

Literacy and Homelessness Project

(Excerpts from) Phase 3 Report

More Ideas

June 1999

St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program

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Acknowledgements

Consultant David Greig (for writing, editing and designing this report); St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program staff, particularly project manager Katrina Grieve; St. Christopher House Meeting Place Drop-in staff, especially Christopher Smith and (Literacy staff) Alan Webb for assistance with the project-based work and book created; project reference group members Tim Crooks (Halifax), Violetta Ilkiw (Toronto), Mary Norton (Edmonton), Brian Graham (Vancouver); Toronto Street Education Coalition members; other staff, volunteers, participants and learners of programs involved; NALD (National Adult Literacy Database) especially Charles Ramsey for Internet and computer-related assistance; and the National Literacy Secretariat and Give the Gift of Literacy Foundation for funding.

Literacy and Homelessness Project Phase 3 Report

More Ideas

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June 1999

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selected excerpts from Phases 1, 2 and 3: web archive: www.nald.ca/schalp/homeless

To order this publication (or to order the Phase 1 report Delivering Literacy in an Adult Drop-in by Karen Farmer or the Phase 2 report Gimme Shelter by Betsy Trumpener), call 416-539-9000.

This project was made possible by the generous support of the National Literacy Secretariat.

Archives of the Literacy and Homelessness Project electronic discussion are accessible at the AlphaPlus web site at <http://alphaplus.ca/>

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Literacy and Homelessness Project, phase 3 report: more ideas

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-9681979-1-4

1. Literacy programs – Ontario – Toronto. 2. Homeless persons – Ontario – Toronto. I. St. Christopher House (Toronto, Ont.). Adult Literacy Program.

LC154.3.T67L57 1999 374'.0124 C99-931635-4

Literacy and Homelessness Project

Phase 3 Report: More Ideas

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What is this project?

Project background

This project is the third phase of the St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program's Literacy and Homelessness Project. Phase 3 was designed to continue the work done over the past five years in the previous two phases. This work involved developing and documenting ways to do literacy work with homeless, transient or other marginalized people. The work of Phase 1 is documented in a report by Karen Farmer entitled Delivering Literacy In An Adult Drop-In. The work of Phase 2 is documented in a report by Betsy Trumpener entitled Gimme Shelter.

Both reports documented models and methods for working on literacy with homeless people and provided critical examinations of issues concerning the work including issues such as access and equity. In addition to a range of activities, Phase 2 culminated (during the Feasibility Phase) with a survey of the literacy field that reported a number of programs across the country involved or interested in this work. This survey led to a proposal to continue the work into a third phase to further document literacy and homelessness practice and to further discuss literacy and homelessness issues.

Timeline of the Literacy and Homelessness Projects

1991

Forum on Literacy and Homelessness organized by Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy

1991 – 1995

Advisory group formed: other activities carried out (see Phase 1 and 2 reports for details) along with project planning

1995

Phase 1 (report “Delivering Literacy In An Adult Drop-in”)

1996-1997

Phase 2 (report “Gimme Shelter”)

1997-1998

Phase 2 Feasibility Study on the need for Phase 3

1998-1999

Phase 3 (Sept 98 to June 99)

Organization of this report

This report is divided into two main sections: ‘Practical ideas’ and ‘Critical issues’. The ‘Practical ideas’ section presents a selection of concrete ideas for doing project-based work and for documenting learning that have been successful in literacy work with homeless and marginalized people. Most of these ideas could be adapted by programs that do any kind of literacy work and not just work with

homeless people. The “Critical issues” section presents a discussion about some current critical issues concerning this work and literacy work in general, including issues about accountability and funding. A final section of this report provides a brief listing of some print and Internet resources (designed to complement the many resources listed in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports). Below is a brief overview of some of the research findings of the Phase 3 Project.

Overview of research findings

Phase 3 began with the idea of locating or developing further ideas about doing literacy and homelessness work that had not been examined in the previous two phases. A review of the literature was undertaken to locate fresh articles and new ideas about how to do literacy and homelessness work. At the same time, discussions commenced with people involved in this work including drop-in staff, a street education coalition, workers from programs across the country, and others involved in literacy work with homeless people.

Research into programs in Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere shows that there are many different models of ‘literacy and homelessness work’. These models are extremely varied. This variety results from a range of factors such as location of the work (day drop-in, overnight shelter, religious shelter, publicly-funded shelter, etc.), target population (men, women, people using substances,

people with mental illness, groups based on ethnicity or other labels, families with children, single women with children, etc.), philosophy of the provider (religious, clinical, social work, education, general government program, health focus, etc.), along with a number of other factors. Despite the range of models, the context for this work continues to be problematic. Many descriptions of literacy and homelessness work say as much about funding restrictions and the bureaucratic narrowing of the definition of 'literacy' itself as they do about literacy work with homeless people. This finding is discussed further in the 'Critical issues' section of this report.

There are many community-based and other kinds of programs in Canada and elsewhere that do various kinds of literacy work with people who are homeless. Interestingly, some of these programs focus on areas other than just homelessness or just literacy. Some community-based programs or services in Canada do some kind of literacy work with, for example, First Nations people (some of whom may be homeless) or do literacy work with women as part of a larger women's social service centre (again where some of the women may be homeless) or with youth (where some are street-involved or homeless while others are not). In fact, in Canada, a lot of interesting and innovative work is being done with street-involved youth. Programs such as Beat the Street in Toronto, Downtown East Education Centre in Vancouver and the Phoenix Centre for Youth Program in Halifax have developed or are in the process of developing exciting and effective projects with youth. These projects frequently involve an array of skill sets that

overlap education and other areas to develop literacy skills in the context of building other capacities, such as self-esteem, motivation, group work, etc. This work is discussed in the section 'Practical ideas'.

Various other types of 'literacy and homelessness' programs 'reside' within particular social service or health-oriented organizations. For example, there are some literacy classes or projects in some larger mental health organizations that work with people who have psychiatric disabilities (some of whom are homeless). The work of all of these groups is not 'literacy and homelessness work' per se because what they do is far more interconnected and complex than just 'literacy', and the people they work with may or may not be homeless. Their work is linked into a larger organizational framework within which both the 'literacy' component and the 'homelessness' component are but small parts. This is an important finding and is explored further in the 'Critical issues' section of this report.

Of the drop-ins and shelters for homeless people in Canada (excluding Quebec and the northern Territories which were not included in the research for any of the Phases of this project), the St. Christopher House Meeting Place Drop-in in Toronto is one of the few that has provided a regular ongoing structured literacy component (as the site of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this project). A handful of other shelters provide some literacy components and some are just starting up as of the writing of this report – such as a Salvation Army shelter in Toronto, which as of May '99 is planning a literacy component in a new shelter when it opens. And so,

the scope of 'literacy and homelessness work' in Canada – at the moment – remains extremely small.

What this means is that because of the diversity of settings and focus, and the relatively limited number of programs working with these issues, it may not be possible to define a unique form of literacy and homelessness practice. More importantly, what this project has found is that there may be a need to expand existing definitions and frames of reference beyond 'literacy and homelessness'. There is a need for the development of literacy practice with all people who do not necessarily 'fit' into existing conventional adult education structures and not just people who are homeless. As adult education organizations and funding bodies in many parts of Canada (and elsewhere) become more bureaucratized and systematized, more and more people are not 'fitting' onto the rigid education and training continuum. Many literacy programs work with people who do not necessarily want or need to become involved in literacy solely as a route to further education, training or employment. Some of these people are indeed homeless – and for many of them, literacy as it is being currently redefined, is becoming increasingly irrelevant. However, many of these people are not homeless and have never been homeless. Homelessness is not their issue. Marginalization is their issue.

The Literacy and Homelessness project worked during Phases 1 and 2 on developing alternative approaches and methods that would work for homeless

people who did not 'fit' into existing rigid educational structures. The project continued to push for expanded definitions of what literacy means and what it can mean. The frame of reference for this work was primarily homelessness. Research conducted in Phase 3 suggests that it may be necessary to move beyond 'homelessness' and expand this work to include all literacy endeavours that are working with any people – homeless or not homeless – who do not 'fit' into the conventional and increasingly restricted 'new' definitions of 'literacy'.

One of the ways to do this is to begin to document alternative forms of practice. Instead of waiting to receive official curricula or syllabi from governmental bodies, programs should begin to rigorously develop and document the content and process of their own programs. If a program believes that what it is doing is a form of alternative practice that meets the needs of people which are not being met by conventional programs elsewhere, these programs need to record, document and share these practices. The next section of this report, "Practical ideas" presents a handful of suggestions for ways that such alternative practice could be written up or documented.

The other way to move ahead with this work is by sharing critical ideas: debating what literacy means and discussing what education practice actually is. A starting point is the examination of 'hybrid' forms of literacy practice. 'Hybrid' forms of literacy practice are forms that combine elements from a number of different disciplines – community development work, health promotion,

community-based social work, popular education, mental health approaches, etc. This idea was touched on in the descriptions of programs that provide some literacy components and deal with some homeless people, but for whom 'literacy' and 'homelessness' are not the primary focus. Instead a holistic and integrated system of practice exists (in the psychiatric rehabilitation field or health promotion field or community development field, etc.) that could be adapted as a model for evolving forms of hybrid literacy practices. The third section of this report, "Critical ideas" presents a discussion of this idea as food for thought.

There are many people – marginalized learners of all kinds – who continue to have needs that are not being met. The Literacy and Homelessness Projects have been a place for exploring alternative ways to meet these needs through innovative practice and critical inquiry. This exploration continues in Phase 3.

Practical ideas

Projects and other innovative work

There is a lot of innovative work being done with 'street-involved' youth in programs across Canada. One of the (many) interesting features of this work is that it defines 'education' in a very broad way. Rather than simply providing projects and activities that are strictly limited to reading and writing or to formal academic upgrading, this work names and values the many other elements that either lead to or support learning. Group work, self-esteem building, co-operation and organizational skills, time management skills, social interaction skills, affective capacities, cultural meaning development, and so on, are all integrated into these projects for youth – as one of the explicit purposes of the endeavour.

For example, Beat the Street in Toronto recently completed a group work project for youth that explicitly defined the focus of the project to cover a number of complementary areas of work: group work and cultural development skills along with a number of other affective and interpersonal skills were as intrinsic to the project as the reading and writing or other 'educational' elements. The project was also rooted explicitly in the culture of youth. The project combined

photography and writing and culminated in the production of artworks that were exhibited in a gallery and available for sale (thereby adding an additional CED – community economic development – aspect to the project). The entire project was a self-contained microcosm of a kind of hybrid practice in literacy that is rooted in an authentic culture (in this case the culture of youth) and that develops a vast array of interconnected skills and complementary capacities.

Another example is a project in Vancouver – part of the Downtown East Education Centre – which is developing a program for youth that combines a similar array of complementary skills within a cultural context. ‘Field trips’ to museums and similar places in the community are part of the project, but not as ‘themes’ in the way that ‘themes’ are known in some literacy and English as a Second Language approaches. In these purely educational approaches, ‘themes’ are used merely as a contextual ‘hook’ onto which reading and writing can be hung. In the youth work, the ‘theme’ is the content in the form of developing capacities for engagement with their own community, building affective and interpersonal skills and creating their own forms of meaning. All of these elements are learning outcomes in this project. They are complemented by educational activities, but are not merely a vehicle for the delivery of the educational component.

This is innovative and important work. This is the kind of work that the Literacy and Homelessness project has been investigating since it describes more

realistically the kind of work that is needed with many marginalized people. In one of the projects described in this section, the authors talk about their work as being designed for people who do not need content – they need to first develop capacities that will allow them to deal with content. They need structure. A range of skills and capacities – the structure of learning – must be developed before any specific educational content can be meaningfully worked on. This need is great for many marginalized people – that is why the Literacy and Homelessness project focused on this kind of broad-based and multi-layered work – work in which other necessary elements are as intrinsic as any purely educational elements.

The ‘problem’ with this kind of work is that adult education in many jurisdictions is becoming increasingly formalized, systematized and bureaucratized. This process is not necessarily reactionary. It serves the needs of many people who use the adult education system because they have clearly stated goals for further education, training or employment. These people need to achieve these goals as quickly and as expediently as possible in a professional system that is credible and effective. A system has to be in place to meet these people’s needs – this fact is unquestionable – and that system is being built in Ontario and in other parts of Canada (and the world). However, very often in this process, there emerges a ‘baby with the bathwater’ effect. While the system is reformed to better serve the needs of the majority, the needs of the minority are tossed out because they no longer ‘fit’ into the new system.

What happens to these people who no longer 'fit'? What happens to people who do not have the same academic needs or employment-based goals as the majority of mainstream adult education students? What happens to the people who have a need to develop other kinds of skills and capacities – the kinds described in the projects above? For these people, the new formalized adult education system does not work – and probably cannot work. There is some other kind of work that needs to be done with these people that is too complex and broad to be formalized solely as educational upgrading or systematized solely as employment preparation. The kind of work that is needed can be described as 'hybrid literacy' practice and this idea is discussed in the next section of this report.

Meanwhile, it is very important for programs that are working with people who do not 'fit' on learning activities like the ones discussed above to document and record these practices. Even if it turns out that the content of these activities is not 'adult education' in its new formalized meaning – the work itself needs to be recorded so that it can become part of a dialogue – a discourse – on the need for expanded definitions of what literacy work can mean. Abstract theory and argument are important, but practical and concrete evidence to back up this theory is vital.

This section presents a handful of practical ideas about doing a kind of literacy work that is broad and expansive and that 'covers' a range of different kinds of learning experiences. It also presents ideas about how to possibly

document this kind of work – using tools and formats adapted from existing adult educational recording criteria, such as levels, learning outcomes, learning records, etc. As the examples that follow will show, none of this work is exclusively about homeless people. It is about doing literacy work with any people who do not fit into the formal and narrow definition of literacy as academic upgrading or workplace preparation. It is about hybrid practices that cover a range of skill sets and developmental capacities.

One starting point for beginning this kind of work is to begin to do project- or identity-based work. Project-based work is work that is planned around a central project – the project should have meaning to the participants and should allow them to express their own authentic needs while developing a range of capacities and skills. Identity-based work is work that begins with the formation of a group who all share a common, self-expressed identity – such identity-based groups can be First Nations groups, women’s groups, youth groups, first-language groups, and so on. The key in this work – similar to the project idea – is that there is a reason for the group to get together as a group. A lot of work can be developed that builds on the strengths and skills of group members. Examples of identity-based work include the youth projects described above – where everyone involved was, of course, youth.

This section presents a description of a project undertaken as part of Phase 3 of the Literacy and Homelessness Project at St. Christopher House in Toronto. Details about how the project was organized and what happened are presented

along with pictures of part of the project. Also presented are two examples of project- and identity-based work from the literature (one from France and the other from the U.S.). Following this, some tips are provided on doing project-based work as well as some ideas for documenting learning using learning contracts, levels, learning outcomes, etc.

St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program
and Meeting Place Drop-in Project Description

- This project was created to implement one of the Final Project Recommendations of the Phase 1 Report of the Literacy and Homelessness Project by project researcher Karen Farmer. The report recommended: “14. that other forms of expression be explored such as writing and performing a play”. A play was too complicated to organize, and so a different implementation of this recommendation was designed and is described below.
- In this project, ‘literacy’ meant engaging with reading and writing in a critical manner that might lead to further reading and writing activities while developing other capacities (described as ‘learning outcomes’ below).
- The project started with discussions with Meeting Place drop-in staff to discover what activities were happening organically within the drop-in. Some staff and members were planning to be involved in a labour arts festival that would culminate in a show of artwork by members of the drop-in at an art gallery in Toronto. It was decided to piggy-back onto this project to add an element of literacy.

- The Meeting Place drop-in has had a Camera Club for many years. Members take and develop photos, many of which have been shown publicly in events and publications. These photos document people's real lives on the street.

- The central project idea was to adapt the popular education technique of the photo-story. The learning outcomes that would be worked on in this phase of the project included:
 - reflect on issues that affect them
 - read and write
 - express opinions and attitudes honestly
 - respond in writing to visual prompts
 - respond in writing to other member's writing
 - use 'graffiti' as a form of language experience approach
 - write freely without censorship of ideas or content
 - create 'artworks' out of their own words
 - be part of a process for documenting their own lives
 - spark an interest in further reading and writing activities

- A selection of photographs was chosen from the Meeting Place drop-in Camera Club's vast array of recent photos. These photographs were chosen

because they depicted or evoked particular basic themes. The themes were: aging; life and death; food; identity; private property; sanctuary, and winter.

- Large white boards were used as a 'canvas'. The theme words were typeset using a large font size and pasted onto the boards. Along with each theme word was a brief phrase that served as a thematic prompt. These theme prompt phrases included the following:

- Aging: I'm getting old.
- Life and death: Shit happens.
- Food: I'm hungry.
- Identity: Who am I?
- Private property: Who owns it?
- Sanctuary: Home sweet home
- Winter: It's freezing!

- In addition to the theme words and theme prompt phrases, additional statements were added that would function as critical catalysts of meaning. Deliberately provocative or probing comments on each theme were located in previous writing by homeless people and paraphrased and added to the boards. These meaning catalyst statements included:

- Aging: "How do you survive, when you're old on the street?"
 - Life and death: "I know a lot of people who've died out here."
 - Food: "They throw so much of it away."
 - Identity: "People look right through you."
 - Private property: "There are so many boarded up buildings."
 - Sanctuary: "I just want to find a place to rest."
 - Winter: "What do you do when it's minus 22?"
-
- The final words that were typeset and pasted onto the boards were instructions saying: "What do you have to say? Write your thoughts. Write on this page. Write whatever you want."

 - Once the boards were set up, they were placed on the walls of the drop-in in random locations. Some of the boards were posted in more private areas since it was assumed that people might be reticent to write their thoughts with an audience watching. Pens were attached to the walls next to the boards. Drop-in staff who were working on the project agreed to encourage people to write on the boards. It did not require much encouragement. The intention was to leave the boards up for a month or even two and to have staff regularly encourage people to write. The boards – eight of them – were all filled up with writing in less than two weeks.

- Most of the writing responded directly to the prompts. These thematic issues – with the exception of “aging” – proved to be relevant and engaging for members. The possibility to express themselves with their own words as if they were writing graffiti on a wall, proved a rich experience in personal freedom of expression.
- The boards with their words were viewed as graffiti artworks. They were taken down at the end of the time period and were added to the other art work that was being prepared for the gallery show. The boards were exhibited as part of the Mayworks Labour Arts Festival at Toronto's A Space Gallery for one month along with Meeting Place photos, artworks, video and other forms of cultural expression. The show was a cultural project that engaged homeless street people, allowed them to develop their own artistic and organizational talents and join in their city as citizens creating culture and meaning.
- The next step of the project involved using the words and the photos to create a book. A grant had been received to develop a book created by learners at a basic reading level.
- The content of the boards was transcribed and printed out. A group of learners was assembled at the St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program. The task was presented as an editing project: creating a book in the same manner that

any editorial or magazine workers create their own books. The photos were used as a starting point and then the requirements explained. The book had to be developed as a basic level book that had a particular number of words on each page and that conformed to CLAD principles. (For detailed discussions of CLAD – Clear Language and Design – see both the Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports).

- Learners worked in small editing groups and began by discussing the issues presented in the photos, in the theme prompt phrases, in the meaning catalyst statements and in the actual words written on the boards. Learners edited the words until they felt they had created seminal summative statements reflecting each theme, which fitted the page size and word count restrictions.

- The group then discussed lay out and planned out the design and composition of the book, including font, title, and so on. The group functioned as an editorial collective. The experience provided the learners with the chance to understand and experience how books are actually made. Learners worked on a range of learning outcomes including:
 - reading
 - interpreting information
 - group work and co-operation

- working to deadlines
 - editing and re-writing
 - spelling and grammar development
 - knowledge about the book production process
-
- The material was then gathered up, retranscribed and typeset and the book prepared for production.

 - This project is one example of a project-based endeavour that began with an understanding of and respect for the culture of a homeless drop-in. The project respected the autonomy and freedom of expression of all the people involved. It allowed people to work on many different skill areas while engaging in a task that allowed them to act as citizens in a cultural context and not merely as the disaffected objects of external program interventions. It also brought about a fascinating 'inter-cultural meaning resonance' by having very different groups of people become involved in the same process – the learners who edited the book were mostly 'regular' literacy program learners, meaning that most were housed and working. For the participants who had never been homeless, exposure to the cultural expression of homeless people was a challenging but enriching experience.

- This is one example of project-based work that should be very well suited for adaptation by a range of other literacy programs.
- Note that some of the photographs are different because the originals were permanently mounted on the boards and the negatives were not available. Three photos selected from the Meeting Place Camera Club were substituted for the three unavailable negatives.
- Copies of the transcription of the words can be made available if requested from the St. Christopher House Literacy Program. Copies of the book are also available. (Contact information is found at the beginning of this report.)

Project Idea: "Personalized Education Workshops" (France)

(Note: for ease of reading, some parts of this have been paraphrased.)

"Theme workshops:

These workshops bring together people who at any given time show similar needs in the same area (such as reading, arithmetic). They offer to people with a low degree of autonomy... the possibility of learning basic knowledge in a group. This is also the best place to start reflection on the process of self-training. (What does it mean to be a reader? What does it mean to learn? How do we learn?) This is also where teaching can rely on group dynamics, on collective projects such as production of a newspaper. Group work requires going through phases of socialization. Without these workshops we would not be able to motivate some people whose need is more a need for structure than for training. These different objectives may or may not exist simultaneously. They are regulated by how the groups are made up at a given time. Similarly, certain themes emerge, others fade away, depending on people's interests at any one time.

Newspapers and writing workshops:

The aim of this workshop is not to cover all the skills involved in writing the French language, but to touch on all work that can be done in writing: summarizing, planning, construction of a text and so on. The main support of this workshop is

the newspaper. People write articles which, once completed, are assembled as a newspaper, which is then distributed to other people in the program. It is not strictly necessary to know how to write to participate in this workshop.

Each person works at their own pace, although the date [when] the newspaper is to come out sets a goal for the person to reach: 'What must I do so that my article will be in the next newspaper?' This leads to setting up a schedule, organizing of work and so forth. In theory, a person goes from using paper and pencil to using a computer for desktop publishing. Not all people work on the computer. It would be too difficult to manage. The texts are revised, corrections are made in a group. In this way we touch on the rules of grammar and spelling, which have more effect when work is done in a group on a text which means something to people. It is of prime importance that the people in the reading workshops be able to reconstruct the experiences and written material they meet with in other workshops.

Functional workshops:

The purpose of these workshops is to facilitate basic learning, in reading and arithmetic, for example. They allow for use of different support material, stimulating interest in completing projects and relating the work to daily life. These workshops (such as photography, oral expression, computer science, cooking) are

not meant to train photographers and so on, but to offer technical frameworks where, according to liking for a particular field, people will verify the relevance of their projects.

For people who feel excluded from any traditional learning situation with pencil and paper, these workshops offer a place for success, and often start up a process of regaining self-respect, which is necessary for undertaking any training.

Workshops for individual work: People work autonomously and have at least one opportunity a week for individual work. The goal for each person is to succeed in managing time and pace of work, to use the most suitable tools or those which suit them best, not to deviate from the planned project but to become an active participant in their training. The process should be facilitated by the person's record booklet. The content of these workshops is prepared in the theme and/or functional workshops.

Links between workshops:

These... kinds of interventions are closely linked and only make sense in relation to each other. It is the person's project that must be the common thread in participation in the workshops. Thus, the workshops interact among themselves, making requests and responding to them, ensuring a link in the person's progress

as well. For example, at one point, the group in the reading workshop, who were working on daily writing, sent an order to the photography workshop for pictures to illustrate a recipe. People made their request explicit: they wanted photos of the different steps in the recipe with the various ingredients and utensils pointed out and named. These people then participated in the photography workshop, which was transformed into a cooking/photography workshop. Then the texts and photograph captions were worked out in the newspaper workshop and in the individual work periods. The photographs and text were assembled using desktop publishing software on the computer, the recipe and pictures were published in the newspaper and then used again in the reading workshop.

It is essential for people to be aware at the time of the initial interview that their training will be constructed around their own project (even if the training project is the construction of the latter). The project evolves and involves giving value to intermediate projects: it allows the person to measure results. A workshop, whatever it may be, never has defined content. It offers people different tools and situations so that they can achieve immediate objectives, never losing sight of the fact that what they have achieved is never without value, but is well integrated into their own project.

Remaining faithful to our past (artistic expression course) and our original intentions (to promote and develop a means suited to health, social and cultural

training...) we intend to continue to work on research for alternatives to any kind of exclusion, including cultural ghettos. The collective desire at AFER is to integrate artistic expression with all other training processes. We do not want to set up culture as a pedagogical-therapeutic tool, as is often done in the health and social sector. We are trying to bring about a juxtaposition.

We believe that there is a difference between occupational or therapeutic educational techniques and an artistic practice calling first of all on the creative possibilities that each of us has or may have, no matter what our social status. This is why we attempt to have professional artists intervene in some organized meetings – providing training with a cultural dimension.”

*ALPHA 92: Current Research in Literacy
Training – A Tool in the Struggle Against All Types of Exclusion?
The History of AFER
Francis Gosset, Christine Caron, Didier Andreau
Action-Formation-Etude-Recherche, Lille, France;
p. 404, 405, 410, 412, 413, 414, 418*

Project Idea: "The Women's Empowerment Hour" (Chicago)

"The WEH – Women Empowerment Hour: The co-ordinator continuously offers assistance and helps develop self-esteem and a sense of empowerment in the participants themselves so they can share the task of mutual assistance. And this is precisely what the WEH is trying to accomplish... the weekly sessions of the WEH are based on a rather complex vision of 'success', a vision that is only tangentially related to equating success with finding a job.

The WEH's emphasis on caring for one's self first, of attaining a sense of power becomes particularly important in this context. Caring is an essential dimension of the spiritual, psychological and physical survival of the individual women and children. As indicated by one of the WEH facilitator's remark about her mother's failings, women have to learn to care for themselves first. Without recognizing the importance of their own selves they will not gain the strength and power needed to move on with the overwhelming tasks that confront them.

'WEH is very exciting because you can talk about things that happen in your life and we can learn so much from each other. It also helps us express ourselves. I look forward to the WEH every Thursday. It helps me talk about things going on in my life. And those times when there is nothing to say or you don't feel like writing,

you say nothing and you write nothing and that's OK, too. All the time is not the time to do everything. But WEH capitalizes on the wit, the experience and the dynamics of the group.'

Volunteer facilitators:

Every week one of the women volunteers to facilitate the next WEH. She has to choose a reading, or create her own text, and develop a number of questions which the participants have to answer. The WEH is formally opened with greeting from facilitator Almetta Russell, and the women are given a few minutes during which they can share with each other anything that happened during the past week and that they consider worthy of sharing. The facilitator then reads her text and the questions, and the participants have about 20 minutes to respond in writing. They then share their writings, often accompanied by lengthy discussions of the thoughts and ideas stimulated by the text and various responses to it.

Time schedules are closely observed, and the discussions are always brought to closure at the end of the allotted time. After naming the volunteer for the next session, the women then randomly draw a name from a bowl and the winner receives a small present (for instance a notebook). No matter how difficult the topic, the WEH always ends with an appreciation of the participants' contributions

and willingness to share. In addition, a variety of pleasantly arranged food and sometimes music or poetry all add to the comfort and stimulation of the participants.

Instead of operating with the usual deficit model which only recognizes certain kinds of 'cognitive processes and modes of communication'... space needs to be provided for acknowledging existing but unrecognized experiences and forms of knowledge which are closely linked to learning desires and abilities... Among the A.B.L.A. women, collective support not only takes the form of listening to and reading about outside/inside examples but comes from the participants themselves. Their many discussions on the relationships among women and men, among women and women, and among women and children, comprise a cluster of themes that show the intricate interplay of connections and contradictions between the personal and the social-cultural, the ideological and economic.

Correspondingly, discussions that took place during the WEH show an interplay of personal stories, anecdotes and the development of a general perspective which puts these stories into a larger framework of understanding... among the A.B.L.A. women's literacy group the process of 'conscientization' was directly connected with the 'craft' of reading and writing.

There is a need to break through the entrenched dichotomy between a job in the labour market and work that is not only taking place 'somewhere else' but that is also directly oriented towards supporting and sustaining life itself. This includes some basic conditions related to life: food, shelter, community, a health-producing and maintaining environment, and hope for the future. The concept of 'work' needs to capture everything that has been experienced, seen and understood by people who do not fit the norm of waged workers within the capitalist-patriarchal market system...

Subsistence work:

Overall subsistence work refers to work that is oriented towards the immediate creation and maintenance of life rather than profit, making the work of raising children, or Motherwork, a clear example of subsistence work. Under conditions of marginalization, subsistence work is more accurately described as 'survival work'... and it can range from the peasant work of growing food for immediate use on the tiny family plot, scraping food from cities' garbage dumps, to protecting children from immediate threats to their lives.

Motherwork does require a holistic mindset and a holistic practical approach. It is work that is contextual, situational, collaborative, and intergenerational, and it incorporates the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. In whatever truncated or tentative form, all of these aspects were present in the women's literacy group. Its participants have shown that there are (still) gaps in the system, and that life-sustaining desires and hopes are alive, in whatever beleaguered form. The women have also shown that their hopes and learning desires are inseparable from the responsibilities and tasks associated with the work of raising children."

*ALPHA 96: Basic Education and Work
Literacy and MotherWork
Mechthild Hart; De Paul University, Chicago, USA
(with Almetta Russell, the A.B.L.A. Homes
Women's Literacy Group and Elio DeArrudah)
p. 36, 38, 40, 43, 52, 53, 54*

Useful tips for project work

Here are some other ideas (adapted from the literature on literacy work with marginalized people) that might be helpful for literacy programs when planning projects and similar work:

- ✓ Know the participants well and modify projects accordingly.

- ✓ Integrated lifeskills that focus on affective or developmental skills can be an important element in designing effective projects.

- ✓ Look at, document and value what is already being done in the larger program as a source of demonstrations of learning. Demonstrations of learning do not have to come 'from without' – they already exist in programs and can be incorporated into project designs.

- ✓ The range of approaches and methods must be wide and varied and matched to participants' demographics and needs.

- ✓ There continues to be a huge need for the development of curriculum materials designed for use in literacy projects (and literacy programs) working with marginalized people.

- ✓ The problem of transience-related attendance can often be addressed by sessional learning contracts.

- ✓ Take advantage of the fact that many of the elements that make up effective projects and programs are already well known and documented (see the Resources section for listing of useful materials).

- ✓ For participants living in chaotic environments, the ability to pay attention needs to be developed as a preliminary essential skill – often before project work can commence.

Documenting learning

(Note: Parts of this were paraphrased for ease of reading.)

- “Documents take on major significance for many marginalized people for whom possession, loss and re-acquisition of identification and records is an ongoing struggle. That particular document, the learning contract, showed that a person existed. At the end of the instructional session, the instructor is able to compile information on dozens of learner accomplishments and successes. By putting all the documents together, the program co-ordinator is able to ascertain that learning is going on, that successes are many, and that certain subject areas are of frequent interest to many marginalized people.
- Adults do move from program to program. Yet, instructors can make every effort to connect learners to different programs. This strategy is especially significant when the learners have begun pursuing beginning reading instruction. Documentation and tracking are both very difficult, but instructors working closely together can overcome these obstacles. Providing for multiple points of staying and managing the necessary co-ordination may be especially difficult for programs in rural areas.
- Documentation of learning should begin the very first day of operation. Documentation should be considered and planned for as a forethought, not a hindsight. Goals include maintaining co-operative agreements and working partnerships with other agencies in the community serving marginalized people. Literacy projects for marginalized people cannot fully have their picture taken, so to speak, by quantitative outcome studies alone.
- Barriers to meaningful evaluations that focus on outcomes include brief time in class, frequent resident movement among programs, a constantly changing education program and time constraints on instructors. Evaluation should include qualitative approaches which focus on the impact of participation on learners. The use of informal evaluation techniques such as portfolios presenting continuing evidence of learning for each participant is a step beyond intuition and serves the dual purpose of informing both the learner and the program of progress.

- Learners need to know they are learning, and all stakeholders need to see the value of the literacy program. Practitioners devote energy to helping the adults get evidence for themselves about the progress they are making toward their educational goals. One method used by literacy instructors to ensure learning and documentation of learning during relatively short periods of time is the sessional learning contract. It applies literally to the next one, two, or three hours if necessary. The instructor and learner agree upon short, obtainable goals. When the goals are met, the instructor signs off on the contract and adds brief comments.
- The completed contract is given to the learner and the instructor maintains a copy on file. If the project is part of a larger program, a copy of the contract may be kept by program providers. The significance of such a document should not be underestimated when working with adults in crisis."

Developing Literacy Programs for Homeless Adults
Joye Norris, Paddy Kennington, 1992; p. 49, 63, 66, 88, 89, 91, 92

Sample of a general sessional learning contract

I _____,

will _____

by _____

Learner _____

Instructor _____

Date _____

Sessional Learning Record

- Since absence is often an issue in literacy programs that work with marginalized learners, it's useful to begin to document learning on a session-by-session basis. This way, programs can keep track of what was occurring even on a very micro level.
- On the following page, is an example of what a more detailed sessional learning record might look like. The sessional learning contract can be filled out instantly. The sessional learning record is more detailed and requires a bit more time. Note that this is not in any way a definitive version of such a form, but is presented merely as a suggested model that could be adapted for use by programs.
- Both the simplified general sessional contract and the more detailed sessional learning record provide programs with a way of capturing learning amongst populations where transience and constantly shifting attendance is an ongoing issue.

SESSIONAL LEARNING RECORD

Program Name

Date

Duration of Learning Session (hours)

Learner's First Name

Surname (if given)

Any relevant information about learner that impacts their learning (Briefly describe)

Any short-term goals? (If yes, note them)

Learning Session Goal: What will be achieved in this session?

Learning Session Outcome: What was achieved during the session?

Any follow-up plans for a further session?

Literacy Moments Recording Form

- Some literacy transactions happen immediately and spontaneously – these are literacy ‘moments’. For a full description of ‘literacy moments’, see the Phase 2 report of this project [to order, see the beginning of this report].
- Literacy moments are transactions between staff and people that involve the use of literacy, but which are not even as ‘planned’ as a ‘contract’. They happen spontaneously – on the spur of the moment. These moments happen all the time in many types of programs but are very hard to keep track of.
- The form on the following page is a sample of a model for how literacy moments could be recorded.
- These forms could provide workers with much data about trends in tasks, areas of need, types of people requesting help and so on. They are also useful to show funders that a lot of learning goes on with people that is so momentary and immediate, that it does not usually, if ever, get reported.

Adapting Learning Outcomes recording devices to suit program needs

- Some jurisdictions use a learning outcomes matrix or other such systematized listing of learning outcomes expected of people within the programs being funded.
- Usually these listings present areas such as communications or numeracy or reading and writing or other standard ABE educational classifications.
- Programs who work with people who do not “fit” well into existing outcome recording systems, could utilize the format of their funders’ learning outcomes recording system to create an alternative listing of outcomes relevant to non-traditional learners in the program.
- On the following page is an example of how this adaptation might be done. The example is based on the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training’s Learning Outcomes Matrix format.
- Suggested samples of alternative ‘fields’ of learning are presented in the sample. Programs might find it useful to create similar recording systems to document the full range of learning being done in their programs.

Alternative Learning Outcomes Recording System (example of a model)

Domain: Functional Skills

Component Outcome: Coping Skills

Skill Set:

Develops skills such as:
thinking skills; problem solving skills;
organizational skills; time management skills;
memory skills; interpersonal skills;
decision making skills; etc

Success Markers could include areas like:

- communicating in front of others
- coping with negative feedback
- describing solutions to problems
- developing a personal system of organization
- developing concentration skills
- developing conversation, discussion and group presentation skills
- developing co-operation and interaction skills
- developing creative skills
- developing listening skills
- developing memory skills
- developing positive attitude, self-image and self-esteem
- developing problem solving skills
- increasing personal motivation
- prioritizing tasks
- remembering information for brief periods, (minutes or hours)
- setting daily goals
- understanding schedules and deadlines

Levels

- Some programs have to provide evidence of the 'level' at which learners are working. These levels can relate to grade levels or to other kinds of academic or vocational ranking systems. On the next few pages are some further ideas about the concept of levels.
- Levels can mean different things for different groups. Defining some learners at a 'Grade 3' level for example is not usually very informative or meaningful.
- Alternative ways to apply the concept of levels are presented here for use and adaptation by programs that need or want to use such a concept. None of the ideas presented are intended to be definitive – they are mere suggestions or samples for use as models to adapt.

Levels could be defined by outcome area:

“Outcome levels: Level one outcomes occur within the individual program participant and include skill acquisition, information acquisition and affective changes.

Level two outcomes – resulting from the application of level one outcomes – represent changes outside of the educational setting and manifest themselves in actions associated with various adult social roles.

Level three outcomes represent the cumulative impact on the person’s situation, environment and context of the actions comprising level two outcomes.”

*Learning to Hope: A Study of the Adult Education for the Homeless Program
1995; Pelavin Associates Inc.; p. 100, 101*

Levels could be defined by knowledge, skill or content area:

- “Level 1 proficiency indicates the ability to perform tasks, such as locating information based on a literal match or entering information from personal knowledge.
- Level 2 proficiency demonstrates the ability to match information where there are several distracters or where the match is based on low-level inferences. Some ability to cycle through or integrate information is also required of individuals at this level.
- Level 3 proficiency indicates the ability to integrate or cycle through material in relatively complex formats in which distracter information is present.
- Level 4 proficiency demonstrates the ability to perform multiple feature matching, cycling, and integration tasks, often involving conditional information that must be taken into account, and to make higher-level inferences.
- Level 5 proficiency indicates the ability to search through complex displays containing multiple distracters, make high text-based inferences, or apply specialized knowledge.”

*Learning to Hope: A Study of the Adult Education for the Homeless Program
1995; Pelavin Associates Inc.; p. 80, 81*

Levels could be described by function, i.e., descriptions of graduated meaning:

<p><i>Level 1</i></p> <p>Introduce</p> <p>What is it?</p> <p>Learner can name the skill area and knows what it is in a general way.</p>	<p><i>Level 2</i></p> <p>Contextualize</p> <p>What's it for?</p> <p>Learner can describe what the skill is used for in one or more real life contexts.</p>	<p><i>Level 3</i></p> <p>Apply</p> <p>How do you use it?</p> <p>Learner can show that they can use the skill in one real life context.</p>	<p><i>Level 4/5</i></p> <p>Transfer</p> <p>What else can you do with it?</p> <p>Learner can demonstrate the use of the skill in a variety of real life contexts.</p>
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The concept of graduated learning – steps in a learning cycle – is the key to accurately and meaningfully determining ‘levels’, regardless of how individual programs configure the particular steps. Below are suggestions for ways these steps might be described.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- introduce – what?- isolate – how?- contextualize – why?- apply – when?- transfer – where?	<p><u>Question cycle</u></p>
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Steps = Levels; Cycles = Learning

- **task statement: what needs to be done?**
 - **introduction of concepts: what material will be covered?**
 - **terminal performance objective: what will be achieved?**
 - **enabling objectives: how will it get done?**
 - **self-checks: how is it going?**
 - **written/performance tests: was the objective achieved?**
- Task cycle**

- **knowledge about... the content**
 - **understanding of... the process**
 - **skills with... the component elements**
 - **attitudes towards... the affective context**
 - **values within... the meaning of the endeavour**
- Knowledge cycle**

- **motivate**
 - **establish**
 - **consolidate**
 - **apply**
 - **link (to previous learning) – spiral back, continue...**
- Spiral cycle**

- **introduction of concept**
 - **direct instruction**
 - **guided practice**
 - **applied practice**
 - **closure**
- Teaching cycle**