

# FOCUSED ON PRACTICE



A Framework for Adult Literacy Research in Canada

Jenny Horsman & Helen Woodrow, Editors



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# PART I:

## WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

### CHAPTER 1 Introduction

by Helen Woodrow & Jenny Horsman

Literacy work is about hope, it's about what we imagine is possible for learners. When we meet a new learner at intake, hear about the challenges in their lives and see their tentativeness, we know they may not be back, but we hold hope for them and speak with them in a way that makes this hope audible. There is a cycle of burn-out that can happen in literacy work. We need to hold hope for ourselves too, for our programs, and for the literacy field as a whole. I think research can help with this. It can give practitioners the reflection time they need and deserve.

The Irish folk tale "The Children of Lir" strikes a cord with our situation. The stepmother Aoife wants rid of her four stepchildren and turns them into swans.

*"You must wait until a druid with a shaven crown comes over the seas and you hear the sound of a bell, ringing for prayers. Only then will your exile be over," she said.*  
*"Will you do nothing to lighten our sorrow?" pleaded Fionnuala. "Surely not even you are so cruel?"*  
*"You shall keep the power of speech and thought," answered the cruel queen, "and you will be able to sing more beautifully than the world has ever heard. That is all I shall give you."*  
(from Malachy Doyle and Niamh Sharkey's [Tales of Old Ireland](#))

These swans, like us, are left with the power of speech and thought. As the world continues to be ruled by people who do not seem to understand or care about the lives of the people we meet in literacy work, we keep the power of speech and thought. We don't have a lot of influence and we've already begged what we can from any friends with two cents to rub together at our fundraisers. Speech and thought are our birth-right. Speech is a major way we pass our knowledge of literacy work on to each other. In holding on to hope for learners, we hold on to their ability to build strength through speech and thought. Research has often exploited and misused people, but it has also been used as a way to look with fresh eyes at a situation and speak powerfully about what is happening. Research in practice can be a way to hold and practice hope for ourselves and our work. (Sheila Stewart, Ontario, Wild Card)

These words introduce our study about research in practice in adult literacy in Canada. It is an excerpt from a “wild card” created by Sheila Stewart, a former literacy practitioner, now coordinator of the Festival of Literacies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Wild cards were an important part of this study. Wild cards are research artefacts in a variety of forms. They are also data that can prompt and elicit further data. Some wild cards were poetry, essays, or letters. Others were multimedia installations, or were fashioned from wood, photographs and fibre.<sup>1</sup> In this study, the wild cards deepened our understanding by capturing the complex richness of the literacy field, and of research in practice (RiP).

Sheila Stewart’s words are the perfect way to begin a publication that is fundamentally about the struggle to hold onto hope that RiP might make a difference in the field of literacy, and hold onto the possibility of speaking and being heard. It also signals the hope that the thoughts and speech captured by this research might reveal the contradictory possibilities of RiP in Canada at this time.

Sheila’s extract from “Children of Lir” says nothing about whether the stepchildren were heard, or whether the perfect combination of circumstances allowed them to be returned from exile. This too echoes our questions:

- Will literacy practitioners be heard?
- Will conditions shift so that we can be freed from the situations that limit and diminish literacy work and literacy learners?

### **Exploring the possibilities**

In 2005, a national steering committee consisting of a small group of people from the adult literacy field, including pioneers in the research in practice movement, applied for funding from the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) to conduct a national research project. Sandy Middleton from Literacy BC (LitBC) initially asked Diana Kaan, senior research officer at NLS, about funding a research in practice meeting similar to the ones that had been held earlier in Edmonton and Newfoundland. However, NLS first wanted to find out more about RiP and the best way to fund it. Diana suggested Sandy bring together a group of people to propose how to find out what was happening in RiP across the country and what supports it needed. An ad hoc committee was formed<sup>2</sup> and three people wrote the proposal: Sandy, Tannis Atkinson, editor of *Literacies*, and Marina Niks, research friend and one of the founders of RiPAL-BC. The proposal was for a project to learn about what was happening across the country and to develop a framework that would support research in practice efforts. Given their interest in RiP and their organizational capacity, LitBC was named as the administrative agency for the project. The objectives were to

- conduct an inventory of research in practice by collecting data at four levels: national, provincial/territorial, community and individual
- produce comprehensive recommendations, based on the data
- create opportunities for practitioners across the country to participate in the development of the framework.

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<sup>1</sup> The full collection of wild cards will be available at: [www.literacy.bc.ca](http://www.literacy.bc.ca). Extracts can be found throughout this book.

<sup>2</sup> Members of this informal committee were: Tannis Atkinson, Evelyn Battell, Helen Balanoff, Nancy Jackson, Sandy Middleton, Marina Niks, Mary Norton, Cate Sills

After the project was approved, a formal steering committee was formed which drew representatives from many parts of the country and from various sectors.<sup>3</sup> In July, 2005 the steering committee hired two coordinating researchers: Helen Woodrow from Newfoundland and Jenny Horsman from Ontario. Both have several decades' experience in the adult literacy field and as researchers, and extensive involvement in the practitioner research and RiP movements in their regions. To carry out the local research, the coordinators and committee decided to look for practitioner-researchers in each province and territory. In August the coordinators sent out a call to the adult literacy field, inviting practitioners and groups, whether or not they had research experience, to apply to participate in this study. By October the national team had been created. It included some teams from within provincial and territorial coalitions, and some individuals. Each individual or team conducted the research in their jurisdiction over six months. A national Aboriginal focus was also created, bringing the number of teams to 14. Teams worked within budgets which varied depending on population and geography. The maximum budget was \$10,000. To free up some money for the Aboriginal focus, teams in every jurisdiction except Ontario and British Columbia, which have the largest populations, worked for a little less.



The National Research Team and some members of the Project Steering Committee

## Our process

By November a dedicated computer conference for the project was up and running on the Hub, the electronic conferencing system used at LitBC. The teams and coordinators shared information online, only meeting face-to-face after the data collection and initial analysis had been completed. On the electronic conference they shared their research hopes and concerns, and discussed the project goals and timelines. Each team selected a combination of interviews, focus groups and surveys to collect data, depending on what seemed most viable in their region. On the Hub all researchers were able to suggest changes to a tentative set of questions and to ask for input on their plans. They used the conference to ask questions, discuss struggles and difficulties, and share insights and data. But reading, writing and engaging in discussion online also added an unforeseen layer of extra work.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 5 for Steering Committee members.

Most of the chapters in this book were written by Helen and Jenny, the coordinating researchers, drawing from a wide range of data and analysis. The whole study draws from the data collected by the provincial, territorial and Aboriginal teams through surveys, focus groups and interviews with selected practitioners, literacy researchers, policy-makers and funders. We, the coordinators, also gathered data from secondary sources and interviews.

Throughout the study, as the enormity of the project became evident, both the research coordinators and the provincial and territorial teams had to make strategic choices about what to include in the research. The time and funds for the study structured what could be accomplished and shaped the different choices each team made. All of us found the online communication took more time than we had expected, and yet it was the primary way for us to connect and support the research. Part way through the study, with the help of the steering committee we, the coordinators, realized that all of our experiences during the research process were also data for the study. To include this data, we decided we had to limit how many other sources of data we collected. This made it possible for us to focus on supporting all members of the team carrying out the challenging research study in their own province or territory.

Over 500 people across the country participated in the research. Table 1 summarizes how many people were involved. Their participation ranged from filling in a survey, to providing a lengthy interview or engaging in an in-depth focus group. A complete list of participants is included in Appendix 3. Some people participated in more than one form of data collection. Although there is no comprehensive data on sites for literacy practice across the country, or the number of practitioners engaged in the work, we estimate this research represents approximately 10% of Canadian practitioners.

Each team carried out a preliminary analysis of the research themes in their data and brought these to a meeting of all the teams in May of 2006. The meeting also included many members of the steering committee and the two national research coordinators. Together we discussed and mapped out the themes, exploring them in greater depth. Teams returned home to tease them out further and to write about the picture in their home region. We, as the research coordinators, drew a national picture from their material, adding our analysis of the data we had collected from interviews and secondary research. The teams and advisory committee members then read a draft and gave feedback on how well the manuscript represented their data and analysis.

We tried to include data and quotes from each region in this report, hoping to capture regional nuances. However, this was not always possible because of the variances in the data collected. In several jurisdictions, researchers had to spend a lot of time seeking to reach and engage practitioners who were either too overworked or too new to RiP to be able to respond. There are few quotes and sparse details from these regions. In addition, researchers came to this project with uneven levels of research experience and participated with different team sizes. These differences may have also influenced the evenness of regional details.

In many ways the results of this study surprised us. In particular, regional researchers found it harder than expected to find practitioners with time and energy for focus groups and interviews.

Table 1: Data collected for project, “Developing a Framework for Research in Practice in Adult Literacy in Canada”

	Focus Groups		Interviews	Surveys	Online Groups	All respondents	Wild Cards
	# of Groups	# of People	Completed	Responses	Participants		
AB	4	21	6			27	1
BC	5	26	2	20		48	3
MB	2	6	7	10		23	1
NB	1	11	1	20		32	2
NL	3	12	3	13	4	32	2
NS	4	29	8	20		57	1
NU	3	13	5			18	2
NWT	1	15	2			17	
ON	4	37	8		26	71	1
ON Aboriginal					14	14	
PEI	3	17	6			23	1
PQ	1	8	10			18	1
SK	4	21	9			30	3
YK	3	11		18		29	1
Aboriginal			9			9	
<b>Subtotals</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>19</b>
National Team			18		14	32	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>29</b>

Those practitioners who did participate were enthusiastic about the possibilities for RiP—if only the state of the field were stronger. It was also surprising that across much of the country, RiP was too new a concept for us to learn nuanced detail about the value of one form of support over another. Essentially, practitioners maintained that any and all support would help them to move forward. We were surprised by how the fragile state of the field coloured the study. We had expected to be examining RiP and comparing different forms of support to assess what might be most useful in particular circumstances. Instead, we found ourselves studying the challenges in the literacy field in detail as those realities impinged on the possibilities for RiP. In some regions people only saw the impossibility of RiP, unless major changes occur.

Sadly, during the closing stages of this project the change that has occurred is for the worse. As the National Literacy Secretariat has been remodelled and it appears regional funding has been discontinued, most provincial and territorial coalitions are struggling to survive. If funding cuts are not reversed, this will leave the literacy field without resources—not even the modest communication, networking and professional development opportunities of the past. This will

make it impossible, or at best unlikely, that practitioners in most of the country will be able to undertake RiP. As members of the provincial, territorial and Aboriginal teams read first drafts of this report, many were struck by the bleak view of the state of the literacy field that emerged. They worried that this bleakness might bury the enthusiasm for RiP that also emerged in the study.

The challenge for all readers is to recognize the bleakness of the state of the literacy field without losing sight of the expressed value and respect for RiP. In this study, RiP emerged as a centrepiece of both great hope as well as intense frustration. In a policy climate which places greater and greater value on applied research, RiP offers great potential. Unlike other research processes RiP captures, from practitioner experience and knowledge, detailed evidence about what works and what does not in ways that can most effectively improve literacy practice.

*... RiP is an extremely important part of adult literacy. In fact I think it's the only way to move forward in a way that's constructive and positive for the learners involved.... The only way you get the information you really need to improve programming is through the people who are actually practicing in the field. I feel very strongly about that.... I think that RiP is an incredibly hopeful thing to be happening in the field of literacy. (Janet Shively, Nova Scotia, Interview)*

### **What is research in practice (RiP)?**

At the start of the study researchers struggled to understand what RiP meant so that they would be able to explain it to practitioners. For many this was a frustrating process. In some regions, RiP is an evolving term with little meaning. The original proposal spoke of RiP and its value in this way:

Encouraging practitioners to conduct research is a means for also articulating, developing, and circulating knowledge from other “places” in the field. In this way, research in practice enriches our collective understanding about how to promote people’s abilities to read and write and to enhance their opportunities and resources for reading and writing.

Research in practice, however, is about more than *doing* research. Research in practice gives practitioners other ways to engage with research: learning about and from research by reading and responding to it; reflecting on research and its implications for practice; and applying research findings to practice (Horsman and Norton, 1999). It opens up opportunities for practitioners to critically reflect on existing knowledge and to apply findings to their practice. The literacy field is also strengthened when practitioners have access to documented research, occasions to think about and to discuss its connections to practice, and opportunities to make changes and improve their practice as a consequence (Horsman and Norton, 1999).

At the national meeting in May of 2006 a small group fleshed out their understanding of the meaning of RiP. They suggested that RiP:

- is personal and self directed but possibly collaborative
- comes from an interest or a need seen on the ground and so is relevant
- implies or involves some action because the question is owned by practitioners
- is shared, not just over coffee or in a workshop
- challenges the researcher to personal change through its process

- is a chance to step back and look in a systematic, reflective, critical way
- is based on the methods drawn from “regular” research
- is an opportunity to engage with your own practice (perhaps in the light of research)
- could become a way to accredit instructors (or recognize their learning).  
(Small Group, National Meeting)

Throughout this study we spoke about RiP as including not only practitioners carrying out research but also reading research, reflecting on practice in the light of research, and changing their practice as a result of research and reflection. Mary Norton, an Alberta-based researcher and practitioner, initiator of RiP, and member of the project steering committee, added to our understanding of RiP as something that is not static:

*I like to talk about a research in practice stance—it’s about an approach. I was thinking about it as an inquiry kind of approach, but as we talk about it I see it as the engagement with the topic, with other people, with literature, and that sort of back and forth. (Interview)*

Perhaps most importantly RiP is “*an opportunity to see things in a different way,*” as Lisa Erickson, from Saskatchewan, illustrated with her wild card fabric creation (see cover and page 10).

### **What follows**

We begin this book with a summary chapter which outlines the elements needed in a framework to support research in practice in Canada. The chapter concludes with recommendations drawn from highlights of the findings of this pan-Canadian study.

We follow with our findings in full. Three key themes were revealed when we did the initial data analysis at our national meeting: the state of the literacy field, conceptions and responses to research broadly, and research in practice itself. This book begins with the most crucial backdrop to any discussion of RiP: the state of the field. Snapshots written by each provincial and territorial researcher give us a window into each region, including a view of the literacy field, and research in practice. We continue with our second theme, a focus on research. Both the state of the literacy field and approaches to research and what counts as knowledge provide a backdrop and a context for the discussion of RiP which follows, where the contradictions of RiP are sharply revealed. We continue with two chapters which tell you about research in practice revealed through our own participation in RiP during this study. Finally we end with a look at the RiP literature in Canada.

## Puzzling over RiP by Ian Carr, PEI



I have an extensive background in industrial and fine arts, and in my current work teach adult learners in workplace settings. I wanted to produce a wild card that would be visual, thought-provoking, and highly usable. I first discussed RiP with my colleagues in Workplace Education Prince Edward Island (PEI) and reviewed some of the current literature. As I read, I became aware that I was trying to piece together my understanding of the field. This idea of “pieces” translated into a concept that seemed to fit together within the overall scheme of RiP. The idea of the jigsaw puzzle was born.



The puzzle distilled some of my thinking about the field. I had identified 16 topics from my research and translated them into images. These appear as bas-relief shapes on the surface of each of the puzzle pieces. A short one-line text interpretation of each of the images are part of my wild card.



Working with the traditional jigsaw shape proved to be a problem as the interlocking jigsaw bumps and holes were taking up too much space on the design. It also meant that the puzzle pieces were only capable of fitting together in one particular pattern. The final shape was adopted from the size and shape of a standard sheet of paper. I used wood as the base and modeling/carving material, to help ensure some longevity.



The concept of longevity led to discussions on greater adaptability, which resulted in four blank puzzle pieces. Blank tiles allow us to imagine other possibilities and extend the way in which the tool could be used. Using art materials, practitioners could create a temporary image to lie on the surface of a blank piece. Further interpretations of the most “puzzling” aspects of research in practice might be revealed in the pieces people select to use or create, and how they choose to align them (for example, hierarchical or linear).



The wooden puzzle was conceived to promote discussion, and was created for a long and productive life. In workshop settings, practitioners could develop and create their own temporary puzzles with standard or custom size papers in a variety of colours. They could use pastels, paints, markers, colored pencils, a modeling compound such as play dough or other art supplies to create their images. Perhaps digital photographs could be taken of all the research in practice puzzles.





Janet Onalik reveals the view of data analysis portrayed in Lisa Erickson's wild card

## CHAPTER 2 A Framework for Research in Practice<sup>4</sup>

by Jenny Horsman & Helen Woodrow

### What is the context for RiP?

*...where literacy work itself is tentative and unsecured, it is almost impossible to think about research in practice.* (Linda Shohet, Quebec Researcher, Recommendations)

Across the country, practitioners overwhelmingly talked about the disturbing state of the literacy field in their region. In Quebec they thought, “RiP could only develop when the working conditions of adult literacy providers have become ‘normalized.’” The data from most of the provinces and territories seems to echo Linda Shohet’s conclusion that RiP is “almost impossible.” Pamela Bennett, Newfoundland researcher, concluded:

*A necessary component for developing a framework to support research in practice in Newfoundland and Labrador would be to have vibrant, supported literacy practices throughout the province.* (Snapshot)

This research study made it clear that the most fundamental support for RiP across the country would be a valued and well-resourced field—one where literacy workers have space for reflection, time to gather with colleagues to share and discuss their work critically, a range of possibilities to enrich their practice through professional development, a chance to influence curriculum and program structures, and the possibility of moving out of reactive crisis mode into a place of creative program development. In sum, a fertile environment for RiP is a literacy field that values the insider knowledge practitioners develop from their experience responding to learners’ lives and needs. It is an environment where the things literacy workers know about literacy learning and teaching are respected and that knowing is challenged, further developed, and nurtured through a broad range of supports.

Unfortunately these working conditions have never been “normal” in adult literacy. Nor have respect for the demanding work and for practitioner knowledge been “normal.” Instead of moving towards such conditions, in most jurisdictions the work has intensified and the isolation sharpened. There is an increased sense that programming is shaped by decisions which ignore the realities of learners’ lives. Demands for programs to collect data to justify program existence have multiplied. Both these factors have created a field that is largely demoralised and disheartened.

Yet it is exactly in the midst of this bleak picture, or even because of it, that many practitioners engaged in this research said they were interested in RiP. Many more said they might be interested if conditions made it possible. In some provinces practitioners were so taken up with their concern about the state of the field they could spare little energy to talk about RiP. What surfaced in many areas was the frustration that funding might be available for research while still unavailable for the

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this study we spoke about RiP as including practitioners not only carrying out research but also reading research, reflecting on practice in the light of research, and changing their practice as a result of research and reflection.

basic necessities of literacy work<sup>5</sup>. Yet many practitioners still dream that RiP might have the power to lead to these much-needed improvements in the field as a whole.

## What issues hinder RiP?

### Recognition

Practitioners are clear that to build a foundation for RiP, government, funders, and institutional providers must be convinced of the value of the knowledge held within the literacy field itself, and how this knowledge is central to the complex work of “literacy,” with its differing cultural and regional realities. Furthermore, if RiP is to flourish, there needs to be recognition, within the actual work day, of all the elements that make up effective RiP, such as reading, reflection, carrying out research and applying the knowledge gained to change programming. As two British Columbia practitioners stated:

*[We need] some recognition on the part of the institution that this [RiP] is valuable enough to support in some sort of substantial way, which really translates into time.*  
(Carol Abernathy, Interview)

*You do the research in your classroom, but the hard stuff—analysis and writing—needs to be acknowledged as work.* (Paula Davies, Interview)

The stages of research that take intensive and concerted effort must be recognized as part of literacy work and there needs to be enough time allocated so that practitioners can undertake meaningful projects. This might include various forms of sabbatical structures to allow for time away from the day-to-day literacy work or it might be a financial incentive for the work of taking part in RiP. If RiP is understood as something which strengthens literacy practice, then practitioners who take on RiP need to be recognized.

### Awareness

*If we're going to build something from nothing, people have to become aware that it's a good idea, it works, it's worth putting energy and support into, and it's worked elsewhere—and we should get on board. Frankly, people just don't know. ...Awareness is everything at this stage.* (Allan Quigley, Nova Scotia, Interview)

During the study many researchers heard from practitioners who were suspicious of research and had a sense of being “researched to death.” They heard extensively about the frustration practitioners felt when researchers took information from them but returned nothing. They also heard about government fads that shaped literacy programming while deep knowledge, developed through diligent, long-term observation in practice, was discounted.

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5 The funding divide in adult literacy has led to this situation. Provincial and territorial governments fund direct service (although that funding is often extremely limited and tightly tied to contact hours or outcomes) and the federal government provides the bulk of project funding. Although provincial and territorial governments also often provide small amounts of money for projects, often these too are tightly tied to current government priorities. Project funding for reflection and research has been much augmented in the past by National Literacy Secretariat funding which was more open to innovative ideas from the field.

In many provinces and territories practitioners were unfamiliar with RiP and unclear what it might be or might mean. As the NWT researchers explained: “*People did not understand how RiP differed from other research activities like academic research, strategic planning, evaluation and needs assessment.*” (Snapshot) The Quebec team stated:

*The concept [of RiP] has to be demystified. Most practitioners see researchers as ‘other’ and identify research from the standpoint of subjects. The idea of a practitioner being a researcher is still not widely shared. Many are suspicious or wary of ‘research’ as irrelevant.* (Linda Shohet, Recommendations)

Many practitioners, once prompted to reflect, recognized that much of their regular work incorporates elements of research. Some suggested that drawing out this wisdom might lead to more understanding of RiP. Practitioners, administrators, and funders need opportunities to increase their awareness of RiP and its value. The chance to connect with experienced RiP practitioners and to learn from provinces and territories where RiP is beginning to take off will be important for awareness-raising.

## Infrastructure

If RiP is to flourish in Canada, it needs an infrastructure in each province and territory. This structure needs to fully support RiP and create viable conditions for RiP to take place and for the learning resulting from RiP to lead to program change. Many practitioners feared that RiP might be only a temporary fad. They questioned whether they should put time and energy into learning how to do it unless it was going to be an ongoing possibility. As Janet Shively, the Nova Scotian researcher, recommended:

*Administrative commitment and support is needed at all stages of the process—professional development, proposal writing, research, and implementation of findings into service delivery to support an actual (rather than theoretical) link between research and practice.* (Recommendations)

Doris Gillis of Nova Scotia said:

*Where do you need the commitment? It’s not just through the practitioners. You need it throughout the system that supports the practitioners. Research is a systematic process of gathering data and trying to address a question, and it requires support to carry through on that—particularly once you have those findings—to do something with it.* (Doris Gillis, Nova Scotia, Interview)

The national research revealed that consistency and thoroughness were important. It is wasteful when essential stages in the RiP process are neglected so that practitioners are inadequately prepared at the beginning, or unable to access, read, or reflect on the completed research. It is also wasteful if the field does not have the flexibility to change, to make improvements as a result of research findings.

Resources are needed to make connections across the country, to support provinces and territories where RiP has not yet taken off, to learn from those where it has, to build capacity and expertise, and to develop culturally appropriate approaches in each province and territory. In regions where RiP is new, infrastructure is needed to support practitioners to reflect within programs and in local

networks, to read about research, and to hear from the practitioner-researchers and mentors who have been active in other regions. Although individual project-by-project supports have been available in some regions, practitioners were often not aware of this. An overarching infrastructure is vital.

## Money

*[The] reoccurring theme is time and money—it's not lack of interest.* (Lorene Anderson, Alberta Focus Group)

Funds are needed for all stages of the research process and for a variety of types of research and ways to engage with research. Short and longer-term studies need to be supported. This study identified problems with one year projects: they include little leeway for the unexpected. In British Columbia the problem has been finding alternative sources of funds and where to go for matching funds, whereas in most other provinces and territories the problem is finding any sources for funding. In Ontario some funding has been available to support RiP projects but many programs, particularly small ones, still struggle to find funds for RiP. Application processes need to be straightforward and those not familiar with writing proposals need supports. If practitioners are to engage with research they need paid time and resources to carry out each stage of RiP, from appropriate training, mentorship, and collaboration with other practitioners, to disseminating and actively engaging with the findings. Members of advisory committees, support groups, and research participants need to be compensated for their time and travel costs. Funding is also needed to allow practitioners a range of opportunities to meet together, to read, reflect, network and share research findings and implications.

In most provinces practitioners were clear that money was also needed for programming and that it would not help programs if money was available for research but not for the basics of program delivery.

*Well of course the whole funding issue is a critical one in Nova Scotia. Basically everybody said [about RiP]: 'Yes, in another world - but we don't have enough money to keep our doors open let alone do a research project.' In an ideal world where there was actually money for RiP, you would then need professional development before practitioners could apply it in the field. ... What I heard over and over again was, 'Don't just have this be another way of getting funding for something that has nothing to do with actual programming, because what we need is money for programming. So if it's not going to help our program, then we're not interested' ...So those are the issues here.* (Janet Shively, Nova Scotia Researcher, Interview)

*And when we boil everything down... we need a significant influx of real dollars. We need funding for staff training and development. We need money for learner facilitation. We need money for resources. We need money to provide time to learn, examine and reflect. And we need it without it being tied to contact hours or quantity of students.* (Tim Nicholls Harrison, Ontario, Online Discussion)

## Time

*To have the time to reflect, to read, to write as we're educating would be wonderful.* (Loretta Paoli, Regina Focus Group, Saskatchewan)

Practitioners in every province and territory were in agreement with this Regina-based practitioner. They said lack of time is the biggest barrier to taking part in RiP. As Rebecca Still, the lead researcher in Alberta stated:

*One challenge that will be difficult to overcome is the time constraints on individuals. They only have so much time in a day and need to prioritize their work. This means that although they would like to be involved there are other pressures on their time creating a barrier. (Recommendations)*

A New Brunswick practitioner suggested that one way to boost research in practice by freeing up time is to “provide more simplified paper tracking systems” (Joan Perry, NB Survey Report). Aboriginal practitioners were clear that time needs to be blocked in the weekly schedule “that is recognized by the host organizations and the funders” (Ningwakwe/Priscilla George, Themes). Even if project funds are available for research, these do not take account of all the work that is needed to prepare to do research, or how impossible these tasks will be for programs struggling to keep the doors open. For example, staff members must have time to read research, to talk with their colleagues, to reflect, to envisage research projects, to write proposals, to imagine how to free up staff time to take on research, to train new staff to fill in, and to integrate learning from research into the program.

One BC practitioner asked: “If I were to take something on, how would I juggle that with the work I do on a daily basis?” (Marji Aiken) In spite of the differences between community-based programs and community colleges, practitioners in both settings spoke of how impossible it was to find time for reflection and research. In some provinces such as PEI, college instructors said they might carry out research after the term was completed, if grants were available.

Many creative and flexible options of seed money and sabbaticals are needed to allow people to do research while working full-time. These need to be easily available, with straight forward application processes that are mindful of constraints in the field. New researchers will need support to complete proposals. Along with these opportunities, the conditions in the field need to shift so that there are sufficient staff hours for practitioners to add reading, reflection, and writing as regular activities in their work day.

### **Professional development and mentors**

*...it's a mistake to think that it [RiP] can thrive without people support. When you see the places where they've had mentors or people who can really help people through that whole process and be there, not just be totally an online resource but that can actually be there in person...that is where RiP has thrived. That is so central. In-person support or mentorship is absolutely vital. RiP can't really happen without that—it's just going to continue to be piecemeal. (Tannis Atkinson, Interview)*

Practitioners in each province and territory agreed that professional development and ongoing mentoring are essential. This national study itself also revealed the inadequacy of attempting to support researchers, especially newcomers to research, entirely online. Taking on research and the researcher role are intimidating. One has to develop trust and build in extensive training and support. In provinces that are new to RiP, researchers were clear that they needed to bring

in experienced practitioner-researchers and research mentors from other provinces to teach practitioners how to take on RiP:

*I think primarily what needs to happen is that there has to be a lot of professional development. But it has to be PD from people who have been doing RiP projects—like bring in a team who has been working on a RiP project somewhere else in Canada. When I was doing the interviews, people wanted specifics. Practitioners were saying, ‘This sounds like a wonderful idea, but I haven’t a clue how to go about it—the term research is scaring me. When you talk about it, it sounds really important—but I don’t know how to even start.’ So I think they need to hear from other practitioners exactly how they identified issues, how they went about getting funding or setting up the project—the whole process they went through. I think people need to hear that first. (Janet Shively, Nova Scotia Researcher, Interview)*

In some provinces people also suggested that virtual mentoring might be helpful, but our experience with this project was that virtual support is only really effective alongside an initial face-to-face meeting.

### **Networks and gatherings**

*[We need] ...diverse ways to share and learn; something face-to-face, rather than reading a document. (Julia, British Columbia, Focus Group)*

In all provinces and territories, the isolation of practitioners was revealed. Many talked about how important it was to get together with other practitioners locally, regionally and nationally. Even in provinces where there has been some support for RiP, such as in Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia, many practitioners knew little about RiP activities and were eager to learn more.

In most provinces and territories practitioners spoke of learning about literacy work from their peers and from students. Few said that reading research reports was an effective way to learn; many more spoke of the value of meeting face-to-face. Particularly in provinces and territories where RiP is just beginning, researchers were clear that RiP needed to begin first as opportunities to reflect on practice with other practitioners and that such opportunities needed to be integrated into meetings, conferences and networks. The Nunavut research team wrote:

*Opportunities to share and reflect on practice, more institutional support, and more information about RiP may gradually and naturally lead to a desire and ability on the part of practitioners to become more involved in RiP projects. (Recommendations)*

### **Dissemination and resources**

Several researchers spoke about the challenge of thinking about how best to disseminate research findings when conditions of literacy work across the country make it so difficult for practitioners to access and read reports. Some spoke about the importance of national and provincial websites to make it easier to locate this information. A practitioner in Manitoba, for example, suggested “a centralized location for research” while others were clear that existing websites were hard to understand and seemed to speak only to insiders. People also suggested that the field should be more creative about the ways we disseminate information coming out of projects, including

workshops, videos, and other media. Clearly there is a need for a resource base that is easily accessible to those who are new to RiP and in the process of figuring out how to make RiP relevant and doable in their own context.

Those who want to learn more about RiP need access to ongoing information about current RiP projects, publications and conferences. They need to be exposed to both the process and content of research so that practitioners can:

*Continue to develop our understanding about literacy practices and ... continue to develop our understanding about research practices, and continue to stretch both, and share that.* (Mary Norton, Researcher/Practitioner, Interview)

Wherever practitioners knew of the journal *Literacies* they spoke of its value and effectiveness at disseminating research findings and increasing awareness. Rebecca Still, the lead researcher in Alberta, stressed the need for continued funding for *Literacies*. Supports—such as time, travel dollars, and local mentors—are needed to provide access to national and regional resources. Several researchers suggested that provincial and territorial exchanges were also essential—both face-to-face and virtual—to build from the current situation and create an environment of “reflective-practice,” before attempting to initiate a full range of activities where RiP is a new concept.

## Next steps

Throughout the field people recommended a balance between local initiatives, appropriate to the local context, and national initiatives, which reduce isolation. Practitioners in every province and territory were interested in RiP. When we interviewed provincial and territorial researchers, each was clear about appropriate next steps for their region. Researchers valued participating in a national project as a way to reduce the isolation which is too often experienced in literacy. Several wanted to collectively generate a national project from the start and flesh out the details in an initial meeting. A small group of the researchers suggested that a national group that “*promotes/advocates/coordinates/provides support to local groups, programs and people to engage in RiP*” would make it possible for practitioners to move from “reflective-practice” to RiP.

Data from across the country clearly revealed that the most important next step is for this study to be used as a building block. It is crucial that this latest RiP study not fail to deliver on its promises, reinforcing the widely-held belief that all research takes ideas and insights away from practitioners and does not give anything back in return. As Sandra from New Brunswick stated in a survey: “*teachers are accustomed to hearing a study has been conducted and that nothing was ever done about it.*” (NB Survey Report). One Nunavut educator reacted to the concept of research by saying:

*Oh no! I wonder if this will be put in drawers and not looked at again? Is anything coming out of the research?—is the first thing that comes to mind.* (Interview)

**These words underscore how important it is that this study leads to action, contributes to changes in literacy practice, and creates a wide-reaching framework that will support RiP across Canada.**

## Summary of recommendations to support RiP

The following recommendations are directed to all levels of government, policy-makers, other funders, literacy network staff and program administrators. They summarize the points made in this chapter.

Research in practice will thrive within an infrastructure that strengthens both the literacy field and RiP itself. It will flourish if governments, funders, administrators and institutional providers recognize the realities of literacy work and value and support practitioner knowledge and methods of strengthening and developing that knowledge. Here is what this means:

### 1. Infrastructure that strengthens the literacy field

- a. Stable long-term funding (to reduce staff turnover, build staff morale and commitment, increase efficiency)
- b. Adequate staffing (to create time within the work day for reflection and research)
- c. Flexible program structures (to enable program change)
- d. Varied opportunities for practitioners to communicate and share knowledge
- e. Adult literacy policy that is responsive to practitioner knowledge
- f. Accountability that values qualitative as well as quantitative data

### 2. Infrastructure that strengthens RiP

- a. Awareness raising
- b. Funding for all aspects of RiP (locally and nationally, including various ways to engage with research, for short and longer-term studies)
- c. Support for reflective practice as a precursor to RiP
- d. Readily available and flexible seed money, sabbaticals and other structures that would free up time to plan and carry out RiP
- e. Training (both face-to-face and face-to-face combined with online formats; topics including introduction to reflective-practice, recognizing the role of research in everyday practice, and all aspects of RiP)
- f. Mentors (face-to-face and online, both local and from other regions)
- g. Flexible ways for provinces and territories that are new to RiP to learn from other regions and to develop locally appropriate models
- h. Support for dissemination in varied formats (including *Literacies* and other print vehicles, online sites, and face-to-face methods)
- i. Networks (local, regional and national)
- j. Gatherings (local, regional and national)
- k. Resources (easily accessible for both newcomers to the field and experienced RiP practitioners)

### 3. Governments, funders, administrators and institutional providers need to recognize

- a. the complexity of literacy work
- b. the knowledge literacy workers hold
- c. the value of reflective practice
- d. the value of RiP and the amount of time required to carry it out
- e. the supports needed to develop better recognition of the complexity of literacy work, the knowledge workers hold, and the value of reflective practice and other types of RiP
- f. the need for cross-sector collaboration

## Staying Connected by Sheryl Harrow, SK

I adore knitting; my life feels like it has always been filled with wool, needles and patterns. Knitting is what relaxes me, takes me away from my job's stresses and reminds me of my grandmother and mother. It is my family's history.



I carefully contemplated how to describe my artefact. Talking in metaphors seemed to weave its way into everything I tried to say:

- Experienced knitters aren't afraid to unpick a project. But they will always stay true to their original vision.
- Perfection is strived for, but rarely achieved. We learn to live with imperfection, always focusing on what we have become skilled at.
- Knitting is about the process, not the final project. What did you learn as you knit? What new stitches did you discover? What would you do again? What wouldn't you do?
- Experienced knitters are considering each part of the project as they knit. Is this the right wool? What about the colour? Will it fit Olivia? Alice? Should I add some more cables? Should I change the neck from a crew to a turtleneck?
- The most rewarding knitting projects are those that have the most personal investment. There is nothing more rewarding than giving a hand-knitted gift to someone who understands the work.
- You must always respect the wool. You are molding something that is already a natural fiber.
- The more experienced a knitter the better the garment. Experienced knitters can work without a pattern; they intrinsically know what to do.
- Everyone starts with two sticks and wool.
- We need our mothers or grandmothers to guide us. Without guidance we get frustrated and the project gets put in the back closet.
- A knitting project is about "finishing". The world's best knitter may not make the best garments. You have to be able sew, wash and shape it. It is the final touches that take it from a craft to a piece of art.
- Knitting is more fun when shared with people who understand the passion.
- A project is never truly finished. The great thing about knitting is that even years later, as fashion changes, the wool can be unpicked and reused in another project.
- Knitting has always been around and it will always be around. Just because you have just discovered it, doesn't mean that it wasn't happening.
- Knitting is about the application of what you learned. What will you share? Who will you guide?

*"Knitting is a process craft...it is like [research in practice]. We have to enjoy the journey if we expect the destination to mean much."* From B. Murphy, [Zen and the Art of Knitting: Exploring the Links between Knitting, Spirituality and Creativity](#) (2002).



# **PART II:**

## **FINDINGS**

### **CHAPTER 3 The State of the Field** by Helen Woodrow

#### **Magnificence in the midst of crisis**

This national study was designed to learn about people's experiences of and interest in research in practice (RiP) in adult literacy so that a framework to support practitioner research efforts could be created. A primary goal was to document what was happening in each province and territory. In each corner of the country there was hope and guarded enthusiasm about the opportunities research in practice provided to make a difference in the lives of learners, practitioners and programs. RiP was particularly valued by those who had some experience conducting research. But with limited resources, many practitioners asked: how can the field carry one more burden? The magnificence of RiP, its power to improve the work of teachers, programs and learners, cannot be fully realized until the mess and havoc in the adult literacy provision system have been addressed.

Field researchers for the project discovered that the difficulties of doing research in practice are symptomatic of the realities of the field. Adult literacy and basic upgrading suffers from a lack of recognition, minimal professional development opportunities, and insufficient funding supports. The havoc can be traced to a set of dominant attitudes about second-chance learning. Economists view state investments in adults who come back to learn in upgrading programs as "inefficient" (LeFebvre & Merrigan 2003; Heckman, Lalonde & Smith 1999). When undereducated adults aren't seen as a "good investment," the possibilities for education to bring enhanced economic returns to individuals, and the overall economy, are limited.

The perception that funding for adult literacy is not worthwhile is challenged by a lifelong learning policy which purports to serve all citizens, not just the well-educated, and by reports from international literacy surveys. Recent research has determined how many Canadians age 16 to 65 years have literacy skills below the level considered necessary to live and work in contemporary society (IALSS 2003). In Canada, there has been no marked difference in these rates over the past 10 years. Such rates reflect a gross, quantitative measure and do not illuminate the qualitative changes best captured through RiP. Evidence now suggests that increasing the skills of the least educated is an important route to increased productivity (Zhang & Palameta 2006; Coulombe & Tremblay 2005; Myers & Myles 2005).

In 2002, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommended that more attention be paid to the overall funding for Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Canada (p. 49). In a time with high expectations of accountability for public services, little is known about the state

of ABE provision—either system inputs or outputs. There has traditionally been limited comparable data on the number of practitioners, registrations, programs, or available funding by program across Canada (Hoddinott 1998). Though extensive investments have been made in quantitative research and much knowledge has been generated, basic information is missing. There are numbers that we still do not know. Tannis Atkinson, the editor of *Literacies*, a Canadian journal on literacy research, discovered in 2002 how these information gaps impacted on a business plan for the publication.

*I couldn't get a fixed number from anybody about the number of programs and practitioners within their province and territory... Governments didn't seem to know and coalitions didn't know. I found that quite startling...No one knows who they are or where they are. That was a pretty big hurdle.*

In *Too Many Left Behind* (2006), a study of Canada's adult education and training system, Myers and de Broucker found that few provinces were able to report accurate participation counts by type of upgrading program. They published rough estimates of participation in a variety of formal upgrading programs for adults in five provinces — BC, NS, ON, PQ and AB. These figures are reproduced in Table 2. Each province and territory has its own adult education system. The study authors describe these systems as “complex, fragmented and incomplete.” However, they found one unchanging variable across all systems: people without secondary leaving certificates receive the least educational services. Very few supports exist for full-time attendance in adult upgrading programs, and in most cases, “returning to school requires great sacrifice and a profound leap of faith” (Myers and de Broucker 2006, vi). According to the latest IALSS study, nine million Canadians aged 16 to 65 years have skills below the level considered necessary to live and work in Canadian society. A recent study comparing adult literacy in Canada and Sweden explored how the approach adopted in this country has failed to support learning opportunities for these adults (Veeman et al, 2006). It is time to build a basic infrastructure and provide stable program funding for the field so that more Canadians can contribute to the social and economic well being of their families, communities and nation.

### **We have to make the system work**

At present, all too little is done. The teaching of basic skills to adults is often marginalised, remaining something of a Cinderella service. In this report, we propose a wide-ranging strategy... (Moser 1999, 8)

Sir Claus Moser was writing about the state of program provision for adults in the United Kingdom but he might have been describing our situation. In Canada, the adult literacy and basic education system is characterized by the low status of programs, the push for standardization which ignores the realities of students' lives, and the poor working and learning conditions created by limited investments in the field. This system reflects the educational policies of governments, and the class biases that exist against those who are without high school.

Table 2: Estimates of the number of adult learners in high-school-related programs

OPTION	AB	BC	NS	ON	PQ
Regular and adult diplomas, and academic upgrading	6,500* (2005 data)	18,811 (secondary system) 25,000 (post-secondary) (2004-05 data)	2,076 (2004-05 data)	28,620 Adult Day schools (2001-02 data)  20,000 (Independent Learning Centre)  1,500 Academic Upgrading (2004-05 data)	70,328
Literacy and basic skills (equivalent to Gr 10)	4,000 (2005 data)	Not available	2,336 (2004-05 data)	42,008 (2004 data)	(included above)
GED General Education	1,946 (2003 data)	1,493 (2003 data)	1,427 (2003 data)	3,751 (2003 data)	Not available- GED was implemented in PQ in 2005
TOWES Test for Workplace Essential Skills	2,615 (2005 data)	541 (2005 data)	212 (2005 data)	1,673 (2005 data)	810 (2005 data)
Total learners	15,061	45,846	6,051	97,552	71,138

\* This figure and the 4,000 participants involved in literacy and basic skills is limited to learners funded by the Alberta Ministry of Human Resources & Education (AHRE), estimated at about 75% of total number of learners.

Source: Myers, K. & de Broucker, P. (2006). *Too many left behind: Canada's adult education and training system*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, p. 25.

**Dear literacy worker  
by Sheila Stewart, ON**

My father used to say, 'Are you *still* in the Cinderella of the education system? What about a pension? Aren't there jobs in the school system for you?' Yes, Dad, I blew it in terms of establishing a properly paid career, but I've learned so much and worked with amazing people. My father grew up in a village in Ireland and escaped working in the linen mill by getting an education. I grew up listening to his sermons—he became a United Church minister. I ended up working with people who live in poverty, following what I'd heard him preach.

Cinderellas also sit at teaching desks in literacy and ABE programs south of the Canadian border. An exploratory study on the characteristics and concerns of ABE teachers conducted by the National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy in New England concluded that “the poor conditions under which [practitioners] work . . . was an urgent issue for the field” (Smith & Hofer, 2003, 165). The top concerns of the teachers were about their program (structure and mission, facilities and administrative support) and their job (salary, security, benefits and number of working hours). Cassie Drennon, an American adult literacy and basic education consultant described the dilemma:

*It's very hard work. It's very rewarding work but you're always trying to create a rationale for your existence year after year, and to fight for more funding.*

In a focus group of Aboriginal literacy workers, a Canadian practitioner described her working conditions. She reveals some of the tensions between how literacy is viewed by policy makers, and how it is lived inside programs.

*I am one person... trying to fix last year's financial problems, work on a shoestring budget, look for more money, do outreach, create learner-centred curriculum, do monthly reports to the MTCU (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities) and to my board here, expand workplace curriculum/networks, do evaluation, look at true community literacy needs versus what MTCU says are the needs, follow up with learners while getting into tangled emotional webs with learners' lives whose circumstances and families intertwine with our own. (Aboriginal Focus Group, Ontario)*

This description of the demands and pressures of daily work would resonate with many practitioners across Canada. It is difficult to imagine a profession with similar material conditions of work. Adult literacy is the poorest<sup>6</sup> cousin of the education system.

## **Material conditions of the field**

While there are significant public investments in adult literacy in Canada, practitioners are generally not paid well. This contributes to a high turnover in the field. One Manitoba program has gone

<sup>6</sup> *The Poor Cousin: A Study of Adult Education* (1979) drew on author Michael Newman's experiences of work in an adult education centre in the UK.

through six employees: equivalent salaries are paid to managers in the fast food industry (Francine Villeneuve, Manitoba report). Alberta's community-based programs have experienced as much as a one-third turnover in coordinators in one year (Mary Norton, Interview). Approximately 50% of Aboriginal literacy practitioners in Ontario were new to the field this year (Christianna Jones, Ontario, Data Collection Report). A position paper prepared by the National Aboriginal Design Committee (2002) concluded that the wages of Aboriginal literacy practitioners were at or slightly above the poverty level.

### **Journal extract: Excavating in the trenches**

**by Sally Crawford, NB**

For the last several years I have worked for the Saint John Learning Exchange coordinating a family literacy program in Fredericton. What my job description did not say was:

- Must be able to write funding proposals that, for a pittance, will guarantee reproducible, quantitative outcomes in an unrealistic time frame.
- Before program begins and funding starts, find invisible learners and design an individualized program for and with each.
- Facilitate adult literacy classes—program delivery may also include making the muffins, janitorial work such as mopping flooded floors, unplugging toilets and/or jumpstarting a geriatric furnace, fending off learners' unsupportive partners, taking phone call from learner attempting suicide, visiting learner in hospital who has become catatonic, maintaining personal boundaries.
- At all times, stay attuned to needs of staff, partners and volunteers.
- Lead children's programs that include, but are not limited to: aerobic exercises to determine if one's Ears Hang Low; messy, germmy hugs and kisses from toddlers; consoling the tender-hearted as they learn about life when a group of non vegetarian pigs eat the Big Bad Wolf; possessing the tact of UN diplomat as a twenty-something dad rants about "not believing" in war and Remembrance Day observances as a refugee from Yugoslavia looks on.
- Keep up with mountains of paperwork / evaluations / assessments—in spare time.
- Rant as necessary. I often speak up about literacy—sometimes I'm even invited to do so. I now know enough to stop talking when people's eyes glaze over. I once spoke to a local Rotary group who meets at 7 am in the lounge of Delta Hotel. So I can now claim to hang out in bars for literacy.
- Participate in "RIGOROUS" research.
- Leap tall buildings .....

Many Canadian community-based practitioners work for low wages, often on a part-time basis, in very insecure jobs. There is a wide range in the pay scales and benefits available within different sectors. Though practitioners in institutional settings such as school boards or colleges get paid considerably more than their counterparts in community-based programs, they are often hired as contractors, not employees. The pay of college instructors, for example, may be tied to their teaching hours, with no compensation for preparation time and no access to benefits. Some have to apply for their jobs as often as three times a year. Many people work several jobs in order to make a living.

In such a poorly-valued field, program budgets may not provide much access to professional development, and complex work schedules do not necessarily permit the personal flexibility to participate in programs that are available.

### **Access to professional development**

In 2004, Literacy Alberta undertook research to plan a professional development approach for coordinators of community literacy programs. A survey found that 87 % of the coordinators were part-time workers (Norton, 2004, 16), and almost one-half were the sole employees in their organization. The coordinators identified time and cost as the greatest barriers to participation in professional development activities.

A recent American study conducted for the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education in the state of Pennsylvania found that participation in professional development programs is strongly correlated to work status (World Education, Inc. & Cassandra Drennon & Associates, 2006). Though the system offers professional development to all adult education practitioners across the state, those that do attend work more hours, have paid release time, and receive support from their administrators. A survey of teachers in New England by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) revealed that one fourth received no paid professional development release time (Smith & Hofer, 2003, 152).

Lack of professional development opportunities means there are limited occasions in which practitioners can gather with peers to share experiences. This is particularly important for improving practice. Participants engaged in focus groups, surveys and interviews across Canada ranked colleagues and peers as their most significant source of new teaching ideas. In their study of how adult literacy practitioners used research in Texas, St. Clair, Chen and Taylor (2003) found that academic books and research reports were the least popular sources of information for practitioners. Face-to face communication about research was particularly important to changes in practice. Similar experiences were reported in our Canadian research.

The models used for professional development also make a difference. In the U.S., practitioners who came together to participate in professional development using a research in practice model demonstrated greater change than those who joined a multi-session workshop or mentor teacher group model. Smith and Hofer found that the differences in what groups learned on the topic of the professional development was insignificant, but that participants in the practitioner research groups increased their awareness of the field and knowledge of the research. These practitioners also demonstrated a greater appreciation for learning with other teachers (Smith & Hofer, 2002).

In this study, practitioners said that they preferred learning with and from fellow teachers face-to-face. Practitioners across the country described feeling lonely and isolated. In more recent

years, they have had fewer and fewer opportunities to get together, or for free discussions among practitioners.

As there is no prescribed career path in the field, professional development also helps to give new entrants foundation knowledge and skills, and to provide seasoned practitioners with ongoing opportunities to learn.

**Journal extract: Excavating in the trenches  
by Sally Crawford, NB**

I enjoy the fact that everyone I talk to has come to the field by a different route. I've not met one person yet who woke up one morning as a youngster and said, "I think I'll be a literacy facilitator when I grow up." And they are all passionate in some way about their work and about social justice. They all seem to be comfortable choosing "curiosity over certainty." Such richness!

Most practitioners want to enhance their knowledge and abilities but some feel morally troubled if such efforts decrease investments that would more directly benefit learners in the program. With so few dollars in program budgets, practitioners often deny their own needs.

Ontario field researcher Katrina Grieve reported that many practitioners told her they had little access to meaningful professional development. Some managers felt unable to send practitioners to professional development sessions, unless it was required by program funders, as time away from programs can involve direct costs and decrease the contact hours on which funding is based. Some practitioners discovered that much training is focused on the accountability and delivery framework, rather than on teaching or on issues emerging from literacy practice. Practitioners in several Ontario focus groups said a professional association is vital if educators are to achieve an independent voice and to set their own priorities for professional development.

Some practitioners have multiple responsibilities. This may include: instructing; recruiting, screening, training and providing support to volunteers; and writing proposals and reports. Lack of long-term funding means there is no time to associate with colleagues, no time to implement the results of learnings from research and limited time, if any, to invest in reading the literature of the field. Practitioners soon learn they are a dispensable line item on the budget.

*They pay me to get stuff done and to bring in numbers but not to figure out how I can do it better...because I'm not permanent and they're getting rid of me in a month.* (Saskatoon focus group participant)

There was a general consensus that adult literacy practitioners need more recognition as professionals, and that their pay and working conditions need to reflect that status.

*People are underpaid, have absolutely no job security, they are laid off at the whim of funders, they give probably more than they're paid for, and the implication is that in spite of all that, they can and will do more. I think there comes a point when you have to stop and say 'Can we ask more of people?'* (Interview with Ann Marie Downie and Jayne Hunter, Nova Scotia)

## Shifting roles: educator or clerk?

*We're so focused forward, we don't have an opportunity to reflect and share what we have done. Staff are spending more and more time administering and less time doing practical hands-on delivery of services. (Quebec practitioner, Interview)*

In adult literacy and basic education programs, time is in short supply. Much of the data they must gather for provincial funding bodies is preoccupied with systematically documenting learner outcomes. Practitioners in most jurisdictions report that they are “drowning in paperwork.” In their review of changes in adult literacy education in the US, Belzer and St. Clair (2003) proposed this documentation has altered program structures and classroom routines in significant ways. It may lead to the disappearance of the pedagogy of hope (Collins, 1991) which has inspired many adult literacy programs. Christina Arcand in Saskatchewan used metaphoric language in the wild card she created to reveal her hope.

Literacy means that I have a chance in this world.

The forces that insist practitioners spend more time keeping statistics also contribute to increased institutionalization and tighter limitations on practice. This has been particularly evident in Ontario. As educators become data collectors, literacy education narrows in scope. Programs are hugely affected, particularly ones whose holistic approaches help mend and heal past wounds such as those induced by residential schools and discriminatory social policies. These forces also have an impact on practitioner research. In the United States, the accountability movement of the mid-nineties collapsed the practitioner inquiry models that had been nurtured in the adult literacy field by Susan Lytle, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and others. Cassie Drennon spoke about how this transformation occurred in the state of Pennsylvania.

*Teachers became number crunchers. They were made data collectors but they lost control of the focus and control of the methods. I think what happened is that [government officials] adopted some of the language of practitioner inquiry but took away some of the supporting values. It became more of a bureaucratic kind of program-based process.*

In her interview, Cassie also made the thought-provoking comment that the emphasis on accountability has resulted in program workers becoming data entry clerks.

## Basic adult literacy: education's poorest cousin

### Research by Jo de Beudrap, YT

The challenges for the worker are often similar to the challenges of the learner: time, money, support and staying motivated.

Canada has no national policy that guarantees access to learning for undereducated adults who wish to extend their literacy abilities. With the exception of workplace literacy, there has been limited funding support for alternative, non-school approaches. Education is a provincial responsibility

and in most instances governments focus their attention on maintaining an “economical” provision system for literacy education. This means that participants at the basic level, who may have complex learning needs, receive the least investment and have access to few formal spaces for learning. There are limited supports to attend full-time programs. In some jurisdictions, students might have supports that make full-time attendance possible, such as child care and transportation allowances, but these are inconsistent. Often these supports are only available until students find work. Learners are only directed to educational programs until a job, any job, becomes available.

Some programs have seen a significant drop in the average age of participants in recent years, and many learners are under 25. Recruitment may be targeted at this age group, who are perceived as having greater outcome potential. According to Mary Hamilton, a former ABE practitioner and current professor at Lancaster University in the UK, similar patterns are seen in Britain where older people and adults with multiple disadvantages are being dropped off the learning agenda.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Education thought they could create a community-based delivery system for basic literacy when HRSDC withdrew financial support for provision at the colleges.<sup>7</sup> The full-time ABE Level I or the basic literacy program was nurtured in an enriched, immersion environment at the college, but it was dispensable when the HRSDC investment was no longer available to support it. When the program moved to the community it continued to use a school model, but the teacher-student ratio increased from 1:6 to 1:12. Funds that would not support one college instructor were now expected to support all the costs for a full-time program for 12 adults. The government now provides an annual budget of approximately \$40,000 to pay for facilities, books and materials, professional development, an instructor’s salary and all other program costs.

In Canada, many literacy programs spend an inordinate amount of time seeking financial support. They prepare annual applications for grants to help extend learning opportunities to the least served. In essence, they live from project to project trying to keep programs alive. These programs might reflect traditional schooling models or address adults’ preferences to learn through a variety of innovative approaches, including apprenticeships in community-driven initiatives. Securing project funding creates new work demands inside programs but it does keep community sites for learning open.

*What starts to happen is that people get tired, they get exhausted trying to find enough money just to operate, trying to keep up with all of the accountability changes, the paperwork. They become less and less energized to talk about the issues related to practice... a lot of instructors are working more than one job, trying to make a living for themselves. That sucks away people’s energy. (Ottawa focus group)*

People who come to learn are not seen as productive citizens, and practitioners are not seen as possessing important pedagogical knowledge. There are few rewards for adult literacy work. Men and women associated with adult basic education, particularly those engaged in basic level programs, have no status.

*Instructors in Fundamentals in BC have no status at all, particularly if they are in a community-based program because it is assumed anyone could do [the work],*

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<sup>7</sup> There were rare exceptions where learners continued to receive support to attend the college.

*even a volunteer. People that teach Grade 10, 11 and 12 have a tiny bit of status because at least they teach in the college and have the equivalent status of a high school teacher. (Evelyn Battell, British Columbia, Interview)*

Low status further marginalizes students and practitioners. Though many programs believe voice is the most critical outcome of literacy education, in effect practitioners lack power and voice. Many practitioners talked about not being able to “have their say” for fear that the program would be shut down or jobs lost.

*There are dominant ways of thinking about literacy and learning... Whether you are talking about K-12 or talking about adult literacy, there is a culture of silence. People only feel safe to say so much. People are reprimanded in different kinds of ways (for speaking up). (Barb Marshall, Newfoundland and Labrador, Interview)*

Those are female voices, and the majority of adult literacy educators in Canada are women.

*You won't find many men who will do this work because it doesn't come with the pay, the security and the status. So it's not surprising to me that it's mostly women and the more women that are in [an occupation] the more it's devalued. (Evelyn Battell, British Columbia, Interview)*

## **Finding magnificence**

*The adult literacy [field] is underfunded and is now employment based, so [it's] not exactly literacy and the family literacy infrastructure is non-existent. Once we actually have program funding in place there is funding needed to support practitioners doing RiP. (Cheryl Brown, New Brunswick, Survey Report)*

The material conditions of the field make program provision difficult to achieve. Bill Fagan of Newfoundland and Labrador, whose educational practice spans the community and the academy, stated: “*With research in practice, we can begin to look at how the literacy field may become more meaningful in the lives of the participants.*” (Interview) If we can stabilize the field, some questions remain:

- How can we structure opportunities for the magnificence of research in practice across the country?
- If we are unable to do this, will we only see more rarified abstract or statistical research?
- What questions will those studies answer about teaching and learning?
- How will the field benefit from that knowledge?

## Research by Jo de Beudrap, YT

I am a visual artist often incorporating symbols, collage and mixed media into paintings. For this piece I wanted to use, as raw material, the ideas and drawings recorded by people who took part in the research project. Since I don't work in the field myself this allowed me to connect with relevant issues, gather visual material and include real literacy workers in the project.

RiP participants expressed both frustration and gratification about their field. They wrote about the need for community support, for building a foundation and finding new ways to do things. Some expressed frustration at being surveyed when time and money are stretched thin. Several participants used a flower or tree to illustrate issues in their work. Although the plant/tree is not a particularly original metaphor, it is a theme I considered using and the association with drawings by participants supported it.

Working on the piece I thought about how literacy affects the social and economic development of individuals. The impression that I have is that the challenges for the worker are often similar to the challenges of the learner: time, money, support and staying motivated.

We can look at research as the roots of literacy work; roots that support growth and the real life of literacy, people working and striving, whether in the field or in achieving literacy personally. The fruit of the plant is the literacy, symbolized by the alphabet buds; this fruit can be harvested and used in many ways. Individual characters compose words or numbers which can express ideas; those with absolutely simple application and absolute necessity or those that convey and explore a creative thought. Whether practical or profound, the uses are the same. This work yields a harvest. The three smaller pieces at the bottom each have roots: some older and dried, some fresh and vital, some different—the new roots of technology. This is a society where constant development pushes us into new ways and new notions of literacy. One may learn to read and write, handle time and money but computer and technological literacy is a world unto itself. Technology can be both a barrier and an equalizer. It can be incredibly accessible yet so complex that few of us can really understand it and manipulate it. Notice the research rabbit, the time challenges and the arts and words of RiP participants.

This was a wonderful project and I enjoyed collaborating with the Yukon learning community.



**Adult learners' wild card**  
**Bay St. George Learning Centre, NL**

When I was young and crazy, I never made time for school. It feels good to know it is not too late to learn as an adult.

- Doris Hillier, St. George's

Feeling tense or worried in school is nothing compared to the feeling of not being able to read.

- Jamie Garland, St. George's

I am in school now so I can teach my son to read and spell.

- Winnie Abbott, St. George's

I have to do better now to get somewhere in life.

- Natasha Young, Stephenville

I graduated from high school with a grade 6 reading level. Coming back to school was not a difficult choice for me because I wasn't that long out of school and didn't want to lose the courage to come back.

- Chrystal Smith, Stephenville

Coming back to school was an easy choice for me because it was something I wanted to do so badly. I left school 34 years ago. I only got as far as grade 5.

- Josephine Jesso, Ship Cove

I've attended ABE for two years now. I learned things that I never knew before. My wife is proud of me and I feel good about myself.

- Daniel Russell, Stephenville

School is important. It is very important to read and write. School is everything to me.

- Sarah Lee, Stephenville

I came back to school to get more education, better myself in life, and get a trade.

- Finty Benoit, West Bay Centre

I realized after being in the workforce doing a variety of jobs I needed extra education to improve myself.

- Jackie Benoit, Piccadilly

After you get to know all the other students, you don't feel out of place.

- Danny

## CHAPTER 4 Snapshots of Our Reality

by National Team Researchers

In the sections that follow you will read about each province and territory and about Aboriginal efforts across the nation. These snapshots do not capture every aspect of the complex reality we investigated. The team is the photographer, bringing into focus images that were available at a particular time and location, and other perspectives may be missing. The snapshots were designed to provide a sense of the unique character of each region and an indication of the shape of the literacy field. They introduce us to the RiP activity in each jurisdiction across Canada and list research reports that reflect a RiP stance. They cannot give us a feel for the experience of people who must hunt for programs to improve their literacy skills, try to find classes or tutoring at times and locations that work for them, and that use approaches that support their learning. They also cannot reveal the literacy workers' experience of daily life in the literacy programs or the challenges workers face as they seek to obtain sufficient funding to offer an adequate service. Nor do they include how practitioners feel as they journey with each adult they teach, holding onto hope (or sliding into despair) that they can (or cannot) learn successfully and that this educational success can help them dare to dream dreams, to make life changes, or move toward their dreams.

### Provincial / Territorial snapshots

#### Alberta snapshot by Rebecca Still



#### The context for literacy work in Alberta

Alberta is experiencing a strong economy. Large numbers of people are moving into the province for the many available jobs. This makes it possible for people with lower literacy skills to find some form of employment. However, based on the IALSS report, about 40% of Albertans still lack the literacy skills to function fully in society.

In July of 2006 the provincial government released a report, *Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce: Alberta's 10-Year Strategy*, which stated that only half of Albertans go to post-secondary institutions within six years of entering Grade 10. As the Edmonton Journal reported, "If literacy levels are not increased, this will have significant implications on the well-being of individuals, communities and the economy." (Larry Johnsrude, edmontonjournal.com, Aug. 9, 2006)

The Alberta Government spends less than \$10 million on community-based adult literacy programs. A consortium of literacy practitioners, advocates, teachers and agencies produced a framework to advocate for literacy policy for Alberta. Hopefully the increased attention on literacy will result in

increased funding for programs and a united effort to create an effective learning culture in Alberta. For more information about this policy, visit Literacy Alberta's website at [www.literacyalberta.ca](http://www.literacyalberta.ca).

### **Literacy provision in Alberta**

Literacy in Alberta is delivered through community-based volunteer tutor literacy programs, a few colleges and the workplace.

Alberta Advanced Education funds 73 volunteer tutor adult literacy programs. A number of these also offer family literacy programs. A few have full-time staff, but most of these programs have a part-time paid coordinator who oversees all aspects of the program. Literacy instruction in these programs is delivered by volunteer tutors who work one-to-one or with small groups of learners. Some groups work with a paid facilitator. Tutors are from within the community and come with many different skills, abilities and experiences. The coordinators also come with a variety of skills, abilities and experiences. Some coordinators have worked in the field for some time, and others are new to literacy. Many of the coordinators feel overwhelmed with the workload and are paid little for the work they perform. With the increase in wages for many jobs, it will become difficult for programs to attract qualified and dedicated workers.

A number of other community organizations offer literacy instruction. These include programs for seniors, the deaf/hard of hearing, those with learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities and people learning English as a Second Language. Some of the funding comes through Advanced Education.

Although colleges in Alberta offered Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses a number of years ago, most closed their programs when provincial funding was pulled. At present only two colleges in Alberta offer ABE programs with paid instructors. Instead, a number of colleges deliver essential skills training projects. These programs focus on reading, writing, math and ESL as well as communication and computer skills. The Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (AWES) Society supports essential skills training. For more information about AWES visit [www.nald.ca/awes/start.htm](http://www.nald.ca/awes/start.htm).

Literacy Alberta is the provincial literacy coalition. It links together people involved in literacy, promotes the value of literacy, provides literacy information and offers professional development for practitioners, tutors and students. One of the most significant professional development projects underway is the Pathways project, a systematic program for adult literacy coordinators which incorporates a research in practice stance. This professional development project is more comprehensive than former training workshops and could lead towards a certificate for literacy coordinators.

### **Research in practice in Alberta**

Research in practice officially began in Alberta in 1997 when the Learning Centre in Edmonton partnered with the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta to initiate practitioner research. The project was funded by the National Literacy Secretariat and explored participatory approaches in literacy education.

Research in practice really took off in 2000, when the Literacy Coordinators of Alberta, The Learning Centre and The Centre for Research on Literacy at the University of Alberta joined to initiate the RiPAL (Research in Practice in Adult Literacy) Network project. This project

incorporated approaches described in the resource developed by Horsman and Norton (1999). An online course facilitated by Mary Norton allowed practitioners to learn more about adult literacy and research. Practitioners were given time and funding to take the course. When it was finished a number of participants completed research in practice projects with support from Mary.

Throughout all of these projects the support of a research facilitator was invaluable. Many participants stated the support of a facilitator was significant to their gaining research skills. They could not have participated in research in practice without the support of a research facilitator.

Learnings from the RiPAL Network project informed approaches for a project about addressing the impacts of violence on learning titled *Violence and Learning: Taking Action*. More recently, Literacy Alberta has obtained funding for a few RiP projects involving practitioners from around the province.

Literacy Coordinators of Alberta, The Learning Centre and The Centre for Research on Literacy at the University of Alberta hosted a gathering about literacy research in practice in Edmonton in 2001. Fifty-eight participants from across the country and around the world gathered to share and dream about research in practice. This event was the first of three national research in practice gatherings held in Canada.

Currently there is no systematic support for literacy practitioners to engage in research in practice. Colleges have recently been given funding to conduct applied research, and a few ESL organizations carry out research projects. But overall, the sense in the province is that very little formal research in practice is underway. What research is being done is happening in isolation and few other practitioners know about it.

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## British Columbia snapshot by Leonne Beebe



### The context for literacy work in British Columbia

With the unemployment rate in July 2006 at a 30-year low of 4.7% (Stats Can) and a steadily growing economy, BC presents an optimistic present and future. However, within its population of nearly 4.3 million, many English First Language, Aboriginal and English Second Language populations would benefit from or need improved literacy skills. Many of these people also have multi-generational and multi-cultural literacy needs: families with parents who need literacy skills and their children, especially preschool children; young adults who have dropped out of school or who graduated without sufficient literacy skills; youth and adults of all ages who are learning English as another language; and youth and adults of all ages who need workplace literacy.

In contrast to the optimistic picture of the BC economy, there are many still growing and unmet needs in the BC literacy field. Funding for program development and expansion for the secondary and post-secondary institutional programs is limited or lacking for the community literacy programs. This fiscal insecurity for literacy programs has a serious impact on literacy workers and their programs throughout BC.

Since Vancouver was awarded the 2010 Olympics, literacy has become a focal point in BC. After the Premier announced that he wanted to make BC the most literate place in North America by 2010, the provincial government launched several literacy initiatives.

- Literacy Now was launched in spring 2004 to stimulate new community programs and networking and to raise awareness about literacy within communities throughout BC. Forty communities have created community plans and are in the process of applying for funding to implement the community plan. Many other communities are waiting for the second round of community applications.
- The Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy was established in November 2004 to "assess the nature and scope of literacy challenges and issues in BC and to develop recommendations for a Provincial Literacy Framework that 'builds capacity, forges intersections, and increases profile' for the issue while indicating priorities for potential future investments."
- In February of 2006 the Select Standing Committee on Education was empowered to "examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to finding effective strategies to address the specific challenge of adult literacy, and in particular, to conduct consultations to consider successful strategies from other jurisdictions on the promotion of adult literacy and specific strategies to improve literacy rates among Aboriginal people, English-as-a-second-language adults, and seniors." This Committee requested position papers from community/institutional program providers and literacy organizations and groups and held regional hearings in May and June 2006.

### **Literacy provision in British Columbia**

In BC, the Ministry of Advanced Education is responsible for organizing the Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs at the 17 post-secondary colleges, university colleges, and universities. The program has four levels: Fundamental (literacy)—up to Grade 8, Intermediate—Grades 9 and 10, Advanced—Grade 11, and Provincial—Grade 12. Provincial ABE Articulation committees and working groups are responsible for the learning outcomes for each subject at each of the four levels. This articulation allows students to continue their upgrading if they have to move. ABE courses are free for students in Fundamental level courses, or for those who have not graduated from Grade 12; however, students who have already graduated pay course fees in most post-secondary institutions. An adult may also complete the BC Grade 12 Adult Dogwood Diploma (Adult High School Graduation) at these institutions, but most students choose upgrading course prerequisites in order to move into their career programs sooner.

The Ministry of Advanced Education also funds 13 Regional Literacy Coordinators through the federal-provincial “cost shared” program. These Coordinators support literacy practitioners by sharing information and resources and delivering regional training and professional development events. They promote awareness about literacy and organize learner gatherings. They also support networking throughout their region and across the province.

The Ministry of Education, which deals with the K-12 system, funds another group of literacy programs in BC school districts: the Grade 12 Adult Dogwood Diploma. Although these programs tend to serve those adult students who want to attain a high school certificate, other adults also complete secondary courses which are prerequisites for college or university courses. However, many of these literacy programs focus primarily on the Grade 10–12 courses only, and not the lower literacy levels.

Finally, a number of community-based courses and family literacy programs exist throughout the province. An example of a community collaboration program is Central Gateway for Families in Chilliwack, which is a “family-learning centre run in an inner-city community school (donated public school space). At the hub of Central Gateway is a... Family Literacy Program comprised of an Adult Basic Education Learning Centre (funded by the University College of the Fraser Valley), a parent education program, a literacy-based pre-school and infant/toddler program, and a facilitated parent/child learning program (funded by Chilliwack Community Services).” ([www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/38thparl/session-2/edu/blues](http://www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/38thparl/session-2/edu/blues)).

This particular program focuses on family literacy as well as adult academic upgrading skills and employment/career preparation skills. Community Family Literacy programs like Central Gateway are now being supported as a successful model by both community and provincial government literacy advocates; however, ongoing program funding is a critical issue for these programs.

The issue of where programs should be located has long been a point of contention between School Districts (K-12) and the colleges/university colleges (post-secondary ABE). Those in the K-12 system state that literacy is within their mandated content. However, those in the post-secondary ABE system state the age of the adult literacy student is within their mandated age group.

Another critical issue is the lack of funding for adult literacy students and programs. Many of the literacy-level students who would benefit from upgrading are also unemployed and on social assistance. The Ministry of Human Resources’ policies state they must take short career preparation courses and look for work, when in fact their lack of literacy may be the main reason they are

unemployed. Too often, students who are just starting to make progress in literacy classes are required to leave the class to take work prep courses that are six to ten weeks long, or go out to look for work. This often results in more frustration than learning.

Lack of program funding is another ongoing chronic issue, especially for the community-based Family Literacy Programs. There is a general sense that literacy has a low priority on the budgets of some educational institutions and ministries.

Programs throughout the province are supported professionally by the two non-profit literacy networks in BC: Literacy BC and the Adult Basic Education Association of BC. (ABEABC). Literacy BC is a provincial organization whose mission states “we believe that literacy is a human right; that literacy is everyone’s business and that we all have a part to play.” It is a non-profit organization funded by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, the National Literacy Secretariat and donations. Literacy BC provides public awareness, program consultation and referral, a resource centre, professional development and training, regional literacy coordination, learner advocacy and a literacy email and conference network called the Hub. It also sponsors national literacy initiatives, such as this national research project, and demonstration projects whose interests transcend provincial borders. Literacy BC is also responsible for coordinating the 13 Regional Literacy Coordinators.

The Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia (ABEABC) is open to ABE instructors, program personnel and institutions from the post-secondary, secondary, community, and corrections systems. Its focus is on professional development. ABEABC sponsors yearly conferences hosted by institutions which offer ABE courses and programs. The conference is an excellent opportunity for practitioners and practitioner-researchers to present to their peers. The ABEABC magazine, *Groundwork*, contains articles written by ABE instructors.

### **Research in practice in British Columbia**

Audrey Thomas, ABE Education Officer in the Ministry of Advanced Education between 1994 and 2003, set up the environment for practitioner research to grow in BC. Aware of the building momentum for RiP in the country, Audrey contacted the University of British Columbia (UBC) and secured academic support for practitioners interested in doing and being trained in research. In September of 1999, with funding from the cost-shared program a “research friend”, Marina Niks, started to formally support practitioners. Through this contract, practitioners had access to research training workshops, research support and online discussions about doing and reflecting on research. This support and NLS funding allowed for several collaborative RiP projects to take place: [Naming the Magic](#) (2001), [Dancing in the Dark](#) (2003), [Literacy for Women on the Streets](#) (2003), [Hardwired for Hope](#) (2004) and Research in Practice Projects (2006).

In the summer of 2002, a small group of people organized a pre-conference to an international literacy conference located at UBC. With funding from the Ministry of Advanced Education, practitioners in the province were supported to attend the gathering that also included RiP people from across Canada, UK and the USA. Out of the organizing committee for the pre-conference RiPAL-BC emerged.

RiPAL-BC is a grassroots network of individuals that support research in practice in BC. RiPAL-BC is funded through the federal/provincial stream of NLS. It “has three main objectives: to develop a plan to sustain research in practice in BC over the long-term; to support research-related

professional development among BC practitioners and disseminate practitioner research; and to promote research in practice and create opportunities for BC practitioners to participate.”

RiPAL-BC serves the practitioners and researchers in the BC Adult Literacy field and helps community-based and institutional-based practitioners with writing proposals, doing projects or organizing events. It has direct relationships with Literacy BC, the Regional Literacy Coordinators and Literacy Now, and connects with other literacy-related workers such as librarians.

Thanks to the educational structure in the province, mainly the existence of colleges and university colleges, there is a body of experienced literacy practitioners who have been in the field for over 25 years. Many of these practitioners have also been involved in advocacy and administrative roles in their organizations and active in provincial and national organizations. This capacity has been crucial to the development of a strong RiP landscape in BC. Nonetheless, several major issues remain:

- funding: where to go for funds, other than the “cost-shared” program, which may change?
- time: when can practitioners do research while working full-time?
- recognition: how could the work-related role and value of RiP be identified?
- support: who will be available to mentor and support practitioners doing RiP?

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## Manitoba snapshot by Francine Villeneuve



### **The context for literacy work in Manitoba**

Manitoba is a small province with about 1,000,000 people. The main city, Winnipeg, is about 750,000, so it functions almost as a city-state. Although the majority of the population is in Winnipeg, at least 1/3 of programs are offered in rural and northern locations. The provincial government does not have a policy or consistent practice about defining literacy. Programs are not mandated to have work outcomes or welfare related policies. However, some Employment Centres will not allow individuals to use training allowances for literacy upgrading.

### **Literacy provision in Manitoba**

Historically, basic education in Manitoba was provided by community colleges and school divisions. In the 1980s some voluntary programs were developed and by the mid-1980s a number of small community-based programs were being funded by the province.

In 1989, the provincial government conducted a Task Force on Literacy which concluded that Manitoba should adopt a community-based delivery framework for adult literacy programming in the province. The province also identified a need for programming for Aboriginal people across the province, including programming for First Nations people living off-reserve.

Most community programs funded by the province are part-time and receive a grant that covers only part of their budget. About 38 programs receive funding from the province. Most programs are run by a paid instructor and supported by a board, committee or Literacy Working Group which oversees the management and evaluation of the program. Some programs get funding for both a coordinator and instructors. Instructors are paid less than teachers in the Adult Learning Centres, but the province does not require literacy practitioners to have a Bachelor of Education. All programs use volunteers. Their roles range from tutoring to developing materials, to doing outreach and carrying out other responsibilities.

Programs funded by the province are expected to assess learners using a system based on the IALS levels. The programs are encouraged to help learners get certificates for each stage corresponding to an IALS level. The Province offers professional development and multi-media materials for instructors and tutors to support them in using this approach. This approach is called the Facilitators Guide Project and materials are available online at [www.facilitatorguide.ca](http://www.facilitatorguide.ca).

Programs are expected to self-evaluate using input from learners, instructors, tutors, and Literacy Working Group members. Once a year programs must submit a Development Plan which includes a budget request and outlines how the program will improve in the coming year.

In recent years community programs have felt increasingly beleaguered by accountability requests. They do not feel their training and learning needs are met and are concerned about how to provide quality instruction and programming that meets learners' needs (including appropriate supports such as travel and child care).

Adults with higher literacy skills can attend regular high school programs or attend an Adult Learning Centre to work towards their Mature Student Diploma. There are about 50 Adult Learning Centres across the province. To graduate, students must pass a minimum of eight credits, four of which must be at Senior 4 (or Grade 12) level. Schools may apply to the Department of Education in order to offer new or different courses. These School Initiated Courses (SICs) allow programs to respond flexibly to their community needs and learner interests. Adults may also gain credit towards their high school diploma through a prior learning assessment process (PLA). There is no clear system for laddering from literacy to Adult Learning Centres, but some communities do recognize literacy Level 3 Certificate for credit towards the Mature Student Diploma.

Some community colleges offer ABE, but only as a prerequisite to their training courses. Colleges sometimes do not recognize the Mature Student Diploma.

### **Research in practice in Manitoba**

Manitoba includes many experienced practitioners who could conduct research in practice projects. However, programs do not receive the financial or other support that would make it possible to move in this direction.

Over the years, the National Literacy Secretariat has funded a number of projects that have included a research component. However, this research has generally been limited to literature reviews or developing a survey to assess communities' or learners' needs. Most projects funded through the NLS federal/provincial cost-sharing program have not focused on research in practice. In spite of this lack of support, two organizations have conducted research projects: the Centre for Education and Work and Literacy Works.

### ***Centre for Education and Work (CEW)***

The CEW conducted three projects between 2001 and 2004 that moved research in practice forward in the province. All were possible because of funding through the federal-provincial cost-shared program through the National Literacy Secretariat.

In the first phase, the CEW held focus groups with 40 practitioners—including program coordinators, instructors, volunteers, and tutors—to find out what they knew about research in practice. This project revealed that:

- few literacy workers understood the process and products of research in practice
- most practitioners think of research as something that is done at universities or in laboratories
- practitioners worried that research in practice projects would take away from the concrete learner-centred work that they do
- practitioners were interested in research but did not have the time to keep abreast of research findings or trends
- practitioners generally felt they did not have the skills to conduct research.

To follow up these findings, CEW was funded to identify what skills practitioners needed to do literacy research, and communicate and disseminate current research. Lead staff members were

appointed in 20 literacy programs. They were responsible for disseminating research information in their region. The CEW developed six extremely popular research bulletins called *LiteracyNOW*. The bulletins provided summaries of research, outlined how research connected to classroom practice and included e-links.

Finally, CEW helped literacy workers develop skills in conducting qualitative research within a literacy program setting. The CEW worked with three practitioners from programs serving different needs: one program was rural and worked with Aboriginal learners, another worked with people with disabilities, and the third was an urban Aboriginal program. The CEW worked with each program and individual to develop a mini research project. Each researcher received support and assistance in person, online and by telephone, and practitioners gave each other feedback on the projects. Each participant received an honorarium for participating in the project.

The CEW had great difficulty recruiting researchers for this project. However, those that participated said the project was incredibly valuable. They presented their research in a variety of ways including video and books for learners; and developed ideas for follow-up research projects that they hope will be funded in future.

### ***Literacy Works***

Literacy Works Inc. is a literacy program which provides diagnosis and teaching strategies to assist those working with individuals with learning disabilities. They undertook research to identify a sustainable model for literacy programming for adults with learning disabilities in Manitoba. This three-year project from 2002 to 2005 surveyed literacy programs to find out how literacy practitioners diagnose learning disabilities, and what learning strategies they give to students with specific learning disabilities. The survey also asked what supports the practitioners needed. Literacy Works found that all practitioners welcomed professional development opportunities in this area. Programs were interested in and needed a diagnostic support service which would provide teaching and learning strategies for students with learning disabilities.

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## New Brunswick snapshot by Jan Greer



### The context for literacy work in New Brunswick

New Brunswick is a province of about 752,000 people. It is Canada's first officially bilingual province and the only province with both an English and a French Literacy Coalition. The recent IALSS research revealed that approximately 60% of adults in the province have fairly serious literacy challenges. New Brunswick faces additional concerns in the francophone sector. Sixty-four percent of francophone adults had low literacy proficiencies. With half the adult population of working age functioning at a low skill level, literacy is a serious political, social and economic issue in our province.

Historically, New Brunswick's working population have been "hewers of wood and drawers of water". The traditional resource-based industries of farming, fishing and timbering have become highly mechanized, leaving many labourers in New Brunswick unemployed. Only one generation ago, men and women could make a decent wage in these industries even for seasonal employment. As the resources decline, employment opportunities have diminished.

Interestingly, the fastest growing sector in the province is the information technology sector. This has created a wide gap because of the disparity between New Brunswick's traditional economy and the high level of skills required for the new occupations.

There is an exodus of highly-skilled graduates from New Brunswick. Young people leave in droves to establish their careers and to earn higher wages elsewhere. The economy simply does not support the income expectations of these sophisticated, educated and highly-skilled young adults. This exodus completes a cycle that perpetuates a low tax base, which can not support a superior public education system. Therefore teachers and students in the public education system subsist without proper resources. This continues in the adult literacy structure where under-resourced and over-burdened classroom settings and volunteer literacy agencies are expected to meet the needs of a large number of adults, children and families who want more than anything to improve their literacy skills so that they can have a chance at a better quality of life.

And so the cycle will continue and many families will continue to barely thrive—either unemployed, underemployed or on income assistance programs which keep them poor, impoverished and locked into desperation. In this environment, literacy programs face many barriers.

### Literacy provision in New Brunswick

Since the early 1970s, literacy in New Brunswick has been delivered through Adult Basic Education programs offering academic upgrading in the community college system. At that time the nine colleges in the province each established a literacy coordinator position. In 1976, Laubach Literacy Councils began to emerge. They provided one-to-one tutoring using volunteers, and worked mostly with learners just beginning to read English.

In 1988 the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB) and its sister organization, *la Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick*, were formed. The two coalitions are responsible for research, promotion, public awareness, advocacy, professional development for teachers and the development and delivery of literacy projects that enhance existing work. The LCNB receives no provincial funding, and operates from project to project funded by the Government of Canada through the National Literacy Secretariat, now known as the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program.

In 1991, the provincial government established community-based literacy programs called Community Academic Services Programs (CASP). The first CASP was set up in Minto and the instructor was Joan Perry. The CASPs were based directly in communities to make it easier for adults who needed them to access the service. The programs were supported through combined support from the government, the community and business. The model took off and within a few years over 1,000 program contracts had been offered in the province. They offered literacy services from basic to intermediate academic upgrading through to GED preparation and essay-writing. Some of these CASPs are still operating today.

Recently the CASPs have been through a number of changes. The initiatives came about because of research carried out in 2002 that outlined the severely limited resources in classrooms and how ill-equipped settings affected both the teachers and the learners in these programs. The report, *Comprehensive Training Needs Assessment for Literacy in New Brunswick*, offered over 40 recommendations for changes needed for literacy to show success in New Brunswick. Although there are still improvements to be made, some positive steps have been taken. With the release of the IALSS 2005, the government understands that in order to affect change, adequate resources must be allocated to literacy programs and efforts.

In 2005, the CASPs were re-named Community Adult Learning Programs (CALP) and the teachers at more than 100 CALCs, available in 70 communities across the province, organized into two professional associations for both linguistic communities. Each program receives a grant of \$20,000 which covers the teacher's salary and provides a \$1,500 grant to purchase materials and resources for teachers and students. Most of the teachers have Education degrees or other relevant post-secondary education. They are paid \$14.14 per hour for 35 hours a week. The programs operate from mid-September to June, a total of 34 weeks. The number of weeks the programs are open was condensed to accommodate a pay raise for the CALP teachers. This was the first time their pay increased since the \$11.50/hour wage fixed in 1992, a cutback from the original \$16.14/hour wage allotted (per Joan Perry) when the programs started in 1991.

In 2005 the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Training, which hosts the adult literacy section, began to set up regional committees to oversee the CALPs that operate within each college region. The regional committees report to the Community College Literacy Coordinator in their region. Committees are responsible for administering the CALPs in their region. The department developed policy manuals for instructors (teachers), students and program administration and set standards for the location of each CALP. In 2006, the provincial government installed two new, up-to-date computers with internet access in each CALP. A group called the Provincial Partners for Literacy (PPL) was recently set up to advise to the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Training (PSET). It includes the major literacy agencies and several learners.

Laubach Literacy continues to provide one-to-one tutoring. The 12 councils involve approximately 600 volunteers, but provincial funding has diminished over the years. Individual councils and

the provincial organization, Laubach Literacy New Brunswick (LLNB), have had tremendous challenges keeping their programs operating. In the middle of 2006, however, Laubach negotiated an arrangement whereby the provincial government would provide more financial assistance.

The CALPs collaborate with Laubach councils. While the CALPs tend to focus on learners with more advanced skills, some learners who could be served by Laubach prefer the small classroom setting of CALP. In such cases the Laubach tutor can work with the learner in the CALP classroom. Laubach is available in English, while CALP instruction is available in either English or French.

There are also a number of family literacy programs in the province. Some stand alone and others are embedded in the programs of other agencies such as family resource centres and government services such as Early Intervention programs or public libraries. Finally, Frontier College is well established in New Brunswick with volunteer students on most campuses. Their focus is on providing literacy to children and new Canadians.

### **Research in practice in New Brunswick**

Research in practice is a new concept for most literacy practitioners in New Brunswick. Very few people have had the time or resources to do this work. To heighten awareness about research in practice, the Coalition produced four issues of an electronic newsletter, *Community of Inquiry*, in 2004. The newsletter contained a number of articles written by local literacy practitioners. Each article elaborated on their experience in research in practice and the value that this brought to their way of teaching and reaching their students. The newsletter also educated practitioners about research and methods used in reflective practice. The Coalition also hosted online discussions which referred to the various articles as a way to pursue research ideas and practices. The evaluation of this project revealed that practitioners were so burdened with the stresses of teaching in severely under-resourced conditions that even those who had participated in the online discussion could not remember doing so, or reading the newsletters.

Participants in our focus group for this research project told us that they do read research and that they do change their practice as a result of reading or reflecting on their own practice. The missing link is that they do not document the changes and outcomes. The primary reason they do not is time. Time is one of many resources that literacy programs all across the province lack, both for volunteers and paid staff.

The participants in our focus group expressed keen interest in learning more about research in practice. They also wanted to find ways to impress upon funders that building time into the program for comprehensive reading, reflection and documentation is essential. One practitioner said, “*Sometimes I change what I do—sometime I recognize what I shouldn’t change*” (Wendell Dryden, NB Survey Report). Reflective practice can improve the setting and outcomes for both learners and teachers, and help learners move across the learning continuum.

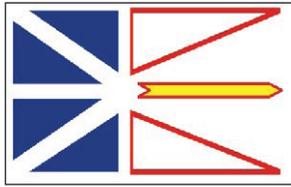
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## Newfoundland and Labrador snapshot by Pamela Bennett



### The context for literacy work in Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador is a province that has a vast geography, five languages (English, French, Mi'kmaq, Innu Aïmun and Inuktituk), a scattered, rural population and few resources or infrastructure to deliver literacy programs. Despite all of that, people are keen to be more educated, to read and write better and to be on par, in terms of literacy, with other Canadians.

Literacy in Newfoundland and Labrador is a very timely issue. This “have-not” province seems to continuously reel under the issues of employment and education. Everyone tries to obtain and maintain jobs within the province, but the dictates of a mostly rural economy often mean that people leave the province for financial opportunities that beckon in other parts of the country and across the world. Those who remain struggle to secure jobs with the minimal levels of education they have or struggle to become more educated. Thus the cycle of out-migration continues.

### Literacy provision in Newfoundland and Labrador

According to the recent IALSS data, Newfoundland and Labrador is facing a literacy crisis. In fact, the study results show that this province is well below the national average in terms of basic literacy performance and individuals' ability to obtain employment in a modern workforce. While this public statement of our literacy issues has brought many to debate the validity of the statistics, few literacy providers in the province would disagree that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador face barriers because of their lower levels of literacy and numeracy.

Literacy programs in Newfoundland and Labrador are offered in a few ways. Formal educational institutions offer some Adult Basic Education programs and continuing education programs, both part-time and full-time. The bulk of literacy programs are provided by community-based organizations that may or may not receive funding for the literacy work they do. These programs are often run by volunteers and some have a minimal core staff person who is paid far less than their professionally recognized counterparts at colleges and school boards. According to the Department of Education, a total of 1,621 full-time and part-time students attended ABE programs offered by the public and private colleges and correctional centres in 2004-2005. One hundred and sixty-four adults participated in the ABE Level I community programs in 2005-2006. The Newfoundland and Labrador Laubach Literacy Council and Teachers on Wheels estimate that 125 people are currently matched with volunteer tutors.

The face of literacy within the province needs to mutate, change and develop if the literacy problem is going to be addressed. Practitioners need to be able to earn a decent wage, have benefits, build pension plans, and find some level of job security. Government needs to realize that given the geography, weather, employment patterns and such like, flexible educational opportunities need to be made available in all parts of the province. Funds need to be made available not only for educated and experienced staff, but also for adequate space for programs to be delivered in, for resources such as books and computers, and for programs to become more than just temporary solutions to a long term literacy problem. Monies need to be made available to ensure that literacy

programs continue in rural communities. Longer term funding would allow individual learners to believe that there is benefit in getting involved with a literacy program, because they would know that the program will be there in the future.

### **Research in practice in Newfoundland and Labrador**

Formal research in practice has been limited in the province. Literacy practitioners deliver programs to learners in spite of all the barriers they face in doing so. For the most part, they have little time or support to participate in formal research in practice activities.

In 2003 the third national research in practice gathering, *Adult Literacy Research: Extending our Practice and Building Networks*, was held in St. John's. Organizers hoped it would help build and strengthen literacy practitioners' ability to take on research, and would build links between people involved in research in practice across the country. They hoped the institute would particularly help to expand these networks in Atlantic Canada.

Fifteen of the 80 participants at the institute were literacy practitioners from Newfoundland and Labrador. The institute piqued their interest and changed how they thought about research. As one person said, "*I never thought of myself as a researcher before. But I realize I always have questions, and I'm always searching for answers. Now I see that as research.*"

In addition, practitioners in the province were actively involved in a thorough research process during 2005-2006 which resulted in the founding of the first grassroots provincial coalition. A previous provincial body, the Literacy Development Council, was a government initiative which was established in 1994 and evaluated in 2003. The main recommendation of the evaluation was that the Literacy Development Council be replaced with a community-based organization. Funding from the National Literacy Secretariat allowed a one-year process of extensive community consultations. This research process led to the creation of Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador.

Practitioners have little time to focus on initiatives that are not central to keeping the program doors open and the program running. Perhaps research in practice could flourish in the province if literacy programs were more permanent, more supported and more funded. A necessary component for developing a framework to support research in practice in Newfoundland and Labrador would be to have vibrant, supported literacy programs throughout the province.

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## Northwest Territories snapshot by Cate Sills & Helen Balanoff



### The context for literacy work in the Northwest Territories

The Northwest Territories (NWT) covers roughly one tenth of the area of Canada, but its population is small—around 42,000. The people live in 33 relatively small and isolated communities.

Yellowknife is the largest, with approximately 18,000 people, while Kakisa is the smallest, with only 40 people. Most communities are accessible year round by road. However, twelve can be reached only by air for all or part of the year.

Forty-nine percent of the population is Aboriginal. The NWT has 11 official languages: English, French, Tlicho, Inuvialuktun, Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Gwich'in, North Slavey, South Slavey, Chipewyan and Cree. Each language group is responsible for, and receives funding for, developing, maintaining or revitalizing its own language. For many people, English is their second language. According to the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, approximately 42% of the NWT population aged 16-65 overall had low-level English literacy skills—below the level of skills they need in today's world. However, among Aboriginal people that proportion jumps to 69%.

### Literacy provision in the Northwest Territories

In 1958, before division of Nunavut and the NWT, 49 communities provided some form of adult education, usually delivered through the schools. In the 1970s, a system of community-based adult education was introduced and local education authorities were responsible for overseeing programs. Then in 1984, following an investigation into the entire education system by a legislative committee, Arctic College (now called Aurora College) was created and assumed responsibility for the Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) programs.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) have overall responsibility for legislation, policy and planning, curriculum, funding and standards related to literacy programming and services. ECE has one literacy coordinator. The department developed and has been implementing a new Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) curriculum since 1998. The ALBE program has never been reviewed.

Aurora College is the NWT's only college. It receives funding from ECE to deliver ALBE programs throughout the NWT. It does this through its three campuses in Yellowknife, Fort Smith and Inuvik. It also operates 21 community learning centres, where adult educators offer ALBE programs. Yellowknife and Inuvik, the two largest communities, each have a literacy outreach centre that offers programs to people with very low literacy skills. A coordinator in Fort Smith oversees ALBE programs throughout the NWT.

Until recently, many college adult educators were hired on term positions. Consequently, turnover among adult educators was relatively high. More recently, however, the college changed its hiring policy to ensure more continuity and the situation has become more stable. Most adult educators work alone. They have to address a broad range of needs, from low-level literacy, to GED, to preparation for apprenticeship examinations. They often feel very isolated, and are able to come

together only once or twice a year on their respective campuses. Some campuses have instituted buddy systems or regular teleconferences to bridge the isolation. Given the distances and the costs of travel, face-to-face meetings are prohibitively expensive.

The college's focus has tended to be on academic programs. As a result, and because of implementation of the new curriculum, ALBE programs have become much more institutionalized. Low-level literacy learners, in particular, are not served well by current programs. Last year, the retention rate among this group was less than ten percent.

Two not-for-profit organizations, the Tree of Peace and the Native Women's Training Centre, also deliver programs in Yellowknife. Much of their funding comes from ECE, and they must follow the NWT ALBE curriculum. Other literacy provision includes on-site workplace literacy programs in two diamond mines as well as programming in the correctional centres and young offender facilities. Aboriginal language groups deliver language and literacy programs in their specific region and language.

The NWT Literacy Council is a not-for-profit organization that provides support for literacy development in all the NWT official languages. It supports literacy providers largely through research, training and developing resources.

There has been no territorial-wide professional development since 2001. Adult educators from the not-for-profit programs, the mines and justice facilities are included in the regional training sessions organized by each Aurora College campus. These workshops have tended to focus on curriculum and administrative issues, with little opportunity for literacy providers to discuss practice.

### ***The Northwest Territories Literacy Strategy***

In January 2001, the Government of the NWT (GNWT) approved the NWT Literacy Strategy. This included the allocation of \$2.4 million annually for literacy initiatives in the NWT. The Literacy Strategy took a comprehensive approach and covers the spectrum of lifelong learning, from early childhood to seniors.

The Literacy Strategy was designed to provide a framework for a broad range of activities. It was based on public consultations and on research into actions taken by other provinces and territories in supporting literacy development. Four overall goals formed the foundation of the NWT Literacy Strategy:

- to increase the number of people in the NWT who are literate
- to increase awareness of the importance of literacy in the official languages of the NWT
- to ensure government departments work together to increase literacy levels in the NWT
- to develop literacy partnerships across society.

Three types of resources were allocated to the Strategy:

- new funding in the amount of \$2.4 million annually to fill gaps in adult literacy programming

- funding for literacy activities from complementary strategies, including the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Initiative and the NWT Aboriginal Languages Strategy
- existing program resources.

The NWT Literacy Strategy has been in place for five years now and has had some success particularly in the following areas: increased accessibility to adult literacy and basic education programs across the NWT; support for the development of family literacy programming in almost every community of the NWT; provision of literacy supports and programs for persons with disabilities, and seniors and increased awareness of literacy as an important socio-economic issue in the NWT.

The Literacy Strategy is not without its challenges, however. These include: funding cuts to the overall Strategy budget (current spending is approximately \$1.7 million); limited funding to support community-based literacy initiatives that fall outside the more institutional approaches to literacy; poorly implemented supports for workplace literacy resulted in a significant reduction in the resources allocated to support this initiative; lack of interdepartmental support and partnerships for literacy development and cuts to funding that supported literacy research in the NWT.

The first five years of the Literacy Strategy are currently being evaluated. There is a commitment on the part of the government to renew the Strategy based on results from the evaluation as well analysis from the NWT results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS).

### **Research in practice in the Northwest Territories**

There has been little in the way of research in practice in the NWT. Two people have attended RiPAL institutes. Aboriginal language groups, several adult educators conducting research for post-graduate degrees, and the NWT Literacy Council have undertaken research that most closely fits descriptions of RiP.

From the one focus group that we held for this project, it was very clear that people did not understand how RiP differed from other research activities like academic research, strategic planning, evaluation and needs assessment. A few literacy providers were supportive of the concept of RiP. They saw the need to reflect on their practice and take measures to improve it. Some felt they did that on an ongoing basis, but in an informal way, noting that if you are going to grow as a professional you are doing it all the time. One example was someone who taught a mathematics lesson without manipulatives, then did it again with manipulatives, then analyzed and charted the results. Many read journals and applied some of what they learned from that and monitored the results. There was, however, little sharing of findings among a larger group.

Overall, literacy providers feel they lack time, money and institutional support to take part in RiP, and that RiP cannot be successful unless these needs are addressed. They also felt that more systematic partnerships among key players, such as the research friend model in BC, would help support RiP activities.

### **Published research**

Balanoff, H. & Chambers, C. (2005). Do my literacies count as literacy?: An inquiry into *Inuinnaqtun* literacies in the Canadian north. *Literacies*, 6, 18-20. [www.literacyjournal.ca/literacies/6-2005/pdf./balanoff+chambers.pdf](http://www.literacyjournal.ca/literacies/6-2005/pdf./balanoff+chambers.pdf).

### **Nova Scotia snapshot by Janet Shively**



#### **The context for literacy work in Nova Scotia**

Nova Scotia is a Maritime province surrounded by water—the Atlantic Ocean, the Bay of Fundy, the Northumberland Strait and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Although it is the second smallest province in Canada, it is also the most populous province in the Maritimes with around 937,000 people (known as Bluenosers). Its traditional resource-based economies (fishing, mining, forestry, and agriculture) have, in recent decades, been joined by tourism, technology, film production, music and other cultural industries.

Nova Scotia was already home to the Mi'kmaq people when the first European colonists arrived. In 1604, French colonists established the first permanent European settlement north of Florida at Port Royal, founding what would become known as Acadia. The British Empire obtained control of the region between 1713 and 1760 and expelled the Acadians. Those Acadians from Nova Scotia who were deported to the Louisiana Territories are now known as “Cajuns.”

The population of Nova Scotia doubled when thousands of United Empire Loyalists (colonists loyal to Britain) fled to Canada from the newly independent United States following the American Revolution. Among these Loyalists were the first free Blacks outside of Africa, the Black Loyalists, who played a major part in the British war effort in return for their freedom. With the defeat of the British, the Loyalists were evacuated to Nova Scotia where land was promised to all of them. However, for the Black Loyalists this land was never granted and many left for Sierra Leone. After the War of 1812, several thousand Blacks settled in the Halifax area; today over 15,000 residents of the province have Black origins. With the Scottish Highland Clearances (c.1762) many Gaelic-speaking Highlanders were forced from their homes and it is estimated that more than 50,000 Gaelic settlers immigrated to Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island during this period. The Scottish cultural influence was, and remains, significant in the province; Nova Scotia means “New Scotland” in Latin.

Over 80% of Nova Scotia's population trace their ancestry either wholly or partly to the British Isles. Those with French origin rank second at 18 %, while the next largest groups by ancestry are German and Dutch. Many residents of Nova Scotia are also of Polish, Italian, Jewish and Lebanese descent. More recent immigrants to Nova Scotia have included Chinese, Indo-Chinese, African, Asian and eastern European groups. Almost 22,000 residents of Nova Scotia have Aboriginal origins and primarily belong to the Mi'kmaq Nation.

#### **Literacy provision in Nova Scotia**

Until very recently, many people who made a good living from the sea, the land, or the woods did not consider higher education important to their livelihood, and many young people left school early to begin earning a living in the traditional ways of their parents and grandparents. With the sudden drop in resource-based employment, however, many found themselves looking for work in a labour market that requires at least a Grade 12 education. This requires a quick change in education level as well as in culture.

According to information from the latest IALSS report, around 32% of adult Nova Scotians do not possess a high school diploma. Thirty-eight percent of adult Nova Scotians have a prose literacy proficiency below Level 3. While slightly higher than the Canadian average, this should not be a point of particular pride. In Atlantic Canada, only about 21% of people at Level 1 participated in adult education and training programs.

All adult literacy and academic upgrading programs in Nova Scotia are delivered through the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL), which was implemented in 2001. Funding for this initiative is provided by the Department of Education, the Department of Community Services, and Human Resources Development Canada. The goal of the NSSAL is to provide learning opportunities for adults at any point along the way to a Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults. There are 17 Adult High School sites, administered by six regional school boards, that focus on the Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults.

The Adult Learning Program (ALP) meets high school graduation standards and consists of 4 levels of courses from basic literacy to high school graduation. The outcomes of each level correspond loosely to the following grade levels: Level 1–Completion of Grade 6; Level 2–Grade 8; Level 3–Grade 10; Level 4–Grades 11 & 12. Most of the lower level programs are offered by community-based organizations, while Levels 3 & 4 are provided in a college setting.

Around 30 community-based organizations provide one-to-one tutoring and classroom-based programs for students in ALP Levels 1-2 and sometimes Level 3. These organizations provide the important foundational programs. Some adults in these programs wish to eventually earn the High School Diploma for Adults, or work towards their GED certificate, while others wish to simply improve knowledge and skills to achieve personal goals.

Twelve campuses of the Nova Scotia Community College offer ALP Levels 3 & 4. French language programming, at all levels, is coordinated through Université Sainte-Anne at six sites across the province. There are Workplace Education programs consisting of essential skills, and literacy training is available to businesses and labour organizations across Nova Scotia through the Department of Education.

The research for this project revealed a perception among literacy practitioners that a “two-tier” system of literacy delivery exists in the province, with institution-based adult educators having more status and being much better paid than community-based practitioners, even when delivering the same Level 3 curriculum. Another significant theme among community-based practitioners was that the “foundational piece” was being neglected in favour of the high school diploma. As one person said,

*So little attention is being paid to the foundation piece, the community-based piece. Funders don't seem to recognize that in order to advance you have to start with people where they are. You can't start half-way up the ladder.*

In spite of these concerns, one of the common themes that emerged at focus group meetings that brought people together from community and institutional groups was the surprising similarity of their issues and the need for continued connection and sharing of information.

### Research in practice in Nova Scotia

Research in Practice has not been well represented in Nova Scotia. The structure, priorities and focus of the literacy delivery system have not supported practitioner-based research, and literacy practitioners are currently under considerable stress without the addition of “one more thing.” However, a couple of recent projects provide a more optimistic outlook for the future of RiP in this province.

One project cited by a number of informants as an example of RiP in Nova Scotia is the Advancing Learning Technology (ALT) project of Literacy Nova Scotia, the provincial literacy coalition. Although the project was undertaken at LNS’s instigation and the actual research was not conducted by practitioners in the field, it did arise from questions and observations over the years and was carried out by someone who had been in the field the previous year doing a related project. The research questions posed were:

- To what extent do adult literacy learners in Nova Scotia have access to learning through technology?
- To what extent do community-based literacy organizations use learning technologies effectively and with optimal outcome in their operations and service delivery?

Main research activities included province-wide focus groups of the literacy community (practitioners, learners and coordinators of the community-based literacy networks), asset mapping, and an extensive survey to assess the state of technology of all the literacy networks. Findings resulted in Literacy Nova Scotia developing an action plan for the optimal use of learning technologies in the delivery and support of adult literacy programming in Nova Scotia, including a website launched in February 2006: <http://alt.ns.literacy.ca>.

Interest and activity in RiP have escalated since the spring of 2006. Literacy Nova Scotia invited Allan Quigley from the Department of Adult Education at St. Francis Xavier University, and also a member of the Steering Committee for this project, to present a professional development workshop on action research, “the most popular method used internationally in research in practice”. The session was called “Posing Problems/Solving Problems: Using Action Research to Address Issues of Retention, Recruitment and Effective Teaching in Literacy”. It aimed to show literacy practitioners how to apply action research to solve their own issues, create closer work-alliances within and across literacy programs, and create a province-wide network. Ideally the network could lift the province’s literacy field collectively and connect us with the exciting national and international movement of research in practice.

At this meeting, nine action research projects were initiated by working groups representing regions across the province. Some of the problems posed by the practitioners include:

- encouraging prospective students to attend informational sessions
- poor attendance leading to drop-out
- increase learner attendance by 15%
- keep younger students engaged
- reduce drop-out rate in Strait region
- poor attendance in community-based programs

- addressing the extended time that some learners experience waiting for an appropriate tutor in the one-to-one volunteer programs

A new network also emerged from this workshop: NS-ARM (Action Research Movement). Funded in part through a small grant from the Canadian Council on Learning's Adult Learning Knowledge Centre, the objective of the network and its website (<http://www.ns.literacy.ca/nsarmove>) is to support action research and to acknowledge its importance to literacy in Nova Scotia. Although at this point NS-ARM's main focus is on the nine action research projects initiated at the workshop, it will also undertake initiatives to embed action research more firmly into literacy work in Nova Scotia. In the next two years the network hopes to develop a Fact Sheet, create stronger links to information on practitioner research, and offer further professional development on action research.

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## Nunavut snapshot by Cayla Chenier & Janet Onalik



### The context for literacy work in Nunavut

Nunavut consists of 26 communities ranging in population from 300 to 7,000 spread over nearly 2 million square kilometres. Eighty-two percent of Nunavut's approximately 29,000 people are Inuit. The Government of Nunavut is a public government, rather than a form of self-government. All Nunavut residents have the same rights and responsibilities, but the majority of voters in Nunavut are Inuit, so Inuit hold the balance of power.

Nunavut is a complex language environment and therefore a complex literacy environment. The majority of the people speak Inuktitut as their first language. While Inuktitut is relatively strong compared with other indigenous languages of Canada, due to the increasingly intense contact and influence of English, the language has shifted in usage and strength in a short period of time. The dominance of English is especially apparent in the three largest communities of Nunavut: Iqaluit (the capital), Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay.

Inuktitut was traditionally an oral language. Missionaries developed syllabics and assisted in spreading the written word through publishing bibles in Inuktitut syllabics and teaching Inuktitut literacy skills. Other materials written in syllabics were very rare. The syllabic system is used in the central and eastern parts of Nunavut, but several communities in the west use Roman orthography. Even today, there is not an abundance of materials—for children or adults—written in either Inuktitut writing system. This alone poses a major challenge for developing strong Inuktitut literacy skills.

The fact that Inuktitut has a written form—developed in the late 1800's—probably contributed to its preservation. However, a lack of a standardized writing system also complicates the challenge of printing texts in Inuktitut. Within Nunavut, there are several different dialects of spoken Inuktitut. The dialects are mutually intelligible; however, to date, there has been a lack of consensus with respect to developing one standardized system of writing.

In the 1950s and 60s many young Inuit were sent to residential schools where English was the language of instruction. There, students developed English literacy skills, but most were able to maintain strong Inuktitut speaking skills because of early home usage. Students of the residential school generation, whose parents were usually unilingual Inuktitut speakers, are the most proficiently bilingual generation. Their strong foundation in Inuktitut, plus solid English instruction, is evident today. The results of the International Adult Literacy & Skills Survey show that, unlike everywhere else in Canada, the generation of Inuit who attended residential school has better English literacy skills than the younger generation. This speaks to the importance of having a strong language foundation.

Every community in Nunavut now offers K-12 education. In almost all communities, the language of instruction until grade 3 or 4 is Inuktitut. From grade 4 on, the curriculum, imported from Alberta, is delivered in English as though it were the first language of the students. Consequently, the development of literacy skills in Inuktitut is interrupted once English language instruction begins. Most students leave school long before completing grade 12 and without having developed

strong literacy skills in either language. Data from the first International Adult Literacy & Skills Survey (IALSS) for Nunavut, show that approximately 50% of those surveyed scored at Level 1 in document, prose and numeracy. Of significant concern is the youth population. Over 80% of the Inuit youth aged 16 to 25 scored less than Level 3 in prose literacy proficiency.

### **Literacy provision in Nunavut**

Literacy programming is woefully under-supported in Nunavut. Almost all adult literacy programming is delivered by or with the support of the Adult Educator in Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in every community. CLCs are administered by Nunavut Arctic College (NAC), the only college in Nunavut. NAC offers certificate, diploma, ABE, job preparation, literacy and cultural programs, as well as a few degree programs: law, nursing and education. The ABE, literacy, job preparation and some community-based cultural programs take place at the CLCs.

Most literacy programs offered at the Community Learning Centres must rely on short term third-party project-based funding. New funding must be sought each year; base funding through Nunavut Arctic College only covers costs associated with the actual building and the position of Adult Educator.

There are just two sources of funding available for literacy programs in Nunavut. Nunavut Arctic College has a small fund of approximately \$300,000 per year dedicated to literacy. This fund is not divided equally amongst the Community Learning Centres. Rather, Adult Educators must compete in a formal process that includes the submission of proposals. Equal access to the fund is further hindered for those Adult Educators with little proposal writing experience and, in some cases, little administrative support. The Government of Nunavut, through the Department of Education, supplies a meagre \$75,000 per year through the “Community Literacy Fund”. This is less than \$3,000 per community. With an increased awareness of literacy needs, competition for these funds has increased over the last few years. However, the amount available in each fund has remained unchanged.

The advantage of these funds is flexibility of criteria. To their credit, the administrators of these funds have supported some very successful community-based literacy programs in Nunavut. These programs are unique in that they combine culture and literacy and program facilitators report an increase in learners’ self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of identity. No long-term tracking of participants has taken place, but anecdotal information indicates that community-based literacy programs that integrate culture and literacy serve as a stepping stone to prepare students for the challenge of higher education and employment. Unfortunately there is not enough money to support such programs in every community and these important programs are neither permanent nor long-term.

The alternative to community-based programs for adults who wish to upgrade their skills is training type programs. The main funders of training in Nunavut are the Employment Insurance Program and Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement, both of which insist that programming must be job-related. Unlike the funding discussed in the previous paragraph, neither funder accepts that literacy development is one of a series of steps towards job preparation.

Despite these challenges, there are several bright policy sparks on the literacy horizon:

- **IALSS:** Results from the first International Adult Literacy & Skills Survey (IALSS) show dramatically that Nunavut needs significant support for literacy development.

- ***Nunavut Adult Learning Strategy:*** The Department of Education and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (the organization that represents Inuit under the land claim) struck the Nunavut Adult Learning Working Group in 2004. This working group includes a broad range of stakeholders including the Nunavut Literacy Council, Nunavut Arctic College, the Municipal Training Organization, regional Inuit organizations and senior level bureaucrats from various Government of Nunavut departments. The group recently completed a 20-year strategy which identifies literacy as the foundation for adult learning in Nunavut. The strategy also recommends a significant increase in support for more non-formal community-based programs. Literacy development is the primary focus for the first five years of the strategy, which has been approved by Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. and by Cabinet. It will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly before the end of June.
- ***Bilingual Education Strategy:*** The Department of Education has developed a strategy through which it plans to improve the K-12 system to turn out strong bilingual graduates.
- ***The Nunavut Project:*** Thomas Berger, the conciliator for implementing the land claim from 2003 to 2013, has submitted a report which recommends that the federal government provide adequate funding to significantly improve the public education system and adult learning opportunities, as well as halting the erosion of Inuktitut language and literacy. The Government of Nunavut is aiming for a representative workforce of 85% Inuit, and Inuktitut as the working language of government. They need a federal commitment to meet this goal. The Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Jim Prentice, has agreed to set up a working group to review the report and recommendations. However the Minister has stated that more study has to be done before the Federal Government decides what to do.

### **Research in practice in Nunavut**

Given the challenges of adult education and literacy programming in the Nunavut context we assumed that no formal research in practice had been carried out. This assumption proved correct. Only one educator we interviewed had even heard of RiP, in the field of health care. Nor did we find any formal documented Nunavut-based research in practice. However, there were many indications that literacy practitioners in Nunavut do carry out informal research in sharing information with their colleagues and using ideas in their practice that come from within their communities. Most practitioners felt that reading research, reflecting on practice and carrying out research would help them with their practice, but until greater institutional and technological support was made available, it would not be possible to engage in research in practice in a formal or committed way.

### **A Short History of Nunavut**

**5,000 years ago** the Tuniit or Dorset Culture peoples started to spread across the western Arctic and down the coasts of Greenland and Labrador. They brought metal tools and weapons, the bow and arrow and finely tailored skin clothing similar to modern Inuit skin clothing.

**Between 3,000 and 2,000 years ago** the Inuit peoples, ancestors of modern Inuit, appeared in the southern Bering Sea or Northern Pacific.

**Between 1,500 and 1,000 years ago** some of the Inuit moved eastward across Arctic Canada, bringing dog teams, kayaks and *umiak* (large skin boats) and specialized tools for whale hunting. The Inuit displaced the Tuniit and established the first Inuit settlements in Nunavut—small nomadic groups of several families who moved according to the seasons and the animals who sustained them.

**Beginning 400 years ago** the first non-Inuit - explorers, whalers and fishermen started to turn up in the arctic.

**From the 1800's** the number of arctic visitors increased. Explorers, whalers, fur traders, and missionaries survived the harsh environment thanks to knowledge and technology shared by Inuit hunters, guides and interpreters.

**From the 1930's** the Catholic and Protestant churches established a few scattered missions, hospitals and schools.

**In the 1950's** Inuit way of life began to change dramatically when the government established settlements which offered education, healthcare, churches, policing and traders. Some families were reluctantly relocated to new communities far away from their own land. The education system imparted southern knowledge, language and values—including *Dick and Jane!*—and the residential school system removed young children from their families, their language and their culture, often for many years.

**During the 1960's and early 70's** more & more non-Inuit moved north to work in government and the service sector. Young Inuit began to look for political change, land claims settlements and redress for past wrongs.

**In 1976** negotiations for a land claim agreement and a new territory began between the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada and the Government of Canada.

**In April 1982**, a majority of Northwest Territories residents voted 'yes' to division of the territory in a territory-wide plebiscite.

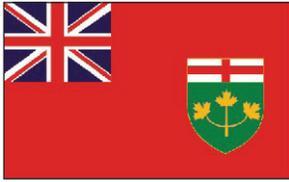
**In September 1992** Inuit and government negotiators reached a land claims agreement, which was ratified by nearly 85% of Inuit beneficiaries.

**In June 1993** the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act and the Nunavut Act were passed by the Canadian Parliament.

**On April 1, 1999** the territory of Nunavut joined the federation of Canada.

Sources: <http://www.mapleleafweb.com/features/nunavut/history.html>; [www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/about/road.shtml](http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/about/road.shtml); and McGhee, R. & Crowe, K. (1999). The early years. In Soubliere, M. & Coleman, G. *Nunavut '99: Changing the map of Canada*. Iqaluit: Nortext Multimedia Inc.

## Ontario snapshot by Katrina Grieve



### The context for literacy work in Ontario

The adult literacy field in Ontario is as complex and diverse as the province itself. Most of the population is concentrated in urban centres and in southern Ontario, and a significant proportion of adult literacy programs are in these areas. Adult literacy programming in the cities of Toronto and Ottawa tends to have a somewhat different character than programming elsewhere due a high immigrant population, and the range of social issues facing inner cities. Many community-based programs focus on the needs of particular groups such as street-involved youth, Native women, or residents of local social housing complexes. There are also a range of programs available at school boards and community colleges.

Few programs are available in smaller centres. Those that do exist serve wide geographic areas. Rural programs face particular challenges with transportation being a significant barrier.

Literacy programs in northern Ontario have their own unique challenges. Large distances between communities and a lack of community services mean that adult literacy programs are quite isolated and have no support in responding to the range of needs adults bring. In smaller communities adult literacy programming may consist of a one-person program with few resources working with Aboriginal learners.

### Literacy provision in Ontario

Adult literacy programming in Ontario is primarily funded through the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Funding and programming within LBS is divided into four streams: anglophone, francophone, deaf and native. Programming is split fairly evenly between community-based, school-board and community college sectors. Community-based programs make up the largest number of programs and serve many learners, while school-boards and community colleges tend to provide more intensive programming. Many community-based programs provide one-to-one tutoring using volunteers, as well as small groups, and tend to work with students at the most basic levels.

While these divisions allow programs to serve particular needs, they also tend to separate literacy practitioners from one another. Professional development is often organized according to stream or sector and practitioners don't tend to connect much across these divisions. The Ontario Literacy Coalition is the one organization where the sectors do come together to address joint issues and do collaborative research. However the OLC primarily has a mandate to serve the anglophone stream. The francophone, deaf and native streams are much smaller than the anglophone stream and have fewer resources. They have distinct needs and issues. While there have been some joint events bringing together practitioners from the different streams at the Festival of Literacies, on the whole there is not much dialogue across these divisions.

The different types of literacy providers come together at mandatory regional Literacy Service Planning Committees, usually on a monthly basis. These meetings focus primarily on meeting the

Ministry's priorities, which have recently included creating a seamless referral and delivery system, partnering with Ontario Works (social assistance) and a focus on preparing literacy students for the workforce.

The LBS program is a highly systematized framework for delivering adult literacy. This framework has been developed over the last 10 years, as part of the Recognition of Adult Learning Strategy. It involves extensive requirements for documentation, assessment and reporting. The system is based on a learner-centred approach, where programs work with learners to set goals, assess literacy levels, develop an individualized program, and create relevant "demonstrations" of progress. Programs are required to maintain individual learner files and submit information on a monthly basis through a computerized "Information Management System" on learners' status, contact hours, progress, and outcomes. These reports are part of an accountability framework that also includes annual visits to each program by field consultants from the Ministry, who rate programs on each of these requirements.



Source: Katrina Grieve

The literacy practitioners contacted in this project talked about the heavy demands of this accountability framework. They described a sense of exhaustion at meeting all the administrative and reporting tasks expected by funders while trying to meet the needs of learners who often face personal crises, all on very limited resources. In particular, practitioners talked about the lack of resources and poor working conditions. They described a sense that there is always more work for less money and that they constantly have to justify their existence.

While a considerable amount of money is spent on adult literacy in Ontario, the funding structure creates many challenges for programs, given the reality of literacy programming, learners dropping out temporarily, and the increasing challenges of finding reliable long-term volunteers. As many practitioners stated: "We are working on a very shaky foundation as a field and, "We don't have a profession."

Practitioners described their lack of status, lack

of voice and poor working conditions. Practitioners are not generally paid well and have insecure jobs. Many work part-time and are only paid for time spent in the classroom. There is considerable variation in the pay and working conditions of practitioners between the different sectors (community-based, school-board and college). However in each sector, literacy practitioners tend to have little status within their institutions. Most put in many volunteer hours in order to accomplish their work.

Practitioners also talked about having little access to professional development. They were frustrated at the lack of time for reflection, the few face-to-face gatherings of literacy practitioners and the growing sense of loneliness and isolation. Some program managers reported that the only

professional development opportunities they can afford to send practitioners to are those required by the funders. Many practitioners reported that this type of training generally focuses on the delivery framework and funder priorities. They despaired at how few opportunities exist to pass on core practitioner knowledge or discuss issues emerging from literacy practice.

### Research in practice in Ontario

The term “research in practice” is not widely understood in the field. When practitioners have the opportunity to explore this concept and what it can include, they see its potential. However, lack of time and resources prevent many from participating. Many “research” projects in the province are hard to distinguish from “development projects” focused on needs assessments, program evaluations and projects developing aspects of the LBS delivery system. This reflects Ontario’s focus on implementing a systematized delivery system, and its focus on evaluating program outcomes.

However, there is a budding interest in research in practice in Ontario. In the last five years, there have been a number of supports to encourage practitioner involvement in research, and projects of a more reflective nature based on questions that have emerged from practice. For example, the Festival of Literacies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto has offered a number of activities. These have included workshops, training on research in practice, research circles, guest access to courses, and support to particular projects. A number of other universities have participated in research collaborations. Improved access to resources through the AlphaPlus Centre and NALD has also helped to create greater awareness of research in practice projects happening in Ontario, in other parts of Canada, and internationally.

While the level of involvement in research in practice is still quite small, the practitioners who have been connected to these activities or projects feel a renewed sense of excitement. Informal groups have begun to spring up, where practitioners meet to reflect on their work or discuss issues of common interest. Those involved talk about developing a stronger sense of identity as educators and experienced practitioners. For these practitioners, research in practice breathes renewal and gives them new creative energy for their work.

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## Prince Edward Island snapshot by Karen Chandler



### The context for literacy work in Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island is the smallest province in Canada with a total population of approximately 138,500. According to the 2003 IALSS, 43% of adult Islanders between the ages of 16 and 65 are at Level 1 and 2. Of that number, 14,000 are at Level 1. According to Statistics Canada, there are 36,000 out of school youth and adults under 55 who do not have Grade 12. This is a shocking statistic from a total working population of 76,800 people!

### Literacy provision in Prince Edward Island

For those who wish to improve their skills or obtain a Grade 12 certificate, Literacy/Adult Basic Education Programs are offered province-wide through a community college (Holland College) and community learning centres. Programs include literacy, high school credits leading to the PEI High School Graduation Certificate for Mature Students, and GED Preparation. The program is funded by the province and the Canada/PEI Labour Market Development Agreement and there is no charge to learners who attend the program. Participants must be at least 18 years of age and out of the public school system for at least a year. The challenge faced by this program is how to attract low-level literacy learners. We know they are “out there” but having them self-identify and engage in learning is a major issue.

The practitioners who facilitate these programs are hired by Holland College and require a PEI Teacher’s Licence as well as experience or formal training in adult education. They are hired on short-term contracts and receive health and retirement benefits. The instructors in this setting have generally been part of the system for several years and are comfortable with that arrangement. Their issues are not so much around the terms of their employment as they are around the methods and supports needed to help those with low literacy skills to move forward.

The Volunteer Literacy Program provides one-on-one literacy tutoring to individuals who may not be ready to participate in the Literacy/ABE Program offered by Holland College. The challenge faced with this program is having enough trained volunteers to fill the needs as they arise. Providing ongoing training and support services for the tutors is essential. Project funding provides coordination and training support for tutors and our system relies heavily on volunteer services.

Workplace Education PEI, a partnership of business, labour and government, provides learning opportunities in the workplace and for the workforce. Programs are developed following organizational needs assessments (ONA) and individual needs assessments (INA). Funding for workplace education is always a challenge, with programs seeking funding from various sources to cover the costs. The other major challenges in workplace education are finding employers who are willing to offer employees the opportunity to improve their literacy skills in the workplace, and finding qualified instructors who are able to commit to the uncertainty and limited hours of employment.

The combined efforts of the PEI Literacy Initiatives Secretariat and the PEI Literacy Alliance have helped to move the literacy agenda forward in this province and created a sense of urgency to address literacy issues. In response, Premier Binns committed his government to take the lead in working with communities and business partners to develop the Provincial Literacy and Learning Strategy that will incorporate all life stages. The Strategy is scheduled to be released early in October 2006.

Earlier, in a presentation to the Rotary Club of Charlottetown, Premier Binns said, "Government cannot solve the literacy problem alone but all Islanders working together can make a difference for our future and for the future of Island families." In May of 2006 he called together his senior bureaucrats, policy makers, communications officers and deputy ministers to hear the latest literacy survey results and the implications of these results for both children and adults in the province. As a follow up, he directed those in attendance to find ways of putting literacy front and centre in all dealings with the public and to report back on how it is being implemented in each department.

The move to transform PEI into a fully functional, literate society must be grounded in solid evidence. We have current international and national literacy research but there is also a need to create new knowledge in the form of PEI-based literacy research. To date, research activity has been limited in this province.

### **Research in practice in Prince Edward Island**

At the present time, PEI does not have a framework to encourage research activity and there is no support for research in practice. However, efforts are being made to change that situation. In 2005 the University of Prince Edward Island and the PEI Literacy Alliance formed the Literacy Research Network (LRN). Its mandate is to promote, develop and disseminate literacy research in PEI while increasing the research capacity of community-based organizations. LRN will take the lead, through mentoring programs along with a series of workshops, to help community leaders use research in their policy-making and program delivery.

As in the other provinces, PEI has significant barriers to research in practice. According to Audrey Penner, Program Manager at the Institute of Adult and Community Education, located within Holland College:

*Some of the barriers that may be limiting the research activity at the practitioner level in this organization include negativity around the term, a lack of confidence in being able to conduct research, lack of time and, more importantly, lack of funding for long-term projects.*

The practitioners themselves questioned the value of existing research, their level of expertise and where they would find the time to do research. According to Jessie Lees, a researcher for the LRN, "If the literacy effort in PEI is to reach its potential, it will be necessary to convey the everyday usefulness, comprehensibility, and interest in research."

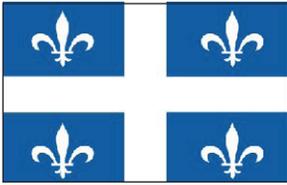
At the practitioner level, lack of time was cited more frequently than was the issue of funding. However, those interviewees who have experience writing proposals expressed concern about the present funding criteria. Jessie Lees also feels that there are many problems associated with proposal-based funding. She is concerned that, "We have good people wasting time writing proposals in competition with each other and the research has to fit the proposal, not the need."

Ray Doiron, Co-Director of the Learning Research Network (LRN), echoes Jessie's sentiments and feels that too much research is driven by someone else's agenda. *"People are not free to ask their own questions as they have to make the question fit the proposal. They often do not have the freedom, the flexibility or the resources to do it well"*.

It was obvious from the conversations with practitioners that the possibility of engaging in research activity has not, in most cases, been brought to their attention. As a result of the focus groups and interviews, practitioners may look more critically at existing research and perhaps through time may show more interest in research that directly impacts their practice. The concept of a mentorship program has been introduced by the LRN and, in the introductory phase, two non-researchers participated in research projects. By continuing to offer this approach, the LRN may entice practitioners to become involved.

The recent findings of the IALSS and PISA as it relates to PEI raise many questions in the field of adult education. Why are the literacy rates in PEI so low? Why do those who need to improve their educational levels not come forward? What strategies will work best for those who do? How can we identify and better serve those with learning disabilities? How can we dispel the myths about those who are incarcerated? The PEI Literacy Action Agenda calls for Literacy for All by the year 2020. It appears that the time is right for literacy research that is current and relevant to the needs of Islanders.

### Quebec snapshot by Linda Shohet



#### The context for literacy work in Quebec

Quebec is geographically huge, and has the second-largest population of any province or territory. The population is mainly concentrated along the St. Lawrence River and in urban areas, with almost half in the region of Greater Montreal. Anglophones make up only about 8% of the province and allophones (non-speakers of French or English) and Aboriginal groups account for about 10%. This distribution gives anglophones the federal status of “Minority Official Language” accorded to francophones in provinces outside Quebec, and brings with it some targeted funding. The English population, however, is concentrated around Greater Montreal where anglophones make up 12.5% and allophones 18.5%; on the Island of Montreal, the francophone percentage is 52 and anglophone is 21. For literacy provision, the largest school boards and community volunteer groups operate in the Greater Montreal area, although great need has been identified in remote and rural areas. Challenges for all anglophones in these areas are large; literacy barriers simply magnify the norm. Nevertheless, there are innovative projects currently being developed to maximize the resources available to these communities, including distance education options.

#### Literacy provision in Quebec

Quebec takes a unique view of literacy, both broader and narrower than elsewhere in Canada. The broad view is grounded in its long history of putting social needs above economic. While that is slowly shifting, the strong tradition of social consciousness has led to a recent adult education policy in which literacy is identified as the foundation for lifelong learning. The narrowness of its position, on the other hand, is embodied in the French word for literacy—*alphabétisation*—which suggests an infantile minimalist conception quite at odds with the policy intent. There is growing debate in the French community about the use of this word. Meanwhile, English literacy practice in the formal sector is framed by Education Ministry documents on *alphabétisation*. The other manifestation of narrowness is in the channels of provision.

Adult literacy provision is offered primarily through two channels: school boards and community organizations. Colleges are not mandated to offer service at all, and only a very small number of employers or unions have workplace programs, none in English. Even the terminology differs across language groups. For anglophones, “community organization” refers to volunteer tutoring through organizations recognized or “certified” by the Ministry. Other community organizations with broad mandates also offer literacy but do not show up in official numbers. For francophones, “community organization” means various popular education centres for adults staffed by trained and paid facilitators or animators. Their numbers have shrunk over the last decade, but they still offer stimulating programs for learners.

In our interviews and focus groups, informants were often uneasy about what they could or should say about literacy provision, research, and research in practice. Then as a stroke of good fortune, in late May 2006 the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports (MELS) released a detailed analysis of registrations in literacy services in school boards and community organizations for 2002-2003, and a MELS project officer shared selected data with literacy organizations. Details from this report corroborate many of the comments made by informants.

What is salient? That registrations overall dropped over the previous 11 years; that community organizations serve more people than school boards in 13 of 17 regions; that allophones account for 66% of all literacy registrations and 86% in Montreal school boards; that *francisation* and literacy are confounded in French as ESL and literacy are in English. None of these numbers refers to content or quality of curriculum or training. Nevertheless, they raise baseline issues that perhaps can now be put on the table. The full analysis is available online at [www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dfga/disciplines/alphabetisation/autres\\_productions/pdf./statalpha0203.pdf](http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dfga/disciplines/alphabetisation/autres_productions/pdf./statalpha0203.pdf).

Here are a number of other points made in the report:

- There were 21,250 registrations in 2002-03, down from over 31,000 registrations in 1991-1992.
- 51% of students were registered full-time.
- The number of registrations represents only 4.5% of the target population of people aged 15-64 who have less than 9 years education.
- 75% of students were only registered for one session (usually the fall), and allophone students were the most likely to register for more than one session.
- Nearly 14% of literacy students also registered in other adult education services.
- 92% of francophones and 32% of anglophones chose French school boards.
- Only 2.5% of registrations in School Boards, or 336 students across the province, were anglophone.
- Over 52% of registrations were in English school boards.
- 74% of allophones chose English schools boards compared to 36% in 1996-1997. The report states, “*Notons que depuis quelques années, la population allophone s’accroît considérablement dans les services d’alphabétisation et qu’elle a davantage tendance à s’inscrire au secteur anglophone.*” [translation: “We note that for several years the numbers of allophone students in literacy has increased considerably, and this group has a greater tendency to enroll in anglophone programs.”]
- Registrations at community organizations (in 2002-2003) ranged from 24 to 192, varying greatly between rural and urban settings.
- 4.7% of registrations were referred by MESSF (Emploi-Que or welfare).

### **Research in practice in Quebec**

For this project, a limitation was that francophone literacy was not included. Popular education literacy providers in this province have, for more than 30 years, engaged in action-research. Pioneers such as Serge Wagner and Jean-Paul Hautecoeur began publishing collections of the outcomes from these projects in the late 1970s. Currently the Université du Québec à Montréal offers formal training for adult literacy providers. English providers in Quebec have no resources of this type. The one university program at Concordia that offered adult education was dropped in 2005.

In general, anglophone practitioners have done a limited amount of research in practice. In the community sector, there has been none. In the school board sector, there is a Ministry-supported program to encourage adult education teachers to undertake research. Some has been done by teachers who are either enrolled in or considering graduate studies. Much of the work has been project-based, and only a small number of projects have focused directly on literacy. Even when

adult educators have done work that could be relevant to literacy, there is no mechanism for circulating or sharing results.

This project raised awareness about RiP. Informants agreed that teachers are always asking questions about their practice and want to improve their teaching and student learning. Several expressed interest in finding ways to develop a RiP culture. That will be the next step.

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## Saskatchewan snapshot by Stacey Crooks



### The context for literacy work in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan is a province of many communities. The population is small and spread out. Saskatoon and Regina are the largest centres but together they account for less than half of the province's population. A number of smaller cities throughout the province are significant centres for the areas they serve. In addition, many people live in small towns and villages and on farms. The diversity of communities calls for a diversity of literacy program approaches.

Over the past few years, Saskatchewan's population has remained stagnant or shrunk due to migration to other provinces, notably Alberta. Consequently there is much concern about labour shortages and maintaining an educated and skilled workforce in the province.

At the same time as the general population is shrinking, the Aboriginal population is growing rapidly. Also whereas the overall population is aging, the Aboriginal population is young; on average, at least ten years younger than the non-Aboriginal population. Engaging young Aboriginal people is a priority for literacy programs in the province.

Although large numbers of immigrants do not come to Saskatchewan, their cultural and social impact is significant in many communities. A lack of services for immigrants leads many to seek out literacy programs to improve their English. This is most significant in Regina and Saskatoon where ESL learners outnumber English speakers in some programs. Some small communities are also greatly impacted by small numbers of immigrants who are brought in to fill gaps in the labour market.

### Literacy provision in Saskatchewan

Literacy services in Saskatchewan are provided by a network of government and non-governmental organizations. The provincial Department of Learning provides funding for adult literacy program delivery and coordination. In the larger centres the main provider of full-time literacy programs is Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). In smaller centres and rural areas, the regional colleges provide similar services. In addition, the province funds seven other community-based organizations (CBOs) throughout the province to provide literacy programs. Provincial money available for adult literacy programs has not increased in the last ten years; in fact, the allocation is lower than it was in the early 1990s.

In 1998, the province introduced the family literacy initiative. This funding goes to the Saskatchewan Literacy Network to provide support for family literacy programs in the province and to *Service Fransaskois* to coordinate and deliver francophone family literacy programming. The rest of the money is allocated annually through grants that support program delivery and regional coordination.

The provincial adult and family literacy money funds only a portion of literacy programs that operate in Saskatchewan and for many of the organizations that do receive a piece of this funding, it

does not provide enough to sustain their programs. Most organizations, particularly CBOs, must find project funding to continue to operate on a yearly basis. The most significant funder is the National Literacy Secretariat but sources also include other provincial and federal departments and a few private funders.

Many CBOs and regional colleges rely heavily on volunteer tutors. This allows them to serve the diverse learners in their programs, including ESL learners, in a more cost effective manner. Although there are advantages to this approach, there are also concerns. Over the last few years many organizations have noticed a shortage of volunteers. Some programs do not have the staff needed to effectively support the numbers of tutors and learners in their programs. Additionally, it is often the highest need learners who end up in volunteer programs and these learners may need more support than can be expected of an average volunteer tutor.

Provincial organizations provide a way to connect the diverse and dispersed literacy programs in the province. The largest of these is the provincial literacy coalition, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN), which many practitioners rely on for support. The SLN also works closely with the provincial government on literacy projects in the province. Two other significant provincial organizations are the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network (SALN) and the Saskatchewan Adult Basic Education Association (SABEA).

The participants in this research project provide a snapshot of literacy practice in Saskatchewan. They work in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, LaRonge, Yorkton, Swift Current and Balcarres. They work for many different organizations including SIAST, regional colleges, CBOs, libraries, provincial networking organizations and the government. Although there are many similarities among the participants, they also face different challenges shaped by the physical and social geography of their communities and by the nature and funding of the organizations for which they work.

### ***Changes on the horizon***

In recent years, a number of initiatives have signalled changes may be coming for literacy practitioners and learners in Saskatchewan.

- In 2001, work to develop a provincial literacy strategy for literacy programming in Saskatchewan began. Literacy practitioners and learners were consulted and a draft document was completed but we do not yet know if and when the strategy will be implemented.
- In the spring of 2006, pilot tests of the Circle of Learning literacy benchmarks were completed. The benchmarks were developed by the SLN and the provincial government with input from practitioners and learners across the province. It is expected that the benchmarks will be implemented in the next year. To date there has been no such standardized document to guide literacy programs in Saskatchewan and it is uncertain what effect this will have on literacy learners and practitioners in Saskatchewan, particularly on CBOs and organizations that rely heavily on volunteers.
- In the fall of 2005, the provincial government announced a new initiative—Saskmart: Literacy for Life. The initiative established a provincial literacy commission that is charged with developing and implementing a province-wide strategy to foster literacy development for Saskatchewan residents of all ages. The literacy commission has an advisory board made up of individuals from across the province. In the spring of 2006, the commission released its first call for proposals

for the Sasksmart Innovations Fund, which will fund community action plans for literacy. This initiative is a radically different way of funding and talking about literacy service in Saskatchewan and it is difficult to say what the impact will be on literacy delivery in the province.

### **Research in practice in Saskatchewan**

In 2004, at the request of the National Literacy Secretariat, the SLN completed a project, *Exploring the Possibilities of Research in Practice in Saskatchewan*. The results of the project indicated that many practitioners were engaging with research in a variety of ways and that practitioners were interested in learning more about research in practice and in becoming more actively involved in research themselves. The report, available on the SLN website, contains several recommendations for future steps to support research in practice. In 2004/2005 RiP support was part of the SLN's field development plan and the network held a research in practice workshop facilitated by Mary Norton. The following year two practitioners were contracted to support research in practice.

SABEA has also been working to support research among its members. A workshop led by Allan Quigley resulted in four action research projects. Since then SABEA has continued to work to raise awareness and offer support to practitioners who want to engage in action research. In addition to the original projects, one project has been completed with SABEA's support.

Although little practitioner research has been completed to date, there is a sense that things are beginning to happen. Currently interest in RiP in Saskatchewan is high. The initial work of the SLN has laid a foundation and the response to our work on this project suggests that practitioners are aware of the concept and eager to learn more. Practitioners also see RiP as a way to respond to the changing climate of literacy work in Saskatchewan. More work in awareness raising and support is needed but it seems that research in practice is on its way to becoming part of the Saskatchewan literacy landscape.

### **Published research**

Erickson, L. (2004). *Exploring the possibilities for literacy research in practice in Saskatchewan: Project summary, 2003-2004*. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Literacy Network. <http://www.sk.literacy.ca/resource/pubs/rip/Rip.pdf>.

## Yukon snapshot by Beth Mulloy & Sierra van der Meer



### The context for literacy work in the Yukon

It's the cussedest land that I know,  
 From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it  
 To the deep, deathlike valleys below.  
 Some say God was tired when He made it;  
 Some say it's a fine land to shun;  
 Maybe; but there's some as would trade it  
 For no land on earth—and I'm one.

*The Spell of the Yukon, Robert Service*

The Yukon is a land of extremes. In the winter people live in virtual darkness and ridiculous cold. Temperatures can dip to -40 for weeks and things grind to a halt, as cars stop working and people spend their time cuddled next to a warm stove or oil monitor. In the summer, the days are long and warm. Programs and meetings get put on hold as people rush to take advantage of every nice day. Workers flock outdoors to spend time in kayaks, canoes, bicycles and tents before the winter creeps back.

The Yukon is a big territory of almost 500,000 square kilometres stretching from the 60<sup>th</sup> latitude right up to the Arctic Ocean, and a sparse population of approximately 32,000 residents. Almost 75% of the Yukon's population is located in Whitehorse, the capital city. The rest is speckled across 15 communities ranging in size from 37 to 2,000 people. These communities are connected by long highways, except for Old Crow, which is accessible by plane only.

The Yukon has 11 self-governing First Nations and three First Nations that have yet to sign final land claims and self-government acts. The overall population of the Yukon is 23% First Nations, although the proportion is significantly higher in the communities. The Yukon works hard to develop and deliver Aboriginal and family literacy programs that are culturally and regionally relevant. Long distances, low populations, relative isolation and limited resources make literacy a challenge in communities. Practitioners developing and delivering literacy programs are acutely aware of the history of education in the Yukon, especially for the many First Nations people who attended residential school only one generation earlier.

According to the International Adult Literacy Skills Survey (IALSS), the Yukon has the highest literacy rates in the country. However, the numbers reflect the fact that a high number of professionally-educated people work in the territory. These people are largely concentrated in Whitehorse. The IALSS statistics were surprising to many community members who did not feel it reflected the reality of rural community and First Nations' literacy challenges.

### **Literacy provision in the Yukon**

Literacy in the Yukon has evolved significantly in the last five years. The literacy landscape of the Yukon was fundamentally altered in 2004 when the Yukon Literacy Coalition became an independent organization. The Yukon Literacy Coalition was the first literacy group that was community owned and governed. It has been instrumental in encouraging community-driven literacy programs and projects and has led to an increase in information sharing and training opportunities for community literacy practitioners.

Although First Nations, schools and workplaces are involved in literacy, most literacy services in the territory are delivered from a small number of organizations:

- Yukon Literacy Coalition is the territorial coalition that offers training, information-sharing, promotion, capacity building and family literacy
- Yukon Learn Society is an adult learning center and tutor training center located in Whitehorse with service delivery across the territory
- Yukon College offers tutoring for adults on its campuses in most communities
- The Learning Disability Association of the Yukon works with people with learning disabilities
- *Association Franco-Yukonnaise* works with francophone learners on improving their French literacy, as well as ESL students wanting to improve their English.

The primary funding agencies for literacy programs in the Yukon are the Yukon Government Department of Education, Advanced Education Branch and the previous National Literacy Secretariat. The Yukon Government budgets approximately \$1.2 million for adult learning. This budget includes Yukon College apprenticeship programs, home tutor programs, and native language programs. The former National Literacy Secretariat funded adult literacy programs in the Yukon through various programs (the NLS is in transition as we write this). A small amount of other funding is available from private donations and fundraising.

### **Research in practice in the Yukon**

We are not aware of any research in practice projects in the Yukon, although we understand that literacy practitioners generally **do** reflect on their work. We believe that there have not been any formal research in practice projects in the Yukon because people are not aware of, or informed about, research in practice. The executive director of the Yukon Literacy Coalition has attended two national research-in-practice gatherings, but has not worked directly on a Yukon RiP project.

As a result of this project the Yukon Literacy Coalition has made a commitment to informing literacy practitioners and others about RiP, and to developing and initiating research in practice in the Yukon. We believe that research in practice is a wonderful tool for improving practice and developing the literacy community.

*People are researched to death and they are tired of it. They want concrete [literacy] programs. (Beth Mulloy, YT)*

## **Snapshot of the Aboriginal literacy community by Ningwakwe/ E. Priscilla George**

**National Speaker, National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA)**

### **The context for literacy work with Aboriginal people**

Two of the most important principles that constitute the foundation of the work of the National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA) are:

- the holistic approach to Aboriginal literacy is effective, therefore, crucial. As the original peoples of this country, we have our own distinct cultures. We must base our models and methodologies in Aboriginal culture. Such an approach recognizes that each individual is Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body; therefore, literacy programming must recognize and nurture each of those four aspects); and
- language and culture are inextricable, therefore, literacy in our own Aboriginal languages is paramount. In 1992, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) summarized the importance of Aboriginal languages as follows:

“The Aboriginal Languages were given by the Creator as an integral part of life. Embodied in Aboriginal languages is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values, and the fundamental notion of what is truth. Aboriginal language is an asset to one’s own education, formal and informal. Aboriginal language contributes to greater pride in the history and culture of the community; greater involvement and interest of parents in the education of their children, and greater respect for Elders. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one’s ancestral language.”<sup>8</sup>

Aboriginal literacy learners bring many issues with them to a learning situation. However, these are symptoms of a larger concern, the erosion of culture. Many factors have contributed to this erosion including, but not limited to:

- the Indian Act, along with its attendant "reserve" system; and,
- residential schools, where several generations of children were systematically removed from their birth families/communities, and punished for speaking their Aboriginal language.

The implicit message is that there is something wrong with being Aboriginal. The long-term effect has been a loss of pride in one's Aboriginal identity. Accordingly, when a group of practitioners formed the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition in 1988, they began with this understanding:

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<sup>8</sup> Marianne B. Ignace. *Handbook for Aboriginal Language Programming, A Report Prepared for the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Aboriginal Languages Sub-Committee*. North Vancouver, BC, April 1998.

Native literacy is a tool which empowers the spirit of Native people... Native literacy fosters and promotes achievement and a sense of purpose, which are both central to self-determination.

At the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples' Roundtable on April 19, 2004, the Prime Minister of Canada committed to "renew and strengthen cooperation between the Government of Canada and Aboriginal Peoples." Each of the five national Aboriginal political organizations signed individual Accords on Cooperative Policy Development with the Government of Canada.

There are over 630 First Nations communities in Canada.<sup>9</sup> While the term "Indian" is used in the Constitution Act, many people use First Nations to signify that we were here first. It refers to Indigenous peoples and their descendants who are not Inuit or Metis. First Nation replaces the term "Indian Band".

There are 61 Metis communities in Canada, mostly in the prairie provinces, but also in Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador and the Northwest Territories.

There are 53 Inuit communities in Canada, mostly in Nunavut and Quebec, but also in Newfoundland/Labrador and the Northwest Territories.<sup>10</sup>

**Total Aboriginal Identity\* population, 2001 Census<sup>11</sup>**

Status Indian	505,000 (51%)
Non-Status Indian	104,000 (11%)
Metis	292,310 (30%)
Inuit	45,070 ( 5%)
Multiple and other Aboriginal responses	30,080 ( 3%)
<b>Total Aboriginal identity</b>	<b>976,305</b>

\* The Aboriginal Identity population includes people who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, North American Indian, Metis or Inuit, or who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian, as defined by the Indian Act of Canada, or who reported being a member of an Indian Band or First Nation.

**Literacy provision for Aboriginal people**

The 1998 research for *The Language of Literacy: A National Resource Directory of Aboriginal Literacy Programs* found just over 90 Aboriginal-controlled literacy programs in Canada. Approximately one-third were in Ontario. The resulting 2000 National Aboriginal Literacy Gathering (NALG) in Morley, Alberta, confirmed that funding criteria often precluded literacy programming in Aboriginal languages except in the territories, where Aboriginal languages are official. A handful of programs in other provinces were creative in how they incorporated Aboriginal language literacy. Most certainly, practitioners were doing their level best to ensure that methodologies and resources were at least culturally-relevant, if not culture-based. However, such resources were minimal, and often required that practitioners "burn the midnight oil" to produce them.

9 As reported by the Assembly of First Nations.

10 This figure is taken from the Aboriginal Portal at <http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca>.

11 Totals in this table are based on data from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Federal Interlocutor for Metis and Non-Status Indians and from Statistics Canada's 1994 publication, *A profile of Canada's Inuit population*.

For any programming to be effective, it must be based in the Aboriginal worldview. That is, life is viewed holistically and interconnected, and Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body must be considered and included in everything.

Several Aboriginal people involved in literacy have found that, when they do presentations in fora with non-Aboriginal people, participants often come up to them afterwards and express an interest in learning about the Aboriginal worldview. They feel that it encapsulates what they've felt all along, but either have expressed in other words, or have not yet articulated.



**Artist Statement**  
**by Christina Arcand, SK**

The Eagle: my goals and my achievements  
The Lone Wolf: what my future holds before me  
The Gathering: the head, the feather, the paw, the staff—what I've become  
The Mother and Cub: all of my life's lessons  
The Small Paws: the paths of life  
The Borders: my four fathers—my supports, protectors, teachers, and loved ones.

This is my vision of learning and this is life itself.

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### Research in practice in Aboriginal literacy

Aboriginal practitioners and researchers have presented at, and participated in, the two research in practice conferences (Edmonton in 2001 and St. John's in 2003), and the Portraits of Literacy conference held at the University of British Columbia in July 2002.

Two academics have done Aboriginal literacy research on a national level: Eileen Antone, Associate Professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and Maurice Taylor, Professor, University of Ottawa. A handful of graduate students are doing or have done Aboriginal literacy research at their respective institutions, including Michael Johnny at Trent, Nancy Cooper at OISE, and Jan Hare at UBC.

In March 2004, the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) hosted a meeting called "Setting Priorities for Literacy Research" which included representatives from across Canada involved in literacy research. People and organizations involved in Aboriginal literacy research met as a group to discuss common aspirations and concerns, which they felt were distinct from that of the mainstream and francophone groups. As a result of that meeting, and Dr. Ralf St. Clair's analysis of what literacy research NLS had supported between 1998 and 2003, NLS expressed an interest in supporting an Aboriginal Literacy Research Network. It has yet to be funded, partly because the current funding criteria act as a barrier. The other impediment is that changes in the federal government have stalled many projects.

At a program level, many practitioners feel that they are already doing RiP. That is, they constantly reflect on their practice, and seek ways to improve. That reflection is based in the culture, the holistic approach. Because programs are often under-funded, the practitioners are swamped with administrative and programming requirements. They need a way to systematically document their reflections, and to share them. Currently, they do not have time. In the words of one practitioner, "*We do it on the fly.*" Literacy programs would benefit if funders and host organizations would recognize that research and reflection are bona fide activities.

Integral to programming and research is the fact that many Aboriginal peoples live in two worlds. A respectful way to honour the strengths of each needs to be found. Too often, the focus is on quantitative results, such as contact hours, which speak only to the values of the funder, rather than qualitative results, such as a positive cultural identity, which is a foundation to learning. Qualitative results are less valued and take more time. In fact, Schnarch (2004) postulates that "Doing respectful research in Aboriginal communities takes more time, more money and, arguably, moral fibre."<sup>12</sup>

Schnarch suggests that the following themes and objectives emerge from a survey of existing research policy documents prepared by First Nations. Research should:

- provide clear benefits to First Nations Peoples and communities
- help develop capacity in meaningful ways
- increase First Nations' control of information and research processes
- respect sovereignty/jurisdiction/rights of First Nations
- support self-determination
- support cultural preservation and development

<sup>12</sup> Brian Schnarch, Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research: A Critical Analysis of Contemporary First Nations Research and Some Options for First Nations Communities, *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 1 (1). Ottawa: National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2004.

Schnarch states that “Although OCAP originates from a First Nations context, many of the insights and propositions outlined are relevant and applicable to Inuit, Metis and other Indigenous Peoples internationally.

A number of projects and research initiatives have been integral to the evolution of Aboriginal literacy research in Canada. These activities have been crucial to NILA’s development as well, and we have participated in many projects, including the following:

- NILA hosted a project that surveyed workplace/workforce literacy and essential skills programs for Indigenous persons, analyzed for promising practice, recommended principles of best practice, and recommended how to train practitioners for these programs. (completed November 2005)
- member of the Thesis Advisory Committee for a Masters’ Thesis through Trent University *Policy Implications for Native Literacy in Ontario*. (2006)
- Sponsoring a Masters’ Thesis research project through Royal Roads University, *Supporting Rural and Remote Employment Counsellor*. (2006-7)
- The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres’ research project on literacy as a barrier to employment. (2006)
- The Chiefs of Ontario *Manifesto on First Nation Education*, which entailed writing a chapter on principles and practices in literacy programming, along with recommendations. (2005)
- OISE’S SSHRC project, *Aboriginal Literacy in Cultural Context: An Alternate Perspective*. (2004–Present)
- The Canadian Public Health Association’s pre-conference research workshop on literacy and health, as well as coordinating a supplement in the *Canadian Journal on Public Health*. (2004)
- *Identifying Inclusive Models of Lifelong Learning in Canada: Building a Learning Nation*, Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (2004-2006)
- The Advisory Committee for the Canadian Indigenous Literacy and Language Institute (CILLDI) which, among other activities, conducts research on the methodologies for teaching and preserving Aboriginal languages. (2005–Present)
- *Developing and Supporting Capacity for Practice-Related Research on Literacy and Health in Canada*, Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto. (2005-Present)
- *Moving Research about Violence and Learning into Practice: A Practitioner Model*, consortium of literacy organizations. (2006–2008)
- The Adult Work Group of the Health and Learning Knowledge Centre. (2006)
- The National Advisory Committee for the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (2006)

## A national snapshot by Jenny Horsman

As the provincial snapshots reveal, adult literacy is a patchwork, often charity-based, remedial “system.” The patchwork includes programs run by community-based organizations, school boards, community colleges, and workplace programs run by business and unions. Some programs focus on family literacy, youth or specific language groups. There is very little “system” to support students moving from one program to another, from basic literacy to adult basic education or upgrading, to job or career training. Very few programs across the country have adequate or stable funding.

Over the last ten years, changing measures of literacy have created a bigger “literacy” problem. In 1989, the National Literacy Secretariat asked Statistics Canada to profile *Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities* (LSUDA). The survey was based on the idea of literacy as a continuum rather than something people did or did not have. LSUDA concluded that 7% of Canadians couldn’t read at all, that 9% were barely literate, and that 22% of adults were not literate enough for success. The first IALS study (Statistics Canada, 1996) ranked adults at various levels of proficiency: 22% of Canadians were at the lowest level, 26% were at level 2, and proposed that both levels would benefit from instruction. At the same time resources for literacy programs largely stayed the same. Programs were given no increases to enable them to meet this growing need. Awareness of the complexity of adult literacy issues and of the importance of alternative approaches continues to be limited. Access to programs is inadequate: less than 1% of Canadians ranked in levels 1 and 2 (Statistics Canada, 1996) attend adult literacy programs.

The provincial and territorial snapshots reveal that:

- The fewest number of programs are for students working at the most basic levels.
- Very few supports exist for students to attend full-time. Government funding requirements frequently require students to leave programs to take a job, any job, rather than continuing with their education.
- Supports which make attendance possible, such as childcare and transportation allowances or assistance, are inconsistent. Where they are provided, they are not always structured in ways that truly make a difference to student attendance.
- There is little recognition and support for alternative programs that attract adults who wish to extend their reading and writing skills but do not attend conventional literacy programs.
- Despite research that shows literacy progress is fastest when people become literate in their mother tongue first, very few first-language literacy programs exist.
- Most practitioners work in positions that expect them to assume a great range of responsibilities with few supports.
- Practitioners in many parts of the country work part-time for relatively low pay.
- Programs in many parts of the country rely on year-to-year grant funding.
- Many practitioner networks rely on project funding and must recast their work each year as a special project rather than as ongoing work.

Adult literacy provision is under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Lead ministries vary between jurisdictions and include Education, Training, Social Services and Labour. The federal government has invested in adult literacy through the National Literacy Secretariat which did not fund direct service, but provided project funding for research, materials development, professional development

and networking. The federal government invests in some literacy training through Labour Market Development Agreements (EI money), and through institutions such as community colleges and prison literacy programs. In October of 2006 the National Literacy Secretariat was changed to the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESP) and funding for the “cost-shared program” through which regional initiatives were linked with provincial funding was cut.

### **National anglophone organizations**

In spite of the difficulties of working nationally across a network with many different shapes and characters in each province and territory, some organizations do take on this challenge:

- ABC CANADA focuses on awareness-raising and carries out some research. They work in partnership with business, labour, educators and government.
- Frontier College runs several different programs including a university-based program using student volunteers who work in communities with children, teens and adults, a labourer teacher program, and programs with street youth and with adults with disabilities.
- Laubach Literacy of Canada is a network of about 200 programs, about 250 trainers, and about 5,000 volunteer tutors.
- The Movement for Canadian Literacy is a network of 13 provincial and territorial networks representing more than 2,500 programs.
- The National Adult Literacy Database is a key technology resource for the literacy community, making a huge array of resources available online and hosting local websites for organizations across the country.
- The National Indigenous Literacy Association is an Aboriginal network, linked with three provincial Aboriginal literacy networks (Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario) and 90 Aboriginal-controlled literacy programs.

A series of other national organizations are also engaged in literacy issues:

- Association of Canadian Community Colleges
- Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs
- Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators
- Canadian Council on Learning
- Canadian Education Association
- Canadian Labour Congress
- Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
- Conference Board of Canada
- John Howard Society
- YM-YWCA

### **National research in practice initiatives**

In 1996 the National Literacy Secretariat held a policy conversation on research. Participants identified the need to link research and practice more effectively. The next year Mary Norton and Yvon Laberge carried out a small survey on practitioner research and discovered interest but little activity. They planned a bilingual research in practice seminar in Edmonton. It brought together

18 practitioners, researchers and staff from government and literacy organizations from across Canada. The aim of the gathering was to “encourage and support practitioner research in adult literacy.” This first national initiative built on local practitioner activities that had been percolating in several provinces.

In 1998 the National Literacy Secretariat issued a report, *Enhancing Literacy Research in Canada*, which recognized the value of practitioner-driven research. Mary Norton continued to play a major role in building the movement. In 2001 she initiated plans for a second event in Edmonton. About 50 practitioners met at *Sowing Seeds, Bearing Blossoms* for three days of workshops, large group discussions and socializing. The gathering broke new ground by focusing on literacy research in practice settings, by including and focusing on the work of adult literacy practitioners, and by using an intimate setting conducive to conversation, network-building and information sharing.

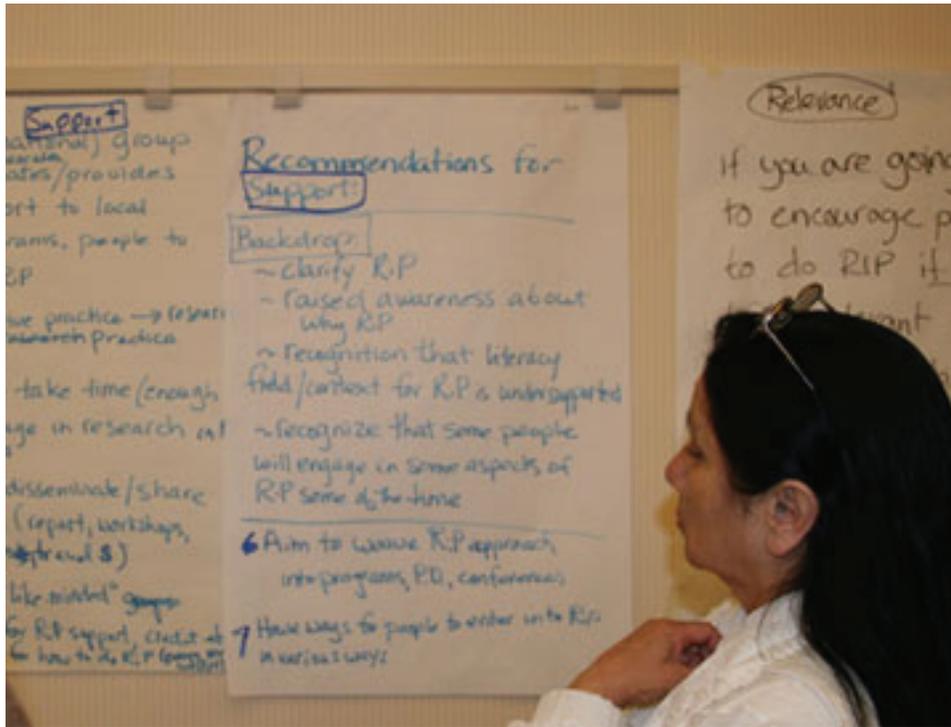
A consultation process began in 2000 to ask what practitioners and researchers thought about creating an adult literacy journal. More than a hundred people gave input at face-to-face meetings in Edmonton, Ottawa and Halifax and many more participated online. Energy and enthusiasm was high, as people felt a publication could share information and link people across the country. In June of 2002, 25 people met in Toronto to plan a structure and to figure out how to engage a range of partners to support the journal. An editor was hired to bring the journal into being.

In 2002 a group of literacy educators at the University of British Columbia decided that the international literacy conference in the department of Language and Literacy Education (LLED), *Portraits of Literacy: Critical Issues in Family, School and Community Literacy*, should involve adult literacy practitioners. They planned a one day pre-conference on research. The event was intended as a follow-up to the Edmonton gathering. Its aim was to support bringing the unique perspective of literacy practitioners to the mainstream academic conference. Approximately 50 practitioners and researchers attended this one-day event in Vancouver which used creative media to explore issues related to research in practice.

These events led to calls for more sustained training in research in practice. A national planning group designed an education and networking event which included a core of intense courses, workshops, inquiry sessions and affinity groups. The 2003 institute, *Extending Practices...Building Networks*, took place in St. John’s NL. It provided a unique setting for more than 70 practitioners and researchers from across the country to learn about RiP, explore issues in depth, and network. The journal *Literacies* was launched at that institute.

Alongside these gatherings to explore RiP there have also been several large practitioner research projects. As early as 1990 the National Literacy Secretariat supported the Canadian Congress on Learning Opportunities for Women to carry out a national research study on women and literacy. More recently researchers from selected regions of the country have been included in projects such as *Identifying Inclusive Models of Lifelong Learning in Canada: Building a Learning Nation* ([www.nald.ca/learningcircles/index.htm](http://www.nald.ca/learningcircles/index.htm).) and *Moving Research about Violence and Learning into Practice: A practitioner model* (information will be available at [www.learningandviolence.net](http://www.learningandviolence.net)). Although primarily serving practitioners in Ontario, the Festival of Literacies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto has also offered online graduate courses which are open to the community. These have enabled practitioners from across the country to participate in education on issues related to research.

These initiatives have all been substantially, or entirely, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat. The field has many questions about what funding will be supported by the new National Office of Literacy and Learning and whether RiP will receive support in the new funding climate.



Ningwakwe reviews elements of the team's work on the RiP Framework

## CHAPTER 5 Learnings about Research

by Helen Woodrow

### For Learning Researchers: A Found Poem

By many standards of judgement,  
this book cannot be considered  
a model piece of...  
research.

Educators should not look for  
experiments,  
controlled  
conditions,  
systematic  
score-keeping...

Nor should psychologists  
look for data taped at  
periodic intervals  
under  
similar conditions  
over  
a predesignated  
period of time.

What this book does do is  
record the natural flow of  
community and classroom life  
over nearly a decade.

The question of how  
“scientific”  
this work is  
will have to depend on  
each reader’s conceptions  
of science...

From *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in  
Classrooms and Communities* (1983) by Shirley Brice Heath

In literacy classrooms, found poems are used to help adults think about language and writing forms. This poem was found in a book by Shirley Brice Heath, a linguistic anthropologist and an international authority on literacy. *Ways with Words* is a study of children learning to use language at home and school in two communities in the Piedmont Carolinas. The found poem describes

Heath's research approach which, according to *Language in Society*, was seen as "a model from which all researchers of language, literacy, schooling or culture could profit." How would that approach be viewed today?

The debate about what actually does count and how value is determined is a long-standing one. This chapter provides background information on practitioners' experiences of research, in both its visible and invisible forms, and discusses how some of the research work has been supported and some of the topics addressed by practitioner research.

## The scientific conception of educational research

In recent years, there has been a shift in thinking about research. Policy makers call for "rigorous" and "objective" studies in education that produce the best empirical evidence for decision making. It is a research paradigm with a limited view. Variations of these "evidence-based" research models are now present in the educational policy process of many western countries, including Canada and the UK. To date, experimental research has been relatively rare in adult education (Hayes, 1991). Policy makers that advocate for this approach claim that "fad, fancy, and personal bias" have characterized decision making in the education field. Stanovic and Stanovic (2003) call it the "anything goes" mentality.

In the United States, replicable randomized trials, capable of generating statistically analyzable data, are considered the "gold standard." They are perceived as the top of a hierarchy of research approaches because they claim to answer questions with certainty. In addition, knowledge production has been linked to knowledge application; programs must apply the findings of the gold standard research in order to secure funding. Now you know how Heath's classic study would be perceived today. According to stated policy, her approach would have limited currency and value.

Many see the "evidence-based" models, and the voluminous data requests funders require from practitioners, as a means to control what is meant by literacy and how it will be achieved. Belzer and St. Clair (2005) suggest that these efforts enforce a narrow view of scientific research. "Evidence-based" models dismiss the importance of context and limit investigators to questions of prediction, explanation and verification. Other questions, such as those of description, interpretation and discovery, cannot be answered by causal research designs that use standardized instruments and control groups. Such studies may answer what works, but cannot address such questions as for whom, why or what really matters.

This narrow view has been thrust upon the American education system. Like many other American practitioners, Cassie Drennon feels this particular conception of what counts as research cannot respond to the needs of a complex, under-researched field like adult literacy and basic education. Although this approach may answer some questions, it ignores many others that are critically important.

*The questions have to be so big and so generic. I think there are things we need to know, like what is the best way to teach reading... But there are really important problems to be solved and questions to be pursued that don't lend themselves to gold standards...A lot of good research that is really useful can be done by practitioners... more participatory, collaborative and learner oriented, more valuing of the idiosyncratic as opposed to the generalizeable.*

The evidence available in the field confirms the importance of multiple contexts and perspectives. Elsa Auerbach, Cheryl Gowen and other researchers who adopt a socio-cultural or critical perspective use methods that are appropriate for the field. How can this evidence not count?

Mary Hamilton, who teaches at Lancaster University and is a consultant to practitioner-researchers in England, questions whether the policy is actually interested in the quality of educational research.

*In the US they have evidence-based policy—you tie it with quantitative economic-driven impact studies that show value for money. That’s what research means to the policy people. How good it is doesn’t make it to the table. (Interview)*

## The world of research

*How much research there is depends on how you look at research. (Regina, Saskatchewan Focus Group participant)*

Research is a process of discovering facts, knowledge, or understanding through close study. It is used to shape policy, generate theory, evaluate programs, or solve problems. It is a vast subject with an extensive lexicon, and many philosophical influences. Research comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. It might consist of reading literature, or of conducting an investigation tailored to suit a particular research purpose, context and question. Research can be action-oriented, conducted in classrooms by teachers when they engage in instruction, or can take place in controlled laboratory settings.

Defining what constitutes research is problematic both in the academic world and in public debate (Benseman 2003, 4). Kimberly Kuzak, a basic education instructor at the Saskatchewan Institute for Applied Science and Technology (SIASST) addressed a fundamental issue of who has the authority and power to define research.

*It’s not research until someone puts a stamp on it.*

Hayes (1991, 35) claimed research “is either spoken of with reverence as a source of solutions to all problems or seen as useless from a practical (and sometimes theoretical) perspective within the adult education field.”

## What we learned

In most jurisdictions, field researchers did not find many examples of supported research in practice efforts. Given the state of the field, it is not surprising that some practitioners in our study saw research as a luxury, the work of outsiders whose interests are not at a practical level. In New Brunswick, practitioners distinguish between capital “R”<sup>13</sup> research—that gets the money and

<sup>13</sup> The term capital or “big R” research is also used by Garth Boomer, an advocate of action research. Boomer is critiquing the academic monopoly on research. In the article cited below, he used the term to describe research owned by someone else, where the researchers are detached from the problem under investigation. According to Boomer, the antidote to “elsewhereness” is personally owned research, that is, investigations oriented towards the solution of problems in classrooms. See Boomer “Addressing the Problem of Elsewhereness” in Goswami, D., Stillman, P. (eds). (1987). Susan Lytle and Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1992) state that “teachers are among those who have the authority to know—that is, to construct “capital K” knowledge about teaching, learning and schooling” (p 447).

recognition—and the research work they do daily to help their classroom practice. Most Canadian practitioners integrate research into their daily worlds but, lacking time and money, this may remain a form of invisible, informal research.

### **Aboriginal literacy by Pat Powell, ON**

There is the gap between research and the front line worker...the research the Aboriginal practitioner applies is not literacy research as defined by the mainstream but research completed by their own people in their own communities.

There are a number of troublesome questions about research. Do some forms have higher status? Are particular designs or methods seen as more “truthful” than others? Does the richness of interpretative research equal the weight of statistical representations? Who is a researcher?

These and other pragmatic questions occupied us at the beginning of the computer conference as the research teams began to think about what data collection might be possible in their jurisdiction. Even in locations with limited experience of research in practice, people felt hope. If traditional relationships between the worlds of practice and theory were not equal, research in practice opened up new possibilities for multi-vocal discourse. As the teams moved into the field and listened to the voices of practitioners, they heard more particular concerns about research.

### **What good is all the research?**

Many practitioners were weary of research studies that do not get to the field in an appropriate manner. They called these “dust collectors”. Another problem is research findings that are not applied. In these cases, practitioners see research being used as a tool to delay action.

*For instance, there is no shortage of conclusive research that indicates investment in ground level literacy programs pays huge dividends. However, this has only translated into more research. That does not solve the problems. (Survey respondent, Nova Scotia)*

These practitioners echo the belief of the National Institute for Literacy in the United States, that “all adult literacy research must lead to improvements in practice or policy to be valuable” (NIFL, 1999, 10). For many Canadian practitioners, learners are vital partners in that research.

*For me there's no value in doing research that doesn't involve learners in some way. To exclude them from the process is a big part of the problem. (Susan Lefebvre, Ontario, Interview)*

### **Experiences with research**

Adult literacy practitioners have a range of understanding and experiences with research. One Quebec practitioner said that research was “something that has to be done perfectly or not at all.” To some PEI practitioners, research meant “studies that were not relevant.” In a number of jurisdictions, particularly in the territories, practitioners felt “researched to death.” Others described negative experiences in their relationships with researchers who come into the field to gather data.

*... It's frustrating that we spent the time to answer their questions and we didn't get any results back... it didn't help us become better adult educators. (Adult Educator, Nunavut, Interview)*

*People have been studied far too much up here by a gazillion ethnographers. (Helen Balanoff, NWT, Interview)*

In Quebec, the Ministry produced a comprehensive *Methodology Guide for Research in Literacy* (Coulombe & Roy 2000). According to practitioners, it isolated the field from engaging in research.

*It's a very good document, well put together, a lot of thought went into it, but it became prescriptive. If you do research in your project, this is the method you must use. This is why we are careful not to call ourselves researchers... In our projects we do not use the word research; we say we are going to 'study', are going to examine, look at... and if we do use the word research, we bring in a professional. (Interview respondent, Quebec)*

### **Trying to make practitioners' knowledge visible**

In a number of jurisdictions, teams reported that practitioners were unfamiliar with the term research in practice. There was a problem in seeing practitioners and learners as researchers. Some people believed research belonged in a particular location.

*The first time I heard that phrase—research in practice—I had absolutely no idea what it meant. I had that mental block...It sounds so highfaluting... it should be at the university...it's much too big. (Maxine Budgell, Newfoundland and Labrador)*

*What people don't understand about the term is the link between practice and practitioner. I don't think people make that link at all. People [think] somebody from outside is going to come in and look at my practice or situation... (Ann Marie Downey and Jayne Hunter, Nova Scotia.)*

In PEI, many practitioners who participated in the focus groups and interviews were unfamiliar with RiP terminology. They did not see the connection between research and practice: *The role of the practitioner is often to apply the results, rather than ask the questions or collect the data* (PEI Data Collection report, March 31, 2006). People who hold this view often believe that the central problem in improving practice is to make university research more accessible, relevant and used in the classroom. It assumes teachers are not creators of knowledge. Lytle and Cochrane-Smith (1992) refer to this view of knowledge as “outside in.”

The BC team captured some of the complexities practitioners face when they consider a new identity. The team prepared a script of a possible focus group session as a wild card. Here's a brief extract.

### **But I'm not a researcher by Kathy Rollheiser, BC**

Susan: But what do we mean when we say research? All we've got so far is reading, talking to colleagues about research, writing down your thoughts on your work, trying new things and sharing your observations with others in the field... but you can't call that research.

Leona: Yeah. You can't call that research.

Kate: Why not?

Leona: Because I already do all that stuff... and I told you, I don't do research.

Susan: No, I don't either.

Mary Norton, a co-coordinator and facilitator in a community-based literacy program, reflected that when she first became involved in research in practice she assumed that research was done “by someone from the university” even though she had research training and experience. When she developed a project about participatory approaches to research in practice, she asked a university faculty member to teach the research part of the project course.

*It never occurred to me that I would teach the research part. There's probably an idea about who did research and maybe who does it where? I had chosen to go into practice and probably hadn't thought I would continue to do research. (Interview)*

### **The invisible research practitioners do**

Most practitioners engage in research. Since adult education was recognized as a field of academic study in Canada, the largest group of people generating knowledge and data on adult literacy have been practitioners. That work is often embedded in a desire to improve practice. Many would call it informal research or reflection on practice.

*Practitioners do research to solve classroom problems. (Nova Scotia, Focus Group)*

*Research in practice is what we do, that's what teaching is. When working one-on-one, you're always trying to figure out what will work for that person. That requires research. You're always probing and digging and trying to find new ways, looking for resources, looking for strategies, modifying them to fit with your learners. (Flo Brokop, Alberta, Focus Group)*

Each year, practitioners evaluate programs and assess needs. They reflect on how they might shift their teaching to respond to the realities of learners' lives. That research may lead to new resources, materials or strategies. It is practical research, research that looks for solutions to issues and problems that emerge in classrooms, communities, and within curricula. Practitioners rarely have time to document these efforts.

**Is this research?  
by Margaret Chambers, MB**

Trigger	Research Question	Action	Results
<p><u>Changing attitudes towards math</u></p> <p>A young man, D, in an employment training literacy class told me that his weakest area was math, but there was <b>no way</b> he was going to do any math! He hated math and hated the math teacher he had in high school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- D's dream was to own a tow truck so that he could do tow jobs and snow clearing in the winter.</li> <li>- The centre had a stack of ABE study modules which the manager told me were the content of the course.</li> <li>- There was continuous intake into the centre and learners would often leave after a few weeks if they got a job.</li> <li>- Most learners had bad memories of school and were in the class only because they had to be there.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How could D ever manage the business aspects of being self-employed without math skills?</li> <li>- How could I get him to learn math skills with his present attitude?</li> <li>- How could I build trust and get the manager to accept another way of teaching this class?</li> <li>- How could I design a program that accommodated the coming and going of students?</li> <li>- How could I make learning relevant, fun and give learners a sense of accomplishment and pride?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I asked D to talk more about his dream job. I asked questions that focused on his strengths and that I knew he could answer with confidence. Then we moved into questions that related to business management. This led us to creating a business plan to get financing, a marketing plan, and to Revenue Canada accounting requirements.</li> <li>- I gave the manager regular reports that contained the content addressed, the skills developed, and the learners' own evaluation of the progress they were making.</li> <li>- I tailored individual programs based entirely on the employment goals and dreams of each individual.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- D was now doing a great deal of math. Every time we identified a weakness, we looked at ways of dealing with it and practiced several scenarios similar to the one in which he had a weakness. There were no worksheets, no math books, and no drills. Once we had identified what operation (+, -, x) was required, he used the calculator and estimating to arrive at answers.</li> <li>- We used the same method of learning math for learners who wanted to start a house painting business and to run a beauty salon.</li> <li>- The attitudes of the class participants changed 180°. They were the first to tell newcomers to the class to park their attitude; this was a good place to be.</li> </ul>

This table is the result of Margaret Chambers' reflecting on how research was woven into her work in Manitoba. It shows one of the 12 examples she documented.

What distinguishes this informal research or the reflective inquiry done in classrooms from research in practice? Essentially, the practitioner engaged in research has a different stance. Her objective is not to solve an immediate problem but to engage in a search for knowledge. She may be prompted by what she sees in her environment but also looks outside to see if similar or different realities

exist elsewhere. She engages in conversations with both colleagues and the literature. The search for knowledge requires gathering evidence and documenting the processes through which the knowledge emerged. Any new knowledge is linked to what is already known.

Even when practitioners have time to write up their research, it can be difficult for anyone outside the program to find it. Documentation that does not necessarily follow conventional distribution methods is described as grey or feral literature. In the marginalized field of adult literacy, where community literacy workers put turkeys on layaway for Christmas<sup>14</sup>, a ream of paper may be a precious commodity (as cited in Quigley, 2006) and postage to mail project reports is impossibly expensive.

### **In my humble opinion by Kate Nonesuch, BC**

#### I've always done informal research—why isn't that good enough?

I have learned to be a good instructor from my students. Term after term, I have attempted to teach the same skills to different groups of students, using various methods and materials. Every term I have reflected on the factors of successes and failures; every term I have gone to workshops or conferences and/or read articles and books about teaching; every term I have noticed students' reactions; every term I have asked students what worked for them and what didn't work, and for suggestions for improvement. Every good instructor I know, at the end of the term, starts talking about how s/he will apply this term's reflections to next term's planning and teaching. Over the years, I have given about 50 workshops on aspects of my practice to other instructors, and I have attended many given by other instructors.

Research in practice is presented as an add-on to practice; yet I say that practice includes this informal research. If you do not reflect, you do not practice.

I found, however, that I got much more prestige when my work was labelled 'research.' The first indication I had was the article in the local paper that resulted from the National Literacy Secretariat's announcement of the grants they had given. The headline for the story called me 'professor.' For the previous 10 years I had appeared in that same newspaper two or three times a year, always to do with my work in literacy, but I had always been called 'instructor'—never had they referred to me as 'professor.' And the work of research—being able to bring grants into the College, to publish a report or an article, to present my findings at a conference—all this work seems to be considered more tangible and important than turning out class after successful class, year after year. Why is the work that I am trained to do and paid to do—classroom instruction—less valuable than this extra piece, research in practice?

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14 As reported by Bella Biddiscombe, one of the first community literacy workers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## How research is supported in Canada

Research takes time and requires financial support. In New Zealand, Benseman (2003) describes the level of investment in research in adult literacy as minimal compared to research in other educational sectors. Here in Canada, the National Literacy Secretariat has been a major funder of literacy research. Financial support can also be provided through universities or from external bodies that grant research funds to students and scholars. Ministries of Education might contract research work to private consultants. Unions, such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees or philanthropic groups such as the Vancouver Foundation have also supported research initiatives in adult literacy.

Many people believe universities hold the monopoly on knowledge production. In fact, a number of agencies and groups have produced research on adult literacy in Canada including literacy organizations, programs and practitioners; consultants; and academics and graduate students (many of whom come from practice settings). There are particular features that may distinguish research produced by these different sponsors: for example, one-year funding deadlines constrain much research work that could be done by the field; and academic research is more related to particular theoretical frameworks, which may not include program-based research.

The Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research in English is an online database<sup>15</sup>. It accepts entries of research works that contain a problem or purpose; background or context; methods for data collection and analysis; and discussion of results and implications. A search of the database in August 2006 revealed that 160 of the total entries sorted by sponsor are affiliated with universities; 49% of those are the theses and dissertations of graduate students. Fifty-two studies were sponsored by government agencies and 61 studies by provincial literacy organizations, colleges, national literacy organizations, and the private sector. The remaining 42 were sponsored by community literacy programs, a resource-poor sector compared to most institutional settings. Their efforts to produce research deserve special recognition and levels of support.

Given that the Directory identifies universities as the single largest group sponsoring research, one variable which may influence research activity is the presence of graduate programs in adult education. Eight provinces have masters of adult education programs in at least one of their universities (Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island do not). Across the country, however, there are fewer than 10 researchers working on adult literacy in academic settings or independently as their teaching and other responsibilities allow, and as funding permits (Quigley, 2006, 14). This low number might be considered an indicator of the marginality of the field. When practitioners such as Kate Nonesuch have approached faculty members from their own university-colleges to solicit their engagement in research on literacy, few have expressed an interest.

## Research Policy at the National Literacy Secretariat/ALLESP

Since its creation in 1988, the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) has been the most important literacy research partner in Canada. About 10% of their annual budget has been devoted to research (St. Clair, 2004, 1). In its first ten years, NLS supported a variety of research efforts:

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<sup>15</sup> The URL for the directory is [www.nald.ca/crd](http://www.nald.ca/crd).

needs assessments, evaluations, pilot projects, and research into best practices. A 1995 evaluation of the NLS suggested the scope and quality of the research should be monitored more closely, and more attention paid to disseminating the results of research (NLS, 1988). By 1998, *Enhancing Literacy Research in Canada* outlined new policies for research to address these weaknesses. It also called for efforts to build research capacity and encourage cooperation between researchers and practitioners.

In the summer of 2006, HRSDC released guidelines for the literacy and learning research initiative of the Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESP).<sup>16</sup> The initiative continued to support applied research and development initiatives which address the needs of literacy practice and practitioners. At present these web pages are not available, but at the time they were created there were four priority areas for research funding:

- *exploring accountability and effectiveness in literacy education* through research designed to develop inclusive and valid ways to assess program effectiveness and learner progress;
- *developing Aboriginal literacy research* through initiatives that contribute to a strengthened research community among Aboriginal practitioners and researchers;
- *developing francophone literacy research* through initiatives that contribute to a strengthened research community among francophone practitioners and researchers;
- *supporting research in practice* with the aim of bringing research and practice together and supporting new researchers.<sup>17</sup>

### Valuing Literacy in Canada

In 1999, the National Literacy Secretariat partnered with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to implement Valuing Literacy in Canada (VLC). The program encouraged multidisciplinary approaches to scholarly literacy research that encompassed the social, economic and cultural dimensions of literacy in Canada.

When VLC was first announced, three areas were designated for support: conducting research, exploring partnerships, and supporting doctoral and post doctoral fellowships. From 1999 to 2005, a total of 77 Valuing Literacy in Canada grants were funded; 60 were awarded in English-speaking Canada.<sup>18</sup> Sixty-five percent of all VLC grants were awarded for research; 12% supported the development of partnerships for research activities related to literacy. Interest was most evident in a few provinces. In English-speaking Canada, 74% of the VLC research grants and 80% of all program grants were awarded to applicants from Ontario, Nova Scotia and British Columbia. There was no program presence on Prince Edward Island or the territories. Table 3 summarizes the distribution of grants. Though this program was designed for scholarly research, some of the work that was produced with the support of the VLC program might be known by practitioners across the country.

<sup>16</sup> The ALLESP Program integrates the National Literacy Secretariat, the Office of Learning Technologies, and the Learning Initiatives programs. The new program promotes lifelong learning by reducing non-financial barriers to adult learning and facilitates the creation of opportunities for Canadians to acquire the leaning, literacy and essential skills to participate in society and the economy. Information on ALLESP has been acquired from the Human Resources and Social Development Canada website. See [www.hrsdc.gc.ca](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca).

<sup>17</sup> Last accessed August 15, 2006 from <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/1ld/olt/ADULTLLES/CFP-2006/nation>.

<sup>18</sup> In 2003-04, a virtual scholar in residence was supported through the VLC program.

Table 3: Valuing Literacy in Canada 1999/2000-2004/2005: Grants in Canada by jurisdiction, type and official language

Province or Territory	Research Grants		Partnership Grants		Doctoral and Post Docs		Virtual Scholar		English VLC	French VLC	Total
	Eng.	Fr.	Eng.	Fr.	Eng.	Fr.	Eng.	Fr.			
AB	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
BC	4	-	1	-	3	-	1	-	9	-	9
MB	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
NB	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2
NL	3	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	4
NS	6	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	10	-	10
NU	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NWT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ON	18	2	3	-	8	-	-	-	29	2	31
PE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PQ	-	10	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	14	14
SK	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	4
YK	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>77</b>

Source: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

### Federal-Provincial and National Grants

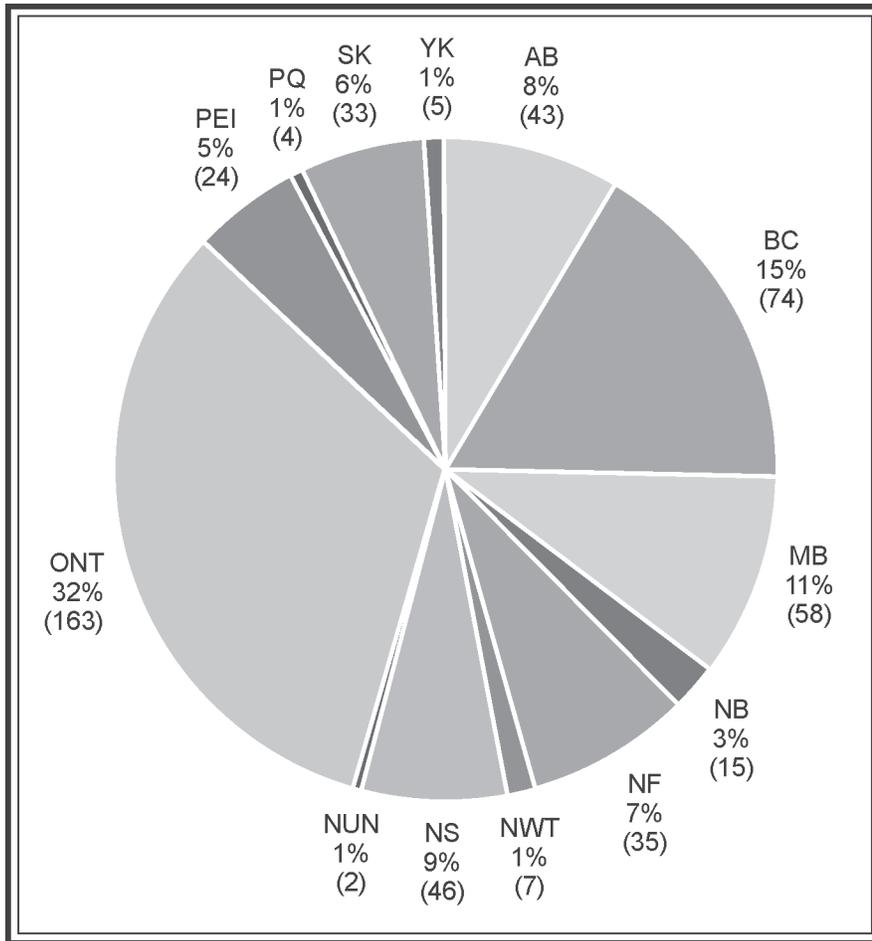
For many years, research was one of five areas eligible for funding through the National Literacy Secretariat national and cost-shared programs with the provinces and territories. Between 1995-96 and 2005-06, the NLS coded 650 of their national and cost-shared projects as research. Of these, 136 were French and 514 were English projects. The provinces with the greatest number of anglophone projects coded research from 1995 to 2006 were Ontario, British Columbia and Manitoba; the fewest total research projects were in the territories.

Because so few jurisdictions provide adequate funding for program delivery, some programs were drawn to the research funding as a way to help keep their doors open to learners.

*Literacy programs have often used research project funding to augment their programming. Not surprisingly they felt some conflict about the research agenda...If the research project takes them away from their primary need, which is serving students, then practitioners could not see the value in research. On the other hand, virtually all of the participating practitioners wanted to improve the quality of their teaching, their programs and their services. (Millar and Porter, 2002, 5)*

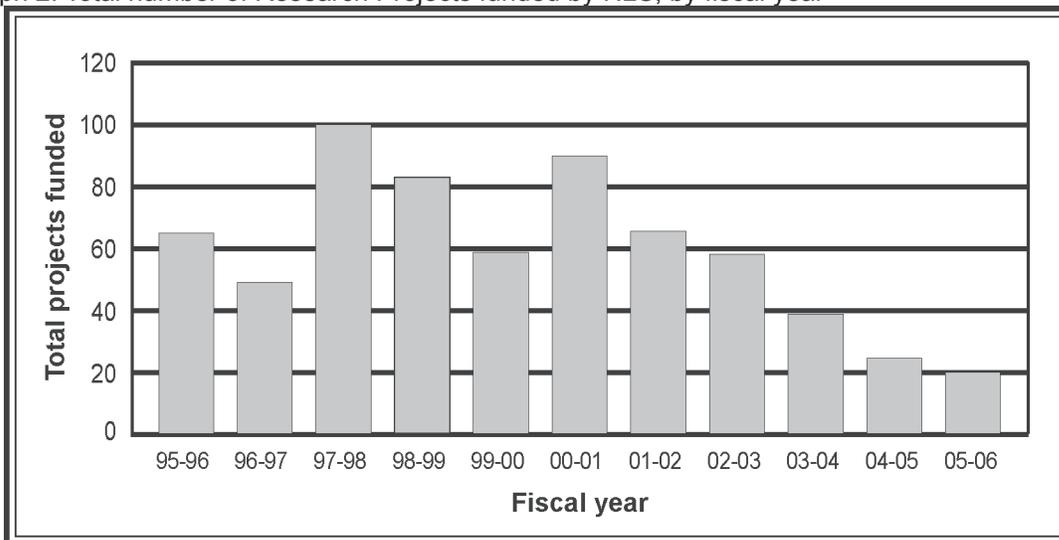
Since 2000-2001, the number of research projects that were funded by NLS has declined each year. In the last fiscal year only 20 anglophone and francophone research projects across the country received funding. Table 4 summarizes the distribution of grants. This information is also illustrated in Graphs 1 and 2.

Graph 1: Geographical Distribution of Research Projects in English funded by NLS between 1995-2006



Source: National Literacy Secretariat

Graph 2. Total number of Research Projects funded by NLS, by fiscal year



Source: National Literacy Secretariat

Some of the national project research grants supported the development of research tools such as the Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research in English, and a French counterpart, as well as the Canadian Literacy Thesaurus<sup>19</sup>/*Thésaurus canadien d'alphabétisation*. The Thesaurus, first published in 1992, is a bilingual list of standardized vocabulary in the area of adult literacy. The terms describe literacy as a field of knowledge and as an application. A second edition, published in 1996, brought the total number of terms to 1890 in English and 1950 in French.

It was hoped that the Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research would assist in disseminating research not published in mainstream resources but this goal has been difficult to achieve. Few agencies, organizations or groups submit their work directly to the website so staff regularly search over 30 databases to identify suitable entries. These databases, however, primarily capture publications from mainstream sources.

Table 4: NLS Federal-Provincial and National Projects, coded 'research' by province or territory, language, and year

	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	Sub Total	
												Eng.	Fr.
<b>AB</b>	4	1	5	5	5	7	5	5	5	1	-	<b>43</b>	-
<b>BC</b>	4	2	12	8	7	12	9	5	6	4	5	<b>74</b>	-
<b>MB</b>	8	8	16	8	4	3	3	1	3	2	2	<b>58</b>	-
<b>NB</b>	2	2	-	2	1	5	5	3	2	1	1	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>NF</b>	7	2	3	9	-	1	3	4	1	3	2	<b>35</b>	-
<b>NWT</b>	1	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	1	<b>7</b>	-
<b>NS</b>	8	5	7	5	7	8	3	4	-	-	-	<b>46</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>NUN</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	<b>2</b>	-
<b>ONT</b>	23	17	32	19	16	25	19	21	10	11	3	<b>163</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>PEI</b>	1	3	2	3	2	4	3	2	3	-	1	<b>24</b>	-
<b>PQ</b>	5	7	12	13	12	15	12	10	4	2	4	<b>4</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>SK</b>	1	1	9	8	4	5	1	2	2	-	1	<b>33</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>YK</b>	-	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	<b>5</b>	-
<b>Unesco</b>	-	-	1	2	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	<b>5</b>	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>136</b>

Source: National Literacy Secretariat

<sup>19</sup> Available online at <http://thesaurusalpha.org>

The projects that do appear in the directory can be searched by province and territory. According to the directory, the provinces with the most published research in adult literacy in Canada are Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia and Manitoba. There are between zero and twenty entries for all other provinces and territories, with an average of seven listings. The three provinces with the most listings—Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia—have long-standing graduate programs that offer both masters and doctoral degrees. All three have explored and supported research in practice for some time.

### **What we know about adult literacy research in Canada**

In 2005 the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) funded a review and analysis of the literacy knowledge base. Seventeen literacy experts and 12 literacy organizations participated in the study by identifying published literature, databases, government reports, monographs, list serves and websites (Quigley, Folinsbee & Kraglund-Gauthier 2005).

In the world of research, knowledge is recognized when it is written down. In the world of community literacy, “*people are quoted, not texts*” (Davies et al 2006<sup>20</sup>). Written text has other meanings for program participants; it is used to regulate and exclude. One of the stated limitations of the Quigley study was that knowledge is not always encoded in text.

*Practice-based knowledge, expertise, and experience exist in the minds of the practitioners and learners, in the classroom materials, cohorts of learners and generations of teachers. (Quigley, Folinsbee, Kraglund-Gauthier & Shohet 2006, 180)*

The study cited over 1,300 publications including work from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. A number of topic areas were explored, including Canadian and international reviews of adult literacy; the history of literacy; literacy and theory; literacy and specific groups; and learning, teaching and research in practice.

Slightly more than 30% of the Canadian references on learning, teaching, and research in practice are articles and reports of research in practice (Quigley, Folinsbee and Kraglund-Gauthier 2005, 14). The bulk of those citations come from Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Nova Scotia.

The authors identified that close to 40% of the overview studies produced in Canada, including government reports, are preoccupied by numbers and statistics about people who have literacy challenges, and in particular the economic implications of those realities. In contrast, there was little research on the experiences of learners and practitioners. In fact, the authors suggest the “counts-and-amounts” perspective may distort the complexities of the field.

The 2005 study concluded:

- the Canadian field of adult literacy is well surveyed but under-theorized

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20 Sheila Stewart said this at a roundtable organized for the 2006 Canadian Association for Studies in Adult Education National Conference held at York University, Toronto, May 28-30, 2006. The title of the presentation was “‘Scientific’ Research in Literacy Education: Responses from the Research-in-Practice Movement.”

- the findings of both qualitative, interpretive research and large quantitative, empirical studies have much to offer the field
- there is a need to make stronger connections between literacy theory and research, policy, and practice.

**Measure this: How we see literacy**  
**by Nancy Cooper, ON**

Quantitative research has often been the preferred way of measuring literacy. We are bombarded with statistics that paint the dire picture of the state of literacy in Canada. When practitioners are asked to present at meetings they are asked about percentages of success and failure. But qualitative research can often be where the meat of an issue is found—in the stories, words, and experiences of the very people who are involved with literacy learning and provision.

In my art installation, I wanted to make a statement about how quantitative research is often preferred by funders and some researchers. I used measuring tapes as a curtain to cover the quote from a former literacy learner who is currently a literacy practitioner. She states that if the government really listened to people who have lived the experience of the healing and transformation that comes from literacy, then programs would change radically. This is a perfect example of how qualitative research can capture the realities of people, and how change can come about as a result of the research.



Campbell's (2003) thematic summary of adult literacy research in Canada analyzed entries to the Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research over the past decade and yielded ten subject areas in which there has been some significant research. There has been a growing body of research that examines family literacy; programs; access and retention; educators and students. Pressing questions still need to be addressed such as the effects of accountability frameworks on programs, learners and educators; the impact of funding structures on practice; the relationship between

government legislation and supports or barriers to life-long learning, and the elements needed for a pan-Canadian literacy and skills development system. Many of these pressing questions would benefit from research in practice approaches.

*The other piece of research that was really helpful to me was Ellen Long and Sandy Middleton's Patterns of Participation: Who is not Enrolling in Literacy Classes? Interestingly enough, it's not about self-confidence. It's got to do with the program details, wrong time, and wrong content, can't get in, and being on a waiting list.*  
(Sally Crawford, New Brunswick Focus Group)

## **Time to build the insider perspective**

It is not surprising that practitioners suggest that the basic infrastructure of the field be secured before the benefits of practitioner research can be fully realized. In 2006 the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) in the United States published an evaluation of their publication, *Focus on Basics* (Garner et al). A total of 292 readers responded to a web-based survey conducted for the evaluation study. Forty-six percent of respondents said they wanted to put into practice specific activities or ideas they learned about in *Focus on Basics* but could not. Lack of time was identified as the biggest deterrent to implementing the ideas, followed closely by lack of funds. Similarly, Alberta practitioners who engaged in a learning process about research in practice said it simply would not have been possible without financial support and the research assistance provided by the project directors (Malicky 2000, 209). Each Alberta practitioner conducted their own research project, a more complex and time-consuming process than simply implementing new ideas.

Research presents a paradox for many of the practitioners involved in this study. They do not want research done to them. They want to engage in more systematic research efforts that provide an emic or insider perspective of the field and, when possible, involve their students in those efforts. Malicky (2000) believes that insider perspective is critical. Other practitioners would like more time to read or discuss research findings with their colleagues. Passionate, curious literacy educators have always wanted to do their jobs better. The field, particularly given the current conditions, is fortunate to have them. The gap will narrow between research and practice as people are offered meaningful opportunities to read the literature, discuss changes in practice, and engage in actual research.

## **Turn the world around**

Research in practice provides space to challenge conventional thinking about research. It is designed to make visible important aspects of practice and provision and to enhance the learning of participants. RiP includes classroom inquiry, what Britton (1987) described as a “quiet” form of research, but it is more than that. A review of recent research in practice efforts suggests RiP allows the field to bring into focus what policy might overlook. Some examples include such topics as: ways to address the impacts of violence on learning (Norton 2004); the vast reservoir of knowledge practitioners possess (Battell et al 2005); and how learners measure their progress (Lefebvre et al 2006).

In the next chapter you'll learn about the tensions practitioners face in making research an integral part of the field.

## **CHAPTER 6 Learnings about Research in Practice (RiP)**

**by Jenny Horsman**

This chapter explores what we learned about RiP in Canada. Earlier chapters have looked in-depth at the state of the literacy field, and of research. As a trilogy, these chapters provide a current picture of RiP and the context for its growth in Canada. They tell a complex and contradictory story about RiP. In particular, this chapter is shaped by the contradictions about RiP that the countrywide data persistently revealed.

In this chapter we will discuss in depth the reasons why RiP is seen as essential yet close to impossible, given the state of the adult literacy field. In summary, RiP is valued because it:

- makes the practitioner more confident, more effective, more skilled
- improves practice for the learner
- shares knowledge in ways that can be replicated
- decreases burn out and may lessen staff turnover
- provides opportunities for critical reflection
- affirms literacy workers' knowledge
- ensures knowledge is not lost, but sustained and built upon
- increases the value of the knowledge in the field
- leads more attention to be paid to the field
- is useful for advocacy, helps practitioners have a voice
- influences policy makers
- perhaps may lead to more money for literacy

The primary finding of our research is this contradiction: that the state of the literacy field makes it both virtually impossible and essential to do RiP. In this section, we explore the many reasons why this is the case—the impossibility of and possibilities for RiP.

### **We want to read research and engage in it, we just can't spare the time or find the energy**

Tam Miller of the Regina Family Literacy Network Ltd. in Saskatchewan said exactly what most literacy workers might say: *"I'm going to read it. I just don't know when."* Lack of time is an enormous barrier to taking on RiP, from reading relevant research, to reflecting on practice in the light of that research, to carrying out research oneself. Although we heard that research would be of interest to practitioners, even of great interest to some, most told us that they *"have to make choices based on the time they have."* (Saskatchewan) Many made it clear that the only way RiP

could become a well-used resource would be if funders and employers were to recognize it as a valuable aspect of literacy work and allocate paid time to it. Several said they could imagine taking on research (or taking it on again) if it was an integral part of their workday:

*First of all, to ... have the time blocked out in my paid day, in order to do it...I can't do it, as an add-on, it's not something I can do in the evenings anymore. Or in the middle of the night ...but I wouldn't want to be disconnected from delivery, right, because then I'm not a practitioner. So I often wondered... 'Gee, in order to write about my work in this community, I have to stop doing my work.' I felt like that so often, and it was so frustrating for me. (Cheryl Brown, New Brunswick, Interview)*

Finding ways to balance program work with time spent reading, reflecting on or carrying out research is tricky—particularly during the intense process of writing up research. Writing takes a huge amount of time. As Paula Davies made clear “*none of the things that I have done in my work... have required the time of RiP... time is astronomical.*” (Interview) Many observed it is getting harder to find time, rather than easier, as the competing needs of juggling part-time jobs, maximizing contact hours, and collecting statistics for funders absorb every ounce of energy.

*RiP is very difficult logistically for practitioners. It's exhausting, time-consuming, and a lot of time is spent on a voluntary basis. It's very hard to do if you work part-time, or if you teach 5 hours a day. You need paid time away from everyday programming to do it effectively: for planning and reflection time. (Ontario, Toronto Focus Group)*

Active practitioner-researchers from British Columbia mostly had grown families or no children and many years' experience as instructors in colleges. As a result it seemed they felt more able and willing to take on the challenge of research with its huge requirements, particularly since the norm for research projects is inadequate funding and substantially more time than estimates ever take into account. Adding the challenging task of completing research to the already demanding commitments of work in a community-based program and caring for young children is even trickier.

In most provinces and territories it seemed that many, if not most, practitioners did not have the opportunity to look up from the depths of their program work to find out what research is being done, or discern whether that research might be relevant to their practice. Data from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador in particular revealed that most practitioners were too busy trying to keep their programs afloat to explore anything else. Circumstances are different, but challenging, in each province and territory. In colleges, literacy instructors are frequently only paid for direct student contact hours. In community-based programs, the first task of literacy workers is usually to find the operating funds to stay open. In both settings in most provinces research participants reported that literacy practitioners are essentially marginalized workers with relatively few opportunities to access resources that might ease the demands of the work. Across the country few literacy practitioners have the time or funds to make RiP a viable option. As one Nova Scotia practitioner put it, workers in the literacy field are either “*overworked and too busy, or 'underworked' and overstressed*” [as much of the work is part-time and consists of minimal ‘contact’ hours].

Researchers across the country heard about how little energy or mental “space” literacy practitioners were able to negotiate. In the Yukon, for instance, practitioners can think of little else, besides

“getting by.” “*People are in survival mode.*” (Beth Mulloy, Interview) People in other parts of the country echoed this sentiment:

*Unfortunately what starts to happen is that people get tired, they get exhausted trying to find enough money just to operate, trying to keep up with all of the accountability changes, the paper work. They become less and less energized to talk about the issues related to practice... a lot of instructors are working more than one job, trying to make a living for themselves. That sucks away people's energy.* (Ontario, Ottawa Focus Group)

In some jurisdictions the consequence is substantial staff turnover. In NWT, for example, adult educators are rarely in the job for more than a year or two. The researchers observed that it is those who “*stay around a bit longer*” who are “*more likely to be innovative and reflect on practice.*” (Focus group) In Ontario Aboriginal programs, there is about 50% staff turnover each year—leaving only very few who have remained in the field more than a couple of years. As Christianna Jones stated, “*there are always complaints about the amount of paper work and tracking that is required. Many of the programs have only one person who is responsible for coordinating, teaching, filing, answering the phone, everything...*” (Email correspondence, 25.8.06) This bleak picture is echoed across the country.

In the rare jurisdictions where RiP is currently funded, practitioners commented that it is immensely difficult to switch gears from the intense, diverse and demanding work in programs to carry out in-depth reflection or research. Literacy work demands that practitioners respond to the ongoing needs of marginalized adult learners, who themselves are experiencing a lot of financial, personal, and social pressures. Literacy work demands responding to these students in respectful ways that are effective and empowering. This work is made incomparably harder and more exhausting when practitioners have few resources to support them. In this context, carving out a space for RiP is virtually impossible, even when some funding is available.

The impoverished and sometimes inadequate state of literacy practice can lead to calls for regulation, systematization, certification and greater accountability, in the hopes that such initiatives will improve and strengthen literacy practice. However, each approach that is introduced to improve the field seems to destroy flexibility, limit the possibilities to respond to the community, and become yet another hard-to-meet demand on practitioners. Instead of strengthening and improving programs, each new expectation creates more pressure. The increased demand for accountability seems to have led to exhaustion rather than improvement.

As Cassie Drennon observed in an interview, accountability could have more usefully led to supporting practitioners to become skilled researchers. It could have led to collecting nuanced qualitative data on practice. The quantitative data about students that programs are currently required to collect—such as how many students enter employment—might show that something is wrong, but it will not show how to address the problem. It will also not show whether the problem is in the program or in how programs are funded or if the problem reflects a larger social issue. As an alternative to the current accountability demands for quantitative statistics, program workers could be supported to spend their time researching more effective teaching approaches that lead to positive program changes. If the purpose of “accountability” is to ensure that public dollars are well spent, this approach would surely be more efficacious.

As Audrey Penner, Program Manager for the Institute of Adult and Community Education, the organization responsible for adult literacy programming in Prince Edward Island described RiP, it is basically “*about finding what works so you can do more of it and not waste money on things that don't.*” This is what accountability is really about. This example, from PEI shows, the value of RiP:

*Ellyn's topic is about learner engagement—what factors actually lead to learner disengagement and how can they re-engage in the learning process. Her work is a critical reflection that begins with her own experience in elementary school followed by an inquiry into the disengagement of adult learners in her class. Her results have influenced her teaching and in sharing her findings, she will certainly influence others.* (Karen Chandler, PEI, Themes)

In Alberta, practitioners remarked:

*RiP should be part of your workday world; unfortunately we don't seem to have that time built into the budget. How can we help the funder to understand that our work doesn't just mean sitting down and cranking out numbers, it's qualitative rather than quantitative.* (Carolyn, Interview)

No provincial or territorial government has used qualitative data, generated by RiP, as a way to demonstrate accountability for how public funds are used. Instead, practitioners in some provinces face relentless demands to collect and report statistics, and have no input into what meaning is made of those statistics. They are left with little energy or resources for creative reflection on their practice.

In such a climate of scarcity and expectation there is a danger that RiP, if it is endorsed, could simply emerge as yet another demand, yet another skill required of practitioners and a further time-consuming expectation that drains, rather than enhances, the field. During the national meeting in May of 2006, one of the Steering Committee members for this project noted:

*In our small breakout sessions, I heard a great deal of conversation—the mistrust of funders, the lack of certainty around the corner for literacy programs and workers, the reticence to participate because of fear of program cancelling—and only generalities as to how the reflection about students and their literacy work benefited from RiP. It seems that the infrastructure of the field needs urgent attention—and maybe in a concerted way.* (Sandy Zimmerman, Project Steering Committee, National Meeting)

### **...Even so, or because of this, RiP is needed more than ever before**

The above findings clearly show that the literacy field lacks the time and energy to fully embrace RiP. But this is not the end of the story; we found an equally strong “flip side.” In fact, it is precisely because of their lack of time and energy that many participants believed that RiP is needed more than ever before in literacy. An adult educator in Nunavut described:

*There is tremendous information out there... but I'm teaching students for six hours a day and I'm preparing right now three separate new units, in addition to teach-*

*ing people at eleven different levels and getting assignments marked, plus doing all the friggin' administration for five agencies that want your attendance. There's no time to do it [read/do research]. It's just not possible! ...and yet we need it to recharge. (Interview)*

The challenging times in the literacy field are not new. For almost a decade practitioners have detailed the difficulties of researching in an environment where there are few resources. These conditions have only worsened in recent years as literacy workers continue to stretch and make do. Nonetheless researchers saw RiP as offering a possibility to convince funders, the public, and governments of the importance of literacy and the need to secure more resources. They also saw research as having the potential to provide a critical edge in a field which some see as “narrowing,” to improve practice, and engage and retain staff who grow and develop through the research process into more reflective and effective practitioners.

Yet as Stacey Crooks, the lead researcher from Saskatchewan, observed, she is torn about RiP when she reviews the data she collected and considers her own experience:

*From a perspective of justice—it's not reasonable. It's not reasonable to sustain a field on people's volunteer labour. They're not paid very well and then they're working far beyond what they're paid for. So from that perspective I really do think we need to be paying people for what they are doing. On the other hand, I think that something like research and practice can be really positive for the field in so many ways and we have to emphasize aspects that aren't part of the time and money dilemma. That for some people it is rewarding and renewing and can...move them in the profession in a way they may not have realized was possible. So...I feel kind of conflicted...on the one hand I want to convince people that it is valuable even though it's a struggle—if it's something you feel you can commit to, it's worth it. On the other hand I don't want to encourage people to do work they're not paid for... (Stacey Crooks, Saskatchewan Researcher, Interview)*

In this study, practitioners were asked if they value RiP. Many spoke of their interest in RiP—even those who had heard so little about the approach that they were stretching to understand exactly what it might mean:

*We're dealing with very low pay, lost funding, there's very little support for adult literacy here...because it's a government funded program, the government wants to tell us how to do it, you know, and so...there's all kinds of paper work and...so doing research in that kind of environment...doing research in practice...well, you know, it's hard to value RiP if the actual service itself isn't valued... If practitioners didn't have these concerns maybe they would have more time to consider its value... But now that I have done it, I cannot imagine my literacy practice without research and/or reflections on my practice. It's that valuable to the quality of my literacy work and in helping me reach my personal goals as a practitioner. (Cheryl Brown, New Brunswick, Focus Group)*

Across the country, it seemed that the impossibility and invisibility of the field and the low value placed on adult literacy work along with the recognition that RiP makes the work more satisfying and effective led some practitioners to believe RiP is an important way to improve the field.

*RiP has the potential, at least, to document what is happening in communities in terms of literacy. The kind of work we do is very difficult to evaluate on a spreadsheet. ...It helps to prioritize what people want in terms of learning opportunities. It can lead to a better knowledge of where we want to go and how to evaluate what we are doing. (Barbara Marshall, Labrador, Interview )*

*I still feel it's an emerging art—or that's what it is for me. It's becoming clearer, I'm seeing more. I know it's important and I think for funding in literacy to increase... we have to have research. (Jan Sawyer, British Columbia Researcher, Interview)*

One practitioner said that research is needed to provide evidence of the importance of adult literacy. Without it, she said, “*we are doomed.*” (Literacy advocate, Saskatchewan) And during the all-teams meeting, researchers suggested that RiP might be valuable as an advocacy tool. They argued that the literacy field needs a voice—nationally and provincially—a voice that is grounded and informed by the grassroots. But the question remains:

*Will RiP ever be able to take off without building the basic infrastructure of the field (more staffing, more resources, more [professional development])? (Ontario, Toronto Focus Group)*

## **We must do RiP because we are so isolated, yet our isolation makes it impossible to do RiP!**

Across the country, researchers heard about the isolation many, if not most, literacy workers experienced. In small community programs practitioners often work alone and have too many program demands to connect with other colleagues. Practitioners in Northern and rural centres have limited opportunities for professional development because of long distances. They are left to work alone with their own challenges. Educators in Nunavut, amongst others, spoke about the need to share ideas and the difficulties of doing so. In many locations the internet and email are not easily accessible. Furthermore, face-to-face connection is still the way that is most often preferred. For college and school board instructors only paid for contact hours, there are few opportunities to reflect on their practice, individually or with others, even if colleagues work down the hall.

In Manitoba, a focus group of volunteer tutors suggested that when you are a volunteer, there is a lot to learn—just to be a tutor. A volunteer, without any experience in teaching, has to learn about their student’s specific learning needs and styles, how to teach the basics of reading and writing, specific content and how to prepare and develop this content with accompanying materials. Given these challenges, it is too huge a leap to learn about exemplary practices, let alone engage in a RiP project that contributes to “new methodologies.”

This isolation led to little awareness of RiP, even in provinces where there is activity, but particularly in provinces and territories where RiP has not yet taken off. Yet it was disturbing to hear practitioners and volunteers struggling with the same old problems in literacy, disconnected from any innovations that might support more creativity and save them from reinventing the wheel. Isolation increases the need for innovation and creativity, but it also leaves practitioners with few supports to make it possible to explore RiP—to read what has been learned from research, to reflect on practice in the light of it, or to carry out research to address the challenges faced in practice.

## Storytelling by Margan Dawson, NS



Long before there were written records, there was storytelling. We are all storytellers—stories were central to how I learned when I was growing up and it is the stories that I heard in my literacy classroom that had huge impacts on how I conducted my practice. I heard stories of success, adversity, and of overcoming hardship and barriers. These are the stories we collect as researchers in the daily process of our practice. By paying attention to these stories we improve our practice; stories are also a means for participants to reclaim voice.

...Fire is a source of light and energy, and a focal point around which people gather and share. Fire implies risk, as there is a risk in opening ourselves up to both telling our stories and listening to the stories of others.

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The isolation of literacy workers and the fragmentation of the field limit access to research. Yet one of the reasons practitioners appreciated the RiP experience was that it provided an opportunity to become part of a community of researchers and it led them to feel less isolated. Kate Nonesuch, a British Columbia literacy practitioner and researcher, believes that research is not the only way to reduce isolation and improve practice. Several practitioners agreed. They spoke about the need for regular get-togethers and for more professional development. They also spoke of the use of technology as a way to link, energize, and provide opportunities for exchanging ideas and sharing

innovative solutions. Equally valuable might be internships in different organizations and creating videos to provide new ideas and support—all of which would help practitioners to view themselves as part of a vibrant community of educators. In contrast to this unrealized vision is the current picture of isolated and beleaguered practitioners with access to few resources to support their efforts.

### **Given the state of the field, RiP is essential, but the state of the field limits the value of RiP!**

Much that could be gained from RiP is lost because of the precariousness of the field. This limits RiP's impact on practice. In most provinces and territories, researchers heard from practitioners who knew little about RiP and previous undertakings in Canada. Yet those who participated in this study were more likely to be relatively well-connected and active in their region. Given this, it seems reasonable to assume that most literacy workers know even less about RiP, in spite of many excellent practitioner-led research studies and a number of earlier attempts to support reflective practice and engagement with research.

In many jurisdictions, practitioners reported that they didn't know what research (RiP or otherwise) in their own province or territory might be relevant to their experience. Even those "most in the know," didn't know primarily, they said, because research rarely reaches front-line educators—it usually stops at an administrator's desk. At every stage there are difficulties which make it unlikely that RiP will be fully utilized. For example, even if practitioners and programs do hear about research if the report is available on the internet, they are unlikely to have the budget or the equipment to print it. Another barrier, one that we looked at earlier, is how to find the time to read reports, let alone the time and energy to apply new learning to practice. In many jurisdictions, rigidity in curriculum and program structures make it impossible for practitioners to use research findings to change their practice.

The instability and short-term nature of funding is wasteful. Practitioners across the country complained that good research takes time yet funding, where it exists, is short-term and requires practitioners to jump through hoops. As Jessie Lees, a researcher in PEI, pointed out: "*We have good people wasting time writing proposals, in competition with each other, and the research has to fit the proposal, not the need.*" When funding is approved it still can be less effective than it might be, not only because of funding delays, but also because practitioners don't have the time to keep abreast of research in the field:

*... when they're starting their research project they are already two months behind because there was delay in the funding and so they feel pressed to begin. [It takes] too much time in the beginning to find out who has already done what... they just leap ahead and then discover six months later that it would have helped to talk to somebody else who had already looked at some of those questions. (Tannis Atkinson, Editor of *Literacies*, Interview)*

Some practitioners suggested that there needed to be more flexibility in funding for RiP projects to allow practitioners to apprentice in a range of ways. These could include taking a small role on a larger project, or beginning with library research or a reflective practice project, and then moving on to larger projects. Some form of sabbatical would make it possible for practitioners to take on large projects. In the absence of these opportunities, practitioners are less likely to take on further

research that complements and builds on their first experiments with RiP. As a result the literacy field continuously loses its pool of experienced practitioner-researchers who, with experience, would bring a nuanced understanding of research and the field to their later studies. The number and range of research studies and the size of projects are limited because practitioners are steeped in the demands of their daily practice, even though a broader range of more substantial studies would greatly benefit the individual researcher and the field more broadly. There are dangers when RiP is carried out in a piecemeal fashion, with no infrastructure and no networking system. As Cassie Drennon, a US-based researcher, observed, interest in RiP is more likely to “drop-off” when it is no longer the “flavour of the day.” The lack of infrastructure also means that the value of RiP is not maximized, and valuable gains are lost when funding parameters shift.

There is little evidence that policy-makers or decision-makers take into account either field-based research or academic research. Most practitioners did not believe that those who influence practice value their knowledge. The low value placed on the field, to them, also indicates that a low value is placed on the research that emerges from the field. Nonetheless, many still believe that taking on research holds the potential to increase the value of the field and to have their knowledge recognized. Paula Davies, from British Columbia, said how much it meant to her to be invited to take part in a workshop about research—to be seen as somebody with knowledge worth sharing—and how stimulating it was to carry out a research project. Several of the experienced literacy educators in British Columbia who have taken part in several research studies spoke of their excitement at having their voices paid attention to. Many of the participants in this study felt that their participation in the study gave them new energy and new interest in innovation. It led them to dream of more practitioners becoming engaged in RiP and to deliberate about the difference this engagement would make to the literacy field.

### **We are wary of research yet we use research skills all the time...**

Literacy practitioners were generally wary about research. Aboriginal practitioners spoke strongly as one voice that research must be grounded in Indigenous knowledge and relevant to the learners they work with. Some were clear that they did not want to have research used as another opportunity to appropriate Indigenous knowledge. One practitioner went on to explain:

*When Aboriginal people open up, much of what is shared is deeply felt... it is sacred and deserves a level of respect that is often not understood, or given. Once it is put on paper it can get ‘watered down’ even more. (Pat Powell, email correspondence)*

Many practitioners expressed concern about the particular forms of research that are valued, the ways research data is collected and the fact that practitioners are not involved in the conclusions drawn from the data they themselves provided to government. In spite of the mistrust of research, many practitioners believed they use research skills “on the fly” (Aboriginal practitioner, Interview) all the time in order to be effective teachers. As Esther Nordin, a literacy practitioner based in Ontario, stated, this everyday research opens possibilities for RiP:

In a sense, a great deal of learning that occurs in community-based programs can be re-framed as a form of research. We research our various childhoods, we research our cultural traditions, we research our goals and experience with work, and we research our understanding of a novel or even a word. Once we reframe our everyday learning and insights as a form of research, we can become conscious

researchers of our own experience, histories, situations and communities; a new world of content and form opens up to us. We can explore topics that are critical to us, in new and novel ways, not only through academic language but also through poetry and the arts, social activism and advocacy. (Wild Card)

Participants in this study illustrated the myriad ways that their everyday work involved research skills. Practitioners in Saskatchewan, for example, discussed how research skills and processes were a part of program planning, evaluating and documenting outcomes, participating in pilot projects, reflecting and asking questions, looking for answers to problems, formal and informal needs assessment, proposal writing and reporting, informal sharing at meetings and in documentation. As Nayda Veeman, a Saskatchewan based researcher and practitioner, explained:

*A good instructor always is interested in doing things in the best way possible and so in some sense that's not labelled research but it probably is. And going to in-service sessions and talking to other people and sharing information, those are all ways of improving practice and what I see the research in practice initiative doing is formalizing that in a way and encouraging people to be more systematic about the way they gather information and share it. (Interview)*

Some practitioners commented that using research skills, and recognizing the work they did as containing elements of research, had led them to shift their scepticism about research and allowed them to be more open to possibilities for RiP. A program administrator in Nunavut commented that informal research “*really does work, but we need to facilitate it more.*” Several practitioners were particularly interested in reading research carried out by other practitioners and were curious about the processes these practitioners used to address questions about their own practice. Practitioners who had the opportunity to undertake RiP stated that carrying out research themselves had a profound effect on their own individual practice.

Some, not wanting to undertake a RiP study themselves, were still interested in drawing in other researchers to document their practice:

*It was interesting for me to see the responses to different researchers in the field. People seemed to really want them to come in and observe their practice but they themselves didn't want to do the work to document it. (Jan Sawyer, British Columbia, Interview)*

This researcher was quite surprised by the excitement that practitioners expressed in having other researchers document their practice so that it could be shared more widely. Kate Nonesuch has taken advantage of that sort of approach on several occasions to help her see her practice “*with new eyes*” (Wild Card). She agreed to have one researcher explore issues of student resistance and searched out another to document her practice. As she explained:

*I thought we were doing something good and different, and wanted people to pay attention—that was part of my motivation, plus outside eyes looking at it, observing in the classroom... [The researchers] had access to my students in ways I didn't. They did in-depth one-on-one interviews, which I don't have time for. (Kate Nonesuch, British Columbia, Interview)*

The value of outside eyes looking at the classroom anew would be interesting to explore further. Kate Nonesuch also raises questions about whether experienced educators becoming “researchers” is the best way to pass on what they have learned from experience: *“Research is not my culture. I want teaching to be made better, and... what is known about teaching literacy to adults to be front and centre.”* (Interview) One valuable approach to RiP, that might reveal new perspectives, would be for practitioners to collaborate with each other, and perhaps sometimes with outside researchers, to carry out research to explore and reveal the complexities of practice.

Although there is growing interest in RiP in some provinces, such as Ontario, many practitioners still don’t see themselves as researchers, nor do they necessarily see any relevance in research. These practitioners are not drawn to research events:

*Some practitioners do not see themselves as ‘researchers’. The key is getting people to see practitioner research as beneficial to them and their practice, rather than primarily an additional responsibility. Terms such as ‘practitioner research’ and ‘reflective practice’ are not familiar to most practitioners.* (Festival of Literacies Evaluation Report, Ontario)

Some researchers were concerned that RiP has become the latest fashion and wondered if RiP was the best way to address the problems in the field. Kate Nonesuch observed that there are limitations to sharing learning in the form of research reports. She pointed out that *“what teachers need is way more about how to do it.”* For example, she said research reports *“didn’t tell what readings they had given the students, just how successful they were.”* (Interview)

Research reports often don’t speak as clearly to practice as they do to research. Many traditional research reports situate themselves in terms of what research they drew on and what further research they call for, rather than delineating ways they emerge from problems in practice, and should lead to changes in practice. These criticisms suggest the need for other supports for critical reflective practice, not only research opportunities, and for the need for a range of ways of reporting research and moving it into practice.

## **RiP might lead to change, but would we like all the changes?**

Many practitioners were clear that carrying out research has enormous value. It can support personal and professional change and has the potential to enable practitioners to be more able and willing to read research. It could lead to broad changes in the field if the climate were right.

*The research that impacted my practice the most...was the research I actually did... you understand what you did much better and you actually understand research when you read it.* (Fay Holt Begg, Alberta, Focus Group)

Although many practitioners were eager to see RiP support changes in practice, others had concerns that if practitioners become researchers in their classrooms the programs might change in less desirable ways. For example Esther Nordin, an Ontario-based literacy practitioner, was concerned that RiP might damage valuable elements of community-based programming in attempting to reveal the complexity and strengths of the approach:

Many of our programs attempt to eliminate the hierarchical relationship between learners and teachers found in more traditional learning settings. I worry that once practitioners become researchers of their own practice and their knowledge becomes further ‘professionalized’ there will be a shift in the power relations between practitioners and learners away from the dialogic and toward the hierarchical... (Esther Nordin, Wild Card)

Similarly Guy Ewing, another Ontario-based practitioner and researcher, hoped that rather than fixing the knowledge of the field, RiP would continue to be fluid and have a holistic character truer to the complex process of literacy work:

In the research in practice workshops that we developed last year at the Festival of Literacies we talked about ‘ongoing knowledge creation’ in literacy work, ‘literacy worker knowledge’ and how it can become ‘research knowledge.’ But as I continue to discuss these workshops with my colleagues, I am becoming increasingly uncomfortable using the words ‘know’, ‘knowing,’ and ‘knowledge.’ Perhaps literacy work and research in practice are about continuous discovery, not ‘creating knowledge.’ ‘Knowledge’ is a noun representing a state. If there were such a state, it would entail a kind of forgetting of what we actually experience in literacy work, the dynamism of each moment of discovery. For those moments to happen, we have to not know, not expect, be open to what we might see, hear, feel. And if this is true of literacy work, it should also be true of research in practice. If knowledge is a state, it couldn’t ‘keep bleeding’ out of experience. It would be blood collected in vials and labelled. We need research in practice that doesn’t bleed anything, lets the blood keep flowing in our whole selves, describes, speculates, doesn’t pretend to know. (Guy Ewing, Wild Card)

And for research in practice to maintain such fluidity, it is crucial that frameworks to support RiP also be flexible and fluid. As Cheryl Brown observes:

*...the framework needs to be flexible enough so you can do capital R research, if you get to, or you can reflect on your practice if that’s as far as you can go... My concern about the framework is that it’ll tell people how to do research in practice...as opposed to leaving it open and ... valuing whatever people do and supporting them to do that, and a little bit more, if they can. (New Brunswick, Interview).*

## Conclusion

Overall the picture of the literacy field across most of the country was disturbing and led to many questions about the role of RiP at this time in a field which is so overburdened and precarious. Yet in spite of this bleak picture, or possibly because of it, there was substantial interest in developing RiP. Practitioner-researchers spoke about the difference RiP had made to their own confidence and their own practice even when it did not appear to have as much influence on the field as they had hoped. They spoke of their renewed energy as practitioners, of the changes they made to their own practice and of their increased interest in reading research. Once they felt heard and experienced respect for their field knowledge, they were more open to listening to others. They were also more

open to benefiting from research and finding the value in another insider's insights. Perhaps if there were more spaces where literacy workers' knowledge were recognized and valued more practitioners might be inspired to reflect on practice, to explore innovative practice, and to be inspired to carry out research to find answers to particularly challenging questions that many others share.

Many suggested that the greatest need is for a range of "spaces" for reflective practice—opportunities for practitioners to plan and evaluate their practice, to meet together face-to-face, and to have paid time within the work day to connect online, exchange ideas, and discuss strategies to address the complex problems they face in their day-to-day work. Some suggested that such reflective practice might eventually lead to increased numbers of practitioners being ready to take on research. Others suggested various professional development possibilities such as mentors, exchanges, and outside researchers documenting exemplary practice.

In spite of the conditions in the field and concerns about research, there was an enormous interest in RiP amongst those who participated in this study. Practitioners who took on the role of researcher expressed a strong sense of accomplishment, even though several were also utterly frustrated and all insisted that it is simply not possible to carry out research, in addition to their daily work, with the current level of support. By the end of this study, researchers in each province and territory had ideas about how RiP could be developed in their jurisdiction and most seemed to believe that it was important to do so. For example Beth Mulloy, lead researcher in the Yukon, suggested the next step she would like to see:

*...because people are confused about what research is in the Yukon I would like to do a project on how do we research every day. How do we get information? I think that would be fascinating and fun. So we start getting comfortable with what research is and start learning how to use it and start constantly observing, probing and getting more information. (Interview)*

Even where researchers had found it difficult to get practitioners to participate in their jurisdiction, they saw RiP as a valuable way to address some of the problems of the field. Finally Janet Shively, Nova Scotian lead researcher, expresses the widely held hope for the potential for RiP in Canada but hints at the fears that many in the field also share about the possibilities for missteps as RiP develops:

*I feel personally that RiP is an extremely important part of adult literacy. In fact I think it's the only way to move forward in a way that's constructive and positive for the learners involved. What I found in my own experience [is that] too much literacy policy is made by policy makers who haven't been in the field, or who have forgotten what it's like in the field, or who aren't connected to people in the field—or to the people who are supposedly benefiting from the programs. The only way you get the information you really need to improve programming is through the people who are actually practicing in the field. I feel very strongly about that...I think that RiP is an incredibly hopeful thing to be happening in the field of literacy and I just hope that it does gain momentum and it does get support and that it remains practitioner-based—rather than something that gets handed over ... [and] actually ends up just being another way of supporting the status quo. What I hope is that policy makers and government people start listening [to practitioners]. So that's my hope for RiP— and what I think needs to happen for it to be valuable. I think it could make a real change if it does what it's supposed to do—if it remains what it's supposed to be. (Interview)*

**Pilgrims**  
**by Helen Woodrow**

If you lost a marble or book, you were  
told to pray to St. Anthony. He would  
help you find the precious item gone  
wandering beyond your grasp.

My mother sometimes prayed to St. Jude.  
Children didn't know much about the saint  
whose holy job depended on lost causes  
and most desperate situations.

When we traveled, we learned about  
saints who offered special protection.  
Christopher rode on the dash of our car  
though I hear he later lost that job.

Some cast their powers against bad  
harvests, riots, strife and poverty.  
There were those like Bridget who wrapped  
their blessed cloaks around entire communities.

You were lucky if you worked as a bar keep,  
broom maker or boat man. You had your own  
saint to watch over you. Today Isidore  
has gone digital to shield those surfing the net.

Last week I sent word to Anthony. I wondered  
if a saint had been lost. Does no one  
walk with the pilgrims navigating the foggy  
lands between research and practice?

## **CHAPTER 7 Our Research Journeys**

### **Alberta journey by Rebecca Still**

What a challenging yet rewarding experience this journey has been. When I first saw the call for applications I knew I wanted to be involved. I had participated in a few research projects and was somewhat familiar with the process. However, I was hoping to join a team in Alberta. By no means did I consider myself qualified to lead such a large project.

When I discovered there was no team shaping up in our province I decided to apply as an individual. I hoped that others were applying and we could join as a team. However, I soon found out that there was no team I could join and no organization or group willing to take the lead on the project. I was therefore given the contract for Alberta.

I felt overwhelmed with the responsibility of overseeing the whole project for Alberta. We are one of the larger provinces and quite a bit of research has been done in this province so there were quite a few people to connect with and interview. I felt the project was too much for one person, and knew my limitations.

When I started to look for others to join me, I got discouraged. Most people were too busy. At the same time, groups in other provinces and territories were already holding focus groups and conducting interviews. I felt like Alberta was being left behind. Eventually I posted a call on the online provincial network. I asked for people to join me in any way they could. Perhaps my flexibility about how they could be involved made the difference: five practitioners were willing to help lead focus groups and conduct interviews. I was very encouraged to know I was not totally alone.

Still, I was lost in a fog. I wondered how we could include practitioners in every sector, from workplace programs to ESL classes to college programs to groups in the deaf community to family literacy groups to community-based programs. I wondered how to reach practitioners in all parts of the province including cities, small communities and rural areas. How would we find people interested in coming to a focus group or willing to be interviewed? Where should we hold the focus groups? I felt like I was spinning my wheels in the mud.

We finally moved forward when one of the team members set a date and place for the first focus group. This gave me the courage to post a plan online that listed dates and locations for several focus groups throughout the province. Once we started the interviews and focus groups I felt better.

We did our best to connect with a wide representative of literacy providers in Alberta. A number of people said they were interested in participating but did not have the time. That seems to always be an issue in literacy work! Those who were able to participate were excited and very interested in the project. They never assumed they would be compensated for attending a focus group or for being away from their other work.

We finally moved forward when one of the team members set a date and place for the first focus group. This gave me the courage to post a plan online that listed dates and locations for several focus groups throughout the province. Once we started the interviews and focus groups I felt better.

The participants had a lot to say about the state of literacy in our province. Many practitioners are trying to deal with complex issues with many responsibilities and too little time. Some coordinators feel their job has changed and their responsibilities have increased. Many are bogged down in writing grant proposals and reports, managing people and focusing on what is necessary to do in 18-24 hours a week. All of this makes it challenging for them to also take on research. Yet when they looked closer at what research in practice meant, they began to see how they used research every day in their work. All agreed it made their practice richer and stronger.

I was surprised to learn how little people knew about the research being done in Alberta. Many knew that something was happening, but did not know any details about the work. It became quite obvious that we need a better way for people across the province to share what they are doing. I hope that this research will lead to stronger supports for research in practice for our province and for Canada as a whole.

### **British Columbia journey by Leonne Beebe**

When I first read the invitation to apply to be part of the national framework project, I envisioned the opportunity to learn more about the national scene and to meet literacy folk from across Canada. I knew this project was designed to help teach us about and experience research in practice while collecting the provincial data. I also knew this would definitely be outside of my experienced comfort zone as a new research in practice literacy teacher, but I like the challenge of new experiences, so I plunged in and asked RiPAL-BC to help me with the application. Our joint application was accepted, and I became the BC Team Leader. We met in Vancouver to set up the BC Team. Considering the size of BC and the winter weather conditions expected during the data-collecting time frame, we looked for people in specific areas of BC to act as Regional Team Members. We hoped to reach the other areas of BC with surveys and provincial meetings. We hoped that our BC Team would be ready for the advertised “exceptional opportunity for a research in practice experience”!

Overcoming computer and network technical problems and inexperience with online conferencing, our team started to form through confusion, commitment and once in a while, clarity, as we read the national conference emails and emailed each other. As faculty at a BC public post-secondary University College, I needed to apply for ethical review approval of the project. I knew this would delay data collection until January of 2006. When I used the logos of both my institution and RiPAL-BC on team documents, however, on-going “ethics” discussions arose, accompanied by further delays. Fortunately, this was the only team issue. Each team member collected data in one or more of the three formats: focus groups, interviews and surveys, although some collected less than they had hoped.

We all agreed that we should have had a team meeting at the beginning of the project. This would have helped form the team and allowed us to develop a clearer sense of what the team's work entailed.

Our team finally met each other in early April of 2006. We gathered in Vancouver for an evening and a day to review our data. Betsy Alkenbrack, an ABE instructor, RiPAL-BC member and doctoral candidate looking at collaborative RiP, joined our team as the bibliography writer and acted as our “thought-provoker” and “facilitator” while we analyzed the team data. We all agreed that we

should have had a team meeting at the beginning of the project. This would have helped form the team and allowed us to develop a clearer sense of what the team's work entailed.

Each of us had a different journey with the project. Here are some reflections from the members of our team.

Kathy Rollheiser: *I needed a break from the advocacy work I am doing with children with learning disabilities. I am enraged at how poorly the public school system is meeting their needs! I found respite in this project. I felt less like a fish out of water than I expected, not being an 'adult literacy person', because of the wonderful sense of community in this field. I felt my contributions were welcomed here. I loved the online conferencing, and really appreciated the communication line that stretched across the country. This project does for me what CBC radio does; makes me feel connected to the rest of the country.*

Jan Sawyer: *I am very appreciative that Leonne contacted me. At first I was apprehensive, but I did enjoy past research projects and wanted to get back into it. What a wonderful way to reconnect: hearing people value research in practice. I appreciate being connected to people whose work I have read or heard about. I was frustrated at all the reading online. I have stacks of paper lying around that I printed off so I could read it. I was there reading, even if I wasn't always talking. I was also frustrated when we started. I would ask, 'Where are we going?', and then get no response. Suzanne finally contacted me and I thought, 'Okay'. While timelines mattered, they were different for everyone. I had time considerations and had to get started on the data collection. Once I began getting feedback I felt better. I am a face-to-face person, and I found the online work difficult. Emails can be misunderstood—we have to be very careful with the tone.*

Suzanne Smythe: *The project ended up being more work than I thought it would be, but I enjoyed it in the end. I had to negotiate what I could do, between my teaching job and my thesis coming due. I am glad I did it, though. I learned a lot, and would like to do more. At first RiPAL-BC wasn't involved, but then we thought we should encourage people to apply. Then we thought we should be involved and help out more, but we worried we might be stepping on toes. This negotiating of roles should have happened at the beginning.*

*The Ethics review was really interesting; the difference between institutions that had to worry about it and those who didn't. I liked the online conferences, but the discussions would have been better if we could have met first. Our meeting in April was the greatest part.*

Leonne Beebe: *The project was both inspirational and motivational. This has been professional development for me. I feel like I am climbing up a hill, and I am not at the peak yet. I need lots of breaks, and when I see the top I notice valleys and then another peak! I have learned that I need to find shade trees along the way. At times I felt that although we started at the same place, I went overland while the others went by water; however, we all ended up at the same place.*

*When I went to the national meeting in Toronto I remembered when I first took part in provincial articulation working groups and committees: I was overwhelmed, impressed and excited about the experience of working with 'all of BC in one room'. Magnify this*

*feeling by all 13 provinces and territories and me with 'Canada in one room'! The only things we all had in common were the National Framework Project and a passion for literacy.*

Back in BC, writing the final report was the stage where it was the easiest for me to get lost in all the words and the hardest, as a practitioner, to find time for writing. This experience without a mentor taught me that I need to have a mentor at this stage to keep me on track with the writing process! Looking back over the past 10 months, this truly was an “exceptional opportunity for a research in practice experience”. Would I do this type of project again? Yes!

## **Manitoba journey by Francine Villeneuve**

If I had started my journal the first month I began working on this project then I probably could have written a more heroic story. I might have written about how I was going to get so much research done, how all the provinces together would come up with a wonderful plan to improve adult literacy, and how the practitioners in Manitoba would be so enthused about the project that they would gladly participate. But after three months, I honestly didn't feel like a researcher or a hero. I felt more like a frustrated and scared child heading off to kindergarten. On my way to the Toronto meeting in May I had a million things going through my head, wondering did I do things right, how could I do better, was I going to embarrass myself, or whether I would misrepresent Manitoba. My biggest fear was whether I was going to disappoint other members of the national research in practice team.

I didn't start work on this project until the end of February. I took over from Yvonne, the original team member, who had tried to organize a focus group and had completed some interviews before she left on maternity leave.

Like most new things, I jumped in believing that this was such a great idea that people were going to be supportive and enthused about giving input. Sadly, I found this wasn't the case. In my first effort to collect some data, I distributed over 20 surveys to adult literacy coordinators and instructors, explaining what RiP was and why I was asking for their input. I asked them to send the survey back within two weeks. After a week and a half I had received little response so I decided to send out an email repeating my initial speech. Well, I ended up with four surveys. This was not exactly the wave of information I had been expecting! However, reports, proposals, and budgets were due the same month, so I understand that people's attention must have been focused on those priorities instead.

Organizing a focus group was also very difficult. Yvonne had struggled to find a time when people could get together, and I had the same problem. Finally in mid-April I was able to hold a focus group with two participants. It was a huge relief to finally find people who were willing to participate. I was nervous before the focus group. I still felt new to the project, and wasn't sure I would be able to answer all of the participants' questions. However, the two people that came brought some interesting questions, new ideas and many thoughts about how adult literacy affects people.

I feel as though I've more than survived my first day of kindergarten. I now know more about literacy and research and realize that I'm not the only person in literacy work who feels overwhelmed. I'm glad to have worked on this project and would be interested in continuing the work. Next time I would like to be mentored or guided. This experience did not break me, it only made me stronger, so I guess in my own world I am a hero.

This project was...

- really important to our adult literacy programs.
- amazing.
- challenging.
- thought-provoking.
- exhausting at times.
- scary for me, a newcomer to research and literacy. But every one in the project was patient and understanding. I was excited to meet all the new people.

On my way to the Toronto meeting in May I had a million things going through my head, wondering did I do things right, how could I do better, was I going to embarrass myself, or whether I would misrepresent Manitoba. My biggest fear was whether I was going to disappoint other members of the national research in practice team.

Being involved in the project...

- pushed me to new limits. I wanted to prove I could do it.
- helped me realize what researchers go through.
- was a great learning experience.

There were many hurdles and barriers along the way. It was an intense job for one person!

I learned...

- never do this kind of project without team members.
- attracting colleagues to the project can be difficult.
- we could use more RiP in Manitoba.

## **New Brunswick journey by Jan Greer**

Like many long road trips, the journey in New Brunswick would not have been possible without several people to share in the driving. When the call for proposals came across my electronic desk, I sent it along to Joan Perry. She was on contract with the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick at the time and I depended on her keen ability to read and dissect information and make a recommendation about whether things fit within the coalition's mandate and resources. She felt that the project fit with our priorities, but might be too onerous, given that we were already overworked and understaffed.

However, a short time later one of our directors called and encouraged the coalition to apply. Dr. Heather Richmond is a family literacy and research specialist based at St. Thomas University in Fredericton. At her suggestion, we held a meeting to discuss the project. We invited other volunteers with the coalition who had a research perspective, to form a seven-member steering committee which included Dr. Heather Richmond, Sally Crawford, Cheryl Brown, Wendell Dryden, Lynda Homer, Jan Geer and Joan Perry.

Those of us at the meeting thought the journey would be possible if we divided the work. We looked at the project in pieces and each took an area of responsibility. Since Joan was already involved in researching and writing for the coalition, we decided that she would manage the project and act as the primary staff person.

The project itself was a much longer trek than we had expected. The number of paid hours racked up quickly. Joan managed the information on the Hub messaging system and relayed highlights to the team. This required many, many hours of reading and synthesizing. Thank goodness for Joan's expertise in dissecting and analyzing information and her ability to share cohesive yet detailed summaries with the rest of the team!

We would not have finished if the team members had not volunteered many hours to the project. Along the way we lost a few people because of their heavily burdened schedules. The theme of too much work and not enough time was not unique to this project—we heard this comment again and again from practitioners in the field.

The first leg of the journey was an electronic survey. It was a quick and easy way to gather information within a tight timeframe, and we received a good response. The next leg of the journey

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was the focus group. We hoped to hold a focus group in conjunction with another event but nothing materialized so we held our focus group mid-February. Each member of the RiP team played a role and Joan planned and led a very thoughtful and reflective process. The people who attended were a diverse group, although we would have liked a more representative sample of practitioners. Our next challenge was the labour-intensive process of transcribing the conversations and scrapbooking the artifacts from the entire process. Two experienced scrapbookers, Connie Locke and Wendy Dumaresq, helped Joan Perry with the layout of this very creative artifact.

Although it was a long and arduous journey, it was a pleasant one. We managed to navigate through and around the many potholes in the road. In New Brunswick we reached a comfortable destination and are proud of the final products that came out of our journey together.

## **Newfoundland and Labrador journey by Pamela Bennett**

Looking for a change from the multiple layers of issues and responsibilities involved with my regular job as a literacy practitioner, I eagerly applied for and was hired to become the Newfoundland and Labrador participant in this national project. When I met with my provincial team to map out my journey, the possibilities for data gathering seemed positively endless. My optimism soon turned to confusion as literacy practitioners failed to respond to the opportunities to share what they thought and knew about RiP. I reminded myself of all of the things that would make it difficult for people to participate, including people's tight and overburdened work schedules. I tried again, sent out more prompts and reminders and invitations, tried to make things easier and more attractive, but still there were few takers.

Weather played a role in my RiP frustrations. The data collection was in the winter months. Isolated rural communities were sometimes impossible to reach because of the snow and bad weather, causing several of my initiatives to be postponed, rescheduled or cancelled. Geography impacted as well. The practitioners who wanted to be involved in this project were spread across the province. We had few funds for travel and although people participated via the telephone, teleconferences, and the internet, I often wonder whether the data would have been different if I had been able to meet more people face-to-face.

When people finally came together or agreed to speak to me about RiP and their experiences with RiP, there were new discoveries. The conversations were multilayered, revolving always around the nature of literacy and literacy program delivery within the province. No matter where the participants were from—community-based organizations, government bodies, educational institutions or individuals simply interested in literacy—conversations always echoed the state of literacy in Newfoundland and Labrador. People vented and voiced concerns. They despaired at the current literacy situation. They wanted to speak about “our literacy problems”. They searched for solutions and hoped for a better future.

People who work in programs shared stories about being overworked and underpaid. They revealed insights about how they delivered programs with few supports and resources. They disclosed how they feel about juggling the often conflicting demands of governments, communities and individuals. They spoke about all the unpaid work they must do to keep their programs going. They expressed fear about becoming unemployed in a province with few opportunities for employment. Many felt that they had little choice but to keep on doing the jobs they had in literacy, despite the many frustrations. Many also said that they had few opportunities to share their frustrations, hopes or fears about literacy in the province.

It is plain to see why the focus of my sessions became general discussions about literacy within the province. Practitioners are the front-line people involved with literacy on a daily basis. They deal directly with the general public, they design programs, they obtain the necessary supplies and resources, they maintain the spaces in which programs run, they secure funding for programs, they advocate for learners, and perform a thousand other duties to ensure that the doors to literacy programs remain open. Many of these literacy practitioners are paid far less than their counterparts at school boards or other institutions of learning who are protected by collective agreements and unions. Yet Newfoundland and Labrador, with its rugged coastline and scattered population, depends on the local literacy practitioners. These educators are the individuals in small communities who can be counted upon to read and write letters, make phone calls, fill out forms, and attend hearings and meetings. They perform a host of other very vital tasks that are far removed from literacy teaching, but yet are not so removed at all from literacy practices. In fact, people who have literacy issues need a friendly individual to advocate on their behalf and assist with problems in their daily lives. Often times in our rural communities, literacy practitioners are the ones who handle these tasks.

People who work in programs revealed insights about how they delivered programs with few supports and resources. They said that literacy practitioners who were delivering well-resourced, well-housed, well-funded literacy programs would be better able to participate in documenting, reflecting and analyzing their literacy practices.

But the point of my research was research in practice. When I asked about it, most participants did not have much to say about research in practice or about practicing research. They said they were not familiar with the term. They said that literacy practitioners who were secure in their employment would be more willing and able to participate in RiP initiatives. Practitioners who were delivering well-resourced, well-housed, well-funded literacy programs would be better able to participate in documenting, reflecting and analyzing their literacy practices.

During my six month stint as a researcher my life became very consumed with all things RiP. I was tethered to my computer so as to not miss vital information posted to the electronic discussions on the Hub. Although I read everything, I posted little. I suppose I felt intimidated by the expertise of the other members of the national team. I was sure that everyone else was moving along smoothly, finding the data collection to be a seamless effort. I trudged on. The readings piled up. Deadlines

came and went. The layers of RiP continued to cover me. I wondered if the process would ever end. I thought that I was the only member of the national team struggling with the project. I worried that my efforts weren't pointed in the right direction. I stressed about all of it.

Sometimes I still worry that all the layers are still not correct enough, that I missed the big picture for all the small bits and pieces. Maybe it's true. Maybe I did get caught up and didn't produce the desired results, but throughout the whole journey I was assured that the process was important. I definitely feel I have been "processed" by the RiP. This experience taught me many things about research in practice, about my province and about myself. The positive experiences, the supports and nurturing, allow me to be much more willing to take professional chances. I am ready to move forward and embrace the future of literacy and of research in practice, and ready to embrace my future in that process, whatever my role may be.

### **Northwest Territories journey by Cate Sills and Helen Balanoff**

The NWT Literacy Council has been involved in a number of research-in-practice initiatives, particularly the RiP conferences in 2001 and 2003. We were also part of the committee that originally discussed this project, partly because we were interested in the possibility of hosting a RiP conference in the north. When the project called for participants we discussed the idea with our two major partners in literacy, Aurora College and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Together we decided that the NWT Literacy Council should apply to conduct the research in the NWT, with the others as supporting partners.

We are a small organization that serves the entire NWT. To cover the whole territory the staff travels a lot, so we are almost always fully extended. By the time we got started, the national project had already begun online discussions on the Hub. We found that if we missed a few days of the online discussion, we were overwhelmed by the volume of messages and found it very difficult to pick up the thread. Before long we wondered what we had gotten ourselves into.

The responses were what we had expected: few people knew what RiP was, and they told us that RiP was not possible without time, money, institutional support and partnerships.

And we seemed foiled at every turn.

We planned to conduct focus groups at the face-to-face professional development sessions that each campus of Aurora College holds each year between January and March. Every literacy provider in the NWT attends one of these sessions, and this is the only time literacy providers come together. We knew these were our only opportunity for face-to-face discussions, since travel into the communities is prohibitively expensive.

However this year one campus held its session in November, before our plan for the project was approved, and another held its session in May, after the deadline for collecting data for the project. This forced us to change our plan a few times.

The situation was compounded in December when our main researcher was hospitalized and subsequently on medical leave for five months. In January our executive director carried out the first focus group for adult educators from the South Mackenzie and Deh Cho regions. The responses were what we had expected: few people knew what RiP was, and they told us that RiP was not possible without time, money, institutional support and partnerships.

We had hoped that our main researcher could interview other literacy providers from different regions by phone from her home while she was on medical leave. However, she was re-hospitalized

during the week when the interviews were scheduled. We cancelled the interviews and re-thought our plan yet again. We were so far behind that we decided we had no option but to withdraw from the project and return the funding. We were interviewed by one of the national researchers, but could do little more than write a snapshot of the NWT and this brief description of our process.

## **Nova Scotia journey by Janet Shively**

I undertook this project with a mix of feelings, from excitement to trepidation. I always enjoy the opportunity to work with national teams and meet people in the field who are quietly doing good work in their own corners of the country. And my 20 years as a practitioner in the field of literacy have instilled in me a commitment to the importance of documenting the significant learning and insights that come from teaching and interacting with learners. And yet—what did I really know about practitioner research? I felt comfortable as a *practitioner*, and I had recently completed a *research* project, but I wasn't sure how you put the two together to form a new entity: *practitioner research*. But I'd find out. That must be what practitioner research is all about, after all.

At first this seemed a lonely and daunting endeavour. Not many people in Nova Scotia expressed interest in the project, and when no teams came forward I applied as an individual—becoming one of the few solo “teams” involved in the project. This was a big job, so I was delighted when Kathy MacCuish agreed to lend her expertise and support by conducting a couple of focus groups and reviewing some of the material.

I knew before I began that research in practice was not—at that point—something that had much familiarity or cachet in Nova Scotia, and that for this reason it might be difficult to find people interested in participating in the project. It was. I began by developing an electronic survey that I distributed widely among all the usual suspects in an inter-sectoral approach to literacy issues: Regional Adult Education Coordinators with the Department of Adult Education, Community Literacy Coordinators, College Adult Learning Program instructors, the Workplace Education Network, Women's Centres and Family Resource Centres across the province, the Nova Scotia Library System, and faculty from several Nova Scotia universities who I thought might have an interest. In all, I sent out about 160 surveys and invitations to participate in the project. In addition, Literacy Nova Scotia graciously offered to post the information and survey in its E-news, which went out to literacy practitioners across the province. I received only 20 replies, fairly evenly divided between community literacy practitioners and college based Adult Learning Program instructors.

I soon found out why the response rate was so low (about 12.5%). I started calling people and the story was short and consistent. “Not one more thing. We can't take on one more thing. We're overstretched, under funded and understaffed. We receive way too many requests to participate in this or that survey or research project with no compensation, have enough trouble just keeping our doors open, and we can't take on one more thing! The project sounds as if it might be interesting but it's unlikely to improve things for our programs in the foreseeable future and that's what we have to concentrate on. Attend a focus group? On whose time? **What** time? Sorry!” One coordinator gently told me that it would be much more respectful to conduct individual interviews at people's workplaces, or by phone, than to ask people to take time to travel to a focus group. I appreciated the honesty. And I felt like a telemarketer interrupting people at the busiest part of their day to earnestly sell another product for which there was absolutely no interest, need, or money.

But there were bright spots, too. The Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton and the Dartmouth Literacy Network graciously offered to host and organize focus groups, for which I am most grateful. I conducted eight interviews in person and by phone with literacy informants with a range of expertise and experience—university professors, network coordinators, coalition managers and practitioners. Everyone was extremely generous in sharing their time, knowledge, and perspective.

Then Literacy Nova Scotia came to the rescue by allowing us to conduct two RiP focus groups in conjunction with a professional development event in March, a one-and-a-half day workshop led by Allan Quigley, coincidentally a member of the steering committee for this project. Unfortunately, this opportunity came at the end of my data collection phase. My journey might have been quite different had it occurred at the beginning. The workshop was the ideal opportunity to discuss RiP with literacy practitioners working in college and community-based programs across the province—**after** Allan had already informed and energized them. Allan’s workshop, the nine action research projects that resulted from it, and the development of NS-ARM (Nova Scotia - Action Research Movement) directly following the workshop, have, hopefully, initiated a permanent shift in the research in practice landscape in Nova Scotia. As Ann Marie Downie, Executive Director of Literacy Nova Scotia, put it:

*There are people around the province who are saying maybe we’re missing the boat here. I think that’s progress. How many people from Nova Scotia went to the event in Newfoundland [Research in Practice Institute, 2003]? Not many, and I wasn’t interested. But if they were having it **this** summer...*

As is often the case, my timing was a bit off. I was there a little too soon.

If I could do this research project over again next year, who knows what I’d find? Optimistically, it would be energized literacy practitioners asking their own questions, discovering, documenting, and sharing their own answers, and making their voices heard as part of a larger framework—a true community of practice.

As one of the project informants said to me, “Acceptance of research is accepting that you’re part of a larger discipline that is always growing and changing and responding to social needs.”

It is exciting to witness the beginning of a movement when enthusiasm is high and possibilities wide. During the process of this project, listening to practitioners’ stories, voices, concerns, and hopes, a number of questions seemed to be emerging. I was reminded of Esther Nordin’s “Musings on research in practice”:

I would ask: Who defines the questions to be asked? Who funds the research and towards what ends?...Whose voices will be heard? Whose interests are represented through the research?...Will re-

search in practice represent itself as speaking for learners while learners continue to remain silent and powerless?

Although, as Nordin puts it, “Research in practice is a powerful tool from which practitioners can explore, define, and deepen practice,” it is **not** neutral. In a system that has one funding source and in an environment where the issues of “bums in seats” and “curriculum outcomes” seem to take precedence over concerns about underlying causes or long-term social and educational changes, it is important to reflect critically on the direction this new and potentially powerful tool will lead the field of literacy. As one of the project informants said to me, “Acceptance of research is accepting

that you're part of a larger discipline that is always growing and changing and responding to social needs."

I am sincerely thankful for all the committed professionals in Nova Scotia who generously shared their time, wisdom, concerns and insights with this project. They made my journey worth the effort.

## **Nunavut journey by Cayla Chenier and Janet Onalik**

When we agreed to participate in this national research project, we were both familiar with the term "research in practice" (RiP) but did not know much else about it. The Nunavut Literacy Council has received some published RiP work from other provinces and we have seen announcements for RiP workshops being delivered on the east coast. Based on this cursory exposure, we liked the idea of research in practice and thought it might have potential in Nunavut. As well, the voice of the northern territories has often been excluded from national endeavours and we wanted to make sure that Nunavut's perspective be included in this project. Not surprisingly, we had to adjust the project to fit our unique context.

We felt face-to-face interviews would be the most effective way to conduct the research. However, this would mean organizing interviews in communities where we were already scheduled to deliver workshops, as travel in the north is extremely expensive. For example, the cost of a flight between Rankin Inlet and Cambridge Bay is approximately \$3000. Unfortunately, we were only able to conduct two face-to-face focus groups. The rest of our interviews were conducted by telephone, using two different questionnaires.

All of the people we interviewed work for Nunavut Arctic College (NAC). Most are Adult Educators. Their jobs include community development, proposal development and program management and counselling—as well as teaching ABE and literacy programs. We also interviewed certificate or diploma instructors, program administrators and one director. All encounter literacy issues in their work since the majority of students enter NAC programs without grade 12.

In Nunavut, Adult Educators' jobs are broader than just being instructors or literacy practitioners. Their various roles are connected and necessary to working with the "whole" individual or community. In the interviews, we wanted to open the conversation to allow them to think of all aspects of their work. We wanted them to be able to "think out of the box" and holistically so they would consider ways they might get ideas and inspiration other than through western-type "research". We wanted to avoid people being constrained by western divisions or classifications.

Currently there is no formal process of accreditation or training for Adult Educators and many come from other professions or from the public school system. In the past, the position of adult educator was most often held by a southerner. In more recent years, Nunavut Arctic College has hired a number of local Inuit to fill this position within communities. Inuit Adult Educators have had little or no formal training in adult education and have had little opportunity for professional development. Most, if not all have had little or no contact with the academic world and therefore with research. They may, however, have had the experience of being a research subject, research assistant or research translator in one of the many research projects conducted by southerners for academic purposes.

We wanted to take the focus away from reading and open up the conversation to include more culturally relevant ways that the Inuit Adult Educators might get information and ideas. We also knew that using the new term 'research in practice' might not give us insight into the literacy practices of Inuit Adult Educators, or how they access and use new information.

To get a good sense of Inuit Adult Educators' practice, we felt we needed to develop a second, somewhat different, questionnaire. We have often heard Inuit say that the most significant way of passing along information in their culture is orally. This is still very true today. We thought the focus on "research" and the term "research in practice" in the national questionnaire implied reading. We wanted to take the focus away from reading and open up the conversation to include more culturally relevant ways that the Inuit Adult Educators might get information and ideas. We also knew that using the new term "research in practice" might not give us insight into the literacy practices of Inuit Adult Educators, or how they access and use new information.

We struggled with what it meant to develop two different questionnaires within Nunavut, since the national project required that people ask the same, or similar, questions in every province and territory. However, based on the responses we got, we feel confident that our questions worked well and we were able to create a comfortable environment in which people were able to share with us freely. We enjoyed, as always, speaking with

literacy practitioners from different communities across Nunavut. Many answers given during the interviews will serve us well in supporting these practitioners in other areas of our work.

## Ontario journey by Katrina Grieve

I started this project with a sense of anticipation, excited to be doing research in an area so closely related to my interests. I was aware of the extent of the task, given the diversity of literacy programming in Ontario, including distinct streams, sectors and vast regional differences. I quickly experienced great anxiety, as the potential scope of the project and the limited time and resources became clear. I went through the same kind of process that most practitioner-researchers do, questioning what I could achieve and realizing my limitations.

At the outset I found myself caught in the middle of many questions, tensions and challenges. Some of these tensions were around lack of resources.

I started this project with a sense of anticipation, excited to be doing research in an area so closely related to my interests. I quickly experienced great anxiety, as the potential scope of the project and the limited time and resources became clear. I went through the same kind of process that most practitioner-researchers do, questioning what I could achieve and realizing my limitations.

- How can I expect practitioners to take time out of their programs without offering them an honorarium for their time and expenses? Given how literacy practitioners' work is undervalued, I wanted to do this, but the budget wasn't sufficient.
- How can I reach the diversity of perspectives and experiences in Ontario given the limited budget of the project?

Other tensions were around power and politics in the field. Some of these surfaced as people questioned me about the project, while others emerged from my own concerns and reflections.

- Who gets research dollars? (including funding for this project)

- Who will participate?
- Who controls voice and representation?
- How can I represent the distinct issues experienced by particular groups in Ontario? (Deaf, francophone, Native, anglophone, different sectors, urban/rural, north/south)
- What counts as “research” and “research in practice”?
- Given the challenges of the field right now, what difference will this project make? What will come of this?

Each of the distinct groups in Ontario has legitimate reasons for wanting to speak with their own voice, in representing their issues and priorities. They also want to frame their own questions and have some control over the research that affects policy and programming. In a collaborative project, recognizing and acknowledging differences, building trust, and communicating across differences takes significant time and resources.

This project did not include enough time or resources to adequately represent the perspectives of all of the distinct groups in Ontario. The best I could do was to seek out other practitioners with research experience who could help me with this work. I found two colleagues who could help organize and facilitate focus groups in different regions, and two Aboriginal literacy practitioners collected data from practitioners in the Aboriginal stream. We managed to involve a range of practitioners from school board, community-based and college programs across Ontario through focus groups, interviews and an online discussion.

Once the data collection was fully underway, strong patterns began to emerge. I saw a lot of similarities in what people were saying, despite their different contexts or experiences of research. A lot of the commonalities were around the obstacles to research in practice and the challenges faced by the literacy field. It was affirming to see these similarities and to see the potential of coming together around what is needed at a fundamental level.

## **Prince Edward Island journey by Karen Chandler**

I approached this journey with little understanding or appreciation for the value of research in practice (RiP) in adult literacy, let alone the need for a framework for RiP for all of Canada. During my time working on this project I was so focused on the task of gathering information that I did not realize I would be part of putting together pieces of a PEI puzzle, let alone a national puzzle.

Being involved in this project has proven to be extremely valuable to me. I have acquired skills and broadened my knowledge. More importantly, I have changed my way of thinking about research. Like many who participated in the PEI focus groups and interviews, I was indifferent, if not somewhat negative, toward research. Like the participants, I felt no connection to the field of research except as something I would occasionally read and make reference to. I had no reason to think otherwise. Now I understand why this negative perception exists, and I have a clearer vision of what it would take to change this point of view. However, I hope that the journey was not all about personal gain, and that I was able to contribute to moving RiP forward, in PEI and across Canada.

Overall, research activity in PEI has been limited. As a small province we have a tendency to rely on research carried out in other regions, and sometimes other countries, to direct our programs and policies. This is true in all areas, not just in education. My background search for literacy research

found very limited research activity in PEI. Fortunately, Jessie Lees shared her bibliography of research about literacy on PEI since 1990, which she had done for the PEI Literacy Research Network. The Network's interest in our work and Jessie's willingness to share her bibliography saved us many hours of library searching. With this lack of research at any level, the probability of research being carried out by practitioners becomes even more remote.

I hope that, by being exposed to instructor-led research, practitioners have been encouraged to develop their expertise in research and to share their knowledge by participating in research projects. Had I known how little they knew about practitioner research, and how important it would be for them to hear about research in practice, I would have included more of an awareness component in the focus group sessions. Practitioners need a great deal more time to talk and a strong support system before they will see the value of engaging in their own research.

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However, momentum is building in PEI. This project was timely. A Learning Research Network (LRN) committed to supporting research from the field was established in 2005. As an advocate for the LRN and a member of the board of the PEI Literacy Alliance, I am now in a much better position to support and promote research relevant to the needs of Islanders.

Working for a not-for-profit organization, I am fully aware of the limitations of proposal-based funding. I was happy to be part of a united national voice which I believe will impact on funding criteria in a positive way and, in time, will help to remove the barriers to instructor-led research. I am beginning to see how the puzzle fits together!

In closing, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to my co worker, Ruth Rogerson, for her help in collecting data, taking notes, and for helping to find our direction. I would also like to thank Jessie Lees for her expertise, enthusiasm and mentorship through out this project.

## Quebec journey by Linda Shohet

We can't go over it. We can't go under it: Should we let it RiP?

I should have known that any project with an acronym like "RiP" would lead to some unforeseen places. And so it has.

I embarked on this project with more naïveté than should have been possible after so many years in the field. From the model of committed enquiring colleagues who have made research inseparable from their teaching and learning, I imagined that literacy practitioners everywhere could be inspired and see ways to bring new meaning to their work. And in the beginning, my faith seemed well-placed. Colleagues signed on to be part of a provincial "team" to identify practice-based research in our own milieu and ask how others might be engaged.

But then the work began, and life got in the way, and how many ways it did. Many of the group had never worked in online environments; one worked at an institution that did not allow employees to download communication software; a labour dispute that had run a year longer than expected

kept school board members out of the group. A few were overwhelmed by their own organizational funding issues, and one person had signed on without consulting her coordinator and left her job a month later.

That was a harbinger. Once we began to uncover provincial research, we also uncovered tensions about how research has been defined and who does it. In interviews and discussions, people expressed concern about expressing concerns, worry about funding being affected if they appeared to be critical, or worse, told the truth about practices that contradicted official policy.

The further it went, the more challenging. “How do I report what we heard and represent the contradictions while respecting the challenges and concerns of the people I work with every day?” I wondered. Then when I finally sat at the same table with my counterparts from 12 other jurisdictions, we found we were playing a theme with variations. We had all had remarkably similar experiences in some or many aspects of our search.

As always on projects, the people I met were the highlight—people who had been working alone quietly in small spaces, the talented poets, carvers, quilters, who offered wild cards—the unpredictable factors that weave imagination into the mundane.

In the end, the project was only nominally about research in practice. It opened a door to much larger and potentially more threatening questions. It was essentially about the entire field of literacy work: how we variously define literacy, research, ourselves and the nature of the endeavour, and sometimes about whether we define it.

My grandson’s favourite book is Michael Rosen’s retelling of “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt”. In this tale, a father and his children set out on an adventure to find a bear, and encounter one obstacle after another—tall grass, a deep river, and more. But nothing scares them. Each time, they chant, “We can’t go over it. We can’t go under it. Oh, no! We’ve got to go through it!” Finally, they actually find a bear in a cave and he wakes up and begins to chase them, all the way back through the obstacles to their house where they lock the doors, run up to the bedroom, hide under the covers, and say, “We’re not going on a bear hunt again!”

So now it’s up to us about how we use what we found in this project, much of it unflattering or depressing. We can choose to bury it—Let it really RiP—and we won’t go there again. Or we can deconstruct some of the smoke and mirrors surrounding literacy in this country, let the light shine on some hard issues, and use our creativity to build a secure field where research in practice is both possible and actual.

Once a naïf, always a naïf.

Once we began to uncover provincial research, we also uncovered tensions about how research has been defined and who does it. ... We can choose to bury it...or we can let the light shine on some hard issues, and use our creativity to build a secure field where research in practice is both possible and actual.

## **Saskatchewan journey by Stacey Crooks**

When it first occurred to me to describe my research journey in terms of the prairie landscape in which I live, I thought it was a bit cliché, but the more I played with it, the more it seemed to illustrate what I had experienced. Even the fact that I chose the prairie, when so much of Saskatchewan is not prairie, had significance. As much as I have tried to listen to the diverse voices

and let them speak through my reporting, my lens has shaped my perceptions of what is going on in the province. That lens is influenced by my own experiences and biases, and I relate more easily to a metaphor of southern prairie than to a metaphor of northern forests.

At the beginning of the project, sitting here in Regina, looking out over the prairie, the landscape appeared vast and empty. There were many roads traveling in many directions. Each road was different, but the differences were not immediately apparent. For example, if I chose to travel along the TransCanada highway, the prairie looked flat and monotonous, but I knew if I headed off the highway in any direction I would actually find a richness that was anything but flat.

Knowing this diversity existed was not that much help. There were no signposts that told me where I might find it. It was hidden behind rolling hills and blowing grass which all looked the same to me. I consulted a few guides who knew the territory in different ways than I did and then spoke with my co-researchers. Being in Saskatoon, Nancy Cooper and Sheryl Harrow had a different starting point than I did, a different landscape to explore. And coming from different backgrounds they had different contacts and different perspectives that began to cast a web across the province. (Of course it would have been nice to have someone from that vast northern forest; and someone who actually lives in the middle of the seeming “nothingness” of the prairie instead of one who looks out at it from the sidelines of urban Regina or Saskatoon)

With Nancy and Sheryl’s input, getting started was easier. We picked some points and headed off in our separate directions trying to be sure we at least touched the north, south and central areas of the province. We planned focus groups for Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert but knew that was not enough. There were so many places we had not yet looked. We tried to cover more ground by selecting some potential interview participants. Sometimes it felt a bit random—why talk to this person and not that person? Why look behind this small tree but take a wide berth around that sprawling shrub? How do I know we have covered enough of the vast landscape to be “representative”? How do I know that by turning left instead of right we haven’t missed some key artifact? And sometimes it still all looked like plain old grass to me.

The unexpected is part of the prairie landscape. For example, there are many coulees and valleys that dot southern Saskatchewan. You may think you know exactly where you are going—you can see the horizon after all—and then suddenly the land falls away from you. You follow it into a depression and you can no longer see where the landscape ends. You have no choice but to wind your way along it for a while, to see what happens until you can find your way ‘forward’ again.

In our research, there were many surprise coulees. Some were like deep, wide valleys, stopping us from getting to the other side that, only a few miles back, we had thought was right in front of us. Some contacts we thought would be easy to make, weren’t. People who I assumed would be part of the project were missed. The reasons weren’t always clear. Time, ours and theirs, was always a factor, but politics sometimes seemed to play a part as well.

I was also surprised by how hard it sometimes was to find people willing to be interviewed. People seemed to rule themselves and others out because of lack of research experience. Perhaps they didn’t recognize the unique nature of their landscape and perspective.

On the other hand, some coulees were diversions that, when I entered them, I discovered a rich experience I had not realized existed before. They led to people I would not have otherwise talked to and questions I would not otherwise have asked.

At some point, standing in the middle of the endless prairie with still so many directions to head in, we three had to call it quits and try to make sense of all that we had experienced. It was hard to stop. I was aware that just over that slight rise in the geography, or just behind that abandoned farmhouse, there was bound to be something interesting and unique—a rare bird, a wildflower, an unusual geographic formation.

I kept looking, pushing aside every blade of grass hoping that I was not passing over something important. I tried to represent all the various shades of meaning and colour and hoped that I was not missing something unique and interesting that was staring me in the face.

We had spoken to over 30 different practitioners from different parts of the province, working in different kinds of communities and different kinds of organizations. Still it felt like there was so much ground we had not covered and that we had covered some pieces in much more detail than others. Regina was over-represented in terms of the number of practitioners that had participated, and I feared that the ‘real’ north was not represented at all.

Data analysis was like heading back to the beginning. There was no clear direction at first, but now I could see just how much detail there was in that huge, seemingly empty landscape. I relied on my co-researchers to help me make sense of their data and then I tried to put it all together. I kept looking, pushing aside every blade of grass hoping that I was not passing over something important. I tried to represent all the various shades of meaning and colour and hoped that I was not missing something unique and interesting that was staring me in the face.

In the end, I feel that we have created a rich and deep picture of literacy and research in Saskatchewan. Like a painting, or a photograph, it is only one way of seeing that landscape; but it is one that shows the life and energy that exists here and I am excited to continue to explore it.

## **Yukon journey by Beth Mulloy and Sierra van der Meer**

The work of Team Yukon has been interesting and challenging. When the Yukon Literacy Coalition (YLC) applied and was invited to join the project, we felt it was a good fit. As well as having keen and interested staff, Beth, the executive director, had attended two national RiP gatherings and was very excited and interested about the possibilities and potential of working on a Yukon RiP project. As a team we felt well-equipped to participate.

The project offered the opportunity to look for previous Yukon literacy research projects, to connect with literacy stakeholders across the north, and to find out how people access information and increase their knowledge. We also felt it was a chance to get ideas for future research projects and find out how to improve our information-sharing activities. Finally, we looked forward to working with literacy practitioners and researchers from across Canada.

We had some challenges. The biggest was staff. First the executive director left for three months at the beginning of the project, and then the primary researcher left two months before the project ended. However, we were successful in spite of this. The rest of the staff pitched in and we had excellent participation and support from our fellow literacy workers across the north.

We have ideas for at least three potential research projects in the Yukon...and ideas about how to improve how we communicate and share information.

Our next challenge was not understanding, in the beginning, what RiP really meant. We did not have a clear definition and did not feel confident that

many people in the Yukon would know what it was or how it could benefit their work. But we reviewed the messages on the Hub and had many discussions and came up with an understanding that we all felt comfortable with. Basically we thought that RiP was the way people gather and use information, and how they assess their work to find out how to make it better. We had not heard of anyone in the Yukon being involved in any identified RiP projects so we expanded our questions to include queries about Yukon literacy research.

We found this project interesting, challenging and rewarding. The information gathered from the interviews and focus groups was very useful. We have ideas for at least three potential research projects in the Yukon. This project also gave us ideas about how to improve how the Yukon Literacy Coalition communicates and shares information. Finally, it was hugely rewarding to work on a national project, especially one that so clearly encouraged honest and frank consultations.

### **Ningwakwe's Journey by Ningwakwe / E. Priscilla George**

National Speaker, National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA)

I got off to a slow start on this project because of transitions within NILA and Life events. I was leaving my role as Executive Director of NILA and becoming the National Speaker. My new job description became official the end of November 2005. Between then and March 2006, I assisted as the Interim Executive Director took over. I know that many organizations go through transitions that affect their employees' ability to complete projects. I certainly saw that at the May Retreat for this project!

Coinciding with changes at NILA, my family was just coming up on our first Christmas without our mother, while helping our second oldest brother to adjust to his recent amputation. We took turns staying with him. Quite unexpectedly, our fourth oldest brother went to the Spirit World in January—he was the third in our family in less than a year, as our oldest brother went the end of May 2005. As the new matriarch to this family, it was incumbent on me to ease the family's markings of many firsts without our loved ones here physically.

My initial plan for this project was to piggyback interviews and focus groups on trips for NILA. When the Federal Election was called, I knew that there would be a delay in our funding beyond the current grant, which was to end mid-March. I called folks at the federal government to get their best estimate as to when we could expect our new funding. They estimated mid-June. That meant NILA had to stretch its budget for an extra three months. There went the “piggy-backing” idea. To me, this is a clear example of how things beyond our control can impact our best plans.

During all of this time I was ambivalent about the discussions on the Hub. While I appreciated the help given to us by Helen and Jenny, I often felt overwhelmed by the volume of messages. When I made the decision to live as much of a life of balance as I could, I decided not to access my e-mails when I was travelling. This way, I'm not in meetings all day and spending my evenings on the internet. In this project, when I came home and accessed my e-mail, I balked at the number and length of messages. Often I would just scan to look for anything urgent, and I would not respond.

When I was able to devote some concentrated time to the RiP initiative, I planned who I would talk to. My dilemma was knowing how busy those people were, and wondering how I could ask them to do yet another task without at least some sort of compensation. Some of the people I approached did not respond. I felt this was most likely a reflection of their workload. Those that did respond

were very giving of their time and energy. I felt energized after each interview, because of the enthusiasm and commitment they demonstrated to their work. I was blown away by how readily they gave of their time and energy when they are so overworked and underpaid.

Most of the respondents felt that they've been doing research in practice in some way, shape or form for a long time. The Aboriginal literacy field has long been reflecting on how to make their practice better. In some ways, that reflection is personal, and even takes place with others. We would, however, benefit from a more formalized sharing of our reflections, challenges and successes.

The personal and institutional challenges I had with this project are a mirror to me of the issues practitioners and learners face. I've always been able to empathize when I see the load that they're carrying. I've just recently been able to get better at being kind to myself when I can't do it all in a regular work day. I'm still working at not comparing myself to others who produce, produce, produce. I remind myself that my life is way better than it was when I succumbed to being a workaholic in my efforts to please everybody.

I firmly believe—no, I **KNOW**—that we need to support the practitioners. They are the ones who feel responsible for making a difference in the lives of the learners. I'm always on the lookout for ways to make that path easier for them. At the retreat, Beth Mulloy made a comment about literacy programming being much like improv. She said that there are ground rules for how to do improv so that it is successful. I truly appreciated her comment, especially the part about ground rules. Literacy work, in many instances, is “improv”. Practitioners come in with an idea of how their day is going to unfold, and one phone call, one e-mail, one comment from a learner, “Got a minute?” can change that plan. I would like to see us establish a framework that will help make each day a series of successes, rather than a drain.

The Aboriginal literacy field has long been reflecting on how to make their practice better...We would, however, benefit from a more formalized sharing of our reflections, challenges and successes.

**Not knowing**  
**by Guy Ewing, ON**

I remember  
how his body relaxed,  
how he began to recognize  
letters, words,  
how his nightmares began to  
fold into themselves.

But what  
can I tell you?

What do I  
know?

Knowledge,  
how does it bleed  
out of fear,  
hope,  
what we did,  
said?

Will it keep bleeding?

## CHAPTER 8 Research in Practice (RiP) in Action

by Jenny Horsman

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the findings from the data the research coordinators collected that contributes to a further understanding about RiP. Our findings are drawn from observations throughout this research project and from interviews and questionnaires with the provincial and territorial researchers.

There is a tradition within action research that suggests practitioners take on research by trying out an intervention while simultaneously carrying out careful observation of the intervention and its effects. Then practitioners use the research findings to change and strengthen their practice. This was our undertaking—to conduct an action research project by studying the research process, the provincial and territorial researchers' experiences, along with reflecting on our own experiences coordinating the project. Our data included several phone interviews with the provincial/territorial practitioner-researchers, the messages on our online discussion group, the national all-teams meeting, along with our own reflections on the process. As Rebecca Still, the Alberta lead researcher, wisely observed part way through an online check in process about how the project was going *“the discussion is data in itself.”* This overarching study enabled us, together with the practitioner-researchers, to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the processes of carrying out RiP. This chapter highlights these findings and explores further the barriers and opportunities for RiP in Canada.

The research objectives for this project led to a multi-layered process—collecting data on RiP in adult literacy in Canada, exploring what RiP might actually mean, or come to mean, in different provinces and territories, and looking at how to make RiP viable in every region. Not unlike other projects of this type that compete for scarce project dollars and where people care passionately about the work they do, this project promised more than was really possible. So in addition to the multi-layered research objectives and process, this project also promised to generate and develop interest in RiP throughout Canada. To achieve this objective we, the research coordinators, chose to hire researchers who were local literacy practitioners—even in those areas where RiP has barely been introduced and where it was particularly challenging to find literacy practitioners to take on the project. This choice added to the difficulties experienced during the project. Even though these researchers were inexperienced, they had the task of engaging other practitioners in this research—some of whom had previously experienced research as alienating. This choice also added enormous richness to the study by revealing the complexities and realities in each region that the project itself was also seeking to illuminate.

The issues we heard about during the action research process we led echoed the issues regional researchers heard about in their data collection. As coordinators, we also experienced many of the same frustrations. A clear picture developed: RiP is an enormously difficult process when carried out without adequate resources—including time, money and support. The difficulties with RiP are further exacerbated within the Canadian literacy field because literacy provision in most jurisdictions is carried out on a shoestring, with little acknowledgement that literacy work is challenging because it cannot be separated from the complex social issues that surround it. The field is also reeling from the downloading of accountability demands and the ever-increasing and changing requirements to articulate achievement and “success.”

## Who is interested in RiP anyway?

Our first big challenge was to find practitioner-researchers to undertake this research in the provinces where the term RiP has little or no currency or where literacy is drastically under-funded. Not surprisingly, a snapshot of the national picture was created by the initial pattern of applications. In most provinces and territories there was little competition to take on the project. In Ontario, however, there were a number of applications submitted from different sectors—showing a level of interest as well as the complexity of provision (e.g. colleges, school boards, and community programs) and different categories of student (i.e. Deaf, Native, francophone, and anglophone). When we finally received applications from almost every province and territory we were very pleased. With a little encouragement, we were able realize full representation from the Maritime Provinces and with a lot of encouragement we were able to find someone in Manitoba who was willing to take on the project.

This uneven interest played itself out during the research. In provinces where there had been little interest, or limited capacity to participate, researchers faced tougher challenges. For some researchers the struggles included their own steep learning curve and a literacy field that barely responded to surveys, attended focus groups, or gave interviews. In several provinces and territories there was little knowledge of RiP and this project in itself raised awareness and interest. In Prince Edward Island, for example, researchers said:

*We need a hook—they have to see the value in it for them—our sessions turned out to be information sharing rather than information gathering.* (Karen Chandler, PEI, National Meeting)

In contrast in British Columbia researchers found themselves responding to interviewees and focus group participants who wanted to learn more about RiP:

*I think another real benefit of this project was that people were interested in RiP in some form. Either being involved in it or having someone come in [to carry out research]. People wanted to know if support was available and I could say yes, and help people connect to get support. It was great.* (Jan Sawyer, British Columbia Researcher, Interview)

## What on earth is RiP?

We began this project with a pretty good picture that RiP was known and used in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, the three largest anglophone populations, and eager to find out what was happening elsewhere. We hoped that this project would add to a national picture. In provinces and territories where RiP was unfamiliar or underdeveloped, we wanted to find out whether practitioners engaged with research to improve literacy practice, and if so, how they did so.

However, this was a real challenge. Instead of opening up discussion about how practitioners engage with research, the term RiP, which perhaps could have been negotiated and contested, was often used even when it had little meaning for practitioners. Consequently, especially in the early stages of the project, researchers tried hard to tease out exactly what RiP meant and to figure out which research studies were or were not RiP. What was lost by the focus on the “correct” meaning of the term RiP, was a recognition that RiP is an evolving term that primarily speaks to a complex

set of possible relationships between literacy practitioners and research—including reading research, engaging critically with research, as well as carrying out or participating in research—rather than describing a particular type of research. This tension revealed how RiP, like any other term, is created in a particular time and place; it can and will change over time and will have various meanings within different communities. The value of this project was not in holding onto a clear-cut definition and findings that reflected only that definition, but rather to open up the meaning of RiP for local exploration. Yet many researchers were eager for a fixed definition. This led to tension with our desire, as research coordinators, to keep the definition as open as possible to find out what RiP might usefully come to mean in the field as a whole. This is a common tension in research—the desire to leave the object of study as little defined as possible to reveal its nature through the research, while needing enough definition for researchers and participants to understand the object of study!

We were further challenged by the desire for a definition of RiP that was neither too broad nor too narrow. As a steering committee member noted during the meeting that finally brought all researchers together:

*If its [RiP's] meaning is too broad, it is meaningless—if too narrow then [it] will exclude certain research [we] want to encompass. (Sandy Zimmerman, Project Steering Committee, National Meeting)*

When Beth Mulloy, Yukon lead researcher, returned from a stint away from the Yukon, she found that very little had been done on the study:

*Part of the reason very little had been done was because of a huge lack of understanding about RiP: what it was, what it meant, and we knew from the beginning that no one would know anything here about it. But when we applied we didn't mention that. (Interview)*

So interestingly enough, the strong desire to be included in the national picture left many researchers struggling to find a way to give it meaning in their own jurisdiction and to find a viable way to proceed and produce data that would be relevant locally and nationally.

### **The barriers seemed to quickly pile up...**

It wasn't long before the enormous difficulty of taking on a RiP project led to many challenges. Whether working alone or in a team, each local researcher faced the challenging task of designing the research in a way that would be viable and effective—maintaining a sense of continuity across the country but allowing for sufficient individuality to be relevant and applicable locally. In some provinces and territories, researchers were trying to add this study to their already busy schedules as workers in provincial and territorial literacy associations and networks; in others practitioners were working alone, either wishing they could afford to pay others to join them in conducting the research, or struggling to find others with free time and interest to form a team.

Linda Shohet, lead researcher in Quebec, has given a description of the particularly acute trials and tribulations that beset the research process, but her account also reflects the challenges of carrying out research in every jurisdiction. Her team struggled to get the research off the ground in the face of labour disputes, staff turnover, regulations that made it impossible for researchers to get online

at work, and the stretch and struggle to keep programs functioning, quite apart from the additional challenge of embarking on the intimidating task of designing and carrying out a research study. This added to the anxiety for inexperienced researchers and made it harder still to find the way forward. Although conditions were more conducive in provinces with funding, research mentors and supporters in place, in all the provinces and territories researchers found that the scarce resources in the literacy field had stretched most literacy workers to the point that there was little “space” to add participating in this research study to their agenda. Janet Shively, lead researcher in Nova Scotia, reported feeling like a telemarketer at dinnertime as she sought to draw in practitioners to participate in surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

Just as researchers heard from practitioners that the limitations of the literacy field presented huge problems when they tried to take on RiP, we saw how the context of the field created difficulties for researchers in this study.

### **We need to meet face-to-face...**

Perhaps one of the most striking findings of our study was how eager all participants were for a face-to-face meeting at the start of the project. This RiP project lacked the minimum that was needed for it to reach its full potential. The strongest suggestion was that there should have been a face-to-face meeting at the beginning. Such a meeting is needed to set expectations, clarify and agree upon working processes, clearly map out the scope of the research, offer face-to-face training, and build trust. This struggle has been echoed in other research projects—other attempts to carry out excellent projects with inadequate funds, time and support. Projects commonly operate with insufficient funds to pay attention to the process itself and to develop ways to make it work well for all participants. Even in local projects a common omission is the time and expense of meeting face-to-face, for initial planning, and for building trust to work together.

Interviews with RiP supporters in England, British Columbia, and Alberta clearly showed that to make RiP viable, there needs to be face-to-face meetings, research advisors participating in the team who are available to visit regularly and provide extensive and detailed research support, and mentoring (Mary Hamilton, Marina Niks, Interviews). The face-to-face connection seems particularly important. Without it other supports—such as information on how to carry out research, and people available online to discuss approaches—are not experienced as support!

Face-to-face meetings are crucial for online support to be experienced as helpful rather than intimidating or burdensome—getting in the way of data collection. In spite of our best efforts as coordinators to be supportive, researchers found it confusing and time-consuming to read online about the parameters and shape of the research and to engage in the discussions about how to proceed. Most resisted our repeated requests to post brief reports online as they proceeded with their research. One crucial element seems to be that meeting face-to-face builds trust that enables the online process to build connection rather than increase isolation. As one researcher said:

*If I knew who I was talking to it would be better. It's impersonal over the internet.....to meet and then follow up... if we had met together it would be entirely different. I needed to have a relationship with what I was doing. I think I heard the same thing from other participants, that they kind of got lost but didn't really know how to address it. And they felt insecure about their deliverables. (Beth Mulloy, Yukon Researcher, Interview)*

In the absence of a face-to-face meeting, researchers struggled enormously hard to carry out what they had deciphered as the expectations of the project. However, they were not able to push the parameters as a team to make the research appropriate in their area. Beth continues:

*I was trying to re-write the questionnaire so that it made sense for the Yukon knowing full well that people didn't know anything about RiP. ...First challenge/issue was that we should have had a set up meeting because I was hooked (confused) from the word go about what it is we are looking for. (Interview)*

Some of the steering committee, who had the added benefit of teleconference voice conversations, still did not find the online conference adequate for providing them with the connections they needed.

*I think that for me, though I use the computer daily and in many ways, the computer detracted from my involvement. For me, it tended to emphasize the disconnection between members rather than the connectedness. Since I didn't know others, I think I more readily jumped to conclusions, often ones which mirrored my uneasiness rather than anything anyone said. I often wondered whether my e-mails had been lost in cyberspace—and after teleconferences, whether my brain was working in a way that took a path very different from what I thought I heard. I don't think this was so, but I realize now how much I interpret from body language, facial expression, and even subtle nuances of tone and silences (which were lost even in the teleconferencing). (Sandy Zimmerman, Steering Committee Member, Notes)*

With RiP, as in the literacy field in general, we make do with whatever resources we have—but when the resources are inadequate, it makes the task more challenging and frustrating.

### **Research takes more time than we plan....**

Research always takes more time to do than is initially planned. For practitioner-researchers, there is the added challenge of learning new skills and trying to slide the research work into an already intense workday. This project was no different. The time allocated was inadequate: to learn to do research, to pull together a local team, to become an active member of a national team and stay connected on line, to collectively develop plans for the project and maintain a sense of the overall research study, to carry out each phase of the process, to write, and to re-write. Joan Perry, lead researcher in New Brunswick, wrote about the challenges her team experienced as they sought to do all this:

*A concern for making the research 'doable' in the timeline needed, while making it 'relevant' for the field in New Brunswick, guided our course. The scope of the project seemed to swell as talks hurled around secondary research lists, focus groups, key themes, interviews, RiP definitions, and 'wild card' artefacts. In this early 'hazy' stage of the project, we lost two members of our steering committee, overcome by the ever-consuming 'TIME' monster demanding a decision for manageable literacy tasking. No one questioned the choices made, as all could identify with the 'tyranny of the urgent' that can hold any of us at bay, at a moment's notice, in our work and lives. The five remaining members tightened their grip for the task at hand, with their eyes upon the widespread NB literacy terrain as winter weather advanced towards us. (Survey Response Report)*

When asked how much time she had put into this research study Stacey Crooks, Saskatchewan lead researcher, replied:

*I have no idea, it's probably double, I don't think it's as much as triple, it could have been, but being pregnant and having a toddler it could only take up so much time!* (Interview)

Stacey was definitely not alone in spending an enormous amount of unpaid time, or in trying to limit the time spent while trying to do an adequate job. Cayla Chenier, researcher from Nunavut, described the need to make choices that all researchers struggled with:

*What we lack is time! It seems we can't participate in all facets of the project on a consistent basis. If we are organizing a focus group then we can't always check/read the postings on the Hub. If we are reading the many, many postings online then we are taking away from the time it takes to organize/carry out focus groups and interviews. At this point, we feel it more important to concentrate on organizing and carrying out focus groups and interviews so that we will have the data available to analyze.* (Message online, 07.2.06)

One researcher who has recently retired spoke about the relief of having more time and for once not having to do the research “off the side of the desk.” For others, the endless tension of balancing competing demands was the daily challenge of the research.

In a literacy field that is stressed and under-resourced, it is not surprising that literacy workers had difficulty making time to participate—to fill in questionnaires, attend focus groups and interviews. As Francine Villeneuve, Manitoban lead researcher, described:

*They said no time, no time. I beg[ged] people to give me something, throw me a bone. One time I travelled and was told I was on the agenda of literacy coordinators. When I got there I was supposed to talk over lunch but something else took up lunch—then they said I could have 20 minutes at the end. Finally I just passed out some surveys and asked them to send them back in—there were 20 people—I got one back (and a couple more were sent in later).* (Francine Villeneuve, National Meeting)

Researchers felt they lost the rich knowledge held by practitioners when the only time to meet with them was after the practitioners had finished a long day of work. Throughout the research there were comments, in every jurisdiction, about the challenge that every season brings when adding research to already overloaded schedules. Trying to get data collection happening in the pre-Christmas period and during the worst of winter was particularly problematic. In addition to the difficulties of winter in many regions in Canada, spring only provides for a small opening when travel is possible, before some staff are laid off for the summer—sometimes as early as May. During the summer many programs are closed and others have reduced staff. In the fall programs are wildly busy with start up, so anything additional must fit between programs getting up and running and the holiday season, which brings the distraction of special events and added tensions for many students.

Researchers noted how stressful it is to carry out research projects over the course of only one year. Given that the literacy field is already over-stretched, so much as to have no leeway for the unexpected, some recommended that projects be designed over a longer period of time. During the course of this project we experienced several health crises and changes of circumstance that made it impossible for researchers to continue, and we saw how difficult it was to replace researchers. Extra time would give everyone a bit more “space” for all the slippages resulting from scheduling problems and would take into account the unexpected, such as health problems and personal or work interruptions.

### **There is never enough money to really compensate everyone...**

Funding for this project covered some of the researchers’ time and expenses, but, in reality, there was not enough money: to feel that an adequate job was done; nor to recompense interviewees, focus group members and support group/advisory committee members for their time; and to make the project really enjoyable. This funding gap made it harder to collect data and get input from the full range of the field. If RiP is to continue, let alone develop, it should be funded appropriately so that all participants are compensated for their time. Katrina Grieve, in Ontario, felt uncomfortable about asking for volunteers to help set up or participate in focus groups in different regions without appropriate compensation:

*I felt like I was perpetuating the problem in a lot of ways—that I wasn’t adequately compensating practitioners for their time. And it partly has to do with the changing field right now in Ontario. Some people feel overburdened and that they can barely send themselves to opportunities unless they are required because they feel they can’t take the time out of the program. (Katrina Grieve, Ontario Researcher, Interview)*

As research coordinators, like the researchers and the practitioners they heard from, we too felt the tension of trying to balance our workload. As we sought to provide support for the provincial and territorial teams and to carry out our own data collection to illuminate the national scene, we experienced the utter impossibility of moving steadily forward in the face of conflicting demands on our time, especially at an allocation of approximately two days a week. Like the researchers, we juggled this project with others, but found that to complete our mission effectively, the work expanded beyond the time and money that was available.

### **Fearing judgment...**

An added tension for practitioner-researchers is the desire to do a good job—to carry out research that will be judged adequate and not seen as less acceptable than the work done by “real” researchers. Several researchers spoke about not wanting to be exposed as practitioners untrained in research, from a marginalized field, a poor province, a remote territory, or as a newcomer to research. Several factors may have added to the stress for researchers. Many were trying out the new identity of researcher, some were concerned about the responsibility of representing a province or territory, or of adequately reflecting all the participants, and several did not want to expose the weaknesses of their own region. Any or all of those factors led researchers to feel stressed and anxious about their work and led some to paralysis, silence on the discussion forum, or taking on huge overwork. Some, like Pamela Bennett, researcher for Newfoundland and Labrador, posted online about the challenges they were facing:

*...I must admit to still feeling a bit overwhelmed at times. Newfoundland and Labrador is new on the RiP scene, at least in naming what is done in literacy (on a constant basis) across the province as practitioner research and/or research in practice. Add that to the geography of this beautiful province and the weather at this time of the year, stir it up and voila! There are worries about completing our team's plans before the end of February.*

*I have been heartened that there are others who are proceeding with their research work in the same manner as I am...simply trying to make one step forward, while keeping my eyes on the horizon. I enjoy hearing about people's successes, and findings. I will admit to feeling relieved that not everyone feels 100% comfortable with all of this and/or meeting anticipated deadlines. It makes me feel more "normal"... whatever normal actually means...LOL (Online message)*

Researchers wanted to do the focus groups correctly, wanted to interview the right people in the right way and wanted to be able to talk with confidence about what RiP was. Notions of scientific research and fears that samples were not "representative" made the entire process more stressful. Whilst critical of traditional research, these researchers were still informed by it, and this, more often than not, dogged their footsteps as they planned and carried out their research. Though this project was designed with supports in place, this support was almost entirely online and it was with and from strangers. The online support did little to alleviate the fears: the more anxious the researcher, the less likely they would ask for support, fearing that their shortcomings would become exposed. Ideally to address these fears, researchers might have been partnered with local mentors or research friends who could reassure and encourage with ample time and availability to meet face-to-face.

### **How do you really learn to do research?**

This project made clear the importance of concerted training to learn how to carry out research and the value of ongoing mentoring by researchers who are known and trusted. Although researchers were given many resource materials online, it became clear that this was not adequate to prepare novice researchers to feel comfortable to take on research, particularly as part of a larger study. Researchers sometimes found it hard to make meaning of the resources, saying they needed to talk them through, to explore and to clarify, yet most felt unwilling to expose themselves and ask for help from strangers online.

In contrast it was interesting to hear practitioners' accounts of working closely with a mentor—one they could meet with regularly face-to-face, and from whom they could get support when needed online. The ease of online connection when familiarity and trust have been developed and the importance of detailed research help was clearly revealed in an online interchange on the RiPAL discussion list when Kate Nonesuch posted a concern:

*So I have my data. First I'm worried that the data is so limited that I won't be able to usefully 'prove' anything with it. Then I code it and recheck my codes and compare my results from different sources. Then I think I have so much data that I don't even want to look at the rest of it. Then I worry that I have incorrectly interpreted it*

*so that it is meaningless anyway, and only speaks to my biases. Then I worry that I have overcompensated the other way and am refusing to see data that confirms my suspicions. Is this normal?*

Marina Niks replied:

*Nooooo, experienced, seasoned and skilled researchers know that they have the exact amount and kind of data that truly represents the knowledge they want to write about, they have kept all their biases in check and would never influence their findings, they do not misinterpret anything because they are objective and neutral and the methods they use guarantee that the knowledge is true, valid, universal, generalizable and all that. But of course, we are not 'them.' We do worry, and question how we do things, and try to make sure we are representing the data as 'truthfully' as possible. We acknowledge how hard it is and we write about how we make decisions to be transparent about the biases we know we have and the influence we know we are having on the data we collected and the analysis of that data. We know that the 'correct way' to interpret can be left to interpretation. Most of all we know that this kind of research is messy and analysis can be very frustrating. So is uncertainty, doubt, frustration, anxiety 'normal'? I would say yes. Not all is lost though. There are some things you can do:*

*1. Try to be very clear about how and why you collected your data. This will help limit your claims and calm down the sense that having 'limited' data is a bad thing. Yes, your data is limited and there are reasons for that. Can you imagine what research projects would look like if data wasn't limited? The important piece is that you have set the limits when you collected it. By describing the criteria you used to set those limits you are showing the boundaries of your project. The same can be said about analysis: clearly describe how you did the analysis and how you checked for validity.*

*2. If you feel there are themes or connections that you are not exploring, check your data for those themes. Make sure that they are not there. See if there are themes that contradict your findings and if so, see how much they are present in the data and if you decide to not use them, be clear about the reasons why.*

*3. Show your analysis to someone who can 'check' it. It is common to go back to research participants and have them check the analysis. In your case this might be hard to do but you might be able to get two or three (math) instructors check your initial thoughts.*

*If these are helpful (or not) I can share other strategies to use at this stage in your research. Let me know how it goes. We can also chat on the phone (or meet??!!) if that is something that you feel would help. Good luck! (Posts from the Hub, July 19 and 20 2006)*

The questions and suggestions continued and another researcher joined in with her reflections. This combination of practical and precise insight and strategy and humour is a beautiful illustration of what support can look like when sensitivity and knowledge is combined with trust and familiarity developed over the long haul.

## How do we design research collectively?

One enormous challenge of the research was the attempt to work collectively online as far as possible to develop many aspects of the project—to plan the approaches we would use and to design questions. Although some participants were excited to watch and participate in this evolving process, others were frustrated and wanted more clarity up-front.

*Because I really appreciated the opportunity, and watching the questions evolve nationally. I appreciated seeing that it could be done with that many people; there were a lot of remarkable things that happened with the number of people and coming from such different perspectives. (Jan Sawyer, British Columbia Researcher, Interview)*

*I got the impression that Jenny and Helen really wanted this to be a collaborative as much as possible—to involve people into thinking through things for themselves rather than providing answers to questions. I think that is very useful, but given the timeframe of the project, and distance, I think maybe more direction right off the bat would have been better. (Katrina Grieve, Ontario, Researcher, Interview)*

A face-to-face meeting at the start might have enabled researchers to participate in the planning process and still be able to work with a clear structure and plan.

### Introducing creative approaches

During this study we introduced the idea of “wild cards,” artefacts in any form that might offer interesting data on the issues we were studying. In response we received amazing, diverse creations in words and visual images conveying nuanced points that we would not have captured had we not included this format. But this unconventional data was clearly another bewildering aspect of the research for many researchers, adding to the confusion of what this research was and what data we were trying to collect. It was also data that was of such a different form from the rest of the material that it was not easy to incorporate in the analysis.

We had hoped that these artefacts would serve not only as data in themselves, but also as prompts to elicit data in focus groups and interviews. This proved difficult to achieve. Partly this was due to simple practicalities—many were not completed until long after the focus groups were held—but partly the visual creations were a new and odd concept to add to the already challenging task of holding focus groups. When we came together for our face-to-face meeting in May, we attempted to work with this data and discuss these creations. We did not allocate enough time to do them justice. But at flip charts posted near each wildcard, participants wrote about the value they found in the data:

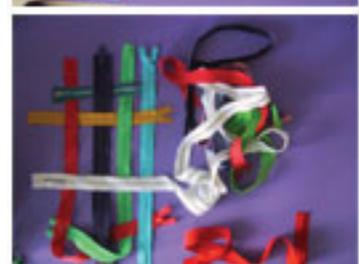
- Many of these pieces resemble what it felt like doing RiP...what the provinces need.
- Great way to visualize themes.
- This might have helped my effort to create a RiP discussion.
- There are some simple, powerful tools created for this project.

## Seeing a process by Bonnie Soroke, BC

Originally this series of images was a report on a meeting about an action research project. The first picture represented the initial feelings of wanting to run away from it all; then sitting down with the mess of ideas, proposals, and necessities of the project; gradually teasing out what we wanted to do and could do; and gradually weaving together ideas and activities, jointly making some structure that was do-able.

Later in the project this same series of images became representative of the whole cyclical process of research—that we eventually would again arrive back at a place of being overwhelmed with all the stuff of research (data collection, issues, tangents) and would again go through the process of sitting down, reflecting upon the most recent messiness, pulling out themes and issues, weaving together and creating—following an emergent design.

Now, this series of images speaks to me again. I read it anew in my present work, where the situation is different, the issues and messiness are different. What remains the same is the need to be aware of the process of being buried or overwhelmed by the data/issues/forces and having to take action to determine what is important, what goes together, and to create/find some clarity in order to move forward...only to know that we will again spiral back to a place of running away, getting mired in messiness, pulling out and weaving together what is necessary to move forward.



The limitations of time also affected our efforts to use a range of creative activities to enhance the process and draw in knowledge in different forms at the all-teams meeting. We could not accomplish all that we wanted and only met with limited success. To develop creative approaches with sensitivity and nuance, in ways that truly draw in all participants and provide a complex understanding of issues, requires extensive time, which is rarely available.

### **Should we do national studies?**

Provincial and territorial researchers, wanting to participate in a national project, avoided identifying the difficulties they might encounter in carrying out their research—in case they were not selected to participate. During the study researchers struggled to represent their unique reality while remaining true to what they thought was being asked of them.

*Knowing everything I know now I would have changed what we put out with the questionnaire completely. But we did it according to what we thought the project wanted.* (Beth Mulloy, Yukon Researcher, Interview)

Researchers did not want to expose the weaknesses and problems in their own region in a national forum and several questioned their adequacy to represent their whole province or territory.

Given the challenges experienced in carrying out this project, an observer might be tempted to suggest that many could be addressed by moving away from national studies, taking on only small local studies where people could meet face-to-face, especially given the cost of national meetings. However, this research also revealed the value of a national project. Most researchers appreciated the recognition they felt from being part of a national endeavour. They valued connecting with those from different provinces and territories to learn what was happening across the country. The opportunity to learn from others and to move from the isolation of their own community or province was seen as enormously important. Working with people from across the country allowed researchers to see the uniqueness of their own situation but also the commonalities with other provinces and territories. It also allowed them to see that learning from local research carried out in other provinces and territories might be a valuable resource for their own communities. As one practitioner said:

*It was interesting to hear what people have to say across the country, [The Hub conference] was like the literacy CBC. Although some were different, I think many of the issues were very much the same.* (Jan Sawyer, British Columbia Researcher, Interview)

Individual researchers and provincial and territorial coalitions were eager to take part in a national project:

*OK. When we first saw it we thought it was very exciting. We really wanted to be a part of a national project because we were in a coalition that had become separate and we really wanted to take the initiative of research and practice. We were eager as an agency to be a part of a national project as well as a national **research** project.* (Beth Mulloy, Yukon Researcher, Interview)

And by the end of the project they could see ways to carry out a national project in the future that might enhance the possibilities for provinces and territories new to RiP to learn from provinces where RiP has taken off. This could mean that resources would be shared creatively:

*I think if there was a federal project going where people were very experienced using research, if they could come into our community and share that would be great... The other thing that people really like here is to feel like we can connect with where other people are at because we feel isolated. I think that is interesting for federal projects to find out how people share info. We are very interested in what each other is doing. (Beth Mulloy, Yukon Researcher, Interview)*

### **Why Inuit shouldn't ask why by Monica Shouldice, NU**

In the world there are many different cultures and many ways of doing things. A unique example is that Inuit children were told never to ask "Why". Instead they were told to observe, listen and learn. Inuit laws were similar all over the Inuit lands. The way we raise our children, how we treat each other as husband and wife, how we treat our relatives are very similar up to today.

When something is made to its perfection it is hard to make any improvements. It does not matter if it is a sled or an article of clothing or how we prepare food. When we cannot make it any better, it will be put into an Inuit unwritten law that it should always be made that way; although it may not be a crime to change it because we are free to experiment with things.

An example is when an Inuk woman makes a pair of *niururiak* (a pair of sealskin boots with hair) there has to be a strip of hairless sealskin, called *singirniq*, sewn between the leg and the foot. Questions about why it has to be sewn that way have never been asked. Not too long ago a lady from Sanikiluaq was going to make a pair of *kamiks* and started wondering why she had to put that strip. Because of her curiosity she put on the strip piece without taking the hair off. When she started wearing the *kamiks* outside in the snow, she realized that when the snow melted on the strip it loosened the stitches along the seams. She then realized that the Inuit unwritten law should not be broken. So she shaved the hair off the strip.

Inuit have struggled in their lives for so many generations. They had to think seriously about what would be the best for their fellow Inuit, things that will not need any improvements. Perhaps there were people who were curious and would try and change the rules like the lady from Sanikiluaq. But perhaps they would always go back to the original rules.

It's just like when scientists do something. They stop when they know that it cannot get better. For instance medicine. They can't just make it and sell it to us to make money. The medicine has to be approved before they can start selling it to the people. Same with the Inuit. Years ago Inuit made something until they would approve it. After that they wouldn't ask any questions because it could not get better.

## CHAPTER 9 What's On Our Bookshelves?: RiP literature

by Helen Woodrow & National Team Members

To reveal the extent of practitioner research across the country, each project team searched for research on adult literacy produced in their jurisdiction in the last ten years. This secondary research was not designed to yield a comprehensive literature review. Rather, researchers looked for trends in the literature, such as who produced the work, whether financial or other forms of support (such as research mentors) were available, and if the topics under investigation revealed changing themes about research. We were particularly interested in determining if practitioners were involved in the design, execution and dissemination of research, and whether any research issues were raised in the studies that were particularly relevant to research in practice. Teams also generated a list of relevant research in practice titles in the jurisdictions, where they were available. These reports are listed with the snapshots in Chapter 4.

### Sources

Teams used a variety of local and national resources to locate research in practice efforts. The sources included:

- national databases such as the Directory of Canadian Adult Literacy Research in English (CRD), the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) and Library and Archives Canada (AMICUS);
- an online *Compendia of Licensed Research, 1997-2004*, operated by the Nunavut Research Institute;
- a listing of all research projects funded by the National Literacy Secretariat since 1995 to the 2005-06 fiscal year reported by province and territory, drawn from the NLS database;
- a listing of work conducted by the Valuing Literacy in Canada program, drawn from files made available by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC);
- national reports on research in adult literacy in Canada, including Campbell (2003) and Quigley, Folinsbee and Kraglund-Gauthier (2005);
- libraries operated by post secondary institutions and provincial or territorial coalitions;
- websites of provincial or territorial departments responsible for adult literacy, literacy coalitions and other organizations with an interest in research in practice such as Research in Practice in Adult Literacy (RiPAL-BC) in British Columbia and Adult Literacy Research in Ontario (ALRiO), an online database operated by the AlphaPlus Centre;
- resource people within their jurisdiction. This included staff within Ministries, provincial organizations, and literacy programs who helped researchers by offering assistance to locate relevant literature, and engaging in discussions on what constituted research and RiP.



### Image of research in practice by Alberta practitioners

This collage outlines the process. First you choose the tools you will use to collect your data. Then you go out and do the mouse work, gathering the facts and finding all the details. While you are doing this you keep track of everything. As you go along you will shine a spotlight on some of the facts and details that you find. Then you need to step back, look at everything with an eagle eye and spend some time reflecting. Hopefully that will lead you to an “Aha!”

### Process not product

The teams forwarded over 500 titles of research within their jurisdiction. The lists included theses and dissertations, articles about RiP, resource manuals for literacy workers, project reports, journal articles, statistical profiles, evaluations, project abstracts, RiP studies, needs assessments, examples of work not yet completed, and NLS research project abstracts. Some teams searched the NLS project abstracts to determine if an effort displayed a RiP stance, but project publications were not always available. Rebecca Still, for example, believed certain items were absent from her list, including “*informal research efforts undertaken by practitioners, as they are not being published and shared with others.*”

Katrina Grieve analyzed literacy research within Ontario. The focus on research themes and trends in that province concluded that over the last ten years there has been a shift to an outcomes-based approach to learning, which has included documenting and measuring the impact of practice. Research priorities are driven by the funders—the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the National Literacy Secretariat—and are tied to policy initiatives, such as the current emphasis on workforce preparation. Larger scale projects are being funded, and partnerships are encouraged.

British Columbia forwarded a comprehensive literature review prepared by Betsy Alkenbrack. The review focused on who conducts research in the jurisdiction, with special attention given to the

research conducted by practitioners. Time constraints limited the author's search for studies focused on First Nations literacy and workplace literacy.

The greatest number of RiP entries were provided by the three most populated English speaking provinces: Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. The literacy field in these locations have organized some critical research supports within their jurisdictions. Those supports include: organizations, such as Research in Practice in Adult Literacy in British Columbia (RiPAL-BC); research mentors or friends such as Mary Norton or Marina Niks; and significant program efforts by the field and educational institutions, such as the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/ University of Toronto's Festival of Literacies, or the participatory approaches project in Alberta.

The momentum for RiP in those provinces has depended on the research interests, persistence and sacrifices of individual literacy workers in the community, some friends in the academy and strong local networks. Practitioners throughout the country have displayed the same tenacity, either as individuals or as members of groups. For example, the New Brunswick team included practitioners who work together to promote the concept of reflective inquiry and research in practice throughout the province, and to support each other's research efforts.

The picture across the rest of the country was varied. Not all jurisdictions distinguished between RiP and more conventional research approaches or studies. In jurisdictions with less experience of RiP, this highlighted obvious gaps and needs. On PEI, the secondary research was done by the Literacy Research Network (LRN), and one half of the author's recommendations concerned the development of infrastructure and financial support for research in practice.<sup>21</sup> There was hope that these recommendations would lead to a RiP stance in the future.

*"No research in practice studies were found"*, the Nunavut team reported. Janet Shively asked participants in Nova Scotia if they could identify local research/RiP titles that might be included in a report on their provincial literature. *"No one could. This in itself is descriptive of the current relevance of research to the field of adult and family literacy in NS"* (Janet Shively, NS). In a mail survey conducted in Newfoundland and Labrador, practitioners were asked whether the local research reports they identified as important to practitioners in the field might be considered research in practice. Responses such as *"I think so"* and *"need more information on RiP to comment"* may reflect how new the concept of RiP was and the limited professional development opportunities in the jurisdiction.

## What does count?

The absence of a shared definition of RiP created some difficulties for teams. Like the Newfoundland and Labrador practitioners who responded to a mail survey, researchers spoke of finding it hard to determine what to include in, or exclude from, their listing. In reference to the titles listed by the NWT team, Helen Balanoff wrote: *"While these do not necessarily fit the accepted definition of RiPAL (research in practice in adult literacy), here in the NWT, because they are community-based, engaging many community members, we would probably include*

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<sup>21</sup> Project researchers worked in consultation with the PEI Literacy Research Network (LRN). They were producing a bibliography of local research on literacy published after 1990 and kindly agreed to share their results. About 25% of the citations in Jessie Lees' *Literacy Research in PEI: A reflection (2006)* focus on adult literacy.

*them as RiPAL activities.*” If there were to be an “accepted definition” of RiP, how would it be determined and by whom? Should it not include values and beliefs such as the engagement of community members in the process?

Stacey Crooks in Saskatchewan searched various sites and concluded the titles yielded through her NALD search “*cannot be described as RiP but were probably typical of the research that is happening in the province.*” Research efforts undertaken by the Saskatchewan Adult Basic Education Association’s (SABEA) Action Research Project “*are the clearest example of practitioner research in Saskatchewan at this point.*” Yet those titles are not easily accessible.

The task was equally difficult for a province with more direct experience of RiP. Katrina Grieve wrote:

*In Ontario, given the wide range of materials and the debate over what constitutes ‘research,’ it was difficult to come up with such a list. ...I also had difficulty defining ‘practitioner-researcher.’ Does this only describe research done by people who were working as practitioners at the time of the research? Does it also include people hired as project consultants who had many years of experience as practitioners, but who are not currently working in a program? Does it include research done by network staff or coalition staff?*

This project avoided adopting a strict definition of RiP, hoping one might emerge that reflected the needs of practice. But the question remains: can we concretize RiP so that practitioners can begin to build from a shared foundation? Hautecoeur (1991) documented significant support for program-based research in adult literacy in Canada. People have been writing from the world of practice for some time. Betsy Alkenbrack, the author of the literature review submitted by the BC team and a doctoral student whose dissertation is examining RiP, wrote that practitioners have done research to:

*...assess needs, evaluate programs, improve their practice, report to funders, and in some cases complete graduate degrees. With the emergence of the research in practice movement, practitioners began to see themselves as researchers, and their work as having impact that reaches far beyond their own practice.*

Bill Fagan, in Newfoundland and Labrador, reminds us of the realities that face practitioners. “*We are so busy trying to get things done that we don’t stand back and look, and listen.*” Given the time constraints and havoc in the field, researchers may not have had an opportunity to ask: what knowledge has been uncovered here? Does it offer an emic or insider, view or is it “research on practice,” done by others from the “outside-in”? Is it written down or recorded in any form? Have practitioners who left the field to attend graduate programs chosen research topics that reflect a practice point of view? Many of the research entries from jurisdictions with little or no RiP activity indicate that most of the research across the country has been undertaken for academic reasons or to inform government work in literacy. Kim Gillard, the executive director of Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador, prepared the listings from her province, and speculated that the work of practitioner-researchers remains “*well-hidden.*”

The Quebec team distributed their list of research titles to practitioners in advance of interviews and the focus group meeting. In the sessions, practitioners were asked a number of questions about

the titles including: their familiarity with the entries; how they distinguished between research and research in practice; and their personal involvement with research. Many respondents were surprised by some of the titles, and “*most felt that the vast majority of the projects on the list were not [literacy]*” (Quebec Report). Participants did offer concrete anchors to describe their understanding of RiP. Research done by practitioners was “*practical and relevant,*” “*field driven,*” and “*local and specific.*” Another person said, “*One [type of research] is not better than another; they address different needs.*” Perhaps the best of RiP addresses issues that are overlooked, ignored or invisible to those outside the field.

## Where can I find it?

*There's tons and tons of RiP that has gone on out there, but is there one place that it has been stored? How can we retrieve it? How do we get word out so others can find it?* (Maxine Budgell, Newfoundland and Labrador)

Compounding the conceptual struggles were the actual difficulties in locating literature. Stacey Crooks adopted an ethnographic stance and set out to assess how a practitioner might learn about the research that has been done in Saskatchewan. She concluded: “*little practitioner research has been completed to date and there is no central location where research can be accessed.*” Much of the research that has been done, such as needs assessments and evaluations, has been funded by the NLS but the work is not always accessible. Across the country, there may be more examples of feral literature than those found in databases on adult literacy research. Rebecca Still reported: “*There is a lack of a broad-based listing or database of research in practice conducted in the province.*” Consequently, she wrote, research findings can be difficult to share with others.

Another factor that affected this effort was time. Locating feral literature requires some detective work; there is no national collection of all the research done in the field with complete text files available for downloading or reading. NALD does include numerous full text documents at their website, and recent funding support will undoubtedly enhance their capacity and search functions. Studies listed in the Canadian Research Directory database, also searched through NALD, reflect an academic definition of research. Even with an extensive knowledge of the literature, time must still be found for reading. Field teams had a specified period of time and a limited budget for their research, and most placed their emphasis on the collection and analysis of primary data.

Time and money is essential to supporting RiP. Like most provinces and territories, Manitoba indicated that few projects have been undertaken that reflect the spirit and purpose of practitioner-based research. Why? Robin Millar, who authored the literature listing, wrote:

*This is due to factors present for many provinces including: there is not enough provincial support for literacy—not on the political agenda; not enough resources—lack of materials for improving writing skills; it takes time to find resources—time that is unpaid; and finally, lack of opportunities to share experiences. Academic research is rarely linked to the field, and dissemination efforts are poor and almost non-existent.*

The listing of RiP publications included in this report is offered as a starting point, an effort to claim the research work of practitioners and to honour those who have contributed to the effort over the last ten years. It is not an exhaustive listing, and may not represent everything that has been

produced by practitioner-researchers or all studies reflecting a research in practice stance across the country. Another project might focus exclusively on a comprehensive, pan-Canadian bibliography. This chapter concludes with citations from the literature collected by the research teams. There are three categories: short articles about RiP, theses and dissertations which are often infused by the experiences of educators who come to graduate work from the field of practice; and research efforts that were in progress at the time of this research.

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### Theses and Dissertations on Adult Literacy

Library and Archives Canada offers an online search capability through its Theses Canada Portal. Some of these documents are in electronic format and others are held within the collection on microfiche. Information about online searches is available at <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/thesescanada/index-e.html>.

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### **Samples of Current Projects**

Beyond Worksheets: Numeracy in Adult Literacy Programs (forthcoming). Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy.

Circle of Learning Literacy Benchmarks Project (forthcoming). Saskatchewan Literacy Network.

Distance Development Delivery and Research Project (forthcoming). Partners include AlphaPlus Centre and Dr. Paul Porter, Sonoma State University, along with Sioux-Hudson Literacy Council, Confederation College, Kingston Literacy and *J'aime Apprendre*.

Gushue, H. (in progress). Literacy as an Island cultural value: A study of Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island with a focus on literacy. Master's thesis, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI.

Factors of Success for Adults in Community-Based Literacy Programs (forthcoming). Laubach Literacy Ontario in partnership with Dr. Joseph Casey, Department of Psychology, University of Windsor.

Identifying Inclusive Models of Lifelong Learning in Canada: Building a Learning Nation (forthcoming). Partners include Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, National Indigenous Literacy Association.

Moving Research about Violence and Learning into Practice: A Practitioner Model (forthcoming). Consortium of literacy organizations.

Nonesuch, K. (forthcoming). Changing our practice: A manual for teaching basic math to adults.

# PART III:

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: Citations

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## APPENDIX 2: Research Teams

### Alberta

Rebecca Still–team leader  
 Judy Murphy  
 Shelley Goulet  
 Belle Auld  
 Laureen McKenzie–focus group facilitator Calgary

### British Columbia

Leonne Beebe–lead researcher, BC Team Report writer  
 Kathy Rollheiser–regional researcher  
 Jan Sawyer–regional researcher  
 Suzanne Smythe–regional researcher, RiPAL-BC Joint Application  
 Betsy Alkenbrack–literature review writer, RiPAL-BC Facilitator

### Manitoba

Yvonne Jordaan–researcher from October to February  
 Francine Villeneuve–researcher from March to June  
 Lorraine Kaczor–focus group facilitator  
 Robin Millar–writer snapshot and literature

### New Brunswick

Joan Perry–lead researcher & ‘wild card’ scrapbook creator  
 Jan Greer Langley–writer of snapshot and journey  
 Dr. Heather Richmond–focus group presenter  
 Sally Crawford–focus group presenter & ‘wild card’ journal creator  
 Cheryl Brown–focus group presenter & secondary research list  
 Wendell Dryden–HUB & survey response  
 Lynda Homer–HUB & survey response

### Newfoundland and Labrador

Pamela Bennett  
 Kim Gillard  
 Ed Brown  
 Janet Skinner  
 Caroline Vaughan  
 Barbara Burnaby

### Northwest Territories

Helen Balanoff  
 Cate Sills

### Nova Scotia

Janet Shively–lead researcher  
 Kathryn MacCuish–focus group facilitator

**Nunavut**

Janet Onalik  
Cayla Chenier

**Ontario**

Katrina Grieve—lead researcher  
Christine Pinsent-Johnson—focus group facilitator, Ottawa  
Jane Godfrey—focus group facilitator, Thunder Bay  
Pat Powell and Karen McClain—online focus group for Aboriginal literacy workers

**Prince Edward Island**

Karen Chandler  
Ruth Rogerson

**Quebec**

Linda Shohet—lead researcher  
Ronit Yarosky  
Denise Llewellyn  
Patti Moore  
Brenda Platt

**Saskatchewan Researchers**

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Nancy Cooper, Saskatchewan Literacy Network  
Sheryl Harrow, Read Saskatoon  
Bev Digout

**Yukon**

Jake Derksen  
Beth Mulloy  
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**Aboriginal Literacy Community**

Ningwakwe/E.Priscilla George

### APPENDIX 3: Participants

#### **Alberta**

Ann Marston  
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 Belle Auld  
 Candice Jackson  
 Carol McCullough  
 Carolyn  
 Celia Logan  
 Denine McCormick  
 Elaine Cairns  
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#### **British Columbia**

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 Betsy Alkenbrack  
 Betty Knight  
 Bev Routledge  
 Bridget Bruniski, Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo  
 Carol Abernathy, Okanagan College  
 Cherie Skripnik  
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 College instructor  
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Diana Twiss, Langley, Capilano College  
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Evelyn Battel  
Gregory Meaker  
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Instructor, Community Adult Learning Centre  
Instructor, OCN Employment and Training  
Instructor, Swan Valley Adult Education  
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Lorraine Kaczor, Program Manager, Literacy Works, Winnipeg  
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 Lynda Homer, Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick  
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Advocate, St. John's  
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Kay Wall, Labrador West Young People's Association  
Kelly Penney, Labrador White Bear Literacy Council  
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Tom Dawe, Teachers on Wheels

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#### Hay River Focus Group

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Bruce Green, Adult Educator, Hay River Reserve  
Gavin McConnell, ESL Instructor, Aurora College, Yellowknife  
Jennifer Rooke, Adult Educator, Aurora College, Fort Resolution  
Karla Carter, ALBE Instructor, Aurora College, Hay River  
Kathleen Purchase, Campus Director, Thebacha Campus, Aurora College, Ft. Smith  
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Margaret Field, Adult Educator, Aurora College, Fort Providence  
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Arlene MacKenzie, Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton County  
Ben Bishop, Adult Education Coordinator  
Bruce Oliver  
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Cheryl, Shelbourne County Learning Network

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 Della Larke  
 Dianne Gray  
 Dianne Gray, Instructor, ALACBC  
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 Doris Gillis, Associate Professor, St. Francis Xavier University  
 Educator  
 Eunice Abaga, Policy Analyst, Nova Scotia Health  
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 Lauren Seaton, Instructor Queen's Learning Network  
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 Linda Findlay  
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 Linda, Instructor  
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 Marlene Duckworth  
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 Mary Moore, Dartmouth Literacy Network  
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**Nunavut**

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Instructor 1  
Jean Conrad  
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Kivalliq Region

Adult Educator 1  
Angie Kubluitok  
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Leonie McKitrick

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Adult Educator 2  
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Lizzie Aliqatuqtuq  
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Rankin Inlet, Kivalliq Region

Ahmed Ismail  
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Barbara Crawley, Wellington Centre for Continuing Education  
Bernadette Walsh  
Beth Bellaire, Fleming College  
Bobby Nand  
Carol Visser, Toronto District School Board  
Chris Andres, Niagara Regional Literacy Council  
Colleen D'Souza, Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy  
Corry Wink  
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Dorothy Franklin, Literacy Link Niagara  
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 Susan Lefebvre, Literacy for East Toronto  
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 Vicki Trottier, Literacy Council of South Temikaming  
 Wendy DesBrisay, Movement for Canadian Literacy  
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 "Natalie," Practitioner and Research

### **Prince Edward Island**

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 Anonymous, Institute of Adult and Community Education, Holland College  
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 Audrey Penner, Institute of Adult and Community Education, Holland College  
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Jane McMillan, Institute of Adult and Community Education, Holland College  
Jessie Lees, PEI Literacy Research Network  
Jim Carpenter, Institute of Adult and Community Education, Holland College  
Joan MacFarlane, Provincial Correctional Centre  
Linda M. King, Institute of Adult and Community Education, Holland College  
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Mary MacLean, Institute of Adult and Community Education, Holland College  
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Sally Lavern, Institute of Adult and Community Education, Holland College  
Sandra Rendell, Learning and Reading Partners  
Susan Cheverie, Institute of Adult and Community Education, Holland College  
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### **Quebec**

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Darlene Brown, Sir Wildred Laurier School Board  
David Roberts, Littoral School Board  
Denise Llewellyn, Lester B. Pearson School Board  
Dennis Murray, Quebec Literacy Working Group  
Ilze Epnors, Eastern Townships School Board  
Isabelle Coulombe, Ministry of Education of Quebec  
Kathy Richan, Literacy in Action  
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Patti L. Moore, Quebec Literacy Working Group  
Vicki Ann Huegli, Literacy Working Group  
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### **Saskatchewan**

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Debra, WCTR. Elizabeth Fry Society  
Deirdre Crichton, Parkland Regional College  
Donna Woloshyn, Saskatchewan Literacy Commission  
Jennifer Bain, SIAST Wascana Campus/Saskatchewan Adult Basic Education Association  
Jeri Marchinko, Advanced Education and Employment  
Joan McCulloch, Regina Association for Community Living  
John H. Foster, SIAST Woodland Campus  
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 Mavis McPhee, READ Saskatoon  
 Michelle Bellegarde, Balcarres Community School  
 Nayda Veeman  
 Pat  
 Roni Spetalnick, Adult Centre for Employment Readiness and Training at the Regina and District  
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 Sandra Cook, Northlands College  
 Sheryl Harrow, READ Saskatoon  
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### **Yukon**

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 Danielle Sheldon, Government of Yukon, Whitehorse  
 Dawn Marino  
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 Dorothy Dickson, Liard First Nation, Watson Lake  
 Eldo Enns  
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 James Wood, Old Crow  
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 Marjorie Shaw, Whitehorse  
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## **APPENDIX 4: Creators of Wild Cards**

### **Alberta**

Julie  
Connie Gross  
Lorene Anderson  
Kim Baxter  
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Dawn  
Valerie Neaves  
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### **British Columbia**

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### **Manitoba**

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### **Newfoundland**

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Centre  
Dawna Lee

### **Nova Scotia**

Margan Dawson

### **Nunavut**

Zebedee Nungak  
Monica Tuurngaq Shouldice

### **Ontario**

Guy Ewing  
Esther Nordin  
Karen McClain and Pat Powell

### **Prince Edward Island**

Ian Carr

### **Quebec**

Denise Lewellyn

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## **APPENDIX 5: Steering Committee for the Research Project**

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“We can all work together to make research in practice matter. In every part of the country, adult students face similar struggles. Literacy practitioners across Canada need to be able to share their research and ideas, as they did in this study.”

*Anita Abbott*

*Rabbittown Learners Program, Newfoundland and Labrador*

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“Now, more than ever, the field needs to know the strength, possibilities and value of research in practice. Now, more than ever, the field needs to read, reflect upon and discuss the state of adult literacy and how literacy workers can move this work forward. This engaging read is an important historical document that models what research in practice can be.”

*Janet Isserlis*

*Brown University, Rhode Island*

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“This encouraging piece of work focuses clearly on the qualitative results garnered by recording 'the natural flow of community and classroom life'. It articulates what research in practice means, how much time and skill it takes to collect this kind of data, and why it matters in the field of adult literacy. The national scope of participation and contribution is impressive.”

*Vicki Noonan*

*Malaspina University College, British Columbia*

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“...a complex portrait of hope and anguish about the health of the adult literacy field in Canada. Research in practice is shown here as only one part of the solution.”

*Nancy Jackson*

*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto*

