

## *Literacies for Learning in FE Research Project*

# Into Phase Two

As the Project gains momentum and moves into the second of its three phases, researchers are focusing on learners' existing literacy practices.

We are gathering evidence that students are inventive and resourceful in their response to the demands of studying at college.

Examples of good practice in FE are already beginning to emerge (see Page 2).

College-based researchers and coordinators have now been recruited in all four colleges. Their curriculum areas will provide the detailed case studies of the research (see Page 4).

Interviews with tutors and students have begun and produced some interesting insights into the literacy demands made on students and the informal literacy practices students take with them into their learning environments.



Students at Lancaster and Morecambe College with their clock diagrams

### ...and time for new methodology

Each of the 128 students participating in the research will complete 'clock faces' to represent their reading and writing in the course of a day.

They will be asked to talk about what they read — when, where, how, why and as part of what aspect of their lives.

### Inside this issue:

An example of good practice	2	Curriculum areas	4
Project team at Preston College	2/3	Meet our new researchers	4
Reinventing the wheel	3	Publications	4
Questions for further research	3		

## Good practice: an example from Phase One

Grace started her career as a primary teacher and is now teaching child care in Scotland. When she started in FE she had assumed that her students would have certain academic skills like writing essays, taking notes and presenting information neatly. She was surprised to find that most of her students were not able to do any of this.

Rather than assuming that these academic practices would be taught by the core skills teacher, Grace decided to change her teaching practice to help the students develop these skills themselves. She said that she needed the students to develop these skills by discussing and thinking about the handouts they have been given "otherwise they have no stake in their own learning".

This is one of the exercises she carries out in the first few classes in which she gives out a handout to the students to develop their note taking:

The students are given a set amount of time to read the handout and they are asked to highlight as they are reading what they think are the most important points/aspects/themes for themselves. In groups of three or four they then discuss and decide what are the

most important aspects the group has highlighted. When this is finished she asks each of the groups to report back to her. She writes these points on the whiteboard. Many of the groups have picked up the same points and if there is anything they have missed she initiates a

*'The difference here is that Grace felt strongly that students need to develop some ownership of their own learning.'*

discussion around those points. The end product is a consensus list of the important aspects of the handout which then becomes part of each student's notes.

*What is this achieving?*

- It ensures the students have all read the handout
- Because they are working as a group no-one is singled out as being wrong. Grace said: "they don't want to be seen to be failing"
- They learn that selecting

information is a process which can be refined

- It takes the pressure off individual performance
- Students develop some ownership of the finished product

*At the end of the lesson*

- They have a collective number of important points that have been discussed in small groups and in the whole class
- It allows them to build up confidence to try for themselves in future classes

Grace wanted to be involved in helping the students develop their academic literacies, rather than leave it to chance or core skills teachers, and to contextualise the students' learning. It is quite common to find teachers who do all the work for the students, producing mind-maps and revision notes and hoping the students will take their behaviour as a model.

*The difference here is that Grace felt strongly that students need to develop some ownership of their own learning.*

Her students produced the list of key points for themselves individually, then in a group, then in a class. They worked through the process, reading, writing, thinking and refining as they went.

### Some questions for further research

Here are some issues which have arisen from our Phase 1 research:

1. Does writing hold as much value for learning as it does for demonstrating knowledge and competence?
2. Do students really have difficulty navigating large amounts of texts, or is the problem more with the relevance, visual design, value, location, tone and language of the texts?
3. How does funding affect the range of media for communication available in the teaching and learning of different subjects (for example, from abundant wireless laptops in some areas to insufficient core course texts in other areas)?
4. Do staff 'over-crutch' students to meet the demands of the awarding bodies?

5. What is the relationship between available media, text types and literacy practices?
6. How can vocational tutors best negotiate the requirements of the awarding bodies with the real-life literacies of their vocational area?
7. What is the efficacy and appropriateness of current approaches to liaison between subject area staff and staff responsible for support, careers, admin, recruitment, and Core Skills (Scotland) / Key Skills (England)?
8. Which literacy practices do staff and students think should be taught explicitly, which are best developed through involvement with the course, and which should students already have?
9. What new ways of working might enable a new literacy studies pedagogy to be effective?

To let us know your interests, concerns and questions, email Marie Ashman at [m.ashman@lancs.ac.uk](mailto:m.ashman@lancs.ac.uk)

## Reinventing the wheel

Janet is a mature, overseas student who has just started her second year on the Hospitality Diploma. She is working on an NVQ level 2 at the moment but her main interest is in patisserie. When she agreed to become involved with the project, I was certain that she would bring a new dimension to the research and I was right.

As a teacher in Further Education and particularly in Hospitality and Catering it is easy to build up preconceptions of what the style, ability and attitude of students will be.

What makes Janet so refreshing is that she breaks this preconception. Her keenness to learn and develop her skills astounds me. The LfLFE project has allowed me to see the person behind the student and see that the way Janet organises her life outside college seems to reflect the way she performs in college.

Janet has provided a lot of information in terms of the reading and writing she does both in and out of college. It would be impossible for me to reflect on them all but the one that has stood out to me more than anything is the "steering wheel".

Janet is learning to drive and to help her practise she made her own steering wheel out of some card. After looking at this piece of card she didn't like to see all that wasted space so she used it to write out a few paragraphs from a book. It starts:

*"A funeral was more than a family burying its dead. It was an affirmation of life and the values that give it purpose and grant us as much of eternity as we will know on earth."*

The most interesting thing about this for me is that I don't think this literacy event will make Janet a better chef or a better restaurant manager. It would be easy for me to assume that Janet has done this because she was educated differently in another country or she is more mature than the other students.

However, I can't make this assumption until I know that the other students I am researching (who I perceive to be more typical) don't do the same kind of thing.

So far the research has helped me a lot in terms of being able to look more closely at my students and I hope that as we progress there will be more opportunity to challenge some of the preconceptions I have encountered.

## The Project team at Preston College

Below left: Lancaster and Morecambe research coordinator Sarah Wilcock (left) and Stirling researcher June Smith at the entrance to Preston College Centre: A student enrolling at Preston College Right: David Barton, project deputy director and Preston research coordinator Angela Brzeski during a visit to the College's construction department



Bottom left: meeting between Preston College key personnel and researchers Below: Lancaster University researcher Zoe Fowler chats with Andy Dawson, Dean of Maths and Science at Preston College.

# Welcome to our new researchers



Part-time Research Associates Candice Satchwell (top) and Kate Miller and College Based Research Coordinator

Jim Carmichael joined the project team this autumn. Candice is based at Lancaster University, Kate at the University of Stirling and Jim at Anniesland College, Glasgow.



## Project Publications:

Edwards, R., and Mannion, G., Spring 2004, 'Literacies for Learning' Broadcast 62, pp.31-32

Ivanič, R. and Edwards, R., May 2004, 'Mobilising a Network', Teaching and Learning (Post-compulsory Edition), p.6.

Smith, J.M, Anderson, R, and McDougall, D., Autumn 2004, 'Journey with Hope': Broadcast 64, p.23.

Stanistreet, P., September 2004, Research Special 'We are losing students because we are not accessing the skills they have got' Adults Learning, Volume 16, Number 1, pp. 10-12.

### Conference Papers

Edwards, R. and Smith, J., 2004, 'Telling Tales of Literacy' SCUTREA Proceedings. Whose Story now? (RE)generating research in adult learning and teaching, University of Exeter ISBN 0902746138

Fowler, Z., Smith, J., and Wilcock, S., July 2004, 'Literacies for Learning in Further Education', RaPAL.

Ivanič, R., Mannion, G., September 2004, 'Mapping Literacy Practices; Theory, Methodology, Methods', BERA.

Ivanič, R., Smith, J.M., Edwards, R., Mannion, G. and Fowler, Z., November 2004, *Literacy practices as resources for learning: Issues of identity, modality and fluidity*' TLRP CONFERENCE.

### Awaiting publication

Edwards, R., 'A sticky business? Exploring the 'and' in teaching and learning,' Discourse.

Edwards, R. and Fowler, Z., 'Fashioning boundaries in making a space for research,' British Educational Research Journal (submitted for publication)

and welcome also to new members of our Advisory Group:

JUDITH EDWARDS, Regional Director, DfES Standards Unit, HEATHER HOLLANDS, Consultant, CTAD Ltd., STEVE BARON, Director, TLRP, CLAIRE KEGGIE, Scottish Executive, MERILLIE VAUGHAN-HUXLEY, Consultant and KATE ANDERSON, Director of Research, LSDA

## Our wide range of curriculum areas

The Project has recruited college based researchers in each of four FE colleges who teach across eleven different curriculum areas, each of which will be studied at two levels.

Child Care was purposely selected as an area common to all four colleges, although other comparisons will be possible where two colleges share a common curriculum area, eg: Construction (Perth and Preston), Hospitality (Perth and Lancaster & Morecambe). The student mix has been given great consideration. Although all students are post-compulsory, some are school leavers, some mature students and others on the Government's New Deal scheme. Where possible students have been selected with a wide range of abilities, from those with support needs to mature students with degrees retraining for trowel occupations.

College researchers were asked to list typical literacy demands facing their students. These were different for each course, with the most demands in Business Administration, but even on courses where students may consider literacy demands to be marginal or irrelevant such as Construction, there were learning packages, student handouts, written specifications and briefs, communications by email and website material for student research.

### Anniesland

**Childcare** Rosheen Young  
**Social sciences**  
Jim Carmichael  
**Accounts** Janet Gray  
**Multi-media** Mike Ward

### Perth

**Childcare** Joyce Gaechter  
**Construction** Roy Anderson  
**Music and audio**  
Ronnie Goodman  
**Hospitality** Ian Gibb

### Lancaster & Morecambe

**Childcare**  
Christine Phillipson  
**Media studies**  
Patrick Marsh  
**Tourism** David Jarratt  
**Catering and hospitality**  
Sarah Wilcock

### Preston

**Childcare** Joanne Knowles  
**Human biology**  
Sandra Mulligan  
**Construction**  
Dave Brown  
**Business administration**  
Angela Brzeski  
Christine Kendrick

### TLRP

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