ESSAY REVIEW

The Pragmatic Reform Vision of B. Allan Quigley in Light of the Indubitable Social Facts

Quigley, B.A. (1997). *Rethinking Literacy Education: The Critical Need for Practice-Based Change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers).

This essay takes an empathetic, although critical look at Quigley's recent text, *Rethinking Literacy Education*. Specifically, it challenges the viability of reform Quigley seeks that 'the practitioner...will turn illiteracy around in America,' in light of the many social facts Quigley presents which militate against it. A primary value of the text is the tension it fails to resolve between quest and reality and the author's call for `small victories' to keep existential hope alive and despair at bay.

> *Adult literacy education has a greater potential to make an immediate and dramatic impact on learners than any other field of education (p.4).*
>
> *As it enters the twenty-first century, adult literacy education needs to assess where it has been, consider what it has become, and address some of the conflicting realities that not only have shaped it but continue to control it (p.4).*

B. Allan Quigley has written a wide ranging, important book intended for literacy practitioners as well as for researchers. The style is accessible, combining personal reminiscences of this engaging practitioner-scholar and stimulating case study material, with critical theory gracefully laced throughout the narrative. Those conversant with Quigley's research will easily recognize the key themes that he has articulated in a series of articles during the past decade: the importance of history in adult literacy, stinging policy analysis, and the centrality of "resistance" and non-participation. What is somewhat new, but implicit in much that Quigley has written, is a call for a diverse curriculum and instructional program to match the complicated lives and aspirations of adult literacy learners.

In his call for practitioners to take the initiative to revitalize the field, Quigley identifies enduring problems that are, I believe, ultimately not resolvable. Nor is his conviction for practitioners to stay engaged because it is worthwhile to do so convincing, except as an article of existential faith to which some may and others may not subscribe. For substantial reasons that Quigley well articulates, more than a few seasoned practitioners have taken a more cynical, resigned view than he. Moreover, it would be difficult to miss the cynicism in some of Quigley's other writing, which may be profitably viewed as a subtext in evaluating this current work. Consider the following:

> ...on the one hand, there is a demand in the [policy] rhetoric for accountability. But on the other, we still do not know what is required or how it is to be done. Some will say this is a bonus. Maybe they are right in the short run. My guess is that this section [of the Adult Literacy and the S-2 Omnibus Education Bill] will continue to haunt programs over the long term since programs would be just as glad to comply with something defined than live with a Kafskaesque expectation for something legislators demand but cannot define. This only creates a guilt complex that only the long time literacy educator can appreciate (Quigley, p. 1991, p. 115).

It would not be far-fetched to identify a profound pessimism as a subliminal countervoice within *Rethinking Literacy Education* that surfaces in the seemingly enduring problems that Quigley discusses. The text oscillates between Quigley's hopeful populist pragmatism and the perpetual dilemmas that seem irresolvable in the foreseeable future.

It is this tension that makes *Rethinking Literacy Education* interesting because there is, if you will, an infinite space between the constraints and possibilities Quigley identifies that provide provocative theater for thoughtful action. The fundamental contribution of the text, then, is that Quigley stimulates the reader to think in a probing manner about the broad range of issues he discusses. In pragmatic fashion, he provides valuable insight on how to move forward with "small victories rather than with grand solutions from the pens of political advisors or academic experts" (p. 127).

Illiteracy Through Society's Eyes

Quigley views literacy as a social construct as he explores the perspectives of policy makers, the popular media, adult literacy learners, and practitioners. This divergent constituency represents a broad range of ideologies that stream across the social and cultural landscape of contemporary America. Quigley's hope is through the concerted action of practitioners, in particular, a resurgent power may emerge in the field to reshape the rhetorical force field that gives voice to the current public discussion of adult literacy education.

Quigley's first section, "Illiteracy Through Society's Eyes," is a stinging analysis of media and policy rhetoric on literacy and illiteracy. In his opening chapter, he points out some depressing statistics. "...[F]unded programs in adult literacy only attract 8 percent of those eligible for them" (p. 8). Of that paltry 8 percent, recent attrition rates were marked at 74 percent. Those who do participate log in an average of "4.9 hours of instruction per week" (p. 8) (Beder, 1994, p. 16, cited in Quigley, p. 8). As Quigley puts it, "What other area of education could live with such numbers?" (p. 8). These are the cold "facts" upon which Quigley bases his narrative.

Other problems include limited full-time careers in the field, lack of a coherent policy analysis or sustained public interest in adult literacy, and an unenviable historical legacy (for the most part) upon which to build. In the face of these constraints, to keep cynicism at bay, practitioners must "depend on [their own] analysis, questioning, risk taking, and, above all, exercising the *faith* (emphasis added) that literacy is worth doing" (p. 32). For Quigley, that faith is as much a matter of career survival as a response to ":objective reality."

Quigley covers substantial ground in his discussion of popular (soft) perspectives of illiteracy as reflected in media representations. Stereotypical imagery runs rampant, which places an indelible stamp on the entire field and seeps into the consciousness of learners and practitioners. Quigley obviously knows this, but the point is not stressed in

his text. Such imagery includes, "[t]he sad male figure, the innocent child, [and] the maternal voice of Maureen Stapelton" (p. 39), to say nothing of the indubitable image of Barbara Bush as the arch symbol of what might be called, "literacy soft."

Buttressed by such popular movies as *Bluffing It* and *Stanley and Iris*, along with studies that point to "rampant" illiteracy, Quigley identifies finer stereotypical gradations which fuel the "war on illiteracy" in the "Heroic Victim," "The Simple Immigrant," "The Simple American Worker" (an Ernest Borgnine-like figure), "Simple African Americans" and "Simple Southern Whites," and as a countervoice, "The Illiterate as Natural Man" (pp. 51-62). I leave it to the reader to pick up on the details of these images.

The political or policy perspective represents the "hard" side of the dominant public discourse on literacy. While "[s]ocial policy is that part of public policy specifically dedicated to improving some specific aspect of human or societal condition, typically through governmental programs" (p. 69), it is also a form of social control for "regulating subordinate groups" (p. 70, citing Finch, 1984, p. 4). Illiterates are not viewed as innocent victims (literacy soft), but as threats to society, whether through an alleged lack of desired middle-class social and moral values, or as a human resource drain, placing in danger the economic vitality of the United States to compete effectively in the post-industrial global economy. Quigley takes us through a century of literacy social policy that has stressed the importance of social control rather than that of social justice (pp. 71-85).

Policy makers from the post World War II era to the present have overwhelmingly linked literacy with human capital development. This linkage became marked with the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) in 1962. According to Quigley, this legislation shifted the focus from "the vague term `literacy'" (p. 86) to that of "adult basic education that was now proscribed for those who fell below requisite [vocational] training levels" (p. 86). The Adult Basic Education Act of 1965 reinforced the human capital development impetus inherent in modernization interpretations of

literacy, which, in broad strokes, has continued to shape the view of policy makers in more recent times to meet the needs, now, of the "post-industrial" society. From this viewpoint, "Any suggestion of personal needs or the popular perspective had long since been squeezed out of this legislated brave new world of social engineering" (p. 88).

Quigley detected a glimmer of hope in the now rescinded National Literacy Act of 1991 in its broadened definition of literacy as:

> an individual's ability to read, write and speak in English, and to compute and solve problems *at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society*, [Quigley's emphasis] to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential" (p. 89).

The part on personal development was the result of "hard lobbying by literacy professionals' (p. 89), and not the main focus of policymakers.

According to Quigley, literacy became "'policy disenfranchised'" with the move toward ABE" (p. 89) in its economic imperative focus. There is currently little prospect of broadening the discussion on literacy among policy elites beyond vocationalism, and, thanks to the initiative of Barbara Bush, a normative family literacy thrust that stresses the important, but narrow themes of parenting and schooling, but not the social context in which families "at risk" are enmeshed (Aurebach, 1989). At best, practitioners may build somewhat on personal goals articulated by students, since, to use the business analogy of the United States Department of Education, "customer satisfaction" (Condelli and Kunter, 1997) remains one of a number of legitimate public outcomes that would merit funding. Yet, the focus in Washington remains predominantly on "real-world" outcomes linked to work and family improvement and an accountable "delivery-system" based upon statistical reliability. Thus, "real-life" gains will remain abstracted from the concrete persons who experience them through a data collection process (some form of quantification) that will mask as much, if not more, than it reveals about the actual effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of adult literacy education. Quigley holds little hope of changing this Washingtonian picture.

"Happy Consciousness"

The other public voice that Quigley discusses is that of the publishers of adult literacy instructional texts. On Quigley's admittedly partial reading, these materials reinforce stereotypes of adult illiteracy that he discusses in part one of *Rethinking Literacy Education.*

Quigley is at his caustic best in his discussion of these texts. Replicating a 1977 study by Coles, Quigley and his co-author (Quigley and Holsinger, 1993) identified similar themes with the earlier research. Both studies found pronounced racial, gender, and class stereotyping, and an individual ethic, buttressed by a belief that "the system 'delivered the goods'" (p. 143) for those who accepted its premises. The authors linked this latter belief with the term "happy consciousness" borrowed from neo-Marxian philosopher, Herbert Marcuse. (Coles, 1977, pp. 49-50, cited in Quigley, p. 143) to characterize "happy consciousness:"

> When the story characters, including the majority of white males, are examined in terms of how they perceive themselves qua employees, citizens, and social beings, the results are appalling.... the characters are overwhelmingly isolated, conformist, uncritical, and frequently filled with self-blame..... Through thick and thin, they adhere to explicit or implicit beliefs that agencies of authority and hierarchical control are working in harmony with them, and when problems arise they have their own individual fortitude to rely on (or in the case of women, that of their men)—overall, they exude [the] "happy consciousness" and absence of contradictory thought of which Marcuse speaks.

More cryptically, the texts send the message that adherence to dominant social values will enable adult literacy students to achieve the American Dream. This is the thesis of the "hidden curriculum" inherent within the texts studied.

Quigley is quick to admit that his study and that of Coles have only scratched the surface of the voluminous publications available to adult literacy educators. As a textual analysis, moreover, neither Coles nor Quigley and Hoslinger dealt with the responses of learners and instructors to such materials. Thus, a "reader-response" analysis could open additional insight that these pioneer studies have not disclosed.

What would also be of interest is a textual analysis of the more progressive of adult literacy texts. The texts that Quigley and Holsinger selected are easy targets for the literacy left. Such texts and series as *Famous Black Americans*, (1989), *Remembering* (1990), *Adult Reader* (Malone, 1981), and *Words on the Page, the World in Your Hands* (Lipkin and Solotaroff, 1990) present a more complex and socially nuanced life view than that evident in the studies by Coles, and Quigley and Holsinger. It would be of significant interest to ascertain whether even these more progressive texts contain notable elements of the values identified in those studies and to explore the relationship between "normalization" and "empowerment" that they might disclose, including the viability of the neo-Marxist concept of "false consciousness."

Quigley calls on practitioners to use alternative materials that resonate more compellingly with the needs, interests, and life experiences of students. Examples can be found in the annotated bibliography of texts listed in the Ohio Literacy Resource Center (p. 157), and through various adult education publishing companies like New Reader's Press and Globe Fearon. Given such texts now available that deal with complex issues of class, race, gender, and culture as well as student-generated materials produced by many programs, there is a profusion of illuminating resources for creative practitioners to draw upon. As Quigley points out, print resources need not be confined to traditional ABE texts, but can be found within the social settings of students "who should play a large part in the search" (p. 158) for them.

Notwithstanding the availability of such materials, the extent of the stereotypical representations evident in many published adult literacy texts, and the pervasiveness of these materials within ABE and literacy programs, still represents a powerful discourse system that challenges even the "small victories" that Quigley seeks to wrest. Yet for those instructors, administrators, and students who will draw upon them, the more thoughtful resources to which Quigley alludes may prove invaluable. As he puts it,

"[c]hoosing texts is a matter of choosing knowledge and choosing the values embedded in that knowledge" (p. 159).

Attrition and Resistance in Adult Literacy and Basic Education

The narrow range of the "small victories" is also evident in Quigley's discussion of attrition and resistance (or non-participation). Quigley offers recommendations that I will discuss later. An important social fact he stresses in this chapter is that attrition and resistance are much more pervasive than participation, which further erodes the effectiveness of any adult literacy education system.

Quigley points to a paucity of research on literacy retention, which is sometimes linked, inappropriately, with recruitment and non-participation. Quigley is reluctant to use the term "barrier" in describing attrition since "The metaphor suggests that low-literate students are trying to enter our Fortress of Knowledge and that we need only knock down the 'barriers' for them to flood in" (p. 169). Quigley argues that low level reading adults are free moral agents with the capacity to leave a program that fails to provide a fit between what it offers and their actual needs and interests. Despite this assertion of personal freedom to "resist" inappropriate or offensive education, in other places Quigley still uses the term, but focuses on "*responses* (original italics) to barriers" (p. 169). Specifically, Quigley points to situational, institutional, and attitudinal barriers and his discussion is illuminating, although I am not convinced that he fully clarifies the extent to which sources of barriers reside within society or among individuals.

Adult educators have least influence over situational barriers. "[F]or our own mental health" (p. 172), it is critical for practitioners to accept that. Situational barriers include lack of transportation, day care, finances, time, or family support, often, not always, linked to poverty. Without a profound societal change Quigley views these barriers as likely to persist.

Institutional barriers over which practitioners exercise more control refer to programmatic limitations. Institutional efficacy requires a strong commonality of purpose often inhibited by the politicization and bureaucratization of ABE and literacy programs that have alienated more than a few practitioners and learners. Based on Quigley's research, however, institutional barriers are of only minor significance in students' to leave programs (p. 173).

Dispositional barriers or attitudinal factors related to prior schooling, self-esteem, and a "field dependence" orientation—"a dominant need for acceptance, a desire for belonging, and strong need for harmony in the environment" (p. 179)— play a significant role in why students leave, particularly in the first few weeks. It is in dealing with dispositional barriers that Quigley places his greatest hope for intervention on the part of practitioners and here, if anywhere, where many of the "small victories' upon which rests his existential faith, will occur.

That only 8 percent of those eligible for ABE and literacy programs participate is a concern with which Quigley has wrestled for some time. He has characterized this refusal to participate as "resistance," which is the focus of chapter 7. It is not that those who resist do not desire to learn, but that they have found schooling repressive, irrelevant, or demeaning. Quigley doubts that resisters will ever participate in ABE and literacy programs in statistically significant numbers.

Quigley identifies resistance as an almost innate American cultural phenomenon grounded in an imagery of protest and rebellion; a critical source of identity for those for whom the system does not "deliver the goods." He draws upon fiction to examine the theme of resistance to schooling in American literature. Quigley concludes that:

> ...the protagonist's resistance to school was more than just a rejection of school....
> [I]t was a positive quest for freedom that each protagonist undertook with
> absolute conviction and, in some cases, with risk to reputation and even to life. In
> their eyes, resistance to school meant a determination to stay true to the beliefs
> and values of their own culture, their own race, or their religious heritage. Instead

of conforming to what they saw as the spurious values promoted by schooling, they resisted authority as they saw it. The protagonists were seeking to gain the liberty...to follow a culture, value system, or lifestyle that they held to be superior to that of school (p. 201).

Those to whom Quigley refers as "personal-emotive resisters" found their public school experience traumatic. "They felt betrayed not by systems themselves but by individuals within those systems" (p. 210)—teachers and peers. Quigley's believes that only a small percentage of personal/emotive resisters will ever participate in ABE and literacy programs even in the best of situations.

Ideological-cultural resisters are those for whom schooling conflicts with their own world views and cultures and is, therefore, a form of disempowerment. As long as ABE and literacy programs evoke an ideology of "happy consciousness" ideological-cultural resisters can have no part of schooling and maintain their self-respect.

"Older resisters" are those who have deemed formal schooling irrelevant to what is important in their lives. Quigley does not hold much prospect of enticing older resisters to participate in ABE or literacy programs in any significant numbers.

Without reforming an ABE and literacy system along lines that would enable a curriculum and a culture of learning to resonate with the values and needs of resisters, and including them in "student advisory groups" (p. 212) to reconstruct programs, it is unlikely that the rate of non-participation will shift to any significant degree. Thus, Quigley's message is that increasing retention will come, if anywhere, among some of those who would typically exit within the first few weeks; that is, by expanding the retention of the 8 percent. This best case scenario would represent one of the "small victories" of which Quigley speaks.

A Practitioner Based Curriculum: Working Philosophies

In calling to ground practice within the context of both student and practitioner interest, Quigley sets out a curriculum based on what he refers to as the "Four Working

Philosophies Underlying Literacy Practice;" vocational, liberal, humanist, and liberatory. In Quigley's vision, effective programs will contain one or more of these various strands or have the capacity to refer students to other programs that would complement their own.

Vocational literacy education has been a dominant thrust in ABE since the 1960s. Its philosophy is that "[l]iteracy is mainly for job preparation and financial independence." (p. 110). Historically, it is grounded in the psychology of behaviorism. Thomas Sticht (not a strict behaviorist) is one of its current major advocates. It focuses on the attainment of "competencies" and alleges to prepare students for the "real world." Vocational literacy often takes place at the job-site where students master functional tasks in the actual contexts they face at work.

Quigley raises some issues with this focus. Specifically, he questions any one-to-one relationship between literacy and employment (p. 112) and points to the importance of other interests students have in becoming increasingly literate. Still, for those students who want to focus on job readiness, vocational literacy education is an important component of a viable ABE and literacy curriculum.

"Liberal literacy education is mainly for acquiring cultural knowledge" (p. 110). Historically, it is linked with the conservative traditionalist, Mortimer Adler. Current advocates include E.D Hirsch and Harold Bloom who identify cultural knowledge with the canon of western civilization and the "classics" of American civilization. While such a focus has received much bashing from the left, Quigley appreciates the value of cultural knowledge in stimulating the interest of ABE and literacy learners, and the potential role of literature "for enhancing critical thinking" (p. 119). Moreover, by expanding the canon to include ethnic history, culture, and literature, liberal literacy education can help students link autobiographical experience to broader social themes.

Liberatory literacy education is the least likely of the working philosophies to attain wide viability in mainstream ABE and literacy programs. Literacy from this

perspective "is mainly for critical thinking and political awareness" (p. 110). Viewed as an "emancipatory" pedagogy, it is most foundationally linked with the work of Paulo Freire. While Quigley assumes a neutral stance in describing the working philosophies, it is clear from all of his writing that he shares a close affinity to liberatory literacy education while recognizing the importance of the other working philosophies.

Humanist literacy education is the most pervasive working philosophy among literacy teachers and tutors. Within this philosophy, "Literacy is mainly for personal growth, self-actualization, and self-esteem building" (p. 110). Historically, Quigley links this framework with the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers and Abraham Mazlow. He views Hanna Fingeret as a major contemporary practitioner-researcher of humanistic literacy education. The great strength of this philosophy is that it links cognitive with social and emotional development and meets some primary needs of many ABE and literacy students. A major weakness is a proclivity toward maternalism (not evident, by the way, in Fingeret's work). The downside, then, is that an excessive preoccupation with "humanistic" concerns inhibits instructors treating students as adults, resulting in an inevitable condescension, whether conscious or not. Moreover, many students do not require such support and would be better served by other philosophies and approaches. Still, given the large numbers of students who do respond well to a humanistic approach, it needs to remain a potent component of the curriculum.

Another value of this approach, according to Quigley is that it contributes to the reduction of attrition among those facing "dispositional barriers" since those individuals are more "field-dependent" and in need of strong social and emotional support, particularly in the early period of program participation. Through counseling, small group instruction, and strong staff support, Quigley argues that a humanistically-oriented curriculum can mitigate the drop-out rate of this group.

Quigley believes that the working philosophies provide practitioners clout in negotiating for viable curricula and resources with policymakers or external

administrative bodies like state departments of education. Quoting Stephen Brookfield, Quigley argues that with a working philosophy:

> you will...be much more likely to communicate a sense of confidence and clearheadedness, a sense that your position is grounded in a well-developed and carefully considered philosophy of practice. Opposition to the wishes of superiors is less likely to be interpreted as sheer stubbornness. You are more likely to gain a measure of respect for your thoughtfulness and commitment which is important for your self-esteem and political survival (Brookfield, 1990, p. 17, cited in Quigley, p. 128).

More fundamentally, a working philosophy provides practitioners with an underlying rationale and sense of coherency for their work, even though it "may not guarantee that you'll always win the argument" (p. 128) with policymakers or funders for your position.

Taking a populist approach, Quigley prefers practitioners to struggle through the logic of their own assumptions and philosophies even if such work does not result in the kind of intellectual consistency that he as a theorist and researcher might offer. This is so because of his belief that "[i]t is the practitioner..., not the researcher, who [if anyone] will turn illiteracy around in America" (p. xi). As a result, Quigley takes a neutral position among the philosophies even though it is clear that he is more empathetic to the liberationist and humanist perspectives.

If teachers and programs rigorously work through the provocative questions Quigley poses to adherents of the working philosophies and if administrative support for such pedagogical work is built into the programs, then the kind of populist reform he advocates may have some chance of realization. Except for rare cases, I don't think this is likely since an overwhelming number of ABE and literacy instructors seek more immediate, practical solutions to pressing need rather than exercises in extensive critical reflection which Quigley's questions would stimulate. Moreover, there is rarely the luxury for a pedagogical consensus to flourish in any widespread sense among paid (mostly part time) or volunteer instructors within a program given the diversity of their backgrounds and the field's marginalization which mitigates against coherent staff and

curriculum development. Finally, given their training, socialization, and competing demands on their time and energy, the number of program administrators highly focused on pedagogy, to say nothing of divergent working philosophies, is likely to remain small. For those instructors and programs able to embrace Quigley's suggestions, there is much to gain. My point is that it is unlikely that instructors and programs will embrace such reform in statistically significant numbers. Thus, Quigley's reform impetus may be a "small victory," indeed, yet incalculable in significance for those who embrace it.

Action Research

Quigley's call for "action research" is a logical corollary of his working philosophies and underlying assumption that system reform in small doses will come from practitioners and nowhere else. Drawing on the words of Maxine Greene (1988, p. 18, cited in Quigley, p. 221), he is idealistic in "the ability to make present what is absent, to summon up a condition that is not yet" (p. 221) in his vision of action research to spur at least statewide agendas from the bottom up. At the same time, he is immensely practical in the list of suggestions he makes to stimulate action research at the local level. At the least, "[w]e can own our own knowledge at the classroom level" (p. 237), although it is clear that Quigley has a more extensive agenda than that for action research.

Quigley contrasts action research, with its "ideas in action," (p. 225) to the "received knowledge" model of traditional research (p. 224). In the former, practitioners set the research agenda "to bring about change in the every day world" (p. 225). Action researchers not only define the purpose of research, but the methodologies, which may differ markedly from traditional academic research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). In the latter, the focal point typically stems from questions and issues defined by the scholarly community, which may or may not have direct bearing on practice. In action research, questions emerge from experience rather than the canon of an academic discipline. Thus, "an itch" encountered in the immediacy of a teaching environment

stimulates a quest for further knowledge, less for the sake of knowing, per se, than to resolve a perplexing problem as experienced by participants. As Dewey (1991, p. 11) put it, *"Demand for the solution of perplexity is the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection"* (original italics). In action research, therefore, a question typically ends when the problem is resolved. Since problems remain more or less interminable, the trajectory of research can theoretically continue through cycles of action and reflection. Still, the broader point remains that in action research, there is no inherent need for a terminable project.

Quigley is aware of this, but sets up a framework which results as much or even more in a product than it illuminates a process. I do not want to overstate that since Quigley keeps the focus on practical issues as his main point. Yet he encourages action researchers "to [k]eep at it" even when initial issues that drove practitioner researchers change. "To quit is to waste all the thinking and work that have previously been invested in the project'"(p. 228). Perhaps so in a traditional academic research project, but that is not necessarily the same concern if the primary objective is to reflect in order to improve practice.

It is likely that the loaded term "research" carries inevitable baggage, including a need for a finished product like a report. Systematic and intentional inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) or critical reflection may more accurately describe the need of practitioners for "ideas in action" as they relate to specific challenges within the immediacy of the instructional setting.

This is not to deny the value of a specific "research" focus that includes and draws deeply upon teacher knowledge. The compelling questions Quigley poses to stimulate action research (pp. 234-236) attest to the importance of the mental constructs of teachers *and* students as *contributory* to a broader field-based knowledge of critical topics. More fundamentally, the primary value of practitioner-grounded research is that it makes profound sense to those who would utilize it in order to gain a deeper

understanding of the instructional setting in which they are embedded and to improve practice. The broad-based questions Quigley poses, however, that link individual psychology and the social environment of learning settings to the working philosophies described earlier, require research *communities* that draw on specialists as well as practitioners from a wide range of learning climates. Specialists would contribute to the research focus at hand rather than "reify" their technical expertise. Moreover, their knowledge base would not be viewed as more "foundational" than anyone else's, just different. Practically speaking, research institutions like the National Institute for Literacy, the National Center for Adult Literacy, the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, and state and regional centers which draw on teacher knowledge and participation *along* with the insights of specialists and scholars, would lead much of this effort. Any "grander solutions" beyond the immediacy of local classroom experience necessitates the involvement of a broad array of constituents, including "ideas from the pens of political advisors ...[and] academic experts" (p. 127).

Quigley's recommendations are incisive for those who will draw upon his work. Yet in the real world of ABE and adult literacy education, that group of practitioners who will embrace action research is likely to remain so exceedingly small (although this is not *inevitable*) that the system will continue on its current course largely unaffected. This is not to deny the inestimable value that practitioners who adopt Quigley's ideas may attain. On Quigley's existential plane, such "small victories" may make the effort for him and for many others worthwhile. It is highly unlikely, however, that such efforts which Quigley suggests "will turn illiteracy around in America" (p. xi).

Existential Faith in Light of the Indubitable Social Facts

I have spent considerable space examining the barriers that inhibit the fruition of Quigley's vision not because I am over and above the fray, but because I share the same ambivalence that the author expresses. I am, therefore, highly empathetic to the

oscillations he expresses between hope and cynicism and in the quest for creative spaces amidst what can only be viewed as powerful constraints. A century ago, the founder of American pragmatism, Charles S. Peirce, made the following observation:

> In order that a man's whole heart be in teaching he must be thoroughly imbued with the vital importance and absolute truth of what he has to teach; while that in order that he may have any measure of success in learning he must be permeated with the sense of unsatisfactoriness of his present condition of knowledge. The two attitudes are almost irreconcilable (cited in Diggins, 1994, p. 204).

One might take issue with the polarity Peirce describes as applied to teaching and learning. The broader issue points to a certain conflict between beliefs and "objective" social analysis as reflected, for example, in *Rethinking Literacy Education*. Commenting on Peirce's observation, one of the foremost intellectual historians of our time argues that "while society requires beliefs for its very survival, science itself cannot survive except on the basis of doubt and negation" (Diggins, 1994, p. 204).

The social facts of adult literacy education may paint a bleak picture to the disinterested scholar, but for an engaged intellectual like Quigley, any such portrayal needs to be mediated by the compelling life dramas in which he and countless practitioners and students are enmeshed. Citing Lindeman (1961), Quigley suggests, "We have only one pragmatic guide: meaning must reside in the things for which people strive, the goals which they set for themselves, their wants, needs, desires and wishes" (p. 8). Quigley continues, "Our working philosophy and sense of purpose take us to the emotional foundation of why we do what we do—to life's meaning and matters of the heart" (p. 243).

This is the pragmatic space out of which Quigley constructs his existentialist faith. For him, the quest to reconstruct the field "is worth doing" (p. 243) despite the indubitable social facts of which he is well aware. Quigley searches long and hard for small victories with the realization that more enduring reform remains elusive. We search along with him.

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