

## Five lessons from nature

A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.  
—CHINESE PROVERB

Be like the bird that, passing on her flight awhile on boughs too slight, feels them give way beneath her, and yet sings, knowing that she hath wings.  
—VICTOR HUGO

People from a planet without flowers would think we must be mad with joy the whole time to have such things about us.  
—IRIS MURDOCH

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.  
—ANAÏS NIN

I decided that if I could paint that flower in a huge scale, you could not ignore its beauty.  
—GEORGIA O'KEEFFE



## The November 2007 Web Forum

In November 2007, we held our first-ever blog web forum on working in literacy. Literacy workers from across the country joined a lively conversation about working conditions, how working conditions affect learning, and why, despite the sometimes challenging environments in which we work, we love working in literacy. Once again, literacy workers proved that they are innovative, creative, compassionate and deeply knowledgeable. Check out the conversation at [workinginliteracy.blogspot.com](http://workinginliteracy.blogspot.com).

## The conundrum of communicating at a distance

The literacy community has struggled with this. Not with the technology—we are amazingly adept at adapting to new mechanisms—but with the quality of the experience. Our favourite way to network is to get together in the same room at the same time to talk and listen and reflect and create. Those rare opportunities are so rich and inspiring that at-a-distance options often seem to be pale approximations. Whether we choose to communicate synchronously by teleconference, web chat, webconference or asynchronously on web boards, listservs or blogs, the conversation can feel stilted and creaky. There is no consensus on which “approximation” is best. Different people like different mediums and express very good reasons for their preferences. So, what to do?

After each web forum we evaluate the experience. We look at the feedback from participants. We look at the number of people who joined us and the number of

posts they made. Sometimes we conclude that we should try a new technology. Sometimes we conclude that we should focus our energy on face-to-face networking. But then time passes and we start to reflect less on quantities and critical feedback and look more to the quality of what happened and how these conversations shape and enhance the way we think about *Literacies* and literacy work.

Synchronous communication allows us to be dynamic and spontaneous—sparks fly. Asynchronous communication allows us to set our own pace and research and reflect before responding—embers glow. And they glow with such promise. We carry them around in our pockets and warm our hands on them. They become our worry beads. And then one day, when the moment is right, when the stars have aligned, we toss that ember onto the table and—sparks fly.

## Five lessons from literacy workers who joined us at the Fall 2007 Web Forum

It is commonplace for “poor education” to be cited as a cause of “low employment”—and for literacy programs to be promoted as a way of raising employment figures. But literacy programs don’t increase job opportunities: they increase literacy. Jobs come from tax policies and infrastructure resource allocation and decisions made in a thousand boardrooms, large and small. If people in my city are underemployed, poor and increasingly desperate and despondent, that’s not my fault. I just help them with things like reading, writing, math and some computer skills.

—WENDELL DRYDEN responds to *literacy for what?*

Yes, some adult learners want to improve their skills so that they can find employment or “better” employment. The situation we’re more and more finding ourselves

in, though, is that employment is being seen as the only “acceptable” reason for improving skills. It’s as though there’s only one right answer to the question “why are you setting out on this learning journey?” The only destination can be a job...If learning only supports us to fit in and does not support us to question and to critically review, what does that mean?

—MAIRE responds to *literacy for what?*

I like to operate as a literacy practitioner from my ideal place, and I find it more and more spiritually draining and challenging to my integrity to be caught up in the global thrust—the numbers game, the administrative accountability game—to prove that it is valid to help people increase their literacy skills.

—NANCY FRIDAY responds to *literacy for what?*

Current governments, in Canada and BC, at least, don’t care about the same things literacy workers do. They care about getting and keeping power, not sharing it and giving it away. They care about profits. Practitioners can “focus on accreditation,” or marshal columns of learners, or insist on giving up all pay and benefits and join barefoot orders to work for nothing, or whatever other strategy we dream up. It will not make current governments care about oppressed people; it will not make them care less about power and profits.

—KATE NONESUCH responds to *have we shot ourselves in the foot?*

So the simple idea of a learning place just makes my head and heart swell. The learning place I envision

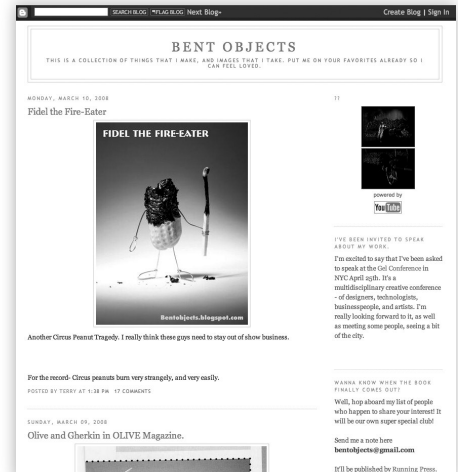
would be itinerant, would **go** to where people are—and one of the tools I’d need is a wheeled cart that folds out, accordions out with tons of drawers and containers full of nontraditional art materials, writing materials, supplies that encourage **play**—a mobile zipper workshop even. And the people who are teaching, instructing, would be from all sorts of backgrounds, education levels, ethnicities—they would speak the language(s) of the communities, they would be open to learning themselves and they would be **paid** in some form (money is not the only currency). The learning place would be embedded (and have sustainable funding) within schools, community organizations, and have a presence at events, festivals, etc., so that “learning” and **play** become more entwined. Oh, I love dreaming of this—thank you!

—BONNIE SOROKE responds to *places to learn*

Five quick-read blogs that cheer us up



**Witty inquiry**  
 Wendell's Blog—  
[wendell-communitylit.blogspot.com](http://wendell-communitylit.blogspot.com)  
 Wendell is a literacy practitioner exploring technology and learning with literacy learners through a lens that is hilariously grumbly and visionary.

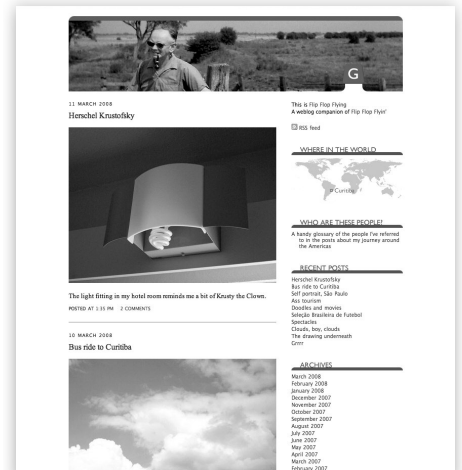
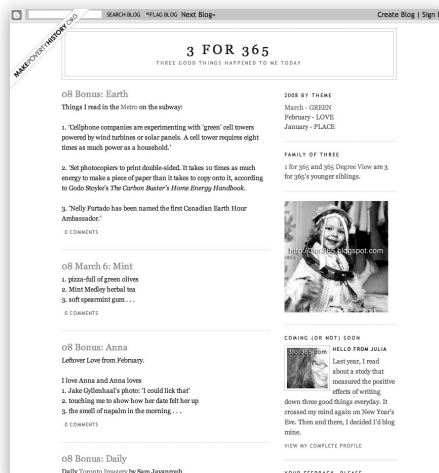


**Witty metallurgy**  
 Bent Objects—[bentobjects.blogspot.com](http://bentobjects.blogspot.com)  
 Terry makes little characters out of household objects and wire and puts them into amusing scenarios. Sometimes he holds contests where you can win characters.



**Witty alchemy**  
 Life in Combe Martin—  
[combemartin.blogspot.com](http://combemartin.blogspot.com)  
 Martin takes photographs of his Combe Martin neighbourhood, exposing the many twists and mysteries of life in North Devon, England.

**Witty gratitude**  
 3 for 365—  
[3for365.blogspot.com](http://3for365.blogspot.com)  
 There are lots of blogs where people document three things that make them grateful every day but I like Julia's pithy posts the best.



**Witty observation**  
 Flip Flop Flying—  
[www.flipflopflFlying.com](http://www.flipflopflFlying.com)  
 Craig creates odd little 21st-century characters and documents his travels through a lens that is oddly postmodern and quixotic.