

# **Family and Community Literacy in the Community Academic Services Program ( CASP)**

**Learners at CASP**

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## **Family and Community Literacy in the Community Academic Services Program ( CASP)**

### **1. Introduction**

This study ( Richmond ,1999) examines the nature and effectiveness of a community-based literacy program in a Canadian province, specifically the Community Academic Services Program (CASP) of New Brunswick. It will look at this rurally-located literacy program and at the experiences of the learners and facilitators within the program.

Literacy is a socially constructed concept that is defined in ways congruent with the expectations and attitudes of various interest groups. Most interest groups focus on the " problems of literacy" and define it in ways which problematise the relationships among literacy, education, employment and culture, as well as those among adults with low level literacy skills<sup>1</sup>, their family and community, and with the literate members of society. The full impact of literacy as a problem, as well as its definition, lies within an intersecting network of local and societal beliefs which link literacy and education, literacy and employment, literacy and culture, and literacy and daily life in the local community.

In the past New Brunswickers could live their daily lives within a culture which did not demand literacy skills. Adults were assessed on the basis of their competence to do work and support their family. In this culture, adults with low literacy skills worked at seasonal unskilled jobs, in resource-based industries such as farming, fishing, mining, trapping, logging and hunting; and were supported by unemployment benefits for the rest of the year. Many of the jobs in these industries have disappeared due to over-fishing, mechanized farming and logging, bans on leg-hold traps, the collapse of the fur

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<sup>1</sup> Whenever possible, the terms "illiteracy" and "illiterate adult" are not used in this study because the terms are viewed as pejorative and are difficult to define. Alternate terms will be used: "low level literacy," "low-literate adult" and "adults with low level literacy skills."

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industry, fewer animals to hunt, and the depletion of mining resources. In other cases, the industries are no longer labour-intensive and jobs are fewer in number. The jobs that are left require new knowledge and new technical skills. Adults without this knowledge or these new skills are increasingly marginalised in the workplace, and fewer and fewer can find jobs that pay a living wage.

As unemployment benefits and the nature of jobs change, the need for literacy skills will increase and the skills themselves will change. The demand for coordinated literacy programs may also increase.

In Canada, both federal and provincial governments have shifted the financial and social burden for unemployed and unemployable adults to the local community. A high proportion of these two groups are low-literate adults likely to become a financial burden on their community and society in general.

Local communities do not have the fiscal resources to provide adequate income assistance to these adults and have little control over creating jobs that might employ them. The community, therefore, is left with the responsibility for responding to prior failures of the educational system and current changes in the nature of work, and for supporting those who require financial assistance. One response is to provide educational programs through which adults can increase or improve their literacy skills in the hope that such skills will provide solutions to some of the problems facing both communities and low-literate adults.

Adults with low literacy skills may have had problems learning to read and write due to past experiences in schools and poor self-esteem due to past failure in the educational system (Gabor-Katz & Watson, 1991; Horsman, 1990; O'Brien, 1989; Purcell-Gates, 1994). One means for acquiring literacy skills in adulthood would be to re-enter the educational system, but past experiences may have

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created overwhelming obstacles for the adult learners and make this option untenable for them. From the perspective of the educational system, re-accepting such adult learners may place the system in the position of having to acknowledge its earlier failures.

A second means for acquiring literacy skills would be to participate in literacy activities and individual tutoring offered by not-for-profit organizations such as local literacy councils, Laubach Literacy or Frontier College. These activities reach only a small number of adults and do not represent a coordinated public response to the problem of low literacy levels among the adult population.

In dividing governing responsibilities among the various levels of government in Canada, the provision of educational services, occupational training and welfare assistance has been assigned to the provinces. Each provincial government is responsible, therefore, for developing educational services for low-literacy adults, including assisting communities to develop literacy programs. New Brunswick has dedicated itself to implementing suitable policies and strategies which will result in the delivery of literacy training through an effective and acceptable educational model. The government of New Brunswick considers literacy essential to living in a modern society and has set out to raise the literacy level of its citizens through partnerships (Downey & Landry, 1993, p.25). These partnerships between public and private sectors, government and citizen, shift responsibility for literacy problems away from the government and share it with other valued segments of the society. A major stakeholder and fund raiser was Literacy New Brunswick Inc.<sup>2</sup> The Literacy NB Inc. board is made up of corporate business and senior bureaucrats. Day to day operations are managed through persons who work for the department

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of education or post-secondary, in the learners financial assistance and literacy branch. One of the resulting programs is a literacy program based on a partnership between provincial organisations (i.e., the community colleges), local communities, individual learners, and others. This community-based initiative is the Community Academic Services Program (CASP). Each CASP is organized by a community committee and is supported by both local and provincial funds. Local people with needs for literacy skills or academic upgrading become learners in the program for a half-day for 40 weeks. More than 100 CASPs were established throughout New Brunswick during the first two years (1991-93) of the program; and between 1991 and 1998, 992 programs — 413 in English, 548 in French, and 31 in both languages — were funded (Literacy NB, Fast Facts, 1998).

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

The study reported here examined the nature of a community-based literacy program, the Community Academic Services Program in the province of New Brunswick (Richmond, 1999). This paper examines two of the study's objectives: to examine literacy practices of learners in the family, the community and the academic services program; and to examine outcomes of the CASP literacy experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> In the year 2001 the CASPs continue to operate as does Literacy New Brunswick Inc.

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### **1.2 Significance of the Study**

The study addresses an issue viewed as problematic in New Brunswick society, namely the literacy level of its adult populace, particularly its rural populace. The outcomes of the study should heighten our understanding of low level literacy skills and their connection to early schooling, family influences, and adult life experiences; and of literacy education programs for adults. The findings of this study will contribute to our understanding of the effectiveness of an existing model of literacy education.

### **1.3 Limitations of the Study**

New Brunswick can be understood as comprising three major geographic regions with CASPS located in all three. These three regions differ from each other. The central region includes the seat of provincial government; has a population mix of anglophones and francophones; and in general, has a higher average educational level because of the presence of government departments and two universities. The southern region has an industrial economic base; and is predominantly anglophone having been settled by United Empire Loyalists and immigrants from Ireland and Scotland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The northern region's economic base relies heavily on the primary sector (e.g., forestry, mining, fishing); and is predominantly francophone having been settled by Acadian settlers in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The manner in which CASP-related partnerships operate varies from one region to another. Only the central region is represented in this study because of limitations in the time and resources necessary to travel to other regions.

The participants in any CASP vary from month to month. In any given week, new learners arrive to begin the program; others drop out for various reasons; and some move on to higher academic

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studies and occupational training programs. The learners who were interviewed during my visit to their CASP may or may not be representative of the full New Brunswick population of adults with low level literacy skills. In addition, those learners who did not wish to be interviewed may be representative of an important segment of this population.

The francophone population of New Brunswick was not included in this study because I did not have sufficient competency to conduct, transcribe and translate interviews in French. Some CASP learners, whose first language is French, are fluently bilingual. Representatives of these learners have been included as participants wherever possible. Research indicates that the early literacy and educational experiences for anglophones and francophones are different and result in somewhat different needs within the CASPs (MacKeracher, 1993). Because interviews were conducted only in English, the study must be understood as a case study of the anglophone version of CASP.

Another limitation is the lack of inclusion of newcomers to the province whose first language is neither French nor English. CASPs do not normally serve the needs of second language learners although some individuals attend CASP as the only local alternative to adequate second language training. None of the learners interviewed in this study fell into either group, so the concerns of immigrants were not examined.

## **2. Learners' Literacy Practices**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In response to the question “Why literacy?”, each learner proclaims a need to “get my education,” perhaps believing that this will enmesh and embed their literacy practice in the larger society, in a

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personal way. The connection between literacy and work is not as clear for the learners. They understand that the establishment of a prerequisite level of education for employment is exclusionary and marginalises them from both occupational training and entry-level work positions. The dominant society, in the meantime, sets the barrier of educational levels higher and higher effectively shutting out low-literacy adults from both training and employment. With a provincial unemployment level among the highest in Canada, New Brunswick literacy learners in CASP do not talk much about work. Their focus is on understanding themselves and making sense of the literacy which affects their lives.

## **2.2 Background to study**

The purpose of CASP, from the government's point of view, lies in a school-based and economic definition of literacy. In this perspective, literacy programs follow a curriculum leading to basic literacy and academic upgrading as preparation for entering the work force or advancing to occupational training requiring high school equivalency (MacKeracher, 1993). Other partners, including the community committee members, facilitators, learners, their families, and the local service clubs which provide resources, may interpret CASP's purpose from a community or family perspective. In this perspective, literacy programs, instead of transmitting school practices or training individuals for economic productivity, are expected to improve the individual's and community's "literacy practices" (Auerbach, 1989, p.168) which, in turn, "are the basis for informing and modifying school practices . . . from community to classroom" (p.176).

This report analyzes on data collected through a survey of CASP learners and a statistical snapshot of adult learners in 15 anglophone CASPs. Few basic data exist on the low-literate, rural

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adult population in New Brunswick. The picture provided by the data collected for this study may assist policy developers, program planners, and service providers in the field of literacy. The quantitative data include general information on learners' beliefs about learning to read, their literacy history, current literacy activities, and the effects of the CASP experience on their families.

The learners included in the survey attended CASPs in the central region of New Brunswick. These CASPs are typical of those which serve anglophone communities in the province. The learners appear to be similar in age, educational background, and economic status to adult learners enrolled in other literacy programs (Carley, 1991; Horsman, 1990).

### **2.3 Literacy studies**

Literacy studies focus on a diverse range of literacy characteristics and literacy program outcomes. Large scale studies tend to focus on the literacy skill levels of respondents and to be concerned with functional definitions of literacy. Small scale studies tend to focus on individual characteristics such as self-esteem and personal meaning making and on intergenerational aspects of literacy.

Few educators really know what is going on in adult literacy programs, who or how many are being served, or what the outcomes are (Huie, 1993). This question is raised in a study of academic upgrading in New Brunswick (MacKeracher, 1993). She points out that little is known about the educational system serving adults who lack literacy skills or basic education, particularly about the CASP system. While New Brunswick has been quick to publicize the extent of the literacy services being supported by public funds, little has been done to assess the quality of the

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literacy education being delivered.

### **3. The Survey**

The questions used in the survey were developed by the author and piloted in four adult literacy CASPs in New Brunswick. The questions were drawn from other studies in the field of adult literacy (Gabor-Katz, 1991; Horsman, 1990; MacKeracher, 1993) and from my personal experience of teaching reading and language arts courses to Bachelor of Education students for over ten years. Each year I have designed a literacy profile survey and administered it to these students. I wanted to explore their literacy history and their current literacy activities. These informal survey results led to more development and revisions, until the survey became useful for planning and teaching, and finally became a tool for research.

The survey questions were modified following the pilot study. In consultation with the CASP learners and their facilitators, I developed the questions most appropriate for meeting the research objectives of this study. The resulting questionnaires were sent to the facilitators at 16 CASPs in the central region of New Brunswick. Permission to do this was obtained from the Provincial and Regional Literacy Coordinators who were responsible for the CASPs in the region.

Precautions were taken to prevent the possibility of identifying any individual respondents. Because CASP learners had an established relationship with their respective facilitators, the questionnaires were administered by these individuals. This approach was deemed to be potentially less threatening to the learners than if I, a complete stranger, had come into the setting. Completed surveys were received from 175 anglophone CASP learners, 50 men and 125 women. Not all

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respondents answered all questions.

The data were coded numerically and then prepared for analysis using SPSSX. Frequency distributions were run for all questions and crosstabs calculated for all questions by age and by gender. Chi squares were then calculated for the more interesting crosstab results. Only those results which seemed interesting or which were of significance at a confidence level of 0.01 or better are reported here.

### 3.1 Respondents by age and gender

Table 1 shows that the majority of responses were 35 years or under (56%) and female (71%).

**Table 1**  
**Respondents by Age and Gender**

Age Groups	Males (N=50)		Females (N=125)	
		%		%
Under 26 years	17	34%	42	20%
26 to 35 years	10	20%	50	40%
36 to 45 years	14	28%	31	25%
46 years and over	9	18%	19	15%

A government-sponsored survey of CASPs (Godin, 1996) shows that 60% of participants are women, almost half are under 35 years of age, and more than one in four receive income assistance. The findings in the current survey support these data.

Statistics for New Brunswick reveal that more males than females have less than a grade nine education (Statistics Canada, 1991), and more females than males have completed their education

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to the end of secondary school. Because the CASP offers basic (to grade 6) and intermediate (grades 7-9) academic upgrading. We might expect to find more males than females in the program. Educational levels attained in the past, do not explain the preponderance of women in the CASP.

A partial answer to the relatively high number of young adults and women in the CASPs may lie in the community-based nature of the program and its focus on both small group activities and individual study. The primary purpose of the program is to provide adults with a second chance to complete their basic education; assisting them to complete their secondary education and gain access to occupational training programs is only a secondary purpose. The social nature of the program implicitly serves needs related to poor self-esteem and self-efficacy, particularly for those who have very little paid work experience or who are unemployed or unemployable.

Statistics Canada (1991) points out that reading levels are closely associated with the type of occupation held. Among adults with limited reading skills, 64% of the women and 68% of the men hold jobs in service (i.e., cleaning, personal care), primary (i.e., agriculture, forestry, fishing) or "blue collar" (i.e., manufacturing, construction) occupations. Men with limited reading skills are often admitted to industrial apprenticeship or institutional training programs without a complete secondary education. The same opportunities are not as readily available to women.

MacKeracher (1989) writes "when they re-enter educational institutions for occupational training, women are more likely than men to be directed toward non-skill, general educational programs" (p.379). The women of CASP may be part of that trend -- toward general education and basic

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literacy skills rather than toward job-related skill-oriented education.

In addition to CASP, Literacy NB participates in two other programs. One involves 22 training programs for some 300 learners in northeastern New Brunswick under contract with The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS). The second, Enhanced Employment Initiatives offers a further 54 programs “provided 1,080 training opportunities for workers” (Godin, 1996, p. E-5). The majority of participants in these programs are males; and the educational offered is more directly connected to occupational re-training.

### **3.2 Early Literacy Experiences**

The survey questions related to early literacy experiences were designed to explore the connections between individual learners, their families and community, and the formal education system. From the learners’ early awareness of learning at home to the learners’ perceptions of schooling, the survey questions attempted to explore the personal literacies of these CASP participants. The questions covered such topics as: childhood play, storytelling, access to reading material and being read to. Other questions specifically asked how learners thought they had learned to read, or if they did not learn to read, why not. These early memories reflected what had shaped their literacy development. Comments written on the survey form provided responses that were revealing and heartfelt.

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### 3.2.1 Favourite childhood pastimes

Respondents were asked to indicate their favourite pastime in childhood. Table 2 indicates that differences between males and females are significant. The majority of both males and females indicated that playing with friends was their favourite pastime, and roughly equal proportions indicated they had watched television. None of the males reported reading as a favourite pastime, while over one-third reported they had preferred to participate in sports. One in five female respondents reported reading as a favourite pastime. This finding does not mean that the males did not read, only that they preferred other activities since data reported in a later section indicates that at least 70% of all respondents had access to reading materials.

**Table 2**  
**Favourite Childhood Pastimes by Gender**

Pastimes	Males (N=50)		Females (N=122)	
		%		%
Playing with friends	26	52%	69	57%
Watching television	6	12%	13	10%
Reading	--	--	23	19%
Participating in sports	18	36%	17	14%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 11.34194      df = 3      Significant at 0.01 level

An analysis of the data on favourite childhood pastimes by age for the female respondents also shows significant differences (Table 3). Forty-four percent of women over 45 years read as children but only 14% of those 45 years and under did so. Thirteen percent of women 45 years and under watched television but none of those over 45 years, a reflection of the introduction of television to New Brunswick homes. For successively younger age groups, the preference for watching

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television increased while the preference for reading

decreased.

**Table 3**  
**Favourite Childhood Pastimes for Females by Age**

Pastimes	Under 26 years		26-35 years		36-45 years		45 years and over	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Playing with friends	9	36%	31	69%	18	60%	9	50%
TV	7	28%	4	9%	2	7%	--	--
Reading	2	8%	6	13%	6	20%	8	44%
Sports	7	28%	4	9%	4	13%	1	6%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 26.56863      df = 9      Significant at 0.002 level

### 3.2.2 Early literacy at school

Nearly 60% of male and 75% of female respondents believe that people learn to read in elementary school. A similar number believe that schooling and teachers can help an individual acquire literacy skills. Nearly 17% of male respondents, but only 5% of female respondents, believe that one can learn literacy skills after completing high school. These findings raise additional questions about the reasons why so many women attend literacy training if so few believe they can learn literacy skills after leaving high school.

### 3.2.3 Early literacy at home

Questions about the home experiences of learners were intended to explore the culture of family life from the perspective of family literacy and cultural consciousness. Almost 70% of all age groups reported they had heard stories as children. Hearing stories from family members reflects a strong oral tradition that still exists in New Brunswick. "The traditional talking circle is a very old way of bringing Native People of all ages together in a quiet respectful manner for the purposes of teaching,

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listening, learning, and sharing" (No author, *Tobique Today*, 1996).

Across all age groups, about 30% of respondents were read to by their parents and 30% by their grandparents and 19% reported that they were read to by friends, cousins, teachers, babysitters, and neighbours. The remaining 21% reported that no one read to them.

Over 70% of all age groups reported that they had reading materials when young. These reading materials were found at home (36%), at school (38%) and at the library (13%). This finding is important in highlighting the need for books to be affordable for home and school purchase if literacy acquisition is to be a societal goal.

The CASP respondents were also asked to report on the types of reading materials which they used. These results are illuminating when analysed by gender (Table 4). Over 50% of male respondents read comics as children; while over 60% of female respondents read story books. This difference in choice holds when analysed by age category for both males and females. Comic books are not often used in New Brunswick schools.

**Table 4**  
**Types of Early Reading Materials**

What did you read most as a child?	Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%
Comic books	28	52%	26	22%
Story books	19	35%	72	61%
Magazines	2	4%	8	7%
Newspapers	2	4%	1	1%
Other	3	5%	11	9%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 18.14529      df = 4      Significant at 0.002 level

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The written in answers in the ‘other’ response space included such reading material as: science fiction, true stories, picture books, and rhymes. One respondent wrote: “I did not know how (to) read at all. . . didn’t read much. . . nothing, I did (not) read at all.”

### 3.2.4 Reasons for low literacy

Respondents were asked: If you did not learn to read as a child, can you tell me the reasons why? The responses to this question are reported in Table 5.

Written responses to the question about reasons for low literacy indicate that learners had strong reactions to their early literacy experiences.

"I learn more at CASP than when I was in school"

"I feel ashamed of quitting school..."

"I used to think I would fail at everything"

"In my school years I was placed in special education . . . now I don't feel so stupid"

**Table 5**  
**Reasons for Low Literacy**

If you did not learn to read as a child can you tell me reasons why	Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%
Home life	5	19%	23	53%
No reading materials	1	4%	8	19%
Poor teaching	8	31%	3	7%
School failure	8	31%	2	5%
Other reasons	4	15%	7	16%

Chi-square, Pearson Value = 20.36032      df = 4 Significant at 0.001 level

Over 50% of the female respondents indicate that their home lives , including abuse and family

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related responsibilities ,were a reason they did not learn to read in school, a finding that holds true within all age groups. The male respondents, on the other hand, named poor teaching (30%) and school failure (30%) as the reasons why they did not learn to read in school, findings that are consistent across all age groups.

In response to a different question, the majority of male respondents reported that some school experiences, such as reading aloud, made them feel uncomfortable. Over 60% of the female respondents, on the other hand, enjoyed reading aloud. These findings were consistent across all age groups.

### **3.2.5 What helped when learning to read**

Respondents were asked to report on what had helped them in learning to read. This question attempted to explore literacy development from the learners' perspective. The responses were not significant when analysed by gender. However, the analysis by age showed some interesting differences (Table 6). The responses were consistent with varied authoritative opinions about how best to teach reading, reflecting either an emphasis on linguistic code or on meaning making.

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**Table 6**  
**What Helped When Learning to Read by Age**

Helped learning to read	Under 26 years		26-35 years		36-45 years		46 years and over	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hear stories	4	10%	18	32%	16	37%	10	36%
Learn words & letters	9	23%	4	7%	12	27%	8	29%
Sound out words	16	41%	18	32%	8	18%	3	11%
Look at pictures	8	21%	15	26%	5	11%	4	14%
Other	2	5%	2	3%	3	7%	3	10%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 25.91199 df = 12 Significant at 0.01 level

The results in Table 6 indicate a difference between younger and older respondents. Those 35 years and under reported that sounding out letters and words and looking at pictures helped them; those over 35 years reported that hearing the stories read to them and learning to recognize letters and words helped them. These two different beliefs about what helped the respondents learn to read appear to correspond to changes in teaching philosophy which occurred in New Brunswick schools. The younger adult learners preferred to use phonics and contextual visual cues while the older adult learners preferred to use word/letter recognition and contextual auditory cues.

Over 80% of the older respondents reported that they had learned to print by copying letters, while 40% of the younger respondents reported learning to print by copying words.

### **3.2.6 Summary of early literacy experiences**

The early experiences of the CASP learners in this study reflect findings from the literature. For example:

... Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) explored the ways in which home settings provide

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dynamic literate environments where writing and reading are an integral part of the family life.

Similarly, Heath's study (1983) of low-ses families from rural communities described the many functional ways that literacy was used by adults and their children (Madigan, 1996, p.272) .

The personal literacy histories of the individuals in this study indicate the ways in which literacy was a part of their homes: hearing stories, having reading materials, the belief that one learns to read in school, and perceptions about how they learned to read. Poor home life, poor teaching and school failure were perceived as reasons why they had not learned to read. Learners showed a great awareness of their antecedent literacy experiences and the effect of these experiences on subsequent literacy activities.

### **3.3 Current Literacy Experiences**

When asked for examples of their current literacy activities learners replied :

"I make letters for my four year old to copy."

"I write letters and stories at home."

"Homework."

"Notes to my son's teacher."

"Writing out the grocery list."

"When I was working at a taxi company."

"With money. . . how much for spending and bills plus other things."

"Going to school now"

"Cooking"

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"Using the phone, computer, (for) jobs, and watching the weather[on television]."

Reading and writing, using numbers and computer, and watching television all formed part of the everyday experiences that learners recounted as literacy experiences.

When asked about their current readings practices, over 80% of the females and 79% of the males reported that they like to read now, "at home and at CASP". Their choices of reading materials (Table7) were not significant when analysed by age or gender, but provide an overview of what people at CASP are reading. About 30% of both men and women read newspapers and textbooks; a few read magazines.

**Table 7**  
**Daily Reading Materials by Age**

Read today?	Under 26		26 - 35		36 - 45		46 and over		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Newspaper	9	25%	10	20%	18	44%	11	52%	48	32%
Magazines	2	5%	4	8%	1	3%	2	10%	9	6%
TV Guide	1	3%	1	2%	--	--	1	5%	3	2%
Book/novel	14	39%	12	23%	10	24%	3	14%	39	26%
Text book	10	28%	24	47%	12	29%	4	19%	50	34%
Total	36	100%	51	100%	41	100%	21	100%	149	100%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 19.01123 df = 12 Significant at .09 level

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When asked about the daily use of writing, 80% of all respondents said they do write everyday: “writing notes”, “write in my journal”, signing things”. Over 70% of the learners also used math or numeracy skills everyday, “... making change at the store”, “in the program I’m in there is math... so I have math skills”, “figuring out how much to spend on food”.

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When asked about television, 95% of the respondents reported watching television. The choice of programming is shown by gender in Table 8.

**Table 8**  
**Daily Television Viewing by Gender**

What is your favourite program?	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
News	10	21%	15	14%	25	16%
The Learning Channel	2	4%	10	9%	12	8%
Action/ adventure	26	53%	25	24%	51	33%
Soap operas	1	2%	31	30%	32	20%
Situation comedies	5	10%	16	15%	21	14%
Other	5	10%	9	8%	14	9%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 23.61496      df = 5      Significant at .001 level

The differences between males and females are significant. The men report they watch predominantly action/adventure programs and the news. The top choices for women were soap operas and action/adventure programs. When asked about the effect of television on learning, 44% of the respondents thought it had some effect on their own learning and over 75% thought it had an effect on their children's learning.

This raises questions about the connections between literacy and television. The New Brunswick Community College is seeking to reach the low literate populace by developing educational television programming (Curtis, personal communication, June 1998). Only a small number of learners (8%) reported that they watched channels with an educational component. The programming favoured by learners -- soap operas, action and adventure dramas -- may provide a

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narrative structure for literacy learners. In personal interviews

(Richmond, 2000), individuals told the plots of several soap operas and compared and critiqued the characters and story lines. The language construction, plot events and actions of television literacy may contribute to literacy development. Issues of literacy and television need to be explored further. For example, the texts of television soap operas might be useful as adult literacy reading material.

### **3. 3.1 Use of Computers**

When asked what they wanted to be doing in the future, the respondents reported:

"To learn computers and find a job"

"To continue learning especially about computer skills -- need computer skill in this day and age"

"I feel computers are going to be everywhere"

"I plan to go into computer work"

The province of New Brunswick is much concerned that its citizens become linked to the information highway (Brennan, 1997, p. 3). To this end, it has appointed a government minister to be responsible for the Information Highway Secretariat, has mandated that all high school graduates become computer literate, and has funded the development of computer training centres at the community colleges. Computers are not available in the CASPs unless an individual community is willing to provide such resources.

When asked if they could use a computer, nearly three-quarters of the respondents reported

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that they could not. An analysis of the data on computer use are shown in Table 9 by age groups.

About half of the youngest age group reported they could use a computer; this proportion decreased markedly with increasing age. The respondents were next asked whether the computer had any effect on their learning. The results are shown by age in Table 10.

**Table 9**  
**Ability to Use Computer by Age**

Use a computer?	Under 26		26 - 35		35 - 45		46 and over		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	20	49%	17	29%	7	16%	2	7%	46	27%
No	21	51%	42	71%	38	84%	26	93%	127	73%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 18.72430 df = 3 Significant at .01 level

**Table 10**  
**Effect of Computer on Own Learning by Age**

Computer affects learning:	Under 26 years		26 - 35 years		35 - 45 years		46 and over		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	17	47%	39	72%	25	61%	13	72%	94	63%
A little	14	39%	12	22%	5	12%	2	11%	33	22%
A lot	5	14%	3	6%	11	27%	3	17%	22	15%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 17.00328 df = 6 Significant at .01 level

About 60% of both males and females reported the computer had no effect on their learning. Only within the youngest group did any significant proportion report that the computer had some effect on their learning.

These two findings are significant in light of the technological thrust behind provincial education

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policy (NB Department of Education, 1996; Downey & Landry, 1993). The community colleges in New Brunswick currently offer training for many jobs which require computer skills and the learning activities in many programs are computer-assisted. The CASP learners are seemingly out of the mainstream of education as their literacy training does not include any technological learning. At the time of writing this report, many academic upgrading programs within the community colleges, but not the CASPs, had moved to using computer-assisted instruction to replace the old paper-and-text-based learning modules.

### **3.3.2 Summary of current literacy experiences**

Current literacy experiences tend to reflect learners' awareness of when and how they use literacy in their lives. The majority reported reading at home (newspaper, novels) and at CASP (textbooks). Home literacy experiences were reported by 80% of respondents who said that they write such things as notes and journals and sign things every day. Furthermore, 70% of learners reported that they use numeracy skills at home.

Television was reported as a big part of the home literacy experiences of the respondents -- 95% reported watching television; the type of programming may or may not influence their growing literacy. The technology/information revolution is reaching these learners through television, although not through computer access.

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The home and community literacies of these learners have developed perhaps in response to the way in which they (the learners) have come to understand their place in the world. Educators and administrators need to be mindful of home and community literacies as they attempt to work with learners in the CASP partnership.

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### 3.4 Outcomes of CASP Literacy Experiences

In the last section of the survey, respondents were asked to comment on a number of possible outcomes from their experiences at CASP. Some of the questions were open-ended and the responses have been summarized in subsequent sub-sections.

#### 3.4.1 Personal outcomes

In response to the questions “How do you feel about the way you learn at CASP?”, 99% responded positively. In response to the question “Have you changed the way you feel about yourself as a learner?”: the majority (75%) of both men and women have changed their attitude, with the women being somewhat more positive.( See table 11). One respondent wrote that she felt “confident, have more time, work at own pace, feel more capable, don’t feel under stress at CASP and . . . better than high school.”

**Table 11**  
**Personal Outcomes of CASP Learning Experience by Gender**

Have you changed the way you feel about yourself as a learner	Males		Females		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	31	63%	107	86%	138	79%
No	18	37%	18	14%	36	21%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 11.11936 df = 1 Significant at .001 level

In response to the question “What are your future plans with respect to your learning?”, the majority, over 70 %, indicated they would be going on to more school or training. The next most common response (26%) was “get a job . . . find work.” Thirteen percent were uncertain and 6% reported that they now had goals for themselves where before they had none.

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**Table 12**  
**Effect of CASP Learning Experience on Family Attitudes toward Learning**

Effect on your family's attitude toward learning?	Males		Females		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Great	8	16%	41	33%	49	28%
Some	14	27%	39	31%	53	30%
Little	7	14%	14	11%	21	12%
None	22	43%	31	25%	53	30%

Chi-square Pearson Value = 8.21768 df = 3 Significant at .05 level

### 3.4.2 Family-related outcomes

Respondents were asked whether they thought their attendance at CASP had affected their family members' attitudes towards learning (Table 12). The majority of men (57%) thought there was little or no effect; the majority of women (64%) thought there was some, or a great effect on family attitudes. The female response may reflect an embeddedness in family life which is not as typical for the males in the study.

Respondents wrote in answer to the question "Please tell me how you were able to help your family with their continued learning." These answers were summarized as follows:

The respondents (21%) helped children or family members to stay in school or stated that they helped the family generally (20%). Others (14%) helped their families do homework, specifically math (11%), reading (9%) and a few (3%) helped with spelling.

Eight percent of respondents were uncertain whether they had helped other family members and 14% reported that they had not helped.

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### **3.4.3 Summary of CASP Outcomes**

The importance of the CASP experience is shown not only in the changes in the learners' attitudes but also in how literacy is handled at home. Guardians and parents report that they help their children with their spelling, reading, math and writing homework. They also help their families by telling their children about the importance of staying in or returning to school. The emphasis in these reports is on the learner helping their children with the child's school-related literacy concerns, rather than on going to the library, telling or reading stories to the children in their homes. The learners themselves were intent on personal literacy development through schooling and may have altered their own perceptions about schooling. The learners' interest in and experiences of schooling at CASP are far different than their earlier experiences, leading to outcomes that indicate CASP can be a useful model for adult learners.

A climate of learning may be developing in some of these families. It remains to be seen if these antecedent literacy experiences will inform both the family and community literacy programming and practices. Literacy planners and educators "... must learn about the literacy that occurs in homes of families from diverse cultural backgrounds and how these parents and other caregivers and children share literacy on a daily basis" (Morrow, 1995, p.73)

## **4. Discussion**

This article has reported on the survey of 175 CASP learners in 15 anglophone CASPs in New Brunswick. The survey was conducted to learn more about past and present literacy experiences of

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the respondents and about their experiences in CASP.

CASP was founded on school-based and economic definitions of literacy. The survey, however, examined other elements of literacy including those related to personal concerns, family and community elements. While the learners expressed concerns about moving upwards through the hierarchy of literacy skills as these are measured through various tests, they were also concerned about how their literacy practices are affecting other family members.

More women attend CASPs than men. The preponderance of women cannot be accounted for by reviewing statistics on educational attainment levels of adults. The explanation may have to do with the community-based, interpersonal nature of the program. The existence of other, male-dominated, literacy programs, also funded through Literacy NB, suggests that, while the system encourages low literate women to participate in general educational activities which lead to further academic upgrading and occupational training, low literate men are encouraged to participate in specific activities which lead directly to employment opportunities ( MacKeracher 1989).

Early experiences of the learners reflect literacy experiences which are strongly affected by out-of-school activities, such as hearing stories, being read to, reading comics and story books, and watching television for younger respondents. When asked to give reasons for not learning to read as children, the majority of the males named poor teaching and school failure, while the majority of the females cited their home lives. In the learner interviews, "home life" as a contributor to not reading included both abuse of the individual and the requirement that the individual take on more family - related responsibilities than most children must bear.

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A majority of the learners believed that people learn to read in elementary school; that it is very difficult to read after high school. In these responses, the learners reflect a view of the acquisition of literacy skills as being school-based with their home-based literacy experiences contributing to their literacy skills only in negative terms. Although the respondents described themselves as using literacy and numeracy skills in their daily lives.

Respondents (95%) reported watching television. This is a common social practice that needs to be included as a resource for literacy. Facilitators of literacy programs need to develop creative ways to connect literacy activities to television watching.

Current literacy activities within CASP did not include access to computer technology. The information/technology revolution and its resulting need for computer literacy has not become part of the lives of CASP learners. They are aware of this lack -- and their responses show their desire for access to and knowledge about computers. There is a need for more research on the computer/technology in adult education. Learners in adult basic education need support in acquiring technological skills and knowledge.

## **5. Findings**

### **Home and School**

Learners in the survey reported having access to reading materials at home and to being read to as children and to other home-based literacy experiences. These literacies of home, like those of Heath's (1983) Trackton and Roadville children, did not stand them in good stead when they

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reached school. The respondents reported that they had lost their ‘literacy’ at school. However they did not lose their everyday literacy ( Barton & Hamilton, 1998) — it was just not valued or recognized in the school (Heath, 1983; Taylor, Dorsey, Gaines, 1988; Wells, 1986) in the school. Learners are using literacy skills, including writing, reading and numeracy on a daily basis.

Findings indicate that literacy practices are found in the everyday lives of the CASP learners. The literacy reported by learners did not mean that they had an education. In fact many seemed bewildered about what had happened to them in school. They blamed themselves or their families of origin, or their confusing school experience. The learners at the CASP had not known the literacy practices necessary to negotiate successfully in school. Taylor and Dorsey- Gaines ( 1988) suggest that researchers look for resilience and strength in order to build new literacy understandings.

These home literacies are essential to the everyday life of the CASP learners. “To ignore these literacies makes the CASP curriculum irrelevant” (MacKeracher, 2001, personal communication). Concern over the widening gap between home and school literacies is also seen in the learners’ stated reasons for not learning in school. The majority of women cited home problems (abuse and family responsibilities) while the majority of men cited poor teaching and school failure.

Learners reported home literacy experiences such as watching television or engaging in discussion, however these tend to be viewed as social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and go unrecognized by both learners and literacy teachers as important literacy skills.

Television is recognized as a media literacy in newer literacy definitions. However, in school-based economic definition television as a source of script/text would not be acceptable. 95% of the

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learners survey watched television and could and did report discussing plot outlines, characters, conflicts and comparing story lines. One of the learners in a personal interview told me that the soap opera her mother watched was “more real to her than what we were.” This same learner could predict plot outcomes and character development with accuracy.

Many learners have a strong interest in learning computers — although most do not use them in their daily lives. This is an example of a post-literacy interest (Mace, 1992, 1994) causing some learners to need the basic upgrading in order to go on to seek further technical knowledge. The need to use technology in the late twentieth century enables rather than causes the learner to gain literacy. (Street, 1985; Freire, 1994).

Further post-literacy needs must include television and computer technology as a part of the technical and communicative knowledge sought by the learners. Almost all the learners (95%) watched television and the parents among them stated that television affects their children’s learning. Television presents an ‘everyday text’ that may not always be approved of by the dominant literacy groups (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Television brings other worlds into the family home and needs to be acknowledged as a social literacy practice in many people’s lives.

This survey reports that CASP enabled a majority of women (64%) to connect the effect of their own return to school with their family’s continued learning. Women’s post-literacy goal was to keep their children in school and to help the family generally with literacy practices.

That there are more women than men in CASP raises questions. Reasons for this are unclear especially if so few believe they can learn literacy skills after leaving high school, and when statistics

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(1991) suggest that women are more likely to have completed the grades covered by CASP. Also the CASP program is based on school economic definition of literacy rather than community and family definitions. At CASP the women are there for personal and familial reasons as seen in their survey responses.

## **6. Conclusions**

Literacy definitions must continue to be reexamined to include and expand many of the practices seen in the CASP learners. This 'new' literacy crosses the gap between the cultures of family and community. Rather than holding the family and community to some arbitrary amount of knowledge to be learned before membership in the greater society is earned. The new literacy proposes to recognize and celebrate the literacies of home.

The definition of literacy from the learners' perspective must be seen as multi-faceted. The literacies of the majority of female learners were family and community-bound; the male learners, as well as a few females, spoke of school literacy in the context of the CASP. The learners describe literacy as encompassing thinking, listening and speaking, reading and writing, and using numbers in home, community and workplace contexts, as well as in the CASP.

Most of the learners understood themselves to be literate, but their literacy skills were not always recognized in the school-bound or economic definitions of literacy. The learners were able to carry on literate discourses even though they may not have earned formal credentials. Perhaps when the learners enter CASP, the literacy that they do have is suppressed in order that they might access

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another literacy of the type needed to achieve an educational credential. If the learners want this credential, and by all accounts the CASP learners do, then they have to go through the school and government prescribed steps to literacy.

The learners did not criticize the school for not matching or reflecting their home literacies; they didn't expect this from the school. The learners may have been unaware of just how vast the gap was between family or community-bound literacies and the literacy of the dominant group and that of the schools. The literacy of the learners, evident in their thinking, acting and narratives, had not been recognized. The home maker, the woods worker, the fisher, the miner, the clerk and the factory worker of even twenty years ago did not need special qualifications. Today such individuals are prevented from obtaining work by the creation of barriers related to the acquisition of school-related credentials.

The definitions of literacy need to be redefined to include family/ community literacies and computer/ technological literacies. Literacy continues to be a socially defined construct defined in ways congruent with the expectations and attitudes of various interest groups.

The CASP learners know that literacy is a basic right, a fundamental and societal necessity – how to achieve recognition for having another task. In a cultural assimilative economic and deficit definition, literacy is seen as beginning at home and school and vital to New Brunswick's "social and economic development strategy" (Provincial Partners in Literacy, 2000, p. 5). The deficit notion comes from the view that no school can make up for a home where literacy is lacking. In a literacy definition which promotes cultural maintenance or community and social change, we can see the

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CASP as an autonomous place where “Literacy initiatives are tailored to the needs of learners and communities” (Provincial Partners in Literacy, 2000, p. 5). Both these definitions continue to drive adult education in the CASPs of New Brunswick. The research reveals that the family and community are not places to look for ‘pathologies’ but rather to seek strengths and competencies with which to build new literacy understandings.

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