

## References

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Michael W. Apple  
 University of Wisconsin and Institute of Education, University of London  
 Apple@education.wisc.edu  
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**Changing faces of adult literacy, language and numeracy: A critical history**, by Mary Hamilton and Yvonne Hillier, Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books, 2006, 208 pp., £18.99 (paperback), ISBN 1-85-856348-8

This book is a major output of the Economic and Social Research Council research project 'Changing Faces of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy: A Critical History of Policy and Practice 1970–2000' (ESRC Ref. No. R000239387), a collaboration between Lancaster University, City University and the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, London. It is the first comprehensive historical study of adult literacy, language and numeracy (ALLN) in England covering the period from the 1970s adult literacy campaign to the eve of the government's 'Skills for Life' strategy to improve adult literacy and numeracy in England.

The project aimed to identify the key issues and forces that have driven change in the ALLN field and to investigate and represent the perspectives of the main protagonists through oral history interviews. The research team collected documentary and statistical evidence and carried out 200 oral history interviews with representatives of three interest groups: 'policy actors' (decision-makers in government and national agencies); practitioners teaching and organising within ALLN programmes; and adults with basic skills needs. Four case study sites give a geographical spread and a range of urban and rural areas: North East London; Norfolk; Leicestershire; and Manchester. Data were analysed using an interpretative, pragmatic and deliberative process known as 'deliberative policy analysis' (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). The study is situated in a social practice framework that emphasises the uses, meanings and values of reading, writing and numeracy in everyday activities, and the social relationships and institutions within which these are embedded.

The project has created an archive of material accessible through the project website (<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/edres/changingfaces/>); items may be browsed via <http://litcent.lancs.ac.uk/RIS/RISWEB.ISA>. The website (which is still being populated) also includes details of the research team, the methods and activities of the project, timelines, analysis, findings and the project's final project report, as well as lists of publications and other resources. Together, the project outputs constitute an invaluable resource for the use of present and future participants and researchers in the field.

The book is well produced, with comprehensive and informative appendices with timelines and lists of archival sources and interviewees quoted and a useful index, glossary and bibliography. It traces the story of ALLN through four policy phases: (1) the mid-1970s, when a campaign led by voluntary agencies worked in partnership with the BBC to bring adult literacy to public attention; (2) the 1980s, with ALLN provision supported by local education authority (LEA) adult education services and voluntary organisations, and leadership, training

and development funding from the national Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (later the Basic Skills Agency); (3) 1989–1998, with the decline of LEA funding, statutory status for ALLN education and a move into the further education system; and (4) 1998–2000, the era of the Moser Report (Department for Education and Employment 1999) and the dawn of Skills for Life. ALLN is presented as a key case study of change in post-16 educational provision, while situating the UK experience in an international context. ‘Enduring tensions’ that emerged as the field developed from the creative and informal structures of the 1970s to today’s more formal and systematic provision are outlined, including: the professionalisation of practitioners, many of whom started as volunteers; pedagogical issues of working with a negotiated or a standardised curriculum; tensions between vocational and more open learning goals; the alignment of ALLN with the formal education system; difficulties over naming the field and its participants; and responses to the introduction of high-stakes targets and an audit culture that shape notions of ‘good practice’. The authors note that, as a fragmented and marginalised field for many years, ALLN provision has always been affected by structures designed for other areas of social policy and they therefore examine emerging practice both within and beyond ALLN.

The book’s outstanding achievement lies in two main areas. Firstly, as a study of social policy, it gives a cogent and coherent account of three decades of change in a complex field which is still ‘raw’ in research terms, highlighting the continuing importance of work which has been little regarded by the wider world. Secondly, as oral history, the book gives voice to the various ‘actors’ who have shaped the ALLN field.

The inclusion of adult learners’ (and ‘would-be’ and ‘won’t-be’ learners’) voices is particularly welcome, given their absence from the ‘consultative spaces’ of ALLN policy development, noted in the book. The book draws on interviews with 78 members of the National Child Development Survey cohort who fitted the profile of the government’s target groups for Skills for Life. Many of these people, who were aged 44 at the time, had not participated in formal education or training since leaving school. When asked to comment on a range of advertising for ALLN since the 1970s, their response is telling: they felt that ALLN ‘would be good for people who need it, but did not count themselves as being in that group’ (147). This reveals something of the difficulties faced by those attempting to engage adults in ALLN learning and raises questions about the notion of ‘need’ that has underlain successive initiatives since the 1970s.

Inevitably, given the wealth of data and limited space available, lines could have been drawn differently. I should declare an interest here: as a former ALLN practitioner and now an academic specialising in numeracy, I was interviewed for the project and contributed papers and other artefacts to the archive. The hegemonic status of literacy within ALLN, noted on page 61, is starkly reflected in the balance of references and overall focus of the book. As a result some important but lesser-known aspects of the numeracy experience are omitted. For example, the innovative but sadly short-lived ‘Take Away Times’ (Colwell 1998) is not mentioned in the otherwise excellent section on students’ writing and ‘crossover’ between domains is downplayed (Tomlin 2002). The practitioner ‘voice’ speaks most clearly through the text, so that, while ALLN practitioners’ move away from voluntarism towards professionalism is well documented, the shift from voluntarism to compulsion for some learners for whom receipt of welfare benefits has become conditional on attending ALLN provision (O’Grady and Atkin 2006) is mentioned only in passing.

Overall, however, this timely and important book amply fulfils the project’s promise to ‘offer the field understandings of its origins, help illuminate present dilemmas and identify what still needs to be done to effectively support adult learners, practitioners and managers’. It is an essential read for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers, including especially anyone

undertaking research, study or training and professional development in ALLN, and has much to recommend it for those with a more general interest in adults' access to education and training.

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Diana Coben  
King's College London  
diana.coben@kcl.ac.uk  
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**The philosophy of nurse education**, edited by John Drummond and Paul Standish, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2007, 264 pp., £19.99 (paperback), ISBN 1-40-394833-X

The debate about the most effective method of, and home for, the delivery for nursing education is long running, from when changes were made to the pre-registration curriculum in the 1970s when training was delivered by nursing schools linked to local hospitals, through to the transfer of nursing education to higher education institutions in the 1990s, following a similar move in the USA in the 1970s and in Australia in the 1980s. The debate continues today. The move to a higher education environment may have represented for many the intellectualisation of nursing with greater importance being placed on teaching theory, whilst work-based learning and the role of professional practice play a lesser role (Royal College of Nursing 2007).

The complexity of what it means to be a nurse, the changes to the profession during the last few decades, and indeed the challenges faced in defining nursing as a profession (Royal College of Nursing 2003) have understandably contributed to conflicting views of how best to educate and train people to become good nurses. In this way nursing education is different from medical education, and higher education institutions as the most appropriate home for medical education have not been questioned in the same way, despite the importance of professional practice. This is probably because despite the modern approach of integrated learning in medicine, the science education involved in medical training sits more easily with the perceptions of traditional university learning. However, measuring 'professionalism' and the qualities required to be a good practitioner in terms of learning outcomes within the curriculum are challenges faced by both medical and nursing education, and indeed other professional education programmes.

*The Philosophy of Nurse Education* begins with an engaging introduction by the editors exploring ethics, politics and philosophy in and of nursing education and educational policy. The editors argue that although the current environment is less facilitative to the consideration of the philosophy of education, that is all the more reason for philosophy to play an important role (22).