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# RaPAL

Conference 2015 Plus



# Journal

# The Research and Practice in Adult Literacies Network

## Welcome

Research and Practice in Adult Literacies (RaPAL) is the only UK-wide organisation that focusses on the role of literacies in adult life. We promote effective and innovative practices in adult literacies teaching, learning and research; and support adult literacies practitioners and researchers. We enjoy engaging in debates that touch on English language and literacy, numeracy and digital skills across homes, communities and workplaces. Through our members, digital journals, conferences and fora, policy and advocacy work, we are active in Europe and have international links.

## What we do

- Encourage collaborative and reflective research
- Publish a journal three times a year
- Create networks by organising events (including an annual conference) to contribute to national debate
- Believe in democratic practices in adult literacies
- Emphasise the importance of social context in literacies
- Critique current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill
- Campaign for the rights of adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives

## RaPAL Officers 2015 /2016

<b>Chair</b>	Sallie Condy
<b>Secretary</b>	Claire Collins
<b>Treasurer</b>	Alison Wedgbury
<b>Journal Co-ordinator</b>	Yvonne Spare
<b>Production Editor</b>	Claire Collins
<b>Reviews Editor</b>	Sarah Freeman
<b>Membership Secretary</b>	Yvonne Spare
<b>Website Manager</b>	Tara Furlong

## Editorial Information

The editorial group for 2015-2016 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner-researchers: Claire Collins, Sallie Condy, Samantha Duncan, Sarah Freeman, Tara Furlong, Julie Furnivall, Anne Reardon-James, Irene Schwab, Yvonne Spare and Rachel Stubbley.

RaPAL members are involved in the compilation of the journal as editors, reviewers and referees.

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. The journal is written by and for all learners, tutors/teachers 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 us?**

Further information can be found at our website: [www.rapal.org.uk](http://www.rapal.org.uk)

The RaPAL Journal is also available from various subscription services: EBSCO, LMInfo and Prenax.

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

The RaPAL journal has been designed by Image Printing Company, Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire



# RaPAL Membership form

## Help us to double RaPAL's membership in 2015/2016!

We are always keen to attract new individual and institutional members. Please join us and consider passing this to friends, colleagues and libraries / resource centres and encouraging them to join RaPAL now!

### Members' benefits

Membership brings:

- three RaPAL journals per year
- discounted attendance at RaPAL events
- participation in the RaPAL JISCLIST

We are happy for our members to participate in the journals and conferences and the organisation and administration of RaPAL.

### How to join

To join, please complete this form and email to [membership@rapal.org.uk](mailto:membership@rapal.org.uk) or post to:

RaPAL Membership, c/o Yvonne Spare, Sysondale, Anslow Lane, Rolleston on Dove, DE13 9DS, UK.

By joining, you confirm you sympathise with RaPAL's aims as stated in the Constitution.

### Your details

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Please tick if you do NOT wish your email to be used in the RaPAL network

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To set up a standing order, please request a form from us to send to your bank

Alternatively, you may post a cheque for £ (see below for the appropriate fee)

### Fees 2015/2016

Our membership year runs August to July. Please tick the appropriate subscription rate:

#### Digital editions

Individual membership

£40 Full-time       £25 Low waged, unwaged or student

Institutional Membership

£90 per institution for up to 5 sites and up to 10,000 FTE people (staff and students)  
50% discount per additional 5 sites or each additional 10,000 FTE people (staff and students)

Institutional membership allocates two votes at our AGM; and two member participation free or discount at events

Please tick here if you require an invoice

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# Editorial

Sarah Freeman, Anne Reardon-James and Yvonne Spare

The October 2015 conference held jointly by UCU, NIACE, NATECLA and RaPAL came as a challenge: 'Skills for Life? English, maths and ESOL for 21st Century Citizens'. The title suggested on the one hand that this could be additional training for those of us already immersed in a government run, strict, rigorous, results-focussed system for keeping the qualifications rolled out. Alternatively, the 'Skills for Life?' suggested that delegates might be questioning how fit-for-purpose our current programmes are. What is striking is that those who spoke in the conference and contributed to the journal are all enthusiastic and optimistic about the possibilities for literacies, when delivered with sensitivity, within and outside the classroom.

In this edition there are articles and book reviews that are about examining feasible, tried and up to date ways for situating adult literacy through other contexts – outside college, outside the curriculum; within schools, communities and other venues.

Alex Stevenson's article which opens this Conference 2015 edition sums up the contents of our contributions. Alex explains what the drive towards a 'Citizens' Curriculum' is about: 'More flexible, creative and innovative models are needed to engage and motivate learners and meet the challenge of poor basic language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the context of rapid social change.' NIACE may have now changed its name to Learning and Work Institute but we can be thankful that Alex continues to manage the 'Citizens' Curriculum pilot project'. Alex heralds new terminology and the use of the expression 'capabilities' rather than 'skills' to describe the potential in adults' agency and ability.

This is followed by a peer-reviewed article about terminology stemming from work carried out and presented at the conference by Sam Duncan and Irene Schwab. They advocate seven principles around the use of terminology including precision, the importance of respect and flexibility in particular.

Sallie Condy, also Chair of RaPAL, spoke at the conference about provision for adult literacy in Scotland, which has remained focussed on enabling adults most recently through The 'Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020' (ALIS2020) working on the basis that skills developed must be 'life-wide'. This interview opens our eyes to important work that is happening within a neighbouring country.

Following on are four action reports from projects which have successfully run in England: in numeracy, ESOL, The Reading Agency and the WEA. Charlotte Robey reports on the background and implementation of a NIACE pathfinder project which explored the effectiveness of 'flipped classroom' approaches in family numeracy classes supporting a learning culture in the home. Judith Kirsh, NATECLA Treasurer/Trustee and project coordinator, describes the successful running of joint projects between Learning Unlimited and three partner organisations to promote integration of women and children newly arrived in the UK. Genevieve Clark has brought us more uplifting news about the continuing and expanding popularity of Reading Ahead which is an annual incentive scheme that invites people to pick six reads and log, rate and review them in a diary. The scheme focusses on enthusing those providing the books as well as readers in libraries in the community, colleges, prisons and workplaces, offering not just appropriate books but expertise and encouragement. Then, Sarah Frances Lund describes how projects flexibly run through WEA in the Yorkshire and Humber area are working in three different partnerships, namely delivery-only, management and floating, in order to deliver the most effective provision. Sarah's article is a summary of her on-the-ground case-studies PhD research, and is a good model of how findings can be effectively presented and used to support a perceptive and carefully delivered research area.

# Editorial

Our final article takes on globally situated literacy proportions – taking us to the West African country of Sierra Leone, where beside the use of 23 local languages English remains the language of education and commerce. At the same time as our conference was running in October, an organisation, BAICE (promoting international and comparative education), indirectly linked to RaPAL, was running a series of seminars about ‘Bridging the Gap’. RaPAL members attending these seminars learned about some of the widespread projects taking place across the developing world. Harriet LaBouchere works for Lifeline Network International and her article, richly illustrated, is about literacy coming ‘second’ (but nevertheless coming effectively) in post-Ebola Sierra Leone. These articles are like beacons of hope and innovation, where constructive changes and projects are taking place and it might be said that as a whole they indicate a sea change that is occurring in adult literacy, despite the way it has recently been used as economic leverage by governments worldwide. What is happening is that practitioners, students and even in some cases politicians are pointing out that literacy is vital as a quiet, underlying capability to the development and building of confidence for adults everywhere.

Three of the books reviewed for this edition were among a list of ‘Literacy’ books from Routledge that were offered to us for review in the autumn. The linking factor is that they all provide frameworks for approaching literacy afresh. The titles do not spring from adult learning in the UK, but are written by literacy enthusiasts who have produced frameworks for widening the minds and experiences of learners through other skills and topics such as: educating for sustainability (Victor Nolet) reviewed by Anne Reardon James; place-conscious [literacies pedagogy] advocating greater awareness of the geographical and spatial (Barbara Comber) reviewed by Rachel Stuble; and peer approaches for building argument and counter argument (Kuhn, Hemberger and Khait) reviewed by Irene Schwab .

A different book (Zuber-Skerritt, Wood and Louw), reviewed by Tara Furlong, about action leadership in South Africa suggests a participatory framework - Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR); this brings together teaching, research and community through ‘humanising’ techniques.

These titles have been collected from literacies’ global family including Australia (Comber), America (Kuhn et al) UK and South Africa (Zuber-Skerritt, Wood and Louw), suggesting the hunt for more contextualised approaches to literacy is becoming recognised mainstream worldwide.

Remembering Alex Stevenson’s urgent assertion in the article at the beginning of this journal that ‘more flexible, creative and innovative models are needed to engage and motivate learners, we consider that these books are all doing just that – turning us outwards from the classroom to consider other ways to make literacy studies meaningful.

## News from the Sector

Tara Furlong

*Tara Furlong is RaPAL's webweaver and can be contacted on [webweaver@rapal.org.uk](mailto:webweaver@rapal.org.uk).*

### **Building Skills for All: A Review of England**

The OECD recently released an analysis of adult literacies in the UK, commissioned by BIS, which made it clear that literacies continue to need to be developed and integrated through all educational levels and forms of provision. *OECD (2016) Building Skills for All: A Review of England policy insights from the survey of adult skills* Available online: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf> and blog post <https://rapal.org.uk/2016/02/01/building-skills-for-all-a-review-of-england/> for more discussion

### **UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals**

In early April, RaPAL are participating in a three-day seminar on instituting adult literacies in a lifelong learning framework. Under the Millenium Development Goals, adult education was subsumed by attention to compulsory education internationally. We'll be reporting back but if you have any input, please send it to [webweaver@rapal.org.uk](mailto:webweaver@rapal.org.uk).

### **The new Apprenticeship standards**

Inter- and intra- company co-operation projects are working together to develop these at a right old rate, in response to a government levy on large companies <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/apprenticeship-standards>. English and maths are integral. Businesses contract learning providers; and assessors. The Education and Training Foundation are running training on it all - see <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/events/>.

### **Functional Skills review**

Employers gave very encouraging feedback on Functional Skills last year <https://rapal.org.uk/2015/05/29/ra-ra-go-functional-skills/>. There is still time to feed in to improvements, with a focus on providers from mid-May to late June this year: <http://www.pyetait.com/fsreform/> for detailed information and <http://feweeek.co.uk/2016/01/14/timetable-for-multi-stage-functional-skills-consultation-unveiled/> for a discursive intro.

### **More news**

Plenty of FE conferences, sector news etc on the latest Isrn update for anyone interested <https://lsrn.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/160311-newsletter-mar16.docx>