

The role of fairy tales in affective learning: Enhancing adult literacy and learning in FE and community settings

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This paper explores the role of fairy tales in relation to literacy, affective learning, self-authoring and narrative quest. The study examines fairy tales in the context of the New Literacy Studies with regard to improving cognitive, linguistic and creative writing skills for adult literacy learners.

Keywords: *fairy tales, literacy, affective learning, wellbeing, problem-solving, narrative quest, self-authoring, identity work, New Literacy Studies*

Background

This study explores fairy tales as a means of enhancing literacy and affective learning skills with a focus on adult literacy learners in FE. Underpinning the New Literacy Studies¹ theory, the efficacy of fairy tales

¹The New Literacy Studies examines literacy as social practice in contrast to traditional notions of literacy as a cognitive, linguistic process. The NLS argues that literacy is plural 'literatecies' and should be studied in a more integrated way that encompasses the cultural, social, historical, digital, scientific, legal and psychological process, acknowledging what individuals 'do' as opposed to only focussing on the autonomous skills of reading and writing.

is demonstrated through oral storytelling, creative writing, role-play and drama (Kole, 2017, pp. 11–13). A programme of work was designed and delivered to include written assignments, questionnaires and case study interviews, where participants progress from a literal understanding of narrative text, to symbolic understanding of plot, character, figurative language and a final creative writing piece on a fairy tale of choice.

Existing as liminal narratives, fairy tales provide a unique structure where duality, conflict and transformation can be examined through self-authoring, identity work and problem-solving. Fairy tales address themes in relation to power, gender, socio-economics and confront the impact of these issues regarding society, communities and individuals. Their multi-layered aspects can also act as a unique construct for interdisciplinary learning between literacy skills and personal social wellbeing.

The multidimensional nature of fairy tales makes them an ideal vehicle for exploring literacy in terms of linguistic and cognitive learning. Fairy tales naturally reflect the hero narrative quest, wherein the character is challenged, endures conflict, takes action and achieves his/her goal. In this context, fairy tales support the learner in finding new methods of resolving challenges and transforming issues in their everyday lives.

This approach is relevant to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) insofar as it indicates how adult literacy learning can contribute to a much broader range of interpersonal capacities and their social application. The underlying attention to power relations has implications for learners in that it can enhance their resourcefulness in engaging with a broader change process.

Literacy singular, plural, ideological and autonomous

As the study explores fairy tales in the context of the New Literacy Studies (NLS), it also proposes arguments in terms of contrasting ideological and autonomous, singular and plural, vernacular and dominant literacies, as well as examining different learning practices in terms of linguistic, cognitive and social affective learning.

Previously educationists assumed that literacy was a single or unitary ‘thing where writers often refer to a single ‘literacy’ and assume readers will recognise this (Lambirth, 2005). Lambirth provides several examples of this unproblematic use of the term from various writers,

discussing assessment of 'literacy', the success of a 'literacy' campaign, the challenge of teaching 'literacy' and how scholars work in early 'literacy'. In all these examples the singular term is used whereas, from a socio-cultural view, literacy is seen not as a singular thing but in the plural as 'literacies' (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

Scribner and Cole (1981) provide a persuasive argument that 'literacies' in the plural comprise contextual practices that people 'engage' in rather than skills that they apply. In particular, the work of Street (1984) has contributed to an understanding of the notion of multiple literacies constructed in particular contexts and situations.

These literacies according to Street are routines that people engage in at home, socially or through their work or learning environment. Street (1984) contributed to a view of literacy as a plural concept and also coined two terms: 'ideological' and 'autonomous' literacy. Street's (1984) study 'initiated a paradigmatic revolution', which counteracted a skills-based notion of literacy (Bartlett & Holland, 2002, p. 11) by arguing that literacy is always embedded within social institutions and is bound by political, cultural and historical contexts.

The term 'ideological' (Street 1984) refers to the interactions of power around reading and writing and the term 'autonomous' refers to a view in which literacy is seen as a unitary concept, without reference to contexts. An autonomous view works from the assumption that literacy will affect individual cognition and success in the world leading, for example, to an improved economic position (Street, 2005). According to Street (1984) there are assumptions in the autonomous model presented, as if the views are neutral and taken-for-granted.

Street (1984) argues that we need to reconceptualise literacy as an ideological construct rather than an autonomous skill. This reconceptualisation of the notion of literacy is one of the key reasons why a socio-cultural research approach is significant. From a social practice perspective therefore this research acknowledges the challenges of a skills-based literacy standpoint and suggests that 'autonomous' views of literacy continue to dominate institutional educational practices, imposing conceptions of literacy. In this study therefore a broader understanding of literacy practices is underpinned through social and cultural contexts moving beyond an autonomous conception of literacy as a neutral and technical skill.

New Literacy Studies and identity work

According to Gee (2012) the way we behave, interact, think, value, believe, speak and write are accepted as examples of performing particular identities. This notion of performing identity was also emphasised by Moje and Luke who cited Norton and Toohey (2009, p. 415):

When a language learner writes a poem, a letter, or an academic essay, he/she considers not only the demands of the task but how much of his/her history will be considered relevant to this literacy act.

Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance, are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks.

Norton and Toohey's (*ibid*) quotation emphasises the idea of production of identity through literacy practices or literacy practices as a way of exploring identity. Identity is seen as not only multiple and malleable but is also about an individual taking an 'active' part in producing and performing their own identities to influence their social world. From this position, according to Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes (2009, pp. 123–4) identity is:

dynamic, self-reflective and performative, rather than something that just is, or that we develop into and sustain.

This study therefore supports these theories with participants exploring identity work and self-authoring through discussion, interviews and written assignments in the context of fairy tales underpinning the links between language learning and identity (Kole, 2017, pp. 269–281).

As these writers suggested, there is an ongoing process of active production and mediation of identity even though the possibilities of authoring are bounded by constraints and the need to draw on existing experiences.

Drawing on a number of theoretical traditions, Moje et al. (2009) argue that the concept of identity is an active one focussed on the metaphor of identity as narrative. Moje suggested that this metaphor

is a prominent one with theorists who have argued that identities are not only represented but are constructed in and through stories. What is particularly significant here is the notion of the narrative production of identity at 'two' levels. Moje et al (ibid) argue that people 'narrate' stories and also 'perform' their identity concurrently. The context and interaction with the audience are as significant as the narrative itself.

Pahl and Rowsell (2012) having examined the active nature of literacy and identity through the New Literacy Studies (NLS) argue that ideas about identity are central to research and theory in this field. They emphasise that an important idea in the NLS, is a shift from viewing identities as individually produced, to viewing identities as 'in practice' (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). The authors note that not only do we express identity through language but also:

through our dress, our artefacts, our web presence, etc. in other words, we create our identity through our social practices

(Pahl & Rowsell, 2012, p. 114)

Many studies have focussed on the notion of literacy identities in practice, examples include research focussed on digital literacy and identity (Merchant 2005; 2006; Davies & Tatar, 2012), studies comparing the disjuncture between schools and everyday literacies (Moje, Ciechanowski & Kramer, 2004) and studies in classrooms (Hirst, 2004; Leander, 2002).

In addition, Pahl and Rowsell (2007) introduced the notion of 'sedimented identities' in relation to literacy practices, for example, where the social, economic and historical experiences are viewed as part of the learner's identity and therefore part of the literacy learning process. This notion can also be applied to artefacts or narratives and emphasises the multi-faceted complexity of identity work and literacy in the NLS tradition.

McCarthy and Moje (2002) explain how available literacy practices can constrain and undermine identities, as well as providing chances to acquire new identities. The emphasis on active production of identity has led to the use of the term 'identity work' in many studies Bartlett (2005), Merchant (2005) and Comber and Nixon (2004). This study therefore integrates these theories underpinning identity as a socially situated practice.

New Literacy Studies (NLS) fairy tales and space–time

Multimodal literacies have thus become a current focus through shifts from written to visual texts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) with digital literacy, electronic texts and media technology environments dominating literacy practices (Merchant, 2009). As theories have diversified there has been an expansion in NLS research particularly on ideas about space or place and how these aspects interact with literacies (Leander & Sheehy, 2004).

Space and place help to create human identities (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and where literacy practices take place can allow for more nuanced perspectives of meaning-making, for example, a literacy class set in a community hall would provide a different learning experience to one delivered in a formal classroom setting. Space is generally seen as a more abstract concept than place, although Cresswell (2004) acknowledged that people use the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’ interchangeably. Theorisations about literacy and space have been researched and include investigations of classroom spaces, (Leander & Sheehy 2004; Clark, 2010; Burnett, 2011) and online, off-line spaces (Leander & McKim, 2003).

Literacy events help to generate the nature and quality of space, which also includes physical, intellectual, social and emotional space as all of these aspects are essential for supporting learning (Kole, 2017, pp. 200–207). Rowe (2008) a socio-cultural scholar interested in the interface of space and literacy practices draws on Le Febvre’s work to argue that spatial and material situations, shape literacy events. Rowe argues that writing and reading events in a library, for instance, may take a different form from those happening in a different social environment.

Literacy practices including values, social situations, physical objects and spaces are discussed in Rowe (2008) underpinning their socio-cultural viewpoint. As material space shapes literacy practices, spatial analysis is therefore required to understand the way human beings coordinate and are coordinated (Gee, 2001).

During interviews for this study, photographs and objects were brought to interviews by participants, as artefacts that supported their current and past memories of literacy events. This reflected the socio-economic and historic events of participants’ literacy lives, highlighting the NLS focusses on time–space dimensions where time can also be viewed as an

intrinsic part of literacy practices (Kole, 2017, pp. 295–319). The design of case study interviews for this study was influenced by the material, spatial and embodied aspects of literacy practices with a focus on identities illuminating the multi-faceted nature of participants' literacy experiences and the complexity of both narrating and performing stories grounded in identity work (Kole, 2017, pp. 200–207).

According to Compton-Lilly (2008) we draw on past experience to account for the present and to project into the future. Compton's work drew on Lemke (2001) who used timescales to explain how identity develops longitudinally. Lemke similarly argued that identity formation cannot happen over short time spans and challenged views of time as linear and forward moving. Instead, Lemke suggested we experience time as recursive, for example, we embed experiences from the past into the present. In particular, past experiences are then responsible for taken-for-granted views.

Some scholars have drawn on the notion of 'time–space' or 'space–time' (Leander, 2001) and considered time and space to be inseparable and interrelated. Leander and McKim (2003) explored space as fluid and multiple, linked to time dimensions, drawing on multiple resources related to power and agency. In their view, possibilities always exist for change and reconstruction because of the focus on space–time.

Burgess (2010) discussed educational contexts in relation to time and space, noting that the context is not bounded but includes connections to other spaces and times, therefore from this viewpoint, time and space are interlinked and socially produced.

Fairy tales, chronotopes and New Literacy Studies

In order to examine literacies as a social practice in the context of fairy tales, this study has drawn on the nature of chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981) and notion of timescales (Lemke, 2001) (Kole, 2017, pp. 156–160). Time–space concepts have helped to highlight how literacies are positioned amongst shifting practices and connect in multiple ways to other contexts across times and locations.

The concept of the chronotope literally means 'time–space' argued in Bakhtin (1981) where notions of time and space made narrative events concrete and define chronotopes as 'the intrinsic connectedness of

temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'. In 'Dialogic Imagination' Bakhtin analysed novel genres and the role chronotopes play in each genre. Bakhtin described the ancient adventure novel which contains what he terms 'adventure time' which makes no references to everyday aspects of time. In adventure time the hero moves through time and space drawing on significant objects towards a destination (1981, p. 84).

Bakhtin discussed chronotopes in the context of literary criticism, the concept of chronotopes has been applied across other disciplines, within educational research in the NLS tradition. Hirst (2004) drew on chronotopes to analyse the role that temporal and spatial practices played in determining power relations in a particular classroom in which global relations and social identities intermingled.

Van Enk (2007) used chronotopes as a tool for analysing how adult learners' relationships to literacy are accounted for in often inferred conceptions of time and space. Van Enk noted that through this lens, narratives can be analysed in terms of what they suggest about how things might have been or might yet be different.

As NLS is rooted in research, as well as practice, it implies a teaching method that facilitates students and teachers alike, helping them to describe, observe and analyse different literacies, rather than learning and teaching one literacy as given. In Heath's terms (1983) teachers and students therefore become 'ethnographers' exploring various meanings and uses of literacy in the social context of both school and the surrounding communities where 'schooled literacy' becomes one, amongst many of the literacies with which they engage.

Street (1997) indicates therefore that the task to be developed is a two-fold approach: to challenge the dominant representations of literacy; and to develop collaborative research projects that look at the actual literacy practices of community, home and school with a view as Freebody (1995) states to 'effective mutual recognition of these practices in all sites' and for the data thus collected to be fed into teacher training programmes, curricula and pedagogy. The practical consequences and challenges for educationalists in recognising these principles argued in Street's debate on the NLS, where he proposes a checklist of principles on which its application to education would be based about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (1997, p. 8):

- *Literacy is more complex than curriculum assessment allows where the curricula and assessment reduce literacy to a few simple and mechanistic skills, fail to do justice to the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices in people's lives.*
- *If we want learners to develop and enhance the richness and complexity of literacy practices evident in society at large, then we need curricula and assessment that are themselves rich and complex and based upon research into actual literacy practices.*
- *To develop rich and complex curricula and assessment of literacy we need models of literacy and of pedagogy that capture the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices*

Participants and materials

In investigating the literacy lives of a group of adult literacy learners, the study drew on the theoretical traditions associated with the NLS paradigm, applying this within the context of fairy tales (Kole, 2017, pp. 156–160). The participants were adult literacy learners recruited through an FE college. Literacy learning support was offered to the participants as part of a study on creative writing to enhance literacy and wellbeing through the narrative quest of fairy tales. Seventeen participants signed up for the study, which was conducted over a five-month period. The study included a mixed age, ability and gender group. Workshops were held once a week for a two-hour duration session, which involved traditional oral story telling through fairy tales, group discussion, written assignments, drama, role-play and case study interviews.

Participants were initially assessed on their literacy levels through BSKB² diagnostic assessment tests. The scores from these tests then determined what participants' current literacy status was, in terms of either level 1 or level 2 literacy standard. All participants were working towards a level 2 literacy qualification. Additionally assessment was also conducted through the *Outcome star programme* (2009–2015), which identified social exclusion indicators.

²BSKB (Basic Key Skills Builder) is an online assessment tool that provides an initial assessment of literacy levels.

Although the BSKB tests provided assessment on grammar, punctuation and comprehension they were unsatisfactory for testing the students' understanding of symbolic meaning, figurative language and personal social learning. Participants understanding of symbolic meaning and personal social learning was therefore assessed through written assignments, case study interviews, questionnaires and surveys with the aim of improving participants' understanding of symbolic meaning and figurative language within the narrative texts. The study also provided a broader comprehensive investigation of how participants could enhance personal and social skills through creative writing, group discussion, self-authoring and identity work within the context of fairy tales.

Method

The study aimed to test whether fairy tales provided a more effective means than other genres in enabling adult literacy learners to understand symbolic meaning. This involved a process of deconstructing fairy tales to enable literacy learners to produce creative writing of literary merit. The study also aimed to engage learners who had previously underachieved in education by supporting their personal social skills, creative writing and lifelong literacy learning.

A creative writing programme was therefore designed and delivered for adult literacy learners using fairy tales as a scaffold for exploring problem-solving, wellbeing, identity and literacy. Through this literacy programme Propp's (1984, p. 5) narrative stage approach was introduced as a structure to support experiential writing for the participants through themes, character and plot development (Todorov, 1971, pp. 37–44).

The literacy progress of the participants was then traced from literal to symbolic, to the creative writing of fairy tales, through discussion, interviews and written assignments. Social aspects of character and plot development, psychological descriptors and narrative action-based structure was additionally used to support the creation of personal narratives (Propp *ibid*) (Kole, 2017 pp. 164–227). Themes such as parenting, gender, employment, family, relationships, politics, environment and community, emerged as subjects for creative writing tasks with key concept topics also discussed during interviews 'Fairy tales helped me see things through a character and think about what the character might do in that situation' (Kole, 2017, pp. 270, 315).

Narrative hero quest and journeying themes were reflected in participants' writing, particularly regarding the symbolic value of hero/heroine in relation to problem-solving, resilience, perseverance and resolution-based approach. Participants were encouraged to develop characters and plot with the aim of finding solutions to various personal and social conflicts in their lives and within their community environments.

Throughout the study, participants were presented with a range of traditional fairy-tale texts from different authors such as the Grimm brothers, Hans Christian Andersen and Charles Perrault. In the first two assignments the tales of *Rapunzel* and *Bluebeard* were selected for writing. Written assignment work was set to assess participants' ability to distinguish literal from symbolic meaning within fairy tale texts and to support participants in developing a creative writing assignment on a fairy tale of their choice. Assignment work was assessed on ability to analyse themes, symbolic language, grammar, punctuation and comprehension.

At the beginning of the study, many of the participants were at a level one stage of literacy and had minimal experience in essay writing and literacy assignment tasks that required more than a page of writing. Towards the end of the study participants had made significant progress increasing the output of written work in a fluent and comprehensive format. Participants were also able to interpret themes from the texts and express their opinions and ideas of how these themes and symbols could relate to their lives.

The three written assignments involved; a descriptive interpretation of the *Rapunzel* tale, an analysis of the symbols and metaphors within the *Bluebeard* tale and finally a creative writing fairy tale of their own personal choice, either through reinterpreting a traditional tale or creating their own fairy tale. The assignments demonstrated a range of abilities from higher to lower level literacy skills with literacy competencies measured through the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (2001, pp. 10–36) using this as a benchmark for standard achievement.

The assignments therefore progressed from Assignment 1 (literal interpretation) to Assignment 2 (symbolic interpretation) to Assignment 3 (creative writing).

Participants involved in the research were given the initial first writing assignment in the third week of the study and given an hour to

complete the task under exam conditions. This writing activity asked them to either give their own interpretation of the *Rapunzel* tale or write a character study on one of the characters in the tale. This was an introductory assessment to identify reading and writing ability in terms of cognition, grammar, use of vocabulary, and ability to analyse text for meaning as well as describe or narrate events happening in the story.

The second assignment was delivered in week ten and focussed on the tale of *Bluebeard*. This assignment tested participants' ability to analyse text for symbolic meaning and aimed to assess participants' understanding of figurative language within the text. This exercise was conducted under exam conditions with participants given an hour and fifteen minutes to answer questions on the tale.

The questionnaire was delivered in week twelve and thirteen. As the questionnaire contained qualitative analysis of the participants learning achievements, it was therefore completed over two weeks with participants given an hour each week to complete their questionnaire.

In week seventeen participants completed the third assignment on a creative writing fairy tale of their choice through either reinterpreting a tale that we had previously been covered during the workshops or writing a new tale of their own. This assignment was conducted under exam conditions with participants given an hour and thirty minutes to complete. This writing exercise aimed to test participants writing development to ascertain whether participants had made progress with regard to a shift from literal to symbolic understanding of tales and whether their literacy and creative writing skills had been developed or improved. Finally in week sixteen a survey was carried out with case study interviews conducted the following week.

The participant sample was a diverse group in terms of age, gender, income and ethnicity factors. Participants were interviewed about their reading interests, prior literacy accreditation, aspects of literacy curriculum they found challenging, whether they thought fairy tales had helped them develop themes and understand symbols within the stories and what they considered they had learnt by doing the literacy activities through fairy tales.

As the study underpinned the NLS theory of literacy as a social practice, case study interviews supported this context, with further discussion in relation to questions of identity, personal social, materiality and space,

community, socio-economic issues. The interviews were designed to explore ways in which literacies are intertwined with objects, spaces and relationships with people.

Interviews were conducted at the college and lasted an hour and fifteen minutes approximately. In addition to this, participants also completed notional home study preparatory time of two hours. Part one of the interview was linked to objects, part two was linked to images connected to space and place with part three linked to images representing relationships with people. In each case participants were asked to prepare materials in advance, these were then discussed during interviews. After interviews had taken place the sound recordings were transcribed verbatim and objects brought to the interview were photographed or copied with participants' permission.

The idea of using objects and visual material to engage discussion came from two sources, firstly the findings of Bierman (2008) who acknowledged the value of providing learning intervention programmes to improve social, emotional and academic readiness with culturally disadvantaged groups. The second source was Bakhtin's (1981) theory on chronotopes and language as a dialogic, collaborative exercise.

As the focus of the research was on fairy tales it presented the idea of narrative where the hero carries magical objects on their journey (Bakhtin 1981) The notion of quest and use of magical objects in telling of one's own personal story was an invaluable tool used throughout the case study interviews, representing participants' literacy experiences with personal objects brought to interview, which acted as prompts in telling their literacy stories and personal histories.

Furthermore Bartlett (2007) examined the importance of artefacts in literacy practices and suggested that artefacts can support students in feeling literate. The notion of literacy practice as material, spatial and embodied also reflects Rowe's study (2008) where local literacies draw on material, spatial and embodied resources from everyday life. The objects participants brought to the interview ranged from books, certificates, scarves, pictures of a study space and diagrams of their relationship networks. The notion of journeying as a narrative for participants' literacy lives helped enable focus on the social-cultural context in which these literacies took place.

The table below identifies the different areas of literacy explored through the study; such as time-space, academic, socio-economic/historic and affective:

Sarah’s literacy and personal social education table in context of fairy tales

<p>Time–space notion of journey and spatial learning</p>	<p>Academic literacy experiences Problem-solving, thinking skills</p>	<p>Historic, economic, social reflections</p>	<p>PSE, self-authoring, identity work</p>
<p>Completes a ‘story plan’ before starting written assignment work.</p> <p>Does most of her writing sitting at her kitchen table, it’s a bright spacious area where she can write comfortably, look out at the garden, watch her fish and look at photos of her family when composing written work.</p> <p>Uses online forums i.e. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc. for social interaction and to access information on her writing interests such as the environment, history, economics and politics. (317)</p>	<p>‘I enjoyed taking stories apart where you are kind of analysing symbolic meaning.’</p> <p>‘Liked the <i>Bluebeard</i> story and all the different symbols and themes you could find in it’.</p> <p>(317)</p> <p>‘I enjoyed the <i>Snow Queen</i> fairy tale and exploring themes of <i>warmth</i> and <i>cold</i>’.</p>	<p>‘What interested me when doing the fairy tales was the history and all about the wars and poverty that was going on in Europe at the time.’</p> <p>‘Fairy tales made me want to read more about the history of Ireland and the Great Famine’.</p> <p>‘The history of the Great Famine and how children were abandoned, for me related to the <i>Hansel and Gretel</i> story.’</p> <p>‘I linked the social abuse in Hansel and Gretel with the environmental abuse we are doing to the world today.’ (317)</p> <p>‘I worked in a factory when I was 14 and my grandmother worked there also when she was 8 years old, education was really unimportant then’.</p>	<p>(artefacts)</p> <p>Hand-made book from childhood on fairy tales, story plan of assignment, Grimm’s Bicentennial fairy tale book. Rowe (2012, p. 9) argues that texts are artefacts that link literacy to the identity of the creator and reinforces the theoretical structure of literacy practices as <i>material, spatial</i> and <i>embodied</i>.</p> <p>‘Liked the reality of fairy tales and how they warned you to take heed’.</p> <p>‘People can talk about past trauma using fairy tales, it’s a safe place to explore feelings’ (317)</p>

Sarah's literacy and PSE practices

Metaphorical phrasing linked to time, journeying and fairy tales:

'Wanted to make the *Hansel and Gretel* story more about the environment and helping the earth and got the inspiration from this from reading about the Great Famine too.' (317)

'Was able to link the social abuse that was going on in *Hansel and Gretel* with the environmental abuse we are doing to the world today.' (318)

'I enjoyed the *Snow Queen* fairy tale and exploring themes of *warmth* and *cold*'. (317)

'Liked the Bluebeard story and all the different symbols and themes you could find in it.' (317)

Statistical analysis

As discussed earlier, participants' literacy levels were ascertained through a BKSb standardised diagnostic assessment tool, which identified literacy levels and measured linguistic competency. In relation to this study the BKSb (2013, pp. 1–21) test is referred to as a quantitative assessment tool, which noted participants' literacy levels prior to undertaking the study and was therefore a measurement of the participants' literacy level at that point.

The level 1 BSKB pre-assessment scores for the five case studies were as follows: Katie 65%, Lucy 77%, Sarah 90%, John 80%, James 55% – all students were working towards level 2. In terms of measuring scores, the pass mark for the BSKB level 1 diagnostic assessment test was 45%. Candidates who scored more than fifty per cent in the level 1 diagnostic assessment were deemed eligible to work towards achieving a level 2 qualification (equivalent of GCSE 'c' grade). All the case study participants had therefore successfully scored above fifty per cent with Sarah scoring in the higher ranges. The quantitative BSKB pre-assessment test carried out therefore provided an independent picture of the range of literacy abilities of the group prior to the study.

The questionnaires and written assignments underpinned the research aims, illustrating how the deconstruction of fairy tales can produce better creative writing practice whilst enhancing personal, social wellbeing. The questions also tested the effectiveness of fairy tale genre to enable learners to notice symbolic meaning, to produce creative writing and engage learners who had previously underachieved in formal education programmes (Kole, 2017, pp. 257–313).

In relation to format, the questionnaires consisted of fifteen questions distributed to the seventeen participants who completed the study. Questions 1–6 were scored from 0–5 with 5 being the highest mark, questions 7–10 were scored from 0–10 with 10 being the highest mark. These specific questions identified participants learning progress and understanding, in relation to figurative language, creative writing, themes, symbolism and character. Questions 11–15 assess participants’ individual responses to learning styles (Kole, 2017, p. 288).

Table 1 Scores on the questionnaire (both groups)

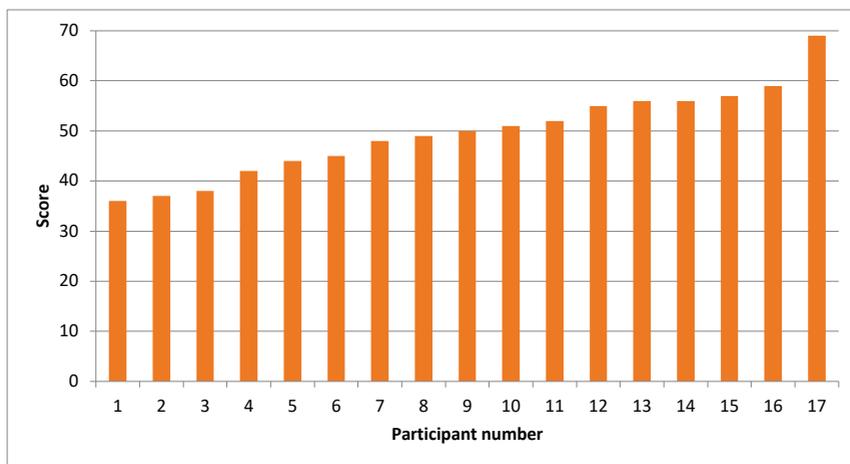


Table 1 is presented in ascending order of result scores from the questionnaire assessment, which was marked out of 74%, with Katie at 37%, being the lowest score and Sarah (69%) being the highest score.

The standard deviation at 8.77 identifies a dispersed skew range from Katie at 37% to Sarah at 69% reflecting a varied result score from competent to highly exceptional.

Outcomes from questions 1–5 and 7–10 were evaluated through a quantitative approach where questions 1–5 identified themes, symbols, metaphors and simile with 95% of participants demonstrating that they had understood these concepts through successful completion of literacy exercises such as cloze passage procedure sentences and paragraph writing (Kole, 2017, pp. 285–289).

Qualitative analysis was used to assess questions 6 and 11–15, these questions identified participants' learning styles as: 80% visual, 10% auditory, 5% literal and 5% kinaesthetic. In relation to interpreting themes, 90% of participants felt more confident and 10% were unsure of analysing themes in fairy tales. Themes within the context of fairy tales were explored in question 7, with participants acquiring knowledge and understanding in relation to character and plot development. Questions 8 and 9 supported the use of deconstruction of fairy tales to improve creative writing practice (Kole, 2017, p. 14).

Further analysis of participants understanding of figurative language and literary techniques were assessed in question 10, which incorporated the reading of *Valentine* by Carol Ann Duffy with participants identifying themes, symbolism, figurative language and literary techniques within the poem (Kole, 2017, pp. 286–290 no.10–11).

Choice of learning style was also explored in question 11 in relation to the *Valentine* poem, this time through an online website presenting a more visual–audio presentation of the poem and experience of literacy learning (Kole, 2017, pp. 286–291).

In relation to questions 12–15, participants provided self-assessment of their acquired knowledge and understanding of themes, figurative language, challenging and less challenging exercises and efficacy of visual resources throughout the study. This confirmed the efficacy of fairy tales for identifying and understanding symbolism and improving lifelong literacy learning (Kole, 2017, p. 14).

From the questionnaire, in relation to using figurative language in writing, 95% of participants reported that they were more confident in this area with 5% stating that they were unsure of figurative language. From the visual resources included as part of the study's learning resources such as PowerPoint on 'Narrative Structure, Plot and Character', 90% stated that the visual resources improved their creative writing practices with 10% of participants reporting that they were unsure about visual resources supporting their creative writing practices. Participants identified that YouTube and other interactive literacy websites supported their literacy learning progress throughout the study.

From the questionnaire all the participants identified the second assignment assessment on the *Bluebeard* tale as the most challenging

writing exercise. This was due to the requirement to symbolically analyse characters and objects in the tale and identify metaphors, addressing the significance of fairy tales to enable learners to identify and understand symbolic meaning. Participants had to deconstruct the tale and analyse what each character and object represented.

In completing the second assignment participants identified the Bluebeard character as a predator who represented the social dangers a young person might encounter when growing up within a community. The youngest sister symbolised a naivety and innocence in the face of this danger, with the older sisters reflecting the knowing insightfulness of the psyche, who warn against romanticising the predator. Finally the 'key' represented knowing, inquiry and truth with the need for investigation and questioning identified as 'keys' to the doors of knowing and truth in the tale.

On questions relating to the most enjoyable part of the project, fifteen participants reported drama scripts and role-play exercises, one participant identified interactive class discussion on fairy tale themes and a further participant reported listening to classical music on fairy tale themes (Kole, 2017, p. 269).

Results from surveys

The feedback surveys contained biographical data, personal, social and socio-economic information. From the surveys participants who had previously underachieved in mainstream education identified the value of creative writing practices through fairy tales and reported an increased understanding of literary devices, improved problem-solving, and wellbeing all of which underpinned the research aims. Surveys also endorsed the NLS theory in addressing issues that highlighted literacy as a socio-economic and culturally situated practice (Kole, 2017, p. 292:1) with narrative inquiry supporting the use of surveys to explore participants' identity through personal stories, allowing the voice of the participant to be heard (Clandinnen & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) 'narrative inquiry is stories lived and told'.

Results from written assignments and case study interviews

Written assignments demonstrated participants' learning progress from literal to symbolic understanding of text, to a creative writing assignment. On completion of the study participants could therefore

incorporate metaphors and similes into their writing practices, deconstruct texts and identify symbolic meaning within texts more effectively. Participants were able to successfully write their own original fairy tale, scaffolded through a narrative structure, based on the concept of Propp's (1968, p. 20) functions; initial adverse event, test, tasks, help, fight, victory, final reward. Participants were able to explore these narrative functions and develop characters with resilience and ability to cope with adversity.

Case study interviews allowed participants to explore themes of identity, self-authoring and problem-solving, highlighting literacies as multi-framed, fluid and collaborative in the nature of social practice. Interviews provided insights into the trajectories of literacies through time and space, underpinning the multiplicity and fluid nature of literacy lives. Participants could therefore identify with the Hansel and Gretel or Rapunzel tales and recognise themes of abandonment, isolation and parental responsibility and explore solutions to address these issues.

Summary of results

The outcomes from the study indicated significant development in participants' learning progress due to the specific links made between literacy, problem-solving and personal social learning (Kole, 2017, pp. 201–204). Throughout the study, opportunities were provided to engage participants in discussion and interpretation of personal narratives, promoting the development of character traits, such as resilience, reasoning and insightfulness (Pennbaker, 2000).

Themes explored in writing and case study interviews involved topics of interest to the participants, such as family, gender roles, community, environment, political and generational conflicts, where similarities with today's problems were identified in the specific coping strategies adopted by the hero/heroine of the story and his/her social and emotional development.

This research tested a New Literacy Studies approach in relation to traditional fairy tales with adult literacy learners, with the aim of helping learners enhance literacy skills, problem-solving and affective learning. From the case studies and surveys, participants reported; improved understanding of symbolism and metaphor within story, increased

understanding of figurative language, improved linguistic skills, cognitive abilities, enhanced problem-solving, self-esteem and personal wellbeing.

After completing the literacy programme, participants were able to identify generic themes in texts, analyse symbolic meaning, improve linguistic, cognitive and affective skills through writing tasks within the context of fairy tale genre. Indicators of success also included, gaining greater confidence in writing creatively, improved engagement in group discussion and debate.

The study addressed the research questions validating the role of fairy tale genre in supporting adult literacy learning, enabling learners to more readily identify symbolic meaning within text, incorporate metaphor and simile in writing, deconstruct text and write creatively. This proved significant in engaging learners who had previously underachieved in mainstream education, allowing them to explore identity, self-authoring and problem-solving in the context of narrative tales.

Collaborative group work underpinned a holistic, inclusive environment where participants could positively engage in discussion, storytelling and writing. Participants were able to examine themes in everyday lives, explore cultural codes, socio-historical learning, engage in debate on environmental, economic, political issues all of which supported the promotion of citizenship, employability and lifelong literacy learning.

The study provided opportunities to develop traditional oral storytelling through fairy tale, which supported the speaking and listening tasks required for participants' literacy level 2 qualification. This corroborated the progress of literacy learning for participants, many of whom had experienced social exclusion and academic underachievement in mainstream education.

Personal and social life goals were also acknowledged as motivational to participant's literacy learning, inspiring them towards achieving academic success, for example, achieving literacy qualifications to gain family and peer approval. Issues on social exclusion, economic poverty and trauma through political conflict were additionally identified as having impacted on participants' literacy learning (Kole, 2017, pp. 315–316).

The case study interviews examined identity across time and space underpinning a multiple nuanced view of literacy as a social practice (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84) By incorporating an affective domain, participants

had an opportunity to focus on the emotional experience of learning, separate from the social or academic learning concept. Each of these themes illuminated a different aspect of participants' literacy lives.

Firstly, the academic identified a linear aspect of learning, secondly the fluid concept of identity moving across time and space encompassing past, present and future lives represented a cyclical aspect and finally the affective domain explored the personal individual's experience of literacy. All three encompassed different dimensions of literacy learning and provided a layered, varied and rich account of participants' literacy lives. The study therefore acknowledged participants' agentic action in their ability to reclaim, transform and reinvent the self, regardless of adverse socio-economic environments.

Conclusions

In conclusion this study fostered the important role of fairy tales in enhancing literacy in relation to understanding linguistic devices, symbolic meaning, personal wellbeing, and affective skills for adult literacy learners. The study introduced themes of journeying in a linear trajectory towards academic learning goals and explored identities in the movement between participants' past and present lives. A focus was provided that identified narrative hero quest in everyday life situations, embedding fairy tales in socio-historic and cultural codes.

The use of artefacts in case study interviews supported literacy experiences and elicited insights into participants' broader literacy lives. By principally focussing on personal narratives through fairy tales the study promoted narrative inquiry through considering stories as lived and told experiences, fostering participants learning 'to tell, relive and retell the stories of experience that make up their lives' (Clandinnen & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

As a holistic literacy practice, the study implemented a learning programme that addressed the balance between autonomous skills-based literacy, greater social inclusion and affective learning. This positively enhanced literacy and personal wellbeing signalling a regensis of self-authoring, identity and empowerment in the context of fairy tales.

For me this represents butterflies; a symbol of hope, it starts as a caterpillar ... then turns into something else, it might take a while to get to be a butterfly ... but you can get there ... you can feel freer ... yes, this is light, this is colour, this is joy.
(Participant: L)

(Kole, 2017, p. 295)

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About the author

Karly Kole has been teaching adult literacy in FE and community education for over ten years. Her research at Ulster University involves the reworking and redrafting of fairy tales to enhance literacy, wellbeing and creative writing. She is particularly interested in exploring how fairy tales develop psychological, social, cognitive and literal skills providing a more inclusive and integrated approach to learning.

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