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LEARNING AND SUPPORTING
THEM TO SUCCEED

20 OCTOBER 2014

RaPAL

*Research and Practice
in Adult Literacy*

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NIACE The National Institute for Adult Literacy and Basic Skills



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The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

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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. The journal is written by and for all learners, tutors/teachers and researchers who want to ask questions about this field of work. It does not matter if the questions have been asked before. We want to reflect the many voices within adult literacy and numeracy work and to encourage debate.

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Editorial

Kieran Harrington, Sam Duncan, Irene Schwab, Yvonne Spare,
Tara Furlong, Ann Reardon- James

In this edition we combine articles originally intended for Volume 84 (“Women and Literacies”) with articles for Volume 85 on the NIACE/NRDC/RAPAL/UCU “Motivated and Mandated” conference on the theme of engaging and supporting adults, which took place in London in October 2014.

The first article is Vicky Duckworth's “Blame, shame and guilt: challenging negative labels and inequality through critical literacy”. It focuses on practitioner research on the themes of women, literacies and empowerment. It explores how literacy classes can challenge symbolic violence, and how the effect of blame and guilt can be shifted by critical approaches to education and curriculum design. Next, Jacqueline Panton's short reflection, “Literacy for freedom and expression”, reminds us how therapeutic and liberating writing can be, and it highlights the value of the social aspect of writing within a group.

In the first of the articles stemming from the presentations of the October 2014 conference, Tina Byrne, who is a research officer with the National Adult Literacy Agency in Ireland, summarises the main points from research on blended learning in numeracy and ESOL. She concludes that the benefits of introducing blended learning in an adult literacy context outweigh the challenges.

In “Unintended consequences of incentives, penalties and compulsion”, Maxine Burton and Greg Brooks report on various studies carried out on the correlation between attendance and progress, and between attendance and incentives and punishments. These questions are debated every day of the week in adult literacy centres all over the world, so it is enlightening to read about the production of “perverse effects” when incentives and penalties were introduced in a situation where intrinsic motivation already existed.

We are delighted to review five books in this edition, all of them important additions to the literature of adult literacy. Jane Mace, one of the founder members of RaPAL, returns as a reviewer, and it is good to hear that she is still involved in research. Her perpetual passion for literacy shines through, as does that of all the other writers and reviewers in this edition. We would like to thank all them for their work and patience over the last couple of months.

As always, please note that the views expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of RaPAL.

Blame, shame and guilt: challenging negative labels and inequality through critical literacy

Vicky Duckworth

Vicky is Senior Lecturer and Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education, at Edge Hill University, Lancashire, UK. Vicky's research has a strong social justice and theoretical focus. Most recently she has drawn on wide critical perspectives, applying Bourdieu's work as the theoretical framework, and drawing on theory and research in feminism, the sociology of education, literature, ethics of care and critical literacy pedagogy, including the New Literacy Studies, to explore and add to the debate on the impact of violence and trauma on learning, and its link to class, gender and basic skills.

Vicky's research has resulted in the investigation of symbolic violence and learning; possibilities, resistance and transformation; widening participation; social justice and teacher education; community activism aiming at addressing issues of structures of power with the form and content of the curriculum, community empowerment and social identities and equality in education.

Introduction

In the UK, Further Education (FE) colleges play a key role in providing literacy programmes. This paper draws upon practitioner research in FE with a focus on women, literacies and empowerment. It explores how literacy classes can challenge symbolic violence, which includes labelling, and how the subsequent impact of “blame” and “guilt” carried by learners can be shifted by critical approaches to education and curriculum design. It concludes that drawing on New Literacy Studies is important in challenging notions of literacies and empowering women in the private (for example, home and motherhood) and public (for example, work and college) domains of their lives.

My positioning

My personal position as an “insider” with “insider knowledge” of marginalised communities was a key motivation to becoming a basic skills tutor and becoming involved in the study of how sixteen former Basic Skills learners have been shaped by the public domain of schooling, college and work and the private domain of family, friends and home. The longitudinal, ethnographic research sought to highlight learners' perceptions of their reality and unscramble the links between their past, present and future whilst striving to highlight the intersection of class and gender on their pathways in basic skills programmes and subsequent trajectories.

In addition, my involvement in the study was driven by my experience as a tutor and programme leader delivering literacy in an FE college based in the North of England. With an increasing move towards performance via target setting, results and accountability, like many tutors I felt a great deal of my time and energy was beginning to be governed by a managerial system based on close scrutiny of my paperwork, rather than my practice in the classroom. Within this context, the space I had for critical reflection and innovative practice was very limited. Critical autonomy and deep forms of intrinsic motivation were essential in sustaining the research. My drive came from the knowledge that education which centres on social justice can shift classroom practice beyond being merely rhetoric, and instead become part of its lived practice.

My aim, therefore, was to partake in an inquiry which opened a meaningful “space” to develop a teaching and learning culture which moves towards a research-based approach to good practice. As a critical educator/researcher, I sought to develop my practice through the research and reflect a critical pedagogy, providing a curriculum which is culturally relevant, learner driven, and socially empowering (Freire 1993; Barton et al. 2007, Duckworth 2013, 14).

Approaches to literacy

Dominant models of teaching literacy have been critiqued as having a strong utilitarian function, selecting and distributing literacy in different ways to different social groups and thus reproducing class inequalities which fail to address issues of power relations in the learners' lives (see Crowther et al., 2006). A means to challenge such an instrumental *one size fits all* driver, is to shift towards a social approach which draws on The New Literacy Studies perspective (e.g. Barton, 1994; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gee, 1996; Street, 1984). Multifaceted, this model of literacy is seen as having many purposes for the learner and recognises how literacy practices vary from one cultural and historical context to another. For example, in the private domain of home and public domain of formal education, literacy practices, identities and discourse are produced by power and ideology so that literacy is shaped differently in different contexts. This focus can support tutors to shift from a narrow competency-based approach, which separates the literacies from their context and instead harnesses the everyday practices learners bring into the classroom (Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015). This lens broadens literacy from not just a technical or neutral skill, but a social practice and also a multimodal form of communication.

Methods and methodology

The design methodologies of the study included participatory action research (PAR) and feminist standpoint theory, whilst also drawing on life history, literacy studies and ethnographic approaches to exploring social practices. I chose ethnography as the method by which to explore learners' life experiences because it offered me the opportunity to provide rich descriptions, and it has the potential to provide a 'space for the articulations and experiences of the marginalised' (Schostak, 2006: 23). Barton and Hamilton (1998) also show how ethnography has the power to address itself to real people's lives, taking a holistic approach, aiming at whole phenomena. A multiplicity of research techniques can be utilised to collect rich data which reflects the multidimensionality of the interviewees' experiences. PAR has emerged in recent years as an approach which strives to be liberating and not controlling (see Habermas, 1974) for social transformation, and "consciousness raising" (see Freire, 1999) among underprivileged and minority groups. PAR with its alignment to social action, enlightenment (see Habermas 1974: 113), emancipation (see Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998), adult education intervention, development and change within communities and groups (see Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis, 2001; Hooks 1994) therefore fitted my purpose. PAR facilitated the development and delivery of a critical curriculum. Critical educators/researchers reflect a critical pedagogy, providing a curriculum which is culturally relevant, learner-driven and socially empowering (Freire, 1993; Barton et al., 2004). Dialogic communication between teachers and learners was the key to actively involving learners in their own education; this active participation included the co-creation of the curriculum whereby learners' needs, motivations and interests were the driving factors (see McNamara, 2007; Duckworth 2008: 13 14). Offering an egalitarian model takes into consideration the cultural, psychological and educational factors related to the learner. This values their history, present and future narrative, rather than fitting all learners into one learning narrative and prescriptive framework.

The symbolic capital of housing and symbolic violence

The study took place in an area of deprivation and large housing estates. The council estates are fragmented by their racial division in housing occupants, but are united in experiences of poverty. The child Health Profile (2014) found that:

... health and wellbeing of children in Oldham is generally worse than the England average. The infant mortality rate is worse [...] and the child mortality rate is similar to the England average. The level of child poverty is worse than the England average with 26.8% of children aged under 16 years living in poverty. The rate of family homelessness is better than the England average.

Apart from two learners, the rest lived on the council estates. The areas participants live in are not neutral, they hold or lack symbolic power, and the streets hold capital which may be deemed as legitimate or illegitimate depending on how one is positioned in the field. Consider, for example, the locations where people live and how names, including family names, are associated with estates, and are also not neutral. Names have or lack symbolic power (Duckworth, 2014). It should be noted that the symbolic power that areas and names have depend on the field and the lens (whether legitimate or illegitimate) they are viewed from, see figure 1 below.

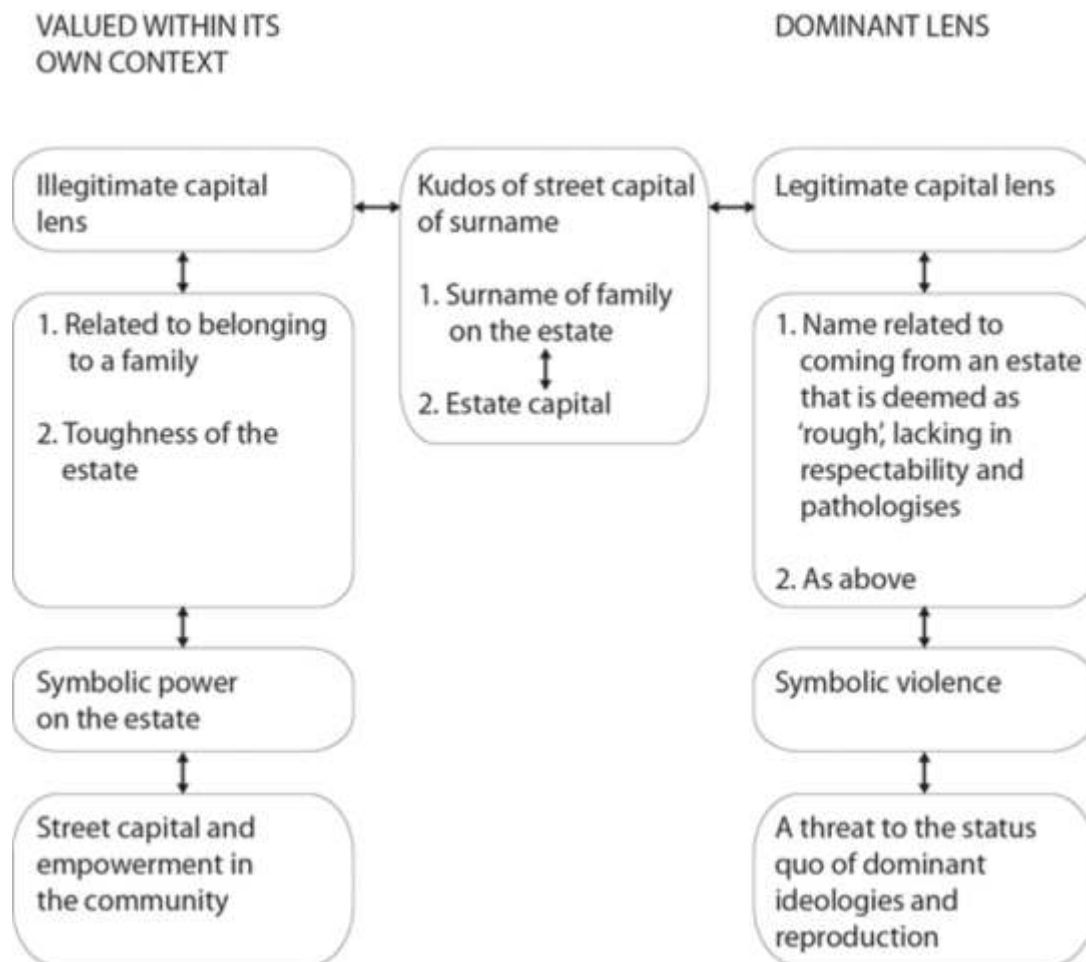


Figure 1 Illegitimate and legitimate lens of capitals (Duckworth, 2013)

Joanne and Stella

Joanne, a single mother of three children in her mid-thirties and Stella, a married mother in her forties, also with three children, were both labelled by school teachers as being “thick” and “stupid”. They voiced how this was due to the connotations related to their family name and the area they lived. For Joanne coming from a big family and not “aving nowt to buy new clothes” meant she was viewed as a “scruff” and “pushed to one side”.

... if you come from big families you were just pushed to the side. I remember being really good at badminton, but cos I was a M...a, come from a big family I couldn't go on the team. Anyhow - we could do what we want the teachers weren't interested in the end. --- It was cos we were the ones who stood out cos of our clothes. Yer know they're looking down on yer cos yer wearin' hand me downs. Yer feel dirty somehow, daft really cos all our clothes has been washed, they were old that's all. Yer can't wash the tattiness out I suppose.

Stella also spoke of feeling like an outsider because of where she lived and teachers having no time for kids from the estate.

They'd 'ave yer address in the mark book, sometimes they'd call out yer name and where yer lived. From Holts Estate, I'll 'ave to keep me eye on you the teacher 'd say. Yer knew then that you were being told yer were bad, the estate had, still has a rotten reputation. I wished they just had me name in that register book and not me address, perhaps then they'd 'ave just thought it's D, a nice girl, like.

At the end I got to the stage in seniors where I was that unhappy with being bullied and if I reacted bad because I wasn't a well-dressed child at school because I was brought up in a big family I used to be looked down on. Obviously I wasn't taking on board what was happening in the class. I was a scruffy child they used to think I was a bother causer which I never was if people hit me I hit them back.'

Within the field of school the teachers had the symbolic power to label pathologies and carry out symbolic violence. The impact of being undervalued and of being given a negative label because of where they lived left learners resisting this symbolic violence. The label of being poor was not neutral. Poor was equated with being deviant and led to being labelled an outcast and marginalised in the dominant group (see Becker 1963). This had an impact on how the learners viewed themselves. In the excerpt from an interview below, Stella describes various feelings and emotions:

Response: I used to get so frustrated

Interviewer: Yeah

Response: because I couldn't help the way I were.

Interviewer: Umm

Response: I couldn't help that my mother couldn't buy the fashionable clothes. I couldn't help being dyslexic, but I didn't know that I was dyslexic at the time

Interviewer: Yeah

Response: I just knew that I were thick, and that's how I put myself down as and even being embarrassed in front of your children, not being able to help them, but I always made them stand up for themselves at school, because I wouldn't let anyone put me down at school...

Joanne reflected on similar feeling:

When I knew they'd be no help, just a tellin' off I stopped asking. Yer just mess about don't yer, hoping someone will say pack it in and get yer back working, sort yer out. They couldn't be arsed yer.

If I could go back now I'd make them teachers come and teach me, rather than just leavin' us to do what we liked.

From Joanne's and Stella's recounting of their experiences, school was clearly a place where fear and intimidation were used to try and get the students to conform, even if that conforming had nothing to do with learning, and more to do with being passive. Rather than being unaware of these labels, in a similar vein to the learners in Skeggs' (1997) study, they were aware they were being viewed in a negative way. However, whilst Skeggs' learners dis-identified with being working class, to avoid shame, the learners in this study resisted the labels in other ways. For example, they ignored teachers, played truant and pretended they did not care how they were viewed/treated (even though they did). In the hiding of their true emotions of pain and despair, the image presented to the public gaze was different to that of their internal image. They resisted being viewed as showing emotions (pain and despair for example) that may be seen as weak, and instead wanted to present a public image that had not been affected by the stigma of labelling (see Goffman 1970).

The dominant instrumental models of literacies, which failed to value or recognise the everyday skills and practices that learners brought into the classroom, were inherent within the schools the learners attended and were highly valued culturally. These were subject to formal rules and were linked to power and prestige. For the learners who were dyslexic, they struggled not only with understanding the lessons, but also with the fact that the barrier to this understanding was not identified. This lack of awareness resulted in them being written off as stupid and bad because they messed about. Subjected to being ignored, ridiculed and labelled by the teachers and peers, the learners experienced symbolic violence. They blamed their “messaging about” on being ignored by the teachers, and being 'obbed off as nothings,' as Stella said.

The learners' non-adherence to academic norms required for distinction, led to them taking the blame and as such internalizing the negative emotions. This hid the symbolic power schools have in the continual reproduction of social hierarchy. These emotions arose from the negative labels that were attached because they struggled at school:

... they called me thick and stupid the teachers.(Stella)

because they were poor: we were left to the side. The teachers knew we had nowt so they put us to one side and carried on with the smarter kids. We were nobodies, the bottom of the barrel. (Joanne)

They were left with feelings of self-consciousness and thoughts that there was something wrong with them.

From School to college

When Joanne arrived at the adult literacy class, she struggled to read and write and sat at the back of the room. She avoided eye contact and neither spoke to myself as her tutor nor the other learners. After Joanne joined the research group, we began to spend more time together. This allowed me the opportunity to speak to her in detail about the barriers she had faced and her hopes and talk about her aspirations for the future. Initially, she described why she had come to college:

I want to be able to fill in forms on me own and be more confident in me spelling.

However as Joanne's confidence increased in both herself and her writing skills, there was a simultaneous shift in aspirations. We spoke of the pathways she could take following Level Two. She began to make choices that she previously thought were deemed as not for people from her background. She began to speak about a career rather than a job:

I want to be a good role model for my children, getting a career can give us all a better future.

Joanne was breaking down the barriers that had held her back for so long and was now on her way - successfully completing a level two course in literacy and numeracy; she progressed onto an Access to Nursing Course then to Salford University to pass her diploma and is now a qualified staff nurse working in the north of England.

Below, Joanne tells her story in her own words. This was part of the writing she shared with me when she began to explore writing her learning autobiography (see McNamara 2007):

Do you know three years ago if I had to fill in anything like a form I couldn't, it may as well have been written in another language. In the end I did not even bother looking at any forms that were sent to me. I would just go to my sister and ask her to fill them in for me and I would just sign them. There are

so many other things that I could tell you about how not being able to read, write and spell has affected my life, but the chances are that if you're reading this you already know about most of them. Through learning to read and write etc., I now see life differently. Now when my children bring homework home I'm right onto it. I sit down with them and we go through their work together. For example, my son Andrew is only eight and he has 20 spellings a week to learn. This week he had words such as exhibition, examination and electrocution. Before returning to education I would never have been able to help him with words like this, so the chances are he would not have learnt them. He would have gone to school, had his spelling test. Maybe he got 4 or 5 out of 20, if he was lucky, felt a bit daft in front of the children who had got most of them right and slowly but surely before you know it, it's a knock on effect, history is repeating itself. But because I can now sit down with Andrew and help him with his homework he gets marks like 17 out of 20, which to me is pretty amazing. I really feel that in my case because I'm all my children have, if I'd not have returned to education the chances are that my children would have ended up experiencing difficulties in their education. I'm not saying that they won't but if they do, like I did, I can now help them.

In today's world qualifications are needed in most jobs, again proving how important learning is. ---I just want to say that returning to education for me was one of the most frightening things that I have ever done, but one of the best. There have been times when I have wanted to quit because I found it too hard and believe me I have cried in frustration. There are two things that have kept me going, one is my beautiful children, they are depending on me and the other is my teacher, who is always on my case, only messing! She has been amazing. She is the one who when I've thought "What's the point?" has kept me going. She made me believe that I can achieve my goal if I work hard enough and so far she has been right.

The transformation of her aspiration and her life impacted on her children's progression and the transformation in the dynamics of the family. She no longer felt childlike but rather empowered to support her children. Their grades improved and Joanne felt much more confident and valued in her role as a mother.

Stella recounted similar experiences:

As soon as I feel confident enough with my writing I'm doing me level 2 in Care. The ones who are doing it in the rest home now are treated more professionally somehow. Like they get to help with the medicine round.

The development of literacy skills, confidence and self-esteem was linked to the learners seeing other possible choices in their lives. For many of the learners the adult literacy classes were their last hope of education. Stella's reflections at the beginning of the course are seen in the following interview extract:

Response: My aim to get on the level two NVQ in Care

Interviewer: That would be great. Have you ever considered that you could go further than that?

Response: What you mean take the level three

Interviewer: Yes

Response: Not really. You've got to be really bright to do that. No I'll just about manage two. A few people are on it I know and there's a lot of writing and that.

There was a transformation in the belief that Stella could just about 'learn to read and write properly' (Stella) to aspiring for and realising her dreams. Working in a collective was a way for the learners to begin to see themselves differently as individuals, and question their positioning in unbalanced power relationships that

have marginalised them and their practices of literacy, and act to change them. Stella progressed onto the level two and completed the level three in Health and Social Care. The cultural capital Stella developed led to resistance and empowerment for her family and self.

Discussion

At a critical time when Joanne and Stella were becoming aware of themselves and how they fitted into the classroom, self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt began to emerge. School should be a place where the learners feel comfortable and respected; instead they were anxious, confused and worried for their own wellbeing.

The PAR facilitated the development and delivery of a critical curriculum. It allowed me to address the conflict for basic skills tutors between enacting the dominant ideologies of individualism and exploring the structural inequalities which have impacted on the learners' lives, so they can challenge these inequalities. As such the learners' lives and experiences were embedded into the curriculum using their narratives and poetry, etc. This validated their experience and deconstructed the old knowledge, where they blamed themselves for being "thick" and "stupid". They substituted the blame with the construction of new, shared knowledge which enabled them to see the inequalities and violence in their lives and where these this had stemmed from.

Offering a democratic space both in the classroom and the community for learners to share their narratives also allowed the sharing stories of obstacles and solutions to overcome them. As such their narratives were themselves a capital which were drawn on by others to inspire and offer strategies to move forward. For example, Joanne's narrative about her learning journey and overcoming obstacles, the poverty, being in an abusive relationship and the power of education to transform her and her children's lives, offered others inspiration.

Conclusion

The "blame" and "guilt" experienced by Joanne and Stella is hardly surprising in today's neo-liberalist society, where myths of everyone having equal choice and options permeate through institutions and public life. The ideas of choices and opportunities for all has been compounded by New Labour's rhetoric about responsibilities (and now the coalition's notion of the Big Society) which have neglected to address the largely structural explanations of poverty and deprivation and instead place significant emphasis upon the lifestyle, culture and choices of the poor and marginalised (Duckworth 2013: 14). Critical literacy and the dialogue it provided encouraged the learners to examine and explore discourses of choice and social justice. How might they define themselves according to their ethnicity, class, gender, and other markers of identity? Providing the space for discourse around critical literacy practices unpicked the learners' understanding of power within identity and ways in which they might see a sharing of power between them and me as their teacher that was more democratic and socially just. Through this exploration of discourse, importantly, we were also able to examine how relationships help shape identities and understandings of others in the world.

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Literacy for freedom and expression

Jacqueline C.J Panton

Jacqueline used to write stories when she was younger. They were like fantasy stories, some horror stories and some supernatural. She had a strict church upbringing and enjoyed bible stories. She then moved to London where she studied for a BA in English and Theatre studies. She also took roles in a few plays. Jacqueline now works as a teacher of Functional skills English and is based in a prison. All her learners are inmates. Nowadays she tends to write about life experiences, her own and those of others.

I get a tremendous release through writing. With writing I dare to give form to my deepest and wildest thoughts and concerns. I used to write stories at a young age. They were mainly fantasy stories that gave me escapism from a strict Christian environment into the world of my imagination. I have since then enjoyed acting in fringe theatre, writing short pieces and teaching Functional Skills English. Now my writing is focussed on the world around me, on relationships, life situations and experiences.

I started a writers' group called "Monotone" in 2005 in Battersea library. The idea was to support new writing and help it to develop its audience. Monotone was about helping to develop creative talent by preparing it for the world of work. It wanted to push the boundaries of creative expression using different voices and energies in the community.

The writers' group aimed to link literacy skills to creative ability, giving ideas from their own worldview expression and form. The writers were encouraged to explore their ideas, highlighting the main ones and then finding appropriate language and style to express them. While some found this easy, others struggled to transfer their ideas to paper. The group members were able to work together and helped each other to organize their ideas. They would listen to each other and make suggestions to develop ideas.

Most of the writers in the group found that social contact with other writers was significant because they usually worked alone and were not able to compare writing skills or get new information. Some of the writers were unemployed and had complex lives influenced by many different things. Some used the writers group to overturn negative social experiences by changing people's perception of them. In their writing they would talk about things that were unknown to many people around them.

The women in the group accounted for 40% and were quite vocal at group meetings. They ranged from mothers who stayed at home with children, to working women who needed to break their 9 to 5 cycle. Writing was the perfect distraction from their daily lives. Most of them found a sense of belonging in the group and found the writing therapeutic. The group sessions were interesting and lively and every week brought with it new ideas and challenges. I set a creative writing task which was to become the main topic of a touring display. I gave the group one of my "inspirational lines", as they were called in the group, to write something about. The inspirational line was, "The skin I'm in". This inspirational line was taken from the title of a book called *The Skin I'm In* by Sharon G. Flake (2000). "The skin I'm in" was the actual line that the writers used to write their piece. The line would sometimes appear at the beginning or in the middle of their pieces often describing a different kind of skin. Some of the writing produced by the women in the group was very interesting especially when they revealed the influence for their writing. One of the women described the skin she was in as the things that she enjoyed doing. In her description she described the skin as being pure, and used the picture of a dove flying away into the sky:

The skin I'm in
Just because it's so pure
Pure in my eyes

For you this may not be
But why destroy this skin I'm in
Because your mind wears thin.
(Sofia Amedume)

She explained that writing gave her a sense of freedom from her everyday life. Another woman used the writing to express the way she felt about the history of her skin. She mentioned historical figures such as queens and princesses that were in the same skin and talked about their achievements. The women in particular found that the writing group provided escapism, expression and at the same time, development for their literary skills. This fact made the group sessions worthwhile and fulfilling.

Below are some pictures of the touring display of writing done by the group;



Earlsfield library
Displayed 17th July 2006
by Barbara Copeland



Balham library
Displayed 26th May 2006
by Daniel Andrews

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Using www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach with adult learners

Tina Byrne

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Context

In 2014 the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has been conducting research focusing on different aspects of literacy and numeracy tuition in Ireland. Two of the groups included in the research were English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners and young offenders. Some of the ESOL learners were referred to the adult literacy service by the Department of Social Protection in Ireland. In large part retaining their full Social Protection entitlement was dependent on taking part in an education and/or training programme. The young offenders were referred to a probation project that offers further education and training and is based on flexible provision. The programmes that the learners took part in offered a blended learning approach using the NALA learning website www.writeon.ie

The objective of this article is to summarise the main points from the NALA research presented at a workshop at the Mandated or Motivated Conference this year. The purpose of the workshop was to present findings from two research projects, [What really counts: Case studies of adult numeracy practice in Ireland pdf](#) and [The Blended Learning Project Report \(ESOL\)](#). The focus of the workshop was to elucidate the benefits of using www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach in the classroom.

Background

In September 2008, NALA launched www.writeon.ie, a website offering learning and national accreditation at Level 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland. In October 2010, the site was updated to offer Level 3 learning and accreditation. The site was intended for use with distance learners primarily but it was quickly identified by local providers as an efficient means of providing accreditation to learners in blended learning contexts.

Since it was launched, www.writeon.ie has been used by distance learners and learners in blended learning contexts in over 180 different learning centres in Ireland. Through this site, NALA has provided 14,990 Level 2 minor awards and 3,312 Level 3 minor awards to just under 3,000 learners. During 2013, 61,558 different people visited www.writeon.ie, spending an average of 22 minutes and 24 seconds each time. NALA ran a Blended Learning project in 2010 to see how the site was being used in 12 local contexts. The [report on this project](#) was published in 2011.

What really counts: Case studies of adult numeracy practice in Ireland

This report presents five case studies on practice in adult numeracy provision in Ireland. In Ireland adult literacy and numeracy provision is mainly provided by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) through local adult literacy and numeracy services (ALS). The ALS offers a range of programmes that include Adult Basic Education, Numeracy, Family Learning, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Workplace Basic Education. The majority of adult learners receive about two to four hours tuition a week during the academic year. The case studies in this report focus on different aspects of practice including general teaching practices, teaching mathematical concepts and the use of technology to teach numeracy in the classroom. Each of the five case studies illustrates numeracy practice as it happens and details the practice of the tutor in the classroom. The data provides an in-depth insight into specific practices that support numeracy development.

This includes teaching strategies that improve learners' understanding and use of maths in different contexts and their ability to transfer numeracy knowledge to everyday situations. Tutors amass substantial skills and knowledge through learning by doing and often by trial and error. NALA carried out this research in order to gain access to the experience and ability of numeracy tutors in relation to practice.

Tallaght Probation Service Case Study

The Tallaght Probation Project is a five day week NFQ Level 3 educational programme for 18-35 year olds leading to further training, education or employment. Participants receive an ETB (formerly FÁS) allowance. There are group-based intervention programmes designed to meet the presenting need of the individual. These include:

- Crime awareness
- Drug misuse
- Anger awareness
- Alcohol awareness
- Dual diagnosis

The service offers a high level of 1:1 support to engage people, promote continued participation and facilitate progression to appropriate options. Educational provision is provided on a flexible basis five days a week. Courses start at an accessible level and offer core skills in literacy, numeracy, computers and a broad range of NFQ accredited elective modules. The tutor uses www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach and describes how it has proven to be a very successful learning tool in the classroom. He explains that having started at NFQ Level 1 the majority of the participants quickly move onto NFQ Level 2. At this stage he introduces the young people to the www.writeon.ie program. As part of the class, the participants are introduced to computers, and once they are comfortable using them, he slowly introduces the program and tells the students that they can do a bit of maths on it as well. According to the tutor, 'after they've been using it a while and realise that it's not difficult they're flying with it.' The strategy is also successful in that the young people have the option of working independently or in partnership with another learner.

The technology presents learning in a way that the young people can understand and are often familiar with even if in a superficial way, for example, through using their mobile phones to send texts. They are familiar with the immediacy of technology; therefore, getting them to sit in front of a computer is not an issue. The young people do, however, tend to resist the use of the more traditional pen and paper as it reminds them of their school experience. Using www.writeon.ie incorporates technology into the learning, makes the learning more real to the young people and allows them to interact with the learning in a way that paper and pen does not. The tutor gives an example of how to answer a numeracy question when using pen and paper:

One young man insisted he could not answer the question even though the tutor knows it was well within his level. This resulted in a 'screaming match' and with him storming out of the classroom.

According to the tutor this situation exemplifies the attitude among the young people towards more traditional approaches to teaching numeracy. For example, they do not like to use pen and paper and often feel defeated by it, so using [writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) is a new and interesting way of learning. Using www.writeon.ie also allows them to answer questions and get an immediate score. The tutor points out that 'it's like instant gratification, [and that] they love it.'

One key benefit to using [writeon](http://www.writeon.ie) is the facility of diagnosing individual learning needs and quickly developing individualised learning plans. With a traditional group situation, the tutor is often forced to teach 'to the

group', trying to make a designed course fit the needs of a disparate group of learners. This can be very demotivating to learners who feel their particular needs are not being met. Because every learner has different learning needs, writeon allows tutors to cater to each person's needs more specifically and thereby maintain greater levels of learner motivation.

The tutor tells of how when the participants complete an exercise and get a perfect score they're elated:

This is probably one of the few times they've felt a sense of achievement in years. They particularly like using the pull and drag facility, the fact that you can click on something and 'ding, ding' numbers are coming up and that you can get through some exercises in under thirty seconds and then you're done. They think it's cool.

Using www.writeon.ie assists the learning process as the participants can see the mathematical problem in an applied, practical and visual way therefore it is very hands on and applicable to everyday life:

I've seen guys coming out of here beaming, you know, after twenty minutes they're literally beaming. They ask if they can go on and do the next exercise. It's really important here, I can't emphasise how important it has been. It has changed lives here. I really mean that.

The tutor provides an example of the success of using [writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) with one of the more vulnerable young people:

When this particular lad was assessed he had a lot of problems. So I supported him very heavily with at least three sessions and then I put him on www.writeon.ie and immediately it clicked and he ran away with it. He left here with a General Learning Cert.

Once they start working on Level 2 and find their confidence, they are ready to contemplate going for accreditation which would have been unthinkable when they first came to the programme. The tutor has been successful in introducing and familiarising the young people with Level 2 which is the level of the majority of the leavers. However, moving them beyond Level 2 to Level 3 can prove to be difficult, 'sometimes, it is too much of a leap for them.'

According to the tutor, since he started using www.writeon.ie in December of 2012, the difference has been 'like night and day - it's been amazing.' He describes how apart from its benefits as a learning tool, the programme can help him address and deal with behavioural issues in the classroom. He illustrates what can happen in a more traditional learning situation where a young person will 'kick off' if they think that one of their peers is getting more attention than they are. Using www.writeon.ie can alleviate and dispel these behavioural problems as the young people work independently with assistance from the tutor on request rather than as a necessity. The tutor concludes by stating that [writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) has proven to be a 'very successful' programme with the young people and it moves them on in terms of their progression.

English for Speakers of Other Languages: Blended learning project report

This report describes the findings from a research project carried out by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) at the request of the Limerick ESOL Partnership (LEP). The focus of the project was the use of www.writeon.ie, as part of a blended learning approach with ESOL learners. This took place over a ten week period with English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners in Limerick City and County. The report develops a profile of ESOL learners from an age, gender, educational, employment and cultural perspective. It documents how using a blended learning approach with www.writeon.ie can meet the needs of ESOL

learners. Finally it proposes recommendations for organisations considering adopting blended learning approaches to tuition of ESOL and adult literacy learners.

Main findings from the research

- The majority of learners were from Eastern Europe and of these 60% were from Poland.
- Over half of the learners were female and more than half were in the 35-44 age category. These numbers broadly reflect the gender and age profile of learners in the adult literacy service in 2012 (NALA, 2013).
- 31% described their personal situation as student. This was followed by working for pay (27%) and unemployed (27%), looking for first regular job (7%), and (2%) of the respondents were looking after home/family. These figures indicate an even spread amongst those who are working for pay and those who are unemployed.
- The majority of respondents (80.5%) indicated that they are not taking another learning course.
- Less than a fifth (19.5 %) identified themselves as taking an English language course along with their ESOL classes.
- The majority of respondents placed a strong emphasis on improving English skills and their main motivation for joining the course was to improve their existing skills in English.
- The learners reported that engaging in their children's education was not a motivating factor for the majority of respondents.
- The results from the survey show that receiving a qualification is not a strong motivating factor.
- The learners reported that since completing the ESOL course that their confidence had increased in a number of learning situations. They reported increased confidence levels when expressing themselves in English.
- The percentage of learners who reported that they found subjects hard has greatly reduced in every subject except 'Numbers' which has decreased.
- The number of people who found subjects easy increased across all the subjects except for 'numbers' which remained static.
- All of the learners reported the importance of accreditation to them.

Learners' views of using www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach

According to the learners using www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach was beneficial to their learning outcomes in a number of ways. They report that using www.writeon.ie allowed them to:

- Improve their English language skills through listening to the voice, 'looking up' words they did not understand by using Google translator
- Work independently at home

- Catch up' on school work that they had missed due to family, work or other commitments

Generally, the learners felt that the programme was most effective in helping them improve their English language skills, as can be seen in the following comments:

It is an opportunity to learn English. I am happy that I can learn English it is important in my life.

I use it for words, for some new words to learn

During interview the learners told how the classroom is often the only place where they speak English on a regular basis:

In here, it is an opportunity to speak English. Outside I understand not everything ... in here I can explain what I want, what I think.

Speaking English in the classroom is viewed as effective by both learners and tutors as it allows for practising the language in a real and safe environment. The learners reported that they tend to speak their native language in the home, or when socialising with friends who are usually the same nationality. Therefore, there are limited opportunities to use English outside of the classroom. This view is supported by the some of the course tutors:

They have Polish friends, they watch Polish TV, they read Polish newspapers so outside of here they don't get the chance to speak much English.

Their children usually have better English than they do, so they can often rely on the kids to be interpreters. So, they don't see it as a priority to speak English. We also see that those with lower levels of educational attainment are less likely to do the work outside of the class.

Some of the learners reported that when they engage in everyday events, going to the local shop, for example, they use whatever limited English they have. They try to avoid engaging in conversation with other locals including their neighbours as they are often 'embarrassed' by their lack of English and their struggle to communicate with others in a meaningful way. This is often a barrier to participating fully in work place conversations and social situations where they are required to speak English. However, they are enthusiastic about putting what they have learned into practice:

You feel better, when you go to shop or somewhere for something to eat. You can talk about weather, you can talk about things, we have our opinion we want to talk about it, but still we have a small vocabulary.

I am happy that I learn English. It is important to my life it make me confident and I can improve my skills.

Using www.writeon.ie as part of a blended learning approach is beneficial to the learners as they get an immediate response they get from completing tasks on the site, as is evinced by their comments:

I like that I could correct myself, I like that I can go back to a question

I like the tests I like that I work on my own

It was fun, I can check my answers and my skills, it make me confident.

Using www.writeon.ie is also beneficial as it allows them to learn English at home. The learners reported that they use the site at home to listen to and learn English rather than for other educational purposes e.g. completing an assignment or working towards accreditation. This practice was acknowledged by one of the tutors:

Okay, the homework situation ... that has its peaks and troughs especially when life gets in the way like an illness or having to deal with the social welfare... they tend to stop everything around language learning.

Some of the learners told us that they have recommended the website to family and friends in their home country as a way of learning English. The use of www.writeon.ie also affords the learners access to other online resources. The most talked about and used online resource is Google Translator. The learners reported that they use this resource extensively:

If I have a problem I copy it into Google and put it in the translator.

According to the tutors, Google Translator is particularly useful for independent learning:

They translate a lot, most of them would have the translation button open at the top and when they didn't understand they'd click and it would translate.

With this group they work fairly independently and what I find excellent is when they don't understand something rather than ask me they go onto Google Translate. I love to see that, I love to see them do that.

The learners cited two major difficulties that they have with the site. The first one is a technical issue in that they sometimes have difficulty understanding the mechanical voice. The second issue is a cultural one and relates specifically to the Sports section on the site:

I have problems with Sports, I don't know anything about Hurling, I don't know nothing about this, I don't understand the scores.

The tutors also reported that the cultural element to the Sports section sometimes created a difficulty in the class. However, this difficulty can provide a learning opportunity that might not otherwise exist:

What is the GAA and what is Hurling? Needs a lot of explaining. So the cultural thing can cause a problem. But, I don't mind doing it because I find it's an opportunity to teach them about Irish culture.

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of these research studies was to document how the literacy centres worked with NALA's [writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) to deliver blended learning opportunities to adult literacy learners. The findings suggest that it has been successful in this regard. There are no doubt challenges to introducing a blended approach into the wider adult literacy sector. However, the findings from these studies suggest that the benefit to learners outweighs any challenges that may exist, not least the costs and time constraints associated with training and supporting full time and volunteer tutors in the area of IT. There is clearly a lot more work to be done in terms of research around blended learning in adult literacy learning contexts. In conclusion, the feedback from tutors and learners suggests that the latter found blended learning helpful in meeting their learning and, in the in case of ESOL learners, their language needs. It was also beneficial to learners when it came to improving their computer skills. It also promoted the idea of independent learning, although this was

curtailed due to the lack of access to IT resources outside of the learning environment. Blended learning using the Internet is a relatively new approach to adult literacy learning in Ireland. It offers a more convenient, independent and flexible way of learning to adult literacy learners.

Unintended consequences of incentives, penalties and compulsion

Maxine Burton and Greg Brooks

Maxine Burton has many years' experience as an adult literacy teacher, trainer and researcher, and while at the University of Sheffield, worked on several projects for NRDC. She is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the UCL Institute of Education, London.

Greg Brooks is Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Sheffield, where he directed 15 NRDC projects from 2002 to 2008. He currently chairs the Federation of European Literacy Associations, and is on the Management Board of the EU-funded European Literacy Policy Network.

Their paper is based on a presentation they gave at the NIACE/NRDC/RAPAL/UCU conference in London in October 2014.

Introduction

Adult literacy learners who attend classes more regularly on average make more progress (Brooks *et al.*, 2001). So if learners could be encouraged, or made, to attend more regularly, they should make more progress. Is this actually correct? Various approaches to increasing attendance have been tried, and the plenary session by Elspeth Kirkman at the NIACE/NRDC/RAPAL/UCU conference showed that the Behavioural Insights Team (recently privatised from the Cabinet Office) is looking at this.

Some definitions

According to the Compact Oxford English Dictionary our terms can be defined as follows:

- Incentive - what motivates/encourages someone to do something
- Penalty - punishment for breaking a rule, law or contract
- Compulsion – forcing/requiring someone to do something

At the NIACE/NRDC/RAPAL/UCU conference, the workshop participants made the following suggestions. Payment for attending might increase attendance, but on the other hand learners might value courses more, and attend more often, if they had to pay for them. Both the latter idea and the possibility of penalties for non-attendance might hit the problem of learners having no money. And it was pointed out that some Job Seekers' Allowance claimants are currently required to attend basic skills classes.

It is interesting to ponder the difference, if any, between “compulsion” and “mandatedness” (the latter term being preferred by, for example, army personnel). Can an “incentive” be regarded as an extrinsic encouragement, and 'motivation' as something internally driven?

The NRDC Effective Practice in Reading study

This National Research and Development Centre in Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) study was conducted in 2003-06 (Brooks *et al.*, 2007). Our team of fieldworkers made four observation visits to each of 59 adult literacy classes attended by 454 learners in all, and also administered pre- and post-tests of reading, and questionnaires on attitudes to literacy. The average amount of progress in reading was small, possibly explained in part by the relatively small amount of specific teaching strategies seen. However, there were modest correlations between level of attendance and amount of progress, and between level of self-study and amount of progress.

During the spring and summer terms of 2005 we built a randomised control trial (RCT) on top of the main study (Brooks *et al.*, 2008). Learners in 28 classes were offered £10 vouchers for taking the pre- and post-

tests, and those in 14 randomly-chosen classes were also offered £5 for each class attended, up to a maximum of 10. The outcome measures were amount of progress in reading, and level of attendance. There was no difference in progress in reading (neither group made a significant gain), but average attendance by learners in the incentive group was actually lower than in the control group, a perverse result, the opposite of what was anticipated. One learner commented: 'I don't need to be bribed to do what I want to do anyway.'

NRDC follow-on studies

After the NRDC Effective Practice studies, there were various follow-on projects, involving members of the Effective Practice team. One project was writing a practitioner guide to reading, which looked at our findings and at other research in order to devise practice guidelines for teachers. It did not have a lot to say about motivation, other than noting that regular attendance was correlated with better progress. The guide went on to suggest (Burton, 2007: 1-2) that practitioners are sometimes too understanding and too ready to make allowances for poor attendance, which may, in turn, 'undermine learners' powers of assuming responsibility for their own learning.'

And there was another project (Burton *et al.*, 2010) which looked at specific teaching strategies, namely phonics, oral reading fluency and sentence combining, which our observations showed weren't being used much with adults, although the research base suggested that they could be effective for children. We incorporated focused training for the teachers as the initial part of the project. In all three strands – they were run independently of each other – significant progress was made by the learners in a relatively short time, progress not just in literacy but in self-confidence, engagement and enjoyment in class. Encouragingly, both the majority of the teachers (who received the extra training and support) and the learners (who were kept informed about the project) claimed to enjoy these lessons and to want to continue teaching and learning using these methods. Whatever the merits of the strategies, the enthusiasm of the teachers, combined with the learners' active engagement with the research project, did seem to provide additional motivation.

Government research

In the early 2000s there were at least two government studies on Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA). A review of its sanctions regime (Mwenitete, 2004) found that sanctions might have encouraged attendance, but were not very effective in boosting progress. And a separate study (Peters *et al.*, 2004) found that incentives were more effective than sanctions at encouraging attendance. Most recently, in the Autumn Statement 2013, the Chancellor announced that the government would pilot a new scheme of support for 18- to 21-year-old unemployed benefit claimants: 'From day 1 of a claim, training will be mandatory for young people without level 2 qualifications in English and maths' (Treasury, 2013: 101). This scheme is being evaluated with an RCT intended to run until 2017. Claimants in a pilot area will be allocated to online or blended (online plus face-to-face) provision or to a "business as usual" control group. It will therefore be at least three years, if not longer, before the results are known.

"Non-voluntary" learners

This was the term introduced by Anne O'Grady (O'Grady and Atkins, 2005/06) during her doctoral research at Nottingham. She intended it to apply to all learners who were receiving financial incentives for attending and/or penalties for not. At the time it covered mainly JSA claimants who had been ordered to attend classes and were receiving payment for compliance, or withdrawal of benefit in the case of non-compliance. Many participants did not want to attend, did not understand why they needed to, and minimised their attendance (they could call off sick a number of times) and involvement (they sat in the room without engaging).

The case of the army

The official history of basic skills in the army goes back at least as far as 1918, with the setting up of the Educational Training Scheme, the creation of the Army Education Corps (subsequently Royal Army Education Corps) and the establishment of the first basic education centres in 1943.

There always seems to have been a significant proportion of recruits with literacy (and numeracy) difficulties, a situation which comes to the forefront at times of mass conscription, such as the two world wars. Percentages recorded vary, but the figure of illiterate or semi-literate seemed to lie somewhere between a quarter and a third. As far as the army was concerned, their education initiatives were all about helping the recruits to function as more effective soldiers. Soldiers had to take part in basic skills classes, and had no choice in the matter. The following quote from Col. White's (1963) *The Story of Army Education 1643-1963* tells us something about the attitudes to soldiers with poor literacy skills during the Second World War:

The lot of the fully illiterate soldier was pitiable. Cut off from family news and public news by his inability to read, almost bound to fall into trouble through neglect of orders that he could not decipher, he often shrank from companionship; and the squad of recruits in which he hoped to integrate himself moved away from him as its efficiency grew. (White, 1963: 113)

This view was very much of its time, drawing on the deficit model, and the stigmatisation of illiteracy. Elsewhere White refers to the “successful treatment” of illiterate soldiers, as though they were ill and needed to be cured; disease metaphors were prevalent. A photograph from the 2nd World War of an army literacy class, sitting formally round a table, is entitled “Backward Readers” – which says it all.

The discourse does seem to have changed, however, and a comparable photo of a basic skills class in the recent report of the *Armed Forces Basic Skills Longitudinal study* (NIACE, 2012) shows men out of doors in combat gear, being shown a map of the terrain. The Ministry of Defence claims 'excellent completion and achievement rates' and it seems that, officially, failure to achieve simply does not happen (personal communication with an army officer, 2014). Certainly promotion is dependent on completing grades. And a further incentive is keeping up with fellow recruits as they progress through the ranks. The report (accessed 2/6/2014) closes with implications for civilian life, and the valuable lessons that could be learnt from the army model of contextualized vocational training: 'The army's investment in skills training for their workforce is a great example for other employers to follow.' The UCL Institute of Education website [reporting](#) on the study also mentions 'an ethos generating high expectations of success.'

From the army example we can thus identify the following relevant aspects that may affect successful “engagement”:

- Compulsion/mandatedness
- Peer pressure – keeping up
- Job pressure – promotion-driven
- Intensive, embedded and relevant work-based training
- High expectations.

Beyond Adult Literacy Language and Numeracy (ALLN)

In health care research, the use of incentives has been shown to reduce attrition in health care services and increase attendance in health education classes. In a systematic review of randomised controlled trials of the use of financial incentives, Guiffrida and Torgerson (1997) demonstrated that, out of 11 trials identified, 10 showed a positive effect of financial incentives in reducing drop-out. These studies were across a range of

health care areas, including health education. For example, in a trial among teenage mothers, incentives were highly effective at improving attendance at classes – but there were no differences in further pregnancies among teenagers in the two trial arms, which was after all the main purpose (Stevens-Simon *et al.*, 1997).

Mostly, rewards which are contingent on engagement reduce it. For example, rewarding children for an inherently rewarding activity (drawing) reduced both their motivation to take part in it, and the quality of their drawing (Lepper *et al.*, 1973).

The classic example of a perverse effect is what happened when staff at a kibbutz crèche introduced fines for parents bringing their children late: late arrival increased – the parents seem to have thought that the fine was a fee entitling them to bring their children late – it had been marketised. Similarly, a recent RCT by Bristol University reported by the Educational Endowment Foundation showed that offering Year 11 pupils financial incentives (up to £80 in each of four half-terms) improved their effort at classwork, but had no effect on their GCSE attainment in English (or science, though a little in some cases in maths). It remains to be seen what the effect will be of the University of Wales offering students money for taking courses in Welsh (reported in *Times Higher Education*, 16/10/14).

So what might work?

That is, what might work to encourage more regular attendance in ALLN, with its possible/probable feed-through to progress? Our own suggestions at the NIACE/NRDC/RAPAL/UCU conference were:

- Help for learners with incidental expenses
- Teachers helping them with bureaucracy
- More use of effective teaching strategies
- More self-study on the part of learners
- Better prospects for employment and/or better pay.

Others put forward by the participants at the conference were:

- Court orders
- Mandatory attendance, but with a choice among options (therefore not absolute direction to a particular course/class)
- A written contract between provider and learner, specifying progress to be expected according to attendance, etc.
- Building on the social norm of functional literacy in order to increase pressure on individuals to tackle their literacy attainment
- CPD for teachers on how to do that
- More role-modelling by literacy achievers and/or high-flyers.

Interactive session

To engage the workshop participants in thinking about incentives and the ethical issues involved, we tried to think of a parallel scenario to adult literacy. That proved hard, as there is a special stigma attached to difficulties with literacy that might not apply elsewhere, for example, to numeracy. Without wanting to get too personal and cause too much embarrassment, we settled on “Improving fitness”. We devised a worksheet for the participants to fill in and then discuss (see Appendix 1).

We wondered if everyone would react differently, as they would have different vulnerabilities, needs,

motivations and requirements for freedom of choice, and that it would be difficult to generalise. Or would we find definite trends in which incentives/ penalties might be most and least effective? Were there ethical issues at stake? And finally were there any parallels to be drawn with adult literacy learners and lessons to be learnt about effective and ethical engagement?

Conclusions

It seems that, if intrinsic motivation is already present, incentives and penalties produce perverse effects – except perhaps where money removes an obstacle, as may have been the case when some 16- to 18-year-olds received the Educational Maintenance Allowance. Compulsion may only work where obeying orders is routine (as in the army). Otherwise, compulsion may only produce resistance.

Also, having done much research over the years around the issue of stigma and illiteracy (Burton, 2014), we reflected that it might be instructive to assess how the features that appear to motivate people either interact with, or neutralise, or even feed off the stigma that is attached to literacy difficulties. After all, it is this stigma – and the accompanying strategies of concealment and denial – that are often a barrier to getting help and attending classes in the first place.

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Appendix 1: Worksheet on Adult Fitness Classes – Entry and Levels 1 and 2

		Student responses – tick and/or add suggestions
Goal	Select from Official ‘race’ to: Walk 5 km (Entry)	Do you need additional level catered for?
	Walk 10 km (L1)	
	Run 10 km (L2)	
Method	Attend 2-hr training sessions once a week for 3 months; do training ‘homework’ at least twice a week.	Too big a commitment?
Excuses	Why can’t you achieve this? What’s stopping you now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * No time * Don’t want to look an idiot * No kit
Motivation (personal)	Why might you want to do this? Think of some good reasons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Better health * Good example to my children
Incentives	What would make you do this? Number, in order, the suggestions that would work for you; cross out those that do not work for you.	Money/vouchers (how much?) – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For attending each session? • For completing the race? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A prize (e.g. holiday, meal) * Award of qualification with certificate * Chance to be on TV * Sponsorship to raise money for charity * Paid time off work to take part
Penalties	Which, if any, would be effective for you? Which strike you as unfair?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Fine for not attending sessions * Fine for not taking part in race * Naming and shaming for non-participation * Withdrawal of benefits/tax-relief/food vouchers/holiday leave entitlement
Compulsion	If training and race were made compulsory – no exceptions - how would you feel?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Resentful – it’s a free country * Relieved – getting fitter is ‘good’ for me * OK but as paid time off work * Anything else?
Any final thoughts & comments		

***New Literacies around the Globe: Policy and Pedagogy* Edited by Cathy Burnett, Julia David, Guy Merchant and Julia Rowsell**

Cost: Hardback, £85

Publisher: Routledge

Pages: 185

ISBN: SBN-13: 978-0415719568

Reviewed by Sam Duncan

Sam Duncan is an adult literacy teacher and teacher educator living and working in London. She is the author of Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development (2012) and Reading for Pleasure and Reading Circles for Adult Emergent Readers (2014). You can contact her on s.duncan@ioe.ac.uk.

Of all the literacy-related books I have managed to get my hands on this year, this is the one I am most pleased to own. By far. This is a wonderful book: stimulating, engaging, exciting, varied and just so *useful*. It is useful in providing new ideas for practice and it is useful in providing new perspectives on research. It begins with a foreword by Peter Freebody asking, 'aren't we all, perhaps, a bit tired of seeing words like "new" and "global"?' And don't we need to examine what exactly is "new" and what is "global" about literacies? Freebody's explorations of these questions alone make this book worth reading; he examines how relationships between technical, economic and social factors produce new literacy demands, and encourages us to think about the ways in which these demands reconfigure how we may understand the local and the global, and what it means to be literate. He asks (xviii) us to think about, as this entire volume asks us to think about, the relationship between "school" literacies and the other, the wider, the more "multiple" literacies of our lives, 'because many of literacy's riches haven't been missed; they've been omitted.'

Each chapter has something important to say about literacy development, each chapter provides valuable references and ways of expressing, imagining and reimagining puzzles of teaching and research. Like most books concerned with literacy, the focus is more on children than adults, but there are chapters with specific foci around teenagers and young adults (for example Davies on young women's Facebook spaces or Williams on university students' engagement with digital texts). Yet, every single chapter addresses issues of relevance of importance- to adult literacy educators and researchers. For example, Beavis' chapter on "Literature, Imagination and Computer Games" forces us to examine what we mean by the subject of English - something of increasing importance as adult literacy provision is labelled, by some, as "adult English". And Merchant's chapter on "Interactive Story-Apps" reminds us to keep broadening our conceptualisations of reading (that reading is not one practice or process; it is multiple and ever-evolving).

Reading this volume (and I did read every chapter; I would have been unable to resist it) also reminded me that though we want, as adult literacy specialists, to emphasise differences between our patch and that of children's literacy, we are still part of a larger literacy context- and thank goodness. As people concerned with literacy (or literacies), we are part of a huge and extraordinarily interesting group. We have so many colleagues from whom to learn.

My favourite part of this volume is in the last few pages, in the chapter, "A Charter for Literacy Education". Burnett et al have created nine key points, all of which are of fundamental relevance to adult literacy scholarship and practice. I'll end with three of these:

- An empowering literacy education involves a recognition of the linguistic, social and cultural resources learners bring to the classroom whilst encouraging them to diversify the range of communicative practices in which they participate.
- An empowering literacy education involves a range of activities that include improvisation and experimentation as well as the production of polished texts.
- An empowering literacy education involves a recognition of the affective, embodied and material dimensions of meaning-making.

And there are six more, each helping us to understand what it means to think about what is “new” and what is “global” about literacy.

Illiteracy in Victorian England: 'Shut out from the World' by Maxine Burton

Cost £24.95

Publisher: NIACE

Pages: 179

ISBN 978-1-86201-640-8

Reviewed by Jane Mace

Jane is a founder member of RaPAL. Although formally retired, she is still involved in research and believes that some research questions never leave you alone. She has recently been researching literacy practices in Quaker business meetings and revisiting issues that emerged in her seminal work - Playing with Time: Mothers and the Meaning of Literacy – as she tries to make sense of the literacy lives of her two grandmothers, both of whom died before she was born.

Despite huge steps in understanding over the last thirty years or more, the myth of the “great divide” persists. The alternative view – that of literacy practices which recognises all of us as various in our capacities to read and write, according to context, power and social relationships - is still barely known outside RaPAL circles. Anyone with shortages in the technical skills of writing and reading has the “slow” and “backward” label: seen (and seeing themselves) as lacking; the deficit, theirs.

So it is valuable to have a study that takes a scholarly look at some of the origins of the myth. To do this, Maxine Burton has chosen her period carefully, exploring attitudes and opinions to illiteracy and literacy at a time in Britain when universal schooling had yet to become possible, let alone compulsory: in the years before and after the 1870 Elementary Education Act.

Using disciplines of discourse analysis, documentary research, sociological frames of reference and a fair amount of literary criticism, Burton looks at two main sources: on the one hand, the propositions of researchers, politicians and journalists as to the state of the nation's education; on the other, the dialogues, incidents and characters conjured up in the work of four novelists. In reflecting on her findings, she has done a scrupulous job, both with her analysis and with the theoretical grounding for her research approach.

First she looks at two sets of documents, appearing either side of the landmark 1870 Act: accounts by assistant commissioners sent out to gather evidence for the Newcastle Report on 'the state of popular education in England' published in 1861; and submissions to the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the 'workings of the Elementary Education Acts' – whose final report appeared in 1888.

Then she explores a total of twelve novels, the work of four authors. Three of these she locates as being of middle or lower-middle class origins (Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and Anthony Trollope); the fourth (Thomas Hardy) an “authentic” working-class writer. Gaskell and Trollope wrote about provincial and northern industrial life, Dickens on life in Victorian London; Hardy, of rural and agricultural communities.

In terms of the literacy context for all this work, this was a time of huge developments: the possibilities for letter-writing and newspaper-reading, to take just two examples, were changing. For assistant commissioner Patrick Cumin, writing in 1861, in such a context the deprivations of those without literacy were distressing:

In these days of penny postage and penny newspapers, those who cannot read or write must remain during their lives shut out from the world (44).

We can imagine, by contrast, that he and his researching colleagues, not to mention the novelists, would all have made the most of both newspaper-reading and letter-writing practices; with Anthony Trollope, being directly caught up in the latter through a working life (as Burton tells us) as a travelling civil servant with the post office (99).

For him, however, the growth of literacy in others was by no means a positive phenomenon. Rather, as Burton shows, he seemed to see it as another sign of the 'unwelcome change' going on around him - a view she elicits from his portrayal of Ruby Ruggles the farmer's daughter in rural Suffolk (*The Way We Live Now*, 1875) and her betrothed, John Crumb, a flour dealer:

It is implied that it is Ruby's very literacy that has led her astray from 'sturdy, honest' John Crumb and into the arms of the 'worthless' Sir Felix.

With the latter, Trollope shows her as having found 'a realisation of those delights of life of which she had read' (104) – perhaps in one of the weekly women's magazines being increasingly published at the time.

On the other hand, as Burton shows us, we see through Elizabeth Gaskell's work, different views on how literacy might or might not confer status. In Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1866) Squire Hamley is portrayed as suffering from an inferiority complex with his lack of higher education, worrying about his sons bringing home their public-school friends and assuming him to be unable to sign his own name; while the Hollingsford Book Society is seen as a 'test of gentility, rather than of education or a love of literature' (97) and any potential stigma of illiteracy is only a problem for the lower classes.

Gaskell dwells lovingly on details of handwriting, grammar and spelling but at the same time there is a feeling that, for members of the middle and upper classes, deficiencies in writing style 'did not matter very much' (106).

Meanwhile, Burton finds in these novels little sense of working class characters themselves feeling any stigma attached to illiteracy: Mother Cuxsom, in Thomas Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) being a good example. Hardy's own life had given him some sense of active relations between literate and illiterate, Burton tells us; as a schoolboy, he had experience of acting as scribe for illiterate girls in his village, reading letters from soldier sweethearts. This experience, she suggests, would have contributed to his account of Mother Cuxom's, recalling this from her girlhood:

Love letters? Then let's hear them, good soul....Lord, do ye mind, Richard, what fools we used to be when we were younger? getting a schoolboy to write ours for us; and give him a penny, do ye mind, not to tell other folks what he'd put inside, do ye mind? (120)

This novel is discussed in what is for me, the most engrossing chapter in Burton's book. Her detailed commentary on passages and characters made me want to go back and reread *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), for example, to rediscover Joseph Poorgrass and Henry Fray's views on illiteracy. I so much enjoyed her account, in *The Return of the Native* (1878) (a novel set, as Burton points out, in the 1840s) of the exchanges between Damon Wildeve, Olly and Grandfer Cattle on learning or not learning to read and write – not to mention the picture of Captain Drew, fulminating at the shocking graffiti in the neighbourhood ('chalking on gateposts and barn doors') by the young rascals who - unlike their parents – had been taught to read and write at school.

More than once, Maxine Burton expresses regret at a shortage of data in her findings as to gender. I regret this too, feeling sorry that she had provided only one female novelist, and puzzled at her interest in Trollope, with so little to say about illiteracy - and what he did say, in some places, showing outright snobbery. In comparing a scene from his *The Warden* (1855), with one from Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), she shows us a distinction between the two writers' sympathies, which suggests a touch of contempt. 'Trollope is creating a picture of the illiterate for the sake of his literate readers,' she tells us, 'as Dickens did.'

But whereas Dickens only poked fun at the pretensions of those who exaggerated their literacy, Trollope seems to find the whole concept of illiterate people amusing. (103)

In her conclusion, Burton invites us to explore further and her book is certainly an inspiration to do so. I would love, for example, to see more research on the common ground between policy writing and fiction writing. Those Victorian assistant commissioners investigating the extent of literacy in the population would themselves have had a literacy life, beyond note-writing and report-drafting. They may well have read – or even written – poetry and novels, as well as government reports.

As Burton suggests, novelists are well able to create as well as to reflect prevailing attitudes. There was, after all, just such a two-way effect in our own times when another policy actor chose to use of fiction to introduce government recommendations on adult literacy education. Instead of citing the experience of a real life adult literacy learner, Sir Claus Moser chose to quote the excited words of Bernard Schlink's protagonist Michael in his novel *The Reader* (already by then translated into 25 languages, not yet brought out as a film), overcome with emotion at receiving a letter from the previously illiterate Hanna, written from her prison cell. Michael, Schlink tells us, had taught Hanna to read and in quoting his delight, Moser positions himself, like Michael, as a rescuer of illiterates. More, he enlists the “Fresh Start” report (1999) policy recommendations - and us - into his project: to rescue the ignorant from darkness and criminality. If ever there was an example of myth-making – however unwitting – by a policy actor, this is one. It was good to be part of RaPAL critiques at the time; but difficult to stem the ripples of influence such a connection might have made in other minds.

Attitude studies matter. In this one, Burton has given us a sense of those which shaped the first years of a British primary schooling system – and how quickly these changed with the start of that system. By the 1860s, the causes of illiteracy are seen mainly to be a lack of opportunity; by the 1880s, that attitude changed, so that those who were without literacy were seen to be short of the intelligence to acquire it – “dull” children failing to reach the standard required for their age. Maxine Burton has done a skilful service in teasing out the threads of that shift in attitude, voiced indirectly and directly both through fiction and policy-writing.

This is a lively book. Challenging at times in its detail, I found it always rewarding in its insights. To all with an interest in showing where the real deficit may lie, 'in a society that excludes, reduces and ridicules the rich means of communication that exists among its people',¹ I warmly recommend it.

***Adult Literacy and Development: Stories from the Field* by Alan Rogers and Brian Street**

Cost: £24.95

Publisher: NIACE, 2012

ISBN 978-1-86201-574-6 (print)

Pages: 185

Reviewed by: Yvonne Spare

Yvonne Spare has taught adult literacy across the whole range of settings for many years, including teacher training, before moving on to work as a research fieldworker for the University of Sheffield, NRDC and the Institute of Education. Since then she has worked as an independent researcher and consultant for various educational organisations, including the National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency. She continues to work as an independent consultant and is currently developing a proofreading website to help small businesses and individuals.

This book is a collaboration by two very experienced practitioners in the field of adult literacy. In it they describe examples of their extensive work in different countries in the developing world and suggest lessons to be learned for our own practice. Alan Rogers has specialised in adult learning methodologies whereas Brian Street's main interest has been in ethnographic field research. It is therefore as much for policy makers and researchers as for practitioners, examining the theories, policies and practices of literacy provision in the wider context of international development.

The book is divided into three parts: the first, "Exploring literacy in the field", looks at some ethnographic studies and proposes a framework for analysis; the second, "Adult literacy learning programmes", looks in more detail at the content of a range of programmes; the third, "Some implications for policy and practice", attempts to reconsider policy and practice as it might relate both to further programmes in the developing world and also in the West.

Part One considers the view of literacy as social practice and how our thinking about literacy, learning and motivation has changed over time. The authors analyse the differences between formal and informal learning, recognising that we may use different languages or literacies (literacy practices) for different purposes. They understand that adults are sometimes more motivated by other types of learning than literacy learning, such as religious practice or work skills and ask (72), 'Who has the power to determine that one form of writing is literacy but other forms are not literacy?'

Part Two investigates the long-term failure of many, indeed, the authors claim, of most large-scale adult literacy programmes in the developing world. They believe that many of the attributed benefits of learning literacy could actually be the benefits of participating in any learning group. These programmes are rarely adequately funded; they are often text-book- based and make the assumption that the learners are all starting at the same level with no prior knowledge. The main failings, they say, are learner motivation, teaching methodology and the gap between classroom and everyday literacies. They offer as evidence the greater success demonstrated in the functional element of combined literacy and functional skills programmes.

1. Tett, Lynn, Hamilton, Mary and Crowther, Jim (2012) *More powerful literacies*. Leicester: NIACE

In contrast, some of the success stories they describe include small-scale, non-text-book programmes, which may be linked to vocational training or health instruction, recognising that many learners will come with a specific task in mind, such as filling in a new form or reading a particular document. Sometimes these may be in workshop format, using learner-generated materials or items taken from the 'literacy environment' of a particular community. They cite (143) the example of a drop-in literacy shop in a market in Nigeria (effectively a stall with a sign above) which attracted 3,900 people in nine months, who could either be helped with some pressing literacy task or passed on to the nearest literacy class, succeeding in reaching a large number of people at very little cost.

The authors conclude this section by suggesting four main reasons for failure, which apply equally to our own work closer to home, the assumption:

- that provision leads to demand
- that texts need to be easy reading
- that new literacy users need reading but not writing
- that literacy is an activity to do alone, independently, not collaboratively

Part Three concludes with the implications of their findings for policy and practice. Firstly, that ethnographic research into existing literacy practices should always be carried out before developing a learning programme. Secondly, that there must be recognition that everyday literacy practices are usually different from forms of literacy being taught in many adult literacy learning programmes; and thirdly, that teaching adults is different from teaching children. Policies should start from the positive, explore existing practices, and include literacy and numeracy as part of a whole set of skills which will help to bring about changes in people's lives.

This is a densely packed book, full of examples and references to many other studies. It benefits from repeated readings. (I had to read it twice to extract examples that I could remember). The "stories from the field" are numerous but they are embedded in detailed analysis and references to other literature. Some examples, twelve in all, are highlighted in textboxes - I would have welcomed more of these. However, it is – as would be expected - a full account of over 40 years of experience. I enjoyed the photographs illustrating the descriptions of learners and classes – I read about the classes that took place at the side of the road because there was nowhere suitable, but it became much more meaningful when I saw the photograph on the following page of learners sitting in a row on the verge with traffic passing immediately behind 'with all the interruptions, noise and even jeering that result (123).' On the face of it, this looks like an example of a culture (in this case Uganda) that did not value adult learning and teaching, yet many of us probably have memories of teaching adult learners in unsuitable spaces when no classroom was available. So despite the examples being distant from the experience of most of us, there is much food for thought. Adult literacy learners come to classes in their own time, each with his or her own aims and motivation, which may or may not be the same as their neighbour's. As Street and Rogers conclude, the key to successfully achieving those aims is to identify and build on existing literacy practices, drawing together the everyday, informal literacies with the more formal classroom literacy.

***Learning with Adults: A Critical Pedagogical Introduction* by English, L.M and Mayo, P**

Cost: £39

Publisher: Sense, 2012

ISBN 978-94-6091-766-0

Pages: 276

***Learning with Adults: A Reader* Edited by Mayo, P**

Cost: £36.89

Publisher: Sense (2013)

ISBN 978-94-6209-333-1

Pages: 407

Review by Alan Rogers

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

It is not easy to review two large and important books adequately within the space of a relatively short note, especially when they aim (2) to provide 'substantive overviews of critical issues and approaches that are integral to practising and theorising on adult education.' What we have here is a textbook written by two prolific writers on adult education and a supplementary volume of 'essays on topics which we have neglected here [in the textbook] such as workplace learning, disability studies and transformative learning(4).' Both are aimed mainly at those students in higher education courses on adult education, although practitioners will also find much in both volumes of value on their particular concerns. For example, the *Reader* groups its 28 essays into 5 sections, on lifelong learning and the learning society; adult learning, difference and identity; sites and instruments of practice; learning in everyday life; and policy and regions. Papers come from many different regions of the world and cover many sectors of adult education; many are revised editions of papers already published but some appear to have been written for this volume. ²

It seems then best to pick out what I see as the four key messages of these volumes. First, there is an apologia for adult education. The term *adult education* is key throughout, but it is always located within a wider field: for example (95), 'the education of adults, within the context of the broader all-embracing process of lifelong learning,' a phrase repeated many times. Adult education is nowhere defined; but, although situated within the whole field of lifelong learning/education, it is argued that adult education is at the same time wider, since lifelong learning/education is often narrowly defined to be education for employability (Chapter 8), while adult education (18) 'takes on board the different multiple subjectivities characterising individuals,' such as education for older persons, for those with disabilities, etc., which (it is claimed) do not fall into many definitions of lifelong learning and which the OECD and the EU, with their exclusive focus on learning and work, tend to exclude. Time and again, the book argues that adult education has a major role to play today.

Secondly, it is asserted (with passion) that adult education is a public good. 'The decline of investment in adult learning and education by state institutions' is deplored (xiv). With other writers, the authors (38) point to the 'transition of [language from] lifelong education to lifelong learning, as a result of which less emphasis is placed on the state's responsibility for "education for all" and more emphasis is placed on the individual

2. All page numbers are from the textbook, not the reader.

taking charge of his or her own learning... , ' thus (16) 'converting education from a public to a consumption good.' The authors warn (19) that 'adult educators need to be constantly vigilant regarding how ideology resides in language.' The OECD and the EU are particularly accused (222) of the 'distortion of the former humanist, albeit liberal ... concepts of lifelong education, ... placing the onus on the individual's personal investment in learning rather than on the state to provide adequate structures for learning.' Education today is seen by such authorities as (96) 'an individual and not a social responsibility ... individuals called on to finance wholly or partially their own access to adult education as though they are purchasing a consumer product rather than availing themselves of a public service to which they are entitled as citizens.' The neo-liberal commodification (96) of adult education, and the "welfarisation" (24) of lifelong learning have betrayed its radical origins; employers make (12) 'employees partly responsible for their professional upgrading.' Education should be intended 'to equip persons not only individually but also collectively' with competences for collective action (98). 'Rather than simply 'define entitlements' and 'set agreed minimum standards', the public sector [including the trade unions] should take upon itself to increase provision in this vital area, quality provision accessible to one and all (17).'

The third message (1) however makes this difficult, for the role of adult education is nothing less 'the promotion of social justice' and the state is called upon (2) to cease supporting unjust and oppressive dominant interests and to assist adult education 'that involves but also transcends personal growth to embrace systemic change,' instead of (215) simply enabling 'people to adapt to and reintegrate within the system, adult education for social purpose is intended to empower groups and individuals to confront the system with a view to changing it.' We are reminded several times that education *cannot* be neutral - it either supports the status quo or challenges it.

So fourthly, the tool for this transformation is critical adult education. All adult education, including workplace training, can be (1) 'a space for a critical examination ... to analyse issues systematically and collectively in order to develop a coherent vision for reconstruction.' 'The thrust throughout this entire book,' the authors say (41) is on criticality and they point out (98) that 'a critical reading of the world should constitute the principal competence to develop within an educational process intended to strengthen and regenerate the public sphere,' even an adult educational process provided by the state.

This defence of adult education and the reminder that adult educators cannot be neutral is greatly to be welcomed. But there are times when (as in CONFINTEA) the (3) 'central role of adult education in addressing worldwide crises, environmental degradation, and in creating a sustainable world for all' feels overclaimed; adult education on its own cannot be omnicompetent. In particular, the book implies that any support to subversive movements would be justified. The "Arab Spring" is mentioned only in passing, and it is not an accident that there is no discussion here about jihadism which too calls for radical transformation of society on a global scale. There is no clear *moral* focus (although spiritual adult education is discussed) to guide adult educators. It assumes (219) that it is easy to identify who the oppressors and the subjugated are. To be opposed to consumptionism and support local collectivities against the global is easy; but it is not always true that (201) 'the people in the community know what is best for them,' and (204) not every adult 'learner is ..an active citizen engaged in the larger socio-cultural context.' Respect for diversity and tolerance do not appear very clearly as guiding lights for the ships at sea (they are mentioned but not expanded upon). The contradiction of arguing for a stronger state in support of something which is openly subversive of state dominance is not adequately addressed, nor how state-sponsored adult education is to avoid dependency. But that these books raise such issues must be to the benefit of all adult educators. That is, if they can get through two long volumes, tightly written, cluttered up page after page with unnecessary references to other authors English and Mayo have either talked to or read (especially the conclusion, well worth struggling through despite the clutter). And the book also suffers from being in large part a compilation of revised

versions of papers which the two authors have written and published elsewhere - which makes some of the sections patchy. Chapter 8, for example, on competency-based adult education is too short really to deal with this crucial issue; adult education for citizenship is treated in two sections and neither really gets to grip with alternative forms of governance - the papers are tied too closely to their earlier published versions.

Despite this, these two books are very useful sources to dig into for material on various aspects of adult education; they should be read despite their length and clutter, for they may form part of the fightback of adult education within the wider context of lifelong education and lifelong learning. They deserve careful consideration for the cogent arguments these two passionate advocates outline - but they will not be as useful as they could have been if they had been freed from the constraints of the earlier publications and if they had avoided the somewhat self-indulgent display of the erudition which the authors clearly have.

WRITING GUIDELINES

Why not write something for the RaPAL Journal?

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

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

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

Guidelines for contributors

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

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

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

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

1. Ideas for teaching

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

2. Developing Research and Practice

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

3. Research and Practice: multi-disciplinary perspectives

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

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

Reviews

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

Submitting your work

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

What happens next?

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

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

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