

Journal

Volume No.56 Spring 2005

RAPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy

The pleasure principle of learning

Great Black Britons

Good Practice: using a variety of texts

Opening the Book for Learners

Practitioner values - what matters?

Write to Read:
strategies for adult readers

Putting Learners in charge
of making decisions

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Philosophy and ideology:
practitioner research choice

Using new concepts to understand
learning and teaching in literacy classes

Philosophical assumptions about literacy:
Perspectives from Lyotard

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

Who we are

RaPAL (established 1985) is a national network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult literacy and basic education. Our support is generated by membership subscription only, and we are therefore completely independent in our views. RaPAL is the only national organisation focusing on the role of literacies in adult life.

What we do.

We ...

- **campaign** for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives.
- **critique** current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill.
- **support** the theories of language and learning, which emphasise the importance of social context in literacy acquisition.
- **encourage** collaborative and reflective research between all participants in literacy work and maintain that research and practice are inextricably linked.
- **believe** in democratic practices in adult literacy which can only be achieved if learning, teaching and research remain connected and stay responsive to changing social contexts and practices in society.
- **recognise** that students are central to a learning democracy and their participation in the decision- making processes of practice and research is essential.
- **foster** collaborative participation between all educational sectors including FE, HE, AE, workplace education, community education and prison education.

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Members are involved in the compilation of the journal as reviewers/referees and editors.

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. This Journal is written by and for all students, tutors and researchers who want to ask questions about this field of work. It does not matter if the questions have been asked before. We want to reflect the many voices within adult literacy and numeracy work and to encourage debate. Why not join in?

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

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Editorial

The theme of this edition is the philosophy of practice. Our focus on the relationship between philosophy and practice is vital so that we do not restrict ourselves only to concerns with 'what works best' in practice, divorced from theory or philosophical questions about what we do and, importantly, why we do it. At this time of fast paced change people are running to stand still: to catch up with new curricula and initiatives; to attract new learners whilst becoming qualified trained professionals able to deliver quality learning provision. It seems all the more important at this moment in time to catch breath and take space to share our various practices, to reflect on our research and debate how we can use and develop theory to support practice and research.

We are delighted with the response to our call for contributions and are pleased that we have such a wide range of items for all sections of the journal, many from practitioners and researchers who are writing for the first time. These contributions provide access to concerns, dialogues and debates that are current in practice and research in adult literacy and remind us of the need, as Wendy Moss points out, of not reinventing the wheel. We hope that this edition offers, in Wendy's wise words for effective teaching, a "range of texts that are meaningful, relevant and stimulating..."

In Section One we have a range of articles offering ideas for teaching that are democratic, creative and within the framework of a curriculum. We begin with two short articles. Alice Sookes offers a way of working that makes the learning relevant to the learner, because it begins with their needs, but the emphasis is on learning being fun. We are then given some ideas for positive uses of the curriculum from Northern Ireland, from tutors involved in teacher training. Sarah Chu and Tish Cooney have themselves completed specialist teacher training in literacy in the last two years. Sarah offers us an account of working with a group of elderly Afro-Caribbean learners. She shows how a positive teacher response to a short text brought in by a student can lead to creative learning using and producing 'real' texts. Tish Cooney uses another approach, following a theme that allows her to explore a range of genres in her

classroom that culminates in a theatre visit for the group. Finally, Genevieve Clarke introduces us to the work of the Vital Link programme. This programme offers both materials and a focus on reading being fun. Perhaps that is the theme for this section of the journal. Learning should be fun. Reading is more than a set of skills to be learned in piecemeal fashion. By integrating the skills and focusing on real texts a social practice view of literacy can accommodate any curriculum.

In Section Two we have reports from different types of research being undertaken by practitioners across a range of settings, each exploring aspects of philosophies of practice. These include: involvement in large funded programmes, practice based reflective research, a journey into postgraduate research and a look at changes in the theories of teaching reading. Linda Pierce starts by describing her work on an NRDC funded project, which, although not looking specifically at teacher values, uncovered some interesting insights into them. She found that practitioners value some of the changes brought in by Skills for Life, including the improved image, but were concerned over the lack of teaching writing skills. Tutors were committed to the quality of the learning provision and to learner achievement. This theme is also found in Gill Britten's research of a reading intervention strategy in Wrexham, funded by Quality Mark funding. Gill researched both her own practice and the reading materials being developed to ensure that they fitted what and how the students wanted to learn. Kate Nonesuch describes the philosophy and practice of student decision making at the Reading and Writing Centre at Malaspina College, British Columbia, Canada. Although continents apart, Kate provides us with powerful narrative that speaks to common democratic values as she describes how she attempts to implement her philosophy of student decision making within her practice. Wendy Moss provides an important historical view of theories of reading, showing how practice changes and is informed by research and theory. She reminds us that this process has been happening for over thirty years and contains within it many important insights and philosophical values that are relevant to practice today. Sophia Monerville ends this section with her postgraduate

research journey. She describes the journey requiring her to make difficult decisions as she tries to fit philosophies and methods linked to her practice based study.

In section three Amy Burgess links literacy research, theory and practice in her research looking at learning and teaching in an adult literacy classroom. She argues that theoretical constructs can be used as lenses by practitioners, through which to view their practice. Using a social practices perspective, which looks at literacy events and literacy practices, she considers the usefulness of some new concepts against 'real life' practices within the classroom. Gaye Houghton critically explores philosophical assumptions about the purpose and practice of literacy which adult basic skills practitioners value. Gaye describes the use of narrative in her research which uncovers 'little'

professional stories as well as 'grand' philosophical/social narratives. She makes the point that her article is also a journey from practice to research and back again.

The review by Judy Gawn from NIACE looks at two booklets about assessment. Although based on work in secondary schools, Judy thinks they have fundamental pedagogical relevance for lecturers and tutor trainers in the post 16 sector and are well worth reading.

Finally, all the articles in this issue have been put together to show that philosophy, theory and practice are inextricably linked. We as editors hope you enjoy reading them.

Copy Deadlines for the RaPAL Journals in 2005

Please send your articles, comments, suggestions etc to the named editors or to Margaret Herrington, the Journal Contact (mherrington1@aol.com)

Spring - Themed Edition on the Philosophy of Practice

Jan 14 2005 (Ed. Yvon Appleby, Ellayne Fowler & Gaye Houghton)

Summer - Themed Edition on Multimodal Literacies

April 24 2005 (Ed. Linda Eastwood and Barbara Hatley Broad)

Autumn/Winter 2005 Themed Edition: Numeracy

Copy date August 15th 2005 (Editors to be announced)

Do not be concerned if your chosen piece does not seem to fit with the themes selected. There are spaces within the themed editions for work in progress or general commentary. Be assured that your ideas could also be retained for the next open edition of the journal.

Note: these dates are final deadlines. Please contact us well beforehand to guarantee consideration for any particular journal.

Section 1. Ideas for Teaching

The 'pleasure principle of learning'.

Alice Fookes

Alice has worked as an adult literacy tutor for five years and is completing a part-time PGCE in Adult Literacy at the Institute of Education. She organises Family Learning and Adult Literacy courses and has a particular interest in embedding literacy into the courses she runs.

The Adult Core Curriculum can and does inform the 'pleasure principle of learning' with particular reference to the social practice model of reading. I teach an Outreach Return to Study course funded by South Thames College. It's available to the parents/carers of Albemarle Primary School in Wandsworth. The purpose of the group is to reach those who for different reasons don't take the regular route to Further Education. Many have experienced negative learning environments or suffered limited learning opportunities. The group is Mixed Entry Level and Level 1 with lots of learners with English as an Additional Language.

This particular group of learners need, as a priority, to experience 'the pleasure principle' inherent in any positive learning experience. I believe that it is this need which ultimately informs a successful social practice model of reading.

On the face of it, the English Adult Literacy Core Curriculum appears to lack any connection between enjoyment and fun, with learning. Of course it's only a matter of making the curriculum work for you rather than the other way round. For example, many of our student individual learning plans state that they 'want to help my daughter or son with reading'. You can use this as your Text Focus (Rt/E2.1) to underpin a lesson or inform a Scheme of Work on reading children's stories. Students are encouraged to bring in their kid's 'best books' (the 'authentic texts' that inform the model) supported by a video showing sequences of 'good reading' aloud and 'bad reading' (a very funny one by the Storysacks team). By reading and evaluating kids' books, students soon naturally embrace critical language awareness: "my son loves Turtles books", "oh mine only likes ones about princesses". Here literacy is so situated in the learner's social practice that they are driven by their own needs thus developing as autonomous readers. Keywords (Sentence Focus Rs/E2.4) connected with story reading mean that students tackle words out of their own immediate context, words that seem too advanced-such as 'expression', 'pace', 'pause'

or 'dialogue' but students naturally 'scaffold' this onto existing knowledge. This leads to Word Focus (Rw/E1) looking, for example, at ways of remembering key words and pinning them up at home.

The fun of learning is directly connected with the learning outcome of parents/carers enjoying stories with their kids. Reading naturally becomes central to social interaction. Activities linking with this could be prop making (adults love a reason to be creative), making a tape, bi-lingual translation, or free writing-write your own kid's story. All can be linked with ease to the curriculum with little or no trouble. You need a starting point-in our case with the pleasure of reading to children in mind.

Section 1.**Using the curriculum with learners: Notes from Northern Ireland****Shelly Tracey**

Shelly works in the Institute of Lifelong Learning Queen's University, Belfast.

Literacy tutors in Northern Ireland are currently enrolled on the second year of their training as practitioners. These are brief positive examples of how we use the curriculum with learners:

- We are using role-plays and radio programmes to meet the speaking and listening requirements
- We focus our lessons on themes such as career planning and health topics.
- To extend their reading skills, we take our learners to the library and introduce them to the use of the Internet
- We believe it is important to use socially appropriate and contextualised materials for literacy teaching to enhance the literacy skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. With a young women's group, we are working on health issues including topics such as breast self checks and smear test awareness raising. As we have parenting experience ourselves, we can relate to these young mothers and the issues they encounter

We are organising a conference to share our work. For more details contact Shelly Tracey

**INSTITUTE OF LIFELONG LEARNING
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
BELFAST
Thursday 21st April 2005**

**Conference on Reflective Practice in Essential Skills
(Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL)**

Contact: Shelly Tracey s.tracey@qub.ac.uk

Section 1.

Great Black Britons

Sarah Chu

Sarah has worked as both an ESOL and outreach coordinator at Wiltshire College. She gained her level 4 literacy specialist qualification in one of the first pilot courses in England.

The group of learners that I teach attends a Basic Literacy class once a week at a local community centre in Trowbridge, Wiltshire. They are Afro-Caribbean and all originally from Jamaica. They came to the UK in the 1960s and have lived in the Trowbridge area since then. They are all retired and range in age from sixty-eight to eighty-two years old.

The class was set up in co-operation with Wiltshire Racial Equality Council and Wiltshire College, who identified a literacy need within this community. This is the fourth year that the class has run and my third year of teaching them. When I took over the class there were six learners but this has now increased to twelve. In previous years the learners have been mostly women but this year there are three men and nine women. The class has increased in size through word of mouth. There is no pressure for them to attend and they say their reasons for coming are simply to keep their minds active. They are very loyal and faithful attendees who rarely miss a session and are very enthusiastic and open to learning. They do not want or need to take a qualification and work towards individual learning plans, so I can be very free in my choice of what we can do in the class.

I have built up a good relationship with them over the last two years and it is partly due to this that they continue to attend. When I began teaching them I focussed on more traditional teaching but this didn't always work with them so I decided to try to be more creative and make the learning much more relevant to them. In the first year we worked on memories of their childhood and family. From this they produced some wonderful poetry that they still talk about now. I think this was so successful with the group because we had discovered something that tapped into very personal memories that they hadn't thought about for many years. It made them happy to think about them and the learning and writing was coming from their own experiences and they relished this.

As a result I wanted to find a project that we could work on but I wasn't sure what we could

do next. One of the learners brought in a newspaper article from his church produced paper titled "What it means to be black in Britain." He was very keen for me to read this as he said that he had enjoyed reading it and wanted to share it with me. The article contained a lot of historical information and initially I thought I could use it in the class but after reading it I felt that although they might enjoy reading it, it didn't tap into their emotions in the same way that we had been able to do with the poetry. From reading and thinking about this article I discovered a website (www.100greatblackbritons.com) that I thought had potential. The 100 Great Black Britons were compiled as a response to the BBC Great Britons TV programme that took place in 2003. No black people even made it to the Top 100 and this was felt to be because many people were unaware of black achievements and contributions made over the centuries. The website contained short histories of each person in the top 100.

I chose one person who I felt the group could identify with to introduce the idea of them thinking about who they felt were the Great Black Britons. I chose Sir Bill Morris as he is originally from Jamaica and most of them had worked in factories and belonged to the trade union (TGWU) where he was the General Secretary. They responded very well to reading about him and it helped to introduce the idea of Great Black Britons.

I originally planned that we would spend two to three weeks (we meet once a week for two hours) on this but it grew beyond this as they became immersed and it completely engaged them. As a group they made a list of ten people and then negotiated together to five and then to the final number one. Finally they made their individual choice of who they considered to be the number one Great Black Briton. This had taken us six weeks as a group but they were still motivated and keen to continue. The final individual choices were: Sir Bill Morris, Diane Abbott MP, Lennox Lewis, Lenny Henry and the founder of their church, Bishop O A Lyesight.

I am a Briton who is black because when I came to England I came with a Jamaica passport. After a while when I am here for some years I change my passport to British passport. I then become a British citizen so I am a Briton who is black. At first it was very hard to fit in but now I find it easy.

Mavis

I am a Briton who is black because I was born in Jamaica. After spending forty years in Britain I claim England as my country. Knowing that no one can take Jamaica out of my blood because I am proud to be black.

Leroy

Checklist

Have you made sure you have included:

- ✓ Information about you?
- ✓ Information about the class?
- ✓ Your address?
- ✓ What we have been doing in the class?
- ✓ Why you chose the person?
- ✓ Why you wanted them to know you have chosen them?

When you have finished writing your letter:

1. Ask for some help to have it checked.
 2. Type up your letter using the computer.
 3. Print your letter.
- Ask for the address

They each wrote a letter and sent it. So far we have had a reply from Diane Abbott MP and from Sir Bill Morris, which was written by him and was a very personal letter to the student. She felt very proud of this letter and also pleased because she was the first one to get a response! It seems age doesn't diminish that competitive air...

This project had developed beyond my expectations and it was wonderful to see how much the students had enjoyed it and how it had made them aware of the achievements of the black community.

As they had worked so hard I wanted to finish it with something concrete so we decided that they would write to each person they had chosen and explain who they were, what we did in class and why they had chosen that person. To help them to do this fairly independently I gave them a writing checklist to make sure they had included everything that was relevant and that they wanted to say.

November 2004

Dear Diane Abbott

My name is Elfreda. I am originally from Jamaica and I am now retired. I attend a literacy class, which is held at Longfield Community Centre on Mondays at 10am until 12noon in Trowbridge.

We have been doing a project on 10 top famous black British people. We chose our top five, and then we chose our top one. I chose you as my top one, because I admire you very much and I am happy to know that you have the ability to enter politics and are able to be such a good representative for people of the black race.

I think you are a fine example of what black people are capable of doing and I do wish you a very long and successful career in your job and hope and pray that you will progress as time goes by. I want you to know that people like myself do admire you and are praying for you. I hope you will receive this letter and I would greatly appreciate a reply from you.

Yours sincerely
Elfreda

Through teaching this group and being free to be creative in their learning we have produced some wonderful work together and as we are about to begin again for 2005 I have no doubt they will all be there for the first session, hopefully proudly waving replies to their letters.

The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum that we use in England was produced to help structure our teaching but while we don't have to let it rule, being creative doesn't mean ignoring the curriculum. With this group I have found that I plan the teaching and then go to the curriculum for references. I have always been able to reference anything we have done and link it to the curriculum.

For the work we did on Great Black Britons and for those of you who are interested, here are the curriculum references.

SLd/E2.2 SLd/E3.1 SLd/E3.2 SLd/E3.3

Rt/E2.3 Rt/E3.1 Rt/E3.8

Wt/E2.1 Wt/E3.1 Wt/E3.2

Section 1.

Good Practice: Literacy Activities Using a Variety of Texts

Tish Cooney

Tish Cooney is Programme Team Leader for Essential Skills at Salisbury College. Her initial awareness of the literacy and numeracy needs of work experience students at her florist shop led to a change of career and an ongoing passion for providing basic skills in alternative contexts.

As a Programme Team Leader and Literacy/Numeracy Tutor I feel that we place too great an emphasis on development of everyday life language skills in order that students become more confident and independent learners. This can sometimes lead to a very prescriptive programme. This article looks at how using genre can add a welcome variety to a college programme.

In the past year a local sheltered workshop asked me to deliver a programme for their employees, many of whom lacked the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to progress at work. The sheltered workshop (Shelwork Industries) is keen to ensure that employees should not simply accept that they have just a job but pursue careers of their choice and become part of the community both economically and socially. During discussion it became apparent that many employees felt excluded from participating in various social activities due to low self-esteem and lack of confidence. It was decided, therefore, that they needed whole language activities that would encourage employees to want to read both inside and outside of work.

Ideas began to take shape and the conclusion was to take one central theme and look at the different genres relating to it. Many of the employees did not need to read outside of work and in fact many did not read in work; finding it difficult to extract information and inferences from notices around their workshop. I needed something that would capture their imagination but at the same time teach transferable skills that could be used at work.

The local playhouse was due to show an adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's 'Jamaica Inn' and so the seed was sown! I outlined the plot of how Irish orphan girl, Mary, was sent to stay with her Aunt and Uncle in Cornwall and how the Uncle also headed a gang of pirates who lured ships to their doom on the rocky coast.

To encourage students to read for themselves I felt it was essential that I provided text that was both relevant and comprehensible and went

beyond pure escapism. 'Jamaica Inn' seemed to fit this criteria - not only is it a story of adventure, murder and romance but it gives readers an insight into what life was like in Cornwall and how people lived in the 1800s.

The ultimate aim of the programme was to ensure that employees were able to increase their literacy and numeracy skills and although some employees were at first reluctant, they agreed that gaining a nationally recognised certificate was valuable. Individual Learning Plans were drawn up in consultation with employees following initial and diagnostic assessment. Their assessments ranged from Entry 1 to Level 2 (all levels of the curriculum).

The literacy content of the course focused on different text genres and examined the features of different texts. I produced a summarised version of the story in Arial Font, size 14 and in double-line spacing to enable each employee to have their own copy to view and annotate. After careful prompting and lots of questions and answers, the group concluded that the story was between good and evil. The heroine, Mary, was moral and upright but was threatened and troubled by the contemptible Joss Merlyn.

Some students were vaguely aware of the location of Bodmin Moor and this made the experience more realistic; some had previously looked up on the Internet or brought in holiday brochures that featured the famous Jamaica Inn and we looked at how wagonloads of contraband headed across Bodmin Moor en route for London. In session 2 of 8 I brought in a postcard showing smugglers, under cover of night, carrying casks of brandy and tobacco bales into Jamaica Inn and asked the students to write a narrative to go with the picture. This explored the creation of a mood and looking at the purpose of texts, stages of writing and the use of writing frames for those students who needed extra support. For students that found this difficult I asked them to think about and orally describe what they could see in the picture to gain understanding of the world presented by stories. This also gave scope for using the

context to plan, draft, review and edit writing to predict future events.

To help with students' own later writing it was important that they realized that all stories had a definite opening (beginning), middle and ending and that to capture an audience a story needs to set the scene and establish a relationship between the reader and the writer.

Once the development, which is normally the largest chunk of the story, is accomplished, the plot needs to be completed and come to an ending. Many students find difficulty with endings and an approach I used was a joint oral construction of what was to happen next when we arrived at the end of a chapter.

In spite of enjoying reading the book, the taped version of the book did not work very well. It was interspersed with large chunks of ominous music and many students lost their place or stumbled over words they were unsure of. On the one hand, we had been able to stop whilst reading and discuss issues that cropped up, but stopping and starting the tape to analyse text had proved too difficult. On the other hand, it worked extremely well for one student who took the recorded book home, listened to it each evening and was able to recount what had happened the following week. It therefore became useful for differentiated work. Once the student became familiar with what was happening he was able to enter discussions and offer opinions.

For the first 15 minutes of sessions I would ask students to orally summarise the preceding chapters for those who had not attended the previous week and also to aid their own communication skills.

With such a diverse group I was always looking to develop new styles of delivery to meet the needs of all students if results (tests, short tasks and assignments) were to be achieved. The group were not known as keen readers and I thought that if the book was too difficult students would lose interest very quickly and although I had transformed the text to large, readable font and double line spacing some students still found it hard to follow, lost concentration or forgot what happened in preceding chapters.

To counteract this, and to keep attention focused I drew students' attention to various aspects of text that would appear in the follow up play

script i.e. 'apostrophes of omission' and asked them to highlight these as we read.

I also gave students a list of key words that would appear later in the play script and this prompted the use of dictionaries and thesauruses, both hard copy and on-line versions (introducing ILT into the session), to look up their meanings in relation to the story. Again, I felt this would aid familiarization with the text and place vocabulary in the context of the play.

A play script was obtained from the theatre (free of charge) and this proved to be the catalyst the group needed. Reading aloud became part of the session, The first reading of the play was a little hesitant. I had been unsure whether the students would want to read out loud, but learners asked to take part and quickly developed non-verbal means of conveying the way they interpreted characters thinking and feeling and they thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

The play was introduced following on from where we had reached in the story. I explained that I would take the part of the narrator (reading all the asides).

Students were asked to look for similarities between the story and the play script and most were able to identify that both stories and plays have a beginning, middle and an end, although expressed in different ways. After discussion it was decided that a story is between reader and writer whereas a play is intended for a variety of audiences. Stories are meant for reading and proper understanding is via the text whereas, on the other hand, plays need to be acted out and understanding is gained between writer and watcher via the text, director, actors, designer and so forth. Once this was agreed the students went on to look for specific features i.e. headings, acts and scenes, the use of italics to denote asides and colons to depict speech. One scene started with the words 'Jamaica yard. Night.' The students discussed this use of 'telegrammatical language' and how it helped to set the scene. We discussed buried messages that the story version of Jamaica Inn did not need to consider i.e. the aside that '*Mary brings on a wash tub, rolls up her sleeves and starts to wash her clothes*' to enhance the tone of the scene and create the impression that Mary was becoming a downtrodden abused character like her Aunt Patience. The students became aware that a play tells a story and explores themes

almost entirely through dialogue.

After reading Act One, Scene 9 and picking out instructions to actors, imperative verbs, becoming aware that action is portrayed in the present tense, learners were able to have a long debate concerning their preferred genre of Jamaica Inn. The decision was unanimous: every one wanted to continue with the play script. Unlike a book, which can be read, put down, picked up and read again, a play needs to be seen in one sitting with the odd interval break for refreshments, but they felt that this format suited their weekly attendance in college and also helped with their speaking and listening skills. All students felt that going through key words and looking at contracted words had helped with their understanding of the text.

One of the challenges of these sessions was to show students that teaching and learning was not a passive process but one that could be interactive and enjoyable. The action packed 'Jamaica Inn' fired up enthusiasm and led to independent work carried out by students in their spare time, i.e. research on the Internet, other texts about smugglers. One student was so gripped he planned to take a holiday in Cornwall, at Jamaica Inn, and brought in a brochure which provided a wealth of information in different genres. It was full of facts and opinions, written in a concise form providing illustrations and tables and specialised vocabulary in a particular structure and style. It proved easy to show how this provided clues to the purpose of the text.

In the past I have taken other groups to the theatre and I see this as an integral literacy event that most students have enjoyed and learnt from. It can be linked to the Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum, from Entry Level to Levels 1 and 2. It demands the skills of active listening, extracting meaning (which is not always explicit) skimming and scanning (programme/leaflet) to locate information, understanding an increasing range of vocabulary together with the skills of planning, reading a 24 hour clock, budgeting for an evening out, following a map or directions (to the theatre) and being able to follow a seating plan (in the auditorium) to identify location of own seat.

The programme culminated in a trip to the theatre to see 'Jamaica Inn' and it was then that I felt all the hard work had been beneficial. The students were aware of the stages the play was going through and discussed their enjoyment at

length during the interval. They were able to give a critical review and were later invited to the local library to give their views to the Manager and also to be part of the book launch for 'First Choice' books'. They were able to give informed views on the different genres and gained enormously in confidence and self-esteem by having someone, other than a college tutor, listen to their views.

Among the many activities that were made possible, following this theme, were the following:

- Comprehension focusing on inference and deduction; different points of view, identifying the main points, fact and opinion
- Identifying powerful verbs, adverbs and adjectives; creating their own questions
- Spelling words through analogy and spelling investigations for similar sounding words with different spellings; first letter cueing, breaking down words into chunks and syllables; investigating spelling
- Discussing both powerful oral and body language
- Identifying the apostrophe used as a contraction
- Planning, drafting, editing and reviewing

On a financial note, in terms of funding, there was a 100% pass rate on the programme for nationally recognized accredited provision. However, the pass rate in terms of learning was even higher.

Section 1.

Opening the Book for Learners

Genevieve Clarke

Genevieve Clarke is National Coordinator for The Vital Link programme at The Reading Agency. She was previously Manager of the National Reading Campaign at the National Literacy Trust and has worked as an adult literacy tutor.

'I never imagined I'd learn to love reading so much. The wonderful thing is that it makes you feel you've got substance. I can now hold my own in a discussion about reading with my peers. But the main thing is that reading and book groups are such fun.' Denise, Brentwood

Choosing and reading books for enjoyment and interest can inspire and sustain adults who are improving their literacy skills. Talking and writing about what they have read can build their confidence and lead them on to further learning. And yet a focus on reading for the sheer pleasure of it has barely featured in work with adults in recent years.

One of several reasons may be that, with little time to spare, tutors have not been sure where to turn to find a ready-made list of titles that might appeal to their students. Another is that the demands of a curriculum and ambitious achievement targets might seem to preclude use of more challenging resources.

These issues are being tackled by a national programme which is building and promoting the capacity of the public library service to lend real support to tutors and learners. The Vital Link, which takes partnership between libraries and learning providers as its starting-point, has a particular focus on reading for enjoyment as a way of engaging and motivating adults who have always struggled with the written word.

Book collections

Many libraries have recently reviewed their stock for adult basic skills learners. Increasingly this means that, in addition to more traditional 'readers' and practical guides, they now have 'proper' books at an appropriate level for adults at Entry Level 3 and above who are just getting into reading for enjoyment. In many cases these mainstream fiction and non-fiction titles have been selected according to criteria developed by the Vital Link programme building on earlier work by Essex Libraries in consultation with basic skills tutors and learners. These take into account elements such as design and type size as well as the interest factor, plot structure, complexity of sentences and level of vocabulary.

The Vital Link programme has identified two collections for this 'emergent reader' audience, both branded, *First Choice*. They include everything from cookery to crime, poetry and DIY as well as short novels by writers such as Roddy Doyle, Patricia Scanlan and Maeve Binchy specially written for emergent readers. These have now been refined into a single *Essential First Choice Collection* and are complemented by a collection to support family literacy activities. *Got kids? Get reading!* includes accessible books for parents and carers with low literacy levels to share with their children.

The challenge now is to extend these collections. The Vital Link welcomes recommendations from tutors and learners for books that have worked well, particularly with readers at lower levels of ability. There is a severe shortage of appealing titles for this audience despite the efforts of specialist publishers such as New Island and Sandstone Press who have commissioned short books by top writers including those listed above. It is very encouraging that a group of major publishing houses are now adopting the same approach to produce and promote a new list of books as part of an adult literacy initiative for World Book Day in March 2006.

Talking about reading

Books and other reading resources are a great way of teasing out and appealing to individual learners' interests such as childcare, food or sport. Once tutors have a supply of books available, activities might include:

- talking about book covers and promotional blurbs
- discussing what people have read already
- recommending books to each other
- talking about what makes them pick up a book
- finding certain books in the library
- writing about a book they have read for a learners' noticeboard, magazine or website

This pro-active approach to promoting reading is known as 'reader development' within the library profession. It focuses on the needs of the

individual reader and offers support and choice in the same way that basic skills provision is geared to the needs of the individual learner. When used effectively, these techniques have enormous potential for encouraging adults to explore the reading experience, adding real pleasure and purpose to the business of acquiring skills.

Mapping reading activity to the curriculum

The added bonus is that all of this reader development activity can be woven into basic skills delivery, meeting the requirements of the adult literacy core curriculum from speaking and listening to reading and writing. The Vital Link has mapped a range of tasks for learners from Entry Level 3 upwards to the curriculum to show how work with books can address adults' learning needs. Tutors have commented on how activity around reading for pleasure can bring a new and valuable dimension to their teaching.

'The librarian came in and recommended books to them, got to know what their interests were ... I think that was good, because some of them haven't really used the library service very much, if at all, so that was a good introduction for them. It's an important role, and it's not something I've been able to do with the class as a general rule.' Tutor, Essex

Once a relationship has been established with a local library, a librarian could visit a class on a regular basis to bring books, talk about what else the library has to offer and encourage feedback from students. When learners are sufficiently confident or attracted by the idea, a tour of the library could be suggested, perhaps when it is closed to the general public. In the best cases, this will lead to independent use of the library by learners and the start of a lifelong engagement with reading.

Sharing the reading experience

With reading groups still a growing phenomenon, there is no reason why emergent readers shouldn't enjoy a similar experience of sharing their enjoyment of reading. Exchanging views about books can help to build their confidence. For instance, it can be liberating for an inexperienced reader to realise that they can stop reading a book they are not enjoying without feeling that they have failed and simply try another book instead.

If the idea of a reading group seems too

daunting for people just getting into reading, it may be better to begin with a looser arrangement where learners just pass on a book they have enjoyed or have time to swap recommendations in class. There are also plenty of ways of getting a conversation going about books without actually reading them such as devising a game to match covers, opening pages and promotional blurbs.

However, tutors and library staff who have started groups have been surprised by the degree of interest from learners at all levels if the idea has been introduced in the right way. Using audio versions of books, and even videos and DVDs, it's possible for everyone to get involved. Here are a few tips:

- Provide a purpose for the group, eg to give feedback on a particular set of books, a gap between courses. Those less familiar with reading are less likely to join a book group for its own sake.
- Create a positive and friendly environment with a few simple ingredients: comfortable seating, posters on the walls, introductions and refreshments.
- Limit the size of the group to between five and 12 participants.
- Get agreement about how you are going to select the books.

Unlike a traditional reading group, there is no need for everyone to read the same book. Participants could be shown a selection of fiction and non-fiction appropriate for their reading level and interests so that they can choose something for themselves. Alternatively the librarian or tutor could pick a theme and introduce a selection of books at different levels that fit in with this, eg food, travel, special occasions.

As well as looking at books, a group could share newspapers and magazines, local history resources, information about local places and personalities or resources on the Internet. The main aim is to get people talking about what they have selected and read as a trigger to other activities.

'The students didn't think they could learn through reading. It's been a revelation to them that they could enjoy a book and still be learning.'
Tutor, Tameside

The new impetus behind libraries' work in

support of learners provides a fantastic opportunity to reintroduce books and reading into the Skills for Life agenda. With publishers beginning to address the dearth of appealing books for new adult readers and the BBC due to launch a major adult literacy campaign in autumn 2005, the time has never been better to move creativity to centre stage.

The Vital Link is run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and the National Reading Campaign. Information about the book collections, promotional resources including reading diaries and downloadable ideas for integrating creative reading activities into adult literacy learning can be found at www.vitallink.org.uk or contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk

Section 2. Developing Research and Practice

Some Fundamental Practitioner Values Concerning Literacy and Literacy Education. Or, Some Things That Really Matter to Tutors.

Linda Pearce

Linda coordinated Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy for Plymouth LEA for many years. She is now working for Lancaster University as a Research Associate on the NRDC 'Qualitative Evaluation of the Impact of Skills for Life on Learners'.

During the last year I have been working on the qualitative strand of a DfES funded NRDC (National Research and Development Centre) evaluation study called 'The Study of the Impact of the Skills for Life Learning Infrastructure on Learners'. The first stage involved meeting 20 key people who had different roles and responsibilities relating to Skills for Life in each of the six case study sites across the country. This was designed to inform the evaluation as a whole. Whilst the aim of this study is to evaluate Skills for Life in relation to learner experience, these twenty interviews have indicated some of the underlying values that are fundamental to them as practitioners. As such it provides an interesting insight into some of the things that really matter to tutors.

The following observations are from the feedback from one case study site. Of the twenty interviews conducted, nine were with practitioners, manager/practitioners or managers who had been practitioners. During the interviews people were asked to respond to a series of questions in relation to Skills for Life. These included information on their role past and present; how they viewed Skills for Life's priorities; how they felt Skills for Life was different from what was in place before; what Skills for Life's main successes have been and what issues still needed to be addressed. None of these questions were directly about practitioner values, therefore any insight gained in relation to these is what emerged in relation to questions about the Skills for Life Strategy. This provides a small but interesting snapshot of underlying practitioner values.

Analysis of interviews showed several themes that relate to practitioner values. Many are positive in relation to Skills for Life, but others raise questions that are important to practitioners but in some way problematic in relation to Skills for Life. The overwhelmingly positive view of raising the profile of basic skills education now, compared with before Skills for Life, is voiced in different ways by eight of the nine interviewees. Interestingly, these responses

can be grouped into two categories; those that relate to prospective learners and those that relate to other professionals. Five practitioners talked about 'reaching more people', including 'those in employment' and the 'short term unemployed'. Three mentioned that 'people are talking about basic skills now', 'it's becoming more mainstream' and 'people at high levels are taking it on board'. These responses indicate that increasing access to literacy and numeracy education is close to the heart of practitioners. These responses also indicate that to achieve this adult literacy, numeracy and language education needed to have its profile raised and the stigma removed. This is both with prospective students and professionals across a broad range of contexts.

There are two areas that were raised by six of the interviewees in some respect. One of these is central to the Skills for Life infrastructure the other, arguably, is not. The first relates to the introduction of a 'proper career structure' for basic skills practitioners. There is a sense that the tutor's role is being valued within the broader teaching community, possibly for the first time. This was commented on largely in relation to the 'main differences' and 'main successes' questions. Phrases like 'academic respectability' and 'improved image' were contrasted with 'something that happens in a hut somewhere' highlight a striking change. This indicates that many practitioners have 'hung on in there' through difficult times and finally the work they do and the learners that they reach is being valued more widely. The fundamental value at the heart of this, for the practitioners, is that more people have access to high quality literacy and numeracy education. The second area was that of writing. This concern showed that the teaching of writing skills was high on the list of practitioner values: a value that seems to have been marginalised by Skills for Life. Whilst a practical range of writing skills is present in the curriculum they are not present in the L1 National Test. The following range of responses from the interviewees highlights this concern:

'Tests need to be better: the L1 not including writing is appalling.'

'I fear that people may pass L1 but still not have L1 writing skills.'

'The nature of the exam papers, particularly literacy's lack of free writing is a cause for concern.'

'The test is, on the one hand good as lots of students get it, but it doesn't deal with all issues related to literacy, in other words there's no writing, and the most ridiculous anomaly is, most basic skills tutors will tell you to get L1 is easier than to get E3 3792 as it contains paragraphs of writing.'

These strong feelings indicate the importance of this issue to practitioners. Note that it's not testing that's the problem but the lack of writing.

The interviewees felt both positive in relation to Skills for Life and indicated room for improvement. Their views were based on values that are important to them as practitioners who valued the curriculum as both 'a valuable resource' and a useful 'structure'. The areas requiring improvement concern funding issues that directly impact on practice. The underlying

concern for practitioners that I spoke with was not the money itself but the underlying valuing of the quality of the teaching and learning experience. Among the concerns voiced around provision for learning were the 'time scales for funding', the 'funding by group size and not the individual student'. Interviewees also mentioned uncertainty around funding, 'double funding issues' and observed that 'funding only kicks in, in terms of targets at E3 and above'. Linked to this were worries about 'staffing resources to meet demand' and 'release time for coordination and development'. As with the previous point these concerns directly impact on the quality of teaching and learning: an issue that is highly valued by the practitioners I talked to.

This is only a brief summary from one case study site. When we have collated the data from all six sites we may find a slightly different range of values within our categories. In drawing these reflections together we find that at the heart of this feedback is a fundamental belief in the provision of a high quality of teaching and learning in the adult literacy field for as broad a cross section of people as possible. A provision that includes valuing writing skills as highly as the other areas of the literacy curriculum. At the heart of these responses is the quality of the learning provision itself and valuing learner achievement across the whole range of levels.

Section 2.

Write to Read: A reading intervention strategy providing for adult beginner readers, financed through 2003 Quality Mark funding.

Gill Britten

Gill is the Family Learning Co-ordinator, a part time basic skills tutor and teaches the City & Guilds 9295 Adult Learner Supporters' course at Yale College in Wrexham. She is currently studying for a Postgraduate Certificate in Dyslexia and Literacy.

Introduction

It is estimated in official figures that more than 1 in 4 adults in Wales have poor basic skills (Basic Skills Agency, 2001) and within this Wrexham is considered to have an average level of need (Extent of the Problem, 2001). In response to this *Write to Read* was set up by Second Chance, part of the Faculty of Life-Long Learning at Yale College. *Write to Read*, is an intervention strategy designed to develop an appropriate programme of work for those adults at Entry Level 2 and below, who for whatever reason had been 'lost in the system,' whilst at the same time creating a bank of resources to support future, low level readers.

This action research project set out to investigate the efficacy of the strategy and was conducted by an adult basic skills tutor at Yale, an FE College in Wrexham. It took place from September 2003 to September 2004. The bank of resources developed during the pilot project aimed to: expose adult beginner readers to text in a wide variety of genre; improve students' existing oracy and literacy skills within the structure of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (ALCC) and allow students to gain OCN literacy accreditation.

The pilot study wanted to know whether an approach to learning employed during the project improved students' progression, retention and attainment and if this was the case what were the implications for future planning .

The study began with a review of existing work and a critical look at personal practice. From the literature understanding of the changing nature of literacy began by referring to David Barton's and Mary Hamilton's (1998) work which suggests that literacy is cultural, political and contextually based. Fingeret & Drennon (1997), Street (1990) and Kazemek (1988) provided insights into the impact of poor literacy skills on learners' lives. Oakhill & Yuill (2002) and Reid and Kirk (2001) prompted a closer look at the early reading experiences and the social use of language. The essential principles of an effective

curriculum outlined by Jane Mace (1992) underpinned the project. Her insights into Life Experience writing and working with adult learners in general proved to be invaluable (Mace, 2002). A broad look at existing teaching/support programmes led to the conclusion that the "top down" approach focussing on the context and language elements of the text as advocated by Gavin Reid and Jane Kirk (2001) would be a valid way to proceed. Finally, an introduction to the use of imagery provided by Hugo Kerr (unpublished research) and Fowler and Rigg (1999) opened up a wealth of creative potential.

Following the literature search, I reflected on my own practice. Firstly, there was the need to extend the range of text offered to students, beyond the typical, functional genre currently used. Students were learning to read to 'get by' but were not developing any real enjoyment of reading or interest in literature. Secondly, students needed to be engaged in a deeper level of group discussion that would challenge their understanding of what they were reading. Speaking and listening were generally the student's greatest strengths, but to date, the least exploited. It was felt there was sufficient, sound, theoretical evidence to support the development of a reading intervention strategy to meet the needs of beginner readers. It was agreed the work should reflect the structure of the ALCC, and should be taught in mixed ability group settings and fulfil the accreditation requirements of the institution, but not at the expense of students' individual long and short term aims.

Carrying out the Research

We used case study methods and my role was that of participant observer. We used BERA Ethical Guidelines through the research process. The target group comprised of 16 Below Entry Level to Entry Level 2 students attending one of two literacy evening classes. Long-standing students, ESOL and those with global learning

difficulties were not included. The target group all registered sometime before the October half term 2003, for up to 36 weeks. The sessions were 2 hours long. The same room was used for both classes, but with different Adult Learner Supporters (ALS).

In order to improve the range and genre of the students' reading, a different text was developed every half term. Issues round cultural differences, gender sensitivity, stimulating adult appropriate content and format, were all considered. The texts were the focal point of the group work and informed much of the students' individual OCN course work.

The research intervention changes made to previous practice included placing a greater emphasis on speaking and listening and better-planned, mixed ability group work, taking up at least half of the teaching time. Every session included individual work and group reading. Independent reading skills were developed by using directed activities related to text (DARTs). All students had a pre and post project assessment of ability.

Before the first class concern was around how the students would respond to this new way of working, to a weekly re-reading of the same text. Would the slightly more able readers find it boring? Would the students feel insulted? After all the planning and preparation, would I be able to do this?

In an attempt to compensate for the missed pre-reading experiences and pleasures of childhood, I introduced the students to group reading. It involved everyone, listening to and tracking text read aloud. I usually read for the first two or three weeks then the more experienced ALS would take over. This allowed me time to observe the least able readers' tracking skills. It widened the students' experience of listening to and comparing different readers' styles. The students monitored their own progress by noting the page number, if they 'got lost'.

What we found

We used different data to assess the impact of our pilot intervention strategy. We found an increase in both retention and attainment with pre and post project informal assessments showing that 100% students felt more confident about working in a group and 100% students felt more confident about writing and reading. By using a pre and post audit of a range of literacy activities carried out at home we found that 82%

reported daily reading and writing at home in contrast with 17% before the pilot. We also used course journals, personal observations, group feedback and conversations with the students and ALS to see what we had found. These showed that poor visual and auditory memory, processing and integration skills, suspected specific speech and language difficulties, lack of pre-reading experience and lack of confidence were identified as being the major difficulties students needed to overcome in order to read and write effectively.

The project showed that the confidence gained through a better understanding of how to access text, transferred to other literacy activities. Subsequent DARTS work showed that all the students understood the main gist of most of the texts. Legitimately the work could have finished there. The gist is all that is required by the ALCC at this level. Subsequent word and sentence focused work showed a general understanding of the text vocabulary and of individual sentences. Latterly, many students could read all or part of the texts fairly fluently for themselves. It was the overall comprehension that remained unsound. An apparent inability to remember the significant details needed for that comprehension was a problem for at least nine of the group. This posed the question: if, throughout formal education these students had only ever experienced the gist of what was taught, did they possess any sense of full comprehension? The impact of the work soon began to show on comprehension and the students' confidence to tackle subsequent written tasks by the end of the autumn term:

"When we first started doing this I never thought I'd get it, but following the words each week as you read makes it a lot easier. I've been really surprised that I can do the work now and find the parts in the book myself. It makes all the difference when you know what you're doing, you feel so much better about it."

(BEL student)

Some students' difficulties remained around poor memory, for others it was the processing and integration of knowledge to create comprehension that was causing the difficulty, for some it appeared to be a combination of both.

Some weeks the session focussed on speaking and listening. A student who really struggled with the reading commented:

"I've really enjoyed tonight, because when we're talking we're all the same."
(BEL student)

She went on to explain that when it came to speaking and listening she felt everyone was working at a similar level and that was obviously important to her. Another said:

"I felt good last week when I went home to him (husband) and said what we'd done. I told him, political debate you should've seen his face!"
(E1 student)

For beginner readers and writers a break from the pen is very welcome.

"I know we've got to write to get better at it, but it was good to relax and really talk. I don't do this with anyone. Mates in the pub don't want to know this sort of stuff, and the wife's not that interested."
(EL1 student)

Several students were taken with the idea of reading extracts from the overseas press and the comments demonstrated a little of the awe still felt about published text.

"Never thought I'd be reading bits out of the *New York Times*!"
(EL1 student)

This next student immediately doubted her own opinions when she found they were at odds with the press.

"I always liked Mel Gibson. I thought he was a good actor, but I don't know now, after reading this."
(BEL student)

The only negative student feedback was around my expectations. An EL2 student from another class felt I expected too much of him, but he returned to class again this year!

Conclusion and Implication for Future Practice

Write to Read created as many questions as were answered. Literacy is a social practice. (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and is the means through which, feelings and ideas are communicated, cementing or challenging existing aspects of society. In a modern, multi-literate society, the ability to cope effectively with both paper-based communication and

electronic screen-based technology, are pre-conditions for accessing the information necessary for full participation in that society's political and economic life. Literacy learning is now central to all modern education and is the undeniable right of every adult in Wales.

The impact of 1 in 4 of Welsh adults having poor literacy levels has huge implications for the future of the Welsh economy. In order to reach adults and bring them back to learning, there is a need to engage in more innovative ways of working. Yale College is committed to '*extending horizons for the whole community.*' It strives to ensure that adult literacy learners gain the skills necessary to develop in step with a rapidly changing economy and increase individual employability, should they wish to do so. In Wales the future for adult learning is under review: the need for creative thinking to make basic skills teaching innovative, challenging and more exciting must remain a priority.

To achieve this our pilot study has shown us that we need to find ways of working with adult readers who missed out on pre-reading experiences as children, giving them confidence to use their literacy skills within their own family. We need to continue investigating how to provide a much wider and stimulating reading experience at the same time as meeting students' needs to be able to perform everyday literacy tasks confidently. Lastly, we need to continue work on effective teaching that develops a deeper understanding of the relationship between oracy and literacy learning.

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Section 2.

Putting Learners in Charge of Making Decisions

Kate Nonesuch

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One of the goals of the Reading and Writing Centre where I teach is to put learners in charge of making decisions about Centre policies and practices, day-to-day operations, and their own personal schedules and work habits. How do I shape my practice to accomplish this goal? In this article I will discuss six strategies: giving learners opportunities to make decisions; being clear with myself about my own expectations around learners' decisions; putting an emphasis on making decisions, rather than on the results of decisions made; noticing out loud when learners make decisions; making my own decision-making habits transparent; and giving explicit lessons in saying no to the teacher.

The Centre is a storefront with two large separate rooms, the Inhale Room and the Exhale Room. Our program runs from 9:30 to 3:00 four days a week, and learners are expected to come for the whole time, although most are frequently absent for part or full days to deal with personal issues. Three arenas of Centre life provide learners with the opportunity to make decisions: the weekly planning meeting of students and teachers, the Exhale Room, and field trips. Indeed, these arenas have been set up to serve that explicit purpose to foster decision making, and, more than that, to serve as a laboratory where the process of decision making can be examined, where different ways of making decisions can be tried out and the results noted; most importantly, where the results of not making any decision become obvious, and where there is an abundance of time available to wait for learners to make the decisions, while they wait to be told what to do.

The Exhale Room is where learners make individual decisions about their work at the Centre, so here I will concentrate on aspects of my practice that foster individual decision making in the Exhale Room. The student handbook, *Make Yourself at Home*, explicitly states that students are in charge of making their own decisions there:

[The Exhale Room] is the place to breathe out your own thoughts and ideas. You make your own plan in the Exhale Room. No one will tell you what to do, not even the teacher. You can read, write, work on the computer, play games, do your math homework or any other work you

want. You can stare into space, or make a phone call. You can go for a smoke or a coffee. You make the plan. There is always a teacher in the Exhale Room to help you, when you decide what you want to do. ...

You decide. Some students say that freedom to choose is the best thing about the Centre.

In the Exhale room, I am working in a buzz of learners doing individual projects. Many of these learners will be at one of the eleven computers in the room. For example, one learner may be making a birthday card for a family member while another completes a writing assignment; some are working on educational software in math or English, some are playing computer games and some are on the internet, surfing, doing research or in the chat rooms. Learners at the tables in the centre of the room may be using math manipulatives to do their math proofs, writing first drafts of stories, reading, or working on an assignment. The phone will be ringing, people will walk in off the street to talk to a learner or to a teacher, and learners may decide to get up and go outside for a smoke or go to the back to refill their coffee mugs.



Del Hehn does math proofs

1. I give learners opportunities to make decisions.

At the beginning of an hour-long session in the Exhale Room, I look for ways to give learners the chance to make decisions. I go around the room quickly as people settle in, and ask, "What's your plan for the next hour or so?" The learner knows from experience and from previous talk that I expect his activities will not be random, and that I expect him to be making a plan in the light of what work he has to do, his personal preferences, his energy level at the moment and what constraints he has on his time.

2. I am clear with myself about my expectations.

If the turning of the decision-making power over to learners is to work at all, I need to be clear with myself about my own expectations around learner decisions: I expect them to make a decision about how they will spend their time, but I do not expect them necessarily to make a good decision, and I expect them to notice that they have made a decision, rather than me making it for them. For me, setting aside my judgments about the efficacy or correctness of learner decisions is the hardest part of all. Of course, when learners make "good" decisions ("I'm going to do two pages of my math, then proofread my story from yesterday,") I don't have any trouble "letting" them make the decisions. It's when they make "bad" decisions that I have to remember that I expect them to make decisions, and that when a learner makes a decision, she has fulfilled the expectation. When Rhonda says to me, "I'm going to skip my English lesson so I can finish this birthday card for my sister," I say, "That's a plan. Let me know if you need help with the card. Do you know where the fancy paper is?" At the end of the week, when she has not completed her work in English, or when she is talking about how to move to the next level of the program at the College, I will say, "Your assignment for getting ready to move on is to read a book a week, and write a story a week. Did you get that done this week? No? What could you do to make sure you get them done next week?"

3. I emphasize the act of decision-making

But in the moment, in the Exhale Room, Rhonda's job is to make a decision, and she has decided not to go to her English lesson. If I say, "Can't you make the card later? Do you want to miss class (again?)," then I am making the decision, not Rhonda, and my goal to have learners make decisions is thwarted. If I fight Rhonda's decision, she may refuse to go to class

and enter a power struggle with me, which wastes a lot of my time and sets a sour atmosphere in the room, which I have to work to make right. Alternatively, she may go to class reluctantly and not participate fully because of the emotions left over from my refusing her decision to skip class, which wastes her time and sets a sour atmosphere between us, which I have to work to make right. Later, when she has to leave early to pick up her daughter from daycare, she may blame me as she goes home without the birthday card for her sister. She made her decision to skip the lesson knowing she had to leave early, but although I had less knowledge than she did (I didn't know she had to leave early) I have more power. It is easier for her to agree with my decision and then blame me later when it turns out to have been the wrong one for her. I think the most fruitful thing I can do is accept the learner's decision, and bring the fact of making the decision to the foreground. "That's a plan."

4. I notice out loud when learners make decisions.

Most decisions made at the Centre are not life-changing. Should I use a pencil or a pen? Should my first draft be in longhand or on the computer? Should I make the big coffee pot or the small one? Should I use a period to separate these sentences or join them with "and"? Should I come back after my doctor's appointment, or just go home? How can I get help with this computer program?



Cher Francis at the Welcome Desk

The consequences of making the “wrong” decision are not great, and the increase in self-confidence and sense of control over the learning process far outweigh any consequences of making the wrong one. On the other hand, I have an opinion about all of these things. If called on to make a decision about them, I can quickly decide which would be the better course in a given situation. My job is to not make those decisions; my job is to get out of the way so the learner can make them, and reinforce the learner's confidence in his ability to make decisions that work for him. When a learner comes and says, “What shall I do?” I say, “Your choice. What are you thinking about?” He can outline his thinking with me as an audience, perhaps asking a question for clarification, but at the end of it, I say, “Your decision. What will you do?” (I am also famous for saying, “I'm not your mother,” when people ask permission to do something.)

5. I model my own decision making.

One way to bring decision making out of the “hidden” curriculum and into the forefront is to make my own process transparent. Most learners in the Centre are used to having someone else tell them what to do - a controlling partner, parent or other family member, a social worker, doctor or other professional, and certainly their experience with tutors is that tutors tell you what to do, how to do it and when to get it done. Some learners have told me that when I say, “What's your plan?” they experience it as a negative thing that I am saying they don't have a plan, that their plan is not good enough, or that I am waiting to hear what it is so I can criticize it.

To combat the negative connotation of my question, I frequently make a statement to the group about my own planning for the session: “I'm here for the hour, and I have to plan my work. There are ten or twelve of you here, who may all want help, and my job is to make sure that I can give you the kind of help you need when you need it. You shouldn't have to wait too long for me. That's why I ask what your plan is. When I know your plans, I can make my own plan. If June says she is going to work on math proofs, I know I have to keep coming back to her table, but just to make a quick check and sign off on the proof. I have to keep coming back every four or five minutes, for about thirty seconds each time. When Joe says he is just starting on a story, I know that he won't need my help for half an hour or so, but then he might ask me to sit down with him to read his story,

and that will take about five minutes. Mel has said he is going to fry his brains out playing solitaire for the next half hour, so I know he doesn't need help with that, and Marg is on the chat lines not only she doesn't need my help, but she would like privacy, PLEASE. Steve, Dale and Chris are reading, and they won't need anything from me until they are finished the book and want to report on it. You can see how I have to divide up my time amongst you all for the next hour, and knowing what your plans are helps me make my plan.”

I also tell learners privately how their plans impact my planning. When Rita says, “I'm going out for a smoke, then could you mark my spelling,” I can say, “Okay. I should be finished working with George by then. If you're back in ten minutes, I'll mark your spelling before I go into the Inhale room to teach the next class. If not, it'll have to wait until later.”

6. I give a lesson in saying “No!”

Of course, when everyone agrees about what should be done, there is no problem making a decision. It is when there is no agreement that we want the learner to make a decision for herself. Asserting that decision may be difficult, especially if the learner has to assert it in an area s/he is used to having controlled by the tutor.

I have developed a workshop session on saying no; it goes on the schedule every term as “How to say No to the teacher,” and learners are free to attend or not. In the workshop, learners get a chance to express some of their feelings about saying no to someone in authority, and are given explicit instructions and role play in saying no in situations that come up at the Centre. Their assignment is to say no to a teacher at least once in the following week, and much public acclaim comes as learners say no to a request I make. This explicit lesson makes it clear in the public space of the Centre that it is okay to decide not to go along with a suggestion from the tutor; that making your own decisions is expected; and that saying no will be respected. It also gives me time to say publicly that I can deal with people saying no to me. If I need something done, I may ask a learner to do it; if s/he says no, I'll ask someone else, or make some other plan to get it done, but I don't take it personally if someone says no to me, and I won't lay on a guilt trip when they do. Again, this making public my own decision-making process provides an explicit model for learners.

Shaping my practice to accomplish the goal of putting learners in charge of making decisions came gradually, starting with many talks with Christina Patterson, my teaching partner when we started the Centre more than six years ago. It developed through trial and error, and through observing and talking with learners as I refused the decision-making authority that usually goes with the tutor role. When Bonnie Soroke came to do research at the Centre, I found her questions extremely useful, and her willingness to listen and probe as I articulated my practice resulted in a more sharply honed sense of what I do, what works well and why it works.

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<http://literacy.cc.mala.bc.ca/handbook.pdf>

The Reading and Writing Centre is online at

<http://literacy.cc.mala.bc.ca>

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Section 2.

Theories on the Teaching of Reading to Adults

some notes

Wendy Moss

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How do people learn to read? What theories are there for reading development for adults? I discussed this question with a group of adult literacy teacher trainers in a series of workshops funded by *Talent London* in 2004. The following article is based on our session. It starts with our memory of theories influencing practice in the 70's and early 80's, and finishes by looking at current models of reading in primary education, the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, and literacy research.

The 1970's - the fashion for phonics

In the early 70's, schools were heavily influenced by a phonic approach to reading. At the Lee Community Education Centre, in SE London, I was part of a team developing an early adult literacy scheme. We had a series of readers designed for teachers that were built on staged phonics. Each reader was written using only words demonstrating particular patterns. This led to astoundingly stultifying reading. 'Jack met his mate. His mate is Ken. 'I like my dog', said Ken.' We never used them.

The difficulty with using a phonic-only strategy to learn reading is that the relationship of sound to symbol in English is highly irregular. This makes it very hard to build word attack skills solely through phonics. We also found young adult learners, who had been taught at school to sound out words letter by letter, 'barked at print' that is they read in a hesitant way, with little reading for meaning.

In early guidance for adult literacy teachers (such as in the BBC teacher's book 'On the Move' in 1974), a mixed approach was advocated using both whole word ('look and say') and phonic approaches. 'Look and say' relies on learners recognising the visual shape of a word. It was a truism at the time that new readers would find apparently irregular or phonically difficult words such as 'elephant' easier to read because they had strong visual patterns. Teachers were advised to build up a vocabulary of 100-200 words through word recognition, using vocabulary of interest and meaningful to them, and common words (immortalised in the DOLCH¹ list) which are essential vocabulary. Many of the

words on the list are singularly irregular. *What?*, *where?*, *my* and *the*, for example, are not easy to decode through phonics.

Having started with 'look and say', and acquired a core reading vocabulary, learners were then gradually introduced to key elements of phonics initial sounds, short and long vowel sounds, magic e, common endings (-ing, ed etc), and simple digraphs such as sh, th, ch, ee, oo, ck etc - to develop more word attack skills.

The importance of using meaning to read.

Frank Smith's (1973)² 'The Psycholinguistics of Reading' had a heavy influence by the mid-70's. This radical book argued passionately that fluent readers do not read by decoding words letter by letter. Instead, they bring a wealth of knowledge of grammar and the world to reading and use cues to constantly predict what words will be.

Smith therefore argued that reading is a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'. Fluent readers do not read words, they read meanings. They use minimal visual cues to confirm their guess. This enables good readers to read extremely quickly. Crucially, Smith argued, sounding out letters is the last resort of the fluent reader. Decoding is extremely hard work and, if it were the only way we read, would result in short term memory overload.

Smith wrote a list of 'Principles for Learning Reading' which included:

- Learners learn to read by reading. The priority is to understand text as meaningful. Sense must be prioritised over the decoding of sounds.
- With appropriate cues and support, learners will teach themselves to read, as long as it is enjoyable.
- Learners do not need phonics in order to read new words the phonic system in English is far too complicated for this to work consistently.
- Constant correction is disruptive to the process of reading for meaning. Learners should be encouraged to read without immediate correction, unless they are

completely stuck for a word. Instead learners should be encouraged to *guess and predict from the meaning of the sentence*

Smith's work had a very big impact on adult literacy teaching and school literacy. In retrospect, however, he was perhaps too solidly in the 'look and say' field. Phonics provides a valuable cue (amongst others) when reading new words and a means of checking whether the word is right and it is surely not right to deprive readers of this strategy. Furthermore, can we really argue that everyone will read 'naturally' if encouraged enough? More recent studies have shown how literacy practices at school can conflict with literacy practices at home (eg Heath, 1983)³. The reading is 'natural' approach may rely on people coming from educationally successful communities with a shared understanding of literate practices. Smith's great contribution, however, was to move us from the conception of reading as a letter by letter decoding process, to reading as an act of meaning making, and the new reader as someone who brings inherent knowledge and skills to the reading process.

Paolo Freire⁴ Literacy education for liberation

This Brazilian, Marxist educator worked in the slums in Brazil as a literacy educator and developed a theory of 'liberatory education'. For Freire, there is no such thing as 'neutral' education. Traditional education conveys particular values - those of the dominant culture. Literacy education can either choose to reproduce those values and implicitly support oppression, or to question and challenge the status quo. Learners should learn, in Freire's words, to 'read the world' as well as 'read the word'.

In his classic example learners in a 'learning circle' first learn the word 'favela' (slum). They are then asked 'problematizing' questions such as 'what is a 'favela'?', 'why is it there?' and 'who is responsible for the 'favela'?' Texts are created using the learners own words. The words are then used to break down into syllables and create new words and new texts.

The contribution of Freire to literacy education can be summarised as follows:

- He gave us the term of 'banking education' to describe oppressive education where learners are seen as 'empty vessels' into which knowledge is poured.

- He recognised that both educational **texts** and educational **methods** are not politically 'neutral' they are cultural and social products and reflect the values, beliefs and power structures of a society.
- He thus advocates creating and using texts that are relevant and meaningful to learners, using learners' own lives and language as content, and giving people a 'voice' in a world where they are silenced
- He saw literacy teaching as a site of empowerment for learners, as an agent for social change.⁵

There are problems with the Freirian view of literacy education as outlined in his 70's writing. Firstly, his system for learning to read (recognising and building words through syllables) does not translate into English. It is based on Portuguese and Spanish which are phonically regular, so results in problems in English for all the reasons explored above. Secondly, in the favelas in Brazil, Freire was dealing with a group of learners who were all new to literacy, had a shared life experience and language, and a pressing need for action and change. Amongst groups of diverse learners in the UK from very different backgrounds, it would be hard to recreate those original 'learning circles'. Finally, literacy learners need access to dominant literacy practices - the 'language of the oppressors' - such as Standard English. What Freire reminds us is that literacy education is not neutral. Learners can be encouraged to recognise these **as** dominant practices, and not just accept them as a 'given'.

Language Experience Approaches: creating and using learner texts

The use of language experience as an initial stage in teaching new learners was developed from influences such as Freire and Smith, and new developments in school education.

In the language experience approach, a longstanding approach to starting reading for early readers, the teacher acts as a scribe and records the learners' own words. The 'whole word approach' is used for learning words. Students dictate a short text about a topic in which they are interested. They are then encouraged to read whole sentences, then individual words. The learner begins to build up a sight vocabulary based upon the words they use.

The principles behind the language experience approach to writing are:

- texts can be produced that are relevant to adults and use adults' own language
- the content is well known to the reader and therefore more easily predicted and read
- reading for meaning is encouraged
- the texts provide a basis for further language work

This method is still recommended in the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum as a technique for starting early readers to read. This is a relatively narrow use of language experience, however. The term really refers to any use of learner - created texts in literacy education⁶ - through scribing, taping or writing. It is particularly significant for work with adults as their language, life knowledge and experience may be far in advance of their literacy skills. A beginner reader is not a beginner thinker.

A range of books written by literacy learners were produced in the 70's and 80's. Books written by and for learners are a powerful tool of validation for learners and enable the life experiences, values and culture of structurally excluded groups to find an expression. Books continue to be produced by Gatehouse Press and are a good example. These come accompanied by tapes for newer readers. They also recognise the importance of learners' own language varieties which are reproduced in written form. Language experience reading and writing ensures texts are relevant and interesting, and give a voice to the lives and values of the learners that create them.

Literacy as Social Practice

During the 80's and 90's, linguists moved away from studying written language at sentence level to looking at the structure and patterns of textual organisation. In Australia, theory and practice of reading and writing based on **genre approaches** were developed in schools. Children were encouraged to study the structure of whole texts from an early age, so they could learn the patterns of textual organisation, particularly those needed for school recount, description, report, and discursive writing, for example.⁷ They also emphasised the importance of understanding the context and purpose of a text for reading.

At the same time, those working in the 'literacy as social practice' group of researchers were realising that literacy, now 'literacies', were sets

of social practices. They went a step further than the genre theorists. Like Freire, they argued that reading and writing were not 'neutral' activities. A community's literacies - the genres and linguistic patterning, and the practices used round them - reflected the power structures and cultural values of the community itself. Reading was what they termed a '*situated social practice*'.

Mike Baynham⁸ describes how reading a text effectively and critically involves a range of processes, including

- Awareness of language as social practice - being conscious of the power relationships and values expressed in a text
- Awareness of text as social process - being aware a text is produced socially and in a particular community eg a formal letter presupposes a whole web of social information about the recipient, the purpose of the text and its function.

In the literacy as social practice model, then, learning to read involves a range of skills that go far beyond the decoding of words - including understanding the purpose and function of texts and the cultural values, beliefs and power relations they embed.

Current Models of Literacy Learning

1 Learning Styles

There are several theories of recognising and working to individual learning styles which have been developed and are being promoted now for school and adult educators. It has been particularly significant in the development of teaching approaches for dyslexic learners.

Learning styles theories now strongly inform approaches to learning in education and are supported in a plethora of government documents, including those produced by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Strategy Unit. There has also been a recent critique of learning styles theory⁹ which argues the importance of learning styles may have been overrated. However, as Marie Carbo¹⁰, describing a successful reading programme with struggling readers, reports, 'many schools and districts that have turned to reading styles instruction have reported high reading gains'. The programme recognises the global, tactile and kinaesthetic needs of learners, and tries a wide range of

reading and teaching methods finding the one that most suits their learners.

Learners may not have been successful previously because of the teaching practices which favour one particular learning style over another. Trying a wide range of approaches and finding ones that work for the individual learner is clearly a priority if they are to be successful in adult education.

2 The Phonics Debate

In recent years, there have been strong movements in both the United States and Britain to tackle the perceived problem of children's literacy at school. There has been a strong 'back to phonics' movement in the US and Britain the right seeing phonic instruction as being the key to reading well, particularly as pre-reading skills. In Britain the 'literacy hour' and the school national curriculum have advocated a programme that put increased emphasis on phonics (and grammar) teaching earlier in the curriculum.

In an article which summarises the debate, US educator Gerald Coles¹¹ argues that phonics has always been part of effective reading teaching. Yes, it may be useful to practise phonic skills pre-reading, but the important thing is to interest children in language and reading and then in a range of skills to access that reading. There is no evidence that very early phonemic awareness leads to higher reading achievement. He goes on to question the whole basis of the argument:

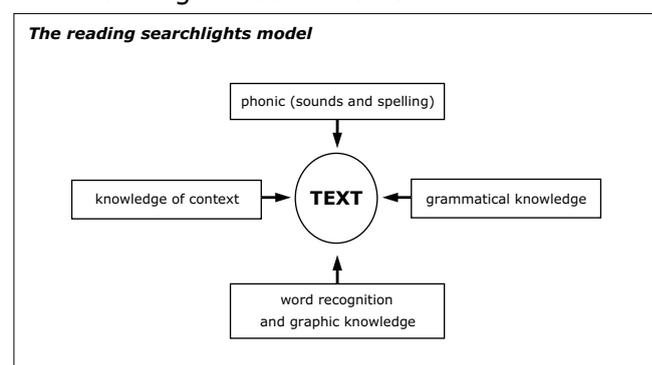
Is this "war" really about skills and how to teach them? On the surface it is, but adequately understanding the conflict requires addressing deeper issues ingrained in the arguments about teaching method. One concerns broad goals for children's development. Accompanying the call for the direct instruction of skills is a managerial, minimally democratic, predetermined, do-as-you're-told-because-it-will-be-good-for-you form of instruction. Outcomes are narrowly instrumental, focusing on test scores of skills, word identification, and delimited conceptions of reading comprehension. It is a scripted pedagogy for producing compliant, conformist, competitive students and adults.

The more liberal lobby emphasise the importance of phonics as one strategy amongst many, of the importance of context and meaning, and the importance of individual learning styles. Adult Literacy teachers, too, know that phonics simply don't work for some learners - they need a range of alternative word attack strategies and to be encouraged to work to their strengths.

3 The School Literacy Curriculum

The DfES Literacy Strategy¹² for schools and the national curriculum have resulted in a national policy on how teaching of reading must be conducted in schools. Despite the rhetoric by recent governments, phonics (now described as phonemic awareness) appears as only one 'searchlight' that children should acquire alongside use of context, whole word recognition, graphical awareness and knowledge of grammar. Children should be able to use all these strategies when approaching a text, so if one strategy fails, the others can support it.

The searchlight model is below



Samples of teaching resources on the DfES Standards website show a 'mixed' approach not very different from that being used consistently by adult literacy (and school) teachers for a long time. A resource pack¹³ for Year 2 children on 'reports' includes the following elements:

- Using a range of reading strategies (or searchlights) to read a text including word recognition, predicting, making connections graphic knowledge, context and phonemic awareness
- Responding to the text encouraging children to ask questions of the text
- Developing other reading strategies such as skimming and scanning skills
- Analysing the text for its language features, and using this to inform writing.

They advocate a range of teaching activities such as introducing learners to a wide range of

relevant reading, discovery learning in pairs, highlighting, discussing, and scribing.

4 The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum

The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum¹⁴ suggests approaches to the teaching of reading that are not dissimilar to the methods described above. There is a similar emphasis on a range of reading strategies, at understanding the context and purpose of a text, and patterns of textual organisation and language analysis. This is generally a useful document. However, there are also absences.

The encouragement to be creative, to try different styles and methods, to discover what works, as advocated by Marie Carbo, is to be found only in 'Access for All'¹⁵, the excellent guidance for Disabled learners.

In my view, the adult literacy core curriculum veers towards embedding a 'deficit' view of the adult literacy learner (see footnote 5). I have listed below the suggested texts for use with Entry Level 1-3 learners. Whilst an individual may find any one of these topics very useful, *cumulatively* they imply adult literacy learners are highly disadvantaged because, for example, they are unable to choose the right washing cycle, make a meal, or manage risk at work. In fact learners may have perfectly good strategies for many of these, and may also be interested in, and motivated by, reading about lives they can relate to, in fiction and poetry, and in discussing and writing about new ideas.

Adult Literacy Core Curriculum: suggested texts

Entry 1
learners' own writing
workplace signs and symbols
household product symbols
headlines on Ceefax and Oracle

Entry 2
children's short story
personal letters, junk mail, invoices, TV listings, recipes, DIY manuals, tickets, magazine stories
TV Guide

Entry 3
parents school newsheet
telephone directory
computer manual
tourist information leaflet
use of equipment
route finder
health and safety notice
hospital/dental appointment

Unlike DfES resources, '**Responding to reading**' is not strongly highlighted in the

curriculum as an important element of the reading process. However, this is the element which allows the learner to critically explore and question the social practices embedded in a text. Learning to read a letter from school, for example, is not only about extracting information, but about considering parent-school power relationships, why the letter has been sent, who has written it, the effect of the language used and options for response.

In this article, I have explored how the approaches to reading advocated in 'On the Move' have been developed and refined in the last 20 years. An effective teacher will offer learners a range of texts that are meaningful, relevant and stimulating, and encourage learners to draw on a range of tools - word recognition, phonics, contexting and predicting - and to develop reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. They will use approaches that meet learners' individual learning styles, and be willing to be flexible and creative. They will introduce learners to variety of genres with different contexts and purposes, and analyse their language and characteristics. They will recognise that reading is not a neutral act of decoding, but an active engagement between the learner's knowledge of language and the world and the text. Finally, if like Freire they see literacy education as a site of empowerment, they will recognise reading as situated social practice, and encourage learners to explore and critique texts and the cultural values and power relations they embody.

NOTES

- 1 The Dolch list is a list of the 200 most commonly used words in English (see p.59 of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum).
- 2 Frank Smith (1973) *Psycholinguistics and Reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- 3 Shirley Brice Heath (1983) *Ways with Words* Cambridge.
- 4 Paolo Freire (1978) *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Penguin.
- 5 In contrast to Freire, who saw difficulties with literacy as a **result** of oppression, the current DfES policy suggests the reverse. The *Subject Specifications for Adult Literacy Subject Specialists* require trainees to learn 'how limited language attainment can restrict or disadvantage individuals as active participants in the community and economy' (DfES/FENTO 2002:4) A range of **consequences** of poor literacy skills is cited poverty, unemployment, criminality and single parenthood.
- 6 For more explanation see Wendy Moss (1995) *Controlling or Empowering? Writing through a Scribe in Adult Basic Education* in Jane Mace (ed) *Literacy, Language and Community Publishing*. Multilingual Matters.
- 7 Education Dept of Western Australia (1997) *First Steps Writing Resource Book* Rigby Heinemann. Marina Spiegel and Helen Sunderland (1999) *Writing Works: Using a genre approach for teaching writing to adults and young people in ESOL and Basic Education classes* London Language and Literacy Unit.
- 8 Mike Baynham (1995) *Literacy Practices*, Longman.
- 9 Learning and Skills Research Centre (2004) *Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning: A systematic and critical review*. Learning and Skills Development Agency. Available on www.lsd.org.uk/pubs
- 10 Marie Carbo, (2003) *Achieving with Struggling Readers* in *Principal Magazine*. NAESP. Also available on www.standards.dfes.gov.uk
- 11 Gerard Coles, *No End to the Reading Wars* in *Edweek* 11 November 1998, www.edweek.org
- 12 See, for example, the materials on phonemic awareness - DfES 1999 and 2000 *Progression in Phonics: materials for whole class teaching* http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy/teaching_resources/404145/404189/
- 13 DfES National Literacy Strategy, Year 2 Term 3 Report Unit (2003) <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy/publications/word/63305/>
- 14 DfES/Read Write Plus Adult Literacy Core Curriculum
- 15 DfES/Read Write Plus Access for All.

Section 2.

Philosophy and ideology: a reflection on the choices made by a practitioner-researcher.

Sophia Monerville

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Introduction

In 2002 I was appointed as the Communications/ Adult Literacy Coordinator for the School of Learner Support within Lambeth College. A position which meant that I was responsible for organising and facilitating workshops for teaching staff to support the implementation of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (ALCC) as part of the Skills for Life Agenda. In September of the same year, as a result of my own quest for part-time, life-long learning, I became a doctoral student and embarked on a professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) at the University of Greenwich. The main focus of my intended research was and still is the impact of the ALCC on teaching culture. The main reason for this research focus was that as a practitioner, I witnessed and colluded with departmental upheaval and the ensuing manic excitement that the imposed but not mandatory use of the ALCC was causing. Teaching staff that were once quietly self-assured and very comfortable with their teaching of adult literacy were becoming anxious and panicky because of what was initially seen as a document that called for a huge change in established teaching behaviours. That was then. Now, in 2005, things have moved on a great deal and the ALCC has been embraced, somewhat grudgingly, by all and I am still responsible for supporting staff to incorporate the use of the ALCC in all aspects of the planning and delivery of teaching adult literacy.

Choosing the method and philosophy

As a researcher I had to choose a method of research enquiry, a philosophical perspective and an ideological perspective in which to place the research. In making my choices, I went through a process of self-reflection and thought long and hard about my own values, beliefs, expectations and life story all of which had been shaped by my gender, race, sexuality etc. It took ages, particularly when I placed all of the above in the context of my practitioner role and in relation to the type of research I wanted to do. As a result of this introspection I gravitated towards a particular qualitative research method and philosophical perspective known as phenomenology.

Prior to coming to a decision about my choice of research method and philosophical perspective, I attended a number of lectures where experienced researchers gave accounts of their own research experiences and the methods they had used. Collectively, they described the highs and lows of different methodology and often recounted the somewhat unethical antics they employed to get the data they wanted. On the basis of these lectures and after being compelled by the requirements of the taught Research Methods component of the EdD program to complete a SPSS module (software for quantitative data analysis), I eliminated the idea of using a quantitative research methodology almost immediately; the thought of me committing myself to doing any form of statistical analysis voluntarily simply did not appeal. I knew I was definitely going to be a researcher set firmly in a qualitative research paradigm.

Whilst trying to make choices about the types of qualitative inquiry I might be interested in, I read Creswell (1998) who presents in the appendixes, journal length articles that modelled five different examples of qualitative research: a biography, a phenomenology, a grounded theory, ethnography and a case study. I read these and read the accompanying chapters in Creswell. I also read relevant chapters in Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and relevant sections of the Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy. These and other readings combined with what I had heard about the different types of qualitative inquiry enabled me to choose phenomenology and forsake the others. However, I am not sure I could pinpoint what it was about phenomenology as both a research method and philosophical perspective that actually appealed to me. All I can really say is that I felt relatively at ease and naively confident with it at the time and not at all intimidated by the prospect of using it for my own research.

Choosing the ideological perspective

Earlier I referred to the fact that I had to choose an ideological perspective too. The ideological perspective I chose was Functionalism and this was because the ALCC seems to support the notion of prescribed functional literacy. More

specifically, I think that it is structural functionalism, as proposed by social scientist and anthropologist, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, that underpins what was the current U.K. government's belief: that increasing the number of functionally literate adults, through the assumed consensus of accessible, well resourced, nationally applied adult learning curricula will positively impact upon the ability of the U.K to compete in the global marketplace. As a practitioner, I object to being forced, through the use of the Core Curriculum, to transmit to adult students the unrealistic expectations of what functional literacy skills can enable them, as individuals to achieve in terms of the economic and social benefits of acquiring these skills. I am concerned that it has been imposed upon practitioners that we share some of the responsibility in keeping these myths alive. As a researcher I am really intrigued by and have to admire the way in which practitioners have been effectively manoeuvred and compelled by the current central government into using this non mandatory adult learning curriculum in the first place.

There may be trouble ahead!

Phenomenology as a research method essentially asks participants in a study 'How was it for you?' in such a way that allows the participants to reflect, unimpeded, upon their own lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. The analysis process that follows then supports the researcher to look for themes or patterns of commonality within what participants have said and establish truths, meanings or 'essences' within the context of the phenomenon.

I intend to use the phenomenology of the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938) which calls for the researcher to locate themselves within the study by going through a process of suspending their own biases and presumptions and achieving a condition Husserl refers to as *epoche*. A condition in which there is no room for consent, approval or open disagreement and that the aim of the research is to obtain objectively derived insights from the data that is the descriptions of the lived experiences of the study's participants. Husserl claims that by suspending their own biases and assumptions, the researcher's mental gaze (consciousness) is focussed only on the data. Then, in the analysis of the collected data, the researcher can evidence an objectivity that will add to the validity of the study's findings. However, after doing a pilot study using a phenomenological analysis process presented by

Clark Moustakas (1994; pp 121-122), I was left with two nagging questions:

1. Could a researcher ever really achieve *epoche* or is it a case of 'The Emperor's new clothes'? In other words, do researchers who claim to achieve *epoche* do so because to do otherwise would be to admit that actually it is unobtainable in the Husserlian sense and then run the risk of exposure and possible ridicule by Husserl's admirers?
2. If *epoche*, which in Husserlian terms is 'scientifically' objective, is achievable, does it not contradict the assertion that: all qualitative research is interpretive and guided by the researcher's own set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood (Creswell, 1998)

I also have a gut feeling, in the context of my intended research, that when the chosen philosophical perspective meets the chosen ideological perspective over what the function of adult literacy is, they may cancel each other out and the study may become about an epistemological issue i.e., about my relationship with functional adult literacy and the ALCC.

Concluding thoughts

I am in the third year of a doctoral process that could take several years to complete. I am at the point where it is not too late to back out of the choices I have made in relation to research method, philosophical perspective and ideological perspective. For what feels like a very long time, I have read books and articles on phenomenology and phenomenological analysis trying to address nagging questions and actual doubts about a final, 100% commitment to using phenomenology in my final research as both a research method and a philosophical perspective. In an attempt to quantify my certainty about the choices I have made, I would say that I am at the 70% certainty mark. At the same time, I am also accepting of the fact that a failure to sufficiently downgrade my reservations may mean having to make these choices all over again.

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Learning for Living Developing access to *Skills for Life* for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Skills for Life is the national strategy for teaching literacy, language and numeracy to adults. As part of this strategy, the government has prioritised work with adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities - a diverse group of around 8.5 million people in Britain with a wide range of abilities and needs.

The learners with whom NIACE and its partners are working on this Learning for Living project are 16+ years of age with no upper age limit. They include learners who experience a range of difficulties in learning, who may have a physical or sensory disability, an acquired disability, mental health difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders or disabling conditions and who are working at Pre-entry, Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 and at Levels 1 and 2 of the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Core Curriculum.

In the previous phase of the project, we have developed a range of draft guidance materials, which include:

- *Access for All Families*, which is identifying promising approaches to family literacy, language and numeracy for parents and carers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their children and
- *ESOL Access for All*, providing guidance on making the ESOL Core Curriculum accessible to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is guidance for staff working with learners at Pre-entry and Entry Level 1, 2 and 3 with the focus on 'transitions', using the Pre-entry curriculum framework in a range of contexts and extending literacy, language and numeracy into ICT and the wider key skills. It is also for staff supporting learners accessing employment; teacher training modules to support teachers and staff at Level 3 and 4, to produce suitable learning materials for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Throughout this next phase of the project, we are looking at literacy, language and numeracy to find examples of developing and interesting practice, and, as so many skills are learnt in everyday situations, we want to encourage, not only teachers and practitioners, but carers, support workers and employers to be more involved in the learning process. In this phase we are also evaluating our draft guidance materials until July 2005, in a number of 'pathfinder sites' with colleagues working in a variety of contexts, such as colleges, care settings, work based learning, prisons and the community. The purpose of these evaluations is to provide us with feedback on whether the materials are 'fit for purpose' within the organisation and the context within which they are working. This is a key part of the work we are doing.

As well as a specific pathfinder evaluating the materials for use in offender institutions, we have 5 other geographical areas, with over 70 provider sites providing us with feedback. Each of the organisations is currently receiving training in how to evaluate the materials.

We look forward to working with staff and learners in this next phase and what they can tell us.

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Linking Literacy Research and Practice: using new concepts to understand learning and teaching in an adult literacy classroom.

Amy Burgess

Amy has worked as an adult literacy tutor in and around Bristol for ten years. She became interested in research when working for an MEd in Literacy and is now a full-time research student in the Department of Linguistics at Lancaster University. She is also a practitioner researcher on the NRDC/LSDA 'Effective Approaches to the Teaching and Learning of Writing Project'.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the relevance of some recent developments in literacy theory to the experiences of learners and tutors in adult literacy classrooms. I do this by summarising the main points of a recently published academic article (Brandt and Clinton, 2000) and applying the new concepts proposed by its authors to a 'real life' situation from my own research. My aim is to show how theoretical constructs can be used as lenses through which to view teaching and learning activities, enabling practitioners to gain clearer insights into their own and their students' experiences.

The Social Practice Approach to Literacy

The research I am carrying out is situated within the approach to literacy known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000; Street, 1995), which views literacy primarily as a social activity embedded in the particular social and cultural contexts in which it is used. This approach has been summed up by Barton and Hamilton:

'Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analysed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people.' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998 p.3)

NLS challenges the conceptualisation of literacy as a set of context-free, value-neutral skills which dominates much public and educational discussion of literacy and underpins the UK Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001). The skills model of literacy has been criticised (see Barton and Hamilton, 1998 pp20-22, Crowther, Hamilton and Tett, 2001) because it implies a deficit model of learners: if literacy consists of a

set of technical skills, its acquisition should be unproblematic (according to this view) and the 'problem' must therefore lie with the learner, who is deemed to have 'literacy difficulties' or 'needs'.

A key aspect of the theory developed by NLS is the distinction between literacy events and literacy practices. Literacy events are activities in which literacy plays a part, often - but not only - in the form of a written text or texts; whereas literacy practices are culturally patterned, socially recognised ways of using language. Literacy events are observable; but literacy practices, which exist at a more abstract level, are not directly observable and therefore have to be inferred from literacy events. A literacy event might consist of completing a mail order form, which is part of the practice of using literacy to buy and sell goods and services. Furthermore, there is a reciprocal relationship between literacy events and practices: over time, individual literacy events aggregate to form practices, and practices shape particular literacy events. For example, an event might consist of someone placing a note inside an empty milk bottle to request extra milk - an event which has been repeated so many times by so many people that it is now a recognised practice with its own conventions. The fact that such a practice exists means that I could leave such a note and be confident that it would get the result I want.

New Concepts in Literacy Theory

Over the past three or four years, a number of books and articles have been published which take a critical look at NLS and suggest some ways in which the field might develop. I will discuss one of these papers, 'Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice' by Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton (Brandt and Clinton, 2002). I begin by summarising the paper and then show how I have used the concepts it proposes to answer

some of the questions I have been exploring, and how by doing so I have been able to evaluate the usefulness of the concepts.

Brandt and Clinton describe how NLS originated as a challenge to what Street (1995) refers to as the 'autonomous' model of literacy as a set of context-free, value-neutral technical skills. In place of this, NLS has developed a social practice approach, which I have described above. However, Brandt and Clinton express their concern about what they call 'the limits of the local', arguing that in its efforts to counter the limitations of the autonomous model, NLS has overstated the importance of local, situated uses of literacy, but that it tends to downplay or ignore those aspects of literacy which are in fact 'autonomous' (Brandt and Clinton, 2000 p354) in the sense that they do not vary according to context. These are the material aspects of literacy, or literacy artefacts (see Hamilton 2000, p17), which, Brandt and Clinton claim, remain constant and allow literacy to travel relatively unchanged between different contexts. One of Brandt and Clinton's central arguments is that people's use of literacy often relies on powerful technologies which originate in and reflect the interests of more distant contexts, but which nevertheless strongly influence local practices. They illustrate this with the example of a customer discussing a loan with a bank manager. On one level, this is a purely local literacy/numeracy event, but material objects such as files, forms, contracts and data bases mean that this transaction also becomes part of the information which may be used in more distant contexts such as at the bank's headquarters, on the floor of the stock exchange or even in calculations made by the Treasury. In this way the participants of a local literacy event are co-opted into much wider processes and practices.

In order to redress this imbalance and fill what they regard as gaps in literacy theory, Brandt and Clinton propose several new concepts: *literacy-in-action* (to replace literacy events), *localising moves*, *globalising connects*, *folding in* and *sponsors of literacy*.

1. Literacy-in-action

Brandt and Clinton state that the double meaning of the term 'literacy-in-action' is intentional because they want to convey the idea that people use literacy to accomplish social purposes and that literacy itself can act as a social agent.

They propose this concept because they believe the concept of a literacy event to be anthropocentric, or too narrowly focused on a human perspective. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, they state that the concept of literacy events does not take account of the fact that literacy can be present in a situation even without human beings:

'We can say that literacy as a something is still there when people around it are gone. It is that which is still acting when people have stopped talking, reading or writing.' (p348)

The second reason why they regard the concept of literacy events as inadequate is that, as they see it, this concept 'suggests that literacy is not happening unless it can be shown that local human actors at the scene are oriented toward writing or reading.' (p349)

2. Localising moves and globalising connects.

Brandt and Clinton draw on the work of Latour, whose theories stress:

'two of the key social roles played by objects in human life. One of them is to hold steady a certain frame such that a discrete interaction can take place and another is to mediate and aggregate events to relocate them in a network of events.'
(Brandt and Clinton, 2000 p344)

Rather than seeing a distinction between local situations and wider social structures and processes, Brandt and Clinton argue that 'society exists nowhere else except in local situations.' (p346). Within these local situations objects serve to define and embody the nature and purpose of human interactions so that they remain anchored in their immediate context; in other words, objects perform 'localising moves':

'.... literacy objects in action often localise a context by framing it and holding it in place, thereby orienting participants to here-and-now meanings that enable communication' (p351)

Brandt and Clinton argue that objects also connect local situations to wider and more distant contexts, or perform 'globalising connects', as in the example of the bank loan discussed above.

3. Folding in

The notion of 'folding in' describes the nature of the relationships between people and objects. Brandt and Clinton discuss an example used by Latour of a shepherd who 'folds' himself (their generic pronoun) into the pen which he builds to protect the sheep while he is away or asleep. Although the pen is not part of the shepherd himself, it extends his relationship with the sheep. Brandt and Clinton argue that literacy objects can perform a similar function in that they can extend literacy interactions in time and space.

4. Sponsors of Literacy

Brandt and Clinton define sponsors as:

'..... underwriters of acts of reading and writing those agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable or induce literacy and gain advantage by it in some way.' (p349)

Sponsors can both enable and constrain people's literacy. For example, an employer might encourage an employee to attend a workplace literacy class in order to develop the kinds of literacy needed to obtain an NVQ, but might be less keen for the employee to use the class for reading and writing for pleasure. In my discussion of Sally's literacy sponsors below I show how the concept of literacy sponsors can be used to examine issues of power and literacy.

Research Questions and Methods

The research I describe here forms the exploratory stage of the research I am carrying out for my PhD. One of the issues I am examining is the relationship between literacy events and literacy practices and the implications this has for literacy learning. The informing research question is: What is the relationship between the literacy events I observe in classes and the wider literacy practices of which they are a part? This gives rise to further questions such as: How do particular literacy practices make some literacy events possible, but others impossible? How does a set of literacy events become a recognisable literacy practice? In the context of the classes I observe, I am interested in how particular learning activities are both facilitated and constrained by the literacy practices of the wider contexts of learning in Further Education and of the Skills for Life policy. Such questions inevitably involve consideration of power relations: who has the power to define what literacy learning is and to give or deny learners access to the literacy practices in which they wish to engage?

Researchers working within the New Literacy Studies have adopted the methods of ethnography (which originally developed within the discipline of anthropology as a means of studying different cultures) in order to study literacy as a social practice. (See, for example, Barton and Hamilton 1998, Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000.) Ethnographic research has several defining features, which make it particularly well suited to a social practice approach to literacy: it uses multiple methods to study real social situations in a holistic way, and is interpretive, aiming to represent the perspectives of the participants. (For a fuller definition see Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Because I want to explore 'the space between thought and text' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998 p3) where social activity takes place, I have used methods which allow me to analyse the writing that students do and how it is situated within the social context of the class. I have used the following methods:

- Observing classes;
- Talking to the tutor, Rachel, and the students, both informally and in semi-structured, recorded interviews;
- Collecting and analysing texts, including samples of the students' writing, teaching materials and record keeping documents such as individual learning plans, schemes of work and session plans

Each time I visited the class I took detailed notes of the events and interactions that took place. I word processed my notes after each session and on a number of occasions gave a copy to the tutor and asked her to confirm whether she thought my notes accurately represented what happened in the sessions. Similarly, I transcribed all the recorded interviews and gave a copy of each transcript to the relevant participant, asking for their comments. The next step was to read over my notes and transcripts a number of times, looking for recurring ideas and themes as well as for evidence which seemed to relate to concepts I had discovered from my own reading, such as those proposed by Brandt and Clinton. I wrote brief notes to record these initial impressions and this will be followed up with more systematic coding and analysis when I have finished collecting all my data.

Using the Social Practice Approach to Investigate Literacy Learning

For the part of the project described here I visited a class taught by one of my colleagues, Rachel¹, each week for one academic year. This class, which is provided by the local FE college, meets for one two-hour session per week in the community centre on the housing estate where most of the students live. There are usually 4-6 students in the class, ranging from beginners through to one person, Sally, who is working for GCSE English and using the literacy class as extra support. Several students are also attending a numeracy class taught by the same tutor. These learners' stated reasons for joining the class will be familiar to most literacy tutors; they included improving their job prospects (all were either unemployed or in low-paid part-time work), helping their children with reading and writing, and increasing their own confidence with literacy. All the learners except one were keen to gain a qualification in literacy and were working towards accreditation through City and Guilds or Key Skills. Apart from Sally, all were working at Entry Level 1,2 or 3.

Rachel mapped all classroom activities to the Core Curriculum in order to fulfill the requirements of accreditation schemes and the conditions of LSC funding. She also provided (and often made) the learning materials, which were mostly in the form of worksheets to practise the subskills of reading and writing, although there were sometimes activities based on 'real' texts such as bus timetables and tourist information leaflets.

Discussion

In this section I discuss each of the concepts proposed by Brandt and Clinton and assess whether and to what extent they have increased my understanding of the events and interactions I have observed in Rachel's class.

Literacy-in-Action

In their discussion of literacy-in-action, Brandt and Clinton state that they want to focus attention on the social roles played by artefacts, but also to focus on literacy itself as an object. (p348) As far as my own research is concerned, I find it useful to pay close attention to the social roles played by literacy artefacts, or what Brandt and Clinton call the 'material aspects of literacy', as I discuss below. However, since my main interest is in people's development as writers, I do not find it useful to focus on literacy itself, but rather on the people who use it. Furthermore, I am investigating the processes of learning and

development in writing so I want to look at literacy as part of those processes, not as a discrete entity. Another potential disadvantage of *literacy-in-action* is that it may place too much stress on language, which is not central in all social situations. Whilst it clearly is one of the main elements in literacy classes, there are other contexts such as a football match or a concert, for example where it plays a minor role.

I want to suggest that the potential limitations of the concept of literacy events noted by Brandt and Clinton have in fact already been recognised and dealt with. For example, Hamilton addresses this issue in her discussion of 'literacy in the environment' (Hamilton 2000 p29). She states that it is possible for literacy practices to occur without human participants and that the notion of a participant may therefore have to be expanded to include inanimate objects. She also points out that in some situations where literacy is present - as signs or notices, for example - people may not be actively participating in literacy events, but may nonetheless be 'incorporated' into them.

Localising moves/globalising connects

An example from my own research of an object that performs both a localising and delocalising function might be the teaching resources (DfES, 2003) which have been produced by the DfES and distributed free of charge to organisations which provide adult literacy education. When I observed Rachel using these resources, her focus and that of her students was on the learning activity in which they were used. However, the 'Skills for Life' logo on the cover is a reminder that this literacy class is inextricably linked to the education policies of national government. An example of how literacy itself can perform a globalising function is the way that reading and writing enable people to shift out of the local, for example by joining abstract constituencies or categories.

So, in Rachel's class, the students were all conscious of being members of their local community because the class took place in the local community centre and some of them knew each other before they joined the class. However, for the duration of the class they became students of the local college and - despite the fact that they were probably unaware of it - part of the 'seven million adults' at whom the Skills for Life policy is aimed, on the assumption that the generic skills contained within the policy framework and curriculum

¹ All names have been changed

documents and resources will somehow transfer to the specific needs of individuals in different contexts.

The examples I discuss above show that the concept of localising moves/globalising connects does produce some useful insights. However, I suggest that it has two significant limitations. Firstly, as the example of the students being simultaneously members of a class and part of the 'seven million adults' suggests, people are not often aware of distinctions between the 'local' and the 'global'. I would argue that this mismatch between Brandt and Clinton's concept and people's own interpretations of their experience limits the concept's usefulness as an ethnographic research tool, since one of the main aims of ethnographic research is to uncover the meanings that participants attach to their experience, rather than imposing categories and meanings invented by the researcher.

Secondly, I suggest that binary distinctions between 'local' and 'global' are too clear-cut and do not adequately describe the complexity and messiness of people's actual experience. Initially, I favoured Brandt and Clinton's stress on material things because I felt that NLS has paid sufficient attention to abstract things such as values, beliefs and attitudes and I felt that Brandt and Clinton were seeking to rectify what they perceived as an imbalance. However, I now find it more useful to broaden the concept of literacy objects to include abstract entities because, when I have observed Rachel's class, it seems that people are often using abstract things. For example, Rachel uses the notion of 'text, sentence and word level literacy' in her teaching and Sally uses the notion of 'GCSE English'.

Folding in

An example of this concept relevant to my own research might involve the producers of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (the UK government) who can be seen as folding themselves into the curriculum document in order to extend their relationship with literacy teachers and (indirectly) learners. Thus, although no official from the DfES is ever likely to be present in any of the classes I observe, the fact that the Core Curriculum is compulsory means that the government is still able to exercise some control over what and how teachers teach.

Sponsors of Literacy

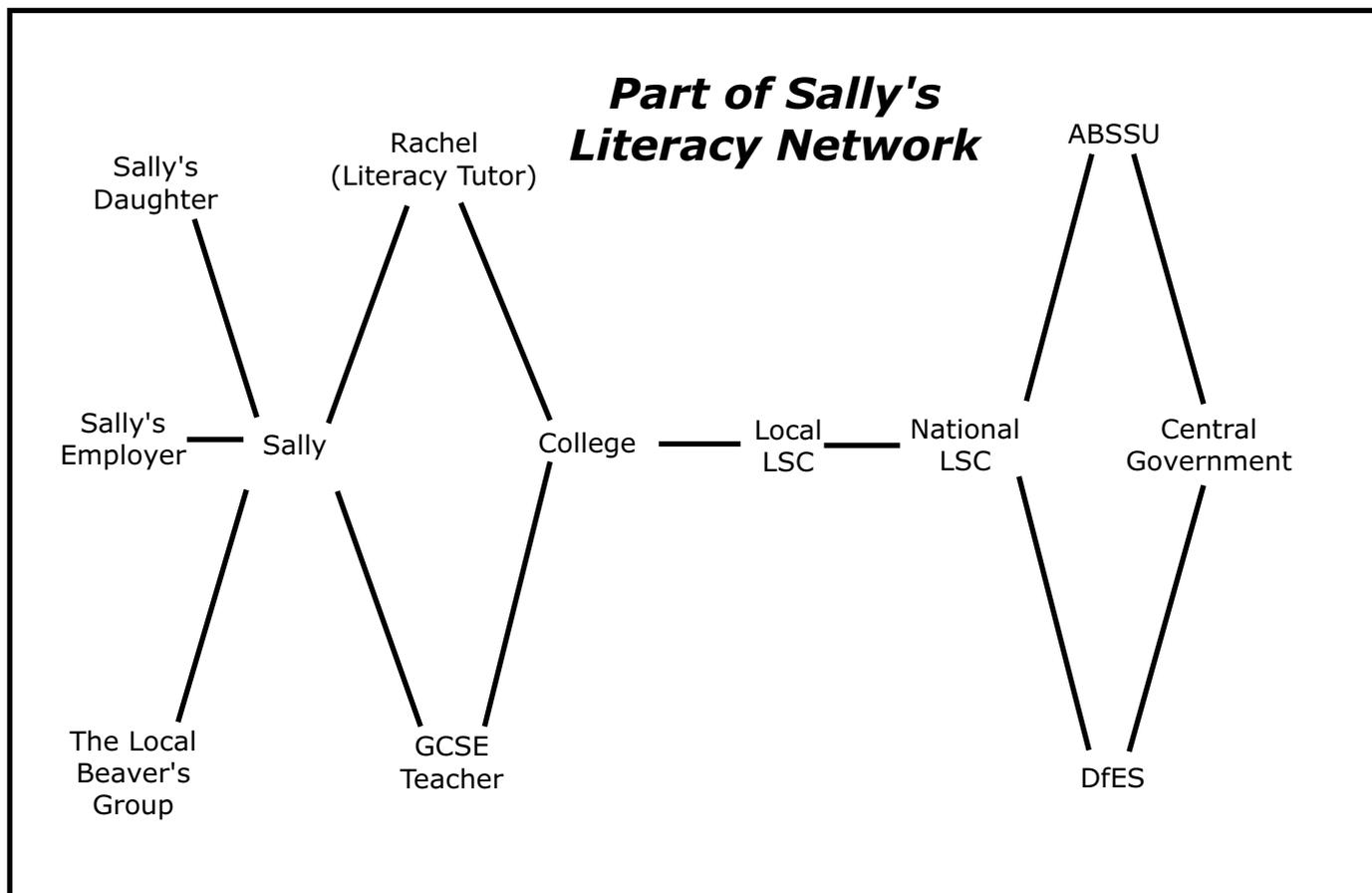
Brandt and Clinton argue that one of the limitations of research carried out by those working within the New Literacy Studies is that it has tended to suggest that literacy can be controlled either by the local, private user or by the dominant social structure, but not by both. Brandt and Clinton suggest that their concept of literacy sponsors enables us to see that in fact the situation is more complicated, since multiple interests can be served by a single performance of literacy. This is illustrated by an event which occurred in one of Rachel's classes.

Sally was working on one of her GCSE assignments, which was to write part of her autobiography; she referred to this piece of writing and read a small section of it aloud to Rachel and the other students. In this section she wrote that during her childhood she had undergone a very difficult and painful experience, and she went on to question why none of the adults in her life had apparently noticed or tried to help her. Multiple interests are being served here. Sally herself benefited from talking to Rachel about this piece of writing since it enabled her to improve it. Ultimately it will become part of the portfolio she submits for GCSE, and by gaining this qualification Sally hopes to be able to obtain a more highly paid job. I would suggest that she may also have benefited at a very personal level, because writing about this difficult time in her life enabled her to reflect on it and to question the behaviour of the adults in her life from an adult standpoint. Other people are also gaining something from Sally's writing. Rachel and the GCSE teacher both have a professional interest because their ability to advance in their careers depends in part on the success of their students. The college has a dual interest in that it has an obligation to provide education for local people, but at the same time it is a corporation which must balance its accounts. Where the college is concerned, therefore, Sally represents a 'service-user' as well as a source of income.

If we identify sponsors it enables us to ask questions about power relations and different, possibly competing interests. For example, we can ask who is providing or paying for the literacy materials being used? Do the providers set any conditions for their use? What do the providers hope to gain? Do individuals manage to balance the requirements of sponsors with their own interests? If so, how?

As diagram 1 shows, the interests of the various

sponsors of Sally's literacy can be traced back to the UK government.



By mapping the relationships between Sally and some of her literacy sponsors in this way, we are able to see the routes by which certain literacy practices enter her particular situation. Brandt and Clinton state that the concept of sponsors of literacy can be operationalised in this way to trace the 'literacy networks' of individuals and social groups, and that by mapping these networks into and out of local situations it is possible to:

'illuminate the processes by which diversity and inequity in literacy are actually sustained.' (p345)

Using the concept of sponsors to trace Sally's literacy network generates a number of other useful insights. If we consider her literacy sponsors (those to the right of Sally in the diagram) we can see that some are individuals and some are institutions, but that even the individuals (the two tutors) are representatives of the institution of the college, and therefore more powerful than Sally herself, who does not represent any organisation or institution. However, the dual role played by the tutors suggests that they can also be seen as Sally's

'guardians' in the sense that they are responsible for mediating between her and the other sponsors. However they are not neutral in this role as they are also under pressure to reach targets. Neither is the employer neutral as he/she is answerable to shareholders and the economic bottom line efficiency and productivity.

Mapping this network also raises questions about the links between the sponsors, which may consist of texts and other material objects as well as abstract things such as discourses. The Individual Learning Plan is one such text, since it records some information (such as the learner's goals), which is used by the learner and the tutor, and other information (such as the course and qualification code numbers), which is only used by tutors and college administrators. The ILP incorporates a powerful discourse of learning in Further Education which regards it primarily as an individual activity proceeding in a linear fashion according to pre-set goals. It is possible to trace this discourse back to central government and the desire of politicians to use statistical information as a basis for and justification of policy. If learning is linear, then it

is possible to divide it up into stages and measure 'how much' learners have learnt and how many targets have been met.

This discourse is closely linked with an 'autonomous' (Street, 1995) skills-based model of literacy, which assumes that literacy can be subdivided into discrete skills and that it is therefore possible to measure 'how many' of the skills learners have acquired. This discourse in turn links central government to LSCs, who are required to provide statistical information in order to justify their receipt of public funding. The LSCs in their turn require information from colleges to calculate the level of funding to which they are entitled. This information consists of numbers of students who have progressed between the different Levels of the Literacy Core Curriculum and numbers who have passed the National Literacy Test. It is also clear from this description that one of the most important links between the sponsors of Sally's literacy is money, and that those who control funding (ultimately central government) have the power to define what learning and literacy are and to give or deny Sally access to the literacy practices in which she wishes to participate.

Conclusion

I have tried to achieve two aims in writing this paper. Firstly, I have shown how the concepts proposed by Brandt and Clinton can be used to generate new insights into literacy learning. Secondly, I have shown how using these conceptual tools has enabled me to evaluate their effectiveness.

An important contribution of the social practice view of literacy is that it enables us to explore the reciprocal relationship between the actual literacy events we can observe and their wider social contexts. I have argued that, although I think Brandt and Clinton may have overstated some of the supposed limitations of NLS, some of the concepts they propose are nevertheless useful tools for investigating this relationship.

My discussion of *localising moves*, *globalising connects*, and *folding in* has shown how the contexts in which literacy classes take place both make literacy learning possible and set limits on it. By using the concept of *sponsors of literacy* to trace part of one student's literacy network, I have shown that, whilst a student such as Sally may not have much power to influence those who sponsor her literacy learning, there is still scope for her own interests as well as those of her sponsors to be served. Moreover, her

teachers could play an important role in ensuring that her interests are served, since their intermediate position between Sally and her more powerful sponsors allows them to act as guardians as well as gatekeepers.

However, this is only possible when teachers recognise the conflicts inherent in their role and resist the pressure on them to promote a version of literacy which views learners as deficient and offers them only narrowly utilitarian 'skills'. I hope my discussion has shown that by applying concepts developed by literacy research to their own practice and experience, it is possible for teachers to adopt a critical, reflective stance and search for ways of working that both satisfy the demands of funders and empower learners to use literacy according to their own purposes and desires.

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Section 3.

Philosophical Assumptions about Literacy: Perspectives from Lyotard

Gaye Houghton

Gaye is teaching on the new, integrated Cert. Ed. courses at the University of Wolverhampton. She is also working as an external researcher for two other universities, the University of Sheffield and the University of Birmingham (where she is doing her PhD). At Sheffield the research is an NRDC project about effective practice in the teaching of reading. The Birmingham research concerns reasons for 'drop-out' rates in PGCE courses.

Introduction

In this article I am clarifying how my professional activities as an adult basic skills practitioner have influenced the research practices in which I am currently engaged for my PhD. The purpose of my research is to identify and critically explore 'philosophical assumptions' about the purpose and practice of literacy and literacy education which adult basic skills practitioners value in relation to their work and training, a topic I will expand on in the next section. What I wish to stress here, is that I want the article to provide an update for those RaPAL members who have already participated (or agreed to participate) in my research and also to provide an overview of my research which will attract new participants for my next round of data collection (my contact details are at the end for anyone who is interested). In section one I state what my research is about and then describe how my choice of research topic is rooted in my own professional activities (section 2). Following this, I briefly outline my research design and identify the reasons why I have chosen to collect 'professional narratives' from RaPAL members to use as my main form of data (section 3). This choice is then linked to Jean-Francois Lyotard's (1984) postmodern ideas about 'meta-narratives' and 'little narratives' (section 4), which I use as an approach for critically questioning established philosophical and theoretical approaches to literacy and literacy education. I also raise some criticisms of Lyotard's ideas. The article ends by describing how my research will be useful not only to me and the other participants but also to practitioners in the field (section 5). In effect, the article is a narrative about my journey from practice to theory and back again.

Section 1: What the research is about

As stated above, the purpose of my research is to identify and critically explore 'philosophical assumptions' about the purpose and practice of literacy and literacy education which adult basic skills practitioners value in relation to their work and training. The term 'adult literacy and basic skills practitioners' includes tutors, trainers,

course directors, coordinators, programme managers and researchers. It covers all those involved with literacy in the post-16 sector whether they are working in Further Education, Continuing Education, Adult Education, Community Education, Prison Education, the training sector or Higher Education. I am in the process of critically reviewing how their 'philosophical assumptions', explicit or implicit, interact with those underpinning wider cultural perceptions about literacy held by society at large; those underpinning government policy on adult literacy including the training of practitioners; and those found in the publications and comments of influential professional researchers and practitioners directly involved in the field of adult literacy itself.

What 'philosophical assumptions' actually are is a contentious issue. For instance, my research identifies some practitioners who think they are 'pedagogical' assumptions and others who think they are 'andragogical' (Knowles, 1970) assumptions. Knowles argued that 'peda' derives from a Greek word meaning child therefore 'pedagogy' refers to the art and science of teaching children. However, he thought adults were far more self-directed in their learning than children and that the word 'pedagogy' was incorrect when used in connection with adult education. Instead, he preferred to use the word 'andragogy'. 'Andra' actually derives from a Greek word meaning 'man' (?) and 'andragogy' was Knowles' attempt to produce a theory about how adults, both women and men, learn. As well as using the terms 'pedagogy' and 'andragogy', however, there are practitioners who prefer to use more generalised words to underpin what they do such as 'values', 'philosophy', 'assumptions', 'reflections' and 'perceptions'. The issues surrounding this 'labelling' are problematic and, although I engage with them in my thesis, the limitations of time and space will not allow me to do so to any great depth here. For the purposes of producing this article I am using 'philosophical assumptions' as an inclusive term for all preferences.

Section 2: Why choose this topic for research?

Firstly, my own interest in philosophical assumptions was fuelled when, as a practitioner in the FE sector, the emphasis policy makers placed on Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) affected me. CBET was developed in the late 1980's to underpin the, then, new National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's). It regarded teaching and learning as a set of prescribed behaviours (competencies) assessed, in part, through observed performance in the work place (Jessup, 1991). The approach was used to develop qualifications for adult literacy and basic skills tutors at two different levels. In 1990 I became a mentor on the tutor accreditation scheme at the higher level. This was the City and Guilds 9285, "The Certificate in Teaching Basic Communication Skills".

The strong endorsement of CBET led to an equally strong reaction against the approach. Those against CBET insisted that its prescriptive character limited the development of 'professionals', a term that is very controversial (Helsby, 1999). They preferred models of tutor-training and development based on experiential approaches to do with expertise and reflective practice (Hyland, 1994). Others suggested a synthesis between competence and reflective practice (Hodkinson and Issitt, 1995). The important point is that 'Competence' on the one hand, and 'experiential approaches' and 'reflective practice' on the other stem from different philosophical roots and I became very interested in the identification and critical exploration of these 'roots'.

Secondly, literacy and literacy education (including the education and training of adult basic skills tutors) is, yet again, topical and contentious. Nowadays, practitioners are in the process of updating their qualifications, which have to be based on new national standards, and are compulsory. The "Moser Report" (1999) which resulted in the DfEE "Skills for Life" (2001) policy document recommends that by this year (2005) all adult basic skills tutors should have qualifications based on the new standards developed by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) and the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO). FENTO has just been renamed as 'Standards Verification UK'. From now on tutors will have to have an initial qualification at Level 4 (undergraduate level) as a minimum requirement. There are also some initial training courses for graduates at PGCE level and some advanced courses, such as post-

graduate diplomas and MAs being (re) developed in Higher Education. Some forms of accreditation, such as The City and Guilds accreditation scheme for which I used to be a mentor are no longer recognised. These developments and changes have further stimulated my interest in philosophical assumptions underpinning literacy, and literacy education included in tutor education programmes. However, because practitioners have experienced various training backgrounds, and because training courses are still being developed, my research does not concentrate on the philosophical assumptions underpinning one particular training course. Instead, it focuses on the philosophical assumptions about the purposes and practice of literacy and literacy education that *practitioners, themselves*, value for inclusion in *any* professional training they undertake.

Section 3: Research Design, Data Collection and Data Analysis

I am a member of RaPAL and I am using it to access research participants in a variety of ways. For instance, three times a year RaPAL publishes the very research and practice journal that I am currently writing this article for. Therefore, I used it to advertise for voluntary participants by inserting a flier about my research in the summer 2001 issue. Secondly, RaPAL holds an annual conference where it has been possible to form networks with members and request their voluntary participation. Thirdly, RaPAL has a website where I posted details about my research informing people about it asking them to participate. From these beginnings I developed a 'snowball' sample where the first participants could recommend other participants who might be interested in becoming part of my research.

As a 'trainee' PhD researcher I have also had to choose an overall strategic approach in which to frame my research. Some researchers call this strategic approach a 'methodology'. Some methodologies relate specifically to quantitative research and others specifically to qualitative research. The term 'methodology', however, is extremely problematical (Usher and Edwards, 1994) and is really the intellectual property of quantitative researchers. Again, I have written a whole chapter in my thesis about these issues and there is not time to go into them here. However, in order to overcome the problem of my discomfort with the word 'methodology' I have decided to use case study as a strategic research approach because:

"Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied...as a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of enquiry used..." (Stake, 1994:435)

The boundaries of a case study have to be clearly specified (Stake, 1994; Gillham, 2000). If its characteristics can apply to others then it cannot be a 'case'. Therefore, I define my 'case' as: adult literacy and basic skills practitioners, from all sectors of post- compulsory education and accessed through RaPAL, who have both delivered and/or received tutor education and training for adult literacy and basic skills in the UK over the last 15-20 years.

Data Collection and Analysis: Professional Narratives

I take the view that all knowledge, including that of my participants, has to be 'language'd into existence (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Therefore, I have chosen to use 'professional narratives' as my main source of data to enable them to do this. If I had used semi-structured interviews I would have had to formulate interview questions (which I actually started to do) and no matter how openly structured these might have been they would have defined, from my point of view only, what the research participants were to talk about. Admittedly, I will have to impose my choice of research area on to my participants but they will be able to talk about it in their own way. As well as asking participants to comment on issues that I consider being important, I also want them to identify and talk about the issues that concern them. In other words, although my own questions and issues are important because I am a participant in my own research, I do not regard them to be the only ones worthy of researching!

Narratives are a meaningful way for participants to articulate the values, questions and issues that concern them. According to Gee (2003:2), when people want to give a meaningful account of their lives, or parts of their lives, it is usual for them to do so in the form of a 'story' or narrative because narrative is... "a primary form of human understanding"... through which "...people make sense of their experiences of other people and the world". The approach will give participants the opportunity to articulate their philosophical assumptions (explicit and implicit) about literacy and literacy education in relation to their own professional development through the personal accounts they give of their own work experiences. As Clifford (1994:34)

points out, "...people's values are revealed in the...stories they tell about their lives."

Therefore, collecting data in this way will allow participants to tell their 'stories', in their own words, at their own pace and at a time and place of their own choosing.

When analysing the data I will identify and investigate the discourses in which various ideological positions about literacy, literacy education and the education and training of adult literacy practitioners are articulated. The positions identified will be critically explored using Halliday's (1978) ideas about the social interpretation of language and also Fairclough's (1989) ideas on "Critical Language Study".

Section 4:

Why use a Postmodern Approach?

As I read through the literature on narrative research I became engrossed with the ideas of Lyotard (1984) who distinguishes between "meta narratives" and "little narratives". He argues that the knowledge produced by the 'language games' of 'little narratives' is just as legitimate as that produced by the 'language games' of the extremely influential 'meta-narratives', even though the former might not be as powerful. I will briefly define the concept of 'language games' first and then follow with definitions of 'meta-narratives and 'little narratives'.

Language games

Society is composed of different discourses that use different narratives to explain themselves. For instance, Malpas (2003:21) points out that the discourse of History constructs narratives of the past, Psychology constructs narratives of the self, Sociology constructs narratives about humans in social formations and so on. Narratives are, therefore, a fundamental way for humanity to understand itself and its existence. Lyotard calls these discourses and their narratives "language games". By saying that the properties of 'language' are synonymous with those of 'games' he is describing how the 'game rules' of different discourses, their related narratives and the type of 'utterance' they use only allow certain language 'moves' to be made. Just as you cannot use the rules of chess and its pieces to play draughts neither can you use the game rules and the utterances of one discourse to engage in another. In this sense, individuals exist in a complicated network of rules and each set of rules and its utterances are valid only for the discourse (game) to which they apply.

Meta-narratives

There are two overarching Modernist discourses and both use their own 'language games' to present ideas about the relationship of knowledge to our existence. One insists that only scientific knowledge is legitimate and that it will lead to the emancipation and freedom of humanity. The other specifies that the acquisition of knowledge is an end in itself and that it is essential for human progress. It also insists that all knowledge is related and will eventually be unified by philosophy for the benefit of all. Whilst the first discourse legitimates science because it is emancipatory, the second legitimates it because it contributes to the unification of knowledge (Usher and Edwards, 1994:161). For Lyotard (1984), however, another type of knowledge, 'narrative' knowledge, has always existed alongside 'scientific' knowledge. In fact, Lyotard argues that the knowledge claims of science and philosophy are actually narratives themselves. They are so powerful, however, that he describes them as "meta discourses" or "grand narratives". Their "language games" are used to perpetuate the "myth" that the knowledge they generate is the only 'true' form of legitimate knowledge. These legitimating meta-narratives, which are placed in a privileged position over other types of narrative, are what Lyotard describes as 'modern'. Both work in the same way. They insist that humanity's progress depends on the truth of all knowledge statements being subject to the rules of a meta-narrative; whichever meta-narrative that might be.

"Under a grand narrative, all the social institutions such as law, education and technology combine to strive for a common goal for all humanity: absolute knowledge or universal emancipation. Knowledge thus acquires a vocation and a role for the greater good." (Malpas, 2003:27)

Since the Enlightenment the major meta-narratives such as 'knowledge as emancipation' and 'knowledge as progress' have manifested themselves in a number of philosophical schools of thought such as Positivism, Phenomenology and Marxism (and Critical Theory). Each school of thought spawned its own particular theories about the purpose and practice of education including literacy education. They all, however, believed in the progressive and emancipatory nature of knowledge but only according to their own rules. Postmodernity, on the other hand, is characterized by an "incredulity" (Lyotard, 1984:xxiv) towards modernity's meta-

narratives because, in spite of latter's promises of emancipation and progress these goals have still not been reached and humanity is still living with such things as war, third world hunger, disease and destruction. According to Lyotard (1984), however, those who believe in 'science' have realised their stance is no longer credible. So instead of 'scientific' knowledge being legitimated because it will lead to emancipation and progress it is now legitimated according to its 'performativity'. Performativity is, in fact, the new meta-narrative and it has infused itself into the practice of education probably far more than Lyotard ever imagined it would.

Little Narratives

Lyotard argues that the meta-narratives and their related schools of thought can never unify all knowledge claims, which depend on consensus and have to be legitimated through scientific verification and falsification, in other words, 'proof'. Instead, rather than consensus, he believes in accepting difference and applying the principle of paralogy to knowledge legitimation. Paralogy refers to inspirational ideas brought about by stimulating discussions without necessarily reaching universal consensus. People who participate in paralogy question, often irreverently, accepted taken for granted theories because they feel such theories often deny spontaneous creativity in the production of knowledge (which, in this case of my research, means knowledge about literacy, literacy education and the education of adult literacy tutors). They avoid "terror" (Lyotard, 1984) whereby people are prevented from talking by being removed from the conversation by the "game rules" of a domineering discourse. Instead attempts are made to listen (an extremely important aspect of paralogy) and develop an understanding of the vocabulary of all the speakers involved. Rather than impose the rules of a universal meta-narrative, the rules of "little narratives" are defined locally and provisionally. For instance, we might say, "I am using the word in this sense", or we might say, "In my own words". In this way the local or "little" narrative becomes the "quintessential form of imaginative invention" (Lyotard 1984: 60) whereby the narratives of everyone involved, including the marginalized can be creative and inspirational. The knowledge generated by them is legitimated by their pragmatic transmission through a contract, explicit or implicit, between players rather than scientific 'proof'.

As I absorbed Lyotard's ideas I began to 'see'

my 'professional narratives' as "little narratives". I saw them as a way of critically engaging with the "meta-narratives" or "grand discourses" (Lyotard, 1984:xxiii) of Modernity and their related schools of thought such as positivism, phenomenology and Marxism (including Critical Theory). As mentioned earlier, the dominant "language games", of these schools of thought have had an enormous influence on education including literacy education. Participants' "Little narratives" are a way of bringing "imagination" (Lyotard, 1984:60) to bear on what is currently a philosophically complex picture of literacy and the philosophical 'make up' of tutor education programmes.

Although I am using Lyotard's ideas I am well aware of the criticisms of them. For instance, Usher and Edwards (1994:183) cite a suggestion that his rejection of 'meta-narratives' in favour of 'little narratives' removes the possibility of collective resistance. This rejection has also been described a paradox because the overarching denial of meta-narratives in favour of 'little narratives' turns into yet another meta-narrative (Usher and Edwards, 1994:184). Therefore, I seem to be going round in a never-ending philosophical 'loop'. In relation to this, Tusting and Barton (2003:31) whilst accepting that 'there may not be a single grand narrative that explains' everything there is a danger that concentrating on differences can 'exclude the patterns that do emerge from the complexity of adult learning interactions'. I mention these three criticisms in particular because they are the current focus for my reading and I am pre-occupied by them. Nevertheless, I still find Lyotard's questioning stance stimulating. My research applies his ideas to all narratives ("grand" or otherwise) to do with literacy, literacy education and the education of adult literacy practitioners. The aim is to give research participants a chance to articulate their concerns and assumptions about the philosophy relating to their professional development courses in their own words, and to explore ways of bringing them to the attention of other practitioners, course designers and policymakers so that they too can paralogically engage with them in these times of change.

I have not fully analysed my data yet but as I read through the 'little narratives' I have collected, one interesting issue has arisen. Whereas Lyotard defines postmodernity as 'incredulity' towards modernity's meta-narratives ('knowledge as emancipation' and 'knowledge as progress') my participants do not seem to

question these as the overarching aims of education. Rather, their 'incredulity' is directed towards the idea of knowledge as 'performativity'. However, a much greater analysis is needed but I am intrigued as to what will emerge.

Section 5: Uses

The aim is to use the process and results of the research to contribute to knowledge about the philosophy relating to literacy, literacy education and the education and training of adult literacy tutors in a variety of ways. On one level they will be a form of personal professional development that will usefully crystallise my own thinking about the topic. For instance, when I started on this research I wanted to use the ideas of Habermas and Critical Theory as my theoretical approach. However, an integral part of the research process involves questioning and critiquing my own choices. It was during this process that I discovered the ideas of Lyotard. Lyotard's ideas are seriously opposed by Habermas (b.1929) who belongs to the second generation of scholars who founded the Frankfurt School of Social Theory in the 1930's. They wanted to develop a "critical theory of society". (Stickle, 2004: 1). Its early thinkers such as Horkeimer and Adorno were strongly influenced by Marxism and wanted to re-evaluate the emancipatory aims of the Enlightenment in the light of Marxist influences "at a time when the ravages of totalitarianism seemed to be making a mockery of Enlightenment ideals." (Scott & Usher, 1999:23). They believed as does Habermas that the 'emancipatory' project could still be carried on but for Lyotard, himself a former Marxist, it is finished.

Lastly, the results of my research will have bearing on current developments in the adult literacy field. The philosophical assumptions which participants themselves value in relation to literacy, literacy education and the education of literacy tutors are relevant for the new literacy curricula and qualifications now being established for both students and tutors. My research findings will be compared and contrasted to the philosophical assumptions that underpin the standards for these new developments. This will provide useful information for practitioners, course designers at all levels of the further and higher education sectors developing/wishing to develop their own courses in this topical and changing area of professional interest.

If you are interested in participating in this research or in learning more about it please contact me at **gxh097@bham.ac.uk** (The '0' is a zero. It is not the letter 'O').

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Reviews

Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment, Paul Black and Dylan William, 1998. ISBN 07087 1381 5

Working inside the black box: Assessment for learning in the classroom, Paul Black, Christine Harrison, Clare Lee, Bethan Marshall and Dylan William, 2002. ISBN 0 7087 1379 3
Both published by NFER Nelson for the Department of Education and Professional Studies, Kings College London.

Reviewed for RaPAL by Judith Gawn, Regional Development Officer (Skills for Life) for NIACE in London.

At a time when the DfES, through its Skills for Life strategy, sees raising the standards of teaching and learning in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL as a key priority, these two booklets provide some thought-provoking messages for practitioners. Although they focus on work undertaken in secondary schools, the underpinning pedagogical principles are highly relevant, whether you are a part-time tutor, full-time lecturer, teacher trainer, or teacher trainer trainer.

Inside the black box draws on a survey of research literature and focuses on formative assessment, arguing that this feature is at the heart of effective teaching. *Working inside the black box* describes the programme that followed on from the initial booklet, in which a group of teachers were supported in developing innovative formative assessment practices in classrooms.

The authors argue that despite the raft of changes in pursuit of raising standards such as national curriculum testing, league tables, initiatives to improve school planning and management, target setting, more frequent and thorough inspection, something is still missing. This is because government policy treats the classroom as a black box: *"Certain inputs from the outside are fed in or make demands of pupils, teachers, other resources, management rules and requirements, parental anxieties, tests with pressures to score highly, and so on. Some outputs follow, hopefully pupils who are more knowledgeable and competent, better test results, teachers who are more or less satisfied, and more or less exhausted. But what is happening inside? How can anyone be sure that a particular set of new inputs will produce better outputs if we don't ... study what happens*

inside?" As someone who has been at the sharp end of the Skills for Life strategy over the past few years, both as teacher and teacher-trainer, this certainly resonated for me!

In *Inside the black box*, the authors set out to answer three questions:

- 1) Is there evidence that improving formative assessment raises standards?
- 2) Is there evidence that there is room for improvement?
- 3) Is there evidence about how to improve formative assessment?

Drawing extensively on research, the authors reach the conclusion that the answer to all three questions is a resounding "yes". They argue that many current assessment methods are not effective in promoting good learning, that marking and grading practices emphasise competition rather than personal improvement, and that assessment feedback often has a negative impact on confidence and self-esteem. These findings will come as no surprise to practitioners in the field.

In *Working inside the black box*, the authors describe the outcomes of research into enhanced formative assessment practices. They discuss the fundamental issues involved such as questioning, feedback through marking, peer and self-assessment and the formative use of summative tests. The teachers involved in this research began to see learning as a far more collaborative process, where pupils were encouraged to take time to think things through individually or in a group, to reach conclusions for themselves, either to open questions or problem-solving tasks. Assessment practices that employ constructive feedback as a means of planning future work, rather than assessment as a simple measurement tool are of particular relevance. The marking of work with constructive comments rather than a grade changed the attitudes of both teachers and pupils to written work: *"The central point here is that, to be effective feedback should cause thinking to take place."* Peer and self-assessment encouraged pupils to reflect on their own understanding in ways that then informed future teaching. Another clear message to come out of this work was that summative tests should be a positive part of the learning process and that active involvement in the test process help pupils to improve their learning rather than becoming *"victims of testing."*

The booklet also contains some fascinating reflections on some of the deeper issues about learning and teaching which changes in assessment practices provoke, particularly amongst the teachers involved: *"There was a definite transition at some point, from focusing on what I was putting into the process, to what the students were contributing. It became obvious that one way to make a significant sustainable change was to get the students doing more of the thinking. I then began to search for ways to make the learning process more transparent to the students. Indeed, I now spend my time looking for ways to get students to take responsibility for their learning and at the same time making the learning more collaborative."*

Many practitioners within Skills for Life have expressed concern that government initiatives have contributed little to raising standards in teaching and learning overall. These two studies are a must-read for anyone interested in the debate about how best to raise standards in literacy, numeracy and ESOL and the messages are timely and persuasive.

Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

This is an invitation to anyone involved in the field of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL education to write and share their ideas, practice and evidence with RaPAL readers. The RaPAL network includes approximately two hundred managers, practitioner researchers, researchers, tutors, students and librarians in adult, further and higher education in the UK. It also has overseas members in Canada, USA, New Zealand, Australia, South America, Europe and Africa.

The RaPAL network produces a journal three times a year – winter, spring and summer – for contributions linking research and practice. RaPAL welcomes articles, reviews, reports, commentaries, letters and cartoons which reflect the range of activities and interests of those involved in this field. By writing for this network you will have the opportunity to refine your ideas and disseminate to the field.

For RaPAL, research involves asking questions, trying to answer them, asking other people, recording what they say, developing ideas, changing them, and writing and sharing ideas in many different ways. We think that these processes should be open to students and tutors as well as to paid researchers. They often underpin the day-to-day reflective and evaluative work of practitioners but are not usually recognised as research activity.

Journal Structure

We have decided to retain the three section structure introduced in 2002-3, as a means of addressing the emerging needs in this field:

1. Ideas for teaching
Descriptive and reflective pieces on teaching and learning to meet the needs of current teachers in this field. The contributions must demonstrate democratic practice.
 2. Developing Research and Practice
An open-ended category for a varied range of contributions. We want to include articles which show people trying out ideas, pushing back boundaries alongside analysis and critique
 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives
- A section for more sustained pieces of analysis about research, policy and practice which will have refereed journal status

We welcome contributions for each of these sections and are happy to discuss your ideas and proposals with you. We want the RaPAL Journal to continue its vibrant tradition of publishing views from all parts of the field.

Guidelines for Contributors

General

1. Writing for RaPAL must be in a readable, accessible style aimed at a diverse and international readership.
2. If you are writing about individuals or groups you must follow the usual ethical guidelines, seeking permission whenever possible and in all cases representing people fairly.
3. We are always looking for articles which link research and practice in some way. There are many possibilities and we do not set hard and fast rules about how this should be done.
4. RaPAL articles should encourage readers to question dominant or taken for granted views of literacy, numeracy and ESOL. We would, for example, challenge views which fail to acknowledge the abilities of learners to be actively involved in developing and evaluating practice.

Specific Pointers

1. When you submit your work, please indicate the intended section for publication.
2. Articles should have a title with clear headings and subheadings; and must contain a clear introduction, indicating the scope of the piece.
3. If you write for section 3, the article should:
 - relate to the practice** of learning or teaching adult literacy (in any language)
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 - provide 'critical' analysis** of the topic, involving theoretical underpinnings; and
 - be coherent** with a clear structure, explanation of any terminology, use of examples and the usual referencing conventions (Use the Harvard referencing system and make sure that all references are in alphabetical order and complete).
5. Length- Articles should be 1,000- 2500 words for sections 1 and 2 and not more than 4000 words for section 3. These limits do not include any accompanying references and bibliographies. Reviews and reports should be 50-800 words.

6. Illustrations and graphic material are much appreciated. Please consult the editor about preferred formats.
7. Your article must be submitted both in hard copy and in electronic form. Please send it word processed, double-spaced, on A4 paper and with numbered pages. The electronic versions must be sent as Word files attached to emails. If we do not receive both versions, we cannot consider the paper for publication.
8. Please provide a title page with your name, title, and contact details (postal address, e-mail address and phone number). It is very important that you also provide a short 2-3 line biography to accompany the article. We like to encourage correspondence between readers and writers and if you would like readers to get in touch with you, please provide contact details at the end of the article.

Editorial Procedures

1. All contributions are peer reviewed by researchers and practitioners in the Editorial Group. The reviewing for section three is done by an experienced researcher and two additional researcher practitioners and focuses on the criteria noted above.
2. Feedback is provided by the editor within eight ten weeks of receiving your text and constructive comment (and notes to be of use in its development) are made if appropriate.
If the article is accepted, once the amendments have been made, the editor will work on a final edit. We may make minor alterations ourselves and the final version will be sent to you for checking before it goes to print.

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