

From Coast to Coast: A Thematic Summary of Canadian Adult Literacy Research



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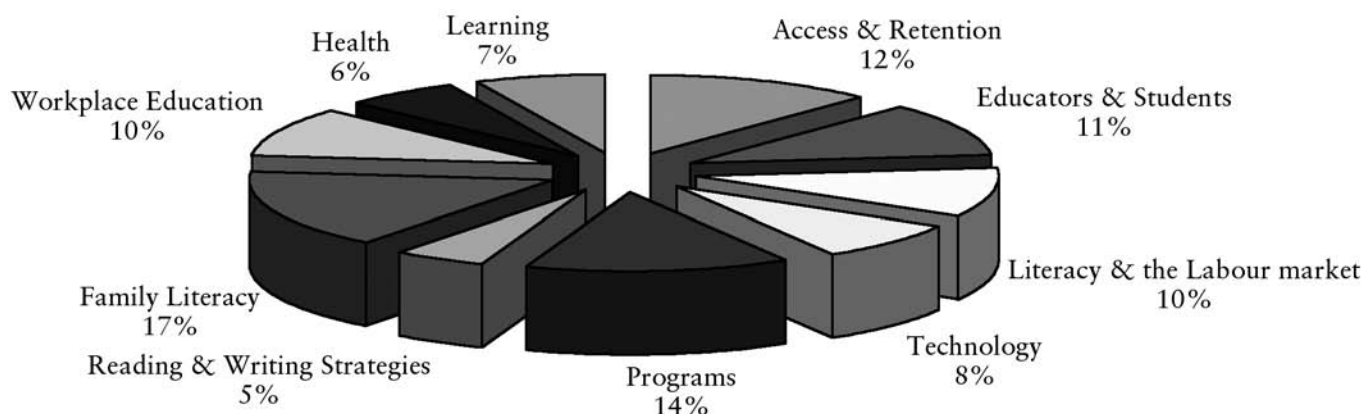
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Introduction

In Canada, there is a growing body of research in the area of adult literacy and adult basic education. This research has been referenced and annotated in the *Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research in English*.¹ This directory, which is an on-line database, includes approximately 228 pieces of research conducted within Canada by researchers and practitioners since 1994.² The purpose of this report is to identify major themes within the directory in an effort to determine areas of coverage and gaps in Canada's body of research. The secondary purpose of this report is to provide the key findings for the research conducted within each theme.³

The ten identified themes were: access and retention; educators and students; family literacy; health; learning; literacy and the labour market; programs; reading and writing strategies; technology; and workplace education.⁴ Figure 1 compares the percentage of research studies conducted within each theme. For example, the topic of family literacy represents 16 percent of the research studies among the ten themes whereas the topic of health represents 6 percent.

Figure 1: Comparison of Research Conducted From 1994 to 2002.⁵



Clearly, over the past decade, there has been a growing body of research that examines access and retention; family literacy; programs; and educators and students. It is interesting to note that although a substantial body of research has been conducted on access and retention, the National Literacy Secretariat's funding guidelines state "there is a need to know more about how to reach people and how to make programs *accessible*"

¹ The database is located at this URL: www.nald.ca/crd

² Each piece of research in the database includes a problem/purpose, background/context, methods for data collection, discussion of findings, and implications. The database does not contain program evaluations or needs assessments.

³ For each study, the key findings are either paraphrased or direct quotations.

⁴ Research topics, such as accreditation, best practices, essential skills, and learning styles did not qualify as a theme because there was a limited body of research (less than five studies) pertaining to each topic.

⁵ The information in Figure One is based on the number of research studies in the *Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research in English*.

to all who wish to improve their literacy skills.”⁶ This raises an important question: “Does the field of literacy really need to know more about access or does the field need to integrate what is known about access into policies, programs, and procedures?” Perhaps, in some cases, the issue is not one of needing *more research*; rather, the existing research needs to be disseminated so that the findings will inform practice. Innovative projects, such as the newly released *Literacies* journal funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, is an important step in exploring ways in which people are linking research and practice. The field of literacy needs more projects that focus on praxis, a cyclical process of learning that unifies theory and practice.

The International Adult Literacy Survey defines literacy as “the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” The ability to learn, read, and write play a role in achieving one’s goals and developing one’s knowledge and potential. Yet, within the ten themes, there is a paucity of research on the reading behaviours, strategies and processes of adult literacy learners. In fact, only recently, has research been conducted on the simple, yet essential question, “How do adults with little formal education learn?”⁷

Within the ten themes, the subject of health and literacy is another area that currently contains a limited body of research. However, this research gap is being addressed through a three-year project to develop a national program for literacy and health research. This project is being sponsored by The Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) and the University of Toronto’s Centre for Health Promotion and funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Valuing Literacy in Canada Program and the National Literacy Secretariat. According to Debra Gordon, who coordinates the National Literacy and Health Program, there is limited research on literacy and health policy, health communication, and the relationship of literacy to the other social determinants of health. Further, there is no research on how much it costs the health system to support people with low-literacy skills.

Aside from the ten themes and 115 related research studies identified in this report, the *Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research in English* contains an additional 113 research studies on an assortment of topics. These studies did not constitute a “theme” as there less than five studies on each given topic. For example, there were only one or two studies on the following topics: essential skills, auditory discrimination, numeracy, learning disabilities, and fetal alcohol syndrome. Although the paucity of research on certain topics signifies a “gap,” we need to determine whether it is a gap that needs to be filled. For example, at this point in time, is it necessary to have a body of research on the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome on adult literacy skills? Or, is it more important to have a body of research on learning disabilities?

⁶ National Literacy Secretariat (2003). *What types of projects are eligible for funding*. Retrieved November 20, 2003 from <http://www.nald.ca/nls/nlsfund/guide/funding.htm#2>

⁷ Niks, M., Allen, D., Davies, P., McRae, D., & Nonesuch, K. (2003). *Dancing in the dark? How do adults with little formal education learn?* BC: Malaspina University College.

Finally, in addition to the research gaps within the ten themes addressed in this report, there is a need for research that pertains to current policy issues. For example, The National Summit on Innovation and Learning, held in November, 2002, recommended the establishment of a pan-Canadian literacy and essential skills development system. If this recommendation is implemented, policy-makers might benefit from research in the following areas:

- Determining the elements needed for a pan-Canadian literacy and essential skills development system; benchmarks, standards, accountability frameworks, assessment tools, curriculum, adult educator certification.
- Reviewing federal, provincial, and territorial government policy as expressed in legislation to understand support and barriers for the life-long learning agenda.
- Examining funding and income support models in an effort to understand the impact of funding structures on practice.
- Examining the effects of accountability frameworks on programs, educators, and learners.
- Examining the impact of educational reform on programs, educators, and learners by interviewing stakeholders who have participated in educational reform; What lessons have been learned by stakeholders involved with Ontario and Quebec's educational reform?

In summary, there are and have been many significant and impressive studies of literacy sponsored by universities, community agencies, organizations, coalitions, associations, and centers across Canada. Despite the growing body of adult and family literacy research, pressing questions still need to be addressed in order to inform policy and practice. Moreover, the research findings need to be broadly disseminated in innovative ways in order to transform policy and practice.

Educators and Students

Introduction

Of the 13 studies within this theme, 5 pertain to educators and 8 to students. The completed studies pertaining to paid practitioners and tutors describe their knowledge, experiences, working conditions, practices, beliefs, and roles. The completed studies pertaining to students explore their experiences in the public school system and in adult basic education programs; and their work values, goals, and perceptions about themselves and their lives. The majority of the 13 studies involve less than 30 participants, and only one involves more than 100 participants.

Educators

Arneson, W.D. (1999). *The working lives of adult literacy practitioners*. Vancouver, BC: Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program, The British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology.

Research Question:

How do adult literacy practitioners in British Columbia describe their working lives?

Participants:

A total of 23 participants from 6 community-based centres and 6 institutions.

Data Collection:

Transcription of in-depth interviews.

Key Findings:

- All of the participants described a very high level of job satisfaction.
- The participants addressed the fundamental need for raising public awareness.
- The strongest pattern to emerge from the data for executive directors, tutor coordinators, and instructors was role overload.
- The executive directors spoke about the challenge of creating collaborative relationships within a hierarchical setting.
- The tutor coordinators described a high degree of isolation. The instructors were not as isolated as were the tutor coordinators.
- Electronic communication has increased work loads.

Battell, E., Twiss, D., Rose, J., Sawyer, J., Gesser, L., & Niks, M. (in progress). *What makes literacy/ABE instructors effective in their practice?* BC: Malaspina University-College & Literacy BC.

Research Questions:

What makes literacy/ABE instructors effective in their practice?

What do instructors and learners define as effective literacy/ABE practice?

What factors contribute to instructor effectiveness?

What are the teaching styles, approaches and educational philosophies of effective instructors?

Participants:

Five instructors who have been involved in literacy/ABE practice for between 6 and 25 years.

Data Collection:

Autobiographies, journals, student consultations, interviews.

Key Findings:

- The research is in progress.

Hambly, C. (1998). *Behavior and beliefs of volunteer literacy tutors*. (Working Paper No.3). Montreal, QC: The Centre for Literacy.

Research Questions:

How do tutors describe their experiences?

What are tutors' beliefs about literacy and literacy volunteerism?

Participants:

A total of 40 tutors from a volunteer literacy program.

Data Collection:

Semi-structured interviews.

Key Findings:

- Almost all tutors stated that their learners had made little or no progress. Yet, despite the tutors' poor assessment of the learners' progress, the tutors did not turn to the coordinators or use other resources in the organization for advice and support.
- The tutors believe that a learner who does not succeed in a classroom learning format will be helped by one-on-one tutoring.
- Tutors, while recognizing the wide variety of learner needs, rely on individual attention rather than specific training to function in the match.
- Tutors value good will over good training.
- Tutors defend their volunteer activities based on perceived needs rather than on demonstrable progress and results.

Magro, K. (2002). *Exploring teaching roles and responsibilities in adult literacy education: Do teachers see themselves as transformative educators?* Proceedings of the 21st Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, May 30-31 & June 1.

Research Questions:

Do adult educators' conceptualizations of the teaching-learning process reflect the assumptions about the role of the educator and the process of learning described in transformative learning theories?

Do teachers see themselves as transformative educators?

Participants:

A total of 12 English and ESL teachers.

Data Collection:

Semi-structured interviews.

Key Findings:

- The literacy teachers did not view themselves as transformative educators. Yet for some teachers, their views of learning, curriculum orientation, and personal philosophy of practice were consistent with the theories of transformative education.
- Most of the teachers emphasized the importance of providing a safe, open, and trusting environment for learning, and for using instructional strategies that supported a learner-centred approach that promoted choice and self-direction.
- The educators viewed their roles as being quite fluid and flexible. The role that they identified most with was the role of the facilitator. The educators explained that it was sometimes difficult to separate the roles of the counsellor/therapist and the teacher.
- Despite educators' efforts to reduce the power imbalance between educators and students, the educators acknowledged the limitations of "power sharing."

Ralph, P.F. (1994). *A description of teachers' awareness and translation of adult education/learning and whole language theory to teaching practice*. Unpublished master's thesis. St. John's, NL: Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Research Questions:

To what extent are teachers aware of adult education/learning and whole language philosophy?

How do teachers translate this theory into practice?

Participants:

Ten adult basic education Level 1 teachers.

Data Collection:

Class observation and interviews.

Key Findings:

- The findings indicated variability between and among both teachers' reported awareness of adult education/learning and whole language philosophy, and their reported teaching behaviours/activities.
- It was also found that teachers' practice is guided, at least in part, by factors other than their knowledge of adult education/learning and whole language philosophy.

Students

Arnott, K. L. (2000). *What went wrong: Women speak out about their school literacy problems*. Master's Abstracts International, 39 (03). (UMI No. MQ55131).

Research Questions:

Why do some adults in Canada return to basic literacy programs after receiving all their education in Canadian schools?

What caused their apparent failure to acquire the literacy skills necessary to meet their needs and interests?

Participants:

Eight women who were attending literacy programs.

Data Collection:

Individual and small group interviews.

Key Findings:

- These women, as children and adolescents, experienced a loss of time or were robbed of time. Most notably, they rarely felt that their teachers had spent enough time with them but did remember the few times when they felt that their teachers had given them enough time or showed that they cared about them. They had decided to return to their literacy programs, both for themselves and for their children, to improve their lives and to make up for some of their lost time.
- These women had experienced the harmful and negative effects of being grouped and labelled by others. They were left with painful emotions from these experiences and described how they had learned to think of themselves and behave in ways that were representative of the views of others.
- The women saw themselves as misfits within the educational system, and school had not been a comfortable time for them. Their lessons and assignments did not make sense to them; as children they felt intimidated by their teachers; they were viewed in a negative light; and they were in frequent conflict with their teachers. They had suffered from a series of mismatches among themselves, their teachers, and the ways in which they were expected to accomplish their learning--ways that did not use their strengths.
- These women, like many others, had missed out on the understanding that there must be a meaningful interaction among author, text, and reader for reading and writing to be learned successfully and willingly.

Blunt, A. & Richards, G. (1998). The work values of marginalized adult learners. *Adult Basic Education*, 8(3), 157-175.

Research Questions:

What are the hierarchically ordered, work-related values of the marginalized population served by ABE programs?

Are there differences among the work related values of the marginalized population served by ABE programs?

Do gender differences exist in the marginalized population and sub-groups?

Participants:

A total of 136 subjects enrolled in one of 8 ABE or employment reading training courses.

Data Collection:

Life Roles Inventory.

Key Findings:

- The “population of marginalized adult learners are not homogenous in terms of the hierarchy of work values that they hold, in fact, they differ by ethnic group and gender in terms of the importance they attach to LRI values” (p. 173).
- “Any differences in the work values observed among ethnic and gender groups are based on the varying degrees of importance each group attaches to its own values within its community and society at large” (p. 173).
- The subjects ranked personal development, economics, achievement, ability utilization, and social relations as their most important work-related values.
- The least important work-related values reported were risk, physical prowess, cultural identity, authority, and social interaction.
- The respondents’ current priorities, during their period of training, were the home and family, while they gave studying the lowest rank.

Bossort, P., Cottingham, B. & Gardner, L. (1994). *Learning to learn: Impacts of the adult basic education experience on the lives of participants*. Vancouver, BC: Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia.

Research Questions:

What is the nature of the effects that participation in a literacy or adult basic education program (ABE) program has had on the lives of former students from their perspective?

What are the intended effects on the lives of students from instructors' perspectives?

Participants:

A total of 45 former ABE students who had been away from their last ABE course for at least 1 year and 15 ABE instructors.

Data Collection:

Intensive interviews.

Key Findings:

- The vast majority (over 90 percent) of former students who participated in the study reported positive impacts. The primary essence of the ABE experience is that people are learning to learn.
- In the area of educational impacts, the participants learned many skills, among them reading, writing, mathematics, public speaking, and job-related skills.
- The most salient and impressive impacts of the ABE experience have been psychological (increased self-esteem and self-confidence). The psychological changes, combined with new information and experiences, impacted social relationships.
- People gained greater access to their own physical, social, and inner world. This enhanced their capacity for reflection, meaning, and action.
- The participants were living intentionally, through the process of becoming aware that they wanted to change their lives and resolving to re-enter a formal educational experience.
- A number of ABE participants became volunteers in a variety of community organizations for the first time in their lives.
- The process of ABE is fundamentally social, even for those students working on specific curricula by themselves.

Ewing, G. (1998). *The reason I joined this program: Creating a database of learner goals for program planning*. North York, ON: Literacy and Basic Skills Program (North York), Toronto District School Board.

Research Question:

Why do adults come to adult literacy programs?

Participants:

A total of 227 adult learners in North York, Ontario.

Data Collection:

Class discussions, one-one-one open discussions, and questionnaires.

Key Findings:

- Most learners had more than one kind of goal.
- The most common kinds of life goals that emerged, in their order of frequency, were finding a job, preparing for further upgrading, learning how to do everyday tasks better, getting an education, and learning how to help children with their school work. Another kind of goal, learning how to communicate better, was particularly important to learners with disabilities.

Katz, C. (1997). *Portrait of an adult literacy learner*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Research Question:

What does learning to read and write entail for a marginally literate adult?

Participant:

Thomas, a 35 year-old-man enrolled in a community-based literacy program.

Data Collection:

Participant-observation, interviews, questionnaires, videotapes, and samples of the participant's writing.

Key Findings:

- The student participated more fully in informal than in formal literacy learning opportunities.
- The participant understood reading as a practical tool used to accomplish personal goals.
- The participant considered writing to be his greatest challenge and viewed written communication as a valuable end in itself.
- The findings suggest that culture differences existed between Thomas' expectations for literacy learning and those provided by the school for his son.
- The study suggests the relevance to adult literacy practice and theory of the need of marginally literate adults to attain and maintain control over their lives as an aspect of literacy learning.

Lothian, T. (1996). *Older adults, literacy and social networks: A qualitative inquiry into the lives of two older women*. Unpublished master's thesis. Ottawa, ON: Carleton University.

Research Question:

What are the experiences of two older women with limited literacy skills?

Participants:

Two older women attending a literacy program.

Data Collection:

Interviews.

Findings

- “Dependency on others for literate help has negative consequences on one’s self-image and ability to function in society” (p. 1).
- “Although the full implications of literate dependence may not be realized until one’s social network undergoes significant changes, these negative impacts are evident throughout adult life” (pp. 1-2).

Malicky, G.V. & Norman, C.A. (1996). Perceptions of adult literacy learners about themselves and their lives. *Adult Basic Education*, 6(1), 3-20.

Research Questions:

What are adult literacy learners' perceptions about their lives?

What are adult literacy learners' perceptions about changes in themselves and in their lives as they participated in literacy programs?

Participants:

A total of 94 adults entering literacy classes.

Data Collection:

Over a 3-year period, data was collected through structured interviews.

Key Findings:

- Many participants talked about problems in relationships with family members. It was primarily Canadian-born women who cited these problems.
- Many women and some men talked about the difficulty in juggling the combined workload of home and school.
- Violence was a theme that surfaced in the study, particularly violence against women. Immigrant women had nowhere to turn for help because they had not been in the country long enough to establish extensive social networks.
- Nearly 50 percent of the participants belong to at least one community or cultural group. Some participants did not belong to any group and valued the opportunity provided by literacy classes to extend their community contacts. Immigrant learners, in particular, value these contacts.
- The participants reported positive cognitive, psychological/affective and social changes within themselves, especially near the beginning of their involvement in literacy programs. Many reported increased confidence, self-esteem, and independence.
- These positive outcomes persisted for some participants, but for others, both social and psychological changes appeared to go through a downward spiral over the course of the study.
- The participants felt that they were able to communicate better, both orally and in writing.

Young, P. (1999). *Adult high school learners' experiences with literacy education in institutional upgrading classrooms*. Unpublished master's thesis. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Research Question:

What are the adult high school learners' experiences with literacy education in institutional upgrading classes?

Participants:

Six students who were enrolled in either a Grade 11 or Grade 12 English class.

Data Collection:

Interviews.

Key Findings:

- In the instructional realm, the participants did not tend to understand or practice active learning techniques. Instead they relied on instructors to understand and accommodate their individual learning backgrounds, pace of learning, learning styles, and interests.
- They also sought an approach to writing instruction that included sustained practice and sensitive, specific feedback.
- In the affective realm, their past work, home, and school experiences impacted their expectations and experiences of their adult learning situations. They appreciated opportunities for meaningful peer interaction both within and outside the classroom. Also, they relied on their instructors for satisfying classroom experiences.
- In the realm of power and control, most of these participants felt that their instructor dominated classroom decisions. This dominance was an expectation for some but produced tensions for others. Most participants wanted more opportunities to have their opinions heard and respected in the classroom.

Enhancing Access and Increasing Retention

Introduction

Of the 15 studies within this theme, 9 focus on enhancing access and 5 focus on increasing retention, while the study by Roussy (2002) addresses both access *and* retention. The participants in the access studies include individuals who had never enrolled in an adult basic education program; individuals with past or current experience in an adult basic education program; and potential literacy learners who had contacted programs. The participants in the retention studies include drop-outs and students currently enrolled in an adult basic education program. Interestingly, program- and policy-related barriers were the most frequently cited reasons for leaving a program, and the main deterrent to joining a program (Long and Middleton, 2001; Malicky & Norman, 1994). While relatively few participants reported that financial pressures forced them to discontinue programs, non-participants cited economic influences as a concrete barrier to participation (Hart, Long, Breslauer & Slosser, 2002; Malicky & Norman, 1994).

Ducklow, D.A. (1994). *A matter of balance: The difference between dropping out and persisting in an adult learning centre*. Unpublished master's thesis. Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University.

Research Question:

What are the factors contributing to dropout and persistence at one adult learning centre?

Participants:

Twenty-five dropouts and 26 persisters who participated in an adult learning centre in Surrey, B.C.

Data Collection:

Questionnaire and interviews.

Key Findings:

- The complex problem is not explainable by a single set of contributing factors, and because of this complexity, analysis for the purpose of improving retention is best carried out in a single context.
- The differences between dropouts and persisters are so subtle that a matter of degree may be all that tips the balance of contributing factors towards persistence or withdrawal.
- A central theme in student responses was difficulty in managing the self-paced learning format.

Hart, D., Long, E., Breslauer H. & Slosser, C. (2002). *Nonparticipation in literacy and upgrading programs: A national study. Stage Two: Survey of attitudes, perceptions, and preferences regarding adult basic education programs*. Toronto, ON: ABC CANADA.

Research Question:

What are nonparticipants' attitudes, awareness, perceptions, and preferences regarding adult basic education programs?

Participants:

A representative sample of 866 people with less than high school completion who have never taken a literacy or upgrading program.

Data Collection:

Telephone survey.

Key Findings:

- Approximately 60 percent of the respondents indicated awareness of literacy and upgrading programs in their community.
- Approximately 60 percent of the respondents had considered taking upgrading or completing their high school diploma since leaving school.
- Expectations of enrolling in an upgrading program or completing a high school diploma are highest for those 18-24 years of age and drop off at about age 50.
- There is a “consistent hierarchy of concerns among respondents about attending a program: socioeconomic/circumstantial and program/policy-related concerns generally rank higher than cognitive-emotive concerns (e.g., fear). The two most highly ranked socioeconomic/circumstantial concerns revolved around money and conflict with paid employment, followed by the distance of the program being offered. The next most highly ranked set of concerns is program/policy-related, including program length, level of difficulty, not being able to work at one’s own pace, and relevance of program content. The highest cognitive-emotive factors is general nervousness about attending a program” (p. 10).
- Respondents preferred the following two learning formats: one-on-one learning with a tutor and small-group sessions of 5 to 10 people.
- The preferred location for learning among respondents was classrooms in educational institutions.

Hoddinott, S. (1998). *Something to think about; please think about this: Report on a national study of access to ABE programs and services in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Board of Education.

Research Questions:

Is there equitable access to high-quality adult upgrading opportunities in each province and territory?

Is equitable (and universal) access likely to be achieved under existing policies and practices?

To what extent do current public policies with respect to literacy and adult basic education enable undereducated adults to improve their literacy skills or increase their educational attainment?

Participants:

A pan-Canadian study involving government officials and administrators with responsibility for adult basic education and literacy, representatives of literacy networks and literacy advocacy organizations, deliverers of literacy and adult basic education programs, researchers with an interest or involvement in literacy issues, and selected literacy and adult basic education teachers and representatives of teacher associations or unions.

Five teachers and 39 students from 4 adult basic education programs situated in an urban-based college, rural-based college, an institution-based school board program, and a community-based school board program.

Data Collection:

Weekly surveys and journals, written reports, daily logs, individual and group interviews, and document analysis.

Key Findings:

- “In many parts of Canada, there is simply no public provision of Adult Basic Education. The picture overall is rather grim—though a poorly supported and still largely undeveloped public service, Adult Basic Education is in decline in virtually every jurisdiction in this country. In some jurisdictions it has been all but eliminated” (p. 192).
- “This study has demonstrated that documenting the state of Adult Basic Education provision is far more difficult than the documentation of any area of public

service provision—or public taxation expenditures—ought to be. The difficulty of ascertaining levels of funding and numbers enrolled in programs, for example, has serious implications for public accountability for the meeting of this very real social need” (p. 192).

- “...Every jurisdiction has a long way to go before universal access to basic education services is a reality and virtually every jurisdiction is moving farther and farther away from achieving this goal in the current period” (p. 192).
- “...Adult education programs in this country are not only diminishing but are becoming increasingly narrow” in their purpose(s) (p. 192). Social policy initiatives value educational upgrading “from a purely instrumental perspective”—preparing them for job-related training or for immediate employment in entry-level jobs or for getting people off social assistance via the shortest possible route (p. 193).

Jessup, L.L. (n.d.). *Barriers to youth in acquiring literacy assistance*. Tillsonburg, ON: Tillsonburg and District Multi-Service Centre.

Research Question:

What factors deter participation in literacy programs for low-literacy youth residing in southwestern Ontario?

Participants:

A total of 145 youth with low-literacy skills who resided in rural and urban areas in southwestern Ontario. In the total sample, 50 youth had never participated in any form of adult education and 95 had some experience with adult education.

Data Collection:

Oral questionnaire.

Key Findings:

- The primary factors affecting participation fall under the following groupings: psychosocial barriers, dislike for school, and situational barriers.
- The reasons for nonparticipation are multidimensional in nature.

Long, E. (1996). *Impact of ABC CANADA's LEARN campaign: Results of a national research study*. Toronto, ON: ABC CANADA.

Research Question:

What is the impact of the LEARN campaign?

Participants:

A total of 94 literacy groups and 3,500 respondents.

Data Collection:

Questionnaires.

Key Findings:

- The LEARN campaign was the most common way that learners found about literacy organizations. More than 50 percent of calls from learners were associated with the LEARN campaign.
- Forty-four percent of *all* calls to literacy organizations were associated with the LEARN campaign.
- Ninety-five percent of potential learners who saw a LEARN ad said that it helped them to decide to call a literacy program.
- The main motivators for calling literacy groups included reasons related to work (36 percent) and self-esteem and confidence (32 percent).
- The main reasons most learners didn't call literacy groups earlier was that they hadn't known literacy programs existed or how to find them (42 percent).

Long, E. & Taylor, L. (2002). *Non-participation in literacy and upgrading programs: A national study. Stage One: Interviews from across Canada*. Toronto, ON: ABC CANADA.

Research Questions:

How do non-participants frame and interpret their own non-participation?

How do non-participants perceive and speak about programs?

How do early school experiences influence people's ideas about programs?

What is the relationship between people's ideas about programs and their perception of life opportunities (educational, vocational, and social)?

Participants:

A total of 44 individuals with low levels of formal education who had never participated in a literacy or upgrading program.

Data Collection:

Semi-structured, in-person interview.

Key Findings:

- Three kinds of factors affect nonparticipation: divisionary factors, transition points, and intervening factors. These factors interrelate and influence each other in complex ways, and strategies aimed at increasing participation will have to address all of these factors.
- "...Divisionary factors, relating to social status, life context, and life experience influenced respondents from their early life right into adulthood" (p. 103).
- Respondents discussed transition points, or "aha!" moments, which acted as triggering events for respondents to think about a need to upgrade their literacy skills. Respondents did not sign up for programs during these transition points because of a wide array of structural barriers that included financial worries, work-related conflicts, and family and child care responsibilities.
- "...Intervening factors, which include a wide range of socio-economic-circumstantial influences that act as concrete barriers to nonparticipation, along with a host of cognitive-emotive influences that have to do with respondents' thoughts, perceptions, expectations, fears, and assumptions about learning and adult education programs" also affected non-participation (p. 103).

- “A particularly pronounced finding... is the degree to which people are still affected by negative early school experiences. Most interview participants gave spontaneous and lengthy accounts of early schooling and thus clearly framed what they imagined adult education programs would be like” (pp. 9-10).

Long, E., & Middleton, S. (2001). *Patterns of participation in Canadian literacy and upgrading programs: Results of a national follow-up study*. Toronto, ON: ABC CANADA.

Research Question:

What are the experiences of people who attempt to access literacy services?

Participants:

A total of 338 potential literacy learners who had contacted 55 programs seeking literacy information or services.

Data Collection:

Telephone interviews.

Key Findings:

- The findings reveal critical problems with access to literacy and upgrading education in Canada. Less than half of the respondents who attempted to access services enrolled in a program. Nonenrolment was particularly pronounced in large urban centres, where almost 75 percent did not enroll.
- Program/policy-related barriers were the main deterrents for 43 percent of respondents who did not enroll. These factors include not being called back after contacting a program, long waiting lists, inconvenient class locations and times, inappropriate content or teaching structure, and having to pay for the program or tutor. Socioeconomic-circumstantial barriers were reported by the next largest percentage (30 percent) of respondents who did not enroll. Overall, women were much more likely to report socioeconomic-circumstantial barriers than men. Cognitive-emotive reasons (e.g., fear) were least likely (15 percent) to be cited as the main factor for not enrolling.
- The respondents who did enroll in programs ran an obstacle course of barriers that ultimately led more than a third to drop out within six to eight months. Socioeconomic-circumstantial factors were the main reason reported by more than half of those who dropped out of programs. Another 25 percent cited program/policy-related factors as their most important reason for dropping out. Only 6 percent of the respondents cited cognitive-emotive factors as their main reason for dropping out.

Malicky, G.V., & Norman, C.A. (1994). Participation patterns in adult literacy programs. *Adult Basic Education*, 4(3), 144-156.

Research Question:

What are the participation and dropout patterns of adults in literacy programs in one urban center in Alberta across a 3-year time period?

Participants:

A total of 94 adults enrolled in literacy programs in one urban centre. Forty of them were Canadian-born, 54 immigrants.

Data Collection:

Formal testing and a series of interviews at six-month intervals.

Key Findings:

- The most frequently cited reason for enrolling in literacy programs were job-related, with 83 percent of the participants providing reasons in this category. Personal/psychological reasons were cited by 43 percent of the Canadian-born participants and 17 percent of the immigrants. Seventy-three percent of Canadian-born women cited social reasons for their involvement in literacy programs while between 21 and 29 percent of men and immigrant women gave social reasons for their involvement in literacy programs.
- Approximately half of the participants in the study dropped out of literacy classes before they had met their goals. Drop-out rates were highest for the first few months of literacy programs. A variety of reasons was given by participants for leaving programs. The most frequently cited reason was related to inappropriate programs, while the second most frequent category of reasons involved social, family, and personal problems. Relatively few participants reported that financial pressures or work schedules forced them to discontinue programs.
- A higher proportion of Canadian-born participants (68 percent) than immigrants (39 percent) dropped out of literacy classes, with Canadian-born men having the highest dropout rate of any group (79 percent). Only 31 percent of the participants were still attending literacy programs or high school upgrading programs at the end of the study.

Middleton, S. & Bancroft Planning and Research Associates. (1999). *It guided me back to learning*. Vancouver, BC: Literacy BC.

Research Questions:

Who calls the Literacy BC helpline?

Why do callers want to improve their literacy skills?

What are the deterrents to seeking help?

Do callers access and participate in the programs suggested by the helpline staff?

If not, what stopped or prevented callers from access and participation?

For those who participate, do the programs they attend meet their needs and expectations?

Participants:

A total of 248 individuals who called the Literacy BC helpline.

Data Collection:

A series of telephone surveys.

Key Findings:

- The majority of callers lived in two major urban areas, while 31 percent lived in less populated rural areas. The largest percentage of callers fell between the ages of 25 and 24 (40 percent). More than 70 percent of the callers had not completed high school, and more than half of the callers were unemployed.
- Among the callers, the primary reason for wanting to gain literacy skills was to increase their employment opportunities (41 percent). The next three highest categories included gaining more education (20 percent), performing functional tasks (11 percent), and improving their social and personal lives (10 percent).
- Callers with no previous program experience listed three primary factors that prevented them from seeking help in the past: no perceived need for literacy training (22 percent), lack of confidence in their own ability (22 percent), and lack of time (21 percent).

- A total of 86 percent of callers contacted the program suggested by the helpline staff. Of those who called, 52 percent enrolled during the course of this study. A total of 35 percent of the students were still attending the program after 8 months, 22 percent had completed the program, and 43 percent had dropped out of the program. These students dropped out because of program-related issues.
- The factor most clearly separating those who enrolled from those who did not was language. Learners whose first language was other than English were far less likely to enroll. Deterrents to enrolling also included not having enough time, inappropriate program, lack of money or health, and attitudinal factors such as lost incentive and/or low self-esteem.
- The two principal reasons for not contacting a program were that the participants were too busy with their lives and/or they did not feel confident in making the call.

Millar, R. (1998). *Ambivalent learning: Adult learners confronting the emancipation myth of literacy*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN.

Research Questions:

What are the experiences of adult learners who had dropped out of school and later returned to adult education?

What are the experiences of adult learners who confront the myth of literacy and the traditional view of its “emancipatory” effect in people’s lives?

Participants:

Thirteen women and 9 men from 4 adult literacy education programs.

Data Collection:

Interviews, a cohort discussion group, and participant observations.

Key Findings:

- The participants had ambivalence about the value of formal education, but they accepted that they needed literacy to participate in the dominant society. They continued their resistance towards powerful people and systems in their lives, and did not accept the emancipation myth of literacy.
- As adults, these students can examine their resistant behaviours and understand how they were deeply ingrained, complex reactions to the demands of the system.
- These learners had a great need to discuss their prior school experiences and their reasons for dropping out of school.
- These learners were motivated to return to education, yet some dropped out of their programs because of life circumstances, their continued resistance to schooling, and the lack of personal support.
- These adults returned to school to gain control over their lives and to gain credentials and develop skills.

Millar, R. & So, J. (1998). *Learning and talking together*. Winnipeg, MB: Journeys Adult Education Centre.

Research Question:

To what extent would a cohort group provide support for adult learners and thereby increase retention rates?

Participants:

Thirteen students receiving academic instruction.

Data Collection:

Transcripts from eight one hour discussion sessions.

Key Findings:

- Family responsibilities, work-related responsibilities, and other concerns affected drop-out rate more than did learning levels.
- Being part of a cohort group reduced feelings of isolation and provided a sense of belonging.
- Having the opportunity to share past schooling experiences and difficulties was supportive.
- Participating in the group offered comfort and encouragement, and sustained commitment.

Pare, A.L. (1994). *Attending to resistance: An ethnographic study of resistance and attendance in an adult basic education classroom*. Unpublished master's thesis. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia.

Research Question:

What is the relationship of student resistance to student attendance in an adult basic education classroom?

Participants:

Students from a community college fundamental adult basic education class.

Data Collection:

Videotaped observation and interviews.

Key Findings:

- Students with varied resistance styles attended class most regularly.
- Most of the students who attended sporadically or who dropped out of the ABE program either demonstrated no resistance, little resistance, or the type of resistance categorized as “withdrawal” resistance.

Park, V. (2000). Why don't people come?: Some reasons for non-participation in literacy programs. In M. Norton & G. Malicky (Eds.), *Learning about participatory approaches in adult literacy education: Six research in practice studies* (pp. 193-202). Edmonton, AB: Learning at the Centre Press.

Research Question:

Why are people not accessing literacy services in a small city that is an urban centre for an agricultural area?

Participants:

Four literacy and upgrading students.

Data Collection:

Transcriptions of student meetings and field notes.

Key Findings:

- Reasons for non-participation include painful early schooling experiences, lack of confidence about doing well in a new learning environment, and the development of coping strategies for dealing with literacy needs in their lives.

Roussy, Y., & Hart, D. (2002). *Seeing the need: Meeting the need. A report on recruitment and retention issues in literacy and basic skills programs*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Literacy Coalition.

Research Questions:

What prompts learners to enroll in LBS programs in the first place?

Do learners complete their programs, and what factors might discourage their participation?

What are learners doing six months after enrolling and how have their expectations changed over the six-month period?

Participants:

A total of 92 students who were starting a Literacy and Basic Skills Program in Ontario.

Data Collection:

Face-to-face and telephone interviews.

Key Findings:

- The key factors in drawing learners to agencies were program-related reasons (positive initial interaction with program staff, attractive program features) and personal circumstances (self-confidence, support from family and friends). For a minority of respondents, unemployment had given them a strong interest in pursuing a program.
- After six months, 55 percent of the students completed or were still attending the program, 27 percent left the program, and 17 percent were unable to be reached.
- Of the 27 percent who left the program, no single factor emerged as the leading cause of attrition. The factors included financial difficulties, work conflicts, personal, health, or issues of self-confidence. Only two students cited program-related reasons as the factor for leaving their *current* program. Program factors, however, did seem to play a significant role for learners who had left *previous* programs. Yet, despite negative past experiences in a program, learners returned to literacy programs.
- Younger, under-educated single parents are more likely than others to drop out of programs unexpectedly, without leaving contact information behind.
- Expectations at entry and six months later are largely consistent.

Family Literacy

Introduction

The 17 studies in the family literacy theme can be categorized into three broad topics. First, the 2 studies conducted by Statistics Canada explore the intergenerational aspects of education, literacy acquisition, and economic status. Second, 8 studies examine the impacts of family literacy training and programs. Third, 7 pieces of research focus on emergent literacy, a term used to describe the early reading and writing development of children. Emergent literacy knowledge, which encompasses the children's concepts, understanding, awareness, and attitudes towards written language, is shaped in response to children's initial literacy experiences in the home and the community (Purcell-Gates, 1998). It should be noted that the majority of studies within the family literacy theme do not usually use the term "emergent literacy"; rather, the terms "family literacy practices," "home literacy experiences," and "parent-child literacy activities" are used.

Anderson, J. (1995). How parents perceive literacy acquisition: A cross-cultural study. In W.M. Linek. & E.G. Sturtevant (Eds.), *Generations of literacy: The seventeenth yearbook of the college reading association*. (pp. 263-277). Harrisonburg, VA: College Reading Association.

Research Questions:

Do parents from different cultural groups hold perceptions of literacy learning consistent with an emergent literacy perspective?

Are there commonalities across the cultural groups in terms of parents' perceptions of emergent literacy?

Participants:

A total of 30 parents equally selected from three cultural groups (Chinese-Canadian, Euro-Canadian, and Indo-Canadian).

Data Collection:

Interviews that used the *Parents' Perceptions of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule*.

Key Findings:

- “Euro-Canadian parents were much more supportive of an emergent literacy perspective than other groups, although there was less support for particular aspects of emergent literacy” (p. 274).
- “Indo-Canadian parents were less supportive of an emergent literacy perspective than Euro-Canadian parents, and they unanimously rejected some aspects of emergent literacy” (p. 274).
- “Chinese-Canadian parents were the least supportive of an emergent literacy perspective and rejected several aspects of an emergent literacy perspective unanimously” (p. 274).

de Broucker, P. & Lavalley, L. (1998). Intergenerational aspects of education and literacy skills acquisition. In M. Corak, (Ed.), *Labour markets, social institutions, and the future of Canada's children* (pp.129-143). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.

Research Questions:

Do families pass on their intellectual capital to the next generation, and has the pattern of educational mobility changed over time?

Are literacy skills associated with educational attainment, and do they play a role in educational mobility and in gaining access to training opportunities?

Does the labour market experience of parents influence their ability to pass on intellectual capital to their children?

Do literacy skills enhance occupational opportunities?

Do the parents' education levels influence the strategies they use to influence their children's education?

Participants:

A total of 1,010 Canadians aged 26 to 35 and 658 aged 46 to 55. These Canadians participated in the International Adult Literacy Survey.

Data Collection:

International Adult Literacy Survey.

Key Findings:

- “There is substantial upward educational mobility, but inherited intellectual capital still makes a significant difference in individuals' ability to access and succeed in post-secondary education.”
- “Parents' occupational experience, in addition to their education, also influences the educational attainment of their children.”
- “How parents support the education of their children reflects their own educational background, with more educated parents adopting strategies more likely to set their children on a successful path.”

Fagan, W. T. (2001). *Transfer of learning in parent-focussed family literacy programs*. St. John's, NL: Faculty of Education, Memorial University. SSHRC Study: #831-1999-0007.

Research Question:

What is the influence of the transfer of learning within the continuum of initiating and implementing a family literacy program (PRINTS)?

Participants:

A total of 80 parents, 80 children, and 11 facilitators.

Data Collection:

Interviews, a literacy attitude/interest inventory, questionnaires, informal questioning, and review of content and procedures of three workshops.

Teachers' ratings of children's literacy behaviours, facilitators' ratings of their expertise in using the PRINTS program, facilitators' ratings of parents' knowledge at the end of workshops, parents' ratings of their literacy behaviours when interacting with children.

Key Findings:

- “Children in the top and bottom quartiles differed significantly on their knowledge and involvement in reading and writing” (p. 14).
- “Children in the top quartile engaged in a variety of literacy behaviours, including reading and writing tasks, and tasks that were part of the family literacy program (PRINTS). Those in the bottom quartile were more likely to engage in social-play activities” (p. 41).
- “While all parents believed their children would become readers, the parents of the top quartile children believed they would become good readers” (p. 41).
- “The training of the parents of children in the top quartile was more inclined to be rated by facilitators as extremely positive, and these parents felt very or extremely confident in supporting young children's literacy development” (p. 24).
- “The parents of top quartile children were more inclined to give positive feedback to their children, try and find a variety of reading material, talk about books read, give the children help with writing when asked, and use the public library as a source of reading material...” (p. 42). “These parents were also more inclined to develop greater insight into their children's literacy learning, become more aware that literacy

development can occur in any venue, develop a sense of ownership of their early literacy development involvement, understand the overall structure and organization of the PRINTS program, know how to best access and use materials and resources, and develop a greater sensitivity to their children's characteristics and needs" (p. 24).

- "The more effective facilitators made a special effort to develop and encourage a positive attitude on the part of parents about literacy development; [and] they fostered a sense of ownership in parents..." (p. 33). They made time for parents to socialize and to get concerns and issues 'out of their system'. They held a "belief in the importance of parent input, involving the parents in evaluating the effects of the program on themselves and their children, understanding the overall structure of the program, and using the parent handbook effectively" (p. 36).
- "The facilitators of parents of children in the top quartile placed more emphasis on drawing on parent input in developing key concepts. They were more likely to be nurturers and to give positive feedback to the parents. They highlighted the overall structure of the program... and were more inclined to promote learning by engaging the parents in hands-on activities" (p. 33).

Hammett, R., Artiss, P., & Barrell, B. (2000). *Strengthening families and communities through literacy learning opportunities for women/adults*. St. John's, NL: Memorial University of Newfoundland. SSHRC Study: # 831-1999-0011.

Research Question (pertaining to family literacy):

To assist the participants in their support and development of their children's learning.

Participants:

A total of 60 participants at 2 computer sites.

Data Collection:

Ethnographic field notes, interviews, and artifacts.

Key Findings:

- The participants have cemented relationships with their children's school.
- Most of the participants have increased their individual and collective participation in the school community.

Hayden R. and Phillips L. (2000). *The forecast is good: Report on the formative evaluation of the “Learning together: Read and write with your child” program*. Edmonton, AB: Centre for Research on Literacy, University of Alberta.

Research Questions:

Does the *Learning Together* program:

- boost the children’s early literacy development?
- improve parents’ ability to help their children with the early stages of literacy development?
- increase parents’ own literacy levels?

Participants:

A total of 17 parents and 16 children.

Data Collection:

Interviews, observation, and pre- and post-test data from the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test*, the *Test of Early Reading Ability*, and the *Bader Reading and Language Inventory*.

Key Findings:

- “The children’s receptive vocabulary increased” and they “made strong gains in their knowledge of the alphabet and the conventions of print” (p. 52).
- “The children’s gains in their ability to construct meaning from print situations (e.g., environmental print) reflected less vigorous growth” (p. 52).
- “The parents’ ability to remember and to comprehend more accurately what they had read increased considerably. However, an overall increase in their reading level achievement was not demonstrated” (p. 52).
- “Parents views about “the what” of literacy changed from a focus on merely the learning of letters, sounds and words to one that included more strategic views of reading as the construction of meaning. Parents moved from a practice of using language primarily to regulate their children’s behaviours to practices that included interactive language use in order to address the imaginative, informational, and heuristic functions of language” (pp. 52-53).
- “Parents perceived themselves as more confident models for the oral language and literacy development of their children” (p. 52).
- “Parents reported the social aspects of the program to be of considerable benefit for themselves and their children” (p. 53).

Hayden, R. & Sanders, M. (1998). Community service providers as literacy facilitators: A pilot project. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 44(2), 135-148.

Research Questions:

What are community service providers' perspectives on literacy?

Does six hours of training in family literacy development strategies modify service providers' understanding of literacy acquisition?

How do community service providers, as a result of the training, incorporate literacy events for the families they service in their professional practice?"

Participants:

A total of 20 community workers from 14 community agencies.

Data Collection:

Pre- and post-survey, interviews, and information collected during the workshops.

Key Findings:

- Participants demonstrated a shift in attitudes about literacy acquisition and development, moving from a more traditional understanding of literacy to one that includes more holistic sociocultural perspectives.
- Participants demonstrated a shift *away* from considering low-literacy skills a cause of society's social ills.
- Before the workshops, slightly more than a third of the participants indicated that poverty was a cause for illiteracy. After the workshops, more than three-quarters of the participants held this view.
- The participants revised their original views of less literate parents as deficient and therefore inappropriate literacy models for their children.
- The community service providers attended to and included literacy events more frequently in their own professional practices after workshop participation.

Nason, P., & Whitty, P. (forthcoming). *E/Merging literacies of home, family and community: Valuing the literacies of community workers and mothers*. University of New Brunswick. SSHRC Study: #831-2000-0011.

Research Questions:

What are the “living contradictions” or “tensions” between practitioners’ beliefs and their practice?

What type of project can the practitioners implement to address the contradiction?

Participants:

A total of 26 literacy practitioners.

Data Collection:

In this action research project, conversations were tape recorded and transcribed.

Key Findings:

- Data is in preliminary stage of analysis.
- The practitioners also completed projects to address the contradictions. These included formulating strategic partnerships, bringing distinct neighbourhoods together through a literacy initiative, creating links with rural library services, creating awareness of the mandate of a health-based organization, developing dramatic play boxes, and organizing a book drive.

O'Sullivan, J. & Howe, M.L. (1999). *Overcoming poverty: Promoting literacy in children from low-income families*. Thunder Bay, ON: Lakehead University.

Research Questions:

What do young children in low-income families believe about their reading and how do these beliefs influence their reading proficiency?

What role do parents in low-income families play in influencing their children's beliefs about reading?

Participants:

A total of 702 low-income parents and 439 children aged 4 to 8 years.

Data Collection:

Interviews, questionnaires, and tests (Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery, Syllable/Phoneme Segmentation Tests, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Concepts about Print Test).

Key Findings:

- “On average, the children had pre-reading and reading proficiencies that were well below the national average” (p. 31). The children’s “competencies in reading related knowledge and processing were also well below the national average” (p. 31). “The children and their parents received [school] reports about the children’s reading that did not present a realistic picture of their children’s achievement relative to the national average” (p. 32).
- Despite their below-average reading proficiency, the “children, and their parents, had well-established beliefs about their reading, beliefs where they saw themselves (and parents saw them) as good readers; and they saw reading as an interesting and useful activity” (p. 32).
- “...at every grade level the parents’ of outstanding readers were distinguished by their extremely positive beliefs about their child’s competence” (p. 29).
- “...it is the parents’ belief in their child’s ability that is critical rather than the literacy environment they report in their home” (p. 33). “Parent’s beliefs about their children’s competence are linked to their children’s reading behaviour in the home, rather than the parents’ own involvement in reading activities, alone or in conjunction with their children” (p. 28).

- “Before Grade 2, children travel down one of two paths to excellent reading, a path driven by skill (knowledge of print conventions) or a path driven by will, (believing one is excellent).” “...for children on the skill path, the influence of parents is evident” (p. 33).

Rubin, R. (forthcoming). *Voices from the Heart: One low-income community in New Brunswick*. Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa.

Research Questions:

How do family literacy practices unfold in low-income homes?

How is literacy embedded in families' social practices and relationships between schools and homes?

What conditions and factors within the family contribute to family literacy practices and the enculturation of children into these practices?

Participants:

Eight families with at least one child enrolled in the Grade 1, 2 or 3 English program.

Data Collection:

School observations, videotapes of parent-child interactions, multiple interviews with the parents, and a review of parent-reflective journal entries and responses to a questionnaire.

Key Findings:

- Thesis will be released in 2004.

Senechal, M., LeFevre, J., Thomas, E. M. & Daley, K. (1998). Differential effects of home literacy experiences on the development of oral and written language. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33(1), 96-116.

Research Questions:

“What is the relation between storybook reading and parent teaching?”

“Do both storybook reading and parent teaching predict oral- and written-language skills?”

“Do storybook reading and parent teaching predict word reading at the end of Grade 1?”

Participants:

A total of 110 Kindergarten and 47 Grade 1 children, 14 teachers, and 297 parents.

Data Collection:

Parent questionnaire, checklists, self-reports, and standardized tests.

Key Findings:

- There is no correlation between storybook exposure and parent-reported teaching.
- In middle class homes, “experiences that included informal interactions with print, such as storybook reading, were associated with the development of children’s oral language, and experiences that included more formal interactions with print, such as teaching about reading, were associated with the development of written-language skills” (p. 109).
- The impact of home literacy experiences on children’s reading at the end of Grade 1 was mediated through oral- and written-language skills.
- The language skills “predicted later reading, specifically word reading at the end of Grade 1” (p. 110).

Shalla, V. & Schellenberg, G. (1998). *The value of words: Literacy and economic security in Canada* (Catalogue no. 89-552-MPE, no. 3). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.

Research Question:

What is the relationship between parents' economic security and the literacy practices of parents and their children?

Participants:

A total of 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over.

Data Collection:

Survey.

Key Findings:

- There is “a connection between household economic status and intergenerational literacy.”
- The analysis of several indicators of literacy practices and activities “in the home points to differences between low-income and non-low-income households, but in many cases the differences are small. While it appears that economic circumstances impose some constraints on literacy practices and activities in the home, parents and children from low-income homes are obviously finding ways to develop literacy skills despite financial obstacles” (p. 44).

Shaw, D.L. (1997). *Parent-child literacy activities as predictors of kindergarten achievement*. Unpublished master's thesis. Guelph, ON: University of Guelph.

Research Question:

What is the relationship between the home environments of Kindergarten children and their literacy and vocabulary development?

Participants:

A total of 63 Kindergarten children and their parents.

Data Collection:

Unknown.

Key Findings:

- “Time parents spent reading with their children and their familiarity with children’s books was not correlated with children’s reading skills” (p. 1).
- “Aspects of the home environment predicted modest, although significant, amounts of variance on literacy outcome measures after controlling for child ability and interest. The aspects of the home environment that made the greatest contribution to the amount of variance predicted were style of home reading instruction and teaching letter names or sounds in the past” (p. 2).
- “Cognitive ability (i.e., Block Design and rapid automatized naming) predicted significant and the greatest amounts of variance on the literacy measures. In contrast, home environment, cognitive ability, and age predicted significant and approximately equal amounts of unique variance in receptive vocabulary scores” (p. 2).

Symons, S., Szuszkiewicz, T. & Bonnell, C. (1996). Parental print exposure and young children's language and literacy skills. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 42(1), 49-58.

Research Question:

What is the relationship among parental print exposure, socio-economic status, and education to young children's language and literacy skills?

Participants:

A total of 39 five-and six-year-olds in their first year of school and 64 parents and/or guardians.

Data Collection:

Vocabulary, printing performance, phonemic awareness tests, parental print exposure measures (*Magazine Recognition Test, Author Recognition Test, Cultural Literacy Test*) and interviews.

Key Findings:

- Parental print exposure influences children's literacy development.
- "Phonemic awareness was correlated with the print exposure of both parents, as well as with mothers' and fathers' education and family SES" (p. 49).
- "Vocabulary test scores correlated with mothers' print exposure and did not correlate with parental education or family SES" (p. 49).
- "Printing performance was correlated with mothers' and fathers' print exposure and mothers' education" (p. 49).
- "This pattern of results suggests that job status has less impact on literacy outcomes for children than does parental education and that print exposure is more highly associated with children's vocabulary than either education or SES" (p. 52).

The Canadian Institute of Child Health. (2001). *A preliminary evaluation of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program as a family literacy program*. Toronto, ON: Author.

Research Question:

What are the contributions of Mother Goose programs in Toronto to family literacy and family well being?

Participants:

Participants (parents, children, teachers) in six Mother Goose programs.

Data Collection:

Participant observation and interviews.

Key Findings:

- Participation in Mother Goose classes promotes positive, language-based interactions between parent and child.
- Participation in Mother Goose encourages a culture of literacy within families.
- Family literacy is strongly associated with family well-being.

Timmons, V., MacGillivray, T. A., & MacLeod, K. (2002). *Enhancing family literacy in rural Prince Edward Island*. Charlottetown, PEI: Faculty of Education, University of Prince Edward Island.

Research Questions:

What is the impact of a family literacy program on the literacy levels and school success of the children in the families?

What is the impact of a comprehensive family literacy program in areas such as parenting, school relations, etc.?

Can the comprehensive family literacy program be adopted in other low income, rural, and resource-based communities in Canada?

Participants:

A total of seven families from two rural communities who were participating in the development and piloting of a family literacy program, and the children's teachers.

Data Collection:

Pre- and post-reading assessments, interviews, autobiographical books, and focus groups.

Key Findings:

- Based on the three reading assessments, 11 out of 13 children, or 84% showed an improvement of at least one grade level.
- The majority of the remarks were positive when the teachers were directly asked about the relationship they shared with the parents.
- A major benefit of the family literacy program was the rapport that the parents built with one another.
- The program design could easily be implemented in other rural areas with similar demographics as it proved to be successful with the seven families.

Wade-Woolley, L., Pantaleo, S.J., & Kirby, J.R. (2000). *Enhancing adult literacy through reading to children*. Queen's University, Faculty of Education & Kingston Literacy. SHRCC Study: #831-1999-0008.

Research Questions:

Do parents' reading skills (phonemic awareness, word identification, word attack and passage comprehension) improve by participation in a structured family literacy program?

Do children's pre-reading skills (letter identification, letter sounds and phonemic awareness) improve by introducing a structured family literacy program?

Participants:

A total of 16 adults and 17 children from 5 schools in the Kingston area.

Data Collection:

Pre- and post-testing (YOPP-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation and Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests), interviews, demographic information.

Key Findings:

- Statistically significant findings were found post-intervention for both parents and children for phoneme segmentation, for word attack skills (adults) and letter sounds (children).
- A small but statistically significant change in passage comprehension was found at 6 weeks post-program for the first intervention group.
- Qualitative analysis of taped sessions indicated growth in ability to decode, to ask good questions, and to relate text to experience.
- In the initial session, parents' comments reflected being mystified yet excited by how their children were learning to decode words.
- Parents for whom English was a second language perceived a need to pronounce words correctly to assist their children in the decoding process.
- Most of the parents reported that before attending the reading program they simply read stories to the child verbatim from beginning to end. It had not occurred to them to ask questions or to try to engage the child through rhyming, alliteration, or word games.

- Parents found that talking about the events described in the story facilitated children's discussing perceptions and events in their everyday life.
- Shifts in the pre-reading skills of the children were apparent in the recorded dialogue. Shifts included moving from memorizing the book to decoding or learning words from sight.

Wason-Ellam, L. & Cronin, M. (forthcoming). *Family literacy: Creating choices and possibilities*. Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan. SSHRC Study: #831-1999-0017

Research Questions:

How have family literacy initiatives impacted family literacy practices and life-long learning within the entire family? What are some of the choices and opportunities for literacy?

What are the critical factors that sustain family literacy programs?

What “new skills,” choices, or strategies are added that can prepare adults for work, economic opportunities, and life in the community?

Participants:

Participants in family literacy programs in Saskatchewan.

Data Collection:

Site visits, observations of communicative events and informal interactions, interviews, oral questionnaires, and written documents of programs and planning documents.

Key Findings:

- Final report to be released in Fall of 2003.

Health

Introduction

Literacy is a major determinant of health, and it is also closely associated with other socio-economic conditions that influence health, such as income, education, employment, and social support. Health literacy links literacy levels with people's ability "to act upon health information and, ultimately, take control of their health. It builds upon the idea that both health and literacy are critical resources for everyday living."¹

Despite the importance of health literacy, only seven completed studies focused on this subject, with two studies confirming that literacy is a major determinant of health; and three focusing on the impacts of health-related workshops or educational programs for adults with low-literacy skills. The remaining 2 studies examine literacy and health promotion and the screening of reading ability among patients with low-literacy skills. Fortunately, the paucity of research in this area is being addressed through a three-year project to develop a national program for literacy and health research.²

¹ Health Canada's Canadian Health Network (2003). Retrieved December 19, 2003 from <http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/servlet/ContentServer?cid=1044313071285&pagename=CHN-RCS%2FPAGE%2FGTPAGE%2FTemplate&cc=Page&lang=En>

² This project is being sponsored by the Canadian Public Health Association and the University of Toronto's Centre for Health Promotion and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's Valuing Literacy in Canada Program.

Alaverdy, H. (1994). *Diabetes education for the functionally illiterate adult population in central Newfoundland using a client-centered approach*. Unpublished master's thesis. Halifax, NS: Mount Saint Vincent University.

Research Question:

How do diabetic adults with low-literacy skills respond to a client-centered educational program?

Participants:

Eight diabetic adults with low-literacy skills.

Data Collection:

Interviews and observation.

Key Findings:

- There was an increase in client confidence in their abilities to learn and care for their diabetes.
- There was a shift in the balance of power and control from the educators to the clients.
- Clients were able to increase knowledge, improve skills and behaviour, improve quality of life, and change attitudes and confidence in their abilities to learn and care for their diabetes.

Brez, S.A. & Taylor, M. (1997). Assessing literacy for patient teaching: Perspectives of adults with low literacy skills. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 25, 1040-1047.

Research Question:

How do English speaking adults with low-literacy skills respond to screening of reading ability in order to facilitate the planning of patient teaching in a hospital setting?

Participants:

Eight adults with low-literacy skills.

Data Collection:

Interviews and participant observation before, during, and after a literacy screening stimulation experience.

Key Findings:

- “While all participants supported the principle of screening in the context of the hospital, response to the actual experience was varied” (p. 1040).
- “Factors found to influence responses to screening included perceived risks of illiteracy exposure, perceived risks of non-disclosures during hospitalization and the attribution of characteristics to the hospital leading to its designation as a ‘special’ place” (p. 1040).

Gillis, D., Quigley, A., Gallant, D., & Dublin, S. (forthcoming). *Health literacy in rural Nova Scotia*. St. Francis Xavier University, Department of Human Nutrition, Department of Adult Education. Halifax, NS: Author. SSHRC sponsored project.

Research Questions:

What do people in Antigonish, Guysborough, and Richmond Counties in northeastern Nova Scotia think are links between literacy and health?

How do adults with limited literacy find and use health information, services and supports?

What should be done in this region to make it easier for people with limited literacy skills to have better health?

Participants:

Adults with low literacy skills living in northeastern Nova Scotia.

Data Collection:

Interviews

Key Findings:

- Research is in progress.

Heart Health Nova Scotia. (2001). *Literacy and health promotion: Four case studies*. Halifax, NS: Author.

Research Question:

What is the relationship between literacy levels and the ability to engage in health promotion strategies?

Participants:

Seven learning networks, and four learners and tutors.

Data Collection:

Interviews and document analysis.

Key Findings:

- Each learner-tutor pair felt that they had learned a great deal about the health issue they had researched.
- The learners felt, and their tutors agreed, that their literacy skills had improved by the project work.
- Further results show that the learners (except one, who was a better reader) found that the written information they located or were offered by health care professionals was not helpful because they were often unable to read or interpret it. Likewise, the learners found that information available on the Internet was usually too complicated and used too much medical terminology.
- Each learner felt that he or she would be able to ask good questions as a result of participation in the project, and would have a better idea of where to look for good, usable information.
- Learners needed to understand the diseases of interest to them before they could utilize information about prevention of the same diseases; pharmacies provided some of the most readable information the learners located; and videos are an exceptionally good source of information because of their clarity and readability.

Horne, T. & Well Quest Consulting (1999). *Learning for our health: Outcomes for women in a participatory literacy and health education program*. Edmonton, AB: The Learning Centre Literacy Association.

Research Question:

What are the health-related outcomes for women with low-literacy skills who participated in a health group?

Participants:

Six women who participated in a literacy program's health group.

Data Collection:

Interviews and a meeting.

Key Findings:

- The women who participated in the project felt that a significant factor that contributed to the success of the project was the support they received from the facilitators and each other, which gave them the opportunity to open up and share their experiences in a trusting environment.
- The women made a continuing attempt to change their lifestyles, especially in terms of diet and exercise.
- The most consistent change that women attributed to the health group was their confidence to say "No." Saying "No" allowed them to strive for a balance in their lives with respect to caring for others while paying attention to their own needs as well.
- The women increased their ability to access health information and services, and critically weigh health advice from all sources of information.
- The women began to recognize the limitations placed on their health practices by their low incomes, and to learn how to start dealing with these limitations.

Roberts, P. & Fawcett, G. (1998). *At risk: A socioeconomic analysis of health and literacy among seniors* (Catalogue no. 89-552-MPE, no. 5). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.

Research Question:

What is the relationship between health and socio-economic variables among seniors?

Participants:

A total of 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

Survey.

Key Findings:

- “People with lower literacy levels are more likely to be at highest health risk, with an increased effect on senior citizens” (p. 33).
- “A large number of low-literacy senior citizens, who have a relatively higher health risk, require assistance to complete a number of everyday tasks, such as reading government information and filling out forms. In contrast, far fewer of those in the higher-literacy population, where there is a relatively lower health risk, require such help” (p. 33).
- “Higher-literacy seniors were more likely to obtain information from a wider selection of sources than were their lower-literacy counterparts” (p. 33).
- A large number of senior citizens, particularly those with the lowest-measured literacy abilities, overestimated their literacy abilities. Sixty-seven percent of seniors (65 and over) who scored at Level 1 on the document literacy test and 90 percent who scored at Level 2 believe that they possess good-to-excellent reading skills.
- There is a “link between those at high health risk and those who possess lower levels of literacy, particularly for senior citizens” (p. 33).

Sarginson, R.J. (1997). *Literacy and health: A Manitoba perspective*. Winnipeg, MB: Literacy Partners of Manitoba.

Research Question:

What are the findings when literacy levels from the 1991 Canada Census are superimposed on the health regions designated by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation?

Participants:

Participants in 1991 Canada Census and citizens using the provincial medicare system in Manitoba since the early 1970s.

Data Collection:

The 1991 Canada Census and a study by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation.

Key Findings:

- Instances of disease and epidemic increase markedly in areas where literacy rates are low.
- Violent death is more prevalent in low-literacy areas than elsewhere in Manitoba.
- Hospital usage by children is highest in low-literacy communities.
- The highest rates of pediatric hospitalization, hospitalization for infectious disease, and accidental and violent death are found on reserves.

Toroshenko, N.M. (1998). *The women's group on health: A study in participatory education*. Unpublished master's thesis. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Research Questions:

How do women with low-literacy skills who live in a rural area respond to health workshops?

Are the workshops an effective resource for facilitators of the health curriculum for women?

What is the nature of the participatory process?

Participants:

A total of 11 women who attended a health group.

Data Collection:

Interviews, field notes, and audio recordings of group sessions.

Key Findings:

- The workshops on health literacy appeared to be an accessible and effective resource for facilitators, yet were of limited use to the women with low-literacy skills.
- The participatory process encouraged participation by those involved in the project.
- The participants were more interested in the social dimension of literacy than in getting together to research health information.

Learning

Introduction

The ten studies within the theme of learning covered a spectrum of topics that address general to specific questions. Three general questions are asked: “How do adults with little formal education learn?” “What is the nature of literacy learning?” “What are the differences between instructors’ and learners’ view of the nature of knowledge and its acquisition?” The more specific questions targeted certain populations such as deaf students, a single learning resource such as the television, or a specific instructional strategy such as peer tutoring. The majority of researchers interviewed male and female students who had experience in a literacy program within a college or community-based setting. Horsman’s study (1999), which has received international attention, was the only study that focused on women, while Salembier’s study (2002) was unique in that the participants were from a workplace education program.

Battell, E. (2001). *Naming the magic: Non-academic outcomes in basic literacy*. (Project no: 99-00 AVED C2-3/NLS C103). Victoria, BC: Ministry of Advanced Education, Province of British Columbia and National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada.

Research Question:

What techniques can educators use to document the non-academic changes in the lives of learners as a result of participation in literacy instruction?

Participants:

Adult basic education students and educators who field-tested six documentation techniques.

Data Collection:

Survey completed by educators who field-tested the following six documentation techniques: a multi-media approach, journals, goal setting by learners, anecdotal reporting and end-of-term reports, and questions for developing awareness.

Key Findings:

- The techniques raise awareness and help to document of non-academic outcomes.
- The techniques are more effective when the instructors know the students and when trust has been developed.

Dyer, P. (1994). Ways of knowing in a writing-based adult literacy program. In R. Coreau, J. Dawson, & B. Sigaty, (Eds.), *Canadian association for the study of adult education 13th annual Conference*. Conference Proceedings.

Research Question:

What are the differences between instructors' and learners' views of the nature of knowledge and its acquisition, with respect to the development of literacy?

Participants:

Students from a literacy program.

Data Collection:

Participant observation, interviews, and studying documents such as student journals and writing.

Key Findings:

- There was evidence of a gap between the thinking of instructors and the expectations of students in the program in terms of program philosophy and delivery. More specifically, the instructors viewed the writing process as a means to communicate, gain understanding of experiences, and learn to value one's knowledge and experience, whereas the students focused on accuracy and reproduction of set or learned skills.
- Establishing personal connections between instructors and students enhanced the students' learning experience.
- There were cases of drastic differences between instructors' and learners' perceptions and intentions with respect to why students attended the centre and how they viewed the writing process.
- The researcher concluded that the differences between instructors' and learners' thinking about learning reflected the contrasting exogenous and endogenous paradigms about knowledge. An understanding of these paradigms would enable instructors to make connections with their learners, who may have different frameworks and educational experiences than do the instructors.

Horsman, J. (1999). *Too scared to learn: Women, violence and education*. Toronto, ON: McGilligan Books.¹

Research Questions:

How does women's experience of abuse impact on their literacy learning?

How do common discursive practices of literacy work impede/enable taking up questions of violence in literacy programs?

How could the impacts of abuse be effectively addressed in literacy teaching and programming?

Participants:

Approximately 150 literacy workers, learners, and therapists whose work focused on issues of violence.

Data Collection:

Group sessions, interviews, computer networks, and a linkage of learning as the author travelled from location to location, informing and being informed.

Key Findings:

- “Experience of trauma and its aftermath—whether it took place during childhood or as adults—is likely the present reality for many, if not most, literacy learners” (p. 78).
- “Several literacy workers spoke strongly about the need for a recognition that issues which surface in literacy need to be addressed in literacy, perhaps as well as being addressed elsewhere” (p. 81).
- The issues experienced by survivors of trauma make learning a difficult. Issues which surfaced included several complex notions: tendencies to view everything as “all or nothing”; presence; living with crises; trust; boundaries; and finding balance. Horsman provides suggestions for exploring and heightening awareness about these issues, helping students to see gradual progress, and developing their capacity to learn.
- “...For survivors of trauma, working with the complexity of control, connection, and meaning, goal-setting may be a challenging, if not impossible demand” (p. 164). For survivors, the curriculum could include “practice formulating desires and working towards them,” and exploring the “possibilities of control and choice, and imagin(ing) a future” (pp. 166-167).

¹ Lawrence Erlbaum published the American version of this book in 2000. The quotations in the key findings are from the Canadian version.

- A common theme that surfaced was that trauma affects a woman's body, mind, emotions, and spirit. Therefore, "it is not sufficient to teach only to the mind of the literacy learner." Learning will be more effective if instructional activities "incorporate the whole person into the learning activity" (p. 213).
- "...It is crucial that all programs recognize that learners will be dealing with issues of trauma and many will want access to culturally-appropriate counselling or other resources" (p. 252)
- "Women working in literacy take on a level of bearing witness to the violence in learners' lives, and sometimes also experience an increased threat of violence in their own lives because of the role they play to create a safer place for literacy learning" (p. 285).

Malicky, G.V., Katz, C.H., Norton, M. & Norman, C.A. (1997). Literacy learning in a community-based program. *Adult Basic Education*, 7(2), 84-103.

Research Questions:

What is the nature of literacy learning for five successful adult learners?

What factors support their learning, within the specific context of a community-based program?

Participants:

Five successful learners (three males and two females) who had been enrolled in a community-based literacy program for at least one year.

Data Collection:

Over the six-month time frame of the study, a field-based researcher spent 200 hours at the program, getting to know the participants, making field notes and engaging in open-ended interviews with each participant.

Key Findings:

- The participants indicated mixed views on their acceptance of the dominant discourse on literacy. Acceptance was especially evident in their labelling of themselves as “illiterate” in spite of their reading and writing abilities. Resistance was demonstrated, both in their belief that school had been at fault and in their belief that learners had knowledge worth sharing.
- All participants were members of social groups both within and outside their literacy program, indicating that learners are not deficient and dependent individuals as the dominant literacy discourse suggests. However, the extent of their social networks and importance attached them varied considerably among the participants.
- Learners gained empowerment from their literacy program, but the empowerment was more personal than social or public. Personal empowerment was most evident in their belief that they were able to do more things. Empowerment was also demonstrated by the respect learners felt from the community literacy program workers and by the control they felt they had over their own learning.

Mason, D.G., (1999). *Mini-research project: Alberta deaf literacy project*. Toronto, ON: York University, Faculty of Education.

Research Question:

Does the use of American Sign Language (ASL) help deaf students to learn and appreciate English-based literacy skills?

Participants:

Five adult students who had all been out of school for several or many years and had communication and instruction in school only through oral-only or oral with MCE (a method of communication to represent English through one of several oral-manual combinations).

Data Collection:

Participant observation and analysis of reading assignments.

Key Finding:

- Deaf and hard-of-hearing adults will be able to use an ASL-English bilingual-bicultural approach to improve their acquisition and appreciation of English-based literacy.

Niks, M., Allen, D., Davies, P., McRae, D., & Nonesuch, K. (2003). *Dancing in the dark? How do adults with little formal education learn?* BC: Malaspina University College.

Research Questions:

How do adults with little formal education learn?

How do practitioners do collaborative research? (The findings and data collection for this question are not listed below.)

Participants:

Literacy instructors.

A total of 25 adults aged 19 or older who had not completed Grade 12 and who were not currently participating in a learning program.

Data Collection:

Individual and group interviews.

Key Findings:

- The adults with little formal education identified five learning strategies: ask, read, observe/model, just do it, and use technology. The “ask” strategy was the most common strategy used by these adults.
- Participants chose learning strategies based on what they “were learning, their skill level, their overall “comfort” with a strategy and their previous success with a particular strategy” (p. 31). “...Emotions were the most important element in determining how and why participants choose one learning strategy over another.” (p. 62).
- “The growing up years’ experiences proved to have a powerful impact on learning in both negative and positive ways” (p. 31). For example, life experiences such as trauma, abuse, or poverty caused stress, which created a negative impact on learning. The learning culture of the family and the community, on the other hand, usually provided a foundation and a positive impact on learning.
- Personal agency was a key factor affecting how the participants learned. Personal agency included (1) having self-confidence to undertake a learning challenge; (2) ability to exert control to get what they needed or wanted; (3) ability to look for, create, or be aware of choices; (4) awareness of themselves, their learning, and their

lives and; (5) the ability to reflect and think about something. “Participants with high agency had more confidence in their ability to learn and employed a wider variety of strategies for learning than participants with less agency” (p. 81).

Norton, M. (1997). *Getting our own education: peer tutoring and participatory education in an adult literacy centre*. Edmonton, AB: The Learning Centre Literacy Association.

Research Questions:

Does peer tutoring affect the participation of peer tutors and other students in the Learning Centre program? If so, how?

Does tutoring affect students' and peer tutors' literacy development and related abilities? If so, how?

Does peer tutoring affect the relationships among peer tutors, other volunteer tutors and staff? If so, how?

Participants:

A total of 25 peer tutors and 25 students.

Data Collection:

Interviews, participant observation, and field notes.

Key Findings:

- “Through peer tutoring, student and tutors develop literacy skills and self-confidence” (p. 21).
- Relationships among students may develop or strengthen, and a sense of community can be fostered.
- Peer tutoring can prompt a shift in power relations as students take more active roles in teaching, learning, and other aspects of their programs” (p. 21).

Salembier, J. (2002). Learning indicators: The catalyst for new instructional strategies. In M. Taylor (Ed.), *Action research in workplace education: A handbook for literacy instructors* (pp. 18-26). Ottawa, ON: Author.

Research Question:

What is the range of learning indicators that provide evidence that learning has occurred for participants of a workplace program, and how can we use these indicators as instructional strategies?

Participants:

Participants in a workplace education program, workplace instructors and trainers, the company Human Resources Director, and a professor who specializes in workplace learning.

Data Collection:

Interviews, a literature review, and document analysis.

Key Findings:

- Evidence of learning consisted of four major themes: helping others, transfer of learning outside of the classroom, feelings of empowerment, and learner-generated products.
- Transferability of learning to work performance is likely to provide improvement in bottom-line outcomes as employees apply their new learning, advocate for more learning, and use the language of new concepts and skills.
- Learners can be encouraged and supported to be active and proactive in their personal assessments of learning; instructors have a significant role in helping learners voice their ideas of the learning process; and learners and instructors can identify indicators of learning within the classroom and beyond.
- A further outcome of these findings was the development of four instructional options to be presented at the beginning of each new course: a checklist, completion of an assignment or product using the course objectives, a print or mental recording of occasions of transfer of learning, and a test or quiz.

Soleil, N. (2002). *Image and voice in adult literacy*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.

Research Questions:

To what extent can television stories be used as an educational resource to enhance language learning?

The study focused on three aspects related to the use of television as text:

- How do oral texts affect an adult literacy student's ability to transfer information into print texts?
- What is the influence of brainstorming techniques on written responses? and
- What factors contributed to reflective writing through the use of television as text?

Participants:

Twenty-two adult literacy learners located at three sites participated in the study.

Data Collection:

Data were collected from a survey, written responses to four story segments from the Canadian television series "North of 60," oral responses to taped interviews, field notes, and observations.

Key Findings:

- Television stories allowed non-readers, reluctant readers, and delayed readers of English to access literary terms, analyze plot and character development, and construct meaning through dialogue and reflection. The majority of participants actively engaged in all four domains of language learning: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Influences affecting an adult literacy learner's ability to transfer oral texts into print texts included his/her ability to acquire literacy skills and the desire to practice in order to increase skill development.
- With regard to the influence of brainstorming on written responses, the findings indicated that the majority of participants made limited use of their vocabulary sheets. However, data from the interviews revealed that brainstorming benefited memory retention and pronunciation for some individuals, encouraged note-taking, increased shared learning, and stimulated social interaction.
- Factors contributing to critical reflection included the researcher's method of presentation, open-ended questioning, the participants' lived experiences, identification with the fictional characters, sense of security, openness to different personal and cultural perspectives, and time.

Taylor, M., King, J., & Pinsent-Johnson, C. (2002). Understanding the zone of proximal development in adult literacy learning. *Proceedings of the 21st Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education*, Ontario Institute for the Study of Education of the University of Toronto, May 30-31 and June 1. SSHRC Study: #831-2001-0003.

Research Questions:

“How does scaffolding and guided participation occur in an adult literacy classroom?”

“What teaching methods and learning materials are best suited to support scaffolding and guided participation among adult literacy learners?”

Participants:

Nine learners from four adult literacy classrooms and four program instructors.

Data Collection:

Participant observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and document analysis.

Key Findings:

- Literacy learners collaborate in their learning in the adult literacy classroom.
- Collaboration is affected by the literacy tasks (reading, spelling, mathematics, computer skills) that the learners undertake in a classroom.
- The classroom socialization process (physical setup of room, learning materials, teacher’s leadership role) is key to collaboration.
- Four key collaborative practices or behaviours among literacy learners emerged: social learning behaviours; negotiation behaviours; feedback behaviours; and patterns of directionality.
- Movement toward the Zone of Proximal Development occurred as independent learning skills were used in and out of the classroom.

Literacy and the Labour Market

Introduction

Of the 13 studies, 10 were written by sociologists, economists, and statisticians, using quantitative data and information found in the *International Adult Literacy Survey* and *Statistic Canada's Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities*. Of these 10, 4 were developed by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada, and Statistics Canada (Krahn, 1998; Shalla & Schellenberg, 1998; Green, 2001; Osberg, 2000). Of the remaining 3 studies, 2 were longitudinal, using qualitative methods to gather data (Malicky, 1994; Smith, 1999). While many quantitative studies found that levels of employment rise with literacy level and education, Malicky found that most learners returned to the same type of low-paying, temporary work they had done before enrolling in literacy classes.

Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development. (1997). *Literacy and the labour market in Canada: Summary findings from the International Adult Literacy Survey*. Edmonton, AB: Author.

Research Question:

What is the relationship between literacy and the labour market?

Participants:

A total of 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

International Adult Literacy Survey.

Key Findings:

- A comparison of the literacy levels of the employed and the unemployed makes it clear that the two groups differ greatly in terms of their literacy skills. Of the employed, 12 percent are at IALS Level 1 (prose), while of the unemployed 33 percent are at IALS Level 1 (prose).
- “There is a large ‘income bonus’ for workers with high literacy skills, and a corresponding income penalty for those with low skills” (p. 15).
- “Those who receive social assistance are more likely to be at lower literacy levels than those receiving unemployment (employment) insurance, who are in turn more likely to be at lower levels than those not receiving any income support. Of those who were receiving social assistance, 65 percent were at prose literacy Level 1 or 2, and only 9 percent were at Level 4/5” (p. 9).
- “Workers at higher levels of literacy are more likely to participate in adult education and training. In Canada, only one in five (21 percent) of those at prose Level 1 had participated in adult education or training, while almost three in five (58 percent) of those at Level 4/5 had participated” (p. 10).

Boothby, D. (1999). *Literacy skills, the knowledge content of occupations and occupational mismatch, W-99-3E*. (Catalogue no. MP32-28/99-3E). Hull, QC: Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada.

Research Questions:

What is the knowledge content of occupations?

What is the relationship between the knowledge content of work and workers' educational level and literacy skills?

What is the mismatch between the educational qualifications of post-secondary graduates and the knowledge content of the occupations in which they work?

Participants:

Citizens who completed the Canadian census and 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

Data from the Canadian sample of the 1994 IALS and from the 1981 to 1991 Canadian Census.

Key Findings:

- The occupational classification structure grouped occupations into seven categories: management (production manager); knowledge (geologists); data (registered nurses); data manipulation (secretaries and stenographers); service (bartenders); skilled goods (tool and die makers); and other goods (structural metal erectors). Management, knowledge, and data occupations require high levels of authority/management, cognitive, and communication skills.
- The results show that the use of literacy skills is a frequent and very important part of the content of work in all of the seven occupational categories. The IALS shows that the data occupations have the highest levels of prose literacy, with almost half of the workers in this occupational category at the top level of literacy proficiency; while the service, skilled goods, and other goods occupations have the lowest levels of prose literacy, with about half of these workers at the lowest levels of literacy proficiency. The results are similar for document and quantitative literacies, and they further show that all of the occupational categories do use quantitative literacy—from 70 percent of managers and knowledge occupations to over 20 percent in the other goods occupations.

- The results show that about 20 percent of university graduates do not work in the skilled information sector but instead actually work in “high school jobs.” The Canadian Census data from 1981 to 1991 show that this mismatch was especially apparent during those years for several reasons, mainly because there were more university graduates in the workforce than there were jobs available to them in the skilled information group of occupations.

Charette, M.F. & Meng, R. (1998). The determinants of literacy and numeracy, and the effect of literacy and numeracy on labour market outcomes. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 31(3), 495- 517.

Research Question:

What are the determinants of literacy and numeracy among native-born Canadians? (This question is not addressed under this theme.)

What is the role of literacy and numeracy as determinants of labour market outcomes?

Participants:

A total of 9,445 adult Canadians.

Data Collection:

Statistic Canada's Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA).

Key Findings:

- “The empirical results indicate that both literacy and numeracy have important roles to play in labour market outcome specifications that account for years of schooling” (p. 516).
- “Both literacy and numeracy exert a positive influence on the income of individuals who work” (p. 516).
- “Years of schooling remains a significant determinant of most measures of labour market outcome, implying a contribution to human capital, on the part of the formal education system, which is distinct from its role in the determination of literacy and numeracy” (p. 516).

Crompton, S. (1996). The marginally literate workforce. *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, 8(2), 14-21.

Research Question:

What are literacy skills of the marginally literate workforce in the United States and Germany in comparison to Canada?

Participants:

Canadians, Germans, and Americans, aged 16 and over, who completed IALS.

Data Collection:

International Adult Literacy Survey.

Key Findings:

- The interaction between low-level literacy and employment is common to all three countries.
- In Canada and the United States, full-time workers are more likely than part-time to have limited prose literacy skills. The gap begins to narrow with document literacy and almost disappears when quantitative skills are examined. This probably reflects the part-time work force in both countries, in which about one-third are students who have predictably high prose literacy. In contrast, in Germany, part-timers are just as likely as full-time workers to test at Level 1 or 2 for document literacy, but they are more likely to have limited quantitative skills, and their prose abilities are better.
- “Canadian workers are less likely than American to have weak literacy skills. This is especially true in manufacturing; financing, insurance, real estate and business services; and community, social, and personal services...a much higher proportion of U.S. workers function at minimal Level 1 literacy in most major industries, especially in the service-producing sector” (p. 20).
- “In Germany, two findings stand out very clearly and in contrast to the Canadian (and American) experience; the consistently good results posted by German workers in terms of quantitative literacy and the much lower percentage of German workers with minimal Level 1 skills” (p. 20).

Folinsbee, S. (2001). *Briefing paper: Literacy and the Canadian workforce*. Ottawa, ON: Movement for Canadian Literacy.

Research Question:

What are the major issues and trends with respect to the issue of literacy and the Canadian workforce?

Participants:

Approximately 80 participants who attended the National Summit on Literacy and Productivity and ten stakeholders from the field of adult literacy and workforce literacy.

Data Collection:

Data from the Summit's working groups and stakeholder interviews.

Key Findings:

- “There is a need for balanced public policy that addresses social and citizenship aspects of literacy development in addition to the economic aspects” (p. 5).
- Literacy cannot be developed through a “one-size-fits-all” strategy but through a multi-faceted, contextualized strategy that addresses multiple literacies.
- Literacy is a systemic issue, rather than an individual problem.
- The current adult learning system is piecemeal; there is a need for a flexible adult lifelong learning strategy and system.
- Common principles centre on a vision for literacy that includes a balanced focus on the whole person in their multiple roles as citizens and as members of families, communities, the workforce, and unions.
- The vision for the future of adult literacy included best practice statements on programs, programming, and learner involvement. The vision also addressed public awareness, partnerships, and resource commitments.
- “Policy for employment-related literacy programming must ensure time and resources for participants to adequately develop their skills...” (p. 9).
- “There needs to be more employer involvement and resource commitment to workforce development including literacy” (p. 9).

- “Joint labour-management decision making at the national, regional, local and organizational levels is essential” (p. 10).

Green, D. A., & Riddell, W. C. (2001). *Literacy, numeracy, and labour market outcomes in Canada*. (Catalogue no. 89-552-MPE, no. 8). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada.

Research Questions:

What is the relationship between labour market success and literacy skills?

What is the relationship between literacy and annual, weekly, and hourly earnings?

Participants:

A total of 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

The International Adult Literacy Survey.

Key Findings:

- There is a positive relationship between literacy and annual earnings; that the number of years of education attained is a valid measure but that highest level of schooling achieved is also important; that women outperform men on all three literacy measures, especially prose literacy; that literacy scores rise till ages 35 to 44 and then decline; that there are differences in average literacy scores by province, rural versus urban areas, and immigrant versus Canadian-born; and that the average score of all three scales of literacy is the best overall measure of literacy skills.
- While labour market experience is an important factor in earnings, the more important factor continues to be educational attainment and the resulting improvement in literacy. Further, each additional year of education raises annual earnings by 8.3 percent and that 3.1 percent of that increase results from the combined influences of education on literacy and literacy on earnings.
- Immigrants to Canada in years past had higher earnings than more recent immigrants; that literacy skills may seriously impact how well immigrants adjust to the new labour market; and that there is little evidence that parents' education has either a direct negative or positive impact upon the labour market earnings of their children when they become adults.
- Both literacy and educational attainment exert a substantial causal effect on earnings.

Krahn, H. & Lowe, G.S. (1998). *Literacy utilization in Canadian workplaces* (Catalogue no. 89-552-MPE, no.4). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.

Research Questions:

What is the distribution of prose, document and quantitative literacy skills among the currently employed in Canada?

To what extent do Canadian workers use their literacy skills on the job? That is, what is the “fit” or “mismatch” between workers’ literacy skills and their literacy needs in the workplace?

How do these patterns of fit and mismatch vary by gender, age, educational attainment, industry, occupation, and employment status?

Among those workers who show a literacy surplus (i.e., their literacy skills are substantially greater than their job requirements), is there any evidence that their skills may decline after prolonged under-usage?

Participants:

A total of 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

Data from the Canadian sample of the 1994 IALS.

Key Findings:

- For each of the three dimensions of literacy (prose, document quantitative), there is a lower proportion of the employed in Level 1 and a higher proportion in level 4/5.
- In the employed population, women have somewhat higher average score than men on all three dimensions.
- There is a “reasonable fit between workers’ literacy skills and their job requirements for about three-quarters of the Canadian labour force” (p. 60).
- The remaining 26 percent of employed Canadians are mismatched in terms of their literacy skills and the skills required by their jobs. (Twenty-one percent of the employed labour force are under-employed in terms of document literacy skills while five to eleven percent were over-employed.)
- “Across the various domains of literacy, women are less likely to be using their literacy skills in their jobs” (p. 35).

- For prose and document literacy, workers aged 56 and older are less likely than younger workers to be classified as having a skill surplus.
- Education appears to be a more consistent predictor of the workplace use of literacy skills than either gender or age. “Higher education brings with it higher literacy skills and is also associated with a higher probability of working in a demanding job” (p. 39).
- “The highest levels of skill surplus (or ‘under-employment’) on all three literacy dimensions are found in the community service industries, which include educational, health, and recreational services” (p. 45).
- “Workers with limited or no supervisory responsibilities, the self-employed with employees or those who work part time or in temporary jobs are more likely to be in jobs where their literacy skills are under-used (the literacy surplus category.)” (p. 45).
- “The cross-sectional test of the “use it or lose it” hypothesis provides only limited support for our argument about potential literacy and human capital loss...” (p. 61).

Krahn, H. (1997). On the permanence of human capital: Use it or lose it. *Policy Options*, 18(6), 17-21.

Research Questions:

To what extent are literacy skills of Canadian workers matched with the literacy requirements of their jobs?

If there is evidence of some under-utiliation of literacy skills, is there also evidence that these infrequently used skills might begin to dissipate?

Participants:

A total of 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

Data from the Canadian sample of the 1994 IALS.

Key Findings:

- “One in six (17 percent) employed Canadians had low document literacy skills and were in jobs that roughly matched their skill levels” (p. 19).
- One third (33 percent) had medium document literacy skills and where in jobs that roughly matched their skill levels.
- One-quarter (24 percent) had high document literacy skills and where in jobs that required such skills.
- The remaining 26 percent of employed Canadians are mismatched in terms of their literacy skills and the skills required by their jobs. (Twenty-one percent of the employed labour force are under-employed in terms of document literacy skills while five percent were over-employed.)
- “While a sizeable number of employed Canadians could benefit from literacy upgrading, about four times as many do not appear to be making optimal use of their literacy skills in their job” (p. 20).
- “Canada has not been taking advantage of its investment in human capital” (p. 20).

Kapsalis, C. (1998). *The connection between literacy and work: Implications for social assistance recipients*. Hull, QC: Applied Research Branch, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada.

Research Question:

What is the effect of education and work on the literacy skills of social assistance recipients (SARs)?

Participants:

Canadians between 26 and 65 years of age who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

Data from the Canadian sample of the IALS. For the most part, the researcher relied on document literacy measures.

Key Findings:

- Social assistance recipients (SAR) have lower levels of education and literacy than non-social assistance recipients. Furthermore, non-working SARs, in contrast to working non-SARs, have 9.5 years of education and document literacy scores of 216, versus 13.1 years of education and document literacy scores of 291 respectively.
- When SARs and non-SARS with the same levels of education are compared, SARs have lower literacy levels. Furthermore, the negative effect of SAR status on literacy is even stronger when there is a difference in employment status. These findings suggest differences in quality of education received, and/or that an absence of employment may cause a decline in literacy.
- Work that requires daily literacy activities is associated with higher literacy. This correlation is even stronger among SARs than among non-SARs.
- Working SARs are more likely to engage in literacy activities at home than are non-working SARs.

Malicky, G.V. & Norman, C.A. (1994). Participation in adult literacy programs and employment. *Journal of Reading*, 38(2), 122-27.

Research Question:

What is the relationship between participation in literacy programs and employment status?

Participants:

A total of 94 adults enrolled in literacy programs in one urban center.

Data Collection:

Formal testing and interviews across a 3-year period.

Key Findings:

- The study found that before starting literacy programs, most participants were employed in the service sector, making low wages and often living below the poverty line.
- The majority of learners believed that participation in literacy programs would improve their job opportunities, and they cited this factor among their list of reasons for enrolling in the program. However, during the course of their programs, the participants' optimism began to wane. They reduced their expectations about their job prospects, and frequently became frustrated and discouraged.
- At the end of their programs, most participants returned to the same type of low-paying, temporary work they had done before enrolling in literacy classes. On the few occasions when participants did find jobs in the new areas in which they were trained, the positions were part-time.
- "Results of this study confirm findings of other research that while there is a relationship between education and employment, the nature of this relationship is neither causal nor simple" (p. 126).

Osberg, L. (2000). *Schooling, literacy and individual earnings*. (Catalogue no. 89-552-MPE, no. 7). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada.

Research Questions:

How much does literacy affect earnings?

How much of the economic payoff to education can be explained by literacy skills?

Participants:

A total of 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

Data from the Canadian sample of the 1994 IALS survey.

Key Findings:

- There is a measurable connection between literacy and earnings. The results show that the attainment of literacy skills as an outcome of education does yield a payoff for Canadians and the Canadian economy.
- Males working full-time throughout the year are especially benefited by literacy skills; possibly by as much as 40 percent to 45 percent in earnings regression results. The result for female workers is almost completely different: literacy skills do not impact the earnings of female workers, and earnings regression tests for women produced insignificant or implausible results. Women, like men, are greatly benefited by the education they receive, but this benefit is less influenced by the attainment of literacy proficiency.

Shalla, V. & Schellenberg, G. (1998). *The value of words: Literacy and economic security in Canada* (Catalogue no. 89-552-MPE, no. 3). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.

Research Questions:

What is the relationship between literacy and economic security or well-being (expressed in different measures of income), taking into account the mediating effects of the labour market?

What is the link between economic security and the practices of literacy?

What is the relationship between parents' economic security and their literacy-enhancing practices and activities, as well as those of their children?

Participants:

A total of 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who completed the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

International Adult Literacy Survey.

Key Findings:

- This study has clearly established a link between literacy and economic security. Individuals with stronger literacy “skills are more likely to participate in the labour market, reap greater financial benefits and face a lower risk of becoming economically disadvantaged. Conversely, those with weaker skills are more likely to be unemployed, work in lower-paying jobs and live in low-income households” (p. 45).
- “Both women and men with higher literacy abilities are better rewarded than their counterparts with marginal abilities. However, men tend to achieve greater returns than women on investments in their literacy. Most startling is that women with stronger literacy skills sometimes fare no better than men with weaker skills” (p. 45).
- The findings from this study also point to a connection between economic security and the practice of literacy both on the job and outside of paid work. Economically disadvantaged adults receive less training and education and engage less in various other practices that favour the development of literacy abilities. A gender analysis indicates that men tend to receive more work-related training than do women, and have a greater opportunity to practice numeracy-related tasks on the job. Women are more likely to pursue reading practices outside of paid work.

- “Parents and children in low-income households participate somewhat less in literacy-enhancing activities than do those who enjoy a higher standard of living. Clearly, household economic status and family literacy practices are interrelated” (p. 45).

Smith, J. (1999). *Literacy, welfare & work: Longitudinal research project: Final report and recommendations*. Brandon, MB: The Coalition for Brandon Literacy Services.

Research Question:

What is the relationship between literacy and employment; the barriers that adult learners face; and the policies, programs and supports that best enable them to move from welfare to work?

Participants:

Seven students from an adult upgrading program. Comparative interviews were also conducted with other literacy students, instructors, social service providers, and key informants.

Data Collection:

Ethnographic longitudinal study: Individual and group interviews.

Key Findings:

- Levels of employment and self-sufficiency rise with literacy level and education.
- Factors within the labour market and a shortage of “real jobs” create problems for adults with limited education. Changes in government funding have produced a trend toward supporting short-term employability funding as opposed to longer-term education.
- Program participants felt that new welfare rules were both punitive and highly discretionary.
- Lack of money for child care and transportation was a further barrier to adults’ returning to work or school. Personal and family issues also presented barriers.
- Workfare programs move people off welfare rolls in the short-term, but the majority end up back on assistance, creating a revolving door syndrome. The lack of consultation among government agencies, educators, and assistance recipients about the implementation of workfare programs creates tension.
- The report concludes that there is a strong case for the effectiveness of long-term investment in education and literacy training in lifting people from poverty into sustainable employment.

Programs

Introduction

This section includes 13 pieces of research that examine adult basic education (ABE) within correctional programs, community-based programs, and employment preparation programs. Of the 4 studies on ABE within correctional programs, 3 examine the inmates' transition to the community, the status of educators, and the nature of adult basic education programs within a federal prison. The fourth study was a large-scale survey of federal offenders who had participated in an adult basic education program. Of the 6 studies on community-based programs, 5 explore participatory education and practices, while the sixth is an ethnographic evaluation of learner-centred education. The studies on employment preparation programs investigated a range of topics, which included the status of literacy education, the factors in a Native program that create an optimal educational climate, and the language and literacy challenges encountered by learners. The 2 studies that examined the status of literacy education and educators had a similar finding: adult basic education programs and educators have marginal status within prisons and employment preparation programs.

Correctional Programs

Boe, R. (1998). *A two-year follow-up of federal offenders who participated in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program*. (No. R-60). Ottawa, ON: Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada.

Research Question:

To what extent is progress being made in terms of release outcomes among offenders who attended the ABE-8 program?

Do the ABE-8 and ABE-10 programs still meet the needs of offenders?

Are the programs contributing in a meaningful way to offender reintegration?

Participants:

A sample of 6,074 ABE participants.

Data Collection:

National Inmate Survey.

Key Findings:

- “ABE participation provides significant benefits for offenders and contributes to their safe reintegration to the community” (p. viii).
- “A majority of inmates surveyed report positive experiences with the ABE program and nearly 80 percent rated it Good or Excellent. Comparatively, the ABE program was rated above average among CSC’s core programs” (p. viii).
- “Literacy gains are also significant. The findings suggest that the ABE program is generally targeted at higher need offenders. Inmates who completed their ABE-8 program gained, on average, nearly 3 grade levels. Similar patterns were indicated for the ABE-10 participants. In addition, there was a modest and statistically significant reduction (overall, about 5%) in release re-admissions associated with grade-level gains” (p. viii).
- “The follow-up indicates that ABE participants show measurable re-integration gains from participating in educational programs. Overall, the study sample was a higher than average risk group, being somewhat younger, and more likely first term with a violent conviction. (For those who complete their program, improvements in their rate of readmission ranges form 5 – 30%, which are modest but significant”) (p. viii).

Fox, A. (1994). *Education rituals and the marginal status of prison educators in a Canadian federal prison: A study for advancing adult education in prisons*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba.

Research Questions:

What are the education rituals performed in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Educational Development (GED) classes offered in one Canadian federal penitentiary?

Do the prison educators and their students perceive that the educators are marginal to the total workings of the institution?

What adult education principles and practices advocated by Knowles (an adult educator) are utilized in the ABE and GED classes?

Participants:

Four ABE educators, one GED education, twelve ABE students, and ten GED students.

Data Collection:

Open-ended interviews, classroom observations, and fieldnotes.

Key Findings:

- “The education rituals commonly used by the prison educators are individualised instruction, one-on-one teaching, and curriculum practices governed by the GED workbooks. Generally, the students appreciated the individual attention given to them by their educators. However, some students expressed frustration with learning from books, lack of group work, and an inadequate curriculum designed for native students” (p. 2).
- “The prison educators and their students concurred that the educators were important for teaching and learner development in the education centre. However, in respect of the whole institution the prison educators were perceived to be marginal. This conclusion was based on the prison educators and their students’ recognition that the primary purpose of the institution was that of public safety and security” (p. 2).
- There was limited demonstration of Knowles’ adult education principles and practices. Only three of Knowles’ adult education principles and practices are utilised in ABE and GED classes. The principles and practices are: (1) Learners feel a need to learn. (2) Learners actively participate; and (3) Learners have a sense of progress toward their goals for evaluation.

Loewen, R.J. (1997). *Transition to the community: Prison literacy programs and factors which lead to success in the community*. Brandon, MB: John Howard Society.

Research Questions:

What education models are used in five Canadian prisons?

Why do inmates participate in prison schooling?

What are the literacy-related goals set by students in prison?

What factors do students believe will contribute to the achievement of these goals?

Participants:

A total of 57 male students who were active in the education programs and 5 prison teachers from five prison schools in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Data Collection:

Interviews, informal observation, and focus groups.

Key Findings:

- Different models of education programs exist, but most students are involved in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) studies.
- The participants reported the same types of reasons for participation in schooling as do their counterparts in the outside community; for example, a chance for a fresh start, a positive place to be, and specific goals such as finishing Grade 12 or improving their employability.
- Similarly, when asked about their literacy-related goals for release, respondents reported the same types of goals for which the majority of Canadians strive. These include a better future, a job they would enjoy, and further training.
- Students identified factors that would influence their success upon release. The most frequently mentioned factors were a positive attitude, family support, non-use of drugs and alcohol, and stable employment/finances.
- Prison schools are generally regarded as sanctuaries within the prison environment, and learning appeared to be directly influenced by the level of safety felt by students. The attitudes and personalities of teachers have a direct influence on the learning environment and content.

Hobley, L. (2002). *Incarceration to inclusion: Looking at the transition from correctional facility programs to community-based adult education*. Smithers, BC: Smithers Literacy Services.

Research Question:

What are the barriers to transition from correctional facility programs to community-based adult education, and how can we address those barriers?

Participants:

A total of 30 inmates from the Terrace Community Correctional Centre.

Data Collection:

Questionnaire and interviews.

Key Findings:

- The inmates' motivations for attending prison-based programs were mainly based on facilitating an early release.
- The inmates were unsure of their ability to continue with community programs after their release, mainly because of lack of money and support.
- The barriers to transition include personal issues such as addictions, recidivism, family and social problems, lack of money and support, doubts about adapting to a classic school model in the community, pressures to work, and lack of referrals by prison staff and counsellors to appropriate community resources and providers.

Community-based Programs

Campbell, P. (1994). *Participatory literacy practices: Having a voice, having a vote*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.

Research Questions:

What are the individual and group experiences of students and literacy workers who are involved in participatory literacy practices?

What changes do students see in themselves and in their programs as they become involved in participatory literacy practices?

Participants:

Students and coordinators in five literacy programs.

Data Collection:

Individual and group interviews, journals, fieldnotes, photostories, document analysis, and a questionnaire.

Key Findings:

- Through the integration of literacy education and social interaction, participatory education creates the possibility for a contextualized literacy education that recognizes the collective, social purpose of education.
- Participatory education creates possibilities for challenging the hierarchical social relations that underlie literacy programs and create borders among students, literacy workers, and board members—borders that distinguish “us” from “them.”
- Participatory education creates a rehearsal ground where students can learn the dominant language that often excludes them from participating in the public events and the wider community. Participatory education creates the possibility for students to speak and be heard, and to listen to others from diverse backgrounds.
- Participatory education creates opportunities for literacy workers to examine their own social identity as it relates to that of their students. It presents an opportunity to move beyond descriptors such as “student” and “literacy worker” and to consider how class, gender, and race constitute social identity.
- Participatory education creates opportunities for literacy workers to question their pedagogical approach with students—an approach that rests on social relations as well as on methodology.

- Participatory education creates opportunities for students to move from silence into speech. Students emphasized the oral aspects of literacy and seldom, if ever, spoke of the visual aspects of literacy such as reading and writing.

Fingeret, H.A., Tom, A., Dyer, P., Morley, A., et al. (1994). *Lives of change: An ethnographic evaluation of two learner centred literacy programs*. Executive Summary. Toronto, ON: ABC CANADA.

Research Questions:

What are the characteristics of two learner centred programs and their organizations?

What are the important characteristics of instruction in each program?

What are the major impacts of participation in each program?

What is the role of culture in the conduct and impact of each program?

Participants:

A total of 42 students, 28 staff and 12 other stakeholders from Invergarry Adult Learning Centre literacy program and the Vancouver Municipal Workplace Language Program (VMWLP).

Data Collection:

Interviews, fieldnotes, participant observation, document analysis, journals, students' writing.

Key Findings:

- “As a result of participation in these programs, many adults develop improved language and literacy skills and practices; develop new attitudes about their abilities and inspirations; develop a larger perspective on education and learning; enhance their ability to negotiate new environments in ways that meet their needs; and enhance their ability to take responsibility for initiating and assessing their own learning” (p. 19).
- Some students developed a “more tolerant view of other cultural groups through participation in these programs. Some learners experience a shift in the extent to which they continue practices from their native cultures; this shift can cause some distress, even when viewed as positive” (p. 20).

Morgan, D. (2000). Changing places: A study about factors that can affect sharing the facilitator's role in a women's writing group. In M. Norton & G. Malicky (Eds.), *Learning about participatory approaches in adult literacy education: Six research in practice studies* (pp. 105-140). Edmonton, AB: Learning at the Centre Press.

Research Question:

What factors influence the process of sharing the facilitator's role in a women's writing group?

Participants:

A total of six women who regularly attended and four women who occasionally attending the writing group.

Data Collection:

Field notes, journal, writing samples, transcribed videotaped interview, and questionnaire.

Key Findings:

- Changing roles and sharing control was a struggle for both the practitioner and students. The practitioner found that “knowing how and when to let go of (her) role as facilitator and knowing how to let go of the control (she) had when (she) was in the facilitator role” was a difficult process. Sometimes, the practitioner “wasn't fostering readiness and independence.” It was difficult “for the students to take a stronger leadership role within the group.”
- Weather affected the mood, health, and mobility of the group.
- Health affected the women's interest and willingness to participate in the group.
- The group needed to establish itself before the women were willing to take a more active role in facilitation. The group was “slow to develop into an inclusive, accepting group because (they) weren't together often enough as a group to give trust building the time it needed” (p. 123).
- Attendance was sometimes sporadic because of the students' personal problems. Consequently, “it was difficult to ask someone to facilitate a portion of the class when there was only one other person in the classroom” (p. 124).

Norton, M. (1997). *Getting our own education: peer tutoring and participatory education in an adult literacy centre*. Edmonton, AB: The Learning Centre Literacy Association.

Research Questions:

Does peer tutoring affect the participation of peer tutors and other students in the Learning Centre program? If so, how?

Does tutoring affect students' and peer tutors' literacy development and related abilities? If so, how?

Does peer tutoring affect the relationships among peer tutors, other volunteer tutors and staff? If so, how?

Participants:

A total of 25 peer tutors and 25 students.

Data Collection:

Interviews, participant observation, and field notes.

Key Findings:

- “Through peer tutoring, student and tutors develop literacy skills and self-confidence.
- Relationships among students may develop or strengthen, and a sense of community can be fostered.
- Peer tutoring can prompt a shift in power relations as students take more active roles in teaching, learning, and other aspects of their programs.” (p. 21).

Norton, M. (2000). Challenges to sharing power in an adult literacy education program. In M. Norton & G. Malicky (Eds.), *Learning about participatory approaches in adult literacy education: Six research in practice studies* (pp. 159-191). Edmonton, AB: Learning at the Centre Press.

Research Question:

To what extent does an educator and researcher (Mary Norton) practice the principle of sharing power with students in an adult literacy education program?

Participants:

A total of nine students who were working on a conference committee and the educator.

Data Collection:

Field notes, tape recordings of meetings, scripts from public presentations, interviews.

Key Findings:

- The findings are discussed according to the following framework of power: “power-over” - the power of persons, groups, or institutions having power over others; “power-with” –one’s influence in a group; and “power-from-within” - the belief in oneself to further develop skills, knowledge, and attributes, and to offer them to others.
- The findings show that while the researcher tried to avoid the situation of power-over in one instance, the committee members were not prepared for the devolution of power that the researcher attempted.
- The results then show that the researcher was able to shift to power-with by spending informal, unstructured committee time with the members and by sharing the duties of chairing the meetings with one volunteer.
- The results also show that special attention must be paid to the aspect of “learning to listen” in situations of participatory power-sharing, since all individuals do not speak up easily or equally and may even remain completely silent because they do not know what to say, do not understand, or are nervous and afraid to speak at all.
- The results then show that, in time the committee members demonstrated power-from-within, as some were more able to speak up for themselves and on behalf of others.

Toroshenko, N.M. (1998). *The women's group on health: A study in participatory education*. Unpublished master's thesis. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta.

Research Questions:

How do women with low-literacy skills who live in a rural area respond to health workshops?

Are the workshops an effective resource for facilitators of the health curriculum for women?

What is the nature of the participatory process?

Participants:

A total of eleven women who attended a health group.

Data Collection:

Interviews, field notes, and audio recordings of group sessions.

Key Findings:

- The workshops on health literacy appeared to be an accessible and effective resource for facilitators, yet were of limited use to the women with low-literacy skills.

The participatory process encouraged participation by those involved in the project.

- The participants were more interested in the social dimension of literacy than on getting together to research health information.

Employment Preparation Programs

Bell, J.S. (2000). Literacy challenges for language learners in job-training programs. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 57(1), 173-200.

Research Question:

What are the language and literacy challenges encountered by the learners in relation to the Luke and Freebody (1997) four-tier model of literate competency?

Participants:

Learners enrolled in a job-training program.

Data Collection:

Questionnaires, learner interviews, document analysis, and participant observation.

Key Findings:

- Luke and Freebody's model identifies the need for learners to demonstrate competence with coding, text-meaning, pragmatic, and critical practices.
- Coding and text-meaning: While the students were able to crack the orthographic code of their textbook, some students had difficulty constructing meaning from their textbook.
- Pragmatic practices: Students experienced difficulty with “discerning the objectives or intents of the text(book) and developing a metapragmatic awareness of textbooks and reading tasks” (pp. 185-186). They had difficulty understanding how they were expected to interact with the text and did not seem to understand what the instructor expected them to do with the text. A number of students reported obstacles with the tests, exams, and note-taking.
- Critical practices: The findings indicate there was little evidence of students critically analyzing or questioning the content of the text. For example, the majority of students were reluctant to critique the text or engage with issues such as “analyzing the positions, voices, and interest at play” in the text. (p. 188)

Brown-Tremblay, P. (1995). *Educational climate in a native employment preparation program: the perceptions of native learners*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa.

Research Question:

What are the salient factors in a Native literacy program which creates an optimal educational climate for Native adult learners?

Participants:

A total of 19 students and 7 staff members involved in The Employment Preparation Program at Grand River Polytechnical Institute on the Six Nations Reserve.

Data Collection:

Participant observations of learner and instructor interactions inside and outside the classroom context, journal entries, quasi-focus group interviews, and in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Key Findings:

- The cultural environment of educational climate was the key dimension which contributed to an optimal learning environment for Native literacy learners. The cultural environment components which emerged as influential included values, cooperation, and supportiveness.
- When the results were compared to the humanistic, holistic, and learner-centred frameworks of andragogy, proficiency, and whole language, research findings confirmed many of the tenets of these frameworks.
- The findings indicated that the program participants perceived the Employment Preparation Program to be one which was characterized as humanistic, learner-centred, holistic, and empowering.

St. Clair, R. (2001). More equal than others: The travails of literacy education in an employment preparation program. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 15(2), 128-148.

Research Question:

What is the relative status of literacy education and vocational education within a Canadian employment preparation program?

Participants:

Key stakeholders in an employment preparation program.

Data Collection:

Interviews, document analysis, and participant observation.

Key Findings:

- The literacy and numeracy components of the first nine weeks of the program involved the use of cooking texts and recipe calculations. Participants were observed refusing language exercises they considered not relevant to kitchen work and reminiscent of early school experiences. Their nine weeks of vocational learning in a commercial kitchen was very hands-on and focused on future employment, with little practice of the literacy curriculum.
- The results show that the instructors in each subject area were viewed differently within the organization. The vocational instructors (chefs) were viewed as assets by the organization and the participants, and credited with great skill and professionalism. The basic skills instructors (literacy staff) were seen quite differently, with low credibility, and not accorded any amount of respect by the organization or the participants. There were significant tensions and barriers between the two groups of instructors, and the chefs were openly dismissive and critical of the literacy instructors.
- All of the vocational instructors and administrators were male, while most of the literacy instructors and program coordinators were female. This “gendered” educational experience emphasized the importance and greater value of the male vocational instructors over the mostly female literacy instructors.
- The vocational instructors were teaching their own craft in which they had invested in many years of apprenticeship and training. Literacy instructors cared deeply about their teaching, but their involvement was of a less personal nature: they were teaching literacy knowledge, not their own “craft” of literacy. In other words, the vocational

instructor's credibility and reputation was on the line as participants left the program and were recommended by the instructor. Literacy instructors were not involved in the same direct way, so their social capital was not as high as that of the vocational instructors.

Reading and Writing Strategies

Introduction

Of the six studies within this section, five focus on reading, while only one explores writing. The participants were Adult Basic Education (ABE) students, with the exception of those in one study in which the participants were university students. The studies examine reading and writing strategies and the reading conceptions and perceptions of students and tutors.

Cameron, J. (1995). *Phonological awareness and adult beginning readers*. Unpublished master's thesis. Ottawa, ON: Carleton University.

Research Questions:

What is the phonological awareness of adult beginning readers?

What are the decoding strategies of adult beginning readers?

What are the teachers' ratings of progress?

Participants:

A total of 33 participants from literacy programs at 2 community colleges.

Data Collection:

Unknown.

Key Findings:

- “Students with low phonological awareness did not use grapheme-phoneme correspondence based strategies successfully” (Abstract).
- “Skill with onset-rime accounted for a significant amount of the variance in choosing a ‘sounding out’ decoding strategy; phoneme blending and rhyme judgement skill and letter sound knowledge each accounted for significant variance in success with sounding out” (Abstract).
- “A relation between reading level and phonological awareness was not established, most likely because of compensatory decoding strategies” (Abstract).
- “The teacher ratings of progress suggested a relation between low phonological awareness and poor progress” (Abstract).

Campbell, P., & Malicky, G. (2002). The reading strategies of adult basic education students. *Adult Basic Education: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Adult Literacy Educators*, 12(1), 3-19. SSHRC Study: #831-1999-0012.

Research Question:

What are the word identification and comprehension strategies used by adult basic education students?

Participants:

A total of 344 adult basic education students, ranging in reading levels from those at a beginning level to those who were able to read high school material.

Data Collection:

Test protocols, miscue analysis, and discourse analysis.

Key Findings:

- Adults at all levels are able to use both text information and background knowledge to construct meaning from what they read. The discrepancy between proportions of meaning-based and print-based miscues suggests a greater reliance on knowledge than on print by adult literacy students at all levels of reading development.
- Differences in reading strategies used by adults *within* levels are greater than differences *across* levels. The large standard deviations, particularly evident in the miscue data, imply that there are significant differences in reading strategies among adults within every level of reading proficiency.
- Beginning readers were able to use knowledge and print cues together at least some of the time. They did not appear to need to use print cues first and then integrate these cues with their language and world knowledge as bottom-up theorists would suggest.

Malnarich, G. (1994). *Whiz into the future: Learner agency and teaching adults reading*. Unpublished master's thesis. Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University.

Research Question:

What are adult readers' conceptions of reading?

Participants:

Unknown.

Data Collection:

Unknown.

Key Findings:

- “That individuals’ ideas about reading may serve as learner-constructed ‘advance organizers’ for responding to texts and for interpreting reading instruction, became evident through tutoring an adult basic education student who thought good readers ‘remember all the names’” (p. 2).
- “Further research with groups of students enrolled in introductory academic reading classes revealed that conflicting ideas about what reading involves along with diverse sociocultural assumptions about language learning and use are commonplace in adult basic education (ABE) and literacy classrooms” (p. 2).
- “Adult readers’ conceptions of reading are challenged directly through texts that capture reader’s interests as well as through explicit discussions of literacy and reading specialists’ views. Recognizing the multiplicities of literacy provides adult readers with the basis for a fully articulated, richer, and more comprehensive understanding of what a ‘good reader’ knows how to do” (p. 2).

Siddiqui, S.K. (1995). *Cognitive consequences of exposure to print: A study of decontextualization and knowledge of mental state verbs*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.

Research Questions:

What are the cognitive outcomes associated with individual differences in exposure to print within a literate society?

Is a high degree of print exposure positively associated with the ability to make subtle semantic distinctions and to reason in a decontextualized manner?

Will these associations remain even after any association with general comprehension ability (and other covariates) has been statistically removed?

Participants:

A total of 140 students at a university in southern Ontario.

Data Collection:

Two recognition checklist measures of print exposure (the Author Recognition Test and the Magazine Recognition Test). The ability to make subtle semantic distinctions was operationalized by a Mental State Verbs Task, and the ability to reason in a decontextualized manner was operationalized by a Syllogistic Reasoning Task and an Argument Evaluation Task.

Key Findings:

- The print exposure measures displayed significant zero-order correlations with all of the cognitive tasks.
- Performance on the Mental State Verbs Task displayed associations with exposure to print even after reading comprehension ability and other covariates (such as grade-point average and current year in university program) were statistically controlled.
- Relationships involving the two measures of decontextualized reasoning were sometimes present but were much weaker.
- The findings reinforced previous research indicating linkages between exposure to print and verbal knowledge.
- Performance on The Mental State Verbs Task had specific and consistent linkages with individual differences with exposure to print.

Still, R. (2002). *Exploring tutors' and students' beliefs about reading and reading strategies*. Edmonton, AB: Learning at the Centre Press.

Research Question:

What are the similarities and differences between tutors' and students' perceptions about reading?

Participants:

Three students (all male) and their tutors (two female and one male) from a rural community-based volunteer adult literacy program.

Data Collection:

Semi-structured interviews and participant observation of students reading.

Key Findings:

- All three tutor-student pairs had “some similar views about reading and the reading process.”
- They all agreed that a good reader practices and reads a lot.
- Tutors' responses supported a balanced theory of reading in which they encouraged reading for meaning and using relevant reading material to teach print-based skills.
- Students also focused on reading for meaning.
- There were no major differences between tutors' and students' perceptions” (pp. 22 - 23)

Young, P. (2002). *“Rapid writing ... is my cup of tea”: Adult upgrading students’ use of writing strategies*. Edmonton, AB: Learning at the Centre Press.

Research Question:

“What writing strategies do adult upgrading students use, and do these strategies help them to succeed in their writing assignments?”

Participants:

A total of four women and two men who were enrolled in an English strategies course at a college.

Data Collection:

Students’ journal entries about writing strategies.

Key Findings:

- Students made effective use of cognitive and metacognitive processes.
- The students learned writing strategies through instruction, modelling, and practice.
- Students used the following strategies: visualizing, self-questioning, predicting, using prior experience, rapid writing, organizing ideas, non-linear writing, and word processing.

Technology

Introduction

The ten studies in the technology theme can be categorized into 3 broad topics: software, students, and programs. First, four studies examine the effectiveness of computer-assisted instruction software, integrated learning systems, and/or text-reading software. Second, five studies explore what students need in order to progress and succeed when using computers; the benefits of computer literacy learning; and the strategies students use while learning on the computer. Third, one study focuses on the extent to which students and teachers have access to, and make use of, computers and the Internet in adult literacy programs.

Action Read Community Literacy Centre. (2002). *Literacy and adaptive technology project: A one-year field test of text-reading software with adult literacy learners*. Guelph, ON: Author.

Research Questions:

To what extent can text-reading software help adult literacy learners?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of different software packages in providing such help?

Participants:

A total of 13 adult literacy learners who experienced a variety of learning needs and disabilities.

Volunteer tutors.

Data Collection:

Field-testing software, pre- and post- reading and writing skills.

Key Findings:

- Over an average of 28.5 hours, the text-reading software improved the learners' reading by one or two levels in all cases, with an average improvement of 1.2 levels. Text-readers greatly increased the volume of text that learners could read in a given time and increased the level of material that they could access.
- The text-reading software improved the learners' writing by an average of 0.6 levels. By listening to their own writing read aloud, learners were able to write better, more complex sentences.
- "By making the entire written world available to literacy learners, text-readers open up a wealth of real-life learning opportunities" (p. 14).
- "Learners benefit from facilitated research and note-taking, enhanced motivation, easier editing, multi-sensory learning, improved access for visually impaired and learning disabled students, and increased confidence" (p. 21).
- The following six software packages are described and evaluated: Kurzweil 3000, Write: OutLoud, Co:Writer 4000, Read & Write, ReadPlease, and Zoom Text Level 2.

Hammett, R., Artiss, P., & Barrell, B. (2000). *Strengthening families and communities through literacy learning opportunities for women/adults*. St. John's, NL: Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Research Question (pertaining to technology):

What are the intersections of literacies, specifically traditional literacy and computer literacy learning, and their uses in the everyday lives of the participants?

Participants:

A total of 60 participants at 2 computer sites.

Data Collection:

Ethnographic field notes, interviews, and artifacts.

Key Findings:

- Participants in the project acquired and extended basic literacy, visual literacy, computer literacy, Internet literacy, and cultural literacy.
- While most of the participants joined the project for computer instruction, this learning has proved to be an incentive and support for traditional literacy learning (reading and writing).
- “Acquiring computer skills and communicating through Internet and information technologies has enhanced a variety of literacy abilities and has motivated the desire to extend basic literacy skills for other learners as well... Such activities resulted in a visible increase in confidence and self-esteem, a result articulated by the participants themselves” (p. 1).
- “In the collegial, social atmosphere of the crowded computer rooms, tutors and participants shared stories of work experiences, and thus the culture and discourses of workplaces were examined and acquired by women and men who had not experienced paid labour for some time” (p. 1).
- “Computers were used to build job skills...” (p. 1).

Howard Research and Instructional Systems & Kysela Consultants. (1997). *Alberta Vocational College - Calgary computer assisted reading instruction project: Evaluation report*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Vocational College Calgary.

Research Question:

What is the short- and long-term effectiveness of CAI software (Autoskill Reading Program and PLATO) in improving the reading skills of three groups of adult upgrading students: Adult Basic Education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Adult Basic Literacy (ABL).

Participants:

A total of 127 ABE, ESL, and ABL students completed the study.

Instructors.

Data Collection:

Pre- and post-test performance in sight word recognition, decoding skills, comprehension, observation, survey, and interviews.

Key Findings:

- “While this study reveals few significant differences between the reading performance of students receiving computer-assisted instruction and those receiving the conventional program of studies, statistical results point toward a gain in reading performance by some groups of students whose program included computer-assisted instruction” (p. 8).
- “Results of this study also suggest that ABL and low initial entry level readers appear to make greatest gains using CAI programs” (p. 9).
- “...there appears to be no appreciable difference in the rate of course completions associated with computer use” (p. 9).
- “...where CAI was more fully integrated into instruction, it had a stronger positive effect on student performance” (p. 9).
- “With the exception of the Autoskill experience for Stage One ABE students, all students in this study reported enjoying their CAI experience” (p. 10).

Kunz, J.L., & Tsoukalas, S. (2000). *Riding the technology wave: experiences of adult literacy students and teachers in Ontario*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Council on Social Development.

Research Question:

To what extent do adult literacy students and teachers in Ontario have access to, and make use of, computers and the Internet in adult literacy programs?

Participants:

A total of 643 students enrolled in adult literacy classes.

A total of 135 literacy teachers.

Data Collection:

Surveys and focus group discussions.

Key Findings:

- Eight percent of literacy students were using computers, 60 percent the Internet, and 30 percent e-mail. Of the 30 percent of students who owned a computer, the majority were male with higher family incomes. Literacy teachers had high rates of computer usage (almost all), Internet (80 percent), e-mail (66 percent); and 83 percent owned a computer.
- Nearly half (47 percent) of the adult literacy teachers working in classroom settings felt the quality of computer access for students was inadequate.
- Both teachers and students used computers primarily for word processing and half of the teachers and students used computers for playing computer games.
- On average, teachers spent 32 hours per month delivering literacy instruction using a computer.
- Both students and teachers were enthusiastic about “Computer-Assisted Instruction” (CAI) and the vast resources of the Internet.
- Students have not been able to benefit fully from CAI because of problems with access to computers; literacy programs using trailing-edge hardware incompatible with leading-edge software; barriers to computer training due to cost, lack of time, and lack of information; problems for Francophone students who must learn to read and write in both languages; and the need for better-priced and content-appropriate “adult learnware” programs.

Larocque, D.L. (1999). *AlphaRoute (phase 2): A research report*. Toronto, ON: Centre AlphaPlus Centre and Réseau Interaction Network, Inc.

Research Questions:

At what stage of their learning can literacy students begin to be independent in an online environment?

What supports do they need to do so?

Participants:

A total of 46 learners from six community literacy centres in Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec.

Data Collection:

A series of individual interviews, small group interviews and participant observation.

Key Findings:

- Learners gained functional independence through navigational skills; emotional independence through feeling good about learning and displaying curiosity and persistence; cognitive independence through reading instructions, concentrating, and making choices in the website; and meta-cognitive independence through getting results, transferring knowledge, and expressing their understanding of the learning experience.
- Some Level 1 learners needed more reminders and functional support and had difficulties with cognitive independence whereby certain concepts were not understood even when repeated many times.
- The concept of independence, while important in education, may be difficult to define in this setting; that the concept of learner control better describes what adult learners need in order to progress and succeed; and that control focusses on the strategies, ways of learning, and support mechanisms that can be offered to learners for their choosing.
- The instructional, technical, and graphic design of the site were crucial elements in the experiences of the learners through factors such as appropriate vocabulary, clear instructions, and a good variety of activities; and that of equal importance was the support through mentoring, technical help, on-site facilitation, and learner-to-learner support, in person and through an online café.

Millar, D. (1996). *The use of educational software in adult literacy programs: A comparison of integrated learning systems and stand-alone software*. Winnipeg, MB: Stevenson Britannia Community Resource Centre.

Research Question:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using stand-alone software and integrated learning systems (ILS) in Manitoba?

Participants:

Participants in adult literacy programs in Manitoba.

Data Collection:

A questionnaire and pre-and post-test instruments that measured achievement gains in reading, changes in student attitudes towards computers, changes in student self-esteem, and basic computer skills.

Key Findings:

- ILS programs are no more effective than stand-alone software packages in terms of the reading gains made by students, the students' attitudes toward computers, students' self-esteem, or the computer skills learned by students.
- Integrated learning systems and stand-alone software help students to acquire basic computer skills.
- It may be difficult to integrate ILS and stand-alone software into the program curriculum effectively. The easiest packages to integrate are more generic packages, such as word-processing packages, whereas packages with prescriptive curriculums are more problematic.
- The ILS and stand-alone software may not be appropriate for adult students in that they may be based on an instructional approach that is incompatible with both a learner-centred program and an understanding of reading as a meaning or schema-based process.
- ILS programs do provide student records so that students and teachers can see their progress.
- ILS vendors provide training, whereas there is no training available for teachers wanting to use stand-alone or word processing software packages.

- ILS programs are expensive, ranging from \$8,000 to \$100,000, whereas stand-alone packages range from \$25 to \$300.

Pheasey, A. (2000). Learning about group process in a participatory action research project on computer training. In M. Norton & G. Malicky (Eds.), *Learning about participatory approaches in adult literacy education: Six research in practice studies* (pp. 45-70). Edmonton, AB: Learning at the Centre Press.

Research Question (pertaining to technology):

How can students make more and better use of computers at the Learning Centre?

Participants:

A total of ten students.

Data Collection:

Field notes of meetings, questionnaire, observation, and informal survey.

Key Findings:

- The students needed to plan a computer-training program for students at The Learning Centre.
- “Students were not using the computers because they didn’t know how, they needed help or they didn’t have time.”
- The students “wanted to learn how to start and stop the computers, how to save their stories on disks, how to play games and how to make cards and posters” (p. 57).
- The majority of students wanted computer skills taught in a one-to-one setting. The general feeling among the students was that they preferred to be taught by a fellow student so that they could ask “dumb” questions without fear of embarrassment.

Symons, S. (2003). *Improving workplace literacy through knowledge building technology and information-seeking*. SSHRC Study: #831-1999-0003.

Research Questions:

What is the effectiveness of teaching participants in an adult literacy program how to use literacy skills in a technological context?

What is the effectiveness of teaching information-seeking skills to adult learners?

Participants:

A total of 80 students enrolled in the Annapolis Valley Work Centre.

Students from Nova Scotia Community College.

Data Collection:

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Key Findings:

- “Initial reactions from the adult students who are often intimidated in classroom contexts, suggest that the electronic learning format provides a non-threatening way to express opinions and that they perceive participating in electronic discussion groups as a useful workplace skill” (p. 1).
- Community college students did not benefit from short-term instruction that taught information-seeking skills (book searching and world-wide web search strategies).

Tessier, A. (2000). *The computer learning evaluation project (C. L. E. P.): Aspects and attitudes of adult literacy learners when learning on computer*. Winnipeg, MB: Prior Learning Assessment Centre.

Research Questions:

How do people learn on computers?

What is the correlation in learning styles between a text-based environment to learning on the computer?

Participants:

A total of 15 men and 36 women in adult literacy programs.

Data Collection:

Learning style inventory, observation, survey, and pre- and post-test questions.

Key Findings:

- Learning on a computer, regardless of learning style, was highly beneficial and significantly increased participants' knowledge about topics chosen for study.
- While the average pre-test score was 52.9 percent, the average post-test score was significantly higher at 69.1 percent. Forty-one participants (80.4 percent) scored the same or higher in the post-tests, while ten participants scored lower.
- Overall, the participants responded very favourably to learning on the computer: 76 percent found that the computer made the information much more or somewhat more interesting; 90 percent felt that learning on a computer helped them to learn new material; 90 percent felt that learning new information on a computer helped them to improve their computer skills; and 83 percent felt that learning on a computer gave them greater confidence in themselves.
- The results also indicated that participants used different strategies in the various learning style groups. Across all groups, there were differences in the degree of subvocalization, the use of the cursor as a means of tracking information, and the intensity with which material was read.
- All of the participants preferred to work by themselves and asked questions only when they needed help.

Thomas, A.M. & Buck, M.P. (1994). *An analysis of integrated learning systems and their use in adult basic education programs in British Columbia*. Burnaby, BC: Curriculum Publications.

Research Question:

How are integrated learning systems (Autoskill, CCC, Jostens, Pathfinder, PALS, PLATO) being used in British Columbia?

Participants:

A total of 21 instructors, 46 students currently working on an integrated learning system (ILS), and 12 students who had worked on an ILS.

Data Collection:

Interviews and surveys.

Key Findings:

- PALS is used at Lower Fundamental level; Pathfinder is used at Upper Fundamental and Intermediate levels; Autoskill, CCC, Jostens and PLATO are used throughout the Fundamental and also at Intermediate levels, but Autoskill is the least comprehensive of the systems at the Intermediate level. None of the current systems seem to fit too well with upper ABE levels for college programs at the present time.
- Pathfinder has the best Canadian content while Jostens has the worst, followed by CCC.
- The average length of time spent working on the ILS for all 46 students was nearly 29 weeks.
- Within each computer program, the students usually choose math as their favourite subject. The majority of students stated that the computer program had improved their math skills.
- None of the current systems seem to fit too well with upper ABE levels for college programs at the present time.
- The students cited several advantages of the ILS: the programs accommodated different student levels; allowed students to work independently; provided instant feedback; allowed students to see their progress; kept them on-track; enhanced self-esteem; offered privacy and repetition; and provided flexibility and consistency. The students also cited disadvantages of the ILSs: limited human interaction; reduced

contact with instructors; caused frustration; were not comprehensive enough; and did not quite fit the needs of everyone. Instructors' responses also included strengths and weaknesses of ILS: ILSs allowed students to learn at different rates, encouraged learning as an individual process, required the active participation of learners, provided reports on curricula and student progress, and offered adequate security. In addition the software was reliable and easy to use, and the curricula met fundamental ABE requirements. However, instructors found deficiencies in programs: curricula not meeting Provincial ABE/Dogwood requirements; limited opportunity for instructors to develop curriculum; limited use of off-line materials as supplements to on-line material; insufficient on-going training offered by developers; and incompatibilities between programs and courseware from other vendors and sources.

Workplace Education

Introduction

The 12 studies in this section represent the different ways of thinking about literacies in the workplace. Cognitive, social, and economic theories provide the foundation for these studies. The research in this section is quite broad in its scope, ranging from the economic benefits of improving literacy skills in the workplace to the nature of literacies in contemporary workplace settings.

Belfiore, M.E. (1997). *The benefits of participating in collaborative committees*. Toronto, ON: ABC CANADA.

Research Question:

How are committee members affected by participation in a collaborative workplace planning committee?

Participants:

A total of 34 committee members.

Data Collection:

Interview and survey.

Key Findings:

- The two most frequently mentioned benefits for both new and seasoned committee members are increasing their knowledge about and skills for process and project work; and working with others in a new style of teamwork.
- The most experienced people cited the self-confidence they gained in collaborative work. The experienced members integrated their new knowledge about literacy into their existing knowledge about their organizations. Inexperienced members cited their new awareness of issues, problems, and all of the aspects of their organization.
- As committee members grow into the collaborative process, their excitement and experience is passed on to their colleagues and into their communities.
- Two of the challenges committees face were first cited by members as benefits: teamwork and communicating about literacy issues. Other challenges include understanding the pervasiveness of literacy issues and bringing them to the fore for serious discussing, finding time to get the committee working cooperatively; defining roles, responsibilities, and relationships; overcoming geographic distances; and maintaining consistency and continuity in committee memberships.

Belfiore, M.E., Defoe, T.A., Folinsbee, S. Hunter, J. & Jackson, N.S. (2003). *Reading work: Literacies in the new workplace*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Research Question:

What is the nature of literacies in contemporary workplace settings?

Participants:

Stakeholders involved in workplace literacy.

Data Collection:

Four interrelated ethnographic studies in a food processing plant, a textile factory, a tourist hotel, and a metals manufacturing company.

Key Findings:

Book to be released in February, 2004.

Bloom, M., Burrows, M., Lafleur, B. & Squires, R. (1997). *The economic benefits of improving literacy skills in the workplace*. Ottawa, ON: Conference Board of Canada.

Research Question:

What are the economic benefits of improving literacy skills in the workplace from the perspective of both employers and employees?

Participants:

A total of 40 employers that are offering or have offered a workplace literacy program and 5,660 Canadians aged 16 and over who participated in the IALS survey.

Data Collection:

IALS survey and Conference Board of Canada survey.

Key Findings:

- The results revealed that improving literacy skills in the workplace yields benefits for employers and employees. Employers cited the following benefits for themselves:
 - increased employee ability to handle on-the-job training, and quicker training results.
 - better team performance.
 - improved labour-management relations.
 - increased quality of products and services.
 - reduced time per tasks.
 - increased output.
 - reduced error rate.
 - better health and safety rate.
 - increased profitability.
 - increased retention of employees.
 - increased retention of customers.
 - reduced absenteeism.
 - organizational flexibility.
- Data analysis from the 1994 IALS revealed the following benefits for employees with increased literacy skills:
 - higher earnings.
 - decreased incidence of unemployment.
 - more full-time employment.
 - more training.

Bond, J. (2002). *Building momentum and finding champions for workplace literacy in Ontario: Field report*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Literacy Coalition.

Research Question:

What is the current level of awareness and commitment to workplace/workforce literacy among human resource professionals in Ontario?

Participants:

A total of 90 surveys were distributed to human resource professionals in long-term senior care facilities, plastics manufacturers, and shipping industries, and approximately 30 were returned.

Data Collection:

Survey.

Key Findings:

- “Most companies accept the GED and upgrading courses in place of a high school diploma” (p. 11). “Educational requirements had not changed in the past five years. When educational requirements had been raised, 40% of employers still did not require a high school diploma.”
- The top three sources for employee training named by all three sectors were in-house training programs, local colleges of applied arts and technology, and industry associations.
- Factors limiting training within all three industries included lack of training needs. Within the plastics industry, factors also included lack of interest among employees and cost of training.
- The three highest rated indicators of problems related to numeracy/literacy of employees were reports from immediate supervisors, poor job performance, and health and safety problems/accident reports.
- In all three industries, respondents reported that their current workforce has the right level of literacy and numeracy for their jobs. Few thought that employees were over-skilled. Most felt that skill requirements for jobs would stay the same or increase somewhat.
- Responses generally showed a positive orientation to the value of upgrading, in the belief that it would help work practices and cut costs. They didn’t believe that employees who needed to upgrade would do so on their own.

Kelly, S. (1999). *Workplace education works: The results of an outcome evaluation study of the Nova Scotia workplace education initiative*. Halifax, NS: Nova Scotia Department of Education.

Research Question:

To what degree did the Workplace Education Initiative meet its objectives?

Participants:

A total of 324 participants.

Data Collection:

End-of-program evaluations gathered from managers and participants of 24 workplaces, and in-depth interviews with stakeholders from five workplace sites.

Key Findings:

- “Ninety-six percent of the workplaces successfully indicated that workplace education met their goals” (p. iii).
- “Eighty-seven percent of the participants completed workplace education courses at their work sites and 73 percent of those surveyed would have not enrolled in essential skills or academic upgrading programs if they were not offered throughout their workplace” (pp. iii -iv).
- Seventy-five percent of the participants who took part in the GED preparation courses at three workplace sites received their GED certificates.
- “Ninety-two percent of the participants indicated that they observed improvements in the participants’ essential skills at work.”
- “Ninety-two percent noticed that workplace communications improved because of workplace education” (p. iv).
- “Sixty-seven percent observed improvements in the confidence level of participants” (p. iv).
- “Sixty-six percent stated that workplace education improved productivity” (p. iv).
- “Sixty-seven percent believed that worker-management-labour relations improved” (p. iv).

- “Eighty-nine percent reported that their general essential skills improved” (p. iv).
- “Eighty-two percent indicated that their workplace specific essential skills improved” (p. iv).
- “Ninety-one percent experienced a growth in self-confidence which was facilitated by workplace education” (p. iv).
- “Eighty-three percent stated that they improved their ability to communicate in the workplace” (p. v).
- “Seventy-four percent improved their overall job performance” (p. v).
- “Ninety percent are better equipped to participate in further training, and 86 percent of those interviewed indicated the workplace education program encouraged them to seek out further educational and training opportunities” (p. v).
- “Sixty-three percent feel more loyalty toward their employers and unions because of the investment in workplace education” (p. v).

Long, E. (1997). *The impact of basic skills programs on Canadian workplaces*. Toronto, ON: ABC CANADA.

Research Question:

What is the impact of basic skills programs on Canadian workplaces?

Participants:

A total of 86 individuals from 53 workplaces across Canada.

Data Collection:

Telephone interviews.

Key Findings:

- “Ninety-seven of the respondents report that basic skills programs increase the confidence level of program participants” (p. 2).
- “Ninety-four percent of respondents state that the basic skills programs positively influence participants’ reading, writing, and oral communication skills in ways that benefit the workplace” (p. 2).
- “Eighty-seven percent of respondents believe that basic skills programs exert an independent, and positive influence on participants’ ability to problem-solve” (p. 3).
- “Ninety percent of respondents indicate that employees who take basic skills programs have an increased ability to work independently” (p. 3).
- “Eighty-seven percent of respondents say that programs impact positively on participants’ ability to use workplace-based technology” (p. 3).
- “Eighty-five percent of respondents report that basic skills programs enhance participants’ ability to work within a team-based model” (p. 3).
- “Eighty-two percent of respondents link increased health and safety with their workplace’s basic skills program” (p. 3).
- “Close to 90 percent of respondents indicate that employees are more promotable as a result of basic skills programs. Sixty-three percent of respondents report that basic skills programs help workplaces to retain employees over time” (p. 3).

- “Ninety-three percent of respondents report that basic skills programs help to increase employee morale. Program participants feel better about their workplace, and about the unions that represent them” (p. 3).
- “Many respondents stated that basic skills programs help remove barriers in the workplace based on age, sex, race, and language” (p. 3).
- “Eighty-five percent of company and employee representatives concur that basic skills programs have improved labour relations in their workplaces. Improved labour relations are particularly pronounced in large urban centres” (p. 3).
- “Close to 80 percent of the respondents report that their workplaces have seen increased productivity because of the basic skills programs” (p. 3).
- “Two-thirds of respondents have seen reduced error rates in people’s work” (p. 3).
- “Eighty-five percent of respondents have seen increases in the quality of people’s work” (p. 3).
- “Seventy-three percent of respondents have seen increases in work effort” (p. 3).
- “All respondents agree that workplace basic skills programs are a good training investment and would recommend them to other workplaces” (p. 3).
- “Central among the barriers to workplaces starting basic skills programs are perceived cost; lack of awareness of the need for a program; literacy needs being hidden by employees; companies not feeling responsible; lack of understanding about the outcome of programs; and mistrust between labour and management” (p. 3).

Salembier, J. (2002). Learning indicators: The catalyst for new instructional strategies. In M. Taylor (Ed.), *Action research in workplace education: A handbook for literacy instructors* (pp. 18-26). Ottawa, ON: Author.

Research Question:

What is the range of learning indicators that provide evidence that learning has occurred for participants of a workplace program, and how can we use these indicators as instructional strategies?

Participants:

Participants in a workplace education program, workplace instructors and trainers, the company Human Resources Director, and a professor who specializes in workplace learning.

Data Collection:

Interviews, a literature review, and document analysis.

Key Findings:

- Evidence of learning consisted of four major themes: helping others; transfer of learning outside of the classroom; feelings of empowerment; and learner-generated products.
- Transferability of learning to work performance is likely to provide improvement in bottom-line outcomes as employees apply their new learning, advocate for more learning, and use the language of new concepts and skills.
- Learners can be encouraged and supported to be active and proactive in their personal assessments of learning; instructors have a significant role in helping learners voice their ideas of the learning process; and learners and instructors can identify indicators of learning within the classroom and beyond.
- A further outcome of these findings was the development of four instructional options to be presented at the beginning of each new course: a checklist, completion of an assignment or product using the course objectives, a print or mental recording of occasions of transfer of learning, a test or quiz.

Taylor, M. (2000). Transfer of learning in workplace literacy programs. *Adult Basic Education: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Adult Literacy Educators*, 10(1), 3-20.

Research Question:

What are common types of transfer of learning strategies?

Participants:

Approximately 90 key stakeholders in 11 workplace education programs representing manufacturing, utilities, mining, health, and natural resources sectors.

Data Collection:

Interviews, field notes, and participant observation.

Key Findings:

- Common transfer strategies used by instructors included developing transfer objectives, involving the learners and supervisor in program planning, linking program content to workplace tasks, and using evaluation results to understand how and when the transfer of learning had taken place.
- Common transfer strategies used by trainees included providing input into program planning, planning to apply and review the new information, maintaining an ideas and applications notebook, and linking with a training buddy.
- Common transfer strategies used by supervisors included creating an optimal training and work schedule, providing opportunities within the workplace to practice the skills being learned, providing support through mentoring, being a role model, providing positive reinforcement, debriefing the trainees, and celebrating small wins.

Taylor, M.C. & Tremblay, P. (1997). The explanatory power of an early framework of good practice principles in workplace education. *International Journal of University Adult Education*, 35(3), 38-48.

Research Question:

What trends emerge when a good practice framework is applied to 18 case studies that focus on workplace education programs?

Participants:

Participants in 18 workplace programs.

Data Collection:

A trend extrapolation technique was used on the practices documented in 18 existing case studies and then a framework was used to analyze these practices.

Key Findings:

- Most of the programs exhibited a worker-centred orientation, and learner goals were both work-related and personal.
- With respect to the organizing structure in place, most programs employed committees composed of a variety of stakeholders. As a result of this participation in decision-making, employees reported a sense of ownership of the training.
- Issues of equity emerged, which were related to the ability of workplace programs to act as catalysts for change. Participants reported both barriers to change and elements that contributed to change.
- The need for program assessment was seen as extremely important, and assessment techniques varied.
- The concept of ongoing learning was supported by participants.
- Support for foundational beliefs in adult education was demonstrated.
- Delivery and content issues emerged, such as the importance of voluntary participation and variety in delivery methods.
- Desired qualities for program instructors were reported, including the need for instructors to liaise well with different stakeholders, and to be adaptable to different program curricula.

- Participant satisfaction was a major theme related to the evaluation of workplace education programs.

Taylor, M.C. (1995). What makes a successful workplace education program? *Adult Basic Education*, 5(1), 37-52.

Research Question:

What makes a successful workplace education program work?

Participants:

Key stakeholders from eight worksites that provided workplace education programs.

Data Collection:

Standardized interview schedule, field notes, and participant observation.

Key Findings:

- The results revealed seven factors that characterize successful workplace education programs:
 - a new training culture philosophy that incorporates the broader intent of education with the specific focus of training.
 - a high level of commitment from all stakeholders.
 - dynamic and flexible organizational structures.
 - innovative program components that support flexibility, relevancy, self-paced learning, etc.
 - marketing and recruitment strategies that usually entail several different modes of communication, including personal contact.
 - appropriate and varied support services.
 - funding resources that often include multiple sources beyond the company itself.

Taylor, M.C. (1997). Portfolios at the workplace. In Taylor, M.C. (Ed.), *Workplace education: The changing landscape* (pp. 381-385). Toronto, ON: Culture Concepts Inc.

Research Question:

How can portfolios be used in workplace basic skills programs?

Participants:

Participants from four workplace programs in central Canada.

Data Collection:

Interviews and document analysis.

Key Findings:

- Portfolios were seen as being an effective way to promote a learner-centred approach to instruction and evaluation.
- Using portfolios helped the instructor quickly identify the students' strengths and weaknesses, which facilitated goal-setting.
- Portfolios allowed students to demonstrate all their learned skills and encouraged critical thought.
- Both instructors and students liked the idea of ongoing assessment. The dialogue journal and personal journal were mentioned by students as being the most meaningful parts of the portfolios.
- Trainees felt that the portfolio afforded a concrete means of seeing progress.
- The instructors felt that, overall, the students enjoyed and benefited from developing portfolios.

Whincup, S. (2001). Appendix A: Research report: For the Workplace Education Development (WED) research project. In S. Whincup (Ed.), *WED practitioner's guide: Customizing accreditation curricula in workplace education programs* (pp. 385-418). Calgary, AB: Bow Valley College.

Research Questions:

What are the essential skills needed in common for a typical accreditation and for work-related tasks?

How do practitioners customize the delivery of accreditation curricula to facilitate the learning of these common skills?

What strategies and materials do practitioners use to help learners truly grasp the needed essential skills?

Participants:

Participants from 76 workplace education programs in Canada.

Data Collection:

Telephone and face-to-face interviews that involved structured, open-ended questioning.

Key Findings:

- Practitioners customize curricula (in general workplace basic skills programs more than in accreditation programs) and contextualize the learning to help learners connect their classroom learning to real-world situations. The customizing process includes three elements: determination of the needs and goals for accreditation; analysis and linkage of the accreditation to real-life contexts; and design of learning activities in authentic tasks using authentic materials.
- Practitioners see the value of customizing curricula and instruction to the workplace context, and are eager to begin or do more customizing in the future by seeing examples of “how others do it.”
- Practitioners lack preparation time, access to authentic materials, understanding of work tasks and materials, support from all participant groups, approval and understanding of customizing, experience with customizing, expertise in teaching varied subjects such as business writing or ESL, opportunities to refine curriculum ideas, and support from colleagues.

- The conditions conducive to customizing follow: (1) “Structural Supports” - paid time to research and develop customized lessons, and active support from participant groups; (2) “Understanding and Motivation” - participants understanding the reasons for and benefits of customizing, and practitioners being motivated to customize when given sufficient time and resources; and (3) “Experience and Expertise” - gained through years of teaching, knowledge of various subject areas, and professional development opportunities. Successful “customizers” are flexible, open to new experiences, creative, patient, and tolerant of ambiguity.

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