

RaPAL/NIACE/UCU Conference Workshop Summary

'Literacy' phased out of Adult Education

Workshop presenters: Sarah Freeman, Sallie Condy and Tara Furlong

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This was a really interesting debate about the current policy shift to dropping the terms literacy and numeracy in favour of adult English and maths. It was a debate that needed longer to reach a consensus. There was agreement that constantly changing our terminology (basic skills, Skills for Life, key skills etc.) is confusing and we would welcome a period of stability. Also, different parties (colleges, JCPs etc.) use different terms. It was felt the terms English and maths evoke connections with schools and particularly with GCSEs however these are the terms policy makers currently recognise. One person suggested that using the same terms for children and adults may join up DfE and BIS which would be positive.

Most group members avoid the terms literacy and numeracy when promoting courses, favouring terms such as 'Flying Start', 'Keeping up with the children', 'Booktime' or 'Report Writing'. There was broad consensus the terms literacy and numeracy held a stigma for a lot of adults and act as a barrier to engagement. The term 'basic skills' is unpopular for the same reason. However, academics still use the terms literacy and literacies and there is potential for disconnect between different people adopting different language to discuss the same thing. One person also raised the point that studying the history of literacy and numeracy would be problematic as different labels are used and this was a strong argument for defending the terms literacy and numeracy.