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# RaPAL

Open Edition



# Journal

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# 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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## Editorial Information

The Editorial Group for 2009-2010 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner researchers: Yvon Appleby, Sue Bates, Amy Burgess, Maxine Burton, Ellayne Fowler, Tara Furlong, Mary Hamilton, Kieran Harrington, Gaye Houghton, Fiona Macdonald, Colleen Molloy, Bex Ferriday, Carol Azumah Dennis, Julie Meredith and Sarah Rennie. Overseas members of the Editorial Group include: Jean Searle, Rosie Wickert, Stephen Black, Australia; Mary Norton, Bonnie Soroke, Sheila Stewart, 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 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](http://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 open issue of the Journal. Collaboration has been the underpinning hallmark of this edition as contributors have worked with us to provide insight into their experience of both learning and practice. This has been a rewarding journey for us as editors, and we hope those who have contributed will have found the process a rewarding one.

## Section 1

Two learners, Angela and Jerry, open the section by sharing their personal experiences of returning to the classroom. We hope you will share their contributions and encourage other learners to write for the Journal.

Issues of confidence with language are not exclusive to literacy classrooms as numeracy specialist Sally Stanton reminds us. She suggests an active approach to familiarise learners with the language of maths by building on existing knowledge and allowing individuals to learn from each other.

Hugo Kerr picks up on the topic of learner autonomy and focuses our attention at sentence level. He advocates reviewing writing sentence by sentence then prompts us, in poetic form, to think about length.

## Section 2

The common denominator in this section is reflection. Cathy Clarkson shares an honest appraisal of the use of a blog and wiki for initial teacher training. We believe her experience will strike a chord with many readers starting to explore and expand their use of ICT.

Michael Atkinson considers how reflection provides space for practitioners to access different perspectives and gain deeper insights. Reassuringly, he suggests that it is not always necessary to find answers, but instead to identify gaps in our understanding.

Chris Aldred celebrates what we can learn from 'ordinary' practice, and with technology making publication possible for all, she invites us to consider what is worth saying and to whom.

From the freedoms of the Web, we move to the confines of a prison. Graham Meadows looks to informal learning to rebalance the curriculum and re-engage disengaged prisoners.

Judith Rose picks up the question of engagement from a different angle. She asks: When is an adult literacy class not an adult literacy class? Her piece considers the distinction between

literacy and social/living skills in provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. Nick Shepherd, who co-authored a contribution in Volume No. 70 with Lorraine Borwick, responds to Judith Rose. We invite you to join the conversation by contributing to future editions.

## Section 3

What is it like to read? Sam Duncan asks this question and shares her case study research on a reading circle. She considers the challenges of accessing and collecting first person perspectives on the experience of reading. Sam also invites us to ponder new ways of generating knowledge about adult reading development.

## Reviews

We are delighted to have four reviews in this issue. The first two illustrate the relevance of historical accounts for contemporary practice and remind us of our links with colleagues abroad. Gordon Ade-Ojo takes us to Australia for his review of *Reading the Fine Print: A history of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) 1978-2008*. Meanwhile Maxine Burton heads to Sweden with *Understanding Literacy in its Historical Contexts*.

With news headlines at home filled with budget cuts and continued talk of 'literacy levels', we come bang up to date with the other two pieces. Sam Duncan looks at *Improving reading: phonics and fluency* and Jay Derrick shares his thoughts on *Why leadership matters: putting basic skills at the heart of adult learning*.

## A word of thanks

We would like to thank all the writers, referees and reviewers who have worked with us over the last few months. A special word of appreciation goes to Yvon Appleby, the Journal Co-ordinator, who mentored and supported us throughout the editorial process. We would also like to extend our thanks to Bex Ferriday for her help with sourcing images.

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

*Linda Pearce, Plymouth Parent Partnership  
Julie Meredith, Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT)*