

Best Practices for Adult Literacy

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Introduction

The topic of best practices seemed almost as large in scope as adult literacy itself. Though not exactly sure where to start unearthing its riches, I was keenly aware of the necessity of the task. Thirteen years of work with CASP students gave me that edge. Certainly, there were more qualified/experienced researchers, but perhaps, not many would have the literacy cause embedded so deeply at heart.

Throughout the project, I was driven by memories of adults whose lives have been impacted by literacy. It's the names and faces of many, who left for unknown reasons, with unfinished goals and success unrealized, that should haunt all of us. Was there something that could've been done to keep them from falling through the cracks? What have we learned from our experiences? My hope is that this collection of valued learning will provide a solid knowledge base for working toward a solution. "Agreement on best practice standards is needed in order to increase consistency, credibility, accountability, and professional standards" in the adult literacy field (Literacy BC, 3).

I was asked to approach the topic from a global, national, and provincial perspective. The question of what best practices meant brought different answers from literacy facilitators. It was important to look at it in light of adult education and adult learning principles, as these informed some of the field's best practices. First, I undertook a literature review. Next, I conducted a 'community of inquiry' research method, hearing from or visiting the Anglophone CASP (Community Academic Services Program) instructors. I needed to find out what was working in their programs. I met only with those who volunteered for a face-to-face visit. Also, I received lists of CASP best practices that had been collected at provincial facilitator conferences. These practical teaching tips and strategies were what practitioners wanted most.

The bulk of information demanded that the final report be divided into two chapters. This first deals with best practices from a general policy perspective. In it, a sampling of events, definitions, approaches, and principles is given. The second chapter deals with best practices from a teaching and delivery perspective. In it, a sampling of successful strategies, techniques, activities, and exercises is shared.

Term Definitions

“**Best practices**” are the most effective ways to reach goals. As a formula for success, they hint that no *better* tactics are known or recommended. By using these choice methods, we can expect quality results.

Today, “**literacy**” is “*using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential*” (OECD, Literacy Economy and Society, 14). For years, it meant reading ability or inability. The term ‘illiterate’ is seldom used in the field today. We prefer to talk of ‘low literacy skills’, recognizing the reading difficulties that many experience.

“**Workplace literacy**” refers to the skills that people need at work, which includes reading, writing, math, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Workplace literacy programs may be short-term and usually include filling out work forms.

“**Family literacy**” concerns the ways that families use literacy in daily life. Inter-generational programs usually include parenting skills, reading to children, writing notes to seniors, making shopping lists, using recipes, or planning budgets.

“**Adult literacy**” refers to the art of helping adults acquire the skills they need to be the best they can be in today’s knowledge-based world. Adult literacy programs address personal, home, work, and community-based needs. Traditional literacy programs target those below a grade nine level.

“**Adult basic education**” (**ABE**) applies to programs designed to raise educational levels to high-school equivalency for retraining, employment, or personal satisfaction. Because adults do not fall into neatly graded packages, the term was often used interchangeably with literacy projects to identify programs offering similar services.

“**Adult education**” implies continuing education for adults, undertaken on a part-time basis, “over and above the ordinary business of life” (Selman, 267). Individual skills, needs, and experiences often inform the program design.

“**Policy**” is a general, value-based principle that guides toward the greater good of the population. “**Procedure**” is the ‘how to’ of such policy (LLSC, 1-6).

What makes a best practice?



How one interprets best practice is subject to the 'viewing lens.' *Government* may see it as policy framework guidelines for standards in outcomes-based service delivery. *Instructors* might see best practices as practical teaching tips. This latter view could include hints for working with adult learning styles or specific subjects. I will try to cover both, but the results will depend on available research and shared practices of those in the literacy field.

The principle or strategy must be tried, tested, and proven to bring quality results. In any practice, we should always reflect on *what* we do and *how* we do it. Educators put ideas and theories into practice as pilot projects. If they work, they get adopted for use. If not, they get scrapped or reworked. What's birthed in experience is often all that survives for application. Valuable input can be gained from similar activities in other sectors. As research continues, *shared experiences* help to shape best practices for the literacy field.

Best practices need to be recorded, reviewed, reflected on, and refined if we are to address literacy needs effectively. What makes for best practice today, may not do so tomorrow. No *one* practice is necessarily best in *every* situation. It can differ for the context of use (i.e., workplace, family, or adult literacy.) Certain conditions may affect the outcomes. What works best in one region may not do so elsewhere. As we talk, read, and write about experiences, a general consensus takes place. Best practices serve as guidelines for ensuring effective, high-quality services. By using best practices on a continued basis, we may have a better chance of meeting the needs of those who are often excluded or marginalised.

Best practice frameworks should be reflected in the following areas as groundwork for further development:

- mission statements
- community partnerships, referrals, and support structure
- promotions, planning, and recruitment
- human resources and development
- material resources and development
- program design and delivery policies
- access
- assessment, instruction, and evaluation

Who benefits from best practices in adult literacy?

We all do! By using best practice guidelines, direction, support, and value is given to all kinds of literacy activity. Research, policy, promotion, partnerships, and programs are enhanced. A foundation for consistency and professionalism is set. Benefits are experienced in various ways:

- ✓ **Governments** find tools for framing policies, partnerships, funding plans, and standards. More cost-effective strategies may be developed, service delays avoided, and markers of accountability placed.
- ✓ **Communities** learn how to raise awareness and support for quality services that are relevant to *everyone*. Promotional tips will ensure that they are using the best means possible to reach people.
- ✓ **Employers** access a pool of workers with better skills, work habits, and attitudes. Best practices can help them to develop better personnel policies.
- ✓ **Labour unions** use plain language to inform workers on safety, training, and health.
- ✓ **Non-government organizations and committees** get guidelines for writing proposals, delivering programs, and structuring their agency. They can develop existing designs, materials, and evaluation tools. Access to resources on hiring, recruiting, fundraising, & decision-making tips will be available.
- ✓ **Educators** gain experience in understanding adult learners, using learning principles to inform their decisions and teaching strategies. What proves to be the "best fit" for individuals will help to ensure learner success.
- ✓ **Families** are strengthened as problem-solving skills improve roles.
- ✓ **Individuals** find personal empowerment with new skills and choices. Quality of life can be changed as personal rights are understood. Attitudes and self-esteem improve as adults learn to value learning.
- ✓ **Educational institutions** see a rise in adult registration, form new community partnerships, and design courses to meet the latest demands.

What is the Global Perspective on Adult Literacy & Best Practices?



Literacy was once thought to be a problem only in the less-developed countries, particularly for the female gender. Negative attitudes formed about those who couldn't read and write. Alarming illiteracy rates in world adult populations gave rise to agencies and activities to improve situations. Literacy targets that were set were not often reached. Increasing pressure on world governments brought more involvement in literacy for many nations, though lack of agreement on definitions hindered policymaking. Some dealt only with its human development aspect. Literacy education became part of a global movement toward human rights and equality. The Right to Learn declaration (1985) painted literacy as a basic human right. Society recognized its moral obligation to educate the *young*, yet investment in adult literacy education still varies between countries.

Through collaboration, new policies are being born for **lifelong learning** (learning across the life span). Written policies and procedures are being put in place in order to ensure the provision of quality service (LLSC, 1-4). Literacy is more than just reading, writing, and numeracy. It's not about being literate or illiterate anymore, but having adequate skills for today's demands (OECD, Literacy Economy and Society, 24). It's not even about adapting to the existing world, but being able to deal with and bring about any changes needed. Problem-solving and critical thinking skills will ensure global progress. Shortages in this kind of global knowledge bring insecurity, at being unable to compete. Countries with longstanding literacy programs are becoming more concerned about 'what comes next' after basic skills are taught. Innovative methods are being developed to address the aims of learners in social, economic, and cultural areas. The results are more flexible, responsive approaches.

Policy and practice differed as our understanding of literacy changed. While talk went on about what it meant to *be* literate, literacy organizations and tutors struggled with lack of finance, resources, and recognition. Basic programs, offered at community levels by private voluntary organizations or church groups, seldom involved government. Multinational agencies might offer support only if programs met certain criteria, leaving those most in need without access to learning. Learning took place in formal and informal settings, for personal or professional reasons, and on a full or part-time basis. Policies focussed on perceived priority, national strategy, public interest, and the value placed on individual growth.

The first world conference on adult education was held in 1929. Since then,

a considerable number of international events have taken place... Changes in the functional view of literacy; mobilizing public opinion; literacy and nationalism; literacy linked to development, employment, empowerment, production and citizenship; and attempts to humanize human existence all became goals to be achieved through literacy (Taylor & Draper, 15, 17).

Historically, different approaches to literacy developed:

- ▲ The **development approach** had a humanitarian view for making people as learners central to development, by adapting small-scale technology.
 - ▲ The **traditional approach** used rote learning and classical literature for learning to read and write. Content was irrelevant and unrelated to daily life.
 - ▲ The **religious approach** focussed on reading holy scriptures to spread "the faith." Writing skills and materials outside of religion were missing.
 - ▲ The **work-oriented approach** had an economic incentive to increase employment and production.
 - ▲ The **social-change approach** overcame oppression for its participants through awareness.
 - ▲ The **life-oriented approach** developed the learners' functional ability to learn, think, solve problems, and develop coping skills for daily living.
- (Taylor & Draper, 72-73).

Until the early 90s, the focus was still on **fundamental literacy** (reading and writing skills) to erase illiteracy (Shohet, 18). Soon, it was no longer viewed as a disease to be wiped out, but a product of social, economic, and political factors.

Functional literacy (training that relates to the context of a learner's life, as in using resources) influenced international thought in the late 50s. Literacy was linked to social and economic development for work and increased productivity (Malicky & Norman, 65). Global projects increased awareness and called on further efforts for social participation. Literacy education was a human capital investment toward a job-ready workforce. With a mismatch between skills supply and demand, workplace programs shifted from an employer-centred to **learner-centred** approach. The new focus on **holistic education** (for the whole person) let workers gain control over their lives as well as their jobs (OLC, 7). Work participation was expanded to community participation as citizens.

"... investment in the initial education of youth will not be enough to address the problem of skills' deficits for adults... Special measures for improving and replenishing the skills among adults are also needed" (Tuijnman, 89). Policies must expand learning opportunities for adults. Targets listed for improving literacy in

North America were given:

- promoting cultures of lifelong and life-wide learning
- promoting early childhood education and care programs
- promoting measures to improve the quality of education
- promoting measures to reduce inequality in the outcomes of schooling
- promoting access to adult education for all citizens
- promoting literacy-rich environments at work, at home, and in the community
- promoting workplace literacy programs
- promoting access to information and communication technologies

Emancipatory literacy (for liberating and empowering the individual, by knowing where to get help, and improving self-confidence) came on the scene in the 70s as a reflection of the work of educators like Freire and others. His work inspired "grass roots" development. Emphasis was on education as a path of hope for the poor and marginalised, to bring change in social injustices and inequities. Every citizen was encouraged to be actively involved and to have a voice in their communities. Freire's method presented participation in the political process through knowledge of reading and writing. Having a say in decisions that affected life was important. Such was empowerment against oppression. A declaration of "Literacy for all by the year 2000" was initiated at an international conference in India in 1982 (Taylor & Draper, 22). It was an admirable goal, but not to be met.

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) emphasized a new approach to learning, focussing on 'measurable learning outcomes' for literacy and adult education.

It was the first **International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)**, in 1994, that hinted at a link between literacy and a country's economic potential. IALS no longer defined literacy in terms of reading performance standards. (For 1994 IALS, go to www.statcan.ca; 1998 IALS, go to <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-588-XIE/free.htm>.) Surveying the landscape of literacy, serious realities became evident.

Wealthy nations found that up to half of their populations could *not* use information well enough to function adequately in daily life. Literacy levels were linked to the *quantity* and *quality* of formal education that people had (Tuijnman, 24). Other factors were age, occupation, and language of use (Darcovich, 58). Literacy capacity must be developed, if people were to adapt to changing trends. Paying close attention to community interests and needs was important.

IALS reports attracted interest from policy makers in questioning the relationship of literacy to other issues (Darcovich, xv). Global efforts needed to focus on lifelong learning for more than economic reasons. Low literacy didn't only affect one's ability to work. It impacted health, self-esteem, justice, and the quality of home and community life. All of these influenced the economy. New market demands brought action. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) developed lifelong learning policies. All forms of learning are being encouraged on a 'use-it-or-lose-it' principle.

Guiding principles underlying best program practices include: learner-centred programs aimed at lifelong learning, universal access, free services, proactive learning environments, and first language literacy (SLN, iv.) Various literacy organizations are developing policy and procedure manuals dealing with volunteers, personnel, learners, and program delivery. "Literacy education has been both reactive and pro-active, both remedial and preventive" (Taylor & Draper, 79).

UNESCO, founded in 1946, continues to promote literacy awareness and a culture of lifelong learning:

- celebrating September 8 as **International Literacy Day** since 1965
- proclaiming 1990 as **International Literacy Year** as a move to mobilize universal literacy by the year 2000
- saluting **International adult learners' week** since 1999
- proclaiming the **United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012)** as part of global efforts toward basic education for all
- developing a website @ www.literacyexchange.net/lixintro.htm of literacy resources shared by policymakers, planners, and practitioners in non-formal basic education (MCL, Newsletter, 6).
- setting up an e-mail Listserv on its Institute for Education ALADIN (Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network) website at www.unesco.org/education/aladin/application.htm

In 2003, the OECD released “**Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices**” in an effort to identify what was working for nine countries (available at: <http://oecdpublications.gfi-nb.com>). Key practices were listed:

- ☒ a conducive environment
- ☒ a learner-centred approach
- ☒ routine assessment and professional development
- ☒ prior learning recognition
- ☒ delivery models and materials to suit the adult learner

People no longer dismiss literacy as a myth. Its role in the development of nations has appeared in a policymaking context. Assumptions that people were innately motivated to work together and willing to change has made literacy education a slow process. The choice of the literacy approach has unfolded through projects, programs, and campaigns (Taylor & Draper, 445).

For many years, the campaign focus was on erasing illiteracy from society, so all resources were directed toward that goal. Work-oriented literacy was replaced by human development literacy. Freire said that by learning to read the word, one also learns to read the world (Taylor & Draper, 442). Liberating individuals from ignorance and exploitation, through literacy, was the goal, but the disadvantaged and marginalised people still failed to participate. Strategies shifted to increasing public awareness of literacy's far-reaching impact.

Looking on the bright side, literacy has become a worldwide issue. “No nation is *against* literacy, even though in some countries it may not be a national priority yet” (Taylor & Draper, 448). The current understanding is that “literacy is for life.” The challenge will be to make everyone believe it for lifelong learning participation. By developing best practices, it is a step in the right direction.



For further study: (Check <http://portal.unesco.org/education> for UNESCO, <http://www.oecd.org> for OECD, and <http://web.uvic.ca/~malinie/coalitions.htm> for literacy coalitions. Pro-Literacy Worldwide's International programs are at www.proliteracy.org/news)

What is the National Perspective on Adult Literacy & Best Practices?



Adult literacy is just now appearing on the federal agenda, as we move from a *resource-based* to *knowledge-based* economy.

It's like political dynamite here, as government tries to figure out exactly how to situate it. "Canada is one of only a few industrialized countries without a national strategy for adult literacy" (MCL, 6). A national policy to reach everyone with literacy needs is crucial. The shift is from maintenance learning to innovative learning (Selman, 17). Canada's economic prosperity rests upon advancing its skills.

Through time, literacy services varied across regions, from urban reading rooms to rural reading camps, one-on-one tutoring, and teacher-led instruction. The focus was on nurturing a "reading society" as public libraries were created (Taylor & Draper, 15). Problems in access, professional development, adult-relevant resources, support networks, and technology are still common (Shohet, 21). "Volunteers were the backbone of Canadian adult literacy provision before ABE was officially sponsored" (Shohet, 22). Sponsorship was in the private, voluntary, and non-governmental sectors (e.g. YMCA, Frontier College, Women's Institutes.)

Past policy dealt with literacy only as it posed a problem in a link to health, unemployment, or social assistance dependence. The magnitude of the literacy need demanded action. The key was "recognition of the essential role of adult education in the development process" (Selman, 18). Adult learning was interpreted here as vocational training and general education. Age and time since leaving formal education or training has often been the main criterion for defining adult learners.



In the 60s and 70s, government's focus in adult education was on job skills. The Technical and Vocational Training Act of 1960 provided funding for programs preparing adults for employment (Taylor & Draper, 95). Job placement training programs and private trainers were on the rise. Manpower/Education departments-funded programs worried about adults 'not having completed grade nine.' Vocational training (like BTSD, Basic Training and Skills Development) and second-language teaching pointed to a need for ABE. Basic literacy programs weren't given equal status to other training being provided for those on paid educational leave.

Some notable events occurred in adult literacy in Canada:

★Frontier College was incorporated in 1919, to replace the Canadian Reading Camp Association in existence since 1899 (Taylor & Draper, 18).

★Since 1935, the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) has developed *citizenship*-focussed education, served adult educators, and laid a base for adult literacy organizations central to the field (Shohet, 29).

★In 1953, UNESCO undertook a world survey of adult illiteracy. The Canadian government returned the uncompleted questionnaire with the comment, "Adult illiteracy is not a problem in Canada." Less than ten years later, the country could no longer deny its reality (Taylor & Draper, 16). 

★In 1955, a federal grant allowed Toronto-based **World Literacy of Canada** to "internationally promote non-formal adult education programs for integrated community development" (Draper, *Introduction*, 62). It was the first non-governmental organization (NGO) in Canada to support literacy.

★1970 saw the first Laubach training workshop held. It was important to the training of volunteers for fundamental literacy services.

★*Adult Basic Education*, the first major book on ABE in Canada, was first published in 1971.

★In 1977, the **Movement for Canadian Literacy**(MCL) was created as the first organization dedicated exclusively to adult learning and literacy (Shohet, 31). As a national nonprofit organization (NPO), it would represent coalitions, organizations, and individuals across Canada.

★By 1981, **Laubach Literacy of Canada** (LLC) was formed, linking reading councils across the country.

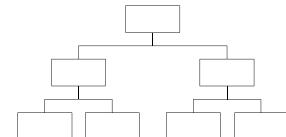
★The National Training Act, passed in 1982, re-allocated federal support away from many ABE programs and placed it on job training skills programs (Taylor & Draper, 96).

★ In 1986, the federal government promised to work with provinces, the private sector, and volunteer groups to develop resources to ensure that Canadians had access to literacy skills needed (Shohet, 32). "Adult literacy systems do not exist in a vacuum, but are one piece of a puzzle to help governments address multiple systems and overlapping needs" (HRDC, Adult Literacy . . . , 19). Program services weren't coordinated. Differences in funding sources and teaching methods became an issue (Shohet, 4-5).

★ In 1988, the government established the **National Literacy Secretariat (NLS)** as the commanding agency for literacy (in response to a survey by Southam news.) Its seat in various departments has been the result of shifts in perceptions on literacy. Its role has been "to raise public awareness, develop learning materials, carry out research, improve student access and outreach, and improve coordination and information-sharing among practitioners" (Shohet, 12-13). In short, it's "to facilitate the involvement of all sectors of society in creating a more literate Canada" (NLS, *Policy*, 1). Partnering with provincial governments and NGOs has been its method to support literacy needs. Though it can't provide direct literacy service funding, it's often been held accountable when literacy skill levels remained unchanged by its work (Shohet, 17).

★ Three pre-existing **national organizations** (LLC, Frontier College, and MCL) initially received core funding from NLS. Soon, they too had to submit project proposals for annual funding. National/provincial groups competed for similar project grants, causing tension in the field. By 1989, the NLS had helped to form three new nationals: ABC Canada, National Adult Literacy Database (NALD), and the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF) (Shohet, 16-17). The NLS supported "the creation or expansion of literacy coalitions in almost every province and territory" (Shohet, 15).

★ The 90s was a decade of *infrastructure* development and network-building. However, much work still needed to be done to ensure literacy became integrated into the thinking of those with power to change policy. Senator Joyce Fairbairn, a special minister responsible for literacy until the post was dropped in '97, felt cooperative discussion would allow us to pull together a workable program for a better life for Canadians (Shohet, 37).



★The 1994 IALS, funded partly by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and the NLS, showed that the distribution of literacy gradually improved as one moved from east to west, though services varied by regions (Statistics Canada, *A NB Snapshot*, 13). Programs were less likely to reach those with low skills. Services lacked a single, unified system and were often exclusive, inaccessible, or poorly promoted and attended.

★In 1999, Family Literacy Day was created by ABC Canada to promote the importance of learning and reading together as families. Each year the organization chooses an honorary chair for promotional events.

Public policies related to adult literacy in Canada have largely supported: (1) researching the nature of adult literacy; (2) promoting the values of literacy through public education campaigns; (3) developing delivery models and materials; (4) implementing plain language initiatives; and (5) encouraging the non-governmental sector to deliver programs (*HRDC, Adult Literacy...*, 6).
...the support appears to end there, with no great outpouring of support for other policy alternatives, such as increased spending on adult education. As a result, considerable amounts of adult literacy resources go to research and public education...but few dedicated resources have been directed at modifying the current education and training system to accommodate adult literacy in a meaningful way (*HRDC, Adult Literacy...*, 10).

IALS findings and program participation rates have shown that many people with low literacy skills do not *think* they have a problem. There must be provisions to reach these people in policy. Government should redefine literacy funding, terms, and roles, while strengthening its responsibility for infrastructure (Shohet, chapter summary, 1-2). Canada's geography, educational systems, and the diverse needs of its multicultural population are challenges in the process. A growing awareness of Canada's significant undereducated adult population is producing a variety of programs as a means of providing ABE. Government policies must be open to approval, assessment, and amendment to meet the real needs of adults.

The **Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC)** is a core to future **collaboration** (joint cooperation in working together) toward making space for adult literacy in lifelong learning policy (Shohet, 28). Undereducated adults can no longer be written off, or overlooked, as government concentrates on children.

HRDC and other agencies identified nine Essential Skills foundational to lifelong learning (from website at <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/essentialskills>):

- | | |
|---|---|
| * reading text
* document use
* computer use
* numeracy
* working with others | * critical thinking
* continuous learning
* oral communication
* writing |
|---|---|

Before any national policy could be developed, there was need for consensus-forming to discuss strategies. In 1995, ABC Canada held a think tank on good practices for workplace education. One suggestion was the collaborative process to deal with assessment (OLC, Belfiore, 1, 13).

In 2000, HRDC's study, "*Adult literacy: policies, programs and practices*," listed several lessons learned from the previous decade in service delivery:

1. "... programs benefit both individuals and society, but . . . have not been fully realized due to insufficient levels of public interest and political support . . .
2. Experience suggests how to design and deliver quality . . . programs, but conditions do not always exist to allow that to happen consistently or systematically . . .
3. Adult literacy programs aimed at specific target groups appear to have better results . . .
4. Barriers facing adults limit their capacity to enter and remain in literacy programs . . .
5. It is important that adult literacy learners have a say in policies and programs addressing their needs . . .
6. While evidence suggests . . . advantages in using . . . technologies, . . . some question . . . effectiveness and appropriateness . . .
7. More systematic evaluation of adult literacy policies, programs and practices is needed to increase accountability and to improve the knowledge base in the field." (HRDC, *Adult Literacy* . . . , 8-21)



In February 2002, the government (HRDC) launched its **Innovation Strategy** paper entitled, "*Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians.*" It was a pan-Canadian literacy strategy geared to improving learning access. HRDC Minister, Jane Stewart, said, "Without proper skills, eight million Canadians cannot participate in Canada's educational, economic, and social forums" (from an October 2002 speech). However, the government was still not making allowances for *each* to be the best they could be! (E.g., offenders, First Nations, and those in poverty were not accommodated).

In October 2002, at a **Best Practices National Workshop on Literacy**, stakeholders gave suggestions for government action in literacy advancement:

1. Expand the role and resources of the National Literacy Secretariat.
2. Increase secured funding (from government).
3. Raise awareness and heighten the profile of literacy.
4. Define literacy and deepen understanding. (Make it inclusive.)
5. Develop a national public awareness campaign. Enhance the transfer of information and knowledge (using technology & plain language).
6. Develop a national system and strategy (a policy framework) for literacy and adult learning.
7. Integrate the literacy issue into all government departments. (Move beyond best practices.)
8. Create a process for planning and implementing the integration of literacy with other issues. (E.g., health, Aboriginal affairs, justice)
9. Develop measurements for accountability and outcomes.
10. Build capacity for research and collaboration.
11. Take a holistic approach to recruiting more learners to programs.
12. Obtain funding and support from business and other stakeholders.
13. Support communities and families to plan literacy activities.

(Leslie, LCNB e-mail)

In November 2002, at the **National Summit on Innovation and Learning**, government said it would make Canada "a learning society, where learning and skills upgrading become continuous" (from www.innovationstrategy.gc.ca). Plans for a Canadian Learning Institute were announced, but its design is still a work in progress. Leading up to the Summit, "... over 10,000 Canadians provided their views and recommendations for actions to advance Canada's innovation and learning capacity" (www.nald.ca/WHATNEW/hnews/2003/hrdcli.htm).

At the same time, the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) submitted its paper, "*Literacy Matters: Why Canada Should Make Adult Literacy and Essential Skills a Policy and Funding Priority*" (found at www.literacy.ca). It was a push for literacy investment as a federal budget priority to bring social, job market, economic, and healthcare dividends. This move to treat individuals with dignity and respect, by providing quality service using the resources necessary, was a cry from front-line workers.



In June 2003, a Parliamentary committee delivered the **Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities** (at www.literacy.ca). It gave 21 hints for building a pan-Canadian Literacy and Essential Skills Strategy. Speaking out for literacy, making it an issue of priority, and building strong partnerships were listed as keys to future success.

The **Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALL)**, known in Canada as the **International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS)**, is expected to release new data in 2004. It will include profiles for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations across Canada (HRDC Information Kit). An NLS initiative, **Valuing Literacy in Canada**, will try to develop adult literacy research capacity, using researcher-practitioner cooperation (HRDC Kit).

The time has surely come for re-evaluating the adult education system. Roles and responsibilities need to be re-examined, redefined, and even perhaps, reassigned. Better access to learning is needed to keep adult literacy skills from decaying. The government must give its supportive, committed response to pleas from partners in literacy across the nation. Its decisions need to be based on human needs more than dollar figures. Collaboration through a host of projects, research, programs, and practices has already provided a wealth of learning.



For further study: For a Canadian literacy organization list, go to www.literacy.ca/lac/contacts.htm For an adult literacy funding and delivery overview, check out the information at www.literacy.ca/litand/overview.htm Go to www.nald.ca for national programs & research. NLS-funded projects appear at www.nald.ca/nls/nlsfund/projects.htm Information about MCL is located at www.literacy.ca

What is the Provincial Perspective on Adult Literacy & Best Practices?

Provinces still hold the jurisdiction for education and training. Each develops its own delivery system, while the federal government influences policy. Various stakeholders want programs and policies to be created through a "literacy lens" to allow maximum adult literacy support, beyond a labour market development scheme. These groups wish to present key issues for resolution in adult literacy talks with the current Minister of Education (Madeleine Dubé.)

The government needs to act soon on its ten-year **Prosperity Plan** aimed at developing a fully literate society. Before the province's "*Quality Learning Agenda*" was tabled, a strong community-based commitment to learners fuelled the adult literacy field in New Brunswick (NB). Simply stated, it was seeing a need and finding some way to address it. Teachers saw daily that education level did *not* guarantee literacy proficiency. Instructors wanted to make a difference in individual lives. Over time, programs gained experience in meeting local literacy needs of adults as the number and variety of programs increased (SLN, i). Best practices were often limited by cost, relevance, expertise, and resources at hand. Organizations were burdened by budget constraints and worker burnout. Some viewed program delivery as "patchwork" services in a bilingual province.

The educational focus here has been more on children than adults. OECD's newest report, *Education at a Glance*, provides 2001 statistics from 30 member countries (from www.oecdpublications.gfi-nb.com). Though Canadian 15-year-olds ranked second *internationally* in reading literacy, *provincially* those in New Brunswick stood last. Younger, more than older, adults have traditionally been targeted for workplace training (HRDC, *Gilbert*, 25). As adult literacy becomes embedded in other issues, funding must be improved and residents encouraged to participate in lifelong learning trends.



The 1989 LSUDA (Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities) survey showed a profile of literacy skills, ranking us second to Nova Scotia in Atlantic Canada. The link between literacy and education hinted at a higher payoff of high school graduation in NB than elsewhere (Statistics Canada, *A NB Snapshot*, 17). A difference in the literacy levels between our adult *Anglophone* and *Francophone* populations was cause for concern.



The 1994 **IALS** findings were mirrored in NB. Jobs were disappearing in fishing, forestry, and mining. *Increases* for information technology (IT) experience were appearing. *Decreases* in traditional low literacy jobs were evident. NB reading practices were weaker than in the rest of Canada (Stats Canada, *A NB Snapshot*, 54). Literacy affected employment success. Job creations continued to offer low-paying, labour-intense, short-term employment. Most did not require reading at work or prepare workers for jobs on the rise (NBCL, 1).

Some notable events for adult literacy in New Brunswick took place:

- ⇒ In 1983, the Saint John Human Development Council developed an adult literacy pilot project. In 1984, the **Saint John Learning Exchange** was established as a nonprofit adult literacy education centre to meet needs in the greater Saint John area.
- ⇒ In 1988, the **New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy (NBCL)**, now the **Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick (LCNB)** was formed to increase literacy in partnership with provincial and federal government, business and labour, learners and practitioners, universities, and community organizations.
- ⇒ In 1989, the **Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick (FANB)** was established to promote literacy in French in the province.
- ⇒ In 1998, the **Provincial Partners for Literacy (PPL)** was established as an advisory group to the Minister of Education. Representation from LCNB, FANB, LNBI , LLNB, TED, DOE, learners, and the NB Literacy Secretariat forms its working group.
- ⇒ In November 2002, the PPL made this list of recommendations to the Minister of Education, for which they are still awaiting a response:
 - ✿ Adopt a new vision for literacy: "a fully literate New Brunswick."
 - ✿ Entrench adult literacy in legislation.
 - ✿ Consolidate adult literacy under the supervision of one department.
 - ✿ Establish an adequate provincial budget for adult literacy.
 - ✿ Improve interdepartmental communication around issues of adult literacy.

- ❖ Continue government recognition of literacy efforts.
- ❖ Keep pace with changing needs in adult literacy.
- ❖ Respect the cultural and linguistic diversity of adult learners.
- ❖ Maximize cost-effectiveness by creating lifelong learning centres or offering existing facilities for adult literacy programs.
- ❖ Continue to work with the literacy community.
(Jan Greer Langley's summary posted on NBCL site at
www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/NB/NBCL/election/recomm1.pdf)

Satisfied learners have become the programs' best promotion. Low-level learners are usually referred to local volunteers for intense one-on-one tutoring. Formal program intakes of higher-level learners have been thought to offer a better chance for success in fixed time frames (Shohet, 24).

Some practitioners are still trying to sort the links in governing agencies, as mandates and boundaries have often been unclear. Collaboration and camaraderie are helping to raise awareness that literacy is everyone's responsibility.

Literacy New Brunswick Inc. (LNBI) controls funding for the **Community Academic Services Programs (CASP)** model, which offers basic and intermediate academic upgrading literacy services. CASPs provide learning opportunities in many local settings, offering adults a chance to work at their own pace through varied teaching/learning strategies. To date, CASPs have been in danger of closing due to fluctuating student numbers and unstable funding. Literacy programs have tended to be short-term in nature. Student recruitment/retention and bureaucratic conflict have been common problems.

Barriers to participation must be studied. Urban and rural adult students have different goals and needs. Program outcomes should be defined. If NB is to build on its strengths and develop resources, an annual \$500,000 NLS pot is not nearly enough. Dependency on project funding has limited the ability to focus on service provision. This has placed undue stress on workers *and* students. The literacy community will not rule out public-private partnerships if government fails to provide adequately. Ongoing debate about the best way to get funding and resources still occurs.



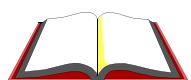


Kay Curtis, provincial literacy coordinator for the NBCC-Woodstock region, told me of the needs that some facilitators and coordinators identified:

- ✚ more availability of curriculum resources that are adult-relevant
- ✚ more funding to allow for student field trips, outings, and site resources
- ✚ full access to transportation, childcare, and books for learners
- ✚ more recognition for facilitator expertise (= more pay and benefits)
- ✚ more opportunities for fully paid professional development and further education (e.g. learning styles/learning disabilities training, and upgrading of qualifications)
- ✚ more computers, software training, and access to Internet hook-ups
- ✚ better facilities and working conditions (more standardized)
- ✚ realization in educational services, that adult students need to learn from a functioning level rather than a grade completion level

There is a current move toward the formation of a CASP facilitator network. Its establishment will be useful in dealing with participant concerns within the CASP delivery system.

Francophone communities can apply for funding from NLS or Heritage Canada as **Official Languages Minority Communities (OLMC)** (HRDC Kit). There is a need to secure long-term funding to develop best practices, improve access, and create new program initiatives for both language sectors. Building on the strengths and sound practices already present will enrich literacy activities. Studying pilot projects from other provinces and revising our practices in response to program reviews will supply us with a wide range of successful delivery guidelines.



New Brunswickers need empowerment and government has the means to secure it, through a more direct role. A study commissioned by the PPL, called "*Comprehensive Training Needs Assessment for Literacy in New Brunswick*" (available at www.nald.ca/nbclhom.htm), was released publicly in November 2002.

Known as the **Landal Report**, it is an exposé on the state of literacy training in NB, pointing out gaps in support that learners and teachers receive. The report outlines 24 recommended actions dealing with strategy vision, integration of existing skills and expertise, recruitment and participation, delivery structure, curriculum, and human resources:

1. Develop a provincial literacy strategy.
2. Give support to a literacy champion who'd become the literacy spokesperson.
3. Develop a pan-Canadian literacy awareness campaign.
4. Adopt an integrated, collaborative approach.
5. Integrate skills and expertise of literacy NGOs.
6. Benefit from the best practices in other sectors.
7. Facilitate the sharing of best practices.
8. Create a tracking database of participants.
9. Reform and simplify the delivery structure.
10. Update the definition of roles and responsibilities.
11. Clarify the role of volunteers.
12. Evaluate and assign responsibilities for consistency, accountability, and effectiveness.
13. Develop a regional referral system for learners.
14. Adopt standards across the province to ensure quality and consistency.
15. Arrange access to tools and materials for teachers.
16. Develop a budget to accommodate the need of staff, equipment, and resources.
17. Develop standardized curriculums in both languages.
18. Assess teacher skills.
19. Recognize CASP teaching experience as teacher equivalency.
20. Protect long-term teachers, via a grandfather clause, from penalties or discrimination for teaching skills, by providing opportunities to upgrade.
21. Detect learning disorders by supplying teachers with specific training.
22. Establish teaching approaches for learning disorders.
23. Assessment of learning disabilities.
24. Develop a mechanism for recognition of volunteers.
(Landal, 53-58).

The PPL condensed the Landal Report into a document called "*Provincial Partners for Literacy-Report to the Government of New Brunswick*," presented to the Minister of Education in November 2002 (NBCL, *Annual Report*, 2).



For further study: PPL's "Literacy Programs in New Brunswick Survey" directory appears at www.nald.ca/NBLiteracyprograms/. Provincial literacy contacts and research can be located at www.nald.ca/nald-nb/. The Literacy Coalition's new e-bulletin can be found at www.nb.literacy.ca by clicking on the Literacy News Bulletin link.

How does Adult Education Influence Literacy Best Practice?

Adult literacy shares many common themes with adult education:

- ◆ professional development and funding shortage
 - ◆ volunteer usage
 - ◆ partnership
 - ◆ diversity
 - ◆ service duplication

These two overlapping fields (adult education and adult literacy) must do better to address future global needs in changing times. Stakeholders in the collaborative process will be educators, learners, policymakers, government members, program managers, businesses, and community organizations who value learning. There are several key elements to ensure success:

- ◆ Respecting and supporting students as individuals
 - ◆ Raising public awareness
 - ◆ Developing program infrastructure
 - ◆ Cultivating professionalization
 - ◆ Establishing service improvement

Quality literacy programs are always accountable to learners, community partners, sponsoring organizations, and funders (LLSC, 1-10). They follow policies and procedures that deal with:

- personnel
- finance
- access
- referral
- promotion
- recruitment
- safety
- evaluation
- assessment
- coordination
- accountability
- program
- community outreach
- planning

Adult literacy education reacted to the needs of individuals and society by offering basic skills of reading and writing. Often seen as continued schooling, it's used the same teaching materials and strategies. More pro-active methods are being adopted as experience in the field grows. Adult education's history, theories, and learning principles have helped to inform literacy's choices. This is how adult students can expect to receive the best practices that we have to offer.

The History of Adult Education in Canada

"The story of adult education over the past two centuries is intimately linked with the struggle of humanity for freedom and dignity, for progress and development—for the good life" (Selman, 15). It was rooted in ordinary people's experiences. Whether formal or informal, for credit or not, adult education pursued learning activities to improve abilities, qualifications, knowledge, attitudes, or values. Education developed as a people's movement to improve the quality of life, promoting "citizen participation, social justice, and equality" (Selman, 16). It was education plus organization to change economic conditions for individuals (Spencer, 33). Competition of aims, purpose, and priorities often brought tension (Selman, 16). Adult education (AE) was often seen as a social activity with a purpose.



Canada's history of educating adults had its beginnings "in the military and... church and in developing citizenship" (Thomas, 325). Its growth was influenced by several developments:

- Farmers' and Women's Institutes
 - Frontier College
 - libraries, credit unions, co-ops
 - the Antigonish Movement
 - technology
 - the National Film Board of Canada
 - CBC radio
 - self-help groups
 - publicly-sponsored night school
- (Draper, 33-76)



"Adult educator" described anyone who helped adults to learn something. They've been called trainers, instructors, facilitators, mentors, tutors, teachers, and coordinators. Frontier College's labourer-teacher model lived and worked with students in railway and lumber camps. Moses Coady, Father Jimmy Tompkins, Adelaide Hoodless, Roby Kidd, and Alexander Laidlaw are noted contributors to adult education in Canada. Providing learning opportunities and social activities for the ordinary people in community study groups, citizens' forums, homemaker groups, universities, homes, and co-ops forged their names in history.

The focus was on *what worked best* in the learning moment, more than field consensus. Time and opportunity for professional development was often missing. Pioneers had a strong work ethic, yet often worked from a personal values system. By continually examining models, how well they "fit" was being determined.

Becoming effective instructors involved understanding how adults learn. Roby Kidd (1959) identified a difference in the kind of learning between youth and adults (Thomas, 336). Other research and practice led to the idea that educating adults required a different teaching method. Malcolm Knowles (US educator), the father of andragogy, changed the role of "teacher" to one of "facilitator."

Andragogy soon became the science of studying the way *adults* learn and **pedagogy**, the way *children* learn. Traditional literacy programs had always used a *pedagogical* approach, with a teacher-centred learning environment. The instructor determined the curriculum, designed and delivered lessons, and evaluated student progress with little or no input from learners. Many adult educators are now shifting to this *andragogical* approach, where teaching and learning becomes more collaborative in nature. There is an ongoing debate between the variances in these two teaching approaches on the basis of purpose, activities, and educational quality. The following chart highlights some of the differences:

Teacher-Centred (PEDAGOGY)	Learner-Centred (ANDRAGOGY)
Learners are dependent, directed by teachers (PASSIVE learners)	Learners are independent and self-directed (ACTIVE learners)
Learners are externally motivated (e.g., competition and rewards)	Learners are internally driven (e.g., interested in learning for its own sake)
Formal environment with planning, value judgment, and assessment done by the teacher	Non-formal environment with teacher & student showing mutual respect and collaborating in planning & assessment
"Transfer of knowledge" for absorption of material (e.g., lectures, assigned readings), where students are expected to "regurgitate" the subject matter	"Construction of knowledge" methods for critical thinking (e.g., inquiry projects, independent studies, experiential learning)
External evaluation methods (using standardized tests, grades, quizzes)	Evaluation by self-assessment methods

(Modified from a chart at <http://www2.merlin.mb.ca/~alce/Mod2.htm>)

Adult Learning Theory

Learning stems from a need to make sense of life's experiences, by giving meaning to whatever 'sense' we make of them (MacKeracher, 6). "All education involves learning, but not all learning involves education" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 6). It can come in non-traditional ways outside of formal institutions. The method chosen depends on whether one wants surface or deeper-level learning (Smith, 52). Relationships, self-understanding, and personal interpretations can fuel learning. Stress can block it. Adult learning can be restricted by several things:

- physical and emotional factors
- visual or hearing loss
- ill health
- negative prior learning experiences
- low self-esteem
- poor memory
- lack of motivation
- learning pace

We may not fully understand all there is to know about adult learning, but we are gaining ground. Cognitive theories of learning grew out of psychology because learning was believed to be a reorganization of one's perceptions. Other studies conceived it to be the result of association, connections, and habit formations. This latter view was a matter of repetition, manipulation, and chance rather than construction and perception.

The **adult learning cycle** involves *doing* (experiential learning), *reflecting* (processing personal observations and feelings), *generalizing* (meaning-making), and *applying* (taking action in real-life situations).

Kolb (1981) emphasized **experiential learning** as foundational in adults and worked on learning styles for continuous lifelong learning (Smith, 33). Accumulation of experiences across the lifespan is the chief difference between learning in adulthood and learning in childhood. "People's experience of life rapidly teaches them not just about the content but also about the process of learning" (Smith, 40). It's not always *transfer* of knowledge, but *construction* of knowledge. (E.g., Teaching adults to read involves more than just knowing letters, phonics, and words. To understand what's read, adults need to have some content-specific knowledge they can apply.) Adult learning must be problem and experience-centred (Brookfield, 1986). How we draw meaning from our experience is culturally framed and shaped. This new understanding requires that learning programs be structured differently and that teaching and learning roles be redefined.

Learning to learn (becoming skilled at learning in a variety of situations through a range of different styles) is an adult education theory. In it, educators must help adults to develop insight into their habitual ways of learning. Smith's research (1990) used learner awareness, self-organization, and self-monitoring skills to bring understanding. Teaching techniques foster such skills. Guiding people away from passive reliance on instructors helps them to become active, reflective individuals capable of choosing learning strategies that are suitable to whatever tasks confront them (Smith, cover flap). This theory was seen as a role of formal schooling institutions, but it's being revisited in some lifelong learning projects emphasizing practical intelligence.

Learning theories often focus on *what* is being learned more than *who* is learning and *why*. Allowing for differences in prior knowledge and skills can inform teaching practices and influence program outcomes. Thinking about *why* we do what we do helps us to become better adult educators. "Philosophy encompasses the principles, values and attitudes that structure our beliefs and guide our behaviours in our work as well as in the whole of our daily life" (Draper, 57). What's been learned from research already informs how many adult educators practice their craft. No one theory can explain all facets of the learning process. Some theories complement each other and with continuing practice, new theories may evolve. All of the following approaches still exist in some form or other:

- **The liberal (or traditional) perspective** arose out of early Greek thought on developing the intellect and morals. An ability to think, reason, question, and make wise judgments was part of this broad-based general education. Its "academic excellence" model used a teacher-centred approach to develop the power of the person. Hirsch (1988) promoted a culture-based literacy. (e.g. liberal arts, religious training)
- **The behavioural (or vocational) perspective** grew from Skinner's stimulus response work, a mechanics-based theory of learning. It presents short-term education for job preparation. Its aim is behavioural change, precision, and competency-based training. Learning tasks have measurable objectives matching pre-set standards. Sticht(1975, 1978) saw job training as a means of individual and national economic growth.(e.g. computer or military training, certification exams) Early workplace programs used this theory in a team-teaching approach.

- The **humanistic perspective** focusses on personal growth and development in values, beliefs, and attitudes. A theory of Knowles (1984) and Brookfield (1986) was that students succeed when they're confident in their ability to learn and take responsibility for it. Self-evaluation and group discussion are used to "bring out the best in people." (e.g. assertiveness training courses).
- The **radical (or liberatory) philosophy** grew out of Marxist-socialist ideas of education as a means of social and political change. Consciousness-raising in daily life experiences empowers students to take ownership for social action. Freire (1970) promoted "knowledge as power" as a means of freedom for the oppressed (e.g., feminist studies, social justice education, and emancipatory learning.)
- The **developmental theory** highlights stages of human development and the role they play in learning. Cross (1981) felt that there were differences in *when* people chronologically reached a stage where they're ready to learn at a higher level. The work of Perry (1970) and Mezirow (1978) supported this notion (e.g., self-directed learning.) (TCALL, 3) (Draper, 58-62).

Malcolm Knowles, (1950-1970) was instrumental in the concept of developing programs for people who wanted to learn. To him, caring about learners' interests was more important than any other belief of what might interest learners. His ideas went beyond the 'maturing mind' theories of adult education. He felt that adult students tend to experience more **self-directed learning** (ability to take responsibility for their own learning). They learn things they need to know on a daily basis, setting their own goals, finding resources, choosing methods, and evaluating results. Self-directedness does not always carry through or succeed in every learning situation. Knowles (1984) noted that adults in formal instruction often return to a conditioned dependency (passive) role, and resent or resist situations where they're expected to take responsibility for learning (Smith, 123). When this happens, educators may have to foster the self-directed approach.

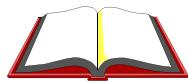
This democratic theory to work toward maturity and modernization through self-directed learning met with resistance by those who supported the traditional lecture approach. His methods included: cooperative learning climates, learner needs and interests inquiries, learning objectives to match learner needs, sequential learning activities, and quality evaluations.

Zinn (1983) designed the **Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory (PAEI)**, based on five philosophies practised by adult educators. The following chart describes them:

	Liberal	Behaviorist	Progressive	Humanistic	Radical
Purpose	-to develop powers of intellect by seeking knowledge	-to promote behavioral change to meet society standard & expectations	-to promote the individual's role in society, for well-being of society	-to facilitate personal growth and development	-to promote social, political, & economic change thru education
Educator Role	-educator "expert" directs the learning & has full authority (Socrates, Plato)	-educator "manages" environmental standards-based learning & directs it to mastery levels (Skinner)	-educator "organizes" & guides learning & evaluates it for highly motivated self-directed learners (Dewey, Spencer)	-educator "facilitates" learning, & doesn't direct it; "partners" with learners (Knowles, Mezirow, Maslow)	-educator "coordinates" & suggests but doesn't direct, as an equal partner in learning (Freire,)
Methods	-use lecture, study groups, and discussion	-use vocational programmed instruction, contract learning & computer-guided lessons	-use problem-solving, scientific method, & cooperative learning	-use group discussion, team teaching, individualized learning, and the discovery method	-embraces non-compulsory learning & de-schooling, and uses exposure to the media and people in real-life situations

(Developed from website www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/aee521/class09/boone.html)

In his revised book (1970), "The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy," Malcolm Knowles wrote about adult education:



The only hope now seems to be a crash program to retool the present generation of adults with the competencies required to function adequately in a condition of perpetual challenge. This is the deep need — the awesome challenge — presented to the adult educator by modern society. . . At its best an adult learning experience should be a process of self-directed inquiry, with the resources of the teacher, fellow students, and materials being available to the learner but not imposed on him (sic)" (Carlson, <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Knowles.html>, 5).

Jack Mezirow (1991) is responsible for a movement away from skills-based learning to **transformative learning**, "a critically reflective process by which one changes assumptions, beliefs, values, or perspectives, making them more open and better justified" (Patricia Cranton). He promoted this *emancipatory learning* as the goal of adult education. (Professor Mezirow has been a consultant/advisor on global adult literacy projects.) Life events trigger reflection on meaning schemes and self-questioning. Discussion, group activities, personal conditions, and sensitivity to others fuel the process.

Transformative learning occurs in one of four ways:

1. learning a new frame of reference (how one sees the world and interprets experience)
2. elaborating on an existing frame of reference
3. transforming points of view
4. transforming habits of mind (predisposed to interpreting experiences in a certain way based on cultural, ethical, moral, or philosophical principles)

Dirkx (1997) developed a holistic concept of transformative learning that involves "**nurturing soul in adult learning**." It isn't teaching or facilitating, but recognizing the subconscious as operational in imagination, creativity, and intuition. In this approach, caring for physical space and spirituality becomes important. "Learning through soul occurs most readily in environments rich with metaphor, story, images, art, music, film, and poetry" (Dirkx, 87).

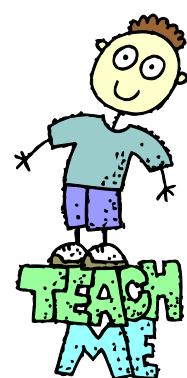
Cross-cultural adult learning evolved around 'natural' experiential adult learning and the multicultural needs of the 90s for 'teaching their own.' Brookfield (1990) discovered that adults tend to feel more comfortable and do better when taught by educators drawn from their own ethnic communities. (A. Tuinjman, at <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/AdultLearning.html>) This might be relevant for First Nations literacy programs.



Distance learning covers correspondence studies as well as the new online programs. It uses collaboration and critical thinking in adult learning. The Internet offers new possibilities for improving infrastructure for literacy across the country.

Adult Learners and Learning Styles/Strategies

The minimum age for defining adult learners varies by country. It may be as low as 16 if employed or as high as 25 (OECD, *Beyond*, 23). They cannot always be lumped together on the basis of age. Differences in culture, personality, learning style, life experiences, gender, spirituality, and personal motivation define adult diversity. Learners will have different **reasons for coming** to programs. It might be to make something of self, to make a difference in their children's lives, or even to show others they can do it (Ziegler & Durant, 3). Learners tend to view literacy from a fundamental slant, yet, enter programs for job-related reasons.



Goal-oriented learners want to know *how* to do a specific task needed for immediate "life application" circumstances. It may be about getting a GED, driver's licence, better job, or legal help. "Trigger" events, such as birth of a child, death of a spouse, divorce, or loss of a job often bring on the need for learning.
Activity-oriented learners come for pleasure or social opportunities. They may want to escape from boredom or other stressful life details. **Learning-oriented** learners come for the joy of learning, to satisfy an inquiring mind. The learning process and environment are important in keeping them. Inappropriate materials may factor in dropout rates.

Learning styles are "the choice methods that adults use for learning." These preferences might consider environment, structure, time, or participation level. Knowing your strengths and how you learn best can be important for students and teachers. Learning results may be better when a variety of methods are used.

Knowles (1990) and other educators stated that people keep:

- 20% of what they **hear** (e.g., lecture)
- 30% of what they **see** (e.g., demonstration, visual aid)
- 50% of what they **see and hear** (e.g., face-to-face talk)
- 70% of what they **see, hear, & say** (e.g., video group discussion)
- 90% of what they **see, hear, say, and do** (e.g., role play)

Learning strategies vary from memorization to **critical reflection** (using logic, intelligence, judgment, reasoning, and questioning to define meaning or decide action). Reflection is the exploratory and discovery means for turning experience into learning. It happens in autobiographical writing, discussion, or learning conversations (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 7).

With all that changes, learning *continues* throughout life, responding to roles, relationships, curiosity, interests, conditions, and demands. It comes from work exposure, self-directed study, formal training, travel, family, culture, and life experiences. People learn at different speeds. Some adopt the general (holistic) approach of concept-comprehension, while others try to master details in an operation-learning, serial-like approach (Entwistle, 93).

Flexibility may be more important than holding to any single theory of learning or teaching. Because of responsibilities that adults balance with learning, there are many **barriers to participation** that prevent learners from fully participating or benefiting from programs (SLN, 1-44). Some could be: lack of money, time, confidence, interest, transportation, and childcare provision.

Constructivism is a teaching/learning approach based on brain research, where learning is seen as a “mental construct.” In it, “students learn by fitting new information together with what is already known/experienced. Teaching uses varied strategies and global patterns. Constructivists believe that learning is affected by the context in which an idea is taught as well as by students’ beliefs and attitudes” (NCREL).

Adult Education and Teaching Literacy

Before adult education training existed, **ABE** drew from different pools of experience. Some ABE practitioners had left the K-12 public school system. In the 50s and 60s, *degrees* in adult education appeared on the Canadian university scene.

British Columbia and Ontario universities offered the first, while Quebec offered the first *certificate* in adult literacy (Shohet, 22). **Accreditation** and credentials are hot issues in adult literacy service delivery. Until a national standard is set, short-term contracts without job security or benefits may be the norm (Shohet, 23). ("Developing as a profession involves networking and exchange." Strategies for developing as such are at www.literacy.ca/public/litca/fall03/page2.htm)

Brookfield (1995) suggested four critically reflective lenses for "seeing" our teaching practice differently:

- ① Our own eyes: Writing a teaching/learning journal can help us to define perspectives if we don't deny or distort what we see.
- ② Our students' eyes: Using anonymous questionnaires in environments that breed trust and comfort will provide feedback on methods and materials used. Discovering what engages or distances learners is valuable. The teaching actions that affirm learning are confirmed.
- ③ Our co-workers' eyes: Talking with peers provides a forum for sharing perspectives and action plans.
- ④ Our field's literature: Reading the latest research and development articles can keep us informed on new understandings and explanations (Rocco, 1).

Developing policies that take the special needs of adults into consideration is important for overall effectiveness. During the discourse, there's been a shift from *teacher*-centred to *learner*-centred instruction. The educator's role has undergone an important change:

- from teaching *content* to responding to *individual needs*.
- from information-giving and skills-competency to participatory education
- from a teaching function/role (*sharing* from our heads), to a teaching feeling/response (*caring* from our hearts).

What emerges is often not what we *know* (as in course content) but who we *are*.

A **learner-centred approach** focussing on prior experiences makes learning more meaningful for personal growth, employment, and citizenship. In the switch, debate often centres on the power balance. Learners will shift from being "consumers of knowledge" to "producers of information and knowledge" (Morin, 69). Holistic education encourages and guides us into the future and can expand funding sources.



Mentoring enhances the learning experience in everyday interactions. By assuming the role of challenger, sponsor, coach, listener, nurturer, or role model, learner needs can be met. *Positive reinforcement* and *plain language use* will enhance learning.

Traditional education is being rejected, though some still believe its methods are the road to improved job opportunities. However, research shows that learners often return to the same low-paying, temporary jobs held before literacy program enrollment (Malicky & Norman, 80). As adult literacy students experience success and slowly develop confidence, they become more self-directed and independent, a basic principle of adult education (Malicky & Norman, 82).

Collaborative learning methods are being adopted to enhance participant self-conception and provide more meaningful, collective learning. Collaboration is also a component of **progressive education**, supporting responsible participation in society, by developing real-life problem-solving skills. It begins with an assessment of learner needs, values prior experiences, and encourages field trips and projects. Teachers take on the role of organizers or guides.



Functional context education uses a curriculum for the practical knowledge essential to improve personal, family, workplace, and community status. Early literacy programs focussed on the fundamentals of reading and writing skills. In a community-based literacy program, teachers might view literacy from a functional perspective, yet offer programs that are fundamental in nature (Malicky & Norman, 63). Functional literacy programs would deal with acquiring the skills in a learner's context of need (e.g., at home or at work.) Interest is growing among adults for practical knowledge.

With the increase in adult learners, there is a demand for **community-based learning**. Futures are no longer predictable. Forecasting, estimating, inventing, reflecting, discussing, and using different techniques prepares us for the options.

Adult educators will become designers, using a variety of informal delivery models. Teachers, more than technology or strategies, are seen as program strengths by adult literacy students, who value their help and explanations given (Malicky & Norman, 81). Teaching philosophies inform course content and delivery. How we view literacy, why we think it's important, and our program purposes are shown in our teaching methods:

- A *liberal* approach might use a lecture followed by a true & false quiz.
- A *behaviourist* would use sequential learning modules for task-oriented skills (like spelling strategies). Everyone must pass through the same curriculum.
- A *progressive* strategy might be a group project on the community's history.
- *Humanists* may have students write life stories, journals, or develop portfolios. Responses to literature read are encouraged.
- A *radical* approach might use role play, debate teams, and dialogue activities.

It is possible that there is a gap between our definitions of literacy, programs we provide, and practices we use. There may even be a discrepancy between what we believe *should* be done and what we *are* doing. Reluctance to participate in educational research or to connect with its findings widens this gap. Constraint within learners, institutions, or facilitators determines practice. (E.g., If a program goal is to increase learner self-esteem, preparing students for academic programs using traditional language arts education may not be the best practice).

Adult Learning Principles and Best Practices

Adults prefer **problem-centred learning** that actively engages them. It must have direct applications to real-world situations. Students bring prior experiential learning to bridge to new learning, which they want control over. Learning at different rates and in different ways will ensure maximum learner input and choice. Students require time and teaching flexibility, as well as ongoing feedback.

There are adult learning principles to guide all literacy activities. The list of principles that follows was developed by combining information that appears in a number of sources (Brookfield, 1986; Imel, 1998; Knowles, 1992; Vella, 1994). No single one will be the best in every situation, but some are valid in spite of variables. Finding the right mix for your community and learners is important in delivering effective programs and working toward continued improvement.

Some best practices that should be in place for adult literacy services are:

- Operating accessible learner-centred programs that link to lifelong and workplace learning
- Establishing partnerships to provide funding and support in offering essential literacy services
- Hiring educators with multitasking abilities (evaluating, planning, advising, teaching, advocating, researching, and facilitating the learning)
- Involving learners in decision-making, program design, and evaluation
- Ensuring flexibility for adult time commitments
- Providing a learning environment conducive to learning
- Structuring learning to build upon students' prior knowledge, skills, and experiences
- Developing learning tasks that actively engage adult participants
- Showing respect and ensuring equity for all as *adult* learners
- Accommodating different learning styles
- Using materials and resources relevant to adults
- Conducting ongoing program and learner evaluation

Best practices seek to make learning relevant, effective, and enjoyable. They are not meant to be mandatory or to force all programs to become clone-like. They are useful in developing program frameworks for serving adult literacy students. Adult learning principles dealing with learning environment, instructional approach, and resources dictate these best practices.

BEST PRACTICES FOR AN ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

- **Community-based programs** make it convenient for transportation, childcare, and scheduling flexibility for adults most in need of services. Familiar, local surroundings lessen learner embarrassment and make access easier for disabled students. Local partnerships can be formed, as local needs are addressed.
- **Program sites** should consider privacy, comfort, and availability in being “adequately serviced and equipped to meet administrative, instructional, and program support needs” (Department of Education and Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador). Less outside noise and interruptions provide a better learning environment.
- Program management should consider any barriers to participation in the selection of a site. (E.g., a local school may be centrally located, but not provide privacy to parents whose children attend there. Also, it may not be open to offer evening classes on a regular basis.)
- **Non-threatening environments** that are friendly and relaxed are great for adults. Facilities that have convenient washroom access and space for socializing, confidential interviewing, and resource storage are best. Kitchen facilities are bonuses for adult programs (Literacy BC, 11). Ensure that the program has exclusive use of the space. This allows for program security and identity if it's not used in another capacity for part of the time. (This might be difficult if you need to find a rent-free location.)
- Ensure that the **training space** is safe, comfortable, and enjoyable. Avoid cramped quarters. A large, well-lit, furnished room welcomes adults. Provide appropriate seating and work areas. Chairs with proper back support allow those with physical concerns to ease into learning. Long tables (set up in a square, circle, or U-shape) in the room centre will give students larger writing surfaces and a group discussion area.
- **Access:** Is the location accessible by private, public, or program-sponsored transportation? Is the site accessible for persons with disabilities? (Literacy BC, 11).
- **Program Participation:** Participation that is free of charge means

opportunity for all, especially those with limited incomes. The greatest amount of adult learning is done on a voluntary basis. If students come voluntarily, they are more likely to continue to participate. Compulsory attendance places undue pressure on learners that can cause a resistance to learning, a reminder of past failure, or the setting of unrealistic goals. Follow-up on absenteeism offers support contact for learners and validates their participation in learning.

- **Time Flexibility:** Adults need time to balance ongoing family and work responsibilities with a learning schedule. Offering more suitable times ensures larger enrollments. A choice of weekday morning, afternoon, or evening timeslots is best. Summer isn't convenient for adults whose children are home from school, as child care may be costly and hard to secure. Removing time barriers for program completion relieves tension for learners. Literacy programs offering part-time hours give learners a chance to work at their own pace. Workplace programs offered on time-sharing plans during normal working hours are better attended. Family literacy programs must allow for child care needs.
- **Promotion** of literacy achievements is a factor in success. Community events can include awards ceremonies, open houses, reading festivals, book fairs, fund-raisers, poster contests, writing competitions, learner testimonials, and media contacts and launches. Toll-free LEARN lines with call-back options, posters, flyers, and brochures can be set up. Newsletters, displays, referral agencies, and reports will inform area residents. Learner stories in newspapers and recommendations by word-of-mouth are popular methods. Determining which are the best recruitment strategies for attracting students/volunteers is helpful.
- **Participant confidentiality** must be guaranteed. Adult students need the assurance that personal information and progress reports stay within the teacher-student relationship. The adult student holds sole power to make his/her progress public. Nothing should be shared without student consent.
- **Group size** (i.e., a teacher-learner ratio) should consider one-on-one tutoring, catering to special needs, and space accommodations.
- **Targeting specific groups** appears to have better results (e.g., prison inmates, parents with school-aged children, youth, workers, seniors)

(HRDC, *Adult Literacy . . .* 11-12). Learners can be grouped in programs on the basis of age, goals, workplace context, or life experience.

BEST PRACTICES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH WITH ADULTS:

- **Experienced adult educators** are trained in effective record-keeping, evaluation, intervention, and delivery strategies. Competency in working with adult learners is important. Skills in accommodating different learning styles are valuable. Qualified instructors set appropriate learning opportunities for multi-level students. Right mixes of education, training and experience lay a foundation for quality services, and can create opportunities for public speaking engagements. Qualifications must match adult education standards, community needs, agency requirements, and program formats.
- **Mission statements** need to be reviewed and updated regularly by program personnel. The philosophy expressed should be clearly stated. The program's objectives, goals, instructional delivery methods, as well as geographic and target populations should be included (Literacy BC, 9). A quality mission statement needs to be reflected in the program's practice.
- **Respect for learner differences and recognition for equal voice** must be given. Learners need to be treated as adults. They won't ask questions or give opinions if they expect to be put down. Respecting diversity in background, health, income, academic achievement, and ability is important. Discrimination on any basis is unacceptable (e.g., race, gender, disabilities, culture, religious beliefs, attitudes/opinions, values/biases, lifestyle and experiences, family background, social, educational, or economic status). Sensitivity to language, gesturing, or the written word influences mutual understanding (Literacy BC, 16). Learners need open-minded learning environments to enhance self-esteem. Though conflict may arise, it should be "handled in a way that challenges learners to acquire new perspectives and supports them in their efforts to do so" (Imel, 2). Are we, as facilitators, willing to support changes that challenge our own reality and beliefs?
- **Collaboration** lets students share experiences, accomplishments, and views when it occurs in open-minded settings. "Everyone has something to teach and to learn from the other" (Draper, 75). Letting them know

they're entitled to differences, that others may not share, allows room for debate, challenge, and exchange. Adult students must be given 'voice' to feel valued for their ideas and experiences, thereby feeding self-development and self-esteem. Having occasion to say what they want to (both orally and/or in writing) in a supportive environment will help them gain the confidence they need to keep learning on their own.

- **Learner involvement** makes sure that learning matches the reasons for being there. Has he or she come to enhance personal development, job skills, or community involvement? Learner buy-in is secure when they have an active stake in the learning plan used. We must not forget that *the learner is the customer* for whom service is being provided. Adults are usually goal-driven, coming with a purpose in mind for what they *want* and *need* to know. Self-directed learning may be more meaningful. Decision-sharing brings a sense of ownership, leading to empowerment. Student participation might start with their own needs assessment. Sharing on the board, and in the planning, recruitment, evaluation, and teaching process facilitates learning by giving up some teacher control. If learners assess their skills and strategies, opportunities come for reinforcement, review, and awareness. Learners go from passive listeners to active participants. It sets up a base for discussion in a positive teacher-learner relationship. (Note: Learning at their own pace is fine, but some may need extra help.)
- **Prior learning experience** is a key resource. Focussing on strengths they bring, not just gaps in their knowledge is crucial. Individuals have their own wealth of information and skills. Using what they already know becomes the building blocks for learning. Readiness to learn comes from their life situations. Background experiences from home, work, and community can be reinforced and integrated with new information. (Note: In some cases, prior learning experiences interfere with new learning.) Recognition of all learning in formal, non formal, or life experience activities encourages adults to continue to participate in learning. Changes in skill, knowledge, attitude, or behaviour can result.
- **Learner-centred program content** ensures individual interests will be covered. Basic learning plans, activities, and resources are organized

around the learner's needs, goals, and interests (SLN, 1-44). Content and delivery should support and promote the development of practical skills and lifelong learning (SLN, 1-13). Responding to the needs of the learner can start as early as program design.

- **Engagement** is a phenomenon that connects an individual to an experience in a meaningful way" (Ziegler, 4). It stimulates attendance and learning, by working on the learning environment, relationships, or beliefs on teaching and learning that are in place. Relationships between learners, learner-teacher, and learner-family feed mutual respect, success, and acceptance.
- **Self-directed learning** can be a goal of adult literacy programs. Some students may not have this attribute because of their experience with teacher-led learning. Structure the learning to nurture self-directedness. Learners become empowered in a pro-active way (Imel, 2.)
- **Adult learning styles** should be accommodated. Adjusting the teaching to suit student learning styles is crucial. What works best? Is it one method or a combination approach? Multiple strategies might better address individual ideas, feelings, and actions. Are all ways possible? Will the learner benefit most from discussion, tutoring, coaching, self-directed study, field trips, small group work, guest speakers, films and videos, or computer-based training? If one technique doesn't work, find another. Varying the methods can help to reach all preferences. Using participatory, interactive methods may work for a variety of learning preferences. Technique successes vary with different kinds of learners. With some personalities, it may be better to adopt extreme approaches that do not fully match the preferred learning style. Personal teaching experience might dictate the method of choice.
- **Use plain language and simple concepts** or practical examples in instruction to capture student interest. Summarize often to help them retain the material. Consider multi-cultural applications. Encourage discussion, critical thinking, questioning, and creative expression (Literacy BC, 15).
- **Plan frequent breaks**. Adults need to be able to move freely. Providing regular breaks allows for exercise, smoking, and coffee stretches.

- **A teacher role as guide-by-the-side** will help adults to overcome fears and anxieties, so they will grow confident in their ability to learn. Don't spoon-feed them. A teacher needs to put forth the idea that he or she believes that a student is able to learn, in spite of past experiences or learning disabilities. It's a matter of finding the best way for that to happen. Engage learners in a process of co-learning. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding students toward self-directed learning. Strengthening the learner 'voice' creates a pool of convincing support for literacy issues, while laying a base of approachability (when students need to ask questions of teachers). Treat all questions with respect and avoid saying, "I just covered that." The only silly question is the unasked one.
- **Ongoing student assessment** lends accountability, feeds learner awareness, and increases knowledge in the field. Evaluations should vary in format and be done at various points in the program:
 1. At start-up for interests, goals, and strengths for entry placement (e.g. confidential interview, checklist, or Likert-scale questionnaire)
 2. At regular intervals to monitor progress or attitude changes, build self-confidence, and inform goal redefinition . Assessment choices should result from teacher-student collaboration (e.g. projects, journals, exercises, assessment checklists, self-assessments, presentations, or discussions.)
 3. At exit or completion for referral and achievement verification. This might be done in collaboration with someone other than the teacher, so learners can give frank program appraisals (e.g. standardized tests, reflection sheets, life skill demonstrations, or conferences.) Noting success affirms and encourages goal achievement. Learners progress faster when they know what was done well and where to improve. Incentives can take the form of verbal approval or more tangible expressions (e.g., outings, guest of honour celebrations . . .).
- Some materials or groups already have their own unique assessment tools. (E.g. Laubach resources are subject-based and use chapter tests and periodic reviews.) "Spell Read Canada conducts an initial, middle,

and end assessment orally in small group sessions" (Dept. of Education and Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, 69) .

- **Risk-taking and experimentation** are developed through collaboration. Activities should not always require answers for closure. Uncertainty, unanswered questions, inconsistencies, guessing, and problem-finding are acceptable.
- **Small group work** encourages the exploration of feelings and attitudes. "Groups promote teamwork and encourage cooperation and collaboration among learners" (Imel, 2). Seeing how others deal with similar challenges is valuable in learning. Group work values learning from peers and allows each to participate in discussions. Peer support provides valuable feedback and strengthens learner 'voice' in the politics of literacy.

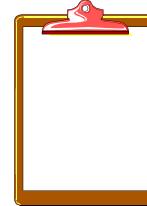
BEST PRACTICES FOR LITERACY RESOURCES:

- **Human resource development**: Facilitators and program volunteers need regular access to training, communication support networks, literacy forums, journals, and in-service workshops as professional development. Such are the means to staying informed on teaching and learning methods, ethics, assessment, and new technology.
- As workers, we do *not* need to know all the answers. We may only know where to go, or who to call to find them. Being provided with sufficient prior orientation familiarizes us with the policies and procedures in place. Ongoing training will allow for personal growth and development in our roles. By sharing successful practices at training opportunities, individual work performances can be improved.
- **An adult-relevant curriculum** is a must. Resources should be free from cultural bias and be context-specific. Materials reflecting real-life challenges on a 'need to know' rather than a 'nice to know' basis are best.
- Supplying a variety of resources matching interests, goals, and workforce needs is important. Using drama, documentaries, movies,

stories, poetry, music, or novels, can lead to engaging dialogue. "Interest-driven reading is key to the development of high literacy levels" (HRDC, *Adult Literacy* . . . , 15.) Resources should expand knowledge and challenge critical thinking skills. Educators should be familiar with the best resources at hand and know how to coordinate their use. Being willing to listen to learner suggestions for other resources is helpful. Accessing local and culturally-relevant resources can bring learner satisfaction.

- **Individualized instruction** starts where the learner is and builds from there. When instruction focusses on a learner's interest and context, it becomes more personally meaningful and practical. Tailoring materials to match learner goals will make the learning more relevant. Be careful not to become preoccupied with serving individuals, to the exclusion of the group. Developing an understanding of different experiences and cultures is valuable.
- *Older* students may be more impatient with activities that they feel aren't useful. They may not want to adjust to new ideas outside their experiences.(Ask the learner to play a role in finding or deciding on the materials to be used. This sets the stage for learner empowerment.)
- **Learner achievements** need to be documented, recognized, and celebrated. These can be used in recruitment or as learning validation. They can increase learner self-confidence and erase past feelings of failure. Students will be more likely to stay until goals are met. A long-term goal will be to get recognition for literacy learning in other programs and educational organizations.
- **Partnerships and support services** can be accessed through a host of partners. Partnerships afford a roundtable for discussion and problem-solving (i.e., locally, provincially, and nationally.) Educators interact to find what counts for learning success in the community. Collaboration and cooperation breed respect and consensus in strong partnerships. Networks provide a strong base of support for community-based literacy programs. Accountability measures should be in place.
- Shared responsibilities for coordination, design, promotion, and funding bring strength. Making formal or informal arrangements with various social agencies also provides valuable links for resource-sharing.

- Referrals to other agencies and services are helpful. Contacts with health centres, educational institutions, women's groups, employment services, career counsellors, mental health workers, libraries, and local businesses help to build stronger networks. Support services such as counselling, financial aid, child care, peer tutoring, free books, learning disabilities assessment, transportation assistance, and absenteeism follow-up improve student retention and attendance.
- **Technology use** may increase interest and enthusiasm in learners. Using computers is often subject to cost, time, training, availability, compatibility to site and staff, and relevance to adult learner needs. Computers should never take the place of group and social interaction.
- **Supplementary tools** facilitate learning for some adults (e.g., large-print books, overhead projectors, videos, coloured overlay transparency sheets, chalkboards, flip charts, or audio tapes.)
- **Program evaluations** give feedback to assure effectiveness and accountability. Evaluations show program-specific progress and problems, while serving as reports for funding sponsors. Evaluations must be completed by instructors, volunteers, and students to show both *quantitative* (measurable in numbers) and *qualitative* (measurable in degree of excellence) success indicators.
Are tutors and instructors pleased with assessment and evaluation methods? Do they have the necessary resources, professional development, and support they need? Do learners take part in planning, assessment, and program delivery? Are they satisfied with the site, instructor, and support services? These evaluations may take the form of written questionnaires, phone surveys, interviews, or group discussions. Sensitivity to literacy and comfort levels is crucial when asking for learner feedback (SLN, vi).



Summary for Best Practices

Following adult education principles, ABE literature, research, and program and practitioner feedback, there are several recommendations for best practice:

- * Build effective, committed partnerships to share resources and responsibilities
- * Create a climate of trust and respect that encourages and supports learning
- * Foster a spirit of collaboration in the learning setting
- * Involve adult learners in planning and implementing learning activities that are student-centred (using a participatory approach)
- * Draw upon students' prior learning experience as a resource
- * Cultivate and nurture the development of self-directedness in learners
- * Use small groups with adults for learning activities
- * Design and/or use instructional materials that are based on students' lives, focussing on where people are at
- * Develop meaningful assessment and evaluation strategies
- * Ensure access to learning opportunities through inclusive activities and programs
- * Provide adequate, long-term, secure funding and supportive referral services

An overall conclusion is that there is no one way to deliver adult literacy services. Standards might provide a framework for adaptation. Programs should create cooperative, participatory settings. If we're to reach and retain more students, we may need to change our thinking on learning. Traditional school models may need to be exchanged for others that address the realities of adult lives.

Learning is most effective if it's learner-centred, directed by learners, and related to learners' real needs. *Contextualized or theme-based learning* (where materials draw on actual problems/experiences of learners) makes it more relevant. Learners gain awareness of their circumstances and their ability to make changes. Small group work feeds collaboration and gives a context where adults can use literacy skills (Imel, 3-4). Fostering critical reflection and self-directedness in learners needs to be the focus of our efforts.

These best practices evolved from a consensus of stakeholder perspectives. Using them, innovative approaches, and collaboration will guide us in making any necessary changes. Even if much of what's currently in place *is* bringing success, we should not be afraid to ask, "What else *can* be done?" It mustn't be change for change's sake, but change for the advancement of literacy for all.

Summary of the Literature Reviewed

Author & Date	Title of Literature	Descriptive Summary
Department of Education and Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (2001, February)	<u>Report on the Evaluation of Basic Literacy/ABE Level 1 Programs in Newfoundland and Labrador.</u> Prepared by Goss Gilroy Inc. (110 pgs.). Full text available at: www.gov.nf.ca/edu/literacy/report.htm	<u>The ABE Perspective in another province:</u> - identifies <i>what is working well and gaps that need to be addressed</i> in basic literacy (Level 1-ABE) programs in Newfoundland and Labrador
House of Commons, Judi Longfield, M.P., Chair (2003, June)	<u>RAISING ADULT LITERACY SKILLS: THE NEED FOR A PAN-CANADIAN RESPONSE</u> <u>Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities</u> (116 pgs. =1514 KB)	<u>The National Perspective:</u> -contains <i>21 recommendations for developing a Pan-Canadian literacy strategy</i>
(HRDC) Human Resources Development Canada (2000)	<u>Adult literacy: policies, programs and practices.</u> Lessons learned. Final report. Based on a technical paper by Dr. Kathryn Barker of <i>FuturEd</i> . (28 pgs.) (Doc. # SP-AH113E-03-00).	<u>The National Perspective:</u> -deals with problems associated with adult literacy, policy & research, programs & practices, and <i>adult literacy lessons learned</i>
(HRDC) Human Resources Development Canada (2002)	<u>Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians</u> (60 pgs.) Available at: http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/sp-ps/sl-ca/doc/report.shtml	<u>The National Perspective:</u> -a discussion document outlining goals, milestones and <i>targets for improving skills and learning in Canada</i>

Author & Date	Title of Literature	Descriptive Summary
Imel, Susan (1998)	<u>Using Adult Learning Principles in Adult Basic and Literacy Education</u> ERIC Practice Application Brief. (6 pages), at www.ericacve.org/docs/pab00008.htm	<u>Adult Education Principles:</u> -how adult education principles can be used in adult basic and literacy education (ABLE)
Landal Inc. For Provincial Partners in Literacy (PPL) (2002)	<u>Comprehensive Training Needs Assessment for Literacy in New Brunswick</u> (77 pgs.) Available at: www.nald.ca/nbclhom.htm	<u>The Provincial Perspective:</u> -outlines the state of literacy services in New Brunswick and lists 24 recommendations for government action
Literacy BC (1999)	<u>The BC Framework of Statements and Standards of Best Practices in Family Literacy</u> (16 pgs.), at www.nald.ca/FULLTEXT/framework/toc.htm	<u>Family Literacy Standards Perspective:</u> -focusses on best practices for family literacy, from field input in the province of BC
Literacy Link South Central (1999)	<u>A Collection of Policy and Procedure Templates</u> (176 pgs. = 1927 KB), at www.llsc.on.ca/	<u>A Policy Perspective:</u> -manual gives starting templates for use in drafting policy for a literacy & basic skills program
Malicky, Grace V. and Norman, Charles A. (1995, March)	<u>Perceptions of literacy and adult literacy programs.</u> In <i>the Alberta Journal of Educational Research</i> , Vol. XLI, No. 1. pgs.63-83, at www.nald.ca/fulltext/pat/march95/	<u>The Literacy Instructor and Learner Perspective:</u> <i>-views of 94 learners and 31 teachers</i> on literacy & literacy programs (functional or fundamental)

Author & Date	Title of Literature	Descriptive Summary
(OECD) Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2003)	<u>Beyond Rhetoric: Adult Learning Policies and Practices</u> (248 pgs. =2821 KB) Avail. at: www.oecdpublications.gfi-nb.com	<u>The Global Perspective:</u> <i>-identifies what works in the policy and practice of adult learning in 9 OECD countries (including Canada)</i>
(SLN) Saskatchewan Literacy Network (2000, March)	<u>Best Program Practices</u> Self-Evaluation Kit (56 pgs. = 718 KB), available at: www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/ASK/SLM/selfeval/toc.htm	<u>Quality Standards for Literacy Programs</u> -outlines 13 standards broken down into indicators of literacy program success in the province of Saskatchewan. Guiding principles, questionnaires, and a glossary of terms is listed.
Shohet, Linda (2001)	<u>Adult Learning and Literacy in Canada</u> (41 pgs.) In <i>The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy</i> , Vol. 2, Chapter 6. (NCSALL). At: http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/ann_rev/vol2_6.html	<u>The National Perspective:</u> -the historical development & description of <i>Canada's adult literacy system</i> . -learner demographics, national support, & integration of new technologies
Tuijnman, Albert (2001)	<u>Benchmarking adult literacy in North America: an international comparative study</u> (Statistics Canada catalogue no. 89-572-XPE) (57 pgs.)	<u>The National Perspective:</u> -deals with IALS results from 1994 to 1998; presents influencing factors for literacy proficiency; gives comparison between countries; <i>offers targets & tools for improving literacy</i>

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www.literacy.ca MCL's site, which contains its "Literacy Matters..." paper & more.

www.literacy.ca/lac/contacts.htm MCL's list of Canadian literacy organizations.

www.literacy.ca/litand/overview.htm MCL's summary of adult literacy funding and delivery services in Canada.

www.literacy.ca/public/litca MCL's newsletter.

www.literacyexchange.net/lixintro.htm UNESCO's Institute of Education website of world resources on literacy.

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