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# RaPAL

Open Edition



# Journal

# The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

## Who we are

RaPAL is an independent national network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult literacies and numeracy. Our support is generated by membership subscription only, and we are therefore completely independent in our views. RaPAL is the only national organisation focusing on the role of literacies in adult life.

## What we do

- Campaign for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives
- Critique current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill
- Emphasise the importance of social context in literacy
- Encourage collaborative and reflective research
- Believe in democratic practices in adult literacy
- Create networks by organising events (including an annual conference) to contribute to national debate
- Publish a journal three times a year

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Members are involved in the compilation of the journal as reviewers/referees and editors.

We are a friendly group - open to new members and new ideas. Please contact us with any contributions (views, comments, reports and articles) and do not be put off if you are new to the field or if you have not written for a publication before. This Journal is written by and for all learners, tutors and researchers who want to ask questions about this field of work. It does not matter if the questions have been asked before. We want to reflect the many voices within adult literacy and numeracy work and to encourage debate.

**Why not join in?**

**Further information can be found at our website: [www.rapal.org.uk](http://www.rapal.org.uk)**

The RaPAL Journal expresses a variety of views which do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial group. The RaPAL Journal has been printed by Image Printing Co., Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire.

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# Editorial

## Linda Pearce and Julie Meredith

*Linda is a Parent Support Coordinator at Plymouth Parent Partnership and a member of the RaPAL Editorial Group. Julie is an English Tutor at Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT) and Joint Coordinator of the RaPAL Journal.*

Welcome to this Open Edition of the Journal which draws together an engaging and eclectic mix of contributions. If “all writing is still for us always also learning to write”,<sup>i</sup> the same holds for editing, and we have thoroughly enjoyed working with all the contributors.

### Section 1: Voices from the Classroom

We begin this section with two learner voices. Leroy Powell shares his story and personal realisation that confidence in reading and writing is a prerequisite for finding and gaining employment in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Aneila Sultan then provides an implicit reminder that the impact of learning and 'measures of success' are not exclusively about test results or 'progression' through 'levels'. She describes how she has begun to find words more approachable and spelling less scary. She addresses tutors and students with some tips.

Following on from our *Digital Literacies Edition*,<sup>ii</sup> our next two writers suggest ways learners can create their own electronic content rather than simply consuming content created by others. Susan Aldridge outlines a project developed from the *Six Book Challenge*<sup>iii</sup> that involved her learners writing about their reading and developing digital literacy at the same time. Are you or your learners blogging yet?

If a blog sounds a rather long-term commitment, you could consider an ebook. Vickie Johnstone suggests this as a way to find an audience outside the classroom. She shares her experience of self-publishing to encourage tutors to consider ebooks as a route for students to publish their own writing. A poem from Vickie's first published collection then highlights that inspiration can come from anywhere.

Whether blogging or creating ebooks, these practical ideas start to address what has been identified as a second 'digital divide'. That is, not a question of access to computers and the Internet, but a divide “between people who have the competencies to use computers productively and creatively, and those who use computers in more prosaic ways”.<sup>iv</sup>

Our pieces from Steve Gibson and Jill Jones confront a different divide: language. They may challenge your deaf awareness as they reflect on the role of language in learning and question what it means to have full and equal access to learning. Steve considers the difficulties faced by Deaf<sup>v</sup> students outside the classroom and looks for practical solutions. He has provided a BSL translation of his article at [www.tinyurl.com/RaPaLBSL](http://www.tinyurl.com/RaPaLBSL). Jill, a member of DEX,<sup>vi</sup> argues for a change in legislation to give deaf children

access to bilingual education. In the same spirit as RaPAL, DEX enables learners to make their views known and encourages their participation in decision-making processes.

The final article in this section highlights that funding needs to reflect the value of a range of outcomes, not just qualifications. Clare Williams from The Reader Organisation brings reading back into focus with her reflections on the inspirational and therapeutic effects of reading groups on participants' mental health, wellbeing and enjoyment of life. We hope you will be encouraged to be part of “building a reading revolution” with your learners, whoever and wherever they may be.

### Section 2: Developing Research and Practice

Our contributors to this section grapple with the challenging realities of providing learning experiences which are appropriate and context effective. They do this against the backdrop of economic difficulties both here in the UK, where vocationally-orientated education has been in the spotlight, and globally with relation to adult literacy in international development.

Recently, and particularly during the current economic crisis, vocationally-oriented education has been forefronted. Sarah Aynsley and Jacqui Shepherd's article, drawn from the wider evaluation of the Skills for Life at Work Project, looks in particular at the learners' experience. Their evidence suggests that the opening up of new possibilities, increase in confidence and self-belief are as important as the development of knowledge and skills. This indicates that the vocational element of the project and learning for personal/social reasons are not mutually exclusive.

In the international arena Jan Eldred, from the Literacy Working Group, highlights the realities of global interdependence and the serious implications for all if we neglect to invest in supporting emerging economies. She discusses the centrality of using appropriate approaches to teaching and learning underpinned by lifelong learning policies and practice in building vibrant economies, where social justice, active citizenship and lively democracy prevail.

### Section 3: Research and Practice – Multidisciplinary Perspectives

In this section we revisit and build on the reading group theme introduced by Clare in Section 1 and explore the impact of reading groups on prisoners' literacy practices through Kate Hendry's action research project undertaken in Barlinnie Prison. Here Kate argues that reading groups, “rather than focusing on non-ability, non-attendance and non-compliance,

help prisoners to use their literacy practices as a way to sustain their social and individual identities within an institutional setting". Hooray for teachers and learners having the freedom to work creatively and design provision that suits their own contexts!

### Reviews

Near the start of the new academic year, it is lovely to have new resources and we are delighted that learners are involved in our first two reviews. Entry Level students and education professionals share their thoughts on two New Leaf titles, *The Cardigan* and *The Kit Kat*, which have come out as bilingual eBooks in collaboration with DeafEducate. Aneila Sultan then gives her opinion on the third in Gatehouse Books' series of Supermarket Stories, *Dan's Dinner*.

Phonics is never far from any discussion about literacy in the UK and continues to get a mixed reception in the post-compulsory classroom. Teacher trainer Irene Schwab suggests that *Phonetics for Phonics* may be just what is needed to support tutors to be both

knowledgeable and effective in this area. Naomi Sorge also reviews a title aimed at practitioners, *Teaching Adults*, and gives a timely reminder to trainers to consider the readability for students on generic teacher training courses.

Yvonne Spare gives her verdict on *Adult Basic Skills*. Produced by the International Review Programme, it considers the key principles of effective practice and the wider gains in terms of human and social capital.

The Journal closes with a review essay on *Remaking Adult Learning*. Margaret Herrington shares her views on this collection of 27 essays on adult education written in honour of Alan Tuckett, former Chief Executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

*Please note that the views expressed by individual contributors to the Journal do not necessarily reflect those of RaPAL.*

- i Clark, R. and Ivanic, R. (1997). *The Politics of Writing*. London: Routledge.
- ii RaPAL Journal No. 74. Spring/Summer 2011. ISSN 1747-5600.
- iii The Reading Agency, an independent charity with a mission to inspire more people to read more, launched the Six Book Challenge in 2008. The Challenge invites less confident readers to read six books and record their reading in a diary in order to receive incentives, a certificate and the chance to enter a national prize draw. Find out more at <http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk/>
- iv Discussion paper High Level Expert Group on Literacy. (2011). *Trends affecting Europe and what they mean for literacy*. P.16
- v Deaf with a capital 'D' is taken to represent deaf individuals who use British Sign Language as their main mode of communication.
- vi The Deaf Ex-Mainstreamers Group (DEX) is a deaf-led organisation that was set up to support deaf people who are being educated in mainstream education, or attended mainstream schools.