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RaPAL

Digital Literacies



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 literacies work and to encourage debate.

Why not join us?

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

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Editorial

Julie Meredith and Jonathan Mann

Welcome to Journal 90 in which we revisit the subject of digital literacies five years after first exploring the subject in a dedicated edition. If some tweachers - teachers who tweet - are to be believed, digital literacies are a given for teachers. Secondary Head of English Matt Pinkett tweeted, 'It strikes me that selling yourself on the fact that you use IT is a lot like saying, "Hire me. I eat food."' But is this confidence the reality for teaching staff in the post-compulsory sector? And what is the situation for our learners?

In a so-called *information age*, digital literacy is constantly on the agendas of policy makers who note its centrality to contemporary curricula, and teachers who have to identify the best ways to practically implement a seemingly endless swathe of constantly-evolving directives. Exploring the economic impact of the current digital divide in rural communities, the right-leaning Countryside Alliance recently noted that parliament believes 12.6 million UK adults do not possess even the most basic digital skills. Accordingly, they contend, the £63 billion is effectively lost in the UK every year, through untapped digital potential (Countryside Alliance, 2016). That a digital divide also exists in towns and cities makes the matter increasingly urgent. In the context of a connected digital world, the UK's economic losses through digital skill gaps are potential opportunities for other countries. The Conservative government's response, then, is in the form of the Digital Economy Bill, which – it is hoped – will provide much-needed investment in the area. Whether those funds find their way to FE and beyond remains to be seen. Notwithstanding this, the writers in the present edition are able to draw upon their substantial experience in order to provide practical advice on how best to address this problem in educational settings.

Our edition, then, opens in the classroom with four professionals discussing the obstacles – practical, personal and institutional – to developing and embracing digital literacies. **Amanda Easto** is *Banishing Barriers*. She considers the day-to-day reality of introducing technology to Pre-Entry and Entry Level 1 learners and acknowledges her own aversion. She describes how the arrival of Smartboards changed her approach, and shares some successful activities. **Sharon Murphy** explores similar issues albeit with Level 1 learners. She recounts her introduction of iPads and examines their impact on learning, inclusion and confidence. Her piece includes advice and points readers in the direction of a useful resource.

Our next contributor, **Lauren Foster**, challenges the prevalence of bans on MP3 players and mobiles in classrooms as this prevents students from listening to music in sessions. With specific reference to individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Lauren explores the benefits of music for learning and wellbeing. She invites institutions to consider flexibility to promote inclusion.

Chloë Hynes addresses *The myths and legends of digital literacy: from an ESOL practitioner's perspective*. Does technology belong in the classroom? Are all ESOL learners digitally illiterate? Is technology in the classroom more trouble than it's worth? Is technology a fad? Chloë shares her responses to these questions and digital discoveries from her classroom practice.

From ESOL learners in the Wirral, we move south to Wales then cross the Irish Sea for our next two pieces. **Anne Reardon-James** shares a Welsh perspective and presents the rationale and components of the Essential Skills in Digital Literacy qualification recently made available to adult learners across Wales. Digital responsibility, digital information literacy and digital collaboration are among the six units. Is this qualification the way to tackle digital exclusion and provide people with the confidence and abilities they need to make responsible, informed choices as full citizens?

Our colleagues at the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in Ireland also provide routes for adult learners to develop digital confidence alongside literacy and numeracy. **Gillian Harris** outlines the role of NALA's Distance Learner Service. She highlights how the service's flexibility breaks down barriers to learning by enabling individuals to study when, where and what they want. Accreditation is optional, which frees tutors from the funding-related focus on qualifications to concentrate on learning.

NALA's students benefit from a virtual classroom. Are there advantages to a virtual staffroom? Our final article is from **Ellayne Fowler** who reflects on the use of blogs within a teaching course for health professionals. She considers whether blogs can lead to the creation of a medical education community of practice and their impact on both reflection and practice.

Our seven contributors' experiences are largely positive. Are yours? Headlines continue to question the impact of screens, in particular, on individuals. Some go as far as to suggest the addictive effect of technology is 'electronic cocaine' or 'digital heroin' (Kardaras, 2016) and various companies now offer retreats for a *digital detox*. From damage to mental health to cyberbullying, do the benefits of digital access outweigh the risks? Almost a decade ago, neurologist Frank Wilson (1999) claimed that 'speaking out against the technofaith has become a kind of heresy'. Is this edition inadvertently

an echo chamber? Share your thoughts and experiences with RaPAL via [Twitter](#), our Facebook page or LinkedIn group.

We are delighted to include three stories from *Resilience: Stories of Adult Learning*, which demonstrate that for these individuals, at least, digital literacies are a plus. **Lizzie Addison** tells us how studying changed her as a person. A partially-sighted student, Lizzie believed she could do more than she achieved at school, and she was right. Next, **Debbie Weldon** recalls how she could not even turn on a computer when she first started studying and was isolated. College helped her build confidence and she explains how the world now feels open to her. The third story is from **Allison Churchill**. The end of a relationship was her impetus to return to learning, and she credits her computer classes with helping her get a lovely job. She now relishes challenges and declares, 'I recommend adult learning to everyone; it really can be life changing.'

From learners' voices we next gain an insight into the working lives of four colleagues in Glasgow. **Donna Moore** describes her work with Glasgow Women's Library. She talks about the charity's vision and the diversity of her own role from supporting learners to write a book about a superheroine to enabling another to do a crossword. **Maggie McPherson** mainly works with offenders and supports them to turn their lives around. She uses contextualised learning to prepare individuals for vocational roles as well as providing opportunities for them to develop confidence and interpersonal skills. **Debbie Thompson**, meanwhile, is a tutor within the NHS. Her tuition supports staff to brush up on writing, reading, number and basic computing skills. She is also works with staff undertaking NHS training or study programmes and supports those with learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Although she is no longer in a teaching role, **Marianne Miller** says, 'Seeing progress is the main gain' in her post. Marianne manages the full-time staff, sessional staff and volunteers who work for the Literacy Service at Rosemount Lifelong Learning.

We move beyond the UK with the first of our two book reviews. **Ian Cheffy** read John W. Miller and Michael C. McKenna's *World literacy: how countries rank and why It matters*. The authors, two American academics, acknowledge digital literacies but focus on a 'traditional kind of literacy' as they attempt to 'interpret the results of international literacy surveys' for a general readership. Unlike UK newspaper headlines, the writers discourage comparisons between countries and, instead, encourage us to tease out insights. Ian is doubtful that this book deserves a place on your personal bookshelves, but encourages you to borrow it from the library.

Next, **Yvonne Spare** reviews *Social Justice, Transformation and Knowledge Policy, Workplace learning and skills* by James Avis from the University of Huddersfield. Avis considers how the

political economy has an impact on policy for lifelong learning, training and skill development, and vocational education. He flags up contradictions and limitations of so-called progressive policies, for instance, the ‘mismatch’ between the vocations that students are training for and local jobs available to them. Readers also have the opportunity to reflect on changes to college governance, models of staff professionalism, the ‘value’ of different types of work, and the emphasis on education as a route to paid employment. Yvonne considers many of the examples thought-provoking, and reflects his view that the outlook is ‘bleak’.

Our edition closes with **Tara Furlong’s** round up of news from the sector.

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

Julie Meredith

English Tutor

Freeman College, Sheffield

meredith_julie@yahoo.co.uk

Jonathan Mann

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Tutor

University of East London

j.mann@uel.ac.uk

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NOTE FROM THE JOURNAL COORDINATOR

Hello fellow RaPAL members

For this edition we have returned to the theme of digital literacies. We suspected that our use of digital technology had greatly increased over the five years since our first Journal on this subject, when it was a relatively new way of working with our learners for some of us. There is a telling description by one of our writers of how it used to be, with learners working in isolation, facing computers lined up facing the classroom walls, which resonated with me as a tutor. With the now widespread familiarity with tablets and other devices, we can see how the whole classroom experience has changed.

If there are those of our readers who are inspired by these writers' accounts to try out this way of working themselves, especially in the field of numeracy, there will be another opportunity to let us know how it goes in the summer when we plan to produce an edition on numeracies as social practice. Perhaps your learners, or indeed you as a tutor, have found this to be a more accessible route into numeracy. Alternatively, you could drop us a note about what you are trying out to our feedback page on the RaPAL website www.rapal.org.uk or via the link on this page. The password required will be the one that has been sent out with the notification of this publication. We are still hoping to receive enough of your responses to be able to print some or to start a conversation on the website.

Any comments about this or other editions or ideas for future content can be sent to journal@rapal.org.uk and don't forget that most Journal editions contain articles by new writers. There are guidelines on our website on the [Write for Us](#) page and we offer as much support as you feel you need to be able to see your writing 'in print' – is there a more appropriate phrase for online writing that gives the same sense of achievement?

Season's greetings from all the team at RaPAL and we hope that you manage to find a few moments during the festivities to enjoy our latest edition of the Journal.

Best wishes

Yvonne

Banishing Barriers

Amanda Easto

Amanda Easto is an adult literacy tutor at Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT). She has been teaching there since 2007, and in that time she has worked with groups of adults of all levels from Pre-Entry to Level 1. She has taught mixed level groups and some embedded literacy classes. Before training to be a teacher, she was a graphic designer. She can be contacted at amanda.easto@btinternet.com

Context

Stergioulas (2006) explains digital literacy as:

the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyse and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process.

The day-to-day reality for classroom teachers is less of a mouthful but can be a challenge. I have been teaching Pre-Entry and Entry 1 literacy for nine years. This piece considers how I have used information and communications technology (ICT) in classes at these levels, how the equipment has changed, and how my teaching methods and my attitude have also evolved since I started teaching.

Acknowledging aversion

I have always loved teaching Pre-Entry and Entry 1 classes but, until recently, I have to admit that I have had an aversion to embedding digital literacy. One of the challenges of planning and preparing activities using ICT in lessons at these levels is the lack of available resources. Online literacy resources are usually aimed at very young children, and given the reading level of learners in these groups, activities for adults, such as those on [BBC Skillswise](#), are too difficult.

The *Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework for Literacy and Numeracy* (2001) does not explicitly mention digital literacy. However, Pre-Entry Milestone 8 requires learners to:

understand that individual words are grouped together to convey meaning and information, [...] recognise/read a growing repertoire of familiar words, signs and symbols which they encounter in daily life.

Similarly, the *Adult Literacy Core Curriculum* (2001) refers, at Entry Level 1, to an adult's ability to:

read and understand short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics; read and obtain information from common signs and symbols.

We are all increasingly encountering digital content and we must not allow personal aversion or antagonism to become another barrier to learning for those in our classrooms.

Considering computers

At CALAT, we were expected to use ICT in most lessons and this was monitored in our annual lesson observations. To be honest, I struggled. Computer-based activities in lessons were usually time-consuming and frustrating, and managing a lesson with 10 learners on slow, outdated PCs or laptops riddled with problems was often frustrating. Although some learners in these groups were happy to work in pairs, and managed well, the majority had little or no experience of using computers, lacked keyboard skills and needed one-to-one support.

Given their literacy levels and the lack of resources, I found there was little learners could do with computers. Typing up a short piece of their own writing would take a whole lesson, or more. Often I found I was spending the entire session trying to resolve computer issues, instead of teaching. I questioned the value of computer-based activities: were they helping the learners to improve their literacy, gain confidence and independence, and achieve their personal goals?

Smart interaction

In the last few years, I changed the way I taught digital literacy in my classes thanks to the prevalence of smartphones and the arrival of interactive whiteboards. I do still allow time for practising keyboard skills using PCs or laptops, but the interactive whiteboard has been a great resource for whole group learning. I appreciate that this type of learning has to be used sparingly, and does not suit every learning style, but it has often brought variety and enjoyment to lessons I have taught.

As well as having an interactive whiteboard, another change I have noticed is in the number of learners with smartphones. In last term's group of 10 learners in a Pre-Entry and Entry 1 class, eight had smartphones. Although some only used their phones to make calls, others were more confident. They used voice recognition to send messages or WhatsApp, and social media such as Facebook. Generally, the learners were keen to gain and share new skills using smartphones, so I tried to find activities they could practise at home.

Actual activities

I have recently used the interactive whiteboard in Pre-Entry and Entry 1 classes in a variety of ways.

Here are some examples.

Short PowerPoint presentations were useful for teaching, practising and consolidating phonic sounds. I used colour on the words to demonstrate word patterns, phonic sounds or words within words. I found images from Google images and changed them according to the interests of the group. To address differentiation, whilst some learners would use this example to read and spell the words, more confident learners could think of other words incorporating 'man'.



Images: [Pinterest](#)

In a similar way, I have often used short PowerPoint presentations to teach and practise vocabulary. Those with a visual preference may remember words more easily if they are associated with pictures, and colour on the letters may help with differentiation and recognition of sounds.



Image: <http://fullhdpictures.com>

Phonic recognition can be taught or reinforced with videos, such as [Mr Thorne does Phonics](#), where there is huge number of excellent, short videos demonstrating the sounds of phonemes, digraphs and trigraphs. The videos also cover elements of grammar and maths, which learners can use and practise at home on a smartphone or tablet. The [Mr Thorne videos](#) are intended for young children, their parents and for adults who struggle to read.



Image: YouTube

Word games, such as this [anagram phonics game](#) make good whole group activities. I have often used these games at the end of lessons to consolidate a phonic sound the group has been focusing on.



Image: <http://www.galacticphonics.com/>

I have produced PowerPoint presentations for practising 'real life' situations, such as using a touchscreen at the doctors' surgery. Learners, in turn, can practise reading the instructions and touching the correct parts of the screen.

Sometimes I have used Google Images to add reality to comprehension practice. Using this picture with a question such as, 'What time does the shop close on Thursday?' is good for Functional Skills exam practice.



Image: <https://uk.pinterest.com>

I have often used websites for individual or group activities. Learners take turns to use the interactive whiteboard to find information from sites such as Transport for London, the BBC or Croydon Council. Learners, who have smartphones and are confident using them, can download and use apps to find information.

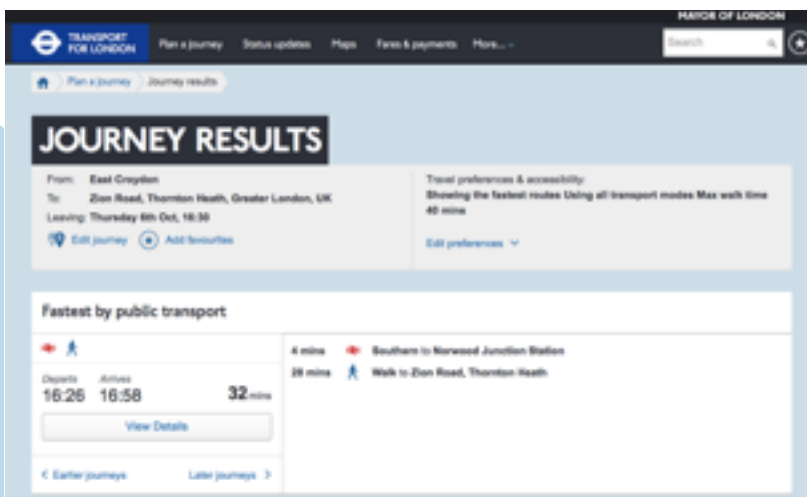




Image: <https://tfl.gov.uk>

In this activity, which was created in Microsoft Word, learners used the internet to look up shopping websites to find information and fill in the question sheet.

Internet Shopping

1	2	3
Go to  www.amazon.co.uk	Find a keep fit DVD 1. What is it called? 2. What does it cost?	1. _____ _____ 2. _____
Go to  www.tesco.com and click on groceries	Look up this week's top offers 1. How much is lettuce? 2. How much are tomatoes? 3. How much are peppers?	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

I have made maths quizzes using PowerPoint, such as the example below, to add fun and variety to lessons to practise for Functional Skills reading exams where the answer often requires writing an amount of money. In these short, warm up activities, learners wrote their answers on mini

How much is this?



whiteboards. I find that there are many advantages in using mini whiteboards. For instance, the tutor can give instant feedback, mistakes can be instantly corrected and no paper is wasted. In this activity, the whiteboards gave learners who struggled with writing the £ symbol and amounts of money in figures, a chance to practise and correct their writing as many times as they wished.

Images: [British notes](#) and [Britannia School of English](#)

For this short reading activity, I asked for volunteers to come to the board and draw lines using the interactive tools. I have found recently that most learners are happy to use the interactive whiteboard. Maybe this is because it is a form of media, like their smartphones or tablets that they are used to. Naturally, some learners have been reluctant to come to the front of the class and use the whiteboard, but after a while, all have been keen to participate. Any learner with a mobility difficulty gives verbal instructions to a buddy to accomplish the task and I've found that these group activities have been great for teamwork and confidence building.

Words that tell us what to do

Draw lines to match the words and pictures.

bake



peel



mix



boil



fry



chop



Other examples of activities using the interactive whiteboard are:

- Using coloured and clear fonts to display the learning objectives for the session
- Using pictures to facilitate discussions
- Showing short extracts of text for group reading
- Showing road and workplace signs in use, such as in photos of the local area

- Using online dictionaries, such as [Picture That](#) online talking dyslexic dictionary to demonstrate word sounds, or for a group activity.

Reflection

Although most of the lesson time is still devoted to reading and writing activities, having an interactive whiteboard has brought colour, dynamism and fun into the classroom. It has changed the way I have taught these classes, and embedding ICT in lessons is now easy, and usually rewarding. Resources and activities are quick and easy to prepare, and can be used in a number of different ways. Learners have enjoyed having an interactive whiteboard in the classroom and although some were initially reluctant, all have enjoyed participating in group activities. Smartphones have also enabled many learners to access interactive resources in their own time to practise and reinforce learning outside the classroom.

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I think I can... Improving adult literacy with iPads

Sharon Murphy

Sharon Murphy has been working in adult education for many years and has a particular interest in adult literacy. A strong believer in continuing professional development, Sharon is presently pursuing a Master of Arts (MA) in Learning and Teaching through Dundalk Institute of Technology in the north east of Ireland.

Background

People with low levels of literacy often face a series of challenges in everyday life which can be exacerbated in today's digital world as almost every transaction now has some element of information and communications technology (ICT) involved. Literacy tutors need to be aware of the significant challenges this poses for learners and the importance of incorporating technology into teaching. As part of an assessment for Enhancing Learning through Technology, a module on the MA programme, I was given the task of selecting, implementing and evaluating the use of a technology in my own practice.

What I did and why

I had recently started to work with a small Level 1 literacy group. The group consisted of five learners ranging in age from mid-thirties to late fifties. All the learners have intellectual disabilities. Two learners also have physical disabilities: one is deaf and has difficulty with speech and the other uses a wheelchair and has limited use of their right hand. Digital interventions such as laptops and an interactive whiteboard used with this group had yielded limited success and I felt it was worth trying something new.

Having recently purchased an iPad, I was struck by how the tablet PC is transforming the way in which we communicate with one another and with the world around us. This led me to consider how the use of iPads might enhance learning in the adult literacy classroom.

I wanted to introduce a technology that my group could engage with in a collaborative way and involve them in practical IT activities that, up to this point, may have seemed ambitious. I was conscious that adults lacking in digital literacy skills are likely to have more limited opportunities for work along with reduced opportunities to progress in their current positions or even their day-to-

day lives (Brynner, 2009). For that reason, I hoped that using the iPads in the classroom would serve to improve the learners' reading and writing while simultaneously developing their digital literacy.

I was excited at the prospect of introducing new technology into the classroom. However, my learners were reluctant initially to engage with the iPads as I suspect that they may not have appreciated the connection between using an iPad and improving their reading and writing. As with all innovation, the acceptance of change can be a barrier (Evans-Andris, 1995). Furthermore, there were a number of logistical challenges to overcome such as ensuring:

- iPads were booked in advance with the IT department
- they were charged (at least sufficiently for a two-hour lesson)
- the Apple ID, password and the Wi-Fi code were available
- there was Wi-Fi access in the classroom.

What worked and why

Another challenge I encountered was sourcing suitable applications (apps) for my group, as many of the literacy apps are geared towards children. A particularly useful find was the [Wheel of Apps](#) devised by Communication, Access, Literacy and Learning (CALL) Scotland. This resource divides up applications into different categories and specifically caters for learners with reading and writing difficulties including dyslexia.

I made particular use of an application located on the Wheel of Apps called [Bitsboard](#). A free version is available for download and it provided many useful classroom activities. The application contains dozens of interactive games including spelling exercises, word searches, word builder exercises and even digital jigsaw puzzles. The latter were particularly useful in helping my students to use their fingers and learn how to swipe.

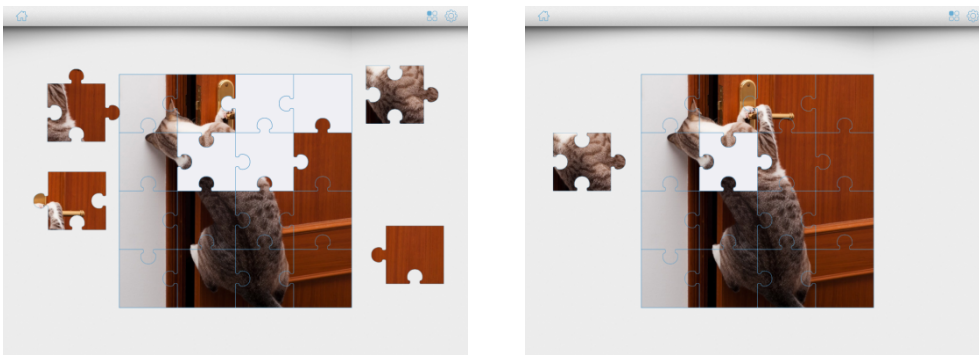
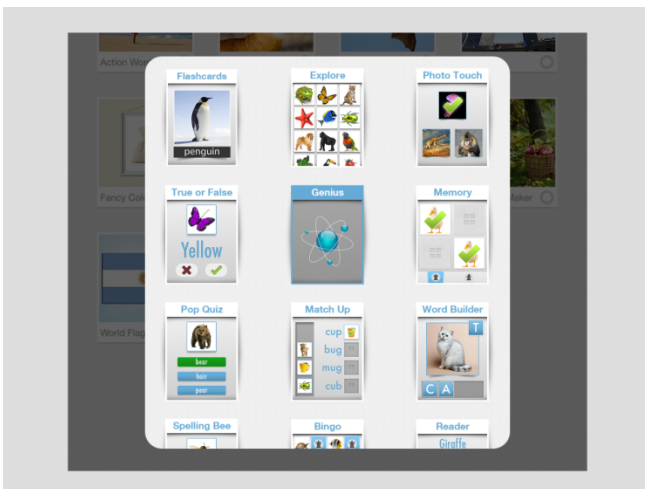


Photo: [Bitsboard](#)



Photos: [Bitsboard](#)

Literature suggests that iPads in the classroom can engage even the most stubborn student (Carey & Moorehead, 2016) and that students both enjoy learning and stay more focused when using iPads (Mango, 2015). iPads reduce the need for paper and textbooks and they are light and portable. They allow for the electronic storage of work and materials, all of which can be shared between students and tutors using electronic folders. Arguably, iPads are also intuitive to use and this can be advantageous to students with disabilities or reduced motor functions. They allow for a multi-tasking, differentiated environment within the classroom as learners can progress through exercises at their own pace on individual devices. iPads are viewed as 'normal' or perhaps even 'cool', and unlike assistive technology, they are not seen as specific intervention for people with literacy difficulties or a disability.

There are, of course, disadvantages to using iPads in the classroom: the main one is the cost as they can be expensive to roll out in large numbers. They are also heavily dependent on the quality of the Wi-Fi and with phones, computers and laptops competing for Wi-Fi, a slow or disconnected server can spoil a carefully planned lesson. Typing can also be more frustrating on the iPad and the lack of

a USB port limits their functionality. Additionally, some tutors are resistant to truly integrating iPads into the classroom due to time constraints and lack of training (Clark & Luckin, 2012).

Advice to others

When integrating technology into educational practice, learner engagement can be a challenge. It is necessary to gauge the learners' prior knowledge, experience and feelings about technology and, more importantly, to help learners make the connection between the technology use and the learning outcomes.

However, the most striking impact of this initiative for me was the extent to which my students appeared more 'included' in today's digital world. The students' sense of ownership and control of their own learning improved while using the devices. It seemed that their confidence increased simply by being given the chance to use the iPads and, more notably, being trusted to use them.

Many adult literacy students have had negative schooling experiences which have a profound impact on what they believe they can achieve. The fact they were using such an expensive and 'hip' technological tool in the classroom appeared to give them an air of confidence that even carried outside the classroom.

On two occasions during the tea break I overheard two of my learners telling members of another group how they were using iPads in the classroom and discussing the various activities they had carried out and how they had enjoyed them. Using an iPad does not come with a stigma and students with learning disabilities fit right in, unlike when using interventions that are different from methods used by the majority which can often accentuate the feeling of 'being different' for students with physical or intellectual disabilities.

One learner spoke about how she was able to look up and capture a picture of a particular foot cream on the iPad which made it easier for her to explain to the counter assistant in the pharmacy what kind of cream she was looking for.

The question remains: did it help their learning? I think that using the technology provided a more engaging learning experience for the students. There is enormous scope for the use of apps in literacy and numeracy education. While the iPad provided the learners with tools for improving their literacy and digital literacy skills, it is not necessarily suitable for actual writing practice and it is easy to see how the basic exercise of handwriting could be forgotten. I think, therefore, it is important to see the iPad as a supplement to reading and writing rather than a replacement for traditional literacy teaching methods.

While the academic progress made by the group during this intervention did not show any great strides, I think it had a positive effect on their confidence from a feeling of inclusion in a digital world from which they had previously been excluded. Traditionally, literacy has been summarised as the skills of reading and writing. However, today literacy encompasses so much more than that. When students improve their literacy, it allows them to participate more fully in society; *digital literacy* serves to enhance this even more.

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Music and learning: is it time for FE to change its tune?

Lauren Foster

Lauren Foster is currently training to be a special educational needs (SEN) teacher in the lifelong learning sector. She has been working in a support role with young people with disabilities for five years in Further Education colleges and through national charity programmes. Her personal research interests include digital literacies, SEN education and gender representation. She can be contacted on fosterl1993@gmail.com.

Introduction

Music can have a range of effects on individuals. It can be either soothing or stimulating (Rief, 2015). An array of emotions can be ignited through a song or it can be used to block out the world around you. I have been particularly interested in the latter option and have often wondered why there is frequently a blanket ban on the use of MP3 players or smartphones in the classrooms of schools and Further Education (FE) institutions when music can have positive effects. In my experience, I have found that listening to music has particularly helped learners with special educational needs.

I have worked with FE students with a range of conditions including Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Although individual needs can be very different, I have found that many of the students had a common strategy: they use their headphones and music to block out surrounding distractions and help them focus on tasks. This article will consider the influence on students with these two conditions of listening to digital music while learning.

Music and ADHD

Listening to music can have a positive influence on learners with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. Studies have found that the addition of a stimulus such as music to a familiar and repetitive task can aid concentration. In particular, background music can support students with ADHD completing cognitive tasks (Pelham et al, 2011). Additionally, the type of music can have an influence. Research has suggested that classical music can be soothing, boost creativity and even increase critical thinking skills whereas energising music can give students with ADHD a boost when they are cognitively fatigued or have low energy for tasks (Rief, 2015). Furthermore, Rogers (2012, in Rief, 2015) found that individuals listening to their favourite music had increased dopamine levels in

the brain. Dopamine is the neurotransmitter in the brain that controls attention, memory and motivation and its levels are believed to be malfunctioning or reduced in the brain of a person with ADHD (OASIS, 2016, Nauert, 2015). Consequently, allowing students with this condition to listen to music may be beneficial to their learning and music may be considered as a focusing tool.

Music and ASD

Processing everyday sensory information can be problematic for learners on the autism spectrum and an individual may experience sensory overload. This can cause anxiety, stress or even physical pain, which has a direct impact on the person's behaviour (National Autistic Society, 2016). Background noises, such as the sound of a ticking clock, can be highly distracting (ibid), which can have a detrimental effect on their education as they may not be able to concentrate on a given task. Additionally, studies have found that some young people on the autism spectrum are more responsive to music than speech and environmental noise (Hillier et al, 2016). Allowing the learner to wear headphones may help them to block out surrounding noises and enable them to focus. As well as improving concentration, music has been found to help students with ASD regulate emotions. Individuals with autism can experience high levels of anxiety and can have difficulty controlling emotions; however, listening to music can have a soothing effect and help regulate emotions (Hillier 2016).

Music, equality and inclusion

Of course, using personal music devices needs to be supervised and perhaps rules created between the teacher and student. Although music can be used as a tool to aid concentration, it can also become a distraction. The effectiveness needs to be monitored on an individual basis. Tutors need to be proactive and set ground rules for when it is acceptable for students to listen to their music. It may need to be limited to activities such as individual work. Clearly, the use of headphones whilst working in a pair or group could be distracting and likely to discourage the learner from fully interacting with peers.

Potential challenges relating to behaviour management are not a sufficient reason for a ban on music in the classroom. 'An education provider has a duty to make "reasonable adjustments" to make sure disabled students are not discriminated against.' (Government Digital Service, nd). Individuals with learning difficulties or disabilities may have an Education, Health and Care Plan

(EHCP) or have a support plan created by their institution. Guidance from professionals within this paperwork may recommend that the individual uses music to support them. If there is a blanket ban on all digital music players in classrooms, allowing exceptions for specific individuals may cause them to be singled out. When forming relationships and communicating with peers can already be difficult for students with ADHD and ASD, being highlighted for something has the potential to build additional barriers and even lead to bullying behaviour. Individuals with autism can be 'particularly vulnerable to being bullied' (Reid & Batten, 2006), whilst those with a diagnosis of ADHD are 'proportionately more likely to display bullying behaviour' (Todd, 2016). If the learner is comfortable with their learning needs being discussed, the teacher could explain to the class why an exception is being made to try to avoid confrontation. However, if the individual does not feel comfortable with this, the teacher could investigate if allowances can be made to the ban for the whole group in order to ensure reasonable adjustments and avoid discrimination.

Conclusion

Music can be used to aid concentration. It can be particularly useful in helping students with ADHD and ASD to focus or as a calming tool. However, the use of personal devices needs to be monitored on an individual basis. Whilst using MP3 players or smartphones in a learning environment may have a positive effect for some learners, others may find them distracting. Guidelines need to be set by the tutor to ensure students are using their headphones at acceptable times such as individual tasks. Listening to music during other activities such as teacher-led tasks or group work may cause a learner to disengage or miss important opportunities to build relationships with peers. If a learner requires music as a *reasonable adjustment*, the institution needs to reconsider any complete ban to avoid discrimination.

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The myths and legends of digital literacy: from an ESOL practitioner's perspective

Chloë Hynes

Chloë Hynes is a qualified art, performance and ESOL teacher. She has been teaching ESOL for Wirral Council for 3 years via Entry Level classes plus reading, drama, sewing and art groups and projects. She is a management council representative for NATECLA and an active part of the North West and Wales branch committee. Her personal research interests include digital literacies, and online and digital identities. She can be contacted on Miss_chloe_hynes@hotmail.co.uk

I completed my PGCE during a year of change, turmoil and, some would say, anarchy in education in the UK spearheaded by the Conservative politician Michael Gove. The upheaval was such that the essay I completed in my first term was out of date by the time I qualified. I find that, to this day, some teachers think some reforms and acts are in play when they are not only outmoded, but have been replaced. You may be glad to read that this article is not about Michael Gove. I mention his name in an article about digital literacies to illustrate a parallel with the incredibly fast movement of the world today. By the time we have dealt with one change, there is another in its place. The same is said of technology.

Technology is a fad - a short story

15 years ago, I got my first mobile phone. It needed charging once every two weeks, it held five text messages and it was unbreakable. The only people who sent me text messages were my dad and a boy or girl I was interested in at the time (I was 15). Each message cost me 12p so each was extremely well-considered before clicking the important send button. I looked at my phone maybe once every few days or every day if I had a high school crush. I checked emails maybe once every week as I had to time it well with my mum due to the noise and the fact that she wanted to use the phone at night to speak to her boyfriend. She'd give me half an hour and in that time I could get on to the internet (which made that horrifying dial up noise we all want to forget), get onto a browser, log on and check one email.

Skip forward five years and I'm in university where I submit assignments online. This was a shock to the system as at college everything was hand-written. However, all those years on MSN as a teenager helped me prepare for the amount of typing I was going to do during my degree. At college I became interested in analogue sound art, so at university I took the opportunity to explore digital art. I am versed in most art and performance-aiding software from circa 2008. After graduating, I joined Facebook to keep in touch with friends I met whilst travelling.

It's 2011 now and I'm training to teach ESOL in a local community college. I am using an overhead projector (OHP) and am lucky if I get a room with a projector. During my PGCE, I am offered half an hour in a room with a Smartboard if I want to practise how to use it, but I'm told that many schools and colleges don't have them as they are as much of a fad as minidisks were. I'm advised that you can't embed ICT into every class but you can embed it in every course by booking a computer room for a lesson or two for research or write ups. I now have a smart phone and it can do everything! I don't need an mp3 player, watch, calculator or camera anymore as I can do it all on my phone. It's not as unbreakable as my first phone though and I have to charge it every day. I'm told to delete my Facebook profile for my own security whilst teaching.

Another five years and we are in the present day. The speed of the internet is now unthinkable to my 15-year-old self. It no longer takes me half an hour to check one email. I work in the community and am rarely at the main site so I check my emails during every break and between every lesson. I do this on my phone. I need to have tutor files for each class and they need to be lightweight and portable to carry between venues. So, I have a digital tutor file on the cloud. I also need to send registers every day. I do all this on my tablet. You can get WiFi access in libraries, cafes, shopping centres and even buses, now. Most community venues have WiFi (albeit at varying degrees of usability). If I wanted to, I could buy everything online and never leave the house. I look at job descriptions for art teachers locally and discover that the software I learned to use during my degree is now out of date.

Technology doesn't belong in the classroom

You may be reading these stories and see some similarities or parallels with your own life. This is how much we now need to rely on technology in our day-to-day lives at home and at work. Proof of this digital progression can be seen in the statistics (BIS, 2014):

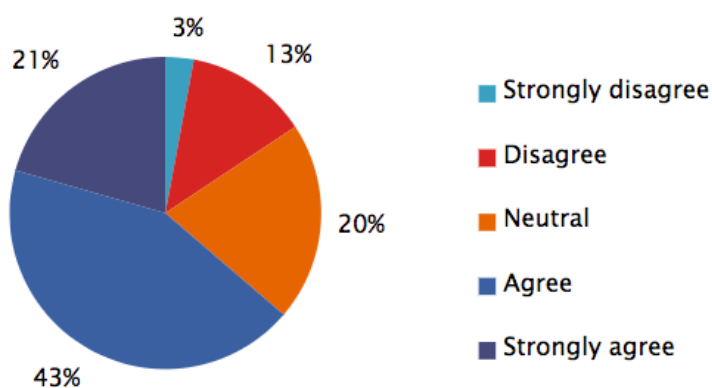
- Access to mobile phones has doubled between 2010 and 2014 (from 24% to 58%)
- Daily use of the internet has more than doubled since 2006 (76% in 2014)

- Daily use of the internet for adults aged 65+ has grown enormously between 2006 and 2014 (9% to 42%).

According to NIACE's (2015) report *Digital Learning and Digital Skills*, 90% of jobs in the European Union (EU) require basic computer skills such as the ability to: email a timesheet, clock in/out, book time off or use a till. However, around half of adults in the UK do not have this basic skillset and this is causing a major 'digital divide' (FELTAG, 2013). Therefore, adults with low digital literacy skills are at a severe disadvantage. Digital literacy is now an essential life skill as much as English and maths (Bradley, 2016). So, if we don't embed it in our teaching, we are letting our learners down.

Some teachers, however, do not see the value or importance in using technology to support their teaching and learning (SCOLA, NIACE & TCL, 2014:8). Think for a moment how much you interact with technology in any given week. From emails to text messages, social media to TV, computer games to digital billboards. Then, consider how much your learners must also interact with technology. Imagine also, the difficulties they would face if they were *digitally illiterate*. Digital literacy is something many people, including me, take for granted. With the new government plans (Bradley, 2016) to make the UK one of the most 'digitally skilled nations', it will be increasingly difficult to live and work in the UK if you are on the wrong side of the digital divide. So, where and how does a person acquire digital literacy?

Figure 4. I have sufficient confidence in using technology to support teaching and learning.



Morris (2012:6) says that the digital competence in the teaching workforce is 'patchy'. I imagine that there may be teachers reading this article and wondering how to embed this element when they lack digital confidence themselves. Indeed, according to research carried out by SCOLA, NIACE and The Campaign for Learning (2014:7-8), only 64% of their respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they have 'sufficient confidence in using technology to support teaching and learning'. If you are a part of the remaining 36%, then you may decide to arrange some CPD, whether that's independent

research and practice, staff skill shares or attending a course or workshop. This answer is not only for you, but for your learners, too. Where do you learn digital literacy? Through practice and through education (LLUK, 2007:64).

My intention is not to scare people away from technology use by making you imagine that your classroom has to be so digitally enhanced that it could quite easily be slotted into a sci-fi movie. No, *Blade Runner* is fine as it is. *TRON* does not need any extras. Put down that light saber! Instead, think small, because the small things could be what really make a difference to teaching and learning. Think about devices and websites that your learners will use every day, whether that's job searching websites or ASDA home delivery. Or similarly, think of websites that may help them that they may not already use, for instance: the local council website or PayPal. There are so many applications (apps) on phones and tablets these days that the sky is the limit on how you could embed them in your classroom. Or, if you are highly digitally literate yourself, you could always make your own app.

There are two parallel factors at play whilst embedding digital literacy:

- Teaching how to use digital platforms
- Learning through digital means.

It's our role as educators to discover a learner's digital starting point through our initial and diagnostic assessments. From there we can discern how we can embed technology in the classroom seamlessly whilst also giving them practice using technology. Many of our learners may not need help with their practical digital literacies, but will respond better to digital formats over paper. If it is our role to prepare people for work, then it is crucial that we embolden this digital learning style.

ESOL learners are all digitally illiterate

In the short time I have been teaching, I have heard non-ESOL teachers make *advantaged* assumptions that ESOL learners come from countries where technology doesn't exist and where they live in poverty. Many of these teachers are surprised if ESOL learners own and know how to use a smartphone. Such ill-informed opinions were only heightened by the media representation of the refugee crisis last year.

Unsurprisingly, the situation in the classroom is at odds with that being published in the newspapers. If we get to the bare bones of what a phone is – a tool for communication – we can see how important this device is for individuals who are settling in a new country. This is not only to keep a direct line to those who speak their language locally, but also to keep in touch with friends and family who are not in the UK, and of course, for [Google Translate](#). Benton (2014:2) explains that smartphones help to overcome barriers when communicating with officials and offer opportunities to practise English ‘anywhere and at any time’ through dedicated apps like [Duolingo](#) plus general internet usage.



Images: Duolingo

According to the Office for National Statistics (2015), people of Black and Asian ethnicities use computers and the internet slightly more often than people of white ethnicities and general use includes that of information seeking and communicative activities. However, this figure does not take into account who is/is not an English language learner. Nor does it consider white language learners. ESOL classes by their very nature are extremely culturally diverse and this is reflected in digital use (BIS, 2014:26). Some learners are confident users but are uncomfortable using technology in the classroom. Others, meanwhile, feel it is a ‘natural part of their language learning experience’ (Slaouti, Onat-Stelma & Motteram, 2013:84). The risk with the latter can be reliance on digital translators. I have found that there are few cultural or age related commonalities in usage, everyone is different, depending on their personal motivations for ICT use.

With this in mind, if we are to then lead a class with leaflet after brochure after flyer will they be representative of resources learners would be exposed to in their personal and professional lives? Professional marketing director and blogger for The Marketing Centre, Lance Hiley (2015) says that, ‘printed brochures can complement digital strategies ... but they can’t be everything’. A significant portion of advertising is now online or represented somehow in digital format. Yet, some teachers

still rely on leaflets, brochures and flyers. Hiley explains that the amount of printed advertising and information has reduced due to the convenience of the internet. Most printed materials that are available usually refer to an online source for further information. Therefore, we must consider using a digital resource to accompany the leaflet or brochure as this would provide a more authentic stimulus for learners.

Motteram (2013:83) explains that ESOL learners in particular, need to develop their digital literacies alongside English because they will need ICT skills to be learners and workers within the current UK landscape and 'operate in the ESOL world beyond the institution's doors'. Evidence also indicates that development of digital literacies can reduce social exclusion (BIS, 2014:27) as technology offers spaces for language learning that classrooms and everyday activities of marginalized groups do not. Finally, Woodson (nd) offers a concise list of reasons why embedding technology is pertinent in ESOL education:

- It increases student engagement and motivation
- It offers mobility
- It teaches students valuable tools for the future
- It can be a timesaver for teachers
- It promotes learner independence
- It provides students with access to the target culture.

Using technology in the classroom is more trouble than it's worth

Of course there may be difficulties in employing blended learning, partly because it may be a new way of working that requires you to reconsider your habitual teaching practice. Other issues you may have to consider include time, equipment and connectivity (SOCLA, NIACE & TCfL, 2014:10). However, these will be specific to you, your place of work and other external factors. It may require some exploration to decide the most appropriate use of technology in your classroom.

Garrison, Kanuka and Littlejohn (cited in Motteram, 2013:111) warn against going headfirst into embracing blended learning. They advise to consider your limitations, your institution's limitations and ensure your ideas are not only feasible, but also sustainable. Asking your manager for 15 iPads tomorrow probably won't work; carefully considering the equipment you do have (or can gain access to) and exploring what it can do for you and your classroom, will be time well spent.



Last year I explored the use of blogs for an ESOL reading group I had started. I was frustrated with the small amount of time the learners had as a group (two hours per week for 10 weeks) and I wanted a place where learners could share reviews they had written as part of [Reading Ahead](#) (formerly called 'The Six Book Challenge'; a confidence building programme run by the Reading Agency to encourage young people and adults to read). I was very precise in my hunt that the website needed to be free, easily accessible, private and could have multiple authors. I came across [Blogger](#). The initial start-up and research into what would work best with my learners was time consuming, I will admit. However, it paid off as the learners were engaged outside of class time and motivated to access it to read what others had written. I usually do a second icebreaker in lesson two as the class is still bonding, but by lesson two this particular class already knew each other very well!

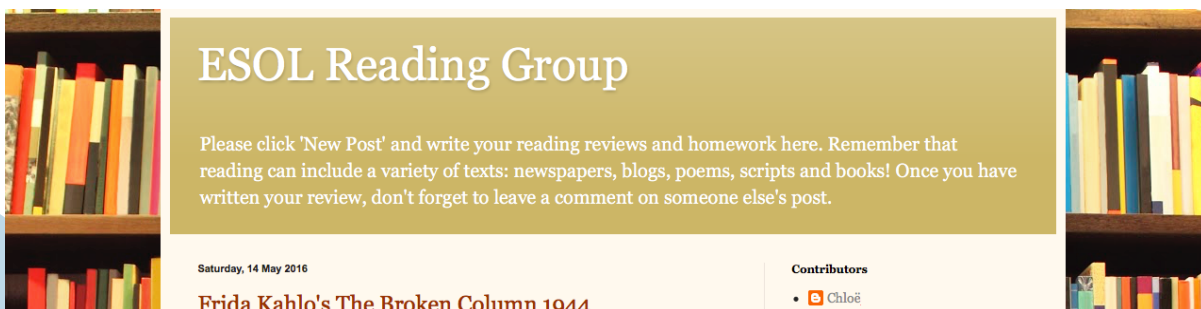


Image: Blogger

However, the downside of Blogger is that it requires an email for set up. Not only that, but it requires a Google Account. This means that when you first use Blogger with your class, you may need to set a little time aside in order to ensure everyone has an email address, a Google account

and they know how to access Blogger. Once online however, the Google Account allows access to other platforms:

- [Drive](#) – This is cloud storage, similar to [Dropbox](#). It is great for sharing resources for learners who have missed a class or for learners who want to refresh.
- [Docs](#) – This is free word processing software. If learners share work with you, you can leave comments and feedback on their work. You can also create a collaborative document which different learners can work on simultaneously.
- [Hangouts](#) – This is free video messaging software and similar to [Skype](#).
- [Books](#) – This gives access to online e-books. Some can be read free of charge. You can search for specific terms and learners can review books.
- YouTube – This is a video sharing website. I highly recommend [TED Talks](#) and audiobooks. Learners can leave comments and have discussions on video pages. Viral videos can also be an interesting teaching point. Videos are an excellent accompaniment to storytelling activities. Some have the option of subtitles which aid an active ‘negotiation of meaning’ (BIS, 2014:26).
- [Maps](#) – The group can create a collaborative class map and each learner can pin point where they have lived and write about their country.
- [Translate](#) – This is good for general use as it’s more mobile than a paper dictionary.

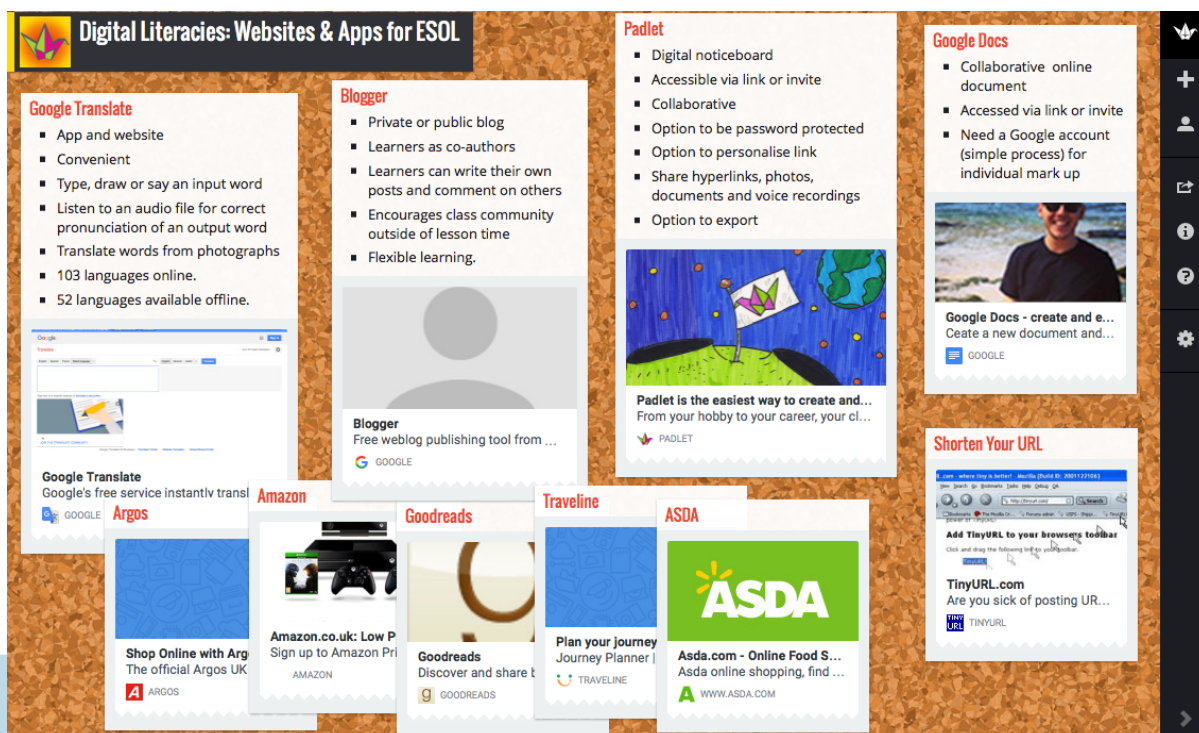
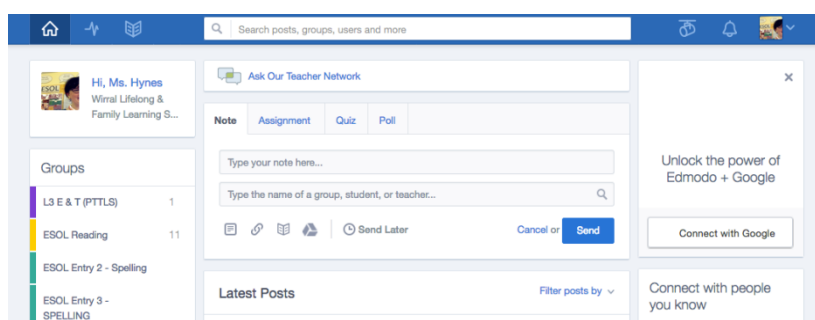


Image: [Padlet](#)

Earlier this year, I discovered [Edmodo](#). At first it seemed like a good alternative to Blogger because it doesn't require an email account. However, upon further exploration I discovered that it offered much more than a simple text posting interface. Edmodo could be described as a closed and secure version of Facebook. Visually it looks very similar, so the interface is more approachable for those who have previously used social media platforms. Used by teachers of children and adults alike, it is particularly useful for language learners as it encourages social inclusion. It allows learners to chat within the group (and privately to one another) outside of class time. Learners can share posts, images, videos, links or documents and they can take part in quizzes or polls that you can create and post. Learners can link their accounts with Google Drive so they can easily share documents with you and vice versa. Teachers can upload assignment submission posts for which learners can 'turn in' their work once complete. Each learner's work, along with the day they submitted and their resulting grade is then kept neat and tidy in the teacher's online 'gradebook'. Using this feature means you, the teacher, have one less tracking sheet to complete, as it's all done immediately for you. In this way, Edmodo acts like a small virtual learning environment (VLE such as Moodle, Blackboard or MyCollege) which is perfect for teachers who do not have access to an institution-wide VLE. Edmodo supports learner autonomy as learners can access it whenever, wherever and however much they like.



Images: Edmodo

I continue to use Edmodo with a variety of my classes and for different reasons. So far so good, but I'm always interested in hearing from other teachers about their experiences and their recommendations. Technology can be extremely overwhelming and so I think it's crucial that as practitioners we share good practice with one another so we don't become deterred by this infinite idea of 'digital literacies'.

Technology is a fad: an epilogue

Sharma (nd) details four simple principles for embedding digital literacies into our teaching practice:

- Separate the role of the teacher and digital
- Teach in a principled way by considering the pedagogical or andragogical reasons for using something
- Use technology to complement and enhance
- Think about how you are using what you are using.

Embedding digital literacies should not be an add-on to your lesson that you hastily include to tick a box. Instead, treat it as a seamless enhancement creating an enjoyable blended learning environment for you and your learners. Don't do something just to give your lessons the 'wow factor'. Make sure you try and test the technology beforehand to ensure that you understand how it works because you will need to support learners if they have issues with the technology. Challenge yourself to find something works for you and your classroom.

Technology is not a new reform that will be altered and developed as time goes on to meet the needs of current learners. Reforms sometimes develop backwards and sometimes they develop forwards or even go completely *off-piste*. Technology, however, is created for users not learners and is here to stay. It's moving fast and furious and always, forwards. If you miss the train, it won't be coming back around again. So (un)fortunately, it's time to get on board.

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Digital literacy: an update from a Welsh perspective

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, as well as training of essential skills practitioners. Anne is currently completing a Professional Doctorate in Education at Cardiff University, evaluating the effectiveness of essential skills programmes from the varying perspectives of learner, employer and tutor. She can be contacted on areardon-james@cavc.ac.uk

Introduction

Having recently completed the new Digital Literacy Practitioner qualification through [Colegau Cymru](#), this article will reflect on details of the justification for the development of a new digital literacy curriculum for adults and young people within the last year.

Times, they are changing. Whilst years ago, learners would often work on IT (information technology) projects in isolation - facing computers lining up alongside the classroom walls - now working together in the spirit of collaboration is key. Today, mirroring more of what goes on in the workplace and life in general, adult learners are being encouraged to work together as a team on a single Googledoc planning document for example, in real-time. This could be followed by presenting their information on interactive non-linear tools such as [Prezi](#) or [Sway](#), using their tablets or even mobile phones and saving their work to an online cloud such as Microsoft Office 365 (other tools are widely available!).

Digital literacy capabilities

Digital literacy remains a new, developing literacy, which can be defined as 'the capabilities which fit someone for living, learning and working in a digital society' (JISC, 2014). Rather than simply looking at standalone computing devices and functional IT or ICT (information and communications technology) skills in how to use word processing packages effectively, for example, it looks at the knowledge, skills and behaviours used with a broad range of devices as collaborative networks. The nature and scope of digital literacy is immense and can be broken down into the following seven key areas:

- Media literacy – to be able to evaluate current media stories and create own multi-media communications
- Communications and collaboration – to take an active part in digital networks in order to carry out learning and research
- Career and identity management – to establish and manage a reputable, online identity
- ICT literacy – to use digital devices, applications and services effectively
- Learning skills – to use formal and informal technologies in order to learn and study
- Digital scholarship – to take part in academic, professional and research practices via digital systems
- Information literacy – to use digital devices, applications and methods to find, interpret, evaluate, manage and share information. (JISC, 2014)

A thorough grounding and understanding of how to use digital literacies effectively is seen as an essential skill for adults and young people to develop in order to fully function in today's society, whether it be socially, in everyday life and activities, or for career and employment prospects. Whilst working with offenders, for instance, it quickly became apparent that many needed an email address, up-to-date CV, and to be shown how to register with job search services online to access employment opportunities and benefits. The Welsh Government sees the development of a workforce with a high level and broad range of 'e-skills' as crucial to the success of the Welsh economy, stating that '90% of new jobs will require excellent digital skills' (JISC, 2014). Indeed, many argue that digital literacy is now 'as important as reading and writing' (Gurney-Read, 2013).

Advances in technology have an impact on every part of the day, whether it be banking using a mobile smartphone application, reading the news via Twitter feed, talking with friends with Facebook messenger, listening to music by streaming through iTunes, buying car insurance by comparing deals on a comparison website, applying for a job using an online application form, planning a holiday using Google searches, or claiming benefits online. The list is endless and the [impact of learning](#) these skills can be life-changing and empowering. I recall the case of one learner who stated adamantly during our first session at the start of a ten-week course that he was not prepared to use email, and indeed was very scared due to all the security and ID theft horror stories he had read about in the newspapers. Over time however, with understanding and support from his peers and encouragement from the teaching staff, his stance gradually softened. By the end of the course, the glee and excitement from being able to email and share amazing landscape images with

his brother abroad, to research information online to help look after the roses in his garden, and to view old videos of *Coronation Street* on YouTube to watch with his elderly mother was infectious.

Many now see being *digitally literate* as essential to achieving full citizenship, with the development of citizens who can make responsible choices and access information, analysing and sharing information and ideas in order to create content using a range of multimedia platforms; ultimately taking social action by working both individually and collaboratively to solve problems in the family, workplace and community (Hobbs, 2010). An example of this can be seen through the increasing use of online petitions such as those on [Change.org](https://www.change.org), which are written, created and shared via social media by ordinary people in order to gather support for local issues and seek the attention of local and UK government, in the hope of influencing policy.

Interestingly however, whilst advances in digital technologies give opportunities to some, they highlight disadvantages for others. Technology can increase inclusivity, such as the provision of information in a variety of formats which can be accessed more readily by those with disabilities. Text on a screen can be enlarged or a different background colour added for those with dyslexia or visual impairments, for example. Conversely, there is also the reality of creating disadvantages for those people in society who cannot access information on digital devices and therefore become digitally excluded. This lack of access can be for a variety of reasons, such as poor internet infrastructure in rural locations, a lack of knowledge or skill for those who missed out on digital literacy education (such as older people), or a lack of finances to be able to buy a computer, laptop or smartphone. In order to address these problems in Wales, the Welsh government is implementing a number of steps, such as working with internet providers to aim to deliver super-fast broadband to all businesses as soon as possible, as well as to all households by 2020. It is also actively exploring opportunities to improve joint working between higher education, further education, schools, business and other sectors to share expertise and promote good practice (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010). In recognition of the skills required in the changing digital world, a new digital literacy qualification and [assessment](#) have been developed to help meet this need.

Key themes of the digital literacy qualification

The design principles of the new [Essential Skills in Digital Literacy](#), proposed by the Welsh Government (2015) contain six key strands or skill units. These are:

- Digital responsibility
- Digital productivity

- Digital Information literacy
- Digital collaboration
- Digital creativity
- Digital learning

Digital responsibility

This area is involved with safe and secure learning, such as e-safety. It encourages learners to reflect on the short and long term impacts of sharing information online in real world situations. Topics could include looking at email protocol and digital etiquette, computer viruses, tools and security settings to protect online identity and privacy, laws related to copyright and awareness of age restrictions, knowing how to report concerns and how to buy and sell online safely, such as paying bills and comparing services.

Digital productivity

This strand is concerned with working in an efficient and effective way. Whilst not promoting the use of any particular product or brand, learners will be encouraged to develop the confidence to use familiar and unfamiliar devices to organise, manipulate and present data through systematic use of digital files, problem-solving and developing appropriate solutions to tasks. Examples could include using cloud storage, setting up and managing files, folders and sub-folders, organising contacts, and using internal/external/removable drives appropriately to store and access data.

Digital information literacy

This key area looks at how learners carry out research in a digital environment, being aware of relevance, accuracy and validity of information, as well as any copyright issues. The aim is for learners to be critically reflective users of digital information in order to solve problems and complete tasks. This could include identifying purpose, creating appropriate search questions to be answered, using systems effectively to search, store and manage search results (such as bookmarks), evaluating, referencing information and communicating this in an appropriate way.

Digital collaboration

This strand is concerned with how learners should be able to work together effectively as a team using technology, either in the same setting or remotely. Examples here include taking a respectful and active part in online networks and communities, solving and evaluating problems or managing projects together. There are a multitude of collaborative tools that can be learned and used, such as web and video conferencing, file or calendar sharing, emails, instant messaging, blogs, wikis and social media.

Digital creativity

This element looks at the importance of challenging learners to think creatively in a digital environment, as well as being critical and reflective with regards to target audience and the processes used to solve problems in order to justify decisions. Examples here could include using creative applications, tools and techniques to edit text and presentation in order to increase possibilities for wealth creation, enterprise, entrepreneurship and employability.

Digital learning

This strand examines how learners can be encouraged to become independent and reflective, as well as learning from others, using a variety of familiar and unfamiliar digital tools to solve problems and complete tasks. This could be formal or informal and learners should be able to select, synthesise and evaluate information. Learning can be recorded and evidenced in many ways, including word processing, audio or video methods and blogs.

Assessment

Coinciding with the overhaul of the digital literacy curriculum is the launch of the new, standardised, online [Wales Essential Skills Toolkit assessment](#) for use across the whole of Wales.

This toolkit is composed of:

- a screener
- a combined initial/diagnostic assessment

- an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) mapped to the new essential skills standards for digital literacy, communication, application of number and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- interactive learning resources.

It is hoped that the tool will provide consistency and support to learners in all settings, whether it be in college, the community, work-based or prison. Feedback to date from many of my learners has been largely positive. They value the opportunity to freely access learning materials at times convenient to them, and enjoy seeing their progress and working their way up in 'bite-sized' chunks through the levels from Entry Level to Level 2 or Level 3.

The purpose of the qualification

The purpose of the stand-alone [digital literacy qualification](#) is to help learners to develop and evidence digital abilities that employers and educators will value. It equips individuals with relevant skills that are needed to function efficiently and effectively in learning, work and life. Ultimately, in the digital society of today, people need to be able to use software tools (applications and programmes) and technology hardware (such as laptops, smartphones, tablets) confidently to solve everyday problems and deal with modern day life. Increasingly, we communicate with others online, via email or instant messaging systems and create documents and products for work with a team who may not necessarily be in the same country, let alone the same room. We need to know how to work and learn safely, where to look for reliable information and then how to store, manage and present it to others, using critical thinking and reflection in order to keep improving.

I recently delivered sessions to adult learners working in school canteens. They are now expected to be proficient in spreadsheets, securely saving and sending stock information via email with attachments and running their kitchens as businesses, which is very different from the dinner ladies of old! These new responsibilities had the added benefit of improving the life of one lady in particular who was finding the physical demands of being on her feet all day in a café increasingly difficult. By learning skills in Microsoft Office packages, she was able to transfer to an office-based position and stay with her employer.

Conclusion

The new digital literacy standards were developed in response to the recommendations of the Ministerial ICT Steering Group, through identifying best practice in adult literacy, numeracy and ICT. They are fully mapped to coherent curriculum criteria from Entry 1 through to Level 3, so provide a clear progression route for learners. Seen as accessible and inclusive, they can be used with any adult learner, of any ability, studying on any programme. Ideally, learning should be incidental and naturally-occurring, encouraging learners to self-reflect and develop transferable skills to give increased confidence in dealing with real-life contexts and problems. Indeed, the Welsh government (2015) sees it as imperative that these skills are practised in an integrated and holistic manner, to mirror every day working life. Why not have a go at the free [WEST screener](#) yourself?

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NALA's Distance Learning Service: enriching learning through digital literacy

Gillian Harris

Gillian Harris is the distance learning coordinator at the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and has 19 years' experience in the fields of education and technology. She worked for 10 years as team leader and tutor in a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) accredited education programme for homeless people in Dublin. Previous to this, Gillian worked for six years in multimedia and web design in Dublin and Sydney. She graduated with a Master of Science in Multimedia Systems from Trinity College Dublin in 1997. She can be contacted at gharris@nala.ie

Background

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has been offering a Distance Learning Service since 2000. The Distance Learning Service provides high quality, free distance learning opportunities to adult learners who wish to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Since 2000, the Distance Learning Service has used technologies such as television, radio, internet and telecommunications to offer learners varied ways of learning.

The Distance Learning Service was created as a way of opening routes to learning for adults who would otherwise not have engaged in adult literacy learning. Research has shown that barriers to participation in adult literacy tuition include those associated with time, transport, location and care issues. There are also other barriers such as stigma, negative experiences in school and a fear of others finding out about a literacy difficulty (NALA, 2010, 2008, 2009; De Brún & Du Vivier, 2008, McGivney 2004, Bailey & Coleman, 1998).

The Distance Learning Service allows learners to choose when, what and where they want to learn. Tuition is available in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. It enables learners to learn online by themselves or to work with a distance learning tutor over the phone or online. It is a free and confidential service and learners decide what they want to study as there is no set course. It also allows individuals to take part in blended learning using the [NALA eLearning website](#). This is supported by a Freephone service at 1800 20 20 65 and a range of [online resources](#).

The learners

In 2015, the Distance Learning Service worked with 300 learners who did weekly one-to-one sessions with specialised distance learning tutors. These learners came from all over Ireland and ranged in age from 20 to 82 years of age. They used the service to improve their numeracy, reading, writing and digital skills.

The majority of learners are early school leavers. Many are motivated to join the service for personal development reasons, to help children with their homework and to gain promotion in work. In 2015, 50% of learners were in employment.

The Distance Learning Service has learners who use it because it is confidential, because they cannot travel to a centre or because they have caring or work commitments. It is a flexible service which is available all year round. Learners can choose a time that suits them and they can also take a break from learning at busy times of the year and resume learning when it suits. This is particularly attractive to people who do seasonal work or are employed in shift work.

Digital literacy and the Distance Learning Service



Image: [Write On](#)

Digital literacy in the Distance Learning Service involves learners and tutors using the internet and digital technologies to enrich learning. Learners can progress through the service at their own pace. Individuals can join the service with no prior digital skills and can start working on their literacy and numeracy. When ready, learners can progress to digital skills such as setting up emails, using digital cameras, using iPads and applications (apps) for learning. They can start using the [website](#) at any stage to use it for learning and to gain accreditation if they wish. This is all supported by weekly one-to-one sessions with tutors.

Digital learning activities

Setting up an email account and using the internet

Through the service learners have set up email accounts, learnt how to use email to communicate with family and friends and to receive and send work to their tutor. Learners have also been introduced to the use of social networks which allows them to keep up with the technology that their children may be using. They have also been introduced to online literacy and numeracy exercises, games and quizzes which reinforce their learning.

I wanted to do IT literacy and Distance Learning was perfect. I had tried a computer class but it didn't work. I needed to do the very basics. My tutor gave me customised materials and I have gained enough skills to move on and experiment for myself. I am an independent IT user now.

NALA distance learner

Using Google Drive to work on literacy and numeracy together

Tutors have also used Google Drive with their learners to work on creative writing, cloze exercises, spelling and numeracy. A tutor can give a set of literacy or numeracy exercises for the learner to fill out using Google Drive and it allows the learner and tutor to work together on an exercise. The tutor can also share documents with a learner, see their work and give instant feedback. Work can also be set for learners to do between weekly sessions.

My students like the fact that I can set them numeracy, spelling or cloze exercises that they can complete on Google Drive. I am able to give them instant feedback and adjust the task to their needs.

Sinead Clinton, NALA distance learning tutor

Using everyday mobile phone applications

Distance learning tutors have also worked with learners on getting the most out of their mobile phone applications. Teaching learners how to use the calculator on their phone allows students to discreetly work out percentages and discounts in a shop or to divide a bill in a restaurant. Applications such as WhatsApp allow the learner to take a photo of their work to send to their tutor. Individuals like the fact that it is a free, instant service and it allows a record of the conversation between themselves and their tutor to be kept.

Keeping skills up to date with a monthly e-zine

Some of our learners keep their skills up-to-date through our monthly worksheet, *The Distance Learner*. This worksheet is sent out to learners through the monthly NALA e-zine, *NALA News*. It can also be posted out to learners who do not have access to email. Topical articles are written each month on subjects such as sport, politics, and people in the news. There are also exercises on spelling, numeracy and grammar.

Using Write On for learning and accreditation

Tutors also support learners who are using the [NALA eLearning website](http://www.nala.ie). Learners can work independently or with a tutor on awards from Level 1 to Level 4 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). They can study in the area of words, numbers, learning to learn and technology. There are 12 national Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) awards at Level 2 and 14 awards at Level 3. Level 3 is the equivalent of a Junior Certificate in Ireland.

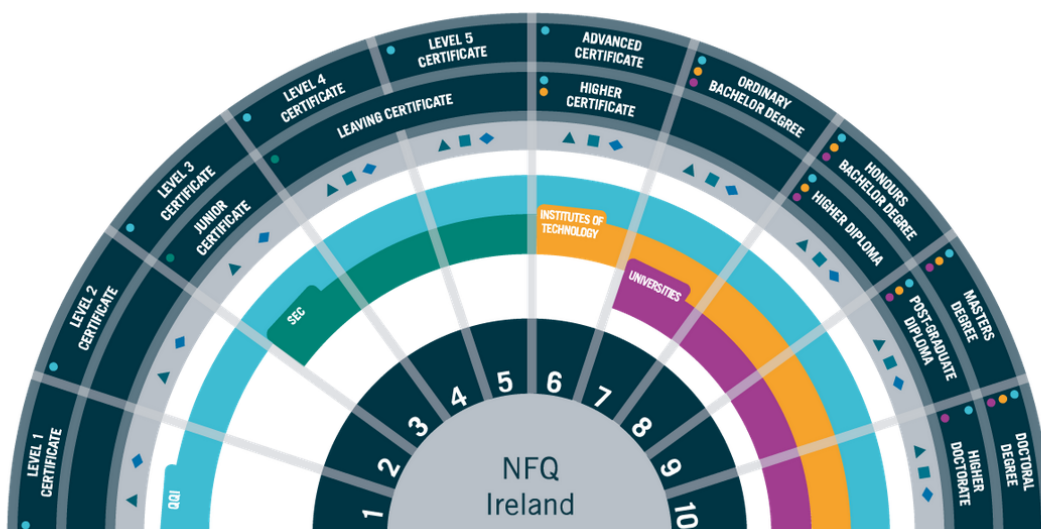


Image: <http://www.nfq-qqi.com>

[Write On](#) provides two primary services to enable learners to achieve Level 2 and 3 accreditation. Firstly, a recognition of prior learning (RPL) tool that uses online assessments allows learners to obtain qualifications for what they have previously learned but never received formal qualifications for. This facility is the only method of RPL available in Ireland at this level (UNESCO, 2013). Secondly, Write On offers a suite of online learning materials, with access to a distance learning tutor, for users to improve their skills and work towards accreditation. Write On also offers learners the option of working at Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 without working towards accreditation.

Write On 1
helping you improve your reading, writing and number skills

NALA

You are logged in as Gilliangharris Log out

Hint Print Share

Options

- Lessons
- Help
- Contact
- Journal
- Texts
- Resources
- Level 2

Watch this video about letter sounds.

Vowels and Consonants

down

0:39 / 1:51

<<Back Next>>

Level 1: Getting started: Sounds of the English Language

Image: Write On

Write On 2

helping you improve your reading, writing and number skills



You are logged in as Giliangharris | Log out



Options

- Listen to the sentences and type in the missing words.
- Patrick bought a new phone so now he has two .
- The computer room has several for students to use.
- Laura writes on the computer and then she prints them.
- Alan joined a computer class with his , Jerry and Helen.



LIST OF WORDS
letters
computers
phones
friends

02:23

<<Back Try Again Next>>

Level 2:Writing:Writing sentences

Image: [Write On](#)

Write On 3

helping you improve your reading, writing and number skills



You are logged in as Giliangharris | Log out



Options

In the computer room, there are signs displayed to help us in case of an emergency. Match the signs with their meaning.

Fire Point Electrical danger Emergency exit



00:25

<<Back Try Again Next>>

Level 3:Health and Safety Awareness:Working Safely

Image: [Write On](#)

Learners can work independently online in-between weekly sessions with their tutor. There is a function on the website called a Learning Journal which allows learners to save lessons that they are having difficulty with or want to repeat. The tutor can immediately see which area they are having difficulty with and support them with this.

I find that learners using Write On are improving their ICT skills without even realising it. They are so focused on the questions in a particular topic that they do not realise how much they are improving their technology skills at the same time. It is only when we go to review our work at the end of a module that they realise they have been learning how to navigate an eLearning website, learning mouse skills, how to drag and drop and use drop-down menus.

Fiona Higgins, NALA distance learning tutor

Learners can also use Write On in a blended learning context. Since 2008, 180 different centres have registered to use the website for learning and accreditation. In 2015, learners from 79 different centres received QQI Level 2 and Level 3 awards online. There are a wide variety of centres using the site such as Education and Training Boards, [Youthreach](#) programmes, [Community Training Centres](#), probation services, special schools, Traveller organisations, homeless education centres and disability providers.

13,000 people visited Write On in 2015 and the average time spent on the site was 21 minutes. In 2015, 1,000 learners received over 4,500 minor awards at QQI Level 2 and Level 3. Since 2008, over 4,400 learners have received over 26,000 minor awards. 'Minor awards (...) are always part of at least one major award. They facilitate the recognition of part of the learning outcomes of a major award.' (QQI, nd)

Through the use of an eLearning website such as Write On, technology is integrated into the teaching of literacy, language and numeracy. Research suggests that not only is technology an engagement and motivational tool for literacy, language and numeracy learners, but those learners who use ICT for learning, double the value of their study time by acquiring two sets of skills at the same time (Moser, 2000, NALA, 2011).

Write On is a unique, powerful and empowering resource. It not only reduces barriers to access, but it also provides learners with opportunities to accredit their prior learning.

Learners, with particular dispositions and existing skills, can also work towards learning new skills and having these accredited at Level 2 and Level 3.

(Broderick, 2015)

Conclusion

Distance learning and digital literacy have opened new avenues to learning and qualifications for our Distance Learning Service learners. They have been equipped with the tools for accessing and using digital resources and have grown in confidence in using these tools to expand and enrich their own learning. As new technologies come on board, our learners and tutors are working together to explore new ways of engaging in learning and using digital tools to progress learning.

Further information

Find out more about NALA's [Distance Learning Service](#).

Find out more about NALA and read an [evaluation](#) of the Distance Learning Service.

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Digital literacies – an update: a virtual staffroom

Ellayne Fowler

Ellayne Fowler is co-director of the Teaching and Learning for Health Professionals MSc at the University of Bristol. She spent many years teaching and researching adult literacy in Further Education and other settings and maintains her interest in literacy as social practice through her work with health professionals, particularly in using digital literacy to develop reflective practice with her students.

Introduction

Since my last article on digital literacies (Fowler, 2011) where I used the lens of Actor Network Theory to position emails as an actor in literacy practices, I have moved towards the centre of a new *community of practice* (Wenger, 1998) in medical education. I work with health professionals (nurses, doctors, dentists, health scientists...) to facilitate their development as teachers of other health professionals. While I am no longer involved in teaching adult literacy, I am very much involved in helping adult learners to negotiate new discourses. In particular, I introduce people used to *objective* and *scientific* writing to a more *personal*, *subjective* and *reflective* writing style. While, as a linguist, I can identify the grammatical underpinnings of this (use of first person singular pronoun and the active voice), it is not a simple, technical exercise but one that challenges self-perceptions and ideas about knowledge. In this article, I reflect on the use of a digital space to facilitate this literacy journey – the use of a group blog.

In looking at definitions of digital literacy it is easy to find skills-based definitions such as JISC - formerly Joint Information Systems Committee - (2015): 'the capabilities which fit someone for living, learning and working in a digital society'. In my original article, I used Gillen and Barton's (2010:9) definition of digital literacy as: 'the constantly changing practices through which people make traceable meanings using digital technologies', which better underpins an understanding of how students made sense of and used a digital space to both develop their community and their use of reflection, which was part of an academic literacy that was new to most of them.

In looking at *academic literacy* I might also take a skills-based view, as suggested in the grammatical note above, but again I feel that an academic literacies approach, as outlined by Lea and Street (1998), which sees academic literacy practices as contextualised within disciplines, allows for a fuller exploration of the difficulties high-achieving students can have in adapting to a new set of literacy practices.

The context

The use of reflective blogs was trialled to take the place of a 4,000-word reflective assignment in a one year, part-time teaching certificate for health professionals. The blog was set up on Blackboard, the virtual learning environment used by the university, and restricted to students in one cohort of 14 students and their tutors. While use of the blogs was a compulsory part of the course, it was assessed formatively.

Students were required to blog four times during the course, following each of four modules on:

- Teaching and learning methods
- Evaluation methods and their impact on practice
- Learning theory
- Creating an environment for learning.

They were also required to respond to other postings.

Why did I use blogs as a space for reflection? It is worth at this point saying a little more about our students. This cohort was doctors with the addition of one nurse. In each profession, part of their role is to teach other doctors or nurses. The certificate course allows the professionals to develop their teaching skills and introduces them to critical appraisal of educational literature and theory. However, they only came together for eight teaching days during the year (NB the course has now changed) and did not go back to a staff room to become part of a teaching community as they might in an educational setting. The blog was an attempt to develop the cohort as a medical education group, where they could share their reflections on teaching, resources and ideas within the group. It would also provide evidence of their ongoing development as teachers.

Theoretical base

The reflective blog was underpinned by two key concepts – *productive reflection* and *community of practice*. Reflection is embedded in teacher education and nowadays underpins professional qualifications. However, finding consensus on a definition of reflection is difficult. It is generally seen as practitioners developing their work by thinking critically about it (see Gibbs, 1988, for example). However, Bradbury et al (2010:2) warn that reflection's 'radical potential was subsumed by individualistic, rather than situated understanding of practice'. How far can reflection take us if it is individual and not challenged by another person? Cressey and Boud's (2006) concept of *productive reflection* gives a definition of reflection that includes action. According to them, reflection is:

- Collective rather than individual
- Contextualised within work
- Generative rather than instrumental
- Developmental
- An unpredictable and dynamic process.

What the digital space offered was an area for collective reflection, contextualised to teaching aspects of the participants' work.

The other key concept that underpinned the blogs was a *community of practice* (Wenger, 1998): 'groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact'. In Wenger's social theory of learning: 'the primary focus ...is on learning as social participation' (ibid: 4). Tellingly, he goes on to write: 'Across the worldwide web of computers, people congregate in virtual spaces and develop shared ways of pursuing their common interests' (ibid: 6-7). This then was inspiration for a blog as a space for developing a community of people who were spread across a wide geographical area.

Process

The blogs were introduced in the teaching course and students gave permission for their blogs to be quoted as part of a research project that sought to answer two questions:

1. Does this format of reflective writing encourage students to innovate in their teaching?
2. Do blogs continue to the creation of a medical education community of practice?

I will focus on the second question in this article, but it is worth noting that over the course of the year there was a wide range of teaching methods cited and shared, particularly focused on interactivity and student-centred learning (the main aim of the teaching course), which meant that students were sharing their experiences of using new teaching methods. Thematic analysis of the blogs also identified a theme of *being brave*:

In future, rather than take a topic that I want to teach and produce 50+ powerpoint slides filled with all the facts I think the students should learn, I will (and already have) put the learners at the centre of my teaching. I am braver now and more likely to risk trying novel approaches.

Basically, being a little bit braver!! First attempt at 'snow-balling' with a group of GP trainees last week, went well.....so perhaps this heralds the beginning of more variety!?

Understanding of the theory gives me confidence to attempt new teaching techniques, recognise when a teaching session is not going well and have both the courage and skills to change it following reflection-in-action.

This goes some way towards the concept of community of practice, with students not simply describing what they did but sharing their sense of the process of becoming a teacher. It takes courage to try something new.

The key idea behind using blogs was to create a digital common room, a place for a teaching community of practice to develop. For that to happen there had to be interaction, rather than simply submission of writing to fulfil a course requirement. The interaction was evidenced through quoting, group dialogue, group meaning-making and the use of group metaphors.

Participants quoted other blogs or referred to them (student names are anonymised to S1, S2 etc.):

I had done exactly what S1 describes in his blog 'provided notes that collect dust rather than knowledge'.

Prior to the TLHP course the majority of evaluation I received was through standardised numerical feedback forms as described by S2 and S1.

I realise, like S5 I had not been receiving any specific feedback and as a consequence how can I have evidence to modify my teaching?

This further developed in group dialogue. The freedom from the rigours of *academic literacy* seemed to encourage sharing through more informal expressions and the use of first person pronouns, which was one of the key elements of the reflective writing we encouraged on the course.

Morning all. Very rainy this morning, so am doing this blog instead of walking the dog (poor pooch!)

As doctors we continually challenge our clinical knowledge. We strive to practice in accordance with the best available evidence and are lifelong learners.

Reading other blogs on this subject, it comes as no surprise that most of us had preconceived ideas regarding effective teaching and learning.

One of the key lessons for us as tutors was the importance of the tutor being involved in the conversations. This was not necessarily to aid learning but often to make clear that someone in authority was paying attention. However, as the blogs developed, tutor feedback became the start of a conversational string:

I love your reflective approach to trying out new techniques. You reflect on how they went, analyse the experience and then plan for the future. I am glad the techniques you are learning are so useful. It is clear to see that you are developing a very student-centred approach. (tutor)

I did exactly the same after 101, so excited to use all that I had learnt my session was so jam packed! Students really appreciated the interaction though, as I'm sure your students did. I'm sure with time we will become better judges of how long each activity will take, and allow time for it. (student)

Me too! My first few sessions after 101 were so full of dynamic, exciting exercises, I knew more about the entry level, confidence and exit opinions of my students than I ever will again!

I've learnt to tailor these to individual sessions now, but still find tools like the line-up and snow-balling really useful to engage the students in a topic. (student)

There were also examples of what I classed as group meaning-making, particularly in the blog that focused on educational theory.

I would be interested to hear everyone else's understanding of the triangulation process.

I agree with the others that there is no single, all encompassing educational theory, successful teaching requires elements of different theories. However, like S1 I tend towards a cognitivist/social/situational approach.

It is so interesting to read S6's reflection on this topic, as it helps to clarify my own.

For this group meaning-making to happen participants need to be reading other blogs. As Deng and Yuen (2011) found in their exploration of a framework for educational blogging in teacher education, it is not just about participants expressing themselves but also about them listening/reading other blogs.

Our experience of blogs in different cohorts was that certain metaphors were taken up and developed through the course. For this pilot course the conversations began and ended with *cake*.

Referring back to my teaching session in blog 2 and the feedback from the hungry student who could have done with some food over lunchtime, I would also need to combine some humanistic psychology. I noteS5 now has a similar approach in her own learning theory in her blog which now involves cake. (Blog 3)

When making a cake, you can have all the finest ingredients. Belgian chocolate, organic vanilla etc etc. However, if the oven is too hot or too cold the final product will not have met its potential. This can also be said for learners in a sub-optimal environment. (Blog 4)

Conclusion

In returning to the research questions, it did seem that this format of reflective writing encouraged students to innovate in their teaching and to share their experiences. It also seemed clear that the blogs contributed to the creation of a medical education community of practice, although this is with the proviso that students had already met and started to form relationships face to face. It was clear that blogging fostered productive reflection:

- It encouraged collective reflection and prompted the further reflection of participants. This prompting came from both tutor and other students.
- It was contextualised to medical education.
- It was mostly generative (creating ideas) rather than instrumental (simply being used for assessment).

- It provided evidence of participants' development to both the tutor and themselves.
- It was a dynamic process. I would not have predicted how much was gained through reading blogs, as well as writing them.

The digital space offered an opportunity to share reflections and develop teaching practices in a group. Moreover, the more informal writing of a blog freed students from the constraints of a new academic literacy (reflective writing) to really develop reflection. This was a digital space for developing literacy practices as a group and a reminder that literacy practices encompass reading, writing and the social practices around their use.

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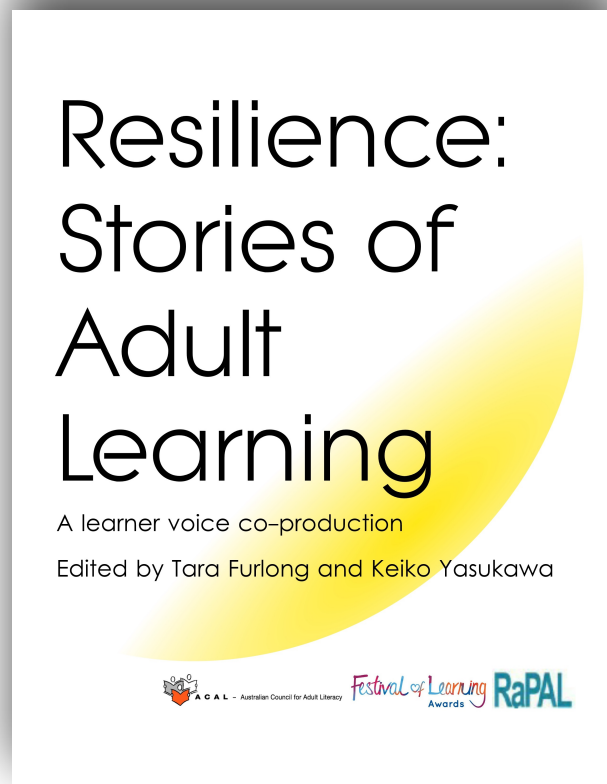
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Resilience: Stories of Adult Learning

Supporting learners and potential learners into and through adult, further and community education

This motivational collection of learner stories is free for individuals and organisations to link via Moodle or libraries to the resources available in e-book, pdf and web page forms including multimedia content from <https://rapal.org.uk/resilience/>. The book is also available via standard e-book platforms such as Kobo, Barnes and Noble and Amazon for less than £1 to support and encourage learners into using reading apps, and in paperback for printing, p&p to support inclusion.



In addition to providing authentic materials for entry level classes, these accessible stories motivate participation at higher levels through to workplace and university study.

Stories

In this edition of the journal, you can read the following stories:

- Lizzie Addison
- Debbie Weldon
- Allison Churchill

Lizzie Addison, Learn Devon



I started my first course at Bideford Arts Centre four years ago. I am visually impaired and I decided to do some courses to help me become more independent. I believed that I could do more than what I had learnt at school. I went to a college for visually impaired pupils. I did not do any English, maths or ICT at school. Things I did at school were learning to clean, learning to help in the nursery and to look after the flowers and plants. We used to cook our own lunches with some help.

I learnt about adult learning when I came to The Hub in the same building where they ran the courses. I registered for my first course which was English and maths and learnt so much that I decided to keep on learning.

I also believed that doing more courses would help me to communicate easier and understand more things better. I did some art courses and continued my English and maths. I started using the computer and soon my ICT skills got better. I have given some Powerpoint presentations in class which made me feel good and happy. The art courses helped me to do creative things. I realised that being visually impaired doesn't have to stop you from making beautiful things. When I started to use a computer I learnt to type with my special keyboard and that helped me to spell some words

myself. I soon learnt to make Powerpoint presentations and do research on Google.

I have now started working in a charity shop. Without the maths skills I learnt I would not be able to work with money and on a till. I also deal with customers. I got the confidence to work with people by being part of adult learning.

My life has changed a lot since I enrolled onto my first course.

I have met lots of different people and realised that I am good at working in a team. I participated in art exhibitions and I welcomed the public at the door and showed them to the drinks counter. I would never have dreamt of doing so before I started the courses.

My money skills have got better since doing maths and I now have the confidence to pay for things myself when I get the chance.

I think doing the courses has changed me as a person. I feel very proud of myself for what I have achieved. I have got loads of certificates for my hard work and I feel confident that the future will bring more happy things for me.

Debbie Weldon, MTC Maroubra

Being a single mother, I became isolated from the world and the changes that were happening. With computers becoming prevalent, I decided to learn about them. I chose a course Women out of Work designed for my age. It was very challenging, as I did not own a computer, and couldn't even turn one on. I was the odd one out in the class for many reasons.

Suffering from panic attacks and anxiety, I found it hard to even get through the induction. I struggled with leaving the house, and catching a train to get to college. Finding classrooms was the biggest challenge. In class, my lack of finances was obvious in my dress, lunch time and interaction with other class members. My teachers were helpful and patient. Frustrated, stressed and down-hearted, I persisted.

Knowing this would change my world, giving up was not an option. With the routine of classes, I found it easier to find my way around and even a reason to get out of bed. One of the other ladies in the class gave me her old computer, so I could practise. I passed the assessments in class and now with my new skills the world is open to me.

With my new found confidence, I attended the end-of-course party and group photo. At fifty years of age, I booked an aeroplane and hotel and went on my first holiday. I also can write resumes and cover letters, which has helped me gain employment. I bought a computer and now use it to store photos and videos, which I use to make cds for my family. I also make birthday cards and party invitations for my grandchildren, who are very impressed with Nana's skills.

As my family live in remote areas I can plan my transport and email my schedule so I can visit them without them worrying about my journey. Again this is something my grandchildren enjoy. I have found I enjoy learning and have the confidence to enrol and complete other courses.

Thankyou.

Allison Churchill

I was born in south London, on the edge of Brixton in 1966. It was a wonderful multi-cultural melting pot of different faiths, ethnicity and class. I thought the whole world was like our neighbourhood, just like 'Sesame Street'. Our flat was on the seventh floor of a tower block where our game of 'chicken' was to hang by our fingers on the wrong side of the balcony whilst our friends punched our fingers.

We were considered 'posh' by many because my mother had worked as a switchboard operator and spoke 'properly' and that our father actually lived with us. Unfortunately, we wished he didn't as he was an angry and abusive man behind closed doors. My mother wouldn't leave him because she was too frightened that my sister and I would be taken away from her. She had two nervous breakdowns. Back then, we never knew who we would come home to after school, would it be happy mummy who would play board games with us, or angry mummy chasing us with a wooden spoon or crying mummy weeping on the sofa.

Our nan (dad's mum) lived with us in the early years, until she set fire to her bedroom the second time! Dad, mum, my sister and I slept in the other bedroom. Sometimes it was so cold we would sleep with hats and coats on in bed, drawing pictures in the ice on the inside of the windows.

When I went to secondary school I was considered 'common' because of where I came from. I thrived in the first year academically and was put up to the higher set the following year. But it was too hard for me and I never caught up. They advised for me to go down to the lower set again but my father refused, because I had embarrassed him. Consequently, I was put in to do eleven Ordinary Level exams (O levels) but left school with only two.

I joined a youth opportunities programme, at sixteen years old and studied office work at a secretarial college, whilst doing work experience for a couple of different companies. I drifted from office job to office job for years, moving to Poole, Dorset when I was twenty-three. I lived with my sister to keep her company because her husband was in the RAF and she was lonely bringing up her little girl.

I was working in a toy shop when I met a young man. We went on to make a home together and had two sons. Sadly, our relationship fell apart. He had a couple of affairs, was unreliable with work and money and occasionally violent. The last straw was one evening he was going out again and my little boys begged him not to go. They stood on the front door step crying and I remember thinking to myself if he turns round to wave as he walks down the road, I'll give him another chance but he didn't. I thought to myself, hurt me all you like but you do not hurt them. This gave me the impetus to step up to the plate.

I saw in the local children's centre a course called 'maths for the terrified'. I thought, yep, that is me alright. I signed up for that and for a computer class for beginners. I really enjoyed these and they gave me the confidence to try more things. I ended up doing my City and Guilds 1, 2, 3 and 4 in maths (distinction) and eventually my GCSE (a high grade B). I couldn't believe I could do it, but I did! I carried on with computer classes, gaining in confidence and qualifications.

I took French classes for a few years (various education authorities), and I treated myself to doing lots of art classes (City and Guilds) too. I even obtained an A level in art which had always been my passion. I wanted to be a good example to my boys about studying and it seems to have worked. They both received really good GCSE

results, my youngest son is doing his second year of A Levels and my eldest is in his first year at university. Proud mum! This is just one of the many things that adult learning has afforded me.

Thanks to my computer classes, I have a lovely job working at the maternity hospital on reception. I have made so many lovely friends through adult learning. I have gained in self-confidence. I even met my lovely husband on-line! We've been together for eleven years and married for five. He loves the fact that I am always busy and willing to try new things.

For the past two years, I have been a stalwart member of the New Bourne Community Choir (sponsored by the RCM) which brings me so much joy and lifts my spirits on the darkest of days. I am a member of the hospital craft club which is a wonderful way of learning new skills in a fun environment. I have just passed my British Sign Language stage 1 qualification, partially paid for by the RCM.

I am now on the look-out for the next challenge!! I can hardly believe how far I have come from the withdrawn, awkward and damaged child and teenager that I was. I am loving life and adult education has brought me so much of what is good in it. I recommend adult learning to everyone; it really can be life changing.

Regional Advocate's Window "A day in the life of..."

Donna Moore, one of RaPAL's Regional Advocates, offers an outline of her role in adult literacies with three others in her local network. We illuminate the diversity across the adult literacies sector with these short accounts. If you'd like to contribute 'A day in the life of...' your role, please email to dayinthelife@rapal.org.uk

Donna Moore

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Development Worker, Glasgow Women's Library, Aka 'The Best Job In The World'

GWL's vision is of a world in which every woman is able to fulfill her potential and women's historical, cultural and political contributions to society are fully recognised, valued and celebrated. We enable women, particularly the most vulnerable and excluded in society, to access the information, resources and services they need to make positive life choices, and to break down barriers to learning and participation for women so that they become fully active citizens, develop skills and knowledge, engender self-confidence and equip themselves to pass on their experience to benefit their families and broader communities.

I work with individual women on a 1:1 basis, supporting them with their literacy and numeracy needs in a totally flexible and creative way. I support learners who range from 18 to 85. Some have never been to school, for others English is not their first language, others left school very early. Some women want to help their children with their homework, others are at college, some want to do something for themselves and would like to tell their story. I have a learner who is writing down a very detailed dream she had about being a Viking princess; a woman who is blind and has only partial hearing who wants to write a biography of Helen Keller; a woman who came to us because she saw someone doing a crossword on a bus and wanted to do one; a woman for whom GWL is a safe place where she can have a game of Scrabble and forget about her life; an 85-year-old woman who had never been to school due to physical disabilities and who wants to write a letter to her nephew in Australia; a woman who loved the Anne of Green Gables film and wants to be able to read the book...the list of inspirations and reasons is endless, varied and wonderful. Some women self-refer; others are referred by a variety of organisations, including organisations for refugees and asylum seekers, childhood sexual abuse, rape, domestic abuse, trafficking, addiction, mental health, social work, criminal justice. I'm full-time and have another part-time tutor and one volunteer tutor. Between us we work with around 15-20 women a week on an individual basis, as well as running groups. No two days are the same.

We are a library, a museum and an information hub, and lifelong learning is at the heart of our work. We aim to include the women we work with in everything we do. So a woman who comes along to us saying that she wants to improve her spelling and grammar will get support to do all sorts of other things – she might go along to one of our Story Cafes, or a women’s heritage walk; she might attend a playreading session or an author talk; she might research women in World War I or visit an art gallery and do some sculpture. We provide support to enable women to attend events they might not normally feel comfortable or able to.

I also run Creative Writing For Wellbeing sessions both here at GWL and also externally – mostly in nurseries and schools in some of the most deprived areas of Glasgow. One of the groups that I worked with for about a year ended up writing a book about a super-heroine who helped children who were marginalised and isolated; another group is writing a book of their own creative writing and anecdotes about parenthood.

We are a charity and, like other organisations in the sector, we really struggle with funding. It would be lovely to have money to buy books and resources but we have to be creative with what we do have!

Finally, I just want to share a recent comment: “I have felt my confidence grow, seen it grow and develop in others in class, formed bonds and seen new sides to the class members’ personas and personalities, explored different dimensions of myself, my mind, imagination and personality. I’ve had so much help and fun re-awakening my love of words, exploring myself and others. I have found and fallen in love with my voice.”

Maggie McPherson

Vocational Support Officer, Community Safety Glasgow

We deliver the Choiceworks Programme to support, encourage and motivate individuals to change their lives through a programme of staged support. Our client group is mainly offenders who wish to engage and change their lives for the better and participate in the opportunities society has to offer.

We have Case Management Workers who liaise with clients initially to engage on the programme (Stage 1). We have Intervention Workers who work with clients to address offending and antisocial behaviour (Stage 2). On completion of the stages as above, clients will progress to Stage 3 - Employability. My role as Vocational Support Officer is to support individuals from 16 years and over. These are mainly clients with offending or antisocial behaviour or prisoners nearing release, needing to overcome barriers and be provided with guidance and support to identify routes to progression. My colleague is a Placement Officer who works alongside me to discuss wants and

needs as well as suitable placement opportunities when a client has shown commitment, attendance, good time-keeping and is ready to move forward.

What my role involves:

This includes discussing and agreeing Individual Learning Plans to plan next steps and work towards goals in training, Further Education, placement, employment or Modern Apprenticeships. I deliver learning styles assessments, literacy and numeracy assessments and offer support to meet individual needs. In this, I use the computer-based Target Skills for Work and the NLN (National Learning Network) website to enable learners to gain knowledge of their chosen occupational area of interest. I motivate and improve confidence in those clients who are preparing for college or employment.

The CITB (Construction Industry Training Board) Construction Site Card training prepares learners to undertake the CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) Written and Touch Screen Test, taking into consideration their needs, i.e. literacies. This is delivered paper-based and via information technology, one-to-one and in groups, to suit learner needs and learning styles. We use contextualised learning. This means menus and recipes for individuals looking to enter hospitality occupations, in-house training, manual handling and use of mowers and equipment; all hands-on to learn new skills and gain knowledge. We provide accredited units in woodworking for those clients wishing to further their career in joinery and woodworking. I have devised session plans to cover employability guidance and support. We also provide team-building and activity days i.e. kayaking, outdoor adventure, improving communication, team work and confidence.

Debbie Thompson

Core Skills Tutor, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

I am the resident Core Skills tutor (Adult Literacy and Numeracy tutor) at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. I provide training for NHS staff in core reading, writing and number skills, as well as basic computing skills. I am the sole tutor at NHS GGC, so it's important for me to network with tutors from local organisations such as the Workers Educational Association or Renfrew Literacies.

Core Skills training gives NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde staff the chance to learn or brush up on core writing, reading, number and basic computing skills. This training is free and confidential. Staff choose what we work on and may refer themselves or be referred by a line manager. The aim is for staff to improve skills and perform more confidently in the workplace.

Aside from delivering bespoke training sessions, Core Skills training supports staff who need help to complete NHS training and study programmes, staff who have been redeployed and staff who are struggling to cope with dyslexia. Core Skills tutors also work alongside clinical staff who run the IV Therapy Education Programme, supporting nurses to feel more confident about calculations and number work before sitting the mandatory IV calculations assessment.

For staff who are new to computers, the tutor provides a stand-alone, two-hour basic computing skills training session at GGC acute hospital sites every month. We've successfully trained staff in the basics of using a computer and the internet, skills which have given staff the confidence to go on and tackle other NHS study programmes, and on a day-to-day basis have helped staff become more effective at work, at home and in the community.

Marianne Miller

Literacy Development Co-Ordinator, Rosemount Lifelong Learning

I run the Literacy Service at Rosemount. I have a team of full-time staff, sessional staff and volunteers who do both 1:1 and group work. I also always have placements. This year I have three from university and one from college. As part of my role, I assist with the running of the ESOL work, apply for funding from various funders and complete monitoring reports, and prepare quotes for work with my manager for outreach work. I rarely teach any more as the role has grown substantially. I organise approximately eighteen classes per week and approximately fifteen 1:1 sessions. This is both in-house and outreach work. I work with anyone in the North and North East of Glasgow and staff from partner organisations. They must be 16+.

In more detail and on a day-to-day basis, I arrange tutors for classes including holiday cover, supervise and support sessional staff, volunteers and full-time staff. I attend various meetings in the area and visit outreach locations. I email opportunities and training to staff and assist with the running of the building and other departments when needed at Rosemount. I supervise and train placements from both college and university, speak with students about various issues and refer when possible to other agencies, and I carry out self-evaluation within different groups. I review ILPs and GLPs (individual and group learning plans).

I love working with indigenous learners and asylum seekers and refugees. Seeing progress is the main gain.

I struggle with time as the role has tripled over the years and I now work part time. No-one else in my organisation does the same or a similar role. I have one full-time senior tutor and she focuses on delivery.

World literacy: how countries rank and why it matters

John W. Miller and Michael C. McKenna

Year of publication: 2016

Cost: £31.99

Publisher: Routledge

ISBN: 9781138909564

Reviewed by Ian Cheffy

Ian Cheffy has been working in literacy for over thirty years, primarily with adults in Africa who are learning to read and write for the first time in their mother tongue. He is a member of SIL International, the NGO which specialises in enabling the speakers of unwritten languages to develop writing systems and to use their languages in written form for education and development (www.sil.org). Since returning to the UK after ten years in Cameroon he has been involved in training literacy specialists, and in developing an MA in Literacy Programme Development validated by Middlesex University, focusing on literacy in low-income countries. He is currently working in networking, advocacy and research on mother-tongue literacy in Africa.

It is said that you should not judge a book by its cover and the same probably applies to judging a book by its title. When I picked up this book, I was expecting to find an overview of literacy around the world discussing, for instance, the serious challenges in education in many of the low-income countries of the world and the international efforts to address the literacy learning needs of the 781,000,000 adults who are considered to be illiterate (UNESCO, 2015).

Instead, this book focuses largely on literacy in the higher-income countries of the world, drawing on the data of a number of international surveys, many of them conducted under the auspices of the OECD at various times since 1990. These have been concerned with literacy for young people as much as with adults and include PIRLS, measuring literacy among 9 year olds, PISA doing the same for 15 year olds, and the IALS and PIAAC surveys among adults aged 16 to 65. Underlying these surveys is the conviction that literacy is essential to the ongoing development of national economies.

The authors explain that their intention is to interpret the results of international literacy surveys for 'a broad general readership consisting of policymakers, educators and other concerned adults'. As American academics, they are writing with an American audience in mind, drawing on American history and culture for their illustrations, and making reference mostly to literacy and education issues in the USA. They say little about the UK.

The first chapter gives a reminder that literacy has always been associated with access to knowledge and power, whether by those who desire it for themselves or those who seek to suppress it in others. In addition, and no doubt many of us would agree, literacy is important for contributing to human rights, development and democracy. In the next rather brief chapter, the authors explain that their interest is firmly in the traditional kind of literacy which involves visible written language and in which reading and writing of texts is central. They include digital texts in their definition but they do not give attention to multiliteracies or to multimodal practices.

Chapter 3 provides a useful overview of the international assessments of literacy. The authors make the important point that what matters most is not the comparison of literacy between countries but rather the insights on literacy within any particular country which become apparent when the same surveys are repeated over time, and when the various surveys among children, young people and adults are all carried out in a complementary manner, providing a national profile of literacy across the generations.

The following two chapters then discuss the 'crisis' in formal schooling. (One is tempted to ask whether there is ever a time when education is not in a state of crisis – an approach which is perhaps only exacerbated by the international surveys the authors describe.) Chapter 6 is an interesting chapter in its own right as the authors shift their attention to literate culture, using as indicators the international trends in library use, newspaper circulation, and book sales, drawing on examples of countries in North America, Europe and Asia.

The next chapter discusses how reading can be encouraged especially among younger people; they argue that the value of reading should be promoted more actively by policymakers so as to create a culture of reading. Chapter 8 examines the increasing prevalence of digital texts and argues that these should not be seen as a threat but as a valuable resource.

In Chapter 9, the authors challenge the generalisation that socio-economic status predetermines educational outcomes at both individual and national levels. Drawing on the examples of successful individuals, such as Oprah Winfrey, who came from poor backgrounds, high-achieving schools in poor areas, and countries such as Finland which often score higher on international surveys than their GDP might suggest, they argue that determination to succeed combined with high quality teaching can lead to educational success beyond expectations.

The last chapter considers the increasing demand for literacy within knowledge-based economies; accordingly schools must rise to the challenge of equipping young people so that they can make their way successfully in the world and their national economies can thrive.

I doubt if many of us would want to buy our own personal copy of this book, but it would have a value in a library, giving an (albeit somewhat partial) overview of literacy at national level and making a strong case for ongoing efforts to equip citizens with the skills they need to make use of literacy for their own benefit and that of their societies. The book provides a macro-level context which implicitly reaffirms the importance of our micro-level work with adult learners.

***Social Justice, Transformation and Knowledge
Policy, workplace learning and skills by James Avis***

Cost: £29.99

Kindle: £22.99

Publisher: Routledge, 2016

ISBN 978-1-138-81314-4

Pages: 165

Reviewed by: Yvonne Spare

Yvonne Spare has taught adult literacy across the whole range of settings for many years, including workplace learning, before moving on to manage family literacy and workplace learning projects. Significantly for this review, she has throughout the period been a director of several SMEs in the manufacturing sector and has thus experienced vocational education and training from both sides. She now carries out proofreading and copywriting for small businesses and individuals as well as being Journal Coordinator for RaPAL.

This latest book by James Avis takes as its premise the generally accepted beliefs that vocational education and training and skills development are vital contributors to a successful economy, which in turn provides the basis for political stability; and that education is one of the main drivers for social cohesion and inclusion.

In this work, he looks at the context of this ideology, particularly after 2008 and the financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures, up to the general election in 2015, but before the EU referendum.

The book is structured so that each chapter may be read independently, each one focussing on a separate but overlapping aspect of his subject: politics, economics and political philosophy; educational and social policies; curriculum, governance and professional development; class, social mobility and social justice, among others. These themes are interwoven throughout the narrative, as they are in people's lives.

Chapter 1 being an introduction, Chapter 2 sets the context of economic policies in the UK, Europe and globally, post-banking crisis, in a time of austerity with the urge for economic competitiveness and the focus on education and training needed to support it. He highlights the widespread use of key performance indicators (standards) and league tables, both in business and education.

The subject is continued in the following chapter, analysing the attempts by the recently defeated Labour Party to reposition itself with regard to its attitude to the economy, capitalism and education (specifically here, vocational education and training). Avis analyses and critiques some of the many policy initiatives and reviews that have taken place during this period. Many of his examples are thought-provoking:

“There is a significant mismatch between the types of college-based vocational courses young people are choosing to study and the jobs that are available to them locally”.
(However,) supply-side policy has been a feature of educational policy for several decades and has consistently failed. (From the Adonis Review 2014) (33)

He goes on to explore why this might be, and how various policies that were intended to be progressive, demonstrate contradictions and limitations.

Chapter 4 explores more closely the progressive possibilities of workplace learning, believed during this period and beyond to be a major driver of social mobility as well as improved economic competitiveness. Avis sets the need for workplace and work-based learning in its context of changes in the world of work globally (the need for improved and updated skills), but also as an opportunity for individuals (workers) marginalised by mainstream education. He goes on to explore the concept of transformation through education and training whilst pointing out opposing views, for example:

The authors ... acknowledge that not all workplace learning is progressive or transformative of work processes, and that some workplaces have no real requirement for learning and that it may be counterproductive or even inappropriate (Felstead et al., 2009:5,6). (51)

Next, Avis examines teaching and learning in the lifelong learning sector, especially as it attempts to address inequalities in class, gender and ethnicity. He looks at the many and varied contexts in which lifelong learning may take place: adult and community learning to develop literacy and numeracy or for those with learning disabilities; studying on vocationally-orientated foundation degrees; studying to teach; studying for apprenticeships, among others. Yet, he says, there are themes that overlap the learner experience: the emphasis on paid employment, the suggestion that FE offers a more adult environment for its students and the historically lower esteem accorded to FE in comparison with other, more academic institutions.

Chapter 6 will be of particular interest to readers connected with policy-making, regulatory processes and leadership and management in FE. Avis describes the various phases of governance that colleges have passed through, looks at models of staff professionalism and concludes notably that, however restrictive these ideas may seem, yet they often hold the possibility of 'alternative, transgressive and progressive outcomes'.

Chapter 7 expands the themes of Chapter 4, exploring the ideas of transformation and competence within the framework of the lifelong learning curriculum, and, as he puts it:

...the thorny debate surrounding the relationship between knowledge, skills and the curriculum for VET. (116)

He recognises that the traditional knowledge imparted at school can be alienating for some learners and that student resistance has been a consistent feature of some forms of vocational education and training, particularly if it is classroom-based. He goes on to look at some of the challenges and limitations of competency-based training, for example where the teaching is directed to achieving outcomes rather than being contextualised and situated.

The final chapter draws together the main themes of the book and considers their implications for policy and practice. He considers in turn the 'value' of work and the value or lack of value of specific types of work, the comparison between 'rotten' jobs and those that are meaningful and socially useful, under- and unemployment, precariousness of work, over-qualification and 'busy work' (i.e. defined as that which has no purpose or work for its own sake). He ends his book after the 2015 election win for the Conservatives and judges the future for public services and education to be 'bleak'. I wonder how the subsequent EU referendum with its Brexit vote and resulting challenges for adult education and training might have made for an even more pessimistic prognosis.

News from the sector

Tara Furlong

Tara is the Chair of RaPAL and can be contacted on webweaver@rapal.org.uk

Significant fall in adults participating in English and Maths courses

The Department for Education released statistics showing a fall of almost 100,000 adults participating in England in the last year, the worst performance figures in a decade. The Learning and Work Institute are using this opportunity to argue for the Citizen's Curriculum model they have developed, which provides a broad and inclusive base to educational provision. More [here](#)

David Hughes at the AoC (Association of Colleges)

David Hughes hasn't forgotten about English and maths since moving to Chief Executive at the AoC and talks briefly about the overall context in a post-conference video clip with FE News [here](#). For those of you not familiar, David Hughes led NIACE (now the Learning and Work Institute) for many years before this recent transition.

LSRN discussion workshop 'Evidence-informed decision making: from classroom to boardroom'

The Lsrn (learning and skills research network) recently held an event to interrogate the outcomes of the UCL IoE EPPI centre report '[The Science of Using Science Researching the Use of Research Evidence in Decision-Making](#)', a systematic review into evidence informed decision-making with a focus on the further education sector. A discussion paper is also available. The outcomes may be useful for those supporting management and governance practices in integrating practitioner engagement with and in research and professional learning communities.

In addition the Lsrn event provided a brief overview of other research activity in the sector. The event also disseminated findings from CVER (Centre for Vocational Education and Research) in their first discussion paper [Post-16 Compulsory Education in England: Choices and Implications](#): that prior achievement at age 11, demographics, and school attended at KS4 are highly correlated with outcomes in the subsequent four years. They have moved on to a more detailed analysis of the low achieving cohort, 10% of whom are below level 2, and where the year post-KS4 is critically indicative of progressing versus ongoing NEET status or cycles of no achievement.

We enjoyed further presentations on developing scholarship in the HE provision in FE, on QTLS professionalisation and further initiatives in the sector. The event interrogated the findings and applications of the report through the practical experience of participants.

Use of research evidence in decision-making: key points from “The science of using science”

Isrn (learning and skills research network)

More information about the learning and skills network, and this event, is available from <http://lsrn.wordpress.com>

“Incorporating adult learning principles in the design of capacity-building programmes is likely to benefit capability to use evidence.”

How refreshing to read a finding that resonates so strongly with the experience of FE teachers. The implication is that using research evidence is essentially a form of grown-up learning. Reading the evidence, assimilating it, applying it and making systematic enquiries of our own make for richer professional development than the prevalent box-ticking approaches.

The quote above is taken from a long overdue study, by the EPPI Centre at the UCL Institute of Education, of the evidence about how research evidence influences decision-making. This remarkable systematic review of reviews combines the empirical findings of intervention studies with theoretical ideas drawn from various branches of the social sciences. The result is useful guide for anyone wishing to make use of research evidence in decision-making.

The study of Evidence-Informed Decision-Making (EIDM) offers a two part analysis of the process of influencing decision-making. The first part assesses various mechanisms of research use that have been evaluated and the second considers how behavioural factors affect the impact of each mechanism.

The outcome of the study is a conceptual framework which enables us to anticipate the effect of particular interventions and adapt them in the light of suggestions from the social science literature. The framework identifies six types of mechanism for using evidence and three behavioural factors upon which the effectiveness of the intervention critically depends: capacity, motivation and opportunity.

Types of mechanism

M1 Raising awareness for, and positive attitudes towards, EIDM: there is no strong evidence, but the literature suggest that social marketing, social incentives and user engagement influence behaviour. The risks of not using evidence should be highlighted and the opportunity costs and benefits made clear to decision-makers.

M2 Building agreement on questions and evidence: there is again a lack of strong evidence on interventions but insights from the literature on consensus building techniques (such as Delphi panels), collaborative learning initiatives (such as journal clubs) and user engagement are relevant. Formalising consensus-building and incorporating evidence-use as an aspect of professional identity are suggested by the study.

M3 Communication of, and access to, evidence: there is empirical evidence that interventions can have an impact if they are combined with motivational strategies and provision of opportunities. Effective techniques include: tailoring and framing findings, explaining uncertainty and offering narratives that increase remembering of messages. Passive approaches to dissemination and access to evidence are of questionable value; embedding them in organisational structures are more effective.

M4 Interaction between decision-makers and researchers: empirical evidence shows that mentoring, joint practice development and online interaction between decision-makers are effective approaches but unstructured interactions are not. Interestingly 'social influence' – the way in which the behaviour of one decision-maker affects the behaviour of another is an important factor. There was insufficient evidence about the effect of communities-of-practice and of collaborative trust-building. The review recommends defining the role of the decision-makers, the costs and benefits as well as a theory of change for any proposed intervention. The interaction between decision-makers is important in addition to that with researchers.

M5 Skills for evidence use: these are an important route to increasing use of evidence. Training in critical appraisal is effective and online learning, adult learning principles, mentoring, supervision and learning analytics are all relevant approaches. A key suggestion from the review is to draw on adult learning theories, promoting EIDM as higher level cognitive skill.

M6 Influencing decision-making structures and processes: the evidence is that supervision and executive training interventions are effective, as are on-demand evidence summaries and hotlines. Social science studies suggest that building in incentives and nudges are appropriate approaches, as are making efforts to reduce cognitive bias. Behaviour may change through facilitation, using protocols, financial incentives and audits, for example.

As for the other types of intervention suggestions arising from the review focus on reducing cognitive barriers to using evidence, 'nudging' and incentivising behaviour and developing a professional norm around the use of evidence.

A theory of change

From the findings of this review the authors propose the following preliminaries in designing an intervention on research evidence:

1. Decide upon:
 - the key variables that are relevant in your context, such as the level of analysis, desired outcomes etc.
 - the relevant behavioural factors to focus on i.e. capability, motivation, opportunity.
2. Consider:
 - (a) the mechanism you wish to focus on i.e. awareness, communication/access, interaction, skills or structure
 - (b) the combination of mechanisms to be adopted.

Conclusion

The authors of the review conclude with advice familiar to LSRN regulars: effective research use strategies start with the needs and behaviours of the potential users. Techniques to build motivation (e.g. by increasing visual appeal, using apps) are important, as are developing the research-use skills of decision-makers - adult learning principles are a good guide for this. Directly facilitating through, for example, financial incentives and decision-aid tools are effective and successful schemes formalise and embed interventions into processes and structures and professional norms.

References

Langer, L., Tripney, J. and Gough, D. (2016) *The Science of Using Science Researching the Use of Research Evidence in Decision-Making* London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London Available online: <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Portals/0/PDF%20reviews%20and%20summaries/Science%202016%20Langer%20report.pdf?ver=2016-04-18-142701-867>

Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

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

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

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

Guidelines for contributors

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

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

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

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

1. Ideas for teaching

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

2. Developing Research and Practice

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

3. Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives

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

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

Reviews

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

Submitting your work

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

What happens next?

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

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

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