



Encouraging Adults To Acquire Literacy Skills

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NATIONAL LITERACY SECRETARIAT

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Some useful resources for further reading are listed at the back of the monograph.

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THE ISSUES

What is the Problem?

According to a 1989 Statistics Canada survey of the literacy skills of Canada's adult population, 2.9 million people either cannot read, or have difficulty reading print material encountered in daily life. An additional 4 million people do not have sufficient skills to cope with unfamiliar, complex reading matter and tend to avoid such situations. This total of 6.9 million people represents 38 per cent of the Canadian population aged 16 to 69 years. The survey was carried out in English and in French. Those adults who had no abilities in either official language represented two per cent of the sample and are included in the figures above.

In the fall of 1987, many Canadians were startled to learn of Canada's adult illiteracy problem through a series of hard-hitting articles in the Southam Press across Canada. The basis for these articles was a specially commissioned research study by Southam News. The study found that 4.5 million Canadians could not read, write or use numbers well enough to meet the demands of today's society. One-third of this total said they had graduated from high school.

Adult literacy programs in Canada have been in existence for some time. However, in the last five years, there has been a groundswell of support for the issue and now, during 1990 International Literacy Year (ILY) - many sectors of society are "on side". Adult literacy's moment has come, but ILY is only the beginning of a thrust to improve the literacy situation throughout the world by the year 2000. To improve the situation requires some understanding of the contexts in which literacy occurs as well as trying to probe into the causes of illiteracy. Above all, it demands an understanding of and sensitivity to the people with low literacy skill levels.

The Southam survey pointed out that less than two per cent of the 4.5 million people with literacy difficulties were enrolled in literacy programs in 1987. It also estimated that only 10 per cent of the low-literate population would consider taking literacy classes, and that dropout rates of 50 per cent had been recorded. Taken together, these statistics provide the challenge for improving Canada's literacy situation by the year 2000. The growth of the literacy movement across the country and the increase in the number of programs and new initiatives demonstrate that people are responding to this challenge. The issue here is twofold:

- how to attract more people to take advantage of programs; and
- how to encourage and support those who come so that their literacy skills are improved.

The balance of this paper will address these questions.

Who are the Low-Literate Adults?

Adults with low literacy skills are found throughout Canada and in all age groups but are most numerous in the older groups. There are more or less equal numbers of men and women with low literacy skills. Higher rates of people with literacy difficulties are usually found in rural and remote areas, but actual numbers are greater in the urban centres.

Many low-literate adults, like other sectors of the population, are parents, citizens and taxpayers. Many are employed - some have their own businesses and rely on others to do any necessary paperwork. Many are quite articulate and independent thinkers; others are shy and need to be encouraged to express their opinions. Nevertheless, studies show that there is a strong relationship between attained level of education and literacy skills. Adults with low levels of education are more likely to be poorer than better educated adults, have higher unemployment rates than the average, and have a disproportionately large number among them who do not participate in the work force. Moreover, when times are tough, those low-literate adults who do work are often the first to lose their jobs. Those people who are fortunate enough to retain their jobs, are not likely to be in line for promotions or cannot accept them if they are offered because of their literacy difficulties. Some people become anxious and quit rather than stay and admit to their problem: they are afraid of being found out, of being ridiculed, and of feeling ashamed.

What is Literacy and Why is it Important in Our Society?

Simply expressed, literacy is the ability to read and write. In former times people without that dual ability were called "illiterate". The state of being able to read, but not write was considered a state of "semi-literacy". The twentieth century has brought both enormous technological changes in our society and an accelerated pace of introduction of those changes. Concepts have changed to accommodate and reflect these developments.

Literacy has been defined in many ways reflecting the assumptions and biases of those doing the defining. Compulsory education has been in place for at least 40 years in all provinces of Canada, and for over 100 years in some parts of the country. Thus, the number of people who are completely illiterate, in the old sense, is very small around two per cent of the population 15 years and over. Literacy, however, is situational: it depends on the skills demanded in a specific context. In the print and information oriented society which Canada has become, skills are needed to process print and information in a variety of ways and in many different settings. Consider the following examples:

- It has been estimated that blue-collar workers now spend about two hours a day on some kind of job-related reading task.
- Low-income consumers would probably prefer to purchase generic products in the supermarket because of their low prices. However, if these people have low literacy skills, they may be forced to buy the brand-name products because the pictures on the labels give clues to the contents.
- Parents with low literacy skills become frustrated when they cannot help children with their homework or read the letters which come home from school.
- Some Native peoples and immigrants have difficulty in adjusting to official language literacy because they are not literate in their mother tongue and they require instruction in oral fluency in the official language before literacy.

The above examples illustrate how literacy occurs in the workplace, in the community, in the home, and in the culture. Yet literacy goes beyond such uses. It can be a means of expanding personal and mental horizons, of helping people achieve their goals and dreams. It may encourage self-confidence and contribute to more self-reliant and enlightened citizens. Becoming literate then, means acquiring the necessary reading, writing and other skills which people need to operate in their personal, socio-cultural, and economic contexts.

There is literacy acquisition for personal purposes, but there are national purposes also. Canadian demographic trends, the changes in technology and the structure of the economy are all factors which are coming to bear on the literacy question and use of the country's human resources. In the 1990s, Canadian industry will require a flexible, multi-skilled labour force. The aging of the work force and its slower growth rate will require more retraining of established workers in the 35 to 55 years age group to meet changing job skill requirements.

There is a shift in the economy from the production of goods to the services sector. Labour market studies stress that many jobs in the traditional and least skilled sectors will disappear, while jobs in highly-skilled sectors will increase. The new jobs will require higher levels of language, mathematics and reasoning skills. Workers will have to adapt to new job challenges throughout their working lives. This means workers will need not only a strong foundation in basic skills, but they will also need ongoing opportunities to upgrade their skills and to acquire new knowledge and different skills. With such changes in the work environment, it is natural to wonder why so few adults are enrolled in literacy programs and why so many apparently do not continue.

Why do Low-Literate Adults Not Participate in Programs?

Very little research has been done on this topic in Canada. Much of the literature is U.S.-based and fairly recent. The studies on participation have looked at motivation, deterrents or barriers, and most recently at avoidance or resistance. Much of the research has stressed that low-literate adults should not be regarded as a single group. Researchers argue for a recognition of distinctive sub-groups in the planning of recruitment strategies. Programs can then be designed to meet similar learning needs in specific situations.

In a study of 129 nonparticipants in the state of Iowa, five of the six most quoted reasons for nonparticipation were related to attitudes towards, and perceptions of adult basic education. Such reasons were:

"I would feel strange going back to school."

"There aren't many people in adult high school classes my age."

"Going back to school would be like going to high school all over again."

"I am too old to go back to school."

"A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life."

The average age of those responding to the study was about 56 years and their average income was US\$23,500. Overall, the researchers found four factors to be important:

- low perception of need;
- perceived effort;
- dislike for school; and
- situational barriers (family and work-related).

A recent project in British Columbia interviewed 61 people with low literacy skills; 18 of them had never enrolled in adult basic education classes. Ten of the 18 were men whose ages ranged from 23 to 59 years, more than half were under 45 years of age. These men made comments such as:

"I was a man when I was 12 years old working on the land."

"There are no benefits in going back to school."

"I am successful so far, why do I need an education?"

"You need Grade 12 to be a doorman now."

"Why go to school for four years? What's at the end of it? I know people with two year college degrees and there's no jobs for them. They do what I do."

"We really need job-training."

"I wouldn't go to school. People would know I was dumb."

The first three factors recognized in the Iowa study are also recognizable in the quotations of the British Columbians. Yet, among this same group of men, the researcher found that one of the men had run for political office and was respected among his peers. Another man was on the board of directors of a community group and an active church member. Another regularly taught handicrafts to children in his community and others had artistic and musical abilities.

Thus, the men in this group were quite talented and were not antilearning per se. Rather, they were independently-minded adults with their own value systems who based any perception of adult basic education programs on previously bad or indifferent school experiences they may have had. Because they had never participated in adult basic education programs, they had no way of knowing how different the experience could be. When asked whether they would consider going to an adult basic education program to improve their reading and writing, five of the men said they would, but three specifically wanted one-to-one tutoring. One wanted the privacy offered by this type of arrangement and the other two were dyslexic working men who wanted the flexibility of arranging their own hours and place of meeting as well as the convenience of going at their own pace. Most of the men relied on spouses, friends and faking to get around their literacy difficulties.

Among the female nonparticipants in the British Columbia study, all were on some kind of income assistance. Two of them were working part-time. All the women were single and only one did not have children. For the majority of the women, child care was a problem and an obstacle to returning to school. Several of the women had returned or had come to the town where their families lived in order to have family support, especially for child care. Transportation and lack of suitable courses in their towns also presented problems. Generally speaking, the women appeared to be more job-oriented than education-oriented. They were the providers for their families.

One woman said, "Married women with children are a fatality in the job market", and, "If I got a Grade 12, I'd be several years older and then where would I go? Nowhere. I'd have no experience except what I've already done, so I'd be back to square one. The circle is closed before you get into it. More practical job training experience is required." The women, despite their own admitted difficulties in reading and writing, saw the importance of education for their own children. Life circumstances appeared to be the major reasons for nonparticipation among these women, although one or two could be "resisters" as well. Fears of school and stress factors were also mentioned by some of the women.

In a telephone survey of people who had been assessed at a local college, but then had not enrolled in basic education classes, more than half of the reasons given for not enrolling were work, financial, or transportation related. Reasons for non participation must be considered in any program planning efforts. A list compiled from the British Columbia study is given below. Similar kinds of reasons have emerged from other studies and in conversations with program coordinators in various parts of Canada.

Reasons for Nonparticipation in Adult Basic Literacy Programs

Financial Reasons:

- lack of financial assistance (living allowances);
- costs (fees, books, supplies, transportation, daycare).

Personal and Cultural Constraints:

- Work and time factors;
- children at home;
- cultural constraints, (e.g. opposition of husband to wife enrolling);
- personal problems (e.g. substance abuse, emotional problems);
- family constraints other than financial.

Special Needs:

- disabling conditions (physical, psychological and learning disabilities).

Anxiety and Embarrassment:

- low self-esteem;
- fear of returning to school (too old, away too long, etc.);
- fear of being so far behind they won't catch up;
- fear of low skill level being discovered and labelling;
- fear of failure.

Past School Experiences:

- previous negative educational experiences;
- misconceptions about ABE programs - think it's like school;
- expect large classes and instruction similar to past.

Low Perceived Need and Distractions:

- don't perceive the problem as such;
- easier to compensate for low literacy skills than to correct them;
- other influences compete more successfully for time.

Institutional Constraints:

- institutional intimidation - place, people, bureaucracy;
- lack of commitment of college administration and staff;
- scheduling not conducive to attendance.

Instructional Strategies:

- classroom activity distracting/difficulty working in a group.

Lack of support systems:

- lack of transportation;
- lack of daycare;
- lack of counselling, information and referral services.

Structural:

- lack of programs because of geographic isolation;
- lack of appropriate programs.

What Participants Say About Coming to Adult Basic Literacy Programs

In recent years, many learners' conferences have been held in most provinces of Canada. Some of these are provincial events; others are annual local or regional events. Another recent feature in literacy work is an increase in telephone "hotlines" or toll-free numbers which offer help and information about programs for learners and potential learners. These developments provide vehicles through which learners' voices can be heard. From them, practitioners can learn about the perceived and actual difficulties in participating in adult basic literacy programs.

Strong interior forces impel some to come to programs. "I was tired of hiding my problem and having it eat away at me." "It's like being in prison for years - the prison of oneself." Other people are urged by agency and government workers to enrol in programs. "On the first day of class, I found myself halfway up the stairs and then stopped and asked myself why I was doing this. I was scared, but I'm glad I came." Others come because they see opportunities for job advancement and take the initiative to improve their own skills, or sometimes, may have the backing of their employer to improve and reach the desired educational/occupational goal. For women and parents, the presence of children is a powerful motivator. Parents want to be able to help their children and hope they will not have the same experiences as themselves. Some women, for whom economic circumstances are more favourable, come to improve their literacy skills for their own sake. Some women come into classes when their marriages break up

and are forced into providing for themselves. They want to be independent of the welfare system.

In one study in the U.S., 10 motivational factors for participation in adult basic education by low-literate adults were discovered. They were:

- educational advancements ("I want Grade 12");
- self-improvement ("I want to see what I can do");
- literacy development ("I want to improve my comprehension");
- community/church involvement ("I want to be a more effective board member");
- economic need ("I want to get a job", "I want to get off social assistance");
- family responsibilities ("I want to help my son with his homework");
- job advancement ("I want to do a better job", "I want the promotion");
- diversion ("I thought I'd go and see what it was like");
- launching into a new life-cycle (getting married, becoming a parent);
- and urging of others (responding to pressure from others to attend programs).

Institutional adult basic education programs typically serve those that they are best able to serve - the already motivated and those most likely to succeed. Yet, the odds for these people are often overwhelmingly against them. They have had to overcome all their fears and anxieties about returning to school and what others might say if they found out. They have to juggle job and/or family responsibilities with program timetables. They have to worry about sponsorships, renewals, and how to finance the next stage of their education if they want to continue. They have to think about becoming employable and getting a job when perhaps, after many years of picking up their courage to return to school, they would actually like to continue their learning. They have to deal with institutional barriers and bureaucracies. What little dignity and feelings of self-worth they may have pulled together can be destroyed very easily. The courage, persistence and dedication of those who do participate is admirable.

And What About Dropouts?

Research on adult dropouts from literacy programs has produced contradictory and inconclusive findings. This area is beset with difficulties of definition. Some programs say someone has "dropped out" if they registered and then never showed up again. Other programs define a "dropout" after a specific number of hours of attendance. Others define "dropout" by those who did not complete a course module. Others only consider officially registered withdrawals as dropouts.

The problem of definition is compounded by both the diverse nature of the population and the nature of literacy instruction. Some students have very specific literacy goals. When these are met, the students stop coming. However, they may return at some time in the future to work on another goal. Thus, should these people be characterized as "dropouts", or "successes", or "lifelong learners"? In the adult basic literacy/education field, many "dropouts" might be better called "stopouts" or even "drop-ins". Many of these people have a history of returning to adult basic education. Very often, either their personal situations were not favourable to study and learning the first time round, or the necessary support systems were not in place, or both sets of conditions applied.

In a telephone survey of one adult learning program, the reasons for withdrawal were non-program-related and over 80 per cent of those contacted said they would go back to the program if conditions were right. Such positive attitudes towards adult programs among dropouts have been noted in some other studies as well. Dropouts differ from nonparticipants in that they have been motivated to enter programs and for the most part have had a very different experience from their earlier stints in school. They like the generally more relaxed atmosphere of adult programs. They like being able to go at their own pace and the warm, caring instructors and/or tutors. They also know that they are not alone with their difficulties. There are many others in the same boat. This knowledge becomes a powerful motivator when these adults are ready to return. The intentions to return to adult programs have implications for recruitment and for waitlists.

Other issues related to "dropout" include the mobility or transience of the target population. In one telephone survey of non-registrants, and another on dropouts, the combined samples consisted of 144 people. About one-half of this total (71 persons) could not be reached for reasons such as: number not in service, wrong number or not known at the number given, no phone contact given, moved away, not reached after three calls. Such people are likely younger single people who can more easily move to seek other opportunities. Mobility is a fact of life and presents difficulties for both researchers and practitioners in recruiting and follow-up.

With the majority of adults, economic need is foremost; obtaining a job, shift changes and other work-related matters are usually given a higher priority than educational matters, unless the educational goals are related to work and are fully supported by all concerned.

Cancellation of programs also affects educational progress. In such cases the causes are structural - related to economic situations and the political decisions of governments and educational institutions. Learners in these cases cannot be called "dropouts", but the cancellation has the effect of interrupting their learning and may contribute to a cynical attitude towards "the system".

Other adults may experience learning difficulties when they are in the program and if these are not detected and effectively addressed, students may drop out without a murmur. This is the dropout population about whom programs should be most concerned, because new strategies and program supports could prevent this kind of attrition.

REACHING OUT TO LEARNERS

How can we encourage more people to come to programs? Firstly, it must be stated that given the size of Canada, there are still geographic barriers to providing literacy services. If no service is available, then people cannot participate, even if they are motivated. Apart from this, the evidence seems to suggest that it is only when people themselves have made up their minds to do it, and that the necessary supports are in place that there is a reasonable chance for adults to succeed in their goals. Many low-literate adults are realistic. They know that it will be a long haul to obtain any kind of credential. They also know that the job opportunities in many smaller communities are very limited. Many of them want jobs or trades training which do not demand inflated credentials. Not everyone sees the benefit of literacy for its own sake. To reach potential learners, there needs to be a variety of recruitment methods, a variety of learning situations in varied accessible locations with flexible scheduling, and a variety of learning materials and teaching methods which focus on individual learning needs.

Recruitment

Practitioners know that to attract low-literate adults to programs, innovative use of media, displays and, above all, personal contacts have to be employed. Despite the level of public awareness which now exists about adult literacy, the messages are still not getting through to the people who need help. Many low-literate adults still feel that they are the only ones with the problem. Many of them do not know that programs exist to help them; and if they do hear about programs through media sources, they do not relate it to themselves. Experience has shown that frequent and sustained media messages are required before many of the target population will respond. Experience has also shown that it is the grapevine or word-of-mouth recommendations and personal referrals that are the most usual and effective ways of reaching learners. Thus, focussing on recruitment strategies which use the learners themselves and which involve intermediaries such as social workers and helping agency personnel are probably the most likely to produce the intended results on an ongoing basis.

A recent study asked 106 literacy students in two provinces how they found out about programs. Forty-six per cent said by word-of-mouth, 23 per cent said through helpers (that is, helping professionals), and 17 per cent said through radio and television. When asked what they thought was the best way for literacy students to find out about a program, 55 per cent said television, 38 per cent said radio, 30 per cent said newspapers, 26 per cent said word-of-mouth, 24 per cent said posters and flyers, and only nine per cent said helpers (the categories were not mutually exclusive). This mismatch between the students' perceptions and their own experience is interesting. There were some interesting differences in the responses between men and women. Women favoured radio over all other means and more of them mentioned children's school and employers than the men. Only four out of 43 women mentioned word-of-mouth as a means of recruitment, yet 26 of the 43 women said they had found out about the program by word-of-mouth. They were thus ignoring their own experience.

Special media events with associated toll-free telephone numbers and "hotlines" stimulate flurries of interest and general enquiries. Many of these though, come from people who want to help rather than those who want to be helped. There is a danger in this type of activity also, in that programs may not be able to respond fully to those who do want help. This balancing act of supply and demand is one which all literacy programs have to consider as part of their publicity or recruitment strategies. When existing programs have reached capacity, they do not embark on special recruitment campaigns, but rather keep recruitment to information and referral for program maintenance. Satisfied learners spread the word among their friends and colleagues and the learner population is renewed. Even so, this method can result in waitlists and impatient learners.

Recruitment efforts have to be backed by literacy program services. For this reason, many in the field feel that the best advertising and recruitment is local or regional advertising. The larger the area served by a particular telephone service, there is less chance of successful matching of callers and programs.

Recruitment strategies for hard-to-reach groups are probably most important when programs are starting up, or when programs have funds to expand their services. Experience and research have shown that the target population cannot be treated as a single group. The specific sub-group the program wants to serve should be identified and the messages and recruitment strategies be designed to appeal to that group. Community-based programs are particularly effective in reaching populations either not served by or reluctant to attend educational institutions. The community programs and one-to-one tutoring arrangements act as "feeders" to more traditional institutional programs. The community programs provide a means for potential learners to realize that they can learn and to gain self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. Community programs are rooted in the milieu of the learners and are therefore often more accessible and acceptable to them.

In recruitment efforts for new programs, adequate time has to be allowed for consciousness-raising about the issue in the community or communities to be served. Needs assessments may have to be carried out. Contacts with agency workers and community groups have to be established. Time has to be spent in getting to know the potential target population and establishing credibility and trust. In remote and rural areas, this kind of preliminary work is often hard-going and time-consuming one year may be required to lay the foundations of a future program. People may be slow to come forward, but if they have a good experience, word will spread and others will emerge.

In a rural area of Ontario, door-to-door canvassing of 300 households produced an initial group of only five students, but in time this grew to 25 students. In rural New Brunswick, canvassers visited 10,200 households and obtained 400 students and 1,000 tutors. Many long-time, well-established literacy programs began with only one or two students often in a tutorial arrangement and slowly expanded into a variety of learning situations and arrangements. In a northern area of Alberta, a Native outreach worker is having success in contacting Native communities, raising awareness about literacy issues and initiating new activities.

The words "literacy" and "illiteracy" are fearful and demeaning terms for many people with literacy problems. Thus information about the programs has to be described in appealing language. Learners have said that they prefer the words "learning to read and write", and "upgrading". Sometimes, people are more responsive to a specific activity - sewing or cooking, for example, and literacy work is then introduced in relation to those activities. In many Native communities, literacy is introduced through cultural activities such as dances, oral history and crafts. Literacy is thus seen as something meaningful and part of life, not something apart from it. Literacy programs have to start where people are and their needs have to be uppermost.

Life skills very often have to be part of a literacy program. For people who have had chaotic lives and multi-problems, social interaction and problem-solving skills are necessary. These adults need to learn how to cope and how to study before going into regular institutional adult basic education programs.

Adults need bridging opportunities from one kind of learning experience and program to another, and they also need adequate support services. In Canada at present, there are many innovative ways which have been tried to reach learners and there is a variety of ways in which programs are delivered, as the following lists make clear.

Publicity and Recruitment Strategies Aimed at the General Public and Literacy Intermediaries

Print and Symbols

- bookmarks
- literacy pins
- brochures
- posters
- bumper stickers
- notices in pay stubs and bills

For Distribution in

- medical and dental offices
- banks
- workplaces
- schools
- service agencies
- supermarkets
- public transportation

Newsletters

- community organizations
- churches
- libraries

Newspapers

- articles
- advertisements
- announcements
- letters to the editor

Radio and Television

- talk shows - panels and interviews
- news events
- call-in shows
- public service announcements

Special Exhibits and Displays

- shopping malls
- libraries
- city hall
- conferences
- schools

Strategies to Reach Learners

- Fieldworker employed to go to street hang-outs to make contact with potential clients to come to storefront literacy operation.
- Fieldworker employed to frequent soup kitchen to talk to clients and help them with specific short-term literacy tasks.
- Fieldworkers and/or canvassers employed to go door-to-door (rural or urban settings) to talk about literacy needs and programs.
- Native fieldworker employed to visit Native communities and raise awareness of literacy issues and programs.
- Branch libraries in rural areas used as literacy contact points for requests for tutors and materials.
- A literacy van making regular circuits of rural, isolated communities to recruit students and deliver tutorial services and materials.
- Walk-in centre providing scribe services filling out application forms, help with resumes, etc.
- Walk-in storefront literacy information and referral centre in downtown.
- Walk-in storefront classroom and resource centre in shopping mall.
- Family literacy projects in subsidized housing, community centres and schools:
 - For mothers and children in housing units;
 - for immigrant women and their pre-schoolers in community centres;
 - in elementary schools where parents of attending children need help;
 - reading circles with mothers and children during summer holidays.
- Peer tutoring arrangements:
 - Natives working with Natives;
 - union members working with union members;
 - street people working with street people.
- Students script and develop their own play for public awareness in their community.
- Student groups meet regularly to:
 - discuss topics of interest and invite friends;
 - make plans for social events or visits to other student groups;
 - publish their material or produce a newsletter.

A Variety of Program Settings to Reach Adult Learners

Community-Sponsored Programs:

- arise in response to local need;
- may be under the umbrella of a recognized community coalition;
- may be under an existing non-profit organization whose main purpose may not be literacy training;
- may be a non-profit incorporated society with its own board;
- may operate independently of educational institutions;
- may operate in partnership with a variety of local educational institutions colleges, school boards, etc.;
- usually small groups and one-to-one tutoring arrangements serving local neighbourhood in large cities, or the entire city/town if population is small.

College-Sponsored Programs:

- classes within the institution - full-time and part-time;
- community outreach - small groups in a community setting such as a church hall, a neighbourhood house, library, subsidized housing;
- community outreach - one-to-one volunteer tutoring in the home or other mutually convenient location for learner and tutor.

School Board-Sponsored Programs:

- adult day schools - full-time and part-time;
- night classes;
- drop-in learning centres - open days and evenings;
- classes or small groups in community and specialized settings such as housing units, extended care homes, psychiatric facilities, etc.

Workplace-Sponsored Programs:

- classes delivered in cooperation with college, school board or community-based program personnel (unionized and non-unionized sites);
- classes delivered through existing company trainers (management approach);
- classes delivered through union instructors either from the same workplace and on-site or in off-site locations such as union halls with union instructors from another workplace;
- classes conducted during work-time, after work with no pay, after work with straight time pay, or shared time (one hour of company time, one hour of worker's own time);
- one-to-one peer tutoring.

Library-Sponsored Programs:

- classes, small groups and one-to-one tutoring delivered by library-employed instructors in libraries;
- libraries used for delivery of local school board, college or community-based literacy programs.

Private Programs:

- not-for-profit programs started by adult educators - funding usually comes through fee-for-service contractual arrangements with government and service agencies;
- for profit - e.g. franchised learning operations.

Federally-funded employment-based type of programs:

- usually paid youth peer-tutoring programs.

Native Bands:

- programs run on reserves using classes, one-to-one, small groups, drop-in, etc.

Correctional Programs:

- usually contracted out to local educational institutions.

Unemployed Action Centres:

- small group or one-to-one tutoring, usually under community based programs.

Distance Education:

- using resource capability of computers and network technology;
- using correspondence course type of arrangements but with the use of audio cassettes and an on-site tutor.

Retention

Successful learning centres and programs stress many things to retain students. Above all, is catering to the learning needs of the individual. Learners need to be actively involved in setting their own goals and planning their learning. For this to be done well requires sensitive, caring instructors and low instructor student ratios. Classrooms or learning centres need to be attractive to students and they need to feel at ease there.

A variety of instructional strategies and resources should be used where appropriate. Most learners enjoy coming to literacy programs. They enjoy learning at their own pace, but some need extra help and others need more stimulation in the self-paced classroom or learning centre. Many find computers are motivating and empowering. However, group and social interaction should not be ignored. Learning assistants, aides and or tutors may be needed to help instructors. Some learners need longer than others to reach their goals so allowances should be made. Learners need to see that progress is being made and require frequent positive strokes and evidence of their success.

All the necessary supports need to be in place as has been mentioned elsewhere. Programs which provide daycare, bus passes and free books and tuition are likely to attract more learners than those which do not. Counselling and diagnostic services also need to be available for special needs and problems. Among low-literate adults there is a higher percentage than in the average adult population of people with learning disabilities. These people have often fallen through the cracks of the education system. They need special and individualized help to overcome their difficulties if they are not to withdraw from programs. Alberta Vocational Centre (AVC), Edmonton, has an educational support service called Strategies for Effective Learning (SEL) for registered students in AVC programs. SEL has helped many students continue with their AVC programs by assessing their learning strengths and weaknesses and defining appropriate coping strategies for each student's learning style. This service has reduced the "dropout" rate from programs.

In autonomous programs, learners need to be made welcome and be encouraged to participate in the life of the program. Many programs and groups now have students on their boards. Examples are the Saint John Learning Exchange, East End Literacy (Toronto), Kingston Literacy, Journeys (Winnipeg), Project Literacy Victoria. The Board of the Journeys program, in fact, has nine learners out of a total of 14 board members. Such positions give learners ownership in the program as well as experience in dealing with administrative issues and operational problems.

Learners need to be involved in other ways as well. Peer tutoring or counselling is also seen by learners as being necessary and effective. Student writing and publication are also powerful ways of involving and retaining learner interest in programs.

Follow-up and caring about students who miss classes is a way of keeping them interested and motivated. Nevertheless, some students do need to take breaks from learning. It is hard-going to study consistently when one has not been used to it. We need to rethink our notions of "dropout" for the low-literate population. Many learners are in for a long-haul and program sponsors need to recognize this fact.

CONCLUSION

Encouraging adults to acquire literacy skills involves knowing who we want to reach, designing recruitment strategies to attract the interest of adults, being honest about what we can deliver, treating each individual with dignity and respect, being committed to sound adult learning principles, providing quality service, and having fun together. For all of this to happen demands commitment of energy, enthusiasm and, above all, the necessary resources to do the job.

Advertising and recruitment cannot be performed in a vacuum, or we risk hearing comments such as: "Advertising doesn't live up to its promises!" Satisfied learners are the programs' best ambassadors. "There should definitely be more classes like this. People have to know about them." People cannot be told about them however, if there is not enough room to accommodate everyone and there are already waitlists. This is a dilemma faced by many programs in many parts of Canada. Is the circle closed before it is open?

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

Comeau, Yvan. Sensibilisation du milieu et recrutement des participants. Cahier 2. Alpha communautaire chez les Franco Ontariens. Toronto: Ministère de la formation professionnelle.

Reaching-Out Approaches. A book on effective methods of recruitment compiled during a workshop in the spring of 1989 in New Brunswick, it includes strategies for rural areas, urban areas, the workplace and for young adults. A companion videotape of the panel presentation is also available. For further information contact:

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Thomas, Audrey M. (1990). The Reluctant Learner: A research report on nonparticipation and dropout in literacy programs in British Columbia. Victoria: Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. Order Number VA0105. (Order from: Marketing Department, OLA, 7671 Alderbridge Way, Richmond, B.C., V6X 1Z9; tel: (604) 660-2224; fax: (604) 660-2272)