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# RaPAL

Open Edition



Photo: The Reader Organisation

# 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

## RaPAL Officers 2012

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The Editorial Group for 2012 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner-researchers: Yvon Appleby, Amy Burgess, Maxine Burton, Anne Chester, Julie Collins, Azumah Dennis, Jay Derrick, Bex Ferriday, Sarah Freeman, Kieran Harrington, Naomi Horrocks, Nora Hughes, Vera Hutchinson, Julie Meredith, Linda Pearce, Sarah Rennie, Anthea Rose, Irene Schwab, Naomi Sorge, Yvonne Spare, Sandie Stratford, Shelley Tracey and Alison Wedgbury. 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.  
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# Editorial

## Linda Pearce and Julie Meredith

*Linda is a Parent Support Coordinator at Plymouth Parent Partnership, an Independent Evaluator and a member of the RaPAL Editorial Group. Julie was an Adult Literacy Tutor at CALAT for 7 years. Following redundancy, she joined Action on Hearing Loss where she works with Deaf adults with additional needs. She is about to start at Wakefield College as a Study Coach and Specialist Learning Support Assistant for Deaf and hard of hearing learners.*

Welcome to this Open Edition of the Journal. We are sure you will enjoy the stimulating collection of contributions. Over the last few months we have been buoyed and distracted by London 2012 whilst working in a context of job insecurity. We are most grateful to all the writers working with us for their commitment and resilience. We appreciate that for some this has been a considerable challenge.

We open with a tribute to our colleague, **Gaye Houghton**, who passed away in January. Members share their memories and celebrate Gaye's impact within RaPAL and beyond.

Colleagues, friends or strangers can have an impact on us, and a newspaper article about a businessman with dyslexia made a lasting impression on student **Shauna Ellis**. Her letter to him gives part of her own story and leads to her realisation: "Everything in life is hard. It is just down to me whether I am willing to work hard enough to get there."

Full-time literacy tutor **Cheryl Penn** has learnt many lessons of her own during her teacher training and reflects on some of these. In her *Learner Case Study*, she considers how to identify and meet the needs of one individual. We share the journey from his initial interview to the point when he reminds her that he has to choose his own path. In her second piece, Cheryl explores how to motivate learners to read, by reflecting on feedback from an observed lesson and doing lots of reading herself.

We move next from the observed to the observer. **Sarah Huaraka** argues why she believes a big challenge for trainee literacy teachers is to develop a sense of audience. She explains what this means to her and shares some tips.

In last year's Open Edition<sup>1</sup>, we were introduced to Get Into Reading (GIR) groups run by the Reader Organisation<sup>2</sup>. **Clare Ellis** returns to explore the benefits of the shared reading of difficult poetry within GIR groups. The inclusion of partial transcripts from sessions allows us a unique insight into readers' responses.

Our next two contributions take us outside the UK. **Tina Byrne** shares research findings from Ireland's National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). NALA focused its research on family literacy from the perspective of the adult learner, the recommendations of which are relevant for us all. From Ireland we are taken to various other points in Europe with **Moirá Hamilton's** piece on the Eur-Alpha Network. She explains the purpose and progress of the project, the role learners played and celebrates its positive outcomes.

**Peter Shukie** and **Pip McDonald** consider what literacy means in the 21st century. Peter questions whether research based on outdated ideas and methodologies is fit for purpose. He fears for future policy unless research has a radical overhaul. Peter's article grew from an online discussion between RaPAL members and invites further reflection. From Peter's perspective, Pip is looking in the right place, the right worlds. Through a focus on digital storytelling, she considers the wealth of Web 2.0 tools available for tutors and learners.

Conflicts between tradition and modernity come up in **Sue Charlton's Case Study** of a learner from the Traveller community. Sue sets out to discover whether teaching provision for this minority group is effective and quickly realises that the first challenge for educators is to gain knowledge and understanding of the community's culture and beliefs.

This section of the Journal closes with a Research Project carried out by **Kim Buggins**. She explores why a 17-year-old's writing is significantly weaker than his other skills and wonders what strategies will support his development. Among other things, Kim considers Orthographic Motor Integration, automaticity and attitudes to writing.

1. RaPAL Journal Volume No. 75, Autumn/Winter 2011, pp14-16  
2. TheReader.org.uk

## Reviews

We are delighted to have a bumper selection which starts with a review of Sam Duncan's *Reading Circles, Novels and Adult Reading Development*. Journal readers may remember Sam's piece *Researching the Reading Circle Experience*<sup>3</sup> from our Open Edition in 2010.

**Greg Brooks** warmly welcomes the book and thinks its "humane approach deserves to be widely adopted". He recommends it to "everyone who is passionate about both literature and adult literacy".

**Sarah Freeman** shares her thoughts on two titles on digital literacies: *Multimodality* by Gunther Kress and *Language and Learning in the Digital Age* by James Paul Gee and Elisabeth R Hayes. Sarah sees that what "makes these books stand out is how their respective expert authors contextualize language, literacy and multimodality in our present global society". They go beyond mere fascination at the rate of change and consider "how influential digital communication has become in shaping society" for better or worse.

The NRDC's report *Literacy, Numeracy and Disadvantage among Older Adults in England* by Andrew Jenkins et al is timely as **Maxine Burton** acknowledges in her review. With so little research focusing on the literacy and numeracy of older adults, Maxine considers that "the entire report would repay careful reading" and it is available as a free download.

*Lifelong Learning and Social Justice: Communities, Work and Identities in a Globalised World* from NIACE edited by Sue Jackson is reviewed by **Alison Wedgbury**. She suggests that "RaPAL readers will find all the chapters stimulating and will recognise in their own work both the pressures and the opportunities afforded by this wide range of contexts". The eleven chapters call for a "re-focus on lifelong learning aligned with social justice".

We return to the topic of technology in **Sam Duncan's** review of *Adult Basic Education in the Age of New Literacies* by Erik Jacobson. Sam found this slim publication a "surprising book". Similar to the NIACE title on social justice, "it asks us to question how our actions as learners, teachers and as users of different forms of literacy relate to larger political and economic forces".

The issue of measuring skills raised earlier in this Journal by Peter Shukie comes up again as **Jay Derrick** comments on *Literacy, Numeracy and Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments: Framework for the OECD Survey of Adult Skills*. The booklet's purpose is "to present the detailed conceptual approach that is being taken by the latest of three large scale surveys of adult foundation skills by the OECD". Jay considers that "it takes far greater care than the earlier studies did to measure skills in the context of 'the digital age'" but a number of concerns remain.

We close this Open Edition with reviews from two learners. **Aneila Sultan** and **Ezra Hardware** share their opinions of *Hot Flush* by Helen Fitzgerald and *Sawbones* by Stuart MacBride respectively. Both learners were reading Barrington Stoke titles for the first time and they give mixed responses to the publisher's stated aim to make their titles accessible by minimising "the obstacles that can stop struggling, reluctant or dyslexic readers really getting hooked by a book".<sup>4</sup>

Aneila, who has well and truly become hooked on reading, goes on to review two of this year's Quick Reads: *The Cleverness of Ladies* by Alexander McCall Smith and *Get the Life You Really Want* by James Caan. As well as getting a sense of these titles, we're sure you'll see both final pieces as the work of budding reviewers and encourage you to invite your learners to write reviews for future Journals.

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

3. RaPAL Journal Volume No. 72, Summer 2010, pp32-37.

4. <http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk/> (accessed 10/9/12)

## Gaye Houghton

Many RaPAL members were deeply saddened to hear the news of the death of Gaye Houghton in January. Gaye was an active member of RaPAL for many years and her dedication and great sense of fun were an inspiration to many people. Mary Hamilton represented RaPAL at Gaye's funeral and passed on our condolences to her family. Below we print tributes to Gaye from some of her friends in RaPAL.

### Roz Ivanič writes:

Gaye was unstinting in her energies on behalf of RaPAL, and in her selfless generosity in her dealings with everyone she met. She was a member of RaPAL from its earliest days, she saw it through its shaky days when it was uncertain whether it would survive, and is to a large extent responsible for turning it into the thriving organisation it is today. She was a team player and a champion for all: for adult students on her courses, for tutors in her college, for other members of RaPAL. She gave her warm-hearted and exuberant encouragement to everyone she encountered.

At her memorial service, her family gave moving tributes to her for her stamina and determination. They took joy in the enormous number of certificates and accolades she had received for academic achievement. They said they felt she had always been studying, always wanting to achieve more and more. I first met her at the beginning of this journey, studying for a Diploma in Reading and Language Development in her early forties. She did not stop there, but took one post-graduate course after another, being awarded her PhD just two years before she died.

Her daughter spoke of the enormous respect Gaye had for education, and she impressed this on her children.

*"Whatever you want to do, you can do it!"*

This is the message she had drummed into her children, and they said her belief and her support had helped them become what they are today. This seems to epitomise everything about Gaye: it is the way she approached life herself, it is what made her such an inspiration for many generations of literacy students, and it is the spirit she brought to RaPAL to share with us all.

### Maxine Burton writes:

RaPAL and Gaye were inextricably linked in my mind, and, although I don't remember exact details of our first encounter, I suppose it must have been at a RaPAL conference; the first one I attended was in Nottingham in 2001. Thereafter I looked forward to seeing her each summer with

her warm and friendly welcome.

She interviewed me as part of her doctoral research and I was so pleased when she was awarded her PhD, especially after having the first date for her viva postponed because her examiners were stranded abroad after the eruption of that Icelandic volcano! Here is what she wrote to me in an email in early June 2010:

*"I had my viva just over a week ago.... It went brilliantly! In his report my external examiner said that it was 'an excellent piece of work'. My internal examiner said that 'the thesis is the work of a scholar'. I am really chuffed. I have no revisions apart from a few typos which I had spotted before the viva so they were already done."*

Gaye's moment of glory couldn't have happened to a kinder or more deserving person.

To go back a few years, I also worked with Gaye on a couple of NRDC research projects at the University of Sheffield, from 2004-07. She was one of my practitioner-researchers in the second year of the Effective Practice in Reading study, and then a member of the Consultation Group for the NIACE/NRDC Practitioner Guide to Reading. For that I remember her insisting, very strongly, that our first task must be to outline the different theoretical approaches to reading before we could engage with the predominantly skills-based focus of the publication. In all my dealings with Gaye, her enthusiasm, cheerfulness and commitment shone out. Here she is, with some of her fellow researchers in 2005, in the photo below.



Team from left to right:  
Liz Heydon, Naomi Horrocks,  
Gaye Houghton and Gill Fuller

My last message from her was in early 2011 after she had submitted an excellent book review for RaPAL (published in issue no 73). She mentioned that she had been having assorted scans and tests, but not to worry as she really wasn't feeling ill. Her ever-positive approach misled me, and the news of her death came as a dreadful shock. I still find it difficult to believe that such a larger-than-life presence is no more.

**Below are the messages sent to the RaPAL email list in the days following Gaye's death**

I share the sorrow of all Gaye's colleagues and friends in RaPAL and want to add my condolences to her family and friends. Gaye was always a welcoming and generous member of RaPAL, giving her time and thoughts freely and being around to greet new members. I respected and enjoyed her open attitude, willingness to contribute and her commitment to adult learners. One of my best experiences in RaPAL was meeting at Gaye's for an editorial meeting for one edition - she had a way of getting the job done and getting it done with kindness and good nature. We'll miss her - but we were lucky to have had her alongside us.

**Mary Wolfe**

I was also really sad to hear the news. I took over the RaPAL treasurer role from Gaye and she was so helpful and supportive in the handover period and beyond. She was always so generous with her time and expertise.

**Irene Schwab**

Gaye was a great inspiration. She was encouraging and committed and it was wonderful to meet her through RaPAL.

**Shelley Tracey**

I too am very sorry to hear that Gaye has died. My main contact with her was as a fellow researcher on a Sheffield University project. Gaye was always supportive of me as a new researcher, generous with her time, knowledge and experience.

**Naomi Horrocks**

Gaye was very supportive when I first took on the role of RaPAL Secretary several years ago - the post had been vacant for a while so there was no form of handover or guidance and I was new to RaPAL. Gaye was always very responsive and I remember her being described as 'a force of nature' with a huge amount of affection.

**Tara Furlong**

A force of nature with a huge amount of affection

does it very well. She was a lovely lady. Her PhD was very important to her and it is gratifying to know she had some time to enjoy being Dr Houghton, as she so deserved to be.

**Hugo Kerr**

I am so sorry to hear this news. Gaye and I worked together on the RaPAL committee. One of my happiest memories of her is the interview she did with me as part of her PhD. She was an inspiration in my own studies. I am so glad the PhD was completed. As with everything she did, she put so much into it.

**Ellayne Fowler**

Gaye was such a great person. I too remember my interview as part of her PhD and the discussions that went along with it. And the way she had of getting positive energy to flow. A sad loss.

**Helen Casey**

Such sad news. Gaye always greeted people with a hug and a big smile, she was such a warm, lovely person. All the posts to the list tonight show how greatly she will be missed, she leaves a big hole in the RaPAL community and she will be remembered very fondly.

**Karin Tusting**

Like others I am saddened by Gaye's death, she will be missed by us all. She has been an inspiration and steady companion to RaPAL for many years quietly getting on with things that needed doing. Always cheerful, in spite of her illness, she added much wisdom as well as lightness to the things and the people she engaged with. Her family were important to her, a source of pride and enjoyment. I hope they realise and will take some comfort in knowing how much she meant to others in all the different parts of her life.

**Yvon Appleby**

This came as a bit of a shock. I haven't seen Gaye for some time but used to know her well. Passionate about adult literacy, very enthusiastic. Loss to the world.

**Wendy Moss**

I never met Gaye but I was privileged to work with her jointly editing a RaPAL edition of the journal. We did this by phone and email and I am so sorry not to have met her. She was an inspiring support, taught me a great deal and was always affirming. Her warmth, positivism and energy was uplifting. This is a huge loss for RaPAL and tragic for her family.

**Colleen Molloy**