

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

RaPAL Officers 2009 / 2010

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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 this issue of the journal. We come to our role as editors of this issue as literacy practitioners and tutor educators. While we work in different parts of the UK, London and Northern Ireland, many of the issues for our practice and those of our students and colleagues are similar. We hope in this journal to capture a variety of perspectives on the current landscapes for literacy learning, practice and research, and we believe that the responses which are presented in this edition demonstrate the changing contexts for our work, as well as those aspects which never change: the commitment of practitioners and learners to the learning process.

The introductory piece, ***Changing Landscapes of Literacy***, represents the views of ten people, nine literacy professionals and one former learner, who sent us personal responses to a short questionnaire in which we asked people to describe and reflect on the way in which the changes had impacted on them directly. These contributions range from brief pithy comments to full personal accounts in poetry and prose.

Apart from this composite piece, the journal is similar to previous ones in style and structure. However, we noticed that there is more of a focus on male learners than usual. While this may be coincidental, we hope it represents to some extent the presence of learners in literacy programmes who have previously not been represented. The theme of inclusion emerges as well in a number of articles by practitioners: in Lorraine Borwick and Nick Shepherd's case study of effective learning for adults with learning disabilities, and, on a similar theme, Sue Cathcart's article on the experiences of two disabled learners in Belfast; in Kathy Martin's paper on young people's perspectives on swearing; in Anne Curran's story about the Northern Ireland Learner of the Year; and in Angela Tobin's article, "Critical reading and the Entry Level learner".

Section 1 has a strong focus on learning and teaching. Johnny Crossan and John Kerr describe their experiences of prison education, their achievements and aspirations. Anne Curran tells the story of an *Adult Learner of the Year* award winner and the strategies and approaches that she and the learner developed together. Sue Cathcart presents the experiences of Alan and Derek, two disabled learners from Belfast, in seeking help with learning to read and write.

Section 2 Angela Tobin explores the development of 'critical reading' skills with inexperienced readers and writers, challenging the notion that critical literacy is only for 'higher' level learners. Lorraine Borwick and Nick Shepherd explain how they applied their learning from an action research project to enhancing their practice. Finally Sue McCulloch and Marie Kerwin with Yvon Appleby discuss current issues concerning

provision and take up of professional qualifications for literacy, language and numeracy teachers

Section 3 begins with a critical investigation by Azumah Dennis of the concept of 'quality', and continues with Kathy Martin's paper on swearing. The final paper in this section is Dorothy McIntyre's autoethnographic exploration of a current area of interest in the landscapes of practice and learning, that of behaviour management.

We are aware that there is very little reference in this journal to one of the most prominent features of the landscape of current learning: the impact of new technologies on learning, practice and research. This theme, however, will be the focus of a future edition.

We end with our observation that although there have been many changes in the landscape of literacy education, the articles in this journal demonstrate that some things never alter: learners remain committed to learning and practitioners to exploring ways of enhancing the experiences through which they achieve this.

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

Nora Hughes, Institute of Education, London
Shelley Tracey, Queen's University, Belfast

Note: Curriculum frameworks in England, Wales and Northern Ireland: some terminology appearing in this issue of RaPAL Journal

Skills for Life refers to the current UK government strategy for adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) in England and Wales. **Essential Skills for Living** is the equivalent strategy for LLN in Northern Ireland. England, Wales and Northern Ireland share a common 'core curriculum' for Literacy.¹ In this issue of the journal, a number of contributors make references to 'levels' of the curriculum at which learners are deemed to be operating and which form the basis of referrals, course planning and assessment. Learners are considered to be working at five levels: Entry Levels One to Three, and Levels One and Two. Entry Level One learners might generally be understood as beginners in reading and writing, while Level Two learners are working at a level which is regarded as equivalent to GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education), which school students take in their final year of compulsory education at age 16.

For an overview of the Literacy curriculum levels see pages 16-17 of National Standards for Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ICT (DfES 2005).
www.qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/14130_national_standards_for_adult_literacy_numeracy_ict.pdf
(Last accessed 19/01/10)
There is also an Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework for Literacy and Numeracy – see
www.dcsf.gov.uk/curriculum_preentry/level/m1a/
(Last accessed 19/01/10)

¹ Scotland has a separate strategy and curriculum framework - see *Adult Literacies Online (ALO)* www.aloscotland.com/alo/38.html
(Last accessed 19/01/10)