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RaPAL

Creative Responses to Literacies Policies

Learners have shown increasing willingness to become involved in new ventures, building confidence in their own voices. Their bravery in taking on new challenges is astounding.

Kerry Scattergood 2019

Journal

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Editorial

Sarah Freeman and Toni Lambe

It has been exciting reading the articles from teachers and students that have been contributed to Journal 98. As each one has come in, we have thought that it might be too different for this edition, but on reading we have realised this is another inspiring story of teaching and learning that responds to our theme, *Creative Responses to Literacies Policies*. Each has presented another facet of how to deliver reading and writing skills e.g. ESOL Literacy, literacy for teacher trainees, family learning/ ESOL; or it has drawn attention to alternative literacy practices that have been equally rewarding in building confidence for participants. The latter might include pottery, poetry, drawing and radio presentation.

Looked at through a timeline lens we have also been reminded of some of the possibilities for creativity opened to literacy schemes when there was more government funding as well as European funding.

With little official lead for literacy in community learning at the time of writing, we re-emphasise a basic-education- for-adults situation that has become almost invisible in terms of overall post-19 education affairs. In our previous Journal 97 in an article by Sue Pember, Policy Director for HOLEX, we gained a comprehensive insight into why education policy is no longer providing openings for adults who start from more disadvantaged beginnings. For example she explained the complex reasons why there has been a rapid drop in participation in recent years: 'funding levels for courses are now not covering the cost of provision'; no-one comes forward because there is no national or regional promotion; the jobcentre, which focuses on work, has taken on the role that advice and guidance could give in past years; and the provision is aimed at part-time workers and not the unemployed. (p.10)

With so much impoverishment in the provision on offer, it is, in my experience, the case that our teachers and students are thankful for the few courses they can sign up to. However, Sue Pember concludes 'the infrastructure that supports them is disintegrating'. (p 10)

With diminishing funds for the lower level learners, you might wonder if the delivery of the subject too might become functional and uninspiring. However, the ideas and the output from students received for Journal 98 are a tribute to the adult community educators of 2019. It has been delightful to find out that practitioners are still drawn to creative methods even in this time of severe cuts in adult education. We also look back and celebrate alternative methods that could be afforded in the past.

Georgina Garbett's article is the first to provoke our imagination drawing on a method she calls 'Trickster Methodology'. She suggests this as a method for students to develop a reflective technique to help themselves out of 'knotty problems'. While this may not be intended for literacy students but rather for teacher trainees it does encourage teachers to use oral storytelling techniques – 'autobiographical, semi-fictional, to explore and disseminate... findings'.

Naeema Hann's article gives us insight into how liberating it was for ESOL learners in family learning classes to be able to kick-start their learning with initial work on Asian language literacy. With the relevant equipment such as writing software, adapted books and games, and audiotapes, Bradford teachers were able to give learners a much greater ownership of their own literacy learning, as their first language was encouraged as a doorway to accessing English. Naeema is now a researcher in low-literate contexts of both second and first language learning and this is evident in the sensitive way in which she writes about this subject.

Mary-Rose Puttick and Kerry Scattergood's students have produced work which their respective teachers are particularly proud of. As always there is something in students' writing to blow you away – Kerry's student, Nikita writes:

In the 21st century, no girl child must be left uneducated. There is a saying: 'If we educate a boy, we educate an individual, but if we educate a girl, we educate a family and a whole nation.' An educated woman can educate future generations. An educated mother can raise a family with knowledge, skills and as respected citizens of society.

Mary-Rose has used creative methods in an ESOL IELTS setting, which were introduced to her in seminars which were part of her studies for her PhD. Students were able to explore their own lives in greater depth using such methods as 'self-interviewing techniques' (Keightley et al., 2012).

Kerry has also worked with a number of methods that have merged being creative with literacy with the official coursework that the students are signed up to take. She writes, basing all her ideas on real life experience in literacy classrooms, and indicates a wide range of methods which she has used both to help her reflective practice and ongoing research as well as encourage reflective practice among her students.

This leads on well to Julie Collins' two articles which cover works she has been involved in over 30+ years in community education, including in an outreach centre in Coventry and later a homeless hostel and other outreach sites in Warrington. Julie's students benefitted from well-planned creative literacy sessions and in her second article she describes in some detail how the students in the homeless hostel setting were drawn into literacy through being in a creative atmosphere such as making tiles, or presenting themselves on radio. This article not only celebrates the everyday literacy practices which were much more easily integrated into literacy/art activities in the previous, social practices rich period; it also gives practical step by step advice on how to do the tile-making activity and describes the actual transformation that involvement in shared production could bring about for several members of a group.

So many of the articles, however different the methods, bring us back to the value of reflective practice at every stage on adult education courses. This culminates in the first of two book reviews in which Alan Rogers has reviewed: *Bourdieu, Language-based Ethnographies and Reflexivity: putting theory into practice* by Mike Grenfell and Kate Pahl. Alan, a long standing educationist and adult education specialist, is keen to emphasise the necessity of reflexivity in research and he has used his review not only to write a comprehensive critique of the new book, but also to put forward clearly how being thorough in reflective research means being critical of the method of research and of the researcher herself.

The final review written by Rachel Stubley of the book, *Academics Writing: the dynamics of knowledge creation* by Tusting et al, addresses the fact that this book, a little niche, nevertheless creates the strong and helpful sense that the writers themselves, despite the constraints on time put on them by their employers, can form a community of practice among themselves.

Overall the journal enables us to perceive how joyful and possible it is to still bring creativity into the 'classroom', even though it may be to courses that are qualification driven. We have learnt through articles in this edition, that many creative methods can be adapted for all levels in English. As long as we can keep our minds open to the need to be flexible with time and coursework, we can open up learning experiences to include some exploration of the self as well.

REFERENCES

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Note from the Journal Coordinator

Yvonne Spare

Yvonne can be contacted on journal@rapal.org.uk

Hello fellow RaPAL members

We hope you enjoy this, our Summer edition of the Journal on Creative Responses to Literacies Policies, and how good to see that we are still able to introduce creativity into our teaching and learning. Our next edition will be on the subject of T-Levels, apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships, so if you are involved in delivery of these courses, please do get in touch with us to talk about writing something for edition 99.

This leads us to the exciting prospect of our 100th edition, due to be the first one of 2020, which also happens to be our 35th year. We have decided to undertake a major piece of research, to see if we can identify 100 centres providing classes of any type which include adult literacy teaching, across all the regions of the UK and Ireland. We will circulate more information as soon as we are able, but in the meantime, we will be happy to collect your names and contact details if you would like to participate in this project by either assisting with the research or giving us a snapshot of your provision.

For this project you can contact Sarah Freeman on azdak@btopenworld.com or myself on journal@rapal.org.uk.

Finally, the next meeting of the editorial group will be on **Saturday 7th September 2019 in Chester**. Exact details of time and place will follow soon, but please note that this will not be at our usual meeting place in London. During the day we make plans for next year 2019-20. This group is not just for experienced editors – we also welcome anyone who would like to gain experience by teaming up with one of our regular editors, or if you have ideas about the kind of things we could include or any other aspect of the Journals.

We feel that this face-to-face meeting is important, so we provide travel expenses and lunch for everyone. We hope to see as many people there as possible. If you are interested but would like to know more, please contact me on journal@rapal.org.uk for a chat at any time.

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. We are also interested in hearing what you think about your Journal. There is a feedback section on the website so that you can comment on anything you have read in this or previous editions. Follow the link to our comments space at the bottom of the page, which needs the password that has been circulated with this edition. We look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Yvonne