DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 938 CE 071 073

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TITLE Women and Literacy: An Emerging Discourse.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Consciousness Raising; Equal Education; *Females; *Feminism; Illiteracy; *Literacy Education; *Sex Discrimination; Sex Fairness

ABSTRACT

Women have been silenced through their exclusion from the dominant discourse of il/literacy. The construction of an illiterate population has been part of an "othering" process by the state and serves to create a national ideology of illiteracy that locates the blame for educational deficiencies in the individual, rather than in the structural inequalities within society. Women must move beyond looking at individuals to the processes of production to see how the practices of the dominant discourse are lodged in social relations. An emerging feminist discourse is exploring the issue of literacy. First, it is examining the social forces that restrict women from pursuing their desire to engage in literacy practices that reflect the specificity of their needs, including social disapproval and situational barriers, the sexual division of labor, the control of women's sexuality. Second, this feminist discourse is exploring what must change to meet women's needs. Research shows that women in literacy programs want both social contact and an educational event. Women-positive programs can be a first step in reducing women's isolation. Small groups could move from the personal to the political. Third, the feminist discourse is investigating what resistance literacy workers might encounter as they actively begin to support women. The resistance comes from funders, colleagues, male students, and the male partners of the women students. (Contains 44 references.) (YLB)

Women and Literacy: An Emerging Discourse

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1992

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: it discusses how women have been silenced through their exclusion from the dominant discourse of il/literacy and then presents an emerging discourse that explores the issue of literacy from a feminist perspective. With respect to the first purpose, this paper draws attention to how the construction of il/literacy has been a process of 'othering' which has created discursive boundaries. With respect to the second purpose, this paper examines an emerging feminist discourse which addresses the following questions: (1) What are the social forces which restrict women from pursuing their desire to engage in literacy practices that reflect the specificity of their needs?; (2) What needs to change in order to meet women's needs?; and (3) What resistance might literacy workers encounter as they actively begin to support women?

It should be noted that this paper does not intend to re-define il/literacy from a women's point of view, because this would only perpetuate society's need to view literacy as a unitary static term, rather than a fluid social construct. If I posed the question, "What is literacy?" to my female friends, relatives and colleagues, I would receive varied responses, all of which reflect the relative, pluralistic, contextualized nature of literacy based on the different locations of their privilege and oppression.

The construction of an 'illiterate' population has been part of an 'othering' process by the state and serves to create a national ideology of illiteracy which locates the blame for educational deficiencies in the individual, rather than in the structural inequalities within society. Rather than examining the deficiencies and inequities of the socio-economic system, the state operates from a deprivation-development perspective which focuses on the personal and educational deficiencies of individuals. This serves to shift the public's

attention away from the deficiencies of the education, economic and social systems to the individual. Interestingly, prior to 1960, the federal government denied the existence of illiteracy in Canada. According to Kerfoot et al. (1974), when Ottawa received a questionnaire from UNESCO requesting information about illiteracy, it was returned with a curt note stating that illiteracy did not exist in Canada. One is forced to ask why the government has felt compelled to construct an illiterate other? Willinsky (1990) states that a literacy crisis has been constructed "to reinforce the sense of threat and marginalization of those outside the mainstream of middle-class society" (p. 13). Perhaps by deeming the literate society to be the norm, the state builds a case (a literacy crisis) to restructure the lives of the illiterate population and bring them into the mainstream populace.

In the construction of the concept 'il/literacy', the state's first concern has been with statistics - - determining the numbers. What is the ratio between 'them' and 'us?' In Canada, the ratio of one person with low-literacy skills to every seven literate people is considered to be too high by the government, the business and labor sectors and the media - - 'it' constitutes a threat to the economy. The lines of battle have been demarcated through the use of statistics and the process of 'othering' begins. I deliberately used a military metaphor such as the 'lines of battle' because this is the language used by the media and the government to create a battleground (a patriarchal dualistic logic) between 'us', the literate society, and 'them', the illiterate others. [1] The low-literate population is construed as the enemy and is depicted as an economic burden to society.

The media contributes to the dominant discourse by sending messages which shape the public's perception about adults with low literacy skills. For instance, a popular image is that which ties women with low-literacy skills to the private sphere. We see pictures of

[1] For a more detailed discussion on literacy metaphors, refer to Ilsley, P.J. (1989). The language of adult literacy. Thresholds in Education, 15(4), 6-9.

women who cannot read soup cans or children's medicine bottles. We hear about women who want to read to their children, help them with their homework and write notes to their teacher. Again, the gaze is focused on the individual and the domestic role. I do not think that reading soup cans and medicine bottles will improve women's condition and release them from their subjugated position(s). Furthermore, these messages place a burden on women. When a woman with low-literacy skills receives messages about what she *should* be (ie. a good mother who can read and write) she may feel inadequate. Educators need to assist women in challenging these images by asking, "Is this an accurate representation?" and "How would you like to be represented?".

Male dominance in literacy policy-making means that literacy is tied to issues of economic growth and returns and maintaining the status quo (Ramdas, 1990; Stromquist, 1990). The concept of functional literacy, which views literacy as a set of functional tasks, came into prominence in the 1960s with the pronouncements of UNESCO and still appears to be the most widely used term in government documents. The functional definition links literacy to individualism and capitalism - - one becomes more literate in order to become a more productive worker. De Castell et al.(1981) express concern about the notion of functional literacy and say:

> we must be particularly wary...of concepts of literacy which embody a built-in passivity factor (e.g., functional literacy qua acquiescent consumer competence or restrictively defined occupational skills). The intent of literacy instruction in Canada must not be the creation of manipulable populace, characterized by passive acceptance of information and prescribed behavior (p. 16).

In the past, the idea that adults with low-literacy skills need reading and writing skills to participate as fully as possible in all aspects of life in society has served as a smokescreen for the state's hidden agenda of productivity. Interestingly, this smoke screen is disappearing as the state's concern about the global economy 'legitimizes' productivity. For

instance, in Ontario, community-based programs which were previously funded by the Ontario Community Literacy Grants Program will soon be funded by the Labour Force Entry/Re-entry Program under the newly created Ontario Training and Adjustment Board. This shift in funding suggests that the state will only fund literacy programs which will prepare individuals to participate in the labor force.

The next logical step to dominating the 'other' has been to increase the number of educational programs or opportunities for illiterate adults.[2] Education is promoted as the great equalizer, the institution that provides citizens with the tools they need to participate fully and productively in mainstream society. In other words, literacy is a prerequisite to equality and all individuals must be treated in a similar fashion to ensure fairness. Rockhill (1987a) argues that "in the process of establishing literacy as a universalistic formula through which equality can be realized, literacy is treated as though it occurs in a vacuum. Thus, all learners are treated as the same"(p. 158). In the spirit of equality, many literacy programs do not differentiate between the students' race, sex or gender and concentrate instead on providing the same curriculum to all students, in the hope that these students will 'acquire' literacy, a measurable commodity which one can 'get' by attending a class or completing a set of workbooks. Since literacy is considered to be a commodity, it has been packaged into neat little programs by educational publishing and computer companies.

At this point, I'd like to place myself in the discussion and explore how I came to view students as ungendered and unraced individuals. My education as a reading specialist 'trained' me to focus my attention on the individualized learner and her/his reading deficiencies rather than on social structures and practices that perpetuate illiteracy. I was so obsessed with assessment, methodology and remediation that I ignored gender, race, and

[2] After the publication of the Southam Report, the the Prime Minister of Canada announced the federal government's National Literacy Strategy consisting of a $110 million fund to be used towards pilot or demonstration literacy projects over the span of five years.

class. I worked within the boundaries of education and the public sphere, and did not think it was my 'place' to cross these lines. After all, weren't there counsellors and psychologists who were better equipped to 'deal' with the private lives of women? Consequently, I didn't create openings or spaces to hear the women's stories. In effect, I was not working with the whole person as my education had trapped me within an analytical, partialist framework of thinking. I viewed illiteracy as the women's principal source of oppression rather than their gender, race or class. It's only through reflection that I've been able to see my work in a new dimension. I can resonate with Rockhill's (1987a) statement:

> Our work suffers from a splitting between the public and the private which reinforces precisely the same gendered practices through which women are oppressed in their everyday lives (p.166).

Feminists are concerned that this process of othering will separate women. Rockhill (1988a) asks "how does the wall established by "illiteracy' further divide us as women, creating a barrier across which it is impossible to speak or to hear one another?" (p. 9). Kit Yuen Quan (1990), a woman-of-color who is not confident about her literacy skills has experienced this wall and painfully describes what it feels like not to be heard because she does not speak the dominant language.

> I often felt beaten down by these kinds of attitudes while still thinking that my not being understood was the result of my inability to communicate rather than an unreceptive environment. A lot of times my language and the language of other working class, non-academic people become the target of scrutiny and criticism when others don't want to hear what we have to say (p. 215).

The dominant discourse of the illiterate as 'other' serves to put the spotlight on the individual. Women assimilate society's belief that illiteracy is their problem and that they are responsible for their failures. They blame themselves. As women, we need to shift our gaze away from the conductor. That is, we have to move beyond looking at individuals to

the processes of production in order to see the discursive practices and how they are lodged in social relations.[3]

A dominant theme within the literature rationalizes high attrition and low participation rates by labelling the students as 'unmotivated'.[4] An emerging discourse known as resistance theory (Quigley, 1990; Giroux, 1987) has added a new dimension to the high rate of attrition and non-participation. Quigley criticizes those who conceptualize non-participation as a barriers or motivational issue as this is another way of shifting the blame back to the individuals. Quigley concludes that these assumptions are faulty and serve to:

> effectively diminish perceived capacity for human agency among nonparticipants and tend to reinforce stereotypes of illiterate adults as fearful, suspicious victims of socioeconomic circumstances who are incapable of utilizing the educational opportunities extended to them (p. 104).

Giroux (1987) also believes that non-participation may be a conscious or unconscious refusal to learn the specific cultural codes and competencies authorized by the dominant culture's view of literacy. In other words, people are choosing not to participate in programs because the curriculum is irrelevant to their lives and does not reflect their cultural and/or social values. However, neither of these two men address gender and the specificity of women's experience in their resistance theory. Stromquist (1990) states that "the few studies that have looked into the everyday reality of some illiterate women find that motivation pales as an explanatory factor when compared to the physical, material and ideological obstacles they face" (p. 103).

WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL FORCES WHICH RESTRICT WOMEN FROM PURSUING THEIR DESIRE TO ENGAGE IN LITERACY PRACTICES WHICH REFLECT THE SPECIFICITY OF THEIR NEEDS?

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[3] The concept of shifting our gaze away from the conductor came from a lecture by K. Rockhill in December, 1991.

[4] For a literature review of nonparticipation and dropout, see Thomas, A. (1990). The reluctant learner: A research report on nonparticipation and dropout in literacy programs in British Columbia. Victoria: Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology and the National Literacy Secretariat.

Kazemek (1988) expresses astonishment at the

> almost unbelievable omission of study into the relationship between women and literacy [and that it] suggests , at the best a naivete or ignorance on our part as literacy scholars and, at the worst, a conscious or unconscious disdain for the specific literacy needs of women within a patriarchal society (p. 23).

As literacy workers, we need to be aware of discourses which omit differences and contradictory experiences of oppression. For instance, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator whose work has been fundamental to the development of critical approaches in literacy education, has excluded women in his analysis of what it means to be literate. Although he promotes literacy for liberation, he does not address the gendered role of literacy and views class as the principal source of oppression. Of late, his pedagogy has been criticized because it does not include the specificity of women's needs. (Chledbowska, 1990; Weiler, 1991; Rockhill, 1988b) Chledbowska states that Freire's pedagogy does not include an analysis of the peasant woman's condition, and as such, women do not see the dualities of their lives reflected in Freire's educational programs. The programs reflect their private lives as reproducers, but disregards their public lives as producers. Chledbowska (1990) makes a plea for literacy programs in which women could "explore their own experience of daily life in a shared perspective so as to derive pedagogic benefit and personal enrichment (which) would pave the way for a truly participative form of literacy training capable of transforming the existence of the women who take part" (p. 65).

Rockhill (1988b) takes a different cut into Freire's pedagogy by questioning his emphasis on the need to teach in the dominant language in order to preserve political unity. In his efforts to preserve unity, Freire did not address "how literacy, as a social practice, is gendered" (p. 114). The process of literacy acquisition is difficult for women when they are taught in the country's dominant or 'official' language because the women have fewer

opportunities than men to practice their oral literacy skills. Lind (1990) points out that "many more men than women communicate in the official language due to patriarchal traditions of men being the "spokesmen" " (p. 4).

The research which documents barriers to literacy education generally lacks a feminist analysis. However, a quick glance at any list of 'obstacles' will show that many are gender-specific, ie. social disapproval and situational barriers (Thomas, 1990). Stromquist states that the next challenge of "feminist theory is to uncover the systematic mechanisms behind such 'obstacles'" (p. 26). She names these mechanisms of subordination as the sexual division of labor and the control of women's sexuality. Rockhill (1987b) underscores this idea by asking "how man's ownership of woman's labour and sexuality, her body and mind, affects her participation in education, and how education poses a threat to that ownership" (p. 316).

The sexual division of labour means that the pattern of women's daily lives are organized and determined by external forces over which they have little or no control. For instance, women are overburdened with domestic tasks and usually work a double day. Women are usually less mobile than men, particularly in developing countries, and when they are allowed to venture outside the private sphere of home, they are expected to maintain a posture of silence which makes it difficult for them to sustain their literacy skills. Men's control over women's sexuality often results in frequent child-bearing which prohibits women from attending literacy classes. For instance, in my former position as a coordinator of a community-based literacy program, I would frequently interview older women in their 60s who were finally pursuing their dream of becoming literate after raising a family of eight to ten children. Men's control over women's sexuality also means that women who pursue a higher education often face resistance in the form of physical and/or psychological violence from their male partners.

Feminists have documented how women who wish to become literate face resistance from their male partners (Rockhill, 1987a, 1987b; Garber, Horsman and Westell, 1991; Horsman, 1988a, 1988b; Parajuli and Enslin, 1990; Stromquist, 1990; Lloyd, 1991a). If we operate from the belief that literacy is power, then men are afraid of the challenge to their power position within the family as their partner becomes more literate. Men are afraid that their ignorance will be exposed as the women in their lives become more literate. This ultimately leads to violence or the threat of violence.

As part of the research for this paper, I interviewed a literacy worker (whom I'll refer to as Lois) who has recently started a women's group in her program. The anger in Lois's voice was palpable as she described the violence and opposition women face in their pursuit of an education.

> "There were women whose boyfriends wouldn't allow them to come. Would either find excuses or go I want to be with you, stay home, or to you know punch them in the face if they were talking about coming."

Clearly, the resistance from men follows a continuum from a vocal plea to a fist in the face. This literacy program worked with 'street people', and consequently, there seemed to be less of a division between their private and public lives. By that, I mean that their private lives were not hidden within four walls and seemed to be meshed with their public lives. In most literacy programs, there is more of a division between the public/private lives of students; students do not usually disclose aspects of their private lives, nor do literacy workers encourage disclosure. Consequently, literacy workers are not always as aware as Lois was about the resistance women students may be facing from their male partners.

As previously mentioned, I didn't create openings or spaces to hear women's stories. However, an incident during the beginning of my work in the adult literacy field prompted

me always to pose the following question during student interviews. I used to ask, "Is your family supporting your efforts to become a better reader and writer?" The women's responses were usually veiled, but still touched upon the manner in which literacy enters the power dimensions between men and women in the private sphere. Their responses went something like "He doesn't mind as long as I'm home by 4:00 to start dinner" or "He doesn't think I'm smart enough" or "He doesn't see why I need to go and get educated." The latter comment came from a woman whose husband was a well-to-do business man who wanted her 'at home' to keep the household running smoothly and entertain his clients. Perhaps because I never probed beneath the surface of their responses, I did not *really* 'hear' the degree of the resistance that they were facing from their male partners. Garber, Horsman and Westell (1991) articulate the need to listen to women's stories:

> Sometimes the voices of women in our programs are so quiet that we do not hear what they are saying. We must listen closely to hear the small voice of protest or the tentative complaint. We must hear the silence of women who are afraid to speak out (p. 15).

The incident which I just mentioned involved a woman named Tara. She was petrified of driving and since she lived in a rural area, I agreed to drive to her home. I was met at the door by Tara and her husband, and I could immediately sense tension in the air. The husband stood and hovered over us while we talked at the kitchen table, and continually made disparaging comments about Tara's ability to learn. He was quick to let me know how he had 'saved' Tara from a refugee camp through marriage. Three years later, this story did end on a better note as Tara left her husband. But, reflecting, on this incident, I regret my reluctance to cross the boundary line from the public to the private. Most of all, I deeply regret the missed opportunity of creating spaces for women to share their stories and to collectively act upon them.

Horsman (1988b) found that "although many men object to their wives or girlfriends participating in educational programs, others "permit" them to participate on the basis that improved literacy skills will enable them to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers better" (79). A popular statement among adult educators working in adult basic education is that they are giving women a second chance. One might ask, "A second chance for what?" Is it a second chance to be better mothers and wives? Surely, it is not a coincidence that family literacy has become such a 'hot' topic. The abstracted reference to family literacy does not mean parents and their children; it means mothers and their children. Breen (1991) states that women's "reproductive work also tends to include responsibility for children's education, which is how mothers get the blame for passing illiteracy on to their children" (p. 44). A capitalistic, patriarchal society reproduces sexist relations by only funding literacy programs which "reaffirm the existing sexual division of labor, that is, traditional definitions of women as wives and mothers" (Stromquist, 1990: 105).

Thompson (1983) also believes that adult basic education is reinforcing inequality between the sexes by "defin[ing] women exclusively in stereotyped, domestic roles and as appendages of husbands, homes and children (p. 44).The social and political structures determine the relevance of women's literacy to society and subsequently what literacy programs are relevant for women. In India, for example, the state is concerned about the effect of women's literacy on the "desirable" national goals (Ramdas, 1990). The document which outlines India's National Literacy Mission focuses on the role of women as reproducers. On one hand, the state promotes literacy of women because it will decrease infant mortality and will enhance a women's role in providing health care to her children. On the other hand, the state is concerned that as a literate women becomes more knowledgeable about birth control, fertility rates will decline. Stromquist (1990) states that "when literacy skills are offered (to women), they are combined with other traditional skills women are supposed to need: child care, nutrition, family planning" (105). This is certainly

the case in both developing and developed countries. For instance, Alberta's Foundations for Adult Learning and Development Policy (1990) views adult basic education as an educational process which involves the acquisition of basic skills in three areas: communication, living, and production. Living skills, as defined by the Government of Alberta refers to "knowledge of health, sanitation, nutrition, family planning, the environment, management of the family economy, and creation and maintenance of a home" (p. 4).

Community-based literacy programs began emerging in the late 1970s as an alternative to traditional upgrading programs offered through colleges and school boards. Since their funding often comes from multiple sources, they have more leeway in the orientation of their programs. Consequently, these programs have chosen to stress a human development (social demand) orientation as opposed to a labour orientation.[5] In a participatory study, Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) named the fundamental elements of a community-based program as learner-centredness, literacy from a critical perspective and community-building. The element of learner-centredness is described as encompassing "a commitment to active learning, a process whereby learners will be involved in setting their own goals and determining their own curriculum" (p. 8).

Although the term 'learner-centred' connotes a willingness to address differences such as race, class, and gender, the term has come to mean designing a curriculum to meet the needs of the generic, non-gendered student (Lloyd, 1991b). An example might be appropriate to show how a 'learner-centred' philosophy detracts from meeting the specificity of women's needs. In the case of Tara, one of her stated goals was to learn how to read city road maps and road signs so that she would be more comfortable about driving

[5] Torres (1988) states that a human development orientation is "concerned with enabling all individuals to participate as fully as possible in all aspects of life in society" whereas a manpower orientation is concerned "primarily with enabling individuals to participate in the labor force through exchanges in the market by "upgrading" the value of their labour. (p. 279)

in the city. In designing a learner-centred program, I assessed her literacy skills and found that she needed to learn how to attend to word endings and use context to predict words. The tutor brought road maps into the lessons and worked on developing these skills. But, what about Tara's unstated needs? What about her feelings of isolation? What about her dream of escaping from the domination of her husband? In this case, a learner-centred program was just teaching Tara about how to cope with her existing situation, rather than how to change it. We were, in effect, just preserving the status quo by not introducing a feminist agenda.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN ORDER TO MEET WOMEN'S NEEDS?

As literacy workers, our responsibility is to resist the dominant discourse on il/literacy and focus our energies on developing an emerging discourse which "reconceptualise(s) how 'the political' and 'the educational' are constituted so that the primary sites of oppression in (women's) lives are not systematically excluded from our politics or our classrooms (Rockhill, 1987a: 166). Literacy workers are not always attuned to listening to women's stories or to acting upon what they hear because they are operating with the dominant discourse which decontextualizes what il/literacy means to women in their day-to-day lives. As literacy workers, we need to step out of this dominant discourse and begin exploring how to support the specificity of women's needs. MacKeracher (1989) calls for literacy programs which would "allow women to explore their own experience, make sense of that experience, and promote this "sense" into personal concerns and public issues can best be understood, not as remedial education, but as *transformative participation in better basic education*" (p. 385). Ramdas (1990) states that women want literacy in their own terms. It must be practical and relevant to their lives. Her statement raises the question, "What does literacy mean to women?"

Feminist researchers are only beginning to explore what literacy means through a women's eyes. Horsman's (1988a) research was a seminal study because it documented the women's words on the subject of what literacy meant to them. Horsman interviewed twenty Maritime women who were students in adult basic education (ABE) programs to explore their experience of literacy. The research uncovered some of the inadequacies of traditional frameworks for literacy. The ABE programs, which were shaped by a functional definition of literacy, viewed literacy as a simple set of skills a woman needs to acquire in order to function adequately in society. However, Horsman discovered that the women resisted the discourse that classified them as functionally illiterate and that their motivation for attending literacy classes did not hinge on wanting to learn 'functional' skills. Rather, they sought to finding meaning in their lives, and often, to pursue a dream of a better life for themselves and their children. Literacy programs also provided a venue for social interaction with other women and helped to diminish their isolation.

During my interview with Lois, she also spoke about the isolated lives of the women she works with in her program.

> There's a woman here who has been abused and abused and abused and abused this woman all her life and we talked about it one time and she said, "You know, I have no women friends." Yeah, and it hit me, God. I don't really understand the whole psychology of it, I only, but I feel like it's something the guy did to them again. They took their women friends, you know. Yeah, and don't even let them go out to meet with a woman friend.

Although illiteracy is not the cause of women's isolation; a literacy program can begin to meet women's social needs. Horsman (1988b) found that women in literacy programs wanted both social contact and an educational event. Women-positive programs can be a first step in reducing women's isolation and in helping them to discover that their problems are shared by other women. Lloyd (1991b) describes woman-positive as an activity that "in its particular context, arises out of the expressed needs and desires of particular women

working in that context" (p.2). According to Lloyd, as women go though a process of reflection and analysis, vision and strategizing, the activity may change. She warns against a universal concept of woman-positive that does not recognize differences of "race, class, abilities, formal education, immigration status, employment status, relationship to children (and) histories of emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse" (p.3).

Some community-based programs are at least encouraging women to write their own stories which document the past and present day-to-day realities of their lives. In fact, a few programs have gone a step further and published the women's writing for public consumption. East End Literacy, an urban community-oriented literacy program based in Toronto, has become internationally known as a publisher of students' stories. One of their publications, entitled My Name is Rose, is a photo-story about physical abuse. It was written by one woman and produced in collaboration with other students, volunteers and staff. In the writing of My Name is Rose, McBeth and Stollmeyer (1989) mention the difficulty Rose has in naming her experience by saying, "Rose did not know the words of many things she wanted to say" (p. 53). Garber, Horsman and Westel (1991) acknowledge the need for women's stories, but raise questions about whether these stories lead to social change. In other words, how do we move beyond the personal to the political?

Hooks (1988) believes women with low-literacy skills have been alienated from the feminist debate because much of the discussion about feminism takes place through print materials and the academy. Hooks advocates small discussion groups because they would "subvert the appropriation of feminist thinking by a select group of academic women and men, usually white, usually from privileged class backgrounds" She states that "literacy should be a goal for feminists" and promotes the use of small groups since they provide a venue for women with low-literacy skills because "information is primarily shared though

discussion" (p. 24). Hooks believes that small groups could move from the personal to the political, by "integrating critical analysis with discussion of personal experience" (p.25).

Hooks still does not answer the question of *how* to move from the personal to the political. Literacy workers who want to begin addressing women's issues within the context of their literacy programs do not usually have experience or education in teaching for social change.[6] These workers may wonder what to 'do' after women have shared their personal stories. Hooks (1989) warns that past experience has shown that "naming or uncovering the pain in a context where it is not linked to strategies for resistance and transformation created for many women the conditions for even greater estrangement, alienation, isolation and at times great despair" (p. 32). Literacy workers may also have difficulty working with groups where they encounter differences of race, class and experience. Again, I turn to Hooks who proclaims that a context in which race or class are not named as structures of domination "could easily lead to misnaming, to the creation of yet another sophisticated level of non-or distorted awareness" (p. 32). So, in order to support the specificity of women's needs, we also need to encourage and support the training needs of literacy workers. In developing training seminars for literacy workers, we must remember to draw upon and learn from the work and experiences of literacy workers in developing countries.

In developing countries, female adult educators who realize the possibilities and the limitations of Freire's pedagogy are re-defining Freire's 'generative word process' to create a feminist pedagogy which addresses women's specificity and differences. (Parajuli & Enslin, 1990; Schmidt, 1990; Moran and Hingston, 1990). The generative word process entails the identification of key words which will generate a discussion of the women's

[6] For three years, part of my duties included the development and implementation of training for Alberta's literacy workers. I came to know their backgrounds and needs, so I think that this is a fair statement to make. However, a deeper concern is that none of the participants identified education for social change as one of their needs.

"social reality and develop confidence in their abilities to both know and change the world" (Parajuli & Enslin, 1990). A literacy program in rural Nepal which uses the generative word process "provided a forum in which local memories of women's power and subordination in the past shaped the struggle for survival and identity in the present" (p. 54). The key word 'daurra' (firewood) triggered a discussion amongst women about how the increasing scarcity of firewood and fodder was causing them to walk longer distances to collect it. The facilitator encouraged the women to place their experience within a cultural and historical framework.

> Older women began to narrate the stories of 30 years ago when the forest of Chitwan had been cleared for resettlement. They remembered how powerful men had forcibly claimed portions of the common grazing lands and gradually diminished their access to fodder. They questioned what they had gained and lost in the pursuit of development. They asked: Is this mode of development suitable to women's identities? Can development be achieved only at the expense of commons, forest and water sources? (Parajuli & Enslin, 1990: 47-48)

The women composed a song and declared the need for women to join together to plant trees. This program provides a case study of how to move from the personal to the political.

WHAT RESISTANCE MIGHT LITERACY WORKERS ENCOUNTER AS THEY ACTIVELY BEGIN TO SUPPORT WOMEN?

Rockhill (1991) states that "separate education for women in which a feminist agenda is the announced goal of the course is virtually unthinkable" (p. 4). In talking with literacy workers who are beginning to actively support women in their programs, I have learned that they face resistance from funders, colleagues, male students and the male partners of women students.

In my interview with Lois, she referred to fundraising as a juggling act . She was not receiving any financial support from her program's base funding. Furthermore, any extra funds which the program raised were being directed into other area of programming. It was clear that her program did not value women-positive programming.

> "And we're (the women) trying to actually do a fundraiser cause other than the money that we've raised, the C.C.L.O.W. you know pays for my time to do the research and I've put that money into the women's group. So, but we need to raise some more money cause we want to do a retreat. There's a little farm out by Kingston that we can get for free."

How long will it take before Lois gets 'burnt-out' from trying to raise extra funds in addition to her other responsibilities?

In March of last year I attended an informal meeting which provided a forum for women literacy workers to address the following question. How do we respond to women learners' needs and our own needs as women? We talked about the resistance we encounter as we try to respond to women's needs. The fact that a few of the workers had to attend this meeting 'on their own time' sends a strong message of resistance. Several women mentioned that the government would only fund women's activities which were time-bound projects that produced an end-product such as a book.

Programs which support women-positive programs can expect acts of resistance from the male students and staff members in the program. In my interview with Lois, I also learned about the resistance she and female students faced as they formed a women-positive program.

> "When the guys found it, I mean the first meeting we ever had, when one of the guys found about it he barged through the door and argued with me and just smashed a cup and cut himself so bad he had to go for stitches and he chased one of the woman right through the centre."

Literacy workers who also cross the public/private boundaries expose themselves to episodes of violence. Last month, for instance, a colleague who works in Northern Alberta was shot at by the husband of one of her literacy students as she picked her up to drive her to a woman's shelter. If one operates from the adage that the personal is political - what does this resistance to women's literacy mean within the political realm? Stromquist's (1990) response is that "political will decreases as literacy is seen as a potential challenge to patriarchy. Hence, an implicit alliance is formed by men of all classes to make it difficult for low-income women to attain literacy skills" (p. 105).

SUMMARY

As literacy workers, we need to start asking ourselves, "Why are we focusing on the need to read, rather than on the needs of women who cannot read?" We have to remove ourselves from a dominant discourse which locks us into a dualistic framework by creating boundaries between literacy and illiteracy, the personal and the political, the private and the public and between education and therapy. Shifting paradigms is not an easy task, and as we begin to respond to women learners' needs, we also need to support our own needs as women by developing networks with other women literacy workers. And what about female literacy workers who are opposed to introducing a feminist agenda because they believe it is a form of propoganda or because they believe it is contradictory to a learner-

centred approach or because they are afraid of the word feminist? Hooks (1984) responds in the following manner:

> The compassion we extend to ourselves, the recognition that our change in consciousness and action has been a process, must characterize our approach to those individuals who are politically unconscious. We cannot motivate them to join the feminist struggle by asserting a political superiority that makes the movement just another oppressive hierarchy (p. 161-162).

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