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ABSTRACT

This document is a summary of the proceedings of a symposium that was attended by more than 100 adult literacy practitioners, researchers, and government officials in Ontario (Canada). The largest part of the document consists of summaries of the issues and policy/program options discussed in relation to the following aspects of adult literacy programming: program evaluation, recognition of learning, workplace/work force literacy, literacy and aboriginal peoples, practitioner training and accreditation, literacy and the survival of cultural and linguistic minorities, volunteers in literacy, integration versus segregation of "special needs" populations, issues for literacy in the 1990s, community based literacy, literacy and youth, and learner participation. The remainder of the document consists of the following: reports and recommendations regarding these aspects of adult literacy programming that were presented at the final plenary, the names/addresses of invited participants, and lists of French and English videotapes and scripts of roundtable discussions on issues in adult literacy. (MN)

Proceedings of "Issues and Options in Adult Literacy: A National Symposium"

Held in Toronto

June 17 - 20, 1991

Literacy Branch

Ontario Ministry of Education

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- Arthur Bull, who co-ordinated the planning for the symposium and the writing of this report

- Stan Jones and Raymond Day, who consulted with provincial and territorial governments, assisted with the planning, facilitated many sessions and wrote the individual workshop reports in this document

- other participants who facilitated sessions, recorded, and presented reports and recommendations at the final plenary.

Introduction

1. Background

This document is the summary of the proceedings of ***"Issues and Options in Adult Literacy: A National Symposium"***, which was held in Toronto in June, 1991. This event, sponsored by the Literacy Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education and the National Literacy Secretariat of Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, brought together more than 100 adult literacy practitioners, researchers and government officials to discuss a range of key issues about adult literacy provision in Canada. The symposium was held in conjunction with the third annual meeting of provincial, territorial and federal government ministries and departments responsible for adult literacy. The previous two meetings of this kind, hosted by the Nova Scotia and British Columbia governments, had provided a useful forum for these government officials to share information, make contacts and discuss common concerns. The 1991 meeting, which was scheduled to be hosted by the Ontario Government in Toronto, provided the occasion for adding an event which would bring together a wider circle of individuals with experience and knowledge of literacy practice and research, to take part in a symposium. The symposium was four days long, from a Monday afternoon to Thursday morning. In all, there were twenty sessions on specific topics, two plenary sessions and a reception. The intergovernmental meeting followed the symposium on Thursday and Friday of the same week.

In many ways the symposium was the first event of its kind in the adult literacy field in Canada. This is not to say that there had not been important and useful national conferences on adult literacy over the years. Between the first national literacy conference in 1975, and the numerous conferences celebrating International Literacy Year in 1990, there were a number of conferences which provided important watersheds for the adult literacy field in Canada. But this symposium differed from these conferences in a number of important ways.

By necessity, most previous literacy conferences had focused on immediate issues which were specific to particular sectors of the literacy field, whether geographical, cultural, linguistic, or methodological. The symposium, on the other hand, was designed to address, as much as possible, issues which were common to the whole literacy field across the country. For government, the issues were those most related to program quality, effectiveness of learning outcomes and accountability. After a period of consultation (see below) these issues were chosen:

- Program Evaluation
- Recognition of Learning

- Workplace/Workforce Literacy
- Literacy and Aboriginal Peoples
- Practitioner Training and Accreditation
- Literacy and the Survival of Cultural and Linguistic Minorities
- Volunteers and Literacy
- *"Special Needs"* Populations: Integration vs. Segregation
- Literacy in the 1990's
- Community-Based Literacy
- Literacy and Youth
- Learner Involvement.

The symposium also differed from other conferences in terms of the kinds of participants it brought together. Only a diverse group of individuals representing a cross-section of the Canadian literacy field could address these issues in a broad, national context. This meant ensuring participation which reflected literacy work as it is practised across Canada; participants were invited from all geographical regions, from a variety of program settings, and from a wide range of cultural and linguistic communities. (To further ensure this involvement, the symposium was held in both official languages with simultaneous translation, as well as translation of all print handouts and information.) This is a difficult thing to do in Canada, and it is especially difficult in a field as complex as the literacy field. The participants list gives a sense of how diverse this group was. It was the first time such a group of Canadian literacy practitioners and researchers had been brought together, for these kinds of in-depth discussions.

The design of the symposium also differed from the design of past conferences. Rather than providing a format of workshops by experts from whom participants could learn about aspects of adult literacy, the symposium provided a forum for discussion of issues between the participants themselves. In this sense it was truly a symposium, in which every participant was a resource person. And for the first time, these resource people were all Canadians; it was a recognition that the real expertise on adult literacy in Canada could only be found within our own borders. This was, among other things, a measure of the maturity of the adult literacy field in Canada.

2. Purpose

Another significant difference between the symposium and past conferences was its purpose. This was as much due to the situation of the adult literacy field at the time, as it was to the aims of the organizers. To understand this purpose, it is first necessary to understand the context of the symposium, in terms of the development of the literacy field in Canada.

The history of this development can be roughly divided into two periods. The first, dating from the mid-1970's to about 1986-7, was a period of steady, incremental development, limited by the lack of major government support in most provinces and territories. This is not to say there were not significant breakthroughs in the field, particularly in some of the provinces, but the progress was slow, and support hard to come by. The second period, from 1986-91 saw an enormous increase in adult literacy activity. This was the result of a combination of factors, primarily the development of literacy policies and programs by a number of provincial and territorial governments, as well as by the Federal Government.

The immediate result was an increase in the number of literacy programs. For example, in Ontario, the number of community-based programs grew in this period from 30-40 to more than 150. As well as an increase in the quantity of programs, there was also an increase in kinds of programs available. Literacy provision was being developed for a far wider variety of cultural and linguistic populations, including Aboriginal communities, Francophone communities outside Quebec, and minority communities. New kinds of literacy programs emerged to meet a wider variety of needs: workplace programs, family literacy programs, programs for the hearing impaired, programs in correctional institutions and many others. Within many existing programs, efforts were made to serve a wider range of learners, including people with disabilities, laid off workers and other groups.

There was also an increase in the diversity of kinds of organizations offering adult literacy provision. Of all the possible organizational structures, no single model predominated across the country. There continued to be a mixture of program sponsors, including community-based organizations, libraries, community colleges, school boards, band councils, employers and unions.

Partly as a result of this new diversity of contexts and the challenges it presented, and partly as a result of federal funding for projects, this was also a period of intensive innovation and the introduction of new approaches and methodologies. Parallel to this, there was an increase in research activity about literacy in Canada, at all levels, ranging from local needs assessments to the massive Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities, undertaken by Statistics Canada.

This expansion created a need for the sharing of information and discussion about issues in literacy, at a national level. More than ever, literacy practitioners

needed to be in touch with each other. In many cases, people were doing the same kind of literacy work, in the same kind of settings, without knowing that their counterparts in other provinces and territories were covering the same ground. For example, workplace projects, which were emerging throughout this period in most provinces, had difficulty finding out about other projects elsewhere, working in the same economic sectors. This applied equally to literacy work relating to youth, parents, and rural communities. Based on this need alone, an event such as the symposium would have been justified. Many of the participants expressed their initial enthusiasm for the event for this reason alone.

But beyond the immediate need for sharing information and ideas, this period of expanded activity had created a more fundamental need in the literacy field. This can be summed up by two questions: *"What have we learned?"* and *"How can we apply this to our future efforts?"* By 1990, International Literacy Year, many people in the Canadian literacy field were ready to look back at their work, to take stock and to think about their future. This need takes different forms depending on who is asking the questions.

From the point of view of government funding bodies, it relates to the need to establish criteria for evaluating programs and projects that have been funded, based on the goals and standards intrinsic to the field itself. Such evaluation would then provide a basis for allocating increasingly limited resources in the future, in a way that would ensure the most efficient and effective results. By 1991, most of these government bodies were emerging from a period of intensive program and project development and support, and the implementation of new government policies on adult literacy. These policies also needed to be modified and, again, this would depend on a sound process of evaluation.

From the point of view of national, provincial and regional networks and umbrella organizations, this need relates to the evaluation of past efforts in promoting the issue of adult literacy and the support of programs in the field. Many of these organizations came into existence after the advent of federal funding, and were emerging from a period of organizational development and structuring. In order to plan their development and establish priorities, this process would also help them to set future directions.

From the point of view of literacy programs themselves, this need involved looking back at past achievements to determine what had worked and what had not worked, in order to plan for the future. This process of self-evaluation at the program level is the most critical, and would be based on input from adult literacy learners themselves.

In the end, these are all aspects of the same process, and they all share the same need: the need for standards to improve quality, effectiveness and accountability. Only by agreeing on some common measures, to provide a framework for judging past efforts and for planning future efforts, will this process be

meaningful. These standards, which are sometimes called *"standards of good practice"*, following the British example, can be arrived at by a number of different routes.

One approach is to draw on the expertise and research of a selected group of experts and consultants. While this approach has the advantage of being efficient in terms of time, it runs the risk of missing the input of those who know most about the work that has been happening: the literacy practitioners and the learners themselves. Another approach is to document literacy practice as it is happening in the field. This aims at identifying standards of good practice by looking at what actually works in the field. This approach goes a long way towards reaching these standards, but its limitation is that it can only look at what IS being done but not at what is NOT being done. It is unable to identify gaps in services and new approaches which could fill them.

A third approach to identifying these standards, one which was the guiding principle behind the symposium, combines these approaches in a larger process. This approach rests on the belief that standards of good practice can best be identified through a thorough process of exchange of ideas, debate and information sharing, as well as research and documentation of practice in the field. It is also based on ongoing interaction between different parts of the literacy field and different levels of government responsible for literacy.

The purpose of the symposium was to contribute to this process, by providing a *"jumping off point"* for a wider range of discussion, debate and exchange across the literacy field in Canada. By asking the participants to draw up principles relating to the various topics, and by documenting the results of their discussions, the symposium could provide a *"snapshot"* of the field's views on a range of issues and options.

Principles framed in this way would in turn be useful to anyone working towards identifying these kinds of standards of quality for the adult literacy field. This might work in a wide variety of contexts relating to adult literacy, including:

- government officials drawing up specific policies on adult literacy
- non-governmental agencies wishing to define their role with regard to literacy
- literacy organizations and programs in a process of organizational development, long range planning or self-evaluation.

It is important to note here that the symposium was not meant in any way to specifically represent the Canadian literacy field. Such representation would necessarily require the participation of practitioners, volunteers and, above all, learners, based on a democratically structured process of selection. In the absence of such a process, the symposium brought together a group of people

who had working experience related to the issues under discussion, in a way that would provide a *"cross-section"* of points of view from the literacy field across the country. The organizers of the symposium invited participants as individuals, rather than as representatives of their organizations and constituencies. Participants at the symposium were never asked to speak for anyone but themselves.

3. Process

In order to organize the symposium in a way that would achieve its purpose, three things needed to be done: to develop a list of topics for discussion, to come up with a list of names of participants and to design a process for the event itself. Because these tasks required input from the literacy field across the country, two consultants - Stan Jones, of Carleton University and Raymond Day of ALPHA Consultants - were asked to conduct extensive consultations early in the symposium's planning phase. The consultants and conference organizers addressed the three tasks as follows.

1) List of Topics

Drawing on a wide range of sources, as well as their own considerable experience and that of the Literacy Branch, the consultants drew up a preliminary list of possible topics. The criteria for these topics were that they were:

- common to the field across the country
- issues which were relevant to evaluation and long term planning
- issues which might stimulate useful discussions in a symposium setting.

The consultants then took the initial list on a round of consultations with provincial and federal governments, organizations and a number of other individuals, to get feedback. From this input the organizers were able to put together a list of eight topics. Four further sessions were left open and participants were asked to identify any other key issues they wished to discuss. Using these responses, four more topics were added. Because of time limitations, some important issues had to be left out and others were amalgamated into more general topics. It is a measure of the thoroughness of these consultations that the list of topics was almost completely different than the initial list which had been drawn up.

2) **Participants**

In order to bring together a group of people who would be most likely to participate in the symposium in a way that would help it achieve its purpose, the organizers used the following general criteria.

Participants at the symposium would:

- have actively worked on one or more of the topics under discussion, either in the field or in a research capacity
- be drawn from a wide spectrum of the literacy field in Canada, generally reflecting geographical, cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. This meant a rough parity between Anglophone and Francophone and a significant number of participants from the Aboriginal literacy field.
- be interested in being part of the symposium and able to participate in an active and informed way in all the sessions which they attended.

The same round of consultations mentioned above was used to draw up the list of participants. After a difficult process of selection, a list of participants was drawn up. One of the positive things that emerged from this process was the discovery that there are more experienced and informed literacy practitioners than ever before; unfortunately, this meant that only a small fraction of these people could be invited to attend.

3) **The Process of the Event**

In order to address the twelve issues in a way that would stimulate the discussions, as well as specific recommendations, the following process was designed.

- Each issue would be addressed by one session. Participants would choose which session they wanted to be in. (Because of the numbers involved, some participants went into sessions identified as their second choice.)
- Each session was divided into two three hour parts, except for the last four sessions, which had a single three hour discussion.

- Sessions were given a suggested sequence for their discussions, made up of the following elements:

  a) a short introduction to the topic at hand, either in the form of a videotape of a round table discussion on the issue[1], or some other presentation

  b) the presentation of a short *"case history"* relating to the issue, in a way that might draw out some different perspectives and options

  c) a general discussion of the issues and options

  d) the formulation of recommendations in the form of standards relating to the issue, based on the group's preceding discussion. These would be presented in the final plenary session.

- Each session was assigned a team of facilitators to help the group meet its goals, to link the two parts of the session and to finalize the sessions's recommendations.

This process for the discussion was suggested. While some groups used it as a framework for discussions, others modified it or developed an alternative process. The only required part of the process was that every session produce a set of recommendations.

4. Results

The results of this process are contained in the summaries of the sessions, which follow. Because all the sessions, including the plenary sessions, were recorded and transcribed, the original thought was to simply present the transcriptions themselves as a record of the symposium. It soon became apparent that this would result in a huge, unorganized and largely unusable document. As a more practical option, the sessions have been summarized with a view to capturing the key exchanges, points of views and deliberations leading to recommendations on each issue. Each summary follows a general outline made up of:

- background on the issue
- a summary of the discussion
- the recommendations tabled by the session.

[1] These videotapes were part of a series, "Roundtable Discussions on Issues in Adult Literacy", which were produced by the Literacy Branch in 1991. A complete list and further information is listed at the end of this document.

Taken as whole, these summaries reveal two striking, and seemingly contradictory, features: how much the sessions differed from one another and how much they had in common. The twelve sessions varied greatly, both in the way the discussions went and in the recommendations they produced. Each one followed a unique course toward its goal and each took a different tack through its issues and options. T.e sessions do, however, fall into some general categories, according to the degree of consensus that each session produced.

In some discussions, there was complete agreement about how to approach the topic in question and the time was spent in clearly articulating strong principles. For example, the session called *"'Special Needs' Populations: Integrations vs. Segregation"* spent little time choosing between segregation and integration. As the session reporter put it, *"Integration won hands down"*. Instead, the participants focused on developing a forceful, clear set of principles. In the same way, the session on *"Literacy and Aboriginal Peoples"* started from a similar consensus on basic issues and options and was able to refer tc previous reports which had already articulated their underlying principles. Likewise, in the session on *"Learner Involvement"* the discussion was not about whether or not to have increased learner involvement, but on how to bring it about.

In a few of the sessions, there were discussions which began with clear statements of the differences between the participants' perspectives on the issue, but which progressed toward the common ground between them. For example, the session on *"Community-based Literacy"*, began with descriptions of two distinct traditions of community-based literacy programming, in the Francophone and Anglophone fields. Much of the session was given to articulating these different definitions of community-based and popular education literacy programs. But by the end of the discussion, the participants were working together to frame principles which would apply to the whole range of diverse programs which fall under the general label of community-based. There was a recognition that there was in fact something important to be said about community-based literacy as a whole. In the session called *"Literacy and the Survival of Cultural and Linguistic Minorities"* an even stronger solidarity was struck between some very different linguistic and cultural groups from across the country: a recognition that they shared a similar relationship with the mainstream, majority cultures with which they lived. This kind of solidarity produced some of the clearest and most moving results of the symposium.

In contrast to this, there were sessions in which there were quite divergent points of view on the issues, which were stated but never entirely resolved. These discussions produced little consensus. For example, the session on *"Practitioner Training and Accreditation"* was able to agree on the importance of practitioner training, but not on key issues, such as who is responsible for it, what the curriculum should be and whether there should be any system of accreditation. Likewise, the session *"Recognition of Learning"* found little value in current systems of recognizing learning, but failed to come to a consensus about alternative systems which would better serve the learners. In some cases,

different perspectives simply reflected the differences in literacy practice in different parts of the country. In these discussions, the groups spent their time, not so much disagreeing, as articulating these differences and trying to put them in a larger, national context. For example, the session on *"Volunteers and Literacy"* had to come to terms with at least two different approaches to the use of volunteers in literacy programs. Although they were able to come up with some important common principles regarding volunteers, they also made it clear that, when addressing this issue, the contextual differences could not be ignored.

Finally, there were discussions which dealt with very broad issues, touching on some of the most fundamental aspects of adult literacy in Canada. These sessions spent most of their time trying to frame their issues and options. They did this remarkably well considering the scope of the issues they were given to address in a short length of time. For example, the session on *"Literacy in the 1990's"*, in a three hour period, was able to outline a number of general, long-term strategies for the Canadian literacy field. Likewise, the session on *"Program Evaluation"* found that it could not address the issue of evaluation apart from the need for a clear policy framework. These kinds of sessions were also the hardest to summarize, because they tended to widen, rather than narrow, the scope of their issues.

There were a number of reasons for this diversity in the kind of discussion that took place.

- The topics under discussion were quite different from each other, in terms of their complexity and scope. They ranged from wide open topics like *"Literacy in the 90's"* to very specific topics like *"Learner Accreditation"*.

- Different groups adopted different processes. Although a process for the sessions was suggested, most of the sessions modified the process to a greater or lesser degree.

- The simple reality of group dynamics - that is, any group, over a two day, six hour period will take on a life of its own. This is compounded by the different sizes of the groups, which varied from 8 to 30 in number.

These differences were not only predictable - they were in fact desirable. Given the variety of issues being addressed, any more uniformity in the discussions would have had a distorting effect, by forcing them into too similar a mould. Each topic required its own particular kind of discussion. Furthermore, in terms of the symposium's purpose, it is important to note that disagreement was as important as agreement. That is, if the symposium aimed at giving a *"snapshot"* of the field's views, consensus is not necessarily the only useful result. Much more important was a clear articulation of the key points of view, however divergent. Naturally, the degree of divergence would differ from issue to issue.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this symposium is that, despite widely differing kinds of discussion involving such a variety of points of view, the sessions were all able to table such clear, cogent and specific recommendations. Taken as whole, these recommendations provide an authoritative (if preliminary) list of principles which touch on the most fundamental aspects of adult literacy practice. When reading these, however, it is important to bear in mind that these recommendations were formulated with different purposes in mind, taking different forms. The recommendations, like the discussions, fall into a number of categories:

- recommendations which provide a set of guidelines for standards for that aspect of literacy practice. Most of the sessions fall into this category.

- recommendations which provide these kinds of guidelines, along with in-depth statements of principles which underlie them. The recommendations from the sessions on *"Literacy and Aboriginal Peoples"*, *"Special Needs"* and *"The Survival of Cultural and Linguistic Minorities"* stand out as example of this category.

- recommendations which provide a few key principles which could be a starting point for addressing the issues in question. *"Recognition of Learning"* and *"Practitioner Training and Accreditation"* fall into this category.

- recommendations which make general statements framing the issues and options, indicating the scope and importance of the issue. Among these were *"Learner Involvement"* and *"Literacy and Youth"*.

As well as these differences, and perhaps more surprisingly, the sessions also had a great deal in common. These commonalities reflected what was shared by this very diverse group from across Canada, dealing with this wide range of issues. They run like connecting strands throughout the transcriptions of the proceedings, usually relating to attitudes and approaches rather than specific opinions, not often stated explicitly, but always present, underpinning the opinions and discussions.

Most notable of these common features was a sense of commitment to the field of adult literacy. Again and again, the statements of the participants reflect the values held by the speakers, values which constantly informed their opinions about literacy. Nowhere is literacy practice reduced to a merely technical or methodological activity. Whether these values relate to the survival of a linguistic or cultural minority, to the equitable access to employment-related training, to the empowerment of individuals in their communities or to the principle that adult education serves the *whole* community, they all shared a common base in their commitment to social change and social justice. Every session, in its own way, reflected this shared, if unspoken, base of values and commitment.

In many cases these values took the form of specific principles for adult literacy practice. Among these were the commonly held convictions that adult literacy education should be:

- organized according to principles of democratic participation of adult learners rather than *"top-down"* decision-making
- developed to reflect the specific cultural, linguistic and economic needs and natures of the communities being served
- based on a learner-centred approach to adult education, in which the learner is an active partner in the learning process.

These principles emerged in most of the sessions and informed many of the symposium's recommendations.

Along with this sense of commitment, there was a common willingness to listen to new points of view and work towards compromise. Especially in sessions where there were marked differences in approach and attitude to the issue under discussion, participants showed a flexibility and interest in finding common ground with practitioners and researchers with very different backgrounds in adult literacy practice. Without this flexibility, it would have been impossible to arrive at the recommendations that were produced. In many of the sessions, they reached points of impasse where it would have easily bogged them down, yet, in every case, the participants ended up by pulling together lists of standards which reflected the whole group.

On a more practical level, the sessions reveal a shared concern with the future of adult literacy provision in Canada, particularly as it relates to government policy and funding. In some sessions, this took the form of uneasiness with the possibility of the application of government standards from above. For example, in the sessions on *"Recognition of Learning"* and *"Practitioner Training"*, participants expressed caution about any kind of levels or standards of accreditation, either for learner or for practitioners. In most of the sessions, on the other hand, there was a strong sense of need for a better developed policy framework for government support of adult literacy programs. This point was made several times in the closing plenary session, and recurred in many of the working sessions, whether they related to large scope issues such as *"Literacy in the 90's"* or to more specific issues like *"Community-Based Literacy"*.

It is possible, taking the results of these discussions as a whole, to draw some conclusions about the current state of adult literacy work in Canada. Any such generalizations are of course not based on any kind of research, but rather on the fact that a unique cross-section from across the country was present. The most striking, yet predictable, of the things that the symposium told us was that what we have been calling the *"literacy field"* in Canada is in fact made up of an extremely diverse collection of organizations working in a very wide range of

cultural, linguistic, and geographical settings, often towards different kinds of goals, often using different methodologies. Such diversity can probably be found in many other fields of endeavour taken as a whole across the country, but for the adult literacy field there is even more so, since literacy itself is a phenomenon which is specific to context. When we ask the classic question about literacy *"Literacy for What?"* we are liable to get a lot of different answers from across the country. There has never been one single entity which we can call *"a generic adult literacy program"* in Canada. And the Canadian literacy field can never be taken as a single, monolithic whole. The symposium once again reminded us of this diversity.

At the same time, the symposium's results show that there is a lot of commonality between different parts of the literacy field in Canada. Sometimes this commonality was shared between cultural groups which, despite their differences, found that they have similar struggles within the context of the *"mainstream"* culture. Sometime there were shared concerns about large issues such as evaluation, policy and government funding. Sometimes there were shared interests in specific aspects of literacy practice, ranging from practitioner training to learner involvement. Taken together, all these commonalities show that, while there are vast differences between different kinds of adult literacy provision, it is still possible to speak of a single entity called *"the Canadian adult literacy field"*. In the end what connects these various groups adds up to more than their differences.

The symposium also showed that the greatest strength of the Canadian adult literacy movement is the people who work in it. This field continues to attract people who bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and commitment from many different backgrounds. There is no lack of highly qualified and motivated individuals to do this work. The challenge for policy makers to is to support these people in their work.

Finally, the symposium demonstrated very clearly that there is an interest in, and a need for, further discussion about adult literacy on a national level. We all know how divisions of provincial jurisdiction, language, culture and geography make it difficult to have this kind of discussion. But judging by the reaction of the symposium participants, it is worth the effort, because of what they were able to take back to their programs, and because of what they were able to learn about the importance of adult literacy in a national context. By the end of the symposium, many participants said they wanted to continue to have contact with their counterparts from other parts of the country; it seems probable that many other practitioners and researchers who were not at the symposium would share this view.

5. Suggestions for Follow-up

Participants at the final plenary made a number of suggestions for follow-up to the symposium. Some of these suggestions were that:

- another national symposium be held as a follow-up to this one
- the results be used towards the development of long term government policies on adult literacy
- the results be *"cycled back"* to the field so that further discussions could build them in. As one of the participants stated, this would avoid the problem of people going over the same ground all over again at the next event they attended.
- specific links be developed between some of the groups which found that they shared common ground in their work.

As well as these specific suggestions, there were calls for continued dialogue on many of these issues at the national level. Although these were not defined in detail, it is possible to identify some of the ways this process might be continued.

- COMPUTER NETWORKS

  Programs and organizations in all provinces territories and regions could be linked using computer/modem links. Such a network is already operational across Ontario, linking more than 400 literacy programs. This would provide an ongoing communication link and facilitate further discussion about issues and options like the ones addressed at the symposium.

- NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

  Organizations such as the Movement for Canadian Literacy are playing a key role in facilitating discussion about developing national standards for literacy provision. Other organizations, addressing specific sectors of the field, such as Aboriginal literacy and rural literacy, also provide important forums for similar discussions.

- PROVINCIAL, REGIONAL AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

  These kinds of organizations have a key role to play in developing standards of quality for literacy provision, since they are the link between the programs which are doing the work, and government bodies which support that work.

- CLEARING HOUSES AND RESOURCE CENTRES

  Many provinces have resource centres with mandates to collect and disseminate literacy materials, including the documents relating to good practice.

- INTERGOVERNMENTAL LINKS

  There is a need for continued and improved communication between provincial governments, and between provincial governments and the federal government, especially relating to evaluation and policy development.

- LINKS BETWEEN PROGRAMS

  Programs which are addressing similar issues in different context across the country might work to stay in touch with each other. (This idea related specifically to the session on *"The Survival of Cultural and Linguistic Minorities".*)

Finally, there may be some specific activities which might be useful as a follow-up to the symposium.

- ANOTHER SYMPOSIUM

  As already suggested in the final plenary session, there should be another national symposium, because

  - the discussions on the twelve issues raised at the symposium require further debate, in order to be adequately addressed
  - because there were other issues which were not included in the symposium, which need to be debated at a national level
  - there is increasing pressure on the literacy field across Canada to establish its priorities, in the context of accelerating social and economic change.

- EXCHANGES BETWEEN PROGRAMS

  In a number of sessions there were suggestions that these kinds of discussion of issues could be continued by means of practitioners visiting and working in different kinds of programs in other parts of the country.

- RESEARCH

  Some of the discussions pointed to the need for research into particular aspects of literacy. For example, information about relative pay levels for literacy workers in different parts of the field might be an important part of the issue of practitioner training. Likewise their is a need for information about what is happening in other countries, on issues such as recognition of learning, learner involvement and program evaluation.

- REGIONAL OR PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES

  The kinds of discussions which happened at the symposium need to also happen at the regional and provincial level, with a greater scope for involvement of all participants in the literacy field.

Whatever the follow-up, it is clear from the participants' comments, that there should be a greater participation of both practitioners and learners and that the results should relate to concrete change at the level of public policy, both federal and provincial.

6. How To Use This Document

As outlined above, this document is meant to be a tool to be used in further discussions and deliberations. Some possible applications might be:

- GROUP DISCUSSIONS

  Sections of the report could be used to provide background information for discussion groups addressing a particular issue. For example, at a program level, there might be a group deliberating the future role of volunteers in the program. The members of this group could photocopy and hand out the principles drawn up by the *"Volunteers and Literacy"* session before their meeting, or could discuss these principles orally. This could provide a framework for their discussion, even if they ended up with a quite different set of principles.

- POLICY DEVELOPMENT

  As a first step in a policy development process, some of the principles from the symposium could form the basis for a *"discussion paper"* in consulting with the field. The session summaries could also be used to give a sense of some of the different points of view on issues as well as some key options. For example, a provincial government drawing up a policy of funding for community-based programs might use the recommendations provided by that session as a starting point for a discussion about funding guidelines and criteria.

- WITH OTHER RESOURCES

  Parts of this document could be used in conjunction with other resources as part of a package or presentation. For example in a briefing on workplace literacy, it could be used along with videotape and print materials which give more specific background information.

- AS A SUPPORT FOR ADVOCACY

  The fact that the principles in the symposium's recommendation were drawn up by experienced literacy practitioners, researchers and government officials from across the country gives them some credibility. Organizations with a mandate for advocacy could draw on these in their efforts to further the development of adult literacy provision.

- AS A LITERACY ACTIVITY

  Parts of this document might be adapted or re-written in a form that could be used in learning groups, in order to stimulate learner writing.

- AS A MODEL FOR A PROCESS

  The process which was used for the symposium seemed to work for most of the participants and could be adapted to other events. In particular, the idea of using the symposium format and dividing the session into two separate parts might prove effective.

These are just a few possible ways the document could be used and certainly do not exhaust the possibilities.

Please Note

This report attempts to reflect honestly the diversity of opinion expressed by those from the literacy field across Canada who attended the symposium. It does not reflect in its entirety the views of the Literacy Branch or the Ministry of Education.

Program Evaluation

A concern I have is how to develop an evaluation of programs that is not one that lacks flexibility because I think that one of the real virtues of the field is the variety that we have. And it's difficult, I think, to develop an evaluation that recognizes that kind of flexibility and also recognizes the growth and the change that is constantly happening in the field; so we want something that isn't going to be a static set of rules that would tend to close down the growth and development rather than to spur it on.

The participants in the workshop on program evaluation could be said to have approached their topic with cautious enthusiasm. Enthusiasm, because they could imagine how evaluation could be creative and lead to growth and development.

I have ... a particular concern around how [evaluation] can be used to be a really creative, enlivening process in the program rather than a measuring, judging process.

There is always fear when you approach evaluation, but if it's approached the right way, I think that it's an experience where people grow.

Caution, because they were aware that evaluation could also be simply a sterile, counting exercise with no opportunity to examine fundamentals. A central theme of the workshop was to explore ways of ensuring that the former and not the latter was possible.

I'm worried that program evaluation will be something that's imposed on the literacy movement and that it will not be multi-dimensional; it will be a one-dimensional approach and I'm very concerned about the whole issue of evaluation.

Without a sound policy framework, the participants agreed, it would be difficult to achieve reflective evaluation. At the same time, it was recognized that program evaluation was important for policy development. We will consider both of these aspects.

The need for a sound policy basis is reflected both in concerns for what is to be evaluated (discussed more a bit further on) as well as in concern for the reasons for evaluation at all.

You really can't take evaluation seriously unless literacy itself is taken seriously.

Important parts of that policy are a long term commitment and appropriate funding. Without both, the reasons for evaluation become judgmental rather than reflective.

People don't want to put a lot of effort into evaluation if you're not evaluating for the long term and if you don't have some sense of security. I would like to see a policy that would first of all reflect some commitment in the long term to literacy.

There tends to be more demand [for evaluation] when there is less of an ongoing commitment to funding, and that then really structures what sort of evaluation can be done because the evaluation has to be looking mostly outwards and mostly justifying the work. It doesn't allow you to do the sort of evaluation that really makes it possible to struggle to make a stronger program because that's not what you have the freedom to do in that case.

One productive aspect of the workshop was the interchange between those who worked for governments and those directly involved in the program delivery. The former often suggested ways in which productive program evaluation could support their work in policy development.

I'm reaching a point where I have to answer to our politicians and to our senior bureaucrats about the overall impact of the strategy... so I am interested in the two levels of program evaluation and also how you articulate the evaluation of individual programs into making some kind of assessment of the overall impact. I, too, have a particular interest in being able to sell to the power-makers and the decision-makers a flexibility and program evaluation that is necessary for the complexity of the literacy programming [we do].

For us, to be able to make rational decisions about the level of funding it takes to support a program, and to support a program to be effective, it's important for program managers to understand what the program is and what it does and what it cannot do.

There was general agreement that good practice should be the focus of policy and that evaluation should be a tool for identifying and validating good practice.

Evaluation should inform practice and I think it's a macro as well as a micro principle, that it should inform policy and procedures at the ministerial and at the provider levels.

Why do we conduct evaluations: who benefits?

Consistent with the broad principles that underlie literacy work, the answer to this question was uniformly: everyone. Everyone, that is, if the evaluation is genuinely participatory. Of course, some benefits will be more important for some participants than for others. It is useful to distinguish the immediate local benefits to the program that actually does the evaluation from the more general, generic benefits that flow to the community as a whole.

For the program itself, naturally, there is the benefit of learning about itself and using that knowledge to move ahead.

> *You assess needs or programs that you've done, you assess where you're at and then you reformat things and try them out, assess them; you're on this ongoing cycle, organizational development cycle.*

Evaluation can also be a means through which the program tells the local community about the program and, crucially, provides an accounting to the learners.

> *They're making sure their community knows what they're doing because they have an accountability to the learner in the community. That also creates a political base as well for continuing funding and it's something a program should keep in mind very clearly.*

> *There's the accountability also to the learners and to the program itself and when people have groaned about evaluation when I've done workshops, I said, 'If you're offering a service to the public and haven't got time to sit down and reflect on your practice and what you're doing, then maybe you shouldn't be offering the service'.*

The whole literacy community benefits when one part of community learns more about its work through an evaluation and then shares that new understanding. Too often, however, that sharing is difficult and happens too infrequently.

> *The results of the evaluation [should be] known to all... That's also a weakness in many organizations. We all gear up and we do this big process, even if it's quite democratic, and then somehow the results get put on a shelf and we move on and get down to work.*

Because a program evaluation tests and validates, and sometimes identifies, concepts of good practice, the product is a resource for all of the literacy community.

Nonetheless, there will be differences between what benefits a particular program acquires and what the broad community gets. It is, after all, only the local program that learns from the ***process***. The community as a whole learns only indirectly. It is important, then, that all parts of the community participate in some evaluation.

What do we evaluate?

Throughout the discussions of the need for a policy framework, there was talk about what kind of policy there should be, a policy that would provide some guidance on the criteria and goals of the evaluation. There was less agreement on all suggestions, but on many points all participants shared common concerns.

Clearly a fundamental aspect of literacy programs is that learners learn to read better. Two caveats to this are necessary: this is not all that programs need to do and 'read better' is not a simple concept. Resolving the latter helps focus on the former. To all participants 'read better' was a learner centred concept and one that required ongoing rather than 'entrance/exit' testing.

> *If programs are set up to meet learners' goals, then it's critical that we look at what learners wanted to learn and how well they learned it and that in some way is tied into the program.*

> *...being learner centred, that part of ongoing evaluation means that there has to be initial evaluation assessment with students. I'm not referring to standardized testing, but that there has to be some process at the very beginning which helps to identify what students' goals are because part of your evaluation is going to be, 'Were those goals met?'*

> *...with the idea of the initial assessment of the learners' goals and the need for evaluation to be ongoing, both at a programmatic level and at the smaller level including the students.. I think the students' goals change a lot and that a good sign of a program is the growth and development of those goals. A student comes in wanting to learn to read and write something, perhaps quite specific, and that at a later stage recognizes that even if they haven't achieved that particular goal, they've gained lots of confidence and feel quite differently about themselves and about the learning process. That evaluation has to be ongoing and not just at an entry and exit point.*

Participants did have some disagreement over whether it was reasonable to evaluate appropriateness of a program's goals or whether it was possible to agree on a common set of appropriate goals.

> *The evaluation process must be generic enough so that workplace people don't feel at odds with community literacy people and that people who just want to teach reading and writing don't feel at odds with those who want critical thinkers who are empowered in our democratic society. If we start prescribing objectives, even in a recommended way, we've lost that breadth that I think we must keep.*

> *I don't think it's possible to talk about evaluation without it coming from an ideology. I don't think there's very much that's value free and I certainly don't think that evaluation is value free. I think that one of the things that we're talking about is what kind of values do we think need to be reflected in the evaluation process and for me, I would argue very strongly that critical thinking is something that is an important part of the kind of teaching that should go on and the approaches, the methodology, that's involved. A program may feel that that's not something that they want to do; for instance, they may want to teach straight decoding, but, nonetheless, I think that they should be evaluated on a basis which says that critical thinking is important and that's part of what we do with literacy and helping people to achieve what they want to achieve. I disagree with you, I'm*

not prepared to be so inclusive that the evaluation ends up saying that everything is OK, because everything is not OK.

Program evaluation, of course, must deal with more than whether the learners learned something (and with what they learned). There must be some attention paid to the vision of the program as a whole.

If you look at the goals of a program, you get one piece. Did it achieve the goals it was trying to achieve? But you also miss a lot of other things. You miss some of the other ways in which the program itself functioned which is more than quite how it conceptualized what it might do. One of the things I often have as a worry with evaluation is when it focuses only on, 'Did it meet its objectives or what else did it do?' What did it do that it didn't even imagine it might do is just as valid in relation to the program as it is in relation to the learner.

How do we conduct evaluations?

How evaluations were conducted was seen as a crucial issue by the participants, involving issues of who participated in what way, what methods were used, and what we do with the results.

Although we have already noted the wide agreement on broad participation in evaluation,

that all levels of a particular organization be involved in the evaluation whether it be learners, volunteers, particularly learners and volunteers, and also practitioners,

it is important to examine the ways in which this participation can be realized.

One basic principle is that of participation in the sense that there be a partnership of all the stakeholders in the program and that the learners, particularly, who are usually the forgotten elements in any evaluation, be involved in the planning process right from the start, and that by doing that, the evaluation can be empowering in many ways for the learners as well as the practitioners and others involved.

We wrote that policy and practice should be evaluated against the above principles. Evaluation should be part of policy statements, and researchers should be provided to do this evaluation and evaluation should involve stakeholders at all levels, i.e. policy makers, community learners.

While this last comment could be read as implying that evaluations should be conducted by specially qualified researchers, this was not a generally accepted principle. Indeed, the participants were in broad agreement that doing the evaluation should involve as many diverse people from the program as possible. Of particular note, is the question of whose perspective is reflected in the design of the evaluation.

All I meant was that it wasn't just method or just the distinction between qualitative or quantitative. It was from whose perspective you evaluate is perhaps part of what I was doing. I don't think broad processes explain it at all. I was thinking about whether you evaluate from the perspective of the institution itself, from the perspective of the learner, from the perspective of the tutor, the instructor, the coordinator, that sense of the different perspective, different locations in the program. You could do that by a lot of different methods.

The workshop spent considerable time emphasizing that quantitative research methods were unable to capture all the information we wanted about our programs. Indeed, quantitative approaches were seen to have direct negative consequences in some circumstances.

It's very easy to get into number crunching and as in most human services to produce lots of people that are easy to deal with and to leave behind all the people that are at the highest risk of not being integrated in programs.

There was, however, more discussion of the positives of qualitative approaches.

One can use many methods within both qualitative and quantitative evaluations so I think if we feel strongly that literacy work is more like the affective stuff and we want to get that message across, then I think [emphasizing qualitative evaluation] *should stand as a principle on its own.*

The principle is that quantitative is not enough. I don't know that I would want to say that the principle is that it must always be qualitative and quantitative. I think on many occasions, you might choose that it is not relevant to do the quantitative piece, but my principle would be that one could do quantitative and qualitative but not quantitative alone, that it will lose so many aspects. That it's important to have the principle that one should not do quantitative evaluation alone, that it should have qualitative as well.

In general, the participants expressed support for multiple methods.

Use as many methods as possible and use as many different sources of information as possible in doing the evaluation and you see there a list of some of the methods: interviews, discussions, journals or logs, anecdotal reporting, use of popular education, techniques, theatre, so on, and a look at what kind of transfer of learning is taking place from the instructional setting to the other areas of a learner's life, and that's important, both in the one-to-one tutorial type of program and also in the small group or classroom setting.

What happens as a result of an evaluation?

Participants were concerned that all too frequently the answer to this question is, 'nothing'.

> *I think we should make a very clear statement that only information that is going to be used should be requested. If it's not used, don't ask for it.*

Some people identified reasons why it was difficult to do much with an evaluation. As one person, who worked in an institutional setting suggested:

> *I think where it breaks down is that the learners don't have, and even the tutors and the instructors, for that matter, don't have the same kind of control over what happens with that evaluation - so you can do all kinds of wonderful things and all kinds of wonderful recommendations might come out of it - because they might very well get lost in the bureaucracy, whereas, in a community program, I think perhaps, the accountability is a little more direct because you're not dealing with the bureaucracy. It seems to me that the contrast is that in the community, you may have all the recommendations that you can't carry out because you haven't got the funds to do it and in the institution you may have the wonderful recommendations that you can't carry out because the hierarchy will get in the way.*

Finally, one participant noted that too often nothing happens because too few people ever see the evaluation.

> *I'm interested in how you use the information from evaluation in a very broad based kind of way. I know that evaluation, even when it's quite participatory in the collection of the information, the information often doesn't get out to all the people who have interest in the evaluation and its meaning because the main part of evaluation is applying intelligence to information and thinking about it and talking about what it means and then acting on it in some way, so I'm really interested in how you do that.*

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Reporters: Penny Lawler/Tracy Westell

This group discussed evaluation issues at the macro and micro levels. We realized that evaluation needs a policy framework for it to be meaningful and because of this came up with some principles for policy development and evaluation.

Policy Principles

Adults have a right to literacy and a basic education.

This right will mean:

- full and equal access to quality programs for all adults
- opportunities for lifelong learning
- equity of outcome for adult learners
- responsibility on the part of government to ensure that these goals are met.

Evaluation Principles

Macro Level

- Policy and practice should be evaluated against policy principles.
- Evaluation is built into any policy statement and resources should be provided to support this evaluation.
- Development of criteria for evaluation should actively involve all stakeholders at all levels.

Micro Level

1. Participation: There should be a partnership of all stakeholders in the program.
    - Learners must be involved throughout the process in an empowering way.

- All participants set the criteria and indicators.
- Evaluation should take into account many different perspectives from inside the program and within the broader community.

2. Evaluation must be culturally sensitive and relevant:
   - anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-ablist.

3. Evaluation must be an ongoing process.

4. Evaluation must use as many methods and sources as possible:
   - interviews, journals, discussions, popular education, anecdotal, regular reporting, self-evaluation.

5. Evaluation must take into account:
   - how learning influences other parts of peoples lives
   - prior experience of learners
   - program goals
   - assessment of teachers and tutors
   - learning outcomes and whether they are equitable
   - materials and their effectiveness.

6. Qualitative evaluation should be emphasized, rather than quantitative evaluation.

7. Program goals should be evaluated for:
   - critical thinking
   - creativity
   - independence of learners and opportunities to move into lifelong learning.

8. Support services and resources must be a part of any evaluation process.

9. Program evaluation should lead to growth, program planning and change.

10. Program evaluation requested by government should be collected and reported on for the benefit of future planning and policy development.

11. Accountability is a key part of evaluation and includes accountability between:
    - programs and learners
    - programs and their communities
    - programs and funders
    - government and programs
    - politicians and the general public.

Other Issues Discussed

1. Relationship of Policy and Evaluation

    - Dynamic - evaluation informs policy. Is this what we should be doing? Is this how we should be doing it?

    - Long Term Vision - need for policy to be stable and consistent so evaluation can be meaningful - can't change from year to year.

2. Purposes of Evaluation

    - Program improvement and development

    - Accountability
        - funders - government - taxpayers
        - learners
        - community

      Broad accountability protects programs.

    - Finally - evaluation information must be shared and used.

Recognition of Learning

I'm very interested in learner assessment for a number of reasons. I've seen it be a barrier to employment, an artificial barrier, where a certain grade is required for a particular job where the skills for that job don't require that level of education. It's just a way of weeding out from the employer's point of view. I've seen it be a real frustration for other learners who, when they left our program and went into retraining programs where they were able to pass an equivalency test and did well in their courses, but tried to get that equivalency for their high school diploma, were not able to get that. They had to go right back to the very beginning. Also, a number of our learners are coming forward and asking for an evaluation. I see that as a positive thing, that they're feeling really good about what they would hear. Part of me wants to run out of the room and say, 'I don't want to touch this issue with a ten-foot pole because it's so contentious and it scares the heck out of me,' and the other part of me says that so much of the outside world is so focused in on concrete and how do we mesh what we know is the right way of looking at people's skills and abilities and change them to our way of thinking.

As clearly expressed by this participant, the workshop on recognition of learning agreed that the current system of credentialing worked against learning. They could not agree, however, that any alternative would be any more acceptable.

What's wrong with what we do now?

Participants found little to value in current practices. This was the area of discussion that found greatest consensus. This may be the most valuable part of this workshop, in that it draws out most clearly the group's attitude towards recognition. There were three features of that system that were identified as particularly problematic, all set out in the quote that begins this chapter.

The credentials are imposed from outside the adult literacy community, without input from that community. While this might be tolerable as an initial state, if there were not other problems, without any influence on possible changes, it is difficult to see why the community would have any enthusiasm for the system. This is even more important since recent changes, or at least recent calls for changes, threaten to narrow rather than broaden the system.

The criteria that are used to award recognition are often not related to individual needs of learners or context in which they find themselves. Too often this results in artificial barriers to work or further education; often, participants felt the criteria are used just to create a smaller pool of eligible people rather than to ensure that learners or workers have the appropriate background.

Finally, the current system is inconsistent with the learner- and community-centred model of literacy education that informs most programs. Because the credentials are generic, the same for all, they do not encourage the learner-specific need-driven curriculum that good adult education practice demands.

What would a new model value?

It would be misleading to say that all participants agreed that a new model of formal recognition of learning was the appropriate solution to the problem. Many argued for more informal models, where a particular program would identify for each learner what gains had been achieved in that program and would make arrangements with other local programs or employers to which (or from which) learners wanted to move. Although, this model is similar to what is often known as the Manchester Model (see below), it does not impose a formal structure or a permanent organization to operate it, unlike that in Manchester.

Still, there were some principles that did receive wide acceptance. The model would:

- **reflect needs expressed by learners**

  That is, it would be consistent with the learner-centred principle that guides literacy work. It would also mean a system that was different for different learners. It would, therefore, be an open rather than a closed system.

- **be controlled by program participants**

  That is, it would be organized bottom-up, not top-down and authority to change and adapt the system would be in the hands of those who use the system - the learners and the programs.

- **recognize prior learning**

  That is, it would treat what learners bring to a program with the same respect and value as what they learn in that program. Recognition for accomplishments would not be based on having sat in set courses or studied particular curricula, but on demonstrations of those accomplishments.

- **respect diversity**

  That is, it would recognize different styles of learning and different approaches to education, as well as different goals.

- **not be a series of hurdles to pass over**

  That is, the purpose would be to reward people for what they have accomplished, not set unnecessary, unjustified barriers in their way. Its primary purpose would not be to set a series of goals for the learner, that should be the responsibility of the learner.

There were a significant number of participants who were pessimistic about the possibility of a system that met all these criteria. They felt that it simply was not worth the effort required to construct an alternate system.

> *We have limited resources. We can either spend those resources in constructing a system of more standardized accreditation or we can use those resources to try to convince people that they should develop very flexible ways of recognizing learning.*

In the end, then, the participants could not recommend any system, though a minority still felt that this just allowed someone else to do so.

What kind of alternatives are there?

In the course of discussing the recognition issue, participants reviewed several models. Their comments are worth recording.

- **Course recognition model**

  In the so-called Manchester Model (first widely used in Manchester, UK), there is an organization that vets course proposals from programs and certifies the course for inclusion at a particular level in the overall scheme. Students carry a document that records the approved courses, and levels, that they have completed. The various programs in the scheme agree to accept these records.

  Participants recognized some merits in the model, but were concerned that because it recognizes courses, rather than learners' goals, it fails to satisfy the learner-centred principle. As well, as noted above, some objected to the bureaucratization of the process, feeling that the same goals could be achieved through informal, program-to-program negotiation.

- **Levels of training model**

  There are various progressions through levels of recognition models. The Manchester Model, itself, approves a course at a particular level. Some have recommended level schemes based on various occupational levels, such as that used in the new *National Occupational Classification* system or in the similar National Vocational Qualification scheme in the UK.

Because such systems imply an external structure, often one designed for other purposes than literacy work, participants found the model wanting.

> *I think you can't have a level kind of system that truly serves the learners' needs because it slides over into some sort of external structure no matter how you try and deal with it, so you have to deal with some form of portfolio evaluation. I feel in many cases evaluation should be set up in terms of a person's goal. It might be set up in a very generalized goal. It might be set up in a very specific goal aimed at the guy in Rankin Inlet who needs to be the carpenter or wants to get his papers or whatever -- that kind of thing. A portfolio is good language for it. It gives us a good grip around it because otherwise we slide back into levels and those levels, no matter how we try and guard against it, are going to be controlled externally. When we get one level, this should be at this level, that should be at that level, and it will gradually expand and grow like topsy and go off in all sorts of directions.*

- **Set curriculum / set goals models**

Some models have been developed in which a number of ability and knowledge criteria are identified and learners receive recognition for meeting all or some of the criteria. Perhaps the best known of these is the ***Adult Performance Level*** program in the United States. Participants felt this was just the substitution of a different set of arbitrary hurdles for the existing ones. There was particular concern that a system would try to identify a small number of skills that all learners would need to achieve.

> *I also recognize that there are people who will argue that there is a basic amount of knowledge that we all should have in our society and we should decide what that knowledge is and set up that kind of goal. My only response to that is what you tell me that knowledge is and I'm sure if we went around the room, we'd get 15 other levels of what that basic knowledge is; so while it sounds good, it's very difficult to put it into practice.*

- **Needs driven model**

These are, perhaps, the most informal models. In these, learners identify goals and criteria they will use to judge whether that goal has been reached. The recognition scheme is simply a record of those goals and their accompanying criteria. In some ways, this model is similar to the portfolio models that are being increasingly talked about for K-12 education, except that learners have greater control over the portfolio, including both types of material and examples of accomplishment.

Some argued that this system was, in fact, no new system but simply a further use of an existing good practice.

> *Moving the accreditation scheme ... so that the accreditation arises not out of something new that we do in our programs, but simply is a way that we make use of what we already do to gain public recognition of the learning, that's really taking place and [shows] we already know how to assess.*

Others noted that such a scheme was consistent with the fundamental principle of learner control.

> *One of the principles is that learners have a central role in determining how they're learning. That not only do they have a role in how the system as a whole operates, each individual learner has a major role in how their own learning gets assessed as part of that, or gets recognized as part of that.*

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

RECOGNITION OF LEARNING

(How Learner Accomplishments Are Recognized)

Reporter: Yvon Laberge

A) Preamble

The present credentialing system is inappropriate.

- The group was unable to agree that a system of learner recognition was the best solution to the problem.
- But it was able to agree that no system should be imposed.
- Further, any proposal for a recognition system can be approved only after consultation with those for whom the system will have consequences and only after alternative solutions have been explored.

Models

- Credit bank - alternative training experiences
- Course - stated curriculum, for example, Carleton grad program
- Workshops - emerging from needs in the field
- Content courses - emerging from experience in the field
- Levels of training, for example, beginner ---> advanced
- Specific interests/needs, for example, workplace, ESL
- Training the trainers
- Community development, for example problem solving.

B) Recommendations

1. We need to find out what the learner perspective is.

2. Any recognition system would be based on collaboration. It would be a system created and controlled by learners and others in programs.

3. Learners have a central role in determining how their learning is represented in any recognition system.

4. One of the elements of such a system would be recognition of prior learning.

5. Such a system would not require standardization and would respect diversity.

6. A recognition system would not require levels that a learner would pass through.

7. A public information/education, sensitization process would accompany implementation.

8. The system would be able to change and grow as the participants (the owners) saw the need.

9. This discussion is not the end of discussion on this issue.

Workplace/Workforce: Literacy for Employment

Opening Discussion

Who should benefit from literacy programs in the workplace? Employers? The economy? Is their only function to increase productivity? Should they be exclusively linked to the needs of business?

The participants in this workshop felt that literacy in the workplace is on the wrong track. It has been given an economic focus, rather than a learner-centred focus. It has a utilitarian goal expressed in terms of better adaptation of the workforce to technological change, increased productivity, and fewer work accidents, when it should pursue objectives set by the learners themselves, which may include self-confidence, improved self-esteem, increased involvement in the community and the democratic process, and so forth. These objectives may differ from those of their employers.

Up to now, the term *literacy in the workplace* has implied that illiterate workers are a burden on the economy. It has also been a source of confusion, which the workshop participants discussed. It is, in fact, inappropriate to talk about literacy in the workplace. All too often, this refers to a place, such as a factory, and not a group of people, i.e., the workers. In reality, it excludes workers who are temporarily out of work and workers in primary industries whose place of work may be the ocean, the forest or the land. In order to correct this perception, it would be more accurate to use the term *worker literacy*.

All of the workshop participants felt that there are currently many problems with literacy in the workplace. They identified these problems and proposed solutions.

The Negative Consequences of a Necessary Marketing Effort

Literacy in the workplace has always faced a major difficulty: indifference. According to a participant from New Brunswick, one recent survey indicates that employers are not at all interested in spending money on literacy programs for their employees. One country-wide survey indicates that almost all Canadian workers feel that their level of education is adequate for them to perform their work correctly. Illiteracy is not perceived as a problem either by workers or employers. Both groups are indifferent. It is pointless, therefore, to count on their spontaneous cooperation. It is unlikely that they will express a need for literacy when that need is not perceived and when they are not aware of the benefits they might derive from it.

According to the participants, this general attitude has had a strong impact on workplace literacy. In order to increase awareness and break through the indifference, literacy program coordinators must become aggressive marketers.

> *You have to market to an employer to make them aware of the possible need for literacy programs.*

They have to study the organisation and operation of the businesses that they intend to target. They have to carry out mini-feasibility studies, calculating and analyzing the benefits that the company and its employees could derive from a literacy program. In short, in order to introduce literacy in the workplace, they have to use language that employers generally understand, i.e., the language of productivity, which includes better adaptation of the workforce to technological change, greater flexibility on the part of the company in the face of change, fewer work accidents, and so forth. Presented in this light, literacy is judged in terms of its economic spin-offs. This is an effective means of breaking through the indifference, but it also stigmatizes illiterate workers and runs the risk of challenging their right to work.

One participant stressed that the arguments used with employers often focus on the "losses" incurred because of illiteracy. Employers are often told that they can increase their productivity with a literate work force. Such an approach is dangerous; if taken literally, it could mean a witch hunt for illiterate workers, with unpredictable consequences. Will workers who admit that they can neither read nor write be penalised? Will they be passed over for promotion? Or, in an effort to increase productivity, will literacy classes one day be made mandatory? Under legislation recently introduced in Quebec, recipients of social assistance must enrol in remedial classes in order to receive support. Will this soon become the case for illiterate workers in the workplace? Will workers who do not want to take training courses be laid off? Will they take training just to please their employers or to satisfy their own interests? Current discussions on literacy in the workplace suggest that this may happen.

Another participant added that this utilitarian vision of literacy in the workplace and the language used to promote it almost amount to false advertising.

> *I see sometimes some things that scare me even in promotion, in terms of if you do this it's going to save you so many hundreds of thousands of dollars. We have to be really careful what productivity, because how do we measure that?*

The participants agreed that literacy does not always translate into savings for employers. Initially, at least, that is not its purpose. Literacy, measured by the ability to read instructions, labels, and folders, is not a miracle cure for industrial accidents.

> *We have to stop saying that illiterate workers cause accidents because they don't know how to operate machinery.*

The work pace and negligence are more frequent causes of accidents. The Conference Board of Canada, which estimates that illiteracy costs the Canadian economy four billion dollars each year through work accidents and lower productivity, is wrong. This interpretation is reductionist. It tries to translate into dollars and cents benefits that manifest themselves first on an individual level in the form of self-awareness, self-actualization, and emancipation, then on a collective level through involvement in the future of the community rather than isolation and withdrawal.

Prevention or Cure: Training as a Last Resort

On the rare occasions when employers articulate a need for literacy programs in the workplace, it is generally because they have encountered some unforeseen problem. A new machine may suddenly expose illiterate workers who, because they cannot read or write, are unable to adjust. Suddenly, the company's productivity is affected and its situation becomes precarious. According to one participant, it is as though a company had to be in difficulty before it responded.

> *I've never seen a company approach me to ask for a literacy course, but what I've seen, especially in small business firms is that company approach us to do something when they are in trouble, when they have a problem. Usually, they will get a new machine, or they will start up in place a quality circle; then they get in trouble because they have opened a can of worms and they don't know what to do with that.*

This response reflects a poor understanding of literacy. There is a tendency to compare it to re-training or upgrading where, for a few weeks, workers assigned to a particular operation in the company learn new techniques and upgrade their skills. Literacy, on the other hand, is a process that can take months and years. The results are not immediately felt and, for this reason, it is often seen as unprofitable.

According to the participants, literacy training in the workplace is all too often seen as a means of addressing a decline in productivity, when it should be seen as one element in a global education process. Basically, it is the first link in a long chain. It exists to meet training needs, needs which can range from basic literacy training to occupational training. The skills acquired give workers greater mobility within their trade. They enable workers to progress, change jobs, and transfer their skills. Literacy benefits training and, like training, it suffers from the fact that Canada is not a country that places a premium on training or re-training for its workforce. Canada does not have a tradition of ongoing training for its workforce, nor does the corporate culture place value on training. The participants noted that underlying the difficulties surrounding literacy training in the workplace is a negative attitude toward training. Unlike their counterparts in Japan and certain European countries, Canadian companies tend to treat the money they spend on training as an expense, not an investment.

Legislators and program coordinators have a tendency to be reactive rather than pro-active. They intervene on an as-needed basis, as plant shutdowns or technological changes occur. They introduce stop-gap measures for the workers affected by these economic upheavals. Thus, the financial difficulties and image problems from which literacy training suffers in the workplace are, first and foremost, indicative of a lack of interest and a perception that worker training is superfluous and financially unsound.

Re-examining the Objectives

Up to now, literacy in the workplace has overlooked the most important element of its mission: the individual. It has been diverted from its original goal by a utilitarian, economic vision. This situation must be re-examined and corrected.

The participants were unanimous that it is not up to employers, governments or program coordinators to decide what workers need. Despite the obvious economic benefits, the fact remains that only those directly concerned, i.e., the illiterate workers themselves, should decide whether or not they take part in a literacy program.

It must be remembered that literacy in the workplace benefits learners first. Their immediate objectives are not necessarily those of their employers. The learners may be interested in acquiring literacy skills for personal reasons: to monitor their children's progress at school, to broaden their horizons, to express their thoughts in writing or to achieve self-actualization. Workers whose personal interests do not necessarily coincide with their employer's should not be deprived of the right to literacy.

One participant from Quebec begged to differ on this point. She believed that in order to be effective, literacy in the workplace had to focus on a particular goal. It had to have a structure, with principles and objectives. It had to be more than "personal growth literacy". It had to offer both the employer and the employee greater flexibility in dealing with changes occurring in the marketplace and the industry. It had to have tangible benefits for the workplace. In her view, a workplace literacy program is best able to demonstrate its benefits in cases of technological change, new product management techniques, changes to the production line, and so forth. In such cases, the ability to read and write helps workers to internalize the changes. They see practical benefits and this facilitates the learning process.

One Franco-Ontarian participant responded that this view narrowed the scope of literacy to work, when it has implications for life as a whole. Literacy implies an openness to the world, a greater level of involvement in the democratic life of the country, and greater assertiveness. Literacy must be seen within a broader context. What is more, it is a trap if it does not extend beyond the workplace.

These comments met with the approval of most of the participants who felt that the benefits of literacy in the workplace extended well beyond the workplace itself. They thus arrived at the conclusion that the government should assume the full cost of literacy training. This would reduce the expectations of employers -- and, therefore, the pressure exerted by th m -- and give workers greater latitude in their individual development.

The term *literacy in the workplace* clearly causes confusion. It connotes a place, generally a factory, and not people. According to the workshop participants, this notion must change. Not only is it inappropriate for the objectives pursued in literacy, which focus on respect for the individual development of learners, but in practice it presents a number of difficulties. As one participant pointed out, in primary industries such as forestry, fishing, and agriculture, the workplace may be the ocean, the forest or the land. How can workers scattered throughout an immense *"workplace"* be reached? Although attempts are being made to provide literacy training on fishing boats in Newfoundland, most efforts to enable workers to acquire literacy skills exclude workers in the primary sector. In order to correct this situation, we must re-examine our notion of literacy in the workplace. We must change our approach and speak of worker literacy, focusing on workers and not the workplace. Lastly, worker literacy should not exclude the unemployed or those who are temporarily out of work.

Partnerships

A worker-centred approach does not exclude the possibility of cooperation with employers, nor does it mean that employers cannot satisfy their own needs. What is required is a means of reconciling the needs of employers with the needs of workers who want literacy training. Often, their needs are of a more personal nature. A notion of literacy that respects the learner's individual development is not incompatible with the production-oriented objectives of employers. However, it is necessary to be flexible and to stop referring to literacy as though it were simply a potential source of additional revenue.

Having made this distinction, the participants pointed out that this does not address the practical problems facing literacy in the workplace. In this regard, by far the greatest difficulty is getting programs introduced. Employer reticence is not the only obstacle. The role of labour groups should not be overlooked. They can act as catalysts. One participant cited the example of a literacy program for workers offered by the Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal (Montreal Catholic School Board). Despite the fact that the city had given its approval and foremen had been involved in needs assessment, fewer than five workers signed up. The program coordinators then decided to approach the union. Two weeks later, scores of workers had signed up. Labour leaders and their ready means of access to the employees had made the difference.

This example and many others show that literacy in the workplace cannot be done effectively without cooperation among the management, the union or other labour representatives, and literacy program coordinators. This partnership is critical. That is why the quality of labour relations within the company targeted for a literacy program must be taken into account. Strategically, it is not advisable to approach a company during collective bargaining, a strike or a lock-out, when the chances of success are non-existent.

Furthermore, a flexible approach is needed when introducing literacy programs that involve a partnership. Not all companies are unionized. Institutionalising a partnership model that must include a union means excluding non-unionized workers and this means most workers in Canada. Overall, the workshop participants hoped to see the kind of partnership that is common in Sweden, England, France, and Germany, for example, and which is all too rare here. They went so far as to say that such partnerships are absolutely indispensable to all literacy activities in the workplace.

Principles

At the conclusion of the discussion, the participants attempted to draw up a non-exhaustive list of minimum conditions for literacy in the workplace, a term which was firmly rejected in favour of worker literacy, which was felt to be more appropriate. These principles provide a framework for all worker literacy programs.

- Priority must be given to the needs of individuals who want to acquire literacy skills.
- Learners must be given an opportunity to participate in defining their programs so that they are directly involved and assume some measure of responsibility for an activity that will affect their future.
- Group literacy must be promoted as a means of stimulating participation.
- The cultural, linguistic, and racial peculiarities of the workplace must be respected.
- Workers who enrol in literacy programs must receive assurances that they will not be penalized, downgraded, or passed over for promotion. In other words, workers must receive a guarantee that enrolment in a literacy course will not result in loss of employment and that it could translate into gains, a promotion or job security.
- Workers must be allowed to enrol in literacy programs on a voluntary basis. Refusal to participate should not result in a penalty affecting their employment.

- The interests of employers must be brought into line with those of their employees. Although employers generally have an immediate and specific goal, such as adapting their workforce to technological change, they must accept the fact that training may involve the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are transferable to other jobs and that enable learners to continue their education beyond basic literacy, through integration into school programs, access to diploma programs, and so forth. If the interests of the employer and the employees cannot be reconciled, a literacy program should not be introduced.

- Partnerships involving training organizations, employers, and employees represented by a union or ad hoc employees' group are essential. Otherwise, the chances of introducing literacy activities in the workplace are minimal.

- Literacy activities must not be carried out in a vacuum; they must be integrated into an ongoing training process in which other training needs can be addressed. Workers with inadequate literacy skills should not be marginalized or stigmatized.

- There must be flexibility; literacy activities must be adapted to the workers' own limitations. This may require flexible scheduling, the provision of transportation or child care for single parents, learning materials and approaches that are adapted to the needs of the learners, and so forth.

- All literacy activities introduced in the workplace (that take place over a period of weeks or, at most, months) must have counterparts in the community, so that learners have an opportunity to pursue their education.

After reaching a consensus on these principles, the members of the workshop recommended that governments only fund literacy activities that meet these minimum conditions.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN WORKPLACE LITERACY

Reporter: Sue Waugh

Summary of Recommendations

Discussion

- ✔ Literacy for workers
- ✔ Literacy for the workforce *vs* workplace literacy
- ✔ People not in workforce (adjustment training)
- ✔ Workers can be anywhere

Definition

1. Recognizing that management, the unions and individuals have different perspectives -

   Good workplace literacy practice must meet the common needs of all stakeholders involved in the WL project, as agreed through an inclusive consultative process.

Principles

(To be adopted by publicly funded organizations delivering WL programs)

2. The process must be cooperative to meet the needs of both the individual and of the organization. If an effective partnership cannot be formed based on shared goals and objectives, then the delivery organization should not proceed with the process and a program.

3. All stakeholders must be involved from the beginning and throughout the process.

4. The process and practice must respect the cultural, linguistic and racial diversity of the WP.

5. Flexibility must be applied when determining program aspects, such as location on or off site, materials, methodology, scheduling, according to the agreed-upon needs of all stakeholders.

6. Language describing the process, the program, and the "participants" should be respectful and should evolve from a wellness, rather than deficiency model. Evaluation techniques should follow this principle and ensure that participants are not labelled negatively.

7. Upgrading opportunities must be built-in and ongoing within the organization to foster a training culture and to facilitate transferability of skills and linkages to further training (not just training as "crisis intervention").

8. Strategies to address literacy issues must go beyond learning opportunities for workers; for example, plain language in the WP, access to information, intercultural communication training.

9. Government funding should be tied to good practice principles.

10. Some way of recognizing learning in workplace literacy needs to be instituted.

11. Participation in a workplace literacy program should be voluntary.

Discussion Point

12. That the right to literacy for adults should be legislated and that WL would exist in this context (that is, employers would be compelled to participate in a continuous training/education process).

Literacy and Aboriginal Peoples

Opening Discussion

Is there a learning approach appropriate for Native peoples? Can literacy programs allow for the affirmation of Native cultures and communities? Do the structures and programs offer enough flexibility? How will those with responsibility for literacy respond to the cultural realities and special needs of Native peoples?

The participants in this workshop were, for the most part, Native Canadians. They attempted to define the parameters of an approach to literacy based on their culture. Three major ideas were developed:

- a community approach
- a learner-centred approach
- a holistic approach to literacy.[2]

The workshop began with a video on issues in Native literacy. The participants were then invited to express their points of view and interest in attending the workshop. One participant from James Bay summed up the feelings and concerns expressed during the opening discussion quite well.

> *Once we got into school, we lost the language. We had to speak English so we put our first language back. We spoke English in order to get through the education system, in order to be able to grasp what we were being taught. Three middle ones heard us speak the language but they couldn't speak it themselves, but they managed it because of actions, I guess, more or less. The three youngest heard us speak it, but they don't understand. They know that we're speaking in a different language which is Cree, but they don't have a sense of what's being said, so there's a very divided family right there with just the language itself, plus with the education. ... I can just imagine how the elders and young children today feel. They don't understand a single word she is saying and that's how our elders feel towards their great-great-grandchildren that are in the education system. It's a shame, because if you can't really speak to your great-grandparents, where can you go?*

Literacy was seen as an urgent priority, but not one that should be achieved at any cost. The first priority is the continual survival of Native culture, which is closely linked to the survival of Native languages. The participants offered several solutions based on an understanding of Native community life and culture.

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[2] This idea is developed in greater detail later on.

Scenario...

After this preliminary discussion, the participants were asked to consider a hypothetical situation. The workshop leaders wanted to get the discussion going. The hypothetical situation took the form of a case study.

> *A remote reserve has identified a need to start a literacy program. The band council, after doing initial research, has come up with three options: i) purchase a computer-based course for a learning system; ii) contract with the community college in an urban area to provide the training off the reserve with travel and accommodation subsidies or iii) hire an outside training consultant to design and deliver a program on the reserve. You have been asked to prepare a response, giving recommendations based on a rationale. How would you proceed?*

One participant from Nova Scotia began by saying that the first thing to do was to identify the community's needs more clearly and that it was pointless to hire an outside person who did not know the community. Another participant went even further, pointing out that in analyzing the community's needs, it would quickly become evident that for many people, literacy meant

> *... learning life skills, social skills, much before you can even look at the basis of being able to look at the job market.*

Hiring people on the reserve would have the advantage of building local resources. If necessary, it would be preferable to bring in someone who had a good understanding of life on the reserve and who could train people on-the-spot and

> *not a southern or oriented package deal that says, 'Here, this is it.'*

In other words, partnerships have to be developed. The participants began using the expression, "information sharing".

> *I think there's a tremendous amount for people to learn from [what] others are doing at this very moment or what has been done a year or two in the past. Somehow the sharing of that information should become much more an automatic kind of thing. If there were some way to do that. It's not a problem that I think everybody can solve individually. ... For so long, we had been thinking that we couldn't do it ourselves.*

In this sense, literacy becomes a tool not only for sharing information, but for promoting culture and preserving language and community.

We must not, however, fall into the trap of using programs that do not respect the needs of the community.

> *... you know, it's easier to use a package program rather than being creative and innovative and so on and determining your own evaluation methods.*

In order to avoid falling into this trap, Natives in Ontario have created their own institute of Native literacy. This does not mean that non-Native resources are rejected out-of-hand. The most important thing is to pin-point where previous literacy experiments have gone wrong. Literacy on a voluntary basis is a good example. We have to avoid re-inventing the wheel. Sharing information can serve the entire community and all races.

Understanding the Needs of Learners and the Community

The most important thing is to be able to begin by clearly understanding the needs of learners. In other words, literacy practices must be based on the interests of those most directly concerned. How do learners plan to use their new reading and writing skills? In what language do they want to learn to read and write? Administrative forms, legends, community history?

Literacy programs must reflect this reality. They must offer maximum flexibility and also reflect the complex reality of individuals and communities.

> *... a program that will cater to the needs of those students and that at the same time will use the resources of the community in terms of people that know so many things. ... with literacy, what you need to have success is a method that is holistic, that takes everything at the same time and there are ways of calling that. There's the whole language approach to literacy now, with controversy now and everything, but it's there, dialogical education, language experience.*

Where learning methodologies are concerned, it would be a mistake to believe that they are exclusively "white", that they can only be developed by universities and licensed specialists. Native people may have a lot to learn, one participant pointed out, but they also have a lot to give.

> *Thinking of Native people having the expertise and content, and the mainstream university-trained people having the methodology expertise may create problems. They have had their ways, their methods of passing information down and the learning, the methodology is there, it's part of their life, it's part of our life. So to think of a marriage of content, Native content with mainstream methodology is problematic, to me, the way that I'm looking at it right now.*

Another participant cautioned the others that it is not easy to create learning programs and that it is important to be honest with learners. When it is possible to complete a program in two years, using a specific method, it would be unfortunate to use another method and take five years to achieve the same result. This comment led to another on the specificity of Native programs. It would appear that the participants were not in total agreement on the subject.

The Issue of Funding

Is the holistic approach compatible with the programs and grants? It would appear not. In a way, literacy workers who use a holistic approach are outlaws.

> *The biggest problem that I see in relation to the posture of institutions or governments or funding agencies in relation to all or they all tend to look at one-time one-shot deals in terms of providing programming when we should be looking at, to use the phrase that Wally Beevor used this morning, lifelong learning. ... When we talk about legends and we talk about cultural aspects of it, to me that's almost like a treat because I don't know of any program or funding agency that will come to you and say, 'O.K., we're going to give you X number of dollars and go ahead, design your own package.'*

The participants were adamant about one thing: the ultimate goal of literacy on the reserves should not be to improve the statistics on illiteracy and unemployment. It is a well-known fact that, on the reserves, employment is virtually non-existent. Training subsidies should be based on the needs of the community and the aspirations of learners.

In changing the criteria for literacy, the tools, programs and funding mechanisms will change to reflect those most directly affected: the learners.

> *So what I'm going to propose here may sound radical and revolutionary, but I think that what we need to do is change the criteria.*

We have to start by setting an example on the reserves by legislating on the language of usage, *"... as they have in the Northwest Territories ..."* so that the language of the community becomes a tool of communication, not an element of the folklore. And the participants supported the reports that have come out of the most recent studies: the Aboriginal Literacy Action Plan, You Took My Voice, Towards Linguistic Justice, and the Native Literacy Research Report.

What is meant by a "community-based program"?

For one participant from Manitoba, a community-based program is a literacy service that reports directly to an agency in the community. Colleges and schools boards do not provide this service. They can, however, provide support, as one participant from Alberta pointed out.

> *I don't like to think that they are necessarily excluded because sometimes the option that may make the most sense in a particular situation, might involve a very cooperative post-secondary institution in helping to deliver a program.*

One participant from Ontario pointed out that it was up to groups of citizens to identify the needs and then to find a school board that was sympathetic to the approach that they favoured.

> *The fact that it was an institution that delivered the program did not mean that it was not community-based. In another place, something similar happened with a community college. Responding to community needs and using community resources to the greatest extent possible would be two basic characteristics of a community-based program in my understanding.*

According to the participants, a community-based approach begins with a group of citizens managing a literacy program. The group identifies a need. It decides on training. It gives direction to the activities. It chooses an instructor. It supports recruitment and the overall functioning of the activity. It develops various types of partnerships, especially with colleges, local schools, etc. It increases the level of awareness of other local agencies, while promoting literacy activities according to various formulas that it has developed itself.

What is meant by "learner-centred"?

For the participants, the term "learner-centred" refers to the needs of the learner. It does not mean administering a series of tests. It means identifying the true desires of learners, then creating a training program. This approach implies a consultation process between the trainer and the learner. It implies a dialectic relationship. During the needs identification phase, the trainer acts as a facilitator. In so doing, the trainer also goes through a learning process.

> *... because you have to meet their needs and then meanwhile you're rushing to learn everything and anything about this topic they want to learn, so you're more or less like a jack-of-all-trades.*

The reader might be tempted to conclude that this is an individualized approach, but the participants insisted that it was not.

> *In any group of learners, independently of what level they may be at, particularly when we're talking about Native people from the same community, there will always be issues of concern that are common to everybody that will become the thread that will bring the group together.*

The participants stressed that programs that restricted learner participation had to be avoided at all costs. At this point in the discussion, computer-assisted learning programs drew heavy criticism.

... because the thing has nothing to do with their lives, the content is completely irrelevant. ... Perhaps, what we can do is make a recommendation that it neve. be considered an answer by itself, that it only be seen as an additional resource to a program with human instruction.

The Holistic Approach[3]

The holistic approach is not a global approach; according to the participants, it is a legacy of Native culture. It can be divided into three parts:

- *The whole thing about the person, as a complete entity, and not just this receptacle of information*
- *and the part about the language and the whole approach towards language*
- *in terms of methodology, in terms of how this language and the learning of new skills in the language, is transmitted or is communicated to the learner.*

The holistic approach takes into account the fact that a person learns in different ways. It is an approach to literacy that would benefit from wider exposure on the local, provincial and national level. The ultimate goal is not to work for the economy, society or the family. We must change our perception of society and the ways in which we try to change it. The holistic approach should be used by many different people.

A Common Vision

The participants assigned the task of writing recommendations to the workshop leaders. Before the workshop wrapped up, one of the participants proposed the following principle:

We take literacy in the vein of trying to determine how we make it a shield for cultural transmission and to continue our language and cultures and communities and world views and thinking, as well as how we also utilize it as a sword to empower ourselves in the future. We use that sword in an aggressive way to build our nations' strength, to empower our people and to search for a future that will enable all of us to feel about ourselves and be able to pass on information that will lead to the continual survival of our people.

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[3] The term, "holistic" appears to have been used for the first time by Marilyn Ferguson in her book entitled, The Aquarian Conspiracy.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

LITERACY AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Reporter: Joyce Wabano

We believe that the serious issue of Native literacy programming has either been ignored or approached through inappropriate and ineffective means.

We believe that Native people have the right to be literate in both their mother tongue and the official language of the region. Furthermore, we strongly recommend that aboriginal languages become official in Canada and thus gain the recognition they deserve. In terms of Native literacy programming, we recommend that the following documents be used as a guide or a basis for policy making:

- Aboriginal Literacy Action Plan
- You Took My Talk
- Towards Linguistic Justice
- Native Literacy Research Report.

These documents provide necessary background information and analysis, while also giving concrete recommendations with respect to Native literacy programming.

The following is a summary of the characteristics that our group considered to be most important in Native literacy programs:

1. Programs need to be community-based. This means that they respond to the needs of the community and use community resources.

2. Programs need to be student-centred. This means that:

   - the learners' needs, strengths, desires, experiences, background, etc., are the basis of the curriculum

   - the curriculum is designed through a process of negotiation that involves all the participants: learners, instructors, programmers, community, etc.

   - instructors accommodate a variety of student learning styles

   - program locations, format, scheduling, etc. are flexible enough to cater to the learners' needs and circumstances

   - learners are allowed the necessary time to fulfil their goals

- the program is flexible enough to respond to the changing needs of the learners and the community

- interaction and cooperation are encouraged

- computers are used as one more instructional tool among many and are not put at the centre of the curriculum.

3. Programs need to follow a holistic approach. This means:

   - recognizing that culture and language cannot be separated

   - language is best learned when it is authentic and natural, kept whole and not divided into meaningless fragments

   - learning of reading and writing is integrated with and in intricate relation to oral language

   - learning is considered to be a holistic process as opposed to a linear, segmented sequence of skills learning

   - all the aspects of the participants' lives are considered to be equally important

   - the participants are whole individuals, members of a family, a community and a nation. In order to ensure that these kinds of programs occur, we recommend that opportunities be provided for:

     - the networking/exchange of information among programs, regionally and nationally

     - the development of Native education/literacy resource centres that centralize and offer expert materials, and all kinds of other resources to programs in a particular region

     - the training of community workers, instructors, facilitators, animation tutors, etc. in the philosophy of community-based, student-centred and holistic programming. That particular emphasis be given to the development of independent Native institutes that will carry out this task.

Practitioner Training and Accreditation

No one doubts that practitioner training is an essential component of literacy work. There is much less agreement on what that training should consist of, how it should be organized, and how (or even if) it should be formally recognized. The participants in the sessions on practitioner training brought a wide variety of views to this issue, expressing a variety of concerns, some arising from particular local circumstances, but most shared by all. All agreed with one principle: training should be under the control of the community and not imposed from outside. But just how to implement that principle raises many other issues.

Training for whom and is it the same for everyone?

These seem like crucial preliminary questions. In answering them, the participants raised various issues as to 'what', 'when', and 'how', but these are not as useful a starting point as 'who'. The universal answer is 'everyone' and it is clear that this means, tutors, administrators, learners, anyone who asks to be part of the training. This also means that no prerequisite training or qualifications should be necessary to participate in the training.

> *I am interested in training that supports anyone who works within a program and has anything that they are confronted with, that they can find some training to support their need to address that.*

There was less agreement on whether there should be different training for different people. One province had organized its training around a progression of three levels, but at least one participant rejected the notion that there was any useful notion of progression:

> *I think that there is a danger of thinking in terms of progression and thinking that we have become wiser as we work longer in literacy, and we've become knowledgeable. We have to recognize that a learner coming off the street walking into a program, and saying, 'What the hell are you doing here?' might have more perspective and more things to offer. I'm very nervous about the kind of possible professionalization of our work. I think we have to be very careful to keep our eyes open to new experiences as well as accumulated experiences.*

There was also some concern expressed that tutors with some experience were less likely to seek out further training:

> *... the question is - whether or not there is a strong demand for increased and improved training opportunities for practitioners in the field. I get the feeling, and maybe it's erroneous, that there are a lot of very good opportunities out there right*

now, and that there isn't a strong need and I would like, hopefully, to be reassured that there is a real demand for that ...

This was a distinctly minority view, though one supported by some research and some personal experience. Those who felt that this might be the case attributed it less to the lack of need for training than to the lack of opportunity for appropriate training.

I also understand [the] point, that people with a bit of experience, no longer need to be told how to do the beginning stages again, but what they do need, is that time for reflection, and often they need encouragement to believe that's going to be valuable. It is not going to be some intellectual exercise, that isn't related to their work. If it is that intellectual exercise that isn't related to their work, then I can understand them saying I don't need it any more.

What should the content of training be?

This is clearly the core of the issue, once the who question has been answered. Participants explored a variety of ideas, but came to few specifics. The idea that came through most clearly was that those taking the training should have a central role in deciding what they receive training in. Indeed, there was wide agreement that no single package of training could meet the needs of all literacy workers, except, perhaps, for those just starting in the field.

Whatever the training, it should enable literacy workers to deal with diversity of settings and learners and it should reflect the diversity of experience in the community..

I think it is really important that the kind of training that we offer both recognizes the different needs of practitioners and learners in different settings, but also provides us with an opportunity to hear from each other.

We would like to develop diversity and understanding of the various ways that we can address that particular person's needs, regardless of the setting in which they find themselves.

One way to work towards this is to have the content of the training developed through a wide ranging consultation.

Our intention is to try to have a dialogue that involves learners and administrators and practitioners, volunteers and professionals, throughout the province, so that we start from the point of view [that] there's a lot of diversity and no one organization, no one group, should make any definition about what accreditation or training should be, that it needs to be an outcome of a dialogue that reflects that diversity right from the beginning.

It would be fair to say that the participants were less concerned with the details of what should be learned than with the process of that learning. In particular, there was a concern that practitioners had too little time to reflect on their work and, thus, to learn from the work they were doing.

> *[T]he most important aspect of my training is the work itself, but I don't think that one can take advantage of that training on the job, to a full extent, without being able to reflect, without being able to develop and learn. I think that if training were to replace on-the-job training, if more abstract type of training were to replace on-the-job training, I would feel that perhaps that was a step backwards, but if training is something that augments on-the-job training, then I think that it is a very valuable thing.*

> *... people just want to come together and talk about those alternatives that [we] were talking about earlier, and to have a chance to think critically, to reflect and think, what are the assumptions we're bringing, and how does that come down the tube into whatever the practice is, whether it's dealing with a language or culture or whatever the specifics are.*

If training opportunities are to stimulate this kind of reflection, then they must integrate practical and theoretical concerns.

> *... training should be at the same time, theoretical and practical. That is to say, it's not only practical in the sense that it is learning a bundle of techniques and it's never only theoretical in the sense ... of getting the right abstract ideas about how to do it, or what good literacy work is, but that there is always an interaction between having practical experiences and reflecting on them and formulating them and analyzing them, or again. [I]t is not a matter of kind of learning theory and figuring out how to apply it in the teaching context.*

There was also a sense that training was important not only to develop the individual's experience, but also to contribute to the development of the field.

> *One of the things that I notice myself, and hear other people saying over and over and over, is how often it is [in] literacy discussions, that we need to continually start over, because there are continually new people in the discussion and so we always have to begin at the same place we always began at, which puts limits to how far ahead we can move. I think it is important to look at, without in any kind of way denigrating starting at the beginning, I think it is also important to devise occasions when people who have been at it for five years or fifteen years or twenty years or what not, can get together and work together on the questions that they've arrived at, as a consequence of that amount of experience. Teaching techniques may be at one stage of the game, or questions about how you devise different kinds of materials for different students in different kinds of situations at another stage of the game, or maybe reflections on how questions about literacy teaching go together with questions about changing the way the print and information are circulated in society at another stage of the game.*

Although there was no explicit discussion of the matter, it may be that participants had difficulty coming to grips with the issue that the field itself is underdeveloped. That is, there is as yet no large body of shared experience that defines good practice, or, at least, that shared experience is not yet publicly shared. Perhaps before the issue of content of training can be resolved the body of knowledge that constitutes good literacy practice needs to be identified. At the same time, it must be recognized that a number of participants were reluctant to think that literacy should be thought of as having an 'expertise'.

Who organizes the training?

There was general agreement that training should arise out of the needs of the local literacy community. This was reflected in concerns expressed about programs that had been devised in some institutions without participation from the community, programs that many felt were not addressing the core issues.

> *...the groups themselves or the individuals or however people want to group themselves, whether it was geographic or on [the] basis of language or on [the] basis of type of program that they could develop and have input into the kind of training that they felt they needed.*

There was, however, considerable disagreement over how that 'local control' should be exercised. Some felt that local programs should develop, organize, and conduct the training. Others felt that while local programs should identify the needs, they did not need themselves to organize and operate the training. Still others felt that there was a core of common needs that should be addressed in all training. In short, while participants did not want to hand over control of training to others, not all thought that each program should develop unique training.

For training to be properly organized and utilized, there must be adequate funding. The literacy field is, in general, poorly funded and that makes it difficult to arrange and participate in training. Programs seldom have even enough funds to carry out their core mission of delivering literacy to learners, much less funding extensive training for practitioners. Many literacy workers are volunteers and cannot be expected to pay for their own training. Most paid workers in the field are poorly paid and do not have money to fund their own development.

> *I'd like to see a whole diversity of training opportunities out there and funded and we can talk and talk and talk about the need for training, but we need to have the money to do it and to develop those training opportunities and to put them on and to see if they work and to evaluate them and so on.*

> *I think there's another issue in terms of overall funding because if we provide training, somebody has to mind the house while people are being trained. I think it's such an enormous issue because training takes time, it takes expertise and meanwhile*

there's a delivery of service that's needed and somehow or another, it's a larger issue than just that we need training, but we also need adequate support for our programs.

How should the literacy community recognize training?

There was general concern that attempts to set up schemes for accreditation and recognition of expertise were inconsistent with fundamental tenets of literacy work.

> *This may have already been said but it bears repeating. One of the things that ... cautions against accreditation or against qualifications to get into the field is a further separation between who are the learners and who are the workers and I think that any kind of training that we set up has to challenge the way we think about education and has to be consistent with the kind of principles that we bring to classes or one-on-one tutoring or whatever. With learners they have to be consistent with those education principles that we bring for teaching workers or in that kind of education system, that we don't set up a two-tiered idea.*

Yet recognition appeared to be something practitioners themselves wanted.

> *...we now have three certification levels ..., but that isn't because we decided we wanted them. That came from the field. We were offering a range of workshops and people said, 'We're going to all these workshops - where does it get us, what are you going to do about that?' So, then we said, 'O.K. everybody wants it, so let's call it a certificate if you do so many'; so, that's why we have a level 2 certificate. That didn't emerge from us deciding that people should have that many, it was that people said, 'Could we get some recognition of the training that we've got?'*

But overall there was little support in the sessions for any accreditation scheme. Indeed, there was concern that some form of accreditation would be forced on the community. In general, participants could see no great benefit to accreditation and much to fear. Some participants expressed the view that an accreditation scheme might restrict development in the field.

> *Training and accreditation should be an ever evolving process; avoid fences, avoid blocking yourselves in with sacred cows. [P]eriodic renewal, re-evaluation and re-examination of what we're doing as practitioners is necessary.*

However, it was acknowledged that the literacy community had done little to establish guidelines for good practice.

> *[W]e got into what was really quite an interesting discussion about in order to recognize good practice, we had to also recognize bad practice and do something about it, that we all tend to be very polite with volunteers and with other people that we work with in this social field and that there has to be some criteria for bad practice, as well, and some recognition of what is bad practice.*

It seems clear that the literacy community understands that collectively and individually there is much to be learned. It seems equally clear that until the community comes to understand just what it is that it knows and what it needs to know, that much training will need to be exploratory and responsive to needs as they arise. Most importantly, training for workers must be consistent with the educational philosophy reflected in our own practices.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

PRACTITIONER TRAINING SUMMARY REPORT

Reporters: Jean Reston and Meredith Hutchings

A number of issues were discussed and debated. The following were the ones for which there was consensus.

The central theme of our recommendations is that Training is Essential. This does not necessarily mean that accreditation is the outcome of training.

For effective training, the group came up with the following. It is recommended that:

1. Time and money be allocated, including funds for paid release time for practitioners (covering expenses for attending, salaries, and substitutes).

2. Training be accessible to all participants - learners, volunteers, staff, administrators.

3. Training be flexible and diverse to meet the needs of practitioners in all types of literacy delivery systems - including training around pedagogic and community development needs.

4. Training needs be self-assessed by practitioners and provision of this training be learner-centred.

5. The development of training reflect the interaction between theory and practice.

6. The provision of training in a jurisdiction provides for an opportunity to experience and exchange different learning approaches.

7. Community groups control training which emerges from ongoing consultation with these groups.

Literacy and the Survival of Cultural and Linguistic Minorities

Opening Discussion

For Canadians of Chilean, Cree, Portuguese or Franco-Manitoban origin, should the acquisition of literacy skills in the first language become a right or remain a privilege? Should it serve only as a step toward literacy in one of Canada's official languages or should it be an end in itself? Should it serve the economy or benefit culture? Must it involve a process of integration that is strangely similar to assimilation?

Participants in this workshop included Native Canadians, immigrants, francophones from outside Quebec, and representatives of various agencies and ministries involved in literacy across the country. They provided an essentially political definition of first language literacy. Their discussion focused more on rights and legitimacy than on learning methods. They stated their belief that literacy in the first language was a necessity because it helped minority cultures to flourish.

First Language Literacy - A Step Toward Integration?

Is it possible to learn to read and write in one of Canada's two official languages when one is illiterate in one's first language? This was the first question raised by the workshop. It summed up the unique situation facing minority cultures in Canada. It also set the tone for the workshop.

The spontaneous response of all of the participants was that it was not possible. They have learned from experience that offering immigrants an English- or French-language literacy program amounts to closing the door to literacy. Such a program was offered at the Centre portuguais de Montréal (Montreal's Portuguese Centre), and was a failure. Integration into a new community is difficult; it is even more difficult for immigrants who are illiterate in their own language. They are naturally reluctant to learn a written language that is not their own but that of their adopted country. Their cultural baggage does not prepare them to take the plunge. What is more, for a person belonging to a minority culture, acquiring literacy skills in English or French involves more than learning to read and write. It also involves learning to speak another language. The Centre opted for another solution: a Portuguese literacy program. Such a program is more compatible with the learner's own culture, as the results indicate. Enrolment is higher and the program makes it easier to learn to read and write a second language.

Responding to this experience, a Franco-Ontarian participant said that he had just finished learning to write French. For him, learning to write in French was a

prerequisite. His wife tried to learn to write in English, without knowing how to write in French, and failed. He now feels ready to learn to write in English. In fact, he pointed out, he genuinely wants to do this as it could lead to a better job.

Is learning to write in one's first language a step that leads to learning to write in one of Canada's official languages?

One participant felt that this was the case. This has been demonstrated in many countries, including Sweden, the former Soviet Union, and even the United States, although the approach may differ. For example, in some places, learners are taught to write in their first language and speak the majority language simultaneously. After a while, both the minority and the majority language are spoken. In some cases, learning continues in both languages. This promotes integration into the majority culture but allows the minority culture to remain strong. In other cases, first language literacy is simply a means of making it easier to learn the language of the majority culture. The success of this approach depends on the confidence, skills and attitudes that first language literacy builds in the learner and that are subsequently applied to the acquisition of spoken and written skills in the language of the majority culture.

One participant wondered whether this amounted to a very long integration process. Why talk about time and duration, another participant responded. Why talk about first language literacy as though it were only a bridging mechanism toward official language acquisition? The important thing is to be able to express oneself in writing. For an immigrant from Nicaragua, it may be more important to be able to write a letter in Spanish to her brother back home than to decipher junk mail in English. The important thing is that she be allowed to choose the language of literacy.

After a few practical arguments were put forward in favour of first language literacy (greater potential for success, greater compatibility with the learner's culture of origin, greater compatibility with the learner's personal development, etc.), the discussion moved to a plane which occupied the participants for the remainder of the workshop. Speaking of first language literacy as though it were nothing more than a mechanism for integration was, for most of the participants, offensive. Must first language literacy be a round-about way of melting minority cultures into the majority mould? Is its ultimate purpose assimilation? Or should first language literacy serve to strengthen minority cultures? The debate took a political turn.

First Language Literacy and Culture

If language and culture go together, is it possible to maintain contact with one's roots, one's past, and one's culture, while speaking the language of one's ancestors less and less frequently? Speaking the language of one's ancestors is a means of ensuring the cultural survival of one's community and one's children. Today, this problem is crucial; in order to be used on a regular basis, a language must also be

written. Whether they be Micmac, Cree, Portuguese or French-speakers living outside Quebec, many people cannot read or write their own language; their culture of origin has suffered as a consequence. From this standpoint, first language literacy is, first and foremost, a cultural issue. It should not be a tool for assimilation but, rather, a means of ensuring cultural vitality. The written language must support the oral language, not eliminate it. Thus, first language literacy represents a means of cultural consolidation.

Having expressed their views on this subject, the participants suddenly began expressing their feelings and emotions. Because the cultural survival of so many minorities is at stake, first language literacy should be recognized as a right and a necessity. Yet, first language literacy is not encouraged by government agencies with responsibility for literacy programs. Resources are cut, facilities are lacking, and access is limited. For many Native Canadian participants, this indicates a lack of sincerity, particularly on the part of the federal government. They explained what they meant by this.

What good are studies and expressions of sympathy and support for Native culture, one Micmac participant wondered, when there is no political commitment, when nothing actually changes, and when Native culture is deemed to be a minority culture and thus of secondary importance? She wanted action, not words, from the federal government.

> *I don't want polite acknowledgement any more. I want to be recognized as a member of Canadian society. Once I've been validated through a policy, then I want them to support that by recognizing that I also have a right to do whatever I feel is necessary to slow the pace of (sic). I'm losing my language; my children are losing my language. I want to slow that down. I want somebody to help me to achieve that. I'm sick of politeness and kind words. I'm sick of being told, 'I know you have a language, you have culture and it's wonderful, but unfortunately, the two governing languages are English and French. We'll give you something sometime.'*

She stated that Micmac literacy is an epiphenomenon related to a global political situation. It is an indication of the government's lack of regard for Native Canadians in particular and minority cultures generally. In her opinion, the Canadian government has a utilitarian view of literacy. She suspects that it views literacy solely as an effective means of finding a job, of entering or re-entering the economic sphere. It views literacy as an economic tool, a means of pulling the marginalized back into the mainstream. *"Where does it say"*, she wondered, *"that participants in a literacy program are only looking for a job?"* Learners want to know the alphabet for many different and often more profound reasons, such as self-esteem, self-confidence, personal growth, and self-actualization. They begin to learn to write the way other people take on a new challenge. What is the point of imposing an English course on them which they will reject because they want to speak their first language? If the government, which is the main source of funding for literacy activities, cannot understand this, what does the future hold for literacy?

First Language Literacy - A Right or a Privilege?

There was unanimous agreement that, for minority cultures, first language literacy was chiefly a cultural issue, and that literacy in one of the two languages spoken by the majority of Canadians met largely economic objectives such as finding employment or a better job. The government appears to be ignoring culture in favour of economics. First language literacy programs have a legitimacy problem, as though reading bedtime stories to one's children or writing letters to one's relatives were not legitimate reasons for learning to read and write but working, reading the newspaper, understanding the legislation, in short, blending into the majority culture and suppressing one's differences were. Politicians must be made to understand that, for minority cultures, literacy is more closely linked to survival of culture and language than to stimulation of the national economy. They must understand that this goal has as much legitimacy as, and perhaps more acuity than, the goal they seem to favour. First language literacy programs for minority cultures should therefore receive the same financial and pedagogical treatment as literacy programs in the two official languages. According to one participant, first language literacy should be a right, not a privilege.

> *Literacy would be one more way of ensuring that the culture will not only survive, but I'm having a little bit of trouble with the word "survival". We don't just want to survive, we want to develop, we want to flourish, we want to be able to do the things we want to do. ... What we want is recognition by the institutions, by the educational institutions, of the minority cultures and languages, and not only recognition and respect, but the right of those people to practise that language, to learn that language and continue flourishing in their culture, not only in the home, but in the school.*

At the end of this discussion, the workshop ratified the following principles.

1. Literacy must be considered a right (with the exception of Quebec, this is not a given in Canada).

2. It must be officially recognized that everyone has the right to literacy in his or her first language.

3. The choice of language in which literacy skills are acquired ultimately belongs to learners, not instructors, program coordinators, government officials or legislators.

4. Lastly, literacy must respond to cultural imperatives, not just imperatives directly linked to the economy, such as employment or learning the language of the workplace, wherein the economy becomes a pretext for assimilating minority cultures.

The workshop concluded that it was not up to the politicians to decide what learners want to get out of literacy, but the learners themselves. Coming from the participants, this statement reflected a desire to make literacy programs compatible

with the learner's culture and not the reverse. In Canada, literacy programs must be sufficiently flexible to adapt to the interests and expectations of individual learners.

To ensure that these principles are acted upon, the workshop felt that steps should be taken to lobby politicians. Consideration was given to the possibility of a Canadian coalition of agencies representing minority cultures in literacy; however, this suggestion was rejected because the participants felt that they did not legitimately represent the various cultural minorities in the country. A second proposal was put forward, namely, the creation of an ad hoc committee of workshop participants who would take the workshop's resolutions to government. This proposal was adopted.

It was also proposed that a national documentation and information centre for Aboriginal languages be created. Native Canadian participants felt that such a centre would have educational and political benefits. It would become a means of protecting Native cultures and slowing the pace of assimilation that existing literacy programs are producing.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

LITERACY AND THE SURVIVAL OF CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

Reporter: Marie Battiste

- A national or provincial policy for literacy and minorities should ensure a coordinated vision of linguistic and cultural development which encompasses children's education (for example, pre-school, elementary, secondary) and adult education, including literacy and the lifelong learner. **The goal is to prevent the illiteracy of our children –**

Principles of Good Practice

- Cultural and linguistic minorities have the right not only to survive, but also to flourish economically, socially, culturally, linguistically and educationally in Canada.
- We advocate/accept that literacy is a means by which the linguistic and cultural minorities can develop socially, economically, culturally, linguistically and educationally.
- The right to literacy should be recognized and legislated.
- Linguistic and cultural minorities have the right to be literate and educated in their own dialect and first tongue.
- It should be recognized that all linguistic and cultural minorities have the option of multiple solutions to barriers, which will be unique to each community.
- Since educational institutions have not traditionally recognized the needs of cultural and linguistic minorities, recognition of literacy rights by governments should be followed by the development of concrete policies and appropriation of adequate funds to ensure full implementation of the policies.
- All policy initiatives regarding linguistic and cultural minorities should be developed in consultation and collaboration with the learners and communities affected in order to make literacy accountable and responsive to the needs and desires of the stakeholders, learners and communities, as well as increase the policymaker's sensitivity to community needs.

- Learners must be involved throughout the research and development of policies and programs.

- The process should further advocate culturally sensitive practices, that is, anti-racist, anti-ablist, anti-sexist, and anti-classist.

- Finally, to ensure a follow-up to the discussion, the workshop participants created an ad hoc committee which has as its mandate to explore the issues addressed in the session and examine the possibility of future collaboration among diverse cultural and linguistic minority groups. The committee is made up of Raymond Day, Luce Lapierre, Maria Adamczuk and Joyce Wabano and invites other participants to join.

Volunteers in Literacy

Participants in the workshop on the role of volunteers quickly agreed that the heart of the issue is how to balance the benefits of volunteers (such as community involvement) with the need for stability and continuity, a need that is best met through a permanent, paid staff. Most of the discussion centred on what that balance should be.

Framing the Issue

Historically, adult literacy in part of Canada, particularly in eastern Canada, was largely in the hands of volunteers because there was little funding for literacy work and because there was a broad basis for volunteerism as the approach to community issues. As the complexity of the issues grew and as the need for services provided by literacy organizations increased, governments started to play a larger funding role. With funding came a significant growth in the number of paid workers and a need to discover an appropriate role for volunteers.

> *I think if you look historically at why volunteers became involved, well sure government wasn't interested in adult literacy. People saw it as a way to get the foot in the door and to get things started and to begin to build a sense of a need and the possibility of meeting that need. People got in as volunteers as a fifth column. I think now that we're developed, we've established the field, now I think there can be some differentiation.*

Volunteers are important to literacy programs. In some cases, the program is part of an organization where volunteerism is an important part of how members share their talents.

> *We have really been treating volunteers as people we expected to be professional and they were filling professional roles... What we're saying is no, we're doing something different. There is a role for professionals, there's also a role in our case for volunteers doing labour education because all labour education is volunteer work. I think we have to have different expectations and to say there's the need for both.*

For another example, in a literacy program designed for seniors which is intended to be part of a whole range of activities for older Canadians, a learner in the literacy program may be a volunteer in another activity. In both these cases, the labour union-based literacy program and the seniors literacy program, learners and volunteers are drawn together by a constellation of activities, not just literacy. These are not typical cases, however; most often the only relation between volunteer tutor and learner is just that, tutor/learner, and it is then necessary to ask whether this provides the best literacy education.

To many, the answer was no. A primary concern was whether volunteers can provide the sort of literacy education we desire.

> *I feel that there's a lot of tension between how much time we put into volunteers and how much work we get out of volunteers, about the quality of the tutoring that volunteers do, how do we place some controls around that? How are we accountable to our learners for quality education? How do we ensure that the volunteers we're using and the methods they are using are good ones, are good for the learners?*

Indeed, several participants expressed a concern that the typical use of volunteers, to work with low-level students as their primary (or only) resource on a one-to-one basis, is the worst use that could be made of volunteers.

> *People who are reading, for lack of better terminology, below grade 4, are often the ones that are delivered to volunteer programs. Often, out of that population, those are people who fall into that category of having been to school, having some kind of learning difficulties and needing some specific kind of learning strategies and approaches that are unlikely to have been acquired by volunteer tutors, not due to any ill will or even lack of desire on their own part, but just lack of experience in the field.*

Further, there was a strong feeling against the use of volunteers as a solution to the problem of lack of funding. Indeed, there was some sentiment expressed that the availability of volunteer tutors allowed inadequate funding to persist. However, some people with experience suggested that volunteer programs, where sufficient training is provided for volunteers, do not save money.

Nonetheless, there was the equally strong argument (by the same people who objected to volunteer tutors) that volunteers were essential for the life of a program.

> *My concern was that in our discussions, we tend to start with the issue of funding rather than the issue of volunteers. We say we use volunteers because it's the funding that drives us to do that and I was trying to raise the question, because I thought there was a role for volunteers in the program because they bring a sense of the community to the program that paid staff may not always bring or may find difficult to bring for a variety of reasons, and the question to them is what is the best way to make use of those volunteers. I think the way we use them now, often doesn't allow them to bring that community into the program because we make them into teachers and that doesn't bring that sense in.*

> *It's [volunteers] something that kind of renews the program. I think there are positive aspects to having a program that brings people in from the community as volunteers and as you were mentioning, they go out into the community again and influence how things are done in the community.*

If not as tutors, then as what? The participants had a variety of suggestions. One pointed out that we were inconsistent in our philosophy: we work very hard to find

out what experiences our learners bring to literacy so that we can build on their strengths, but we don't do that, or don't do it very often, with our volunteers.

> *I think we also have an area a bit backwards and that is we speak a lot about the importance of building on the learning strengths of the learners and we haven't applied that same methodology or philosophy to the tutors in that we haven't maybe spent the same kind of attention finding out what the skills are that the tutor brings to the job or brings to the program and then how we can access that skill and strength for the purpose of the program.*

One participant had recently met with an organized volunteer group that wanted to support literacy work, but was not interested in tutoring. That group had itself suggested a great number of ways that it's talents could serve literacy work.

> *They could provide daycare, they could provide transportation, particularly to those that were somewhat removed from where a tutoring project or formal program was maybe going on. They could provide, in some cases, the space where this could happen. The biggest one that I twigged into in terms of how it could be of assistance particularly to me, let alone the learner, was that they could provide promotion. They've got perhaps one of the biggest volunteer networks in our province and particularly where it's rural, where it's difficult for us to reach often. They have a newsletter that goes out every month or so to everyone of these communities, to everyone of their organizations throughout the province and there's probably fifty or more of these organizations scattered throughout our province and they are rural-based and they are community-based. The promotion in that alone was just tremendous, the mushroom effect, because each one of their groups probably had 50 or more members who all got this newsletter and then all of their friends were aware of what this organization was doing as well.*

Still, it was generally agreed that volunteers were an important direct part of literacy learning. Not only did they bring abilities that might not be available to paid staff, they might well be the next paid staff.

> *I agree, we need professionalization but what clouds it is the fact that many people who started as volunteers are the same ones who want to move up and become professionalized.*
>
> *One aspect of volunteers that seems very positive to me is that that process that somebody mentioned of being a tutor and then becoming a literacy worker, it's a way that a person in a particular community without necessarily any formal teacher's training or background of that kind can become part of the literacy program.*

In short, the broad consensus was that volunteers were important, but that tutoring, particularly the initial tutoring, where learners faced the greatest difficulties getting learning underway, was not an appropriate role for them. Not that they should not have an active part in teaching,

It seems to me that the people who need the most experienced adult education literacy workers are the people that aren't getting them. The people with the most experience are teaching the upper level who I figure a good trained volunteer could do the best work for.

but that that role should not be broad and should be carefully monitored.

They decided that volunteers should never be used as a substitute for paid staff but they can be used as an adjunct in the delivery of literacy services as long as there is a proper infrastructure for support and there's proper supervision by paid staff.

There was interesting and generative discussion of the term 'volunteer' itself and the message that it sent out. This was particularly an issue for some francophone programs, where 'bénévole', the term that is regularly used for 'volunteer', carries the connotation that one is giving something rather than sharing an experience. One group had chosen to use 'militant' instead because that reflected more the program's belief in literacy work as social action and transformation. Still, there was in this program a desire to use volunteers for the connection to the community that they provided and because that permitted greater freedom from the restrictions that came with government funding.

The presence of volunteers becomes particularly important, and new ideas about their use occur, when we understand that literacy programs do more than teach literacy to learners. Most also have a mandate to inform the community about literacy and to address other issues, plain writing, for example.

We're also saying that literacy is a community issue. As you were saying, [volunteers] are not something to do first, it just happens to be a vehicle through which you can also access different aspects of your community life, work, social, personal, etc. What I think the role for volunteer tutors can be is that, if we were to find out, for example, a tutor who comes into the program, who happens to be an electrician or happens to be an artist or whatever area that we can identify, we should take those strengths and say O.K., when we have a learner who needs more information in that particular area, we could certainly tap it in terms of just materials development and say, 'Well, how can you help us with this material?' but we can also go the other way which is to say, 'O.K., as an electrician or as a carpenter, or a teacher or whatever else you do in the other part of your life, you're dealing with people who, if we believe the statistics, 25% or so are going to have difficulties with reading and writing.'

The volunteers also learn in the program. I doubt that participating in a program is going to make a volunteer non-sexist and non-racist. It does change volunteers' attitudes and I think we have to be aware that some people who might not seem quite right at the beginning, if they're open when they enter the program as a volunteer, that participation as a volunteer will change their attitude and that's part of why volunteers are important in programs because they do learn as part of the program.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

VOLUNTEERS IN LITERACY

Reporters: Serge Wagner/Audrey Thomas

Preface

In many communities in Canada, volunteers have played significant roles in providing literacy development opportunities for adults. These contributions of volunteers are to be recognized and respected.

The degree of acceptance and valuing of voluntarism as a means of responding to social needs varies from community to community. These variations need to be accounted for in planning whether and how to engage volunteers in literacy work. In some communities, people want to and would continue to volunteer in literacy work, even if there were funding to pay for all aspects of the work.

Literacy development work includes various dimensions, and any or all of these dimensions may be emphasized in a particular program: reading and writing development, personal/human/general educational development, and community development/transformation. The perspective and emphasis on these dimensions will influence how volunteers are engaged in programs.

Volunteers in literacy work have opportunities to learn about the various social, cultural, and political dimensions of literacy development and related factors.

Principles

In specific contexts, volunteers can be an integral part of literacy work. They should be encouraged to take various roles, including instruction, under the following conditions:[4]

- The program has a basic philosophy of community involvement.
- It is recognized that paid staff are necessary to provide program continuity.

[4] There was general consensus that there are roles for volunteers in literacy work; however, there was not entire consensus about the instructional roles of volunteers. In a situation where volunteers are working extensive hours and doing the same work as paid instructors, if funding were available, these volunteers would be paid, rather than asked to work voluntarily.

- It is recognized that volunteers widen access to literacy education, but do not provide a sole approach or substitute for other provision.

    - For some adults, volunteer-based programs are the first stage of literacy development which leads to continuing development and learning.

- Volunteers are not used as a substitute for paid instructors.

    Additional Points:

    - Add "wherever possible" to account for realities of underfunding in some constituencies.

    - Volunteers should not be used because there is a lack of funding to pay staff.

- Wherever possible, volunteers work in the same situation as an instructor or other professional staff.

- Adequate public resources are provided to provide these and other supports for volunteers: resources, training, development and ongoing guidance, and support from professional staff.

    - Volunteers have access to the same developmental and in service training which is available to paid staff.

- Volunteers should be considered first for paid positions which may become open in a program - recognition of prior experience leading to certification.

- Peer tutoring is encouraged, and where possible, programs should seek volunteers who have similar backgrounds and experiences to literacy learners.

- Literacy learners have roles as volunteers.

- Volunteer roles can include: tutoring (one-to-one and groups), outreach, recruitment, promotion and awareness, advocacy, administration, providing transportation and daycare, linking with specific communities, funding, writing lower-level reading materials, tutor training.

"Special Needs" Populations: Integration vs. Segregation

Opening Discussion

What educational approach should be offered to individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities and those with behavioural problems? How can literacy practitioners respond adequately to the needs of this particular clientele? Should integration into regular groups be encouraged and differences overlooked? Should special groups be created and a form of segregation introduced? Or should a compromise be reached in which individuals with special needs are judged according to their potential and not exclusively on the basis of their limitations?

Representing the adult education sector, support groups for itinerant instructors, community literacy groups, and government institutions, the participants in this workshop attempted to define an educational approach based on the diversity of learners' needs, regardless of their differences. The ultimate challenge is to ensure that literacy is a right for all people, including those with special needs. To date, literacy has not been able to meet this challenge adequately. All too often, individuals with special needs are marginalized; their specific needs are not clearly understood and the literacy services they are offered are poorly adapted. Members of the workshop had harsh criticism for existing literacy programs serving individuals with special needs, but they also offered what they considered to be solutions.

Learning Disabilities - A Catch-all Category

In an attempt to recognise the differences that distinguish learners, a category called "learning disabilities" has been created. The original intent was to take into account special problems affecting certain individuals that required an unusual educational approach. In practice, however, this category has become a catch-all. All learners who do not progress at the same rate as the majority of other learners are indiscriminately placed in this category. Up until now, literacy programs have not been able to distinguish between various types of difficulties, or to introduce a system flexible enough to take into account the individual background of each learner. As a result of this confusion, learners with special needs have been poorly identified and poorly served. According to the workshop participants, literacy programs are not equal to the task of serving individuals with special needs. They explained why this was so.

What is a learning difficulty?

The members of the workshop made an initial observation that there are essentially three types of physical and psychological problems that lead to learning disabilities:

1. physical handicaps
2. intellectual handicaps
3. behavioural problems.

These handicaps lead to deficits which have to be recognized; some learners do indeed have learning disabilities. The second step is to ensure that the term "learning disability" does not have a negative connotation, that it is explained and used advisedly. For example, there is a fundamental difference between physiological problems such as deafness or short-sightedness, which make it difficult to receive information, and intellectual problems. In the case of a physiological problem, the learning difficulty is "mechanical" in nature. Some participants preferred to use the term "learning styles". These differences should not require a major adjustment in terms of access or teaching methods. In such cases, special attention is all that is required. In the case of intellectual handicaps, the educational practices must be modified; however, classroom ghettoes must not be created.

Is labelling a necessary evil?

It cannot be denied that some learners have learning difficulties; does this mean that we should try to label them? One participant felt that labels resulted in unnecessary segregation.

> *We label a group of individuals for vague reasons and create confusion.*

Another participant added,

> *Labelling does create barriers, but at the same time, it offers some individuals with inadequate literacy skills the possibility of gaining access to programs that are specifically adapted to their needs.*

What is more, labelling enables learners to identify their "differences" as well as the learning problems -- or challenges -- that these entail. Labels become useful and enlightening. The participants felt that labelling had a positive effect only when it was used to adapt programs to the special needs of certain learners. Otherwise, labelling became an instrument of marginalization, even of psychological destruction.

The participants' position on labelling became clearer. They were in favour of labelling to the extent that it forced the education system to adapt. They were against labelling when its only function was to exclude and marginalize individuals with disabilities.

Their position on judicious labelling raised another question. How should labelling be done? Past experience provides little useful information. The tests which are still used today to classify and label individuals with special needs are fundamentally biased. They do not reflect the complex nature of society. They do not take into account its cultural, social or psychological diversity. According to the participants, these tests are only able to identify marginality in relation to some abstract average standard, regardless of the individual's disability or its severity. In short, they provide little useful information. Where literacy programs for individuals with special needs are concerned, standardized norms are not recommended. A personalized, flexible approach that recognizes each learner's style represents a better approach.

An effective labelling system should take into account the context in which each individual with a learning difficulty is learning. At the present time, this is not the case. Precedence is given to the very physical limitations that the learner is trying to overcome by obtaining an education. In this regard, the members of the workshop deplored the fact that professionals may charge up to $1,000 a day to refer individuals without taking into account their educational context. It seems absurd to fund referral centres that have a complete disregard for learners' educational requirements. Institutional clientism is harmful. It is often used to obtain subsidies or to meet "quotas" willy-nilly, to the detriment of the true needs of individuals with disabilities. It would be preferable for those who refer individuals with learning disabilities to develop a referral pattern that takes into account their educational vision.

In spite of these reservations and the changes that are called for in the current labelling system, the participants agreed that labelling could have a positive impact provided it was not an end in itself and did not contribute to segregation. Acknowledging a difference that is problematic, but that is also full of potential on an educational level, may be a source of strength for individual learners, a means of identifying themselves and their needs.

It makes the person say, 'Oh, yes, that's me, that's the problem I've got'.

Furthermore, judicious labelling can make it possible to adjust services to individual needs, so that for the effort expended by the individual encountering learning disabilities there is a complementary effort in available literacy services. Labelling must provide information, or input, that can be used to modify a learner's program.

To sum up, "learning disabilities" must be seen as a challenge for the education system. They must be treated as differences, not as shortcomings. This nuance is a critical one. It dictates an appropriate attitude. It points to the need for change in literacy practices because, all too often, literacy practitioners focus on the weaknesses, not the strengths and aptitudes, of people with disabilities. A participant from Ontario remarked that, unfortunately, learning disabilities were not the only problem. There were also teaching difficulties, i.e., difficulties encountered by practitioners and program directors in adapting to the clientele and its special needs. Most members

of the workshop felt that the label, "learning disability" makes sense only when used to identify an individual's needs, background, and educational requirements. It must enable practitioners to overcome their own difficulties, provide them with information on the special needs of some of their learners, and enable them to serve those learners better.

Literacy and Socialization: Integration of People with Disabilities

What approach should be used with learners who have learning disabilities? An individual or a collective approach? A one-to-one or a group approach? Should these learners be grouped together exclusively or integrated with "the others"?

Some participants felt that a one-to-one program respects the differences, uniqueness, background, and pace of individual learners. Such a program makes it easier for the instructor to adapt the material to the difficulties encountered by the learner. Close contact with the instructor makes it possible for the learner to develop the ability to interact. In this way, the literacy program adapts to the special needs of the learner and provides better results. However, it is a long-term undertaking, requiring continuity, in which the instructor becomes a travelling companion of sorts.

Other participants felt that a program that was too personalized did not provide the opportunities for social interaction that could occur if instruction were offered in a group setting, and that it deprived the learner of any opportunity for socialization and integration.

Weighing the pros and cons of these two options, the workshop participants concluded that it was necessary to work simultaneously on both fronts. The group approach does not negate the individual. It is entirely possible, even preferable, to use a one-to-one approach within a social setting, such as a class or group. One practitioner related that for learners with special needs, the most intense experiences in learning communications skills often occur at the coffee break, when learners try out their new skills.

This anecdote clearly illustrates once again that there is more to literacy than learning to read and write. For individuals with special needs it is, undeniably, a means of socialization and integration into the community.

Literacy practitioners must make the mission of integration their own. Recognizing the special needs of individuals with learning disabilities and adapting their practices to meet these needs does not mean that special groups have to be created. The workshop participants felt that individuals with disabilities should not be isolated; rather, they should be integrated into normal learning groups. However, integration should not have the effect of diluting the special services that their needs require. Integration should simply involve becoming part of the whole, living as full members of society.

A practitioner from Quebec stated that individuals with disabilities are integrated into most groups. Another pointed out that today, most *"normal"* schools have integration policies. Why should it not be the same with literacy? Regular learners may have some fears concerning the integration of individuals with learning disabilities. In response to a question about the risk of segregation and ostracism within the group, one participant replied that it disappears quickly. Integration can be accomplished without difficulty. Instructors have to show leadership by teaching tolerance, acceptance, and even appreciation of differences. There is, however, a limit to integration. In the case of learners with behavioural problems, for example, disruption of the group may set the limit. One participant related an incident in which a violent learner hit a computer. He had to be made to understand that he belonged there, and this took patience. Eventually, he became fully integrated into the group.

Lastly, the workshop participants recalled that priority should be given to involving learners in defining specific needs that might require special treatment. This should not rule out the possibility of integration, which reflects reality in all its diversity and richness. Integration can only encourage individuals to identify their strengths and differences, and to carve out their own personal space in the real world.

Principles...

Following this discussion, the members of the workshop arrived at a number of principles to guide literacy practices applicable to individuals with special needs. They were careful, however, not to limit the scope of these principles to people with disabilities. Whenever possible, they preferred to use general expressions, such as "everyone". In so doing, they expressed a willingness to promote the integration of individuals with disabilities and a refusal to marginalize them with useless labels. The principles ratified by the workshop are as follows.

1. Everyone has the right to literacy and an education adapted to his or her learning style.

2. Everyone should have adequate access to public literacy programs.

3. Public literacy programs should provide a variety of approaches that include one-to-one learning, small groups, classes, and "open learning".

4. Everyone has the right to "equity of outcome", which goes beyond equal opportunity. Handicapped individuals have the right, for example, to extra help in finding employment.

5. Enrichment and universality are possible in literacy programs through a learner-centred approach; however, this does not mean a narrowly individualistic or isolationist approach.

6. Everyone, learners and tutors alike, has the right to be aware of the special needs that a handicap creates, not for medical diagnostic purposes, but in order to provide information that could improve the practitioner's approach and more clearly define the learner's expectations.

7. Learning tools that place value on the strengths of individuals with disabilities should be used at all stages of the learning process.

8. All learners should be able to choose their literacy program and learning methods. If necessary, they may be helped to make an enlightened choice.

In addition to ratifying these general principles, the workshop members were unanimous in rejecting referral centres, as opposed to learning resource centres, that referred individuals with disabilities to special programs on the basis of the pre-established structures of the education system, rather than on the basis of their needs.

...and Their Application

According to the members of the workshop, these principles should in future form the basis for literacy work with people with disabilities who are trying to improve their condition through learning. Before these principles are implemented, several changes are necessary. We should ensure:

1. Better coordination between programs and the adoption of aims and objectives adapted to the needs of learners.

2. The adoption of a policy of integration, that restores the "natural proportion" of people with disabilities in regular groups. This will require concrete measures to provide greater accessibility, such as access ramps and books in braille, and better training for practitioners so that they can learn, for example, body language that will enable them to better understand the needs of individuals who have difficulty expressing themselves.

3. Enrichment of literacy programs, a variety of models for intervention, and greater flexibility in learning and teaching methods.

4. Working together with learners to reach "equity of outcome", while respecting the principle of different learning styles.

5. A greater degree of collaboration in learner referrals. Referrals must serve the learner, not the centre or the centre's administrative needs or quotas. This should not, however, lead to over-labelling or incorrect labelling. Caution should be exercised in using automatic referrals based on standardized tests that marginalize people with disabilities.

6. That in all literacy activities, the focus is on the learners' strengths, not their weaknesses.

7. That educational and financial resources are allocated to the special needs of people with disabilities.

8. That we never lose sight of the fact that literacy and socialization go hand-in-hand; an individual's approach to learning always has social consequences.

The changes advocated by the workshop participants were many and profound; however, they felt that these changes were necessary because, at the present time, the approach to literacy for individuals with learning disabilities is inadequate.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

"SPECIAL NEEDS" POPULATIONS: INTEGRATION vs. SEGREGATION

Reporter: Tracy Odell

A) General Comments

- Segregated group to talk about inclusion!
  - No contest - Integration won.
- Should be dealt with **across** all topics ... however ...
- Many points will reflect good practice in general, but go one step further to make inclusion more explicit.
- We assume "special needs" are for the person, but the changes/principles show the people with the special needs are sometimes running the programs, for example, those who cannot see the need for ASL, interpreters and ramps.

B) Recommendations

1. Every person has the right to be literate. People have the right to lifelong learning in a variety of settings and contexts.

   Recommendations:
   - Better linkages between programs
   - Program articulation of goals/outcomes

2. All people should have equitable access to programs that are publicly funded, so:

   All publicly funded literacy programs should include the **whole** community. Therefore, if people with disabilities are living in the community, then ALL programs should include a proportional number of people with disabilities.
   (This should not be a surprise; we know who is coming through the system.)

   Recommendations: Institute a policy of inclusiveness and "natural proportion". This ensures all programs do their part to be inclusive; avoid making new ghettos. This will require physical accessibility and staff training.

3. An array of publicly funded literacy programs should use a variety of approaches including one-to-one, small groups, classes and "open learning" part-time and full-time.

   Recommendations: Enrich literacy provision through a variety of delivery models.

4. Every person has the right to "Equity of Outcomes". Therefore, for example, if students attend college to acquire working skills for a chosen job/career, then this outcome will also be valid for people with disabilities through supported employment (perhaps) with literacy taught across the curriculum and work placement in an integrated location. This goes beyond "equal opportunity" or equal access.

   Recommendations: Allocate resources according to **needs**.
   - Be proactive in ensuring equity of outcomes.
   - Maintain a value for "difference", for example, different learning styles.

5. Empowerment and inclusion are derived from a "learner-centred" model. Learner-centred does not have to be individual and isolated, but can also apply to groups and classes. It is a departure from being curriculum- or program-centred. This is important for the people with disabilities. It is not assumed all people learn the same way and need the same curriculum.

6. Every person has the right to identify, or to have identified, any specific needs that arise from the disability - not the medical model, but rather the *"Getting to know you"* approach. Millions of dollars spent on *"assessment"* testing could be put to better use. Some consultants make $1,000 a day testing others.

   Recommendations: Assessments are done collaboratively.
   - Assessments serve the learner's, not the agency's or evaluator's (fiscal) needs.
   - Assessment does not contribute to *"labelling"* or mis-labelling.
   - Assessment process is driven by strengths, not deficits.
   - Program staff receive training in non-standardized assessment tools that meet these criteria.
   - Assessments vs standardized testing - who benefits from testing - the people paid to do the tests - people get labelled - what does the label offer?

7. Use materials that capitalize upon the person's strengths, learning and experiences. For example, a person who lived in an institution will have an inherent knowledge of power relationships.

   Recommendations: Re-write teaching materials which offer good strategies so these strategies are framed in the context of strengths, not deficits.

8. The learner determines curriculum and methodologies by being assisted to make *"informed choices"*. The team approach has been really useful in London, including people with severe disabilities.

   Recommendations:
   - Curriculum directly relates to learner goals (*"pre"* means *"never"*, for example, pre-reading, pre-vocational).
   - Staff do not assume learner's interest.
   - Literacy is not necessarily hooked to work training.
   - Train staff to read body language for confirmation and informed choice, especially for people who cannot articulate.
   - Train staff in adapting curriculum and learning tools.
   - Social and learning goals are interdependent. When a group of people are devalued, then any social goals being met are considered invalid ---> double standard.

Note: We could not support a separate assessment centre which would assign people to segregated, specialty programs.

Issues for Literacy in the 90's

One of my concerns for the 90's is how we build on the level of public awareness that has come about since International Literacy Year. Literacy now, perhaps, needs to be taken seriously. People know we have a problem. Members of the general public can quote statistics and you can have a reasonable conversation with people about literacy in this country which you couldn't have, say, a decade or even 15 years ago. There is this level of public awareness and where are we going with it, and what are we doing with it? There are a lot more players in the field. How do we capitalize on that, and what can we do to help all the people that now have the awareness to take literacy seriously so that it continues to be on the agenda, so that there are funds made available for programming, which is where it really needs to happen and where, in most instances, or in many parts of the country, there are not funds for programs? What can we do to help push that agenda forward, if we're really serious about making some impact by the year 2000?

The purpose of the session on Literacy in the 90's was to identify some of issues that would face literacy policy and literacy work in the next decade. The first task the group explored was identifying just where literacy stood as an issue in 1991.

Is literacy really an issue and what kind of issue is it?

Some participants felt that the efforts of International Literacy Year in 1990 had helped put literacy on the agenda; others were less sure. One cited, as an example, a current newspaper editorial that had rejected the results of the Statistics Canada survey, saying that the problems really didn't exist and that the figures were simply blown out of proportion by 'people who were hoping to get a lot of funding'.

Even those who believed that the profile of literacy as an issue had risen, however, were not certain that it had got on the right agendas. Indeed, there was some concern expressed that too many people thought that literacy should be on someone else's agenda, not theirs. That is, it appeared to be widely agreed that adult literacy was a problem in Canada, but there was very little agreement on what kind of problem it was or whose problem it was. One of the challenges for the 90's, then, for the literacy community was to develop a clear argument about what and who.

There was considerable concern that literacy would be seen only as an issue of international competitiveness and that literacy practice would get distorted as an economic rather than a rights issue.

Part of what has made governments receptive to literacy as something that should be taken seriously and funded is not due to the efforts of advocacy organizations, and to some extent, even not to public awareness that's been built up over the last five years or so, but rather to the economic argument that literacy's a key element in Canada's

productivity or competitiveness. This, I think, feeds into concerns about the ways in which the overall shape of literacy activity might be developed within government policies, that is, that it would come to be something that was more and more clearly dovetailed with the means of industry in various particular areas, and would be less and less associated with community needs and individual needs that didn't coincide with those needs of industry.

At the same time, there was also concern that adult literacy would be seen only as a matter of social welfare.

To promote a broader kind of notion of literacy, I think, does require very much all the sorts of things that we spoke about, having a kind of understanding about how limited literacy is connected to a whole range of other educational issues and social issues, which we don't have a very well developed sense of in Canada. What I mean by that is, it seems to me, what we mostly have is an idea that literacy is a welfare problem. We [might] see it as something that's connected to welfare and to the kinds of benefits that should be provided to people that are at the bottom of society. What this ordinarily means is that resources are provided very stingily and begrudgingly, rather than what we might see if there were a notion that everyone in Canadian society has certain basic rights in educational matters, social matters and economic matters, and that there's a kind of base level of provision that no one should be allowed to fall underneath.

Putting Forward the Issue

A first item for literacy in the 90's, then, is to ensure that literacy is identified as a basic right. Achieving this goal requires a number of different strategies. It will certainly require developing partnerships with other groups, but not at the expense of our own framing of the issue.

How do we build networks to others without letting those other peoples' agendas overtake our agenda? This may, to my mind, be one of the most crucial things we're going to do in the next decade. That's part of building that sustained support, to build these networks, but we can't let those networks with industry, with the government, with other advocacy groups dominate us. We have to be careful that our agenda doesn't get lost in those other peoples' agendas.

One of the difficulties that literacy faced, many participants argued, is that there is not a sense in the literacy community that it has much control over the issue.

We don't control the situation. I think a good part of our difficulty of figuring out what to do, how to do it, where to go, is because we don't control the situation, and because we don't quite know how to get control of the situation either, that we feel ourselves buffeted about by all of these decisions that we have no hand in making,

and are made for us by other people. I think that if there's a theme in my reflection on what we need to do in the 90's, it is we need to find ways to get control of what's going on.

Some argued that it would be difficult to find that control because there was no clear voice for literacy. There is the issue of

... who speaks, because I think that's still an issue that the literacy community needs to resolve. It may be that we need many voices, but one of the problems as some of us were discussing at the break, is there may be inappropriate voices speaking on behalf of the community as well, and that may be something that we need to worry about. It's still, to my mind, who speaks on behalf of people involved in literacy work, and it remains an issue to be resolved in some way.

One of the voices that is not being clearly heard is that of literacy learners.

I think that's a very important concern, 'Who's going to speak for us', but I also think we should be asking ourselves, 'How are we going to get the students to speak for themselves?' and I think the whole area we've talked about over the past couple of days, participatory literacy education, and the instructional models that lend themselves to learners taking better control over their lives. I think if we don't start working with our students and learners to get them to become better advocates of what they want to say, then we're not going to hear a full voice, we're not going to hear as strong a voice as we could.

The group also identified what it felt were some key issues on the literacy agenda. One was to extend public awareness about the nature of literacy itself. Often it was seen as simply reading (or reading and writing), a view that does not incorporate the notion that literacy is a social practice, an idea that is central to most literacy work. Some also expressed a concern that the public (and some governments) felt that the literacy problem could be dealt with simply by treating those adults who had literacy difficulties, because the system had corrected the flaws that had led to the problem in the past. Others felt that the growing public concern with K-12 education presented an opportunity to influence views of literacy, but that it was important for literacy to have an influential voice in the debate so that inappropriate solutions did not win the day.

What can literacy offer?

Although the participants expressed concern about the difficulty of gaining control of the issue on our terms, several pointed out that literacy itself had developed valuable expertise and that building support and alliances through that expertise was important.

require a consolidation of our experience, so we know better where we are and where we need to go. The workshop left the community with three questions to guide this consolidation.

1. What will lead us to be more reflective about the work we do?

2. How do we learn from each other?

3. How do we learn from literacy work in other societies and cultures?

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

ISSUES FOR LITERACY IN THE 90's

Reporter: Stan Jones

- Transform public awareness into sustained support ensuring that the economic interest in literacy is transformed into support for flexible programs.
- Extend public awareness to an understanding of the sources of low literacy including the understanding that those sources have not disappeared.
- Extend public awareness to an understanding that literacy is not just an educational issue.
- Who speaks for literacy?
- What can be done to help learners have a voice beyond the literacy community?
- How do we build networks to others (other education providers, social action groups, industry, for example) without letting their agendas overtake ours?
- How can we deal with inappropriate demands for literacy?
- Can we build alliances with others working for alternate, appropriate, assessment?
- Can we correct some inaccurate public perceptions regarding people with low literacy?
- We must become aware of and more reflective about what it is that we know how to do.
- We need to continue to develop our understanding of literacy work in other societies and cultures.
- Changing patterns of immigration (refugees) to Canada present a new challenge to literacy work.

Community-Based Literacy

Background

This session was one of the last four sessions, which were requested by the participants on their registration forms. In the requests, a number of different concerns relating to community-based literacy provision were identified, based on different conceptions of community-literacy. In many ways, this session's discussion was about these conceptions - what makes them different and what they have in common.

Because a large part of the session was spent in defining community-based literacy, it is impossible to begin with a definition, as part of the background. It is possible, however, to outline very briefly some of the different traditions of community-based literacy, in Francophone and Anglophone Canada.

Community-based literacy in Quebec and in Francophone communities outside Quebec:

- is modelled on the popular education approach first developed in Latin America
- offers small group instruction
- follows a curriculum based on themes and issues relating to the community
- relies on paid "animators", seldom using volunteers in an instructional role.

Anglophone community-based literacy:

- is taken from various models developed in U.S. (Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach), U.K. (ALBSU) and popular education (mostly as a result of the influence of ESL literacy practice)
- offers a variety of instructional settings, mostly one-to-one tutoring with some small group and "drop-in" instruction
- uses trained, unpaid volunteers in conjunction with paid staff.

In general, the difference between the two traditions is that, whereas in Quebec, the definition of community-based literacy has been systematically articulated, in English Canada community-based literacy has evolved in a pragmatic, piecemeal fashion, responding to various need and challenges, resulting in a variety of program models.

The discussion relating these two traditions is somewhat confused by the language used. Whereas "community-based" is often used as a translation for "alphabétisation populaire", Francophone practitioners usually speak of "alpha pop" and "alpha communautaire" as very different approaches. This distinction was further outlined in the session.

The Native literacy field has a more recent tradition of community-based literacy, which does not follow either of these traditions. However, discussion about community literacy is important to Aboriginal communities since, in many parts of the country, community organizations are the only providers of literacy education.

While these are the two predominant traditions which fall under the heading of community-based literacy, it is important to realize that there are many exceptions, especially across the Anglophone field, where development has followed a variety of different approaches, including popular education.

The Discussion

The first half of the session was spent articulating some definitions of community-based literacy provision. As a starting point for these discussions, the participants were given a list of descriptors of community literacy which were developed by the Literacy Branch as part of the Ontario Community Literacy program; these identified some key features of community literacy programs. This list was meant to give a starting point to the discussion. These descriptors are:

- AUTONOMOUS from formal organizational and institutional structures
- ACCESSIBLE to the WHOLE community
- LINKED to other organizations and programs in the community
- INNOVATIVE in terms of outreach, methodology, curriculum and materials
- ADVOCATIVE on behalf of learners and undereducated adults in the community
- SUPPORTIVE of staff in terms of staff development and training
- RESPONSIVE to the changing needs of the community .

These descriptors were originally drawn up to apply to community-based literacy in Ontario, including Anglophone, Francophone and Native programs.

A different definition was articulated by Francophone participants. In this view there are three kinds of literacy programs: institutional, community-based and popular education. Generally the characteristics of the three kinds of programs were outlined as follows:

Institutional Programs

- administration does not include learners
- follow a pre-set curriculum
- instruction relates primarily to the teaching of reading and writing

Community-based Programs

- learners sometimes involved in administrative decision-making
- follow a curriculum based on the individual learner's needs
- help learner to develop functional literacy skills which will be useful in the community

Popular Education Programs

- learners always a part of administrative decision-making
- follow a curriculum based on collective needs of learners
- facilitate learning which involves analysis of social issues, leading to social change.

The discussion which followed revealed that, in general, the Francophone literacy field has a much clearer definition of these categories of literacy provision, based on the articulation of ideological principles. The Anglophone field on the other hand seems to have based its principles upon a much looser definition of the term.

One of the main features that all community-based literacy programs share is their autonomy from educational institutions. However, it was pointed out, that this did not mean that some programs run by school boards and community colleges did not share some of the characteristics of community-based programs. This point was made several time by participants of this session and specific examples were given of these kinds of "community-based institutional programs."

Having established some of these definitional differences, the discussion moved to a number of particular concerns which the participants shared about community literacy.

One of these issues was the concern that community-based programs are increasingly asked to perform tasks which change their nature. As one participant said:

> *I am concerned about a tendency to think that community-based programs can deliver a range of different kinds of programs. I think the things community programs can do have some intrinsic qualities and that they can only be used in certain ways.*

On the other hand, it was pointed out, a too narrow definition of these qualities might limit a community-based program's abilities to respond to changes in the community and to serve the whole community, perhaps making it less "responsive and accessible" than it could be. This was seen as a creative tension in the development of community-based programs.

This increasing demand to deliver a variety of programs was related to the sometimes tenuous relationship between community-based programs and other institutional programs.

> *I think that community programs, when they are going to deliver programs in different ways, or form liaisons or arrangements with other organizations, had better be careful that their organizational structure and philosophy permits that to happen in that framework. It is something that should not be lightly entered into.*

Although it is often in the interest of community-based programs to establish working links with institution-based programs, it should be done from a position of strength, involving equal organizations working together. Otherwise there is a risk that community-based programs will simply became part of a larger school board or college program, losing their unique capabilities.

Throughout the discussion there was a recurrent theme relating to community-based literacy and government support. This took a number of different forms, including statements such as the following.

- There is a need for funding programs designed specifically to support community-based literacy programs.
- These funding programs should be based on a recognition of the nature of community-based literacy.
- Government programs should also include support for the development of community-based literacy organizations.
- Government programs need to take into account the linguistic and cultural specificity of communities.

The discussion moved on to address the question of how to legitimize the idea of community-based programs and this was related again directly to the question of

funding. When placed in a national context, funding for community-based literacy programs is very uneven. Most provinces have no funding for community-based organizations, aside from project funding from the federal government. It was agreed that a fundamental goal should be the recognition and legitimization of community-based literacy programs at all levels of government.

This last point served to move the discussion from a context of particular provinces where there are well-established community-based literacy fields (mostly Ontario and Quebec), to a national context, where community literacy is not as well established. In this wider context, the group was able to agree upon a number of essential features of community-based literacy programs which might apply to the whole range of community-based models. These included the seven listed above along with a number of others, as given in the principles reported at the plenary session.

An important outcome of the session was the recognition that the term community-based literacy is not a single, monolithic entity. It encompasses a number of different traditions and definitions. At the same time, there are features which all community-based programs hold in common, including functions to which they are suited better than other kinds of programs, especially relating to the specific needs and the nature of their communities, including cultural, linguistic, economic or political characteristics.

Overall participants in this session demonstrated a respect for the differences between the various conceptions of community-based literacy. At the same time, they were able to establish some common principles which could provide a basis for the development of community-based literacy anywhere in the country. This could not have been achieved without the openness and willingness to listen which characterized the tone of the session.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

COMMUNITY-BASED LITERACY PROGRAMS

Reporter: Guy Ewing

1. Characteristics of Community-based Literacy

Community-based literacy is:

- autonomous
- accessible
- linked to other organizations in a community
- participatory
- innovative
- advocative
- supportive
- responsive to the changing needs of a community
- culturally and linguistically relevant to a community
- defined by the community it serves
- able to draw on the strengths and resources within a community.

Community-based literacy goes beyond the transfer of reading and writing skills. It starts with learners' needs. It is not based on a predetermined curriculum. It empowers individuals and the community.

2. The Legitimacy of Community-based Literacy

A community has the inherent right to control its own literacy program.

3. Funding

Community-based literacy should be recognized by all levels of government. Community-based literacy programs must receive adequate core funding to permit independent action to respond to community needs.

4. Consultation

All policy affecting community-based literacy should be developed in consultation with community participants, particularly with those who have been historically excluded.

5. Cooperation

There should be a sharing of understandings and information. There should be cooperation on issues of mutual concern, for example, the rights of linguistic and cultural minorities.

Literacy and Youth

Opening Discussion

The participants began by remarking how few people there were in the workshop. This seems to reflect a well-known problem: the absence of young people in the workshop, the absence of young people on the list of people invited to the conference, and the absence of young people in government priorities in general. According to the participants, this results from a lack of understanding of the problem of illiteracy among young people and is a generalization of the feeling that the schools play a lead role and that new approaches to literacy are not needed for a group that is already well served by educational institutions.

> *Many people in adult literacy felt that those funds allocated for that certainly shouldn't be going to youth education, so I feel in a sense there almost could be something of a competition going on, although I think when we are looking at lifelong learning and a continuum of learning and the fact that those youth who are dropping out in high school are very very soon going to be adults, it is an absolutely important concern of adult literacy practitioners and people involved in government as well.*

Low attendance in the workshop reflects a deeper social malaise. Ultimately, illiteracy among young people is the product of an education system that thought that it could solve all of its problems through accessibility, but that was thwarted by social and cultural factors that it had failed to take into consideration.

Is there any potential for change in the schools? Can we come up with an alternative for young drop-outs? How can we help young people to maintain their interest in learning? How can we offer an alternative to the schools that have rejected them? How can we change a negative school experience into a positive literacy experience? Are we facing an uncertain future?

The Failure of a System and the Questioning of an Attitude

> *Of course, he does not fit in there again, he does not fit in the class that he's supposed to be in, he does not fit in the special ed class, he doesn't fit in at home, so how do we meet the needs of this young person?*

The time has come to re-think the education system, because it only meets the needs of a certain percentage of the population. Some citizens do not have access to education which meets their needs. This weakness in the system forces us to re-examine our educational institutions and our perception of education generally. According to one participant from Quebec, it is up to literacy practitioners to speak out on behalf of the youth not served well by the system.

It is difficult for the education system to question itself. After all, it is the education system that is producing illiterate young people, and for a whole range of reasons. If literacy practitioners don't take on this issue, who will? In Quebec, upgrading is a program designed for social assistance recipients, to get them to go back to school and complete their education. That's fine, but they come so that they can do their time and get their cheque. They aren't motivated to learn.

For individuals who have been marginalized by the education system, these programs may grant diplomas that lead, more often than not, to jobs that are precarious. Another participant had this to say:

One of the things that really struck me about vocational schools is that many of the kids were there mainly because they didn't fit anywhere else. The vocational school is becoming equated with the garbage heap and there's no innate reason why they would be better car mechanics than me, really. It's just that that's the only place the school system could put them.

This policy which consists of parking students in vocational courses runs counter to every view on the notion of lifelong education. For the most part these graduates are under-qualified; sooner or later, they join the long lists of workers who need re-training. Industries and governments urgently need to expand their horizons. The participants recalled that providing training for the workforce today ensures the prosperity of society in the future. If Canada fails in this endeavour, will it be ready to compete in the future and respond to changes in the international marketplace?

The workshop participants recalled, however, that the goal is not just to produce workers to keep the wheels of industry turning or consumers to keep the economy running. To achieve the objective of life-long education, schools should also be accessible to different groups within cultural communities. There is an urgent need to re-examine the role of the school. For dropouts in particular, provision must be made for literacy programs that introduce a global vision of training.

I guess that's the part that concerns me about literacy and youth, is that we have no goals for achieving 100% literacy for students in school, that they get accredited or that they get to grades, or that they are assisted in many different ways, but there's not a commitment to making literacies in the many different kinds of ways we know literacies to be available for all the students.

"Should there be a national campaign to promote literacy among young people?" asked one participant. There was no consensus. All too often, astronomical sums of money are spent on advertising, with questionable results. However, the participants did agree that the literacy rate among young people could only be improved by improving the education system.

Cultural Minorities and Illiteracy Among Young People

After discussing the education system at length, the participants watched a video. Their first observation was that illiteracy among young people and illiteracy among minorities are closely connected.

> *The fact that there's such a high rate of illiteracy among French-speaking people outside Quebec has in part the same roots as for Native people, indeed, among the majority.*

Illiteracy among young Native people and young francophones outside Quebec is a clear threat to their cultural survival. In certain situations, the lack of a written code for an oral language, combined with an education system that favours instruction in English, increases the risk of assimilation.

> *I can just imagine the young people now, they don't really have a concrete base to go on because either their parents have the language but they don't pass it on to their children because it's English.*

Services for young Native Canadians in regular school programs are urgently needed.

> *When schooling was introduced and compulsory education was provided, our language was denied and therefore we lost literacy in our language.*

According to one participant from Nova Scotia, the problems of illiteracy and unequal opportunities for academic achievement among Native people are linked to the socio-linguistic context.

> *They might have some difficulties because there's no prepositions in our language or our language is verb-based as opposed to noun-based like English is, and some of the other kinds of things, so they can get a look at how these languages are different and then begin to comprehend that language.*

The relationship between Native parents and their children is another contributing factor. In the Micmac culture, one participant pointed out, parents do not directly encourage their children to stay in school.

> *We have a value of not directly chastising, not directly telling kids what to do, and so when kids say, 'I'm going to drop out of school,' the mother says, 'Oh well, he'll figure it out when he needs it.'*

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- The education system must be improved so that it can respond to young dropouts and potential dropouts.
- Partnerships must be developed among the various players.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

LITERACY AND YOUTH

Reporter: Sophie Artaud

Some Data to Situate Context of Workshop and Recommendations

- Illiteracy among young people under 24 years of age is increasing. **The most recent Statistics Canada survey indicates that 29% of the young people between 16 and 24 years of age are experiencing difficulties with reading, writing and arithmetic!**

- In Quebec, there is a 38% dropout rate; in Ontario, 33% ... e.g., a large portion of tomorrow's working population : they have 40 to 45 years in the workforce ahead of them, with reading and writing problems.

- There is practically no specialized literacy program for young people in Canada. As far as we know, there is only one group in Quebec, "La Boîte à Lettres", and another in Toronto, "Beat the Street" (with its new Francophone counterpart: "Graffiti").

- Study by La Boîte à Lettres: the young illiterates have an average of 10 years of schooling, with 70% of them on unemployment or social assistance, or with no earning power (Canadian Senate Study - March 1991).

Some Findings and Questions

1. Why do young people drop out? For the most part because the school system is inadequate and doesn't meet their expectations; it isn't in touch with their reality ... and it doesn't question itself.

    - **So, need for thorough systemic changes in the school system.**

    - Above all, a need to enhance the value of education, make it meaningful to get an education.

2. Difficult at present to reach the young people: as designed and presented, the literacy programs do NOT attract the youth.

    - Need to set up other, more flexible forms of intervention that correspond to the reality of the young people.

3. Need to set up concrete bridges between the youth literacy and the adult literacy sector.

Video Presentation

Observations:

- Dropouts losing taste for learning.
- The value of education is not enhanced in either the school system or outside the system (society in general).
- The young people who do manage to return to school have been motivated for personal reasons.
    - Often short to middle term projects requiring continual support and constant reminders prevent them from dropping out a second time.
    - There is a constant need to make the link between learning objectives and life objectives.

General Observations of Those Attending the Workshop

- The school system refuses to take a complete or partial look at the problem.
    - It avoids any questioning of its system that would pose a threat.
    - Often it is in competition for literacy budgets.
- There are a great many parallels between the minority groups.
    - Francophones and Native peoples/right to literacy in one's own language.
- Among Native peoples, there is no, or very little, enhancement of the value of learning in general and the written language in particular.

Five Recommendations

Bill: That a program like Beat the Street be set up in every large Canadian city. Intervene to help the young people get out of the vicious cycle of unemployment and violence. Be there for those young street people, and help them resume control of their lives.

Jean-Yves: A recommendation and a wish. Recommendation: that working with young people should be viewed more as social work than teaching. Hope: that the people attending the plenary meeting tomorrow realize that I am astounded so few are attending this workshop .. there's not too much concern for our young illiterates in the literacy sector.

Marie: That the young Native peoples be given the opportunity to become literate in their own language and that the school system recognize the damage it has done to our youth by destroying their feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem, and that they be given the abilities and skills they need to survive in the future.

Joyce: (An observation more than a recommendation) I work with young people, I do what I can to help them out constantly ... There really aren't too many participants today at the workshop ... This is indicative of one thing: to whom are the young people going to be able to turn if we aren't there for them? We're supposed to be models for them, examples ... So we're really going to have to do something ...

Keith: Need for positive and systemic changes in the education of the young people - positive, because we can't just throw stones at the school system. It's a mirror of society. There are societal attitudes that make it what it is today. But some of the ideas presented in this workshop could be quickly and easily integrated into the school system. And this could make a big difference to encourage the young people to stay in school.

Need also for partnerships to include government officials from the other ministries who have an impact on the life of our youth: Social Services, Health and Welfare. It has to be a cooperative undertaking.

Sophie: Very surprised to see so little interest in this workshop. For me, of course, it's the future of our country that's at stake here, but also the future of all our young people ... Someone mentioned it before me: People are just not there at the workshop today. And this reflects the fact that they're not there for the youth in our communities! So a need for positive change. Recommendation: utmost urgency to encourage the literacy sector and the other parties involved to recognize the problem and provide our youth with the necessary support.

Learner Participation

Opening Discussion

Learner participation has emerged not as an option, but as a real necessity. When the participants were asked to comment in turn on the significance of learner involvement, they had many questions and comments. Do learners want to become involved? Is this something that the community wants, or is it a new trend among literacy practitioners? How do we motivate learners to become involved while, at the same time, respecting their needs and wants? In other words, how do we avoid manipulating them?

We have to respect the right of learners to choose whether or not to become involved. They cannot be forced to participate. In order for learners to become involved on a voluntary basis, literacy practitioners urgently need training. For example, how do we involve learners in the annual meeting of a provincial association if they cannot read the proposed agenda? Alternatives to writing and participatory procedures must be improved. Similarly, where involvement in committee work is concerned, learners need training and preparation. What is the most appropriate form of training?

Participation also means involvement at the community level, outside of literacy activities that take place in the classroom or workshop. How can we provide a link between literacy programs and broader learner participation in the future of the community? This raises the issue of post-literacy activities and the participation of former learners.

From the standpoint of the program coordinator, participation raises the issue of the relationship between local and national programs. How can we encourage learner participation in provincial or territorial programs? Similarly, how can we involve learners in controlling the quality of program content?

On the local level, most literacy practitioners ask learners to help with community awareness and recruitment efforts. Learner involvement in the organization of literacy activities generally has very encouraging results. One participant noted the importance of bearing in mind the daily reality of poverty. All too often, general discussions on the "global" issues of literacy fail to take into account the day-to-day reality of learners.

At the conclusion of this discussion, it was realized that the participants were not responding to all of the questions, or commenting on all of the issues. There was little discussion of the merits of learner involvement: it was a given.

The participants explored new ways of ensuring and improving learner involvement. They concluded with a number of general principles and recommendations.

How do we involve learners?

Is it possible to encourage learner involvement without turning it into "the right thing to do"? Learner involvement deserves more than political willingness. It must be taken seriously. It requires tools.

All too often, learner involvement refers to wishes and good intentions. This is how one participant from British Columbia put it:

> *So I am concerned about, as it becomes the popular thing to do, and we are getting pressure from the National Learner Network and so on to have learner involvement on all levels, that we are careful not to abuse learners in that process, that we are careful to notice what our agendas are. Are they truly involved in their own thing or are we manipulating them to be a front for our own political and educational agendas?*

The movement to involve learners is already under way, and it would appear that nothing can slow its pace. From a participant from the Toronto Public Library and Peel Literacy Guild:

> *... the Movement for Canadian Literacy itself should be fifty percent learners in five years, and that was passed at that board meeting, so the Movement for Canadian Literacy has to take on that whole task of how they are going to train people, and the learners in that National Committee were very strong on the fact that that would mean support and that would mean involvement.*

In order to meet the objective of learner involvement, new resources and means are needed. Otherwise, it will never evolve beyond the stage of good intentions. An example of involvement in a provincial organization was offered to illustrate the level of effort that is required to ensure that learners participate.

Before its annual meeting, the provincial association in question organized training sessions. Meetings were planned to inform learners of the content of the discussions. Unfamiliar words were identified and replaced. A revised agenda enabled them to understand the procedure more clearly.

These training sessions were, in fact, an exercise in participatory democracy. A participant from Manitoba explained,

> *At the workshop or group level, the need to be responsive to learners is the basis for involvement.*

In other cases, training is not the first step. Nova Scotia is an interesting case. The literacy coordinator is a learner. He has travelled throughout the province promoting literacy. Involving a learner in this way has been a very effective means of recruiting learners in rural areas. Learners can be involved in fostering community awareness.

Learner involvement is not restricted to associations and public meetings. It also takes place within the community. According to the participants, learners do more than "represent" a literacy program; they demonstrate its accessibility.

A Step Toward Democracy -- or Illusion

After recognizing learner involvement in the literacy process itself, it goes without saying that learners must have the right to participate in the literacy debate. The participants agreed that to achieve this, training sessions for learners and practitioners were needed. The notion of greater learner involvement is at the very heart of the literacy philosophy. In fact, learner participation and involvement is part and parcel of the concept of literacy.

This representation of literacy leads to another idea -- participatory democracy. This link with democracy is linked to the notion of involving a segment of the population that has been marginalized up to this time. Learner involvement or participation is at the very heart of literacy's central objective, which is to apply new knowledge of writing, reading, and arithmetic to everyday life.

Literacy practitioners hope that participants in literacy workshops are learning how to run public meetings, how to look for a job, and so forth. The desired outcome of learner involvement is the transfer of knowledge. Are learners acquiring this knowledge? Are they applying it? Are they developing new skills in participation? Are they able to promote their interests? In other words, is literacy changing the course laid by the legacy of poverty?

According to a participant from Alberta, it is.

> *One volunteered to speak in English at a Chamber of Commerce meeting about literacy and it worked out very well. One found a job in a school which is something that she always wanted to do, but things like that, it's only been about eight or nine months, that we have been really functioning and already we are seeing quite a few of these positive results from this involvement.*

Another participant pointed out that in order to ensure the highest possible level of learner participation and involvement, literacy activities must directly address problems that need to be solved. These may include tenants' associations, women's rights, associations for the unemployed, transportation for learners, and so forth.

At the end of this discussion, the workshop ratified the following principles.

1. In keeping with the learner-centred approach to literacy, literacy needs are understood more clearly if they are discussed with learners at the outset.

2. The philosophy of learner involvement must be respected. The marginalization of people who are not literate must be corrected. Involving a greater number of people in the future of our communities strengthens the entire democratic process.

3. Learners have re-affirmed their right to participate in the development of content and programs.

The workshop recommended that learners be involved in all consultations on literacy. They were critical that few learners were invited to the symposium.

Lastly, the participants recommended that provision be made for learners to be involved in all aspects of the literacy program, including funding, and that resources be made available to promote and support their involvement.

Report and Recommendations Presented at the Final Plenary:

LEARNER PARTICIPATION

Reporters: Omer Caissie/Jenny Horsman

A) The Session Identified Three Reasons Why Learners Should Be Involved In All Aspects Of Adult Literacy Activity

1) It is consistent with the learner-centred philosophy. Literacy needs are better met when there is learner participation at all levels.

2) It is consistent with democratic philosophy. Those who have been disenfranchised should participate in society. Increased participation helps to create a better society.

3) Learners have asked to participate, especially at the curriculum and program level.

B) Recommendations

1) When consultations on literacy are planned, learners should be included in the process. For example, this symposium should have invited learners.

2) We recommend that there be places and opportunities for learners to be involved in all aspects of literacy programs and other literacy initiatives. Further, we recommend that there be resources and means, including funding, to promote and support such involvement.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Reporters: Penny Lawler/Tracy Westell

This group discussed evaluation issues at the macro and micro levels. We realized that evaluation needs a policy framework for it to be meaningful and because of this came up with some principles for policy development and evaluation.

Policy Principles

Adults have a right to literacy and a basic education.

This right will mean:

- full and equal access to quality programs for all adults
- opportunities for lifelong learning
- equity of outcome for adult learners
- responsibility on the part of government to ensure that these goals are met.

Evaluation Principles

Macro Level

- Policy and practice should be evaluated against policy principles.
- Evaluation is built into any policy statement and resources should be provided to support this evaluation.
- Development of criteria for evaluation should actively involve all stakeholders at all levels.

Micro Level

1. Participation: There should be a partnership of all stakeholders in the program.

- Learners must be involved throughout the process in an empowering way.
- All participants set the criteria and indicators.
- Evaluation should take into account many different perspectives from inside the program and within the broader community.

2. Evaluation must be culturally sensitive and relevant:
   - anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-ablist.

3. Evaluation must be an ongoing process.

4. Evaluation must use as many methods and sources as possible:
   - interviews, journals, discussions, popular education, anecdotal, regular reporting, self evaluation.

5. Evaluation must take into account:
   - how learning influences other parts of peoples lives
   - prior experience of learners
   - program goals
   - assessment of teachers and tutors
   - learning outcomes and whether they are equitable
   - materials and their effectiveness.

6. Qualitative evaluation should be emphasized, rather than quantitative evaluation.

7. Program goals should be evaluated for:
   - critical thinking
   - creativity
   - independence of learners and opportunities to move into lifelong learning.

8. Support services and resources must be a part of any evaluation process.

9. Program evaluation should lead to growth, program planning and change.

10. Program evaluation requested by government should be collected and reported on for the benefit of future planning and policy development.

11. Accountability is a key part of evaluation and includes accountability between:
    - programs and learners
    - programs and their communities
    - programs and funders
    - government and programs
    - politicians and the general public

Other Issues Discussed

1. Relationship of Policy and Evaluation:

    - Dynamic - evaluation informs policy. Is this what we should be doing? Is this how we should be doing it?

    - Long Term Vision - need for policy to be stable and consistent so evaluation can be meaningful - can't change from year to year.

2. Purposes of Evaluation:

    - Program improvement and development

    - Accountability
        - funders - government - taxpayers
        - learners
        - community

      Broad accountability protects programs

    - Finally - evaluation information must be shared and used.

RECOGNITION OF LEARNING

(How Learner Accomplishments Are Recognized)

Reporter: Yvon Laberge

A) Preamble

The present credentialing system is inappropriate.

- The group was unable to agree that a system of learner recognition was the best solution to the problem.
- But it was able to agree that no system should be imposed.
- Further, any proposal for a recognition system can be approved only after consultation with those for whom the system will have consequences **and** only after alternative solutions have been explored.

Models

- Credit bank - alternative training experiences
- Course - stated curriculum, for example, Carleton grad program
- Workshops - emerging from needs in the field
- Content courses - emerging from experience in the field
- Levels of training, for example, beginner ---> advanced
- Specific interests/needs, for example, workplace, ESL
- Training the trainers
- Community development, for example problem solving.

B) Recommendations

1. We need to find out what the learner perspective is.
2. Any recognition system would be based on collaboration. It would be a system created and controlled by learners and others in programs.

3. Learners have a central role in determining how their learning is represented in any recognition system.

4. One of the elements of such a system would be recognition of prior learning.

5. Such a system would not require standardization and would respect diversity.

6. A recognition system would not require levels that a learner would pass through.

7. A public information/education, sensitization process would accompany implementation.

8. The system would be able to change and grow as the participants (the owners) saw the need.

9. This discussion is not the end of discussion on this issue.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN WORKPLACE LITERACY

Reporter: Sue Waugh

Summary of Recommendations

Discussion

- ✔ Literacy for workers
- ✔ Literacy for the workforce *vs* workplace literacy
- ✔ People not in workforce (adjustment training)
- ✔ Workers can be anywhere

Definition

1. Recognizing that management, the unions and individuals have different perspectives -

   Good workplace literacy practice must meet the common needs of all stakeholders involved in the WL project, as agreed through an inclusive consultative process.

Principles

(To be adopted by publicly funded organizations delivering WL programs)

2. The process must be cooperative to meet the needs of both the individual and of the organization. If an effective partnership cannot be formed based on shared goals and objectives, then the delivery organization should not proceed with the process and a program.

3. All stakeholders must be involved from the beginning and throughout the process.

4. The process and practice must respect the cultural, linguistic and racial diversity of the WP.

5. Flexibility must be applied when determining program aspects, such as location on or off site, materials, methodology, scheduling, according to the agreed-upon <u>needs</u> of all stakeholders.

6. Language describing the process, the program, and the "participants" should be respectful and should evolve from a wellness, rather than deficiency model. Evaluation techniques should follow this principle and ensure that participants are not labelled negatively.

7. Upgrading opportunities must be built-in and ongoing within the organization to foster a training culture and to facilitate transferability of skills and linkages to further training (not just training as "crisis intervention").

8. Strategies to address literacy issues must go beyond learning opportunities for workers; for example, plain language in the WP, access to information, intercultural communication training.

9. Government funding should be tied to good practice principles.

10. Some way of recognizing learning in workplace literacy needs to be instituted.

11. Participation in a workplace literacy program should be voluntary.

Discussion Point

12. That the right to literacy for adults should be legislated and that WL would exist in this context (that is, employers would be compelled to participate in a continuous training/education process).

LITERACY AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Reporter: Joyce Wabano

We believe that the serious issue of Native literacy programming has either been ignored or approached through inappropriate and ineffective means.

We believe that Native people have the right to be literate in both their mother tongue and the official language of the region. Furthermore, we strongly recommend that aboriginal languages become official in Canada and thus gain the recognition they deserve. In terms of Native literacy programming, we recommend that the following documents be used as a guide or a basis for policy making:

- Aboriginal Literacy Action Plan
- You Took My Talk
- Towards Linguistic Justice
- Native Literacy Research Report.

These documents provide necessary background information and analysis, while also giving concrete recommendations with respect to Native literacy programming.

The following is a summary of the characteristics that our group considered to be most important in Native literacy programs:

1. Programs need to be community-based. This means that they respond to the needs of the community and use community resources.

2. Programs need to be student-centred. This means that:

   - the learners' needs, strengths, desires, experiences, background, etc., are the basis of the curriculum

   - the curriculum is designed through a process of negotiation that involves all the participants: learners, instructors, programmers, community, etc.

   - instructors accommodate a variety of student learning styles

   - program locations, format, scheduling, etc. are flexible enough to cater to the learners' needs and circumstances

   - learners are allowed the necessary time to fulfil their goals

   - the program is flexible enough to respond to the changing needs of the learners and the community

- interaction and cooperation are encouraged
- computers are used as one more instructional tool among many and are not put at the centre of the curriculum.

3. Programs need to follow a holistic approach. This means:
   - recognizing that culture and language cannot be separated
   - language is best learned when it is authentic and natural, kept whole and not divided into meaningless fragments
   - learning of reading and writing is integrated with and in intricate relation to oral language
   - learning is considered to be a holistic process as opposed to a linear, segmented sequence of skills learning
   - all the aspects of the participants' lives are considered to be equally important
   - the participants are whole individuals, members of a family, a community and a nation. In order to ensure that these kinds of programs occur, we recommend that opportunities be provided for:
     - the networking/exchange of information among programs, regionally and nationally
     - the development of Native education/literacy resource centres that centralize and offer expert materials, and all kinds of other resources to programs in a particular region
     - the training of community workers, instructors, facilitators, animation tutors, etc. in the philosophy of community-based, student-centred and holistic programming. That particular emphasis be given to the development of independent Native institutes that will carry out this task.

PRACTITIONER TRAINING SUMMARY REPORT

Reporters: Jean Reston and Meredith Hutchings

A number of issues were discussed and debated. The following were the ones for which there was consensus.

The central theme of our recommendations is that **Training is Essential**. This does not necessarily mean that accreditation is the outcome of training.

For effective training, the group came up with the following. It is recommended that:

1. Time and money be allocated, including funds for paid release time for practitioners (covering expenses for attending, salaries, and substitutes).

2. Training be accessible to all participants - learners, volunteers, staff, administrators.

3. Training be flexible and diverse to meet the needs of practitioners in all types of literacy delivery systems - including training around pedagogic and community development needs.

4. Training needs be self-assessed by practitioners and provision of this training be learner-centred.

5. The development of training reflect the interaction between theory and practice.

6. The provision of training in a jurisdiction provides for an opportunity to experience and exchange different learning approaches.

7. Community groups control training which emerges from ongoing consultation with these groups.

LITERACY AND THE SURVIVAL OF CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

Reporter: Marie Battiste

- ✖ A national or provincial policy for literacy and minorities should ensure a coordinated vision of linguistic and cultural development which encompasses children's education (for example, pre-school, elementary, secondary) and adult education, including literacy and the lifelong learner. **The goal is to prevent the illiteracy of our children –**

Principles of Good Practice

- Cultural and linguistic minorities have the right not only to survive, but also to flourish economically, socially, culturally, linguistically and educationally in Canada.
- We advocate/accept that literacy is a means by which the linguistic and cultural minorities can develop socially, economically, culturally, linguistically and educationally.
- The right to literacy should be recognized and legislated.
- Linguistic and cultural minorities have the right to be literate and educated in their own dialect and first tongue.
- It should be recognized that all linguistic and cultural minorities have the option of multiple solutions to barriers, which will be unique to each community.
- Since educational institutions have not traditionally recognized the needs of cultural and linguistic minorities, recognition of literacy rights by governments should be followed by the development of concrete policies and appropriation of adequate funds to ensure full implementation of the policies.
- All policy initiatives regarding linguistic and cultural minorities should be developed in consultation and collaboration with the learners and communities affected in order to make literacy accountable and responsive to the needs and desires of the stakeholders, learners and communities, as well as increase the policymaker's sensitivity to community needs.
- Learners must be involved throughout the research and development of policies and programs.

- The process should further advocate culturally sensitive practices, that is, anti-racist, anti-ablist, anti-sexist, and anti-classist.

- Finally, to ensure a follow-up to the discussion, the workshop participants created an ad hoc committee which has as its mandate to explore the issues addressed in the session and examine the possibility of future collaboration among diverse cultural and linguistic minority groups. The committee is made up of Raymond Day, Luce Lapierre, Maria Adamczuk and Joyce Wabano and invites other participants to join.

VOLUNTEERS IN LITERACY

Reporters: Serge Wagner/Audrey Thomas

Preface

In many communities in Canada, volunteers have played significant roles in providing literacy development opportunities for adults. These contributions of volunteers are to be recognized and respected.

The degree of acceptance and valuing of voluntarism as a means of responding to social needs varies from community to community. These variations need to be accounted for in planning whether and how to engage volunteers in literacy work. In some communities people want to and would continue to volunteer in literacy work, even if there were funding to pay for all aspects of the work.

Literacy development work includes various dimensions, and any or all of these dimensions may be emphasized in a particular program: reading and writing development, personal/human/general educational development, and community development/transformation. The perspective and emphasis on these dimensions will influence how volunteers are engaged in programs.

Volunteers in literacy work have opportunities to learn about the various social, cultural, and political dimensions of literacy development and related factors.

Principles

In specific contexts, volunteers can be an integral part of literacy work. They should be encouraged to take various roles, including instruction, under the following conditions:[6]

- The program has a basic philosophy of community involvement.
- It is recognized that paid staff are necessary to provide program continuity.
- It is recognized that volunteers widen access to literacy education, but do not provide a sole approach or substitute for other provision.

[6] There was general consensus that there are roles for volunteers in literacy work; however, there was not entire consensus about the instructional roles of volunteers. In a situation where volunteers are working extensive hours and doing the same work as paid instructors, if funding were available, these volunteers would be paid, rather than asked to work voluntarily.

- For some adults, volunteer-based programs are the first stage of literacy development which leads to continuing development and learning.

- Volunteers are not used as a substitute for paid instructors.

  Additional Points:

  - Add "wherever possible" to account for realities of underfunding in some constituencies.

  - Volunteers should not be used because there is a lack of funding to pay staff.

- Wherever possible, volunteers work in the same situation as an instructor or other professional staff.

- Adequate public resources are provided to provide these and other supports for volunteers: resources, training, development and ongoing guidance, and support from professional staff.

  - Volunteers have access to the same developmental and inservice training which is available to paid staff.

- Volunteers should be considered first for paid positions which may become open in a program - recognition of prior experience leading to certification.

- Peer tutoring is encouraged, and where possible, programs should seek volunteers who have similar backgrounds and experiences to literacy learners.

- Literacy learners have roles as volunteers.

- Volunteer roles can include: tutoring (one-to-one and groups), outreach, recruitment, promotion and awareness, advocacy, administration, providing transportation and daycare, linking with specific communities, funding, writing lower-level reading materials, tutor training.

"SPECIAL NEEDS" POPULATIONS
INTEGRATION vs. SEGREGATION

Reporter: Tracy Odell

A) General Comments

- Segregated group to talk about inclusion!
  - No contest - Integration won.
- Should be dealt with **across** all topics ... however ...
- Many points will reflect good practice in general, but go one step further to make inclusion more explicit.
- We assume "special needs" are for the person, but the changes/principles show the people with the special needs are sometimes running the programs, for example, those who cannot see the need for ASL, interpreters and ramps.

B) Recommendations

1. Every person has the right to be literate. People have the right to lifelong learning in a variety of settings and contexts.

   Recommendations:
   - Better linkages between programs
   - Program articulation of goals/outcomes

2. All people should have equitable access to programs that are publicly funded, so:

   All publicly funded literacy programs should include the **whole** community. Therefore, if people with disabilities are living in the community, then ALL programs should include a proportional number of people with disabilities.
   (This should not be a surprise; we know who is coming through the system.)

   Recommendations: Institute a policy of inclusiveness and "natural proportion". This ensures all programs do their part to be inclusive; avoid making new ghettos. This will require physical accessibility and staff training.

3. An array of publicly funded literacy programs should use a variety of approaches including one-to-one, small groups, classes and "open learning" part-time and full-time.

   Recommendations: Enrich literacy provision through a variety of delivery models.

4. Every person has the right to "Equity of Outcomes". Therefore, for example, if students attend college to acquire working skills for a chosen job/career, then this outcome will also be valid for people with disabilities through supported employment (perhaps) with literacy taught across the curriculum and work placement in an integrated location. This goes beyond "equal opportunity" or equal access.

   Recommendations: Allocate resources according to **needs**.
   - Be proactive in ensuring equity of outcomes.
   - Maintain a value for "difference", for example, different learning styles.

5. Empowerment and inclusion are derived from a "learner-centred" model. Learner-centred does not have to be individual and isolated, but can also apply to groups and classes. It is a departure from being curriculum- or program-centred. This is important for the people with disabilities. It is not assumed all people learn the same way and need the same curriculum.

6. Every person has the right to identify, or to have identified, any specific needs that arise from the disability - not the medical model, but rather the *"Getting to know you"* approach. Millions of dollars spent on *"assessment"* testing could be put to better use. Some consultants make $1,000 a day testing others.

   Recommendations: Assessments are done collaboratively.
   - Assessments serve the learner's, not the agency's or evaluator's (fiscal) needs.
   - Assessment does not contribute to *"labelling"* or mis-labelling.
   - Assessment process is driven by strengths, not deficits.
   - Program staff receive training in non-standardized assessment tools that meet these criteria.
   - Assessments vs standardized testing - who benefits from testing - the people paid to do the tests - people get labelled - what does the label offer?

7. Use materials that capitalize upon the person's strengths, learning and experiences. For example, a person who lived in an institution will have an inherent knowledge of power relationships.

   Recommendations: Re-write teaching materials which offer good strategies so these strategies are framed in the context of strengths, not deficits.

8. The learner determines curriculum and methodologies by being assisted to make *"informed choices"*. The team approach has been really useful in London, including people with severe disabilities.

   Recommendations:
   - Curriculum **directly** relates to learner goals (*"pre"* means *"never"*, for example, pre-reading, pre-vocational).
   - Staff do not assume learner's interest.
   - Literacy is not necessarily hooked to work training.
   - Train staff to read body language for confirmation and informed choice, especially for people who cannot articulate.
   - Train staff in adapting curriculum and learning tools.
   - Social and learning goals are interdependent. When a group of people are devalued, then any social goals being met are considered invalid ---> double standard.

Note: We could not support a separate assessment centre which would assign people to segregated, specialty programs.

ISSUES FOR LITERACY IN THE 90's

Reporter: Stan Jones

- Transform public awareness into sustained support ensuring that the economic interest in literacy is transformed into support for flexible programs.
- Extend public awareness to an understanding of the sources of low literacy including the understanding that those sources have not disappeared.
- Extend public awareness to an understanding that literacy is not just an educational issue.
- Who speaks for literacy?
- What can be done to help learners have a voice beyond the literacy community?
- How do we build networks to others (other education providers, social action groups, industry, for example) without letting their agendas overtake ours?
- How can we deal with inappropriate demands for literacy?
- Can we build alliances with others working for alternate, appropriate, assessment?
- Can we correct some inaccurate public perceptions regarding people with low literacy?
- We must become aware of and more reflective about what it is that we know how to do.
- We need to continue to develop our understanding of literacy work in other societies and cultures.
- Changing patterns of immigration (refugees) to Canada, present a new challenge to literacy work.

COMMUNITY-BASED LITERACY PROGRAMS

Reporter: Guy Ewing

1. Characteristics of Community-based Literacy

Community-based literacy is:

- autonomous
- accessible
- linked to other organizations in a community
- participatory
- innovative
- advocative
- supportive
- responsive to the changing needs of a community
- culturally and linguistically relevant to a community
- defined by the community it serves
- able to draw on the strengths and resources within a community.

Community-based literacy goes beyond the transfer of reading and writing skills. It starts with learners' needs. It is not based on a predetermined curriculum. It empowers individuals and the community.

2. The Legitimacy of Community-based Literacy

A community has the inherent right to control its own literacy program.

3. Funding

Community-based literacy should be recognized by all levels of government. Community-based literacy programs must receive adequate core funding to permit independent action to respond to community needs.

4. Consultation

All policy affecting community-based literacy should be developed in consultation with community participants, particularly with those who have been historically excluded.

5. Cooperation

There should be a sharing of understandings and information. There should be cooperation on issues of mutual concern, for example, the rights of linguistic and cultural minorities.

LITERACY AND YOUTH

Reporter: Sophie Artaud

Some Data to Situate Context of Workshop and Recommendations

- Illiteracy among young people under 24 years of age is increasing. **The most recent Statistics Canada survey indicates that 29% of the young people between 16 and 24 years of age are experiencing difficulties with reading, writing and arithmetic!**

- In Quebec, there is a 38% dropout rate; in Ontario, 33% ... e.g., a large portion of tomorrow's working population : they have 40 to 45 years in the workforce ahead of them, with reading and writing problems.

- There is practically no specialized literacy program for young people in Canada. As far as we know, there is only one group in Quebec, "La Boîte à Lettres", and another in Toronto, "Beat the Street" (with its new Francophone counterpart: "Graffiti").

- Study by La Boîte à Lettres: the young illiterates have an average of 10 years of schooling, with 70% of them on unemployment or social assistance, or with no earning power (Canadian Senate Study - March 1991).

Some Findings and Questions

1. Why do young people drop out? For the most part because the school system is inadequate and doesn't meet their expectations; it isn't in touch with their reality ... and it doesn't question itself.

    - **So, need for thorough systemic changes in the school system.**

    - Above all, a need to enhance the value of education, make it meaningful to get an education.

2. Difficult at present to reach the young people: as designed and presented, the literacy programs do NOT attract the youth.

    - Need to set up other, more flexible forms of intervention that correspond to the reality of the young people.

3. Need to set up concrete bridges between the youth literacy and the adult literacy sector.

Video Presentation

Observations:

- Dropouts losing taste for learning.
- The value of education is not enhanced in either the school system or outside the system (society in general).
- The young people who do manage to return to school have been motivated for personal reasons.
    - Often short to middle term projects requiring continual support and constant reminders prevent them from dropping out a second time.
    - There is a constant need to make the link between learning objectives and life objectives.

General Observations of Those Attending the Workshop

- The school system refuses to take a complete or partial look at the problem.
    - It avoids any questioning of its system that would pose a threat.
    - Often it is in competition for literacy budgets.
- There are a great many parallels between the minority groups.
    - Francophones and Native peoples/right to literacy in one's own language.
- Among Native peoples, there is no, or very little, enhancement of the value of learning in general and the written language in particular.

Five Recommendations

Bill: That a program like Beat the Street be set up in every large Canadian city. Intervene to help the young people get out of the vicious cycle of unemployment and violence. Be there for those young street people, and help them resume control of their lives.

Jean-Yves: A recommendation and a wish. Recommendation: that working with young people should be viewed more as social work than teaching. Hope: that the people attending the plenary meeting tomorrow realize that I am astounded so few are attending this workshop .. there's not too much concern for our young illiterates in the literacy sector.

Marie: That the young Native peoples be given the opportunity to become literate in their own language and that the school system recognize the damage it has done to our youth by destroying their feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem, and that they be given the abilities and skills they need to survive in the future.

Joyce: (An observation more than a recommendation) I work with young people, I do what I can to help them out constantly ... There really aren't too many participants today at the workshop ... This is indicative of one thing: to whom are the young people going to be able to turn if we aren't there for them? We're supposed to be models for them, examples ... So we're really going to have to do something ...

Keith: Need for positive and systemic changes in the education of the young people - positive, because we can't just throw stones at the school system. It's a mirror of society. There are societal attitudes that make it what it is today. But some of the ideas presented in this workshop could be quickly and easily integrated into the school system. And this could make a big difference to encourage the young people to stay in school.

Need also for partnerships to include government officials from the other ministries who have an impact on the life of our youth: Social Services, Health and Welfare. It has to be a cooperative undertaking.

Sophie: Very surprised to see so little interest in this workshop. For me, of course, it's the future of our country that's at stake here, but also the future of all our young people ... Someone mentioned it before me: People are just not there at the workshop today. And this reflects the fact that they're not there for the youth in our communities! So a need for positive change. Recommendation: utmost urgency to encourage the literacy sector and the other parties involved to recognize the problem and provide our youth with the necessary support.

LEARNER PARTICIPATION

Reporters: Omer Caissie/Jenny Horsman

A) The Session Identified Three Reasons Why Learners Should Be Involved In All Aspects Of Adult Literacy Activity

1) It is consistent with the learner-centred philosophy. Literacy needs are better met when there is learner participation at all levels.

2) It is consistent with democratic philosophy. Those who have been disenfranchised should participate in society. Increased participation helps to create a better society.

3) Learners have asked to participate, especially at the curriculum and program level.

B) Recommendations

1) When consultations on literacy are planned, learners should be included in the process. For example, this symposium should have invited learners.

2) We recommend that there be places and opportunities for learners to be involved in all aspects of literacy programs and other literacy initiatives. Further, we recommend that there be resources and means, including funding, to promote and support such involvement.

Invited Participants

Participants Invités

Maria Adamczuk
A.B.E. Unit
Toronto Board of Education
Bickford Centre
777 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M6G 1C6
Tel. : (416) 393-1995
Fax : (416) 393-1062

Cynthia Adams
Education Officer
Education Finance Reform
Secretariat
Ministry of Education
21st Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2
Tel. : (416) 325-2031
Fax : (416) 325-2007

Daniel Afonso
Regroupement des groupes
francophones d'alphabétisation
populaire de l'Ontario
C.P. 202
Nakina (Ontario)
P0T 2M0
Tél. : (807) 854-0230
Télécopieur : (807) 854-0852

Harold Alden
English Literacy Coordinator
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5462
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Audrey Anderson
Site 36, Box 7
R.R #4
Sudbury, Ontario
P3E 4M9
Tel. : (705) 522-9209

Ethel Anderson
Chair, Program Planning
and Development
Independent Learning Centre
Ministry of Education
909 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 3G2
Tel. : (416) 965-7326
Fax : (416) 965-7644

Keith Anderson
Senior Consultant, Literacy
Alberta Advanced Education
Debonian Building
East Tower - 6th Floor
11160 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 0L3
Tel. : (403) 427-5624
Fax : (403) 422-1297

Bill Barry
4A Lower Battery
St. John's, Newfoundland
A1A 1A1
Tel. : (709) 576-1412
Fax : (709) 726-9911

Marie Battiste
Eskasoni School Board
Eskasoni Indian Reserve
Eskasoni, Nova Scotia
B0A 1W0
Tel. : (902) 379-2017 (W)
Tel. : (902) 379-2631 (H)
Fax : (902) 379-2273

Jim Bell
Calgary Adult Literacy
Awareness Project
120 - 13th Avenue
Calgary, Alberta
T2G 1B3
Tel. : (403) 263-0720
Fax : (403) 266-1271

Patty Bossort
Adult Basic Education Association
of British Columbia
Box 117
Silverton, British Columbia
V0G 2B0
Tel. : (604) 358-2391
Fax : (604) 358-2391

Invited Participants

Participants Invités

Johanne Brown
Directrice
Regroupement des groupes francophones d'alphabétisation populaire de l'Ontario
576, rue McGill - app. B
Hawkesbury (Ontario)
K6A 1R3
Tél. : (613) 632-5745
Télécopieur : (613) 632-0147

Arthur Bull
RR # 4
Digby, Nova Scotia
N0V 1A0
Tel. : (902) 834-2345

Betty Butterworth
Senior Manager
Program and Policy
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5488
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Joyce Cameron
Douglas College
P.O. Box 2053
New Westminster, British Columbia
V3L 5B2
Tel. : (604) 527-5416
Fax : (604) 527-5095

Omer Caissie
Fédération nationale pour l'alphabétisation en français
60, rue Boggart
St. Catherine (Ontario)
L2M 1G5
Tél. : (416) 934-7016

Cathy Chapman
Director, Policy
National Literacy Secretariat
Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0M5
Tel. : (819) 953-5280
Fax : (819) 953-8076

Charles Craig
Assessment Co-ordinator
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
P.O. Box 2301
Orillia, Ontario
L3V 6S2
Tel. : (705) 325-8866

Richard Darville
Department of Linguistics
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 5B6
Tel. : (613) 788-2808
Fax : (613) 788-6641

Nicole d'Avignon
Council of Ministers of Education
252 Bloor St. West
Suite 5-200
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V5
Tel. : (416) 964-2296

Raymond Day
Alpha Consultants
579 Richmond Street West
Suite 400
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 1Y6
Tel. : (416) 366-8464
Fax : (416) 366-4042

Laurent de Crombugghe
Coordonnateur des programmes francophones de reconversion de la main-d'oeuvre et d'alphabétisation en milieu de travail
Direction de l'Alphabétisation
Ministère de l'Éducation
373, boul. A. Taché
Hull (Québec)
J9A 1M4
Tél. : (819) 771-5989

Carmelle d'Entremont
Department of Advanced Education and Job Training
P.O. Box 2086, Station M
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3B7
Tel. : (902) 424-5760
Fax : (902) 424-0511

Jean-Yves Desjardins
Table inter-régionale d'alphabétisation au Québec
847, 8e rang sud
Case postale 447
East Broughton (Québec)
G0N 1G0

Anne-Marie Downie
Co-ordinator, Literacy Division
Department of Advanced Education and Job Training
P.O. Box 2086, Station "M",
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3B7
Tel. : (902) 424-7573
Fax : (902) 424-0511

James Draper
Adult Education Department
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6
Tel. : (416) 923-6641

Invited Participants

Edna Elias
President
N.W.T Literacy Council
P.O Box 316
Coppermine, N.W.T
X0E 0E0
Tel. : (403) 982-3213
Fax : (403) 982-3054

Guy Ewing
Parkdale Project Read
1303 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M6G 3A5
Tel. : (416) 531-6308

Ron Faris
2669 Shelborne Street
#11
Victoria, British Columbia
V8R 4M1
Tel. : (604) 370-2553

Fernanda Ferreira
Centre Portugais
4150, rue Saint-Urbain
Montréal (Québec)
H2W 1V3
Tél. : (514) 824-8045

Bram Fisher
Family Literacy Interest Group
158 Patrick Street
Kingston, Ontario
K7K 3P5
Tel. : (613) 544-8883

Lynn Fogwill
Manager
Literacy and Adult Education
Government of the Northwest Territories
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, N.W.T
X1A 2L9
Tel. : (403) 920-3482
Fax : (403) 873-0200

Carole Forgues
CECM/CREP
3000, rue Beaubien est
Montréal (Québec)
H1Y 1H2
Tél. : (514) 596-4567

Devron Gaber
Provincial Literacy Director
Manitoba Literacy Office
Department of Education and Training
417-185 Carlton Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3C 3J1
Tel. : (204) 945-8571
Fax : (204) 945-0356

Naomi Garber
Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy
365 Bloor Street East
Suite 1003
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 3M7
Tel. : (416) 961-4013
Fax : (416) 961-8138

Priscilla George
Native Literacy Coordinator
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5461
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Ed Godden
Manager, Program Support
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5471
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Participants Invités

Phil Godon
Policy Consultant
Employment Policies Branch
Employment and Immigration Canada
140 Promenade du Portage
Phase IV, 4th Floor
Hull, Quebec
K1A 0J9
Tel. : (819) 953-7569
Fax : (819) 994-2314

Sheila Goldgrab
Researcher/Educator
235 Vaughan Road, Apt. 17
Toronto, Ontario
M6C 2M8
Tel. : (416) 658-0045

Rose Grotsky
Praxis Adult Training and Skills Development
561 Markham Street
Toronto, Ontario
M6G 2L6
Tel. : (416) 588-4646
Fax : (416) 534-3686

James Haley
Employment and Immigration Canada
140 Promenade du Portage
Phase IV, Fourth Floor
Hull, Quebec
K1A 0J9
Tel. : (819) 994-2373
Fax : (819) 853-2418

Brigid Hayes
Consultant
National Literacy Secretariat
Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0M5
Tel. : (819) 953-5280
Fax : (819) 953-8076

Invited Participants

Anne Hemsworth
Mohawk College
15 Brantdale Ave.
Hamilton, Ontario
L9C 1B6
Tel. : (416) 575-2228
Fax : (416) 575-1047

Pat Hodgson
Literacy Instructor
Capilano College
2055 Purcell Way
North Vancouver, British Columbia
V7J 3H5
Tel. : (604) 984-4971
Fax : (604) 984-1718

Shannon Hogan
Director
Independent Learning Centre
Ministry of Education
909 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 3G2
Tel. : (416) 965-4587
Fax : (416) 965-7644

Jennifer Horsman
(Summer)
R.R #1
Parrsboro, Nova Scotia
B0M 1S0
Tel. : (902) 254-3050
Tel/Fax : (902) 254-2871
(Winter)
27 Walmer Road, Apt. 202
Toronto, Ontario
M5R 2W7
Tel. : (416) 929-9649

Richard Hudon
Coordonateur des programmes d'alphabétisation pour francophones
Direction de l'alphabétisation
Ministère de l'Éducation
625, rue Church, 6e étage
Toronto (Ontario)
M4Y 2E8
Tél. : (416) 326-5460
Télécopieur : (416) 326-5505

Heather Hufton
Peel Literacy Guild
93 Dundas Street East
Suite 105
Mississauga, Ontario
L5A 1W7
Tel. : (416) 273-5796

Meredith Hutchings
5664 Livingstone Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3K 2C1
Tel. : (902) 454-7054

Theresa Isaac-Julien
Nova Scotia Community College
Victoria Square
14 Court Street
Truro, Nova Scotia
B2N 3H7
Tel. : (902) 893-6104
Fax : (902) 893-6104

Michelle Jean
Sous-ministre déléguée et vice-présidente
Emploi et Immigration Canada
Place du Portage
Phase IV, 13e étage
140, promenade du Portage
Hull (Québec)
K1A 0S9
Tél. : (819) 994-4517
Télécopieur : (819) 994-0178

Stan Jones
Centre for Study of Adult Literacy
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 5B6
Tel. : (613) 788-7812
Fax : (613) 788-6641

Arnold Kennedy
Independent Learning Centre
Ministry of Education
909 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 3G2
Tel. : (416) 965-2657
Fax : (416) 965-7644

Participants Invités

Joyce King
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5470
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Yvon Laberge
Agent de liaison
Éducation permanente
Faculté St-Jean
University of Alberta
8406, rue Marie-Anne Gaboury
91e Rue
Edmonton (Alberta)
T6C 4G9
Tél. : (403) 468-1582
Télécopieur : (403) 465-8760

Ginette Lacoste
Réseau populaire
Direction de l'alphabétisation
Ministère de l'Éducation
1035, rue de la Chevrotière
Édifice «G»
Québec (Québec)
G1R 5A5
Tél. : (418) 643-7411
Télécopieur : (418) 646-8419

Lynne Lalonde
Program Officer
National Literacy Secretariat
Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0M5
Tel. : (819) 953-5280

Luce Lapierre
Coordonnatrice
Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français
1, rue Nicholas - pièce 1404
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1N 7B7
Tél. : (613) 563-0311
Télécopieur : (613) 563-0288

Invited Participants

Participants Invités

Penny Lawler
Senior Policy Advisor
Ontario Training and Adjustment Board
595 Bay Street, 9th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5G 2C2
Tel. : (416) 314-5150
Fax : (416) 314-4783

Florian Levesque
246 Albany Street
Toronto (Ontario)
M5R 3C8
Tél. : (416) 538-9816

Joanne Linzey
Executive Director
ABC Canada
1450 Don Mills Road
Don Mills, Ontario
M3B 2X7
Tel. : (416) 442-2292
Fax : (416) 442-2293

Liz Marston
Coordinator, Ontario Basic Skills
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5480
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Lino Mastriani
Coordonnateur
Service de l'alphabétisation
Direction générale des Programmes
Ministère de l'Éducation
1035, rue De la Chevrotière
9e étage
Québec (Québec)
G1R 5A5
Tél. : (418) 644-0220
Télécopieur : (418) 643-7752

Peter McGonnell
Director
Human Resources Development
P.E.I. Department of Industry
P.O. Box 2000
Charlottetown, P.E.I.
C1A 7N8
Tel. : (902) 368-4475
Fax : (902) 368-4224

Pam McKeever
Northern Labour Adjustment Coordinator
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
P.O Box 847
Schreiber, Ontario
P0T 2S0
Tel. : (807) 824-3231

Robin Millar
Adult Learning Specialist
Manitoba Literacy Office
Department of Education and Training
1200 Portage Avenue, Room 100
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3G 0T5
Tel. : (204) 945-8247
Fax : (204) 945-1254

Louise Miller
Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec
2100, avenue Papineau
4e étage
Montréal (Québec)
H2K 4J4
Tél. : (514) 527-8533
Télécopieur : (514) 521-0063

Sandra Miners
Provincial Labour Adjustment Coordinator
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5472
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Sande Minke
Western Labour Adjustment Coordinator
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
65 Heins Avenue
Kitchener, Ontario
N2G 1Z9
Tel. : (519) 749-8463

Brad Munro
Program Officer (Literacy)
Canadian Commission for Unesco
99 Metcalfe Street
P.O. Box 1047
Ottawa, Ontario
K1P 5V8
Tel. : (613) 598-4385
Fax : (613) 598-4390

Richard Nolan
Director General
National Literacy Secretariat
Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0M5
Tel. : (819) 953-5280

Mary Norton
11138 - 81st Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 0S5
Tel. : (403) 433-236

Ruth Norton
Coordinator
Native Literacy
Assembly of First Nations
47 Clarence Street, Suite 300
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 9K1
Tel. : (613) 236-0673
Fax : (613) 238-5780

Invited Participants

Tracy Odell
Literacy Access Coordinator
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5495
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Mary Oliver
Wheable Centre
London Board of Education
70 Jacqueline Street
London, Ontario
N5Z 3P7
Tel. : (519) 434-8404

Anne Marie Paquette
À La Page
90, rue Main sud
C.P. 419
Alexandria (Ontario)
K0C 1A0
Tél. : (613) 525-4194

Maryse Perreault
Regroupement des groupes populaires d'alphabétisation du Québec
5040, boul. Saint-Laurent
Pièce 1
Montréal (Québec)
H2T 1R7
Tél. : (514) 277-9976
Télécopieur : (514) 277-9793

Louise Pharand
Coordonnatrice, Formation de base de l'Ontario
Direction de l'alphabétisation
Ministère de l'Éducation
625 rue Church - 6e étage
Toronto (Ontario)
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5478
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Maurice Poirier
Director, Curriculum Policy
Development Branch
Ministry of Education
16th Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2
Tel. : (416) 965-2666

Charles Ramsey
Director
Program Coordination and Apprenticeship Branch
Department of Advanced Education and Training
P.O. Box 6000
Fredericton, New Brunswick
E3B 5H1
Tel. : (506) 453-8230
Fax : (506) 453-7913

Jean Reston
Adult Education Consultant
Government of the Northwest Territories
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, N.W.T.
X1A 2L9
Tel. : (403) 920-6933
Fax : (403) 873-0200

Carmen Rodriguez
1638 East Third Avenue
Suite 108
Vancouver, British Columbia
V5N 1G9
Tel. : (604) 251-7373
Fax : (604) 632-9664

Grace Scheel
Toronto Public Library
281 Front Street East
Toronto, Ontario
M5A 4L2
Tel. : (416) 393-7606

Participants Invités

Ian Scott
Manager, Adult and Continuing Education Section
Human Resources Development
P.E.I. Department of Industry
P.O. Box 2000
Charlottetown, P.E.I.
C1A 7N8
Tel. : (902) 368-4475
Fax : (902) 368-4224

Jim Selferling
Director
Adult Special Education
Saskatchewan Education
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4P 3V7
Tel. : (306) 787-0477
Fax : (306) 787-2280

Sue Smee
Director, Program Delivery
National Literacy Secretariat
Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K[illegible] 0M5
Tel. : (819) 953-5280
Fax : (819) 953-8076

Sylvie Tardif
COMSEP
749, rue Saint-Urbain
Trois-Rivières (Québec)
G9A 5P5
Tél. : (819) 374-6207

Maurice Taylor
University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education
145 Jean-Jacques Lussier St.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 6N5
Tel. : (613) 564-5439
Fax : (613) 564-9098

Invited Participants

Wayne Taylor
Director
Literacy Policy
Department of Education
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, Newfoundland
A1B 4S6
Tel. : (709) 729-5906
Fax : (709) 729-5896

Audrey Thomas
2043 Swanson Place
Victoria, British Columbia
V8P 1Y5
Tel. : (604) 598-9218
Fax : (604) 721-1029

Bernard Thériault
Coordonnateur des programmes et formation en apprentissage
Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la formation
416, rue York
Case postale 6000
Fredericton (Nouveau-Brunswick)
E3B 5H1
Tél. : (506) 453-8250
Télécopieur : (506) 453-7913

Charline Vautour
Case postale 254
Nigadoo (Nouveau-Brunswick)
E0B 2H0
Tél. : (506) 783-8863

Gilles Vienneau
EDUCACENTRE
1551, 7e Avenue ouest
Vancouver (Colombie-Britannique)
V6J 1S1
Tél. : (604) 736-9806

Jean Unda
Ontario Federation of Labour
15 Gervais Drive
Suite 201
Toronto, Ontario
M3C 1Y8
Tel. : (416) 441-2731

Joyce Wabano
Moosonee Native Friendship Centre
P.O. Box 478
31 Ferguson Road
Moosonee, Ontario
P0L 1Y0

Serge Wagner
Université du Québec à Montréal
1195, rue Lloyd George
Verdun (Québec)
H4H 4K4
Tél. : (514) 769-1236
Télécopieur : (514) 987-7994

Sue Waugh
Workplace Literacy Consultant
ABC Canada
1450 Don Mills Road
Don Mills, Ontario
M3B 2X7
Tel. : (416) 442-2292
Fax : (416) 442-2293

Marion Wells
St. John Learning Exchange
P.O. Box 6278, Station "A"
Saint John, New Brunswick
E2L 4R7
Tel. : (506) 648-0202
Fax : (506) 648-9476

Tracy Westell
14 Right Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
M6R 1K8
Tel. : (416) 537-7746
Fax : (416) 537-2015

Ann Whalen
Director
Literacy Branch
Ministry of Education
625 Church Street, Sixth Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2E8
Tel. : (416) 326-5496
Fax : (416) 326-5505

Participants Invités

Carole Whissell
Directrice
Relations fédérales-provinciales et territoriales
Secrétariat national à l'alphabétisation
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 1M5
Tél. : (819) 953-5284
Télécopieur : (819) 953-8076

Joyce White
Movement for Canadian Literacy
880 Wellington Street, Suite 701
Ottawa, Ontario
K1R 6K7
Tel. : (613) 563-2464
(613) 563-2504

Bill Worrell
Beat the Street
85 Shuter Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 1B3
Tel. : (416) 367-4591
Tel. : (416) 367-7491

Elisse Zack
Ontario Literacy Coalition
365 Bloor Street East
Suite 1003
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 1J6
Tel. : (416) 963-5787

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Video Tapes and Scripts of

Round Table Discussions on Issues in Adult Literacy

Ontario Ministry of Education, Literacy Branch, 1991.

These videotapes, six in English and six in French, were produced as part of the good practice initiative undertaken by the Literacy Branch in 1991. Some of the same topics were included in the symposium. All tapes are available closed-captioned in the original language (English or French), as well as open-captioned (subtitled) in the other official language. Scripts for all twelve tapes are available in both English and French.

English Videos

Recognition of Learning in Adult Basic Education/

Reconnaissance de l'apprentissage dans l'éducation de base aux adultes

- Panellists from Ontario, British Columbia and Great Britain discuss issues related to assessing literacy and providing accreditation or recognition. Issues discussed include the need for recognition to be immediate, learner-centred rather than program-centred, and set in the context of a broader educational policy of lifelong learning. The need for a system which builds on partnerships between deliverers, which is flexible, yet rigorous, and which cuts across workplace and other learning was stressed. The tape concludes with a description of the Manchester and British Columbia models of recognizing and accrediting learning. (Please note; there is a technical problem with the video. It ends just prior to the end of the discussion. However, the last statements are included in the printed script.)

The Role of Volunteers in Adult Literacy/

Le rôle des bénévoles dans l'alphabétisation des adultes

- A panel of people from Manitoba, Alberta and Ontario discuss the role of volunteers in literacy. Volunteers were originally a replacement for paid staff. Now that there is additional funding, diversity and more professionalization, the literacy field can discuss a role for volunteers which is not that currently used, that is to replace professionals. The discussion is wide-ranging and raises many questions, such as:

- Should very basic learners be trained by volunteers who will have fewer strategies?
- In training tutors, how do we draw on their experience as we do with learners?
- Can a program be community-oriented and not have volunteers?
- Can volunteers become paid literacy workers?
- What are ways to utilize volunteers besides tutoring?
- How can the model of union education, an interdependent, community-oriented model, be transferred to other situations?
- How can volunteers augment core activities in a program and be more integrated into a broader program?
- How do we train volunteers over a period of time?
- How can we support program co-ordinators as tutor trainers?
- Do volunteer board members get training?

Panellists express the need to document and create a literature on how literacy programs do their work, including those with volunteers.

Learning Disabilities and Adult Literacy/

Difficultés d 'apprentissage et alphabétisation des adultes

- A panel of four people discuss learning disabilities and literacy: the definition, whether the label is useful, the importance of interviewing and assessing learners, the need for literacy workers and tutors to know a variety of approaches and reflect on how they themselves learned, and the importance of recognizing, but not being intimidated by learning difficulties.

Adult Literacy in the 1990's/

L'alphabétisation des adultes dans les années 90

- A panel of five people from British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, each of whom has been involved in literacy for over ten years, discuss major issues for the literacy movement in the 1990's. Topics include the relationship of literacy and poverty, who controls the literacy agenda, the role of literacy workers and learners, the relationship of literacy to other services and the need to reopen many earlier debates which were repressed as new partners joined the literacy movement in the 1980's.

Issues in Workplace Literacy/

Questions sur l'alphabétisation en milieu de travail

- A group of people representing an employer, union and literacy providers discuss issues related to workplace literacy delivery. Topics covered include organizational needs assessments; the relationship of literacy to other workplace issues; developing a partnership of the company, the union and the provider; recruitment of learners; curriculum and delivery models; task analysis; evaluation; ethical considerations, such as worker confidentiality, and other topics.

Taking Back Our Tongue/

Retrouvons notre langue

- This video is a discussion by Aboriginal literacy workers about the need for Aboriginal People to speak, understand, read and write in their language of origin, as well as English or French. Aboriginal languages are the link with culture and history. They are key to self-government, spirituality and self-identity. Some of the practices used in Aboriginal language education for children and adults are discussed.

French Videos

L'alphabétisation et les femmes/

Women and Literacy

- Panellists from Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec discuss a number of issues related to literacy and women. There are family , social and educational reasons for providing literacy education for women. Women need literacy to achieve autonomy and improve their quality of life. Women in programs tend to stay to the end of programs and do not drop out as quickly as men. Programs need to adapt to serve women, eg. provide child care and transportation costs, as well as a safe place in which to learn. There are few materials specifically targeted at women in literacy programs. The literacy field is structured in a hierarchical and patriarchal way with women in low paying community literacy jobs or working as volunteers in programs.

L'alphabétisation et les jeunes/

Youth and Literacy

- Panellists form New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario discuss issues, experience and strategies related to youth and literacy, including motivation - the discrepancy between life in school and that portrayed by the media; poverty and literacy; the profile of school drop outs; keeping youth in school and prevention of drop outs, and integration of the job market and school.

L'alphabétisation en milieu de travail/

Literacy In the Workplace

- People involved in workplace literacy from Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick talk about their experience with recruitment, needs assessment, program materials, facilitator training and evaluation. The need for a partnership of employers, unions, literacy providers and government is stressed, as well as how literacy relates to each stakeholder's interest. Literacy needs to be accepted as a part of lifelong learning.

La reconnaissance des acquis et l'évalution des programmes/

Recognition of Learning and Program Evaluation

- This round table involves people from Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick discussing issues related to student assessment and recognition, and program evaluation. Whereas Quebec has examinations which adult students can take to get recognition, some panellists expressed concerns about standardized testing which did not respect differences in programs and student goals. In

terms of evaluation, one concern is the difficulty of evaluating programs on a province - wide basis without a provincial policy which sets out broad objectives for adult literacy. The relationship between training and accreditation of practitioners and program quality is also discussed.

Les défis des années 1990 en alphabétisation/

Francophone Literacy in the 1990's

- A panel of four representatives from Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Alberta discuss their past experience and issues in Francophone literacy for Francophones. The discussion includes learner involvement, learning materials, co-ordination, the training of literacy workers, programs linking literacy with skill training, government policy and funding, and the need for a "projet de societé" to achieve full adult literacy.

L'alphabétisation en français en milieu minoritaire/

Francophone Literacy in a Minority Setting

- L'alphabétisation en français is a discussion by people from Ontario, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan about literacy in French and "refrancization". The discussion covers historical issues related to the high rate of illiteracy amongst Francophone minorities outside Quebec and why literacy in French is important to the cultural survival of minority Francophone populations.