

RaPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy

This edition of the journal reports on the 2007 RaPAL conference, which was held at Queen's University, Belfast. The conference theme was *Learning journeys, voices and identities in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL*. The journal takes readers on a journey through the conference, presenting the voices of presenters as well as those of participants.

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

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Editorial

The theme of the 2007 RaPAL conference was *Learning journeys, voices and identities in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL*. This edition of the journal takes readers on a journey through the 2007 conference, presenting the voices of presenters as well as those of participants.

We hope this journal reflects the strong presence of learners at the conference. Learners made a number of key contributions:

- At the pre-conference event, two learners from a Belfast literacy group launched the Literacy Travellers' Tree. Sue Cathcart's article tells the story of the tree and how it played an important part in the conference.
- A group of learners from Edinburgh delivered a workshop.
- The second day of the conference saw the launch of a collection of learners' work, *Reflections*, which was sponsored by RaPAL. Details of this publication are in this journal.
- The launch of *Reflections* was preceded by a special event in which learners from all over Northern Ireland read their writing, showed photographs and sang to an appreciate audience. Some of the contributions are included in the journal.

The 2007 conference was very much an international event. The keynote address was delivered by Inez Bailey, Director of NALA (Ireland). Many participants travelled from great distances to the conference. There were contributions to the programme of workshops from Australia, South Africa, Brazil, America and Canada. Sheila Stewart and Tannis Atkinson

from Canada gave a poetry reading in a local bookshop on the first evening of the conference. They were joined by Shelley Tracey, who organised the conference at Queen's University Belfast along with a large and enthusiastic group of local practitioners.

For many participants from the UK, this was their first visit to Belfast. We hope that the incessant rain has not put them off from returning to Northern Ireland. For local practitioners, the event was their first experience of RaPAL. They were delighted at the opportunity to participate in RaPAL and to meet colleagues from so many other countries.

We are grateful to the organisations which supported the attendance of many of the conference delegates: Learning Connections, Scotland, NALA, Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland, NRDC, Proteus, NALA and the Basic Skills Agency (now merged with NIACE).

The conference enabled us to understand and to celebrate what we as literacy workers and learners have in common and what makes us different from each other. These commonalties and differences are symbolised by the single trunk and many leaves of the Literacy Travellers' Tree. The leaves which appear throughout the journal were created by learners and practitioners alike, and we invite you to create your own tree and share the images with us.

*Amy Burgess
Shelley Tracey*

Sally Murphy

We are sad to announce that Sally Murphy, one of the founder members of RaPAL, died suddenly in November 2007 after a short illness. Sally had a long career as an adult literacy tutor in Bradford College. Along with her colleague, Mandy McMahon (see RaPAL Issue 14, Spring 1991), she took part in the first RaPAL conference at Lancaster in 1984 and was one of the main movers in establishing it as a membership organization, taking on roles as membership secretary and treasurer. Early meetings were held in a pub in Manningham Lane. RaPAL journals were relayed between Lancaster and Bradford in the boot of Sally's car. Sally was always fun to work with and had a strong vision of research in practice that placed learners in a central position. Early issues of the journal are evidence of that vision with reports of the many activities she participated in, including events organised jointly with learners and tutors, European visits and exchanges.

David Barton and Mary Hamilton