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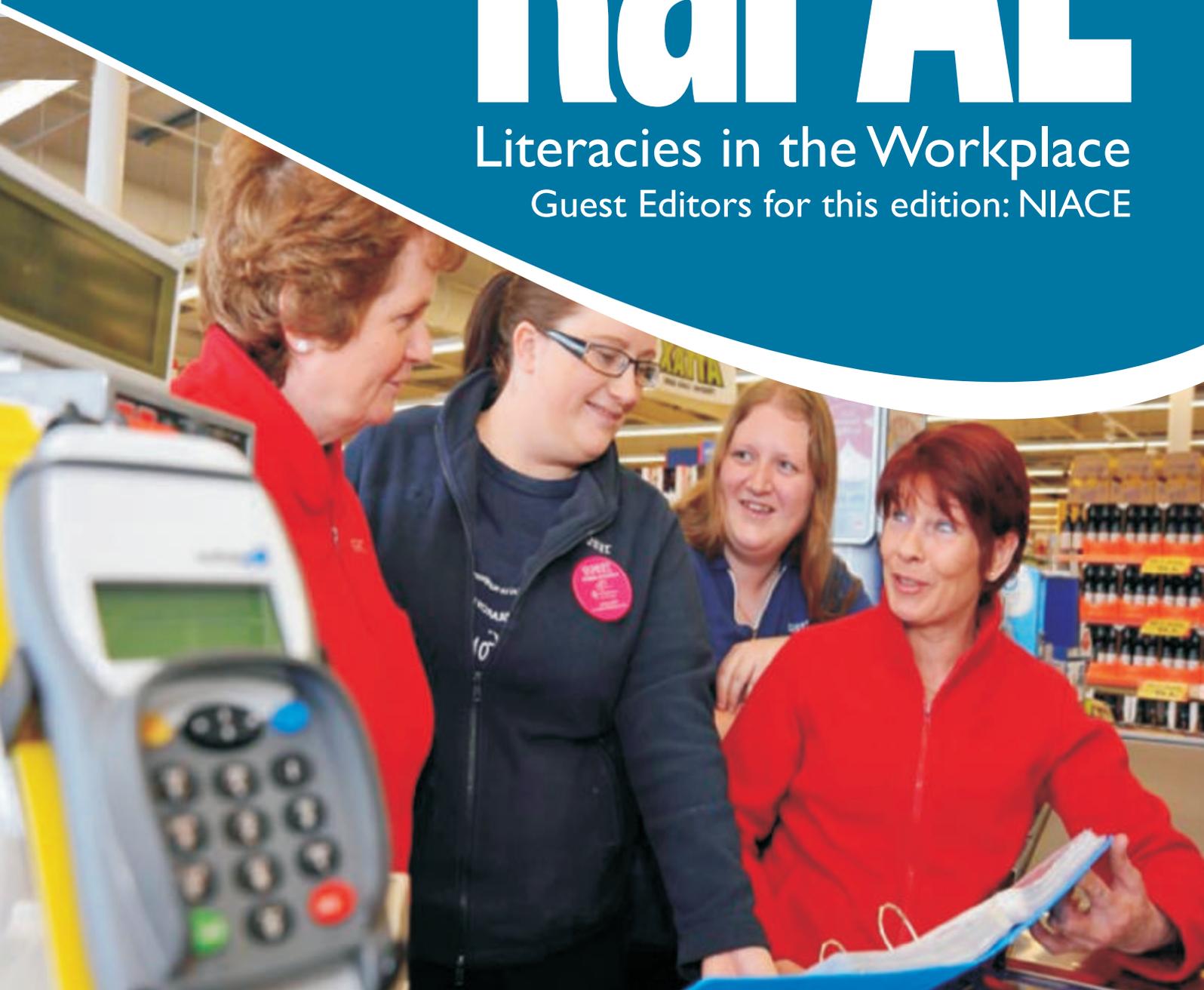
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Summer 2012

RaPAL

Literacies in the Workplace

Guest Editors for this edition: NIACE



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

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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

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.

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* includes 1 pdf copy of each edition of the RaPAL Journal			
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Front cover image © Caters Photographic
 Tesco Old Swan: Previous winners of an ESF Group Award for Adult Learners' Week.

Editorial

Carol Taylor and Jay Derrick

Carol Taylor is Director of Research and Development at the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education. Jay Derrick is a teacher educator and researcher at the Institute of Education, University of London.

There are two 'stand-out' features of this issue of the *RaPAL Journal*: that its theme is Literacy Learning in the Workplace, and that it has been produced jointly and co-operatively with NIACE, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education. For the last twenty years, NIACE has consistently argued for the importance of workplace learning. *Towards a Learning Workforce*, published in 1991, argued to government, employers, and educationalists that workplaces have huge unrealised potential for supporting adult learning, that getting on at work is a powerful motivating factor for individual adults to learn, and that work-based learning also benefits individuals in their family lives and as citizens. In 2003 NIACE published *Expanding Learning in the Workplace*, which made a critical theoretical perspective on effective workplace learning accessible to a non-academic audience for the first time. In 2006, another NIACE publication pointed out, again for the first time to a practitioner audience, the decisive importance of *informal* modes of learning in workplaces and elsewhere, and the consequent misalignment of workforce development policy:

“The government's strategy to stimulate learning in the workplace, based solidly on improving the qualifications of the UK workforce, has so far failed to change workers' learning preferences. When seeking to improve their job performance, all groups, but particularly working-class and low-skilled adults, and those who have had little opportunity to participate in structured learning, still favour informal learning.”

Since 2007, NIACE has become a major publisher of learning materials for workplace learners, many of them designed to support literacy learning embedded in a wide range of work contexts.

It is clear that NIACE's perspectives on learning in the workplace align well with RaPAL's view of literacy as social practice. NIACE's consistent

arguments for effective policy and practice on workplace learning in general are as relevant as ever today, and have, now as then, even more importance in relation to adult literacy learners. A co-operative initiative on workplace literacy learning between NIACE and RaPAL at this moment, seems to make perfect sense.

Although RaPAL and NIACE have never had a close formal relationship, there has always been a significant number of people who have been members of both organisations since RaPAL was launched in 1986. Until the late 1990s, NIACE deliberately avoided major policy interventions on adult literacy, leaving this role to the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), with which it was closely associated. In the 1990s NIACE made adult basic education one of its major areas of activity in terms of acting as a voice for practitioners, lobbying and influencing policy, initiating and supporting research and development, and publishing; the merger with the BSA in 2007 underlined its position as the lead body on literacy and numeracy. It is wholly appropriate, therefore, that NIACE and RaPAL should now have agreed to produce this joint issue of the *RaPAL Journal*, the first in a planned series of co-operative initiatives, to be followed up, it is hoped, with a jointly organised national literacy conference later in 2012.

It has been a pleasure to be able to work together on this co-produced issue of the *Journal* - from the idea, the meetings, the suggestions for papers, the sharing of the tasks and the final *Journal*. It's been a great example of two organisations working together for the best of reasons, on a topic that is of major importance - that workplaces have a huge, and mainly unrealised, potential for supporting adult learning, that getting on at work is highly motivating and that work based learning also benefits families and communities, and develops active citizenship.

This issue takes as its starting point the view that the workplace is not just another location for literacy learning, but a critically important one. It suggests to literacy funders, organisers, and practitioners that it would be useful to pay more attention to workplace learning in general, about which there is an enormous range of experience and research; and it suggests to

organisers of workplace training programmes of all kinds that experienced literacy practitioners may have insights which will help your programmes be more successful. Policy's response to these propositions is assessed in Tony Uden's polemical piece assessing the achievements of Skills for Life in terms of sustainable workplace literacy after 10 years of significant public funding. Alex Braddell follows this with an evaluation of the standard organisational models for workplace literacy programmes which are one of the key products of the Skills for Life policy initiative, and an examination of alternative approaches. Faye McFarlane asks whether a legal entitlement would support workplace literacy learning; teachers' perspectives on workplace literacy are presented by Abi Richards, who works at one of the longest-standing workplace literacy programmes, at Ginster's in Cornwall; and Rachel Öner discusses the difficulties ESOL learners are experiencing at present in the workplace context.

There is a strong focus in this issue on the perspectives of learners themselves. Sue Southwood and Davinder Sandhu report on UNISON's recent survey of attitudes to workplace learning – 27,000 UNISON members responded to this survey which makes it one of the largest ever carried out, and an important database for further research. Judith Swift, the TUC's National Literacy Development Officer, looks at the developing role of Union Learning Reps, arguing that this is one of the undisputed successes in workplace learning over the past decade. We also have the powerful personal testimony of John Maskell, a Post Office

employee and Outstanding Adult Learner Award winner, writing about the ups and downs of his learning journey through work.

Finally, we have an article on the use of e-readers in the classroom, which, while not specifically focused on workplace learning, highlights the use of new technologies for teaching and learning, and will give those working with learners in the workplace an indication of how to use e-readers to support literacy learning.

The issue is rounded off with two review articles: in the first, Jay Derrick reviews *Improving Literacy at Work* by Alison Wolf and Karen Evans, which reports on the 5-year longitudinal research project investigating the question: what benefits do workplace literacy programmes provide for employers, for learners, and for society in general? In the second, Sarah Freeman looks at *The Fundamentals of Workplace Learning*, the new book by Knud Illeris, Professor of Lifelong Learning at the Danish University of Education.

Welcome to this issue of the RaPAL Journal, jointly produced with NIACE. We hope that it will generate ideas, debates, and feedback! Please contact us at: info@rapal.org.uk

References

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NIACE and RaPAL are collaborating with UCU
to run a conference on basic skills

28 September 2012

UCU Head Office, London

More details to follow

