

Journal

Volume No.56 Spring 2005

RAPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy

The pleasure principle of learning

Great Black Britons

Good Practice: using a variety of texts

Opening the Book for Learners

Practitioner values - what matters?

Write to Read:
strategies for adult readers

Putting Learners in charge
of making decisions

Theories of teaching reading

Philosophy and ideology:
practitioner research choice

Using new concepts to understand
learning and teaching in literacy classes

Philosophical assumptions about literacy:
Perspectives from Lyotard

The Research and Practice in Adult Literacy Network

Who we are

RaPAL (established 1985) is a national network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers engaged in adult literacy and basic education. 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.

We ...

- **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.
- **support** the theories of language and learning, which emphasise the importance of social context in literacy acquisition.
- **encourage** collaborative and reflective research between all participants in literacy work and maintain that research and practice are inextricably linked.
- **believe** in democratic practices in adult literacy which can only be achieved if learning, teaching and research remain connected and stay responsive to changing social contexts and practices in society.
- **recognise** that students are central to a learning democracy and their participation in the decision- making processes of practice and research is essential.
- **foster** collaborative participation between all educational sectors including FE, HE, AE, workplace education, community education and prison education.

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Editorial Information

The Editorial Group for 2004-2005 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner researchers : Yvon Appleby, Anne Beattie, Julie Brailey, Gill Britten, Amy Burgess, Maxine Burton, Anne Chester, Linda Eastwood, Joy Evans, Ellayne Fowler, Zoe Fowler, Sue Gardener, Karen Geekie, Alison Gorf, Barbara Hately-Broad, Mary Hamilton, Margaret Herrington, Gaye Houghton, Nora Hughes, Alex Kendall, Hugo Kerr, Jane Mace, Bethia McNeil, Liz Milman, Kate Pahl, Gary Roberts, Irene Schwab, Faizana Syed and Kate Tomlinson.

Overseas members include: Jean Searle, Rosie Wickert, Stephen Black, Geraldine Castleton, Australia; Mary Norton, Bonnie Soroake, Canada; Janet Isserlis, Elsa Auerbach, Steve Reder, USA; and Cathy Kell, New Zealand

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 students, 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?

The RaPAL Journal expresses a variety of views which do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial group.

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Editorial

The theme of this edition is the philosophy of practice. Our focus on the relationship between philosophy and practice is vital so that we do not restrict ourselves only to concerns with 'what works best' in practice, divorced from theory or philosophical questions about what we do and, importantly, why we do it. At this time of fast paced change people are running to stand still: to catch up with new curricula and initiatives; to attract new learners whilst becoming qualified trained professionals able to deliver quality learning provision. It seems all the more important at this moment in time to catch breath and take space to share our various practices, to reflect on our research and debate how we can use and develop theory to support practice and research.

We are delighted with the response to our call for contributions and are pleased that we have such a wide range of items for all sections of the journal, many from practitioners and researchers who are writing for the first time. These contributions provide access to concerns, dialogues and debates that are current in practice and research in adult literacy and remind us of the need, as Wendy Moss points out, of not reinventing the wheel. We hope that this edition offers, in Wendy's wise words for effective teaching, a "range of texts that are meaningful, relevant and stimulating..."

In Section One we have a range of articles offering ideas for teaching that are democratic, creative and within the framework of a curriculum. We begin with two short articles. Alice Sookes offers a way of working that makes the learning relevant to the learner, because it begins with their needs, but the emphasis is on learning being fun. We are then given some ideas for positive uses of the curriculum from Northern Ireland, from tutors involved in teacher training. Sarah Chu and Tish Cooney have themselves completed specialist teacher training in literacy in the last two years. Sarah offers us an account of working with a group of elderly Afro-Caribbean learners. She shows how a positive teacher response to a short text brought in by a student can lead to creative learning using and producing 'real' texts. Tish Cooney uses another approach, following a theme that allows her to explore a range of genres in her

classroom that culminates in a theatre visit for the group. Finally, Genevieve Clarke introduces us to the work of the Vital Link programme. This programme offers both materials and a focus on reading being fun. Perhaps that is the theme for this section of the journal. Learning should be fun. Reading is more than a set of skills to be learned in piecemeal fashion. By integrating the skills and focusing on real texts a social practice view of literacy can accommodate any curriculum.

In Section Two we have reports from different types of research being undertaken by practitioners across a range of settings, each exploring aspects of philosophies of practice. These include: involvement in large funded programmes, practice based reflective research, a journey into postgraduate research and a look at changes in the theories of teaching reading. Linda Pierce starts by describing her work on an NRDC funded project, which, although not looking specifically at teacher values, uncovered some interesting insights into them. She found that practitioners value some of the changes brought in by Skills for Life, including the improved image, but were concerned over the lack of teaching writing skills. Tutors were committed to the quality of the learning provision and to learner achievement. This theme is also found in Gill Britten's research of a reading intervention strategy in Wrexham, funded by Quality Mark funding. Gill researched both her own practice and the reading materials being developed to ensure that they fitted what and how the students wanted to learn. Kate Nonesuch describes the philosophy and practice of student decision making at the Reading and Writing Centre at Malaspina College, British Columbia, Canada. Although continents apart, Kate provides us with powerful narrative that speaks to common democratic values as she describes how she attempts to implement her philosophy of student decision making within her practice. Wendy Moss provides an important historical view of theories of reading, showing how practice changes and is informed by research and theory. She reminds us that this process has been happening for over thirty years and contains within it many important insights and philosophical values that are relevant to practice today. Sophia Monerville ends this section with her postgraduate

research journey. She describes the journey requiring her to make difficult decisions as she tries to fit philosophies and methods linked to her practice based study.

In section three Amy Burgess links literacy research, theory and practice in her research looking at learning and teaching in an adult literacy classroom. She argues that theoretical constructs can be used as lenses by practitioners, through which to view their practice. Using a social practices perspective, which looks at literacy events and literacy practices, she considers the usefulness of some new concepts against 'real life' practices within the classroom. Gaye Houghton critically explores philosophical assumptions about the purpose and practice of literacy which adult basic skills practitioners value. Gaye describes the use of narrative in her research which uncovers 'little'

professional stories as well as 'grand' philosophical/social narratives. She makes the point that her article is also a journey from practice to research and back again.

The review by Judy Gawn from NIACE looks at two booklets about assessment. Although based on work in secondary schools, Judy thinks they have fundamental pedagogical relevance for lecturers and tutor trainers in the post 16 sector and are well worth reading.

Finally, all the articles in this issue have been put together to show that philosophy, theory and practice are inextricably linked. We as editors hope you enjoy reading them.

Copy Deadlines for the RaPAL Journals in 2005

Please send your articles, comments, suggestions etc to the named editors or to Margaret Herrington, the Journal Contact (mherrington1@aol.com)

Spring - Themed Edition on the Philosophy of Practice

Jan 14 2005 (Ed. Yvon Appleby, Ellayne Fowler & Gaye Houghton)

Summer - Themed Edition on Multimodal Literacies

April 24 2005 (Ed. Linda Eastwood and Barbara Hately Broad)

Autumn/Winter 2005 Themed Edition: Numeracy

Copy date August 15th 2005 (Editors to be announced)

Do not be concerned if your chosen piece does not seem to fit with the themes selected. There are spaces within the themed editions for work in progress or general commentary. Be assured that your ideas could also be retained for the next open edition of the journal.

Note: these dates are final deadlines. Please contact us well beforehand to guarantee consideration for any particular journal.