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RaPAL

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy



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. The RaPAL Journal has been printed by Image Printing Co., Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire. Matlock, Derbyshire.

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Editorial

Welcome to the 2009 Summer edition of RaPAL. This is a double open issue edited by a group of colleagues from the Post Compulsory Education Department at the School of Education at the University of Wolverhampton. Fuelled by pre-Christmas optimism we felt the opportunity to work together on an editorial project would provide an opportunity to extend the collaborative work we've been engaged in, with our colleague Margaret Herrington, through our readers and writers group.

We were impressed by the variety, quality and range of submissions (although the numeracy folk in our midst would have welcomed more attention to numeracy) we considered and have thoroughly enjoyed the process of reading, reviewing and engaging in discussion with contributors and indeed we felt rather privileged to be able to facilitate the editorial process. This was fortunate because it was much harder work than we'd expected to sustain our collaboration efficiently in the midst of our busy (teacher education) workloads and we are very grateful to the efforts of our administrator Natalie McKerrigan to co-ordinate and track our progress with each section. Without this central anchor we would no doubt have floundered and get a good administrator to co-ordinate the process from the outset would be our advice to others wishing to follow suit. Having said this, we had varying levels of experience of editing at the outset and have all learned something of great use from the experience, not least the challenge of weaving this kind of activity betwixt and between the demands of the day job!

Our selection of articles for this edition reflects our interest in both the important insights that emerge from practitioner led enquiry and more creative approaches to LNE education. We also are pleased to be able to showcase the work of some of our existing and former students.

Section one explores some exciting ideas for teaching. Nuala Barr describes using found poetry with a group of women in a community setting, involving them in explicitly making sense of their learning. Sara Freeman advocates the use of life stories with literacy students, encouraging exploration of personal experiences. Chris Birkett describes her experiments with developing focused speaking and listening activities in ESOL, using photographs of local venues with great success to stimulate

meaningful talk. Finally, Zoë Tuckley's challenging poem takes us into the possible world-view of a student. Very thought provoking.

In Section Two Ambika Bellary describes and reflects on an effective speaking and listening activity used with a group of ESOL learners. Cath Jackson explores the idea of literacy teachers sharing their stories through formal networks or informal communities of practice to discuss common themes and experiences and consider ways that reflective practice can inform their teaching. Shelley Tracey puts the case forward for how the writing of poems can benefit the literacy development of adult learners. Jori Kowszun and Coleen Molloy look at the relationship between ESOL and numeracy in adult education. And, finally Jane Mace makes the argument for student publishing as a pedagogical exercise and in so doing offers a potential next step from the other ideas explored in this section.

Section three includes three articles by Sue Bell, Ann O'Grady and Chris Atkin and Peggy Warren that draw on the findings of research by practitioner researchers to explore pertinent issues relating to literacy education in community and workbased contexts. Sue Bell's article investigates the personal experience of dyslexic adults and the extent to which sharing an understanding of this experience with other dyslexic adults represents a powerful model of mutual support. Drawing on evidence from a practitioner led research project O'Grady and Atkin explore the concept of choice in relation to the implementation of the Skills for Life strategy and question whether the strategy has influenced the choice of learning programmes available for adult learners in rural England. Peggy Warren draws on the biographical narratives of women healthcare assistants from BME communities employed by an inner city NHS trust to explore the impact of Skills for Life policy on the individual learning trajectories.

We would like to thank everyone, authors, referees, reviewers and most especially our administrator Natalie, who have helped to put together this thought provoking read. Reader we hope you enjoy our efforts.

Editorial Group
Alex Kendall, Cathie Lacey, Matt O'Leary,
Rob Smith and Chris Winter