

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

Who we are

RaPAL is an independent national network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult literacies and numeracy. Our support is generated by membership subscription only, and we are therefore completely independent in our views. RaPAL is the only national organisation focusing on the role of literacies in adult life.

What we do

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

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

Why not join in?

Further information can be found at our website: www.rapal.org.uk

The RaPAL Journal expresses a variety of views which do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial group. The RaPAL Journal has been printed by Image Printing Co., Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire. Matlock, Derbyshire.

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Editorial

Bex Ferriday, Sarah Freeman and Jim Mullan

Bex is a Lead Teacher in Education and Training at Cornwall College; Sarah is an Adult Literacy teacher and teacher trainer in Sutton College of Learning for Adults, South London; Jim Mullan is a teacher educator at Queen's University, Belfast.

Welcome to this edition of the RaPAL journal. Our theme is digital literacy and its implications for the literacies which adult literacy educators draw on to teach effectively and learners need to become more proficient in present day communication. It makes sense then to set the scene with an overview of what digital literacy is and how this relatively new notion has emerged.

As O'Keefe (2011) says:

We live in a world of rapidly evolving technological development which is changing the way in which we communicate, in both our working and social lives. Young people, in particular, tend to be comfortable with this and know only a multimodal world where images, sounds and gesture play as important a role as the written word.

There is a growing belief that technology is responsible for a decline in traditional standards in literacy. McKeown et al (2010) challenge this view and claim that people with poor educational experiences are motivated by new technologies before putting forward a persuasive case for how new technology, by combining text, images, symbols and sound, can help support and develop reading in adults who have experienced difficulty with traditional reading. O'Keefe posits that reading on screen is a more interactive and social activity which allows readers more control over their reading before going on to state that the rise in 'read-write' technologies such as social networking, blogging and wikis enable users to read and write in a more interactive and dynamic way than ever before.

Clearly, this has huge implications for education, so it is important to find out more about the digital literacy practices of learners and their perceptions of these practices.

But what exactly *is* digital literacy?

Despite a plethora of literature about the new digital age and its implications for education in the 21st century, a single definition of digital literacy does not exist. This can be attributed in part to the fact that new digital literacies are evolving all the time.

For this reason Gillen and Barton's (2009) social practice approach makes sense. Their broad definition: '*Digital Literacies are the constantly changing practices through which people make traceable meanings using digital technologies*' (p.1) suggests that people learn how to use these new technologies informally and apply this learning in their everyday lives without consciously learning.

Many of our adult learners use new technology, mainly for the purposes of communication and entertainment. Research confirms they do read and write through new digital media and the skills employed to carry out these tasks have been informally learnt. These practices are part and parcel of their everyday lives but are not skills they associate with formal learning.

The challenge for tutors is to integrate these digital literacy practices into their teaching and build on the informal learning of our learners. Helping the learners to see the value in these skills and how they can be applied in the wider work environment as well as through play should increase their confidence and enable them to take control of their own learning.

By drawing together a varied and very interesting series of articles from practitioners, teacher trainers and researchers in Adult Literacy who have used or observed the use of others of digital literacies, we hope that practitioners can empower their own learners via the honing of digital literacy skills. Their articles together give a very striking picture of how ingrained and essential the application of digital communication has become in everyone's lives in the UK.

We have found it really exciting to receive and work with these articles and several reviews on similar topics at a time when Facebook, Twitter, email, texting, blogging and virtual communication media are becoming charged with all sorts of burning issues be they social, political or educational. RaPAL was started in the nineties to enable literacy practitioners to stay abreast with ideas about literacy and social practices instead of literacy as per the definitions of accreditation systems such as Wordpower or its successor Skills for Life. It is therefore very relevant to observe how not only the tools of literacy but its very modes of communication and the culture it generates are all becoming steeped in electronic (as an offshoot of 'social') practices.

Moving to the articles that make up this edition, we start with Section 1: *Voices from the Classroom*. This consists of three brief but fascinating articles by Michelle Treagust, Sarah Freeman and Roberta Scott respectively. Michelle looks at the use of eBook readers, digital texts and electronic, interactive games with emerging readers while Sarah provides a very honest insight that examines how older learners taking part in a blogging activity have become so adept at using a mouse they now use this extension of their hand skillfully and more naturally than the keyboard. Roberta, a student now graduating from her specialist Numeracy teaching course in Belfast, uses

an innovative form of summative reflection through a wordle (a word cloud) and an image.

In Section 2: *Developing Research and Practice*, Cathy Clarkson provides an extremely useful update to her summer 2010 article looking at using blogs within teacher education. In reflection she looks back at the drawbacks of *Moodle* as a communication tool, before going on to recount her experiences of changing to a more 'blogcentric' application - namely *posterous* - as a way of forming and maintaining both a community of practice and a way of communicating and sharing ideas and issues outside of the classroom. Bex Ferriday then goes on to look at her experiences of delivering an Initial Teacher Training course in the virtual world *Second Life*, and how digital literacy skills were developed then honed naturally and communally within the cohort.

In Section 3: *Research and Practice: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* we read how teachers and researchers interact with online practices. Nick Haigh describes the literacy practices of his adult literacy and ESOL diploma students and suggests that digital engagement and ability levels of learners (and indeed, practitioners) are explicitly linked to their levels of confidence, life history and social situation.

In 'Email as "Literacy-in-Action"' Ellayne Fowler reviews findings from a doctoral research project that investigated the social practices around the use of email in a Further Education setting. Ellayne argues that in researching digital literacies we need to refine our theoretical tools beyond the 'literacy event' and that research findings should inform practitioners' teaching practice to enable learners to embrace ever-evolving digital literacies.

In her article, Irene Schwab asks the question: 'What do adult literacy learners read online and how do their teachers support them?' She writes about her involvement in a small-scale research project that looked at the reading of online texts and the interaction that electronic texts provide - with the 'passive reader' now regularly able to become a more 'active editor'.

The fourth article from Kate Pahl - 'Fusing the Digital with the Non-digital' provides an eye witness account from outside the classroom. We are privileged to get a report of observation of the digital practices of a Bradford Asian family through their everyday life at home, school and work in Yorkshire, and, intriguingly, through the development of a building project in Pakistan.

This journal has been rich in contributions about digital literacies and the book reviews are no exception with two out of three reviews on aspects of digital worlds. The recent proliferation in publications about developments in digital communications means adult literacy and digital literacy teachers and researchers will have no shortage of reading to do when they have finished reading this journal!

We hope you enjoy reading all of this as much as we have enjoyed putting it together and that it provides, at the very least, a starting point for your own understanding and practice within the ever-shifting realms of digital literacy.

References

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- McKeown, S., Moss, M. and Slawson, T. (2009). *Screens and Pages: Technology and reading for pleasure*. Leicester: NIACE
- O'Keefe, J. (2011). *Practitioner Research Papers in Literacy and Numeracy*. Essential Skills, School of Education, Queen's University Belfast

It's OK to Use Games

Michelle Treagust

Michelle Treagust works on adult learning projects for The Reading Agency, develops online study skills materials for Southampton Solent University and teaches Skills for Life in the workplace. She has a particular interest in combining media and education, due to working within BBC Learning for over 10 years on radio programmes and websites such as BBC Skillswise and WebWise.

In this article Michelle Treagust, project manager at The Reading Agency, explores how digital technology is changing the landscape of reading.

At the end of 2010 Amazon announced the site's best-selling product. Can you guess what book it was? In fact it wasn't a book, but instead a digital platform on which to read books – their Kindle 3 eBook reader.¹ Just as the iPod revolutionised music listening, so eBook readers are changing how we engage with text and are drawing new users into the pleasure of reading.

At The Reading Agency we passionately believe in inspiring more people to read more in the belief that reading can have a profound effect on people's life chances. We have recognised the power of digital texts to engage readers and are exploring different ways to use them, as research tells us that creative reading activity motivates people to read and learn.² We run national programmes for audiences of all ages and abilities, including those for adults who struggle with reading, such as the Six Book Challenge (www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk), and have started to explore how we can embed and promote the use of digital texts into these programmes.

Gaming for Reading

In 2010 The Reading Agency was funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to explore whether gaming could be a stepping stone towards improved literacy skills.

As part of our study we asked practitioners about their use of gaming and other digital technologies. Despite the small sample of 66 respondents, about three in five respondents claimed to use digital technologies regularly with their learners, the most popular technologies being websites (91%) and email (74%), with games coming in at only 14%. However, they were generally positive about using digital technologies with engagement thought to be the biggest benefit.

Respondents' use of technologies is imaginative

and innovative and provides a snapshot of how they could be implemented more broadly in formal and informal learning. Eva Coker, ESOL co-ordinator at HMP Belmarsh, uses a classroom smartboard to stimulate her prisoners' learning. She loads it with quizzes and games based on recognisable brands such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* The smartboard quickly gets her learners interactive – both with the game they're playing and each other. "In a prison, that's an important skill," she points out. "It gets them used to the way English is spoken outside as well as inside the prison," says Eva. As learners slowly but surely improve their vocabulary, some move on to books from the prison library, perhaps reading stories out loud in groups.

We also ran a small-scale survey to elicit views and experience from games developers about the links between digital reading and more 'traditional' reading for pleasure. Dr Naomi Norman, Director of Learning at the games based learning solutions company EPIC, recognises the power of games for learning: "Games have a huge part to play in engaging people and motivating them to keep going." EPIC has developed games to engage adults with low literacy levels and have used many different approaches to supporting reading skills. "The power of story is phenomenal. The key thing is offering support around reading so they don't feel intimidated – such as audio or a glossary to click on for unfamiliar words and the ability to choose their own font size. If you're already feeling under-confident a lot of text can create a downward spiral. They need to be motivated to read a small bit and then be rewarded."

As part of our study we took a small selection of commercial games and looked at their suitability and accessibility for using them with adult readers and provided a readability level for each game calculated using an adapted SMOG test (Simplified Measure of Gobbledygook).

Cooking Mama is such an example, a cooking simulation game where players have to select

1. Arthur, C., 2010, *Kindle beats Harry Potter to become Amazon's best-selling product*. The Guardian. [Online] Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/dec/29/amazon-kindle-outsells-harry-potter> [Accessed 28 Feb 2011].

2. Hoey, S. *Practitioners leading research: Weaving reading for pleasure into the Skills for Life Adult Literacy Curriculum* (NRDC 2007)

dishes to cook and follow instructions to prepare and cook a meal in a short amount of time. The minimal text, which has associated instructional graphics, has a readability score of 12.



Screen shot from *Cooking Mama* on the DS, publisher Taito (2009)

The majority of the games we reviewed are accessible to adult readers with literacy levels of Entry 3 to Level 1, which is lower than the average novel. With games developers and traditional publishers starting to turn reading into a 'game', there seems to be much scope to explore the use of gaming as a way to encourage emergent adult readers.

First Choice Books

www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk

In March we re-launched the First Choice Books database to include digital texts. The site contains over 850 reading materials suitable for Pre-Entry to Level 2 readers; to reflect the multi-platform world users can browse recommended readers by different formats; books, eBooks, audio books, games, websites and newspapers and magazines. We want this unique database to grow. If practitioners have any recommendations please do visit the website and recommend a read.

Quick Reads

www.readingagency.org.uk/quickreads

Last year's Quick Reads were available in print and digital format, which proved popular as Peter James' *The Perfect Murder* was a top selling book for the iPad³. The Reading Agency works closely with Quick Reads to create downloadable guides about the books and writing materials for practitioners to use with literacy classes and reading groups. For the 2011 titles, to support practitioners' use of ICT, specific activities have been written on using ICT to engage readers.

Next Steps

The Reading Agency's own next step is to explore options for developing a game that can provide creative ways to engage people in literacy, using our successful Six Book Challenge scheme as a starting-point. We're delighted to have further funding from BIS to take this forward and thereby contribute to the Department's own thinking about ways to capitalize on the power of video games.

Now in its fourth year, the Six Book Challenge invites less confident readers to read six books of their choice while recording their reading in a diary in order to receive incentives along the way and ultimately a certificate. Around 13,500 people registered for the Challenge in 2010 through libraries, colleges, adult education, prisons and workplaces – up 50% on the previous year. With some of the crucial requirements of game play in place – an interesting challenge, rewards and feedback – plus social networking between participants, there's enormous potential to create an appealing and accessible digital version. We are interested in hearing from anyone who would like to get involved with these developments.

But there's also work to be done to enable and encourage the skills workforce to use a gaming approach with their learners. "Gaming lifts the stigma," commented Markos Tiris from LSIS (Learning and Skills Improvement Service) at our roundtable event that launched the *Gaming for Reading* report (see www.youtube.com/readingagency). "People are happy to engage and you can't get a bigger gain than engagement. Games make the link between informal learning – where people are engaged in something for fun – and more formal learning. We need to get the message out to the sector that it's OK to use games."

Visit www.readingagency.org.uk/adults for information on The Reading Agency's work with adult readers and contact

michelle.treagust@readingagency.org.uk if you would like further information about any of our programmes.

3. Quick Reads, 2011, *Quick Reads – Latest News*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.quickreads.org.uk/news-and-media-centre/latest-news> [Accessed 28 Feb 2011].

Fluency in Mouse

Sarah Freeman

Sarah Freeman is an adult education teacher (Adult Literacy, ESOL, Dyslexia specialist and teacher trainer). She is also undertaking research into adult literacy within the Language and Literacy 'strand' of a part time Doctorate in Education programme at Sheffield University.

"Developing digital literacies means working to enable students and teachers to develop their understandings of and skills in using certain tools, not as decontextualised competencies but in ways that are connected to other aspects of their learning." Barton, D and Geillen, J (2010) Digital Literacies
www.tlrp.org/docs/DigitalLiteracies.pdf



These photographs were taken to illustrate a blogging project "Blog that Book!" that our *Skills for Life Literacy* Department in

Sutton, South London has been running (February – June 2011). I knew my intermediate level – Entry 3/Level 1 - learners would benefit a lot from being involved. Several of them are a little computer shy but they have reached a point where sitting down at any PC is no longer a worry. They have improved their reading and online skills a lot in the last months.



The pictures were something I wanted to use to illustrate how accustomed they had become in using the keyboard. For

many learners with mildly 'dyslexic' or severely dyslexic tendencies becoming fluent on a computer can make a difference to spelling.

I explained I wanted some pictures of them at work and I asked each for his or her permission; but I didn't look too hard at which tool they were using when I went into action.

The results - at first I was disappointed - no-one was using the keyboard. But then I

began to look and think again. In each case the student was concentrating on the screen and the tool that they were using was the mouse. This was not contrived in any way – each hand was flexed automatically, delicately grasping the hand-friendly tool that assists our online activity.

It came to me that digital activity, with its multimodality and its hypertext facilities, where some researchers have suggested reading and writing become integrated in such a way that you can no longer identify an activity clearly as one or the other (Kress p.61; Barton & Gillen p.19) requires a whole different set of quite intricate activities rather than just a writing tool and a writing surface.



As the learners created their blogs they were using the spellchecks, grammar checks and word processing tools that they had learnt along the way, but in various different ways and often with the assistance of the mouse instead of the keyboard. Once online they had little use of the keyboard at all.



Who learned more that day – them or me?

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 Kress, Gunther. (2003). *Literacy in the New Media*. Oxon: Routledge.

A Hand in Reflective Learning

Roberta Scott

Roberta Scott has just completed a course for tutors of Adult Numeracy at Queen's University, Belfast. For the reflective learning journal assignment, she had to explore some of her main learning from the course. This is an extract from one of her entries where she has used various digital tools and practices to help herself with a creative approach to reflective practice.

In order to help me analyse my learning from the Diploma course I decided to look into creative methods of reflection. At first, I wanted to create a "wordle" <http://www.wordle.net>. This involved writing down all the words that came to mind associated with the course and loading them into a program which turns them into a "word cloud". This seemed helpful as it allowed me to identify words and topics which stood out as my main learning outcomes. There is also some imagination and free association involved, giving a broad brush stroke over the course. From this, I can decide which topics I want to focus on. I gave myself free rein in terms of the words: how had I felt about the course? What were the aspects that I could remember clearly? What were the most important things to take away with me?

As I looked into wordles I came across a program called "Tagxedo"



<http://www.tagxedo.com/>. This allows you to load your wordle words into an image. I decided to think of an image I could use as a metaphor for my experience on the course. I looked at images on Google along the themes of key, education, essential skills, books, education, world, but nothing fitted. At the time, the best image seemed to be of a maze – going from the start to the finish, other people in the maze taking different turnings and offering you directions, some of the words being "thorns" in the hedges, eg, pressure. However, I was not 100% happy with this.

Finally, I decided to make my own image and scan it into the program. At first I drew a picture of a person with open hands to represent open to learning. From this, I got the idea to trace an outline of my hand, scan it and use this in the tagxedo program. I felt this was the image I wanted to use for the following reasons:

- It represents my personal learning from the course – the image is personal to me
- It's me, making my mark on the course
- Hands are communication, openness, warmth, strength, creativity, relationship, welcome
- Hands represent labour and work
- Hands are extended to those around us
- They represent passing on and receiving knowledge
- Hands offer guidance, support, discipline and correction
- To give a hand, hand out, thumbs up, hand in work
- Digits used for fingers and numbers, representing the relationship between numeracy and language
- Some students might be handfuls, but others are within our reach

I also played around with the image, colours and language. After this, I used the words in the image to help me clarify what I have learnt from the course.

Section 2

Web 2:0 & Teacher Education: Using Blogs and Wikis - An Update and Reflection

Cathy Clarkson

Cathy Clarkson is an an Advanced Teaching and Learning Coach & CELTA tutor at Kirklees College. She has a keen interest in technology for learning and this year she has been particularly interested in social media and mobile technology. You can find Cathy on Twitter @cathywint discussing all things ESOL, technology, CPD and a bit of light chat.

In my article for the RaPAL journal¹ I wrote about my experience of using blogs and wikis within the CELTA² courses that ran during 2008-9 and concluded that while these had been useful tools for the course they had not fulfilled the original objectives which were:

"... I am interested how we can use a blog as part of an initial teacher training course. This blog will be:

- a way to keep in touch
- a place to reflect on your teaching and learning
- a way to comment on each other's reflections
- a place to support each other outside the Monday sessions
- a place to add links to interesting sites or articles - I have a 'stash' of gr8 websites that I use within my ESOL teaching and I plan to add 1 or 2 links every couple of weeks (rather than linking them all NOW) to give you an opportunity to explore them in your own time."

After writing the article I developed a Moodle course for the CELTA 09-10 courses, (the blog and wiki were not available in the college that year due to tighter restrictions in the blocking software). I found that this is a useful tool for sharing course documents, such as the course handbook, assignments and lesson plan proformas as well as a space to add class materials for each taught session. However, in terms of a communication tool the VLE had several drawbacks. I used the News Forum to update trainees throughout the course, but the college system does not allow for these updates to be emailed to the students' personal accounts. This meant that the students did not know *when* they had to check for these updates. Secondly, this was very teacher-centered and there was no opportunity for the students to engage with the tool to communicate with each other, which is still something that I am interested in.

In October 2010 the next CELTA courses started at Kirklees College, and after having a year with only the college VLE available I decided once again to set up a class blog which would run parallel to the Moodle course. This time my aims were less ambitious than in 2008. In my introductory post I simply said "Welcome to the KC CELTA blog. This is a group site where we can all share and discuss ideas and issues outside of the CELTA classroom."⁴

I chose to use the *posterous*⁵ service for two main reasons, firstly the ease of set up and secondly the link to email. This functionality made it easier to use than other blog services or that of a wiki. Once a student was enrolled onto the CELTA I did two things. I emailed them a copy of the pre-course tasks and I added them as contributors to the kccelta blog.⁶ By the time the course started two weeks later there had already been 11 posts, with comments and replies to most of them. Nine of these posts were started by the trainees.

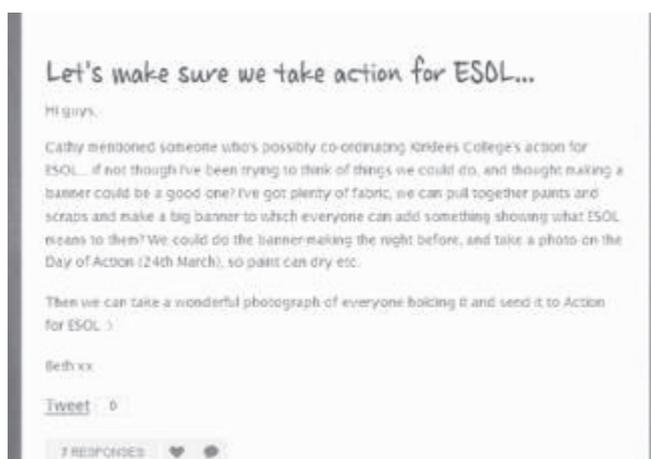
Post Title	Date	Hits	Comments
message for Ross	Jan 15	42	1
volunteers to support beginner classes	Jan 13	74	3
E1 daytime feedback	Jan 17	88	3
E2 evening TP 6 & daytime TP7&8	Jan 14	153	3
TP 7-8 for E2 daytime & Monday's session	Jan 14	154	1
VLE outage	Jan 14	188	2
Stunning resource for learners	Jan 13	233	18
E3 feedback 12/1/11	Jan 13	174	3
Remembering it's the beginning of the journey	Jan 13	232	9
HE prospectus	Jan 12	194	0

At the time of writing we were just over half way through the 20 week course and there have been 137 individual posts. Fig 1 shows a week's activity in January, the number of hits and the number of comments.

There are three distinct themes appearing on the blog:

1. Information external to class activity posted by the tutor
2. Information external to class activity posted by the students
3. Information from class activity

The college marketing department came to interview the daytime group to do an article for the student magazine. It was really interesting sitting in on this interview as so many positive things were said. They talked about how the blog provided a continuous conversation, it was a space to discuss problems, share resources, ideas and websites (fig 2) and have a banter with friends. They added that they felt that they would feel isolated without it.



It was discussed how not everyone contributes to the blog. The main contributors do come to the daytime course and there is limited input from the evening students, however those who don't contribute to posts or comments do say that they read the blog and find it useful.

On a less positive note, when there is a lot of activity on the blog in a short time, coming to your email and seeing all the updates can be overwhelming. Even as the tutor I can feel this too. But again, I would argue that a strength of the posterous service is that you can choose to file away or delete the email updates but then go to the blog page itself at a more convenient time. Or, you can read and reply via email and have no need to visit the main site at all.

The student interview concluded by saying they felt that a key to success was the commitment from the tutor, who they described as a moderator. For example, when problems were being discussed on the blog they were confident that the tutor was there and would respond and put them on the right track if needed.

This is the third class blog that has been set up for the CELTA students at Kirklees College but the first time that it has developed into a space that students can share and discuss ideas. Reflecting on what has been different this time I think there are four key reasons. Firstly, it was set up before the class met using a simple email service. Secondly, I am committed to the blog and spend time reading and responding to posts. Thirdly, I actively use social media and mobile technologies for my own CPD activity, so when I come across relevant links on Twitter or on blogs I send these directly to the kccelta blog. Finally, I think times have changed and using social media is a more accepted form of communication than it was two years ago when I last set up a class blog.



June 2011 Update

Since writing this article in January this year the courses have now finished. The blog continued to be a widely used resource throughout the course, and the students created their own 'post CELTA' blog - a reflection on the positive impact that the CELTA blog had.

4. <http://kccelta.posterous.com/welcome>

5. <https://posterous.com/>

6. <http://kccelta.posterous.com/>

Experiences of Embedding Digital Literacy Skills through Communication in 'Second Life'

Bex Ferriday

Bex Ferriday is a Lead Teacher based within the School of Education and Training at Cornwall College. She delivers a range of Lifelong Learning teacher training programmes from Levels 5 - 7. More recently, Bex's work has moved towards the design and authoring of staff development and teacher training eLearning packages. Her growing interest in using ILT within teaching and learning has led to her speaking at conferences UK-wide on a range of ILT such as the embedding of web 2.0 technologies, using mobile learning, social networking sites and virtual worlds in teaching and learning.

The term 'digital literacy' is a notoriously difficult one to pin down. Indeed, in his article "What is this thing called Digital Literacy?" (Johnson, 2010) states that "what you mean by digital literacy is something quite different from what I mean and probably what everyone else means." Put simply then, we have no definitive handle on this phrase. The very journal you are now reading will contain a range of descriptions from a range of publications - all of them slightly different, but all of them ostensibly 'correct'. However, for the purposes of this article, I will be using the description offered by BECTA (2010):

'Digital literacy is a combination of skills, knowledge and understanding that young people need to learn in order to participate fully and safely in an increasingly digital world.'

We all – regardless of age - live in an ever increasing digital world; people need to be able to use computer technology in everyday life to develop new social and economic opportunities for themselves, their families and their communities. Therefore, being digitally literate is not simply a case of being 'Information Technology Adept', but more about feeling confident in communicating using a range of digital technologies.



Trainee teachers from around Europe meet for the first time in a virtual world

A range of competencies fall under the umbrella term 'digital literacy', among them the ability to discriminate between and select appropriately information needed for a specific purpose, the processing of information, reading comprehension of oral and written texts, critical thinking, writing skills, social networking skills, the ability to work collaboratively and to share knowledge appropriately and Internet and web tools use. For the purposes of this article I shall be concentrating on communication: a skill that is integral to all areas and competencies within digital literacy.

In 2010 I was involved in the delivery of a generic teacher-training course: the City and Guilds Level 3 Award in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), one of a raft of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes put into place after the government's review of teacher training qualifications in 2007. Having successfully run both a classroom and blended learning version of the programme (the blended version being delivered predominantly online, with a few sessions held in the classroom), I decided to pilot a version whereby the classroom-based sessions delivered as part of the blended learning model were replaced by sessions delivered in a virtual world, namely *Second Life*.

Second Life (SL) is an online virtual world developed in San Francisco and launched by its founders, 'Linden Lab', in the summer of 2003. A number of free, downloadable client programmes called 'viewers' enable users of SL, often referred to as 'residents', to interact with one another through their on-screen characters, commonly referred to as 'avatars'. Residents can explore the world, meet other

residents, socialise, participate in individual and group activities (be they educational or leisure-based), and create and trade virtual property and services with one another, the 'Linden' being the virtual currency used in the virtual world. Second Life is intended for people aged 13 and over, and at the start of this year, more than 20 million user accounts have been registered globally. Though exact figures are hard to find and ever-changing, there is evidence to suggest that 'over 90% of UK HE establishments (are) represented in Second Life'. (Nino, 2009)

Researchers point out that participation in virtual worlds gives users access to a 'constellation' of literacy practices (Steinkuehler, 2007). Although my initial reason for running the programme was to examine whether ITT programmes could be delivered without trainees needing to step into a real-world classroom, my continuing interest in the delivery of both traditional and digital literacies added an element of personal enquiry. The trainees enrolled on the course had never met in the real world and were scattered geographically across the UK and Europe. Their only relationship with one another would be within the parameters of the virtual world and through their Second Life 'avatars' (their on-screen characters). It was only as the course developed that I noticed these literacies being honed, almost 'by stealth'.

Communication takes a variety of forms in Second Life. If users have access to a microphone, they can choose to use 'live speech' to communicate. Private chat between avatars can occur via text-based messages. Users can also opt to communicate to any avatar within range using a similar form of text-based communication, this time taking the form of text placed within a speech bubble appearing over the avatar's head. Any literacy practice involves issues of access and power, this being no different. A single ground rule was set at the start of the course: that as the course tutor, I would use a microphone and that trainees would type what they wanted to say using the 'speech-bubble' form of communication. As many of the trainees spoke English as a second language and felt more confident writing rather than speaking in English, and because this helped the sessions to flow without constant chatter,

the group were happy to comply. Without prior discussion, other patterns or 'unspoken rules' of communication formed naturally. A couple of avatars were finding it hard to hear what I was saying, but rather than disturb me (and without my knowledge), used private text messages to alert a colleague whose avatar had been introduced to the group in order to provide technical assistance. She was able to talk trainees through their issues and effectively solve their problems without any interruption to the rest of the group or to me. This form of communication was non-intrusive, didn't ruin the flow of the session and could only be viewed by her and those needing her assistance. Interestingly, this form of communication had happened naturally, again with no prior suggestion, agreement or instruction.



'Good and bad experiences of education' activity

A group discussion held later in the same session honed the group's digital literacy skills and further linked communication to collaboration. Participants were asked to write on virtual note cards good and bad experiences as students. After jotting down their thoughts I asked them to drag the note cards from their inventory and drop it onto a notice board that had been positioned in the corner of a barn...by a tractor. (In Second Life a classroom does not necessarily need to look like a classroom!) The contents of each note card would be displayed fully, and the author of each would then elaborate via the text-based 'speech bubble' method of communication. One trainee suggested that avatars present their note cards in alphabetical order, then asked the rest of the cohort whether they were happy to organise the activity in such a way. Without exception, the remaining participants agreed, with a second group member suggesting that the order was based on the first letter of their

avatars' christian names. Again, the rest of the group agreed and again, this was not agreed prior to the activity.

Whether or not the swift forming of a community of communicative understanding was based on an inherent understanding of the unwritten rules of communication in Second Life, the fact that the participants were adults well-versed in the rules of discussion and electronic communication, or whether it was a combination of the both would require formal, in depth research. It could be said then, that on a subconscious level, social awareness played a large part in the way these conversation patterns formed and remained in place for the duration of the course.



I shall end with a quote from the Common Sense Media group (2009). They comment on Digital Literacy and Citizenship in the 21st Century, and highlight the importance of communication as vital to how we can make sense of and make our way safely through the digital landscape:

'This dynamic new world requires new comprehension and communication skills, as well as new codes of conduct, to ensure that...powerful media and technologies are used responsibly and ethically. Much of the interaction in this digital world happens at a distance, which can diminish the rules of cause and effect, action and consequence. Additionally, much of digital life takes place under the cloak of anonymity, making it easier to participate in unethical and even illegal behaviors.'

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Exploring the Digital Histories, Lives and Literate Identities of Adult Literacy Tutors in Further Education

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Introduction

Current educational research into people's digital lives and the uses of digital technologies has focused almost exclusively on school children, in particular the ease in which they operate within and between digital worlds and the growing discrepancy between their home and school literacy practices (Larson and Marsh, 2005; Pahl and Rowsell, 2006).

Following Graham (2008), I became interested in exploring the impact of digital technologies on the lives of adult literacy tutors and the implications this might have for their teaching practice. Graham's research considered the digital histories and digital lives of young teachers in English primary schools and had its origins in the work of Thomas (1995 in Graham, 2008) on 'reading histories.' The original premise suggested that how teachers learned to read might affect both their lives, as readers, but also their 'way of being' as a teacher of reading and hence the lives of those they teach. This paper seeks to explore a similar assertion with regard to teachers' approach to engagement, both for themselves and their learners, with the digital world and in particular, digital texts which are often multimodal and interactive in nature, and representing a paradigm shift away from traditional print based texts. As an adult basic skills tutor I was always intrigued, yet often horrified, by the stories my learners would tell me about their previous educational experiences. Teachers' methods, attitudes, behaviours and, offhand comments, had all played a part in shaping my learners' perception of their literate identities, and their general confidence in the world. As a teacher educator, I am becoming increasingly interested in exploring the impact teachers' personal histories might have on those they teach. Unwittingly, teachers may be replicating certain behaviours and attitudes, in this case about their experiences of digital technologies and the digital world,

which in turn is shaping their practice and informing the approaches they adopt in supporting their own learners' engagement with digital literacy texts.

Since 2003 Information Communication and Technology (ICT) has been designated as a 'skill for life' within the Skills for Life Strategy for England and Wales. ICT has been seen as a 'powerful tool' in encouraging adults back into learning and in raising literacy and numeracy levels (Mellar et al, 2007). Consequently, adult literacy tutors have been encouraged to develop and integrate these skills into their teaching, in many cases without any formal training, leading to questions not only about practitioners' technical competence, but also their awareness in recognising that 'new technologies involve a new set of skills, that new literacy skills are involved' (Mellar and Kambouri, 2006, p.3).

Theoretical frameworks and relevant literature

I approached my research from a New Literacy Studies perspective (Gee, 2008) which favours a strong use of narratives and personal life histories to help understand the relationship between literacy and social context and to counter the dominant discourse that sees literacy as a singular universal set of skills unrelated to the context within which they are being used. Street (1984) first challenged this dominant discourse by distinguishing between two competing models: the 'autonomous' view of literacy, which sees literacy as a 'neutral' set of skills that can be taught free of context and can be transferred to any given situation as required, and, the 'ideological' view, that sees literacy in terms of social practice. This alternative view stresses the importance of literacy practices, literacy events and sees the role of identity as pivotal to the theorising of literacy (Street, 2003).

The word 'new' has also become associated with literacies, according to Lankshear and Knobel (2006), in the 'ontological' sense. Ontological refers to the abstract nature of existence or being and in the case of 'new literacies' there are two particular aspects that differ from the traditional view of literacy. Firstly, the 'technical' aspect, which corresponds to the development and use of new forms of communication via digital technologies, often multimodal in nature, compared to conventional print based texts: secondly, the 'ethos' related to these new technologies, which Lankshear and Knobel (2006) see as being more collaborative in character and allowing greater distribution opportunities than traditional print-based literacies. These constitute a different kind of 'mindset', suggesting that our frame of mind or attitude requires a fundamental shift if we are to fully realise and exploit the affordances these new technologies can provide. Lankshear and Knobel (2006) identify two digital mindsets: 'newcomers', who view the introduction of new technologies as simply a new tool for doing the same job in the same way, only slightly more 'technologized' (p.34): and 'insiders', who recognise that the digital world is a very different world to what has previously existed.

Although there is no universal agreement on a definition of digital literacy, Martin (2008) has proposed that:

'Digital Literacy is the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately

use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyse and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process' (p.166-167).

Mayes and Fowler (2006) suggest that central to our understanding of digital literacy should be a change of focus away from skill towards identity. They imply being digitally literate resides as an attribute of an individual's life history and social situation, which will vary from person to person. It is this point that had resonance for my own study which sought to explore the relationship between my participants' engagement in digital worlds, their changing confidence and their shifting digital literate identities over time.

Methodology

Context and participants

My research was based on interviews undertaken with four Skills for Life tutors from a large further education college in the North of England, which had recently been subject to a new build. The age profile of the tutors ranged from 39 – 53 years of age, which is fairly typical for staff working within the field of adult literacy in the UK (Cara et al, 2008). The participants had a mixed range of teaching experience, although two of the tutors were relatively new to the profession. The research methods used comprised of a

	Female (3)	Male (1)	Mean age	F/T	P/T (fractional)	Average length of service
Participants	75%	25%	47. 5 years	50%	50%	5 years 6 months
Nat stats*	77%	23 %	45 years	33%	67%	8 years

* Cara, Lister, Swain and Vorhaus (2008)

Participant profile compared to national statistics on Skills for Life workforce

questionnaire, identifying general data on the participants' use of digital technologies both at work and home; a learner biography line graph, which asked informants to plot the trajectory of their confidence since they started using digital technology; and a semi-structured interview, which explored the responses to the questionnaire and line graph, and asked 3 key research questions:

- Who was/is important to you in your journey into digital worlds (any digital medium)?
- What texts (digital) were/are important?
- Where did/do you access these worlds? (Graham, 2008).

Analysis and findings

Who was/is important to you in your journey into digital worlds?

Interestingly, although there were some significant people of influence for the participants in their journey into the digital world, such as friends or relatives, none identified teachers. Indeed, any mention of teachers either directly or indirectly, were in the negative. This negativity seems to stem from the teacher's attitude either to their learners (critical and unsupportive) the subject ('uninspiring' and 'boring') or both:

'she was quite negative about it if you made a mistake...it wasn't a very supportive environment'
(Jane)

'they describe the IT they do at school as boring...you know I've heard a lot of them say that, it's really boring'
(Stephen, talking about his children).

This last comment was not lost on Stephen who later reflected:

'and from our point of view it's how do we stop being described as being boring cos we're not using that technology (with our own learners).'

One of the underlying themes running through all the narratives was that of informants 'picking things up as they went along' and asking for help when needed. This usually occurred through ad hoc

conversations with friends, relatives or work colleagues. Two participants spoke of qualifications they had undertaken, such as CLAIT or ECDL, yet neither felt they had learnt much from the experience. However, this is possibly due to the normal 'modus operandi' for such courses based on individual working, via a workbook, with limited or in some cases no formal tutor support. More meaningful learning appeared to come through short in-house training events or informal sessions with colleagues, which often led to significant changes in both confidence and practice. Indeed, participants were quick to mention the need for training as a starting point, for developing their skills and knowledge, but then counter balanced this by stressing the need for time to 'play' and reflect on their new learning, if it was to be successfully incorporated into their practice:

'I think there's a value to having the formal training just to introduce you to things, but then you need the time to sit and play with it and find a use for it, otherwise you learn it, then you never use it again...or you just don't understand it...and it disappears.'
(Natasha)

What texts were/are important?

Initially, the texts identified by participants were word-processing, databases, spreadsheets and programs requiring the use of specific computer languages. However, their current digital lives are dominated by e-mail, the internet and mobile phones (texting), all of which are multimodal in nature and often involve interconnectivity between technologies with the use of one leading to the use or incorporation of another. Yet none of these are customary classroom texts and do not represent the kind of texts that they themselves currently use (with the exception of internet searches) with their learners. This supports Honan's (2008) observation that teachers seem reluctant and often surprised, at the suggestion at using everyday digital texts in the classroom. Furthermore, these latter texts are more specifically related to social communication than the early texts, signifying a shift in the way people are using digital technologies. Interestingly, despite all the participants having owned a mobile phone for a number of years, their usage was limited to its primary purpose of communication, either phoning

and texting. None had championed the use of any of the other functions available, for example games, a calculator or internet connection, even though time had not necessarily been any issue for exploring these options. This indicates that purpose is the key motivation for uptake and usage of technologies, however once the primary purpose is established there is a propensity to 'functional fixedness', where people are unable to move their thinking beyond the conventional use they have for an object,

limiting its use (Koehler and Mishra, 2007).

Where did/do you access these worlds?

Although the participants' first contact with the digital world began at school and/or university, the workplace is the predominant space in which all the informants have engaged and developed their digital literate lives. However, there is increasing leakage into the home domain, through the ubiquitous nature of mobile phone use and the growth of internet shopping.

Name	Who ?	What ?	Where
Natasha (46)	Brother-in-law Self Tutors	E-mail Internet Databases / spreadsheets / wordprocessing	University, college/local library, work, home
Jane (39)	Friends, self Work colleague (ILT dept)	Mobile phone/texting Internet (Facebook) E-mail Wordprocessing	School, university, work, home, friend's house. Anywhere
Stephen (53)	Self	Mobile phone/texting E-mail	Anywhere Work/home
Pat (52)	Work colleagues, Self, son	Internet E-mail Databases/ wordprocessing	Work, home, Anywhere

Participants' significant influences since engaging with the digital world

Emerging themes

(1) Identity and Confidence

Fluctuations in participant's confidence over the course of their life history indicated a fluid and non-linear trajectory in their digital literate identity, with their sense of self shifting across time and domains. None of the participants illustrated their digital confidence as an upwardly moving straight line over the course of their life history, but rather a series of peaks and troughs marked by the introduction of new technology and the

gradual mastery of their use. In the domain of work, participants positioned their digital literate identity first in relation to their learners, then their colleagues, but also in terms of the new college environment. All of the participants indicated that their current skill level exceeded that of their students, which is one of the main reasons why many of them indicated a high level of confidence in their own digital literacy skills. Yet when reflecting on their use and competence of new literacies texts, such as social networking sites, weblogs, MSN or virtual worlds, such as

Second Life, informants modified their view, playing down their general confidence, with only one admitting to any kind of online identity or use of these technologies as a vehicle for self-expression.

(2) Mindsets

During all of the interviews, the participants mentioned the difficulties they experienced with computers in the early days. These initial experiences, although not necessarily negative, portray computer use as something quite difficult. Very large, often intimidating machines, they were loud and slow to operate, often requiring knowledge of programming languages such as Basic, Fortran, Cobol or Pascal. Their laborious nature often made alternative or traditional ways of doing things appear quicker, easier and considerably less stressful. All my informants' journeys into the digital world began in the 1970's and 1980's, so their experiences of computer based reading and writing were shaped, along with their own sense of agency, by the opportunities and limitations of the technology of the time. At the point at which the participants were coming into contact with computers they were the exception not the rule, as access was fairly limited. Therefore, they rarely had the opportunity to use computers unless it was for a specific purpose. This might provide an explanation to participants' attitude to the role and purpose of computers, as a tool for work and not necessarily play. What is clear is that most of the participants do not have the same attachment to digital media technologies and texts, in the same way as 'Gen-Xers' (25 -35 year olds) or more specifically 'Millennials' (those born after 1982) reputedly do (Oblinger, 2003; Prensky, 2001). Most spoke of the difficulty they had in understanding the attraction of gaming and social network sites and were suspicious of the motivation and purpose behind many of the new technologies. When asked about social networking sites such as Facebook or Bebo, most showed very little interest and were fairly dismissive, particularly in terms of their own use,

'no I can't see the point to be perfectly honest with you' (Stephen)

'I can't see the value in them to be honest, it's just chatter....inane chatter' (Pat).

Nevertheless, all of them recognised that such texts might have some value for their learners, even if they were not quite sure how they could be used for educational purposes

(3) Motivating forces

Although work was identified as the central motivating force in their engagement with digital texts, all the participants agreed that their children, whose ages ranged from 11 months to 22 years, had had an impact on their use or interest in new digital technologies and texts to some extent.

(4) Changes in social practice

What was evident from talking to the participants was that digital technologies were changing their everyday literacy practices, even if they were not consciously aware of it. All use e-mail socially at home, representing a regular, if not primary, mode of communication between their family and friends. All undertake some aspect of shopping online, either browsing in the virtual world before buying in the physical world or actually buying online, with books, CDs, specialised equipment (bikes) or holidays representing typical items purchased. However, all the participants appeared to prefer reading traditional print-based text rather than read on-screen for any length of time. Most admitted to printing off e-mails and other information to read:

'I find it quite hard to read off the screen...I'd rather print it off and read it and then I can scribble on it.'

(Natasha)

(5) Classroom practice

The use of digital texts within traditional adult literacy classes appeared to be limited, when delivering whole group teaching. Nevertheless, the informants did use computers on a regular basis with individuals or small groups of learners to word process documents (learner generated), search for information on the internet or undertake practice papers for National Tests. Indeed, many of the tutors' concerns about using ICT in the classroom centred on the technical competence of their learners, even though the majority of learners seem to enjoy using it. Interestingly, none of the tutors had any real sense of their learners' engagement with digital technologies and digital texts outside of

class, other than mobile phone use. Indeed, the attitude of tutors to mobile phone use by students in class appeared to be split, with some actively encouraging learners to use predictive text to support spelling, while others required learners to turn them off immediately on entry into the classroom. Other digital texts such as e-mail and social networking sites, although not used, were seen to have potential, but in fact ideas were based on communication between tutor and learner only, rather than considering learner to learner or learner to people outside the immediate student group (i.e. anyone in the world). This narrow view highlights the fundamental difference between people's everyday uses of these texts and what might currently be deemed acceptable within a classroom context.

(6) Taking part in the Research

During the course of the interviews all the participants mentioned the usefulness of the pre-interview activities as reflective tools to trace their digital histories:

'I found doing this (digital history line graph) quite interesting actually looking back into the dim and distance past quite good.' (Stephen)

Most commented, post-interview, on how the visual representation of their digital history, on the line graph, had made most impact. Hardly anyone wrote any words to support their graph yet the marks they provided on the page spoke volumes about their individual journeys. This feature appealed to most of the informants who saw an immediate application for their own learners. Suggestions ranged from using it in a similar way to help learners explore their own literacy development, to identifying the origins of their barriers to learning or, by shortening the time frame axis, as a way of measuring confidence and distance travelled on a given aspect of literacy. Finally, taking part in the research had provided the opportunity for participants to reflect on their current practice and consider the possible uses of Web 2.0 technology with their learners.

Conclusions

Researching participants' digital literate lives through the examination of narrative histories proved useful. Not only did it provide an

insight into who, where and how informants gained entry into the digital world, but it afforded them the opportunity for reflection on their lives and practice both in and outside of the classroom. Use of narrative histories can be a practical learning tool for practitioners and more extensive application should be used in teacher training programmes as part of the reflective process. Gaining self-awareness of the origins of how we obtain particular skills, be it reading, writing or digital literacy can only enhance a teacher's understanding and empathy for their learners and strengthen their pedagogy, in relation to these skills. Both existing teachers and those new to the profession need to develop a greater awareness of the issues and implications new technologies are having on our understanding of literacy and what it means to be literate in the 21st century.

According to Prensky (2007), teachers' competence with technology will always play catch up to those of their learners. Although my participants indicated sufficient skills to support their current students, confidence appeared fragile and firmly placed them in the category of 'digital newcomers' (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006). Therefore, they will need to continually develop their own digital literacy skills, not only to support their existing learners and negate concerns over the 'digital divide,' but also in preparation for future generations of learners, the vast majority of whom are likely to be technically competent in accessing digital worlds and will expect the use and proficiency of new technologies in the classroom.

We already know that learners are motivated by the use of ICT (Mellar et al, 2004) but evidence from Synder et al (2005) suggest that learners are keen to broaden their curriculum to include 'information communication and technology life skills' (p. 34) such as finding information using the internet and online banking. This suggests that tutors need to engage more purposefully with the digital world beyond merely familiarising themselves with such texts. As Honan (2008) suggests, this means needing to recognise, draw on and extend their own uses of digital literacy and their everyday practices, by bringing them into the classroom to reflect on what is happening in the wider world. Ivanic (2004) has pointed to the

general lack of research within the FE sector on learners' out-of-college literacy practices, principally their use of technology and how that could be utilized as part of their classroom studies.

In summary, we need to ensure that as literacy teachers, we are mindful of our past, recognise and engage in the classroom with our everyday digital literacy practices in the present, and radically change our curriculum focus for the future. Coupled with this we need to be more aware of learners' own digital literacy practices and harness these, and their own practices from outside the classroom, as resources and tools for learning. Only by doing so, will we make certain that we and our learners develop the necessary competencies and mindset required to live successful digital literate lives in the 21st century.

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Email as 'Literacy-in-Action'

Ellayne Fowler

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How should we research digital literacies? In this paper I argue that in researching digital literacies we need to refine our theoretical tools beyond the *literacy event*, in order to fully explore the social practices that digital literacies are embedded in. Drawing on the work of Brandt and Clinton (2002) I argue for the use of the concept of *literacy-in-action* to fully explore the social practices around the use of email, drawing on both local and global practices. The email examples in this paper are drawn from my own research on literacy practices and email in a Further Education college.

Digital literacy

Gillen and Barton (2010:9) define *digital literacy* as: "the constantly changing practices through which people make traceable meanings using digital technologies". Email is clearly a digital technology and my doctoral research project on the use of email in a Further Education college illustrated a range of social practices around the use of email. I would therefore argue that email is a digital literacy and, as such, I feel the lessons I learnt from researching email may give insight into other digital literacies.

Literacy events and digital literacies

The theoretical basis for my project was the New Literacy Studies (NLS). This body of qualitative research explores the idea of the 'ideological' model of literacy, as proposed by Street (1984). Instead of seeing literacy as a single set of specific skills, which Street terms the 'autonomous' model, my research sought to 'understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorize it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded' (Street, 1984, p.95).

In order to explore literacy as social practice the concepts of *literacy events* and *practices* were utilised. Shirley Brice Heath (1982) introduced the concept of *literacy event* as a

'key concept for the empirical study of ways of taking meaning from written sources across communities' (p.50). She used this to describe the home literacy practices of different communities in the same city in Southeastern USA. For Heath a *literacy event* was an 'occasion in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies' (p.50). From *literacy events* we infer *literacy practices*. Street (1984) developed the concept of *literacy practices* in exploring an ideological model of literacy. In more recent work Street uses *literacy practices* as a broad concept: 'By literacy practices I mean not only the observable behaviours around literacy – Heath's "literacy events" – but also the concepts and meanings brought to those events and which give them meaning' (2003b, p.81). When we explore literacy practices around email, we are looking at far more than the email texts. We need to explore the process of meaning making of which they are a part.

This concept is taken up by other NLS writers. Barton and Hamilton (2000), for example, define literacy events as, 'activities where literacy has a role. Usually there is a written text, or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text. Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them' (p.8). There are, however, difficulties in applying the concept of literacy event to email, which centre on how the boundaries of the event are recorded. Hamilton (2000) explores the difficulty of defining the limits of literacy events in her work on literacy in newspaper photographs. Sometimes the literacy is central to the photographic story (such as the giant cheque made out to a charity) while at other times it can simply be there on signs or T-shirts. This raises the question of how central does email have to be to be part of a literacy event? This difficulty can be

illustrated by considering the history of an actual email from my own research.

An analysis of email as a literacy event (example 1)

An email was sent to all staff to inform them of a change to the staff password for entering *staff room*, an area of the college intranet that includes confidential information and that is available to staff only and is therefore password protected. The email was sent to all academic, support and management staff. It informed people that the password had changed and that the new password was a combination of a standard format and your own personal password. We could see the sending of the email as a literacy event. The new password had been the subject of discussion in the IT department and with the vice principal responsible for this area. As a result of the discussion the IT manager typed the email, which appeared as words on the screen and was then sent, as digital code, to all members of staff on the system.

The next literacy event concerning the email may be when it is opened by members of staff. And yet this will not be one literacy event. It will be an event that occurs for hundreds of staff at different times over a number of months. For some it may become an event, but for many the IT email is a passing moment, something ephemeral that doesn't warrant the term 'event'. They see the email in their inbox, open it and read it. Some may delete it, perhaps without reading it, as they do not use *staff room*. Some members of staff will never see it as they do not use email. While it can be argued that someone reading an email is an example of a literacy event, how does the researcher observe this, without asking for comment from the email reader? At this point this would become a literacy event, but it is one that the researcher has initiated.

However, let us consider what happened with the IT email in the work room I use. Two members of staff were reading their email. One opened the email from IT and in passing mentioned it to her colleague. She then both printed the email and stored it digitally in a folder she had named 'IT'. The email had now taken on a new form, as a printed text, as well as moving in its digitized form to another place on the system. Some weeks later, a

part time member of staff was trying to access *staff room* on the system. Although she remembered there was an email she could not remember the content. She asked for help and a colleague pointed out the email tacked to the wall above the computer. The email had again become part of a new literacy event. And yet, many members of staff glance up at the email tacked to the wall as an aide-memoire when logging on to staffroom. Are these literacy events or the more fleeting literacy moments? Although these moments are hard to capture, they illustrate the practices around the use of email as much as the larger event.

The original email remained also on the system in digital form, saved in the sender's outbox, on the server and in inboxes, deleted files and various staff folders. (It would also exist in backup files, as evidenced recently in the ongoing News of the World telephone bugging scandal!) Digital information can seem ephemeral and yet it is saved in its digital format in many places. And, as this research shows, it is printed as a text and left on walls and in files across the college.

Difficulties with the concept of literacy event

The issues of time and space add to the difficulty of theorising literacy events around email. Where are the boundaries in space and time? How central does the literacy have to be to a series of social actions for it to be part of a literacy event? How long does the interaction with the email have to last to be considered a literacy event? And yet the life of an email is certainly made up of a lot of these moments, which add up to a picture of how individuals interact with technology and the organisation.

Part of the problem with using Heath's concept of literacy event is that the original concept was particularly apt for the research context it was used in. Heath was investigating the home literacy practices that children brought into school. For small children literacy often becomes part of an event, such as 'bedtime stories, reading cereal boxes, stop signs, and television ads, and interpreting instructions for commercial games and toys' (Heath, 1982, p.50). However, for adults in the context of the FE college, literacy is something that is all around

and pervasive. Although literacy can be involved in obvious events, particularly in the classroom, it is often addressed in the fleeting moments described. While it is clear that a discussion that arises from someone reading an email can be seen as an email literacy event, what about an email that is tacked to the wall in a staffroom as a reminder? It may no longer be referred to, so is it part of a literacy event? We might also ask whether this hard copy is still in essence a digital literacy. Email further stretches the limits of the literacy event by nature of its virtual environment. An interaction, such as an email dialogue, can take place between participants in different geographic locations over a period of time. The interaction, as recorded in the email (in virtual reality), appears to be contemporaneous. What seems clear is that *literacy event* may not be the most useful way of theorising email.

Actor Network Theory

A more useful way of theorizing email might come from concepts used in Actor Network Theory (ANT), as suggested by Brandt and Clinton (2002):

'... we want to grant the technologies of literacy certain kinds of undeniable capacities – particularly, a capacity to travel, a capacity to stay intact, and a capacity to be visible and animate outside the interactions of immediate literacy events. These capacities stem from the legibility and durability of literacy: its material forms, its technological apparatus, its objectivity, that is, its (some)thing-ness' (2002, p.344).

This approach addresses the difficulty of the email passing through time and appearing in different forms. Brandt and Clinton propose a number of concepts to be used in the analysis of the literacy networks of individuals and groups. In order to overcome difficulties with the concept of literacy event outlined above, they propose the use of the term *literacy-in-action* to take away the focus from local human actors. Here the focus is on the part literacy plays in an action: "Literacy-in-action" would awaken analytical curiosity in any objective trace of literacy in a setting (print, instruments, paper, other technologies) whether they are being taken up by local actors or not' (p. 349). In Brandt and Clinton's terms email, in my study, was an actor, as much as the writer and reader.

What ANT offers is a perspective that is based on the assumption that in describing and explaining social phenomena, all elements of these phenomena are part of the network of relations. Humans are not privileged in terms of theory. People can be actors, but so can emails. Brandt and Clinton's (2002) concept of literacy-in-action entails analysis not only of 'how readers and writers mediate their social world through literate practice' but also 'of how literacy acts as a social agent' (p.349). This way of theorising allowed me to look at the email tacked to the wall as part of the ongoing literacy-in-action, as much as the opening, reading and printing of the email.

Email as 'literacy-in-action' (example 1)

If we consider the previous email as literacy-in-action, as an actor in a network, it allows us to unpick the relationships and attitudes that are an integral part of that network. The original email arises from a conversation in the IT department. It is sent by them (in digital form) giving out a password to a digital space. The sender then is acting as a gatekeeper and the email is a key. Although the email in digital form arrives in all staff inboxes, not all staff have equal access to the email. They may not have access to a computer at work and may never log on to email, particularly if they are part time. The email is accessed and read by my colleague and a conversation ensues between members of staff, who arrive at a joint understanding and one person prints out the email and posts it on the wall as an aide-memoire. It also acts now as a key for other members of staff who haven't accessed the digital version.

Although we can look at literacy events embedded in this story (the conversation that led to the email being sent and the conversation when it was accessed in one work space), the idea of seeing the email itself as having a part in the action (literacy-in-action) begins to highlight elements of power (IT as gatekeepers and the email as a key) and also the effect of the materiality of the email. Somehow the printing of the digital form into a paper form allows more access to the digital staff room than the original digital form.

Brandt and Clinton acknowledge the links between literacy and power through the concept of *literacy sponsors*: 'underwriters of acts of reading or writing' (p.349). In the

context of a study of email, it allowed a focus both on materials (Who provides the email system? Who gives access to it?) and the multiple interests at play in the system. In example 1, the IT department act as literacy sponsors, but access is further mediated for part time staff by the act of the full time staff member printing the email. This multi-layered approach to literacy and power seems to be a move away from a simplistic dichotomy between dominant and vernacular literacy practices to a more complex explanation.

Literacy-in-action and local practices (example 2)

The following email was recorded in my research diary. As Brandt and Clinton (2002) suggest, the researcher has to ask 'What part does literacy play in the action and what does it look like in action?' (p.349).

Back at my desk after the Easter holiday I logged on remotely to work email. I saw an email from the principal with a colleague's name – she has been ill and without opening it I knew it was bad news. She had died last week. I think I have only read one other like this from the principal and yet I knew – a collection of circumstances or a social practice? Ex-line manager had rung round staff last week to stop them learning by email (I was away).

(Reflective diary 11.4.08)

The email had my colleague's name in the subject field. Other emails with a person's name in the subject field appeared in the system, but they were not sent by the principal. Often they were announcements of collections for people who are leaving and this was signaled by adding a request for the named person not to read the email, also in the subject field. I had seen at least two previous death announcements in the same format, for retired colleagues.

It is also important to note that the manager had phoned staff during the holiday to try to ensure nobody received this very sad news by email, which demonstrates how email was in this instance considered appropriate for dispersing sad news to distant colleagues but not to close colleagues.

As an example of literacy-in-action this email, as actor, can be seen as evidence of situated

literacy practices in this particular organisation. The network includes this format of email, the particular principal and a particular group of colleagues. The meaning arises, for those who are members of this network, from reading the title line, rather than the message itself. As an example it is underpinned by accepted attitudes to the appropriate use of email. Recent newspaper stories about members of the armed forces being made redundant by email again highlight how we, as a larger network (society) are still working out what email is and isn't appropriate for. You could probably identify similar examples yourself from a whole range of digital literacies.

It is important to note also that changes in the actors may well result in a local change in practice. For example, I didn't note any similar death notices after the arrival of a new principal.

The local and the global

One of Brandt and Clinton's key critiques is that there is an over-emphasis on the local use of literacy in the New Literacy Studies. Brandt and Clinton use the concepts of *localizing moves* and *globalizing connects* as a way of theorising the relationship between local and global literacy practices. *Localizing moves* are linked to local literacies, that is, what people do with literacy in a particular context. *Globalizing connects* are ways of individuals moving beyond the local. While I was exploring a local, situated set of literacy practices around the email system in a college, it was not divorced from larger more global practices. Indeed the format of any email is governed by the software chosen by the institution. Groupwise and Outlook emails are laid out and formatted in global ways. It is in an exploration of localizing moves that the social practices that underpin the use of email in a particular context or network become clear. For example, in example 2 the use of the subject line is global. A subject line will appear in any email and is often used by senders to signal content. However, the email actor in a specific network added a different layer of meaning making in the subject line. This then is a localizing move, the forging of meaning in a particular network. Brandt and Clinton's work offered a perspective that allowed for a more complex answer to my research questions. How did the local link to and hybridise global

structures? Brandt and Clinton see the analysis of literacy-in-action as a way of linking local and global aspects of literacy.

Street (2003,2004) counters Brandt and Clinton's concern that NLS focuses too much on the local at the expense of consideration of global or dominant literacies by suggesting: 'the result of local-global encounters around literacy is always a new hybrid rather than a single essentialized version of either' (2003a, p.4). Street argues that while global literacies impact on the local in this way, it is important to realise that these global literacy practices are never value-free and therefore 'autonomous'. Email comes into the organisation using a set format, but individuals within their organisational roles, bringing individual experiences and attitudes develop localised social practice. The more global aspects of the email remain, but within any organisation there are local practices around it, as evidenced in my research findings.

Literacy-in-action and reification: Example 3

Colleagues

Please find attached a statement setting out proposals for change to the College structure and some reductions in posts. The paper explains the context of rapid changes in government policy, reductions in LSC income & our wish to improve pay further as the main issues to which the College needs to respond.

I hope the majority will appreciate that this is a move to ensure the future growth and development of the College and its stability. We will make every effort to ensure that colleagues affected adversely by the proposals are treated supportively and with sensitivity.

If you have questions or issues you wish to raise with me, please do contact me,

The diarist who gave this email to me commented on it:

Email from the Principal – confirming conversation last week that my Division is being reformatted and my job is to be ring-fenced under threat of redundancy.

This is the use of email to confirm a previous spoken discussion. I suspect it was included as a critical incident for very personal reasons, as outlined in the response. The crucial information concerning his job would have been in the attached statement. It is an example of email confirming speech, as having more weight, more 'thingness' than the conversation that had taken place. This involves the actors of the principal, manager, conversation and email in a new relationship that spans time and place.

Conceiving the 'thingness' of email

An exploration of email as literacy-in-action allows us to explore the materiality of the email, whether as digital data or paper. The examples illustrate some of the attitudes I discovered to email, as both a confirmation of speech and as having more evidential weight when printed. One of the key findings of my study was how many emails were printed out to be used as evidence for either internal management or external authority. It is worth at this point citing a further concept that has been used to drive NLS forward more recently, which is *reification*. Barton and Hamilton (2005) argue that Wenger's (1998) 'concept of reification in the communities of practice work is key to making the link with literacy studies' (p.154). Wenger defines *reification* as referring to 'the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into "thingness"' (p.58). This links also to Brandt and Clinton's call to restore 'thing status to literacy' (2002, p.337). Wenger sees *reification* as central to social practice: 'Any community of practice produces abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms and concepts that reify something of that practice in a congealed form' (p.59). As Barton and Hamilton (2005) point out, literacy events are central to the examples Wenger (1998) gives in his book on communities of practice. Reification is about meaning making. Wenger's definition of *reification* is quite wide and Barton and Hamilton point out that his examples in the vignettes are mostly 'literacy artefacts' (2005, p.28). They suggest the notion of *reification* can be further strengthened by connecting with Actor Network Theory, for the same reasons suggested by Brandt and Clinton – that ANT sees 'that agency resides in a combination of both human beings and non-human objects' (p.29). This was a way to explain some of the

uses of email I discovered, such as the blind copy that is sent to prove that an action had occurred. There were always elements of power involved, as it was often to a superior. It seemed that the email reified the action in some way. This reification of actions and conversations was underpinned by an attitude to email that figured it as less ephemeral than speech and therefore able to reify a conversation in some way. However, the digital email was also seen as more ephemeral than the printed version. As literacy-in-action the printed email had a distinct role in networks both within and outside the college.

How then does research on email inform research on digital literacy?

The difficulties in theorizing email as a digital literacy would apply to other digital literacies, such as twitter, blogs, Facebook, etc. The difficulty with identifying literacy events around the use of digital literacy relate particularly to identifying boundaries in time and space to that event, as well as how central the literacy needs to be for it to be a literacy event. The use of the concept of literacy-in-action offers a more dynamic tool to analyse digital literacy in terms of a network of actors in order to identify the social practices that are evolving. In order to identify local practices we need to look at how actors take global elements (the particular format, for example, of many digital literacies) and develop local meaning-making from them. Underpinning those local digital literacies run attitudes to the apparently ephemeral nature of much digital dialogue. Local digital literacies represent our need to capture it as more solid, to reify it in some way. I would suggest that looking at digital literacy as literacy-in-action allows for a multi-layered understanding that goes beyond genre elements (of blogs or twitter) to how the digital literacy works in practice in a context.

What literacy-in-action demonstrates is that a text is interwoven in the relationships in the local and global networks that it is an actor in. Teaching digital literacy is more about critical awareness of those networks than about technology and genre.

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Moving onto the Fast Road

What do adult literacy learners read online and how do their teachers support them?

Irene Schwab

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Everyone know that things will be more easy for them. That's why they on that fast road, because life would never go back on the slow road. You've got to keep moving. (Learner in group B)

This literacy learner might speak for many in the classes I visited during my research. Increasingly, it is access to information and the ability to use information effectively that enables individuals to seize life's opportunities (Leu et al., 2004, p. 1575) and it is often those with the least literacy who find themselves on the wrong side of the 'digital divide' (Bynner et al., 2008, p. 2).

As a teacher educator, my role is to help literacy teachers develop their subject knowledge and practical teaching skills. Since starting to teach on the PGCE at the Institute of Education, I estimate that I have observed about 200 trainee and practising literacy teachers. While many of these teachers have had highly developed skills in teaching print literacy, I have noticed a reluctance to engage in the use of online texts, even when the facilities are on hand and the learners are keen. In some cases, teachers using websites for developing reading have printed out the webpages rather than modelling how to read them online. I was interested to discover what learners and teachers felt about this state of affairs.

The literature stresses the differences between reading print and online texts. It is argued that new screen-based technologies require new literacies, although there is not always agreement about what these might constitute (Coiro et al., 2008; Eagleton and Dobler, 2007; Leu and Kinzer, 2000; Sutherland-Smith, 2002). The new literacies, sometimes called silicon literacies (Snyder, 2002) or digital literacies (Gillen and Barton, 2010), involve reading unfamiliar text genres

(for example, blogs, chat rooms, instant messaging, email, social networking) and relating to text in new interactive ways.

In my small research project I examined an aspect of these practices - the reading of online texts, specifically webpages. The practices involved with such texts are wide, for example, booking tickets, applying for jobs, following one's favourite football team or shopping. These are, of course, also practices that can and do continue to take place non-virtually but as one teacher in the study noted:

People now, and increasingly in the future, are having to access information online. So you've got sort of Government policy, which sort of suggests that people increasingly will be dealing with e-government, so I think it's helpful for people to learn how different it is to navigate websites and web screens. (Teacher of group C)

Kress sees two factors of online texts as crucially different from print texts: firstly, being multimodal, meaning is gained through a variety of modes: visual and sound as well as verbal (with images becoming at least as important as the words). Secondly, the impact of reading on a screen rather than a page means the process becomes a lateral rather than a linear one. (Gillen and Barton, 2010; Kress, 1998). Also key is the interactive nature of reading on the Web, particularly in the age of Web 2.0. The use of hypertext gives the reader a more active, dynamic relationship with the text, and 'changes the status of author and text radically' (Kress in Gillen and Barton, 2010, p. 10).

In terms of online reading I was interested in learning about both learners' current practices and the skills they feel they need to develop to be more effective online readers. I felt that

insight into these areas would enable me, as a teacher educator, to help teachers provide more effective instruction and support to their learners in reading texts on the Web.

Although much attention has been paid to the impact of the new technologies on literacy (for example, Coiro, 2003; Coiro et al., 2008; Gillen and Barton, 2010; Kress, 1998; Martin, 2006; Snyder, 2008), there has been little research on the use of the Internet to teach reading skills to Entry level adult literacy learners. Studies investigating university students (Chun, 2001), school students (Karchmer, 2001) and adult second language learners (Mellar et al., 2007) can give useful insights but literacy learners' particular circumstances can marginalise them. They are less likely than higher level learners to have access to a personal computer and also less likely to use one on a regular basis (Parsons and Bynner, 2008, p. 20). Some teachers (although significantly not those I interviewed) have the attitude that Internet reading is too difficult for emerging readers and should be left until learners reach level 1 of the English Literacy Core Curriculum.

I decided to investigate the perceptions of a small group of teachers and learners of how best to use the Internet to teach reading in adult literacy classes at one further education (FE) college. My research questions were:

- What are the current Internet reading practices of Entry level adult literacy learners?
- How much awareness do their teachers have of these practices?
- What skills do their teachers feel learners need to read online texts?

These questions were best answered, I felt, by a small piece of qualitative research in which I would elicit the views of teachers and learners. I chose to restrict my sample to Entry level literacy learners as at levels 1 and 2 learners are more independent and experienced with a wider variety of texts. The participants were based at a large inner London college, well-equipped with educational technology.

My sample constituted five experienced teachers of Entry level literacy classes and their literacy groups, consisting, in total, of 39

adult literacy students. The data collection all took place in autumn 2009.

Teachers

My five teacher participants were from roughly similar backgrounds. Their ages and experience varied but all were white British women, speaking English as their home language. They were all competent users of the Internet, although one claimed to use it mainly for work. Interestingly, the two younger women seemed to use it less extensively than the older ones.

Learners

The learners were a far more diverse group than the teachers, having in common barely more than the fact that they were all studying literacy at Entry level. As well as gender, there were variations in terms of age and languages spoken, with a significant minority of deaf learners using British Sign Language as their first language (13%). They were also from a variety of ethnic groups, representing fairly typically the diverse student body in the college.

The research used face-to-face semi-structured interviews with teachers and focus groups of learners. The teachers were also asked to explain how they viewed a given website as a teaching tool. All interviews were recorded. Demographic information was obtained by a small-scale survey using questionnaires.

Teachers

I used a written questionnaire of eight questions asking for background information; ten oral questions consisting of themes and prompts around the subject of their teaching reading on the Internet and three oral questions based on the viewing of a website. Towards the end of the interview I displayed the Daily Mirror website (<http://www.mirror.co.uk/>) and elicited comments about how it might be used to teach reading. I chose the Mirror site as it is relevant but quite complex and displays many of the features of online, multimodal texts. My aim here was to put the teachers into a practical situation so that they could consider authentic literacy practices.

Learners

The biographical information questionnaire

was mostly a box ticking exercise and very little writing was required. Most learners were able to fill it in independently.

After the forms were completed we had a recorded focus group discussion, which varied in length between 8 and 37 minutes, reflecting the differing levels of confidence and interests of the groups involved. I decided on focus groups for a variety of reasons: it allowed people to speak anonymously and, at the same time, offered the support of being in a group. The deaf students were able to make their voices heard through their signer.

Findings

I have grouped my findings under the headings of my three research questions.

What are the current Internet reading practices of entry level adult literacy learners?

Almost all the learners (92%) stated they used the computer in college, which might be expected as they have regular sessions in a computer room. The three exceptions may have not attended the computer classes or may not have understood the question. A majority (54%) also used a computer at home. There was little other use (for example, at work or at a library).

A majority (58%) made use of the Internet. The learners were not asked to name the sites they visited; it was considered that individual site names might be too difficult to remember and/or spell. Sites were grouped under subject area headings. Although I intended them to note sites that they visited independently, inevitably some mainly remember what they have done in class. The most popular groups of sites visited were linked to travel (61%), for example booking tickets; looking at maps and renewing Oyster cards.

Second most popular were information sites (55%), maybe due to their use in class work. For example, several teachers mentioned that they had used the computer for searching for information about famous Black people in the recent Black History Month. Also popular was shopping and, as none of the teachers mentioned using shopping sites for teaching, it is likely that this was predominantly or completely home use (42%). Also popular were learners' own interests (football;

recipes; remote control transport; YouTube etc) and the media (the BBC was mentioned with regard to accessing the weather and Skillswise). In addition auction sites (8) and social networking sites (5) were probably chosen by learners, as teachers said they did not use these.

This brief summary of the findings showed that literacy learners, even those at Entry level, engage in a number of reading practices on the Internet, recognised to some extent by their teachers, but not necessarily fully utilised in their literacy classes. On reflection I found that my questions had elicited much useful information but the analysis also highlighted some gaps which would need to be followed up with further enquiry. For example, I found that Google was clearly the most widely used navigation aid (78%), but the fact it was employed did not necessarily imply successful or effective use. One learner stated:

Sometimes it's the way you write something, because when I try going to Google, or even just in the toolbar and you try and get in it, I write it wrongly. I might not word the question right and then it doesn't answer properly. (Learner in group E)

How much awareness do their teachers have of these practices?

Print texts clearly still predominate in class. None of the teachers used the Internet as a resource every lesson. Its use ranged from every two weeks to 'not very often'. Interestingly, the practice seemed to be to use it more as a tool for writing than reading (although many practices involve both). The teachers' most common personal uses (100%) were for information, shopping and travel, the same three areas that were most prevalent amongst learners. However, they used the Internet very differently for teaching: only four used it for information searching; three for travel and none for shopping.

All the teachers drew on it for teaching resources, not just for preparing lessons but for exercises and games the learners could play in the class. They also all mentioned they helped learners follow up their particular interests whether they be football, recipes or old films. None of the teachers used specific Web enquiry activities such as WebQuests, even though these have been shown to be

effective in developing learners' confidence and autonomy (Mellar et al., 2007).

What skills do their teachers feel that learners need to read online texts?

None of the teachers were what Lankshear and Knobel (Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, p. 32) call 'insiders' (those who use new technologies to create new realities). They fitted the profile of 'newcomers' (those who use new technologies to do familiar things in more 'technologized' ways). They were often somewhat anxious about their own technological skills and, whilst acknowledging the motivating and topical nature of online texts, they were sometimes quite ambivalent about using them.

They outlined a number of skills they felt were necessary for learners to access a site fully, both in the abstract and in relation to the website they looked at. I divided these, as noted below, into location skills and interpretation skills.

For teaching how to use the navigational features of the web, 16 different navigational skills were mentioned, but the teachers did not differentiate between the computing skills needed from the reading skills they were trying to develop. They were most in agreement over what I would term ICT skills, but as ICT skills were being taught elsewhere, this left them uncertain about their own role. Skills for interpretation can be divided into two main categories: those involving comprehension skills and those involved with critical reading skills. Comprehension of online sites involves all the elements outlined in the Literacy Core Curriculum (Basic Skills Agency, 2001) at text, sentence and word level. Between them, the teachers identified eleven different skills, but there was little overlap; only four were mentioned by more than one teacher.

Following hyperlinks always involves an element of choice, and learners need to be able to evaluate these choices. Many argue (for example, Kress, 1998; Snyder, 2008; Tindale, 2005) that critical reading is a more crucial skill when dealing with online texts than with print as those might be checked before printing, whereas anyone can publish online. Three teachers claimed to take a critical approach, and of the six points

mentioned, only two were shared. It seems there was little general agreement about the skills needed to read online texts.

Data analysis and interpretation

I drew on Miles and Huberman's conceptual framework for qualitative data analysis, delineating three concurrent 'flows of activity': data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. The aim was to identify 'patterns, processes, commonalities and differences' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.9).

It became clear that teachers raised two key issues in reading electronic text; firstly, to access websites, certain skills are needed - I call these location skills as they involve navigating the Web to locate the relevant text, using both reading and ICT skills. I found it helpful to display it graphically in a hierarchical diagram.

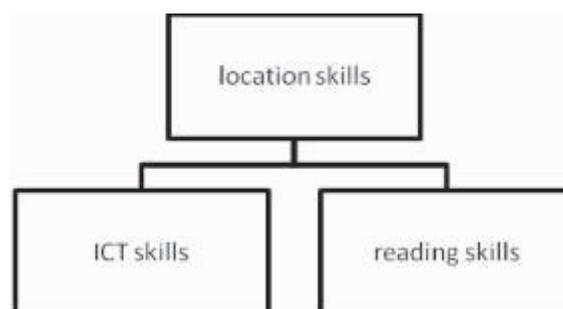
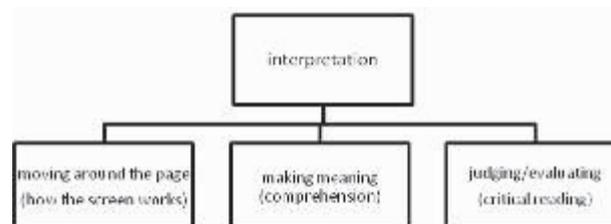


Figure 1 : Location Skills

Secondly, on finding an appropriate website, further skills are necessary to fully access the content. I labelled these interpretation skills. They too, involved certain sub-skills which I summarised as: those relating to understanding how a screen page works (as opposed to a print page); those which enable meaning to be made of a webpage (understanding the genres and conventions of online texts) and those which enabled a reader to make critical judgments about the validity and reliability of what they are reading. This final point is not limited to webpages, but it seems particularly important in the light of the unlimited nature of the Web, where anyone can publish. I have again shown the relationships graphically (figure 2):



28 Figure 2 : Interpretation Skills

Conclusions and discussion

There is insufficient space here to analyse the data in terms of variables. However, some key issues can be noted:

The teachers fairly accurately estimated Internet use by the learners. Four out of the five correctly guessed about half of the learners use the Internet in home, work or leisure domains. They had some sense of the practices in which the learners were engaged, but in fact these were much more varied than the teachers realised.

The teachers focused on some aspects of the Internet, like information gathering and sites they considered of interest to learners (including ones where they could practise their literacy) which learners also found of interest. However, there were some practices prevalent among learners that teachers never utilised, for example, shopping, auction sites; social networking. Several teachers mentioned their own lack of experience / confidence with sites like eBay or Facebook.

The teachers perceive that there are clear differences between online and print texts; at least 20 were mentioned. They also recognised that this would involve using different reading skills but they did not teach these explicitly, only as occasion arose. Key issues included:

- The importance of having relevant computer skills to access online texts; these were seen to be as important as reading skills and often indistinguishable from them. Teachers helping learners to access electronic texts need to teach the ICT skills as well as the literacy skills.
- Before one can read an online text, one has to find it, which is considerably more difficult than with print texts. A search for a relevant Web text can involve an almost infinite number of choices so navigation skills assume great importance.
- Interpretation skills become more complex when reading on screen; comprehension can depend on new genres which focus on visual and aural modes as much as on verbal text; information is organised in new ways and access entails a variety of strategies. These new genres, meanings

and vocabulary need to be learned.

- Critical reading assumes greater importance because of the lack of controls and boundaries on the Web.

Recommendations

Teacher education courses and CPD could support the following recommendations:

1. The teachers had a limited view of learners' current practices using the Web. If teachers are to help learners progress they should draw on learners' 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005) about the Internet. They could do this in discussion with learners, focusing on practices as well as skills.
2. Although some learners regularly use the Internet, teachers cannot assume that they do so effectively and efficiently. Learners talked about using 'random' methods of finding what they want. Teachers need to teach explicit strategies for both navigating and interpreting what is found on the Internet. These strategies are in addition to strategies for reading print texts.
3. As it is difficult to isolate the ICT skills from the literacy skills needed to become adept at using the Web, it is not always helpful to separate what is learned in literacy and ICT classes. Literacy teachers need to be able either to teach both or to work in close liaison with ICT teachers. Further research may cast light on which is the most effective strategy.
4. Teachers' own confidence in using the Web has a distinct effect on their confidence about using it as a teaching resource. If they are able to build their own knowledge and experience in this area, this might extend their ability to use it as a tool for teaching.

Limitations of the study

This study was very small scale. I was aware of limitations with reference to time, the sample and the methods used. A wider sample of both teachers and learners might enable variables to be taken into account, for example, gender, age, ethnicity, experience of computer use, experience of teaching and learning. It might also be interesting to compare teachers and learners in different contexts. The methods used also limited the

scope of the study. Interview data is useful for perceptions, but for evidence of practices it would be helpful to observe learners using the Internet both as part of a taught class and on their own.

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Fusing the Digital with the Non-Digital: An Exploration of Literacy Practices in Home Settings

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Introduction

When adult literacy practitioners work with students in the classroom, they are drawing on their home 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005) around literacy. In particular they draw on existing literacy practices that are being practised in the home. However, it is often unclear what these practices look like. Ethnographic research on literacy practices in homes is time-consuming and requires commitment, both ethically and in terms of time and resources, to home and community research. However, it is important to pay attention to such research for what it can tell us about our students' practices. In this article, I consider how literacy can be conceptualised in relation to on-line and off-line literacy practices. I start with three examples and then provide some theory to make sense of them. I argue that it is important to see texts as material and situated in the everyday. Drawing on the insight from Barton and Hamilton (1998) that literacies are linked to everyday life, to the vernacular and to people's 'ruling passions' I explore home literacies as situated, and argue that the digital is part of a wider landscape of communicative practices that includes talk, oral storytelling, craft activities and the inscription of print into textiles and other material forms.

Data examples

These examples come from an ethnographic study of home literacy practices. This study is an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded study called 'Writing in the Home and in the Street', funded through the Connected Communities programme. The project is cross disciplinary, involving Richard Steadman-Jones, University of Sheffield (English) and William Gould, University of Leeds (History) as well as three artists; Zahir Rafiq, Steve Pool and Irna Qureshi. The specific part of the project I am concerned with here is the 'home' project. The project was funded from October 2010 – September 2011 and will result in an exhibition in Banks Street Arts.

The project involved Zahir Rafiq, the artist, and myself, an ethnographer, who are looking at home literacy practices. I have spent a year visiting this particular home, in order to find out about the family's literacy practices.

Vignette

The family are British Asian; the mother was born in Rotherham, and the father works in a local factory in Rotherham. In this example, I am sitting in a terraced house, in Rotherham, and Amina, the mother of the two girls whose literacy practices I am researching, is telling me about the mosque that her husband has built in Pakistan. I am sitting with Zahir, who is the artist on the project, and the two girls, Mariam and Roxana, on the sofa. In front of us is a wide screen TV/DVD player. Amina is telling us about her husband's mosque that he built in Pakistan.

Example 1: The mosque in Pakistan

A: His mum died a few years ago, his mother, he was really, really sad and when he went to Pakistan, he asked his dad to give a piece of land, for charity, for his mum (his mother died a few years back). He did it from here, the instructions, sending the drawings, telling them all and so on ...

KP: I would love to see that...

A: I was talking to him about you and he was very intrigued because we didn't get that, our parents didn't know English, my husband refused to go to school I don't know why, he failed, his dad was a well off farmer, he didn't go to school, I don't know why, his dad educated him, he regrets it now...

KP: This is the mosque that their dad has been building?

Zahir (artist): In Pakistan?

A: Five years he's been building it. Lacks confidence.

KP: this is the mosque that their dad has been building?

Z: In Pakistan?

A: He built it in Pakistan,

KP: Is this real?

A: the tiles, his mum and dad, his mum died six years ago, his dad gave some land to the side of the house, to the mosque a lot of people have donated it, five years, it's all tiled now. (We look at the dvd) (from fieldnotes 1st November 2010)

In this example, I am given a visual image, as a film on a DVD, of the building of a mosque, in Pakistan, displayed in a home in Rotherham. My question 'is this real?' reflects the uncertainty I feel presented with such a far away image in such a different setting, and at the same time I am marvelling at the complexity of the mosque, its beauty and breathtaking colours, gold and white and blue. Zahir also frequently asks 'in Pakistan?' - as if to question the spatial realities being described by Amina. The interaction is about space, and also about house building, and also about literacy, as Amina explains that her husband built the mosque without a formal education but using his experience as a builder and mathematical expertise. In a later interaction, two weeks after this, the mother, Amina, is telling me about her house move. I am sitting on the sofa in the back room. In the front room is a computer that is linked to the internet, and is switched on.

Example 2: Where is the new house?

K: Where is the new house?

Amina: J_____ street

Mariam (daughter): You can see on the computer!

K: Street view?

A: J_____ street

M: We can go and see it mummy! I want to go! We could go on street view...

A: you can have a drive around

*K: is it the other side of the motorway?
(from fieldnotes 22nd November 2010)*

Here, Street View is an option that involves visiting a place. While the daughter, Mariam, suggests 'visiting' the house on Street View, the mother suggests going for a drive around in the car. Both are suggested to me as possibilities in order to see where the house is.

In each interaction we move from a description of a place – the mosque, the house, to an imagined way of seeing it. There

is a process of representation, the 'telling' of the story and then its instantiation within a more fixed textual form, in one case, a DVD is presented, in the other, Street View is an option in terms of 'seeing' the house. In the case of the mosque, we are given the image of mosque building, filmed on site in Pakistan, through a DVD, played in the television screen. In the case of the house, we can see it either on Street View or we could drive round, as it is not far, both are possible options. The textual nature of these interchanges lies in the way an immaterial conversation, about a house, and a mosque is made material but in a textual digital format. Street View is an affordance in the home, like the DVD and like the television, a way of mediating and experiencing textuality. There is movement between the interaction, and the told narrative, to the textual instantiation of this evoked space. The textual also has a 'thing-like' status.

Literacy, then is both on and off screen. The husband has realised the artefact both digitally and also in real life, in Pakistan. The house exists, round the corner; it is also to be seen on Street View.

In the third example, I look at textuality, writing, made through craft activities. The girls in the study constantly produce bits of 'stuff', often using craft materials, with their names inscribed, or embroidered on them.

Example 3: Writing the name

Kate: Can you tell me a bit about this please?

Mariam: I did it in my big sister's bedroom called Roxana. I used watercolours and I wrote it in my name and I have done lots of stories. And I used some glitter and I wrote some crystals

(from fieldnotes 4th October 2010)

Here, the writing is embedded in the experience of the stuff that was 'to hand' (Kress 1997) and the craft and multimodal textuality surrounds the writing so it almost disappears in the analytic frame. This is an example of the way in which the surface of the text has become the text itself. That is, the name has become realised as an art project, a crystal-imbued piece of paper. It has become both art and writing.

Discussion

These examples, the mosque, the house move, the craft example, shows how literacy practices are linked across online and off line spaces and are also constituted with regard to the movement between those spaces. In homes, this movement is important, however, as literacy educators, the movements are invisible, as we focus only on the texts, and the formation of texts in specific domains of practice.

Here, the text is both far away (mosque) and very local (the street in reality). Street View is a digital text which can instantiate the local and the global together. This can link with concepts from the New Literacy studies on the idea of the 'distant' and the 'local' version of text, that is texts can be imbued with meanings from the 'local' context, such as advertisements for a lost cat, but also, as in banking practices, can remain firmly in a 'global' contexts (Street 2003, Kell 2006). Texts are constructed in the space of the home, and evolve over time. Families draw on stories and memories to create texts. The process of making texts in the home involves drawing on family everyday experience, a process that I have described as *sedimented identities in texts* (Rowell and Pahl 2007; Merchant 2005; Holland and Leander 2004). However, texts can also be objects in their own right, and can acquire a 'thing-like' status, and become material objects (Miller 2010; Kress 1997).

In this discussion I move from considering the way in which texts are locally situated (a discussion in a home) and then the discussion is related to more global contexts, that span continents, (the DVD of mosque building, or Street View) before coming back to the specificities of the location. To make sense of these processes, I argue, might require a re-considering of literacy practices in home contexts that takes account of their material and transient qualities (Pahl, in progress).

What has become clear, in the process of doing this research, is that the connections between online and off line texts remain under-theorised. What happens as the child moves to Street View and considers that as a process of looking at her new house rather than the driving around? How can we imagine the mosque as seen on DVD in relation to the

trip to Pakistan? How can a mosque be built using instructions on email?

What I am realising is that I also need a theory of connectivities, of the lines between each of these interactions (Ingold 2007). These lines start as small threads, bits of discussion, but then become realised as surfaces, on the DVD, on Street View, on the crafted with glitter name. By thinking of literacy practices in relation to the connections between texts, the texts look different.

Local/global literacies

The Google Earth/Street View example is one in which a discussion is located firstly in a discussion of place. It then involves the discussion of a move to consult Street View. The movement can be characterised by a discussion of locally situated experience to a more abstracted representation of that experience in a more digitally mediated textual form. Street (1993) looks at what is literacy and also, asking whose 'literacies' are dominant in different spaces. He questions the concepts of 'local' and 'global' that imply a kind of 'autonomous' literacy practices, as outlined by Brandt and Clinton (2002) and instead argues that,

The features of distant literacies are actually no more autonomous than those of local literacies, or indeed than any literacy practices: their distantness, their relative power over local literacies and their "non-invented" character as far as local users are concerned, do not make them "autonomous", only "distant", "new", or hegemonic. To study such processes we need a framework and conceptual tools that can characterize the relation between local and "distant". (Street 2003:80)

Kell (2006) considers building practices in South Africa, in this case, the example of a woman building a house for herself, and the attendant texts associated with that process, and then looks at the text trajectories that happen across sites, arguing that each of these movements is locally situated within a web of relationships of power and situated histories of those texts. Street (2003), argues that we need to look at literacy practices in relation to more general issues of textuality, figured worlds, identity and power. This

discussion can lead to an understanding of the flows of identity across different textual spaces.

Sedimented Identities in Texts

(Rowse/Pahl/Merchant/Holland and Leander)

The next plank of the theory is to see texts as traces of social practice. This then excavates texts as objects that carry identities within them. Jennifer and I (2007) suggested in our article that texts need to be understood as traces of the sedimentations that had previously occurred surrounding the making of the texts.

The making of texts is part of a realm of meaning making that could be described, from Holland as 'figured worlds'. These are 'as if' realms of practice in which text making is deployed. In that sense, 'Street View' and the 'Mosque' in Pakistan are figured worlds of practice. This theoretical framework enabled textual worlds to be seen as spaces of improvisation, 'as if' realms, which could be linked to the habitus, and the everyday (Holland et al 1998).

An understanding of the formation of texts in everyday spaces requires a theory of identities in practice. Merchant's idea of 'anchored' and 'transient' identities that is the way in which texts can be traced to different emerging and moving clusters of identity, identifies the way in which identities themselves can be tied to popular culture phenomena that are moving, and transient, and then linked to more 'anchored' identities that can be intergenerational and more profound, linked to timescales (Merchant 2005). This relates to the concept of 'laminated identities' from Holland and Leander (2004), that are built up and layered over time.

In the example of the mosque, Amina produces different versions of her husband's identity, both as 'uneducated' and then 'gifted', marvelling at the textual manifestations of his ability to realise a vision in Pakistan long distance through his mathematical skill. Her showing of the DVD privileges his identity, discarding the image of her husband as 'uneducated' but instead showing how his skill in numbers has realised the mosque and his instructions sent from the UK to Pakistan had helped to build it.

Stuff in everyday life - the humble life of things

This reading has to incorporate an understanding of the material life of things, – drawing on Miller (2010) and others who argue that the humble life of things has gone un-regarded in traditional anthropology. In our book (Pahl and Rowse 2010) Jennifer Rowse and I argued that literacies need to be understood as being linked to things. People tell and re-tell stories about things, but also, in themselves, texts are 'thing-like' as they are manifested in material forms. In the examples above, there are links to things (a mosque, a house, some glitter) but also the texts that are produced are represented within things (a television screen, a home computer on a special table, a piece of paper). These things often get left out of discussions of texts and of literacy practices. Kress (1997) presents an analysis of the 'stuff' of everyday life as being bound up with multimodality, but I think this still is not connective enough. The connections between modes, from oral to visual, or across spaces, from Rotherham to Pakistan, need unravelling.

I therefore have started to draw on Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) concept of the 'flow' between the person and the thing, and also the discussion Ingold begins in 'Lines' about where things go on their travels across from threads to surfaces and back again. By following the lines, things look different, less flat and the traces are more imbued with meaning (Ingold 2007). Hurdley, in her study of mantelpieces, also looks at the relationship between narrating and objects as a subject of her enquiry into identities, narrative and objects (2006). I want to look at the traces of the connections between the 'Street View' and the discussion of the house, between the evocation of the husband and the DVD of the mosque and the name and its inscribing into glitter and examine, more closely what those connections mean.

Conclusion

By according literacy a 'thing-like' status it can be understood as materially situated. Homes are full of 'stuff' (Miller 2010). Digital equipment is also a kind of material object, but it contains texts, that can develop and move across spaces. The invisible networks

between people and things can be unpacked using theory that focuses on the lines between people and things and their connectivities. I want to see those lines as embodied and also situated within the material world. By thinking about literacy practices both on-line and off-line it is possible to make sense of situated literacies differently. What this might mean in practice is taking account of 'in-between' moments, as students move into on-line spaces from off-line spaces, and also, taking account of their everyday lives around digital stuff, and how this digital stuff is materialized and transformed, as people making meaning from it. These transformations are multimodal (Kress 1997) but also call up shifts in identity as textual practices are made and re-made in front of our eyes. This is a challenge for literacy researchers, as the movement between and across texts captures our eyes and becomes the focus, temporally, of our lens. I wish to hold that lens and make sense of it for research and practice.

Implications for practice

In adult literacy, there is a tendency, as in all educational contexts, to present texts as separate. While 'Street View' remains a powerful learning tool in literacy classrooms, links to everyday life are immediately present in that work. I would like to suggest that literacy practices in homes are a starting point for seeing literacy differently: as situated, material and connective across time and space.

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Reviews

Why Literacy Matters: Understanding the Effects of Literacy Education for Adults

by Ralf St Clair, published by NIACE, Leicester 2010

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This book makes an important contribution to current debates about the purposes and benefits of literacy education. As its title and subtitle make clear, it has two main purposes: to examine the research evidence about why literacy makes a difference to people's lives, and to consider issues of evaluation and measurement.

The first chapter reviews three current and influential models of literacy: functional literacy, literacy as a set of cognitive processes and literacy as a set of social practices. Chapter 2 introduces an alternative 'capabilities' model, which I describe below. Chapter 3 discusses the problems and possibilities of evaluation and Chapter 4 is concerned with issues of measurement. Each of the next five chapters uses the capabilities model as a conceptual framework for reviewing research evidence about why literacy matters in relation to five possible outcomes (cognitive effects, economic outcomes, literacy and health, family values, and social and political impacts). These chapters provide a useful international context by drawing on a wide range of evidence produced by research in various countries across the world. The final two chapters summarise the evidence and discuss implications for policy and practice.

St Clair acknowledges that there are numerous tensions and contradictions between existing models of literacy, including the three he discusses in Chapter 1, which makes it difficult to find a unified and rigorous approach to understanding the effects of

literacy learning. His solution to this problem is to develop what he calls the 'capabilities approach', which defines literacy as 'the ability to achieve a desired purpose by applying appropriate skills in a specific situation of engagement with texts' (p33). The model is offered as a heuristic rather than a fully developed theory and I found it useful in this regard, although some of the concepts and arguments left me with unanswered questions. For example, I would have welcomed an explanation of the distinction between *skills* and *practices*, which sometimes seemed to be used interchangeably. I was also surprised that the discussion of whether and how people apply literacy skills in different contexts made no reference to recent work on this topic by Ivanič and colleagues (2009). They propose the concept of the translation of practices across domains as an alternative to ideas about the transfer or application of skills, and it would have been interesting to see some comparison of the two approaches. That said, I do think the capabilities perspective has potential and I hope it will be taken up and worked out in more detail in future studies.

The discussion of functional literacy in Chapter 1 will have particular resonance for readers in England at the moment, many of whom will be involved in implementing the new Functional Skills. The inadequacy of this concept as a basis for policy and pedagogy has long been recognised (Levine 1982; see also Burgess, Hamilton and Ivanič, 2008/9) and St Clair provides a succinct introduction to its history and the difficulties it tends to create. For any teachers of Functional English who may not be familiar with these issues, this summary offers a useful starting point for thinking them through.

The book is clearly written and highly readable, with good signposting throughout and helpful summaries at the end of every chapter. I particularly appreciated the personal voice and use of examples from the author's own experience, which blended well with the more abstract discussion.

The two main messages of the book confirm what many practitioners will know from their experience. Firstly, the relationship between literacy learning and its outcomes is highly

complex and contextual, making it impossible to predict that any given intervention will necessarily produce a particular effect. Secondly, it is nevertheless clear that increased literacy capability is associated with a range of desirable outcomes and that limited access to such capabilities does have negative consequences for people's lives. Practitioners may be encouraged to know that their own understandings are validated by a wealth of research evidence, but the book doesn't just invite us to confirm what (we think) we already know; it enables us to think it through in a rigorous way and arrive at more sophisticated understandings. It also challenges some prevailing assumptions about how people learn literacy and what the benefits are. As a result I think it has the potential to strengthen practice and help us make better cases to policy makers and funders. This is particularly valuable at a time when funding is being cut in so many areas, and (in England particularly) official definitions of what counts as literacy are becoming increasingly narrow. It's easy to feel dispirited by the current economic and political situation and the effect it is having on our work, but this book's overall message is positive, so I will end with a quotation that reminds us that optimism is both necessary and possible:

'This is a great moment for lifelong literacy, and another may not come along for a while. So let's use it in the best way we possibly can, with reflection and with care, with recognition of literacy's limits and the enormity of human potential' (p4).

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Web 2.0 for Schools: Learning and Social Participation

(2009) Julia Davies and Guy Merchant; New York, Peter Lang
PRICE £21.20 ISBN: 9781433102639

Reviewed by Sarah Freeman

Sarah Freeman is an adult education teacher (Adult Literacy, ESOL, Dyslexia specialist and teacher trainer). She is also undertaking research into adult literacy within the Language and Literacy 'strand' of a part time Doctorate in Education programme at Sheffield University.

'It has been argued that rather than rendering new citizens passive, new technologies can create increased levels of participation' (p 17). This is a quote from Davies and Merchant's chapter on 'Web 2.0 as Social Practice'; and, indeed, in the past few months it has become more apparent than ever that citizens all over the world – the Middle East, North Africa and New Zealand for example – are finding that 2.0 mediums such as Facebook and Twitter are essential tools in their communication for cultural, political or emergency reasons. The very high importance of Web 2.0 tools as the 'new' mediums of literacy is rapidly becoming apparent at the time of writing this review.

While it is entitled '...for Schools', the book is just as relevant to studying and teaching in Post 16 education at any level and in any IT-friendly learning situation. It is a short, very clearly written book of 129 pages which succeeds in presenting Web 2.0 as a field of Information Technology that has massive implications for social networking as well as for learning. Stating from the outset that these facilities are also rich in potential for situated learning, it then succeeds in introducing an impressively well researched set of examples of such software.

Primarily the emphasis is upon participation and the 'perspective taken.. is that online activity can usefully be described as a set of textually mediated social practices'(p13). The Web 2.0 space is not only text production and consumption but the software used is also creative in the sense of establishing tastes and developing them on our behalf by learning about us and from us.

The arguments for incorporating Web 2.0 practices into a curriculum are not difficult to take on board here. Knowledge-sharing, identity-forming and greater social-awareness-raising are a few of the reasons why the authors think it is obvious that Web 2.0 is a way of motivating teachers and students (p7).

The text is clearly written, presenting balanced arguments on many current issues. Several sections on safety and the necessity to provide guidance are included. And the book is a critical piece of work. In the final pages the authors speculate on whether 2.0 has the power to transform society to the point of becoming an institutionalised form of communication (p113). There are eight pages of references to books, journals and websites.

Chapters are allocated to blogging, photo-sharing, video-sharing, music-sharing and wikis with particular reference to sites such as Flickr, You Tube, Napster, Last FM, Second Life and Wikipedia but seeing each of these as representative of a genre that is rapidly evolving. Looking back to the origins of each of these forms of digital media there are also potted histories which help explain how each form of sharing became viable. For example, pre-copyright litigation Napster started out as a facility where music players shared their recorded music with one another for free. It is now recognised that copyright must be subscribed to, but with the advent of sites like Last FM listeners can still share their music with others with the added bonus of a personal profile page and software that is always searching for more music that will meet their tastes.

As I am currently working with my adult learners on writing and uploading their book review blogs onto our college website, I can say from first hand experience that the effect of seeing their work in blog format and ranged alongside other learners' book reviews in customised format has been very exciting for them. This book is commentary on vibrant and stimulating learning tools. The only criticism that could be made is that it isn't quite up to date. Roll on the second version covering more on Facebook, Twitter and kindles and i phones. But on the other hand maybe becoming quickly out of date is an intrinsic feature of digital media.

The Three Divides. The Digital Divide and its Relation to Basic Skills and Employment in Portland, USA and London, England. Research Report

John Bynner, Steve Reder, Samantha Parsons & Clare Strawn

London: NRDC (2010)

Not available in hard copy. Free download (1224 kb) from www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=164

Research Summary of the above also available from www.nrdc.org.uk/digitaldividesummary

Reviewed by Maxine Burton

Maxine taught adult literacy for many years before working on a series of NRDC projects at the University of Sheffield. She is now a free-lance researcher, writer and consultant. Her new book, 'Phonetics for Phonics', was published by NIACE in spring 2011 and she is currently writing another book for literacy practitioners, this time on grammar and sentence combining. maxineburton@mac.com

The publications list on the website of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) – www.nrdc.org.uk/publications.asp - shows that increasingly, their research reports are not available in hard copy but only as downloads, a publication trend that seems set to increase. It is therefore fitting that, as well as reviewing a report relevant to the theme of this issue of the Journal, I am also engaging directly with digital literacy by accessing the content online!

The 'three divides' of the title refer to the three realms of computer use, literacy proficiency and employability. As a comparative study it aims to compare and contrast the interrelationship of these three factors in both UK and US contexts over a period of 4 years (2000-2004), using datasets from two locations – London and the urban south-east of England, and Portland, Oregon. It is interesting to note that an earlier study - one of the NRDC Effective Practice Studies (Mellar *et al*, 2007) – which set out to assess the contribution of ICT skills in supporting adult literacy/ESOL teaching and learning, found no correlation between changes in ICT skills and confidence scores, and changes in reading and listening skills. This rather unexpected lack of correlation does not seem

to be borne out by the findings of *The Three Divides* report.

This 56-page report of a cross-national quantitative study, which analyses comparable longitudinal research resources by means of a powerful statistical technique known as 'structural equation modelling' (SEM), is not a particularly easy read for the 'lay' reader; the Summary Report (at 8 pages, short enough to print out) is rather more accessible. The conclusions in the main report read as follows (p.9):

- The more depressed labour market conditions in Portland placed a premium on ICT use at home or in the workplace for getting employment, whereas the effect of such ICT use in the more buoyant London labour market was more likely to be access to higher-level jobs.
- The digital divide was reducing more quickly in Portland than in London but a solid minority in both places still had little access to or use of ICT.
- Employment and ICT use support the development of literacy proficiency –hence enhancement of literacy proficiency is aided by time spent in employment and exposure to ICT. The evidence of effects in the other direction is much weaker, i.e. of improved literacy proficiency influencing the take-up of ICT or getting employment.
- From the London evidence it appears that ICT use is more likely for men to be associated with progression in employment. For women it is more likely to arise from engagement with the labour market particularly through high status occupations.
- Decline or stagnation in any of the competences reflected in the three divides increases the likelihood of marginalisation and exclusion reinforcing the case for such government initiatives as Train to Gain and expanded adult basic education provision.

However in such a fast-moving field as ICT, findings can quickly become outdated. In recent years, there has even been talk of email already becoming an 'old-fashioned' technology (see, e.g. Fitzpatrick, 2007). And London no longer has such a 'buoyant' labour market. What is of lasting significance, however, is the focus of the big research question that underpins this enquiry and revolves round the long-standing problem of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', and the risk of social exclusion. What exactly are the factors that reduce employment chances? As the authors observe (p. 44),

Only 30 years ago poor literacy was no impediment to getting a job and digital competence had yet to impact on the nature of employment in any significant way. Today, fuelled by the emergence of computers in every area of work, those without ICT skills – on the 'wrong side' of the digital divide – are likely to have their opportunities for getting work curtailed; they are also likely to find their opportunities for progress in their job impeded.

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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. We welcome articles, reviews, reports, commentaries or cartoons that will stimulate interest and discussion.

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

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

Guidelines for Contributors

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

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

Journal Structure

We want to encourage new writers as well as

those with experience and to cover a range of topics, to do this the journal is divided into three main sections and a review section. Each section is slightly different in length and focus. We welcome illustrations and graphics for any of the sections. The journal has a different theme for each edition but welcomes general contributions particularly for Section 1 and Section 2 and for reviews.

Section 1. Ideas for teaching

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

Section 2. Developing Research and Practice

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

Section 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives

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

- **Relate to the practices** of learning and teaching adult literacy, numeracy or ESOL.
- **Link to research** by describing and analysing new research findings relating this and any critical discussion to existing research studies.

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

Submitting your work

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3. Send a copy to one of the journal co-ordinators
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4. Your contribution should be word processed, in Arial size 12 font, double spaced on A4 paper with numbered pages.

What happens next

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2. Feedback is provided by the editor/s within eight weeks of submission. This will include constructive comment and any suggestions for developing the piece if necessary.
3. You will be informed whether your piece has been accepted, subject to alterations, and if so the editor/s will work on a final editing process. Any final copy will be sent to authors prior to publishing.
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