ISSN 2054-5355

Volume No. 108 Autumn/ Winter 2023

RaPAL

Journal

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacies Network

Welcome

Research and Practice in Adult Literacies (RaPAL) is the only UK-wide organisation that focusses on the role of literacies in adult life. We promote effective and innovative practices in adult literacies teaching, learning and research; and support adult literacies practitioners and researchers. We enjoy engaging in debates that touch on English language and literacy, numeracy and digital skills across homes, communities and workplaces. Through our members, digital journals, conferences and fora, policy and advocacy work, we are active in Europe and have international links.

What we do

- Encourage collaborative and reflective research
- Publish a journal three times a year
- Create networks by organising events (including an annual conference) to contribute to national debate
- Believe in democratic practices in adult literacies
- Emphasise the importance of social context in literacies
- Critique current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill
- Campaign for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives

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

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

Why not join us?

Further information can be found at our website: www.rapal.org.uk
The RaPAL Journal is also available from various subscription services: EBSCO, LMInfo and Prenax.
The RaPAL journal expresses a variety of views which do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial group. The RaPAL journal was designed by Image Printing Company, Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire

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Contents

Note from the Journal Coordinator p.5
Yvonne Spare

Editorial p.6
Dr Toni Lambe

A Personal experience of Teaching English to Ukrainian Refugees p.8
Siobhan Cooney

Autonomy: What does it look like in the classroom? p.12
Mark Hynde

On the pursuit of learner autonomy – encouraging language use outside the classroom p.15
Dr Marcin Lewandowski

Apprehending in the Guild: Reflections on autonomy in the English teaching classroom p.20
Dr Michael Smith

Supporting Student Autonomy through a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Feedback Approach p.24
Dr Eleanor Neff

A Reflection on Promoting Autonomy in an online module p.27
Catriona Warren

Changing the impact of the examination in student learning and module/ programme completion p.29
Dr Clare Power

Language and Literacy Reflections on Autonomy p.32
Dr Eleanor Neff, Catriona Warren, Dr Marcin Lewandowski, Mark Hynde, Dr Michael Smith, and Dr Clare Power

A Weekend with RaPAL p.34
Tara Furlong

Book review: Feminism, Adult Education and Creative Possibility, edited by Darlene E Clover, Kerry Harman, and Kathy Sanford p.37
Ann Swinney PhD

News from the Sector p.38
Tara Furlong

Note from the Journal Coordinator

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

Welcome to Volume 108, our Autumn/Winter edition.

Our next volume, due out in the Spring/Summer of 2024, will be our conference edition, based on the English, Maths and ESOL Annual Conference held in London in November, which is hosted by the Learning & Work Institute, and of which RaPAL is a supporting organisation. This edition will be distributed to all conference attendees and is a valuable way of publicising our activities.

We still need volunteers to help with the editorial process for this and future editions – please contact us if you would like further information.

Everyone with an interest in any aspect of the editorial process would be very welcome – prior experience is not necessary.

Any comments about this or other editions, or ideas for future content can be sent to journal@rapal.org.uk. Don't worry if your ideas for an article do not fit one of our themes – there is space in all our Journals for items of interest to our readers. Most Journal editions contain articles by new writers, including adult literacies learners. There are guidelines on our website on the Write for Us page and we offer as much support as you feel you need.

As always, if you have any ideas about articles suitable for peer-review we would ask you to contact us early to allow discussion of your proposal.

Vacancies

We are still in urgent need of volunteers to put themselves forward for the main management group roles which have become vacant this year, which are **Chair, Membership Secretary, Journal Coordinator and Website Manager**. We are more than happy to discuss any of these roles formally or informally and will welcome enquiries to journal@rapal.org.uk, webweaver@rapal.org.uk or to any other current member of the management group (details inside the front cover of this edition).

We look forward to hearing from you and hope you enjoy this edition of your RaPAL Journal.

We would like to reiterate that the articles we publish are not necessarily representative of the views or position of the membership body, and we do not advocate any given course of action in any given context. We do, of course, support freedom of speech and of academic liberty, and the pragmatic achievement of objectives as a negotiated consensus.

Editorial

Dr Toni Lambe

Toni is an adult literacy professional who has a longstanding interest in social justice. Her research interests are in the area of literacy and social justice and the links between policy and practice.

Welcome to Journal 108 which contains a number of articles related to the theme of autonomy in education – in both the Further and Higher education sectors. We would also like to welcome some new writers to RaPAL and hope we have a long and fruitful co-operative relationship.

Journal 108 opens with an article by Siobhan Cooney whose attention is on the particular challenges faced when working with students intimately connected to an active war. Siobhan works with Ukrainian adults displaced by the ongoing war in Ukraine and hopes her article will provide the impetus for a broader discussion amongst others working in a similar situation.

This is followed by seven articles on the theme of autonomy in education. These articles resulted from a part of a practice-exchange by a group of practitioner researchers in Ireland and the UK. Each of the first six articles is a standalone piece reflecting the authors' understanding of autonomy and their experiences of attempting to create a space for autonomy in their particular learning environments. All articles provide food for thought and some useful examples of good practice. As three of the writers work in Further Education (FE) and the other three in Higher Education (HE) the articles are grouped in the order of FE followed by HE. The final article in this section brings together some common themes from the previous articles.

The first article on autonomy in FE is by Mark Hynde who provides an insightful reflection on the socio-cultural context of language. His efforts to engage students in the language element of a vocational programme leads to some interesting observations regarding student autonomy and learning content. Mark also offers some creative and innovative ideas that should be of practical value.

The next article by Marcin Lewandowski addresses an issue that invariably forms part of the discussion whenever two or more ESOL tutors working with migrants meet. That is, how to encourage autonomy outside the classroom. Marcin argues that autonomous language learning is a skill that needs to be cultivated and provides some examples of his practice. While he does admit that his methods may have 'compromised autonomy in the short

term', it will be up to the reader to determine whether his methods are worth adapting in their practice, particularly in light of the reported positive outcomes.

Michael Smith is focused on writer development within the English teaching classroom. He sees autonomy as something to be aspired to and in line with the previous two authors provides practical examples of his approach.

The next three articles are authored by practitioner researchers all working in the Literacy Development Centre (LDC) in South East Technical University (SETU) Waterford. Their students are all adults who are currently working in, or interested in working in, the Adult Literacy, Adult Education, Community Education and the wider Further Education and Training (FET) Sector.

Eleanor Neff describes how she utilises Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to encourage autonomous learning. Her description of 'feedback videos' will be of interest to those concerned with increasing the value of feedback to the student.

Catriona Warren addresses autonomy in the context of delivering an online module to adult literacy practitioners. Her article emphasises the importance of peer-learning and buddy groups to support autonomous engagement.

The final individual reflection on autonomy in education is by Clare Power. Clare's article will resonate with adult educators whose students are struggling with the idea of terminal examinations and she raises an interesting point about the relevance of terminal examinations in the 'adult education space'.

The concluding article in this section brings together the learning from the preceding six articles.

To complete the articles in this edition, Tara Furlong has written an account of a recent long-awaited weekend away at Aston University in Birmingham, where we held our AGM and annual Editorial Group meeting alongside various strategy and planning workshops.

Our book review for this edition is from Ann Swinney who reviews *Feminism, Adult Education and Creative Possibility.* This is an edited book that challenges us to think about the links between adult education, feminism and creativity.

Tara Furlong's *News from the Sector* update rounds off this volume.

I hope you enjoy Journal 108 and would encourage you to engage with those authors who welcome comments on their ideas. In this way we continue to build communities of practice.

A Personal experience of teaching English to Ukrainian refugees

Siobhan Cooney

Siobhan is currently a tutor and ESOL co-ordinator in Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education Training Board (DDLETB), Ireland. She has worked for over 25 years in further education, across a range of areas including ESOL (English as a Second Language), literacy, IT and rehab care. She now teaches Ukrainian refugees in ESOL as well as working as a co-ordinator of ESOL classes in the local Tallaght area. She recently completed a Masters in Creative Writing and her focus is on a student-centred approach to teaching and learning with a particular emphasis on teaching through creativity. Siobhan welcomes comments on the ideas expressed here and can be contacted at: siobhanbcooney@ddletbaes.ie

Introduction

I began teaching English classes to refugees from the Ukraine-Russia war in September 2022. I knew there would be some challenges given the unique situation of teaching learners directly impacted by an active war. Many had come to Ireland with no English and most having no prior knowledge of the country or the culture. I wasn't sure how I would manage teaching this group of displaced and traumatized people. The classes are held in a large hotel (where the refugees are housed) in the outskirts of Dublin which means that the students are living in an enclave of sorts with only Ukrainian and Russian speakers. Televisions are dotted around the hotel with the Ukrainian news constantly broadcasting live coverage of the war. Initially I wasn't sure if I should even speak about the war in class but could see it would be disingenuous to ignore the situation totally. Eventually, I decided to concentrate on making the classes a useful and enjoyable experience for the students and an escape from the constant stream of news from back home. Oftentimes, there is animated conversation (in Ukrainian) before the class and it is obvious that something serious has occurred. At these times, I allow the discussion to continue for a few minutes as it is clear that students need to vent about what has happened. Also, there are many emotional moments when bad news is received from Ukraine about a hometown or a loved one. Sometimes the students show me before and after pictures from their bombed cities, places of work and homes. But for the most part, I try to keep the focus on the English lessons.

In this reflection I bring together some of my experiences in the hope that they will be of help to others working in a similar situation and perhaps start a conversation that will be useful to us all.

Observations

English language learners are typically motivated to learn the language for work, entry to university or further education and the ability to study in their chosen field. While this is true of some of the Ukrainian students, it is not their primary motivation. These people have been transported without warning to an English-speaking country and now need to acquire the ESOL language skills for daily life. It is important also that they learn about customs and

traditions of Ireland, like Halloween for example. While this can be considered an 'interesting' topic for learners in other countries, the Ukrainian students' children would be dressing up in their schools and the parents needed to know why.

Often though, apart from those who have children in schools, students have limited interaction with the Irish public. Two of the groups I teach started with very little or no English. So, we had to cover the basics, as in alphabet, numbers, dates, telling the time and form filling. Spelling is very important because of the differences in the characters in the Ukrainian alphabet. I also try to incorporate vocabulary around the weather, clothes, household items and typical phrases that we use every day.

With the more advanced groups I typically use articles or 'listenings' from the local news sites like RTE or the BBC, but in this case, I was conscious that clicking onto the websites of the mainstream media would bring up stark images of the war. In the past, I had typically taught students in their country of origin or in a new city but where they had made the choice to go with a specific goal in mind. This group of course had not known anything about Ireland beforehand. In fact, some had never heard of the country before, so I feel that lessons should include information on Irish culture. A major cultural difference is using please and thank you in everyday conversations. This is not the norm in Ukraine, so we discussed the importance of being polite in everyday conversation. At first they were shy about speaking English with their peers. Although they were all from Ukraine, they still had to get to know the others in the class. It was difficult at first to minimise the chatter in Ukrainian but thankfully the students are becoming more comfortable with speaking English and it is really gratifying when they spontaneously chat to each other in English before the class even begins. As time has gone on their classmates have become almost a support group and the consistency of regular classes has provided some certainty in an uncertain world.

Unfamiliar sounds pronunciation

Teaching some phonics is important – and focusing on the sounds that are unfamiliar in Ukrainian. For example, pronouncing the letters 'v' and 'w' is difficult for Ukrainian and Russian speakers. Taking time to demonstrate how to form the shape of the words and giving them the opportunity to distinguish the difference sounds of certain words is vital; for example,' walk' and 'work'. One student in my higher level class was initially very reluctant to use the term vice-versa and wanted reassurance that this was indeed a common phrase in English as she found it so difficult to pronounce. It became such a joke in the class that we now use it all the time and she has mastered it.

Teaching materials

As these learners are living, working and studying in Ireland it is not always logical to teach in a linear fashion as proscribed in textbooks which typically follow a sequence of lessons, for example present tense, followed by present continuous with the past tense coming at a later stage. However, our learners need to use the past tense to talk about their lives in Ukraine, for example, 'Where did you live?' 'What did you do in Ukraine?' So, I decided that

in order to follow a step-by-step curriculum and to measure progress, I would use a typical English teaching textbook. However, most are published in the UK, and use more British-centred vocabulary and references are mostly to England. There is a dearth of Irish-focused material available, so I supplement hugely with more focused material and create my own content and modify stories about Ireland, Irish history, culture, and modern society. I also incorporate information about what services are available and how to access those services, for example local libraries and community services. With the more advanced classes I have created lessons and activities using the flyers available in the hotel reception that advertise tourist attractions and places to see and how to get there. These were enjoyable lessons that introduced the students to a variety of new places and many have since visited those places and talked about the experience in class.

For the lower levels I use *Cutting Edge* as a staple but add a large number of additional materials and try to be as creative as possible. I use images on websites like Dunnes Stores and Marks and Spencer to teach categories of vocabulary like clothing or furniture. I then build on the lesson to teach numbers, then prices. I incorporate the language experience approach by having students prepare and give a presentation about themselves. I find that when the material is relatable to their lives and what is going on around them, students engage more. So, for example, while teaching third person 'he/she', I have them talk about their brothers and sisters, for example, 'Does your sister play tennis?' I then get them to ask questions about my brothers and sisters. They are genuinely curious about me and my family and so come up with a wider range of questions than those proscribed in the textbook.

I have had groups at all levels read a novel in English and even though at beginners' level the books are very short, students feel a great sense of achievement at having read a whole book in English. They get involved in the story and it is a great way to get discussions going about the characters and storyline. The students in one of the higher groups for example are reading a book by an Irish author which has introduced them to Dublin colloquial language. It is full of everyday language, like 'slagging someone' which is a very typical saying in Ireland which means to make fun of someone in a jokey way, or 'a kip' which we use to describe a dirty or rundown home or place. For this exercise I use a flipped classroom approach and hand out the chapters of the book to the students. It is then up to them to come to me with their questions about any language or phrases they do not understand. Following this we discuss the difficult language in class and produce exercises where students practise using those learned phrases and words. The group initially found this a challenge but once they got on board with the story, they enjoyed it immensely and love learning this everyday Dublin English that they definitely will not find in a textbook. It also gives them an insight into the dark humour that is typical of Irish people.

One big challenge though is teaching a cohort of students who all speak the same language. There is a lot of 'helping' each other and I find that students, even those who are reluctant to speak themselves, will answer for each other and shout out answers which I am eliciting from the whole class. Not only will they answer for the other student, but someone will

invariably immediately translate the question. It is frustrating because not only do I not know what the translation is, but it does not give the student time to think of the answer. I have had many class discussions around this, and all have acknowledged that it is unfair not to give someone time to think; but despite these discussions it is an ongoing issue. I'm not sure if this is related to Ukrainian culture somehow but I have heard other teachers share that this happens in their classes also. This usually cannot and mostly does not happen in classrooms with mixed nationalities. In my opinion those who are in classes with a variety of different nationalities are at an advantage as they have to struggle to find the English to communicate with the other students. This is a phenomenon that I still have not got to the bottom of and perhaps it is worth discussing with other teachers of Ukrainian nationals to see how to get round it.

Overall, I feel that the classes have become more than just about learning English. They are an opportunity for the participants to be part of a support group. Since September 2021, many have gone on to do other types of training and some have gained employment and are becoming more and more integrated into Irish society.

Teaching these groups has been a huge learning experience for me, despite having many years of teaching experience, and has challenged me to look for more diverse teaching methods that are suitable and enjoyable and engaging for the Ukrainian groups. Despite my initial apprehension, the whole experience has been extremely rewarding and enlightening.

Autonomy: what does it look like in the classroom?

Mark Hynde

Mark took a less than conventional route into education. Having left school without a clear sense of direction he began a career in the plumbing industry. More than a decade later, he took a job teaching plumbing at a large Further Education (FE) College in East London. Having taught plumbing for a number of years Mark expanded his role to include teaching GCSE English and working with staff to develop practice as an Advanced Practitioner.

Mark developed a love for lifelong learning and has recently achieved Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) and completed a post-graduate MA short course in Practitioner Research through Sunderland University's SUNCETT programme. Currently working as Head of Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Barking and Dagenham College in East London, the expansion of his practitioner research project has enabled Mark to begin working towards a PhD at Sunderland University.

Background

'It's dead.' This was the analysis of a learner on a Level 1 Plumbing Diploma when I asked him why he didn't attend his timetabled GCSE English lessons. For this learner, the study of language had no pulse, it was too late. Any hope or enthusiasm that may have once lived in the fertile land of language acquisition and development for this learner, had now passed and it showed no signs of recovery.

Introduction

In this article, I explore the experiences of a group of 16-19 year-old plumbing students studying GCSE English at a large Further Education (FE) college in East London, and offer an account of how autonomy in learning helped to re-engage these learners in the study of language.

Refusal to engage in language learning

Having taught English and plumbing in FE for over a decade, I became increasingly exasperated with the annually repeated pattern of my learners' obstinate refusal to take any part in their GCSE English programme that ran alongside their plumbing course. Year after year, different learners would enrol in our plumbing courses. Learners from different social and cultural backgrounds with different perspectives and life stories to share. It sometimes felt like the only common thread that bound these groups of learners together was their collective devotion to avoiding any further contact with the continued study of language, post-school. What I found to be especially unique about this issue was that the same learners who went to great lengths to avoid English lessons were often dedicated

learners on their plumbing course, showing high levels of intrinsic motivation for learning and a positive attitude towards their progression.

This issue came to a head one morning when, before my plumbing learners arrived, I received a lengthy email from their English teacher highlighting the recent attendance data of my group in their classes, including various behavioural complaints about those who did manage to make an appearance. Upon reading this email, I made some last-minute changes to the lesson I had planned that morning, with the intention of, at the very least, starting some sort of meaningful dialogue around why their attendance in English lessons was so poor. The conversation that followed was enlightening. The predominant sentiment which nearly all of my learners could agree on was that, put simply, studying GCSE English was boring. These learners shared disheartening school experiences; experiences that were being repeated in college, where they were made to feel unintelligent for using certain types of language. Often the language they were told was inadequate came directly from their personal lives and was the language that their parents and friends used, carrying implications that the people who mean the most to them were somehow deficient in how they chose to express themselves through language. Others claimed that the content they are asked to read, analyse and write about in English lessons carried very little, or absolutely no significance to the socio-cultural worlds that my learners lived and breathed every day. They were asked to write about arbitrary middle-class British themes that they had never experienced and therefore could never fully grasp. Therefore, an imposing dichotomy between the 'real' lives of these learners and the lives they were asked to consider in GCSE English lessons had been set.

Listening to the accounts of these learners, it appeared that somewhere in the midst of feelings of inadequacy around language and learning content that failed to hit the mark, this group of learners came to the clinical analysis that language was 'dead'.

Autonomy in practice

I realised that this conversation could be the start of some positive change, even if only in a very small way. I noticed that my learners had appreciated being listened to and that I had been genuinely interested in their perspectives. I decided to continue to explore this issue with my learners and to dedicate another section of our next plumbing lesson to talking about language. By way of a pedagogic intervention, I requested that each member of the group bring with them an example of language that they can either relate to, enjoy or find meaning in, to the next lesson. Most learners complied and came into the session armed with language excerpts which, in some way, helped them to make sense of their world. These language examples came from television, social media and podcasts, but the most popular source of language inspiration, at least for this group of learners, came from the world of music. I collated all of their language examples and projected them onto the white board at the front of the class. One by one, we talked through the language examples and collectively analysed why they had caught their attention or had made an impact on them. The group were enthused when I projected the words, 'My homies are like chromosomes, they're living in cells'. As we discussed this line, taken from a rap song, the group expressed

their admiration for the clever way in which the lyric has two meanings whilst also encapsulating the hardships that come from growing up in an area where crime and gang culture are prevalent. This led to conversations around similes and other language features and how musicians of all genres use these language features to create memorable lyrics and promote the significance of their message. After this activity, I agreed with my group that we would explore language in this way once every two weeks with the next assignment I set them to bring in language examples of their choice that contain some sort of language feature. For their part, they had to make a concerted effort to attend GCSE English lessons. I hoped, in this way, I could use an aesthetic experience, such as music, to emotionally reconnect these learners with language in an educational context. As the weeks went by, conversations around language became more candid and insightful. I scribbled in my notepad various comments from learners about how language was 'a powerful weapon that people use to express their emotions' and how 'language is about putting words to feelings and senses'. Encouraging these learners to be autonomous in how they want to study language and giving them the independence to decide how their language education should look had elicited a new-found interest in language acquisition and development in them. They were excited by this language, it spoke to them and helped them to define their place in the world.

I am aware that some reading this will question the validity of the literature being analysed but for me the most important thing was that these learners were engaging in language. They were talking about what language means to them and they were connecting with language in an educational setting, for some, perhaps for the first time in years.

Impact

What became more and more apparent to me as I explored language in this way with this group was that all of the language examples my learners engaged with carried themes that they could relate directly to their lives outside of education. These learners were not interested in a text, however credible and well-written that text may be, that failed to connect with the words and worlds that they knew. Neither I, nor I doubt, any other teacher could possibly know what sort of language would engage a learner better than the learner themselves. Therefore, giving the learner autonomy to steer the learning content in this way may be crucial in achieving that emotional investment that must be present if any learner is to meaningfully engage in any study programme.

I also learned that this group of students had an incredible capacity for remembering and reciting lyrics. On demand, members of this group could produce lengthy and linguistically challenging sets of lyrics with ease. Some even opened up to me that they wrote their own lyrics. Notepads were full of words designed to reflect the way they experienced the world. It became clear that language meant a great deal to these learners, but they saw the language of education as something entirely separate. It was the chance to be autonomous with language that appealed to these learners. It was the chance to engage with language on their own terms that allowed them to engage with language in education once more.

On the pursuit of learner autonomy – encouraging language use outside the classroom

Dr Marcin Lewandowski

Marcin is an experienced manager, senior tutor, teacher trainer, researcher and a Fellow of the Society for Education and Training with a history of working in the adult education and community learning sector. As an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher and project manager, he has been involved in issues surrounding the delivery of ESOL in the third sector in London for the past twenty years.

Marcin's doctoral study looked at the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and the goals setting methodology underlying this document and sought to establish if it could be re-engineered and 'de-institutionalised' to foster learner autonomy, promote out-of-classroom learning and lead to greater community cohesion.

Marcin welcomes comments on the ideas expressed here and can be contacted at marcin.lewndowski.11@gmail.com. He also posts at: linkedin.com/in/marcinlewandowski11

Introduction

What do voice recorders, regular tests, Google Hangouts, and goal-setting have in common? They are all attempts to encourage autodidactic processes and facilitate greater language use outside the classroom. Or more specifically, they are interventions that I have personally investigated. Aside from satisfying professional curiosity in trying to ascertain what works and what doesn't work, these disparate approaches addressed an issue that is not uncommon in ESOL teaching and learning, namely, that of limited exposure to the target language outside of the classroom. This may sound counterintuitive. After all, we have been told that one of the most effective ways to learn a language is through immersive language experiences and meaningful interactions during which we have to negotiate meaning (e.g. Cummins 2009, Kinginger 2011, Wilkinson 1998 in Kozlova 2021) and where better to do it than in a country where the target language is spoken by the host population. In fact, this is one of the reasons why the UK and other Anglophone countries are a popular destination for English language learners around the world. Yet many migrants, despite having access to all the opportunities that living in an English-speaking country affords, don't seem to take advantage of them.

There are many reasons why this is the case. Reliance on support networks, residential segregation, relative social isolation due to childcare or family commitments, lack of confidence, mistrust, prejudice and discrimination, or simply a lack of awareness of linguistic affordances are but a few examples why migrants might miss out on opportunities to

practise English (e.g. Rolfe and Stevenson, 2021). Notice that the examples above not only impede migrants' language learning and acquisition but also hinder their integration into the wider society. One could therefore conceivably tackle both issues by addressing one (in a proverbial case of killing two birds with one stone). I believe that promoting autonomous language learning and practice outside the classroom can be one way of achieving this. Admittedly, despite the focus on autonomy, not all the strategies I tested lent themselves to promoting integration - not directly, that is. Because greater linguistic competence can trigger a positive feedback loop. As one's language skills improve so does one's confidence to use them which can lead to greater personal independence. This in turn opens up opportunities for social interactions, access to further learning or employment, any one of which will create opportunities to practise language skills, thus closing the loop (and opening a new one).

Supporting autonomous learning

Learner autonomy has been defined as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (Holec, 1981 in Palfreyman & Smith, 2003). This definition is consistent with our own intuitions of learning autonomy and as such is synonymous with popular terms such as independent or self-directed learning. The methods listed in the opening sentence aimed to foster this notion of autonomy. For example, asking students to use voice recorders in the classroom to record and analyse their interactions, in addition to reducing their reliance on the teacher, was an attempt to help students to pay more attention to the language they produce and to develop the habit of self-correction as well as a greater curiosity about the language around them. I was hoping that such monitoring of linguistic input and output would lead to a consolidation of new language as well as greater accuracy and, with time, fluency (Lewandowski, 2010).

Scheduling regular and consistent tests demonstrated that students are more likely to revise when they have a reason to do so. Students who received announced weekly tests doubled their scores on the post-test but also, importantly, doubled the time they practised English outside the classroom (Lewandowski, 2008). This is not a small feat for busy adults.

Google Hangouts was a vehicle that allowed me to test flipped learning and learner collaboration in two separate studies in addition to trialling the applicability of synchronous online learning environments in adult community settings long before they became the 'new normal' (Lewandowski, 2015 & 2017). Both interventions created opportunities for students to work independently outside the classroom, proved effective in extending their learning and showed a positive effect on their language competence in terms of their lexical knowledge, communication and writing skills.

One could justifiably argue that the strategies described above have little or nothing to do with autonomy; after all it was I, the teacher, who was responsible for setting the activities and thus regulating students' behaviour. At the time I felt that this was justified, for example, on the basis that learners had agency over their decisions regarding when to study and for how long; yet I also recognised that there was a scope for learners to exercise even

more autonomy, not just over the time and duration of study but essentially over every aspect of language use and language learning.

Language is a nuanced, dynamic and open-ended system that cannot be taught - at least not in the sense other subjects are taught, i.e. in a linear fashion, through a presentation of facts that can be understood or memorised and, if need be, regurgitated, discussed or analysed. Yes, we can and do reduce it to a finite number of 'teachable' syntactic and lexical rules that we then explain and practise. Teachers engage students by selecting materials that are interesting or relevant (or both). They try to prepare them for life outside the classroom by simulating real-life scenarios through a careful choice of topics that are pertinent to students' lives. And yet, despite our best efforts we cannot fully capture the subtleties and complexities of a language and its usage or anticipate all the situations our students may find themselves in. Ultimately, the essence of language is shaped by much more than formal instruction - it is the result of a lifetime exposure and use. This means that in addition to facilitating language learning in the classroom, teachers have a responsibility to facilitate its use outside it and encouraging autonomy can play a role in this process.

By pursuing learner autonomy, I wanted to create conditions under which learners would identify and start to tap into language learning opportunities around them. My most recent study investigated the role goal setting can have in this process (Lewandowski, 2021). The study had learners set long-term (course) goals based on things that were important to them, e.g. personal aspirations, the reasons for joining the course. They also set weekly (support) goals which supported the achievement of their course goals. It was important that this was done in a natural and organic way, i.e. the way we set goals in our day-to-day lives, thus, learners had full autonomy over the process - they chose their learning goals and decided on how to achieve them. Framing goal setting around things that were important to my students, allowed me to establish a link between the classroom and the outside world. This, as I discovered, enabled learners to set goals that were both relevant and meaningful. My data showed that learners spent more time using English outside of the classroom and their language skills did improve in the process. They were also more likely to seek solutions when they met obstacles. But this was not the whole story. The data also revealed a wonderful interplay between autonomy and motivation, and highlighted the dynamic nature underpinning these processes. Lisa Legault has suggested that autonomy is '*a critical psychological need [which] denotes the experience of volition and self-direction in thought, feeling, and action [and] refers to the perception of being self-governed rather than controlled by external forces.'* (Legault, 2016:1). This may well be true, yet, despite the fact that my learners had an autonomy which they exercised when setting and completing their goals, their actions were not truly volitional or entirely self-governed, at least not initially.

As it transpired, their initial motivation to complete their weekly goals came from external sources such as the perception that they had to do it and a sense of guilt if they hadn't. The structure of weekly setting and reviewing goals in the classroom was in fact the main source of behaviour regulation for many students. However, with time, the consistency of the weekly goal setting allowed learners to internalise this process as they started to recognise

the inherent value of goal setting and its usefulness for language learning. Professor Vera Lúcia Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva (2011) claims that autonomy is not a state, but rather 'a non-linear process, which undergoes periods of instability, variability and adaptability.' By continuing to engage in this process, learners in my cohort became even more autonomous and were more likely to complete their weekly goals because they wanted to, not because they had to.

Paiva observed that autonomy is an essential element in second language learning because 'it triggers the learning process through learners' agency and leads the system beyond the classroom.' (2011), however, it's also important to remember that autonomous learning is a skill that needs to be developed and carefully fostered. The structure I provided may have compromised autonomy in the short term but ensured a successful independent engagement in the long term.

Conclusion

My pursuit of learner autonomy may have been a curiosity driven affair, a journey of trial and error which allowed me to push my understanding of the interplay between teaching and learning. Yet, as I reflect on my experiences and the research I have conducted, I have come to realise that learner autonomy is a crucial component of effective classroom practice. Equipping learners with the tools to pursue learning on their own terms does not only foster intrinsic motivation, increase engagement and lead to deeper and more meaningful learning, but also helps to prepare learners for success both in and beyond the classroom.

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Apprehending in the Guild: Reflections on autonomy in the English teaching classroom

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Introduction

This short reflective piece considers the role of learner autonomy in learning within the English teaching classroom, and specifically in developing good writers. It looks at the relationship between learners and their teacher and considers how teachers can give learners greater autonomy in developing them as writers.

Guild knowledge

There are different ideas relating to how knowledge is positioned in relation to an English Language taught curriculum. Some see this knowledge as predominantly technical in nature with accordant criteria that distil down the key elements of what it is to read, write, speak and listen, well-defined and bound to levels of proficiency (OECD, 2000; Duckworth and Brzeski, 2015). The idea here is that learning these core skills can be understood at a micro level. Others maintain that knowledge in an English Language taught curriculum should be more firmly located in a socially rich, expressive and artistic understanding (Gee, 1996; Marshall, 2011; Locke, 2015). In this fashion curriculum knowledge is more closely attuned to how it is used by people, to make meaning and form understanding about oneself and the world around them.

Whilst both forms have their merits, I have in recent years found myself more drawn to the latter. Particularly, I have been fascinated with the idea of how as a teacher I can support learners to develop a firm grasp of what good quality writing might look and feel like. In

keeping with the latter understanding I increasingly feel as though it is about much more than technical proficiency alone. Indeed, Eisner (2002) reminds us that artistry consists of:

- having an idea worth expressing
- the imaginative ability needed to conceive of how to express this
- the technical skills needed to work effectively with some material
- the sensibilities needed to make the delicate adjustments that will give the best forms the moving qualities that the best of them possess (2002: 81).

For example, if we are to develop a learner's craft in writing we need to foster their ability to imagine and conceive of what form this expression might take before they put their pen to the paper.

It is here that we can look to Royce Sadler's (1989) concept of 'guild knowledge' as a way of better understanding the issue at hand.

> Teachers' conceptions of quality are typically held, largely in unarticulated form, inside their heads as tacit knowledge...the ability to make sound qualitative judgments constitutes a form of guild knowledge (1989:126).

Essentially, Sadler (ibid) here is suggesting that teachers have a strong conception of what 'good' looks like in their minds – a discerning sense - and the substance of this is unerringly difficult to communicate in explicit terms alone. The idea certainly is in keeping with the principles of developing students as writers. As Eisner (2002) reminds us, teaching good writing is not a formulaic task.

Guild knowledge by its very name draws on the idea that knowledge exists in a practice-oriented community, much like mediaeval craft-focused guild halls. For Sennett (2008) there is a need for practice to be guild-oriented, so to address that which cannot be achieved through individual autonomy. So, in the classroom, standards of 'good' are something that teachers should aspire to bring to the foreground. In doing this, students can become more discerning in their own writing practice about how they might conceive of an idea worth expressing, and how it might best be presented. Sennett's (2008) assertion is that this is not achieved by giving autonomy alone, and that this must be undertaken in collaboration with others, to both test and enrich one's understanding with someone else's.

So how might teachers go about doing this?

In the English teaching classroom

One way in which I have tackled this in my English classes is through peer assessment, and the rest of this piece features some of my reflections on what I feel has helped me try to create spaces when teaching where peer assessment can lead to exciting and productive things happening in the classroom.

In practice, students write their own piece of creative writing to a specific brief and then assume the role of an 'expert' assessor that requires them to approach the reading of their peers' writing with a different set of responsibilities to that of a writer.

The nature of the task requires them to be discerning, which by design is trying to stir their own conception of what good looks like. I have found that students enjoy doing this, albeit some are more confident and capable in assuming this role than others. The approach promotes an autonomy of thought and action in students, but in my experience, this is something to be guided by the teacher. After all, too much freedom might lead to a lack of clarity or misunderstandings being formed. We can think here of the medieval guild again and the role of the master craftsperson in guiding learning.

Perhaps the most important thing I have found in my experiences of using peer assessment strategies in the classroom looking at student writing is the role that dialogue and discussion play. Using peer assessment and encouraging students to assume an expert-assessor role is an invitation for them to join a wider conversation that is taking place in the classroom. In this scenario everyone has a voice and the opportunity to share their opinion with the group. Collectively we are all working to better understand what we make of the words on the page, what we enjoy about these pieces and how they make us feel. I have found it useful to model this behaviour by sharing my thoughts, particularly with classes that are feeling their way into it. In these classroom scenarios I have always seen my goal as trying to bring to the fore what it is that is happening in particularly strong pieces of writing. I have tried to be conscious in drawing this out of my students, rather than impart my own thoughts.

Conclusion

Peer assessment is a well-established teaching method that a significant number of teachers use in a highly effective manner. This piece has not sought to suggest anything to the contrary of this prevailing thought. What it has aimed to do however is help teachers think about some of the greater complexities that are at work when we are using peer assessment with our students in English teaching classrooms. Moreover, it has considered where student autonomy is located within this debate. The suggestion of this writer is that autonomy is something for students to aspire to and to not be granted unconditionally by the teacher, as learning to write is a community-led practice. Dialogue with other members of the community through which standards are challenged, debated and shared is critical. Dialogue, whether with oneself or with an external party, is about more than putting one's own view across. It is about meaning-making. For Sennett, (2008) 'to do good work means to be curious about, to investigate, and to learn from ambiguity.

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Supporting Student Autonomy through a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Feedback Approach

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Introduction

In my practice, I aim to be a humanistic facilitator, present not to just distil information, but 'to create the conditions within which learning can take place' (Elias and Merriam, 2005, p. 127). The concept of learning care (Feeley, 2012) forms an integral part of my approach. Coming from a literacy background, I try to establish a 'caring relationship with each student, learn about a student's individual needs and strengths, and offer the support and encouragement each student needs to reach their potential' (Duckworth, 2014, p. 43).

When my own practice transitioned from literacy provision to teaching literacy educators in a Higher Education setting, it was important to me to still maintain a learning care approach in a more modularised learning environment with specific outcomes to achieve for accreditation purposes. While my students are not literacy learners but rather their educators, many still face institutional, situational and dispositional barriers (Cross, 1981), including low confidence levels around learning in an academic environment.

Universal Design for Learning and 'learning care'

Partaking in professional development about Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with the Association for Higher Education, Access and Disability (AHEAD), concurrent to beginning a lecturing role in SETU, provided an opportunity to tailor this 'learning care' aspect of my provision to a HE environment. UDL resonated with many aspects of my teaching philosophy around supporting and empowering students to reach their potential with autonomy for their own learning (Duckworth, 2012). UDL's three-pronged approach concerning the principles of multiple means of engagement, representation and expression creates an inclusive learning environment that can respond to the needs of diverse learners and empower students (AHEAD, 2017). AHEAD encourages a 'one small change' approach as

a start to incorporating UDL into one's pedagogical approaches. My initial 'small change' was on the feedback mechanisms that I used with students.

One small change

Checkpoint 8.4 for engagement advises practitioners to 'increase mastery-oriented feedback' (CAST, 2018). As O'Neill notes, feedback can come too late for students to make meaningful changes and quite often students will even bypass feedback with their attention being on the summative grade (2017). However, if students request feedback for draft work, this formative feedback can support them to have more autonomy and self-regulation in summative assessments. It can also enhance self-efficacy in students that may have dispositional barriers around academic work, as mentioned earlier, by assuring them that they are approaching assessment work correctly. I actively encourage students to submit a section of their assessment work as a draft before the due date, if they have any concerns about the assessment process. This enables them to become partners in assessment (O'Neill, 2017). However, it is important to note that I do not give any indication of grade in feedback and I am also careful to explain to students that submitting draft work has no implications for the final grade.

Feedback videos

To ensure students get the most from this feedback, I use screencast technology to make 'feedback videos', as O'Neill observes students often do not understand feedback (2017). While making the videos as well as inserting annotated comments on documents involves more work in the short term, I feel more confident that students understand all aspects of feedback and also the spirit in which it is given.

It is essential that feedback does not discourage students but rather highlights what they are already doing well and areas for change that can improve their work (CAST, 2018). In one particular instance where a student had taken the wrong approach to their assessment, the spoken word aspect of the approach allowed me to use supportive and encouraging tones as I explained things. The student later told me that the tone of my voice was 'encouraging' and he felt quite positive about his work although some changes were required. This student had identified himself as a visual learner and expressed surprise at how useful he found the spoken element of the video.

Conclusion

Overall, the response from participating students has been excellent and most students made improvements to their assignments which were reflected in their final marks. One student told me that she had found the feedback method so effective that she has spoken to her manager about using it on their Adult Education programmes for their students. From my perspective as a practitioner, I believe the approach encourages student autonomy and provides an opportunity for them to engage with formative feedback as they become more active partners in their learning journeys and in summative assessment (O'Neill, 2017).

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A Reflection on Promoting Autonomy in an online module

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Background

Teaching is not just about content, but also includes the social practices of that discipline and the effect the learning has on the person (Biesta, 2015). My students tend to be tutors in adult and further education and my practice is underpinned by shared experience, peer learning and reflection. Students are acquiring content and pedagogy to influence their own classroom practice. As a result, modelling good practice and encouraging autonomy are important considerations. Not only do I want my learners to have an enjoyable learning experience, I want to foster this for their own practice. This is generally not difficult as the students seem to emerge from the same philosophical pool where humanistic and learner-centred approaches are the norm.

Introduction

This reflection is based on one particular module which underwent major transformation to bring it from the traditional face-to-face delivery mode to the online environment. The module TESOL 1, which aims to introduce students to teaching ESOL learners, has a practical focus. Concepts can be readily adapted and adopted for use in their own ESOL classrooms. Approaches to language teaching and adult education are used in the design of the module to scaffold learning and model practice. This shows how different language teaching strategies play out in the real world and not just as abstract theoretical concepts.

Nurturing engagement through autonomy

How could engagement be nurtured through autonomy? As the module progresses and the students are reflecting on their learning, they start to independently make connections between pedagogy and content: '*Oh, when we were learning about CEFR,* (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) a TTT (Test Teach Test) approach was used'*. Reflection underpins all learning and is an important element of autonomy according to Little (1991). It is important to give time for this reflection, and sharing of experiences and learning as we hand over the power of learning to the student. However, it is also important to note autonomy is not guaranteed and not all learners respond to autonomy in the same way.

The main approach to encouraging autonomy was through the use of a buddy group system for engagement, peer-learning and support. This employed Garrison's Community of Inquiry model (Garrison, 2007) as teaching, cognitive and social presence were considered at all stages and in all activities. Autonomy was encouraged through choice in how to engage, when to engage and the method of engagement. Resources were multimodal and responses were encouraged in a manner of ways. This allowed the group to find out their learning and interaction preferences. Buddy groups were assigned activities to complete asynchronously with the responsibility of bringing feedback or findings to the main group in face-to-face sessions. The groups responded well to this responsibility and took agency for participation and contribution to the activity and feedback.

Subsequently, individual reflections evidenced autonomy as students discussed how they had supported each other, learned from each other and enjoyed the interactions promoted by the buddy groups. It is worth noting that where possible buddy groups were created with a range of expertise, such as prior experience, subject knowledge and technical ability so strengths can be drawn on from the different group members.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to say that the strength of autonomy is down to the learners themselves and without their willingness to engage, autonomy would not be possible.

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Changing the impact of the examination in student learning and module / programme completion

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Introduction

In lecturing a 10-credit module in Quality Management at level 6 to Lifelong Learning students in the evening, I found over the years that the primary focus for the students was the exam requirement within the module.

The programme had been designed with both a continuous assessment and an exam as the assessment of learning obtained. I felt, as the lecturer, that the exam element was something that the students struggled with and I related to that struggle with the exam process as a lifelong learner myself.

Perhaps a wider discussion may be required to question the necessity of terminal exams in programmes designed for the adult education space. It is acknowledged that the learner returning to education or entering higher education for the first time has many internal barriers to undertaking a programme of education, without the presence of an exam being the rationale behind an individual not undertaking such a programme of study (Murphy and Fleming, 2000).

Quality Management

The field of Quality Management is best learned in an experiential forum, with the use of case studies, peer learning, scenarios, which includes a 'how to' approach in addressing legislative and customer requirements in ensuring a quality produce, process or service ensues within any organisation. To engage in this type of learning, the students must first attend the class, participate in the ensuing discussion and immerse themselves in that

learning environment. If the student remains conscious of the presence of an exam, this may cause a distraction to the learning and a refocus on what is needed to pass the exam.

In addition to the requirement of an exam for this module, there is also an assignment. In this instance the assignment holds more weight than the exam as a measure of the learning achieved. The assignment takes the form of writing a report for their boss in their respective organisation or experience, identifying changes that would result if an upgrade to a Quality Accreditation requirement occurred, such as an upgrade to an aspect of an ISO (International Standards Organisation) Quality Systems Standard.

This type of applicability of learning is the best method of understanding how to implement, understand and audit the application of Quality Management Systems (QMS) within the student's respective organisation, including monitoring the risk rating of the elements within the QMS.

In my experience with this module, the students thrive on this type of assessment and discussions on the assignment are held in class each week until submission, to offer suggested direction to queries and peer support in navigating potential barriers to the research.

In my opinion, it is in conducting this assignment where the best applicability of the learning occurs and not in meeting exam requirements on top of that.

Multiple means of engagement, action and expression

I find that I relate to the student that I teach in my teaching methods, both in the capacity of being myself a lifelong learner and as a professional. My methodology tends to relate the learning to the practice required in industry. In my mind I remove the barrier between student and lecturer and treat the students as fellow professionals.

This approach frames my thinking on the different methodologies, such as those outlined above. In addition to the methodologies used, my ability to speak to a wide application of designing, implementing and auditing quality systems across various industries, means that I can speak to specific examples relating to industry applicable to the student.

In order to allay the genuine anxieties that the students have in the exam space, I reassure them that in attending class, participating in their in-class learning and completing the report assignment as previously outlined, the exam content will not deviate from the relevant topic areas discussed in class. I discuss topic areas from which I will draw from the pool of questions that could possibly be asked. In addition, the mathematical weighting attributed to passing the exam and passing the module is also calculated and framed as having two correct questions out of the five required. Even though five questions are required to complete the exam, they are given a choice of nine questions.

In framing the exam content in this way with the students, the exam ceases to be a barrier to the learning, as its importance and weighting is diminished both statistically and, more importantly, in the eyes of the student.

This lack of 'hold' that the exam now has over the student by its diminished importance, results in the increased presenteeism of the student in the learning and the applicability of the learning to their respective organisation, thereby embedding the learning in such application.

Conclusion

In summary, the 'one thing' I have changed in a learning environment with adult learners is to diminish the importance of the exam and release its 'hold' on the student. In working within the modular assessment requirements in this way, this approach has certainly yielded the best engagement with the subject matter and subsequent learning in that space.

Ideas for the future

My next 'one thing' will be to replace the exam with a presentation on their respective reports by way of a 'Ted Talk' as if they were emulating the implementation of their identified changes within their respective organisation to Management. This would instil the confidence in the student in the applicability of the knowledge obtained in implementing the identified changes to the quality system. In conducting a presentation, peer feedback would also be obtained adding to the richness of the learning.

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Language and Literacy Reflections on Autonomy

Dr Eleanor Neff, Catriona Warren, Dr Marcin Lewandowski, Mark Hynde, Dr Michael Smith, and Dr Clare Power

Introduction

Student autonomy is a critical component of any learning experience. However, it can be a challenging concept to incorporate in practice as all students come to educational experiences with diverse backgrounds. Moreover, not only do the students vary, so do the practitioners and the pedagogies used. The six articles preceding this are an exploration of a practice-exchange by a group of practitioners in the UK and Ireland who work with fundamentally different cohorts of students. Each account presents a different perspective on autonomy. What has emerged is practice-based evidence of the value placed on the student experience, over the focus on measurable outcomes that seem to be ubiquitous in current educational practice. This article brings together the ideas explored in these six reflections on autonomy, identifying some of the common features underpinning the different approaches.

Commonalities

Practitioners working within a system of educational learning that leads to an award are constrained by the predetermined nature of the system within which they work. Nonetheless, as we have seen in the earlier reflections, practitioners are firmly committed to the idea that there should be more to educational practices than the easily measurable quantifiable outcomes of an award. Practitioners recognise that their ambitions for their students extend beyond the quantifiable outcomes of exam results. In keeping the learner at the heart of their practice, their aim is to remove barriers to learning and participation and ultimately enable application of learning in the real world, be that industry, education or social integration.

Defining autonomy as ‘the ability to take charge of one’s own learning’ (Holec, 1981 cited in Palfreyman 2003: 1) practitioners model autonomy through creating a learning environment that gives ‘permission’ to the learners to learn in a way that speaks to them.

In agreement with Dewey (1938) they consider that education and experience cannot and should not be separated. From their perspective the starting point for all education should be experience. Thus, they consider it essential to value the lived experiences of their students and to add nourishment to the curriculum by building on the experiences their students bring to the learning environment. Finally, there is an overwhelming sense coming from all reflections that practitioners draw on their own experiences of learning to try and improve the experiences of their students.

Conclusion

Through their collective reflections practitioners have provided some insight into ways in which autonomy may be fostered in the classroom, demands of accredited programmes notwithstanding. Furthermore, their collaboration highlights the benefits of communities of practice/learning communities which present rich opportunities for sharing practice and continuous personal learning and development.

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A Weekend with RaPAL

Tara Furlong

Tara is the Chair of RaPAL and can be contacted on chair@rapal.org.uk

RaPAL put together an autumn weekend for members with the management group at the end of September, offering workshops in editorial, strategy-setting, and engaging productive skills through the *Poetic* initiative. The workshops were scheduled alongside our AGM and Annual Editorial Meeting, where we set direction for the journal in the year ahead. It was enriching to see each other face-to-face after some years of e-communication.

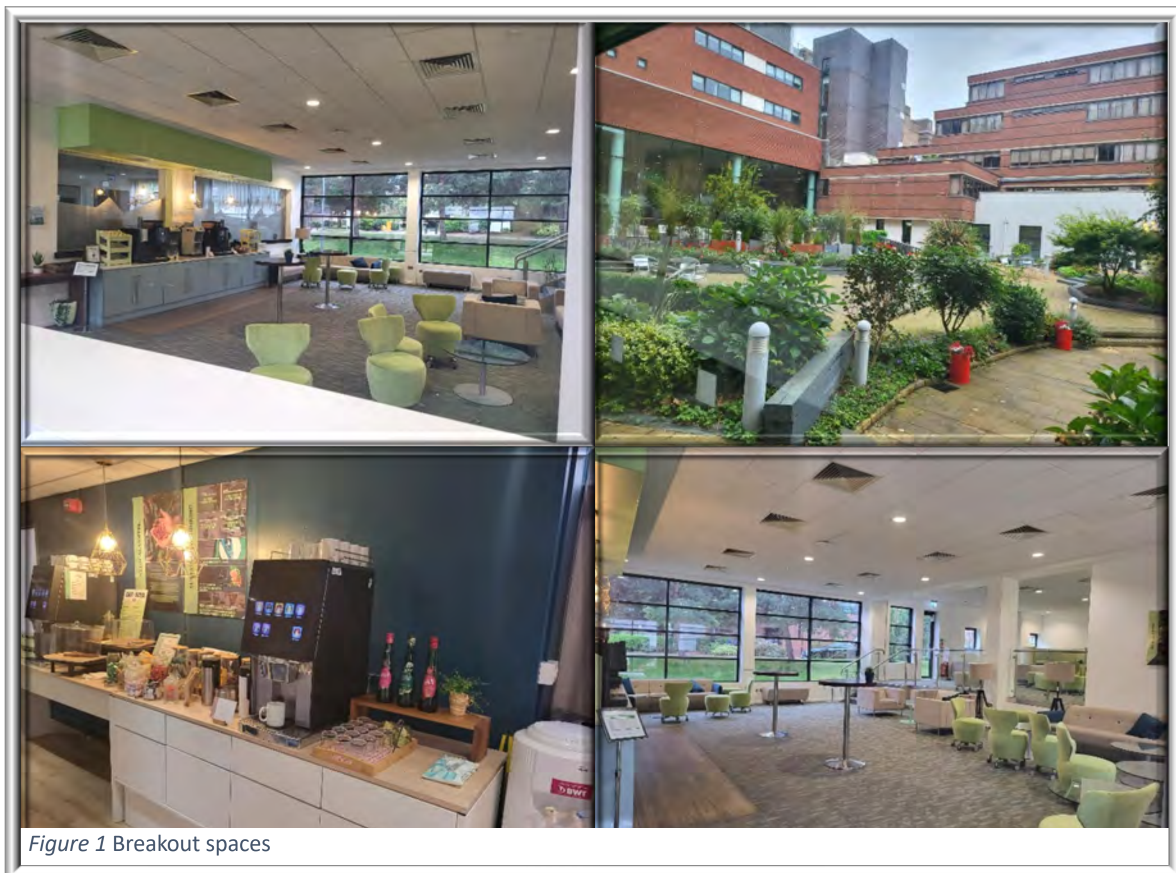

Figure 1 Breakout spaces

The boardroom facilities for the meetings and workshops enabled online participation for those who couldn't make it in person; and the array of flexible breakout and refreshment spaces kept us buzzing with energy through Friday and Saturday's full agendas. We're penciling in an event next year – get in touch if you're interested in participating.

Poetic

A core theme which ran through *A Weekend with RaPAL* was the *Poetic* initiative, which seeks to elicit and celebrate creative writing shorts. Carl Jung (1968:71) is often misquoted as saying,

> 'Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.'

Poetic aims to extend the agency of language and literacy in processing life experience and producing meaning. This is motivated in part by a recognition that the formal adult learning curriculum is biased towards economic performativity, and risks overlooking the constituent personal and social components of communication. Many adult learners are recognised as having a history of negative experiences in the classroom and outside of it, and *Poetic* aims to build positive experiences with language and literacy practices,

> While trauma keeps us dumbfounded, the path out of it is paved with words, carefully assembled, piece by piece…
>
> van der Kolk, 2014:232

We Are Words

RaPAL recently completed a four-month pilot of free online poetry sessions, *We Are Words* with the poet Paul Lyalls. The objective was to introduce accessible, drop-in sessions where participants re-connected with their ability to give voice to experience through creative writing. A second objective was to enable the magic of surprise: to amaze participants with what they unexpectedly produced. A final objective was to consolidate the confidence gained into further creative writing and participation in further courses.

All participants wrote creative pieces that were personal to them, and shared with the group. 100% of respondents in the feedback felt more confident about writing creatively, and wrote creatively again afterwards, attributable to the one and a half hour workshops. All respondents applied to be entered onto a regular online course at the end of the pilot. Here is a selection of comments from the feedback:

'Very relaxed, easy to contribute, inspired (I went away and worked on what we had done)'

'Curious thoughtful challenged, I enjoyed learning more about writing creative poetry from Paul and my fellow creative poets'

'Inspired by others' writing and Paul's prompts'

'I feel great; I feel I can write again. I like Paul's technique in writing poem. He makes it easy and fun. I couldn't help but ask him if there'll be another class in the nearest future'

'excited and I like singing, poetry is similar'

'interested but nervous'

'My interest was held and I enjoyed opportunity to write creatively'

Figure 2 Feedback on drop-in online workshops

We were delighted that one of the participants secured a bursary place commencing in January on Writing Room's *Finding the Poem* with Paul Lyalls, and another on a different course. Everyone who fed back on the pilot received an inspirational mug to encourage them to remember their poetry and to write creatively whenever they sit down for a cuppa.

Future Events

Check the calendar on the RaPAL website for future events, to find out more about the *Poetic* initiative, and to get in contact.

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Feminism, Adult Education and Creative Possibility

Edited by: Darlene E. Clover (Anthology Editor), Kathy Sanford (Anthology Editor) and Kerry Harman (Anthology Editor) (2022)

Cost: Between £22.79 and £35.80 (e-copy, paperback and hardback),

Publisher: Bloomsbury Academic

ISBN-10: 1350231045

ISBN-13: 978-1350231047

Reviewed by Ann Swinney PhD (Retired Senior Lecturer, University of Dundee)

The 'imaginative responses' described in 'Feminism, Adult Education and Creative Possibility' illustrate the inclusivity of the feminist ideal and the differences and complexities of womanhood and all that this concept embraces.

As the stories contained in the volume plainly show, the experiences of women, how they engage with the world and their communities, how they navigate often precarious existence and how they struggle to make sense of and thrive in often hostile environments are multifaceted and imaginative. The authors are unequivocal that the aim of feminist adult education 'is to acknowledge differences whilst forging connections and alliances that expand the horizons of intelligibility' (p5). Contributors illustrate how this can be achieved by showcasing an array of projects which span international boundaries and which tackle interlinked and pressing contemporary issues encompassing climate change, migration, war, decolonisation, sexual and gender-based violence and mental health.

Ivan Kirchgaesser (p.103) captures the theme woven through all of the texts when they write 'listening in to someone's story can be a beautiful organic way to learn'.

Each of the projects described have, at their core, the desire to redress the power imbalances which are threaded through the lives of all women. These power imbalances are often crudely visible but are also frequently incorporated with great subtlety into everyday practices. Disobedience, resistance, solidarity, resilience and protest are needed to rebalance the power dynamic and the stories in this collection give inspiration for how this might be achieved.

News from the sector

Tara Furlong

Tara is the Chair of RaPAL and can be contacted on chair@rapal.org.uk

A short round-up:

National survey records adult participation in learning at a historic high but identifies persistent inequalities between groups

Learning and Work (2023) has continued its fantastic work with the annual *Adult participation in learning* survey. In a national picture of primarily London uplift, they find that, 'there are stark and persistent gaps in participation in learning between demographic groups and geographic areas.' While older adults have increased online participation levels, 'Adults in lower socio-economic groups (DE) remain twice as likely to not have participated in learning since leaving full-time education compared to those in higher socio-economic groups (AB).'

University leaders commit to transforming higher education institutions into lifelong learning agents

UNESCO UIL (2023) reports briefly on a global conference on tertiary engagement with non-traditional learners. I was interested to hear of a dedicated office,

> … with Dublin City University (DCU) providing an exemplary approach to addressing the needs of older learners. In addition to providing this cohort with vocational, formal and non-formal learning opportunities, DCU invites older adults to take part in participatory action research…

PISA (and PIAAC)

The international PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results were released in early December, with the DfE exclaiming in a national press release, 'England among highest performing western countries in education' (DfE, 2023). There is mentioned near the end that sampling standards weren't met. The Department of Education at Oxford University (2023) found that 'PISA Results Reveal Students in the UK Have Higher than Average Levels of Maths, Reading And Science', which puts us above the middle of global rankings. While this is something to be celebrated, in the meantime and on the basis of unequivocal national data, Schools Week proclaims, 'Thousands more kids leaving school without GCSE grades "new norm"' (Booth, 2023). A closer look at the data suggests embedded disadvantage is alive and well in the UK, and there is an increased need to resource adult education in English and maths. To be fair to schools, 'the DfE introduced a

mechanism to adjust the scores of pupils with very low Attainment 8 scores – deemed "outliers" - to stop any disproportionate impact on a school's overall Progress 8.'

The latest round of PIAAC Survey of Adult Skills is due to be published in 2024 (OECD, 2023).

BALID (British Association of Literacy in Development)

BALID's AGM is running on January 23rd from 10.30am to midday at Greenwich University both in-person and online. More here https://balid.org.uk/

An online Informal Literacy Discussion is scheduled for March 5th at midday with MICAIA in Mozambique (https://micaia.org/) on developing lifelong learning alongside basic skills in agricultural communities. Details tbc.

Popular maths, English and ESOL courses return in January 2024

The Education and Training Foundation (2023) have released a new round of professional development courses for the sector at level 5.

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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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