

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award - A place-based approach to literacy: the importance of partnership-working to the delivery of a successful local area project

Project Title				
A place-based approach to literacy: the importance of partnership-working to the delivery of a successful local area project				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	University of Birmingham			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	National Literacy Trust			
Website URL	https://literacytrust.org.uk/			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT				
<p>The National Literacy Trust aims to provide disadvantaged children and young people with the literacy skills they need to succeed, by developing resources for families and schools, campaigning for the importance of literacy, and conducting new research.</p> <p>The NLT has pioneered a local-area approach to literacy, establishing 14 regional 'Hubs' in areas of particular literacy need since 2013. This is a response both to the acknowledged impact of people's local environment on their literacy and to the increased localism and devolution of government funding. Each Hub takes coordinated action with local partners to promote literacy engagement over a ten-year period.</p> <p>In 2019, the University of Birmingham became the first HEI to partner with the NLT to found a Hub. With lead academic researchers from English Literature, Creative Writing, and English Language, 'Birmingham Stories' promotes a love of reading and storytelling in Birmingham through programmes that engage the emotions, foster empathy, and explore the potential of digital technology.</p> <p>One such programme offers Shakespeare workshops at the Library of Birmingham to GCSE English learners from Birmingham Adult Education Service, enhancing learners' confidence by encouraging emotional responses to Shakespeare's words.</p> <p>Recent research in adult literacy has revealed the impact on learners and educators of policies that have 'reshaped lifelong learning for ... economic ends' and led to a narrow focus on functional and vocational skills rather than social or individual development (Bowl, 2017). By contrast, this project examines the impact on adult learners' confidence and motivation of a literacy intervention that encourages engagement with imaginative texts.</p> <p>Crucially, this project considers this arts-based intervention in the context of the NLT's local-area approach. How, it will ask, might different kinds of community partner, from faith groups and community centres to businesses and sporting organisations, help us achieve a more holistic understanding of what motivates adult learners?</p> <p>The project will set out to answer the following questions:</p>				

- 1) What benefits can cultural, educational and other partners bring to HEI-led arts initiatives?
- 2) How can partnership-working ensure that place-based projects reflect, and represent, the diversity of the communities they seek to serve?
- 3) How might place-based work in Birmingham inform the NLT's national Adult Literacy Strategy?

These questions speak to key issues including the significance of local organisations in the promotion of literacy; the value that partner organisations bring to, and gain from, a place-based approach; the importance of collaboration between partner organisations; and the potential contribution of non-statutory partners to improving statutory provision.

The supervisory team of Kate Rumbold (English Literature, UoB), Christina Clark (Head of Literature, National Literacy Trust) and Angus McCabe (Third Sector Research Centre, UoB) brings together expertise in place-based working and impact evaluation, with understanding of the relationship between the arts and humanities, cultural organisations and cultural value, and the role of partnership-working in community projects. The collaborative context is embodied in the Birmingham Hub, 'Birmingham Stories', which gives the student ready access to a wealth of partners, practitioners and learners, as well as to fellow UoB and NLT researchers committed to fostering literacy engagement. The student will also be mentored by Jason Vit (Head of Local Areas, NLT).

We would hope that the student would have existing strengths in academic writing, presentation skills, and general research skills, whether they come from a predominantly arts and humanities or social sciences background.

During the project, depending on their existing skillset, we would envisage that the student would acquire, through training by UoB and NLT, relevant skills in navigating new research resources (i.e. journals, policy documents, databases in literature, literacy and place-based working respectively, depending on their subject background), using specific data collection techniques (surveys, questionnaires, focus groups), and engaging a range of different audiences, from adult learners and academic conferences to literacy professionals and policy-makers, both in writing and in person.

The student would have the opportunity to contribute to the NLT's principles of place-based working, and to their emerging Adult Literacy Strategy. The student would be invited to spend time at the NLT's London offices, taking part in biannual 'Hubbits' (Hub summits), where their findings would shape best practice in the way in which the NLT's Hubs consult the diverse communities they seek to serve. They would also have the chance to contribute to a public-facing webinar series on place-based working, and to feed into the discussions of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy, of which the NLT holds the secretariat.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

Lead HEI Supervisor:	Dr Kate Rumbold
Lead HEI Supervisor Email:	k.l.rumbold@bham.ac.uk