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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

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

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

### Why not join us?

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

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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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

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## Note from the Journal Coordinator

Yvonne Spare

*Yvonne can be contacted on [journal@rapal.org.uk](mailto: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 100<sup>th</sup> edition, due to be the first one of 2020, which also happens to be our 35<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:azdak@btopenworld.com) or myself on [journal@rapal.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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



## A trick in the tale: working with trickster methodology

Georgina Garbett

*Georgina is a PhD candidate and graduate research teaching assistant at Birmingham City University. She has over 15 years teaching experience in adult and community learning, specialising in teaching literacy and GCSE English. She can be contacted at [georgina.garbett@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:georgina.garbett@bcu.ac.uk).*

### Storytelling and education

I became interested in using oral storytelling for educational purposes in the 2000s, first introducing it in my community learning literacy classes and then researching how it could be used to encourage better communication and writing skills. My interest piqued, I continued to research the impact of storytelling/oracy on an individual's literacy journey for my MA dissertation. My research concluded that storytelling should be included in educator training programmes. I have now embarked on a PhD, in which I seek to discover '*What is the role of storytelling for practitioner-educators in nurse and teacher training?*'

Whilst I am still at the research design stage, I am planning to use *trickster methodology* alongside an autobiographical, semi-fictional approach, to explore and disseminate my findings. In this article, the tricksters, a wolf and a raven, will explain how they are helping me to develop my ideas. They will discuss their role as provocateurs and research partners. There is a task at the end of the article, for anyone who wants try out the trickster methodology for themselves.

### Tricksters at play

'What are you doing skulking around the back there? That is you, isn't it, Mr. Elijah John Wolf? Always slinking about, hiding in the shadows, behind bushes.' The raven squawked, defiantly.

'Oh, and you think you're better?' A muffled voice emanated from the depths of greenery.

'Yes - I don't skulk!'

The wolf slunk out from behind the bushes and stood glaring at the raven. He was actually much bigger than she was – but she had fluffed her feathers and spread her wings wide, making her look formidable. Mr. Wolf's nose and whiskers twitched, hackles raised. They sized each other up, jockeying for the upper position.

'Merelina – we seem to have got off to a bad start, again', he tried, in an appeasing tone. 'I was only seeking you out to discuss how we are going to help the young one.' The tension was broken as they contemplated the situation.

‘Oh – ok – the young one? I think she’s past that now - in human terms anyway!’ she cackled, ‘but you’re right, I suppose. Well, first I propose we let her know that we *can* help her – after all, we’re tricksters, we can do anything, of course. I don’t think we should necessarily tell her everything though, she has to find out things for herself, don’t you think?’

‘Yes – certainly, we mustn’t be too obvious about it ... a bit of a history lesson on how the wolf is the most important of the tricksters, our fine heritage, the wonderful things we have bestowed on the ...’

‘Whaaat! Hang on a biscuit minute! You’re not just going to use this as an opportunity to gloat, I hope.’ She clicked her beak and advanced menacingly towards him.

‘No, ok, Merelina, calm down ... Let me think... Ah yes ... there was a time when tricksters were revered by folk, they were celebrated in myths, legends and folklore (Hyde, 2008).’

‘That’s more like it ...’ Merelina shuffled back cocking her head to one side, swaying from left to right as she settled down to listen.

‘...Hmmm, yes, ... so... tricksters, in all our various forms, are seen as important in many cultures (Kamberelis, 2003), of course we are often animals: my cousin coyote; Eshu, the hare; Anansi, the spider; but let’s not forget the demi-gods: Krishna; Loci (now he *is* a tricky chap); Hermes – always rushing about carrying messages ...’

‘Don’t forget us females! What about Apate?’

‘Well, yes, of course, there are a lot of female tricksters, we just don’t get to hear about them very often. These matriarchal societies like to keep things to themselves (Hyde, 2008), I gather. I think *you* will have to enlighten her on that side of things, Merelina.’

‘It will be my pleasure ... carry on, it’s getting interesting hearing *your* take on things.’ Mr. Wolf looked at her sideways, his long salmon tongue flicking across his nose as he contemplated just how sarcastic she was being.

‘Right, well, the thing about being male or female isn’t that important is it? After all, we are all shape-shifters, we can become what we want: male, female, fish, bird, stone or seed (Kamberelis, 2008). We are the ultimate transgressors, humanity can’t pin us down! It’s so useful, being able to change like that. When I change genders, I get such a different perspective on things, it really helps me to not just think what it must be like, but to actually *become* the embodied other.’ Mr. Wolf looked at Merelina for confirmation.

‘Yes, I remember that’s how humans got to learn how to hunt, when Loci was on the run and turned himself into a fish. By living as a salmon, he understood how they spawned, and how he could trap them as they swum up river (Hyde, 2008). He was a bit miffed though, when the demi gods found out his little ploy and passed his ideas on to humanity, especially as they didn’t give him any credit.’

‘Mmmm, exactly, exactly. Of course, we are very *generous* creatures, we often give of ourselves, and we don’t let anything stop us. Do you remember when Prometheus stole fire from the gods, crossing the boundary between heaven and earth to ....’ His voice trailed off. Merelina was hopping up and down, clicking her beak. ‘Something wrong ...?’

‘Prometheus gets all the glory, *Mon dieu!* It was me that took the light from the heavens in the first place so that humans could see (Hyde, 2008), but no-one remembers me!’ She squawked and chuntered to herself ‘*¡Qué lástima, pobre Merelina!*’ (\*What a pity, poor Merelina).

‘There, there, *I* know what you did, and you can tell Georgina all about it,’ he soothed, his voice mellifluous. ‘Of course, we are also great communicators, we can speak to anyone, everyone, and anything. I have some fascinating conversations with trees and plants, you can feel so connected if you really try. But, how is all of this history of us going to help with the research?’

‘Whaat?!’ Merelina drew a long breath and clacked her beak; shaking off her earlier indignation she pierced the wolf with her jet-black eyes. ‘Well, I’ve been doing a bit of research of my own, actually.’ She started to explain, slowly at first, then excitedly, all at once ‘there’s something called the post-qualitative, and the narrative turn, where tricksters can be used to help researchers understand the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). They like our liminality, our ability to work on and around boundaries. Apparently social scientists started to take an interest in our transgressive and transformative character (Vizenor, 1990). Our comic aspect is key to our success as disruptors (Syphor in Vizenor, 1990) as it reflects human behaviour and makes humans look at themselves “sceptically”. Though, actually, I don’t know if I’m insulted by that bit ... our comic side, what’s so comic about us?’ She harrumphed, clacking her beak again.

‘Huh! We’re not comedians,’ agreed Mr. Wolf.

‘Well, it said that humans accept our efforts to disrupt and discombobulate because of the humorous way in which we go about our business ... oh well, that’s ok then, *that* sounds much better.’ Merelina nodded her head, and stretched her wings, the bright sunlight shimmering off the iridescent purple and teal undertones of her feathers. ‘It also said that researchers have used tricksters in postmodern research for “reflexive inter-professional practice”; “sporadic illumination in moments of need” and to “jolt the world out of established or habitual modes of being” (Priyadharshini, 2012: 549, 548).’ Merelina stopped, breathless after the torrent of words.

‘I suppose that’s another language we’re going to have to learn ... academic discourse!’ Mr. Wolf stretched, he was ready to move. ‘So to sum up, as mythological creatures we are rooted in humanity, we are imitators and innovators, a force for good and disruption. We are the intuitive analyst, and the complete idiot. We teach people how to grow and learn from our mistakes. What lovely, benevolent creatures we are!’

Merelina concurred, adding ‘Indeed, from chaos comes order! At least we’re getting some attention again, I like the “intuitive analyst”, not so sure about “complete idiot” though! Ah well, there’s work to be done, let’s go help the young one embrace the chaos!’

### Trickster Reflective Task

- Choose an aspect of your teaching practice or action research, where the use of trickster might be helpful (e.g. a knotty problem, or something that has a controversial element).
- Choose some trickster characteristics to focus on (see below).
- Write about your practice or research by putting yourself in the role of trickster. Or, try to imagine what obstacles or questions trickster might use to trick or challenge you.

Trickster characteristics:

- mischievous: play tricks, deliberately deceive
- disruptive: upsetting the status quo, ultimately benevolent
- liminal: appearing on boundaries, roaming the earth, with the ability to cross boundaries
- transformative: taking on new qualities, e.g. changing gender; changing into objects such as stones and seeds
- adaptive communicators: able to converse with all of nature (including inanimate objects)
- the wise fool: learning, or teaching others, through their own mistakes, sometimes suffering great hardships or physical harm by their actions.

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## Basic Education in Community Languages (BECL) – using L1 to develop second language and literacy skills

Naeema B. Hann

*Naeema began her career as an ESOL teacher in Leeds. She then taught and co-ordinated ESOL and Bi-lingual courses, including the award-winning Basic Education for Community Languages at Bradford College. Naeema currently teaches on the MA/Delta at Leeds Beckett University and researches second and first language learning, especially in low-literate contexts. She can be contacted at [n.hann@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:n.hann@leedsbeckett.ac.uk).*

This article describes courses in community languages offered at Bradford College between 1984 and 2007. The provision was awarded the European Award for Languages<sup>1</sup> in 2000. The criteria for winning the award were around excellence, innovation and the potential to serve as a model and are reflected in the judges' comments:

Essentially the scheme offers the first steps towards literacy in a supportive atmosphere. As well as giving real opportunities to students who can aim for GCSE and other qualifications, the staff manage to provide many unquantifiable opportunities for building confidence and self-esteem for students. In a very real sense, the scheme offers a first step into a learning society.

During conversations with the students (whose ages ranged from mid-twenties to fifties) it was abundantly clear that they had a new pride and self-confidence that was given to them by the acquisition of new [literacy ...] skills (Hann, 2000).

### Basic Education in Community Languages (BECL)

The history of using L1 to support content learning at Bradford College goes back to courses aimed at increasing parents' understanding of what and how their children learnt at school and how parents could help. The courses were funded through Project Comtran<sup>2</sup> and the pilot course was run in Urdu, a shared language among new communities in Bradford. Feedback from parents showed that they wanted to continue learning literacy skills in Urdu beyond the original course. Bradford College also offered courses for learners of English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) and literacy classes in Urdu and Gujarati were offered as part of the ESOL provision.

This set of courses was called Pre-ESOL Study Skills and was renamed Basic Education in Community Languages a few years later. It was included in the ESOL provision because ESOL tutors often found that it was difficult for some learners to access ESOL or progress with their English language skills due to little or no literacy in their first language. Classes offering literacy skills in Gujarati continued for a few years and were

<sup>1</sup> This category of award has evolved into the [European Language Label](#); the criteria seem to remain similar.

<sup>2</sup> Project Comtran was voluntary sector organisation, active in Bradford from 1987 to 2001. Its activities included family learning-type courses for parents to boost children's education at school.

closed due to low numbers. The rest of this article describes learners, teaching, course materials and assessment for Urdu literacy classes

### **The learners, class locations and course**

The classes grew organically and new classes were opened across Bradford in response to demand. The classes took place once a week to begin with and then twice a week, at schools and community centres. The eight groups across Bradford had female learners only. The one group with male learners did not continue due to low numbers. For these courses (in comparison to ESOL) learners preferred classes near their homes. This could have been due to caring responsibilities or learners feeling uncomfortable in main college buildings. Each class had 10 to 14 students enrolled and were mixed level groups which included women with no literacy and those who could read and write functional words such as their own names, grocery shopping lists and simple descriptive texts. A third group were learners consolidating their literacy skills in Urdu to access bilingual courses e.g. community interpreting.

The learners were between 19 to 50 years old and wanted to be able to read letters from family and write back to them even though they all had phones. Keeping this in mind, the course taught generic reading and writing skills in Urdu for mostly social domains.

In addition to BECL, some learners were also enrolled on lower level ESOL courses – the equivalent of Entry 1 or Entry 2 and were often referred by their ESOL teachers to the BECL classes. Most learners were not enrolled on ESOL classes when they joined a BECL course. This low participation in ESOL and the provision of classes at community venues meant that BECL fell within the (then) remit for widening participation.

The classes were on offer at about eight venues across Bradford and offered three levels of accreditation in the same session. Sessions were two hours, once a week to begin with and a few years later, increased to four hours a week split into two-hour sessions. This was partly in response to demand and also to ensure consolidation of learning. Learners new to literacy needed to repeat and practise new skills and words and doing this in a class group with an expert language user (the teacher) meant they got feedback. The accreditation (discussed later in this article) was available to both groups – those with pre-ESOL needs and those accessing bilingual courses. However, course materials and lessons for these two sets of learners were different, though taught in the same session. We found that where students with previous education learnt alongside those with pre-ESOL literacy needs, the motivation and retention of the Pre-ESOL group dropped at some venues. This suggests that mixed level groups do not work well for learners at the lowest levels.

We found that all students attending these classes grew in confidence, literacy and study skills. Learners with pre-ESOL needs who stayed on showed the most progress and often determined the content of the sessions in terms of texts and topics they wanted to use. Once pre-ESOL learners had been on the BECL course for a few months, learners enrolled on ESOL classes and were keen to use the internet and IT. They were more willing to visit institutions outside their community e.g. the University of Leeds.

After completing Level 1 of the BECL accreditation scheme, some went on to doing GCSE in Urdu and other mainstream college courses. The progression routes and where Basic Education in Community Languages sat in relation to other courses on offer are shown here:

<http://bit.ly/2HwFVxR>

### **The teachers and training**

The teachers were all female and multilingual in Urdu, English, Punjabi/ Gujarati. They could also sight-read a couple of other languages e.g. Arabic and Persian. All had a first degree from their countries of origin and experience of language and/or vocational teaching.

To run classes for Basic Education in Community Languages effectively and to ensure that this provision was on par with other, particularly ESOL, provision in terms of quality, teacher training was needed. The main aim of the training was to ensure teachers had the skills and knowledge to develop language and literacy skills of low or non-literate learners. A second aim was to support these bilingual teachers to feel confident in following college and accreditation procedures and to feel confident and visible as professionals and members of the college teaching community.

Training was initiated by a team of ESOL teacher trainers which included two multilingual trainers. To begin with, a community languages training day was offered and received a huge response. Subsequent to this, the original Comtran trainer and one of the ESOL teacher trainers put together a training programme for community language tutors. It was accredited through the then Yorkshire and Humberside Association for Further and Higher Education (YAHFHE) and was called YAHFHE Stage 1. It was seen as a pioneering programme which offered quality training for bilingual teachers. The training ran successfully for five years and was welcomed by the National Association for Teachers of English and Community Languages (NATECLA <https://www.natecla.org.uk>).

A few years later there was a refresher course for BECL teachers at Bradford College which included training to deliver and assess an accredited BECL course. This was followed by several years of termly training sessions which focused on a range of language teaching areas including language awareness, teaching methodology, developing materials for learning and assessment. Further training sessions focused on using IT including software for right to left scripted languages and understanding college and accreditation processes and documentation.

### **Accreditation**

To deliver the BECL programme in a visible, standardised manner, there was a need to develop accreditation. To do this, we looked at who the learners were, what they wanted to learn and why. Here, I would like to mention accredited programmes already available for multilingual learners. Alongside ESOL, Bradford College, then Bradford and Ilkley Community College, had been developing its Access to Bilingual Employment (ABLE) programme, which had its own accreditation. Some students on this programme needed to work on their Asian language literacy.

To meet the needs of pre-ESOL learners and those doing bilingual courses, an accreditation scheme at three levels was developed. The levels were Pre-Entry, Entry and Level 1. Level 1 corresponded to pre-GCSE levels of language, broadly comparable to level B1+ of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)<sup>3</sup>, bearing in mind that these levels are bands covering language skills and knowledge rather than boundaries. The scheme was written by a team of bilingual ESOL tutors at Bradford College. Community language tutors were then trained to deliver the scheme and develop learning and assessment materials including initial assessment for placement. The scheme was organised around the four language skills with greater emphasis on reading and writing at Pre-Entry and Entry levels.

### **Resources**

Learning resources ranged from adaptations of books and workbooks originally meant for use in schools, worksheets and games adapted from ESOL materials to audiotapes and activity sheets produced by tutors. Authentic materials such as audio tapes produced by the police in Urdu were also used and literacy sheets were developed to exploit the audio material. Learner generated materials proved to be popular too.

The college invested in Urdu software that was put on 10 laptops which were shared across BECL classes and used by learners and tutors. We found that these helped learners get past any difficulties with motor skills when writing. Laptops with Urdu software supported running the groups as multilevel workshops. Tutors could set up tasks for all three levels with some tasks on laptops and the learners were able to get on with the lesson at their own pace.

One venue was at a community centre which shared the building with the local library. This library had a suite of computers and a reasonably sized collection of books in Urdu for readers at various levels. The tutor was able to set tasks drawing on internet resources in Urdu e.g. newspaper websites, which allowed the learners to work independently.

As discussed above, the training sessions resulted in tutors producing a bank of materials for use by all BECL classes. This included an initial assessment pack which proved to be a useful diagnostic tool for tutors. It also allowed learners to see their own progress.

Basic Education in Community Languages courses were offered until 2007 and were discontinued gradually as ESOL funding reduced.

### **Principles and theories**

The BECL programme was set up in response to a need in the community of potential ESOL learners. The syllabus, teaching and assessment borrowed some models from ESOL and theories of teaching and learning were not discussed explicitly when designing the syllabus, teaching or materials. However, when looking at the syllabus, learning and assessment materials retrospectively, certain theories of learning and

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<sup>3</sup> The Common European Framework of References for Languages [CEFR](#) is a set of language proficiency descriptors and operates at six levels. It was first published by the Council of Europe and was intended for learning, teaching and assessing European languages but has since been adapted for a wider set of languages such as Chinese.



teaching seem to underpin the provision. To begin with, there is growing evidence that literacy in the mother-tongue supports second language learning, for example, see Dahm and De Angelis (2018).

The syllabus designed and delivered through the accreditation scheme was bottom-up in the sense that rather than designing a syllabus in response to a national curriculum, the syllabus presented in the accreditation scheme responded to learners' literacy needs. This is in line with principles of course design suggested by Graves (2000) and Nation & Macalister (2010). The importance of responsive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers, i.e. offering CPD as training needs arise from the day-to-day delivery of the course is well documented for other educational sectors (Stoll et al. 2006) and the same principles seem to inform how training was organised for these bilingual teachers of literacy.

### **Survival**

This final section suggests several factors which contributed to the continuation of BECL, in various guises, for almost twenty years. The reasons for the survival of this learning opportunity for a marginalised population were similar to why other courses survive and were

- Viable class sizes – groups had 8 to 14 students
- Trained teachers and focused CPD
- Team work – ESOL co-ordinators looked after BECL as well
- Flexible approach at management level
- Time to develop the provision – learners were not able to read any written publicity and learnt about the classes by word of mouth
- Fit-for-purpose accreditation
- Unity in diversity – learners with different needs and goals were able to learn through the same provision
- Persistence!

BECL did not only benefit the learners; accredited teacher training and being part of a professional community brought esteem and a professional identity to the tutors as well. Some of the tutors went on the train as ESOL teachers and this consolidated their integration into the wider team of ESOL and vocational teachers at the college.

In terms of lessons for current and future provision, it would be useful to carry out a language skills audit to gauge current need for a similar provision. This could be part of the initial assessment/ training needs analysis learners and job seekers undertake. If a need is identified, a template of the programme as well as learning and assessment materials are still available for adaption and use.

*An earlier version of this article was published in the CILT Community Languages Bulletin no.7 in 2000.*

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## Creativity in writing: stories from the medical field

### Mary-Rose Puttick

*Mary-Rose Puttick is a fourth-year PhD student and Assistant Lecturer in the School of Education at Birmingham City University. Her PhD research is based on community education provision for mothers from diverse migration contexts. Prior to this she taught Family Literacy and ESOL in adult education for 13 years. Mary-Rose now also teaches IELTSs for a community-based charity in Birmingham as well as two voluntary family literacy classes for refugee and asylum-seeking mothers. She can be contacted at [mary-rose.puttick@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:mary-rose.puttick@bcu.ac.uk).*

I have been teaching an International English Language Testing System (IELTs) class for the past year at a community project in Birmingham, UK. Through this class I have met some unique and very interesting people who are all highly qualified medical practitioners from a variety of professions including GPs, nurses, radiographers, physiotherapists and paediatricians, amongst others. The students come from diverse countries including Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kurdistan, Libya, Eritrea, Ghana, India, the Netherlands, Poland and Romania, with the majority having come to the UK from forced migration contexts as refugees.

What unites the students is their passion and determination to practise their profession here and to offer their skills and dedication to our National Health Service. They all have excellent standards of English yet face specific challenges related to the nature of the academic IELTSs examination, an exam which I believe a lot of people with English as their first language (myself included) would struggle to complete within the strict time limit.

Whilst the classes are filled with many positives in terms of the students' progression in the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing there is also at times a feeling of despair and sadness as they discuss their feelings about their medical skills becoming devalued as more time passes. Added to this, the students have very few opportunities to put their medical knowledge to use, even in a voluntary capacity. Many of them have also faced other challenges such as housing as well as discrimination issues. Last summer one of my male Sudanese students who had been a Public Health Advisor for the Sudanese government spoke of having to move house four times in a six-month period across different parts of the city and I found out later he had walked for four hours to come to class because of his financial situation. Some of the students travel from as far as Wolverhampton to get to the classes as there are so few funded IELTSs classes available for medical practitioners in their situation. I raise these points to demonstrate the resilience and strength of these individuals.

The writing task for the academic IELTSs examination includes two parts, one describing a graph, chart or diagram and the second an opinion piece on an unknown topic. Although both tasks have their values and uses, I found that the students were sometimes so preoccupied with practising exam techniques that they were losing their

passion for writing and were often overwhelmed at the obscure nature of some of the exam topics. It was for such reasons that I started introducing some creative writing tasks into the class, at least one a month, and I feel that it has really sparked the students' interest again in writing for pleasure and for giving them the opportunity, if they choose to do so, to share their reflections and memories.

I have used a variety of creative methods, some of them things I have acquired from seminars I have been to for my own studies, as I am a final year PhD student. For example, we have tried self-interviewing techniques as an interesting method to write about memories. Self-interviewing is a research method developed by Keightley et al. (2012) which gives people the chance to pause and reflect on their answers, as well as to maintain autonomy in what questions they want to ask and answer, as opposed to feeling pressured by a traditional interview technique. This method can be used in a variety of ways such as physically writing questions on a chosen topic and self-recording answers or self-selecting a variety of topics or themes and then choosing one to talk about freely within a set timeframe. The method can be adapted for students of all levels of English, incorporating picture topics and their home languages. Overall, I have found this method can provide a real confidence boost for some students, as well as encouraging a creative outlet. These variations on the self-interviewing method can then form the basis of different creative writing activities.

Another method we have tried in the IELTSs class is using photographs and objects as an autobiographical method to stimulate writing and ideas. As a research method this is known as autophotography and has been used in the field of mental health research to encourage the voices of those who are considered marginalised for different reasons (Glaw et al., 2017). I took in some examples to show them about my own life, including a gold charm bracelet I inherited from my grandma, a photograph of the five cats I had growing up, and my boarding passes from my 18-month round-the-world working holiday when I was 23. Again, an activity like this one gives the students the choice as to what they want to tell you or write about which I believe is particularly important when people have arrived in the UK from challenging circumstances.

The following pieces of creative writing are from four of my IELTSs students. They have all chosen the topic they wanted to share and the visual images they wanted to accompany their writing, and this has culminated in some fascinating and diverse pieces.

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## My Story as a General Practitioner

Karim Albidhani

I have worked as a General Practitioner since 1985 when I graduated in the Medical College of Baghdad University. At the beginning, I worked as a military doctor in Missan Military Hospital in the South of Iraq. Following that, I worked in the Army Medical Unit Number 34 during the first Persian Gulf War between Iraq and Iran in the 1980s. During that period I treated the sick and the wounded soldiers in the war.

I left my home country in 1991. The reason for leaving was due to the second Persian Gulf War between Iraq and Kuwait. My country became unsafe because of the war and the civil revolution that happened after the war. I crossed many countries seeking refuge. Whilst doing so I left behind all of my rights to work as a doctor. The reason for this was that my medical licence was no longer valid to work as a doctor. In spite of that, I helped my fellow refugee people as a medical advisor for as long as I was with them. Additionally, I worked as doctor in the Marshes of Iraq giving all of my medical services completely without any medical licence because the Marshes were out of any governmental control at that time. Following this, I worked as a doctor for Ammar Medical Foundation which was managed and supported by Baroness Emma Harriet Nicholson. Baroness Nicholson was the executive chairwoman of that Foundation which supported the Iraqi refugees medically after the second Persian Gulf War.

In May 1997 I went to Norway where my life completely changed. At the beginning, they accepted me. I had refugee status and this gave me all the rights that came with that status so that accordingly I could live a normal life, like others. However, the exception to this normal life was that I had no right to work as a doctor because I did not hold a valid licence to work as a GP there and had no medical documents to confirm my doctor's identification.

After that sad period I eventually received all of my medical documents and my medical certificate from the College of Medicine in Baghdad. Nevertheless, although I had received all of my documents, I still had no right to work as a doctor until my certificate was approved by the Health Authority of Norway which took a long time.

While I was waiting for approval to practise my profession, I went to learn the Norwegian language in an international class and parallel to this I went to practise in different health sections. Additionally, I was required to take a medical examination in Oslo Medical College to qualify and verify my medical certificate from Iraq. I passed that exam successfully. Following this, I was requested to complete two years as a resident doctor and half a year as a district doctor and I completed both undertakings. Finally, they gave me an authorised license to work as a GP doctor and I did. I still have my medical licence from Norway which is valid until 2042.

I came to the UK with my family in March 2017. It is now two years on and I am still unemployed as a doctor for the same reason I faced before and the licence again is the issue. I still have no right to work as a doctor until the General Medical Council give me that agreement.

This is the part of my story that holds all of my sadness. Yet, the final word has not been spoken and I still hold on to all of my hopes.



## **‘World Pulse’: women speaking out**

Sulafa Fadl

*‘I am a woman from an African developing country, trying to find a place under the sun for myself by making a positive impact on my community. As I am a medical doctor and I have a Master’s in Public and Tropical Health, I am working hard to change and improve the quality of women’s lives in Sudan, my home country. My challenges are all about medical issues that many women face in some, if not all developing countries.’*

These were my first words when I started posting on the World Pulse online blog site nine years ago. I found out about the website from one of my friends who lives in Saudi Arabia. It has become one of my favourite websites. It was founded in 2003 and was established by an organisation located in Portland, Oregon in the USA.

On this website I have felt the freedom to discuss issues considered taboo, such as women’s lives and rights after divorce. I have talked about health challenges that women face, such as maternal mortality and reproductive health. Also, I have touched on some political issues which have arisen in Africa recently. I used to publish a post every month on lots of very useful topics. Such examples of topics include: women talking about their feelings regarding the death of a child/baby; women discussing different types and sources of pain they have faced and the impact of it on their lives; women discussing issues around homelessness; some women have written about drug abuse; women have talked about mental health issues and the attached stigma they have faced; domestic violence; and issues relating to people with disabilities, amongst many other topics.

The World Pulse website is acting to encourage women to hold the power to create global changes.

I believe it speeds up the space and pace towards global gender equality and is for women everywhere. World Pulse motivates, guides and supports women around the world. It gives the chance for women to speak out and encourages them to connect with other women in different places. It is a global social network where every woman’s voice can rise up to transform her community and to change her life and other women’s lives.



## **‘I’ve come a long way’: dreams of a Somali-Dutch nurse**

Fahima Hersi

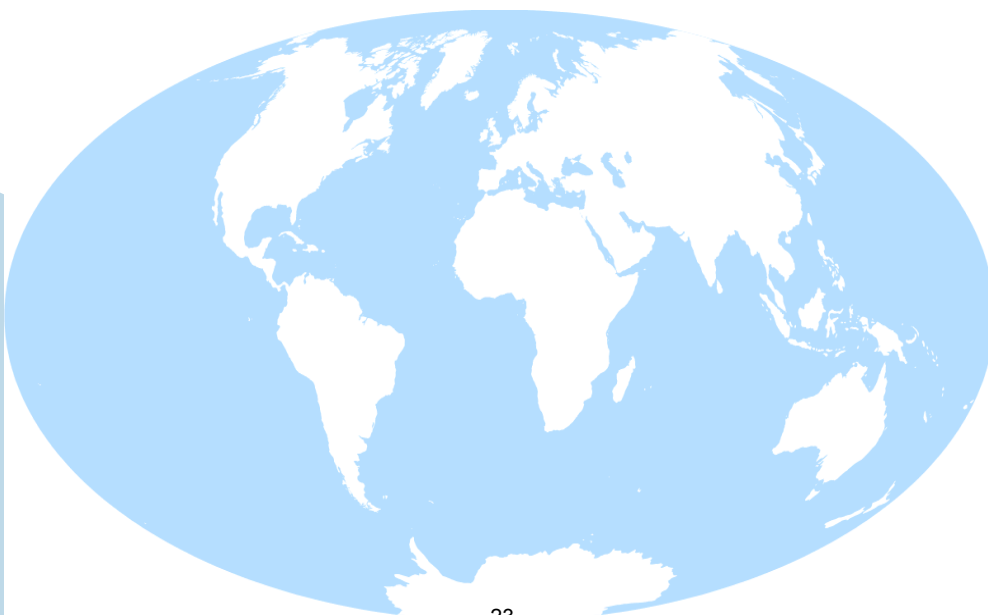
I was born in Gouda, Netherlands in 1991. I was nurtured in a small town called Boskoop, in South Holland, until the age of 6. At the age of 6 my two younger sisters and I moved to Somalia and lived with our grandparents. That’s where I spent most of my childhood and where I got to learn about my Somali culture and my religion of Islamic teachings.

I enjoyed most of my time there but due to a heavy war in the most part of East Africa, particularly Somalia, my two younger sisters and I had to move back to the Netherlands after ten years. By the time I got back to Holland I was around 16 years of age. I had to go through a lot of struggle which, for the most part, was adapting to a new environment and language. This took me a while. I re-learnt the Dutch language through reading books, watching movies, but mostly by communicating with my younger siblings who were fluent in it. I eventually managed to learn the language and adapt to all the changes.

Shortly after this I started my studies to build my dream career which was, and still is, nursing. I have always looked forward to becoming a nurse so that I can help people in need. After lots of hard work and resilience I graduated as a nurse in the Netherlands. Subsequently, I worked as a nurse for a period of 4 months after my nursing certificate was approved.

In the year of 2017 I visited Birmingham, UK, for a lengthy period of time. I enjoyed my time there and was fascinated by the diversity. Not too long before my holiday was over, I decided I would move to the UK and build a new life there.

I am happy to say that I have come a very long way because at the start of this journey I had yet to learn the English language and again I had to adapt to another new environment. I still have a long way to go. I am currently preparing for my IELTS exam which I will be sitting before the end of this year. I hope that I will be successful in achieving the grade I want and need and to pursue the rest of my career as a British approved nurse.





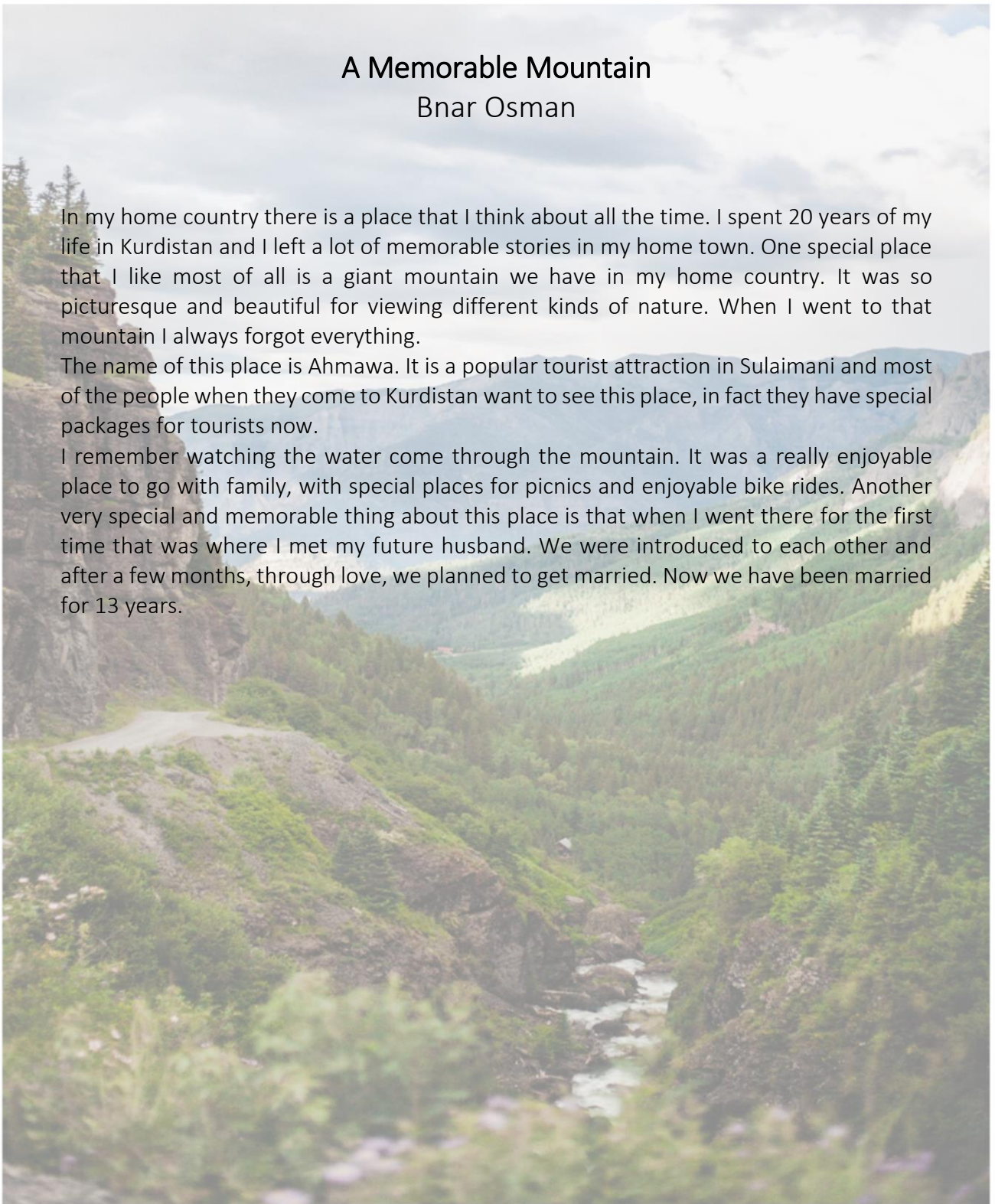
## A Memorable Mountain

Bnar Osman

In my home country there is a place that I think about all the time. I spent 20 years of my life in Kurdistan and I left a lot of memorable stories in my home town. One special place that I like most of all is a giant mountain we have in my home country. It was so picturesque and beautiful for viewing different kinds of nature. When I went to that mountain I always forgot everything.

The name of this place is Ahmawa. It is a popular tourist attraction in Sulaimani and most of the people when they come to Kurdistan want to see this place, in fact they have special packages for tourists now.

I remember watching the water come through the mountain. It was a really enjoyable place to go with family, with special places for picnics and enjoyable bike rides. Another very special and memorable thing about this place is that when I went there for the first time that was where I met my future husband. We were introduced to each other and after a few months, through love, we planned to get married. Now we have been married for 13 years.



## #EverydayLiteracyProject – my creative response

Kerry Scattergood

*Kerry has worked as an adult literacy tutor for eighteen years. She is currently delivering functional skills in the community and is also a primary school governor, specialising in SEND. Kerry is a passionate advocate for further and adult education, believing in valuing tutor and student voices. She is keen to promote expertise in the sector and is currently working to build interest in practitioner-led research within her own setting.*

*Kerry welcomes comments on the ideas expressed here and can be contacted at [kerry.scattergood@solihull.ac.uk](mailto:kerry.scattergood@solihull.ac.uk). She tweets at @KMScattergood and blogs at: [everydayliteracyproject.wordpress.com](http://everydayliteracyproject.wordpress.com)*

### Introduction

I am an experienced adult literacy teacher, working in the adult and community team of a large Further Education (FE) college in the West Midlands. Over the years, I have witnessed a significant change in attitude towards FE provision in general, and adult provision specifically. The neo-liberal approach to education has led to folk discussing our college in business terms, and education appears to have become a commodity that only values that which is viewed as ‘functional’ or employment-focussed.

In the past, I have spoken against such an approach, but I now realise that I have to *participate* to be heard. In hindsight, there's no use in talking against something without demonstrating an alternative, and an alternative that can be successful.

This inspired me to start my blog, #EverydayLiteracyProject, to share how I use research in practice: demonstrating ways to treat literacy as a social practice and building learning experiences around that. Never was such an approach more needed than in these days of ‘functional skills’, where the deficit model of literacy is increasingly in the ascendant and the main focus is on what learners cannot do instead of what they can.

### Everyday literacy practices, every day

It seems strange that, in contrast to the ‘practice makes perfect’ attitude we have to most other forms of learning, we consider one two-hour class per week to be enough to elicit real change in learners’ literacy skills. My own action research has shown me that to make real, lasting change, learners need to practise and engage in real-life literacy practices in their own lives, preferably every day.

This links closely with the many findings of the Open University/UK Literacy Association’s *Reading for Pleasure* research, which identified that regular literacy practices lead to more successful readers and writers: a particular interest of mine. I work to promote reading and writing for pleasure with adult learners, to influence their own everyday literacy practices outside of the classroom.

### Examples of creative approaches

There are lots of creative examples I can suggest for encouraging reading for pleasure, especially within family units, as well as encouraging writing for pleasure and empowerment, using real-life scenarios.

This year, my students have formed reading groups; discussed being reading role-models within their families; identified reasons for reading; taken up the Reading Ahead challenge; and welcomed expert librarians into the classroom to discover that books and libraries are in fact for them.

They've helped a classmate draft an email prospecting for voluntary work, which has now led to a job; written to their MPs; written poetry to share on *International Poetry Day*; contributed their voices to the Transformative FE research project; and are currently taking their voices from first draft to being published in the form of class books and class blogs.

Approaching literacy in this way, in my opinion, creates real and lasting change in everyday literacy events and practices. Partly, this is because learners are able to transfer what they 'know' into other types of writing, using 'real-life' examples for modelling their own writing. Furthermore, these creative approaches allow learners to steadily build confidence in their own abilities.

### Bravery in participation

Learners have shown increasing willingness to become involved in new ventures, building confidence in their own voices. Their bravery in taking on new challenges has astounded me. One learner enjoyed the reading and writing for pleasure activities so much, she started to dabble in poetry. Since being published in the Transformative FE Research project, she has now established her own 'brand', including a Twitter and Instagram account. She was understandably very proud to have her work showcased by Dr Janet Lord, Manchester Metropolitan University, at the recent Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL), conference, as an example of transformative education.

It has been life-changing for me too. I tried to contribute to the RaPAL Journal last year, but wobbled and bottled it, and then didn't submit anything in time. This year, as my confidence in blogging and my own participation in wider conversations has grown, I have written articles for the Times Education Supplement, for a research blog, and now I've braved up and here I am contributing to the RaPAL Journal.

I believe this is because I have *participated*, and have been supported and encouraged. In turn, I support and encourage my learners, and ask them to support and encourage others. As I wrote in a recent blog post, 'empowered writers empower writers'.

### Other barriers

There are many other wonderful examples of creative practice in England, in particular working in partnerships to create delivery mechanisms that allow and encourage those most in need to participate. Unfortunately, a lot of this work is under threat, with many partners, such as Surestart Children's Centres, being closed down under the guise of 'austerity'.

The partnership that delivers to my most 'in-need' learners is a women's centre based in Birmingham. The problem of austerity has reared its ugly head here too. As a charity, the women's centre has not been as heavily impacted by the cuts imposed on other services across the city (although, as always, they struggle for funding). However, as other services are reduced or closed the waiting list for the services provided by the women's centre becomes ever expanding. As demand increases for the centre, so does the demand for our classes. This has proved challenging.

Namely, we can have a group formed that, using the 'levels' system, range from E1 (Entry 1) to L2 (Level 2) – a span of six levels. In consequence, my two most at-need learners have struggled to be accommodated and are no longer attending. The first was unable to access provision as she couldn't fill out our college learning agreement. The second had come from prison and already had certificates ranging from Entry 1 units to a Level 1 Certificate, which spans five levels. She initially assessed at Entry 1. I asked her how she had a Level 1 certificate and she replied 'I don't know how I got that'. I think I can guess very well. If the government are going to continue funding post-compulsory education based on qualifications achieved, this kind of gaming is both inevitable and tragic. Students with qualifications, like the student mentioned above, but without the commensurate skills, are left with nowhere to go.

### ReimagineFE19

In the centenary year of the Ministry of Reconstruction's 1919 *Report on Adult Education*, my frustration at such issues inspired me to write a tweet:



The response from others inspired me and an ESOL colleague to convene a working group at this year's *ReimagineFE19*, a conference for FE and adult education professionals. *ReimagineFE19* puts the focus on the voice of the participants asking them to 'reimagine' real solutions to the issues that the current neo-liberal education policies place on us.

The working group we set up was an opportunity for us to come together with other adult and community professionals from across the country to share our creative solutions to current policy, and to reimagine future solutions. The group included many people from adult, community and offender learning settings, and we worked together

imaginatively throughout the day. Each participant left the session with a list of real, achievable acts that they could commit to and which could change their own working spaces and practices. These commitments included: founding a homework club; promoting family learning; inviting adult education advocates into their teaching spaces and classrooms; networking; sharing resources; and speaking up. All of these acts and more are possible ways that we could all creatively respond to our teaching situations. This again highlighted to me that complaining isn't going to get us anywhere and we need to *participate*. Getting involved and sharing our experiences prevent feelings of isolation and can lead to positive change.

Please do join us and join the conversation on Twitter under the hashtag #ReimagineFE19 and find out more about the Centenary Report by following #AdultEducation100, and please do take a look at my blog and follow my #EverydayLiteracyProject for more information on my teaching practices.

### Further reading on research into Reading for Pleasure

Sullivan A. & Brown M., (2015), [Reading for pleasure and progress in vocabulary and mathematics](#). *British Educational Research Journal*

Clark C. & Teravainen A., (2017), [Celebrating Reading for Enjoyment: Findings from our Annual Literacy Survey 2016](#). *National Literacy Trust*

UKLA & OU, [Teachers as Readers](#). Available from <https://researchrichpedagogies.org/research/reading-for-pleasure>

**BookTrust:**

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/impact-and-research/Research/>

Believing in literacy as an everyday social practice, Kerry tasked her women's centre literacy class to write about the value of adult education. Recognising an opportunity to see these pieces of writing all the way through to publishing, rather than as a token gesture piece of writing, to be written one week and forgotten the next, she supported the women in producing a group booklet and blog. These were contributed to the Transformative Further Education research project, as well as being used to inspire others to join classes at the centre and benefit, in their turn, from transformative educational opportunities.

Next are three examples of their writing.

**Adult education can transform lives****(A spoken piece by Nikita)**

Hi, my name is Nikita and I am here to share my experience of getting back into education.

As an adult, it is a fantastic opportunity to be educated and to improve your knowledge.

I was married at a very young age and did not complete my education. Because I had no proper qualifications, I found it hard to get a job. I was constantly nagged as I had no proper education and I did not have enough confidence and knowledge.

Education is important for every single girl as she can grow up to be a confident individual and independent woman, not just for herself but also to improve her chances in society.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

Educating women at an early age is the best gift for the future generation. Education has a positive influence on the social-economic situation of the country. However, many girls and women lack education due to financial barriers.

Let's educate ourselves so that we can educate more women for the future.

**(A spoken piece by Aklima)**

Hi, my name is Aklima. What do you think about adult education? Do you think it can transform lives?

Well, I think it can! I believe that you never stop learning, no matter how old you are. I'm in education for myself, to improve the skills I already have and to refresh them.

I believe education increases your knowledge and joining education can encourage your children to see how important education is.

I have always had it in me and I have raised my daughters to have the same attitude to education. Me and my daughters have a craving to want to learn more and more and more! The value of education has to be passed on. I value it, which is why they value it too.

Education has helped me to become a better person and also a much stronger woman. It has helped me deal with my fears too.

Since I started adult education, it has had a great impact on mine and on my daughter's lives. It has brought changes into our lives for the better.

I want to set a good example, not just for my daughters, but also other women who struggle to learn. I want them to know that it's not as hard as you think - if you can work hard, you can achieve anything.

The main reason why I want to refresh my maths and English is that my aim is to get the job I deserve!

Education doesn't have to be boring, but it can be fun, and it depends on you and the attitude you have towards it.

### **Education**

#### **(A poem by Zenobia)**

Well education has inspired me,  
To be the higher me.

Education elevates me, stimulates me, motivates me  
You see, the rule of three.

My intuition is based off of the words  
I had studied, the words I had written down

Through words I vibrate  
I mean by the smack of my lips  
Emit  
Verbs, adjectives and nouns

Education has allowed this poet in hand  
To stand unapologetically  
To speak freely  
To be me

Education has said  
'take my hand and be free with me'

Education is to awaken  
Education is set, to set free this upcoming nation.

## Turning negatives into positives

Julie Collins

*Julie Collins has been a Lecturer in Adult Literacy (Community Education) 1979-1997 and then a Course Leader in Basic Skills (Warrington Collegiate) 2000-2006 delivering workshops out in the community, then for the Local Authority 2006 - 2015. As a manager, her team delivered an embedded literacies curriculum of practical subjects from ceramics to web radio and well-being in homeless hostels and with rough sleepers. She has participated in four Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Partnerships with universities, trade unions, research institutes and a range of adult education providers in over twelve countries. Julie can be contacted at [quilamena@hotmail.com](mailto:quilamena@hotmail.com).*

*She wishes to dedicate the article to two important people; Liz Good, her first student, who sadly died earlier this year and Vee Banks, her colleague and friend who was part of the first 18 years of her literacies journey.*

The development of a creative curriculum over two decades of practice is presented to show how a particular perspective developed organically to engage students, enable reflection, in sometimes chaotic lives and promote creative responses to issues. I also want to assert that self-esteem is an important factor in enabling a learning journey and ask that we don't disregard the stories that make us who we are.

What we can learn from the principles behind the New Literacy Studies, which focus on the vernacular and sees literacy as social practice rather than use a deficit model to explain 'failure?'

As an adult literacy teacher, working in a variety of settings (Secondary & Primary Schools, Community Centres, Day Centre for adults with severe learning difficulties), trying to discover an individual student's reasons for walking through the door in the eighties I initially tried to fix the problem of 'illiteracy' using phonics, word building and mnemonics. Listening to students talking and hearing their life stories I believed there was a mismatch of literacy skills, 'achievement' and intelligence. Tangents of thought suggested I should explore different paths. The question for me has been to find ways to facilitate learning that would encourage and support future possibilities. In all of that I had to consider my role. So, what brought me to question ideas then and what brings me here now?

One change was prompted when three women who had lived their lives on the 'cut' (canal) came to Eburne Adult Literacy Group (Wood End), an adult education class run by the Community Education Department of Coventry City Council, because they wanted to learn to read through talking about their own experiences; using language experience they produced a scrapbook of their life.



My continuing confidence at changing from the preferred approaches of teaching literacy changed dramatically when I had the opportunity of working alongside Steve Attridge, a writer employed to produce a Community Play called 'Coventry Made.' He introduced us to creative writing techniques and valued the experiences of the students as storytellers.

Looking back at that time, it seems to me now that my practice was almost entirely a-theoretical. Reflecting on Peter Hannon's presentation at the start of my Masters in Literacy at the University of Sheffield I was reminded of my own insecurity and need for validation of the why's and how's; the need for choice; the option to counter the growing arguments for change on the basis of educational fashion and wanting to have the ability to explain what we were doing but also why. I was glad that other people had said honestly that they too had little idea of what to do as a tutor.

David Barton presented a chart, which encapsulated some of the other ways of talking about literacy, its conditions and the possible responses. He noted the following: Sickness - Treatment; Handicap – Rehabilitation; Ignorance - Training; Incapacity – Therapy; Oppression – Empowerment; Deprivation – Welfare; Deviance - Control. (Barton 1994, p 27)

### **Expressing wealth of experience and identity**

This was mirrored to literacy provision offered on the Wood End estate in North East Coventry, a place known beyond its postcode, where the conditions and responses to perceived low achievement were originally focussed on a mix of deprivation and ignorance as noted in Barton's chart (1994). In reality community leaders, pigeon fanciers, born again Christians, mothers, victims of domestic violence, greyhound trainers – were all students who managed their lives within the community but sometimes found the limits of their own literacy, so they came and asked for help for specific events in their lives.

Jane Mace (1996) at the Lifelong Literacies Conference, asked what would adult literacy education feel like if there was no process which engaged its participants in expressing something of their wealth of experience and identity? There were key answers from the conference.

- that classrooms of students would learn literacy was other people's power.
- without publishing of any kind adult literacy students would hold onto the idea that what they have arrived with is a deficit in their own intellectual and expressive abilities. (Gatehouse/Mace, 1996, p 69)

I then came into contact with the idea of 'literacies' through listening to David Barton at the RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacy) conference in Manchester. In effect we had begun practising the idea without giving it a name. It is

only through the process of thinking about my own learning journey through joining the Masters course that I became aware of how much theory related to my practice.

I continued to read from many different perspectives and reflected again on ideas that might encourage the journey towards deferred success. Barriers to my own achievement, or my students, may have been personal, practical, organisational or social. There were other elements beyond our personal control - class, gender and poverty. Mind mapping blocks brought forward other ideas to examine, for example, displacement, abuse, exclusion and poverty of expectation. But, whoever the individual is, whatever their story, the question for me as a tutor/facilitator was what would help any individual find the nourishment they needed to achieve their goals. In practical terms, functional literacy had often meant teaching literacy as a set of skills thought to be universal and applicable anywhere. 'It means that in general people's needs are not ascertained.' (Barton, 1996, p 193)

The group I worked with at Eburne Primary School was constantly developing and students were prepared to take greater risks. We had started to go away on writing weekends - embedding basic skills across all aspects of the writing, reading and speaking events. Students wanted to find out about the Suffragettes, Anne Frank, Sarajevo, Clarks' shoe factory, Sellafield, Cheddar cheese..... their interests were varied and their search for knowledge insatiable. We learnt together. However we also wanted to consider other questions. What of the other areas of our lives that are not usually considered in literacy groups, for example - the environment, the arts? We are complete human beings after all. Could a holistic approach work better?

### **Other paths explored through literacy**

Several projects then happened which allowed specific ideas to be explored. The Lady Mayoress of Coventry asked if we could contribute and respond to the theme of adults returning to education. We made a banner reflecting on the students' experiences - each person embroidered a negative and positive statement onto a leaf.

**-ve** I was made to feel inferior by other people because I needed help with writing and spelling. I can't express what I want to say in the way I want. When I write it doesn't come out right. I want to sound intelligent. It's a feeling I have inside. I think they'd say I was thick if they knew. I wanted to get a better education but I lacked confidence.

**+ve** Help and support at Eburne makes me feel part of a group. It makes me realize I am not on my own.

The next project involved working with Alan Sprung, a community photographer, to create a series of montages about the students' lives. Their responses were recorded on tape and the transcriptions typed up and displayed. 'Aspects of Ourselves' offered a snapshot about the life of adult literacy students living in Wood End in 1996.

There I was this frail, small kid, with long plaits and a snotty nose dripping. I'd try to catch the snot in a piece of rag that my Mum gave me. Why is everyone else normal, but not me? Would it ever end? No one would call me by my name, they'd just make fun of me and sing in the playground, "Snotty nose, snotty nose."

I thought they must all hate me. I wished I was anyone but me.

My teacher Miss Penn, always kept lovely embroidered hankies for me. I felt like a queen when she gave me a hankie. I felt she was the only one who cared about me and I will never forget her.

On a more practical level and spurred by the response to a letter written to the press to complain about the way rubbish was collected on their estate, some members of the Eburne group set up an Environmentally Friendly Group with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust to try and pressurise the Council into being more accountable. The local authority eventually balked at a community group leading the agenda. As a result the students lost interest. It might be argued that for a brief period they had been too successful.

### **The persistence of the status quo**

Our use of metaphor as an approach to teaching and learning was inspired by Theatre in Education. Tony Grady, a teacher/devisor, used an investigative and analytical questioning of the status quo. Like Edward Bond, speaking in *Raw Edge Magazine* (1996) he believed drama confronts, entices, intrigues audiences with problems, so that they take the problem seriously and learn how to use it. The company created that opportunity for the group when riots erupted on the estate, to explore their concerns. Intimidation and fear meant people had to step back from facing those issues directly.

My community manager could not see the relevance of work that helped to interpret the community in which the students lived, be it through banners, photography or drama projects which all included elements of oral, visual and written literacy. There was, it was argued, no possible link.

At the time I left Coventry, power was heavily invested in maintaining the status quo. A structural perspective believes that those in power erect an ideology to legitimate their position rather than enable people to confront their powerlessness. A seminar, which discussed Wood End's future in 1999, included just three residents out of the total of one hundred participants.

### **Encounter with Skills for Life**

In 2000, I began work in Warrington in Outreach settings. Information technology, although a small part of work in Coventry, was crucial to drawing in students for Warrington Collegiate. A new bid – an NVOPP (National Voluntary Organisations Partnership) programme offered six laptops to the hostel. I worked with the project team to incorporate literacy and numeracy within the resettlement course. When the

laptops arrived, as the carrot for getting involved with basic skills, we introduced word processing, internet, photography, desktop publishing, all combined with English and validated by CAN (Central Access Network).

The following year, nearly 8,000 teachers in England, including myself, were trained to deliver the basic literacy and numeracy curricula and associated tests. However, Skills for Life teachers were critical that the training was too prescriptive, diminished their professional competence and independence, and left little scope for creativity.

RECOMMENDATION 16 - Core Curriculum and Qualifications.

(i) There should be a new national basic skills curriculum for adults, with well-defined standards of skill at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2.

(ii) Only basic skills qualifications based on this new curriculum should be funded from the public purse. Whether assessed by coursework, test or a mixture of both they should use a common set of standards laid down by QCA.

([www.literacytrust](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk) / Moser Report)

When the report *Learner's Journeys: Learners' Voices* (2002), asked how learners viewed their own progress and achievement in the acquisition of literacy many respondents used a negative discourse describing themselves as thick and stupid. This may be because the new adult core curricula had been designed to provide a mechanism for breaking down literacy into the underpinning skills and focusing on those to the detriment of other areas. 'It means the outcomes are not related to learner's ability to act confidently and effectively in real world situations.' (Ward, 2002, p 41) Yet, it was at this very point which learners saw as a significant indicator of successful learning.

I was concerned that I was going to be pushed into teaching a type of curriculum that was solely instructional which wouldn't allow me to work with students on soft outcomes. Life creates cycles and though I might like to embrace 80's fashion again, I was worried by the idea that we might start to revisit practice that was current in the 80's and which I had abandoned.

Determined to draw on what students had negotiated over two decades and using ideas which reflected on what was important in their lives, I remained critical of the government's perspective. Challenging indirectly the accepted routes and roles mapped out for my profession by offering alternatives, I was seen as a maverick. Would I continue to have the courage of my convictions? My philosophy towards education has grown organically and taken strengths from many disciplines. I feel the approach does have validity for encouraging journeys. Today it still appears contradictory to government policy.

### **Finding identity through creativity – the rationale**

Unsure how much our practice should follow policy, or even how we could enable students to walk through the labyrinth of memory, build their confidence and self-esteem, develop their skills and/or find their voice; our small team wanted to draw on different disciplines and thought hard about how creativity, embedding literacies, could be developed to support residents.

I knew I had to return to research questions about class, culture and identity and the factors that build self-esteem. There had been a traditional assumption that functional literacy is perhaps the appropriate diet for the working class whilst more literary examinations were designed for middle class children destined to go to university. Maintenance of the status quo is one of the fundamental tenets of class whereby the dominant culture wants to control what is learnt and who learns.

Children's upbringing rather than poverty itself was said to result in an intellectual poverty. A crucial part of it all was language used in the home.  
(Gregory and Williams, 2000, p 3)

The deficit model suggests the problem lies at the feet of the poor. Low performance of working class children it was argued was due to a 'cognitive' deficit, a defective attitude, a low level of imagination, a dislike of the abstract and a lack of curiosity, sometimes referred to as 'psychological poverty,' which could have disastrous results. 'We do know at what age and to what extent this process is reversible by suitable experience or treatment.' (Gregory and Williams, 2000)

At the homeless hostel where drug, alcohol and mental health issues generate an alternative culture, understanding the ways the different identities can impact on possibilities for change, and learning, was essential. When I made the searches for related literature it did not produce a surfeit of studies. The literacies that speak to a proportion of the students at the hostel may have more similarities to the gangsta adolescents in Moje's study, whom she considered unsanctioned and/or deviant. Like Moje's adolescents individual residents want 'to be part of the story, to claim a space, construct an identity, and take a social position in their worlds.' (Moje, 2000, p 653)

Our society reacts to an 'underclass' which makes it gruelling for individuals to return to what is perceived as normal. It puts people down. It is more about judgement than reason, so we need to acknowledge the part we all play in the maintenance of those communities. Ignorance exists in unobtrusive forms, with passers-by yelling obscenities. Subtle discrimination can be just as hurtful, for example the local library refused to loan more than three books to residents.

In various places I have worked - Asda deli, pit village and 'sink' estate - individuals have exhibited a similar response or perception of themselves which has grown out of years of 'knowing their place.' The sociological and historical approaches of Giddens

(1991) and Foucault (1972; 1977) start from social systems and the ways in which 'social practices are structured and regulated through particular configurations of knowledge and power and then how people's sense of personal identity is shaped by them.' (Barton, Hamilton, 1998, p19)

So can we franchise the 'deviant' that doesn't subsume them into normal culture with a consequent loss of personality? How does society learn to respect the differences? Can they create a separate identity that is not dependant on other people's perceptions and more importantly which identity do they want for their future? A positive identity allows us to be ourselves. A negative identity induces feelings of guilt and shame.

At issue is not just the process, but, the purpose of learning. Some tutors recognised the specific needs of students and responded to the individual learning requirements outside of the core curriculum. Shannon recognised the importance of teachers taking on an active role in raising serious questions about what they teach, how they teach, and the larger goals for which they are striving. 'It means they must take a more critical role in defining the nature of their work as well as shaping the conditions in which they work.' (Shannon, 1992, p 19)

Dominant institutions, influencing adult literacy provision, produce texts, which appear largely irrelevant to the socially excluded. Tupac, Eminem and 'Grits' were writings that students brought in to share and discuss. By doing this they were creating a curriculum, chosen by and, more relevant to themselves. As children, it is unlikely they had access to material that reflected their world so how do we ensure that they feel valued as adults? Unfortunately the deficit model can still have a stubborn toe in the door.

So does narrative have the power to change lives by promoting personal agency? It is strongly attracted to Foucault's (1972) ideas there is no exercise of power without a discourse of 'truth.' People's lives are dependant on language as it ascribes meanings, which in turn are influenced by dominant 'truths.' Some knowledge is disqualified and some stories are not of our own making. 'What we know of life is through lived experience and interpreting an event can be seen as reading a text.' (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000, p 53)

If I shut out the story, what effect would that have?

Using multi modal methods to share narratives, question ideas, critically reflect and record events had a powerful impact. Kress (2003) talked about literacy in the new media age as having revolutionary impact on representation, communication and meaning. What was accepted as literacy practice was being challenged.

Of similar importance to us was how raising self-esteem gives confidence back to individuals who have been in places I can only imagine. What keeps the individual trapped on a journey that has so little hope? There are perspectives that blame the

individual, against this is weighted the impact of ‘secrets’ within families. We need to think about the effect these kinds of attack have on the individual’s esteem and capacity for learning. Having an opportunity to speak and reflect on our lives through the development of creative literacies can undoubtedly help us on our journeys of understanding and acceptance, confirming our place within society. Horsman (2004) argues that we should not silence discourses.

In 2019 we need to keep re-examining what adult literacy can be.

From 2001 – 2106 in Warrington we developed a curriculum that respected individual choice but challenged and supported change. The follow-on article from this discussion looks at some of the alternative and successful expressions of creative literacies that our programme enabled.

As Wright states, ‘Somatic knowing opens the doors of expressive communication, and non-verbal avenues for making and communicating meaning - those very aspects of learning that futurists believe should be enhanced in our world, culture and schools today, such as critical, imaginative and creative thinking; intellectual flexibility; lifelong learning; and whole-person and trans-disciplinary education.’ (Wright, 2002, p 14)

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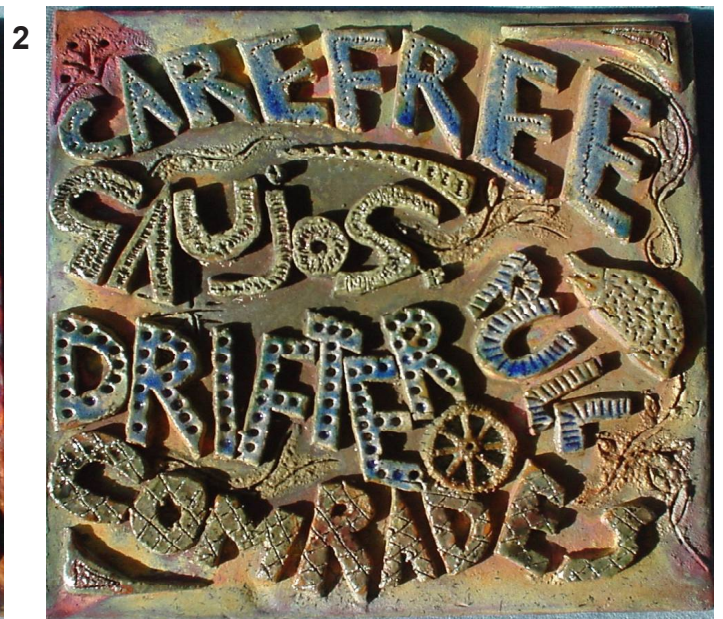
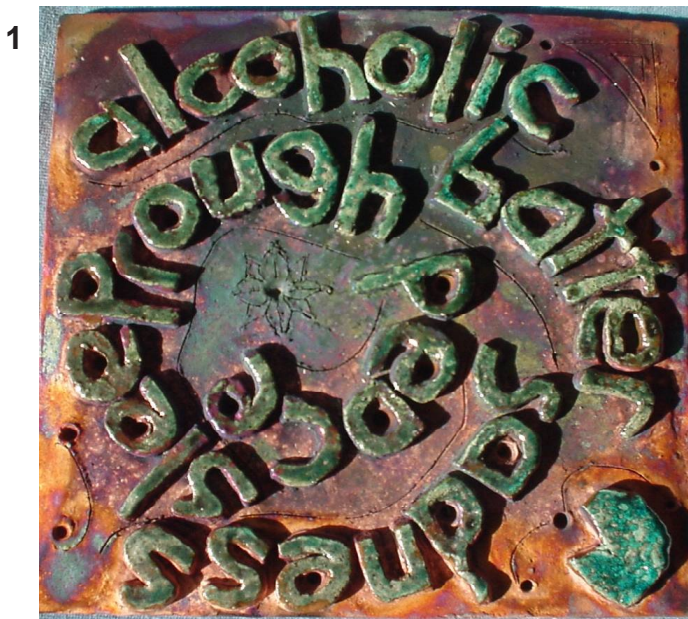
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The design was laid out onto a 12 inch paper square, before rolling out a clay tile and cutting out clay letters and decorations. After the biscuit firing, the tile was glazed and put into the portable raku kiln and taken up to a temperature of over 1000 degrees. Talking with residents during the firing enabled me to consider what other options could, might, would fulfil their aspirations for the future. I asked students to write about their choices of words, or, alternatively I recorded their words, with the option for it to be typed up. When Jed's tile was cleaned, after its raku firing, he wasn't happy with the result and wanted to make another. I believe that Jed's experience exemplifies Giroux's contention.

***Student experience, like the culture and society of which it is a part, is not all of one piece, and it is important to sort through its contradictions and to give students the chance to not only confirm themselves but to raise the question: what is it this society has made of me that I no longer want to be? (Shannon, 1992, (Giroux, p 17-18)).***



The opportunities to record literacy needs were an option once someone dropped in at a later date to one of the computer / English sessions but the approach was gentle and we decided that literacy should continue to be embedded into all courses rather than be stand alone.

### Example 1

Danny skirted the group for almost three months, always watching the others. His tile tells the story about his journey from birth through life.

***I can't remember what I did when I first came down. It took me ages to get into it but I did it. I wouldn't mind doing another tile.***

***Alcoholic batter, sadness – I don't want to go into the first part of the tile. Sleep rough – I slept in a tent in the woods on the Duke of Westminster's estate for 18 months. I went to the Day Centre every day - it's just next to the Police station. I'd get a shower and something to eat there and a cup of tea. I'd then walk around town for hours. I'd pick up my money every week.***

***I kept off the drink mostly. I've seen good mates puke up and be sick on their own vomit and die. It's dangerous it is. It is what frightens me you know.***

***Peace is just peace – we all get on with one another.***

## Example 2

Dennis's tile describes the way he felt about being a traveller, born in 1963 into a traditional Romany family.

***To a great extent, we lead a carefree existence, drifting from town to town, village to village and in my family's case from fairground to fairground. We, as a race, have always been persecuted for one reason or another, because of the way we live. We call those people that persecute us Gaujos. But let's face it everyone is supposed to be scared of the unknown and the dark.***

***I wish that Gaujos would get to know people like myself and open their eyes.***

What did I learn from these rolling weekend workshops? The men inspired me to keep thinking of other programmes that we could put together that enabled their voices to be heard - communicating and challenging the prejudices of a community that wants to judge and not listen or apparently want to understand.

What workshops would they be interested in? Photography? Music? Concentrating solely on literacy was not enough to support the changes that individuals wanted to make. The journey had considerable up and downs but the most positive aspect was that individuals achieved things they had forgotten were possible. They learnt new skills, found that individuals had common worries which they explored in more detail and finally took risks to present their identities. They felt a common bond at producing a tile, sitting watching the potter fire up the raku kiln and then assist in taking their tile out and placing it in sawdust to oxidise the glaze.

The success of that project created an impetus to become involved in the Spanish Culture Fest 05 and to identify a theme that reflected some connection to the country of focus and to the lives of the residents. A steering group called Step Back from the Edge was set up, to oversee the funding and direction of the work. It was a partnership of the residents and ex-residents, Arts Centre staff and tutors.

- **Journeys Project**

Looking for a focus, the steering group talked about famous Spanish names they remembered; Dali, Franco, Gaudi, Picasso and then the story of Don Quixote's journey across Spain was mentioned. It stuck as an idea because it fitted many guises – both at a personal level and collectively for the group. We decided that a journey could be geographical, historical, emotional, metaphorical.... We contacted the Spanish photographer Miguel Navarro who would be working with us and Dave, one of the residents, took responsibility for continuing to e-mail Uta Steiger, their project manager, with proposed ideas, updates and changes.

For the catalogue Miguel wrote the following;

***The idea behind 'Journeys' was to work on portraits, inspired by artistic representations of marine officials and sailors in the 17th and 18th century Spain, which portrayed the sitters in front of an often dramatic background.***

***The portraits of the hostel group would take up this reference from a contemporary perspective. There is nothing like observing these paintings and being taken in by the psychology, the obvious passions and the covert wishes of these personalities. These portraits were a perfect***

*starting point for us to work together on notions such as self-representation, personal history, and desired developments. Their discourses were stimulating, and their capacity to synthesize ideas from what they saw and felt has been a perfect complement to round off the result. In the end, it will have been a journey for us all.*

*You will see the result of an encounter of different realities, which all occupy one space, beyond this text.”*

Miguel Navarro

Each resident who went to Barcelona was asked to write up to 250 words about their personal and or collective journey about taking part and then a further piece about the multi-modal picture they created. The following are extracts from one student's writing.

Spanish Diary.

*A train through eastern Catalunya took us through olive groves and villages. It was like going back to a time to my childhood. Arriving at Montserrat and looking up to the monastery, half hidden in the mountain, as if super-glued to the ledge, I knew I needed a head for heights. As you ride the cable car the view of the rippled effects of the mountainous surroundings is mindblowing. The boldness of the cliffs are saying to all who come. I was here from day one and always will be.*

*The Pyrenees, enormous, tranquil and snow peaked, sitting in whipped cream cloud surely hold stories about how life was before the cable car. What did the Benedictine monks living in solitude in a mountain retreat, hidden by those spectacular mountains, think?*

*Six months ago - jobless, homeless and not knowing which way to turn, feeling an utter failure and suffering deep depression. Now living at the Centre, which is a damn sight better than living on the streets, being called a tramp or low life. I've met a group of people learning skills: computers, camera, pottery and art. Joined in. Next thing you know photo shoot in Barcelona and better still I have been accepted as one of the group. Over to Miguel's studio to have our portraits taken.*

*The topic - Journeys - through life. Then think how to relate it to Barcelona by means of photos and the places we've visited.*

## Process

Students discussed with their peers and with staff the story they wanted to share. The whole group spent a day at Miguel's studio to set up the back-drop and for Miguel to take the two portraits.

Once the story choice was confirmed each student searched the streets of Barcelona (or Montserrat) to find the images they wanted. With cameras in rucksacs we set out in



small groups to find a set of images which they would then photoshop into the window panel - the metaphors for their chosen story.

Topics included: passion for protest (worried that this passion had been lost after taking heroin for 20 years), feelings as an outsider, searching for approval, self-criticism, identity, travel.....

As part of evaluating the Journeys project I have thought long and hard about the many points in people's journeys away from addiction that need resolution. Sometimes the past is denied, which means individuals who are 'not in the same place' can be seen as a 'reminder' to be avoided or rejected. It did throw up issues for the group to determine a mediated outcome. The decision by some individuals in the group who were prepared to support other students who still had 'issues' showed compassion and was a reflection on how far they themselves had travelled. What is not in doubt is that it was a huge journey for us all. As Andy said, "Life changing."



Learning takes place in all environments. Literacies, outside the classroom, function in ways that are different to those in educational settings. Diverse domains impinge on, but also spring from home and hostel literacy. I wanted to acknowledge vernacular practices and respect their place because they enhance the practices of the home, hostel and the wider community. Multi modal responses to the images took us somewhere quite unusual.

So is literacy a part of our very being? 'Gee states the process of being socialised into the way of one's group begins immediately an individual is born, it is not as if, once born, a human being can live and then somehow do culture as an optional extra.

***Human beings are literally born into cultural participation, framed initially by the condition and circumstances encountered in their primary discourse. ((Gee,1990,1991) Lankshear,1997, p19)***

But we have choices so I wonder sometimes if students realise there are other ways of seeing, doing, feeling, living?

Alan completed a second portrait, also using photoshop. It was about making choices. Attend a Photoshop course or smoke weed. The hand outstretched is a reference to this choice. The hand reaching in - the power of his personal battle.



Both sets of workshops enabled growth in self-esteem; confidence from new found skills, new identities as photographers and artists, development of selfhood, a sense of belonging and valuing the support offered by the group. Residents and ex-residents moved on in ways personal to their circumstances. Foundation Art degree, work in Spain and UK, marriage, plumbing course and restoring links with family.

Individual images exhibited at Pyramid Arts Centre, Warrington. Group image exhibited at CCCB Barcelona.(C)



## Labels

The next idea for turning the negative into the positive came from thinking about how to turn round negative labels. It wasn't easy for everyone to imagine. Curtis Watt, a performance poet, writer and drummer, worked with the group at a residential at Rowen Youth Hostel.

## Process

The work came after several other workshops during a weekend of activities that had explored identity - focussing on homelessness. There was an awareness from previous discussions of the impact labels had on the group even though they usually presented a macho front where apparently nothing could touch them.



We discussed the labels people had given us and captured the negative statements on A4 sheets. Allowing time to experiment with words and language. Curtis, our workshop leader, produced his own as an example and was quickly able to turn the negative into a positive. There was no pressure about the time to take, as we had the luxury of being around to follow it up once back in the hostel workshop. One resident took three months to find his words. There was a celebration when the positive words grew out of and from a change in perception to the negative label. The final statements were written on 200gsm paper and the photographs taken on a digital camera.

People's lives are dependant on language as it ascribes meanings, which in turn are influenced by dominant 'truths.' Some knowledge is disqualified and some stories are not of our own making. We all have multiple identities, we have choices, but we grow up with shared conventions codes and values from childhood. Bordieu describes an internalised habitus so while there are differences for each person, Taylor and Spencer (2004) argue that any individual is steeped in the specific traditions of a group, embodying all of its social codes.

***Identity is a work in progress, a negotiated space between ourselves and others.***



Photos  
Alan  
Sprung

## Grundtvig Web Radio - Radio Sovo

The first project that we shared across six internet radio communities in Europe was a **Grundtvig Learning Partnership:**

## Radio SoVo.

(Sounds and Voices)

*Radio Citron: Paris*

*Radio Nikosia: Barcelona*

*Radio Total Normal: Oslo*

*Radio Sovo: Bytom*

*Radio Aurora a Outra Voz: Lisbon*

*Lisbon*

*Radio Xtreme: Warrington*

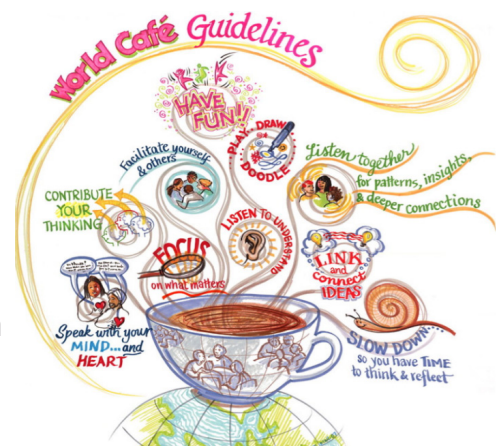


The Grundtvig learning partnership wanted to explore how web radio could facilitate change for groups experiencing a range of mental health conditions. Before our second partnership meeting in Paris we were asked to explore the idea of - What is Normal?

## Process

To facilitate the hostel working with and also drawing ideas from local stakeholders we planned a world cafe event. This project was supported by Warrington Social Services Mental Health Team, Creative Remedies, Warrington Public Health - HAPPY?

OK? SAD?, State Of Mind, Warrington Wolves Charitable Foundation, Creative Possibilities, Combat Stress, 5bp NHS Foundation Trust Forensic Services, Priestley College, AA, NA, CA, Warrington Library, BBC, Papyrus and Pathways to Recovery.



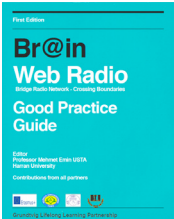
**Residents came up with 5 mental health questions to ask the participants.**

- 1) **What triggers the onset of mental health problems?**
- 2) **How can we prevent stigma?**
- 3) **What impact can mental health have on relationships?**
- 4) **Care in the community - fact or myth?**
- 5) **Coping mechanisms - is it time to talk?**

The group ran the event and residents hosted the 5 tables in pairs. After 20 minutes the room was reorganised - a starburst - at each table participants added new knowledge to the existing notes recorded on the table and the artists listened and captured thoughts to add to the visual minutes. Pens, sweets, sticky notes and cameras were made available to encourage interactivity. The large image shows a proportion of the visual minutes we created with the support of three Liverpool artists who captured our ideas throughout the session. Julie Ward, MEP, came to meet the residents and Stephen Oates (our Web Radio Advisor) to support European funding in action.



Radio Bridge at University of Harran TV studio, Sanilurfa, Turkey.



## Grundtvig Web Radio - Radio Bridge

What we learnt from our involvement in that first project, examining the theme **What is Normal?** was a passion to maintain our links across Europe. Voices, cutting across boundaries, helped to break down barriers. With those objectives we developed a second partnership between Harran University (Turkey), PSOUU (Poland),

and the hostel. Risk assessments for the mobilities were comprehensive because of the additional support required to enable students with addictions and those who had held membership of now banned organisations. However through the opportunities that arose and the connections we made, strong friendships grew. The partnership challenged perceptions held by us all.

**Process:** The set up was written up in a Good Practice Guide, which is replicated here.

**Section 1**

# Web Radio - setting up a studio

**Contents**

1. Background
2. Aims (A) & Objectives (B)
3. Creating a studio
  - I) Equipment purchased
  - II) Digital skills covered
  - III) Communication skills
4. Monthly broadcasts
5. Music production
6. Extras

Authors: Julie Collins, Ricky Phelps, Colin Yates

The UK's task is to record the processes of setting up a studio.

## 1. Background

It's strange how a moment of exclusion, a proposal rejected by a Co-ordinator who didn't want homeless men in her group, provided a challenge that has continued to inspire learners. Minutes later, as I left the conference, I was approached by a web radio manager, with an offer. I jumped in with my size nines, full of enthusiasm, but then on the train home I can recall being worried about the focus of the partnership – Web Radio & Mental Health!

Not only did I know nothing about web radio, but, I had always shied away from tackling head on, topics that focussed on mental health. As I thought about it, two reasons surfaced; family history had silenced any debate at home and I worked in an environment where most addictions were not acknowledged. Residents talked about their lives and their addictions, but was it a mental health issue? How hard would it be to raise this in ways that still protected the vulnerability of the residents?

Was I crazy for accepting this offer?



The realisation of our first Grundtvig web radio project Sounds and Voices, was a partnership between 7 groups from across Europe. Five were already operating as web radio stations supporting learners who had a range of diagnoses.

Two of us were starting from scratch. PSOUU and Creative Possibilities. PSOUU is a therapeutic organisation working with adults with intellectual disabilities and Creative Possibilities was working with a group based at a homeless hostel in Warrington. We produced podcasts to share during mobilities on 'What is normal?' 'Identity.' 'If I was a country.....'

Two years later, the two newest recruits to that web radio project wanted to continue broadcasting, choosing topics relevant to the new partnership. Poland, Portugal and UK gave it the thumbs up and Anna's idea (PSOUU) was to focus on having more frequent broadcasts. PSOUU and Creative Possibilities submitted the Bridge Radio proposal in 2013.

In September we knew we were successful and Harrayn University completed our partnership group.

Sadly some partners did not get through the assessment process.

## 2. Aims & Objectives

### Aims (A)

- I. Create linked monthly broadcasts; Turkey, Poland & UK.
- II. Improve communication and digital skills.
- III. Explore and increase cultural understanding.

To achieve this we needed to think about the issues, be open to resolving them quickly, so evaluation and reflection on the sessions was important to building the correct skills to move forward.

Our specific tasks related to the following objectives.

### Objectives (B)

- I. Creating a Studio
- II. Developing Digital Skills
- III. Developing Communication Skills

Our biggest question with the new group in the workshop, was what do we need to do to begin creating monthly broadcasts? Should we empty the office and glue egg boxes to the wall or use the workshop for the studio?

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## 3. Creating a studio

We sought advice from Stephen Oates, a sound engineer who I had worked with 10 years ago and a music shop Dawsons with a wide experience of supporting the education sector.

### I) Equipment purchased

**Mixing Desk** – supporting input from mikes and computer and output to headphones and computer.

Alto ZMX 122

**Microphones** – we chose different mikes for different purposes; omni directional, dynamic, condenser, cardioid, boundary, usb (Blue)

**Cables** – mono and stereo audio, jack & mini jack, vga, usb, extension leads.

**Internet** – broadband.

**Skype**



**Video Cam** - with usb connection to record room for visuals

**MIDI keyboard** - music input digital input

**Computers** – loaded with one of following audio recording and editing software programmes - Adobe Audition, Garageband, Logic Pro, or Open Source Audacity.

Load **Skype** to create the link up.

There are other professional programmes which can help capture skills learnt.

**Screencast** - to capture learning on the computer

Good handheld recorders - **Tascam, Zoom.**

We had help from Stephen Oates to ensure we set up the system correctly for recording.



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## II) Digital Skills

Broad ranges of digital skills were captured through the individual learning plans of learners. Some courses were organised to enable more complex tasks to be completed.

The four main areas were Photography, Podcasting, Music Production & Garageband for recording and editing.

We needed to think whether we could go straight into broadcasting or whether we should develop confidence through encouraging the telling of personal stories.

### The Four Stages of a recording process

#### 1) Digital Voice Recorder

Enables sound to be recorded independent of the computer. It usually requires batteries, so keep spares. Easy to play-back, wipe and re-record a completed recording can then be uploaded and stored on the computer as a sound file using standard USB connections. Depending upon the make of the recorder, sound will be stored in a particular file format – only the more expensive models allow a choice of file formats. It is worth looking at both Tascam and Zoom recorders.

#### 2) Importing an audio file

Choose (Audacity, Garageband) and agree a format.

In addition you can use photos; some images help the audience to locate a track, interesting visuals also help bring some context to the output.

#### 3) Play, Listen and Watch.

Only by doing this several times will a learner identify what needs to be done to improve their recording. Please see additional exercise in addendum.

#### 4) Bouncing to the WWW.

Uploading audio, video and or instagram / podcasting files to a server, You Tube, Vimeo or web page.

### Music production

Creating stingers, jingles and background music.

Music soundtracks are vital to adding interest to the tracks so there are a number of things to consider. In the UK you need to pay for music unless it is an original composition. There are sources such as Incompetech. The site contains free-to-use music tracks of various genres. All these sound tracks can be copied and used in podcasts but must be attributed. See 'Terms of use' on how to do it. Note: There's lots of music available on the Web which is free to stream (i.e. listen to) or download for later listening but finding music that can be re-used is not so easy. Take a look at <http://www.creativecommons.org>

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It links to some not-so-user-friendly sites. Much of the music is very modern.

Whatever you or your learners find make sure you and they read the terms of use before using the music otherwise you may be encouraging illegal practices.

Alternatively you can set up a computer and midi keyboard to create your own music with the help of a programme like Garageband or Logic Pro (Digital Audio Workstations)

**Jingles** - These are usually short combinations of sound and spoken word, normally used to introduce a programme or segment, e.g. "This is BBC Radio 2." "Welcome to Radio Radio Bridge." "Here is the 10 O'clock news."

**Stingers** - Again a short piece of music, typically 5-10 seconds (without words) to again introduce a section of a programme. e.g news report or to be used as a station ID (Ident)

**Background Music** - Useful for setting a scene of a particular story - happy or sad,(using major or minor musical keys) fast or slow. Can be used with sound effects to 'paint the picture,' behind spoken text. Similar to music used in ballet to portray the sense of drama at a given time. We spent time learning about the range of moods that you can create by using different musical keys and also about key changes

## EXTRAS

### Photography

Photographs can be taken on a compact camera, smart phone - 12/16 million pixels, and uploaded to the computer.

Alternatively you can use a mobile and bluetooth the image.

Photos can be resized, cropped and manipulated to produce the images you want for different purposes. Alternatively Flickr is a photograph search engine with many free to use images. As with all image search engines exercise care in entering search terms to avoid images that might make some viewers blush!

A detail of the individual copyright license is often attached to each image.

### Computer Programmes

Get to know a range of more complex programmes that you can use to help to achieve the project objectives. Computer updates : Ensure all programmes are up to date and compatible.

### Scanner

Check settings are appropriate for the quality required.

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Any type of scanner will be suitable, but software must be installed or downloaded onto the computers. Ensure you have administrative controls.

### Built In microphone

Some computers have a built in microphone. For these to be used the computer must have a recording sound card installed. Files are stored as uncompressed .wav or .aiff files, therefore no need for converters or additional uploading processes.

Built-in microphones are often of low quality resulting in low quality recording. BBC quality is a minimum of 16 bit.

### Headphones

These will allow students to listen to their narratives in relative privacy. Also useful if workshops are noisy. Prices and quality vary, so, do ask and check suitability.



## III Communication Skills

To support the range of communication and digital skills, we agreed we should have some additional help. But who had the knowledge and

expertise to support us? We contacted the Media Trust. We attended a Speed Matching event at Media City and were linked with two BBC journalists. Sharjan was an expert in podcasting.

What communication skills were needed depended on how the project developed and who participated. Specific focus began with the following.

### Personal Stories / Podcasting

#### Finding the Experience.

We start with an appreciative inquiry approach to find those meaningful experiences while individuals explore story styles and the power of personal narrative. Then we try to facilitate a "re-storying" process that encourages reflection around the experience for a deeper understanding of how stories define who we are and how we walk through the world.

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### Telling the Story

Once we "found" the story, we explored the best way to tell that story. This includes writing the voiceover script in a way that works digitally, so as to take advantage of the intricacies of voice, using tone, diction, volume and inflection as powerful tools for creative expression.

The next stage involved developing Interviewing Skills.

- Interviewing a friend
- Street interviews
- Conversations
- Recording groups

### Creating the Piece

The third step is all hands-on production. Editing begins by the melding of audio and if confident adding visuals. See additional steps. Editing is a process of splicing and removing unwanted audio. It is easy to add an additional audio track e.g. for overlaying music and narrative. Once you are satisfied with how multiple tracks will sound when played together they are then ready for exporting (bounced) as a single audio file.

Tracks will be automatically mixed when exported. Some editing programmes are non destructive. \*Garageband, Logic and Adobe Audition.

A cheaper option is TwistedWave Audio Editor which can be bought in the app store. Audacity is free.

#### Additional steps

Visuals There are professional digital video editing software programmes such as Adobe Premier, or scaled down versions like iMovie or Windows Movie Maker which come as standard on your computer. After creating a rough cut, learners can add special effects, transitions and titles to get to a final draft. The process of creation is transformative as we all become producers of multimedia, not just consumers.

### Publishing the Work

Stories can be published to a variety of platforms: Blogs and video sharing sites exist on the Web. After creating the stories, tutors can assess how best to use these stories: for learning, for social activism, or as tools for reflection.

A mix of digital and communication skills are needed to create a good broadcast that an audience wants to listen to.

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## 4. Monthly broadcasts

- 1) Deciding on roles of the group.
- 2) Setting up equipment ensuring it was ready to make contact with Poland and Turkey and to record the output.
- 3) Managing the mixing desk.
- 4) Leading the discussion.

### Researching

The list on a topic can be endless but the important first skills are in identifying words that are needed for researching effectively. Refining words to get the best information was essential.

### Critical thinking

Discriminating between sources of information by reflecting on what interests/funding an organisation has means you are more likely to have a factually correct resource.

Developing critical thinking skills as part of the project also ensures learners find more reliable resources.

### Preparing for an interview.

Collecting interesting historical facts to locate the information and provide a context to a story is vital if you want the audience to stay with you.

### Summarising.

Editing a story to enable it to fit into a podcast. Maybe using the [www](#) or [Wiki](#) will help find out and pare down the detail in plain language.

### Thinking about your audience

To add to the recordings there are extra digital skills required to bring a piece alive.

Please take time to look at this resource produced by the BBC.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/yourvideo/pdf/aguidetodigitalstorytelling-bbc.pdf>

\*\*\*Please see a more detailed description of the impact on learners in the next section written by PSOUU.

These pages explain the planning that was involved in building the skills to have a monthly online broadcast using Skype. Topics included; favourite books, education, the soundtrack to our life.....

At our final partnership meeting in Warrington we explored the theme of conflict and peace. Each group had identified their major concerns around the type of conflict they experienced – bullying, oppression, racism. Each group had identified that they wanted their lives to change in a positive way. We began as a group of 30+ by writing a song in Polish, Turkish and English called Changes. Residents and tutors at the hostel had planned a weekend of activities for the international visitors, to provide a structure for the group to examine how they might challenge themselves to make those positive changes.

Sharjan Miah, (Khulisa & BBC), quizzed us about any personal negative responses we used in our lives in his workshop. A visit to IWM North highlighted the horrendous impact of unresolved conflict. Lizzie Elston worked with the group to make poppy bowls and cards as a symbol of peace - objects to be used as a moment for reflection. During the last session Curtis Watt explored stories as a way for us to focus on finding some inner peace and identifying how we could work towards a positive future. Those who wanted to, recorded their story as an mp3 file.

## Pedagogy and Curriculum

What we know of life is through lived experience and ‘interpreting an event can be seen as reading a text.’ (Parton & Byrne, 2000, p 53) The Stories on a Tile workshops encapsulate this creative work because it works on many levels of meaning. At first glance you see the object: design, patterns - seeing it as it is. On second glance you find words: what’s the story - being able to capture the frame of mind when it was made. Third glance and you see wider connections: some tiles need further exploration to gather and explore meaning.

Combining literacy with creativity can provide important avenues for making the types of multi-modal and somatic connections that are key to deep learning and knowing. My own interpretation comes from what I have learnt from students, working in adult, community and further education for over 30 years. Our use of narrative approaches helped to construct more positive stories that built on strengths and successes rather than problems and deficits.

Wright (2002) similarly argues that the arts involve unique forms of meaning making, knowing and communicating, through the use of discourses and a range of 'texts' that can be read and written.

***Consequently, a multi-modal approach to education should include a liberal definition of the term 'Literacy', which encompasses the multiliteracy integration of body, mind and soul through musical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic and symbolic forms of artistic expression.***

How do we put in place a new set of social practices so as to support students being critically literate when it comes to their involvement with the arts, multimodality, and the new literacies? (Albers & Harste 2013)

To conclude with these words from Brian (Journeys Project) might be representative of all of these creative literacy projects and their ability to support students in moving forward.

***The 'Journeys Project' was of great personal importance to me. It has been a major landmark on my own road, a vantage point to view where I've been, where I am and what's possible for a future direction. Once again I'm in the position of having choices and it's been a long time.***

***My presence here - my current well being and ability to function and enjoy life again. I put down to people. I made a big choice not so long back. It was life saving. I could have not taken and sustained it on my own. At my worst moments I was gravely ill. The people at the 'Sally' saw me through hospital, detox and assisted by Arch saw me into a Turning Point supported housing project.***

***At the core between these physical addresses has been the people of the Journeys Project. We've all been and continue to be on our actual and spiritual journeys and here to tell the tale. Thanks to everyone. I don't have adequate words to do the job, but with all your help, I am able to be here in person.***

**Brian**

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## **Bourdieu, Language-based Ethnographies and Reflexivity: putting theory into practice**

By Grenfell, M and Pahl, K

Cost: £28.79

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Also available in hardback and e-book

Review by Alan Rogers

*Alan Rogers is an educator, author, academic researcher and historian. He has been engaged in adult education in both community and academic contexts for more than forty years. He has undertaken research and training projects widely throughout Asia and Africa, and he has promoted adult literacy in many different countries of the world. Alan is co-author of two recent publications (2012) *Adult Literacy and development: Stories from the Field* and *Numeracy as Social Practice*. He is currently Visiting Professor at the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia and at the School of Education at the University of Nottingham.*

Forget the cumbersome title: this book is simply about reflexivity in research. It is true the case studies the authors use come from ethno-linguistic studies but they could come from any social science research. It is also true that the authors advocate a particular take on reflexivity from Bourdieu, but even without this stance, the theme is the necessity of reflexiveness in all research. And for this it is most welcome.

First, the structure of the book. There are three opening chapters, one on ethno-linguistic studies, one on reflexivity in general, and one on Bourdieu. These are followed by four case studies where four academics engaged on research into language practices and learning have been invited to revisit their research, looking at their reflexivity in the original research and now in this review. There is then a third part in which the two authors draw lessons from the case studies and again enlarge their vision of Bourdieusian reflexivity.

Throughout there are thoughts about 'research' but the book lacks a discussion of it. And this is important, for it impacts on the readership of this book, for whom this book is intended. This book is not just for first-year PhD students with their 'personal development plans', or indeed for all research students and academics. For, as the conclusion reminds us, 'Human beings are by their nature "reflexive", and both our conscious and unconscious minds are in a state of continual reflexive flux – implicitly

and explicitly' (p 173). 'Research' is a normal human activity: we all do it all the time, searching for new knowledge to meet new circumstances, for new meanings when old ones prove inadequate. In particular, teachers are doing it continuously. Building on the maxim that 'all new learning builds on prior learning', teachers consciously or subconsciously seek to understand the background knowledges and understanding of their pupils in school, students in further and higher education, and learners in adult learning programmes. To call this exploration 'research' is to make it more conscious and to help analyse its components and methodologies. So that all of us need reflexivity in this process: '[t]he process of "coming to know" my researcher-Self requires reflexivity – a critical and public reflection on the private Self' (p 91). All members of RaPAL, whether engaged formally in 'research' or in the daily practices of teaching and learning, need to think about the issues raised in this book. 'Just what is the relationship between ourselves and the other – whatever and whoever that might be – and the language which we call upon to both express and sustain it' (p 178).

Research is more than simply one entity (researcher) exploring another entity (the researched); it is, as has been said, one culture meeting another culture (p viii) and both being changed in the process. I have described research as something like a youth hostel – different travellers meeting for one night, sharing making a meal, washing up and experiences; and all going away changed the next day. In this process, we need to reflect closely and deeply on who we are and what we are doing, and how we have been and are being changed. And, as Bourdieu is shown here, to do it with our whole being, including feeling, the 'literacies of the body' (pp 136, 143); not just to 'do' it but to 'be' it (p 169).

One aspect of reflexive research discussed in several places (e.g. pp 116ff) but not brought together is writing up the research: 'we need to tease out not only the relationship between subject and object, but also how it is articulated and the language used to express it' (p 171). Reflexivity is seen as writing 'yourself into your account': 'it is better to have a personal account than codifications' (p 27). It is we who 'choose to word their worlds' (p 102). But the accountability throughout the various discussions seems to be limited to the academic community of practice: 'Within the duelling identities of native ethnographic researcher lies the power struggle between my identities as "native researcher" and "good academic"' (p 103). But there is more to this aspect of reflexivity. There is in almost all research a third party, those to whom the researcher is accountable. Brian Street had a famous story to illustrate ethnographic research; a turtle left her lake to explore dry land *and returned to the lake to talk about her experiences to her friends the fish*. The awareness of the fish will influence what the turtle sees and especially the words she uses to report this. Almost all research is intended for some third party eyes and these eyes influence the researcher; reflexivity in research must include all those who influence the researcher in what is explored and especially in writing up of the research [I am conscious I am writing this for RaPAL members; I would write something different for other audiences]. It may be for funders, for commissioning agencies, for PhD examiners, for

journal editors, for other academics in various disciplines. All research is done for a purpose and that purpose will affect the shape of the research and the discussion of the findings. Reflexivity must include such elements.

But back to the book. The first chapter on ethno-linguistics provides a history of such studies including some account of ‘the language turn’, current approaches to language studies which see ‘speech and language [as] not a standardised set of rules but a locally variable set of situated practices’ (p 8) (the work of Stroud et al 2015 could have been used here). The author ties her discussion tightly to literacy, especially the New Literacy Studies (NLS), a term which many people, including Brian Street himself, have concluded is inadequate and have instead preferred ‘literacy as social practice (LSP)’. I do worry about the use of the term ‘literacy’; in an age of multiple literacies, I ask ‘which literacy are you talking about?’. There are times when I feel we might try to get away without using the word at all, since it can now mean so many different things, including here speech, gestures, artefacts and other forms of communicative practices: ‘literacy ... was inscribed into material objects’ (p 60). Much of what is written here refers to the various uses of language. Perhaps the phrase ‘written communicative practices’ (or even simply ‘writing’, since reading is implied in writing, and writing is essential to reading) might serve. But literacy it is. In this chapter too is the fullest description of ethnography, ‘that respectful and careful understanding of what is going on here and what matters’ (p 7).

The second chapter is a readable account of ‘reflexiveness’ in its various forms. It draws on Schon’s *Reflexive Practitioner* but not much else in background literature. The third chapter on Bourdieu needs a warning note to be attached to it. It is not an introduction to Bourdieu – for that, there are much better introductions including by the author himself. This is a discussion of Bourdieu’s approach to reflexivity to which he came late in life; the subject is not mentioned in his earlier works. The authors of this book insist that Bourdieu’s concepts of *field*, *habitus* and *capital* and his theory of practice are essential features in all forms of reflexive research, whether into linguistics or other social subjects.

Then follow the four case studies, all revisiting earlier research, mostly long-term projects (ten to fifteen years engagement with the researched). The first is an ‘artefactual literacies’ project in Rotherham to which Bourdieusian categories have been applied. It explores the result of the ‘post-human turn’, ‘a rethinking of the ways that the relationship between humans and objects could be conceived of’ (p 4). This is rather more than the ‘figured world’ of Holland and others (1998), even the actants of Latour’s ANT (Actor Network Theory). The new media age challenges ‘conventional binaries of speech, writing and the visual’ (p 6): ‘socio-linguistics could also no longer ignore the visual’ (p 10). The ‘tacit and non-linguistic forms of knowledge ... [which] relate to the everyday’ are part of ethno-linguistics studies (p 58). However, I do have problems over some words here. To me, an *artefact* is something made by human workmanship, a carving, pot, textile etc; a seashell, a piece of driftwood are not



artefacts but objects. And because these artefacts and objects convey a story, a message, have unique meanings to their possessors which can be passed to others, does not mean this is 'literacy'; they are a means of communication. But language is fluid, always changing, and perhaps I have been left behind in these changes.

The second is a major study of the changing relationships between researcher and one of her researched subjects (Christy) over some fifteen years. The dimension of time (what the author calls *temporal discourse analysis*) is the result of reflexive thinking (p 75). The third takes three of her research subjects (see p 97) from her earlier studies to re-examine the way she came to know not just them but herself; reflexivity revealed the importance of place in conducting the research. (There is some oddity in this chapter; two of the three studies, although said to be distinct, have been amalgamated, so only two reports are presented; this is not explained to the reader. I felt stupid as I tried to make out what was going on). The fourth chapter in this section concerns research into student writing in two different contexts, in USA and in Istanbul.

This last chapter in this section is particularly revealing, for it challenges all the four case study chapters. The author, an American of Turkish descent, recites how she landed in Istanbul to undertake language research at university on the day of an alleged coup against the President and how she experienced the backlash, especially against the academic communities in which she was working. Despite the claim that 'In this book, we feature "de-centred selves" ... that sit within fractured contexts - of decolonisation, civic war, divided communities ...' (p 146), despite the recognition of 'the significance of the social conditions that surround [the researchers]' (p 155), this is not much in evidence. This raises the issue, why do the other case studies seem to exist in a vacuum? What were the geo-political contexts of their research? Surely reflexivity should include the wider socio-politico-cultural context. The Rotherham case says nothing about what was going on in the region of Sheffield with Pakistani youth; I have no idea of the background to the American studies although the debates over phonics and 'No child left behind' of 2001 must feature somewhere. Only in Istanbul does reflexivity include the political context within which we all work and which directs and constrains us all the time.

Then come the final two chapters. The first of these draws out from the four case studies some (perhaps slightly prescriptive) features of reflexive literacy studies. The aim is to suggest what impact this form of reflexivity will have on literacy (and language) research. Six key features are set out and discussed: participant-led research, collaborative methodologies, time and space as significant factors, and power, agency, affect and emotion within literacy studies (p 137) – all arising from the application of Bourdieusian concepts to ethnographic literacy research. Participatory approaches are the major focus here. 'Ultimately, we move towards a position where the individual gaze and the group gaze are one and the same' (p 177). And here is an anomaly: one element of the kind of impact the authors see from Bourdieusian reflexivity is the promotion of collaborative research – not 'taking from [but] learning with' the research

participants (p 58), working together collaboratively: so why was this final section not written collaboratively with all the contributors?

Finally, a long and dense discussion of Bourdieusian reflexivity. I must confess I read this twice and will re-read it again but do not hope to follow all of it. The author rather delights in name dropping, citing authors he assumes we have all not only heard of but know what they say (for example, ‘the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis’; ‘Popperian World 3’; ‘a kind of Rortyan final vocabulary’, ‘an echo of Pascal’, and many more); their relevance is never explained. If you read this chapter, try to keep Google open to find out what is being discussed. When I find sections like this:

... it is common for researchers to claim ‘awareness’ of what they are doing and why. However, reflexivity for Bourdieu – Participant Objectivation – is more than this, because it involves an ‘objectification of objectification’ itself through an objectivation of the knowing subject’ (p 157; see also p 151)

I find I have to read it three or four times even to approach its meaning, and am never sure I fully grasp the message. [The use of the French term ‘*objectivation*’ here and elsewhere for ‘objectification’ comes from Bourdieu himself]. But some things come through: for example, the danger that ‘the researcher becomes the focus more than the researched’ (p 150). Running through it all is the claim that the ‘use of key concepts – for example, *habitus*, *field*, *capital* – [is essential] to animate a narrative’, leading to ‘participant objectivation’ and the development of ‘a fully formed praxeological attitude – metanoia – to all aspects of research activity’ and eventually to the ‘emergence of Reflexive Objectivity as a singular and group consciousness’ (p 172; see also p 160).

How do we achieve this reflexive *practical gaze* of practice *in practice* expressed practically? The short answer is by not simply employing these concepts in research but going beyond them and turning them on the research product and researcher as well; and not just as some *post hoc* adjunct but as a central part of the entire research process (p 162).

The chapter ends (again prescriptively) with a set of eight levels through which every researcher should pass to achieve full reflexivity (and presumably nirvana).

What then are some of the key themes arising from this study? Not just the necessity for a one-off reflexivity on the part of the researcher but a permanent frame of mind, keeping under review not just the relationships with the researched but also the changes experienced by the researcher in the course of the activity. This is much more than the proximity-distance of Todorov (1988) (not mentioned) and the -emic (insider) and -etic (outsider) points of view (mentioned once) of traditional ethnography held in tension, which retain the difference and superiority of the researcher. ‘Bourdieu’s conceptual framework of reflexively-informed objectivity’, it is argued, will transform literacy and language research (introductory blurb for the book).

Before ending, I must mention one feature of this book. Some publishers today are finding it hard to retain their profits, and so to cut costs, they have dispensed with in-house sub-editors, relying instead on authors and editors to supply them with 'oven-ready' copy. This book shows the short-sightedness of that policy. It is peppered (and I use the word carefully) with spelling mistakes, grammatical and punctuation errors, missing words (especially the articles 'a', 'an' and 'the'), simple misplacements which spellcheck will not pick up ('as' for 'at' and vice versa, 'is' for 'its' etc). That 'Bourdiesian' is wrongly spelled twice is not perhaps surprising, although any sub-editor would have picked it up, but that 'epsistemology' and 'epsietomology' occur in two successive lines is surely inexcusable. Routledge is a reputable publisher and they should immediately reinstate an in-house sub-editor to avoid publications like this.

But I must not end on such a negative note. This is an important book on an important subject. So I would urge all RaPAL members to look at it. In my opinion, the best way to approach it is to read Chapter 5 first – pure gold; a fascinatingly honest and clearly written account of how a researcher, chasing her research subject across different domains and over many years, changed several times in her identities and relationships. This will now be essential reading for all my co-researchers. Then read Chapter 2 on reflexivity, a readable chapter; then read chapter 4 on artefactual literacies in Rotherham *before* the same author's chapter 1 on language-based ethnographies. Then the other two case studies, especially that on Istanbul and immediately Chapter 8. Finally tackle the Bourdiesian chapters 3 and 9. You will follow what these chapters say more easily because all the other chapters refer to Bourdieu practically.

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## Academics Writing: the dynamics of knowledge creation

By Karin Tusting, Sharon McCulloch, Ibrar Bhatt, Mary Hamilton and David Barton

Publisher: Routledge

Pages: 165

ISBN: 978-0-8153-8590-5

Review by: Rachel Stubbley

*Rachel Stubbley is a senior lecturer in post-compulsory teacher education at the University of South Wales. She is researching student teacher writing in post-compulsory education for her doctorate at Lancaster University.*

This is an account of the writing practices of academics (lecturers, senior lecturers and professors) in three English universities. If that sounds somewhat esoteric, this study investigates phenomena and raises questions relevant to practitioners in any part of the UK education system. In fact, it is for anyone in a workplace 'where centralised accountability systems and a competitive approach have been introduced to a field which was previously characterised by more professional autonomy, and where people are responding to frequent and rapid change' (p147). The focus is on how the writing practices of academics reflect and are influenced by neoliberal corporate practices in universities, and by the affordances and pressures of rapidly expanding digital technologies in higher education. For anyone interested in literacy and literacy practices, it is exciting to see the authors use writing as a window through which to explore such big social, cultural and political themes.

Through its choice of research sites, the study attempts to capture some of the diversity in UK higher education, particularly in terms of working practices (two of the universities in the study are research-intensive institutions, one is teaching-intensive) and discipline-related cultures (the participants come from three contrasting subject areas: maths, marketing and history). In terms of the different types of universities in the UK, I am not sure this study quite captures the range: there seems to be more discussion of environments where intensive research activity and writing are the norm, and heads of department are academics on rotation, rather than career managers. I'd have liked more focus on the generally poorer and less prestigious post-1992 universities, arguably at the sharp(er) end of the neoliberal revolution. Another quibble is the apparent lack of diversity of the individual participants. The authors discuss the challenges they faced in recruiting a good gender balance but, beyond that, the sample seems even less ethnically/socially diverse than our (not very diverse) universities. However, personal and biographical information in the study is limited to the participants' professional

and academic lives, and the names are pseudonyms, so this is just an impression and we don't have the full picture.

The range of subject areas investigated (a STEM subject, a humanities subject, and an applied discipline) is very successful in providing evidence of the deeply situated nature of knowledge production and literacy practices. Academics from maths, history and marketing respond in diverse ways to the same developments and directives e.g. writing the kinds of texts required by the national Research Excellence Framework (and to the REF's timescale); developing a social media 'profile' (or not); collaborating with others (or not), etc. In the current environment, certain university subject disciplines appear under more pressure than others to change their ways of working. Some of the historians interviewed describe 'history writing' practices (years of research in archives, leading to a sole-authored work) which seem quite fragile and vulnerable in an increasingly output- and funding-orientated research culture. The marketing academics might seem to have an advantage in navigating corporate cultures, but as members of a newer academic discipline, are under great pressure to publish articles in a prescribed set of prestigious journals. The mathematicians on the other hand 'appeared to enjoy a greater sense of epistemological security than those in both marketing and history' (p.77). They have always valued writing journal articles (which is congruent with the REF directives) and some of their statements exhibit a rather refreshing insouciance regarding lack of engagement with social media (due to the fact that 'hardly anyone can understand what our research is about') or issues of practical application ('I don't care about that')!

The professional lives of 16 participants lie at the heart of this study (a further 39 were interviewed at a later stage to extend the breadth). These core 16 provide access to their work and writing environments, the history of their writing practices over the years, narratives about a 'writing day' and (thanks to screen recording software and webcams) video and audio data of writing events as they sit at their pcs, capturing 'typing, deleting, copy-pasting, browsing, as well as vocalisations, discussions, gestures, interruptions and how time was managed within the writing event' (p.21). This is a methodologically rich study, and those undertaking any kind of educational or literacy-orientated research can gain a lot from it. Building on the work of literacy studies scholars such as Lea and Street (2006), Tusting, Wilson and Ivanic (2000) and Brandt and Clinton (2002), the study is shaped by a theoretical framework which uses *socio-material theory*. This theory 'takes us beyond the situated context of writing, and towards the network of actors (social, material, and political) implicated in the writing work and knowledge production of academics' (p13), and is a stimulating resource for researching literacy practices.

An early chapter presents ethnographic vignettes (written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person) taking us through a work 'day in the life' of 13 of the participants. Although such vignettes are usually a pleasant 'way in' to a research narrative, I found these almost too

depressing to read: the long hours from first waking through to the evening, the constant juggling of priorities, the difficulty in finding uninterrupted time and space, the lack of boundaries between work and home life, and most of all the unrelenting, never-ending streams of emails... The neoliberal realities of contemporary education systems are indeed grim. Thankfully, the voices of the participants themselves accumulate throughout the book and are one of its pleasures and its strengths. We don't exactly get to know the individuals: there are too many names, and I would have loved a simple table in the appendix with a list of names, subjects and institutions so I could keep track. But these characterful voices (combative, intelligent, anxious, friendly, eccentric, likeable, self-satisfied, rueful) are skilfully woven throughout the book, bringing the narrative alive and illustrating the critique and analysis of the study's findings. The strongly human presence of these participants throughout provides a powerful counterpoint to the corporate cultures in which they operate. It allowed me to have some faith in the optimistic closing statements of the study, which suggest that it is in times of crisis that people realise their shared values and come together to self-organise and resist.

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## News from the sector

Tara Furlong

*Tara is the Chair of RaPAL and can be contacted on [webweaver@rapal.org.uk](mailto:webweaver@rapal.org.uk)*

It has been a busy summer. FE, Skills and Apprenticeships is now without Minister. Does the Secretary of State have the capacity to respond? The Labour Party's Lifelong Learning Commission has released an Interim Report. The Education and Training Foundation have released a raft of resources, not least in support of English, maths and digital learning. FETL with HOLEX have published *Supporting Place and People: Characteristics of Success*. After a year of deliberations, RaPAL formally agreed at the AGM to canvas a *Strategy for English, maths and digital learning* and invites ongoing participation from members.

### Strategy for English, maths and digital learning

At the recent AGM, we agreed RaPAL's intention to formalise management group discussions over the last year around campaigning for a national *Strategy for English, maths and digital learning*, a.k.a. adult literacies. The Augur report was released this spring after extensive delays and calls for an increase in funding for Further Education in a rebalancing with Higher Education. With adult English and maths having assumed a quiet position in working priorities in recent years, adult literacies to level 3 in the context of adult education provision have been specifically mentioned in, for example, a recent report by the Learning and Work Institute *2030 vision: Skills for economic growth and social justice* and by recent candidates for Prime Minister in public campaigning. There is a resurgence in public interest in lifelong learning, from the Adult Education 100 Campaign to the Labour Party's Lifelong Learning Commission and the recent monograph *Supporting Place and People: Characteristics of Success* by FETL with HOLEX.

The adult learning sector has changed almost beyond recognition in the last decade or so across adult, further and community education but also in a burgeoning private sector. Over the last three years, RaPAL has contributed to the reform of the national adult literacy standards and Functional Skills, which are in the process of launching, but we have not fully grappled the impact of the wider context of change in qualifications and provision. There is high turnover of adult literacies (English and maths) tutors, an overall decline in our own qualification profiles, and shortages at critical levels nationally.

RaPAL's constitution is fundamental to discussion of a Strategy and we would like to ask what the following commitments mean in the widest possible sense in our lives, and where we perceive gaps that need to be addressed:

- promote the rights of all adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives;
- critique current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as only a functional skill;
- encourage a broad range of collaborative and reflective research involving all participants in literacy work as partners;
- produce a Journal three times a year and other occasional publications written in accessible plain English;
- contribute to national debates about literacies, actively challenging public myths, developing and publicising alternative views;
- emphasise the importance of social context in literacies;
- create networks by organising events.

The introductory statement, "RaPAL believes in democratic practices in adult literacy" underpins RaPAL's core values and merits particular consideration in reflecting on our commitments and how they relate to a national Strategy for adult literacies. If you would be interested in contributing to these discussions, please email [webweaver@rapal.org.uk](mailto:webweaver@rapal.org.uk). RaPAL are taking this forward with a working group.

### **Supporting Place and People: Characteristics of Success**

FETL with HOLEX have released a monograph on adult and community education which looks at how, with extra-ordinary geographical reach, it is judged 88% Good or Outstanding, tops surveys of student satisfaction, and shows a lower rate of decline in participation than the main FE colleges. A significant factor was found to be their often small size and connectedness to their local communities. More here:

<https://holex.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FETL-Adult-Community-Education-Supporting-place-and-people.pdf>

### **English and maths support from The Education and Training Foundation**

The Education and Training Foundation have been busily releasing support packages for different forms of English, maths and digital learning. There's everything from a [Toolkit for post-16 Phonics](#), [T Level Professional Development: Embedding English, maths and digital skills into technical subject teaching](#), a [16-19 Study Programme Support Package](#) with a stream on vocational English and maths, to preparation for the new [Essential Digital Skills](#) for adults with low or no digital skills. The [first teachers in the country have achieved Chartered Status](#), but we've no idea how many of them are English teachers, or maths, of which there is a recognised national shortage.



**LitBase**

For those of you looking further afield than the Excellence Gateway <https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/>, which is continuously adding to its collection of teaching, learning and research resources, UNESCO UIL have the publicly available LitBase. The international Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database <http://uil.unesco.org/literacy/effective-practices-database-litbase> celebrates a host of worldwide projects and practices.

**FE, Skills and Apprenticeships**

Gavin Williamson, the newly appointed Secretary of State for Education is leading on FE, Skills and Apprenticeships without appointing a dedicated minister, and without mention of community learning. Perhaps with incremental reduction in the role of local authorities, and where not fully devolved, community learning will inadvertently fall within the Communities Strategy, as per the Home Office; or perhaps it falls into the same gap between departments in which we find the importance of literacy to health, wellbeing, social cohesion, trust and finance. Good news for the sector or a worrying absence of dedicated attention and resource?

In the meantime, the Labour Party's Lifelong Learning Commission have released an interim report <http://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Lifelong-Learning-Commission-Interim-Report.pdf> with the full report due in the autumn. Labour are reinvigorating the arguments for a National Education Service and 'cradle-to-grave' lifelong learning provision. Read more about some of this and the existing National Retraining Scheme in brief on FE News, [here](#).

Happy Holidays!

## WRITING GUIDELINES

### Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

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

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

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

#### Guidelines for contributors

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

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

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

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

#### 1. Ideas for teaching

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

#### 2. Developing Research and Practice

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

#### 3. Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives

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

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

#### Reviews

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

#### Submitting your work

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

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