

# RaPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy

**This edition of the journal reports on the 2007 RaPAL conference, which was held at Queen's University, Belfast. The conference theme was *Learning journeys, voices and identities in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL*. The journal takes readers on a journey through the conference, presenting the voices of presenters as well as those of participants.**

**Journal**

## The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

### Who we are

RaPAL is an independent national network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult literacies and numeracy. 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

- **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
- **emphasise** the importance of social context in literacy
- **encourage** collaborative and reflective research
- **believe** in democratic practices in adult literacy
- **create** networks by organising events (including an annual conference) to contribute to national debate
- **publish** a journal three times a year

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

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

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 the 2007 RaPAL conference was *Learning journeys, voices and identities in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL*. This edition of the journal takes readers on a journey through the 2007 conference, presenting the voices of presenters as well as those of participants.

We hope this journal reflects the strong presence of learners at the conference. Learners made a number of key contributions:

- At the pre-conference event, two learners from a Belfast literacy group launched the Literacy Travellers' Tree. Sue Cathcart's article tells the story of the tree and how it played an important part in the conference.
- A group of learners from Edinburgh delivered a workshop.
- The second day of the conference saw the launch of a collection of learners' work, *Reflections*, which was sponsored by RaPAL. Details of this publication are in this journal.
- The launch of *Reflections* was preceded by a special event in which learners from all over Northern Ireland read their writing, showed photographs and sang to an appreciate audience. Some of the contributions are included in the journal.

The 2007 conference was very much an international event. The keynote address was delivered by Inez Bailey, Director of NALA (Ireland). Many participants travelled from great distances to the conference. There were contributions to the programme of workshops from Australia, South Africa, Brazil, America and Canada. Sheila Stewart and Tannis Atkinson

from Canada gave a poetry reading in a local bookshop on the first evening of the conference. They were joined by Shelley Tracey, who organised the conference at Queen's University Belfast along with a large and enthusiastic group of local practitioners.

For many participants from the UK, this was their first visit to Belfast. We hope that the incessant rain has not put them off from returning to Northern Ireland. For local practitioners, the event was their first experience of RaPAL. They were delighted at the opportunity to participate in RaPAL and to meet colleagues from so many other countries.

We are grateful to the organisations which supported the attendance of many of the conference delegates: Learning Connections, Scotland, NALA, Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland, NRDC, Proteus, NALA and the Basic Skills Agency (now merged with NIACE).

The conference enabled us to understand and to celebrate what we as literacy workers and learners have in common and what makes us different from each other. These commonalties and differences are symbolised by the single trunk and many leaves of the Literacy Travellers' Tree. The leaves which appear throughout the journal were created by learners and practitioners alike, and we invite you to create your own tree and share the images with us.

*Amy Burgess  
Shelley Tracey*

## Sally Murphy

We are sad to announce that Sally Murphy, one of the founder members of RaPAL, died suddenly in November 2007 after a short illness. Sally had a long career as an adult literacy tutor in Bradford College. Along with her colleague, Mandy McMahon (see RaPAL Issue 14, Spring 1991), she took part in the first RaPAL conference at Lancaster in 1984 and was one of the main movers in establishing it as a membership organization, taking on roles as membership secretary and treasurer. Early meetings were held in a pub in Manningham Lane. RaPAL journals were relayed between Lancaster and Bradford in the boot of Sally's car. Sally was always fun to work with and had a strong vision of research in practice that placed learners in a central position. Early issues of the journal are evidence of that vision with reports of the many activities she participated in, including events organised jointly with learners and tutors, European visits and exchanges.

*David Barton and Mary Hamilton*

## Section 1. Learners' Voices

### I Am An Adult Learner

*Rhonda Weir*

*Rhonda is a learner from Northern Ireland.*

I am an adult learner.  
 I wonder what classes I will do next.  
 I hear my soul cry out when I want to learn.  
 I see myself no longer stupid.  
 I want to learn as much as I can.  
 I am an adult learner.

I pretend that I am a teacher and this I do  
 with my children each day.  
 I feel more confident and more able.  
 I touch my soul with all I have learnt.  
 I worry less than I used to because I made  
 a life changing choice.  
 I should reach out and encourage more  
 adult learners.  
 I cry when I see people who think they are  
 not good enough.  
 I am an adult learner.



I say get involved in essential skills.  
 I dream of gaining as much education as  
 possible, in order to help my kids.  
 I try, no matter what I do.  
 I hope for peace and understanding.  
 I Am An Adult Learner.

### Literacy and Learning Trees

*Sue Cathcart*

*Sue is a literacy tutor in Belfast. She was a member of the RaPAL organising committee.*

I am standing in front of an enormous collage of a tree, telling a group of conference delegates that it is a well known fact that when in Australia it is common for people to communicate with each other by sticking notes onto trees. This seems to be going down well with the audience until a delegate raises her hand and in a distinctly Australian accent says that she thinks this would be difficult as there are very few trees to speak of in Australia, and putting notes on them would involve trekking hundreds of miles in hazardous conditions.

This is the bit where you are supposed to wake up and be relieved that it is just a dream and go back to sleep. Unfortunately for me this was the RaPAL conference and at this point I had to admit that I had got the idea from a Radio 4 programme and had missed the bit about where the trees were.

The RaPAL traveller's tree began life as an idea back in December 2006, when the committee first got together. I was put in

charge of learner contributions and felt that an all inclusive visual display that gave learners and tutors an opportunity to comment on and give their personal feelings on literacy, would be an interesting project. The premise was based on the idea of the 'traveller's tree', where travellers pass wisdom and insight to fellow travellers behind them, by fixing notes onto particular trees (but not in Australia).

I sent out a letter to tutors asking for contributions from them and their learners and got a good response. I think it worked because people liked the idea of sending a message, the writing was for a specific purpose and they were being asked for their personal thoughts. The contributions could be anonymous, signed or even have photographs attached.

I think what was very important and what I hadn't taken into account was the pleasure that learners got from the idea of having something of their own on display at

## Section 1.

Queen's. Those that had contributed to the display were invited to the learner events afternoon at Queen's and could view their work.

A lot of the messages were very moving and all of them thought provoking. Some were very simply written, others were decorated with glitter and ribbons; all had been constructed with care. We had contributions from across the whole spectrum of adult essential skills learning.

A week before the conference I constructed a massive painting of a tree and stuck the leaves to it. I had to do this outside in the back garden much to the interest of my two cats; they walked about on it looking surprised and a bit critical. I then brought the tree back to Queen's where it was completed by the conference delegates who constructed and added their own leaves.

The finished tree was then hung in the Council Chamber where I have to say that it looked great; it was visually arresting and because of the diversity of contributors, gave a true reflection of the impact that essential skills has on people's lives.



*Sue Cathcart, Northern Ireland*

## Poetry Reading

Following the pre-conference event, a poetry reading took place in local bookshop called No Alibis. For those who missed the event, we give you one of the poems of each of the poets who took part. Shelley Tracey, who was last to read, reflected that it has been a great challenge for her to "come out" to her students as a poet in her practice as a teacher educator.

### Reading the Blues

*Sheila Stewart, Toronto, Canada  
from A Hat to Stop a Train  
(Re-printed with permission from Wolsak  
and Wynn Publishers.)*

She called them Blues. *Any Blues?*  
Thin blue airmail letters from her sisters.  
*Any Blues?* she'd call to whoever brought in  
the mail. Sometimes we'd pretend there  
were none, then draw them from pockets or  
sleeves with  
a flourish, or present them on a silver tray –  
*voila!* - with a cup of tea and a digestive  
biscuit. *Any Blues?* she'd call from her bed.

What do we do with Blues?  
Smell them, hold them tight,  
read them slow, tuck them  
under a pillow to re-read at night.

She wasn't a lady to cry the blues.

What didn't she say to me, or herself?  
What can you tell a mother anyway?  
Unwritten letters. *Don't go crying, she'd say.*

What we tell each other:  
a pale picture, a slight blue.

### From "Mask Migrations"

*Tannis Atkinson*

#### 1966

Water drips into lint memories,  
upturned tail of scorpion under  
Quito stone sink,  
smell of eucalyptus sharp in the air and  
green frogs beneath the stairs.  
Walls with teeth embrace this house,  
broken bottles cut the equator's sky.  
Pale inside I watch through bars of my  
metal gate boys without laughing on the  
cobblestone run,  
tongues too fast for my English ears.

**1976**

Sub-urbans whose wishes sound familiar  
 spread their flag and ask me back.  
 Visitor from another airline  
 I stumble on the television.  
 It is comfortable here in the future of their  
 ambitions, warm in the breath of their  
 furnace, soft in the vault of safety deposits.  
 Whole continents are burning for me to read  
 by, glaciers groan.  
 I shut my ears, my eyes, I smile.  
 Home is where the hard is, a hearth-ache.

**Walking in Margaret's Shoes at Whitehead**

*Shelley Tracey*

A poem, like a memory, takes time  
 to unfold, to raise its new wings, preparing  
 for flight. The stern green poppy head  
 refuses to hurry to relinquish her seed.

My words come slowly like late summer  
 roses, days after the gentle gift of your  
 journey, when you lent me your shoes and  
 your view of what's passed. You said,  
 houses were once the inhabitants here.  
 You said, landslides have altered the shape  
 of this hill.

And while the sea distantly told itself  
 secrets,  
 Maire named her childhood with stories of  
 flowers.  
 Together we noticed fern scribbled on rock,  
 vines tonguing the lighthouse,  
 nasturtiums on sea sand.

Even now, I am walking the labyrinth of  
 memory, while seagulls decisively lift from  
 the water, head precisely toward the  
 horizon, and never return.

## Learners' Voices: Report back on our workshop: CLAN Edinburgh Dyslexia group

*Pam, Katie, Angela, Lynn, Liz, Tam, Soozin, Gillian*

*We are a group of learners with dyslexia who have only been together for a short time but took on the challenge of planning and organising a workshop for the RaPAL conference, 14-16 June 2007 in Belfast, sharing our knowledge and experiences of dyslexia.*

**Before the conference**

Before the conference we worked together, identified our different strengths and abilities to decide how all could contribute to the workshop. 'We had very little time and most of us had never done a workshop before so we were all a bit nervous.' However, although many in the group felt under pressure to produce a workshop at short notice, we all worked as a team and delivered a fabulous participative workshop.

**Our Workshop**

The workshop began by exploring what dyslexia meant to people. This not only shared existing knowledge, it allowed all the participants to expand their knowledge with the knowledge of the group and also to look at some positives which are often ignored, such as creativity and 'seeing the bigger picture.' We also explored learning

styles/preferences and the importance of using a multi-sensory approach by juggling!

'Everything fell into place, we made it fun by getting everyone to join in with all the activities.'

'People seemed to appreciate the personal knowledge and experiences.' We got extremely positive feedback from the 15 participants. In our dyslexia group we work with learning logs to record what we will take from each session and what we feel is important to remember to pass on to other learners. We gave these to the workshop participants as an evaluation tool and were very pleased with all the responses:

'I have had various training programmes on dyslexia but this one was probably the

best because it was delivered by people with dyslexia.'

'Excellent workshop, informative and fun!'

'A stimulating and thought provoking workshop. I will use aspects of it myself in the future.'

'As a tutor I must promote different learning styles and not just my preferred style.'

'The workshop gave me a chance to reflect on how I learn.'

As we reflected on our workshop the only thing we feel could have been done differently was time!

### **What we feel we gave to the workshop**

We gave the people round the tables support! We let them talk to see what they actually knew and asked them questions in a way that made them think rather than giving them the answers. We each supported each other and offered an ear to

listen to if any of us had suggestions or ideas. Some of us gave personal opinions – about not being able to read and write or tell the time when we left school – most of us used to hate it, we were honest and personal.

### **What we feel we got from the workshop**

The feeling of giving the people who come to our workshop a little bit more of an understanding. That they went away with ideas and suggestions to use with what ever they do. We are not only helping ourselves but other people as there is very little help and support for people with dyslexia. The whole conference was an eye opener because only a few of us were learners – almost all the rest were tutors. It was scary and a bit intimidating at first but once we started talking to people it was more relaxed and welcoming – we were just as important as everyone else and treated as equals– the people who came to the workshop listened to us!

## **In the words and images of learners: Learner Presentations: 15th June**

*Margaret:* "I read a poem I wrote about my mother. We had to stand up at a podium to read. I was a bit scared but it was good to hear other people reading."

*Rita:* "I was very nervous but I was glad I did it!"

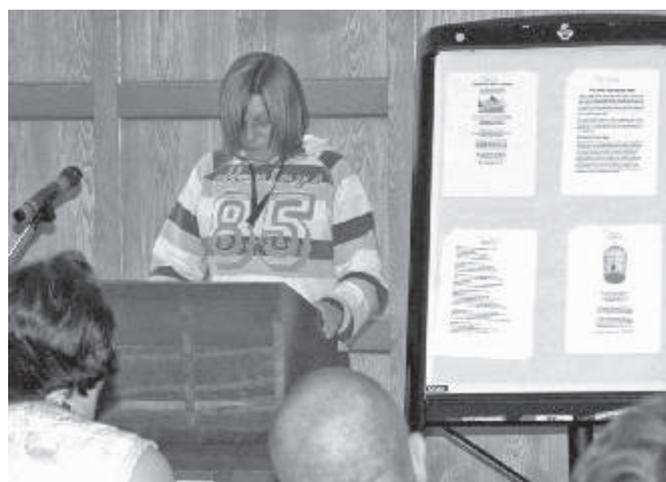
*Nessie:* "I never thought we would achieve what we did. This was a great boost for our morale. It was all worth it!"

### **Friendship**

*By Nessie*

Develop friendship into something special  
Someone special close to your heart  
This cannot be torn apart  
I want to shout  
I know you inside out  
Get into action  
Regard with affection

Be there to console  
When you're in a hole  
To feel at ease, this does please  
Stay loyal and faithful  
This is a test to be blessed  
With joy and laughter  
Today and ever after



*Kathy Kirkham reading*

## Why Oh Why?

Why oh why? On a cold November day in  
1974

Our happy lives ended  
With thundering knocks upon our door  
It was armed police, front and back  
To arrest us for crimes we did not commit

They took us to Guilford in Surrey  
At breakneck speed and in a dreadful hurry  
A cavalcade of cars and cycles, blue flashing  
lights  
Sirens were screaming that added to our  
fright

Their mind games they started without any  
delay  
On the way to our cells they stripped us off  
our clothes  
Much to our dismay  
We protested our innocence, but they just  
laughed at us  
They told us to stop crying and making a fuss

Interviews had started and so did the abuse  
We got no sleep, we got no food  
Just terrible comments that were so rude  
Our minds became exhausted, we could not  
even think  
We were too tired to protest or kick up a stink  
They knew we were innocent that we were  
not to blame  
We knew where we were, as plenty of our  
witnesses would claim

So they added on the pressure and the  
mental stress  
The threats they were making about me, left  
Paul under duress you see  
He decided to confess for crimes he did not do  
He thought quite naively he was innocent  
(they would know that too)

He thought it would all get sorted  
When he would get to court  
Little did he know the nightmare was just  
about to start?  
It would leave our daughter without a father  
And us with broken hearts

Our daughter was two weeks old when his  
trial begun  
In the highest court in England  
"Old Bailey Court Number One"  
The crown came out in force

Black cloaks, briefs and curly wigs  
They looked upon the accused as "Horrible  
Irish Pigs"  
The defence called their witnesses who gave  
evidence in turns  
But it didn't stop the police threats of death  
By shooting or even to be burned

They got their evil way at last  
The jury had gone out to decide upon  
Their futures (of which there was lots of  
doubts)  
Forty eight hours later the jury had come  
back  
They came in with guilty verdicts  
They should have worn black

The judge began his sentencing  
Heavy handed is not the word  
He gave Carole 25 years no less  
Gerry Conlon got thirty  
And Paddy thirty five  
I got afraid for Paul then as I thought he  
wants to take his life  
The judge spoke of his regret that he could  
not hang him  
He gave him life never to be released

We couldn't breathe too numb to cry  
All we could say or think was "Why oh why?"  
I hope the police were happy even thought  
they knew they were wrong  
Four young lives stolen  
How were they going to be strong?  
It would be fifteen long years before they  
were set free

They were released in a blaze of glory  
Media and paparazzi clamouring, begging  
their story  
But where were these people all these years  
gone by?  
When the printed headlines "Not in Hell"  
Now they ask "What was it like in your cell?"  
Well all I can tell you I am so glad they are  
free  
Trying to live, and get on just like you and me  
It has been really hard to pen these lines of  
so many heartaches and memories of those  
days gone by  
Still I keep asking "Why oh why?"

*Gina*

## Section 1.

### Wales Meets America - a meeting of minds

#### *Stacy Perry and Gill Britten*

*Stacy is a practitioner from Texas, USA; Gill Britten is the Family Learning Co-ordinator and a Basic Skills teacher at Yale College in Wrexham*

#### ***In Stacy's words:***

"Lately, travel seems to be so much more difficult than it used to be. I love to travel and had anxiously been awaiting my first visit to Ireland. I was excited and honoured to have been selected to present a presentation of Learning Disability simulation exercises. Unfortunately, I experienced several flight delays and cancellations. I finally landed and arrived in Belfast approximately 15 minutes after my scheduled time to speak. As I stood in the airport looking around, I wondered if I had made a mistake in planning to attend.

Within minutes after my arrival at Queen's University, I knew that I had made a good decision to attend. Although I was new to RaPAL and knew no one at the conference, people quickly introduced themselves and I soon felt at ease. I had been disappointed to have missed my presentation time, but was told that one of the presenters had offered to switch time slots so that I would be able to speak the next day. On the day that I was to present, I met Gill over lunch and we discussed our research. We made a quick decision to do a joint presentation. I am sure that some people might think this hasty decision was nuts. Without practice or prior experience as co-presenters, we delivered our presentations as a team. I would not change a thing. Our information, knowledge and backgrounds seemed to compliment each other well. Ironically, one of my simulation exercises was written in Welsh. Living in the United States, I have successfully been able to use this exercise as most people do not recognize the language. My co-presenter recognized it immediately.

I left the RaPAL conference with a love for the Irish landscape and a new appreciation for the advanced research regarding LD that has been done within the UK. I found that those of us who choose the field of Adult

Literacy seem to have more commonalities than differences. There seemed to be an immediate warmth and connection as I met various RaPAL members. Most importantly, I left the conference with a new friend and a renewed passion for my presentation topic. Thank you to everyone that made my visit so wonderful and a special thanks to my co-presenter Gill Britten."

#### ***In Gill's words:***

The RaPAL Conference inevitably provides a wealth of knowledge, information and the chance to meet with such interesting people. Belfast was no exception. Stacy's late arrival from Texas created a unique opportunity to for us to combine and co-deliver our workshops. As she said, statistically the chances of two strangers from opposite ends of the world, coming together with work that dovetailed so well are not good. Factor into the equation the chances of those two people being able to successfully work together following a brief chat over lunch and the odds are considerably reduced. It was such a privilege to work with Stacy. Apart from the fact she is a really interesting and knowledgeable person to talk to, she provided for me a shining example of someone who had overcome so much and worked so hard to get to where she is now. The insight she gave into the challenges of ADD have been invaluable. I was able to return to some of my learners facing similar issues and say with absolute conviction, 'you *can* do this, it *is* possible.' This was a gem of an experience created by a now valued friend.

## Section 1.

### Talk to Me

*Gill Britten and Jill McMinn*

This work in progress is an action research project looking into the effectiveness of the Yale Profile (YP) in identifying adult learners' poor oracy skills in relation to their basic skills learning.

*Gill Britten is the Family Learning Co-ordinator and a Basic Skills teacher at Yale College in Wrexham, with particular interest in adult oracy skills (speaking and listening).*

*Jill McMinn is the Advisory Teacher SLCD Education Inclusion in Wrexham with responsibility for the speech and language provision for children and young people in statutory mainstream education and resourced provision*

#### Background

For sometime I had been concerned about a particular group of learners; they are those who to appear to be able to manage every other aspect of their lives – long term relationships, employment, own their own homes, successfully cope with families and finances, often engaging in community activities and yet find reading and writing so very difficult. The diagnostic assessments by and large were confirming what was already known about their difficulties and the established repertoire of strategies was working effectively. I was missing part of the puzzle.

At about the same time, I was working with Jill on a new Family Learning project supporting parents of children with speech language and communication difficulties (SLCD). It quickly became apparent that many of these parents, not only shared some of their children's difficulties, but had similar difficulties with their basic skills, as the learners I've already mentioned. We then realised that the element given the least attention in the adult diagnostic assessments we looked at, was oracy; the crucial speaking and listening skills that underpin literacy and numeracy learning.

#### Introduction

"Reading and writing float on a sea of words" (Britton 1970)

It is well established that oracy underpins all learning (Britton 1970). Speech and language difficulties can affect every aspect of daily life and learning. Recent research (Law *et al* 2000) shows that 1 in every 10 children will experience some kind of speech and language

difficulty during their time in school. Local collegiate experience suggests that many of them re-appear as adults in basic skills classes, but currently there appears to be little published research to substantiate this. SLCD can be a hidden, life long disability. We have come to believe that even one aspect of speech and language difficulty can have a significant negative impact on an adult's ability to acquire basic skills. Inevitably this will affect the ability to progress at work and contribute fully to community life.

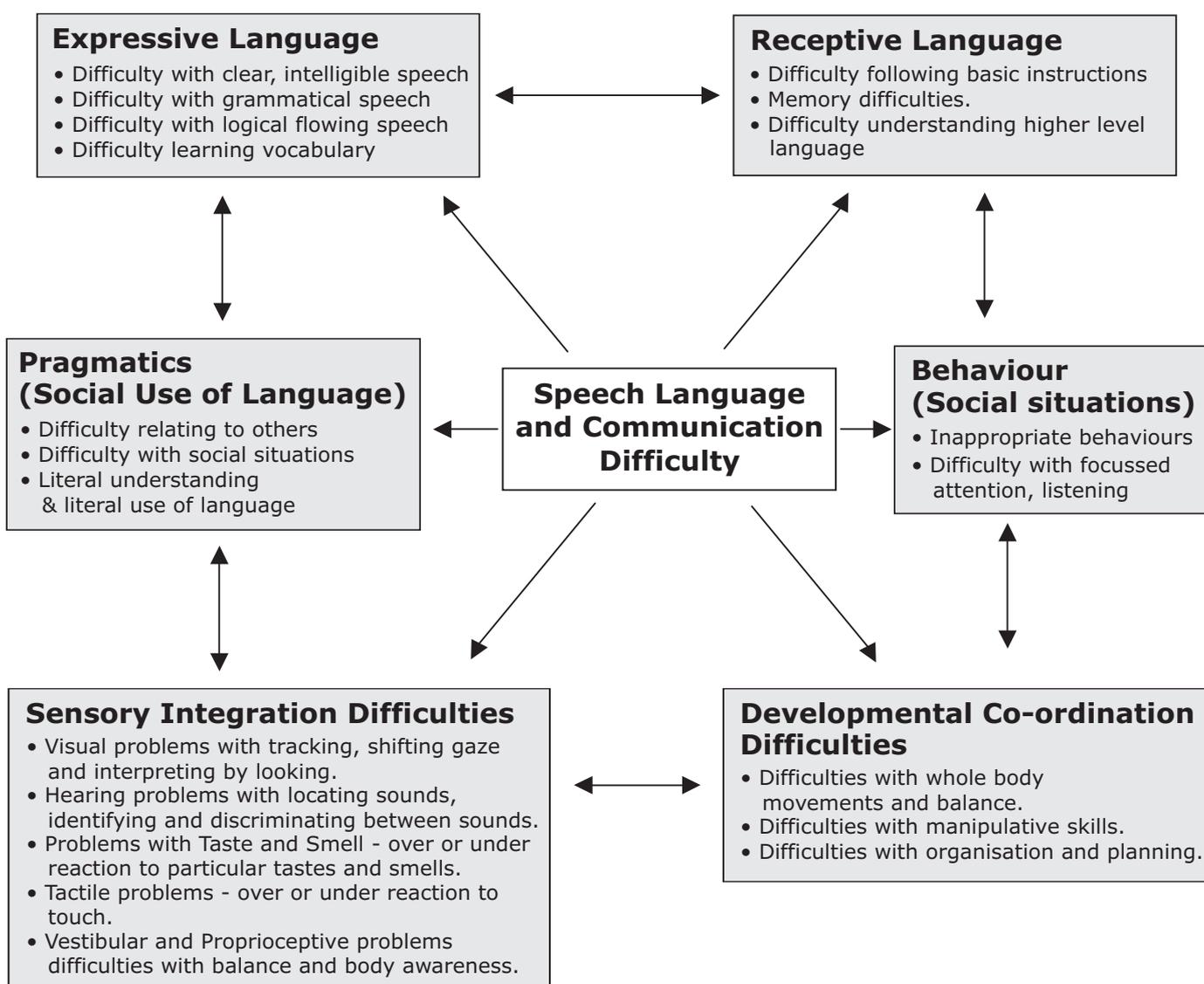
The Yale Profile is intended to be used with learners who are not making a similar or expected rate of progress compared to the rest of the group. This is despite; good attendance, having the apparent ability to successfully cope with other aspects of daily life and despite both the learner's and teacher's best efforts. It is not really intended for use with ESOL learners or those having clearly identified, long term, global learning needs. However, if there are additional underlying, oracy difficulties, anecdotal evidence suggests the strategies and resources can be equally relevant and effective.

A learner's profile is made up of responses to statements that appear on a series of checklists. The YP is intended to give a better understanding of a learner's specific difficulties. It includes a range of strategies and resources to help teachers adjust or change their style of teaching accordingly. It should be understood from the onset that addressing adult oracy difficulties takes time. There is no 'quick fix'.

## An overview of speech and language difficulties in adults

Speech and language difficulties fall into three main categories: expressive, receptive and social use of language, which are closely associated with co-ordination, sensory integration and behavioural difficulties. These frequently co-occur in people with oracy difficulties. Adult learners may well present with any or all of the

above; moreover these may not be immediately apparent. Though these six areas are described separately (Fig 1) and may initially appear to be neatly contained, the diagram is intended to indicate how the language process is inextricably interlinked with the other functional difficulties and the considerable overlaps that occur across all areas.



Learners are either born with speech and language difficulties or acquire them through accident or illness. There is no "cure," but strategies can be learnt to improve communication and learning. Oracy underpins every aspect of basic skills learning, and should therefore be embedded into most elements of every teaching session.

The YP has been designed with the six previously described areas, in mind. It compliments the generally available diagnostic assessments, so the skill areas usually covered by these have not been included. There are checklists for each area, scored from 1-5. (5 is the best, most applicable or the statement that consistently applies). Some questions are based on

teacher observation, some rely on the learner's perception of his or her difficulties and some relate to specific practical tasks, again writing and spelling are not included. It was our intention to give the learner the maximum opportunity for input without feeling tested or examined.

The purpose of carrying out a YP is to give both teacher and learner a deeper understanding of how any specific oracy difficulties may be impacting on learning. This knowledge can then be used to help inform individual learning and teaching plans in any setting. It is intended to help develop a style of teaching that will minimize the negative impact of any difficulties that may be present and so maximise learning. Explanatory notes and more detailed information relating to each area of oracy, teaching strategies and activities mapped to the adult core curriculum (for colleagues who require it) are also included on the CD. The checklists provide the teacher with a wide range of information that includes the learner's preferred paper colour, size and style of font, required thinking time, the optimum information word level for verbal or written instructions, any discrete sensory, proprioceptive, visual, or auditory difficulties and the learner's preferred learning style. The learner receives a coloured graph of his or her difficulties, created from the percentage of points scored on each of the checklists. This is an informal representation and in no way is intended to represent 'hard' scientific data.

### Results to Date

The teacher evaluation from colleagues who have used YP is quite detailed. It includes information about the teacher's age, experience and work setting to ensure we receive feedback from a range of providers. The learner's perception of the experience, the usefulness of the strategies, resources are all included. Due to the complex nature of oracy difficulties, it may be some time before further data about the effectiveness of the some of the resources or strategies will be noticed.

The data from 15 completed feedback sheets from English speaking colleagues based in

colleges and training provisions across North Wales, has been universally positive and encouraging.

**Learners** are overwhelmingly enthusiastic in their evaluation. They all enjoyed the process, found it interesting and very helpful to understand more about the possible reasons behind their difficulties. They all appreciated having the colour print out of their responses to the questions.

**Practitioners**, overall found the suggested strategies and resources very helpful. These are designed to be easily embedded into whole group or individual teaching and are already proving to be useful for 10 out of 13 teachers. The criticism of the manual recording supports our original intention to have this computerised once the wording and content of the checklists are refined. The feedback sheets have been very useful here in highlighting the odd ambiguities.

The Yale Profile has since gone out to colleagues in Scotland, Ireland, England, USA and Australia. Our Welsh and some Scottish colleagues all attended full or half day training sessions. Those from the remaining countries received the Profile 'cold' either through word of mouth or following a short conference workshop session, so this may well change when the recent feedback filters through.

### Conclusion

The field of speech and language difficulties in relation to adult's basic skills learning is relatively new and there appears to be little, published UK research. The ideas for the checklists, resources and support strategies are based on our joint experience. The work so far has proved to be very useful to those that have fed back to us. The cost per learner is minimal, beyond the time to do it and make any relevant resources. The Yale Profile is freely available to anyone on request. Your evaluation or thoughts about the project will be a valuable addition to the current body of knowledge. We offer it in the spirit of collaborative working and in the hope that as practitioners, we can all work together to continue improving current practice and make

learning an enjoyable and essentially successful experience for adult learners.

If anyone would like a copy of the CD please contact Gill at [gmb@yale-wrexham.ac.uk](mailto:gmb@yale-wrexham.ac.uk)

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### The Journeys Project

#### Julie Collins and Allan Higginson

Julie has worked in basic skills since 1979. She began teaching phonics using Portland Blend. Inspired by Freire, learning from students and finding her own confidence she now uses more holistic methods to empower students. She says "I try to focus on their issues, their lives, their discourses".

Julie explains the Journeys project: Adults have complex lives and stories to tell. I feel it is important to celebrate those stories. Using multi modal approaches helps us to have less reliance on written literacy to communicate. In this project the group decided to explore their 'journeys' - a combination of the emotional, physical, spiritual and geographical changes. The challenge was to create a photographic record using metaphor. This narrative works on two levels. The column on the left hand side presents the story in the voices of Allan (learner) and Julie (tutor), while the right hand side contains Julie's reflections.

Clare Grundy (Social Inclusion Officer, Pyramid Arts Centre) asked the group at James Lee House (homeless hostel) to become involved in the Spanish Culture Fest in 2005. A season of activities, events and entertainment for all ages in Warrington's town centre focussing on Spanish culture. James Lee House students were invited to exhibit at the Pyramid Arts Centre. "Can we go to Spain?" But those thoughts were put back as quickly as they had surfaced. "Things like this don't happen to people like us."

So why 'Journeys'? In establishing the aims of this project, the group; residents and ex-residents from the hostel, Claire, Mike (project worker) and I, decided we wanted to challenge the prejudice and ignorance of the neighbourhood. The 'steering group' researched ideas and the story of Juan Carlos' journey across Spain inspired the decision about the subject. Next? The discussion about which 'media' would support their interests and interpretations.

Martin (student) negotiated over dates and development of the theme with Miguel Navarro (photographer), via the internet. Miguel found his inspiration for developing the ideas of portraits from the artistic representation of marine officials and sailors in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in Spain.

**"The portraits would take up this reference from a contemporary perspective and would end up setting each of the group before the visual background they wanted to produce of their own journeys – geographical, personal, or metaphorical. ....You will see the result of an encounter of different realities, which all occupy one single space, beyond this text." Miguel**

### In Allan's words:

**Spanish Diary.** *A train through eastern Catalunya took me through olive groves and villages. It was like going back to a time in my childhood.*

*Arriving at Montserrat and looking up to the monastery half hidden in the mountain and as if super - glued to the ledge. I knew I needed a head for heights. As you ride the cable car the views are mind blowing – the rippled effects of the mountainous surroundings. And hanging over, the boldness of the cliffs saying to all who came. "I was here from day one and always will be." The Pyrenees, enormous, tranquil and snow peaked and sitting in whipped cream cloud surely hold stories about how life have been before the cable car.*

*What did the Benedictine monks living in solitude in a mountain retreat, safe and hidden by those spectacular mountains think?*

*Six months ago – jobless, homeless and not knowing which way to turn, feeling an utter failure and suffering deep depression. Now living at James Lee House which is a damn sight better than living on the streets, being called a tramp or low life. I've met a group of people learning skills; computers, camera, pottery and art . Joined in. Allan*

**At the conference Allan & I wanted to present the Journey Project and to explore with the participants in the workshop the beginning of the process of using image rather than words to record stories.**

The main impact of the project has been on each student's level of self-esteem and confidence. Affiliation and a sense of belonging. Competences and the acquisition of skills. New identities as photographers not 'scum.' Selfhood and dialogues reflected in their new interests. Security from being stable and not chaotic.

As a tutor, I believe learning must relate to social context to have meaning. This project would allow us to explore stories about 'their journeys' and by recording those experiences create a permanent record. At the centre we have used the arts to complement the text based work because students often don't know what to do after a '20 year class 'A' habit' or years of alcohol abuse. It can be hard to see the possibilities. "It's hard enough to see beyond today."

My approach to teaching and learning has grown from listening to students who have taught me the value of telling their own stories. Collins (2005) In a multi media age I believe we should encourage expression through a range of discourses (visual, written, oral, emotional); exploring spoken & the unspoken, what we know & what we don't know, using symbols &, metaphor to examine and explain. The process - the negotiation, the exploration of meaning, the critical thinking, reflection and finally decisions of what to include. These are as important as the outcome; the photograph, the drama, the word, the poetry, the graffiti, the image.

Both Barton (1994) and Gee (1990) consider that learning cannot be taken in isolation from the contexts in which students experience their lives. We need to explore expressive communication, and non-verbal avenues for making and communicating meaning – a way of learning that encourages a more holistic approach.

## Section 2. Telling our stories, writing our identities

### Voices on the Page

*Amy Burgess, Sam Duncan and Nora Hughes*

#### **About Amy:**

*I have recently finished a PhD on writing and identity in adult literacy education at the Literacy Research Centre, Lancaster University, and am now working as a researcher with the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in London. I previously taught adult literacy for 10 years.*

#### **About Nora:**

*I have worked in literacy education, mainly as a tutor and teacher educator, for about thirty years. Currently I work at the Institute of Education in London. At this point in time my main interests are writing development in adult literacy and language issues in LLN policy and practice.*

#### **About Sam:**

*Sam studied literature, language and film before becoming an adult literacy teacher in 1999. She has taught adult literacy from pre-entry to level two, as well as English as a Foreign Language abroad. She currently divides her time between teaching adult literacy at a Further Education College, teaching on the Postgraduate Certificate in Adult Literacy Teaching at the Institute of Education in London, and working as a literary editor. Sam is also working for a PhD on the use of fiction in the development of adult reading. email: [s.duncan@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:s.duncan@ioe.ac.uk)*

*How do we link writing in the classroom with writing outside the classroom?*

*How do we develop critical thinking about writing?*

*How can this help learners develop as writers?*

*Is a division between authoring skills and technical skills useful in the classroom ?*

*What is an authentic or 'real world' writing task?*

These were some of the questions explored in this workshop, which introduced participants to the NRDC (National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy) student writing project *Voices on the Page*. We began by describing the inspiration for the project and what we have done so far, drawing out links between it and the large-scale NRDC research study *Effective Teaching and Learning: Writing* (Grief et al 2007). These two projects have created renewed interest in writing in adult literacy education in England, particularly in the kind of student-led approaches and the emphasis on personal and creative writing which were a strong feature of literacy teaching in England until relatively recently (O'Rourke and Mace 1992). The workshop examined some of the common issues raised by the projects, considering how we can encourage learners to produce writing that is personally inspired and inspiring as well as being externally 'successful'. It was designed to contribute to several of the conference themes: writing identities;

strategies for meeting the needs of a diverse range of literacy learners; learning and motivation; and developing self confidence in the course of the learning journey. As the title suggests, our aim was to explore ways of teaching writing that work from, with and for the learner's voice.

#### **The Inspiration for *Voices on the Page***

Sam introduced the workshop by describing how the *Voices* project began: "A few years ago I found a copy of Paul Auster's *True Tales of American Life* in a cat charity second hand bookshop near Finsbury Park. I read it and loved it. The introduction explained that Auster was given a radio show where he asked Americans, from all walks of life, to send in their true stories. His promise was that each story received would be read out on air. It was a great success and *True Tales of American Life*, a selection of these stories, was the result. What is so extraordinary, appealing and beautiful about the book is the variety, the multiplicity of voices, a harvesting of the diversity of American experience.

I started trying some of these stories with my adult literacy students, of all levels. Nearly all the students loved them, particularly when I explained how the book came into being. We each found something fascinating in reading the true stories of those who don't usually write stories, those who are usually busy leading their lives. We talked about how great it would be to do something similar in England. We wanted to find a way to produce a beautiful book of student writing from all around the country.

Creative writing, or personal writing, or writing unrelated to 'functional writing' is not emphasised in the English Adult Literacy Core Curriculum or in the National Literacy Tests, or in most of the (English) formal accreditation that I have come across. Some teachers therefore feel discouraged from doing this kind of writing in class; 'official' emphasis does give an impression of what is valued 'externally.' There needed to be more, and more public, platforms to talk about the value of creative, personal writing, of writing as self expression within and without a wider range of social and personal contexts. I discussed this and the *True Tales of American Life* idea with my colleague David Mallows at the NRDC and *Voices on the Page* was born."

We launched *Voices on the Page* in November 2006, calling for students in adult literacy, ESOL and numeracy classes throughout England to send in their stories (true and fictional) and poems. We called for students to write about whatever they wanted to write about, whatever they thought others might want to read about, and send it in. We said that each piece submitted would be put onto an online storybank, for everyone to share, that as many pieces as possible would be published as a book, and that outstanding contributions would be honoured at a celebration event in Adult Learners' Week. Almost 700 pieces were sent in between November 2006 and March 2007, eleven pieces were honoured this past Adult Learners' Week, and the book and storybank are about to be launched (the unexpected but wonderful volume of writing sent in has

meant it's taken us longer than expected to organise).

### **The NRDC *Effective Teaching and Learning: Writing* research study**

Amy Burgess and Sue Grief, who both worked on the *Effective Teaching and Learning: Writing* study, became members of the *Voices on the Page* advisory group, and talking in our early meetings, we realised that the two projects shared a lot of similar ideas about writing - particularly around motivation and the importance of linking the writing done in educational contexts with people's everyday lives.

Amy explained to workshop participants that a number of the issues raised by Sam's discussions with her students after reading *True Tales of American Life*, were echoed by the findings of the NRDC's research on writing. These findings revealed much about learners' motivations for writing and about what helps them to make progress. Learners were interested in writing a large range of texts, not only 'functional' writing, and they made progress when they were encouraged to compose different types of texts. They particularly valued writing that had personal meaning and resonance for them, although they also placed strong emphasis on the technical aspects of writing. Teaching that linked writing in educational settings to the wider world outside and to people's real lives was found to help them gain in confidence. In addition, the research found that learners made progress with writing when teachers provided meaningful contexts for writing activities. All of these findings applied to beginner writers just as much as to the more experienced.

In the workshop Nora gave an example of a writing activity linked to the 'world outside', in which the expertise of a learner and a teacher came together to produce a 'successful' piece of writing. The learner, a young Irish Traveller living in London, was writing to her local councillor demanding that he stop the threatened closure of the site where her grandmother lived. She understood the context - the housing needs

of Travellers in the area and previous dealings with the authorities on this issue – much better than the teacher did. What the teacher had to offer was more formal knowledge of how texts are constructed and how literacy conventions operate at text, sentence and word level. So the process of producing a 'successful' text involved a sharing of expertise between learner and teacher. In the *Voices* workshop a participant who had worked with Aboriginal communities in Australia gave more examples of learners' bringing 'funds of knowledge' to the writing process.

Another issue we discussed in the workshop – and by email for weeks afterwards – was what we mean by 'creativity'. Nora suggested that becoming a skilful writer involves learning how to make language work for us 'creatively', not only in the sense of writing stories or poems but in the broadest sense of the word. The young Traveller woman, who set out to persuade her local councillor to support her grandmother's cause, used 'authoring' skills to create a text that worked 'rhetorically'; in other words it created the impact she was aiming for. The tutor provided support by working with her on both 'technical' and 'strategic' aspects of constructing the letter. Other participants

in the *Voices on the Page* workshop gave examples of approaches to writing development that aimed to draw on learners' sense of themselves as 'creative' users of language.

We have been delighted by the enthusiastic response to *Voices on the Page* from learners and tutors across England. Those who participated in our conference workshop seemed to share this enthusiasm and to support the principles which underpin the project. This response has convinced us that we should try to extend the project for at least one more year, and we are currently looking into ways of doing so. We are also eagerly awaiting the launch of the online bank of learners' writing and the *Voices on the Page* book, which will contain a selection of the pieces submitted to the project as well as teaching ideas. Please watch this space for more information about all these developments.

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## Section 2.

### My Story, Your Story, Our Story: reflections on a workshop

Tannis Atkinson and Sheila Stewart

*Tannis Atkinson grew up in Ecuador, the US, Ghana, India and Canada. She first got involved in adult literacy work as a volunteer in 1981, and has been involved in a number of publishing projects over the years. She is currently the editor of Literacies and dabbles in book arts in her spare time.*

*Sheila worked in community-based literacy for many years and now works on adult literacy issues at the Festival of Literacies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. She is currently involved in a research project with practitioner-researchers about story and diversity in literacy practice. Her collection of poetry A Hat to Stop a Train was published by Wolsak and Wynn in 2003.*

Have you ever been at a literacy conference where the learners seem to be having fun in creative workshops and the practitioners are sitting in rows trying to learn something? How often do practitioners have an opportunity to explore their own learning, their reasons for doing literacy work, and the joys and sorrows they experience in their work?

The theme for this year's RaPAL conference offered a chance to get creative with practitioners, and it being held in Belfast had a particular meaning for each of us. Tannis's ancestors had left Ireland and Scotland for Canada in the early 1800s and she had never seen this part of the world. Sheila's parents are from Northern Ireland and she loves to visit Ireland and her relatives.

#### How do our identities enter literacy work?

We wanted to take the theme of "learning journeys – voices and identities" and apply it to ourselves as literacy workers. We immediately thought of sharing our experience with an informal enquiry group in Toronto that had used fun, arts-based activities. Our experience was that working in this way allowed the group to explore complex questions, and to be rejuvenated in the process.

The informal Story Enquiry group in Toronto met approximately once a month to look at our own stories in the context of our literacy practice. Initially we looked at our stories in relation to other literacy stories - those of

the learners we work with, of the funders and of society as a whole, and the media stories about literacy. Gradually we unearthed our own reasons for doing literacy work, and uncovered the questions, enthusiasms and concerns which fuel our interest in literacy. Since practitioners in Canada work in relative isolation, with few opportunities to get together to reflect on our work or to support one another, spending time together talking about our work is precious. Arts-based activities had allowed us to use this time well, to open up and get at deeper layers of questions and understandings.

We were excited to have a chance to try out some of these activities with a group of literacy practitioners and researchers across the water. But we had our trepidations. Would our European colleagues think we were flakey to spend two sessions making collages and woven accordion books? Several months after the conference, participants have been in touch to tell us that they were pleased to have been stretched in this way. They continue to be amazed by what they produced in the workshop, and have found ways to use the woven accordions in their work with students.

#### At the workshop

To approach literacy holistically, we try to bring all of ourselves - body, emotions, spirit, and mind - to our work. Sometimes we need to get grounded so that we can be fully present. We took the time to stretch and breathe, then introduced ourselves

using an image chosen from a table of full pictures. To help participants think in new ways about their learning journeys and identities, we invited them to choose an object without thinking too much about it, then to write for ten minutes. The objects included some everyday pieces from home, such as mirrors and keys, and some from the natural world, such as leaves, rocks and paper from a wasp's nest. We asked participants to allow the writing and object to take unexpected directions. Then the group shared phrases from what they had written, or thoughts and reflections on the process. Some of the comments from this session were: "I seldom stop to think of my identity – it was revealing"; "Made me start to think about how I work what I am"; and "I found the creative writing challenging – had a sense of panic, but thoughts began to flow when I relaxed."

The following day, after some simple stretches, we began with a soundscape, an exercise borrowed from the LEIS project resource manual. We asked people to make sounds to represent how they were feeling, what a day in their literacy program sounds like and their identity as a literacy worker. This got us using our voices and loosened us up with some laughter.

Then we thought back to the writing from the day before, and began to work with the

woven accordion books. Tannis demonstrated how the book opens in two ways. Some panels are always hidden while others are revealed, which seemed fitting for the theme of identities. Tannis also talked about using unity and repetition to help turn a set of images into a cohesive and artful collage. We sat around tables finding images, words and colourful bits of paper for our books. As we cut and ripped pictures from magazines we chatted about our work, homes, and Ireland. Before we knew it, our time was over! We gathered in a circle to show off our creations, and people said they felt grateful for the expansive chance to reflect on their work, their journey and their identity.

Literacy workers' deep commitment to learners and programs, and the ongoing struggles for funding, can lead to burn-out. It's great when we can give to ourselves as we give to others. When we create space for our own vision and passions, it's easier to support learners and cope with all the challenges of our work. We need to have fun too...the tone, collegiality, and spirit of this conference were part of that effort to help our spirits thrive.

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## Section 2.

### Collaborative Writing: Report on Conference Workshop *Sue Grief*

*Sue Grief is an independent consultant currently undertaking work for the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in England. Her particular interests are the teaching of writing and the embedding of literacy, language and numeracy. Sue worked for the Learning and Skills Development Agency for several years as a Development Advisor for Skills for Life. Prior to this she was County Co-ordinator for Adult Basic Skills in Suffolk.*

We were a small group so our discussion was informal but interesting. We shared experiences from several different countries and from very different teaching contexts. The focus was collaborative writing, our experiences of this, its role in literacy teaching and ways in which it can be introduced in adult literacy classes.

Sue shared the findings of a small development project on collaborative writing that had been undertaken by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in the autumn of 2006. This project followed the larger, 'Effective Practice' research study on Writing and explored a topic which the research evidence suggested would repay further investigation.

Although we tend to think of writing as an individual activity when we reflected on our own experience we were surprised how often we do work with other people to create documents of different kinds. For the learners who were introduced to collaborative writing tasks as part of the project, this was a new way of working in class, as it was for their teachers. The great majority gave positive feedback on the experience and the teachers were impressed by how well the learners worked together and pleased with the benefits learners appeared to derive from the activities.

In the development project the teachers found that when learners were asked to write together they:

- were more willing to take risks with their writing
- understood the value of the process of planning and drafting texts better
- spent a lot of time talking about the

technical aspects of writing and language

- thought carefully about vocabulary
- became more conscious of the reader

Learners reported feeling more confident about their writing and more confident about sharing their writing with others. Teachers also noted some wider benefits from working in this way:

- learners were exposed to different viewpoints and experiences
- some learners contributed more readily in a small group than in the full class
- new members were integrated into the class more quickly
- learners developed trust and respect for each other and gained an understanding of other learners' specific needs.

In the workshop we discussed the role of the teacher in setting up and managing collaborative writing including the need to plan activities carefully, to be able to stand back and let learners work together without teacher intervention, but also, the need to be sensitive to what is happening and to be ready to step in when necessary. We looked at the importance of the materials used for collaborative activities. Finally Sue described some of the writing activities the teachers who took part in the project had used and discussed the possible value of activities of this kind in the contexts in which the members of the group taught.

This publication, sponsored by RaPAL and created by learners and tutors in Northern Ireland, was launched at the conference. It includes a collection of writing and artwork on the themes of learning, memories and aspirations, and a learning alphabet designed by a group of Belfast learners.



## Section 3. Learning journeys and spaces for learning

### Literacies and learning in the prison context

*Deirdre Parkinson*

*Deirdre Parkinson is an independent researcher.*

Over the past two years I have been undertaking research on literacies within HMP Cornton Vale, Scotland's women's prison. Over three rounds of fieldwork, I met with 38 women to discuss their literacies and learning both within and before prison. I also met with 10 of the prison staff and 10 staff from the Learning Centre and sat in on 17 classes, covering a variety of subjects within the Learning Centre and the Links Centre. Whilst this research is still very much work-in-progress, the aim of the workshop was to share some of the initial findings and to compare these with the perceptions of the workshop participants.

The workshop began with a brainstorming session, with participants discussing the characteristics of a 'typical' female prisoner. According to those present she comes from a deprived area, is aged 20-30 and is serving a sentence of 5-7 years. She has served between 2 and 7 previous sentences and has been a persistent offender since school. If she has children they are either in care or being looked after by her family. She is likely to have experienced domestic violence and has issues with housing and drugs. She went to school 'on and off' and went downhill from 14. School was a negative experience for her. She probably had no qualifications although it was suggested that as she is from Scotland, she may have benefited from Scotland's renowned education system. She probably has literacies issues and goes to education because it's a diversion. When asked where these characteristics came from, participants mentioned the media and basic skills research.

Having established the participants' perceptions of the female prisoner, we then looked at the context in which my research was undertaken. Scotland's overall prison population (male and female) has grown significantly over the past 15 years, with a 33% increase since 1992:

1992	5,357
1995	5,657
1998	6,082
2001	6,172
2004	6,885
2006	6,857
8/6/2007	7,140

Of the 7,140 above, 305 were women i.e. 4%. They comprised:

Untried Female Adults	61
Untried Female Young Offenders	9
<b>Total Women Untried</b>	<b>70</b>
Sentenced Female Adults	208
Sentenced Female Young Offenders	27
<b>Total Women Sentenced</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>

Source: SPS Website

Whilst total numbers have increased by some 20% from 1995-2006, the number of women held at HMP Cornton Vale has increased by 72% over the past ten years:

1996/97	173	1997/98	166	1998/99	180	1999/00	195	2000/01	190
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2001/02	236	2002/03	245	2003/04	238	2004/05	246	2005/06	298
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In the year 2005-2006, the maximum number of female prisoners was 368 on 29 November 2005, with an average cost per prisoner place in Scotland of £30,338. (1)

In 2006, there were 2,050 liberations of women from Scottish prisons. A 'liberation' is not necessarily an individual woman – many may serve several short sentences within a year. The largest number, 413 (20%) of the liberations were from the City of Glasgow. Looking just at those returning to Glasgow, in terms of sentence 242 (59%) were on remand; 78 (19%) were fine defaulters and others sentenced to less than 31 days; 90 (22%) had been sentenced to

between 31 days and 4 years; 3 (1%) had been sentenced to 4 years or more. Workshop participants were very surprised at the number of women on remand or serving short sentences.

Having looked at the prison context, we moved on to discuss education in Cornton Vale. Formal education is available through the Links Centre, which provides induction and pre-release programmes, and through the Learning Centre's accredited courses. Other formal programmes are also available such as cognitive skills and anger management. In addition there are many opportunities to engage in informal education through music, open learning and drama. The prison has a reader-in-residence, produces a regular magazine and promotes the Storybook Mums project.

Of the 38 women who agreed to participate in the research, I spoke to 32 about their literacies and learning before, during and after prison, including school. I met with 15 of them a second time and talked about their everyday literacies practices within the prison. I spoke to 3 remand prisoners about opportunities for education whilst on remand and to one woman about her involvement with the Storybook Mums Project. As part of a drive to promote peer tutors for literacies learners in the prison, several women had successfully completed an ITALL course: Introductory Training in Adult Literacies Learning. Subsequently, a 'fast-track' ITALL course had been delivered so I had the opportunity to speak with two women, one from each course, about their experiences of the ITALL courses and peer tutoring in the prison. Most interviews were taped; sometimes I wrote, sometimes the women wrote, sometimes they talked and I just listened

In terms of challenging the perceptions of the workshop participants, we looked at the characteristics of the women in my study. I had just 2 criteria for their participation: that their liberation date fell between 1<sup>st</sup> June and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006 and that they took part voluntarily. Of the 38, 35 were sentenced and 3 were on remand. Whilst 2

women had long sentences (9 and 10 years) the average sentence of the others was 28 months with most (28) having sentences between 12 and 36 months. This is somewhat shorter than the 5-7 years suggested at the start of the workshop!

For 26 of the women (68%) this was their first offence whilst another 4 (10%) had one previous offence. Again this fell short of the suggestion made by workshop participants that the typical female prisoner has between 2 and 7 previous offences.

It had been suggested that the 'typical' female was 20-30 years old. However, only 9 (24%) of those in my study fell into this age range, with the largest group (15-39%) aged 31-40 and 9 aged over 40. Generally then, an older group of prisoners than the workshop participants had expected.

With regard to children, 23 of the 24 women who had children, remained in contact with them, one of them by letter only. There was one case where a child had been adopted and another where the child was in care. In 2 instances, the children did not live with the woman. For 17 of the women, there was the expectation that their children would live with them after liberation.

In terms of school education, the information below relates to the 32 women to whom I spoke specifically about education and literacies. 23 (72%) had completed primary school but only 11 (34%) went on to complete secondary school, although many (12 – 37%) left somewhere between 12 and 16. There is obviously, as the workshop participants suggested, a big problem regarding transition between secondary and primary school.

Many of the women had achieved qualifications:

- o 4 had standard grades/O Levels
- o 2 had highers
- o 3 were qualified hairdressers
- o 2 had HNCs
- o 1 had a professional qualification

- o 2 had completed the ITALL Course (1 fast-track)
- o 1 had completed ITOA (IT) courses
- o 2 had NVQs/SVQs
- o 1 had completed a small business course
- o 1 had completed typing exams

Many had completed numeracy and communications courses in the prison's Learning Centre. 6 of the 32 women (19%) said they needed some support with their literacy and although this is lower than the workshop participants had suggested, one could argue that 19% is not too far away from the oft-quoted 23% of Scottish adults requiring literacies support. However, glance through the comments below and decide for yourself whether each of these 6 women really does have an issue with literacy:

- o I've not always been best of spellers
- o I can write the basics. I'm not very good at reading or writing
- o I need help with spelling
- o My writing was terrible
- o I can't spell
- o I need help with writing and spelling

Now think about how many people you come across in your professional – or personal - life who you consider to have poor handwriting or poor spelling. To what extent do you consider them to have a problem with their literacy?

When asked if they had asked for or received literacies help before they came to prison, their responses were varied:

- o I didn't know where to go for help
- o I don't think I'd have accepted help
- o Help was there but it didn't work out
- o I know enough to get by
- o I would have liked help
- o Yes, I would have liked help
- o I'm waiting for glasses

The final discussion in the workshop centred around women's motivation to go 'to education'. The workshop participants had suggested that going to education provided a diversion for the typical female

prisoner and for some of the women in Cornton Vale this was indeed the case, but for many more education provided an opportunity to learn about something specific e.g. computers, English, or to make up for lost time:

- o I felt it was a good chance to do things that I was not able to do when I was younger
- o I've thought about it for years but never done anything about it until now. I decided I had enough time on my hands so education was the first choice
- o To get to learn. I was never interested before. There's lots of opportunities here

Or to build on previous education:

- o I like learning new things and used to go to college outside

And for others, education might provide literacies support:

- o I'd like to be a better writer, speller

Or possibly lead to a job:

- o I never had qualifications, just art and home economics. That wouldn't get me a job

For others, education provided a means to a different kind of end:

- o I needed to go to classes to get home leaves

For one of the women, the motivation was Myself. As it's good to learn, it keeps me busy.

To sum up then, the workshop participants came along with a number of perceptions about a typical female prisoner, gathered from the media and basic skills research, which tends to focus on male prisoners. Whilst some of their perceptions were reflected in the experiences and characteristics of the group of women who participated in my research, most of their prior perceptions were wide of the mark.

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1. Source: SPS Annual Report 2005-2006

## Section 3.

### Learning and motivation

#### *Snoeks Desmond*

*Snoeks is responsible for the Family Literacy Project in South Africa*

In South Africa, 1 million children live with adults who cannot read or write. (Statistics SA 2005) and just over 50% of South African homes do not have books in them. (South African Book Development Council 2007) These facts might provide some clues as to why the literacy levels of many South African school children are cause for concern to teachers and parents.

The Family Literacy Project developed from the need to find ways to address low levels of literacy in pre-school children across South Africa. Since it was established in March 2000, the project has extended its programme to provide support and opportunities to adults, teenagers and young children who want to improve their reading and writing skills. The project is small, with only two full-time staff and eleven part-time facilitators, but has reached many others through conference presentations, articles, workshops and training sessions.

In the Family Literacy Project, twice-weekly sessions are held with parents (adult caregivers) in rural sites in poorly-resourced areas of southern KwaZulu Natal to highlight their role as the first educators of young children and to provide opportunities to improve and use literacy and language skills. Weekly groups are held for teenagers and primary school children and the project has three community libraries and eight book boxes.

This article will highlight how the Family Literacy Project uses aspects of the Reflect approach and why we believe this contributes to the successful motivation and retention of group members. Drawing on the Reflect (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) approach has helped us find out what people know already, discuss that, provide new information and then incorporate the building of literacy skills into session time. An important focus of the programme is that FLP accepts and

strengthens parental desires to provide a better start in life for their children than they themselves had. Parents know that they will find out more about supporting early literacy development, sharing information on issues relating to home life, and at the same time work on their own literacy development. It is important for the FLP to link the adults' growing literacy skills to the way these can be used to improve their own lives and the lives of their children.

Reflect has changed over the years but the initial approach was described by the developers of this method, Archer and Cottingham (1996:6), as:

“a new approach to adult literacy which fuses the theory of Paulo Freire and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal.”

The Reflect approach was the result of an action-research project by ACTIONAID to find out how the PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) techniques could be used to benefit adult literacy projects. In October 1993, the Reflect approach was piloted in Uganda, El Salvador and Bangladesh. Evaluations of the three pilot projects showed that Reflect groups both retained group membership and that those people achieved literacy more than those in control groups. It appeared that Reflect:

“proved to be both more effective at teaching people to read and write and much more effective at linking literacy to wider development.” (Archer and Cottingham 1996:6)

By early 2000, the original definition had become much wider and encompassed development and power more explicitly, as this quotation from Phnuyal, Archer and Cottingham 1998 shows:

“the 'renewed' definition of Reflect: a structured participatory learning process which facilitates people's critical analysis

of their environment, placing empowerment at the heart of sustainable and equitable development. .... Based on ongoing processes of reflection and action, people empower themselves to work for a more just and equitable society.” (EducationAction 2001:11)

Reflect depends on people being actively involved in discussions. When everyone is given a chance to say, write or draw what they know about an issue, they very rarely refuse to do so. So, the appeal of Reflect to the Family Literacy Project was that we believe that we are working with people who know and understand their own situation very well and can often suggest ways to improve it. The Reflect tools give them a voice, whether or not they can read and write. The tools allow people to describe their community, identify problems and strengths and draw their own conclusions about what to do. When using a Reflect tool, the facilitator always probes deeper into the situation by using questions that enable people to look beyond the immediate description of a problem to the root cause. The discussions and answers to the questions may even lead to the discovery of a solution. If this does happen, Reflect practitioners refer to it as an 'action point' where the group is expected to act to make the solution a reality.

There are many different PRA tools that are used by Reflect and have been incorporated into the Family Literacy Project.

### Community map

The group is asked to draw a map of their community. This is usually done on the floor on large sheets of paper, although some groups have tried to do this outside using branches, stones and leaves to indicate different features. Once the map is complete, and this can take a long time as there is debate over the number of houses, the course of the river, or the exact site of a school, the facilitator will lead a discussion on different aspects. She may ask about the use of common ground or about what happens at the river or in the forest. In this way a full picture is built up not only of the physical layout but also of different activities in the community.

This tool can be used when setting up a project and if used again a year or two later can show developments that have taken place in the area.

Once the map has been drawn, the group then works on formulating problems. This must start with a statement about the real problem. For example, rather than saying “there is no clinic”, the problem should be phrased as “people have to travel long distances to get allopathic health care”. The group can then look for creative solutions to the problem rather than focusing only on the lack of a facility. One way the project members have tried to address this problem is by learning more about the key messages contained in the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses programme. These key messages help parents to deal with some ailments in their own homes and also give advice on how to prevent accidents and illness in young children.

### Mobility Map

The tool known as the Mobility Map can be used to actively explore the use of literacy skills. The group is asked to draw or write down where they need to use literacy and numeracy skills. They use one piece of card for each place. Once mobility maps have



been completed by each group member, the group can discard the duplicates and make one large mobility map.

The facilitator will then ask questions to establish exactly why literacy skills are necessary at these places. An example would be the clinic where people say they need to read signs, times, posters, leaflets, appointment times, and medicine dosage. They also need to know the days of week and times when the clinic is open and for what purpose – children, adults, elderly, or pregnant women etc. So within one site, literacy and numeracy skills are needed to find out a number of different things.

When this tool was used in the Family Literacy groups in 2000, women said that they could ask others for this information but they really wanted to be able to find things out for themselves. A lot of the discussion around literacy skills centred on the way women felt inferior and lacking in self confidence when faced with a situation where they needed to ask for help. They also felt that they might be being cheated, for example on taxi trips or in shops.

### **Venn Diagram**

Leading on from the Mobility Map that can be used to explore literacy skills is the Venn Diagram where each woman will draw a circle in the centre of the page to indicate herself. She then writes or draws on pieces of card which literacy and numeracy skills she has and which she wants to develop. She places the cards with the skills she wants to develop first close to the circle indicating herself, and those that are not so important further away. Alternatively, she can be asked to place cards close to her that show what she can already do and those she needs help with further away.

### **The Tree**

This is a very popular tool that has been used often in the Family Literacy Project to explore many different topics, such as budgets, early childhood development, or water-borne diseases. A large tree shape is drawn on a piece of paper and the leaves are made from pieces of paper each bearing

an effect or result. The group writes or draws roots that describe the cause or input in the particular topic under discussion.

All the tools described above can be used to draw out different kinds of information. The tools also provide an opportunity for a lot of discussion about the area, about the needs and especially the problems. The Family Literacy Project encourages facilitators to highlight the strengths of the area in order to build the confidence of the women in their ability to find solutions.

The Family Literacy Project approach also includes aspects of other methods that have been adapted to suit local conditions and resists the temptation to accept without question that there is only one way to help families learn to enjoy reading and writing. The project remains open to finding new ways to meet the needs of group members and their families.

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## Section 3.

# 'Literacy learning in contested societies: can adult literacy learners learn through exploring equality issues and conflicting identities?'

*Rob Mark*

The Literacy & Equality in Irish Society (LEIS) Project is an example of a project which used alternative non-text methodologies to enable adult literacy learners to explore their own identities using equality principles. [www.leis.ac.uk](http://www.leis.ac.uk)

*Rob Mark was coordinator of the LEIS Project (2004-2006). He is currently co-ordinator of lifelong learning at Queen's University of Belfast. Rob presented this paper in his workshop at the conference.*

### Introduction

There is an extensive research literature that demonstrates the link between low literacy and numeracy skills and economic and social status. Adult with low skills are more likely to be unemployed, living on low incomes and experiencing poor health so literacy learners have generally experienced not only these material inequalities but also cultural inequalities. Many learners have been treated as deficit individuals in that the knowledge and experience they have is often unacknowledged (Tett et al, 2006). The Literacy and Equality in Irish Society (LEIS) project is an example of a project that has focused on these inequalities and has also tried to shift the emphasis in adult literacy practice away from using printed material to encouraging learners and tutors to explore together the liberating experience of using non-text based methods of learning. The particular focus for inspiring this new type of learning was the post-conflict situation in the North of Ireland and the need to understand how the inclusion of equality issues in literacy learning might contribute to peace building and reconciliation.

### What was the LEIS Project and what did it set out to achieve?

Although there is currently much rhetoric around peace building in Northern Ireland, little has been written about how this might be achieved and the contribution which lifelong learning can make. Hamber & Kelly (2004, p.1) note that the term 'reconciliation' is not well understood and no agreed definition exists, despite its increasingly common usage in a range of diverse contexts. Their working definition

of reconciliation has five interwoven and related strands which includes a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society; acknowledging and dealing with the past; building positive relationships; significant cultural and attitudinal change; and substantial social, economic and political change (Hamber & Kelly, 2004, p.4).

The opportunity to develop a cross-border regional development project in lifelong learning, focusing on how to provide for excluded literacy learners, grew out of the peace process in Ireland with financial support from the European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (2004-2006). The project, known as the Literacy and Equality in Irish Society (LEIS) project, sought to examine issues of equality and how such issues might be included in adult literacy with a particular emphasis on learning using non-text creative methodologies. The project also sought to provide training for literacy tutors to enable them to promote the goals of the project.

The particular focus on tackling social inequalities using new ways of learning was rooted in the post-conflict situation in Northern Ireland and the need to understand how the inclusion of equality issues in literacy learning could contribute to peace building and reconciliation. The project focused on shifting the emphasis in literacy practice away from printed material to encouraging learners and tutors to explore new non-text based methods of learning. It involved more than one hundred tutors and learners. The key partners in the project were the School of Education at Queen's University Belfast and the Equality

Studies Centre at University College Dublin. Queen's University, the lead partner, is a key provider of tutor education for adult literacy and numeracy in Northern Ireland and provides a range of undergraduate and post-graduate programmes including initial and continuous professional development programme. The Equality Studies Centre, University College Dublin is an inter-faculty research and teaching centre involved in outreach to community and local development organisations and is providing expertise in Equality Studies. The project also involved the National Adult Literacy Agency, an umbrella agency for adult literacy in the Republic of Ireland which focuses on national co-ordination and training and policy development in adult literacy work, and the Educational Guidance Service for Adults in Northern Ireland, a guidance agency which connects adults with learning, providing support services to those concerned with improving access to learning. A number of other voluntary and community organisations also contributed to the development of the project. The author of this paper was the coordinator of the project, which also employed a full time development worker working on both sides of the Irish border and a number of part-time tutor/ facilitators.

The project had three key strands – Literacy, Equality, and Creativity and the partnership brought together different types of expertise to research, design and develop a package of innovative text-free teaching methods that could be used to explore equality issues in adult literacy education. The project explored five different text-free methods and these methods were piloted with adult literacy tutors and tutor-trainers in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of the Irish Republic. The Project developed a *Resource Guide for Adult Learners* and this Guide, together with the full text of the project evaluation report can be found on the project's web page.

### **What ideas influenced LEIS?**

A set of innovative methodologies were developed that could create spaces for the exploration of equality issues for tutors to

use within adult literacy education. These methodologies were intended to empower both tutors and learners to engage with key equality issues of relevance to the lives of literacy learners. In view of the cross-border, peace and reconciliation focus of the project, it was intended that inequalities stemming from the experience of conflict within Northern Ireland and the border counties, would be included in this engagement.

In general, literacy definitions reflect the ideological perspectives of their creators as well as the social, cultural, political and economic environment of the time, making it almost impossible to find a definition that suits everybody. As society evolves, the multiple literacies required in order to make sense of our environment are constantly growing and changing. Some literacy definitions focus on a standard set of measurable generic skills while others tend to be more rooted in the context of people's lives. Definitions are also reflected in the services provided, with a very different kind of adult literacy education coming from a definition that focuses exclusively on technical skills, to the kind of education following on from a more holistic definition of literacy.

Clearly, there is a range of different approaches in relation to how literacy can be understood and defined. The LEIS project found that there were many different interpretations of literacy amongst individuals, between communities and in policies and practices that they examined on both sides of the border. The project held that while it was not necessary to have one agreed understanding of literacy, it was important for literacy tutors to have made their own exploration of the various approaches to understanding literacy, and to reflect on these in order to link theories of literacy and equality with creative methods of learning.

### **Understanding equality**

As in the case of literacy, equality is a complex concept to define and it is challenging to understand how inequality

works in practice. Yet for literacy tutors it is especially important to have an understanding of how inequality in the structures of our society can impact on an individual's life chances. Literacy tutors work with the most some of the most marginalised groups in society. Unless tutors have some understanding of how society operates to discriminate against and marginalise some individuals, while privileging others, they will not be in a position to facilitate their students in exploring the equality issues in their own lives, a central tenet of this project.

The project used a theoretical framework developed by the Equality Studies Centre at UCD to facilitate a better understating of inequality. This theoretical model is underpinned by the belief that there are clear patterns that structure the level of inequality experienced by individuals and groups. This framework identifies five interrelated dimensions of equality and tutors identified changes in all these areas.

- **Respect and recognition** – tutors reported that they had learnt to recognise the differences that were important for each student as well as the commonalities of experience that brought people together
- **Love, care and solidarity** – tutors recognised the important emotional dimension of their work and found that the methodologies enabled them to explore painful issues in creative ways.
- **Resources** – tutors recognised the resource issues that impacted on students such as limited availability of classes at the times and locations that students wanted, and the problems caused by inappropriate accreditation systems but were generally not in positions that enabled them to make changes that would lead to more equality.
- **Power relations** – tutors reported that they had developed a greater understanding of how they could

recognise the strengths and expertise of themselves and the students through dialogue. They found that the methodologies had changed the balance of power between tutor and student and student and student because there was less emphasis on the skills of reading and writing and more on the ability to express your views in other ways.

### **Creative non- text methods, equality & peace building**

The methodologies in the project were developed using the framework outlined above. In keeping with the empowerment and inclusive focus of the framework, the approach used involved an inclusive, participatory approach in which tutors and learners were invited to engage as equal partners with the project development team at all stages **in the project**.

The project saw adult literacy tutors as having a valuable role to play in supporting the process of peace and reconciliation. The project enabled tutors to freely enter into joint programmes to discuss cross-community and inter-community issues in safe paces through the use of creative methodologies in courses and workshops. The tutor group was itself cross-community (religious, political, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation etc) and this was an important aspect of the improvement of relationships as people were able to share their diverse backgrounds and opinions.

The project directly promoted peace and reconciliation through the research, development and design of the resource guide and CD as this enabled tutors to develop more equal practice and also enabled students to participate in the debate about what equality means and how it can be enacted. Learners were given space to question previously held assumptions in the area of politics, economics, religion, and culture, consequently empowering them to challenge and question the deep structural inequalities existing in society. The process of peacebuilding was also enhanced at the

individual level through facilitating literacy learners and tutors to explore the inequalities that impact on their lives and the possibilities that exist for change.

### **Project methodology**

Literacy tutors and learners played a major role in the development of the creative non-text methodologies. In the initial phase, staff worked with learners and tutors to explore issues of equality that related to the experience of conflict and identify and how these experiences can inform the practice of adult literacy education. Some of the issues of concern to tutors and learners that were identified were; lack of time, resources and support, how focusing on the conflict can mask other important inequalities and how to validate and justify non-text based methods. These issues were used to inform the research and development of the text-free methodologies that were piloted with tutors in both Northern Ireland and the Border counties.

The approach to literacy that LEIS took was about changing the arrangements of learning as well as people's perceptions of it because it challenged individually-based, deficit views of learners and instead focused on people's ability to do what they wanted in their lives. In the words of one tutor 'it opened my eyes and mind to what is possible through using other methods'. In addition the work of the project was based on the premise that literacy is far more than a set of basic skills, but rather, are a set of social practices. Literacy practices integrate the routines, skills, and understandings, that are organised within specific contexts and also the feelings and values that people have about these activities. The use of innovative, non-text based methods was designed to take account of the emotional context for learning for many literacy students who have often experienced failure at school and may have low self-esteem.

### **How were the methodologies used?**

Tutors used the various methodologies in a variety of ways. One tutor who works with a group of young men that she teaches job skills to as part of an access to employment

course took along a sculpture she had made to her work base to discuss with this group. She explained that it was about her journey as a tutor and found that it was a good stimulus to discussion as she was sharing her feelings and thoughts with the group in a very open way. Having a concrete object made it easier to bring up more complex issues to do with equality that were generally hard to do in other types of discussion. It was a good stimulus to get the group thinking, rather than asking the group to write their thoughts down, which wouldn't have worked at all and would have limited their thinking to what they knew how to write.

Another tutor working in a rural FE college had used collage as a way of encouraging her students to use pictures to represent their views about their education at school. She found that students worked well together and were able to talk about their joint collages and listen to each other carefully. She felt that this methodology enabled students to think quite deeply about the issues that had affected them without being inhibited by the need to write down their thoughts. Another example is of a tutor in a community development project who used storytelling as a way of having people in this disadvantaged community describe the history of the place through their own family histories. These stories showed the positive networks and understanding of the area and contributed to a reclaiming of the history of the place.

### **Conclusion**

By focusing on equality and creativity, the LEIS project has shown how an understanding of equality & creativity can be used to develop new skills and understanding for adult literacy learners through the use of non-text methodologies. This in turn can empower learners to examine and understand inequalities affecting their own lives and the lives of others, and the underlying causes of these inequalities. It could, for example, include the social, economic, cultural or environmental domain. An understanding of such issues will not on its own provide a

panacea for overcoming such inequalities. Such changes often require commitment from others including those responsible for the allocation of resources and those with political influence to bring about change. This lies largely outside the control of the individual. However, at the very least, a new understanding could be said to provide learners with new skills and knowledge to bring about change in their lives. In the future, the challenge for literary educators will be to find ways to facilitate such learning.



*Advice from the Literacy Travellers' Tree*

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The LEIS worker at Queen's University Belfast was Bonnie Soroke, a Canadian literacies practitioner and researcher and long-time member of RaPAL; her co-worker was Toni Lambe from UCD.

## Section 3.

### Words are for Everyone

*Vicky Duckworth and Kath Taylor*

*Kath Taylor, a grandmother and mother, returned to education in her late fifties. Whilst on a literacy course, together with passing her first qualification, a level two in literacy, she unleashed a real passion for writing poetry which she says 'helps me make sense of my life'.*

*Vicky Duckworth is Senior Lecturer in Education and Training at Edge Hill University. Keen to establish and maintain strong and productive links between practice and research she is passionate about the empowering and transforming nature of education.*

#### Overview

The research project is based on my previous role as research/practitioner at a local Further Education College. I am presently engaged in a three year longitudinal study, which commenced June 2003; the main aim of the research is to investigate the impact of thirteen *Skills for Life* learners joining a basic skills programme and subsequently follow their progression routes.

I chose ethnography as the method to explore learners' life experiences; the force being to provide a 'space for the articulations and experiences of the marginalised' (Schostak, p23, 2006) There was also an awareness that fitted with Barton and Hamilton (2003) which addressed itself to real people's lives and can take a holistic approach, aiming at whole phenomena, whereby a multiplicity of research techniques can be utilised to collect rich data and reflect the multidimensionality of the interviewees experience. In the steps of Walkerdine et al (2001), Luttrell (1997) and Skeggs (1997), who follow the narrative tradition, the main research tool chosen to collect life-history (See, Plummer 1995) was semi-structured interviews. This tool was brought on board to help the interviewees' feel more confident and comfortable with the process and to facilitate the learners stories to follow their chosen direction. As identified by Stanley and Wise (1993) 'the personal is the political' and listening to women's and men's accounts is a way to treat them seriously. The conference workshop focused on the creative journeys of two former basic literacy learners. One literacy learner, Kath, who attended her first course and subsequently gained her first qualification at

the age of 57yrs, unleashed a real talent for writing poetry. She described how poetry helps her to express emotions and how this has been therapeutic in her making better sense of painful experiences.

The learners' voices were heard in the context of their autobiographical (1) and poetic accounts of their learning journeys. This offered a creative springboard to discuss the benefits of applying a holistic approach to teaching and learning. ((See, Morrish et al, 2002)

#### A tutor's story

When Kath, a grandmother in her late fifties, commenced the literacy course she initially had no confidence in writing. Indeed, the idea of writing for creative expression was unthinkable. From the age of two and a half years old, she was brought up in a convent, where schooling was not as high on the rota as cooking and cleaning. She did enjoy reading though, and would be mocked by the other girls as 'an old lady'. On leaving the convent with no qualifications or money in her pocket she travelled to Dublin, then across the waters to London before eventually settling in Oldham. In between bringing up three daughters single-handedly, she continued to do mainly cleaning jobs.

In the formal and informal interviews she described how experiencing a childhood in care and a string of abusive relationships with 'no good' men had 'knocked away' her confidence. In and out of depression she wanted to 'do something with me brain'. Although occasionally daring to think about writing 'maybe poetry or summat', when she arrived on the course and I expressed how the class may cover topics which

include poetry and story telling, she seemed resigned that poetry was not for her. Kath firmly believed that only people who've 'got qualifications and yer know good jobs'; can write poetry, 'they're the clever ones'. She described how she felt almost scared of exploring the possibilities of language, believing it was 'summat not for someone like me.' It may be considered that the 'universal adopted strategy for effectively denouncing the temptation to demean oneself is to naturalize difference, to turn it into second nature through inculcations and incorporation in the form of habitus (Bourdieu, 1994, p122)

However, on reading other learners' poetry she seemed totally amazed that people who lived on the same streets as her had penned such 'magic'... She voiced hope that 'if they can do it, who are just like me, then, so can I'. Her position in the 'field' changed. A common metaphor Bourdieu (1994) uses to represent the field is games. At first glance, a seemingly innocent metaphor; but on deeper probing it reveals how these fields are sites controlled by the dominant class. A means to win advantage – but not always fairly - and in doing so pass on their capital to the next generation and if left un-tackled the ball rolls to the next and next.

Kath grabbed the ball and ran with it. She soaked up the lessons, even asking for more poetry. Words began to really inspire her and rather than running from words she began to embrace language as something she had the right to use. She described how on shaping sentences it really helped her to 'deal with those lousy feelings that had crammed her life fall to often like doubt, failure and fear'.

Discovering she had flair in writing poetry helped her realize, 'I used to think everyone was better, now I know we're all the same – equal like.' Taking control of language, she has kicked out a space in the field, where her expectations, creativity and confidence no longer sit on the side-line. Each word is a winning goal, each poem a winning match.

Below is one of a collection of many that she has written over the course of the research. A poignant reminder that research is not merely pages of ink; it is a means to give voice to those whose words, whose voices have fallen on deaf ears for too long.

### My Mask



*Take a look at my face,  
What do you see  
Do you see happiness,  
Do you see glee.*

*Am I frightening  
is it all an act,  
You will never know,  
Unless you ask.*

*Have you got time,  
Do you really care,  
Are you too wrapped up,  
In your own affairs.*

*Most of the time I wear a mask,  
Pretending to be happy and jolly,  
But deep down inside,  
I'm full of doubt and worry.*

*Take off my mask,  
What do you see  
Nobody of importance,  
Just sad silly me.*

(Kath, March 2007)

### Kath's Story

When I started a part-time course at Oldham College in 2003 to improve my English - never in my wildest dreams did I think I would end up writing poetry. What got me thinking that just maybe I could was reading a poem that a girl called Linda had wrote about the race riots. As I read those powerful words how I wished I had her gift.

When I was asked to have a go at writing a short poem myself - my heart jumped - yeah I wanted to, but to be honest I got stressed out, had sleepless nights. I felt out of my league. When I discussed this with Vicky, my tutor, she reassured me saying 'word are for everyone' and slowly taking small steps then bigger and bigger I grew braver - words I never thought I'd use sprang in my head and onto the page. In fact once I wrote my first one, me Kath Taylor, who you might walk past in the street without a second glance, had words on a page that would stop your stride, I felt full of pride about that.

After that it just got so much easier and when I am feeling stressed and angry about something I find it good therapy to put my thoughts and feelings on paper in the form of a poem. One instance that springs to mind is one Friday night the other week when my granddaughter who's fifteen started playing me up yet again. Not listening to a word I say she stays out with her friends when she should be in for ten. I don't approve of her drinking - but she does - knocking drinks back she becomes abusive with me and shouts that I am always in her face. Upset, I went upstairs to calm down and write my feelings on my pad of paper I always carry with me. This helped me feel calmer. If I didn't have this means of expressing myself I don't know what I'd do - probably I'd just walk out of the house and round the streets, lost and angry as I've done so many times before. It's taken me until I'm sixty to find this way of dealing with life and the pain it sometimes throws at me - and yeah sometimes I wish I would have had this outlet when I was younger and life hit hard. But what matters is I've proved life gets

better with age if you have the tool to help you find your way - for me the tools are the words in my poetry.

(1) Marie Mcnamara's (2006) easy read autobiographical account of her learning journey 'Getting Better', is published by Gate House. In it she writes about her remarkable journey from a stay-at-home single mum, with what she describes as 'hopeless writing and spelling skills' to knocking down the barriers and studying for a diploma in Adult Nursing at University. The motivation was the desire to improve her skills and offer her children a better start in life.

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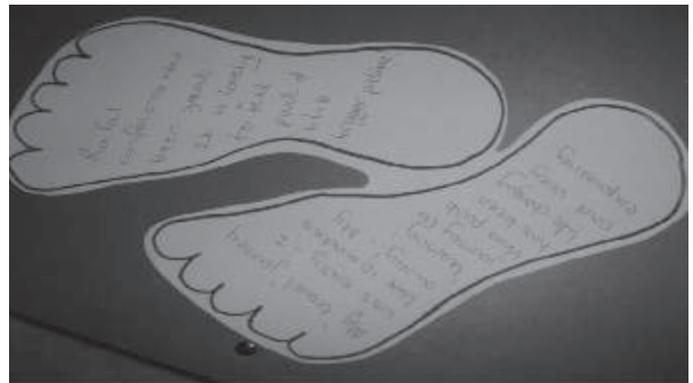
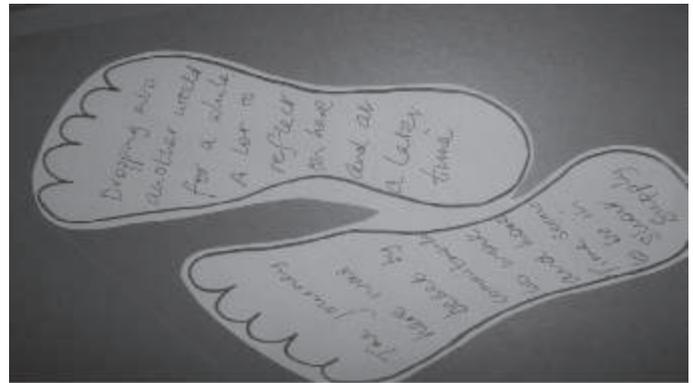
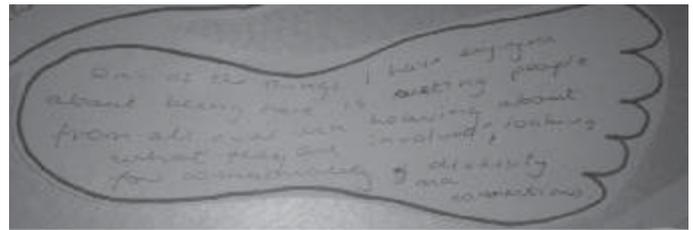
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## The Heart Key

Ann McKay

Ann is a practitioner from Northern Ireland

That's all it's for. To open hearts.  
 You bring it with you all the time.  
 Every door is different.  
 Some doors are hidden.  
 Some doors already open anyway,  
 but not that many. And most are closed.  
 The heart key finds a way.  
 There isn't a door hasn't a lock.  
 There isn't a lock hasn't a key.  
 The heart key opens them all.  
 The heart key opens each door so  
 the world can look in and the world can look  
 out.  
 The worlds see each other.  
 All the stars see each other.  
 Birds and trees see each other.  
 Cups see saucers.  
 Street sweepers see brooms and  
 brooms see witches and dust in corners.  
 The hairdresser sees scissors and rainbows  
 and finds in his seeing hands  
 a pair of rainbow scissors and  
 a head of rainbow hair.  
 The heart key is sometimes yours,  
 and sometimes you know how to use it.



# Reports and Reviews

*The Starter Pack (2nd edition) An essential resource for adult literacy and language tutors*

The Basic Skills Agency, 2007

Mary Osmaston

Mary is Head of ESOL at Bolton Community College, where she is also involved in ESOL teacher training and cross-college Skills for Life initiatives.

The only thing wrong with *The Starter Pack* is its subtitle.

If you're a literacy tutor wanting some new ideas, or you are training literacy tutors, the 'Key points' section in each chapter will remind you of the basics, and the activities which follow will provide a range of good, practical ideas for the classroom. As well as the usual reading and writing focus, there is a helpful chapter on developing learners' speaking and listening skills.

If you're a language tutor, otherwise known as an ESOL teacher, the book will be of interest but should be used with caution. There are many activities that would be great with ESOL students, especially in the 'extending reading/writing skills' sections for higher levels, where Literacy and ESOL converge more. The ICT chapter is also a generally useful quick reference guide to a range of skills, for all teachers and learners. What is missing is any mention of the different approaches and focus needed with people learning a new language (ESOL), as opposed to improving their skills in their first language (Literacy). If the ESOL focus was included, however, it would double the size of the book, so perhaps that is something for a separate publication. In the present volume, it would be helpful for those literacy tutors who do also teach ESOL learners if the book flagged up areas where there is divergence. For example, listening and speaking for ESOL is about teaching a whole language - far more than the focus on developing content and confidence that is discussed here for

native speakers - and phonics and spelling also need a different approach.

Really it's a terminology issue. The introduction says that *The Starter Pack: An essential resource for adult literacy and language tutors* has been brought into the 21st century, but nowadays the term 'Language' is used within Skills for Life to mean ESOL (as in LLN - Language, Literacy and Numeracy) whereas in 1991 language (small 'l') just meant English. So the book is recommended, but be aware that it's not quite what it says on the cover.

The accompanying CD ROM is mainly useful as an electronic version of the pages of the pack, but the images in the book are also provided individually in a clipart section. The most useful feature is the section featuring all the weblinks listed in the book.

## Review

### **Developing Learning and Teaching: Practitioner Guides, published jointly in 2007 by NRDC and NIACE.**

This is a series of guides for practitioners, focusing on teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy classrooms in Skills for life. We have looked at five which cover:

- Reading
- Writing
- Using ICT
- ESOL
- Numeracy

*These review comments were compiled from the responses of a group of practitioners with varying experience of literacy and numeracy teaching.*

We welcome these clearly-written guides. We like the layout and the fact that although the guides are relatively brief, they contain a wealth of useful information.

Some particularly useful aspects:  
We found the case studies and examples from practice very useful, especially in the writing guide.

Fascinating range of ideas in the ICT guide; we were surprised at how accessible some of the technologies and techniques can be for those less confident about ICT!

Details on phonics  
Information about formative assessment – useful to see how it can work in practice

Our conclusion:  
*Highly recommended*

## RaPAL Journal 2008 - Editors, themes and deadlines

<b>Edition</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Editors</b>
Spring (April)	Open edition	End of February	Barbara Hatley Broad and Gaye Houghton
Summer (September)	The impact and legacy of the NRDC: International and national research and policy initiatives	End of June	Ellayne Fowler, Jackie Sitters, Yvon Appleby
Winter (December)	Conference	End of September	Kieran Harrington, Amy Burgess, Colleen Molloy

## Advertise in the RaPAL Journal

Why not advertise your adult literacy event, conference, publication or other products and services that might be of interest to readers of the RaPAL journal? This will boost our income and will help you target your information to literacy practitioners, researchers and those involved in the ALLN field.

Cost per journal:    Whole page    £200  
                                   Half page        £125  
                                   Quarter page   £100

Reduced prices are available for not-for profit organisations.

For more information please contact journal co-ordinator Yvon Appleby at [yappleby@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:yappleby@uclan.ac.uk) or advertising manager Sarah Rennie at [Sarah.rennie@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:Sarah.rennie@sunderland.ac.uk)

*The editorial group reserve the right to refuse any material that is judged to be offensive or contradicts the ethos or principles of RaPAL. RaPAL cannot be held responsible for anything arising from material advertised in the journal.*

## Writing Guidelines

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

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

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

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

#### Guidelines for Contributors

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

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

#### Journal Structure

We want to encourage new writers as well as those with experience and to cover a range of topics, to do this the journal is divided into three main sections and a review section. Each section is slightly different in length and focus. We welcome illustrations and graphics for any of the sections. The journal has a different theme for each edition but welcomes general contributions

particularly for Section 1 and Section 2 and for reviews.

#### Section 1. Ideas for teaching

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

#### Section 2. Developing Research and Practice

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

#### Section 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives

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

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

### Review Section

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

### Submitting your work

1. Check the deadline dates and themes which are available in the journal and on the website.
2. All contributions should have the name of the author/s, a title and contact details which include postal address, email address and phone number. We would also like a short 2-3-line biography to accompany your piece. Sections, subsections, graphs or diagrams should be clearly indicated or labelled.
3. Send a copy either in electronic form or in hard copy to the journal co-ordinator  
**Yvon Appleby at: University of Central**

**Lancashire, Preston, PR1 2HE or to  
YAppleby@uclan.ac.uk**

4. Your contribution should be word processed, in Arial size 12 font, double spaced on A4 paper with numbered pages.

### What happens next

1. Editors and members of the Editorial Group review contributions for Section 1 and Section 2. Contributions for Section 3 are peer reviewed by a mixture of experienced academic, research and practice referees.
2. Feedback is provided by the editor/s within eight weeks of submission. This will include constructive comment and any suggestions for developing the piece if necessary.
3. You will be informed whether your piece has been accepted, subject to alterations, and if so the editor/s will work on a final editing process. Any final copy will be sent to authors prior to publishing.
4. Where work is not accepted the editor/s may suggest more relevant or alternative places for publication.

Please contact us if you want to discuss any ideas you have for contributing to the journal.

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Full-time	£35	£50	£50
Low-waged, unwaged, student	£20	£30	£30
* includes 1 copy of the RaPAL Journal			
<b>Institutional Membership</b>			
2 copies of Journal	£70	£75	£75
3-5 copies of Journal	£90	£100	£100
6-10 copies of Journal	£135	N/A	N/A

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 Lancaster University  
 Lancaster LA1 4YD





## RaPAL Conference 2008

Inclusion and Engagement in Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL

Friday 20th June to Saturday 21st June 2008

Optional pre-conference event Thursday 19th June

The conference will take place at the National University of Ireland, Galway, which is situated in the city centre. Accommodation has been arranged in two of the student villages Cuirte na Coiribe and Gort na Coiribe, which are both a ten-minute walk from the conference venue.

We are sure that a number of people will want to extend their stay and spend some time exploring this beautiful part of the world. The following websites will give plenty of information about places to stay and things to see and do.

<http://www.discoverireland.com>

<http://www.galwaycity.galway-ireland.ie>

<http://www.ebookireland.com/galway.htm>

Further information about the conference will be available soon.

If you would like to be included on the conference mailing list please e-mail

[info.rapal@cgvec.ie](mailto:info.rapal@cgvec.ie)

### Inclusion and Engagement in Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL

*Workshop themes:*

- Approaches to teaching and learning that include a range of learners with different interests, aspirations and needs.
- Engaging with new technologies.
- Literacy, language and numeracy practices and engagement in communities
- Policy and practice: the challenges and opportunities for engagement and inclusive learning.
- Inclusive practices in research in literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

We invite you to participate in these themes by offering workshops, taking part in panel discussions, contributing to practice-based workshops or presenting posters. Please note that workshops should be interactive sessions and that proposals should explain how this will be achieved.

We welcome proposals from new presenters and will be happy to offer advice and support if you have not presented at a conference before.

If you would like more information or would like to register your interest in submitting a proposal please contact Kieran Harrington by 14th March 2008.

[kieran.rapal@cgvec.ie](mailto:kieran.rapal@cgvec.ie)

### Travel to Galway from mainland UK

#### Flying with a budget airline

**Flybe** offer direct flights to Galway from Birmingham and Southampton. See [www.flybe.com](http://www.flybe.com)

**Ryanair** fly to Shannon from the following airports:

Birmingham	Bournemouth
Bristol	E. Midlands
Edinburgh	Glasgow
Leeds Bradford	Liverpool
London Gatwick	London Stansted
Luton	Manchester

See [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)

**Aer Arann** also flies to/from Belfast, Newcastle, Manchester, Luton, Edinburgh, Leeds and Bristol  
<http://www.aerarann.ie/>

There is a regular bus service between Shannon airport and Galway operated by Bus Éireann or Citylink. The journey time is approximately 90 minutes. See <http://www.shannonairport.com/to-from/bybus.html>

If you would prefer not to fly, please see <http://www.seat61.com/Ireland.htm> for information about travel by rail and ferry.

We are sure that a number of people will want to extend their stay and spend some time exploring this beautiful part of the world. The following websites will give plenty of information about places to stay and things to see and do.

<http://www.discoverireland.com>

<http://www.galwaycity.galway-ireland.ie>

<http://www.ebookireland.com/galway.htm>

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