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RaPAL

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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

The RaPAL Journal is also available from EBSCO Information Services.

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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 Rolleston-on-Dove
 Staffordshire
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Editorial

Naomi Horrocks and Amy Burgess

Naomi is a freelance working in research and literacy. She is a member of the RaPAL management committee and Joint Coordinator for the RaPAL journal.

Amy has been involved with literacy education for 20 years, first as a tutor and coordinator and more recently as a Research Fellow at the universities of Lancaster and Exeter. She is currently Chair of RaPAL and works in the voluntary sector.

Welcome to this conference 2012 edition of the journal. We are delighted that so many of the contributors to the conference have found time in their busy schedules to remind us of the interesting and stimulating talks and workshops they presented in October 2012. As **Amy Burgess, Sue Southwood and Dan Taubman** explain in the introduction to this journal RaPAL, NIACE and UCU came together for the first time to hold our first joint annual conference. As they said, "We were delighted to come together in this way because although we all support adult learning in different ways, we share common aims and values and believe that a joint conference provides a valuable opportunity for us to learn from and support each other".

At the conference, Carol Taylor, NIACE Director of Development and Research, launched *More Powerful Literacies*, the sequel to *Powerful Literacies* (Crowther, Hamilton and Tett 2001) published by NIACE in 2001. The original volume grew out of the RaPAL conference in 1999, so it was fitting that its sequel should be launched at this conference. We were therefore delighted that two of the editors, Mary Hamilton and Lyn Tett were keynote speakers at the conference.

Mary Hamilton drew on her recent book (Hamilton, 2012) to talk about literacy and representation. In her article she expands on her talk to urge us as practitioners to "get to grips with numbers and statistics in order to be able to evaluate and critique their use within policy discourse". Only in this way, she argues can we construct alternatives to the "narrow...vision" pursued by policy makers consisting of "hard measurable outcomes fashioned by funders of policy for their purposes of accountability".

Lyn Tett continued Mary's theme in her talk by examining the role of comparative measurement and the use of statistical data in Scotland. In her article Lyn explains how in Scotland the use of OECD data was used to support existing policy in adult literacy provision, taking a positive view

of the data rather than the deficit view so often expressed in England. So far Scotland has resisted moving away from its 'current broad, learner-centred approach' to a more employability-focused agenda, but like Mary, Lyn cautions us to be constantly vigilant in order to retain this wider view of literacy.

The workshops at the conference reflected the interesting and varied work that continues to take place in literacy and numeracy provision even in these straitened times. **Genevieve Clarke** of the Reading Agency looks at the benefits of reading for pleasure as a motivator for groups of adult learners in a wide range of settings as well as its role in building confidence and reading skills. One of the ways the Reading Agency supports reading for pleasure is through its 'Six Book Challenge' where readers are encouraged to 'pick six reads and write a simple diary in order to receive a certificate'.

We are all aware that organisations have to reinvent themselves or change the way they work in order to meet new challenges. Both **Pauline Nugent** and **Judith Swift** explain how in their different working environments they are doing just that. Pecket Well began its life in 1985 as a residential centre for adult literacy and numeracy. Pauline explained its particular philosophy of working as a collective in which all decisions made about the running and learning within the community are made by both students and tutors. Since 2011 when the collective was forced to sell its premises they have decided to continue their work by developing a website 'which will contain the oral history, archive, films and free training materials... using a variety of media to make the content accessible to a broad spectrum of users – including people who have difficulties with reading and writing'. Unionlearn has been successful in the past says **Judith Swift** because it has been responsive to learner need, using employees from within the workforce to motivate, encourage and advise their colleagues and then tailoring provision to their needs.

Working with partners has also been crucial. Despite the difficult financial climate Judith believes that unionlearn can build on their successes by expanding their provision to workers' families and the wider community, taking on the challenge of digital skills learning and engaging in cooperative planning with other education providers.

NIACE has been working with unionlearn to pilot the concept of maths champions in the workplace and **Sue Southwood** describes how they are now working with partners to take this initiative further as part of the post-19 skills agenda for England which includes a national maths initiative to engage 'champions' from employers, communities, agencies and organisations to encourage and enthuse adults to take up maths learning.

In our final article for this edition of the RaPAL Journal **Alison Wedgbury** provides us with an update on the final report of the independent review panel into professionalism in the FE field led by Lord Lingfield, taking up the baton from Helen Casey who spoke at the conference before the final report was published. Alison confirms that specialist qualifications for literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers will continue within the new qualifications framework and will be developed during 2013.

Book Reviews

We have four book reviews for you in this edition. We are delighted that **Claire Collins** shares with us her enjoyment of *'More Powerful Literacies'* launched at the conference. Claire takes us through a whistlestop tour of the themes: Theoretical and Policy Frameworks, Making Power Visible and Resistance and Challenges, providing us with a taste of what's

inside and tempting me (Naomi) at least to order the book immediately.

Azumah Carol Dennis also recommends *'Improving Adult Literacy'* as 'a definitive evidence-based guide on effective literacy teaching'. She cautions that the publication is aimed at the US, nevertheless it provides us in the UK with an opportunity to understand 'that there is an alternative' way of teaching more closely related to a social practice view. As Carol says '(t)he text provides sound theory and empirical evidence which helps establish this fluidity in approach to what good teaching requires if it is to become outstanding teaching. That is, an appreciation that effective pedagogy is thoroughly and completely contextualised'.

'God and decision-making: a Quaker approach' by Jane Mace provides **Sam Duncan** with much food for thought. Describing the book as 'challenging, insightful, thought-provoking and beautifully written', Sam talks about the resonance the Quaker approach to reading and writing may have for literacy practitioners whilst also challenging us to think about how we work with each other in our work and in our lives.

We end on **Mandi Smith's** review of a very practical guide and tool for ESOL and literacy teaching at entry level 2. *'Improve Your Spelling'*, published by NIACE. It consists of a teachers' guide, a student workbook and an audio CD. Mandi has trialled a number of units with her students and thoroughly recommends this as a resource to both new and experienced ESOL and literacy teachers.

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