


# Editorial



## **Introducing RaPAL**

Welcome to this free taster issue of the RaPAL Journal. Its purpose is to introduce RaPAL and its activities to a wider range of people and to give a flavour of the kinds of articles we publish in our journal. We hope you will find this small selection enjoyable and stimulating and that you will decide to support our work by becoming a member. As a member you will be entitled to receive a copy of the journal three times per year. For more details of our activities and of other articles we have published recently please visit our website <http://www.rapal.org.uk>

## **What is RaPAL?**

RaPAL is the only British national organisation that focuses on the role of literacy in adult life. We are an independent network of learners, teachers, managers and researchers in adult basic education. RaPAL was established in 1985 and is supported by membership subscription only. Any individual or institution may join who sympathises with our aims. We have strong links with a range of organisations and individuals in other countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA and regularly publish articles from contributors in these countries.

## **What do we stand for?**

RaPAL campaigns for the rights of all adults to have access to the full range of literacies in their lives. We offer a critique of current policy and practice where it is based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill. We argue for broader ideas of literacy starting from theories of language and literacy acquisition that take account of social context. The theories we draw on are broadly known as the new literacy studies.

RaPAL encourages a broad range of collaborative and reflective research involving all participants in literacy work as partners. We support democratic practices in adult literacy work and believe that a learning democracy can only be achieved if teaching, learning and research are kept together. A dynamic relationship between research and practice keeps the meaning of literacy open and responsive to the variety of changing social contexts and practices that exist in our society.

We recognise the role of professional

development in this process and of activities which enable learners to make their views known, in all media. As we see it, students are central to a learning democracy and their participation in the decision-making processes of practice and research is essential.

## **How do we work?**

The main elements of RaPAL's work are the publication of 3 Journals per year, other occasional publications, and the organisation of one conference each year, at which we hold the AGM. Through this work, we encourage communication between those working on literacy issues with adults. We especially look for opportunities to increase student participation in research and publishing activities.

We critically examine the assumptions on which ABE practice is based, through encouraging and publicising a broad range of reflective research. Such research helps us to articulate the theory behind our practice; to keep asking questions about the significance of literacy in people's lives; to challenge the political uses of common myths about literacy (such as: that lack of literacy causes unemployment; that lack of literacy means low intelligence; that parents pass literacy difficulties onto their children; that literacy can be adequately defined and measured as a narrow set of skills).

Because it is not enough just to ask questions, we work to make other organisations aware of RaPAL. We link with sympathetic organisations working with literacy at all levels of the educational system (including HE and FE) and in community contexts. We particularly value our international links which enable us to compare experiences and learn from other countries.

Our current priorities are to take a more active part in national debates about literacy, to develop and publicise alternative views of literacy and to contribute to the professional development of staff in ABE.

The main organisational structure of RaPAL is the Management Committee and the Journal Committee which meet in different locations around the country. All members of these committees meet together at the AGM.

### **How can you get involved?**

We are a friendly group open to new members and new ideas. In becoming a member of the Management Committee you can influence what RaPAL is and might become in the future; make contact with people around the country who share your interests; and find out how to produce a national publication! For most of the roles, all you need is a contact phone and address and an interest in discussing your ideas with other members. As a first step to becoming more involved in RaPAL, you can become an ordinary member of the Management Committee and come to meetings without taking a specific role.

We also need people to act as local advocates for RaPAL. This involves encouraging people to join; telling them about the RaPAL Journal and our conference; encouraging links between research and practice; and distributing leaflets.

For more information please contact Fiona Macdonald at:

**Fiona.Macdonald@communitiesscotland.gsi.gov.uk**

We welcome contributions for each of these sections and are happy to discuss your ideas and proposals with you. We want the RaPAL Journal to continue its vibrant tradition of publishing views from all parts of the field. Please contact the journal co-ordinator, Deirdre Parkinson at:

**deirdre@dp-associates.org.uk**

### **The RaPAL Journal**

Our full journal is published three times per year and includes the following sections:

- 1. Ideas for teaching**  
*Descriptive and reflective pieces on teaching and learning to meet the needs of current teachers in this field. The contributions must demonstrate democratic practice.*
- 2. Developing Research and Practice**  
*An open-ended category for a varied range of contributions. We want to include articles which show people trying out ideas, pushing back boundaries alongside analysis and critique.*
- 3. Research and Practice: Multi-disciplinary perspectives**  
*A section for more sustained pieces of analysis about research, policy and practice which has refereed journal status.*