

Informal Literacy Discussion No. 33

THE HIDDEN BENEFITS OF LEARNING ENGLISH



This seminar will be led by Dr Sarah Freeman (University of Sheffield) on
Thursday 7th February 2019, 4-6pm
at Feed the Minds, The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR

Sarah Freeman's research focuses on the adult student-described experiences of learning English in various contexts in London, including ESOL-only classes, and functional skills classes for both ESOL students and first-language English students.

Have such students benefitted from these classes only from learning English? Or have they also benefitted in broader aspects of education, with a stronger sense of identity and greater control over their own social experiences? And what have they brought to these classes to improve their own and each others' learning skills, not to mention the teacher's teaching skills?

Sarah's findings are in part informed by an auto-ethnographic approach, and she holds them up to be scrutinised in the light of learning literacy as a social practice. It is suggested that mature student life is a binding social experience across cultures. A celebration is proposed, based upon the argument that these adult education events constitute a vivid acknowledgment of the success of the concept of 'superdiversity'.

Sarah Freeman (Ed Doc, University of Sheffield 2017) has worked as an adult education practitioner since the 1970s. Her teaching has been predominantly in the field of English for adults, ESOL, and ESOL literacy. Her work contexts have included FE colleges, vocational centres, refugee centres, prisons and workplaces. Her thesis, based mainly on in-depth interviews with learners in London, explored the reasons for studying from the students' perspective, revealing motives beyond just getting essential qualifications for work.