REVIEWS

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: RESEARCHING LITERACY WITH ADULT LEARNERS
BY ELLAYNE FOWLER AND JANE MACE (EDITORS)

National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) 2005, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester,
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Outside the classroom: researching literacy with adult learners is another of those interesting publications from the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) in the UK that take on the important task of linking the theory and practice of teaching and researching literacy with adult learners.

Ellayne Fowler and Jane Mace view literacy as a social practice and set out to show how that theory can assist the practice and the training of teachers. They do this by linking aspects of theory to life through the use of various examples of how learners use literacy in their own lives.

The book combines a theoretical discussion with presentation of a series of portraits of the real life experiences of learners. A total of nineteen portraits have been researched and written collaboratively with learners, who were selected from among groups of men and women taking literacy classes with the authors. The portraits explore the reading and writing lives of learners outside the classroom.

Fowler and Mace have focussed on three key theoretical aspects of a social practice view of literacy for this book, namely literacy events, practices and values; social networks; and literacy environments.

Jane Mace discusses literacy events and practices by referring to the work of David Barton and Roz Ivanic, drawing out distinctions between the two, and draws on Brian Street to include a focus on values, attitudes and feelings. Four portraits, together with a concluding commentary

are useful examples of the way literacy events, practices and values are reflected through people's lives.

In analysing social networks Ellayne Fowler draws on the work of James and Lesley Milroy, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger to show how analysing social networks and community of practice can offer valuable insights into the literacy practices of learners.

By exploring the notion of literacy environments, Fowler is also able to shed more light on the different domains of peoples lives and how they impact on learning. She draws on Mary Hamilton, Anita Wilson and Heath's seminal work in educationally disadvantaged communities.

Research is another important focus of the book. Fowler and Mace devote the second part of the book to research, in particular a discussion of the process of research and how research can be used to inform teaching practice.

At a time when so much attention in research is on quantitative approaches, it is timely for Mace and Fowler to reflect on the research process, point to the value of the 'spirit of ethnography' in their approach and remind us of the importance of empowering and including learners in the research process - in a way that has value to them as well as to researchers and readers.

The book also addresses some of the ways research can be used to inform the practice of adult literacy teaching. They draw attention to the need for teachers to remember the main reasons why learners come into classes. As Castleton suggested, it is often about how learners 'can and want to use literacy to bring about changes in their lives'.

As Stephen Kemmis (2005) points out, a central problem in understanding and changing professional practice is 'to recognise and respect the diversity of key features of practice' and his framework draws attention to individual features of practice, social features, cultural features and material-economic features.

This book makes a useful contribution to that task and suggests that a challenge for future work in this area is to continue to acknowledge and include more explicitly, a detailed analysis of the social, cultural and material-economic features

impacting on learners and their learning environments.

Reference

Kemmis, S, (2005) Knowing practice: searching for salience, *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, vol 13, no 3, pp 391-426

Andrew Chodkiewicz