

ISSN 2054-5355

Volume No. 89

Summer 2016

RaPAL

keeping learning meaningful



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 2016 /2017

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Editorial Information

The editorial group for 2016-2017 includes the following researchers, practitioners and practitioner-researchers: Gwyneth Allatt, Claire Collins, Samantha Duncan, Sarah Freeman, Tara Furlong, Julie Furnivall, Sue Lownsbrough, Anne Reardon-James, Irene Schwab, Yvonne Spare, Brian Street and Rachel Stubley.

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 literacies work and to encourage debate.

Why not join us?

Further information can be found at our website: www.rapal.org.uk

The RaPAL Journal is also available from various subscription services: EBSCO, LMIInfo and Prenax. The RaPAL journal expresses a variety of views which do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial group. The RaPAL journal was designed by Image Printing Company, Lumsdale, Matlock, Derbyshire



RaPAL Membership form

Help us to double RaPAL's membership in 2016/2017!

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 JISList

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 the form on our website (rapal.org.uk/join-us). You can also use the form below and email it to membership@rapal.org.uk or post to: RaPAL Membership, c/o Jo Byrne, 8 Phillip Drive, Glen Parva, Leicester, LE2 9US, UK. By joining, you confirm you sympathise with RaPAL's aims as stated in the Constitution.

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Fees 2016/2017

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

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£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

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Editorial

Rachel Stubley and Irene Schwab

Welcome to this edition of the RaPAL journal, which presents writings from adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL educators on the theme of keeping learning meaningful.

In a political climate which encourages freedom of choice and consumer rights (in education as elsewhere), the restrictive nature of much adult literacies learning is striking. The space to develop negotiated, student-centred learning has shrunk dramatically over the last 15 years. Curriculum content, accreditation and, in some cases, even attendance is mandated and controlled, and can 'bracket out the lived experiences of students and teachers' (Comber 2016: xiv). The 'washback' from narrowly-focused (sometimes inappropriate) tests can be a particular challenge to the ingenuity and integrity of adult educators, and to the motivation and progress of adult learners. Elsewhere, teachers can find themselves focusing on collecting evidence and auditing progress rather than on learning and teaching. Tusting reminds us that it is not that teachers cannot cope with change but that they recognise a 'conflict of discourses' where new practices are not based on models of good teaching, which always start with responsiveness to learners (Tusting, 2009). Current educational policies, not just in the UK but across the English-speaking world, seem in conflict with RaPAL's position, that socially-situated learning is crucial to effective adult literacies learning and teaching (Ivanič et al, 2009).

And yet ... adult educators and adult learners continue to find ways to engage in meaningful learning and teaching, and to challenge and resist current strictures. We hope that you, like us, are heartened by the responses to the current environmental and policy contexts which our contributors have shared in this edition of the RaPAL journal. Their responses fall into three broad categories:

Critique and resistance are the focus of two articles on the lived experience of particular groups of women. The first piece in this edition is Helena James' prose poem *Learning from Aprons*. This is an impassioned elegy for a generation of working class miners' daughters let down by schooling, careers advice and above all the gendered expectations of their girlhoods. In our academic peer-reviewed section 3, Sarah Foster has written a fascinating paper presenting her research into the experiences of migrant women living and attending Family Learning classes in North West London. Her study uses the voices of the learners themselves to show that institutional agendas, such as auditing 'employability' outcomes, are blind to (and perhaps irrelevant to) the women's own processes of knowledge building and sharing.

Teachers as researchers is another powerful and inspiring response to institutional and policy challenge. Claire Collins and her colleagues have supported adult literacies tutors in undertaking practitioner-led action research (PLAR). As well as outlining the methodology and focus of some of these projects, their piece argues for the value of small-scale, qualitative educational research, based on the experiences and insights of teachers themselves. Sarah Richards tells us more about one of the PLAR projects. Her work at Abingdon and Witney College with students retaking maths GCSE aims to promote 'mathematical resilience' through growth mind set messages. Whilst it may be too early to tell yet if they make a difference, her work is full of possibility for the future.

In Ireland too, there have been a number of parallel action learning projects concerned with adult numeracy, published as case studies by the National Adult literacy Agency (NALA). The article, *Action learning with Irish numeracy tutors*, outlines what three tutors did and the effect it had on their practice. Action Research can be so empowering for teachers, and we are delighted to be able to include the voices of teacher-researchers in this edition.

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Tutor and learner creativity is the final response to institutional and policy challenge. Anne Smith describes how Creative English, a small-scale, community-based experimental project has become a national programme for ESOL learners using drama and role-play. On the same topic, Eabhan Ni Shuilleabháin, a tutor in Bangor, North Wales, shares her experience of using role play in employability-focused provision. The work of both these practitioners addresses the (potential) challenges of low motivation and restricted resources in a fun and effective way.

Learners too continue to remind us of the importance of adult education and why we must persevere with our resistance to its diminution. In this edition, we add three more stories of resilience to those already published in RaPAL Journals 87 and 88. They continue to inspire us with their writing about how education helped them take more control over their lives.

Irene Schwab
UCL Institute of Education
irene.schwab@ucl.ac.uk

Rachel Stublely
University of South Wales
rachel.stublely@southwales.ac.uk

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