

**ESRC -Teaching and Learning Research Programme:
MEETING OF MINDS FELLOWSHIP
January – August 2008
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Professor Marilyn Martin-Jones, University of Birmingham**

Introduction

My application for a Meetings of Minds fellowship in the autumn of 2007 arose as a result of conversations with Prof. Martin-Jones who had been my internal examiner for my EdD thesis. Having a series of meetings with her would offer a two-pronged opportunity: firstly the chance to conduct further ethnographic research on literacy with three more bilingual students from my workplace, a Further Education college in Bristol, and thus to continue and extend my doctoral work; and secondly to consult a world expert on bilingual literacies in education, and benefit from her advice and experience.

The research project

The title of my project is ‘Refugees in Further Education – literacies in and out of college.’

The main purpose of the short project was to explore three bilingual participants’ uses of written text, and thus to examine the relationship between out-of-college literacies and the practices, ideologies and identities they express. I drew on ideas developed in a recent piece of research (Martin-Jones, Ivanič and Chandler, 2008), which was funded as part of the ESRC’s Teaching and Learning Research Programme (Extension to Wales) In this research, young FE students in Wales took part in interviews based on diaries they kept on their uses of literacy, in Welsh and in English, both inside and outside college. In contrast with the Welsh research, my participants were adults, not teenagers. They included an asylum-seeker and two refugees.

Data collection strategy

In keeping with my original doctoral work, my participants were asked to keep a daily log of their activities and the literacies associated with them. They did this over a period of two weeks. They noted what they had *written* or *read*, for what purpose, and in what languages. There then followed a log-based interview in which I discussed with each participant the meanings and significance of those literacy-based activities. Each of these interviews was audio-recorded and transcribed in full.

Disseminating and writing up the research

During the period of data collection, a new Centre for Research on Multilingualism – Mosaic - was launched at the University of Birmingham in April 2008. Prof. Martin-Jones invited me to present a poster as part of the 2 day inaugural conference. The abstract for the poster is attached below.

In July 2008, I also presented the poster at the annual Research Conference at the City of Bristol College, to share my work with colleagues.

I am in the process of completing the analysis of the new data gathered during the fellowship period and I am writing two articles combining insights from this new project and from my doctoral work. The first will be on the subject of the diary-based interview used in this and my doctoral research. The method has proved extremely fruitful not only as a prompt for discussions on literacy and language practices, but also as a valuable means of reflection for the participants, that builds self-awareness and self-esteem especially if it is on-going. That article will be appearing as part of a special issue of a journal that Prof. Martin-Jones is editing on 'The use of diary and photo-based interviews in qualitative research in multilingual settings.'

The second article will be based around the circumstances of the three participants, all of whom hold a strong religious faith. Attendance at places of worship, daily private devotions, along with accompanying uses of text, provide an interesting view of how each maintains a religious life, with a varying degree of social support from their community.

Conclusion

I am grateful to the TLRP for the opportunity the fellowship has given me to continue on my research journey. I am especially thankful to Prof. Martin-Jones for the generous gift of her time, experience and wisdom, which I have found inspiring and encouraging. As a full-time Further Education lecturer, I am given little time for work and reflection with my students. The current professional focus appears to be on data collection of the auditable variety. I hope that my findings, once published, will remind colleagues of the rich resources brought into our colleges by those students seeking asylum.

Barbara Majer
September 28th 2008

Poster by Barbara Majer entitled
**REFUGEES in FURTHER EDUCATION –
LITERACIES IN AND OUT OF COLLEGE**

The poor reading and writing ability of adults as well as school-leavers was deemed by the Leitch report (2006) to be the primary obstacle to an ‘employer- responsive’ British workforce. It falls largely to the Further Education sector to take up the government’s Skills for Life agenda, addressing the ambitious targets set to boost the population’s literacy skills. In this urgent collective endeavour, the educational trajectories of individual students, in particular those who have joined the FE system as adults from other countries, could easily remain overlooked.

My poster seeks to summarise the pilot project I am undertaking in collaboration with Prof. Marilyn Martin-Jones, as part of the *Meeting of Minds* post-doctoral fellowship scheme, funded by the Economic and Social Research Programme (ESRC), under its Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). This pilot project is applying similar data collection methods to a recent ESRC-funded TLRP project, directed by Marilyn, on bilingual literacies among young Welsh speaking FE students in North Wales. (For details of this project, see the poster presentation by Marilyn and her colleagues.)

My three participants are bilingual adults: one asylum-seeker and two refugees. As in my recent doctoral work, my main data collection method is diary-based interviews; in addition, these students will provide photographs as a way of documenting significant activities and sites in their lives involving the written word. As with the main TLRP project, I hope to juxtapose the out-of-college literacies with those requirements of the participants’ FE courses, seeking to identify possible opportunities to ‘mobilise’ (Ivanič, 2005) within college the participants’ unrecognised funds of knowledge, to their benefit.

Although still a work-in-progress, interviews undertaken have already revealed rich veins of beliefs and understandings embedded in the participants’ engagement with a range of texts. This bears witness to the narrowness of assessments used by colleges to measure literacy levels, noting as they do ability to manipulate for example English orthographic conventions, whilst leaving unacknowledged a wealth of literacy experience.

Leitch, S. (2006) *Review of Skills: Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills* www.hm-treasury.gov.uk (ISBN : 978-0-11-840486-0)

Martin-Jones, M., Ivanič, R., and Chandler, D. (2008) *Bilingual Literacies for Learning in Further Education*. End-of-award report to the ESRC (Grant no. RES-139250171)

Ivanič, R. (2005) *Language, Learning and Identity Across Contexts*. Keynote speech at British Association for Applied Linguistics Annual Conference, 17.9.05.