some support to develop their skills and confidence to use technology in the delivery of their programmes. Pathfinders found that pairing up tutors who are confident in their digital skills with those who need more experience in using technology can be an effective way of enabling delivery staff to develop their skills and confidence in delivering blended Family Learning approaches.

### Adopting a flipped classroom approach

The extent to which a flipped classroom approach was adopted varied between pathfinders. All of the

pathfinders set families homework or activities to complete at home, encouraging them to continue their learning outside of sessions. However, some tutors found it challenging to engage families in substantial independent learning outside of the classroom. In order to achieve this, it was important for learners to be provided with practical activities and the resources (both online and physical) they needed to participate in learning between sessions. Pathfinders found that using technology supported the implementation of a flipped classroom approach as it provided the opportunity for learners to engage through distance learning and gave them easy access to a range of different activities.

Where the flipped classroom approach was implemented successfully, it supported families to develop a learning culture in the home and encouraged them to continue learning in-between sessions and after the programme has finished. As a result, three-quarters of parents/carers increased their confidence to support their children's numeracy learning, and it is a reasonable supposition, on the basis of the evidence outlined in the Inquiry, that this is not only likely to close the gap in children's educational attainment but also break the intergenerational cycle of low numeracy skills experienced by families furthest from learning.



### Conclusions

By adopting and building on the successful approaches developed and evaluated in this project, Family Learning providers can improve the numeracy levels of learners of all ages. These models have the potential to provide a cost-efficient way of tackling the basic skills challenge facing the UK by taking an intergenerational approach to supporting skills development, thereby providing multiple and significantly positive outcomes for adults and children alike. The findings of the evaluation suggest that Family Learning as an approach fits well with the current government's aims to prioritise 'investment in education from childcare to college' (Spending Review 2015, Section 1.6) and the partnership working and community-led provision developed through this project could support the national move towards increased devolution and localised services.

For more detail on the evaluation and to access the resources developed through the project, please visit [www.family-numeracy.org.uk](http://www.family-numeracy.org.uk).

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## Integration for ESOL workshop

Judy Kirsh

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### Introduction

In this article, I look at some of the ways in which three recent European Integration Fund (EIF) projects supported women ESOL learners to integrate into life in the UK. The projects were led by Learning Unlimited (LU) in collaboration with partner organisations. All three projects provided direct ESOL teaching and had a strong underpinning commitment to build bridges between the classroom and the local community, local organisations and other service providers. The LU team, partners and ESOL teachers sought to empower the TCN<sup>1</sup> women learners by building their self-esteem, confidence, knowledge and skills by encouraging their active participation in the range of activities on offer, both at and away from their centres.

### Overview of LU's EIF projects

- Welcome to the UK (WUK) (2010-2013) was a wide-ranging, multi-strand, international three-year project delivered in association with Blackfriars Settlement, the British Council, the Institute of Education, Southwark Council and the UK Bangladesh Education Trust (UKBET).
- Active Citizenship and English (ACE) (2013-2015) built on the success of Welcome to the UK, supporting more than 150 women over two years. This multi-strand project was delivered in London in partnership with Blackfriars Settlement, Working Men's College and the Institute of Education.
- Parents' Integration through Partnership (PIP) (2014-2015) was an innovative, London-based multi-strand project designed to support the language learning and integration of 118 non-EU mothers of school children at partner primary schools and children's centres in the London boroughs of Haringey and Lambeth. It was delivered as part of the GLA's EIF project: English: the key to integration.

### Key approaches

Involving the learners in activities and events outside their ESOL classes was crucial in promoting integration and empowerment. Approaches included:

- training and supporting ESOL learners to become befrienders
- supporting ESOL learners in finding and taking up volunteering opportunities
- enabling ESOL learners to take a proactive role in organising and running events
- supporting ESOL learners to become writers, researchers and film-makers.



All the projects provided opportunities for learners at all levels to get involved in something outside the classroom, e.g. going on an outing, having a befriender, attending an event, participating in a 'taster' or attending an additional short course such as baking or ICT.

1) Third Country National, i.e. someone from outside the European Union area

### Volunteer befrienders



This was a key element of each of the projects. As well as training local volunteers to become befrienders, a significant number of former ESOL learners wanted to have this opportunity as they felt they had a huge amount to contribute: shared, common life experiences of moving and settling in the UK, barriers and challenges, opportunities, etc. This strand also gave the volunteer befrienders an opportunity to gain new skills, knowledge and experience, as well as make new friends, get free training and a DBS check, and valuable experience to add to, or kick-start, their CVs.

### Volunteering strand



The ACE project introduced an explicit focus on volunteering to support higher-level learners into employment and to help them gain some work experience. Volunteering was also seen to present valuable opportunities for learners to build their self-esteem and confidence through building relationships and interacting with staff and/or the general public in a range of settings. We involved local volunteering agencies and encouraged the partner centres (especially the ESOL teachers) to integrate 'volunteering' into their curriculum.

Opportunities arose for all learners to be involved in centre-based volunteering and off-centre volunteering. For example, at Working Men's College learners supported some of the centre's fundraising events such as World AIDS Day and International Women's Day. At other centre-based events, learners helped by meeting and greeting attendees, running or helping with a stall or assisting with the centre's AGM. High-level learners took responsibility for organising the Safety at Home events at both Blackfriars Settlement and Working Men's College. This involved liaising with many different people, organisations and service providers and included interpreting during the event for lower-level learners. Afterwards learners reported that, although challenging, this opportunity had enabled them to develop valuable skills and had significantly boosted their confidence and self-esteem.

Off-site, learners volunteered in a wide variety of ways such as being a guide at an English Heritage property, as a children's centre support worker, as a 'mother-tongue' Saturday school teacher, as an IT teacher at a community organisation and several learners worked in charity shops. Some volunteering opportunities led to actual jobs such as teaching Bengali at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London and permanent employment as a children's centre worker.

### ACE literacy project strand

This strand involved the collaboration of befrienders, learners and the LU team in the production of a unique series of 'easy readers' for ESOL/literacy learners. Befrienders and learners who wanted to get involved worked together, supported by LU, to write stories about funny, personal aspects of everyday life in the UK. Each story

was then developed and graded at two levels (Entry 1 and Entry 2+) by the LU team. As well as meaning that authentic real life experiences were being used and shared, this also meant that mixed-level groups of learners could read the same story at different levels. The books have supporting activities which can be downloaded from the LU website; they are also available in some libraries as well as the British Library and the BBC.



### ACE research strand

We offered befrienders the opportunity to train as practitioner researchers as part of the UCL Institute of Education's investigation into the impact of befriending on ESOL learners. 12 befrienders received training and undertook research with their learners, and their findings contributed to the final impact assessment report.

### Participatory film makers

In the WUK project, learners and volunteers in both Bangladesh and the UK were involved in participatory video projects facilitated by InsightShare. This was an innovative process which provided an opportunity for participants to develop film-making skills and make their own films describing their personal feelings about migration and experiences of settling in the UK to a wider audience.



In the PIP project, one of the teachers was an experienced participatory teacher who wanted to ensure lessons reflected learners' real concerns. Her learners were very concerned about the imminent closure of a local children's centre so, as well as using this as the basis for language work in their ESOL classroom, they started attending and participating in public meetings and sending tweets. Supported by InsightShare, they made a participatory video about the importance of the centre for themselves and their children; they organised film screenings which were attended by other parents, centre staff, members of the public and local councillors. They issued press releases and as a result, a few were invited to make a presentation to the Haringey Council cabinet meeting and two learners were interviewed on Breakfast TV





### Benefits to learners

Benefits to the learners in terms of language skills as well as self-esteem and confidence were astonishing. They discovered new interests and made new friends, surprising us as well as themselves with what they achieved.

In their final evaluations, learners commented positively on the life-changing impact the project had on them:

*'Now I feel more confident, I can speak with other persons, I can do more for myself ... go to the hospital, doctor ... before I can't do it ... everything is new for me ... now I feel better ... everything in my life has changed because of this project.'* (ACE learner, Blackfriars Settlement)

*'I wanted to get another job when I started this course. I knew I needed to improve my English to get a better job and get qualifications. This course has given me that ... opportunity to improve my speaking, reading, writing. I've made friends and had opportunity to volunteer and then I got a job. The course helped me integrate into British society ... learn about customs, society, history, culture, British life.'* (ACE learner, Working Men's College)

*'.. if you help someone to achieve a certain task in life which they are struggling with, it's a very rewarding thing to you, because you know you've taken somebody from one step to another, so ... I'm very proud to be a befriender in this project.'* (WUK befriender, Blackfriars Settlement).

So, can you use any of these ideas/approaches to help your ESOL learners integrate more fully into life in the UK? Here are some suggestions:

- find free activities which learners organise themselves, e.g. trips to local markets, visits to museums and art galleries
- invite visitors to speak to the class, e.g. police, health professionals
- support learners in organising an event, e.g. 'Safety at home', 'Health fair', 'Rail safety' - the planning, pre- and post- event work can be done in class.

You can find out more about Learning Unlimited by visiting their website.

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## Partnerships in ESOL delivery with Workers' Education Association in Yorkshire & Humber

Sarah Frances Lund

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### The Workers' Educational Association

Founded in 1903, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is a national charity and the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education. The organisation specialises in providing lifelong-learning opportunities and tackling economic and social disadvantage through learning by providing high quality, student-centred and tutor-led education for adults from all walks of life. They bring education into the heart of communities, helping people learn a variety of subjects – from Maths, English and skills for employment, through health and wellbeing courses, to cultural studies that help students broaden their horizons and community engagement programmes that encourage active citizenship.

### The Project and NIACE, 2015

This brief article summarises part of the discussion in a full-length report I produced at the culmination of the six-month fieldwork-grounded research project. The research project was developed in partnership with the Y&H region, one of nine regional divisions of the national organisation (the full report is available from the WEA). The aim of the project was to work with Y&H to co-develop a review of the way in which WEA courses are delivered in the region, in other words, how they do what they do. Special thanks go to Sharon Watson and Marie Leadbitter of the WEA for their involvement in the project, their assistance and guidance, and for helping me to connect The University of Sheffield with the Y&H region.

The fieldwork involved visiting seven case studies of WEA ESOL provision in Y&H. The case studies demonstrated, as much as possible for a small-scale study, the range of environments in which WEA ESOL provision is delivered by Y&H. The classes visited were selected to showcase the range of ESOL levels taught, the different partnerships involved in ESOL delivery, a number of contrasting class spaces and the diversity of learner cohorts reached. One of the aims of the original research project was to identify how Y&H deliver WEA ESOL and why it is delivered that way. Through the fieldwork, the complexity of the profile of individuals learning with the Y&H region of the WEA in each class cohort became apparent. In order to deal with this diversity, the partnerships in the WEA have been developed responsively, reacting to the different contexts of learning need across the region.

In a workshop at the 2015 Skills for Life? English, Maths and ESOL for 21st Century Citizens Conference jointly organised by NIACE (now the Learning and Work Institute), RaPAL, NRDC, UCU and NATECLA at University College London, Marie Leadbitter and I explored how Y&H deliver WEA ESOL courses to the community, and how that is achieved with a variety of partner organisations.

We presented the difficulties of providing ESOL to WEA class cohorts characterised by incredibly varied personal histories and educational aspirations. In the workshop, we aimed to highlight the range of partners with whom the Y&H region of the WEA achieve the difficult task of reliable, safe and socially inclusive ESOL learning.

The arrangement of involvement and responsibility between the Y&H region of the WEA and their partners is known as the partnership agreement. During my research, I developed a description of the different partnerships operating in the region. I now turn to a summary of the partnership categorisations I developed, and then subsequently presented with Marie Leadbitter in the workshop.

## Categorising Partnerships

During the fieldwork, I visited three very different schools, a mental wellbeing service, two classes organised through a local charity, a children’s centre, and a class run ‘in house’ at the WEA’s own facilities. During the visits I conducted interviews with practitioners and organisational staff and had conversations with the people attending each class. In the interviews I asked for help characterising the class attendees and the relationship between the Y&H region of the WEA and the partner involved in delivery in each setting. From those discussions and my own observations, I developed a description of the range of partnerships operating at the examples I visited.

The case study partnerships shared three main qualities:

- Each Y&H WEA ESOL course is delivered in an arrangement tailored as much as possible to the course attendees’ requirements. Partner contacts reported confidence in tutors’ and area organisers’ appreciation of the needs, aspirations and agendas of their attendees. The tailoring of courses to suit course cohorts was reported to be a contributing factor to what was described overall as an understanding approach to attendees’ needs (e.g. topic focus of the course or focus on skill such as reading or speaking skills).
- The management and development of partnerships in ESOL provision in each case involved Y&H working with much smaller venues and organisations. Interviewees at each case study characterised the communication with Y&H WEA organisers as personal and detailed, involving checks on ESOL provision to ensure WEA courses continued be sensitive to the partners’ requirements. This responsive approach was felt to be a crucial reason for the success of relationships in providing WEA ESOL courses through the Y&H region of The WEA.
- At each case study location ESOL was the main, and in some cases the only, WEA course subject provided by Y&H in those locations.

Despite these similarities in the case studies, the partnerships differed from site to site, and those differences helped me to develop three distinct categories for the characteristics of those relationships. As such, I was able to organise the examples of WEA ESOL that I visited during the project into three different partnership types<sup>1</sup>: delivery-only partnerships, management partnerships, and detached/floating partnerships. Table 1 demonstrates the three types of agreement into which partnerships can be grouped.

<u>Table 1 – Partnerships</u>		
Delivery-Only	Management	Floating
Partner contact at the partner oversees the maintenance of ESOL courses and is in contact with attendees. They deal with recruitment and advertising.	The Y&H region manage the ESOL course. The tutor and Y&H Area Organiser are responsible for recruitment, management of the course and booking the venue.	The WEA deliver an ESOL course in partnership with another group or organisation.  Recruitment is organised by the partner from whom Y&H deliver the course.  The course is not fixed to a venue.
WEA delivers course content only.		

1) The partnership categories were presented to regional managers and Y&H area organisers in a focus group arranged to discuss the final report from the research project. Although these terms and the justification for the categories were met with approval, they are new labels to Y&H and are not widely used as yet.

### **Delivery-Only Partnerships**

The term 'delivery-only' does not mean a 'hands-off' approach to WEA ESOL provision. Rather, it signifies the partner's main requirement from Y&H is the delivery of the WEA ESOL course by a WEA tutor. At the mental wellbeing facility, the ESOL course existed within the wider concern of providing a holistic wellbeing service and so attendees of that particular course required a more involved level support than the WEA alone would have been able to provide. In the primary school examples, staff at the schools recruited the cohort for classes, maintained contact with people outside the classroom and helped Y&H to develop provision specific to their attendees' needs.

The case studies in the primary schools and the mental wellbeing service were the partners in these examples of delivery-only partnerships. In each case, a 'partner contact' had close links or relationships with the attendees and so was responsible for supporting the individuals on the course closely. Central to the success of these three partnerships is the role of partner contact. The partner contact provides dedicated management of the provision at these sites and it is their presence which distinguishes these examples from the other case study examples I visited.

### **Management Partnerships**

In a 'management partnership', the venue for provision delivery, advertising, and contacting prospective and existing learners are all managed (i.e. facilitated) by the Y&H region of the WEA. During the field work, discussions about partnership agreements and the varying responsibilities addressed by different parties, management partnerships were reported to reflect the majority of Y&H WEA ESOL provision. Despite reports that this type of arrangement is common across the region, only one of the case studies I visited could be considered a management partnership.

At the children's centre, the tutor/organiser for the class was responsible for development and management of the course, including organising use of the learning space. In this case study the children's centre functioned as a 'venue partner'. The staff employed at the centre reported their willingness to assist Y&H by taking messages from attendees and recording expressions of interest in WEA ESOL learning, because the centre is a local community service. In this management partnership there was a clear a difference in the relationship that Y&H have with the site of provision and the extent to which the continuation of the course is the responsibility of Y&H when compared with other delivery-only spaces.

### **Floating Partnerships**

The final grouping of classes that were part of this project are labelled 'floating partnerships'. The two courses run in partnership with the local charity are intended to provide a 'next step' into the community for those who have previously been assisted through a one-to-one at-home learning programme.

The arrangements for these two courses were characterised by the flexibility of location. Neither the charity nor Y&H have connections with the venues used, other than the use of the spaces for the delivery of the WEA ESOL classes (one course ran in a local library for example). As such, these courses are flexible and may move to alternative venues should it be required for any reason – hence the label 'floating'. At both of the sites visited, the charity organised and recruited onto the ESOL courses but the WEA tutor and organiser were the main contact for attendees for the course. There was no partner contact in these examples and the WEA were not wholly responsible for the continuation of the course.

One advantage of the relationship with the charity is the potential for the delivery of a number of courses at various venues with the same partner. Another advantage is that attendees may be signposted to other Y&H WEA courses for different levels of ESOL within the same partnership relationship.

### **ESOL Partnerships in Yorkshire & Humber**

The categories I identified to highlight the differences in partnerships in the region offer a description of ESOL delivery in the region as a tri-part model of partnership types. In terms of how WEA ESOL is delivered in Y&H, the model describes what Y&H are responsible for and what the partner is responsible for in each case. Through these three categories of partnership, Y&H have developed a number of successful relationships managing and delivering successive WEA ESOL courses.

When discussing how the partnership operating in each case study related to other partnerships in the region, those I spoke to during the fieldwork often commented that 'no two partnerships are the same'; these comments reflect why partnership agreements in the region vary. There is a need in community ESOL provision for the agreements with partners to be developed on a case-by-case basis because the people who study WEA ESOL in the community with the Y&H region are hugely diverse. This approach, as identified by interviewees and in my own observations, has resulted in WEA ESOL provision in Y&H which is flexible and is responsive to the local contexts around the region. The approach draws on the WEA's core aim to be a reactive organisation, developing learning provision for adults where and when it is needed; the partnership similarities in the examples I visited reflect this core endeavour.

In this brief summary I have described the range of partnerships with whom Y&H achieve the difficult task of reliable, safe and socially inclusive ESOL learning, and how and why they do this. In a broader context of increasingly challenging financial support for WEA ESOL provision, the need to work innovatively to develop partnerships which respond to community needs is greater than ever. The case studies in this small-scale research project demonstrate that a defining characteristic of WEA ESOL partnerships in Y&H is the tailoring of partnership arrangements, and the courses provided, to respond to external partners' needs. In the future, these characteristics of community ESOL provision are likely to be crucial to the continuation of successful support of the communities for whom WEA ESOL is extremely important.

## Why Terminology is Important

Sam Duncan and Irene Schwab

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### Introduction

This paper stems from the work of an ELINET seminar held in Hamburg in January 2015. The seminar participants recognised the vital importance of ensuring that in our research and practice around adult literacy we are mindful of the impact our use of language can have in shaping impressions of the needs and capabilities of adult literacy learners. We considered the range of terminology used to talk about adult literacy and adult literacy learners and agreed upon seven guiding principles that should inform our choices of language when writing or speaking about adult literacy.

This short paper explores the reasons why we need principles for our use of adult literacy terminology and examines the thinking behind the particular principles we have chosen. The full version can be found on the ELINET website

### Why do we need guiding principles?

#### Precision

Much of the language that is commonly used to talk about adult literacy lacks precision and it is not always clear what is intended by certain terms. For example, what does 'low literacy' mean? What should we understand when we hear that someone 'lacks the literacy to function in daily life'? We will each interpret such an expression in different ways, with the danger that the issues which we so much want to discuss and explore become clouded, lost, confused, and conflated. One problem, then, is that the language we use is often not sufficiently precise. If an advocacy or policy organisation refers to the 'problem' of 'the low-skilled population,' and if by 'low-skilled' what is actually meant is adults with literacy skills below a certain level or expectation, this is an example of language lacking precision. If we mean literacy skills, we should specify literacy skills.

#### Respect

Another problem is that the language we use can be offensive. If we use the term 'low-skilled' to mean 'low literacy' we are equating a lack of literacy skills with a lack of other skills, with a lack of any skills. This is not just imprecise, but also offensive to adults struggling with literacy, because it is communicating that they have no other skills.

#### About whom are we actually talking?

Another challenge is the way we talk about 'people with low literacy skills' without distinguishing who these people are and how they may relate to our advocacy or policy point. We may be talking about adult literacy learners, or we may be talking about the wider population of adults with a variety of literacy skills. We may be referring to adults who have joined provision (either voluntarily or otherwise) or to adults who may be judged as having adult literacy needs by the expectations of others. One group have made a decision (or had it made for them) to set about improving their literacy skills; the other group includes those who have made a conscious decision not to join a class because they feel that they are already able to meet the demands placed on their literacy; those who might want to join a class but for one reason or another have not yet done so, and those who have never considered, or had the opportunity to consider, formally improving their literacy. These people are clearly in different positions vis à vis their literacy and have different attitudes towards literacy use and learning.

### **Different traditions, different expertise**

A further challenge is posed by the fact that adult literacy experts come from such a range of disciplinary or professional backgrounds. This richness makes us stronger, but it does present the challenge that we cannot assume that we share common understandings. We need to be more explicit about what we mean. To take a specific example, one of the seven principles reiterates a phrase well-known to those who worked in adult literacy teaching in England in the 1980s, ‘a beginner reader is not a beginner thinker.’ Those from this tradition may feel the phrase does not need repeating, that we have ‘moved on’ or that it is just too obvious. Yet to others from different traditions, this phrase has a new and important contribution to make in shaping the way we think about, and work with, adult literacy learners.

### **Working across many languages**

Within ELINET we have the additional challenge of our inter-language working. We are working across many languages, with most people translating to and from other languages into our common working language of English. There is ample opportunity for slippages in what we think we mean and, if we are to collaborate effectively to argue for the importance of adult literacy in public policy, we should ensure that our linguistic differences do not mask conceptual differences.

### **The tension between the complexity of literacy and the desire for precision**

The fact that literacy is complex is at the heart of our terminology problem. Here we will try to examine the different ways in which literacy or adult literacy is complex.

### **What is literacy?**

The term literacy is used in different ways. The dominant contemporary UK English-language understanding of ‘literacy’ (in both every day and educational usage) is reading and writing (EU High Level group of Experts on Literacy, 2012) although some argue that the term ‘literacy’ should include spoken communication (see, for example, the English Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, (DfES, 2001a) Defining literacy as reading and writing does not imply, however, a narrow, or ‘utilitarian’ vision of literacy, providing we acknowledge that reading and writing are both themselves immensely broad, and include a range of purposes, pleasures and meanings, closely bound up with issues of personal identity, community belonging, culture, power and desire (Duncan, 2012; Hughes and Schwab, 2010; Pahl, 2014).

### **The Literate-Illiterate Binary**

The word ‘literate’ always carries with it the word ‘illiterate’; these terms are bound together in a binary relationship, with the implication that one is either literate or illiterate. Today, the term ‘illiterate’ with its associations of ‘ignorance’ or ‘stupidity’, is rightly shunned for being offensive. But it is also inaccurate; anyone living in a literate society uses literacy to a certain degree and so is not ‘illiterate’.

‘Illiteracy’, like ‘literacy’, is always relative, based on often ill-defined expectations. As Freire (1985) pointed out, the term ‘illiterate’ is usually used when we expect that someone should be doing something with written language and yet we feel they are not. We should reject the idea of literacy as a binary concept, focusing instead on a spectrum of literacy uses, where individuals engage with literacy to different degrees, with different levels of confidence, for different purposes and with different meanings.

### **The spectrum and its invisible dividing lines**

Replacing a view of literacy as a binary concept with a view of literacy as a spectrum may make more sense in many ways, but it still presents challenges, particularly in the world of education. If we are all on a spectrum of literacy, and our literacy is always developing, how can we talk about particular literacy needs along that spectrum? Indeed, by definition a spectrum is not limited to a specific set of values but can vary infinitely. It is not possible precisely to define the spectrum of literacy practices in which adults engage. However, education provision usually requires the establishment of large and small distinctions – levels, items, teaching points, grades - and a spectrum, by nature makes this hard.

We could try to divide up the spectrum by talking in levels. PIAAC and the English Adult Literacy Core Curriculum each use levels but in different ways. In the English Adult Literacy Core Curriculum levels are used to describe and organise adult literacy provision and assessment, whereas in PIAAC reading levels are used to classify a population. They both provide valuable precision; they allow us to organise and standardise our educational offer and to draw attention to levels of need within the population. But they also present challenges. For example, we need to be cautious of imagining that these levels describe a person, rather than what someone can do at a particular time. We also need to remember that when we label someone as being at a certain literacy level, this is based on a specific assessment process, which may or may not relate to the kinds of literacy practices which an individual is required to, or desires to, perform in her life.

### **Literacy as contextual**

One of the arguments for not using binary terms such as 'literate' and 'illiterate' is that everyone living in a literate society uses literacy in some ways and in some contexts. We recognise that literacy is complex because it is culturally and socially bound; it is contextual. This has been theorised in different ways, for example through Street's distinction between autonomous and ideological models of literacy (Street, 1984; Street, 2003); through the New Literacy Studies and its view of literacy as social practice; through the idea of dominant and invisible literacies, where Baynham has argued that existing social and cultural power relations make some practices 'invisible' while others are dominant; and through the concept of multiliteracies which takes into account the multilingual, multipurpose, multimodal realities of contemporary literacies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000).

These practices run across the life course: they are 'lifelong', as is our literacy development (Duncan, 2014). Literacy is also life-wide, enacted differently for the various domains of our lives. We carry out multiple literacy practices, in multiple life domains and for multiple purposes. Our literacy use is multimodal, including digital modes and, often, multilingual (remembering also language variety). This means literacy is complex and evolving, and literacy development is therefore continuous and varied (Gregory and Williams, 2000).

It is clear from the above that perfect terminology is impossible. It means that we cannot aim for a list of 'good' and 'bad' terms to use. What we can do, instead, is agree on a list of principles to guide our decisions around terminology use, to make us more aware of the consequences, or advantages and disadvantages of different choices, so that we can come a little closer to communicating what we want to communicate, and so that we can stake our claim as literacy experts and work against uses of language which are disrespectful and discriminatory (because if we don't, who will?).

### **The seven principles**

We propose that when we write or talk about literacy we aim for terminology that:

1. provides precision appropriate to communicative purpose
2. communicates transparently and simply, as appropriate to audience, purpose and context
3. is respectful
4. is positive (where possible avoids contributing to a deficit model)
5. recognises that people are not at levels, skills are
6. recognises that 'a beginner reader [or writer] is not a beginner thinker'
7. is appropriate to linguistic and cultural context, as well as to audience and purpose

#### **1. Provides precision appropriate to communicative purpose**

As noted above, the language we use to describe aspects of literacy use or literacy learning is often imprecise. How do we know when someone has moved from having 'poor' literacy to having 'good' or even 'adequate' literacy? Adequate literacy is often called 'functional' literacy, but what would adequate or functional literacy look like? What we may consider 'functioning' in terms of society, home, school and work is a moveable feast depending on your



home, your school, your work and your wider life interests and endeavours. What might be the norm in urban areas of Western Europe is not necessarily the norm everywhere.

To describe the complex nature of what literacy is and how it can be applied to people, we need to have the terminology to match. Each time we have to use a term, we need to think about the purpose for which it is needed and the degree of precision that is needed to fulfil that purpose. For some purposes we need less precision, but for others, a lack of precision could be misleading or dangerous, leading to statements, even policy, being made on assumptions and media hyperbole rather than evidence. The use of precise terminology is a key element in our repertoire of tools for being able to communicate exactly what we mean to say.

## **2. Communicates transparently and simply, as appropriate to audience, purpose and context**

Everyone involved in the world of literacy has an interest in communication. One of the aims of literacy practitioners is to make text accessible to everyone. Problems accessing texts are only partly to do with the reader; it is also incumbent on the writer to make their words readable. Bureaucratic organisations are often accused of producing ‘inconsiderate texts’: those that have characteristics that adversely affect comprehension. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in Ireland supports ‘peoples’ rights to understand text and the spoken word’ (NALA). As a way of respecting our readers, it is important that our message is clear and unambiguous.

This does not necessarily mean that we should not use specialist terminology. Sometimes a specialist term is important in conveying a precise concept and other similar terms will not do. For example, the term literacies as opposed to literacy conveys the multifaceted nature of literacy practices. We can choose to use an imprecise term that everyone knows but which might not convey exactly what we want it to or we can decide to use a precise term and ensure that we explain it so that readers are aware of its meaning and its use becomes increasingly more common and more accepted by a wide range of people. In this way we can influence terminology use for the benefit of our adult literacy work.

We need to model what we see as best practice in putting our ideas across to a range of specialists, the wider media-reading public and, most importantly, the people we are talking about, who are working to improve their own literacy (and those not yet working on it but who might do so in the future).

## **3. Is respectful**

Everyone wants and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Literacy practitioners are often working with people who have been told that they are failures - unintelligent or incapable of learning with nothing to offer society. Some adults hide the fact that they find reading and writing difficult to avoid negative comments and many have talked about how difficult it is to take the first steps back into education where they feel they were stigmatised and humiliated earlier in their lives. Literacy practitioners know that avoiding a deficit model and building self-respect is an important pre-requisite for building cultural capital and enabling learning to take place.

Some current uses of terminology stand out because their lack of precision makes them deeply disrespectful. It is not respectful, for example, to refer to ‘the low-skilled population’ when what we mean is people who might have many other life skills, but who have literacy skills below an arbitrary level. The people we are referring to might have a great many skills and accomplishments. If someone cannot drive, they would feel it was offensive to call them ‘low-skilled’, so it is equally offensive to call someone low-skilled because they are limited in aspects of literacy. We must always consider the effects of our words on those who are listening to them or reading them.

## **4. Is positive, where possible avoiding contributing to a deficit model**

A deficit model of literacy sees people with limited literacy only in terms of the skills they lack or what they cannot do. It offers a view that implies they need something that only others can give them. It also implies that literacy is a matter of a matter of individual cognition and that individuals with limited literacy have something wrong with their brains or lack intelligence.

An alternative view, such as that espoused by New Literacy Studies, argues that literacy is a social practice, something that people do in particular ways, in particular contexts and for particular reasons. From this viewpoint,

the importance is what people do with literacies, not what they cannot do. Adult literacy teaching approaches based on a social practice theory would work from what someone can do, and from this, extend and develop individuals' skills and practices.

### **5. Recognises that people are not at levels, skills are**

For a teacher in a class, levels are a useful shorthand for what a learner can do and what they might want to work on. It is a way of grouping learners who might want to develop similar skills. For those researching wider populations, levels can be useful to try to understand and communicate what members of that wider population can and cannot do in terms of reading and writing. However, we need to remember that they are only a descriptor of someone's literacy skill and that levels do not and cannot describe a whole person or their literacy practices beyond what is assessed on a particular test. Even as a label to attach to a literacy skill, a level can only characterise a sub-skill or element of learning. For example, someone might be able to read at one level but find writing more difficult and place themselves in a different level for that; or even more specifically they might be able to read some texts more easily than others, for example, computer games more than newspapers. A level can only be determined by assessment via a particular text, at a particular time, in a particular context and says little about other times, other texts in other contexts.

Literacy use is lifelong and life-wide, and literacy development is lifelong and life-wide. Just as individual literacy skills and practices change over time and across contexts, cultural literacy expectations and conventions change too.

### **6. Recognises that 'a beginner reader is not a beginner thinker'**

This quote from a literacy learner (Goode, 1985) takes up the banner for adults who might not have facility with reading and writing, but who live full and successful lives which incorporate many other skills, ideas and achievements. People learn from a variety of sources besides the written word: friends, family and colleagues; TV, radio and online media; experience of doing and watching others do things are all tried and tested methods. Literacy skills are not congruent with cognitive skills or with the potential for developing all sorts of other skills. Without literacy, one can still be outstanding as a musician, visual artist, oral poet, craftsperson, sportsperson, a community or faith leader. One does not need literacy to take part in meetings, discussions and debates; to have opinions and to take actions in support of these. We could rephrase 'A beginner reader is not a beginner thinker' as 'someone with a limited command of literacy is not necessarily someone with limited thinking or other skills'. This is a point which underpins the other principles, and should be repeated again and again.

### **7. Appropriate to linguistic context**

Every language has its own lexicon which is used by practitioners, researchers and policy makers to refer to literacy. These terms may or may not have direct translations into English. Some languages will offer more precision than English for particular concepts.

What 'literate' means in one language is different from what it might mean in another. The term 'literacies' to indicate plurality is preferred by some to the singular 'literacy'. Those who use the term need to make a decision on when and where to use it depending on the context in which it is to be used. In some cases, this might mean using it without definition; in others it would need to be explained and, on occasion, the writer might feel it was inappropriate to use at all. If we are conscious of our purpose and audience, we will be more likely to use language that is appropriate. Being aware of our linguistic and social context will also help us to adhere to some of the other guiding principles; it will help us to be precise in what we are saying (principle 1) and to communicate clearly (principle 2).

### **What next? How can we use these principles?**

We have argued above that we need some guiding principles for use when we talk about adult literacy and we are suggesting seven particular principles to use. These should not be seen as 'rules' but rather as an attempt to lead the discussion about how we define what we are doing and why we believe that certain ways of doing this are clearer and more positive than others. Starting with our key criteria of precision and respect, they could be seen as a checklist to apply to any talking/writing about literacy.

As experts in the field, we should be leading the way rather than just following others. We also need to challenge terms used by politicians and the media which we feel do not meet our guidelines. The guidelines can support us in encouraging others to use more appropriate and less offensive terms.

In our various roles as policy makers, researchers, teachers, advocates we all have to discuss literacy with a variety of others within a large range of contexts. Our audiences might be large or small; expert or non-expert; and we might be talking to those who think like ourselves or we may have to vigorously argue our case. The words we choose to use, as always, should be selected according to our particular communicative contexts and purposes.

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## An insider's view on adult learning in Scotland: Sallie Condry in interview with RaPAL

Interviewee: Sallie Condry

Interviewer & Write up: Sarah Freeman

Scottish literacy work has fascinated many English Adult Literacy specialists for over ten years now. In 2005 the Scottish Curriculum Framework Wheel was presented as an alternative, more learner-centred approach to teaching adults literacy. Sallie Condry works for Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS), a key organisation with over 600 members at the heart of the voluntary sector in Glasgow. As Community Learning and Development (CLD) Service Manager, Sallie provides networking and training opportunities for voluntary sector staff including volunteers, tutors, development workers and managers. The overall theme is CLD, but within this is included adult literacies, ESOL and other related topics. There is a tradition of very strong partnership working among organisations within Glasgow, largely in response to the level and complexity of need within the city, for example poverty indicators suggest that almost half of Glasgow's residents live in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland and in 2012 one third of children in the city lived in poverty (Overview | The Glasgow Indicators Project).

Sallie is the Chair of RaPAL, but it was with her experience as a practitioner in Scotland that she spoke to the NIACE/NATECLA/RaPAL/UCU conference in October 2015 about changes in adult literacies provision and wider CLD in Scotland. The following is our question and answer article summarising some of the key developments from Sallie's perspective.

### The Adult Learning in Scotland Statement of Ambition

#### **Q. The new Statement of Ambition is lifelong, life-wide and learner-centred. How do these expressions apply to the adult literacies programmes?**

Of course we have had a long standing approach to adult literacies work that is based on the interests and motivations of learners, as well as taking into account the start point for each learner and the context of learning. This is what is meant by *learner-centred*. The Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020 (ALIS2020) ten-year strategy continues to underpin this approach, with the ambition that 'we want every citizen in Scotland to have the literacies capabilities necessary to bridge the poverty gap, to understand and shape the world they live in, and to enjoy the rich knowledge and benefits that being able to read, write and use numbers can bring.' (p.1)

In practice, tutors and learners generally negotiate either individual or group learning plans. This of course links back to the ideas behind The Wheel, mentioned in our introduction.

Considering the above ambition from ALIS2020, it is clear that adult literacies learning is presented in context beyond the classroom and is seen as life-wide, i.e. that learning can be relevant to any part of your life: personal, work, family and community. Lastly, lifelong as it suggests, means that there is no age limit on learning from early years through school age to adult learning and this applies equally to literacies learning.

However, sometimes, fitting the learners' needs within funding criteria and funders' targets can be problematic. The development of the Adult Learning in Scotland Statement of Ambition (Adult learning statement - CLD policy - Community learning and development) is an exciting example of how learners really have influenced national activity. At a National Adult Learning Conference at Newbattle Abbey College in March 2013, Mike Russell, the keynote speaker and then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, heard learners' views and ambitions for their own learning but rather than leave it there, learners subsequently worked with the National Strategic Forum for Adult Learning to ensure that their views were reflected in this new national statement.

**Q. Literacy teachers in England were attracted by the Scottish Wheel when it was introduced 10 years ago. Is the wheel still featured in Adult Literacies?**

Yes, the ideas and concepts are still there. The messages about how the learning is to be delivered are consistent, although I am not sure that the Wheel itself is commonly used.

**Q How is the learner-centred approach – “what the learner wants to learn, needs to learn and has to learn” - implemented in education programmes?**

As we have said, the learner-centred approach is embedded within literacies provision and tutors and learners will negotiate learning programmes, typically using group or individual learning plans. Consideration is given to literacies skills but also the knowledge and understanding that enables these skills to be used in particular context in the line with the Social Practice model. The life-wide nature can mean that there are sometimes situations where learners feel more compelled to learn, for example if required to as part of employment programmes. This can create tensions for staff and learners, being against the voluntary ethos of community learning and development.

**Q. What is the funding based on? In England it is based on attendance, qualifications gained etc. in minute detail. Is this the same for Scotland? Or do you have a different strategy?**

There are a variety of funding sources. In Glasgow these range from local authority funding and college sector to other sources such as charities and programmes of funding for specific purposes. Many projects are funded from multiple sources, leading to staff having to manage a variety of requirements. The strain on managers to make repeated funding applications and report back to funders is becoming very intense. Although there is some focus on funding for employability, this is not the same as in England.

Reporting back can involve hard measures such as attendances, as you have mentioned, but may also involve softer measures such as progress reported by learners. Of course the potential funding cuts faced across the board is also adding to the pressures around funding.

One help is that there is a good deal of consistency from overarching policy and research around social reform, meaning that many potential funding sources are also aligned to this. For example, in front-line practice, this can mean opportunities funded to encourage participation, inclusion and empowerment. GCVS had such a project for ‘Commonwealth Games Celebration’ funded by the Big Lottery. This involved literacies learners not only developing their literacies skills, but also increasing knowledge and understanding of their own communities, building confidence and sharing with other learners.



*Our Commonwealth Connections banner created by literacies learners, tutors and visitors for Celebrate 2014.*

**Q. Do you have a comprehensive set of qualifications? If so or if not, which qualifications are used and how do they relate to everyday literacies?**

There are I believe a number of differences here with England. We must remember that the responsibility for education is a power devolved to the Scottish Government and although there may be specialist examinations for example for Secure English Language Tests (immigration being the responsibility of the UK Government), the majority of learners in Scotland would take examinations from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). This is certainly the case for young people in school where new national qualifications have been introduced that are taken at a similar stage to GCSEs. SQA also has a wealth of qualifications relevant to different sectors and learners' interests. These include smaller units of say 10-40 hours' study which can be studied individually or combined to make larger awards.

What is different from England is that there is a different view of achievement. Not all learners undertake qualifications although they do have to show progress. As described previously, progress will depend on the learners' own aspirations and perhaps funders' requirements. In the time I have been involved there has never been an intense focus on qualifications. The adult literacy classes have never had a rigid qualification system.

We could perhaps on another occasion discuss the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework and the piloting of Adult Achievement Awards.

**Q. I heard that a Scottish cabinet minister consulted learners in order to write up the new ESOL strategy. Were there other consultations for other groups?**

Yes, and this is potentially another exciting development. As we said the national Adult Learning in Scotland Statement of Ambition came from the Cabinet Secretary for Education's consultation with all learners. More broadly and back to the consistency of policy context, there are two key outcomes for CLD, i.e.

- Improved life chances for people of all ages, through learning, personal development and active citizenship
- Stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities.

As you can see active citizenship and influential communities cannot be achieved without involving individuals. I could go on about the other policy connections and the CLD Regulations that have been enacted and the potential cross over with the Community Empowerment Act but we are perhaps getting too involved in policy. The key message is that there is a push to increasingly involve individuals in their communities, in our case, learners in the planning and development of provision. If you should want to know more about the policy context, then the Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: CLD (Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships) is the place to start.

In terms of front-line delivery, this of course chimes with the learner-centred, social practice approach that we value, but there is no extra government funding for this work, so it can be difficult. This is especially so when learners need financial support to participate, mostly travel and childcare costs.

Glasgow's Learning is a city-wide partnership of learning organisations working across public sector, colleges and the voluntary sector. They are working on a number of projects to increase learners' involvement; for example, a learners' forum and greater involvement of learners in the Aye Write Glasgow's book festival.

**Q The Scottish government rates inclusion and equalities very highly. What evidence is there of the good effects of this approach?**

Yes, as you say, inclusion and equality are important. There are strong legal requirements and policy messages whilst front-line projects promote inclusion and equality in their own context. As an example within GCVS, equalities is one of our organisational values and a number of pieces of Equalities work support this.

I have not researched national statistics but I do know these have been collected locally to monitor progress. There can be challenges around limited resources.

**Q Are the Statement of Ambition and the new ESOL strategy realistic?**

It feels as if the policy and legal context for community learning and development including ESOL and adult literacies has never been stronger, but by contrast the threat to funding including staff time and resources has never been under more pressure. Reflecting back on our interview, this has come through in most of my answers.

The drivers behind the current policy changes which are being rolled out are strong and go back to the Christie Commission 2011 and beyond. They call for radical reform in the delivery of public services, particularly in the face of challenges around poverty and cycles of deprivation in Scotland. However, the very projects and staff that would take this reform forward are now facing serious year on year cuts to their funding.

Unfortunately, on the frontline there are very real worries as already mentioned before. Cutbacks are happening and those immersed in the intricacies of the search for funding are conscious of the policy but do not necessarily have the wherewithal to become fully effective.

From a personal perspective, I believe that we will continue to strive to maintain and build the good practice we have, but how quickly and to what extent this will happen will depend on our funding in the future.

**Interviewee: Sallie Condy**

**Interviewer & Write up: Sarah Freeman**

## Get reading ahead with Quick Reads

Genevieve Clarke

*Genevieve Clark is Programme Manager of the Reading Agency. In this article she reports on the beneficial impact of reading for pleasure on adult learners.*

When Ann Reeder heard about the Six Book Challenge she wasn't sure it was for her. 'At first it was daunting. Six books? I didn't think I could even read one!' A cleaner at De Montfort University in Leicester, she went on to complete the Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge five times with the support of her UNISON learning rep Andrew Jennison alongside various Skills for Life courses. 'Andrew explained I could read anything I liked to complete the challenge, and he introduced me to the Quick Reads series of books. I was nervous, but I picked one of them, and I found that it was really good and I couldn't put it down. I was like a sponge because I just wanted to read another and another. Every time a new Quick Reads title came into our workplace library I got it out.

'I never looked back. I've done the Six Book Challenge every year for five years now, and every time I complete it, I feel great. It gives me so much, not just the reading part, but also it helps you grow and learn - the more you read the more you want to find out. I have gone on to read bigger books, and I love meeting and talking to all the other people at work who are doing the Challenge, hearing them talking about what they are reading and how they have progressed as well.'

### Reading Ahead programme

Ann's story epitomises how we aim to support the start of people's reading journey at The Reading Agency. Now called Reading Ahead, the Six Book Challenge is an annual incentive scheme that invites people to pick six reads and log, rate and review them in a diary in order to get a certificate. The programme has grown seven-fold since its launch in 2008, reaching 48,000 people in 2015 through public libraries working with local partners, FE and sixth form colleges, prisons and workplaces, mainly with the support of trade unions.

Our last impact evaluation showed that 92% of survey respondents felt more confident about reading after taking part in the programme, rising to 93% among 16 to 19 year olds and 96% among 20 to 24 year olds. There was also an increase in enjoyment of reading (from 82% to 95%) and an intention to use a library to borrow books more often (78%) and to buy more books (54%). Tutors report that the programme has benefits for writing, speaking and listening as well reading skills.

The new name for the programme, Reading Ahead, emphasises the fact that people can take part using all kinds of texts ranging from digital to print, magazine articles to books. The key criteria are that participants challenge themselves to try something new and to practise their developing skills.

We've also got a Reading Ahead website which enables participants to search for reading ideas in our Find a Read database and to create a profile to review their reads online – all ways of encouraging digital literacy alongside reading for pleasure.

### Quick Reads

We've worked closely with the Quick Reads publishing initiative since the first titles were published in 2006. We knew that these short books, specially written by well-known writers, were desperately needed if we were to encourage less confident adult readers to develop a love of reading and improve their skills at the same time. So we're delighted that Quick Reads has now joined The Reading Agency and we can work together to get these books into the hands of those who will benefit most.

They've certainly fulfilled this potential, judging by surveys of practitioners carried out by NIACE. The most recent found that 95% said that Quick Reads were effective in improving learners' literacy skills and 97% reported that they were effective in improving learners' confidence to read and their attitudes towards reading.

The six new titles published in February 2016 promise to do the same, with books by Lucy Diamond, Ann Cleeves, Andy McNab, an abridged version of I Am Malala, short stories by Agatha Christie and an anthology called



*The Anniversary* to celebrate ten years of Quick Reads. Galaxy continues to sponsor the initiative and, as in previous years, there will be learning resources to support each title.

With 36% of adults not reading for pleasure, whether or not they find it difficult, Quick Reads are also ideal candidates for inclusion in World Book Night, our annual promotion to non-readers. There are two Quick Reads in the World Book Night list for 2016 so that they can be given away by individuals and organisations who have been successful in their application to be volunteers on 23 April.

### Adding the 'why?' to the 'how?'

Learners may say that reading is 'not for them' but they often have a very fixed view of what being a 'reader' means. Once it's explained that reading embraces all kinds of text, whether print or online, and can lead them to enjoyment in addition to information essential for their everyday life, the prospect begins to look different. Individual stories, such as Ann's above, demonstrate the impact of increased confidence, skills and knowledge that reading can bring.

So how can tutors best weave reading for pleasure into their work with adult learners? It takes planning but also enthusiasm about the difference that reading of any kind can make. Libraries in the community, colleges, prisons and workplaces have a key role to play in offering not just appropriate books but expertise and encouragement. We've a range of case studies to show how public libraries are supporting ESOL and literacy learners in the community but also how college libraries are working with tutors across their institutions to find appealing reads for their students in courses ranging from functional skills to fashion studies. And with the rise in participation age to 18 and the drive for young people to gain at least Grade C in GCSE English, what better way to help them reinforce their skills and develop a love of reading that will stand them and their families in good stead for life?



Books published in February 2016.

## In moments of crisis and success in a vocational training programme, does literacy come second?

Harriet Labouchere

*Harriet works for UK based charity, LifeLine Network International. A coalition of local leaders and grassroots development organisations in 17 nations, LifeLine are dedicated to breaking cycles of poverty and injustice. Their aim is to equip members with the skills and resources to build sustainable models of community development and to foster regional networks to enable sharing of skills and ideas. For more information, visit [www.lifelinenetwork.org](http://www.lifelinenetwork.org)*

*Betteh Tumara*, the Krio phrase for a better tomorrow in Sierra Leone, resonates strongly with the nation's potential for growth. With fertile soils, high mineral deposits and an abundance of labour, in 2013 - 2014 Sierra Leone was seeking to become a transformed nation with middle-income status (World Bank, 2015).

But what is holding the country back?

This article will present one of greatest threats to Sierra Leone's development, what one charity is doing to combat it, and what literacy has to do with it.

### The problem

Standing at a shocking 70%, youth unemployment is cited as the largest threat to ongoing peace in Sierra Leone (UNDP, 2015). The civil war that ravaged the country in the 1990s shattered many young people's chance of getting an education, and now the Government of Sierra Leone identifies the lack of skills in the labour force as a major hindrance to development (ibid).

The impact of such low employment rates is becoming increasingly visible. 60% of the country's population live below the poverty line, crime rates remain high, and young Sierra Leoneans are failing to benefit from economic growth. The threat of civil unrest grows as young people across the nation become further disaffected, which could tip the balance of an already fragile nation (World Bank, 2015).

This concern is shared by the United Nations, who placed the economic and social integration of youth as one of four strategic priorities for UN provision in Sierra Leone. They urge that the problem needs to be addressed 'with the provision of increased educational and employment opportunities in order to raise the level of economic development and reduce the possibility of social unrest' (UN, 2009).

### Our contribution towards a solution

Meet Jabba:



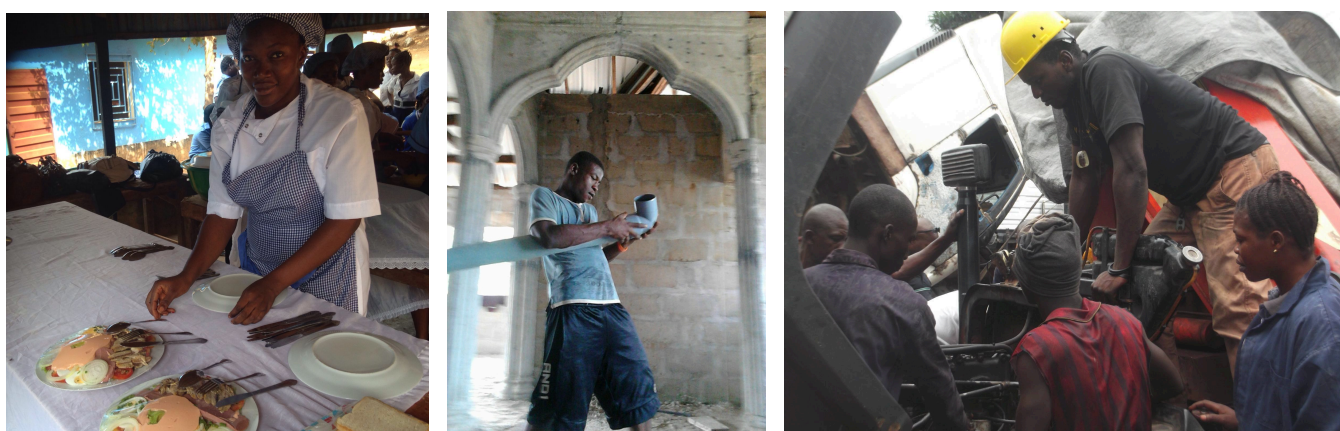
Jabba is the head of our technical vocational training project in Freetown.

Developed in partnership with UK-based LifeLine Network International and Sierra Leone-based LifeLine Nehemiah Projects, the *Betteh Tumara* Vocational Training programme forms a huge part of our vision for Sierra Leone: seeing young unemployed people equipped and empowered with the tools they need to create better lives for themselves and their families.

By providing a wide-ranging package of support and training for disenfranchised young adults aged 16-25 years, the programme combines practical and theoretical vocational training in motor mechanics, hairdressing, construction,

electrical engineering, plumbing, hospitality, IT and customer services with tailored mentoring, life skills training, enterprise/employability training, literacy/numeracy support and a three-month work experience placement. Vocations and skills training that have the best chance in leading to economic activity or employment were chosen in consultation with students, employers and shaped by LifeLine's vast experience of employment training in the UK and around the world.

After ten months on the programme, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and Comic Relief, students are equipped to find employment or set up small businesses and cooperatives. By the end of the five-year scheme, we hope to see 1,190 young unemployed people graduate from the scheme with the skills they need to generate an income and contribute to Sierra Leone's growth. The aim of the project is to lower crime rates and drive local economic growth as participants are empowered with changed attitudes to behaviour and responsibility on an individual and community level.



The literacy and numeracy embedded within the programme is critical in enhancing our students' ability to generate an income. Based on a practical curriculum developed by Feed the Minds suited to being embedded in vocational training, students are taught literacy for their trade, for an hour each week. Through discussion, role play and problem solving, the focus is on literacy that complements the students' vocations and enables graduates of the programme to perform more efficiently in paid roles, with an ability to read instructions, write invoices and make measurements.

Three years in, the *Betteh Tumara* programme reflects LifeLine's vision and purpose: investing in people and seeing them grow; capacity building communities to create lasting positive change.

## The challenges

### When Ebola hit

In the summer of 2014, we were stopped in our tracks by Ebola. The epidemic hit our community hard. Friends, neighbours, and colleagues were dying. When the government announced a national state of emergency in June, all *Betteh Tumara* project activity was forced to close. We quickly re-deployed our staff to our Ebola Response where we had started a community Ebola education campaign. Travelling from community to community in Eastern Freetown, the team managed to share life-saving information with over 90,000 people. Using visual, oral and practical teachings to cater to the illiteracy of the population, we communicated facts, dispelled myths and changed thinking. We built an Ebola Care Centre that treated over 270 patients, and developed a quarantine support programme that provided over 12,000 people with the essential items they needed to survive.

When Sierra Leone was declared Ebola free, a dark cloud lifted from the nation. But as individuals and organisations who courageously battled the epidemic began to take stock and assess the damage, it became clear that the outbreak had left its mark in more ways than one. A nation traumatized, nearly everyone in the country lost someone they cared about, and in some terrible circumstances entire families were wiped out.

The impact on the *Betteh Tumara* programme was severe. We lost students and members of staff to the terrible disease, and alongside the rest of the nation, many returning students had suffered great trauma. Understanding the importance of responding to the catastrophe on our doorstep quickly, the Big Lottery Fund went above and beyond their usual protocol and awarded us an additional grant that fueled our Ebola response. When the crisis ended, we re-profiled the budget and our deliverables in the context of a post-Ebola Sierra Leone. We had to make adaptations which included incorporating the literacy and numeracy coordinator's responsibilities into existing roles.

But our team on the ground rose to the challenge. Jabba absorbed the responsibility of coordinating the literacy and numeracy aspect of the programme, and the vocational trainers took on the role of teaching literacy to their students. Though challenging for our staff at times, this change turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

### Literacy comes second

Literacy training is one aspect of the services we offer. In participating in the programme, our students are seeking to increase their income, not solely to improve their literacy skills. Therefore, the vocational training is given precedence and the majority of the project's budget, time and focus is allocated here, in order to satisfy the aspirations of the trainees, and to ensure the quality and relevance of what we are providing in a rapidly evolving environment.



Though no one predicted it, the budgetary constraints caused by the Ebola crisis positively impacted the literacy aspect of the programme. Before the Ebola outbreak, Jabba, as literacy and numeracy coordinator, taught a tailored literacy curriculum to each vocational stream. Re-profiling the budget meant that our vocational trainers had to take on the literacy teaching for their class, which we initially saw as a challenge. But in fact, the vocational trainers are in a better position to truly embed literacy into their skills training, and to teach the vocation-specific terminology and skills that will help students to succeed in their vocations. Electrical students are able to learn about first aid, electrical materials and components, ethics and problems affecting society within their discipline, while simultaneously learning the practical application and getting work experience; while plumbing students learn the same for their vocation, etcetera.

*In Literacy comes second: working with groups in developing societies*, Professor Alan Rogers (Rogers, 2000) argues that programmes which use a 'learn through doing' approach are more likely to be successful in achieving literacy and in reinforcing other development goals than conventional literacy programmes which focus on a 'learn first, do later' model that is ill-suited to adult learning.

We have seen many benefits in our 'learning through doing' application of this approach, which has led to success in incorporating literacy as part of the training programme.

Students have plenty of opportunity to apply their newly acquired literacy skills in practice; an obvious advantage.

Our students show a range of abilities, from low literacy levels to secondary education. Rather than focusing solely on the least literate members of the group, all participants are given the opportunity to improve their literacy skills. This can be challenging and accommodating. Our focus on embedded, vocation-specific literacy, tailored to each of the professions and incorporated within the programme takes time and effort on behalf of the trainers. The dynamic of the group facilitates positive group learning, whereby students with a higher literacy ability support their less literate peers. But moving all students to a stage at which they can read instructions and write costings for their job while on the programme is difficult, combined with attending to the different abilities within the class,

### **The stress of poverty**

The Ebola outbreak was a devastating but passing ordeal, but the pre-existing and relentless strain of poverty that the people of Sierra Leone face every day still remains.

The men and women on our programme are all under considerable financial pressures as well as individual stresses caused by poverty. 93% of the students who have enrolled on the programme are unemployed. For the 7% employed, incomes average 66,846 Leones per month, compared to the national minimum wage of 500,000. This figure is half of the one dollar per day poverty line that indicates extreme poverty.

While committing to our full-time course, our students are further limited in their earning capacity when finding the means to provide for themselves and their family is already a daily challenge. They are often living hand-to-mouth, and there is simply no contingency for emergencies.

### **Women are under particular pressure.**

Broken relationships, single motherhood, caring for children and elderly relatives, managing household responsibilities and trying to earn an income while studying to improve the family's prospects: only a saint could handle this on their own while maintaining their sanity. But many women enrolled on our programme have no choice but to do just that. As a result, they find it harder to commit to the programme. We also heard stories of women controlled by their husbands or partners who, motivated by jealousy and insecurity, tried to force them to leave the programme.

In a climate where real struggle is part of daily life, these challenges only make things harder.

But Rogers justifies the 'learn through doing' approach using adult learning theory, which argues that adults do not find things difficult when they really want to do them, and it is important for them to do so. Our students, a demographic of unemployed young people working to gain the skills they need to generate an income, are highly motivated by their difficult circumstances. As a result, they seem able to cope with the demanding schedule and challenging curriculum because they know it will support them to better their lives for the future, and as a result we have a very low withdrawal rate.

### **Holistic approach throughout the training**

A holistic approach to the training provides more opportunity to support our students and enhance their individual growth. In addition to the practical and theoretical vocational training, three-month work experience placement, life skills, employability and literacy/numeracy training, the mentoring aspect has proved indispensable, resulting in higher student retention and satisfaction throughout the programme. Jabba told us about cases where mentors have encouraged participants to be more open about their finances, facilitating better financial management in the home. Students who were being unfaithful to their partners were counselled to resolve the problems in their marriage and commit to their partners, leading to happier marriages.



One mentee said: 'I used to drink and drink, but after being open with my mentor he encouraged me to put family first and I decided to stop. Since the programme I am better in support to my family, busy with work and I have a steady flow of income. My children are assured of an education because I can provide it.'

In case studies we conducted in 2014 (pre-Ebola), students gave testimonies on the impact of the literacy aspect of the training:

**‘The literacy and numeracy training helped me build up my writing skills for business, and I now confidently write quotes and prepares invoices’** – Victor Turay, Electrical Engineering stream

**‘The most valuable aspect of the course was the literacy and numeracy training, which built my skills and confidence and contributed to my career success’** – Karim Kamara, Electrical Engineering stream

**‘It has helped me in the work place because I’m often asked to do costing for a job and I do them at ease’** – Marie Kadija, Building and Construction stream

It is evident that students also experience non-literacy benefits, such as a sense of solidarity and community while studying together, and independence through taking control of their lives and actively enhancing their skills and opportunities. Students have used their new skills and increased confidence in their abilities to support their communities. One student said that he was able to fix an electrical fault in his street during a power cut, gaining respect from his neighbours.

We have seen immense success in men and women collaborating and working as teams, by breaking social norms and encouraging women to take positions in traditionally male dominated professions - for example, Marie Kadija\* in Building and Construction, quoted above. 25-year-old Marie says ‘I was not expecting to be employed at a construction company, especially as a woman. People think we are lazy. But my mentor helped me actually feel proud of being a woman in building and construction.’

Marie now works as a stone mason for MODCOM, a national construction company in this very male industry. Her prospects are good now. That wasn’t the case two years ago. Back in 2012, she was hawking - selling clothes on the street that required starting out before 6am and returning after 7pm - not easy for a single mother with a young child. Now she is earning 550,000 Leones per month - 13 times her previous salary. She says ‘I’m much happier now, not having to sleep with a man to get extra money. I’m saving money and have a better future. I’m now independent and rent a room for me, my mother and my daughter.’

\*Marie’s name has been changed



### To the future

Using data we continuously collect from students to monitor progress and measure the impact of the course, we can see that of the students who have graduated from the *Betteh Tumara* programme from 2012 - 2014, 64% are now employed or earning an income, compared to the previous rate of 7%. Incomes average 468,444 Leones (£78) per month – ten times the previous average salary we recorded. This is over two times higher than the one dollar per day extreme poverty line, and 44% of those employed earn more than the Sierra Leone monthly minimum wage of 500,000 Leones.

The success stories of our beneficiaries continue to motivate us to carry on with the work and keep holding our vision for Sierra Leone. We seek to build a strong *Betteh Tumara* alumni and a reliable consortium of employers who see the value of our work and choose to train and upskill their staff with us. This will drive the sustainability of both their firms and our organisation and is part of what makes the programme unique. We are constantly evolving and considering ways in which to avoid reliance on funding.

In better integration of literacy as part of a multidisciplinary approach to vocational training, we anticipate an increase in our students' ability to achieve. As Rogers argues, this approach enables people to use literacy skills to achieve development goals. We believe that this will impact our students' confidence, employability and career success, and we have confidently incorporated the value of 'literacy as second' into our development interventions.

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## Literacy, Place, and Pedagogies of Possibility (2016)

By Barbara Comber

Cost: £31.99

Publisher: Routledge

Pages: 210

ISBN 978-1138829800

Reviewed by Rachel Stubbley

*Rachel Stubbley 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 found this book tremendously uplifting for many reasons. One was that it is informed by insights from three decades of Barbara Comber's pedagogic research and practice. Reading it felt like a conversation with a revered senior colleague, who has maintained her optimism and vision throughout the vicissitudes of education policy and ideologies during that time. Despite its scope, this book is succinct and very current, addressing literacy and learning in an age of climate change and globalisation. But its long view gives it a compelling authority. Comber's work provides us with tools and ways of thinking to counter the pervasive 'deficit discourses of places of poverty' (Comber, 2015:21). For Comber 'a necessary but not sufficient, starting point is to adopt an assets rather than a deficit model of learners and communities'(4) – and the book contains plenty of examples of teachers and learners who are doing just that. Comber tells it with passion and tells it like it is: 'Our horror at the pervasive [media] representation of the poor as deserving blame and as dangerous has fuelled our work in critical literacy' (21). And this is more than just critiquing the media: 'constructing counter-stories is fundamental work for teachers who work in such communities' (21). She also nails the danger and folly of the current and on-going obsession with assessment and measurement, relating (from some of her recent research) that 'high stakes testing closed down teachers' opportunities for innovation and creativity in connecting curriculum with [learners'] lives and interests ... [and] that the impact was greatest in high poverty contexts' (xiv). None of this is exactly new, but it is so easy to feel disheartened in our current political and economic context; this felt like a powerful call to arms. We need to continue to strive for 'critical literacy based on curricular justice ... repositioning students as researchers of language; respecting student resistance and exploring minority culture constructions of literacy; problematising classroom and public texts'(5). And Barbara Comber shows us how this might be possible.

Another cause for celebration is that the book is rooted in collaborative endeavour. Comber believes passionately in research which puts the lived experience of literacy teachers and learners at its heart. She uses the pronoun we throughout, and although this sometimes feels a little artificial, it serves as a constant reminder of the fundamentally collaborative nature of Comber's work, and of the research projects that inform the book. "Our" research agenda ... takes a socio-cultural approach to literacy studies informed by feminist and critical theory. Writing as "we" recognises that this is not an individual account, but a faithful record of practice accomplished by many" (p.xiii). Comber's approach reminds us of why we engage with Research and Practice in Adult Literacy: it is 'cultural and political work ... where theories, with their associated vocabularies, are generated within classrooms and in collaboration with peers and academics'(2).

Most inspiringly of all, Comber extends approaches and frameworks for thinking about literacy and learning by using the work of social geographers such as Doreen Massey. She uses this as a lens through which to consider a new (for me) kind of 'place-conscious [literacies] pedagogy' (p.3), where the geographical and spatial are as relevant to literacies learning as social, cultural, political and historical considerations. This goes beyond valuing 'local literacies' in the classroom to 'making local places and communities the object of study and action' (p.3). Throughout the book there are richly illustrated examples of multimodal projects and activities inside and outside of the classroom which use ideas of space, community, belonging, transformation and imagined futures to inspire literacies and communication. Comber argues that 'place-based knowledges' (environmental, architectural, sociological, linguistic, meteorological, religious and more) can afford rich opportunities for extending literacy



repertoires. Such extended repertoires may include 'traditional school literacies' but also 'emergent school literacies' such as film production, podcasts, installations and community announcements (97).

For fear of putting off RaPAL readers, I haven't yet mentioned that the examples of learning, teaching and collaborative research that Comber shares with us are all based on work with school children and school teachers (many in primary schools and mostly in Australia). I did keep asking myself if these ideas could be transferred to – or could inspire - adult or post-16 literacies learning and teaching. I'm in no doubt that the answer is yes!

## Argue with me: argument as a path to developing students' thinking and writing (2nd edition, 2016)

By Deanna Kuhn, Laura Hemberger and Valerie Khait

Cost: £19.99

Publisher: Routledge, New York and London

Pages: 194

ISBN: 978-1-138-91140-6

Reviewed by Irene Schwab

*Irene Schwab was previously the course leader for the PGCE/Diploma Language, Literacy and Numeracy at the Institute of Education (IOE) in London and has now retired. She is on the Editorial Group for the RaPAL Journal.*

This short book was written to help US middle-school and high-school students develop argument skills which are now part of the US education standards. However, although aimed at a North American school-based audience it still has some relevance for those who are studying in the post-16 sector in the UK, especially in the light of the way these skills figure in the literacy/English curriculum in both in Functional Skills and in GCSE English in writing and, to some extent, in speaking.

The programme this book espouses is one that helps move beyond the personal opinion towards an argument that is supported by relevant and convincing evidence. It is claimed (on the cover blurb) that 'The techniques are designed to be flexible and adaptable, and work with students of all ability levels—especially with those who are less motivated and engaged in school.' The step by step approach which includes detailed lesson plans can be adapted to suit diverse groups and there are materials and examples given for a number of different controversial topics. Inevitably some of these are geared more towards a US audience. It is also the case that some might be mainly of interest to younger participants such as homeschooling, expulsion from school, juvenile justice - although these issues should not be ruled out as parents might also have strong opinions on them. Other topics have a more universal adult appeal (animal research, organ sale, capital punishment) many of which have stood the test of time in the literacy classroom. There are, however, also topics which are very much in the news at the present moment (torture, GM foods, athletes and drug use). So, in terms of ideas, there should be something there that inspires and provokes everyone.

The book is organised in four sections: Part 1 introduces the topic giving a rationale for developing argument skills and explaining what those skills consist of (for example the difference between argument and argumentation). The second part moves on to the specifics (including a useful analysis of the different skills involved), describing the different stages of what the authors call 'the curriculum' with examples of students' written work. Part 3 involves evaluating the method through writing and speaking outcomes and the final section reflects more broadly on student gains the writers have observed and their significance.

This is the second edition of the book which was first published in 2013, and new to the second edition is a chapter on how one might incorporate the approach into a science or a social studies curriculum. What also makes this book particularly useful as a resource is the additional material available on the Routledge website. Here are sited a number of e-resources such as lesson plans, forms, source material to use for evidence gathering and, perhaps of most value, video clips to illustrate all the different stages of the process. Some of these are more useful than others and in a few, the dialogue is hard to make out (although helpful subtitles are provided).

Some might feel a whole book devoted to argument skills is a little excessive but if one sees this as a resource to be dipped into, it offers some good ideas for developing a peer approach to building arguments and counterarguments. However, there is little theory here. The authors have confined themselves to offering a highly structured, practical, classroom-based programme and there is no attempt to relate the skills that are being developed to 'arguments' that learners might need to make in their everyday lives. I would like to have seen these skills linked to the dialogic discourse practices that students already engage in and consideration given to how they could be developed to support students taking a more critical and analytical view of the world around them. The

chapter which is intended to link to relevant formal theory restricts itself to 'assessment gains within the educational domain'. The New Literacy Studies and critical literacy ideology is not an obvious concern of the authors who are psychologists and educationalists.

For this reason, it might have limited appeal to RaPAL members, although, of course, teachers can adapt the material and make their own links with theory. The book will be of most use to new teachers or those who would like a framework to scaffold learners' work in building and supporting arguments.

## **A participatory paradigm for an engaged scholarship in higher education Action leadership from a South African perspective (2015)**

By Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Lesley Wood and Ina Louw

Cost: \$43.00

Publisher: Sense, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Pages: 275

ISBN: 978-9463001823

Reviewed by Tara Furlong

*Tara has worked across private and public sectors inside and outside of education for twenty years in the UK and abroad. She has an ongoing interest in the relationship between multi-modal and contextualised versus abstracted learning; and its mirror in social and literate practice and language across life spheres. Tara is engaged in postgraduate studies in educational leadership with UCL IoE. She can be contacted on [tara.furlong@designingfutures.uk](mailto:tara.furlong@designingfutures.uk)*

This sincere, discursive book introduces a broad overview of a South African perspective on action research in HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) utilising participatory action learning and action research (PALAR), which bring together teaching, research and community (keeping research in its place) in new democratic paradigms of epistemological and methodological research. It has a heavy emphasis on the reformulation of higher education to prioritise emic perspectives, engagement of all community stakeholders in the determination of research; and alongside this it advocates utilising research to strengthen teaching and learning.

The goal? To produce graduates with contextualised knowledge and praxis of clear value to the communities they return to, in a shrinking formal job market. It repeats these themes and lines of argument across its chapters, drawing on a large resource bank of authors: part of the multi-disciplinary appeal. It claims roots in theories of phenomenology, experiential learning, action theory, strengths-based theory, grounded theory and critical theory.

South Africa as a context is a determinative, shaping force in the philosophy of the authors. It humanises democratic, participatory, integrative and transformational activity to address deep-rooted social challenges such as extreme poverty. This, they argue, can

steer (stakeholders such that) ... our research is more responsive to the needs of our socio-cultural, economic and political contexts (24)

Split into three fluid sections following an introduction, Part 1 brings three chapters outlining the conceptual framework. These discuss the participatory nature and history of PALAR, its proposed role for action leadership in HEIs and their communities, and in improving teaching and learning. Guidelines for designing projects are presented: looking to practical, knowledge and emancipatory outcomes. The integrally humanising nature of the PALAR approach is verified by neuroscience in detail: interesting in itself for the teaching and learning guidance neuroscience brings. Within an affective-socio-cognitive approach, they outline processes of

vision and team building, needs analysis, understanding the PALAR paradigm, capacity building, developing critical and self-critical reflection for transformational learning and collaborative project design, implementation and evaluation (58).

Part 2 consists of four chapters developing academic leadership and arguing for quality and equity in education. Community negotiation focusses on relationships, reflection and recognition. Open interactions develop trust through negotiating tensions between stakeholders e.g. community and HEI values, objectives and processes. Within the HEIs the authors respond to leadership at the level of management, professional development and individual. They also, at the same time, integrate indigenous, or African values leading to sustainable change.

Case studies are presented - for example, of programmes focusing on developing female leadership. Likewise, learning outcomes are reviewed which include reflections on skills shortages, omissions of mutual acculturation and the challenges of ensuring multiplier effects. Attention is also drawn to long-term networking opportunities and systemic follow through and institution of leadership development.

Part 3 brings four chapters on developing action leadership in higher education, with further in-depth case studies and examples of PALAR in practice, cognitive shifts and practical considerations. Their central case restates itself as PALAR addressing the complexity of issues on the ground, and in practice, as confidence is built often through multi-faceted evolutions of Kolb's learning cycle. Many learning points are exemplified and discussed. The broad areas are qualitative research methodology; improving teaching and learning through research; learning conference cultures and publishing; and emancipatory critical reflection.

The concluding chapter summarises each chapter and shares the experience of the book's production as live PALAR in action.

This is not a 'literacies' book but its effective research is very relevant to literacies work. This book works very hard to bring existentially and perpetually emergent solutions to complex entrenched social problems; it inspires positive action to change. Each chapter concludes with focus questions. I have found myself reading quite a bit of Michael Fullan recently, a Canadian academic who has researched and written widely about humanising change in education; numerous issues in Fullan's work chimed with the ideas in this book. I found Zuber-Skerritt and colleagues' book useful for knocking ideas about and extracting my own confident solutions to a few current challenges in my practice. As such, I would like to thank the authors.

## **Educating for Sustainability: Principles and Practices for Teachers (2016)**

By Victor Nolet

Cost: £24.50

Publisher: Routledge

Pages: 218

ISBN: 978-0-415-72034-2

Reviewed by Anne Reardon-James

*Anne Reardon-James is currently employed as Essential Skills Project Leader at Cardiff and Vale College. She has taught in a wide variety of adult education settings for almost a decade, including the delivery of literacy, numeracy, ESOL and digital literacy courses, and the training of Essential Skills practitioners. Anne is currently completing a Doctorate in Education at Cardiff University, evaluating the effectiveness of essential skills programmes from the varying perspectives of learner, employer and tutor. You can contact her on areardon-james@cavc.ac.uk.*

Perhaps it's just me, but every time I include the important theme of ESDGC (Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship) in session plans, schemes of work and learner reviews or evaluate the development of this topic in the observation of other practitioners, I break out in a cold sweat, largely due to the magnitude of the subject and my limited knowledge regarding it. I am personally fairly conscious of environmental or global issues and am always looking for more exciting themes to talk about in lessons than recycling or printing on both sides of sheets of paper, again. I was looking forward to learning about new practical activities to carry out in the classroom, but instead Nolet takes a heavily theory-driven approach, which could initially feel a little off-putting in terms of scale and depth. That said, the book does indeed go into great detail regarding a wide range of pertinent themes related to sustainability, including some unexpected ones such as mindfulness.

Whilst the book is aimed at those who teach secondary schoolchildren, it is equally relevant for adults, encouraging teachers and their students to develop their own ways of engaging with sustainable thinking and practices, through better problem-solving and decision making. Nolet starts with a rationale and history of education for sustainability, moving on to its meaning, policy processes and ethical principles such as the Earth Charter. Next Nolet focusses on the importance of developing a sustainability worldview, including values, dispositions and knowledge, in order to work towards professional teaching practices.

Opportunities are given to explore personal philosophies and perspectives on the purposes of education for sustainability, with a discussion of seriously troubling problems and strategies for how to engage with the key issues and develop a positive mind-set. Five learner-centred pedagogies are explained in turn i.e. collaborative small-group learning, inquiry-based learning, experiential learning, service learning and place-based learning, where teachers are encouraged to move from the role of deliverer to facilitator. The last section examines critical and systems thinking, using research-validated strategies, finishing with a focus on more recently popular issues such as happiness and wellbeing.

Nolet encourages the reader to extend their professional knowledge by reflecting on sustainability issues at the end of each chapter, including discussion questions, prompts and links to useful websites for further research and information. Although there is generally a lack of practical ideas tailored to class teaching, the book is indeed well researched and informed, with numerous highly useful references included. The author has made a conscious effort not to make the book a 'how-to' guide and if time was not an issue and the reader engaged fully with it, they would indeed find the material of interest.

## Stories of Resilience

### Tara Furlong

*Tara Furlong is RaPAL's Webweaver.*

We have been receiving amazing stories of adults' learner journeys as part of our joint project with ACAL (Australian Council for Adult Literacy) and with support from our respective Adult Learners Weeks. The final deadline for this co-publication has been extended to 30th April 2016, and we encourage tutors and learners to continue to send us their stories. See the [RaPAL website](#) for more information.

We have selected four to share with you in this issue of the journal: Lynda Blair, Emma Smith, MI and Brett Whiting.

**Lynda Blair**, West Kirby library, Tutor Jill Mothersole

"I really enjoyed school but was particularly weak at Maths due to lots of disruption in our maths class. I always enjoy learning. I have found it difficult when I have been at work doing end of day banking – my stress levels shoot up as I am not confident when checking large figures. I feel it definitely knocks my confidence on so many levels. I would like to feel I could organise the family household budget, and always ask my husband to double check my work. I am really desperate to improve and feel it will definitely add to my confidence."

**Emma Smith**, Ganney's Meadow Nursery School, Tutor Jill Mothersole

"When I started at school at first I was good at maths and in top sets but then I began to fall behind. I never liked school as I'm not much of a people person. I left school at the age of 15, as I wanted to be a dental nurse. After a little while I left and started work in Marks and Spencer. I worked there for six years due to having my little boy Damon. Then came Ellie than my little flower Poppy. Before I knew it all three kids were in school and bringing homework home. I found myself unable to help them as I didn't understand the work. All three of my children are very bright. My youngest, Poppy, has autism and is a whizz with numbers so she gets extra homework. Now my three children are older and now I want to make them proud of their mummy; I want to be able to help them with their homework. I would love one day to become a teacher assistant (TA) but maybe for special needs as I find people don't understand how their minds work and I do with having my little flower. So here I am today starting right from the starting point in maths. I don't find maths easy but I'm keen to learn as I want to make something of myself and better my family's life. This time I'm ready for the challenges ahead and I'm not giving up until I've reached my goals. I feel lucky with this maths course as I like the group and the teacher seems to understand me as a person, which is nice. It makes coming each week easier."

**MI**, Bebington library, Tutor Jill Mothersole

" - 2012 Made a decision to go to maths class! Big decision as I hated Maths at school and was no good at it!  
 - 2013 Been at Maths for a year now. Learning Maths concepts which I can actually understand. Have some concepts of the dreaded fractions!  
 - 2014 Only meant to stay at maths for a year and here I am again! I am enjoying classes and have learnt a lot. Feeling more confident and that I have achieved a lot. I have actually sat some test papers.  
 - 2015 Year 3 and I'm still here! Feel as if I have come a long way and set many tests now. Even if I have failed I still have a better knowledge of Maths concept. Able to help my children with homework and able to do everyday things ie measurement, %, fractions, conversions ratio's. Very stimulating for me and learning.  
 Hope to continue my classes and get some qualifications in Maths. Have enjoyed learning and being back at 'school' – something I did not think I would when I started in 2012"

**Brett Whiting**, TAFE East Coast  
Worth the Read

"All my life I have had an illiteracy problem and it was one of the hardest things to overcome in my life. It's like walking down a path and you hit a brick wall that you can't go around or you can't go over. I have done everything that I want to do in my life besides learning to read and write. For years I was a single parent bringing up two boys. It was hard when it got time to help them with their homework. I always wanted to go back to school or TAFE to help myself but my kids came first until they left the nest. So I had a little break for a few years. Then I had a talk to my job provider and she told me how to do something about it. I told myself "what the heck, I will have a go at this". It was hard at first, getting my mind around the books. I put my head down and went for it. Reading and writing started to get easier for me and before I knew it I was reading a book. I never thought I would do that but I'm reading now and I'm enjoying this for the first time in my life. I'm finally reading and writing like there is no tomorrow. It has even opened up new doors for me to explore. It has changed my life for the better and it has been the second best thing that has happened in life, the first has been my boys, and they have been encouraging me as well. I can now write my teacher this essay and it comes so naturally. All I can say to my angels is thank you from the bottom of my heart, you have given me a new outlook on life and it's great!"



## 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](mailto:journal@rapal.org.uk) in the first instance. The journal coordinator will then let you know what the next steps will be.
3. All contributions should have the name of the author(s), a title and contact email address and telephone number. You should also include a short 2 to 3 line biography. Sections, sub-sections and any images should be clearly indicated or labelled (further guidance on image size is on the website [www.rapal.org.uk](http://www.rapal.org.uk)).
4. All referencing should follow the Harvard system.
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### What happens next?

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

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

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